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THE MUSLIMS OF CALCUTTA, 1918 TO 1935:
A STUDY OF THE SOCIETY AND POLITICS OF AN URBAN
MINORITY GROUP IN INDIA.

by

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All sources used for this thesis
have been acknowledged and the
thesis is my own composition.

Kenneth McPherson

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Glossary of Terms Used in the Thesis

<u>ajlaf</u>	Common body of Muslims, see <u>atrap</u> and <u>ashraf</u> .
Arya Samaj	Hindu sect founded by Dayanand in the Punjab whence it spread into the United Provinces in particular; opposes caste restrictions, aggressively proselytising, especially <u>vis-à-vis</u> Muslims.
<u>ashraf</u>	'Honourable', Muslims of highest status who traced their descent to homelands outside India.
<u>atrap</u>	Bengali corruption of <u>ajlaf</u> .
<u>azan</u>	Muslim call to prayer.
<u>bhadrolok</u>	'Respectable' people. Middle and upper class Bengali Hindus.
<u>bustee</u>	Mud and thatch slum dwellings.
<u>dusturi</u>	Bribe.
<u>dhobi</u>	Washerman.
<u>dhoti</u>	Sarong worn by men.
<u>darbar</u>	Viceregal or gubernatorial levee.
<u>durwan</u>	Watchman.
<u>fatwa</u>	Religious opinion issued by a convocation of Muslim divines (<u>ulema</u>). Not binding upon Muslims.
<u>ghat</u>	Water steps, quay.
<u>gharri</u> (gharry)	Horse-drawn carriage.
<u>goonda</u>	Petty gangster, hooligan.
<u>gurdwara</u>	Sikh religious building.
<u>hartal</u>	Closing of shops and businesses as a sign of mourning and/or political discontent.
Hindu Mahasabha	The oldest Hindu communalist party, founded 1915, especially active from mid-1920s.
<u>imambara</u>	Shia Muslim religious/educational institution.
<u>jamadar</u>	Porter, watchman.

<u>jihad</u>	Religious war.
Caliph	'Successor', the religious and temporal head of Islam (as acknowledged by Sunni Muslims).
<u>khutba</u>	Formal Friday prayer in mosques.
<u>korbani</u>	Cow sacrifice.
<u>kutchra</u>	Temporary building.
lascar	Indian seaman.
<u>lathi</u>	Steel tipped wooden truncheon.
<u>loongi</u>	Sarong worn by men in different fashion from <u>dhoti</u> .
<u>makhtab</u>	<u>Qu'ranic</u> school.
<u>maulana</u>	Title of learned Muslim.
<u>maulvi</u>	Title of learned Muslim.
<u>maund</u>	Measure of 82.286 lbs.
<u>mela</u>	Public festival
<u>mofussil</u>	The rural localities of a district (or region) as distinguished from the chief station (or capital).
<u>Muezzin</u>	Person who calls Muslims to prayer.
<u>Mutwalli</u>	Mosque manager.
<u>Pan</u>	Betel nut mixture.
panchayat	Village or group council.
<u>pandal</u>	Temporary pavilion.
<u>pir</u>	Muslim saint.
<u>pukkah</u>	Permanent, correct.
<u>Qu'ran</u>	Main Muslim religious text.
Sangathan and Suddhi	Hindu religious movements active in 1920s to counteract Muslim proselytising, connected with Hindu Mahasabha.
<u>sari</u>	Female dress in India.
Shia/Sunni	Two main Muslim sects. Sunnis are by far the largest sect.
<u>sirdar</u>	Foreman.

Swaraj	Independence.
<u>Swadeshi</u>	Indigenous industry and products.
<u>Tamasha</u>	A not-particularly violent brawl.
Tanzim and Tabligh	Muslim religious movements founded in the 1920s to counteract activities of the Hindu Sangathan and Suddhi movements.
<u>vakil</u>	Pleader.
<u>zamindar</u>	'A possessor of land', formerly a revenue farmer, in Bengal, eastern United Provinces and parts of Madras they were accorded proprietary rights by the British.

Preface and Acknowledgements

This thesis is a study of an urban minority group within India. In particular it examines the social and political history of the Muslim community in Calcutta between 1918 and 1935.

My initial interest in the topic was provoked by previous research work on the Muslims of Tamil Nad and a thesis written by Dr Donald Ferrell on the political history of Delhi in the early decades of this century.¹ The idea of an urban study was of immediate interest as it represented a hitherto largely unexplored area of modern Indian history; whilst my own preoccupation with the Muslims of the sub-continent gave birth to the idea of combining both interests in a single study.

Calcutta appeared an ideal centre of interest for several reasons. Principally because it was the main urban centre of a province intimately affected by the development of Muslim separatism; also it was a non-traditional city being the product of British penetration into the sub-continent, and as such was more typical of the urban centres which are now developing in India than the majority of older cities.

In addition John Broomfield had published a pioneer work on modern Bengali political history which provoked much controversy, and indicated the need for further research into other aspects of Bengali history - particularly communal relations.²

Broomfield's work was a deliberate study of elitist politics and was mainly concerned with the history of the nationalist movement and the Bengal Legislative Council in the first half of the twentieth century. By its very

¹Ferrell, D.W., 'Delhi 1911-22: Society and Politics in the new Imperial capital of India' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, A.N.U., 1969).

²Broomfield, J.H., Elite Conflict on a Plural Society (Berkeley, U.C.L.A. Press, 1968).

nature it concentrated more upon the history of the various communal leadership groups rather than upon the relationship between the leaders and the communities they led.

My intention was therefore to write a thesis on social and political change amongst the Muslims of Calcutta with particular emphasis upon the relationship between the leaders and the masses of the community, and more generally upon the role which the Muslims of Calcutta played in the history of modern Bengal. Instead of concentrating upon the elitist leadership, which emerged during the nationalist struggle, both inside and outside the institutions of government, I sought to trace the growth of political and communal self-consciousness amongst the largely anonymous mass of Muslims who comprised nearly a quarter of Calcutta's population between the two World Wars.

In doing so I attempted to fathom the basic levels of Muslim communal organisation within Calcutta, and the processes whereby increasing numbers of Muslims were introduced into the political arena. This in turn led to an examination of the changing role of the community's leadership from a largely traditional and homogeneous group, which was dependant upon British support, to a more diverse group which of necessity gained power and influence only by the deliberate cultivation of politically conscious groups within the urban community.

The time span of the thesis had unfortunately to be strictly limited. I would have preferred to have taken the study up to Partition, but the limited time I had available in India, and the difficulty of obtaining material for the years after 1935 imposed restrictions upon the period I could investigate.

1918 seemed a logical year in which to begin; mainly because it was a time when communal relations in the city were in an extremely fluid condition, and in which the Muslims were faced with a severe leadership crisis. Also in 1918 Calcutta experienced the first of a series of massive communal riots in which previously quiescent groups

within the community began to express their first crude political and communal sentiments under the leadership of men who were antagonistic towards both the British and the traditional leaders of Islam in the city.

1935 was chosen as the end date for reasons already discussed, but there were several other factors why it seemed a convenient point to end the study. At the beginning of the year Calcutta gained its first Muslim mayor who, along with the entire bloc of Muslim councillors, resigned from the Corporation in December 1935. These resignations heralded a new era of Muslim politics in Calcutta and Bengal as by 1936 the reformed constitution of 1919 had been abandoned; whilst Jinnah, who had recently risen to prominence within the all-India Muslim community, had begun to lead the Muslims of the province along the road to political separatism and Pakistan.

One of the major difficulties I faced in my research concerned government material. The records of the Imperial Government, held at New Delhi, were freely available, but the same cannot be said of the West Bengal State Archives. At the time of Partition a random division of the provincial archives was made roughly along the lines of the odd years after 1920 to East Pakistan and the even years to West Bengal. In addition to this the bulk of the files which belonged to the Police and Political Departments remained in West Bengal and were transferred to the C.I.D. where they remain closed to scrutiny.

The official documentary material I obtained in West Bengal was therefore very piecemeal and was even worse in East Pakistan where many government records seem to have vanished at the time of transfer from Calcutta.

Similar difficulties were experienced at the offices of the Calcutta Corporation where I was given free access to the 'Minutes' but was otherwise barred from the departmental records of the municipality. Newspaper material helped fill many of the missing details I was searching for, but even here there were serious gaps in the available volumes of such important newspapers as the

Amrita Bazar Patrika and the Statesman. In turn the 'Native Newspaper Reports', compiled weekly by the C.I.D., provided further background information but after 1930 the quality of the reports declined and they were of decreasing value.

The dispersion of families at the time of Partition seems also to have led to the loss of many important collections of personal papers. For example the papers of Abul Kasem were reputedly destroyed at this time and during communal riots in Burdwan in 1950, whilst the remaining papers of Fazl-ul Huq were likewise claimed to have been destroyed by his descendants in Calcutta and Dacca. The surviving members of the Ispahani and Suhrawardy families, who now live in Karachi, indicated that their family papers remained largely intact but they were not prepared to release them.

My main thanks go to the Australian National University who provided me with a scholarship and travel grant which made this study possible. Among others in Australia my sincere thanks are also due to Professor Ravinder Kumar, my original supervisor, Dr Johannes Voigt, Professor J.A. La Nauze and Dr Richard Newman all of whom provided invaluable supervision and encouragement.

The staffs of the Menzies Library at the A.N.U., the Australian National Library in Canberra and of the Victorian State Library in Melbourne were also of great help; whilst Mrs May Richardson, Mrs Beverly Gallina and Bud Jackson typed drafts and compiled maps with unflagging zeal!

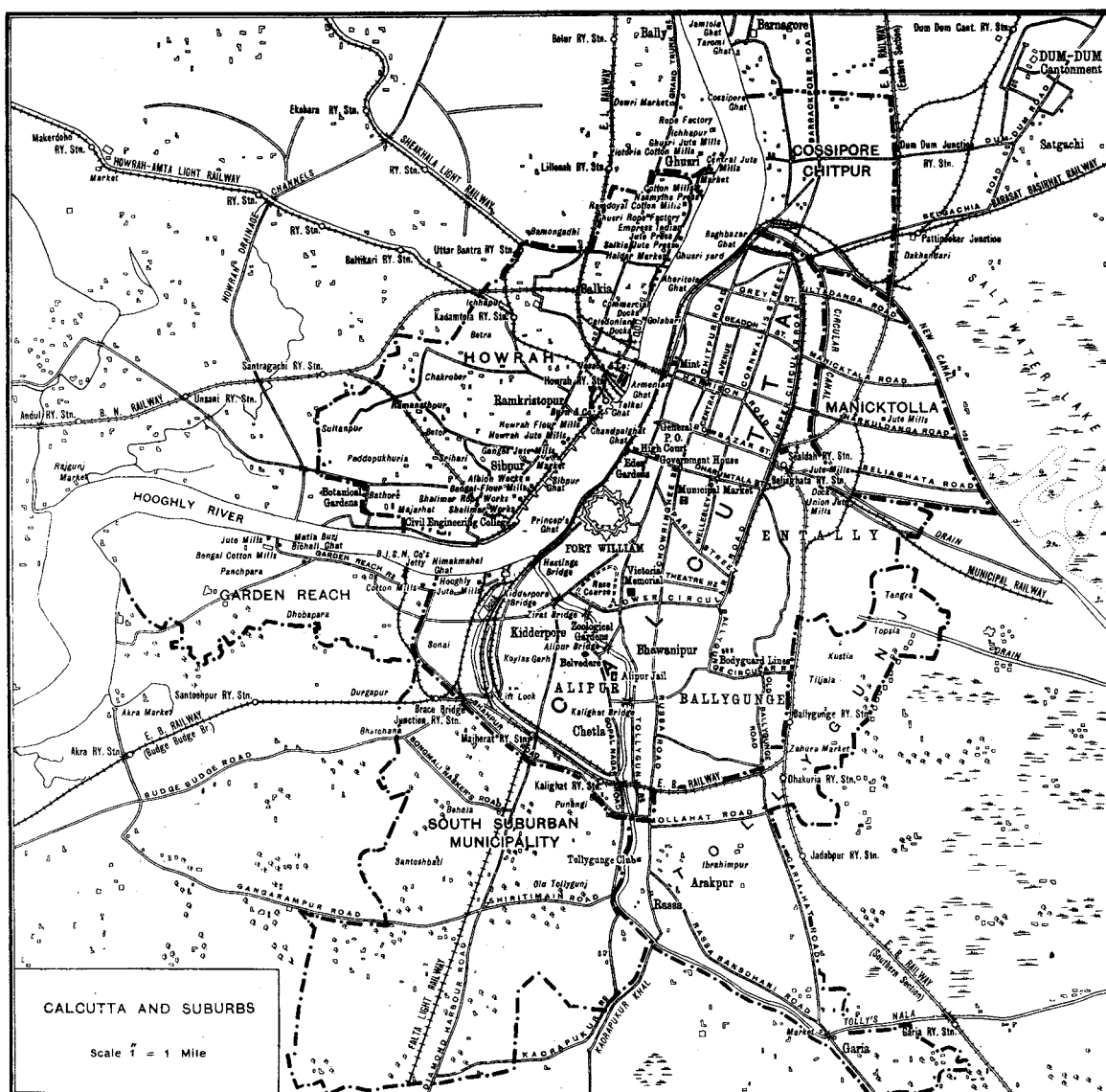
In London the staff of the India Office guided me with a gentle hand through the invaluable material at their disposal; whilst various people at the universities of Sussex and Heidelberg helped sustain my belief in the possibility of such a study.

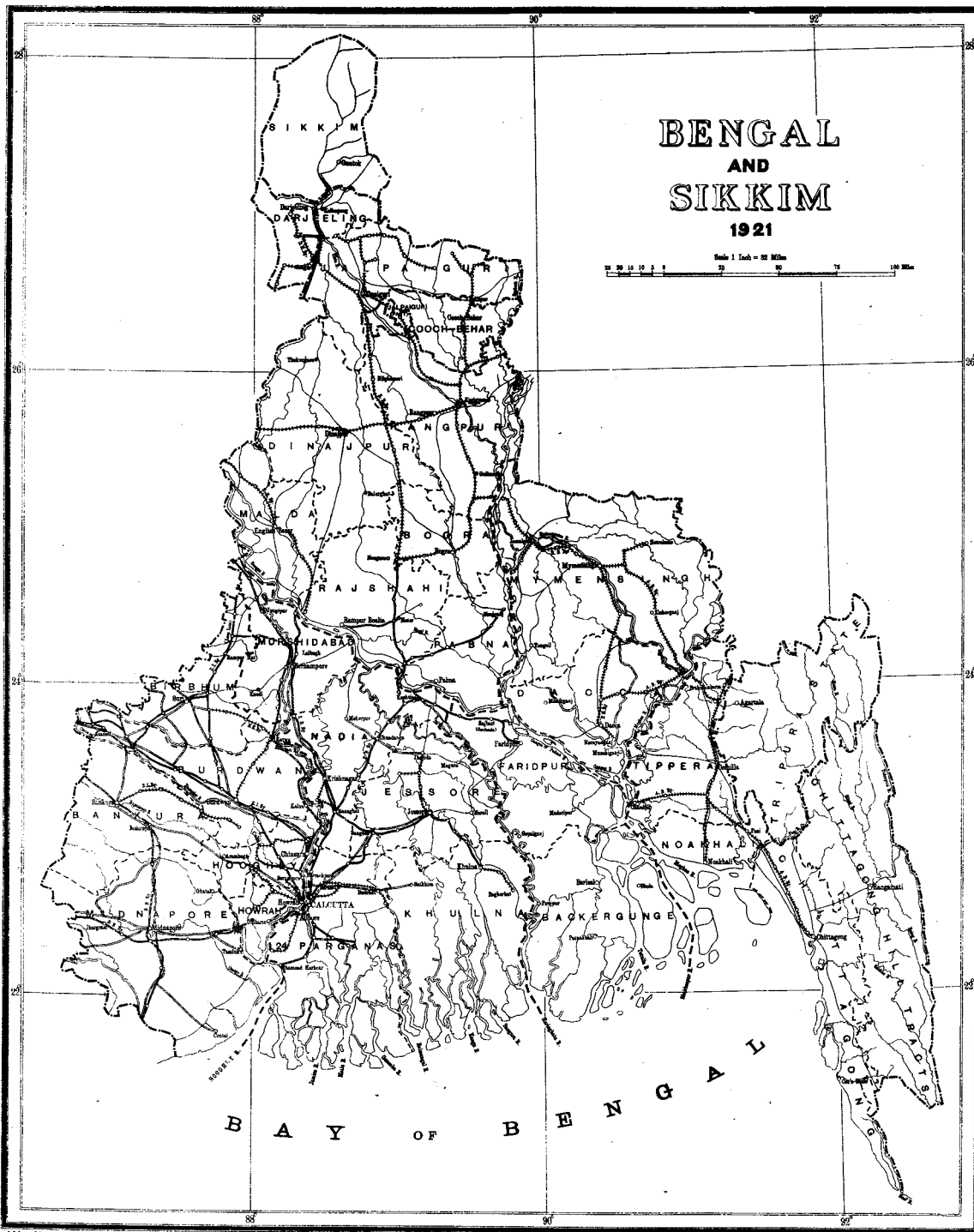
In India I had the assistance of many people including the staffs of the National Archives of India, New Delhi (particularly Miss Dhan Keswani); the West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta; the Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi

and the National Library, Calcutta. To individuals such as Dr Ajita Ranjan Mukherjea, formerly secretary to the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Dr Hossainur Rahman, Mr Ragat Ray, Dr Barun De, Drs Ashin and Uma Das Gupta, Dr Soumeyer Mukherjea and many others who enabled me to gain valuable insights into the work I had undertaken, and who made life in Calcutta so rewarding, my gratitude and affection.

The same thanks I also owe to various people in Bangla Desh. In particular Alhaj Shamsuddin Ahmed, Keeper of Records to the former state of East Pakistan, Mrs Humaira Momen at the University of Dacca, and the staffs of the Bengali Academy and the Australian High Commission (particularly Mr Allen and Mr Abdul Matin) who made possible the interviews I held in Dacca.

Last but not least my thanks to Joan, Nick, Jenny and David whose support during these last three years has made so much possible.



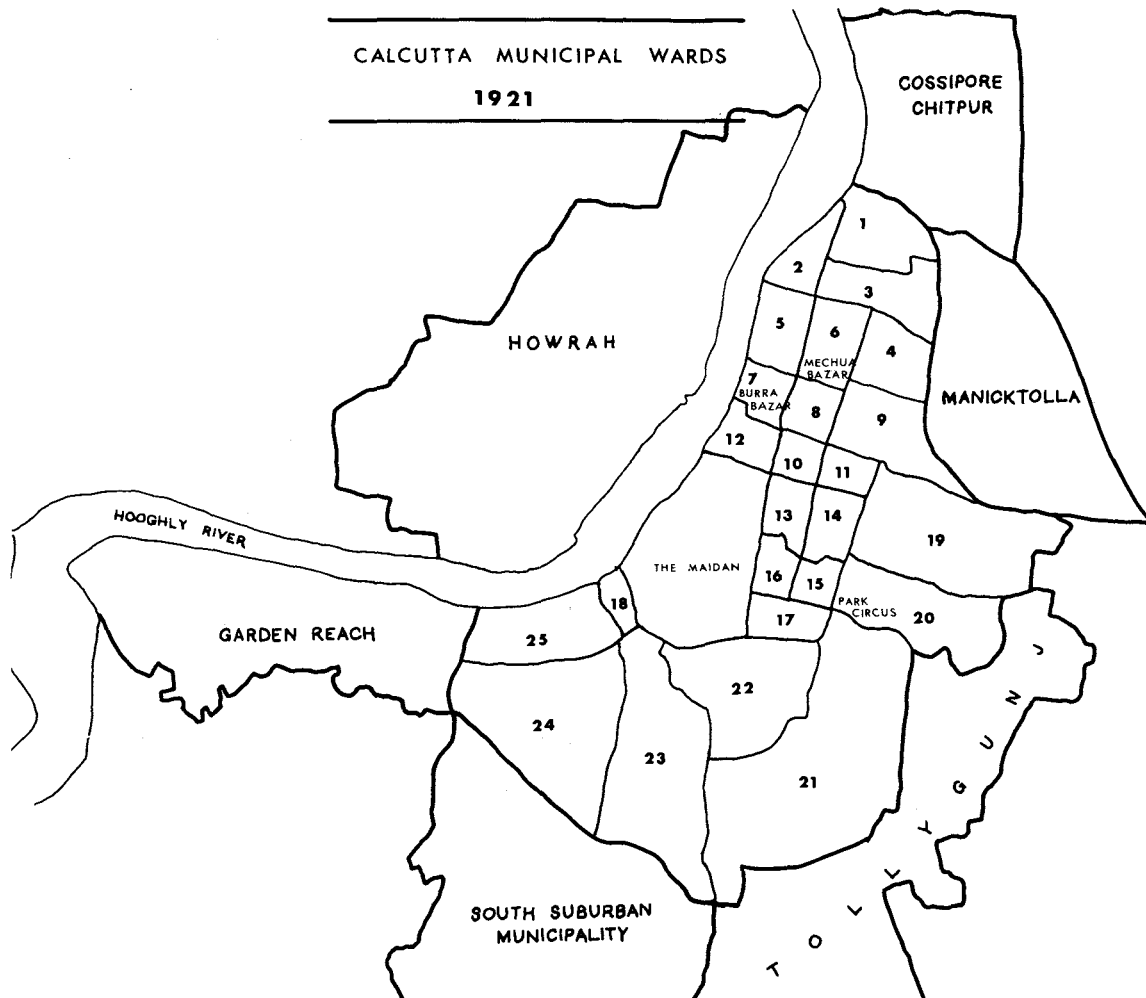


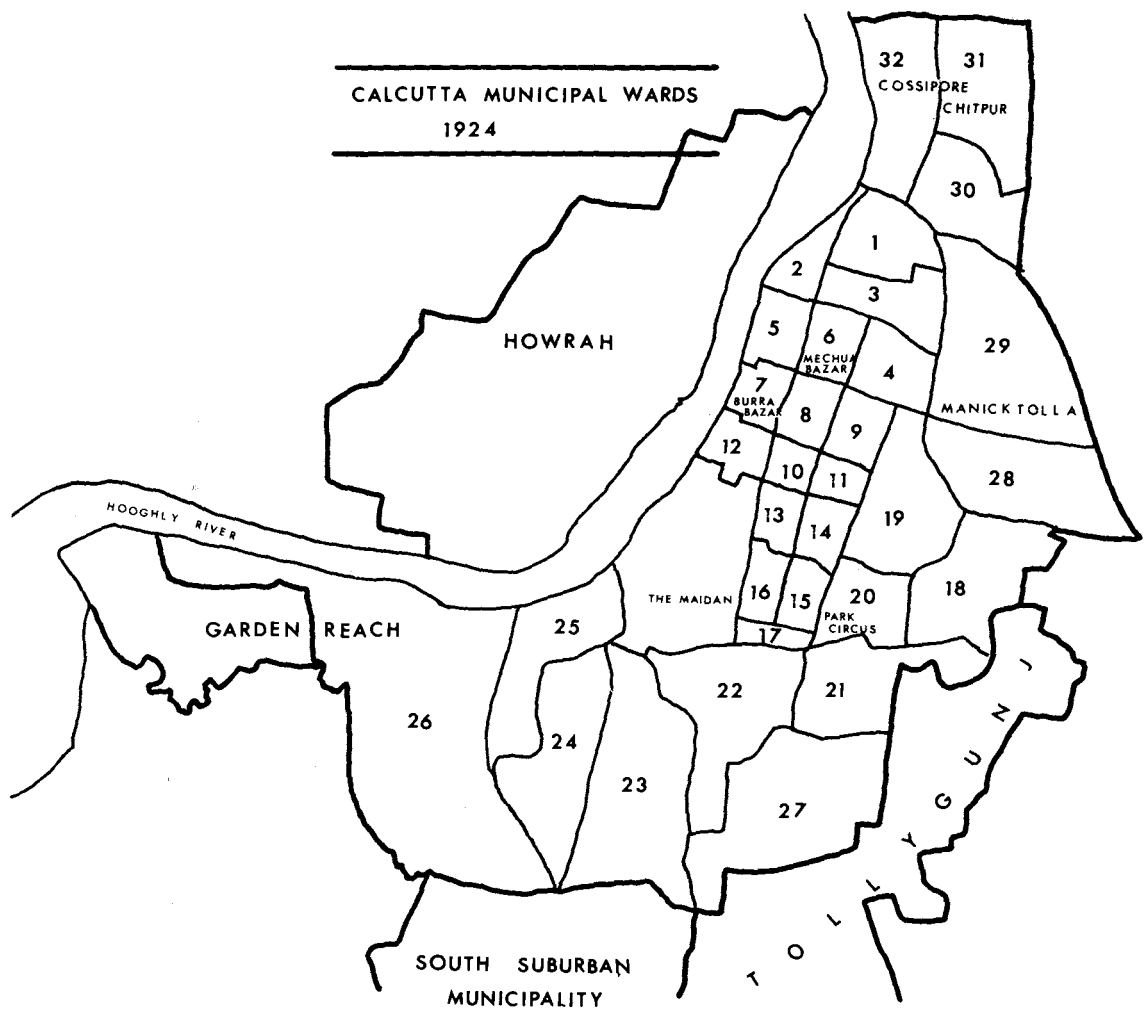
**BENGAL
AND
SIKKIM
1921**

Scale 1 Inch = 100 Miles

B A Y O F B E N G A L

CALCUTTA MUNICIPAL WARDS
1921





CHAPTER ONE

THE MUSLIMS OF CALCUTTA, 1918.

At the end of the Great War in 1918, Calcutta ranked second only to London amongst the great cities of the British Empire. Built on the muddy deltaic plain of riverine Bengal the city was bounded to the west by the sluggish, silt-laden Hooghly and on the east by the saline marshes of the 24 - Parganas district. Across the Hooghly and for 20 miles north and south stretched a variegated panorama of dockyards, ghats, industrial plants, temples, gardens of country houses and densely populated industrial townships centred upon the processing of jute, the mainstay of Bengal's economy. Contiguous to Calcutta city were the 'dormitory' and industrial municipalities of Cossipore-Chitpur, Manicktolla, Tollygunge, South Suburban, Garden Reach and Howrah.¹ Administratively distinct from Calcutta these townships were nevertheless an organic part of the city.²

Founded in the seventeenth century by a band of Scots and English traders Calcutta remained a foreign enclave in Bengal. Its population was predominantly migrant with nearly 50 per cent coming from areas outside Bengal³ - in composition the population ranged from the wealthy European business community with their splendid Victorian office buildings in the area of Clive Row under the shadow of the domed Corinthian General Post Office, to the

¹ See map of city. The best geographical and demographic description of Calcutta in the early years of the twentieth century can be found on pages 1-4 of John Broomfield's book Elite Conflict in a Plural Society (1968).

² 'How far the suburbs of a great city should be held to extend, it is always a matter of some difficulty to determine. Suburban conditions in the case of Calcutta however abruptly terminate in the east with the limits of Manicktolla and Tollygunge, for the level of the land falls at once to the marshes. To the south and west the outlying parts of the South Suburban and Howrah municipalities include certain areas of agricultural land and suburban conditions do not extend beyond municipal limits. To the north, however, the land on both banks of the Hooghly is parcelled out among a series of municipalities extending almost without a break for 20 miles.' Govt of India, Census of India, 1921, vol.VI, part 1, p.1, hereafter referred to as Census, 1921.

³ Ibid., p.18.

impoverished Hindi- and Urdu-speaking 'up country'¹ Hindus and Muslims who lived in the teeming Indian city which stretched northwards from Dharumtala. Riverine, romantic Bengal of the poets and novelists was not in evidence in the streets of Calcutta. In the bazaars and lanes of the city, Hindi, Oriya, Urdu, Bihari, Tamil and many other languages often echoed louder than Bengali.² Certainly Bengali was the language of the predominantly Bengali Hindu professional and clerical middle classes, the wealthy Hindu landowners who had townhouses in the city, and of many of the fine educational establishments scattered throughout the city - but Bengali was the mother tongue of little more than half the city's population.³ Rural prosperity, the disinclination of industrial employers to recruit Bengali labourers and the penchant of Bengali Hindus for education and employment commensurate with their scholastic achievements militated against the formation of a Bengali-speaking working class in the city with the result that the vacuum was filled by non-Bengalis.⁴

The trade and industry of the city was controlled by Europeans and non-Bengali 'latter-day nabobs',⁵ mainly Marwaris from Rajasthan, who from Burra Bazar held virtual monopoly over the trade of north and east India.⁶ Minor partners to the Marwaris were merchants from the Gangetic

¹ 'up country': current term used to describe Indians, both Hindu and Muslims, from the provinces stretching from Bihar to the North West Frontier Province.

² Census, 1921, vol.VI, part 1, p.79.

³ Ibid., p.79, 53.3 per cent spoke Bengali as their mother tongue.

⁴ O'Malley, L.S.S., Hooghly District Gazetteer (1912), p.172; O'Malley, L.S.S., Howrah District Gazetteer (1909), pp.32-3, 94-5; Chaudhuri, M.K. (ed.), Trends of Socio-Economic Change in India (1969), Pradip Sinha, 'Urbanisation and the Bengali Middle Class', p.319. Publication details for these and subsequent publications referred to can be located in the bibliography.

⁵ Broomfield, J., Elite Conflict in a Plural Society (1968), p.1.

⁶ Chaudhuri, M.K. (ed.), op.cit., p.320.

provinces, the Punjab, Bombay, Sind, Gujarat and southern India.¹ Below these magnates were the great mass of the city's population comprising mainly 'up country' Hindus and Muslims who, in preceding years had flooded the city in search 'of wealth and distinction, education, or more simply employment'.² The tide of migration was on the wane by 1918,³ but even so the city's population was still fluid insofar as few of its inhabitants regarded it as their permanent home, and it was very much a city of isolated males rather than family units with a ratio of a little less than ten men to four women.⁴ Petty merchants, shopkeepers, industrialists, domestic servants, labourers, artisans, beggars and the ubiquitous goonda - men of all occupations ranging from 'Kabuli' money-lenders to nerveless Sikh taxi-drivers - were rarely Bengali. By 1918 a certain number of mill operatives, petty merchants, lascars, boatmen and dock labourers were Bengali-speakers, but religion and caste fractionalised the numerically small and nascent Bengali working class while differences in wealth, occupations and life-style set it apart from the Bengali professional and clerical classes of the city.⁵

Physically Calcutta presented an equally diversified picture. To the south were the European and upper-class westernised Indian suburbs of Alipore and Ballygunge, while to the west of these areas lay the dock district of Kidderpore with its comparatively large Bengali labouring class population. To the east of Fort William and the Maidan lay the modern Bengali Hindu suburb of Bhawanipur,

¹ Ray, P.C., Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist (1932), pp.447 et seq.

² Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.1.

³ Census, 1921, op.cit., p.81.

⁴ Ibid., pp.12, 105.

⁵ Chaudhuri, M.K. (ed.), op.cit., pp.316-7, 319; O'Malley, L.S.S., Howrah District Gazetteer (1909); Census, 1921, op.cit., pp.27, 36, 82, 111.

popular with middle class families, and the Europeanised shopping and commercial districts around Park Street. It was also an area of European and Anglo-Indian enclaves; of 'chummeries' where European bachelors lived and created innumerable scandals; of imposing villas and of the new colony at Park Circus - an area settled mainly by successful Muslim professional men, urban and rural property owners and government officials.¹ Throughout the entire district were large settlements of Hindu and Muslim tradesmen, artisans and domestic servants who catered to the needs of the European and westernised Indian communities.

Further to the north were the variegated Indian commercial and business areas which stretched in a crescent from Burra Bazar to the vicinity of the Municipal Market south of Dharumtala Street. Wedged between this crescent, the Hooghly and the Maidan, in the area behind the General Post Office was a monsoon-stained replica of the City of London containing the office buildings of European companies, the residence of the Governor of Bengal and a High Court modelled after the Cloth Hall at Ypres. The bazaars of the 'crescent' were less spectacular architecturally and comprised a multitude of small business premises, workshops and stalls which overflowed into the crowded streets and lanes of the area. Living quarters reared up over business premises, and mercantile buildings vied for space with temples, churches, mosques, gurdwaras, banks, restaurants, schools, workshops, apartment houses and the fortress-like homes of the large and wealthy Marwari joint families. Yet again to the north beyond Harrison Road were large areas of slum and tenement dwellings, inhabited by the labouring classes of the city, and an occasional oasis of more respectable settlement which served as a reminder that this had once been a garden suburb for the wealthier Indian

¹ The Park Circus colony represented a move away from the old centre of Muslim middle- and upper-class settlement in Ward XIV: Bengal Govt, Education Dept, April 1919, File No. 1E-2, Progs 1-10.

inhabitants of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Calcutta. Pukkah tenements now rubbed shoulders with kutchu bustees¹ and decaying villas vacated by their owners as the quarter lost its earlier respectability. Small shops, religious institutions and atelier abounded though the residential nature of the area predominated. In the period immediately after 1916 the Calcutta Corporation implemented several slum improvement campaigns involving bustee clearance but most of the dispossessed population merely shifted site to the less congested municipality of Manicktolla across the Circular Canal where new slum conglomerations rapidly sprang up.²

Such was Calcutta in 1918. A city of diverse peoples and religions: Bengalis, Armenians, Punjabis, Tamils, Afghans, Chinese, Pathans, Biharis, Englishmen, Italians, Persians, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Jains and Buddhists - to name but a few. It was a city of foul slums, a multitude of shops and extraordinary palaces - inhabited by the Bengali Hindu landowning elite and modelled after Highland castles and French chateaux; of sometimes beautiful but more often astonishing British colonial architecture and of medieval bazaars jammed with people, taxis, bullock carts, animals and the lumbering green trams which plied the city from Baghbazar in the far north to Kalighat in the south.

II

Granted municipal status in 1727, Calcutta is the oldest corporation in India. At that date a Council which consisted of a Mayor and nine Aldermen had been created³ - a Council which by 1918 had developed into an institution

¹Ali, Ashraf, The City Government of Calcutta: A Study in Inertia (1966), pp.9-12; Goode, S.W., Municipal Calcutta (1916), pp.167-71.

²O'Malley, L.S.S., 24 - Parganas District Gazetteer (1914), p.227.

³Goode, S.W., op.cit., pp.9-40 for a detailed history of the constitutional development of the Calcutta Corporation.

with 50 members who administered an area of 11,954 acres¹ divided into 25 wards with a population of nearly 885,000.² Each of the wards elected one Councillor; 15 were nominated by the provincial Government; four each by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, which represented European business interests, and the Calcutta Trades Association, which represented Indian business interests and finally two were nominated by the Port Commissioners who controlled the important dockyards and canals of the city.³ In 1915 the 25 elected Councillors represented 38,415 voters, a little less than 5 per cent of the city's population.⁴ This small number of voters comprised only the more affluent businessmen, householders, property owners and professional men who fulfilled the high financial qualifications necessary to be enrolled as a voter.⁵ In all these men held 95,492 votes⁶ under a system which permitted plural voting and which consequently favoured the mercantile and property owning classes in the city with property scattered throughout the 25 wards.

A summary of the incomplete electoral returns between 1876, when the electoral principle was introduced, and 1918 gives some clues as to the composition of the business and property owning classes in the city - insofar as the religion and race of the elected Councillors can be considered to represent the comparative voting strength of various interests in the city in the absence of more detailed statistics. Between 1876 and 1918 more than

¹Goode, S.W., op.cit., p.7.

²Census, 1921, op.cit., p.4.

³There were 15 Port Commissioners: 5 were elected by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, 1 by the Calcutta Trades Association, 1 by the Calcutta Corporation and 8 were nominated by the provincial Government.

⁴Goode, S.W., op.cit., p.371.

⁵Goode, S.W., op.cit., p.371.

⁶Goode, S.W., op.cit., p.371.

75 per cent of the elected Councillors were 'Hindus' - a loose definition comprising members of a wide variety of caste and linguistic groups - the rest being made up of Jews, Europeans, Parsis and Muslims.¹ Following the reconstitution of the Corporation in 1899 at the hands of the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, however, when the number of elected Councillors per ward was reduced from two to one,² the proportion of 'Hindu' Councillors to those of other communities rose. Jews and Europeans still gained election but the numerically small Parsi community was eliminated from direct representation as was the much larger but materially less prosperous Muslim community. In the 1900 Corporation elections three Muslims were elected but from 1903 onwards the 3,523 Muslim voters with 7,365 votes proved unable to get one of their number elected and Muslim representation was limited to the four Councillors nominated triennially by the Government.³ Prior to 1899 the percentage of Muslim municipal voters appears to have been greater but in later years while their numbers did not decline the number of non-Muslim voters increased at a far greater pace which was, in part at least, an indication of the slow rate of Muslim economic progress in the city with the result that by 1911 the Muslims held little more than 8 per cent of the municipal votes although they formed nearly a quarter of the city's population.⁴

In 1918 the Corporation Council was composed of representatives of the following racial and religious groups:

¹Goode, S.W., op.cit., p.372.

²Goode, S.W., op.cit., p.38; Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.26. For details of the 1899 Bill see Christine Roche, 'The Calcutta Municipal Bill, 1896-1900', (1965).

³Goode, S.W., op.cit., p.372; Raheem, Abdur, Mahommedan Representation On the Calcutta Corporation (1919), pp.1-4.

⁴Raheem, Abdur, op.cit., p.3; Roche, C., op.cit., p.3: in 1895 the Muslims had comprised 10.5 per cent of the registered voters.

25 Hindus (20 elected)
 17 Europeans (2 elected)
 4 Muslims
 3 Jews (3 elected)
 1 Parsi.¹

The result was that Hindu interests loomed large in the debates of the Council to the relative exclusion of all but European interests. Not until the reconstitution of the Corporation in 1923, when the principle of separate communal electorates was introduced, did Muslim grievances and aspirations become of greater importance in the daily business of the Corporation. Until then the body retained its overwhelming Hindu bias both in the Council chamber and amongst the ranks of Corporation employees of whom only 12 per cent were Muslim in 1915.²

The Corporation was not, however, the sole agency of civic administration. The Indian Army maintained Fort William and the Maidan independently of the municipal authorities, and the provincial government kept tight rein on law and order by means of the Calcutta Police Force, the Bengal Judicial Service - whose officers staffed the regular courts - and the system of Honorary Magistrates. The latter group were appointed from the ranks of the socially more distinguished members of the city's population and comprised members of all the major communal groups. Social status, influence within their respective communities and loyalty to the Crown were factors important in the choice of these men by the provincial administration. That such considerations were paramount in the mind of the authorities can be confirmed by looking at the background of the eight Muslim Honorary Magistrates and four nominated Muslim Corporation Councillors who held office in 1918.

Socially the most prominent of these men was Prince Afsar-ul-Mulk Mirza Muhammed Akram Hussain Bahadur, the youngest son of the late King of Oudh who had been exiled

¹Goode, S.W., op.cit., p.371.

²Goode, S.W., op.cit., p.372.

to Calcutta after the Mutiny in 1857. The Prince was both a nominated Corporation councillor and an Honorary Magistrate as well as Sheriff of Calcutta in 1918. A pensioner of the British, plagued by financial and family difficulties¹ the Prince nevertheless had a long pedigree which seems to have impressed the British more than the local Muslims. They held the Prince and his family in some esteem but his influence was circumscribed by a considerable amount of intellectual and financial poverty and a natural penchant to live a restricted social life. Safe in a cocoon compounded of his historical prestige and the patronage of the British, the Prince, and men of similar background, regarded themselves as the natural leaders of the Calcutta Muslim community. 'Educated' Muslims he dismissed as 'too busy to provide...leaders' and believed that 'the gentry and nobility' were likely to provide the best leaders of the community.² Merchants and tradesmen he regarded with particular disapproval and considered them social parvenus despite the fact that such men shared his rank as Corporation councillor and Honorary Magistrate. Oblivious to their sentiments and the realities of the changing world he stated in 1913 that

Members of this community from the very nature of their calling are daily brought into contact with all sorts and conditions of men and have therefore no doubt unique opportunities of gaining knowledge and experience....They are not only influential with the people, but also rich. But, as a class, they are by no means more advanced than either [the gentry, nobility or educated Muslims]. They may be less so. They are no doubt, men of experience and business instincts, but barring a few who are self-made, they have come into prosperous lines of business bequeathed

¹ Bengal Govt, Political Dept, December 1918, File no.10-26, Progs 122-3; ibid., February 1920, File no.10-12 of 1919, Progs 20-4.

² Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1913-March 1914, 5.11.1913, pp.1233-4. (In 1895, however, of the 13 nominated and elected Muslim municipal councillors none were representatives of the old aristocratic families: 4 were lawyers, 2 were doctors, 5 were public servants and 2 were property owners, Roche, C., op.cit., p.5).

to them by their ancestors and they are prospering now almost automatically. I know...that great apprehension is entertained in some quarters that a handful of men of this class...will have more or less the monopoly of representing the Mahommedan community.¹

Of the other Honorary Magistrates and Corporation councillors three were merchants, one a zamindar, two members of the legal profession and two were government pensioners. One of the merchants was G.H.C. Ariff, a wealthy Gujerati silk merchant, one-time member of the Imperial Legislative Council, member of the Muhammedan Literary Society² and in 1917 a member of the dissident Presidency Muslim League faction which attempted to take over the Central National Muhammedan Association as a rival organisation to the League. Originally a prominent member of the pro-Congress Muslim group in Calcutta, Ariff had broken with the group over the terms of the Lucknow Pact in 1916 but had lost his seat in the Imperial Legislative Council as a result of his earlier association with the group and it was not until he aligned himself with Nawab Syed Ali Nawab Chowdhury, a wealthy zamindar who led the dissident League faction, that his standing within the elite circles of the Calcutta community and the eyes of the British was restored.³ In 1916 Ariff had been defeated by Abdur Raheem a Corporation councillor since 1913, Honorary Magistrate since 1915, doyen of the Muslim merchants of Ward VIII⁴ and a property owner of some note in the city. Like Ariff, Raheem was a non-Bengali being an Urdu-speaker originally from Delhi. The third merchant was Mirza Muhammed Bakar Shirazi, a wealthy Persian and member of the Muhammedan Literary Society⁵ whose family had a long tradition of Persian scholarship and were intimately connected with the Hooghly Inambara and the

¹Ibid.

²See page 41.

³See pp. 56, 57, 62, 71.

⁴NNR, 1918, 30 March, Jamhur.

⁵See page 41.

Persian Department of Calcutta University. The zamindar was Moulvi Syed Altaf Ali, son of Nawab Syed Ali Nawab Chowdhury, Honorary Magistrate and 'wealthy young man about town' who lived in Calcutta on the rents from family property in Rajshahi. The two lawyers were Nawab A.F.M. Abdur Rahman, son of Nawab Abdul Latif, barrister, retired Chief Judge of the Small Causes Court, President of the Muhammedan Literary Society, Secretary of the Central National Mahommedan Association and a member of the Corporation since 1899, and Nawab Serajul Islam. Originally from Delhi Serajul Islam had settled as a child in Calcutta, practiced law and had first been appointed to the Corporation in 1877 and was made an Honorary Magistrate in 1913. The two remaining Honorary Magistrates were Nawabzada Saiyid Hussain Ali and Nadir Jung Mirza Ahmed Ali, both government pensioners and members respectively of the ex-ruling houses of Mysore and Oudh. Neither were men of public note but the social background and family connections of both were impeccable.

Apart from Ariff who eventually reformed and was appointed an Honorary Magistrate in 1918, these men had avoided involvement in all but the most loyal and respectable political, social and occupational activities. All were men of wealth and education whose life-style and fortunes were closely bound to the maintenance of British rule in India insofar as it apparently maintained the status quo amongst communal groups and social classes in the Indian Empire.¹

III

The Muslims of Calcutta city numbered approximately 205,000 out of a total population of nearly 885,000 in 1918.² The greater Calcutta region - an area which

¹I have avoided biographical footnotes and references in this section for the reason that they are far too numerous to detail and the information provided represents the piecing together of a large number of petty and disparate oddments of information. The more important references are included later in the text if, and when, the individual concerned is of prominence at a particular time between 1918 and 1935.

²Census, 1921, op.cit., pp.4, 34.

included the city and contiguous municipalities¹ - had a population of over 1,300,000 which included some 325,000 Muslims.² The greater proportion of these Muslims were Hindi - and Urdu-speaking migrants from the Gangetic provinces who had flooded into the city in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the census of 1911 435,927 inhabitants of the greater Calcutta area, including 70,588 Urdu-speakers, returned Hindi or Urdu as their mother tongue as did 40.3 per cent of the city's population.³ In that census no breakdown was given for the linguistic affiliations of the Muslim population but the tendency was noted of Bengali-, Hindi- and Bihari-speaking Muslims to return Urdu as their mother tongue,⁴ and it can be safely assumed that the greater proportion of Muslims in the city were not Bengalis.

Prior to the great flood of migrants in the latter half of the nineteenth century the Muslim population of the city had been mainly Bengali-speaking with the 1837 census of the city returning 45,000 Bengali-speaking Muslims to approximately 20,000 non-Bengali Muslims.⁵ The Bengali-speakers had migrated from districts near to Calcutta such as 24 - Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly into a city which was till the 1850s primarily a mercantile rather than industrial centre. They were mainly illiterate peasants who found work as day-labourers, market-gardeners, hawkers, fish sellers, domestic servants and in various other occupations associated with their traditional caste

¹ See Map.

² Census, 1921, op.cit., p.71.

³ Census, 1911, vol.VI, part 1, p.47.

⁴ Ibid.; Govt of Bengal, Report on the Census of Calcutta, 1891, p.25.

⁵ Mukherjea, S.N. & Leach, E. (eds), Elites in South Asia (1970), Mukherjea, S.N., 'Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta, 1815-38', p.37.

or group occupations. The non-Bengali Muslims, however, were a very different group. They were not a homogeneous community but made up of a variety of sectarian, linguistic and regional groups hailing from many parts of India. One of the earliest groups to settle in the city were the Cutchi Memons, a trading group from the Kathiawar region in western India who arrived in 1770.¹ Other groups included traders from Delhi, Oudh, Persia, Dawoodi Bohras and Ismailis, the last two being heterodox sects, Arabs and 'Moghuls' - who were the descendants of the socially elite Ashraf families of foreign descent whose political dominance in Bengal had been usurped by the British.

All these groups were, for the most part, merchants and traders with a sprinkling of government servants and academics who were culturally and linguistically distinct from their Bengali-speaking co-religionists. Few took an interest in public affairs having neither the 'inclination nor skill required for the type of administrative posts open to the Indians'.² Their interests in the mercantile field were mainly traditional being largely restricted to the hide and skin trade, which they virtually controlled,³ and the export of gums, spices, indigo, tobacco and rice⁴ - rarely did they take an interest in 'the areas of economic activity which received a new impetus under the British and opened up opportunities for men to move up in the new world'.⁵

The 'Moghul' Muslims were, however, a very distinct sub-community 'isolated from the vast majority of the Bengali Muslim masses and from other non-Bengali Muslim groups in Calcutta'.⁶ They were the Ashraf, the

¹ Statesman, 1929, 9 May, p.10.

² Mukherjea, S.N. & Leach, E. (eds), op.cit., p.49.

³ Ray, P.C., op.cit., p.447.

⁴ Ibid., p.459 fn.

⁵ Mukherjea, S.N. & Leach, E. (eds), op.cit., p.49.

⁶ Ibid.

aristocrats and traditional social elite of Bengal and included those of highest social ranking such as Saiyid, Pathan and Moghul as opposed to the anonymous mass of Atrap or commoners.¹ The respect and prestige accorded them was based on several factors the most important of which was their claim to foreign descent - a claim which intimated a closer family connection with the glorious past of Islam than could ever be possessed by the larger body of Atrap.² During the pre-British period in Bengal when various Islamic dynasties had held sway from the thirteenth century, the ancestors of these Ashraf families had settled in the province as administrators, soldiers and missionaries. Maintained by land grants these migrant families from northern India, Persia, Iraq and central Asia had formed an exotic ruling class which was culturally and linguistically foreign to Bengal. Their culture aped that of the Moghul court and their language was Persian and to some extent Urdu. Instead of waning over the centuries the cultural distinction between the Ashraf and the largely indigenous Atrap became more rigid.⁴ Knowledge of Bengali permeated the ranks of the Ashraf, but it was the despised language of the uncultured masses⁵ and as far as the Ashraf were concerned it had no place in their religious, intellectual or social life that was of any consequence.⁶

¹O'Malley, L.S.S., 24-Parganas District Gazetteer (1914), p.83: Atrap is the Bengali corruption of Ajlaf (Lower classes) and is a generic designation for converts and functional groups, e.g. Dhunia (cotton cleaner), Kulu (oil presser), Hajjam (barber).

²Roy, Asim, 'Islam in the environment of Medieval Bengal' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, A.N.U., 1970), p.32.

³One major theme of Bengali Muslim historical writings, especially in the late nineteenth century when Islamic revivalist movement swept the mofussil has been the attempt to prove that the Atrap, like the Ashraf, are in fact of foreign origin, e.g. Fazli Rubbee's, The Origin of the Mussalmans of Bengal (1895), a claim not supported by anthropological surveys.

⁴Roy, Asim, op.cit., pp.36-45.

⁵Sinha, Pradip, Nineteenth Century Bengal (1965), p.55.

⁶Roy, Asim, op.cit., p.41.

In no way did the Bengali language or culture impinge upon the circumscribed life of the Ashraf. The result was the emergence of a Muslim social, economic, religious and administrative elite centred upon the Moghul provincial capitals such as Dacca and Murshidabad which was bound to the body of its co-religionists by little more than a common religious belief.

The advent of British rule in the eighteenth century had far-ranging effects upon the position of the Ashraf. The socio-economic changes wrought by the British in the mofussil caused a certain amount of dispossession amongst Muslim landowners,¹ but more important still was the administrative and cultural impact of British rule. At first the British retained the decayed Moghul administrative system but in the early years of the nineteenth century, however, the administrative machinery was overhauled as the process of government expanded and became more sophisticated. The skills required of Indian employees became more diverse and essentially entailed the absorption of western techniques and education, a process the majority of Ashraf families proved incapable of undergoing. The effect on many Ashraf families was severe - an overweening pride in non-Bengali cultural values had prevented any widespread integration of these families with the indigenous society of Bengal and now militated against their acceptance, or at least utilisation, of western techniques and culture. An archaic education system looked backwards to the days of Moghul glory,² and left them ill-prepared to accept the new administrative and economic opportunities which opened up under the new regime. The luckier amongst them found refuge on their estates in the mofussil or in the fading pensionary courts of the Nawabs of Dacca and Murshidabad, but for many the changes spelled ruin. The more enterprising took to trade in

¹ Mukherjea, S.N. & Leach, E. (eds), op.cit., p.39; Mukherjea seriously questions Hunter's thesis of Muslim material dispossession.

² Roy, Asim, op.cit., pp.15-16.

Calcutta or sold off land to provide their children with a western education, but most simply retreated behind their garden walls where in increasing poverty and in a cultural and emotional cocoon they clung to a rapidly fading life-cycle. Of those that did settle in Calcutta, and this included other non-Bengali Muslims, only a few rich landowners and merchants took any interest in public affairs.¹ The majority were simply not interested in acquiring the skills required by the new administration and even when provided with their own institute of higher education, the Calcutta Madrassa, by Hasting in 1780² they either ignored it or allowed it to languish for lack of moral and financial support and under the impact of internecine squabbling over the curriculum.³

By the mid-nineteenth century the Ashraf were a relatively impoverished social elite compared to those of other communities. In the mofussil some of them, such as the Nawab of Dacca, survived as great landowners and were the social and economic leaders of the community but the position of the Ashraf in Calcutta was somewhat different. As far as status was concerned they were still socially pre-eminent in their community and the few Muslims with a western education and who had entered the professions and higher ranks of government service were from this group. But, the wealth of the Calcutta Muslim community was in the hands of migrant merchant families who, although they may have claimed Ashraf status were rarely accorded it by the long-established Ashraf families of the province. The latter took pride in their historical role in Bengal and had imbibed enough of the bhadrolok⁴ ethos to associate status

¹ Mukherjee, S.N. & Leach, E. (eds), op.cit., p.38.

² Huque, M. Azizul, History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal (1917), pp.5-6, 18, 29.

³ Ibid., p.18; Sinha Pradip, op.cit., p.54, quotes the Calcutta University Commission of 1917-19 which stated that: 'while the Bengali Muhammedan is generally anxious that his community should reap the full benefit of secular education, he is not prepared to take the benefits at the price of any real sacrifice of the Islamic tradition or culture'.

⁴ Roy, Asim, op.cit., p.33; Broomfield, J., op.cit., pp.5-6.

also with landownership to the extent that mercantile activities of the Calcutta Muslims were somewhat beyond the bounds of respectability.

This does not mean, however, that the Calcutta Muslim community was socially immobile. In Muslim society throughout India descent and language were the basic criteria for status ranking but pragmatically wealth also counted. Wealth plus the adoption of Ashraf cultural and linguistic values,¹ and also the purchase of an agricultural estate eased the path to higher status. With prosperity non-Ashraf groups did not form rival social elites but by marriage and changes in life-style they were gradually absorbed into the ranks of the traditional elite. The difference was that in Calcutta by the twentieth century the pre-requisites for Ashraf status were subtly different from those current in the mofussil. In Calcutta imitation of this status group implied subscription to time-honoured cultural traditions, but in the urban environment it also entailed the pursuit of occupations other than the ownership of land and the disbursement of patronage granted by the British to prominent communal leaders such as the Nawab of Dacca. The more successful Ashraf in the city had taken to western education and entered the professions and government service with the result that such pursuits gained respectability amongst the economically dominant but socially inferior Muslim mercantile groups in Calcutta adding a hitherto unknown degree of modernity to an ancient pattern of social mobility. In addition this growing differentiation of interests between the western-oriented aspirations of many Calcutta Ashraf families and the traditionalist outlook of leading Ashraf families in the mofussil sowed the seeds for a divergence of interests within Ashraf ranks when in later years members of this group entered the political arena - Ashraf families from Calcutta vied with those from the mofussil for leadership of the Bengal Muslim community, one using the modern political techniques of the age, the other appealing to the romantic

¹ Census, 1921, vol.V, pp.160, 349, vol.VI, p.71.

cause of traditionalism as applied to religious beliefs and the structuring of Islamic society.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the composition of the Muslim population of Calcutta changed radically. In this era Calcutta developed rapidly as a great industrial city based on the processing of jute, cotton and associated industrial concerns which sprang up in and around the city.¹ Vast numbers of labourers and operatives were needed to staff the mills and 'up country' Hindus and Muslims from outside Bengal were recruited. Poor communications with the Bengal mofussil, relatively prosperous rural conditions which reduced the rate of internal migration, caste prohibitions, a strong belief amongst employers that the Bengali was constitutionally unfit for factory labour and not least the penchant of Bengalis for more respectable non-manual pursuits were all factors which militated against the formation of a large Bengali working class in Calcutta during this period.² The system of recruitment organised during this period was found convenient by the mill-owners and directly helped maintain the non-Bengali character of the Calcutta working class. Workers were recruited by sirdars, or foremen, who generally signed on men from their own villages or districts either out of a sense of group loyalty, simple convenience or for the sake of the welcome dasturi or bribe.³ In 1918 the mill population's communal ratio was roughly five Hindus to three Muslims - the figures for 1921 were 47,694 Hindus and

¹ O'Malley, L.S.S., Howrah District Gazetteer (1909), pp.38-9, 110-11; Gadgil, D.R., The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times (1948 ed.), pp.54, 55, 74, 78, 103.

² See footnotes no. 4, p.2 and no.5, p.3; Govt of India, Industrial Commission Report, 1916-18, p.11; Chattopadhyay, K.P., A Socio-Economic Survey of Jute Labour (1952), pp.5-9.

³ Census, 1921, vol.V, part 1, p.143; Chattopadhyay, K.P., op.cit., p.8; Kelman, J.H., Labour in India (1923), p.102; Mukerjee, R., The Indian Working Class (1951), p.39; Govt of India, Industrial Commission Report, 1916-18, pp.11, 13; Anstey, V., The Economic Development of India (1952 ed.), pp.120, 125.

30,182 Muslims.¹ The majority of mill workers were from Bihar and the United Provinces² and most lived either singly or with dependents outside the municipal limits of Calcutta which contained only 17.3 per cent of the mill labourers and families.³ Most lived either in mill housing or in squalid bustees which were ramshackle straw and mud huts crowded onto vacant blocks of unsewered land that was invariably flooded by the annual monsoon. The labourers were in the area for one reason only - to make money, which, despite the temptations and ravages of prostitutes, money lenders, V.D. and grog shops, they sent to their native villages in large quantities.⁴ Few labourers spent more than eight months in the area⁵ and the mills had an exceedingly high labour turnover.⁶ Most labourers arrived without dependents, particularly, for some unknown reason, the Muslims,⁷ and the male-female ratio for the greater Calcutta area was the lowest in Bengal; for the city itself it was 1,000:470 a factor which no doubt contributed to the turbulent social life of the mill labourers in and around the city.⁸

The majority of the Muslim inhabitants of the city were not mill labourers. Calcutta city was not an industrial area but rather a business and mercantile centre which

¹ Census, 1921, vol.VI, part 1, p.107.

² Ibid., p.111.

³ Ibid., p.104.

⁴ Mukerjea, R., op.cit., p.291; Govt of India, Industrial Commission Report, 1916-18, pp.11-12; O'Malley, L.S.S., Howrah District Gazetteer (1909), pp.94-5.

⁵ Census, 1921, vol.VI, part 1, pp.12-13; O'Malley, L.S.S., 24-Parganas District Gazetteer (1914), p.226; O'Malley, L.S.S., Howrah District Gazetteer (1909), p.30.

⁶ Mukherjea, R., op.cit., p.41.

⁷ Kelman, J.H., op.cit., p.98; Chattopadhyay, K.P., op.cit., p.19; Census, 1921, vol.V, part 1, p.364.

⁸ Census, 1921, vol.VI, part 1, p.12; Ali, Ashraf, The City Government of Calcutta: A Study in Inertia (1966), p.6.

provided occupations different to those offered by the mills. The Muslims of the city tended to follow particular occupations because they were traditional and also because some such as butchering and the skin and hide trade were avoided by many caste Hindus.

In particular the Muslims dominated trades such as butchering, leatherwork, cigarette manufacturing, building, carpentry, baking, cabinet-making, tailoring, cart transport - as drivers and entrepreneurs, river transport and various sections of the maritime services, particularly as lascars.¹ Large numbers were also found in the lower ranks of the police force where the tough Bihari Muslims were valued as constables, domestic service, the drug industry, book-binding, animal care, the fresh and dried fruit trade, shoemaking, printing and as dock labourers.² In other fields, however, the Muslims were poorly represented. As merchants, moneylenders and traders they were outnumbered 3:1 by Hindus³ and were mainly, apart from a few wealthy families, petty merchants such as the 'Peshwari' fruitsellers, Bihari butchers, Hooghly Muslim general-goods merchants, 'Kabuli' moneylenders and Pathan shoemakers who had small stalls and shops in Wards VIII, X and XIII, the main centres of Muslim business activity.⁴ A similar ratio of Muslim employment existed in the public force and administrative agencies of the city where they were found mostly in the lower ranks as labourers and petty clerks. In the 'professions and liberal arts' Muslim representation reached its lowest ebb and for every Muslim employed there were six Hindus, not to mention the members

¹ See Appendix I: Census, 1921, vol.V, part 1, p.414, vol.VI, part 1, p.36, 'they are almost the only Indians who go to sea and form a majority of the crews of lighters, launches, river steamers and boats which are in use in the port', pp.104, 105, 107.

² Ibid.; Ray, P.C., op.cit., p.456.

³ Census, 1921, vol.V, part 1, p.414.

⁴ See Map, "Calcutta Municipal Wards, 1921".

of other communities.¹ Overall one third of the city's Muslims were employed in industry, one sixth in transport, one seventh in trade, one eleventh in domestic service and a mere one in twenty in the public administration, professions and liberal arts.²

An interesting feature of Muslim employment in the city, particularly as recorded in the 1901 Census³ is the indication it gives of the social organisation of the community below the elite level of Ashraf families who provided the Muslim membership of the professions and liberal arts,⁴ and the more prosperous merchant families. The 1901 Census revealed that Muslims following certain trades and occupations lived in particular areas of the city, or at least in groups scattered amongst a limited number of wards. For example the greatest concentration of Muslim animal food and vegetable sellers was to be found in Ward VIII whilst the largest number of Muslims engaged in water transport and storage plus those engaged in the professions was to be found in Ward XX.⁵

Obviously this pattern of settlement was more than fortuitous. The pattern of Muslim and non-Muslim settlement in Calcutta was such that the maintenance of identity of communities and sub-communities was relatively easy. The

¹ See footnote 3, page 20; Census, 1921, Vol. VI, part 1, p.107.

² See previous footnote.

³ See Appendix I.

⁴ Census, 1921, vol.VI, part 1, p.123:

Occupations/income of Saiyid's of Calcutta	
Income from rent of land	4.0%
Cultivators	1.1%
Industry	25.4%
Transport	10.5%
Trade	14.4%
Domestic service	13.5%
Contractors etc.	8.3%
Beggars etc.	2.3%
Others (includes academics, clerks, those employed in professions etc.)	20.5%

⁵ Census, 1901, vol.VII, part 1, pp.200-491.

very rapid growth of Calcutta in the latter half of the nineteenth century affected the social organisation of the various communal groups similarly, in at least one basic way. Insofar as it occurred over a relatively short period this rapid urbanisation resulted in the members of various groups clinging together socially in geographic units, as a conscious, or perhaps subconscious, means of protection and maintenance of social identity in what was essentially a foreign environment. Calcutta was, and still is, more a conglomeration of villages than a western metropolis with a major division between the areas inhabited by the larger communal groups and yet further sub-divisions based on regional, linguistic, sectarian and occupational affiliations.¹ Amongst the Muslims the only groups not to be so confined were the Ashraf and wealthier mercantile families who were scattered throughout the areas of greatest Muslim population, but even they had begun by 1918 to congregate at the Park Circus area in Ward XX where a modern, predominantly Muslim upper class suburb developed. Throughout the city there was a noticeable tendency for Hindus and Muslims to move to separate areas - the Hindus to the north of the city and the Muslims to Wards VIII, X, XIII, XIV, XV, and XX partly for the reasons explained above and partly for the more pragmatic reason that Hindu landlords were loath to have Muslim tenants.²

¹'Calcutta does not enjoy that easy and widespread social communication necessary to foster the organisation of a well-knit society of people having a civic consciousness. The lack of assimilation makes Calcutta not a melting pot but a tossed salad, and the city's life seethes with tensions between non-communicating groups, which flare up into riots and disorder at the slightest provocation', in Ali, Ashraf, The City Government of Calcutta: A Study in Inertia (1966), p.18.

²See Table I, page 23; Census, 1921, vol.VI, part 1, p.36, 'in spite of the fact that Calcutta's population is so remarkably a shifting population, the proportion between Hindus and Muhammedans in each locality has been remarkably constant.... Much of the explanation for this...lies in the fact that a Hindu landlord will not have a Muhammedan tenant if he can help it, and a Hindu very much prefers not to live in a house whose previous occupant has been a Muhammedan.... Muhammedans may not have the same prejudice...but they prefer to keep their houses for their co-religionists if only in retaliation for the attitude of the Hindus in the matter', p.37, 'there is undoubtedly a tendency towards segregation [which] has been decidedly more marked in the last decade than previously and that its working is most easily apparent in a drawing apart of the Hindu majority from the rest of the community and the reduction of small minorities of Muhammedan [sic] in the northern end of town, in Bhowanipore and in the Southern suburbs where Hindus are most numerous'.

TABLE 1 :

Ward Population 1921

Ward	Percentage speaking Hindi or Urdu	Migrant Percentage of Ward Population	Muslim Percentage of Ward Population
1	15.3	41.5	7.69
2	15.5	65.1	2.77
3	21.8	54.0	13.22
4	30.3	56.8	19.34
5	56.0	79.3	2.86
6	25.7	50.2	9.22
7	70.0	96.4	13.46
8	54.5	81.7	42.77
9	22.2	78.8	25.69
10	48.5	67.9	33.34
11	15.4	58.2	4.03
12	66.8	91.0	11.60
13	46.5	83.2	36.50
14	40.7	60.5	44.51
15	48.2	70.9	37.16
16	52.5	82.2	13.85
17	53.0	86.7	18.62
18	78.0	62.8	26.80
19	41.4	46.7	33.28
20	46.7	46.4	53.12
21	39.8	56.6	34.83
22	32.6	76.0	6.89
23	38.3	88.8	19.83
24	42.6	60.6	38.84
25	45.3	69.0	28.59
TOTAL	36.8	66.4	23.03
Cossipore - Chitpur	45.1	68.6	27.13
Manicktolla	40.3	70.7	36.40
Garden Reach	35.9	51.3	45.95
Tollygunge	24.6	37.9	29.92
South Suburban	9.5	17.5	17.19
Howrah	41.4	55.9	22.04
Calcutta + Suburbs	37.2	62.9	24.48

References: Govt of India, Census of India, 1921, vol.VI, part 1, pp.27-8, 40,82.

None of the census reports of the period ever attempted to differentiate the Muslims on caste or group grounds beyond enumeration of Saiyid, Pathan, Moghul and Sheikh¹ with an occasional nod in the direction of a few occupational groups.² A report from as late as 1970, however, listed more than 65 'ethnic groups' (including several sectarian groups) among the Muslim population of the city.³ They ranged from the 'groups claiming foreign descent [and] having no traditional occupation and not organised on the basis of caste panchayat'⁴ such as Saiyid, Pathan, Moghul and Sheikh, to 'occupational groups that continue to pursue traditional occupations, besides adopting other occupations, [and] have generally strong caste organisations',⁵ for example the Bengali and non-Bengali Darzi (tailors), the Meo dairymen and dealers in milk who originally migrated from the region north of Delhi and the Qureshi, butchers from the Punjab.⁶

¹ Saiyid, Pathan and Moghul are the three Ashraf titles which denote descent from the Prophet and foreign origin; Sheikh is a much looser title generally assumed by converts and members of functional groups in an attempt to achieve greater respectability.

² Census, 1921, vol.V, part 1, p.349: 'There is no caste recognised by the Muhammedan religion...and although there are certain divisions among the Muhammedan community, they are by no means the clear divisions of the Hindu caste system. The several sections are not to be called castes in the same sense as the word is used for Hindus, and yet some certainly are not distinguished by race. There are functional sections, such as Jolahas and Kulus, and there are what purport to be separate races, the Pathans and the Moghuls, though the fashion nowadays is to deny the existence of rigid partitions on the lines of the functional sections, and the distinctions of race have been almost obliterated. Yet the fact remains that a Sheikh will not marry a Kulu and in some parts one class of Muhammedans will not even feed with another.'; *ibid.*, vol.VI, part 1, p.71: 'there is no doubt that many Muhammedans avoided being returned as Jolaha, Kulu, etc., who should have been so returned, and called themselves Sheikh', p.76: in 1921, 3,302 Muslims returned themselves as Jolaha in Calcutta city, 10,857 as Pathan, 3,981 as Saiyid and 180,632 as Sheikh; see Appendix II.

³ See Appendix II.

⁴ Siddiqui, M.K.A., 'Caste Among the Muslims of Calcutta' (unpubl. seminar paper given at the Indian Anthropological Society, January 1970), p.6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁶ *Ibid.*

The economically more dominant groups were those from Gujerat, 'sectarian-cum-ethnic groups' such as the Dawoodi Bohras, the Cutchi (Kachi) Memons and others, as well as the Qaum-e-Punjabian from Delhi and the Ranki who 'virtually monopolise the hide and skin trade' and claim to have been originally Kalal, or distillers, from Iraq. All these groups maintain some sort of voluntary group association, particularly in the case of the Cutchi Memons who were responsible for the re-building of the Nakhoda Mosque, Calcutta's largest, in the 1920s, and who also controlled considerable funds for the benefit of impoverished group members.¹

Certain groups, however, are not accounted for in the survey, particularly occupational 'castes' such as the Dhuma (cotton cleaners), Kulu (oil pressers) and Kunja (vegetable sellers).² In part the explanation of this is the fact that they were Bengali Muslim groups, amongst whom the tendency was to abandon caste names in favour of the more general and respectable title of Sheikh, especially after settling in Calcutta where they hoped to merge into the greater body of the community.³ This is particularly apparent amongst members of the Joloha, or weaving caste, whose numbers showed a marked decline between 1911 and 1921 as the more prosperous members took to petty trade and adopted the title Sheikh.⁴ The tendency amongst the Bengali Muslim migrants, the least respected group within the community, was to seek higher status by change of name and if possible of language and occupation. Within the Calcutta Muslim community the first two deeds were relatively easily

¹ Ibid., pp.5-6; Statesman, 1929, 9 May, p.10; The Muslim Year Book of India and Who's Who, 1948-49, p.440; Bengal Govt, Political Dept, September 1918, File no.2N-31, Progs B1075-96.

² O'Malley, L.S.S., 24-Parganas District Gazetteer (1914), p.83.

³ O'Malley, L.S.S., Hooghly District Gazetteer (1912), p.98.

⁴ O'Malley, L.S.S., Howrah District Gazetteer (1909), p.38; Census, 1921, Vol.VI, part 1, p.76, the Jolahas declined from 7,145 in 1911 to 3,302 in 1921.

accomplished especially as the common form of Urdu had become debased into a conglomerate patois known in the mofussil as Dobhasi¹ and in Calcutta as Gulabi Urdu 'a Hindustani dialect...that contains Bengali as well as English vocabulary and syntactical elements'.² Change of occupation was another matter. For the most part poor and illiterate the Bengali Muslim was mainly confined to manual labour and, hailing from the riverine and maritime districts of the province, naturally gravitated towards occupations such as river transport, dock labour, fishing and maritime pursuits with the result that they formed the majority of seamen recruited from Calcutta - the lascars.³

Maintenance of group identity was therefore facilitated by several factors: the geographic pattern of settlement in the city, occupation, language, historical tradition and the survival of endogamy in a communal society where social status was inextricably related to religious status and to a large extent material prosperity.

Sectarian differences never loomed large amongst the Muslims of Calcutta. The Census of 1921 enumerated only 816 Shias,⁴ the rest of the population apparently being accounted Sunni. The previously mentioned 1970 survey lists five heterodox sects - namely three Shia groups which maintain strong social exclusiveness and are numerically small, e.g. the Imam Ismaili Shia numbered only 50 families in 1970, and two sects which fall outside the Sunni-Shia spectrum, the Ahl-e-Hadith or Wahabi and the Ahmadia both of which are numerically insignificant and developed only in the twentieth century in Calcutta.⁵ Not mentioned in either the Census or report is the Persian Shia community

¹Roy, Asim, op.cit., pp.23-4.

²Siddiqui, M.K.A., op.cit., p.4.

³Census, 1921, Vol.V, part 1, p.364; ibid., pp.36,105,27.

⁴Census, 1921, Vol.V, part 1, p.161.

⁵Siddiqui, M.K.A., op.cit., pp.8-9.

which although apparently small in numbers included such wealthy families as the Ispahanis, and Shustarys, and had been long established in the city as a merchant group with its own association, the Anjuman-i-Murtazavim founded in the 1890s,¹ and a controlling interest in the Hooghly Imambara an imposing but much troubled Shia educational institution in the Hooghly district. Disputes over the curriculum and finances of this institution spread over the latter half of the nineteenth and earlier part of the twentieth centuries and resulted in innumerable family feuds within the Persian community which somewhat weakened their influence as a united body. In part the official and academic neglect of the Persian community can probably be explained by their wealth and long connection with Calcutta city. Time and wealth tended to obscure their sectarian exclusiveness with the result that they were to the public eye an integral part of the social and economic Muslim elite of the city - they practiced endogamy but so did the older Muslim Ashraf families in Bengal and as far as the Muslim inhabitants of Calcutta were concerned the Persians were Ashraf in terms of status, wealth, language and life-style.

IV

Leadership of the Muslim community in Calcutta obviously existed at several levels. At the apex of the social pyramid were the Ashraf families who formed the social, political, religious and professional elite of the community at large. The Nawab of Dacca, the premier Muslim nobleman of Bengal and British-inspired leader of the province's Muslims, was the head of the principal Ashraf family and in status only approached by the Nawab of Murshidabad, head of the Nizamat family, and the impoverished,

¹ Statesman, 1921, 10 November, p.5.

exiled royal houses of Oudh and Mysore gently decaying in the Garden Reach and Tollygunge suburbs of Calcutta. Both Dacca and Murshidabad were great zamindars with widespread influence in the mofussil and with considerable theoretical but little actual influence in the day to day events of the life of the Calcutta Muslim community. The leaders of the Calcutta community were drawn from the Ashraf, and mercantile families of the city. The Ashraf families settled in Calcutta were closely tied by background, marriage and descent to the Ashraf of the mofussil. Many had settled in the city, been educated and gained employment as a result of the patronage held by men like the Nawab of Dacca,¹ but this process contained the seeds of ultimate differentiation for once settled in the city the ties of these families with the mofussil weakened and they developed aspirations and grievances different to those held by the Ashraf in the mofussil. Few appear to have retained land outside Calcutta and once their dependence upon mofussil patronage had waned there was a tendency amongst them to form a socially elite group from their own members in the city, and to develop their own powers of patronage which inevitably cut across those held by Dacca and Murshidabad. This can be best illustrated by examining the history of two families: those of Nawab Abdul Latif and Obaidullah Al-Obaidi Suhrawardy. Latif's father had settled in Calcutta early in the nineteenth century under the patronage of the Dacca family. Eldest son of an impoverished zamindari family which claimed descent from the Prophet through related noble families in Delhi and Baghdad, Latif's father achieved some success as a Persian historian and as a vakil at the Calcutta High Court. Latif was educated at

¹Ikramullah, Begum S., From Purdah to Parliament (1963): written by the daughter of Sir Hasan Suhrawardy this book provides an excellent background to Muslim society and culture in Calcutta amongst Ashraf families from east Bengal, especially pp.3-13, 22-4; I am indebted to Mr Ragat K. Ray of Calcutta and Oxford for references relating to this period from works such as Sufia Ahmad's Some Aspects of the Muslim Community in Calcutta, 1884-1912 (n.d.) which I was unable to locate and also to a number of Bengali language publications.

the Calcutta Madrassah and in 1849 entered the provincial judicial service as a deputy magistrate. After a successful career in the service, a term in the provincial legislative council and as a Prime Minister of Bhopal Latif retired in 1887. Not only had he completed an eminent public career but he had also taken a lead in the social and political life of his community in Calcutta. In 1863 he established the Muhammedan Literary Society and in 1877 joined Ameer Ali in founding the Central National Muahmmedan Association. Of his children three sons joined the judicial service, the most noteworthy being Nawab A.F.M. Abdur Rahman who took a leading role in the activities of the Calcutta Corporation and who finally retired in 1913 as Chief Judge of the Small Causes Court.¹ A daughter married Nawab Syed Mohammed, member of an impoverished east Bengal zamindar family who had entered Government service as Latif's protege² and two of whose daughters in turn married into the Suhrawardy and Huq families both of which had formerly been petty zamindar families in east Bengal.

The Suhrawardy family were of similar background to that of Latif.³ Obaidullah Suhrawardy was a petty zamindar, who claimed Persian descent, from east Bengal. Steeped in Moghul culture he nevertheless possessed sufficient acumen to gauge the need for coming to terms with the British regime and sold off his land to provide his four sons with an English language education at the Dacca Madrassah. Fortuitously his sons, including one who died tragically at 19, proved brilliant and won scholarships to study in England. Returning from their studies the two

¹ I have avoided giving references for the life of Nawab Abdul Latif and his family as they are many and varied with no comprehensive works available, except Enamul Haque's Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif (1970), which is rather piecemeal.

² Ikramullah, Begum S., op.cit., pp.6-8.

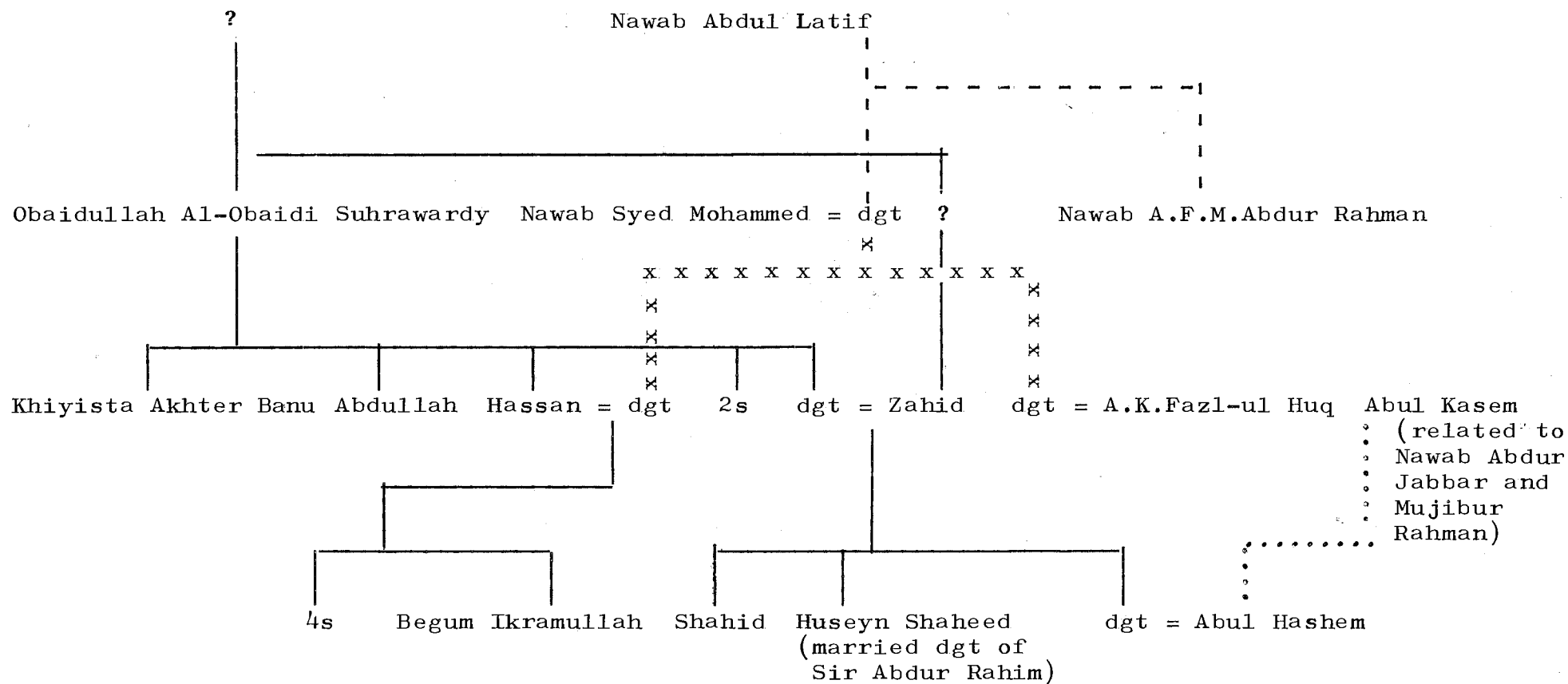
³ Ibid., pp.14-16.

eldest, Abdullah and Hasan, settled in Calcutta, the first as a lawyer and later politician and the second as a doctor and later Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University. They were joined by their elder sister Khyista Akhter Begum, a prominent female educationalist married to a judge and by their cousin Zahid Suhrawardy who entered upon an eminently successful career which culminated in his appointment as a High Court Judge. All three men were eventually knighted and played an important role in the social and political life of their community, first in Calcutta and later throughout Bengal. Initially reliant upon the goodwill of the prominent Ashraf families in the mofussil such men proved to be the political and social technocrats of the new age and equipped with the skills demanded in a rapidly changing society they eventually superseded the role of the mofussil Muslim elite. In Calcutta their influence was bolstered by their powers of patronage, superficial emulation of the life of Anglo-India and close personal identification with the intellectual and cultural traditions of the Ashraf life-style which were not in open contradiction with their chosen careers.¹

In close association with such families were the pre-eminent Muslim mercantile families of the city, such as the Shirazis, Ispahanis, Shustarys, Sallehjis and Ariffs all of whom were non-Bengalis. Supported by business investments and the rents of urban property the members of such families had little need to seek alternative occupations, but nevertheless on account of their wealth and influence amongst other Muslim merchants and businessmen they took an active and vital part in community social life. Their role is perhaps best illustrated in relation to the activities of Nawab Abdul Latif.

A disciple of Saiyid Ahmed Khan, both in the intellectual and political spheres, Latif established the Muhammedan Literary Society in Calcutta in 1863 with the

¹ See footnote 1, page 28; also Table: Genealogical Table, p.31.



s = son
dgt = daughter

TABLE 2

object to

impart useful information to the higher and educated classes of the Mahommedan community...on various subjects in Literature, Science and Society, which are delivered, at the monthly meetings, in the Oordu, Persian, Arabic and English languages.¹

The first committee was elected in October 1863 after a visit by Saiyid Ahmed Khan and apart from Latif, his son A.F.M. Abdur Rahman, close associate Nawab Abdul Jabbar, son of a Burdwan zamindar family, and representatives of the Oudh, Mysore and Nizamat families, it also included Shirazis, Ariffs, Shustaris and members of other mercantile families.²

In 1877 Latif was closely associated with Syed Ameer Ali, whose family were of Persian descent and had been administrators under the Moghuls, in the establishment of the Central National Mahommedan Association, a social and educational organisation³ planned on more grandiose terms than the Literary Society and initially of more widespread influence.⁴ The Calcutta branch was dominated by Ashraf members of the professions and, like the Literary Society, by members of mercantile families, particularly the Gujarati Ariffs.⁵ As with the Literary Society, however, the C.N.M.A. achieved little lasting importance. Both were attuned to the grievances and aspirations of small, socially-exclusive groups. They were concerned with the interests of the non-Bengali 'higher and educated classes' and made no contact with the mass of Bengali-speaking Muslims or, indeed, the mass of lower class Muslims in Calcutta city. The only positive role they played was to provide the first forum

¹Haque, Enamul, Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif (1970), p.195.

²The Mahommedan Literary Society of Calcutta, Abstract of Proceedings (1901), p.i; Haque, Enamul, op.cit., pp.43-53, 78-111, 139-243.

³Bengal Govt, Political Dept, October 1917, File no.8A-8, Progs B584-85, 'C.N.M.A. File' containing correspondence and Government confidential notes.

⁴Aziz, K.K., Ameer Ali (1968), p.8.

⁵See footnote 3.

for concerted public activity by the socially and economically dominant Muslim elites of Calcutta.

Various other institutions rose to prominence within the Calcutta community in the wake of the Muhammedan Literary Society. All were Urdu- or Persian-oriented and restricted to particular groups within the community. The most important were the Anjuman-i-Waizeen,¹ a socio-religious organisation dominated by merchants in Ward VIII; the Anjuman-i-Mufidal-i-Islam, established in 1905, which ran a free Muslim cemetery in Entally, a free school for orphans and the children of poor Muslims and a free library;² the Anjuman-i-Murtazavim of the Persian community, established in the 1890s, and various smaller, localised associations such as the Anjuman-i-Talim-o-Taraqqi and Beniapukur Moslem Association both of which ran free schools in Ward XX.³

One feature common to all these organisations, apart from their organisational dominance by Ashraf and mercantile families, was their non-Bengali cultural outlook. In the late nineteenth century the Muslims of Calcutta remained convinced that their Bengali co-religionists were, apart from the Ashraf families, little more than neo-Muslims.⁴ Little cognisance was taken of the revivalist and puritanical religious movement which swept rural Bengal in this period and produced a mass of Bengali language literature aimed at purifying Islam in the mofussil.⁵ Scant interest in the lot

¹ Statesman, 1919, 9 May, p.11.

² Thackers Directory, 1918, p.67; Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1915-March 1916, 29.3.1916, p.1443-45, April 1919-March 1920, 20.3.1920, p.2000.

³ Ibid.; Thackers Directory, 1918, p.50.

⁴ Roy, Asim, op.cit., p.38.

⁵ Ibid., pp.23-4; also notes provided by Mr Ragat K.Ray relating to this mofussil movement and the publications Meherullar Jibani (1909) by Mohammed A.Pradhan, Meher Chant by Sheikh Mohammed Jaminuddin (1909) and various references in the 'Native Newspaper Reports' which indicated the growing tension between mofussil Bengali-speaking Muslims and the Urdu-speaking Muslims of Calcutta city e.g. NNR, 1895, 17 January, Mihir, Jamany and Damussultanat. 'Native Newspaper Reports' are hereafter referred to as NNR.

of their Bengali co-religionists was displayed by the Muslims of Calcutta until 1899 when the Bengal Provincial Muhammedan Educational Conference was formed at Dacca after a session of the all-India parent body.¹ Calcutta Muslim representation on the subsequent committees of the Conference was disproportionately large² and mofussil representation was Ashraf dominated, but increasingly the exponents of the Bengali language as a means of reaching and educating the masses gained ground in the councils of the Conference.³ This was largely due to the activities of men such as Moulvi Abdul Karim, a member of the Dacca family, one-time teacher at the Calcutta Madrassah and officer in the provincial education department, and also Moulana Abu Bakr a prominent divine from Hooghly with great influence amongst the Muslim peasant masses of Bengal.⁴ Both men came from eminently respectable Ashraf families but the administrative experience of one, and the religious activities of the other had made them aware of the importance of social uplift in the mofussil if the overall position of Muslims in Bengal was to be improved. Respected by all sections of the community both men had considerable influence upon the deliberations and resolutions of the Conference but at the best it was little more than a consultative body, limited by lack of finance and concrete plans for action. Nevertheless it was the first Muslim association in Bengal to look beyond the immediate interests of the dominant Ashraf and mercantile families.

¹ NNR, 1900, 2 January, Chani Mihir.

² Report of the Committee Appointed by the Bengal Government to consider questions connected with Muhammedan Education (1915), pp. iv-vi; Bengal Govt, Education Dept, July 1917; File no. 10C-3, Progs 37-42, report on the Bengal Provincial Muhammedan Education Conference; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1918, 1 January, p. 9.

³ Bengal Govt, Education Dept, July 1917, File no. 10C-3, Progs 37-42; Azam, M.A., Life of Maulavi Abdul Karim (1939), part II, p. 95.

⁴ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), December 1920, no. 74.

Not until 1911, however, did the slowly burgeoning Bengali Muslim awakening make any impact. In that year in Ward IX an area of light Muslim settlement but with a comparatively large Bengali Muslim population, the Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti was established with the help of a prosperous Bengali Muslim merchant and sympathetic Hindu intellectuals from the Bangiya Sahitya Samiti.¹ Slow to flourish the association nevertheless survived under the youthful management of young men such as Mujibur Rahman from Burdwan and Moulana Akram Khan both of whom were members of petty zamindar families from west Bengal which had, as occasionally occurred through the history of Bengal from the middle ages, a long tradition of Bengali as well as Persian scholarship.² By 1918 they had established a free library of 450 books with 1,000 subscribers and a vibrant debating society which proved the intellectual creche for many of Bengal's later prominent Muslim communist and socialist political leaders.³

In general the total effect of the Samiti was marginal. The Muslim culture of Calcutta was Urdu-oriented and this is nowhere better illustrated than in the Muslim educational system of the city. The Calcutta Madrassah had approximately 1,000⁴ students in 1917 most of whom were in the Arabic and Persian departments with a handful of students pursuing English language studies, whilst elsewhere in the city there were fewer than 500 Muslim students out of a tertiary student population of over 5,000 in the various colleges of the city.⁵

¹Ahmad, Muzaffar, Myself and the Communist Party of India, 1920-29 (1970), pp.23-4.

²Roy, Asim, op.cit., passim.

³Ahmad, Muzaffar, op.cit; Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1919-March 1920, 20.3.1920, p.2000.

⁴Huque, M. Azizul, History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal (1917), p.147.

⁵Ibid., p.147.

The bulk of Muslim students briefly attended the 206 government- and municipal-aided makhtabs which had 7,642 male and 1,638 female pupils in 1918.¹ Low as these figures are they are even worse when the curriculum of the makhtabs is considered - all they provided was a poorly supervised rote education which concentrated on Urdu, Arabic, memorising the Qu'ran and simple arithmetic with the main emphasis on religious instruction.²

Small wonder that the Muslim population of the city was one of the least literate communal groups in 1921 with an overall literacy rate of 25.3 per cent compared with 48.7 per cent for the Hindu population. Amongst the Ashraf, particularly the Saiyids, the rate was much higher with 51.9 per cent of males and 19.1 per cent of females over five years of age literate, but amongst the larger body of Atrap it was much lower being 24.3 per cent for males and 4.6 per cent for females.³ The medium of instruction in

¹ Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1917-March 1918, 6.3.1918, pp.1187-206; Bengal Govt Education Dept, April 1919, File no.1E-2, Progs 11-10.

² Census, 1921, Vol.V, part 1, p.291, 'before he is taught anything else the Muhammedan child is usually taught to say his prayers by rote and perhaps to repeat some parts of the Koran. This delays his secular education at the start, as further on in the progress of school education the necessity for him to take up another language, Arabic, as well, gives the Hindu boy an opportunity of getting ahead of him in English'. Bengal Govt, Education Dept, November 1929, File no.7M-1, Progs no.B429-92/, 'the progress in primary education is more apparent than real, for many pupils never pass beyond the lowest class and the wastage is enormous....The Muhammedans of Bengal are educationally backward in comparison with other communities [and] in spite of special facilities provided for [them] the fact remains that the proportion of Mussalman pupils remains low. The well-known effect is that Mussalmans cannot take their proper place in the economic and political life of the country [because] Mussalmans are much poorer than other communities and can less afford to pay for education and because of the intensity of their desire for religious instruction which causes them to demand special institutions which are completely inefficient'.

³ Census, 1921, Vol.VI, part 1, pp.83-94; in Calcutta and suburbs 38.9 per cent of the Hindu population was literate compared with only 19.3 per cent of the Muslim population. In the case of those literate in English 19.68 of the Saiyids were compared with 5.33 per cent of the Sheikhs and 0.79 per cent of the Jolahas.

the makhtabs was Urdu and by the time the principles of this language had been absorbed and large sections of the Qu'ran memorised few pupils had the time, inclination or finance to enter either the Calcutta Madrassah or the Sakhawat Memorial School for Girls, the only reputable institutions which provided the Muslim youth of Calcutta with a secondary education. The more prosperous families employed private tutors for Urdu, Arabic and Qu'ranic studies and educated their children at English-medium schools and colleges such as the Loreto Convent, St Xavier's and La Martinierre.

Communal relations in the city prior to 1918 were generally good. Muslims had precipitated localised riots in the central wards of the city in 1891 and 1897 over possession of mosques but those involved had been 'up-country' Muslims and the police - Bengali Hindus and Muslims were not involved, a pattern which repeated itself in the riots of 1910, 1918, 1926 and to an extent in 1946.¹ The 1910 riot, however, did involve Hindus and Muslims. The immediate cause was not, as Broomfield has suggested, the tension created by the partition agitation,² but rather Marwari agitation over the prospect of cow-slaughter at a mosque in a predominantly Marwari area on the occasion of Bakr-Id. Marwari appeals to the Police Commissioner to halt the korbani enraged the local Muslims population who joined by tough Pathans and Punjabis from the Bowbazar area set upon the Marwaris. 'Up-country' Hindus from Bihar and the U.P. came to the support of the Marwaris and Bengalis of both religions quickly vacated the area. Once the riot had been suppressed the Bengalee attempted to identify the groups involved and classified them as: 1) low class Urdu-speaking migrant Muslims, 'loongiwallas', 2) Pathan money-lenders from the North West Frontier Province, 'Kabulis', 3) 'up-country' Hindus, 4) Marwaris and 5) goondas of all races - indicating that at the later stage of the riot the

¹ Bengalee, 1910, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 18 March: this reference and subsequent references to the Bengalee are by courtesy of Mr Ragat K. Ray.

² Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.32.

goonda element came to the fore with the prospect of loot overwhelming religious fanatacism.¹

While the agitation over the partition of Bengal appears to have made little impact on the non-Bengali Muslim population its impact upon the Ashraf families of the city and mofussil was considerable. For the majority the creation of the Muslim majority province in east Bengal was a God-send. A new world of economic opportunity was opened to them and for a while the old Moghul capital at Dacca regained some of its lost importance. The agitation of Hindu politicians against the partition enraged the Muslim leaders of the new province and partly as a result of this and the prospect of India-wide constitutional reforms the All-India Muslim League and a provincial branch were established under the aegis of the Nawab of Dacca, at Dacca, in 1906. But the League was not the only Muslim political association formed in Bengal that year and it was rivalled as a focus for Muslim political activity by the Bengal Presidency Mahommedan Association.² Politically, however, the two institutions were poles apart - the League was communalistic, Urdu-oriented and the forum for mofussil Ashraf interests whereas the Association was pro-Indian National Congress in outlook, anti-partition and inimical to the social, political and economic dominance exerted by the conservative Ashraf families. Organised by men such as Abdul Halim Ghuznavi, Abdul Rasul, Mujibur Rahman, Moulana Akram Khan and Mazharul Huq, all of whom came from Ashraf families, had received a western education, and were young, the Association set about welding closer contacts with Congress. Under the able leadership of Abul Kasem, a kinsman of Mujibur Rahman and Nawab Abdul Jabbar of nineteenth century prominence in Calcutta, the Association sent a regular stream of delegates to Congress sessions in the years before the First World War.³

¹ See footnote 1, page 37.

² Bengalee, 1907, 9 January; *ibid.*, 20 December; *ibid.*, 1910, 10 October.

³ *Ibid.*, 1910, 10 October; Ahmad, Muzzafar, *op.cit.*, p.8; Hayat, Abul, The Mussalmans of Bengal (1966), pp.19-20.

The members of the Association represented a new current of political thought within the Muslim community of Bengal. They rejected the conservative social and political, i.e. loyalist, outlook of the Ashraf families from the mofussil and had, in the cosmopolitan hot-house of Calcutta, imbibed fresh ideas for the social, educational, economic and political uplift of their community - ideas which stretched beyond the interests of both the majority of Calcutta's Muslim elite and the Ashraf families ensconced on their estates in the mofussil. Politically, however, they were out of tune with the articulate sections of their community at this period. Their efforts to stir up support in the mofussil¹ and Calcutta² met with little success and their immediate influence was drowned in the wave of bitterness which swept Muslim Bengal when the partition was annulled in 1911.³ Conversely it was this event which although it temporarily discredited the pro-Congress Muslims laid the foundation for their future success in the years after 1918 when they usurped the older Ashraf leaders as representatives of the Muslims of Bengal.

The immediate effect of the annulment was not to increase Hindu-Muslim tension but rather to direct Muslim frustration and anger against the British who had betrayed their trust. The younger and more volatile members of the Dacca coterie - men such as Abdullah Suhrawardy and Fazl-ul Huq - began to talk of emulating the eminently successful Hindu pattern of agitation, and at a meeting in Calcutta in January 1912 Suhrawardy preached the cause of Hindu-Muslim political co-operation - a sentiment which echoed that of the members of the Bengal Presidency Mahommedan Association. Indeed, in succeeding years the members of both groups co-operated to

¹ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), September 1912, no.7, pp.179-82.

² Bengalee, 1905, 9 August; *ibid.*, 1907, 6, 9 January.

³ NNR, 1912, 8 March, Mussalman.

⁴ NNR, 1912, 6 January, Bihar Bandhu.

such an extent that they became members of a single faction. They issued no direct challenge to their elders whose influence was still considerable but helped by events between 1911 and 1918 this faction of 'younger Muslim leaders' who 'headed by Dr Suhrawardy and...G.H.C. Ariff [came] into prominence and adopted an attitude of independence towards the accepted leaders of their community'¹ were able to expose the bankruptcy of the pro-British policy of conciliation followed by the Nawab of Dacca and other splendid courtiers at the Viceroy's darbar.

The younger leaders joined the Presidency Muslim League and with the assistance of Mahomed Ali they slowly turned its face towards developments within the All-India Muslim League at the centre of the national scene, and began capitalising on the increasing sense of Muslim grievance against the British in Bengal.²

The Balkan Wars came hard on the heels of the partition furore and stirred the Calcutta Muslims to a pitch of agitation never before achieved. The leading Ashraf families in the city remained aloof from active agitation³ but a 'keen interest in the progress of the war had extended to classes which [were] ordinarily unmoved by political events'.⁴ A widespread feeling of further British betrayals, concern for Turkey and the description of the wars as a crusade of the Cross against the Crescent particularly disturbed the Muslims of Calcutta who with their romantic historical outlook viewed Turkey as the last bastion of Islam's usurped glories.⁵ The Comrade⁶ and its successor Al-Hilal edited by

¹ Govt of India, Home Poll (A), May 1913, no.111.

² Govt of India, Home Poll (B), November 1913, no.149, 'History Sheet of Mohamed Ali'.

³ Govt of India, Home Poll (A), May 1913, no.111.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For a history of the Comrade see Govt of India, Home Poll (B), November 1913, no.111.

the young Abul Kalam Azad took a prominent part in the agitation.¹ Azad's name and family connections added considerable weight to the agitation in the city. His father had been a prominent divine with a considerable following in the city particularly amongst the small but wealthy Cutchi Memon community. The Memons who were the traditional managers of the Nakhoda Mosque, the city's largest, had been responsible for attracting Azad's father to the city from Bombay, and upon his death they had transferred some of their veneration to his son whose newspaper, Al-Hilal, they initially financed.² Ashraf leaders from the mofussil such as the Nawab of Dacca attempted to dampen the surge of Pan-Islamic sentiment, as did the Aga Khan, but their efforts were rejected by the younger leaders who though unable to stir many of their more venerable peers had gained considerable support from the ranks of petty merchants and artisans who on the occasion of Bakr-ld donated the skins from slaughtered animals to the Red Crescent Fund.³ The authorities, however, were not so much concerned with this stirring of previously quiescent Muslim groups but with more immediate and disturbing development of the 'younger Muhammedan party... the more advanced section of the community' seeking a rapprochement with Hindu nationalist politicians.⁴ Abdullah Suhrawardy, G.H.C. Ariff, merchant and younger son of a prominent mercantile family, and Abul Kasem all sought support from the Hindu political leaders who led by B.C. Pal were to be found preaching Hindu-Muslim unity in the working class areas of north Calcutta.⁵

¹Ibid.

²Govt of India, Home Poll, 1921, no.45, Azad's sister married a prominent Maulvi, Irshad Qadri of Midnapore who had thousands of followers and the British considered that 'the marriage has been of great political value to Abul Kalam in Bengal'.

³Govt of India, Home Poll (A), May 1913, no.111.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

Another outcome of this agitation was the growth in influence and circulation of the Calcutta Muslim press.¹ The Urdu daily Al-Hilal was pre-eminent but was rivalled by the Habul Matin, a Persian daily established during the midst of the agitation which had an estimated circulation throughout India, Persia and Central Asia of 25,000 in 1914.² Originally it had an English language edition edited by Abdullah Suhrawardy, and a Bengali-language edition edited by Maniruzzaman Islamabadi a foundation member of the Bengal Presidency Mahommedan Association³ - but neither of these editions appear to have lasted long. In addition there was the Muhammadi, a Bengali daily edited by Moulana Akram Khan, and the Mussalman, an English daily edited by Mujibur Rahman; both were established in 1906 and had been organs of the anti-partition campaign.⁴

As if blessed by the gods the young Muslim party was presented with further causes for agitation once the Balkan Wars had begun to pale as a focus of Muslim interests. The Calcutta University affair and the Cawnpore Mosque incident were grist to their mill. The first affair was of limited interest but served to alienate active members of the young Muslim group further from the British and bound them more closely to their Hindu compatriots. In May 1913 Sir Asutosh Mookerjee submitted the names of Abdul Rasul, Abdullah Suhrawardy and a Hindu K.P. Jayaswal to the provincial Government for confirmation of their appointment as staff to the Law College of Calcutta University. But Governor Carmichael rejected the submissions on the grounds of the political activities of the three and set off a storm of protest which further undermined Muslim and Hindu faith in

¹Ibid.

²Statesman, 1924, 31 August, p.8.

³Ahmad, Muzaffar, op.cit., p.8; Hayat, Abul, op.cit., p.20; The Muslim Year Book of India and Who's Who, 1948-49, p.413.

⁴Ibid., pp.412-3.

British intentions. The second incident was of greater importance and roused perhaps more widespread concern within the Calcutta Muslim community than the Balkan Wars. The supposed mosque demolition drove Mahomed Ali into a paroxysm of pro-Turkish and anti-British utterances at a meeting in Calcutta² and caused the Al-Hilal to advocate, with the support of various Hindu newspapers, the boycott of European goods and the support of Swadeshi industries.³ The Bengal Presidency Muslim League under the signatures of its secretaries Zahid Suhrawardy, a cautious Calcutta lawyer, and Nawab Syed Ali Nawab Chowdhury, a socially conservative and wealthy zamindar from Rajshahi, sent a telegram to the Viceroy in July protesting against the demolition and again in August to protest against the riot.⁴

The outbreak of war in 1914 brought a temporary halt to all political agitation and for the last time the Muslims of India rallied en masse to support the Empire. But the lull was deceptive. The young Muslim party quietly forged ahead on their path of Hindu-Muslim conciliation and in 1915 supported the pro-Congress activities of Jinnah in the councils of the All India Muslim League at Bombay.⁵ Pan-Islamists were also active in the city and late in 1915 they established the Iqdam, Tarjuman and Risalet, Urdu dailies edited by fanatical agitators from the Punjab.⁶

¹Broomfield, J., op.cit., pp.78-9.

²Govt of India, Home Poll (B), November 1913, no.149, 'History Sheet of Mahomed Ali'.

³Govt of India, C.I.D., 'Histories of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement' by P.C. Bamford, Delhi, 1925, Part II, Chapter I, 'Pre-War Pan-Islamic Agitation in India, 1911-14', p.6. Hereafter referred to as the 'Bamford Report'.

⁴Govt of India, Home Poll (B), November 1913, nos.1-36, 'Cawnpore Mosque File', pp.10,16.

⁵'Bamford Report', op.cit., pp.20-1; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), January 1916, no.36, reference by courtesy of Dr D. Ferrell.

⁶Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), March 1916, no.50, reference by courtesy of Dr D. Ferrell; NNR, 1916, 22 June, Sadaqat; ibid., 1918, 6 March, Naqqash.

The prohibition of these newspapers in the Punjab and later of the Iqdam and Risalet in Bengal convinced many Muslims that despite their loyalty to the British they were more suspect than the Hindus¹, a feeling that many felt confirmed when it was revealed that the British had instigated a supposedly spontaneous fatwa signed by several Calcutta divines in support of the war early in 1915.²

The internment of the Ali brothers - Mahomed and Shaukat - in May 1915 further exacerbated Muslim feelings of confusion and discontent engendered by the entry of Turkey into the war on the side of Britain's enemies. Not only had Turkey long been a source of emotional pride as the last major Islamic power but it was also the home of the Caliph, the spiritual head of Islam. The subtleties of Allied propaganda which aimed at convincing the Muslims that war was being waged against the Caliph as temporal rather than spiritual ruler was lost upon most Indian Muslims who failed to fathom the semantic differentiation, as from experience they realised the value of temporal power for the protection of religious and social values.

Hardly had agitation over the Ali brothers reached fever pitch in Calcutta³ when Abul Kalam Azad, described by the British as 'one of the most mischievous Muhammedan agitators in India'⁴ and regarded by the Bengalee as 'an idol of both the male and female members of the Moslem community in Calcutta'⁵, was externed from the province in April 1916. Fifty thousand Muslims in Calcutta signed a petition for his release⁶ and the Muslim press launched an

¹Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), March 1916, no.50.

²'Bamford Report', op.cit., p.20.

³Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), March 1916, no.48.

⁴Govt of India, Home Poll (B), April 1916, nos.475-78.

⁵Bengalee, 1916, 30 July.

⁶Ibid.

impressive campaign against his exile.¹

Agitation on the issue of Muslim detenus continued throughout the war years.² By 1916, however, the activities of the younger Muslim leaders in collaboration with their Hindu supporters had begun to worry the older leaders of the Calcutta community, but they moved too late. The Nawab of Dacca had died late in 1915 and the Bengal Muslims had lost their major spokesman 'at court'.³ Sir Shamsul Huda, member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, who succeeded the leadership role of Dacca, attempted to curb the activities of the younger Muslims who in July 1916 convened a meeting of the Presidency Muslim League to express their condemnation of the Sherif's revolt in Arabia, and indirectly of the British who supported him.⁴ Huda persuaded some of the members led by G.H.C. Ariff to cancel the meeting but Abdul Rasul led an ad hoc meeting which carried the original proposals.⁵

The final break between the younger faction and those who held back from the pell mell rush into conciliation with Congress and the Hindus came in 1917 in the wake of the communal rapprochement reached during the Christmas week of 1916 in Lucknow. Prior to this, however, the controversy over the Sherif's revolt had revealed dissensions within the community, and it would definitely seem that despite the surface success of much of their agitation the younger Muslim leaders had failed even by then to carry the socially and economically dominant Muslim groups with them. In June 1916 one of their party, Abul Kasem, had stood against Zahid Suhrawardy for election to the Imperial Legislative Council. Kasem had carried all the mofussil votes but in the final

¹Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), May 1916, no.8.

²'Bamford Report', op.cit., p.36; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1918, 6 February, p.9, 26 February, p.6, 5 April, p.4, 24 June, p.4.

³Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.118.

⁴'Bamford Report', op.cit., pp.29-30.

⁵Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), August 1916, no.24.

counting was defeated by two Calcutta votes a fact which caused the Muhammadi to comment that Calcutta would always be a hindrance to the election of a true Bengali Muslim representative.¹ The temper of the Calcutta Muslim elite was further revealed when in 1917 following the resignation of Suhrawardy, Abdur Raheem, a 'Delhiwallah', property owner, Corporation councillor, and prosperous tobacco merchant defeated G.H.C. Ariff for the seat.² In part the election results were but a reflection of the old Calcutta Muslim feelings of disdain towards the mofussil and its inhabitants but it was also a rejection of the younger Muslim party and, in the case of Ariff, of those who had been associated with them.

The mass agitation whipped up amongst the lower classes no doubt disturbed the Muslim elite of the city but the rapprochement achieved at Lucknow infuriated them as did Hindu intransigence regarding any modification of the Pact, and the subsequent violent communal riots in Bihar and the U.P. late in 1917 and early in 1918.

The Lucknow Pact settled the proposed Muslim representation in the Bengal Legislative Council at 40 per cent, which when the Muslim population stood at 52.6 per cent failed to please all but the most ardent exponents of the communal rapprochement.³ The inability of the young Muslim party to modify this provision caused a sharp drop in their popularity while the image of conciliatory Hindus was drastically tarnished by the severe communal riots which rocked Bihar and the U.P. in September 1917 and January 1918.⁴ The young Muslim party attempted to retain support by concentrating upon the issue of the Ali brothers⁵, and by

¹ NNR, 1916, 23 June, Muhammadi.

² Bengal Govt, Appointments Dept, March 1917, File no.18L-23, Progs 3-14; see page 10 for further details of Raheem.

³ Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.114.

⁴ 'Bamford Report', op.cit., pp.34-6; Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.119; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), March 1918, no40.

⁵ 'Bamford Report', op.cit., p.35.

attempting to build a basis for mass support as was the case with Fazl-ul Huq's Calcutta Agriculturalists Association established in December 1917¹ - but their activities were futile.

The British proposals of eventual constitutional reforms and the impending visit of Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, to gauge public opinion provoked the more articulate members of the younger Muslim party to action. Their more communalist opponents, mainly conservative merchants from the city and wealthy zamindars from the mofussil, attempted to revitalise the near-defunct Central National Mahommedan Association as a rival organisation to the Presidency Muslim League,² but finding this impractical they established a new body, the Indian Muslim Association under the guidance of Nawab Chowdhury, Nawab A.F.M. Abdur Rahman and G.H.C. Ariff late in 1917.³ The Association soon established links with similar organisations elsewhere in India, particularly with Shafi's dissident Muslim League in the Punjab and the Prince of Arcot's Islamia League in Madras.⁴ But after petitioning Montagu it, like its associated bodies, soon faded into oblivion, although it was temporarily revived in 1921.

Other opponents of the young Muslim party included such former stalwarts as Abdullah Suhrawardy and members of merchant families as Ismail Salehji and Y.C. Ariff, brother of G.H.C. Ariff; however, their sympathies were not with the more communalist and socially conservative group led by

¹Broomfield, J., op.cit., pp.157-8.

²Ibid., p.116; Bengal Govt, Political Dept, October 1917, File no.8A-8, Progs B584-85, 'C.N.M.A. File'.

³Bengal Govt, Political Dept, August 1919, File no.1W-229, Progs 48-62; Statesman, 1918, 17 April, p.8; Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.116; Govt of India, Report of the Franchise Committee, 1918-19 (1919), p.39.

⁴McPherson, Kenneth, 'The Political Development of the Urdu- and Tamil-speaking Muslims of the Madras Presidency, 1901 to 1937', pp.77-9 (unpublished M.A.thesis, University of West. Australia, 1968).

Nawab Chowdbury and they rather unsuccessfully attempted to tread a path between the two extremes - first through a futile attempt to form a moderate organisation¹ and then through the agency of the Society of Moulvis and Ulema, established in September 1917 to find employment for Muslim graduates and 'also to counteract anti-Government propaganda'.² At the same time fanatical 'up-country' Pan Islamists in the city were, through the agency of the Urdu dailies, the Naqqash and Sadaqat³, active in conducting an intensive propaganda campaign against the British and Hindus alike and championed the cause of Islam in danger.

In essence by the beginning of 1918 the Muslims of Calcutta were without a unified leadership. The death of Dacca in 1915 and the replacement of Huda by S.P. Sinha on the Viceroy's Executive Council in June 1917⁴ had left the community bereft of direct contact with the administration, while the leaders of the Calcutta community were divided into inimical factions none of which threw up a leader of sufficient calibre to capture the support of a decisive proportion of the population. The mass of Muslims were confused by a multitude of conflicting emotions which had destroyed their faith in the British, roused their ire against the Hindus and undermined their own self-confidence. The Balkan Wars and the Cawnpore Mosque affair had involved large numbers of them in a crude form of sporadic and disorganised political agitation without evolving a satisfactory mode of leadership. The influence of Ashraf families from the mofussil had been weakened, that of the merchant and urban Ashraf professional families was shaken and divided, and the mass of Muslims in Calcutta were prey to the influence of fanatical Pan-Islamist agitators and the variegated pressures and tensions occasioned by the war.

¹ 'Bamford Report', op.cit., p.35.

² Bengal Govt, Political Dept, May 1918, File no.8A-7, Progs B645-47.

³ The Sadaqat was established to replace the Tarjuman which went bankrupt late in 1916.

⁴ Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.118.

CHAPTER TWO

RIOTS AND RAPPROCHEMENT, 1918 TO 1919

By the beginning of 1918 the mass of Calcutta's suburban and metropolitan population, both Hindu and Muslim, were beginning to feel the full economic effects of the Great War. The larger proportion of the factory workers found employment in the jute mills,¹ but whether mill labourer of Howrah or cart driver in the city the economic implications of the war were the same. Drought, poor harvests, shortage of railway rolling stock, and a sharp reduction in shipping tonnage due to the submarine campaign effectively imposed a supply blockade on Calcutta and Bengal. The result was a sharp rise in prices of basic commodities such as rice, wheat, salt, cooking oil and cloth.² Throughout 1918 and 1919 the price of these and other staple household goods in Calcutta rose rapidly as the following figures indicate:

	<u>salt/maund</u> ³	<u>rice/maund</u>	<u>wheat/maund</u>
1914	Rs 2.118	Rs 6.483	Rs 4.10.0
1918	3.929	5.181	6.5.10
1919	4.012	7.519	7.13.8 ⁴

The rise in the price of cotton cloth was equally dramatic. Best quality cotton cloth rose from Rs 7.10.0 in 1917 to Rs 16.8.0 in 1918 for a standard 9 lb bundle, while the cheaper qualities of cotton cloth which usually found a ready market amongst the poorer classes of the city were similarly affected by the price rise.⁵ Thus between November 1918 and July 1919 the cheapest sari and dhoti lengths⁶ rose from Rs 3.6.0 to Rs 4.12.6 and Rs 2.15.0 to Rs 3.4.6 respectively.⁷

¹Royal Commission on Labour in India, Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1929 (1931), pp.8-9. Hereafter referred to as Labour Commission, 1929.

²Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), May 1918, no.21; *ibid.*, May 1918, no.64; *ibid.*, August 1919, no.50.

³Maund = 82.286 pounds.

⁴12 paise = 1 anna, 16 annas = 1 rupee; Govt of India, Statistical Abstracts for India, 1911-12 to 1920-21, pp.602-5, 614; the format of figures quoted is inconsistent. Hereafter referred to as Statistical Abstracts, 1911 to 1921.

⁵*Ibid.*, p.601.

⁶Standard sari and dhoti lengths were nine yards.

⁷Bengal Govt, Commerce Dept, July 1919, File no.1Q-22, Progs 20-21; *ibid.*, March 1919, File no.1Q-7, Progs 11-12.

The effect of these price rises was disastrous for all sections of the labouring population of the city at a period when wages were static and the industrial and mercantile concerns of the area were reaping large profits. Bolstered by government orders during the war the jute mills declared lavish dividends and experienced their most prosperous period,¹ whilst the great mercantile concerns of the city, particularly those controlled by the Marwaris, experienced a similar rich harvest of profits. Inevitably such a situation gave rise to increasing unrest amongst the working classes who noted the large mill profits, and who were rightly convinced that Marwari speculators were hoarding rice and cloth in an attempt to force up prices.² Rumour also encouraged the belief that the Government was turning a blind eye to Marwari profiteering in the hope that the proceeds would be invested in the War Loan.³ Indeed, there is no doubt that Marwari pressure was in part responsible for the defeat of an attempt in the Calcutta Corporation to appoint a committee to investigate the rise in cloth prices.⁴

One of the hardest hit sections of the labouring population of the Calcutta area was that of the jute mill workers. In 1918 the area had some 300,000 operatives and dependents, a third more than that of its nearest rival in India, Bombay.⁵ Also unlike Bombay, where the majority of workers came from contiguous Marathi-speaking areas and more frequently brought their families with them, the factory population of greater Calcutta contained a smaller proportion of family units, and comprised a labouring class whose language and culture were foreign to Bengal.⁶

¹Cotton, C.W.E., Handbook of Commercial Information for India (1924), p.117; Anstey, V., The Economic Development of India (1952), p.282 and fn.

²Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), March 1918, no.38; *ibid.*, September 1918, no.20.

³*Ibid.*, September 1918, no.20.

⁴Statesman, 1918, 29 August, p.8.

⁵Labour Commission, 1929, pp.8-9.

⁶Gadgil, D.R., The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times (1948), pp.82-3, 120. As Dr R.Newman has pointed out, however, in recent note to the writer 'don't imagine that because the Konkanis and Deccanis in Bombay both spoke Marathi they necessarily had much love for one another'.

Social alienation and dislocation were therefore greater problems in Calcutta than in Bombay where the majority of workers were recruited from the same province. In the Calcutta region the majority of workers were Hindi- and Urdu-speakers from the United Provinces and Bihar whose basic loyalties and attachments were not to Bengal but to their native villages, religion and, in the factory or mill, to the sirdar who had recruited them.¹

Most jute mill labourers were in the city and its suburbs on a temporary basis in order to enhance their earnings from agriculture in their native villages to which they invariably returned for harvest and sowing. The majority regularly remitted money home, but to do so often involved increasing indebtedness to money-lenders and shopkeepers in the mill areas with the result that many had to return to the mills to pay off locally incurred debts.²

The fact that each mill operated on different wage rates has made an accurate assessment of wages for this period difficult,³ but in general it would appear that in 1918, as in 1914,⁴ the average weekly wage for an unskilled mill labourer was approximately two rupees, for a five day week, and that of a skilled operative between three and five rupees for the same period.⁵ Overtime during the war years no doubt boosted average earnings, but few workers responded to the incentive of bonus rates despite their aggravated economic position.⁶ In part the explanation was psychological: the mills and life in the company lines and bustees surrounding them were far from congenial. As the Industrial

¹Labour Commission, 1929, p.341; Royal Commission on Labour in India, Evidence, Vol.V, part 1, p.6: in 1921 of the population of greater Calcutta 495,474 were born in Bihar and 328,398 in the U.P. Hereafter referred to as Labour Commission, 1929, (Evidence).

²Labour Commission, 1929, p.255; ibid., (Evidence), Vol.V, part 1, p.49.

³Ibid., p.216.

⁴Buchanan, D.H., The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India (1934), p.355.

⁵Labour Commission, 1929 (Evidence), Vol.V, part 1, p.299; O'Malley, L.S.S., 24-Parganas District Gazetteer (1914), p.141; British Govt, Report of the Indian Industrial Commission, 1916-18 (1919), p.15: monthly wages in rupees for various types of jute mill operatives

carders	-	9	coolies	-	13	beamers	-	22
shifters	-	11	spinners	-	14 $\frac{3}{4}$	weavers	-	27
rovers	-	12	winders	-	18	mistries	-	30

⁶Ibid., p.11.

Commission of 1916-18 reported both the work and environment were unattractive to men accustomed to rural life and who, rather than spend extra hours in the mills, would prefer to crowd into the grog shops and brothels of the area.¹ No detailed studies of personal expenditure by mill labourers exist for this period, but the Labour Commission of 1929 presented a study of the expenditure of two skilled operatives, a Hindu and a Muslim, at one mill in 1928.² In the case of both workers over 65 per cent of their weekly income was spent on food, at a time when the price of wheat, rice and flour was lower than in 1918, while the remaining portion of their income went on basic essentials such as rent, cloth, soap, firewood and kerosene, tobacco, matches, pan, the barber and the dhobi.³

Given that the items of expenditure were essentially the same in 1918 the position of the mill workers must have been difficult, if not desperate, when one considers that amongst the items of expenditure not accounted for were postal remittances, festivals, religious activities, alcohol and women.⁴ Indeed, in Calcutta by early 1918 although wages had not risen since 1914 wholesale prices in general had increased by 78 per cent.⁵

¹Ibid., pp.11-12.

²No such figures or data are available for either unskilled factory or non-factory labour.

³Labour Commission, 1929 (Evidence), Vol.V, part 1, p.268: distribution of weekly expenditure:

Hindu skilled operative (vegetarian) food (rice, vegetables, flour):	65.5%	Muslim skilled operative food (vegetables, meat, rice, ghee):	71.5%
firewood, tobacco matches:	18.0%	firewood, kerosene, tobacco, matches:	12.5%
soap:	1.5%	soap, <u>dhobi</u> , barber, perfume:	4.1%
cloth:	10.0%	cloth:	8.9%
rent:	5.0%	rent:	3.0%

⁴Ibid., p.268.

⁵Buchanan, D.H., op.cit., p.355:

Index of jute mill wages	Index of wholesale prices in Calcutta
1914 - 100	1914 - 100
1915 - "	1915 - 112
1916 - "	1916 - 128
1917 - "	1917 - 145
1918 - 110	1918 - 178
1919 - 120	1919 - 196

Despite their difficult economic position, both during the period 1918-19 and before, there is little evidence of agitation amongst the workers to improve their position. The reasons for this are not hard to find. Concerted action needed leadership, finance and unity, and the multi-lingual, multi-religious factory population of Calcutta had none of these. Mostly drawn from the ranks of illiterate peasants, the basic loyalties of the industrial worker in the region of Calcutta were to his native village and religion. The world of the factory employee was restricted to the immediate area of the mill where his fellow workers were generally of the same village and district.¹ Within this environment his social world was further restricted to intercourse with members of the same caste or religion and was dominated by the sirdar. The sirdar recruited the worker, maintained him in his job for a financial consideration, passed on the orders of the management and, more often than not, owned the bustee in which the industrial worker lived.² To a lesser degree, however, the sirdar was also subject to the same restricted life and consequently his leadership rarely extended over a group which did not comprise men of one religion and drawn from a particular village or group of villages.

Bengali politicians and political agitators prior to the period beginning in 1920 were largely ignorant or wary of the potential of mass agitation as they were, in politics and life-style, a socially exclusive group which was oriented more towards region and class rather than the nation. They had few interests in common with the predominantly non-Bengali factory population and were separated from them by barriers of language, culture, religion and economic interests. It was not until the advent of Gandhi, when new approaches to political agitation were evolved which necessitated mass participation, that local politicians began to take a serious

¹ Labour Commission, 1929 (Evidence), Vol.V, part 1, p.11.

² Ibid., Vol.V, part 2, p.121; Labour Commission, 1929, p.341.

interest in the industrial labouring population of Calcutta, and provided the finance for a labour movement which the workers themselves were unable to supply.

To a certain extent the questions of group unity and leadership were somewhat different when applied to the Muslim factory population. Despite remnants of caste and occupational differences within the Muslim community, religion provided a more unifying force than it did amongst the multi-caste Hindu community; the same can be said of language where Urdu, no matter how debased the dialect, was the lingua franca of the Muslim factory population and the bulk of the permanently-settled Muslim inhabitants of Calcutta city. Education, wealth and status may have provided some effective social barriers within the community, but in the mosque on Friday Muslims of all backgrounds spoke the same prayers and listened to exhortations of religious and social leaders who ideally differentiated between none of their co-religionists.

This is not to claim, however, that the economic strictures of 1918-19 did not precipitate some form of labour unrest. Throughout 1918 and 1919 the Calcutta area witnessed a series of strikes which not only gained the jute mill workers a wage increase of 20 per cent but which also proved to be a mild foretaste of the massive industrial disturbances of 1920 and 1921.¹

The first reported strike of 1918 came from the Kankinarah jute mills north of Calcutta where crowds of workers agitating for a wage increase, 'to meet the increased cost of living', were forcibly dispersed by troops.² Throughout the remainder of the year and during the course of 1919 the spate of minor strikes continued: coachmen and gharri drivers in the city itself in September,³ jute balers at the Sealdah mills in

¹ Buchanan, D.H., op.cit., p.355; Labour Commission, 1929 (Evidence), Vol.V, part 1, p.299.

² Statesman, 1918, 13 April, p.5.

³ Ibid., 9 May, p.5.

October,¹ dockworkers at Kidderpore and railway workers at Kharagpur in December 1918,² and in May, July and August of 1919 postal peons in the city and workers at the Lilloah workshops of the East Indian Railway.³ None of the strikes were of any great duration and except for the railway strike at Lilloah rarely involved more than 500-1,000 workers: a fact which would seem to indicate that in the mills at least, where the labour force was usually several thousand strong, only certain groups of workers were involved in the strikes. None of these incidents of industrial unrest appear to have been politically motivated, for as far as the demands of the workers were concerned they were of a purely economic nature. No evidence is available that would indicate the involvement of political agitators or local politicians. The one exception was during the strike at Kharagpur in December 1918 when C.R. Das, the rising luminary of nationalist politics in Bengal, stepped in and eventually persuaded the predominantly Bengali labouring force to return to work.⁴

The intervention of Das at Kharagpur was an incident, which although isolated, helps throw further light on the composition of the groups involved in the strikes. At Kharagpur the workers involved were high caste Bengalis who filled specialist positions such as signalmen and clerks.⁵ As such they were a cohesive and well-defined group and typical of the class from whom Das gained the majority of his followers in urban Bengal. In the jute mills a similar pattern of group involvement seems to have occurred. Initially those involved were skilled operatives who formed a distinct regional, linguistic and religious group in the mill concerned.

¹Ibid., 10 October, p.5.

²Ibid., 6 December, p.5; ibid., 18 December, p.5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), December 1918, no.22.

³Statesman, 1919, 24 May, p.8; ibid., 31 July, p.7; ibid., 9 August, p.6.

⁴Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), January 1919, no.41.

⁵Ibid.

Group consciousness was strong, and once the sirdars had decided upon strike action the removal of even a small group of skilled operatives from the mill could effectively cripple its operations.

There is little evidence to indicate the existence of any form of trade unionism during this period. The inability of labourers to pay dues, lack of interest of local politicians and social leaders and the diverse social, linguistic and religious backgrounds of the factory population were all factors which militated against the formation of a trade union movement.¹ There were, however, two exceptions to this rule, the Indian Seamen's Anjuman and the Carters' Union. The former had been established in 1908 by Nawab Chowdhury,² the wealthy Muslim zamindar and politician from east Bengal, to cater for the predominantly east Bengali Muslim seamen population of Calcutta, and the latter in 1917 by Y.C. Ariff, younger brother of G.H.C. Ariff,³ amongst the carters of Calcutta the majority of whom were Muslims.⁴ Both men were communalists and conservative in political outlook,⁵ and as such were not interested in using the organisations they had created for anything more than rallying points for a more widespread support of the communalist cause and also for personal aggrandisement. Indeed, the organisation of the Carters' Union was almost certainly a half-hearted attempt on the part of the dissident faction of the Presidency Muslim League⁶ to rally support amongst a section of the Muslim population of the city, especially as Y.C. Ariff was at this

¹ Kelman, J.H., Labour in India (1923), p.15.

² Saksena, R.N., Seamen in India (1951), pp.92-4. See also pages 59, 62, and 71, for Nawab Chowdhury.

³ See pages 10, 41, 46 and 48 for Ariff brothers.

⁴ Govt of India, Home Poll, 1924, no.66/124 and KW.

⁵ See pages 10, 41, 46, 47.

⁶ See page 47.

time the Secretary of the Central National Mahommedan Association.¹ However, the Indian Seamen's Anjuman was virtually moribund by 1914 and it was not until March 1918 that Mahomed Daud and R. Braunfield, two socially conscious but politically wary lawyers, revived it. By the end of 1919 the Anjuman, had gained sufficient strength to hold a successful strike for increased wages, and in 1920 was renamed the Indian Seamen's Union.²

But economic hardships were not the sole affliction which affected the lives of the working classes of the Calcutta area during the years 1918 and 1919. Like their counterparts elsewhere in India, they felt the full brunt of the great influenza epidemic which swept the world in this period. Admittedly the effects of the epidemic were less severe in Calcutta than in most other urban centres in India,³ but even so deaths from all causes had increased during 1918 by nearly 50 per cent from the 1917 total, and by another 20 per cent by December 1919.⁴ Influenza was the main killer but the debilitating effect of it, a poor diet and insanitary living conditions precipitated an increase in the number of deaths from dysentery, diarrhoea, cholera, smallpox and other causes.⁵

The epidemic first assumed notable proportions in June 1918 and spread with 'lightning like rapidity' so that by July it was causing widespread concern.⁶ Popularly called 'war fever' it upset and dislocated all facets of life in the city and suburbs and spread through every quarter of the metropolis.⁷ The worse affected areas, however, were those

¹See page 47.

²Saksena, R.N., op.cit., pp.92-4.

³Statistical Abstracts, 1911 to 1921, p.374.

⁴Census, 1921, Vol.VI, part 1, p.63.

⁵Ibid., p.63.

⁶Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1918 to March 1919, 12.2.1919, pp.1343-46.

⁷Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), September 1918, no.19.

inhabited by the poorer citizens of the city. . The epidemic's toll was heaviest in the Kidderpore dock area where it was reported that there was a case in every bustee.¹ The northern wards of the city were also severely affected, and the rapid rise in mortality rates was particularly marked amongst children under five years and amongst males in the 20-30 year age group, the largest group in the male working population.² The epidemic declined during the early months of 1919 but experienced a sudden and final resurgence between the months of September and December.³

II

Against this background of material and physical distress relations between the two major communities in Calcutta underwent a piecemeal disintegration during 1918. By 1917 the Lucknow Pact had precipitated divisions within the ranks of the elite Muslim leadership of the city,⁴ whilst severe communal riots in the United Provinces and Bihar had exacerbated tensions between the many thousands of natives from these provinces, both Hindu and Muslim, who were resident in and around the city. The Muslims were confused by the conflicting appeals of a divided leadership and by the incompatible pull on loyalties engendered by the war. Within the city perennial questions involving korbani, or cow slaughter, continued to bedevil relations between Muslims and

¹ Calcutta Corporation, op.cit., p.1346; Statesman, 1918, 25 October, p.6.

² Calcutta Corporation, op.cit., 30.10.1918, p.812; Statistical Abstracts, 1911 to 1921, pp.380-84.

³ Ibid., pp.394-5.

⁴ See page 47.

Marwaris¹ especially when a newspaper such as the Amrita Bazar Patrika, with its proclaimed policy of Hindu-Muslim conciliation, came out in support of Marwari sentiment.² Petty quarrels regarding Corporation policy towards the clearance of Hindu and Muslim bustees, and the alleged penchant of 'lawless Muhammedan ruffians' for idol breaking and the nubile charms of Hindu maidens did little to further the cause of communal goodwill.³

Such incidents provided ideal ammunition for the more communally minded Muslim leaders in the city; but the decline in communal relations was not a simple process of inevitable or final alienation but was compounded of a variety of complicated factors. Feeling amongst the Muslims of the city was certainly directed against Hindu groups such as the Marwaris whose wartime profiteering and religious parochialism offended them, but it was also directed against the British who were engaged in a war with Turkey from which they were to emerge as the victors later in 1918. A prominent Calcutta Bengali-language newspaper, the Moslem Hitaishi - owned by Mulla Enamul Huq, one of the few wealthy Bengali Muslims in the city and reputed to be 'the richest hide merchant in Calcutta'⁴ - may have followed a strictly communal line under the patronage of Nawab Chowdhury and Moulana Abu Bakr;⁵ but its scorn of the non-Bengali mercantile population of the city, which was the legacy of the sense of rivalry felt by the Ashraf families of the mofussil towards the rising Muslim leadership of Calcutta, no doubt lost it much sympathy there.⁶ Many Muslims may have sympathised with its

¹ Statesman, 1918, 29 May 1918, p.7.

² Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1918: various articles between January 4 and 8.

³ Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1918, 22 July, p.7; *ibid.*, 21 August, p.3; *ibid.*, 2 May, p.18; *ibid.*, 15 June, p.7.

⁴ Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File No.472/19.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ NNR, 1918, 26 April, Moslem Hitaishi.

frequent criticisms of Congress as a Hindu-dominated organisation,¹ but its policy of abject loyalty lost it still further support. Increasing numbers of Muslims were, despite their preoccupation with communal grievances, becoming emotionally involved in the mounting furore over the question of the Muslim detenus and the fate of Turkey. More frequently their anger was directed against the British - their political masters.

The question of the Muslim detenus aroused particular feeling in Calcutta. The most prominent Muslims amongst those interned, namely Mahomed and Shaukat Ali and Abul Kalam Azad, were well known figures in the city. They had taken a leading role in local agitation at the time of the Balkan Wars and had established popular Pan-Islamic newspapers in the city which had helped sow the seeds of the present discontent over Turkey.² Hindu and Muslim supporters of the communal rapprochement in the city were quick to make use of the popular feeling aroused by this issue. Younger Muslim leaders such as Fazl-ul Huq and Abul Kasem united with Congress agitators to stir Muslim sentiment. With the help of Hindus such as C.R. Das, the leader of the provincial Congress organisation, and Byomkesh Chakravarti, Annie Besant's lieutenant for the Home Rule movement in Bengal, they were active throughout 1918 and 1919 organising meetings and deputations in support of the detenus.³

The position of men such as Huq and Kasem was, however, complex. Huq was born of a family of Barisal yakils, had completed a brilliant law degree under the great Hindu High Court lawyer Asutosh Mookherjea, and in 1906 had emerged as a protege of the Nawab of Dacca in the administration of the

¹ Ibid., 10 May.

² See pages 41-43.

³ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), March 1918, no.40; e.g. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1918, 1 January, p.6; *ibid.*, 6 February, p.9; *ibid.*, 26 February, p.6; *ibid.*, 5 April, p.4; *ibid.*, 19 June, p.4; *ibid.*, 24 June, p.4.

new province of East Bengal and Assam. Following the reunification of Bengal in 1911 Huq had become one of the major critics of the older Muslim leadership, especially after he entered the Bengal Legislative Council.¹ Wary of Congress he had nevertheless moved towards the position of the more extreme nationalist Hindu politicians in a bid to wrest leadership from men such as the Nawab of Dacca and Nawab Chowdhury. Huq championed the Lucknow Pact in Bengal and as a result lost much popular support, but in the agitation concerning the Muslim detenus he did much to refurbish his image in Calcutta at least.

Huq represented a new kind of leader within the Muslim community. Although his background was Ashraf and in his first and second marriages his wives were members of notable Ashraf families,² his influence was not locally based on land ownership and patronage but rather on personal ability and his realisation of the value of mass agitation and involvement. Unlike the older Ashraf leaders Huq realised the value of rousing widespread popular support and found in the Muslims of Calcutta the ideal material. Admittedly Huq's hometown of Barisal provided him with a life-long base of hard core support due to his own and his family's prestige, but during the years between 1918 and partition in 1947 Huq's centre of activity was Calcutta: the modern social, political and economic capital of Bengal - for Hindus and Muslims alike.

Kasem's background was in many ways different. Born of a land-owning Ashraf family from the Burdwan district in west Bengal Kasem had been one of the foundation members of the Bengal Presidency Mahommedan Association and its first secretary in 1906.³ An earlier convert than Huq to the

¹Low, D.A. (ed.), Soundings in Modern South Asian History (1968), Broomfield, J., 'The Forgotten Majority: The Bengal Muslims and September 1918', pp.202-3.

²His first marriage was to a granddaughter of Nawab Abdul Latif and his second to a daughter of Maulana Abu Bakr his political opponent during this period!

³See page 40.

cause of nationalism he had long opposed the influence exerted by the Dacca faction over the fortunes of his community, and following Huq's emergence as a critic of the old leadership the two came into increasing contact. For a while Kasem allied himself with the moderate Hindu politician Surendranath Banerjea in the provincial Legislative Council,¹ but by 1918 Kasem, Huq and Mujibur Rahman, the editor of the Calcutta English-language newspaper the Mussalman, were members of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee led by C.R. Das.² Until 1917 they had received support in Calcutta city from the prominent lawyer Dr Abdullah Suhrawardy and the brothers Ariff - Yacoob and Ghulam Hussain Cassim - both of whom were wealthy silk merchants. Disillusionment with the terms of the Hindu-Muslim pact at Lucknow and the rapid conciliation with more extreme Hindu politicians, however, alienated Suhrawardy and the Ariff brothers. By 1918 the Ariffs had shifted loyalties to Nawab Chowdhury, and Suhrawardy was following a fine path between the two camps.

Unlike Huq and his followers Suhrawardy was prepared to accept the reforms proposals submitted by the British in 1918. They were in fact based largely on the terms of the Lucknow Pact but were rejected by the nationalist Muslims on the grounds that they left too much power in the hands of the bureaucracy, and by the communalists because they gave the Hindu minority in Bengal a majority of seats in the proposed Legislative Council.³ In part too Suhrawardy's differences with Huq were, like so many of the instances of dispute between leading members of the Muslim community in Calcutta, personal. In March 1918 for instance they were at loggerheads in the Legislative Council over the question of the siting of a proposed Muslim Arts College in Calcutta;

¹ Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.57.

² All India Congress Committee Papers, General Secretary's Correspondence, File no.3. Hereafter referred to as AICC Papers.

³ Statesman, 1918, 11 July, p.4; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1918, 28 August, p.4.

was prohibited, a new crop of Urdu-language newspapers soon rose to replace them. By mid 1918 in addition to the Muhammadi, Mussalman, Moslem Hitaishi and Habul Matin the Muslim press in Calcutta consisted of the Naqqash, established early in 1918, the Jamhur, established in December 1917, a revived Risalet and the Sadaqat, which had been established to replace the bankrupt Tarjuman in 1916.

The editors and leading staff of all these newspapers were non-Bengali Muslims and they frequently swapped from one newspaper to another as in format and content there was little to differentiate the journals. The most prominent of these journalists were Syed Mahomed Fazlur Rahman, a native of Bihar and a former student who had been expelled from his Patna college in 1916 for leading a strike,¹ and who first worked on the Sadaqat and finally on the Jamhur; Kazi Abdul Ghaffur, son of a petty landowner in the United Provinces, who had originally worked on Mahomed Ali's Hamdard in Delhi and who later came to Calcutta to work first on the Tarjuman and its successor the Sadaqat, and then as editor of the Jamhur. In addition there was Saiyid Muhammed Habib Shah a native of the Punjab, former sepoy in Hong Kong and later detenu who in 1916 joined the Risalet, moved to the Sadaqat and finally started the Naqqash; and Jaffar Hussain Kalami, a Madrasi from the south Indian Urdu stronghold of Nellore, who worked as sub-editor on the Sadaqat.

All these men, and others such as the Punjabi Ghulam Hussain of the Risalet, had several things in common - they were Urdu speakers, migrants and fanatically Pan-Islamic and anti-British. Their inspiration was Mahomed Ali with whom at least one, Kalami, was in touch², and as such they

¹ Govt of India, Home Poll (A), November 1918, nos. 164-201: all the biographical details of the Pan-Islamic journalists are contained in this file.

² NNR, 1918, 3 September, Millat.

were hostile to the war being waged against the Ottoman Empire, the temporal domain of the spiritual head of Islam - the Caliph. But the Pan-Islamism of Mahomed Ali had developed from its earlier form of Islamic parochialism and pragmatically Ali, his brother Shaukat and other leading exponents of the movement such as Maulana Abdul Bari, had turned to Congress for moral support in their anti-British stand.¹

The Great War had brought Britain into direct conflict with Turkey and the Pan-Islamists in India who saw the war not in its European context but as the final episode of a long history of Christian and Muslim conflict which dated from the fall of Constantinople. Thus in the pages of newspapers such as the Jamhur, Risalet and Sadaqat articles critical of British attitudes towards Turkey were juxtaposed with articles in support of the detenus, Congress, the Lucknow Pact, and Annie Besant's Home Rule movement.²

As if to illustrate the basic conflict in the Muslim mind of the time, however, when extra-Indian loyalties gained new strength and traditional loyalties and animosities were alternately weakened and strengthened, the same newspapers contained articles of a distinctly anti-Hindu nature. Thus the Jamhur of 6 January 1918 wrote bitterly of Hindu involvement in the recent Bihar riots and on the 9th lavished praise on the stand of Annie Besant and Congress against the British.³ Such was also the case with the Sadaqat,⁴ the Millat - which replaced the Risalet when it was banned in April 1918⁵ - and even the avowedly pro-Congress Muhammadi, which in an issue of 29 March 1918 went

¹ 'Bamford Report', p.58.

² NNR, 1918, January-September, passim.

³ NNR, 1918, 6 and 9 January, Jamhur.

⁴ NNR, 1918, 30 December 1917, 16-19 January, Sadaqat.

as far as to support the British recruiting drive on the grounds that it would provide the Muslims of Bihar and the United Provinces with a military training which would enable them to fight the Hindus in a recurrence of communal strife.¹

Such conflicting emotions were typical not only of the confused state of Muslim opinion in Calcutta but of Muslim opinion throughout India. The pro-British policies of the traditional leadership had been steadily discredited since the early years of the century, and with it any widespread loyalty to the British, but the vacuum had only been partly filled by the rising group of more pro-nationalist younger leaders.

For the Urdu-speaking Muslims of Calcutta, whether up-country mill labourer or petty merchant in the city, increasing bitterness towards the British combined with outraged religious sentiments and renewed suspicions of the Hindus to produce a confusing stream of rumour and counter rumour, and to undermine the influence of all but the most fanatically religious leaders: for religion was the one unchanging factor of which all Muslims were sure. Huq, Abdullah Suhrawardy and Nawab Chowdhury may have exerted some measure of control over the social, professional and economic elites of the Muslim community in the city but it was the Pan-Islamic journalists with their ill-defined creed compounded of religion, hatred of the British and Hindus, and opportunistic outlook towards Congress who held the most immediate and powerful sway over the Muslim masses of the Calcutta area. They owned no master, least of all Huq or any other Muslim politician except perhaps the interned Mahomed Ali,² who was more of a spiritual rather than practical mentor, and were scornful of Bengal and all things Bengali.³ In sentiment they were completely

¹ NNR, 1918, 29 March, Muhammadi.

² NNR, 1918, 3 September, Millat.

³ NNR, 1918, 26 March, Risalet.

oriented to the Urdu heartland of India in the central Gangetic valley and to Turkey, the last great symbol of Islamic temporal and spiritual power.

III

The confusion of Muslim political ideals, the material havoc wrought by rising prices, static wages and the various epidemics that plagued the city in 1918 all combined to create a volatile situation amongst the Muslims of Calcutta. The Risalet was subject to censorship in April 1918 for articles regarding the Bihar riots,¹ and was banned in the following month for flouting censorship rules.² It was succeeded by the Millat which declared in its first issue that India was the home of the Muslims and Hindus had no rights in it, although shortly afterwards it lavished praise on Gandhi for his conciliatory utterances about Muslim grievances against the British.³ In March the Sadaqat has been banned in the Punjab and with the loss of its main market was forced into bankruptcy in the following month.⁴

In March also Gandhi, fast rising to prominence within Congress, came to an agreement with Maulana Abdul Bari of Lucknow, a leading Pan-Islamist, that the Hindus would espouse the cause of Turkey in return for a ban on cow-slaughter. But this had little effect in Calcutta where the mercantile Marwaris, the most fervent supporters of cow-protection, had recourse to the law in May to stop the

¹ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), March 1918, no.38; *ibid.*, March 1918, no.41; *ibid.*, Home Poll (A), November 1918, nos 164-201.

² *Ibid.*

³ NNR, 1918, 6 April and 4 June, Millat.

⁴ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), May 1918, no.64; NNR, 1918, 2 March, Sadaqat.

construction of a Muslim slaughterhouse in Alipore.¹ Huq, Kasem and their followers in the Presidency Muslim League continued to press the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity 'for the cause of the nation',² and Hindu extremist politicians such as B.C. Pal praised the anti-British spirit of the Pan-Islamic movement at meetings in north Calcutta.³ In September 1918, however, Muslim resentment in the city finally exploded into an orgy of violence and looting.

The immediate cause of the outbreak was an article which appeared in the English language Calcutta newspaper, the Indian Daily News, in July 1918. During the course of a description of Paris one of the newspaper's journalists unfortunately wrote that an Algerian street sweeper gazed into a gutter with the reverence usually reserved for the tomb of the Prophet. Innocent in itself the remark was construed as a libellous attack on Islam and was seized upon by the Pan-Islamic journalists of Calcutta as another instance of the scornful attitude of the British towards Islam. That such a seemingly insignificant incident could have assumed its later proportions can only be understood if the full emotional impact of the British involvement against Turkey is grasped. Indian Muslims at this period struggled to preserve the remaining glories of the past in the face of an uncertain future. As the Governor of Bengal, Lord Ronaldshay wrote to the Viceroy:

The root cause of the trouble...is not a local one. It is deep-seated and widespread; and so far as I can judge, the present display of feeling in Bengal is merely a symptom of the disturbed state of the whole Moslem body politic.⁴

¹Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1918, 29 May, p.7.

²Ibid., 26 April, p.12.

³Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), August 1918, no.30.

⁴Details of the riots, characters involved and associated events are drawn from the following sources: Govt of India, Home Poll (A), November 1918, nos 164-201; *ibid.*, Home Poll (Dep.), 1921, no.45; *ibid.*, September 1918, no.41; Bengal Govt, Political Dept, September 1918, File no.2N-31, Progs B1075-96; *ibid.*, File no.12c-63, Progs P57-58; Statesman, 1918, 10 September, pp.5-9; *ibid.*, 11 September, p.6; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1918, 10 September, p.4; *ibid.*, 11 September, p.4; Zetland, Marquis of, Essayez (1956), pp.109-16.

The Pan-Islamic press immediately made capital of the article as a deliberate attack by the British authorities,¹ and launched a virulent campaign against the editor of the newspaper and the British in general. The immediate reaction of the authorities was to censor and then ban the Naqqash later in August when they seized its security 'on account of its wild and indiscreet articles'.² But it was immediately replaced by the Rahbar under the continuing editorship of Saiyid Muhammed Habib Shah.³ The Millat, successor to the Risalet, was subject to censorship also, but proceeded to flaunt the rules much to the chagrin of the British.⁴ The tone of their articles certainly supported Ronaldshay's thesis that the cause of Muslim unrest was not purely local as did the utterances of Ahmed Musa Misri, the Egyptian Imam of the Nakhoda mosque in Ward VIII, who was noted for his anti-British sentiments and who daily offered prayers for the safety of the Caliph. But the pressures of local influences, both economic and communal, were also responsible for the violence of the Muslim reaction to the newspaper articles as is evinced by the pattern of unrest which developed during the month of September.

On 11 August the Presidency Muslim League organised a protest meeting against the article in the Indian Daily News. Chaired by Abdur Raheem, the prominent Colootolla St merchant and member of the Imperial Legislative Council,⁵ the meeting was marked by wild anti-British speeches. Horrified, Raheem immediately visited the Governor to protest his loyalty to the Empire, and to state his inability to persuade the members at the meeting not to organise a

¹ NNR, 1918, 1 August, Naqqash.

² Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), September 1918, no.20.

³ Ibid., no.41.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See page 10.

massive all-India protest meeting for Calcutta in early September. An ad hoc committee comprising mostly up-country merchants from Ward VIII, and particularly from the area immediately around the Nakhoda mosque, was established to arrange the September protest.

The committee consisted of eight Urdu-speaking Muslims, five of whom were petty merchants, one - Habib Ghulam Rasul - a former railway clerk turned journalist, one - Moulvi Najimuddin Ahmed - a retired deputy collector, and one of unknown origin. The committee proceeded to print invitations and leaflets in Urdu which were distributed throughout north India and the mill areas of Bengal which urged all Muslims to attend the proposed protest meeting. The organisers claimed that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the newspaper article and the reforms proposals of the British, but translation of the leaflets does not bear this claim out. The leaflets distributed to the mill-hands in the Calcutta area were both anti-Hindu and anti-British in expression and urged the participation of the Muslim masses in a jihad against all non-believers. Throughout the remainder of the month enthusiasm and support for the September meeting was assiduously cultivated in Calcutta by the Pan-Islamic journalists, especially Kalami and Ghulam Hussain of the Millat, Habib Shah of the Rahbar and Fazlur Rahman of the Jamhur, who organised a variety of meetings at which they hurled wild accusations at the British and blatantly defied the authorities to silence them.

Few other prominent Muslims in Calcutta, however, appear to have been involved in the mounting agitation. The Sunni Bohra Association of Bohra merchants sent a letter of protest regarding the offending article to the Governor, and Mahomed Daud, a leading Calcutta lawyer and President of the Indian Seamen's Anjuman, organised a protest meeting at the Shia imambara in Garden Reach presided over by an obscure prince of the Mysore household and attended by some 2,000 millhands. This meeting in particular was indicative of the growing communal consciousness in the area, at least

as far as the Muslim sirdars in the mills were concerned. Obviously Daud, an Urdu-speaker, had caught the attention of these group leaders and provided the link between them and the mainstream of Muslim sentiment in the city. In general, however, the direction of the agitation was in the hands of Pan-Islamic agitators.

Fazl-ul Huq was bitterly offended by the article and was in contact with the organisers of the proposed meeting but his role is obscure. If anything it appeared that he favoured negotiations with the local government on the issue. However, two of his major supporters in the Presidency Muslim League were on the organising committee, namely Moulvi Najimuddin Ahmed, a retired deputy collector, and Moulana Abdul Rauf, a Bihari merchant and long-time friend of Azad who had taken an active role in the Pan-Islamic movement since the period of the Balkan Wars. Both were fully aware of the anti-Hindu overtones of the agitation and were largely responsible for the collection of Rs 8,000 from 'well-to-do people' in Calcutta to finance their activities.

Other Muslim leaders such as Abdur Raheem, Dr Abdullah Suhrawardy, the Ariff brothers and Nawab Chowdhury appear to have been cowed by the strength of Muslim sentiment on the issue and powerless to control it. Indeed, men such as Nawab Chowdhury had been in a large part responsible for the inflaming of Muslim antipathy towards the Hindus, and the communalist newspaper patronised by Chowdhury, the Moslem Hitaishi, had long been more consistently anti-Hindu than any of the Pan-Islamic journals.

The Governor was not slow to realise the direction the agitation was taking and on 3 September called a meeting of the organisers to discuss events and to suggest that the conference should be cancelled. But under the leadership of Najimuddin the committee members declined the Governor's advice and on the following day delegates from all parts of Urdu-speaking India began to arrive in the city. The authorities persuaded many to return home voluntarily and served externment notices on the more recalcitrant.

Tension rapidly mounted and the speeches of agitators to crowds of several thousand in the central areas of the city, particularly around the Nakhoda mosque, became more virulent and defiant. On the evening of the 6th Kalami made a particularly strong speech which earned him expulsion to his native Madras the following day when similar orders were served on Habib Shah and Fazlur Rahman who had likewise ignored orders prohibiting them from speaking in public. The removal of these journalists effectively curtailed the spirited writings of the Rahbar, Millat and Jumhur, but by now the agitation had gained sufficient momentum to survive the loss of its progenitors.

The British were thoroughly alarmed by this time and troop reinforcements were rushed into the city to be stationed at strategic points such as the Howrah bridge and the Kidderpore docks to defend the city against an influx of turbulent millhands at the time of the meeting on the 9th. On that morning the Governor made a final bid to dissuade the organisers of the meeting. A group of 50 leading Muslims including Huq, Dr A. Suhrawardy, G.H.C. Ariff, Nawab Chowdhury, Najimuddin and several prominent journalists, who had survived the purge of the 7th, were invited to Government House and received a lecture and order from Ronaldshay which banned the meeting.

Meanwhile crowds of Muslims had gathered in the streets and alleyways surrounding the Nakhoda mosque where they were harangued in Urdu by a series of anti-Marwari and anti-British speakers. The hot humid weather frayed tempers and by mid-day lack of news from Government House gave rise to a renewed determination to confront the authorities. A large crowd marched down Chitpur Road from the Nakhoda mosque shortly after 1 p.m. and met a police picket near the junction with Bowbazar Street at 1.15 p.m. Shoes, brickbats and offal were hurled in a rather desultory fashion at the police but Huq arrived from Government House and peace was temporarily restored when he persuaded the crowd to return to the mosque. Unfortunately, however, Huq was the bearer of bad news: the Government remained firm in

their resolve to ban the meeting and once informed of this all control over the tense Muslim mobs in the centre of the city was lost.

The alleged shooting of a Muslim by guards at the house of a nervous Marwari precipitated the next stage of the riot and by early evening Wards VII, VIII and IX of the city were completely in the hands of rampaging mobs of Muslims who were busy attacking the Marwari merchants and looting food and cloth shops. The police and troops eventually restored order by force the next day but only after killing and wounding several rioters. The storm centres of the riots proved not to be at the Howrah bridge, as there was no attempted invasion by the millhands of Howrah, but around the Nakhoda mosque, on the borders of Calcutta city and the municipalities of Garden Reach and Manicktolla.

Order was restored around the Nakhoda mosque late on the evening of the 9th when it was cleared of rioters and the Muslim petty merchants, artisans and labourers of the area had been cowed. The following day, however, Muslim millhands in Garden Reach and from municipalities to the north of Calcutta attempted to enter the city. 10,000 millhands at mills in Garden Reach went on strike and a group of 2,000 labourers and 'Chittagong Muslims of the seafaring class who [were] known to be a turbulent lot',¹ preceded by whirling, screaming fanatics, attacked a line of troops on the main road leading to the Kidderpore docks and were only driven back after 12 were killed and 20 wounded. Meanwhile a resurgence of violence occurred at the Nakhoda mosque where two rioters were shot and several were wounded before order was restored, and a mob of several thousand began a rampage of looting in the Manicktolla markets where two were eventually shot to death.

By the afternoon of the 10th the disturbances began to subside and peace was finally restored once a thoroughly

¹Statesman, 1918, 11 September, p.6.

frightened Najimuddin Ahmed and the Imam of the Nakhoda mosque had agreed to issue a leaflet in Urdu calling for a cessation of hostilities.

In retrospect an analysis of the riots and rioters reveals several interesting features about the nature of Muslim society and communal relations in Calcutta. The victims of the riots were mainly up-country Muslims and Marwaris; Bengali Hindus and Muslims were only marginally involved - for instance in the final stage when the prospect of loot attracted men of varied backgrounds - and within the city itself the riot spread only in those areas where a heavily populated Muslim ward bordered on a centre of Marwari settlement, as was the case in Wards V-VIII - the commercial centre of the city. Indeed, in the latter stages of the riot up-country Hindu and Muslim goondas appear to have been equally responsible for attacks on Marwari shops, and what does emerge from the whole incident is the general lack of violent anti-Hindu activity compared with the strength of anti-Marwari and anti-British sentiment.

Despite the fears of the British the mass of millhands remained quiescent. Admittedly the Muslim millhands of Garden Reach, where the Muslim percentage of mill employees was higher than in other areas,¹ attempted to enter the city but their confrontation was with the police and troops, and there are no reports of any clash with their Hindu co-workers. This might be construed as an indication of the absence of any marked degree of communal tension in the mill areas; perhaps, however, it was more an example of the influence exerted by the sirdars who were undoubtedly responsible for organising the incursions. The Muslim millhands from Garden Reach seem to have been particularly well organised and marched from their mills in orderly groups under the direction of sirdars until they were confronted by British troops at Kidderpore. Similarly in central Calcutta and Manicktolla the British troops were the enemy and the rioters were more

¹ Labour Commission, 1929 (Evidence), Vol.V, part 1, pp.134-5.

intent on loot than anything else.

The main body of rioters in fact comprised the Muslim and non-Muslim up-country inhabitants of Wards V-VIII. Those involved were the middle-class and lower middle-class traders, artisans and clerks of the area and they were joined by the petty hawkers, cart drivers and labourers who lived on the streets and in the bustees of central Calcutta. It was these groups rather than the inarticulate factory workers who were able to air their economic and religious grievances at such a level. Of course, the factory workers were affected by similar grievances but their methods of protest were less well-defined and took the form of haphazard strikes or looting of grain shops.

At no stage in the riots were attacks on temples or images reported, and neither do the Bengali or up-country Hindu population of the area appear to have been the object of organised mob attacks. In Howrah for instance all was quiet despite the circulation of virulently anti-Hindu leaflets and the feeling engendered by the communal riots in Bihar and the United Provinces. Certainly the Marwaris came under attack in the city, especially in their stronghold at Burra Bazar, but in many ways they were the obvious target being suspected of commodity profiteering and the foremost exponents of agitation against cow-slaughter. As Ronaldshay reported to the Viceroy:

The theory that hatred of the Marwaris was the cause of the outbreak in Calcutta is only partially true. Hatred of the Marwaris was undoubtedly a contributory cause, but it was not the root cause. Indeed all disturbances in Calcutta whatever their origin tend to become anti-Marwari before they finish.¹

And in the final count it was the Muslims of the area who bore the full human toll of the riots with 36 dead compared with seven Hindus (including Marwaris) killed.

¹Zetland, Marquis of, op.cit.

IV

The British reaction to the riots was a final burst of activity against the Pan-Islamic press in Calcutta. On 14 September Ghulam Hussain, former editor of the Millat, and Kazi Abdul Ghaffur, former editor of the Jamhur, were externed from Bengal, and censorship regulations were applied to the Muhammadi and Mussalman which temporarily ceased publication.¹ The Hindu press and extremist leaders, however, appear to have reacted in a surprisingly conciliatory manner towards the Muslims. Like the Presidency Muslim League, Hindu Congressmen were quick to blame the British ban on the protest meeting for the riots.²

The mild reaction of the Hindu nationalist press and leaders is perhaps best understood in the light of events outside Bengal, the validity of which were underscored by the troubles in Calcutta. At the centre of the nationalist movement Gandhi was active building up an edifice of Hindu-Muslim unity based on Hindu support of Muslim grievances, particularly those relating to Turkey and the Caliph. He soon realised the tactical and propaganda value of mass involvement in the nationalist movement, and his early experiments in this field won him many supporters throughout India and in Bengal where attempts to evolve mass agitation had originated independently during the course of the anti-partition movement. To the more perceptive Hindu leaders in Bengal and Calcutta the riots provided an immediate example of the strength and feeling of mass agitation thus underscoring Gandhi's arguments, and at the same time brought home the realisation of the catastrophic effects of Muslim alienation. In particular it awakened in the minds of the political leaders of Bengal, both Hindu and Muslim, the spectre of uncontrolled mob activity and the realisation of

¹ Govt of India, Home Poll (A), November 1918, nos. 164-201.

² Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1918, 12 September, p.2; NNR, 1918, September, passim.

the forgotten fact that Muslims, and not Hindus, formed the majority of the provinces' population.

Local Hindu nationalist leaders were not slow to realise the value of Gandhi's style of politics, particularly in relation to the Muslims of Calcutta, and following the riots they pursued a policy of Hindu-Muslim conciliation in the city. The riots had revealed the fact that the British now loomed larger than the Hindus as the object of Muslim fears and hatred and the basis of the new communal rapprochement in the city rested upon this fact. Increasing numbers of Hindu extremist politicians became involved in the agitation concerning the detenus and the Khilafat¹ while the older Muslim leadership, which had proved ineffective during the riots, continued to act as if the political scene was unchanged. They made no attempt to test the strength of their influence within the Calcutta community, and in the columns of the Moslem Hitaishi and in the Corporation they wrote and spoke as if the Hindus and not the British were still the object of their community's bitterness.² Hindu zamindars and money lenders were the object of much vilification by the Moslem Hitaishi, while in the Corporation throughout the last months of 1918 and the early months of 1919 Muslim and Hindu councillors were involved in acrimonious debates concerning the format of the proposed new Corporation constitution. The Muslims demanded separate electorates but at least in this period their efforts were countered by a Hindu determination that the maximum concession they would be granted was a reservation of a limited number of seats that in fact was less than their percentage of the city's population.³ Thus the bitterness

¹ Khilafat denotes the office of the Caliph as spiritual head of Islam.

² NNR, 1918, October-December, Moslem Hitaishi; Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1918-March 1919, 7.1.1919, p.1027.

³ Ibid., 8.3.1919, pp.1422-26; the question of separate electorates had been raised first in 1913, see Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes' October 1913 to March 1914, 22.10.1913, p.1171.

of the older Muslim leaders in the city mounted against the Hindu majority and those of their co-religionists who advocated the cause of a Hindu-Muslim rapprochement.

V

Events in Calcutta city and beyond the borders of Bengal, however, soon exposed the fading importance of the interests and influence of the older leadership. Within the city the Muhammadi and Mussalman were revived and energetically proceeded to preach the cause of communal understanding. In addition Moulana Akram Khan, the editor of the Bengali-language Muhammadi, established an Urdu language edition, the Zamana, in December 1918, to broaden the basis of Congress-League propaganda amongst the Muslim masses of the city.¹

Their cause was aided by another newspaper incident which this time involved the Epiphany which was published by the Oxford Mission. The incident never assumed the proportions of the previous affair but throughout January and February 1919 it was the object of much agitation by the Muhammadi and Huq's friend Abul Kasem, and was reported by the British to have 'created a great impression' amongst the Muslim petty merchants, artisans and labourers of the city: the same groups which had been involved in the outburst of September 1918.² The Epiphany incident occurred at the same time as the Sherif of Mecca received recognition from the British of his claim to be the Guardian of the Holy Places - a declaration which caused considerable disapproval and which was considered a further denigration of the powers of the Caliph.³ Thus the scene was set for a new phase of

¹Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), December 1918, no.23.

²Ibid., February 1919, no.42; ibid., March 1919, no.16.

³Ibid., March 1919, no.17.

agitation over the question of the fate of the Caliph and the Ottoman Empire.

The defeat of Turkey and the subsequent delay of the victorious allies in deciding the fate of her empire and its ruler, the Caliph, had serious repercussions in India. The uncertainty engendered by the precarious situation of the spiritual head of Islam provided fertile ground for the spread of rumours, and it was generally believed that the allies were determined to dismantle the Ottoman Empire, divide its Turkish heartland amongst themselves and depose the Caliph. For the Indian Muslims, and particularly for those steeped in the Urdu language and culture, the Turkish empire and the Caliph were the last symbols of the glorious past of Islam. They saw the Ottoman regime as the ideal Islamic state and could not conceive of a Caliph shorn of his protective temporal powers. The issues involved stirred not only the fanatical and superstitious but Muslims of all classes and backgrounds from the most loyal to the most seditious.¹

In Calcutta both 'extremists and moderates', and included amongst the latter was Nawab Chowdhury, were disturbed by the question and temporarily set aside their differences in a fruitless bid to achieve a common platform on the issue² - but as the British commented 'possibly owing to jealousies among the leaders, there are no signs of any cooperation in this movement'.³ Disagreement there may have been between extremists and moderates but the extremists nevertheless pushed ahead with their agitation, and in cooperation with local Hindu Congressmen they rapidly undermined the remaining influence that the older Muslim leaders held over the masses in the city. The Muhammadi actively campaigned in support of Turkey,⁴ and on 9 February 1919 Calcutta witnessed its first

¹For a description of the emotional impact on a highly westernised Muslim professional family in Calcutta see Begum Ikramullah's From Purdah to Parliament (1963), pp.40-43.

²Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), March 1919, no.16.

³Ibid., August 1919, no.54.

⁴Ibid., April 1919, no.48; NNR, 1919, January-December, Muhammadi.

overt Khilafat meeting under the leadership of Fazl-ul Huq, Abul Kasem, Najimuddin and the newspaper editors Akram Khan and Mujibur Rahman.¹ Several weeks later at Mymensingh a joint meeting of the Bengal Congress and the Presidency Muslim League under Huq, who had recently been President of the annual session of the All-India Muslim League at Delhi, overwhelmingly gave its support to the Caliph,² and shortly afterwards the burgeoning spirit of Hindu-Muslim unity was tested in Calcutta city.

On Sunday 6 April Calcutta observed, at the instance of Gandhi, a hartal in protest against the Rowlatt Act which was proposed by the Imperial authorities to curb nationalist activity in India. Gandhi used the Act as the occasion to test his new tactics of nation-wide mass agitation and the hartal was observed in all parts of India. Indeed, Gandhi could not have chosen a better cause as the Act potentially affected Indians of all creeds and classes. They were considered highly offensive by Indians of every political persuasion from the constitutionally-minded Liberals to the revolutionary terrorists of Bengal.

In Calcutta the hartal passed quietly.³ Most shops in the northern and central areas of the city closed as did the stalls in the Municipal Market with the exception of the Muslim owned fruit and meat kiosks. A good humoured meeting attended by approximately 10,000 was held at the Ochterlony Monument on the Maidan under the chairmanship of C.R. Das and Byomkesh Chakravarti. A police reporter in the crowd later noted that :

¹ Mussalman, 1919, 7 February, p.4.

² Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), July 1919, no.47.

³ Details of the Rowlatt hartal and riots in Calcutta are drawn from the following sources: Govt of India, Home Poll (B), May 1919, nos 514-15; *ibid.*, Home Poll (Dep.), April 1919, no.49; *ibid.*, July 1919, no.46; *ibid.*, July 1919, no.47; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1919, 8-14 April, various articles; Statesman, 1919, 17 April, p.8; Bengal Govt, Political Dept, May 1919, File no. 145-1, Progs B241-44.

The greater part of the crowd assembled at the Maidan consisted of durwans, low class Muhammedans etc (sic), who were evidently out to enjoy a tamasha; they took little or no interest in the actual proceedings and in fact very few of those present could have heard what was said. The programme of speeches at the main meeting was not completed owing to the inability of the speakers to make themselves heard over the noise of the crowd.

However despite official cynicism and the trepidations of the police reporter that trouble was brewing the day passed off quietly and by Monday the city was back to normal. Further meetings punctured by the cries of 'Mahatma Gandhi ki-jai' and 'Hindu-Mussalman-ki-jai' were held on Tuesday the 8th in various parts of the city, but in general Calcutta remained calm until news of Gandhi's alleged arrest in the Punjab reached Bengal on the 10th.

By the morning of Friday the 11th an apparently spontaneous hartal gripped Calcutta. Indian-owned shops and stalls throughout the city closed and Sikh taxi drivers immediately went on strike in support of the hartal. Crowds in the northern wards were exhibiting less good humour than on the previous Sunday, and in Burra Bazar mobs of Marwaris and Muslims fraternised to the extent of cooperating in the ejection of passengers from trams and carriages. A mass meeting was held at the Nakhoda mosque at which Hindus and Jains were invited into the central courtyard where they were served refreshments without regard to caste or creed. Various speakers, both Hindu and Muslim, mounted the pulpit of the mosque amongst whom were Byomkesh Chakravarti and Gandhi's son Haro Lal Gandhi who delivered a speech on Hindu-Muslim unity to the multi-religious congregation.

The next day saw the continuation of the hartal and the complete absence of all traffic in the centre and north of the city. Crowds of Marwari and Muslim youths gathered in Burra Bazar and by noon were engaged in a full scale affray with police pickets in Harrison Road and troops guarding the vital Howrah bridge. At the same time a crowd of some 800 assembled at the Nakhoda mosque. Made up of about 500 Marwaris, Jains, Bhatias and up-country Hindus, and the remainder of

'illiterate' Muslims they excitedly listened to speeches in Urdu by a Muslim, a Marwari and a Bengali which called for Hindu-Muslim unity and a boycott of British goods. Throughout the remainder of the day repeated attacks were made on the police, troops and fire brigades, but by late evening with six dead and troop reinforcements pouring into the city the rioters were spent and by the 13th the city was silent.

One of the main features of the riot was the insignificant role played by the Bengali element and the intensive participation of up-country Muslim, Marwari, Jain and Bhatia mercantile groups. The decline in real income during the war years affected the various groups of petty merchants and artisans in the city as badly as the manual labourer as they were faced with a sharp decline in consumer demand. They were also no doubt further subject to the economic repercussions of the depression which hit the jute mills in 1919 when government orders ceased as a consequence of which mill hours were cut. In addition just as the Muslim mercantile groups were highly sensitive to the religious issues of the period so was the case with certain non-Muslim groups. Marwaris and Jains in particular were strongly drawn to the Hindu and Jain traditions with which Gandhi surrounded his political and social activities, especially with regard to his attempts to prevent the slaughter of 'mother cow' and his advocacy of Swadeshi industries. Such was also the case with the Bhatias, a trading group from Gandhi's home area of Gujarat, who were numerous in both Bombay and Calcutta. Equally remarkable was the absence of any active participation by Muslim leaders. Certainly in February Huq, Kasem and Mujibur Rahman had joined in protest meetings,¹ but Kasem at least apparently still had reservations about the wisdom of stirring the masses in view of events the previous September. On the 6th the Statesman had published a letter from Kasem which stated that:

¹Mussalman, 1919, 7 February, p.6.

Although I yield to none in my condemnation of the Rowlatt Bills...I am not one of those who think that this method of protest would be productive of any good result, especially as the political leaders of the present day in Bengal are hopelessly divided.¹

Apparently doubts still lingered in the minds of the younger Muslim leaders, but nevertheless this did not prevent them from utilising the new spirit of Hindu-Muslim conciliation which had been confirmed by the Rowlatt agitation in Calcutta.

The hartal and riots of April made little impact on the mofussil where the rule of the conservative Ashraf families was still strong amongst the Muslim masses. The Calcutta affair was oriented towards the sensibilities of Urdu Muslims and the dominant Hindu economic groups, and not towards the inarticulate Bengali Muslim peasant masses who had yet to be awakened to the plight of the Caliph. The language and culture of the Calcutta Muslims facilitated the transmission of ideas and news from Muslim areas and groups outside the province, but as yet no means of breaching the barriers between Calcutta and the mofussil had been found.

One major portion of the Indian population of the Calcutta region which did not become involved in the riots and hartals were the factory workers in the mill areas contiguous to Calcutta. There is no evidence that millhands attempted to enter the city as they had in September the previous year, a fact which can perhaps be partly explained by the spontaneous nature of the hartal on the 11th. Agitators would have had little time to organise mill workers outside Calcutta and in any case the original hartal of the 6th was intended to be a peaceful show of solidarity and it may be that memories of the previous year made the organisers wary of stirring up the mill population. Undoubtedly too the main organisation for the original hartal was provided by local Bengali Hindu Congressmen none of whom had any great

¹ Statesman, 1919, 6 April, p.8.

experience with the techniques of mass agitation or had as yet shown any general interest in the political potential of the labouring masses who surrounded the city. Certainly individuals like C.R. Das had exhibited some interest in the strike movement of early 1918, but apart from the activities of Pan-Islamic agitators amongst Muslim millhands in the period immediately before the riots of that year, there is no evidence of any sustained interest being displayed in the bulk of the factory population by the middle and upper class Bengali Hindus who dominated the local Congress organisation.

The British claimed that 'respectable Muhammedans' in the city had been outraged by the hartal riots, and in particular by the spectacle of non-Muslims preaching in the Nakhoda mosque.¹ Indeed, Nawab Chowdhury and the Moslem Hitaishi were vociferously outraged, but to little effect.² The Muhammadi ridiculed the Nawab's notice banning Hindus from preaching in mosques;³ and although he succeeded in rallying the merchants of the Anjuman-i-Waizeen to condemn the call of a Muslim divine from Bareilly in the United Provinces to give up cow-slaughter⁴, his influence in Calcutta was obviously on the wane and by the end of 1919 he was an object of bitter ridicule by the Mussalman and Muhammadi.⁵

The most noticeable outcome of the riots was the increasing Hindu involvement in the Khilafat movement in Calcutta. Throughout June and July a series of 'cloistered conferences and minor meetings' were held to discuss the issue,⁶ and by September the authorities reported to New

¹Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), July 1919, no.46; *ibid.*, July 1919, no.47.

²NNR, 1919, 11 April, Moslem Hitaishi.

³*Ibid.*, 25 April, Muhammadi.

⁴Statesman, 1919, 9 May, p.11.

⁵*Ibid.*, 7 November, p.3.

⁶Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), August 1919, no.55.

Delhi that 'there can be no doubt that interest and anxiety regarding the fate of Turkey are increasing'.¹ This was especially so in the wake of the first All-India Khilafat Conference at Lucknow early in September where Gandhi, as an unbidden but welcome guest, had pledged Hindu support for the Muslim cause.² The proof of the continuing strength of the new found communal unity in Calcutta under the aegis of the Khilafat movement came in October 1919.

At the behest of Gandhi it had been agreed that 17 October should be observed through India as 'Khilafat Day'. In Bengal Hindu Congressmen along with Huq, Akram Khan, Mujibur Rahman and Najimuddin Ahmed issued an appeal to all Hindus and Muslims in the city to observe the day,³ and in the first weeks of October Urdu posters appeared on walls throughout Calcutta reiterating the call.⁴

The day was a great success in Calcutta although it was less widely observed in the mofussil.⁵ Most Indian-owned shops in the city, including those owned by Bengali Hindus and Marwaris, observed the hartal.⁶ The Mussalman reported that 'the demonstration was unparalleled in its intensity and unprecedented in its solemnity...the Jain and Marwari leaders being most enthusiastic in co-operating with the Mussalmans',⁷ and the Hindu-owned Amrita Bazar Patrika noted that the day was 'celebrated with great solemnity by both Hindus and Muslims'.⁸ At midday prayers

¹Ibid., November 1919, no.15.

²Owen, H.F., 'The Leadership of the Indian National Movement' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, A.N.U., 1965), p.443.

³Mussalman, 1919, 17 October, p.5; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1919, 15 October, p.4.

⁴Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), November 1919, no.16.

⁵Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), November 1919, no.16.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Mussalman, 1919, 24 October, p.2.

⁸Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1919, 18 October, p.7.

for the safety of the Caliph were offered in the Nakhoda mosque, and in the afternoon large crowds of Muslims, numbering some 15,000 moved through the central areas of the city to attend a meeting at the Town Hall where Huq and various Hindu leaders addressed them in 'mild tones'.¹

In terms of mass participation and control the day was certainly a success. Not only had it illustrated the feasibility of Hindu-Muslim co-operation but it also ushered in an era of intensive communal co-operation in the city which was to radically alter the politics of twentieth century Bengal.

The period 1918-9 was one of sharp contrasts in the political life of Calcutta. The energy expended in the uncontrolled riots of 1918 was not wasted again, and by 1919 it had been channelled into more tightly organised forms of political agitation. The spontaneous leaders and organisations which flourished in 1918, and which had exerted strong influence over the various Muslim groups who comprised the mob of that year's affray, gave way to more formalised political organisations and leadership. By 1919 formerly antipathetic communal groups had begun to fraternise at the political level and re-directed their pent-up frustrations against the paramount foreign authority rather than against one another.

The contrast between the incidents of the two years can, however, be overdrawn. Certainly communal antipathy was strong in 1918, but economic grievances provided a stronger stimulus for discontent. As the pattern of the riots revealed, communal conflict played a minor role compared to the expressions of material distress, i.e. the looting of grain and cloth shops, and the absence of attacks upon Bengalis of either religion or upon religious institutions. In addition the frustrations of the Muslim groups actively involved were more overtly directed against the British than against their Hindu compatriots, perhaps with the exception

¹ Statesman, 1919, 17 October, p.8; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), November 1919, no.16.

of the Marwari mercantile magnates. Mob activity in 1918 was indeed the culmination of the increasing disillusionment of the Muslim middle- and lower middle-classes with their foreign rulers - a disillusionment which had grown since the first decade of the twentieth century.

By the end of 1919 the older leadership of the Muslim community in Calcutta had been reduced to impotence. The younger pro-nationalist leadership had been hurried along the path of communal rapprochement by the intransigence of their rulers concerning Muslim sentiment and by the spectre of mob rule. Consequently they had been forced to seize upon the religious, and conversely in many ways parochial and backward-looking issue of the Khilafat to assert their influence within the Calcutta community. They rode and for the moment controlled a volatile political tiger, but the inherent communal and religious fanaticism of the Khilafat question had as yet to be equated with a genuine support for the nationalist creed.

Wealthier Muslims of the mercantile and professional elites in Calcutta may have looked askance at the recent examples of mob activity but emotionally or pragmatically they could not deny the sentiments aroused by the Khilafat question. For the first time in the history of Calcutta city the Muslim sans culottes of the city - like their Parisian counterparts of the French revolution, neither impecunious nor illiterate, but petty merchants, artisans, clerks and skilled workers - had called the tune and for a short period had led their leaders until the pattern of their agitation was moulded by men such as Huq, Kasem, Mujibur Rahman and their Hindu counterparts.

CHAPTER THREE

KHILAFATISTS AND NATIONALISTS, 1919 TO 1923

The observance of the Khilafat Day hartal in October 1919 by both Hindus and Muslims marked the beginning of a new era of Muslim politics in Calcutta. For the first time large numbers of local Muslims became actively involved in a political movement which was both India-wide in manifestation and anti-British in sentiment. In addition it was a movement which from its inception was regarded by its leaders as an ideal vehicle for Hindu-Muslim collaboration.

Throughout the period 1918 to 1921 the poorer members of the Hindu and Muslim communities in the Calcutta area shared the economic distress caused by rapidly rising food and cloth prices. Minimal wage increases for jute mill operatives, who formed the greater proportion of industrial workers, in 1918 and 1919 did little to improve their economic position, and members of both communities were involved in the rising tide of labour unrest which reached its peak during 1920 and 1921. The prices of staple goods such as rice, salt, wheat and cloth continued to rise erratically during these years and it was not until the end of 1921 that a definite downward trend in prices was observed.¹ Certainly prices reached their peak in the latter months of 1920,² and then began to decline but not without the occasional months such as May and September 1921 when sharp price rises were recorded.³

The economic position of the jute mill labourers in particular was exacerbated by rising prices and also by the sharp drop in the price of mill products between 1920 and 1921. Export industries throughout India were badly affected by this short, but world-wide, trade recession and the mill owners of Calcutta attempted to counteract their fall in income by restricting production and reducing working hours.⁴ The nett result for the average mill worker in 1921

¹ Statistical Abstracts, 1911 to 1921, pp.602-5.

² Statistical Abstracts, 1929 to 1939, p.423.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.423-4; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.); July 1920, no.106; *ibid.*, February 1921, no.77; *ibid.*, June 1921, no.63.

⁴ Cotton, C.W.E., Handbook of Commercial Information for India, (1924), p.117.

was that although by the end of the year the wage index had increased 50 per cent since 1914, food prices had correspondingly increased by 78 per cent¹ and he was working fewer hours so that in fact his economic position showed little sign of improvement. Compared with 1920, however, when the index of wholesale prices contrasted a 101 per cent rise since 1914 with a 40 per cent wage increase there were indications of a change for the better. The improvement was confirmed during 1922 and 1923 as food and cloth prices dropped slowly from 78 per cent to 72 per cent above the base year of 1914.²

Against this background of economic dislocation and distress the years following 1919 witnessed a sharp rise in Muslim political activity in Calcutta and indeed throughout India. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 Muslim concern for their future in India was channelled into the romantic and backward-looking Khilafat movement. The immediate object of the movement was to defend the temporal power of the Caliph, the spiritual head of Islam and the ruler of the Ottoman Empire; but the enthusiasm with which his cause was embraced by the Muslims of India cannot be accounted for simply on the argument of extra-territorial loyalties or total preoccupation with the past. The Khilafat issue came at a time when economic distress, domestic political uncertainty and disillusionment with the British had permeated Muslim society and undermined the influence of many of its former spokesmen. They had followed a policy of conciliating the British, both as a means of seeking advancement for their community and as a protection against the economically and politically more dominant Hindu community.

¹Buchanan, D.H., The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India (1934), p.355; Statistical Abstracts, 1929 to 1939, p.423.

²Ibid.

In Calcutta Muslim bitterness and confusion had exploded in 1918 in a vicious anti-British and anti-Marwari riot; but the confusion of sentiment within the community was such that by 1919 the strong anti-Marwari feeling of the previous year had declined to be replaced by an alliance between Hindus and Muslims which was directed against the British. In the wake of the riot the older Muslim leadership proved incapable of concerted or effective action, and following an interregnum dominated by non-Bengali Pan-Islamic journalists, a new leadership emerged. This comprised young men with a western education and professional background who were drawn mainly from prosperous mercantile, professional and landowning families. Scornful of the old style of communal leadership and the social and economic products of British penetration into the sub-continent they joined ranks with their counterparts in the Hindu community to wrest power from their British rulers.

The first definite sign of their growing influence within the community had been the Khilafat Day hartal of October 1919, which had been organised jointly by sympathetic Hindu Congressmen and the leaders of the Bengal Presidency Muslim League, namely Fazl-ul Huq and Mujibur Rahman.¹ In succeeding months the growing extent of their influence within the community became increasingly evident. Commensurate with the growth of their influence was the upsurge of Hindu-Muslim political co-operation in the city. Indeed, if the new Muslim spokesmen were to succeed in their object of gaining concessions from the British they needed the support of the Hindu community who dominated the city economically, politically and numerically.

¹Statesman, 1919, 7 November, p.3: Huq was president and Rahman secretary.

II

In November 1919 the Bengal authorities reported to the Imperial government in Delhi that in the wake of the October hartal 'the advocates of Hindu-Muslim Unity [were] not abating their efforts'.¹ On the occasion of the Hindu festival of Diwali Urdu-speaking Muslims bearing gifts toured areas of up-country Hindu settlement in north Calcutta and preached the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. During the Marwari Pinjrapole festival thousands of Muslims, including Fazl-ul Huq and his lieutenants Mujibur Rahman and Najimuddin Ahmed, were guests at the festivities, and later in November Huq and other Muslim leaders participated in the Jain Paraswanath procession.² But the political and social activities of Muslims were not confined to inter-communal reconciliation. At a meeting in the Nakhoda Mosque Akram Khan, a Bengali-speaking Muslim from Burdwan and a fervent advocate of Muslim participation in the activities of the Indian National Congress, articulated the resentment felt by local Muslims over the doubtful future of the Caliph; and in the following month of December he led another meeting at the Mosque where the audience of 700 welcomed the release of the interned Ali brothers.³

The attitude of the Calcutta Muslims towards the Khilafat issue and the British was beginning to take concrete form. By January 1920 the police reported that 'the Muhammedan public has advanced further towards a corporate sense of its interests in the Turkish settlement' under the influence of Huq and other leaders.⁴ Concern for the Caliph was not at this stage restricted to certain sections of the Muslim community of India; across the sub-continent loyalist

¹ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), December 1919, no.5.

² Ibid.; ibid., January 1920, no.5.

³ Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no.292/19.

⁴ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), January 1920, no.78.

Muslim leaders and their more radical co-religionists echoed similar sentiments of concern for the future of the Caliph, a fact which indicated the extent of Muslim pre-occupation with the issue.

In Bengal prominent spokesmen of the old leadership such as the Nawab of Dacca and Sir Shamsul Huda were as moved by the matter as were the more nationalist-oriented leaders such as Huq and his associates - but the common interest ended once the means of rectifying the Muslim grievance had to be decided upon. For the older leadership the only course of action available was continued loyalty to the British, whereas to the younger Muslim spokesmen of Calcutta a more promising alternative seemed to lie in co-operation with the more imaginative and aggressive Hindu-dominated Congress.

In Calcutta the Muslim leaders followed the pattern already established elsewhere in India under the aegis of Gandhi and various Muslims led by the Ali brothers. In November 1919 the Calcutta Khilafat Committee was formed under the presidency of Moulana Abdur Rauf Dinajpuri, a local merchant and friend of Azad's family who had been involved in Muslim agitation at the time of the Balkan Wars, and with Akram Khan as secretary.¹ Although distinct as an organisation from the Bengal Presidency Muslim League both bodies were dominated by the same group of men whose centre of activity was Calcutta rather than the mofussil, and whose political sympathies were becoming increasingly coloured by national rather than communal considerations.

The first trial of strength for the Calcutta Khilafat Committee came in December 1919 over the issue of the Peace Celebrations organised by the provincial government. Loyalist and conservative Muslim organisations in the city indicated their willingness to participate; thus the Central National Mahommedan Association and the Indian Moslem Association

¹Ibid., January 1920, no.5.

respectively nominated Abdus Salam, son-in-law of the late Nawab Abdul Jabbar, and G.H.C. Ariff, Nawab Chowdhury's protege, to the Peace Celebrations Committee, but in general the community remained aloof.¹ Most Muslims in the city, under the leadership of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee and backed by local Hindu Congressmen² and the Hindu and Muslim press, prepared for a boycott.³ On December 4 C.R. Das, the leading Bengali Congressman, Byomkesh Chakravarti, spokesman for the Home Rule League and Fazl-ul Huq, 'the high priest of the anti-peace celebration movement',⁴ and president of the provincial Muslim League, issued a formal manifesto against the celebrations and nominated two Bengali Muslim members of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee - Akram Khan and Maniruzzaman Islamabadi - as chief organisers of the agitation.⁵

Certainly some prominent leaders within the Muslim community of Calcutta were concerned about the direction taken by the agitation. But men such as the Nawab of Dacca and Nawab Chowdhury found their opposition circumscribed by the fact that their power-bases were in the mofussil and not in the city. Dr Abdullah Suhrawardy, whose family dominated the Muslim professional elite of the city, attempted to moderate Muslim sentiment by steering a narrow course between the more radical and conservative factions, and along with Abdus Salam he courted the All-India Moderate Party which held its first annual session at Calcutta in December 1919.⁶ However, social pressures were such that Suhrawardy,

¹Bengal Govt, Political Dept, August 1919, File no.IW-229, Progs 48-62.

²Ibid., Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no. 292/19.

³Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1919, 4 December, p.6; *ibid.*, 16 December, p.6; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), December 1919, no.5.

⁴Ibid., April, 1920, no.103.

⁵Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no.292/19.

⁶Statesman, 2 December, p.8; *ibid.*, 30 December, p.6.

after being arraigned by 'the extremists..for his alleged moderate views on the Khilafat',¹ and Abdus Salam bowed to the majority view and issued a joint statement of sympathy for the Caliph.²

The success of the boycott was largely due to the activities of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee and its Hindu supporters - particularly the Marwaris. Akram Khan and Marwari volunteers distributed rupees to beggars and poor families to keep them away from the free public meals offered by the local government; Abdullah Suhrawardy refused a government donation to provide a mela at the girls' school he had recently established and Muslim and Marwari shops throughout the city closed. The Muslim press led by the Muhammadi and Mussalman urged the social and religious boycott of those who participated in the celebrations, and the police reported that 'so great was the fear of persecution that a grandson of Nawab Sirajul Islam went to the [public] mela dressed like a woman'. Even the editor of the Moslem Hitaishi, the leading Bengali Muslim communalist and anti-Congress newspaper, donated Rs 200 to Akram Khan's fund to bribe Muslim children away from the free food and fireworks offered by the British.³

Elsewhere in Bengal, however there is little evidence of any effectively organised Muslim boycott of the Peace Celebrations. The Muslim jute mill operatives at Titagarh to the north of Calcutta ignored the celebrations at the instance of their sirdars who were thought by the British to be under the influence of local maulvis;⁴ but in general the boycott was confined to the Calcutta area. The influence of the Presidency Muslim League and the Calcutta Khilafat

¹Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), January 1920, no.5.

²Statesman, 1920, 1 January, p.6.

³For details of the Muslim boycott see: Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no.472/19; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), December 1919, no.5; *ibid.*, January 1920, nos 5 and 44.

⁴Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), January 1920, no.45.

Committee did not extend beyond the city. In the mofussil the conservative landowning Ashraf families still retained considerable authority based on status and wealth, whilst the Presidency Muslim League was little more than an elitist club which catered to the political sophistications of the small number of westernised Muslims in Calcutta. The Calcutta Khilafat Committee was rapidly able to extend its influence within the city and proved a much more effective means of mass organisation than the older parent body, the provincial Muslim League.

Within Calcutta the boycott was observed mainly by Muslims and Marwaris. The British noted that Bengali Hindu shopkeepers did not observe the boycott or join the predominantly Muslim and Marwari processions which wound their way through the central and northern areas of the city to the accompaniment of drums and Urdu songs.¹ Undoubtedly local Hindu Congress leaders gave support to the organisation of the demonstrations, but even so the majority of their Bengali co-religionists in the city still held aloof from what was essentially a Muslim communal grievance.

In succeeding years Bengali Hindu involvement in the Khilafat agitation certainly increased, but such support was subject to many qualifications and reservations which did little to create a lasting bond of common interest between the two major communities in the city. Much of the success of the communal rapprochement depended upon the personality of C.R. Das and his policy of conciliating Hindu and Muslim interests. In essence he had to balance the upper-class Bengali Hindu fears of Muslim resentment centred upon the economic and political hegemony exerted by Bengali Hindus in Calcutta and the province at large. Any attempt to conciliate such divergent resentments and fears led to compromises which involved the immediate political interests of one or other group and created further tensions which

¹ Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no. 472/19.

weakened the facade of communal unity. The Hindu-Muslim rapprochement in Calcutta appeared confirmed by the inter-communal political activity during the Khilafat and later Non-Cooperation movements; but once the superficial accord between the Hindu and Muslim masses began to collapse there was a similar bifurcation of interests within and between the leadership groups of both communities which eventually led to the demise of the rapprochement.

Das was continually plagued by the fears of his followers regarding their economic and political interests in Bengal. His most effective support, in terms of finance and personal influence, came from the Bengali Hindu upper-classes who formed the majority of landowners, and those engaged in western professions in Calcutta and Bengal. Many of the landowners were in the invidious position of forming a small economically dominant elite which subsisted on the rents of an impoverished Muslim peasantry. Large numbers of them supported Das and the communal rapprochement, but the spectre of any widespread involvement of the Muslim masses, and the social upheavals such involvement might entail, certainly qualified the nature of their practical support of Muslim political interests.

The same was true of the Bengali Hindu professional class who more often than not were drawn from the landowning group. Not only did they keep a weather-eye on their rents from the mofussil but they were also loath to surrender any share of the stranglehold they exerted over education, the western professions and politics in the province. Thus they could enthusiastically support the gathering of Muslims into the mainstream of the nationalist movement, but they were less ready to face the problems raised by increasing Muslim involvement in provincial and urban politics. The result of victory over the British by a united Bengali people would inevitably have meant concrete concessions in a variety of fields which the Hindu minority in the province was not prepared to make.

Das' Muslim allies such as Huq, Abul Kasem and Akram Khan were plagued by equally strong pressures from their followers which, once the euphoria of the Khilafat movement had subsided, undermined their influence and the facade of Hindu-Muslim unity in Calcutta and Bengal. The basic weakness of the younger Muslim leadership was the fact that the bulk of their support was confined to Calcutta. The Muslim community of the city and its environs was overwhelmingly Urdu-oriented in ethos. Its interests were directed away from the Bengali mofussil towards the Urdu heartland of northern India and the problems of life in the polyglot metropolis of Calcutta. The Muslims of the city rarely extended any degree of sustained interest to their co-religionists in the mofussil, and in the final analysis they failed to make use of their primary strength of numerical superiority in the province.

In part this failure was due to a simple lack of interest on the part of the average Muslim in Calcutta, but it also went deeper than this. Any attempt on the part of the leadership of the Calcutta Muslims to gain support in the mofussil would have required not only an appeal to religious sentiment but also, if the support was to be more than ephemeral, a genuine interest in economic uplift: and this would have meant an immediate alienation of the Bengali Hindu landowners who formed the hardcore of Congress support. Fazl-ul-Huq, indeed, saw the value of mass involvement and vainly tried to enlist the support of the peasantry when he formed the shortlived Bengal Joatadars and Raiyats Association in 1920 on an avowedly non-communal basis.¹ But it was this very fear of an alliance between the Muslims of Calcutta and the mofussil which undermined the support C.R. Das could hope for from his co-religionists, and which was eventually to destroy the communal rapprochement built up during the days of his leadership.

¹Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.157.

The involvement of the Calcutta Muslims in the Khilafat and nationalist movements was not so much due to local exigencies but was rather an acquiescence on their part to the emotional appeal of a vanished era of Islamic glory in India. Immediate economic and political pressures certainly gave the movement added impetus, and the idea of a communal rapprochement had the immediate appeal of providing the Muslims with much needed allies; but for most Muslims in Calcutta the rapprochement had little validity beyond the immediate needs of the Khilafat issue. It merely held in abeyance the real problems which faced the community in the urban environment - problems which could only be solved by the economic and political uplift of the community at the expense of their Hindu compatriots.

III

In the months immediately following the fiasco of the Peace Celebrations the Khilafat movement in Calcutta rapidly gained strength. In January 1920 Abul Kalam Azad was released from internment and briefly visited Calcutta where he received a hero's welcome,¹ and in the following month the Ali brothers and Dr Kitchlew - leading figures of the Khilafat movement in north India - arrived in the city to attend the first provincial Khilafat conference.² Azad reappeared from one of his whirlwind tours around India and after making several violent speeches at the conference he was unanimously elected president of the newly constituted Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee.³ In reality, however, Azad was little more than titular head of the Khilafat movement in Bengal; certainly his presence and the presence

¹Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), January 1920, no.79.

²Ibid., July 1920, no.89.

³Ibid.

of other national leaders gave added impetus to nationalist politics in the province, but the practical details of agitation were organised by local rather than national leaders whose focus of interest was confined to the provincial level. It was men such as Huq, the newspaper editors Akram Khan of the Muhammadi and Mujibur Rahman of the Mussalman,¹ Najimuddin Ahmed, a retired Deputy Collector and friend of Azad, and the merchants Majid Buksh, Hafez Alla Bux Peshwari, Muhammed Osman - an Egyptian - Moulvi Muhammed Hashim and Shamsuddin Ahmed, to name but a few, who were the day-to-day organisers of Muslim political agitation in the city.

As a direct result of the Provincial Khilafat Conference March 14 was declared the occasion for a second province-wide hartal to protest against British policy towards Turkey. In Calcutta Huq attempted to organise Muslim college students with the formation of the Bengal College Students' Association,² and the up-country Muslim merchants of Mechua Bazar in Ward VIII were reported to have begun a voluntary boycott of British goods.³ At the instigation of Shaukat Ali telegrams and leaflets flooded the mofussil with the cry of 'Islam in Danger',⁴ and the Provincial Khilafat Committee embarked on a programme of training professional agitators to tour the mofussil.⁵ Such were the social pressures generated by the campaign and the intensity of the sentiment aroused by the issue that even prominent loyalists such as the Nawab of Dacca, Moulana Abu Bakr of Hooghly and G.H.C. Ariff, Nawab Chowdhury's protege, gave the hartal their tacit blessing.⁶ Local Congress leaders played an

¹In January 1920 both editors were warned by the authorities to tone down their language over the Khilafat issue: Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), January, 1920, no.79.

²Mussalman, 1920, 5 March, p.3.

³Ibid., 12 March, p.6.

⁴Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), July 1920, no.90.

⁵Ibid., April 1920, no.103.

⁶Ibid., Home Poll, 185 of 1925; Statesman, 1920, 29 February, p.15.

apparently minor role in the public organisation of this second hartal inspired by a distinctly communal grievance, but there can be little doubt that they were largely responsible for the continuing enthusiasm the new direction of Muslim political agitation received from the Marwari community.

Despite the vitriolic anti-British utterances of men such as Azad and the Ali brothers the spokesmen of the Muslims of Calcutta still moved with a certain degree of caution. In part this was dictated by their desire to retain the wavering support of the powerful but politically moderate Muslim leaders in the mofussil, and also by lingering fears of unleashing mob violence once more in the streets of Calcutta. Huq and Kasem had certainly echoed Azad's anti-British sentiments at the Provincial Khilafat Conference in February, and had even handed him undated letters of resignation from the Bengal Legislative Council to be used at his discretion,¹ but in practice their approach to the general problems of organisation and agitation was more circumspect. Students, merchants and artisans with a vested interest in the city, and imbued with a new sense of inter-communal cooperation, were relatively easier to organise and control than the more turbulent and transient mill operatives in the districts surrounding Calcutta. As the Calcutta police later remarked the Muslim leaders were wary of stirring up something they could not control so 'they announced that the coolie class was not to cease work on the day fixed for the hartal for more than an hour at the time of midday prayer'.²

Indeed, one of the most notable aspects of the hartal was the lack of participation of mill hands who, except for one instance at a Barrackpore mill,³ remained calm.

¹Govt of India, Home Poll, 185 of 1925; *ibid.* (Dep.), July 1920, no.106; Statesman, 1920, 30 July, p.3.

²Govt of India, Home Poll, 185 of 1925.

³Statesman, 1920, 20 March, p.8.

In the city itself, however, the picture of Muslim involvement was different. The hartal was very near complete with Muslim and Marwari shops throughout the city closed, butchers' stalls empty, fruit stands shuttered, dockyard strikes and most industrial plants in the city closed for the day. Taxis and gharris remained off the streets and Muslims, Marwaris and up-country Hindus flocked to mosques throughout the city to listen to the exhortations of local and up-country agitators. The centre of interest during the day was the great Nakhoda mosque where special prayers were offered by Azad, Najimuddin Ahmed and Akram Khan for the safety of the Caliph. No violence was offered to the authorities and in every aspect the day passed as a peaceful and impressive illustration of the strength of Muslim sentiment.¹

Elsewhere, however, the hartal was only sporadically observed. In the mofussil and amongst the Bengali Hindus of Calcutta involvement was minimal.² As in the Khilafat Day hartal and the Peace Celebration boycott of October and December 1919 two important groups of the population of Calcutta remained passive: the Bengali Hindus as mentioned, and also the mass of mill operatives in the crescent of industrial centres which surrounded the city. In succeeding months both groups began to participate more actively: the Bengali Hindus once the Non-Cooperation movement had been launched by Gandhi as a broad-based national political movement which incorporated the Khilafat agitation, and the mill workers during the years 1920 and 1921 when industrial unrest gave rise to a widespread series of strikes which disrupted all major industrial centres throughout the sub-continent.

¹For further details of the hartal see: Mussalman, 1920, 26 March, p.17; Statesman, 1920, 20 March, p.8; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), April 1920, no.103.

²Statesman, *ibid.*; Mussalman, *ibid.*

IV

In the months following the hartal of March several important developments occurred which radically altered the nature and direction of Muslim political activity in Calcutta. The Calcutta Khilafat Committee came increasingly under the influence of up-country Urdu-speaking merchants such as Hakim Rehat Hussain, a drug merchant of Mechua Bazar, and rapidly extended its influence within the city through a series of ward and district sub-committees. These not only covered the metropolitan area but also the surrounding municipalities and contiguous districts such as Howrah and the 24-Parganas.¹ Street collections and voluntary contributions from mercantile groups in the central wards of the city provided the Calcutta Khilafatists with funds which far surpassed those available to either the Provincial Khilafat Committee or the mushrooming Khilafatist organisations in the mofussil, which relied solely upon the financial support of an impoverished Muslim peasantry. The result of this was the financial and organisational subordination of all the provincial Khilafat organisations to the Calcutta Khilafat Committee and its Urdu-speaking mercantile members. Such a development not only aroused resentment in the mofussil and in the council of the officially dominant Provincial Khilafat Committee, but also caused bitter disputes between the Bengali and non-Bengali factions in the Calcutta committee - led respectively by Akram Khan and Hakim Rehat Hussain.²

Azad managed to prevent a complete public breakdown in the unity of the Khilafat movement in the province but factionalism and intrigue constantly plagued the entire organisation. Finance proved to be the major point of dissension and the cause of many disputes and well-founded

¹Mussalman, 1922, 12 May, p.5; by this date it had 52 sub-committees.

²Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no.267/20.

accusations of financial dishonesty and misuse.¹ So violent indeed did such disputes become that in mid-1921 the Bengali-faction in the Calcutta Khilafat Committee bitterly denounced Azad in a letter to the British-owned Statesman when at one stage he failed to take note of their demands for the curtailment of the influence of the Urdu-speakers of Calcutta.² The first major dispute occurred early in 1920 when the non-Bengali group protested that the Bengalis were using too much of the committees' funds 'the bulk of which was contributed by the non-Bengalee Muslim community of Calcutta' to finance Akram Khan's newspaper the Muhammadi. The Bengalis later countered this by claiming that the profits of the Zamana, an Urdu-daily edited by Akram Khan, but partially financed by the Calcutta Khilafat Committee, were being misused by the non-Bengalis and in a rage they established a new Urdu daily the Daur-i-Jadid.³

Frequent examples of what the editor of the Inquilab-i-Zamana, a Khilafatist Urdu language daily established early in 1923, described as 'factionalism and intrigue'⁴ can be detailed ad nauseam for the years between 1920 and 1923.⁵ On the surface the disputes concerned money and organisational matters, and invariably took the form of bitter recriminations over financial misappropriations. In reality, however, they were symptomatic of the far deeper differences within the Muslim community of Bengal; differences which were glossed over during the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements but which nevertheless seriously weakened any form of consistent and united community action during the period.

¹For details of the many and varied disputes see: ibid.; Govt of India, Home Poll, 741 of 1922; ibid., July 1920, no.97; ibid. (Dep.), January 1921, no.33; ibid., April 1921, no.43; ibid., June 1921, no.45; ibid., no.51; ibid., September 1921, no.1; ibid., 18 of 1922 (June); ibid., 25 of 1923 (March); ibid. (September).

²Statesman, 1921, 27 May, p.6.

³Bengal Govt. Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no.267/20.

⁴Ibid., File no.1/23.

⁵See footnotes 1 and 2; also Statesman, 1921, 3 June, p.5; Mussalman, 1921, 12 August, pp.4-5; ibid., 1922, 12 May, p.5; ibid., 1923, 9 March, p.7; ibid., 1923, 2 November, p.7; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), December 1920, no.74; ibid., April 1921, no.41; ibid., June 1921, no.64, etc.

The basic difference lay in the clash of interests between the wealthier Urdu-speaking and mercantile oriented community of Calcutta and the Bengali-speaking agriculturalists of the mofussil.

Within the councils of the various Khilafat organisations the Bengali Muslim spokesmen such as Akram Khan, Mujibur Rahman and Najimuddin Ahmed proved not only to be more politically and socially radical than the Muslims of Calcutta,¹ but also demanded greater participation in and control over the Khilafat agitation by Bengali-speaking Muslims. While they gained support for this demand in principle, in practice it proved difficult to gain adequate funds from the Calcutta Khilafat Committee to promote any sustained organisational activity in the mofussil. In addition the Bengali Muslim spokesmen, who were in a minority in both the provincial and Calcutta Khilafat committees, found that neither Calcutta nor the mofussil were prepared to subordinate themselves to any supreme authority with the result that no effective province wide organisation or programme emerged.

Frequent attempts were made by Azad to reconcile the hostile factions but he met with little lasting success. In May 1921 the spokesmen of the Bengali faction - Akram Khan, Islamabadi, Mujibur Rahman and Wahed Hossain, a former lawyer and member of the Provincial Education Conference - denounced Azad as president of the Provincial Khilafat Committee and issued a statement that:

We feel very strongly that the Bengal Provincial Khilafat committee has not been doing any propaganda work for the education of the masses... the committee is not at all in touch with the masses.²

This particular storm passed but fresh disputes occurred later as the basic differences in outlook between the two groups were largely irreconcilable.

¹Govt of India, Home Poll, 185 of 1925.

²Statesman, 1921, 27 May, p.6.

Superficially, however, the Khilafat movement in Calcutta moved from strength to strength. Innumerable impressive protest meetings were organised in the years between 1920 and 1923,¹ hartals held,² boycotts implemented,³ newspapers established,⁴ the authorities flaunted, the police undermined,⁵ agitators and politicians arrested and imprisoned in large numbers,⁶ leading newspapers suppressed or fined,⁷ and a host of other exciting and impressive events occurred. Yet divisions within the leadership multiplied and Muslim political activity or organisation never extended beyond a series of reactions to the immediate situation. The Presidency Muslim League was in practice replaced by the Calcutta Khilafat Committee,⁸ and the voices of the Bengali Muslim spokesmen were muffled by the immediate interests of the Muslims of Calcutta. But for the intervention of the Gandhian Non-Cooperation programme and the support of Muslim agitation by the Hindus one suspects that the Khilafat movement in Calcutta and Bengal would have been of short duration.

¹E.g. Govt of India, Home Poll, 185 of 1925; *ibid.*, 1921, no. 415; *ibid.*, (Dep.), July 1920, no.97.

²E.g. Govt of India, Home Poll, 185 of 1925; *ibid.* (Dep.), July 1920, no.106; *ibid.*, August 1920, no.111; *ibid.*, August 1920, nos 338-67 and KW; *ibid.*, June 1921, no.51; *ibid.*, September 1921, no.1; *ibid.*, 18 of 1921 (November); Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no.267/20; Mussalman, 1920, 6 August, pp.2,5; Statesman, 1920, 3 August, p.8.

³E.g. Govt of India, Home Poll, 185 of 1925; *ibid.* (Dep.), June 1921, no.90; Mussalman, 1921, 9 September, p.5.

⁴Daur-i-Jadid (Urdu daily); Paigan (Bengali weekly edited by Azad); Zamana (Urdu daily); Al Kamal (Urdu daily run by Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee); Asr-e-Jadid (Urdu daily); Inquilab-i-Zamana (Urdu daily); Moslem Jagat (Bengali daily); Khuddam (Urdu daily); Navayuga (Bengali daily); Raiyat (Bengali daily).

⁵Govt of India, Home Poll, 18 of 1921 (November).

⁶E.g. *ibid.*, 18 of 1922 (January); Mussalman, 1921, 2 December, p.5; *ibid.*, 16 December, p.2; *ibid.*, 1922, 1 January, pp.8,5; *ibid.*, 17 February, p.5; *ibid.*, 17 March, p.5; *ibid.*, 14 April, p.6; *ibid.*, 1923, 9 March, p.5.

⁷Navayuga (1920); Muhammadi (1920, 1921, 1922); Asr-e-Jadid (1921); Daur-i-Jadid (1922); Paigan (1922); Zamana (1923); Al Kamal (1923); Moslem Jagat (1923).

⁸No meetings were held between January 1921 and January 1925; Mussalman, 1921, 28 January, p.7; *ibid.*, 1925, 20 January, p.2.

V

The Non-Cooperation programme formulated by Gandhi as the ostensible means of giving greater expression to the Khilafat agitation, but in practice as the basis for evolving nation-wide agitation to include all indigenous groups within Indian society, gained currency during the first half of 1920.¹ Its non-sectarian aim of Swaraj offended the susceptibilities of neither Hindu nor Muslim, and in both cases offered a means of defeating the British.

In Calcutta Azad, the Ali brothers, Akram Khan and Mujibur Rahman preached the benefits of the programme² while at the same time cultivating rumours which

were sedulously circulated to the effect that Government had ordered the transfer of the Muhammedan holy day from Friday to Sunday, the substitution of the name of the King-Emperor for that of the Khalif in the Khutba prayer, and the proscription of the Koran.³

The British were cast as immoral and irreligious ogres and further wild accusations were hurled at them by speakers such as Najimuddin Ahmed who, in December 1920, declared that:

The British Government openly gave permission to this effect, that if some sister or mother of yours went to the Police Department and requested permission to become a prostitute, then the British Government would at once consent. They would ask her with pleasure to go and sell her chastity so that your uncles and brothers may waste their money and ruin their morals.⁴

The initial response to the Muslim community in the city was lukewarm, but by the latter half of 1920 support was much more widespread. Admittedly there were reservations amongst Muslims regarding the wisdom of boycotting schools and

¹For the type of appeal issued by Gandhi to Muslims see Appendix III.

²Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), July 1920, no.106.

³Ibid., Home Poll, 185 of 1925.

⁴'Bamford Report', p.78.

legislative institutions, but the consensus of opinion appears to have been that desperate times required desperate measures.¹ Despite reservations the majority of Muslim newspapers in Calcutta joined with the Hindu press in vociferously voicing their support for the programme.² Hindu nationalist leaders such as C.R. Das, who had remained behind the scenes of previous Muslim agitation since 1919, began to take a more active role in whipping up Muslim support and frequently appeared as co-speakers with their Muslim counterparts.³ The more communally oriented Muslim leaders in Bengal, for example the Nawab of Dacca and Nawab Chowdhury, attempted to use their influence in the city to persuade the prosperous mercantile families to withhold their support: but with little success.⁴ In the instance of the influential Anjuman-i-Waizeen⁵ Nawab Chowdhury at first stemmed the rising tide of support for the Non-Cooperation programme but by November 1920, under the influence of Abu Bakr, the members of the Anjuman gave their blessing to the new agitation, and in February 1921 removed all office bearers who retained their links with the Government.⁶

In August 1920 special sessions of the Indian National Congress, the All India Muslim League and the All India Khilafat Conference met in Calcutta to discuss Gandhi's projected programme.⁷ The sessions were turbulent,⁸ and

¹ Ibid. (Dep.), July 1920, no.95; NNR, 1920, 5 May and 11 June; Mussalman; ibid., 27 May, Muhammadi; Mussalman, 1920, 20 August, p.7.

² NNR, 1918, passim.

³ Govt of India, Home Poll, 185 of 1925.

⁴ Ibid.; ibid. (Dep.), July 1920, no.94; ibid., August 1920, no.112; Broomfield, J., op.cit., pp.156-7; NNR, 1920, 5 May, Nayak.

⁵ See pages 33, 84.

⁶ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), December 1920, nos 59 and 74; ibid., January 1921, no.33; ibid., June 1921, no.12; Mussalman, 1920, 29 October, p.3; Statesman, 1920, 2 November, p.8.

⁷ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), September 1920, no.70.

⁸ Ibid.

proved the final occasion when the younger and more radical Muslim leaders in Bengal and Calcutta presented a united front.

The fly-in-the-ointment was Huq. His personal doubts about the Non-Cooperation programme had been growing throughout the early months of 1920, and his relations with his former colleagues within the community had suffered a serious deterioration. In April 1920 a petty incident concerning the presence of several prominent pro-British Calcutta Muslims at the wedding of his daughter had drawn a letter of censure from several of his colleagues led by Akram Khan and Mujibur Rahman.¹ And throughout the months between April and August 1920 considerable pressure appears to have been exerted on Huq to bring him into line.² His doubts concerned the feasibility of Gandhi's whole programme: he viewed the proposed boycott of schools, administrative positions and the reformed legislative institutions as essentially detrimental to Muslim interests in the province. In addition his basic pragmatism recoiled at the vagueness of Gandhi's plans and, like Jinnah, he believed that more solid gains could be achieved by constitutional rather than anti-constitutional means. Wedded to the British parliamentary system, in which he saw a constitutional process ideally suited to the protection of minority interests, he was sceptical of Gandhi's demand of an ill-defined Swaraj before settlement of the basic problem of conflicting communal interests in India.

Nevertheless at the August session of the All India Muslim League, when his pleas for moderation were howled down, Huq publicly gave his support to the Non-Cooperation programme. A turn-about which drew the comment from the Bengal authorities that:

¹Mussalman, 1920, 23 April, p.3.

²Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), July 1920, no.106.

He may have been helped to this decision by the overt threats of his former associates, that they would stomp the country for the purpose of vilifying his reputation and, ruining him professionally and socially.¹

Certainly local Khilafatists led by Azad attempted to force Huq's hand by sending in the undated letters of resignation to the Bengal Legislative Council which he and his closest supporter, Abul Kasem, had written in February 1920.² But in this instance both Huq and Kasem secretly repudiated the letters,³ and, shortly after his public humiliation at the political conferences in August, Huq issued a statement to the Englishman and Statesman in which he criticised the Non-Cooperation programme as 'too vague' and attacked the leaders of the Congress whom he summed up as not possessing 'the brains of a barnyard fowl'.⁴

Throughout the months following, until the formal joint session of the Congress and Muslim League in November 1920 when the Non-Cooperation programme was to be officially accepted as an integral part of the nationalists' programme, the split between Huq and the extremists led by Akram Khan widened. The Nawab of Dacca, son of Huq's former patron, however, proved an unlikely but willing source of support for the embattled politician. Dacca's influence in the mofussil protected Huq in his home base at Barisal, and the Nawab's resignation from the Reception Committee for the special session of Congress early in August, when Huq attempted to do the same, no doubt struck a sympathetic chord in the relationship between them.⁵

¹Ibid., September 1920, no.70.

²See footnote 1, page 100; also Bengal Legislative Council Debates, vol.LII, 1.9.20 - submitted 21 July. Hereafter referred to as BLCD.

³Bengal Govt, Appointments Dept, September 1920, File no. 18 L-71, Progs 217-18.

⁴Ibid.; Statesman, 1920, 29 August, p.21.

⁵Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), August 1920, no.112.

At the superficial level, however, apart from his statement to the British-owned newspapers, Huq remained a supporter of Non-Cooperation. Certainly the Navayuga, a Bengali-language weekly he had established in July 1920, remained an advocate of the programme,¹ but his private dealings with the spokesmen of the Muslim community in Calcutta continued to deteriorate. This was evinced by the vitriolic attack made on him by Mujibur Rahman, editor of the Mussalman, early in September when the sincerity of his support for Non-Cooperation was questioned.²

Immediately following the August meetings up-country agitators, led by Mahomed Ali, began a series of meetings throughout Calcutta to increase Muslim support for Non-Cooperation. Under the spirited leadership of Akram Khan the Calcutta Khilafat Committee temporarily overcame the internecine warfare which too often hampered its activities and sent a stream of agitators into the mill areas and mofussil which surrounded the city.³ Enthusiasm for the new political programme rapidly mounted in Calcutta and by November Non-Cooperation and the Khilafat cause had almost become one for the average Muslim of Calcutta.⁴

At the November sessions of Congress and the League Huq once more attempted to plead for moderation, but threats of violence and a shower of shoes silenced him. The bulky figure and stentorian tones of Shaukut Ali proved his only defence and after hurriedly reaffirming his support for Non-Cooperation Huq slipped quietly from the pandal,⁵ and into the camp of the Nawab of Dacca.⁶

¹Ibid., July 1920, no.106; ibid., December 1920, no.59; ibid. (B), August 1920, nos 338-67 and KW.

²Mussalman, 1920, 3 September, p.4.

³Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), October 1920, no.16.

⁴Ibid., Home Poll, 185 of 1925.

⁵Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no.282/20.

⁶Ibid., File no.267/20.

By the middle of December the differences between Huq and his former colleagues came to a head. Early in December Huq presided over the All Bengal Muslim Conference, organised by the Nawab of Dacca, and formally denounced Congress and the Non-Cooperation programme.¹ The Mussalman declared Huq 'a turncoat' and both he and Kasem, his one loyal follower from the days of his glory as an extremist leader, received a deluge of anonymous letters containing abuse and threats.² In addition both were expelled from the Presidency Muslim League in January 1921.³

Huq's alignment with Dacca effectively removed him from the Calcutta scene. His power base had always been in his native district of Backergunge, and Calcutta had served only to provide him with a more sophisticated and important forum for his interests. His alienation from the Muslims of Calcutta precipitated a realignment of his activities, and he concentrated his interests for the next few years upon provincial rather than urban politics through the medium of the Bengal Legislative Council and with the support of his mofussil adherents.

Other prominent Muslims in Calcutta also broke with the Khilafat organisations at this time. The most important of them were the Suhrawardy brothers, Abdullah and Hasan; their cousin Zahid; Rezaur Rahman Khan, a merchant and yakil from north Calcutta and Sheikh Mahboob Alley, a wealthy merchant, landholder and former Honorary Magistrate from Sealdah on the eastern border of the city. All four men rejected the concept of non-cooperation and successfully contested seats in the reformed Bengal Legislative Council between November 1920 and April 1921.

¹Mussalman, 1920, 17 December, p.5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), February 1921, no.35.

²Mussalman, 1920, 17 December, p.5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), December 1920, no.74; January 1921, no.33.

³Mussalman, 1921, 20 January, p.2.

Abdullah Suhrawardy gained election to two constituencies - Dacca and Calcutta North - and it is interesting to note that when he chose the seat he wished to retain he opted for the more peaceful Dacca rather than for his turbulent home constituency of Calcutta North where only four per cent of the electorate had polled.¹ In January 1921 he was replaced by Rezaur Rahman Khan, and in April 1921 following the resignation of Zahid Suhrawardy, who had been appointed to the Calcutta High Court, Sheikh Mahboob Alley was elected to Calcutta South in a by-election at which 35 per cent of the electorate polled compared with barely 20 per cent at the previous contest.²

Despite the activity of these men in flouting the widespread sentiment in favour of Non-Cooperation within their community in Calcutta, best illustrated by the low level of polling in Calcutta North which included the more volatile Muslim settlements in the central wards of the city,³ they did not suffer the erosion of their influence in Calcutta as did Fazl-ul Huq. In the face of fiery denunciations by agitators, and the vitriolic criticisms of the Muslim press,⁴ they remained figures of influence and prestige within the urban community.

In part the reason for this lay in the dichotomy of Muslim interests in the city, and the practical advantages of patronage which Abdullah Suhrawardy in particular possessed.⁵ Muslim sentiment, at all levels of society, was certainly

¹ Statesman, 1921, 21 January, p.12; ibid., 1920, 8 December, p.7; Govt of India, Reforms Dept, Franchise A, November 1920, nos.101-2.

² Ibid; Statesman, 1921, 23 April, p.6; Mussalman, 1920, 8 December, p.7; ibid., 1921, 16 December, p.2.

³ Statesman, 1920, 17 November, p.7; ibid., 19 November, p.7; ibid., 8 December, p.7; ibid., 1921, 21 January, p.12; ibid., 27 January, p.17; ibid., 23 April, p.6.

⁴ NNR, 1920, November-December, passim; ibid., 1921, January-April, passim; Banerjea, Sir S.N., A Nation in the Making (1925), p.334.

⁵ Ikramullah, Begum S., op.cit., passim.

sympathetic towards the cause of the Caliph. However, few of the more prosperous members of the Calcutta Muslim community, whether merchants or members of the westernised professions, ever lost complete touch with the realities of practical existence in the urban environment. Such Muslims wanted the best of both worlds: the political defeat of the British and the tangible benefits of any devolution of power offered by the imperial authorities. Hence they supported the Khilafat agitation and were circumspect in their opposition to the Non-Cooperation movement, while at the same time they kept a weather-eye on current events beyond the bounds of the nationalist movement.

At no stage, however, did they offer the Muslim community in Calcutta an alternative form of leadership. Personal rivalry between the Suhrawardy family and Nawab Chowdhury in the Legislative Council only served to exacerbate existing temperamental differences;¹ while the Nawab rapidly lost influence in the city when he alienated many of the more conservative Muslim merchants and retired civil servants who were members of the Central National Mahommedan Association. For several years Nawab Chowdhury had been attempting to revitalise the Association as a distinctly communal political organisation, but when this failed he switched his loyalties to the Indian Moslem Association which was primarily a mofussil body dominated by the Nawab of Dacca and other wealthy land-owning Ashraf families. The old rivalry between the Muslim merchants of Calcutta and the landowners of the mofussil was renewed and, in April 1921, the embittered members of the Central National Mahommedan Association expelled Chowdhury and rejected any idea of a political liaison with the Muslims of the mofussil.²

¹Broomfield, J., op.cit., pp.176-9.

²Statesman, 1921, 23 April, p.8.

Not only did the alien mofussil account for little in the considerations of most Muslims in Calcutta but, more important still, both nationalist and communalist failed to take into reckoning the possible political worth of the large and unsettled industrial labour force which surrounded the city. In part these reservations of the permanently-settled Muslim population of Calcutta were matched by those of the Hindu leaders.

C.R. Das in particular shared many of Huq's reservations about the practicality of Non-Cooperation but unlike him he acquiesced to popular support engaged by Gandhi and attempted to work for a reform of ideas within Congress. Following his initial failure to oppose Non-Cooperation he ostensibly accepted the programme until such time as he was able to offer a more attractive alternative. Many of his followers in the province, however, were also like the Muslims of Calcutta keeping a close watch on the current situation in Bengal. They may have espoused a nation-wide ideal but their response to it was moulded by provincial and communal considerations. They were more than prepared to encourage Muslim involvement in the Non-Cooperation movement, and it is generally true that after 1920 the Khilafat movement became so inextricably bound up with that of the general Non-Cooperation campaign that it is difficult to separate the two¹ - despite the efforts of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee to retain some semblance of organisational independence against the inroads of local Congress bodies.² On the other hand Das' Hindu followers resented Muslims such as Huq and the Suhrawardies who seemed determined to wrest immediate gains for their community; gains which could only be achieved at the expense of the Hindu community of Bengal. In addition the Hindus were loath to raise the masses. The large landowners

¹Govt of India, Home Poll, 185 of 1925.

²Ibid., Home Poll (Dep.), 1922, no.327/IV; *ibid.*, April 1921, no.41; Mussalman, 1921, 16 December, p.2.

because of their fear of the predominantly Muslim peasantry; the city-dwellers because of their memories of mob activity, and the Hindu community in the province at large because of the ever-present spectre of Muslim numerical superiority. Such fears qualified the outlook of most nationalist leaders of the Hindu community in the province and undermined their support for Muslim political agitation and their belief in the sincerity of Muslim involvement in the nationalist movement.

VI

It was this qualified attitude of support and involvement which undermined the utilisation of the industrial and mofussil masses in the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements. Certainly throughout 1920 and subsequent years there were instances of strikes and industrial unrest which were directly related to the activities of political agitators,¹ but the majority of strikes and industrial disputes can be accounted for more readily by the pressure of economic discontent.² Admittedly it is difficult to differentiate between political and economic motives during such a period and obviously there was a certain amount of interaction. The various Khilafat organisations, under the influence of Azad and Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, made sporadic attempts to organise the Muslim industrial workers and succeeded in whipping up a considerable amount of discontent in Howrah;³ but their success was ephemeral. Hindu

¹ Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no.267/20; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), February 1921, no.35; *ibid.*, June 1921, no.51; Labour Commission, 1929 (Evidence), vol.V, part 1, pp.121-4; Statesman, 1920, 20 March, p.8; *ibid.*, 1921, 5 April, p.9.

² Bengal Govt, Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest in Bengal, 1921, (1921), p.3.

³ Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File No.224/23; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), January 1921, no.75; *ibid.*, December 1920, no.84; *ibid.*, Home Poll, 303 of 1921; *ibid.* (Dep.), June 1921, no.13; Statesman, 1921, 6 November, p.11; *ibid.*, 1922, 18 January, p.11.

Non-Cooperators made similar attempts but they were in any case dubious about the value of arousing the turbulent mill-hands and loath to use communal arguments to rally support.¹ A close analysis of the strikes reveals that direct political motivation was the exception rather than the rule.² Even when it did occur communal differences helped undermine the agitation as at Kanchipara in 1921,³ or else the failure of the outside agitators to provide sufficient funds turned the workers against them.⁴ At one mill in Garden Reach for instance it was reported that 'the Khilafat leaders beat a hasty retreat from the meeting in their motor cars' under a barrage of brickbats from a mob of starving millhands.⁵

The difficulties entailed in organising labour in Calcutta have been discussed previously. Language, caste, race and religion plus the methods of recruitment and factory organisation all helped fractionalise the labour force and alienate it from the Hindus and Muslims in the city proper. Few Hindus or Muslims were enthusiastic about espousing the workers' cause: the Hindus for fear of raising the beast of the streets and setting in motion an uncontrollable process of social upheaval, and the Muslims of Calcutta because they were more pre-occupied with the romantic aspects of the Khilafat movement rather than with the practical benefits of labour organisation which in this era was of unknown value.

¹Mussalman, 1921, 4 February, p.6; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), December 1920, no.84; *ibid.*, September 1921, no.1; *ibid.*, 25 of 1923, February; *ibid.*, January 1921, no.75.

²Labour Commission, 1929, pp.333-5; Karnik, V.B., Strikes in India (1967), pp.64, 102-3; Mukhtar, A., Factory Labour in India (1930), pp.90-9, 107-8.

³Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), June 1921, no.63.

⁴*Ibid.*, 18 of 1922 (July and August).

⁵*Ibid.*, February 1921, no.35.

In the trade union field there are few examples of organised union involvement in political agitation.¹ Only one example of the formation of a trade union by political agitators comes to light and this was the Kankinara Labour Union.² Formed in 1921 by Khilafatists the union was active in the Kankinara mill district to the north of Calcutta and received support from Gandhi, C.R. Das and Moulvi Latafat Hossein, a Bengali Muslim member of the Legislative Council whose influence was apparently not circumscribed by his political differences with the Non-Cooperators.³ Elsewhere strike committees were formed by Khilafatists and Non-Cooperators; but shortage of funds and communal suspicions invariably led to the collapse of such committees and the strikes they were involved with.

Apart from the Kankinara Labour Union other unions were active in and around Calcutta, particularly amongst the more homogeneous Muslim building workers, domestic servants and seamen.⁴ In general, however, their leaders were Muslim merchants and professional men who avoided any direct political commitments and who were more concerned with securing tangible concessions from employers and government. The best example of such a leader is Mahomed Daud, a Calcutta lawyer, who was leader of the Indian Seamen's Union.⁵ Daud was involved in a variety of strikes concerning seamen and his interests also encompassed domestic servants and shop-workers.⁶ There is evidence that at various times he received the active support of politicians

¹Ibid., Home Poll, 1921, no.415.

²Labour Commission, 1929 (Evidence), vol.V, part 1, p.271.

³Ibid.

⁴Statesman, 1920, 13 January, p.20; Mussalman, 1920, 30 January, p.5; ibid., 1923, 19 June, p.5; ibid., 22 June, p.5; ibid., 1921, 7 September, p.5; ibid., 3 November, p.11.

⁵See page 56.

⁶See footnote 4.

such as Das, Gandhi, Azad and Huq,¹ and he affiliated the Indian Seamen's Union to the Congress-inspired All India Trade Union Congress. But neither politicians nor the 'loosely co-ordinated'² Trade Union Congress had any final say in the affairs of the Union. Willing though he was to receive the support of politicians Daud was also prepared to cooperate with the government and employers, and he was a member of several committees appointed by the government to enquire into labour unrest.³

A somewhat similar union was the Howrah Labour Union formed in 1921 by Mazibar Rahman, a vakil from Howrah. Personally, however, he was much more inimical to 'political agitators' than Daud. At first he appears to have flirted with Congress but he soon threw in his lot with the forces of law and order. Little more is heard of him after 1922 and by 1923 the union was firmly under the control of Fazl-ul Huq, though the benefits he gained from this coup must have been negligible in view of the unions very small membership.⁴

The whole period 1919 to 1923 was one of intense political activity and superficial communal harmony. The crowds which thronged the streets, parks and squares of Calcutta during the peak periods of political unrest were impressive but details of composition reveal the essential weaknesses of the whole movement during the period. In the earlier stages of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements the bulk of demonstrators were Marwaris and Muslims.⁵ Bengali Hindus and up-country Hindus certainly

¹ Mussalman, 1921, 4 February, p.4; Statesman, 1921, 26 April, p.5; ibid., 1923, 6 November, p.7; Saksena, R.N., Seamen in India (1951), p.94.

² Myers, C.A., Labor Problems in the Industrialization of India (1958), p.57.

³ Bakhale, R.R. (ed.), The Directory of Trade Unions (1925), p.55.

⁴ Bengal Govt, Political Dept, December 1921, File no.20P-1, Progs B249-50; Statesman, 1921, 2 September, p.5.

⁵ Govt of India, Home Poll, 185 of 1925; ibid. (Dep.), July 1920, no.106; Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no.267/20.

observed the various hartals, but like the millhands of Howrah and Garden Reach, there is no evidence to indicate that they took a more active role in political agitation during the years 1919 and 1920.

With the adoption of Non-Cooperation by C.R. Das at the end of 1920, however, the Bengali Hindu involvement became much more obvious and reached its peak towards the end of 1921 when protests against the visit of the Prince of Wales precipitated mass arrests by the British.¹ But at the same time that Bengali Hindu involvement increased Marwari involvement decreased. Gandhi's occasional visits during 1921 invariably caused a temporary revival of Marwari interest, but increasing resentment against the economic effects of the boycott of British goods and the attempts of Muslim volunteers to enforce the boycott strained relations between the two communities.² Officially the Marwaris remained active Non-Cooperators but in practice their enthusiasm steadily declined throughout 1921.³

The decline in Marwari political activity was piecemeal but so too was the increase in Bengali Hindu participation. Bengali Hindu students and professional men were certainly involved in Non-Cooperation activities but only at specific times and there is little evidence of sustained Bengali Hindu interest.⁴ The same comment can be made about the Muslim and Hindu millhands; violent flurries of activity by operatives from Howrah and other mill areas

¹Indian Annual Register, 1922, p.339-40.

²Statesman, 1921, 16 July, p.15; ibid., 2 September, p.7; ibid., 13 September, p.7; Mussalman, 1921, 9 September, p.5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), April 1921, no.42; ibid., 18 of 1921 (September); ibid. (October); ibid., January 1921, no.33; ibid., February 1921, no.35; ibid., 1922, no.327/IV; etc.

³Ibid., 18 of 1921 (September); ibid. (October); ibid., 18 of 1922 (July and August); Mussalman, 1921, 9 September, p.5.

⁴Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), December 1920, no.74; ibid., April 1921, no.42; ibid., June 1921, no.90; ibid., 18 of 1921 (December); Statesman, 1921, 26 January, p.8.

often gained more credence than they deserved. Certainly Muslim millhands were prominent in the picketing of cloth shops and in the Civil Disobedience movement of 1921; in addition they staged several spectacular and violent demonstrations in support of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation programme, but such activities were ephemeral and highly organised.¹ They lacked spontaneity and were without any means of sustenance beyond the immediate bribe or emotion of the moment.²

The general picture which emerged for the period 1919 to 1923 of the participation of the population of Calcutta in the political unrest of those years is of the preponderance of Muslims amongst the activists. Hindu leaders such as C.R. Das played a prominent role, but that of their co-religionists was sporadic and rendered inconsistent by the underlying Bengali Hindu fears of a province-wide Muslim awakening. The Muslims of Calcutta participated in the nationalist agitation not so much out of any genuine interest in, or understanding of, Gandhi's objectives, but rather because of the threats they believed were aimed at their religion and their Urdu-oriented society by the British. Their interests were neither national nor provincial but communal, a fact which was temporarily forgotten by them in the relief of finding allies amongst the Hindus. The communal rapprochement was a chimera whose hybrid character had yet to be tested against the realities of daily existence between Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta.

¹ Govt of India, Home Poll, 185 of 1925; *ibid.* (Dep.), 18 of 1921 (December); *ibid.*, 18 of 1922 (February); *ibid.*, 18 of 1922 (June); Statesman, 1921, 13 August, p.5; *ibid.*, 19 October, p.8; *ibid.*, 1922, 2 February, p.5.

² Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 18 of 1922 (June); *ibid.* (July and August).

VII

An examination of the life of the Muslim community in Calcutta between 1919 and 1923 at a level below that of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation agitation provides an alternative picture of the influences working within the community. Certainly the experience of the nation-wide Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements cannot be discounted. Larger numbers of Muslims in Calcutta than ever before had been involved in direct political action, and new groups had been introduced to the political arena. Prominent merchants and professional men no longer held sway over the community by simple virtue of their descent and social status, but had been faced with the necessity of directly cultivating and responding to the interests of other groups within the community. Thus the local mosque, mercantile association - no matter how informally organised - and Khilafat Committee had become the rostra from which would-be community leaders attempted to rally personal and party support. The previously anonymous mass of Muslim petty merchants and artisans in Calcutta had voiced their confused grievances violently in 1918 and in subsequent years it was they, rather than the British, whom aspiring leaders cultivated.

The communal rapprochement had been another result of the Muslim political awakening and yet by the end of 1923 with the Non-Cooperation programme in ruins, after being called-off by Gandhi in 1922, and the Khilafat issue virtually solved, by domestic developments in Turkey, the rapprochement in Calcutta was showing definite signs of strain. The result of this was a realignment of Muslim interests from the international and national spheres to the provincial, district, village and urban level.

Obviously the Muslims of Calcutta were in no way responsible for the termination of the Non-Cooperation programme or the demise of the Khilafat issue, but to what extent did they contribute to the gradual deterioration of the communal rapprochement in Calcutta?

Muslim petty merchant, artisans, unskilled workers and students in the city joined arms with Marwaris, up-country Hindus and Bengali Hindus during the heady days of the nationalist agitation, but beneath the surface harmony older grievances and aspirations were present. They broke forth sporadically throughout this period to cause inter-communal bickering which by 1923 seriously threatened to destroy the vestiges of communal harmony in Calcutta.

Basically the increase in tensions resulted from the issues of korbani (cow slaughter) and municipal reforms. These were the ostensible causes of dispute, but they were the surface manifestations of more deep-seated suspicions which existed between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities of Calcutta: suspicions which led to a determination on both sides that the tangible benefits of urban life should not be gained disproportionately by either group. Such divisions had caused tension within the ranks of Khilafatists and Non-Cooperators to the extent that whilst the Khilafatists demanded the support of Congress they were slow to accept the leadership of C.R. Das; whilst the non-Muslim Non-Cooperators constantly played down the religious element in the Muslim political agitation, and were invariably suspicious of the Pan Islamic overtones of the Khilafat movement.¹

The decision of C.R. Das finally to dispense with the last vestiges of the Non-Cooperation ideal, late in 1922, when he decided to contest the forthcoming elections to the Bengal Legislative Council, further split the unity of the Hindu-Muslim leadership. The more radical Muslim leaders such as Akram Khan, and the Muslim press, were opposed to this return to constitutional agitation, but they grudgingly acquiesced at the prodding of Azad.²

¹ Ibid., 25 of 1923 (January).

² Ibid.; NNR, 1922, 15 November; Moslem Jagat; *ibid.*, 17 November, Muhammadi, *ibid.*, 17 November, Mussalman.

As far as the Muslims of Calcutta were concerned such suspicions meant that a large proportion of the more eminent merchants and professional men within the community, who in public supported current political agitation, were also aware of the more immediate problems facing their community in the city. This led to a bewildering mixture of political loyalties: in the case of the trade union leader Mahomed Daud there was the flirtation with nationalist and moderate politicians combined with a willingness to cooperate with the British. Similarly with the wealthy Ispahani merchant family there was a father who took recourse to a British court to gain control of the Shia Imambara at Hooghly, thereby splitting the Persian community for many years,¹ and a son who used the same family fortune to propagate the Khilafat and Pan-Islamic causes.² The Suhrawardy family provided yet further examples; the brothers Abdullah and Hasan opposed the Non-Cooperation movement and entered the Legislative Council in 1921 along with their cousin Zahid and his son Huseyn Shaheed. Yet both Abdullah and Huseyn Shaheed proved to be their own masters, and when Abdullah addressed the Council in support of nationalist agitation against separate electorates he was matched in his eloquence by Huseyn's support of the Khilafat movement.³

At a less sophisticated level communal tensions and the dichotomy of communal attitudes in this period are best illustrated by an examination of the perennial korbani disputes, and the furore over reforms to the municipal corporation.

Disputes over korbani have been noted as early as the 1890s and were a continual source of tension between the Muslim and Marwari communities. Gandhi had attempted to

¹Bengal Govt, Political Dept, June 1923, File no.1C-23, Progs B425-6; *ibid.*, July 1923, File no.1C-27, Progs B199-200.

²Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), June, 1921, no.90.

³BLCD, Vol.V, 21.11.21 and 1.12.21.

solve the issue by a series of vain compromises, and even at the height of the communal rapprochement in Calcutta the Marwaris persisted in their attempts to change Muslim attitudes on the issue. At one stage they offered to buy the cows destined for korbani with the practical result that the Muslims 'succeeded in extorting fancy prices from the Hindus for the sale of their cows' but continued with the slaughter on the occasion of Bakr Id.¹ At a later date the Marwaris offered the Muslims a more far-reaching bribe when in 1922 they proposed a cessation of korbani in return for a legislative ban on music before mosques, but to no avail.² Muslims were loath to give up what they considered an ancient right, and feared that once any concessions to Hindu or Marwari religious sentiment were made other time-honoured local religious practices may have been similarly attacked.³ The nett result of this agitation was an increasing disparity between Muslim and Marwari interests which not only increased tension between the two communities but which in addition helped drive the Marwaris further into the camp of the opponents of C.R. Das the Hindu champion of the communal rapprochement in Bengal.

Throughout 1921 and 1922 the Corporation debates are full of instances when the Marwari businessman Amaludhone Addy attempted to obtain a formal municipal ban on korbani. His pleas were based on economic arguments of doubtful validity and were bitterly opposed by Muslim members of the Corporation.⁴ So great was the feeling on this issue that even the nationalist press became involved and in 1921,

¹ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), January 1921, no.33; *ibid.*, April 1921, no.43.

² AICC Papers, 1922-23, File No.12, letters from the Calcutta Cow Preservation League dated 7.12.22, 20.12.22, 27.12.22.

³ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), August 1920, no.112.

⁴ Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1920-March 1921, 22.11.1920, pp.1017-21; *ibid.*, October 1921-March 1922, 14.12.1921, p.1301; *ibid.*, 18.1.1922, pp.1413-29; *ibid.*, April 1922-September 1922, 21.7.1922, p.593; BLCD, Vol.II, 4.7.1921.

1922 and 1923 Hindu and Muslim newspapers followed a strictly communal line.¹ In both 1921 and 1923 agitation in the Corporation by men such as Addy produced a rash of minor Muslim demonstrations particularly in such centres as Mechua Bazar and Dharumtala where the spirit of communal rapprochement was supposedly strongest.²

In part the intransigence of the Marwaris can be explained by their increasing disillusionment with the nationalist programme. The Non-Cooperation movement in Calcutta affected their economic interests, particularly with respect to the sale of foreign cloth, and with the failure of Gandhi and C.R. Das to provide them with any tangible rewards for their sacrifices their alienation from the nationalists and Muslims increased. But their reaction was not an isolated phenomenon; throughout northern India a conservative Hindu reaction against the eclectic socio-political programmes of Gandhi had set in by 1923 and was particularly directed at this cultivation of Muslim support. Communal riots in north western India and the Moplah uprising in Malabar had given rise to renewed Hindu fears of Muslim violence, and confirmed the suspicions of many Hindus about the Pan-Islamic sympathies of many Khilafatists. The result of this orthodox reaction was a rapid growth in Hindu communalist organisations ranging from the heterodox Arya Samaj to the more conservative, but equally anti-Muslim, Suddhi and Sangathan movements. In form all these movements aimed at a purification of Hindu religious and social practices, and the prevention of conversions to other faiths. Such interests found support in Bengal from groups like the Marwaris and the more orthodox Bengali Hindus who had been stirred by the korboni question, and who were also conscious

¹ NNR, 1920, 11 August, Nayak; *ibid.*, 13 August, Muhammadi; *ibid.*, 24 September, Navayug; *ibid.*, 1921, 11 February, Muhammadi; *ibid.*, 1922, 2 August, Viswamitra; *ibid.*, 1 August, Muhammadi; *ibid.*, 1923, 9 February, Muhammadi.

² Mussalman, 1921, 9 September, p.6; Statesman, 1923, 7 February, p.5; *ibid.*, 11 February, p.7; *ibid.*, 16 February, p.5.

of the steady stream of converts to Islam in the mofussil, especially amongst the untouchables.

In September 1923 the Hindu Dharma Sudharak Samity of Calcutta - a branch of the Hindu Mahasabha whose membership comprised mainly up-country Hindus - formally denounced korbani and 'Muslim atrocities' in Multan and Malabar, and stated that Hindus no longer had any sympathy with Muslim grievances.¹ The Muslim press led by the Mussalman responded vigorously to castigate the 'Hindu communalists',² but this was only one of many such incidents which had bedevilled communal harmony in Calcutta since the early months of 1923. In July the Muslim merchants of Mechua Bazar and central Calcutta had assembled at the Nakhoda mosque to denounce the Arya Samaj, which in following months became an object of vitriolic attacks by the Mussalman.³ In the same month the police reported that the Calcutta Khilafat Committee 'was alive only in the hearts of anti-Suddhi and Sangathan extremists' who were busy organising mofussil bodies to counteract the activities of the new Hindu organisations.⁴

Korbani and the activities of Hindu communal organisations, however, were not the only issues to arouse communal antipathy in Calcutta. During the years between 1919 and 1923 both major communities in Calcutta were drawn into conflict over the question of a reformed municipal constitution. In 1913 the majority of councillors on the Corporation had discussed the issue and had accepted the principle of separate electorates for Muslims.⁵ But by 1919, apart from the minority groups of Muslims and Europeans,

¹Ibid., 1923, 22 September, p.11; Mussalman, 1923, 28 September, p.3.

²Ibid., 28 September, p.5.

³Bengal Govt, Political Dept, Confidential Police Report, File no.1/23; Mussalman, 1923, 3 August, p.4; *ibid.*, 31 August, p.4; *ibid.*, 28 September, p.5.

⁴Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 25 of 1923 (July).

⁵Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1913-March 1914, 5.11.1913, pp.1233-4.

the Corporation councillors had decided against any such concession to communal interests.¹ In succeeding years a battle was waged in both the provincial Legislative Council and the Calcutta Corporation on the issue of separate electorates for Muslims. In general Muslim opinion seems to have been firmly behind the demand for communal electorates although, as can be expected, the more extremist leaders such as Akram Khan and Mujibur Rahman condemned them as 'anti-national'.² Even Abdullah Suhrawardy thundered in the Legislative Council, against a chorus of criticism from fellow Muslims, that he would

strongly oppose and emphatically repudiate and denounce the innovation and heresy of elevating and exalting the principle of communal representation into the shibboleth of my faith and the creed of my religion.³

Orthodox Hindus and Marwaris, especially Amaludhone Addy in both the Legislative Council and the Corporation, vigorously supported these denunciations. The issues of korboni and the allegedly excessive pandering to Muslim interests by Government and nationalists were both dragged into the interminable wrangling,⁴ which even helped divide further the nascent labour movement when Hindu delegates to the Kankinara Labour Conference refused to sit with Muslim delegates because of the Corporation dispute.⁵

In 1919 and 1920 the dispute had been largely confined to the small group of politically moderate and conservative Muslims in the city who remained aloof from the nationalist agitation. By 1922 and 1923, however, increasing numbers

¹ Ibid., October 1918-March 1919, 18.3.1919, pp.1422-6.

² Mussalman, 1923, 16 February, p.5.

³ BLCD, Vol.V, 1.12.1921.

⁴ Ibid., Vol.V, 29.11.1921; Bengal Govt, Administration Report, 1922-23, p.xvii.

⁵ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 25 of 1923 (March).

of Muslims had either been alienated from, or were merely passive observers of, the nationalist struggle. Their whole-hearted support of the anti-Government and anti-constitutional forces had waned to be replaced by an increasing interest in the problems of life in their immediate environment. This process of increasing communal introspection gave rise to a renewed determination on the part of Muslims to seek benefits for their community, and on the part of Hindus to preserve the status quo.

For both groups the municipality was a vital issue; not only did the Corporation provide an excellent forum for the pursuit and protection of group interests but, at the more practical level, it controlled considerable funds which it spent on slum-clearance, public works, education and a host of institutional projects throughout the city. In addition it was a profitable and respectable source of employment for men of all professions from sweeper to engineer and accountant. Whichever community could gain a voice loud enough to be heard in the councils of the Corporation would obviously have a good chance of assuming some of its powers of financial and employment patronage.

The more nationally minded Muslims, be they Khilafatists or moderates, may have opposed the principle of communal electorates, but for many others the benefits of a community pressure group in a previously Hindu-dominated organisation were too obvious to be ignored. Indeed, in the face of Muslim intransigence, the Hindu opposition steadily waned. Certainly various attempts were made to fob the Muslims off with offers of a number of 'reserved' as opposed to separate electorates, but this suggestion was firmly rejected on the grounds that any Muslim elected by a mixed electorate would be no true representative of Muslim interests.¹ Opposition in the Corporation lasted longer than in the Legislative Council and amongst the

¹Bengal Govt, Political Dept, December 1921, File no.2A-12, Progs B363; Calcutta Corporation, op.cit., 7.1.1919, p.1027; ibid., April 1922-September 1922, 21.7.1922, pp.590-4; BLCD, Vol.V, 22.11.1921.

group of nationalist politicians led by C.R. Das. The reason for this was the rapid approach of the 1923 elections which both Hindu moderates and extremists in Bengal were going to contest for the first time. Das had at last broken the firm stand of Congress against involvement in British-inspired constitutional processes and was busy searching for electoral support - the same can be said of the moderates. The result was a renewal in the cultivation of Muslim support by leading Hindu politicians in the province.

In the Bengal Legislative Council this led to a compromise solution of the municipal question when the Hindu moderates led by Sir Surendranath Banerjea accepted the suggestion of the European bloc that the Muslims be granted separate electorates for a period of 9 years after which joint electorates were to be accepted.¹ In the opposition camp outside the Legislative Council any outspoken criticism of this decision was muted by Das who having gauged the strength of Muslim sentiment on this issue was not eager to alienate Muslim support on the eve of the provincial elections. Even the Mussalman which on 16 February 1923 had condemned the principle of communal electorates performed a volte face and on 23 February tacitly supported the compromise with the acid comment that it was 'a coconut without a kernel'.²

So it was that the Muslims gained their will on the municipal question, but the effects of this victory, korbani and the growth of Hindu communalist organisations had seriously undermined the facade of communal harmony in the city. At the highest level of community leadership amongst the nationalists apparent amity was maintained, but amongst the masses in the city communal divisions multiplied.

¹Ibid., Vol.XI, 14.2.1923 and 19.2.1923. Bengal Govt, Local Self-Government Dept, October 1924, File no.1P-79, Progs A3-4; Bengal Govt, Memo. to the Statutory Commission: Communal Representation in Legislative and Local Bodies (n.d.), passim.

²Mussalman, 1923, 16 February, p.5; ibid., 23 February, p.3.

The silence of Das over the issue of the Corporation removed one cause of friction for the moment, but the communal rapprochement needed a more invigorating dose of practical ideas if it was to survive and grow. Vague political slogans no longer carried more weight than the immediate benefits demanded by Muslims; thus it was that Das agreed to the Corporation's new constitution and in addition began to search around for a more definite means of retaining Muslim support.

By the beginning of 1923 communal distrust in Calcutta had mounted to the extent that the spectre of the 1918 riots once more stalked the city. However, by the beginning of 1924 communal harmony was apparently restored: confirmed by the victory of Das' supporters in Muslim seats at the 1923-24 elections and the Muslim reception of the Das Pact, which was adopted by the nationalists in December 1923, and which provided for immediate and practical concessions to Muslim demands and aspirations in Calcutta and Bengal.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE COMMUNAL REVIVAL, 1923 TO 1926

The signing of the Das Pact in December 1923 was the most important political event in Bengal during that year. Negotiations had begun in September¹ and were completed on 9 December at the home of Khoda Buksh, a wealthy Punjabi merchant and eminent Persian scholar.²

In essence the Pact was the final effort of C.R. Das, the provincial Congress leader, to salvage the communal rapprochement and to secure the Muslim vote for the Swaraj Party at the forthcoming elections to the Bengal Legislative Council and the reformed Calcutta Corporation. To achieve this a pact which contained two sets of provisions was agreed upon by Das and four Calcutta Muslims - namely Abul Kalam Azad, the ex-lawyer and prominent Non-Cooperator Wahed Hossain, Syed Nasim Ali, MLC for 24-Parganas Rural, and Moulvi Abdul Karim, retired government servant, pioneer of modern Muslim education in Bengal and member of the Council of State.³ The first set of provisions conceded the Muslims of Bengal a statutory majority share in the administration and government of the province after Swaraj, whilst the second provided for the voluntary banning by Hindus of music before mosques, the freedom of Muslims to perform korbani, and the promise of a greater percentage of Muslim employees in a Swarajist controlled Corporation.⁴

The Muslim reaction in Bengal was immediate and favourable. At a joint session with the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, the provincial Khilafat Committee under its president Mujibur Rahman, editor of the Mussalman,

¹Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.239.

²Karim, Moulvi A.K., Letters on the Hindu-Muslim Pact (n.d.), p.3; NNR, 1924, 1 January, Swaraj.

³Karim, Moulvi A.K., op.cit.; see page 34 for details of Karim's previous activities, also Azan, M.A., Life of Maulvi Abdul Karim (1939), passim.

⁴See Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.246, and Chatterjee, D.K., C.R. Das and the Indian National Movement (1965), p.131, for details of the Pact provisions.

ratified the Pact. So too did the Calcutta Khilafat Committee, and a meeting of Muslim MLCs at the house of Abdul Karim

which gratefully acknowledged the Das Pact provisions regarding cow-killing and promised that Muslims would consider a solution if Hindus gave up the use of force and legislation.¹

Certainly the attitude of many Khilafatists abruptly changed when the Pact was announced: previously they had strongly opposed Das' scheme for Council Entry in favour of the more overtly anti-British and disruptive Non-Cooperation programme, to the extent of boycotting and disrupting election meetings organised by the Swaraj Party in Calcutta during October and November 1923.² In December, however, they joined with Azad and Mahomed Ali and attempted to rouse Muslim enthusiasm for the elections, and no doubt their activities contributed to the sweeping success of the Swaraj Party at the polls where it gained a majority of elected seats, including half of those allocated to Muslims.³

An analysis of the elections to Muslim constituencies in and immediately surrounding Calcutta, however, reveals that the effect of the Pact on the Muslim population of the metropolis was not completely favourable to Das. In part this was due to the continuing opposition to Council Entry of a minority in the Calcutta Khilafat Committee, which involved that body in internal dissensions so that it proved incapable of organising itself effectively for the elections.⁴ In part also the opposition was provoked by the simple dislike of some Khilafatists to taking orders from the Hindu-dominated Swaraj Party. But the major source of contention was the strong suspicion of the whole process of Council

¹Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 25 of 1923, December; *ibid.*, 25 of 1924, January; Mussalman, 1924, 1 February, p.2.

²Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 25 of 1923, November.

³*Ibid.*, *ibid.*, December.

⁴*Ibid.*, 25 of 1924, September.

Entry, which was seen as a compromise with the British and a betrayal of the earlier, more politically revolutionary, programme of boycotting the British-inspired processes of constitutional government.

In fact neither the Swaraj Party nor the Khilafatists of Calcutta proved capable of or willing to present candidates for either of the two Muslim constituencies in the city. In the four Muslim constituencies which bordered on Calcutta¹ only two Swaraj Party candidates stood for election: namely Wahed Hossain who secured the Barrackpore seat in a straight contest where he won 1093 of the 1585 votes cast; and Syed Nasim Ali who held the 24-Parganas Rural constituency only after his successful rival, Dr Abdullah Suhrawardy, had been disqualified on the grounds of incorrect nomination.² In Calcutta Abdullah Suhrawardy's kinsman, the young Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, easily captured South Calcutta,³ whilst the elderly and wealthy merchant Mahboob Alley⁴ comfortably defeated the Deputy Sherif of Calcutta, Rezaur Rahman Khan, for the seat of North Calcutta.⁵

Neither of the men elected had been actively involved in the political agitation of the preceding years. Indeed, Alley had been prominent in the municipal politics of Manicktolla for many years until 1921 and in addition had been an Honorary Magistrate in 1918 and 1921,⁶ and like

¹ Hooghly cum Howrah Municipal, Barrackpore Municipal, 24-Parganas Municipal and 24-Parganas Rural.

² BLCD, Vol. XIV, 21.1.24; Statesman, 1924, 19 January, p.5; Bengal Govt, Appointments Dept, March 1924, File no.6R-153(1), Progs 13-24.

³ H.S.S. Suhrawardy gained 393 of the 722 votes cast. Huseyn was the son of Abdullah's cousin Zahid.

⁴ See pp.111-12.

⁵ M.Alley: 463 votes; Rezaur Rahman Khan: 136 votes (previous incumbent), see pp. 111-12.

⁶ Bengal Govt, Judicial Dept, January 1922, File no.J 4H-1 of 1921, Progs B42-52.

Suhrawardy had entered the reformed Bengal Legislative Council in 1921 in opposition to the demands of the Non-Cooperation programme. Yet if neither had a record of nationalist activity their abstention from the main current of Muslim politics during the previous years had not been made more heinous by overt collaboration with the British. Alley and Suhrawardy had made their sympathies for the aims, if not the methods, of the nationalists known in the legislative council - unlike Rezaur Rahman Khan who had been a vociferous opponent of the nationalists.¹ In addition both were members of wealthy and pre-eminent families in the city.

Between them the two candidates captured 856 of the 1359 votes cast, which meant that barely 45 per cent of the 3081 registered electors polled. In many ways the low vote was an indication of the confused state of Muslim opinion - it was not a vote for the moderate or communalist candidates such as Rezaur Rahman Khan or Fazl-ul Huq who gained only three votes in the contest against Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, or an outright declaration of sympathy for the Swaraj Party.² Rather it was a compromise vote dictated by Muslim sympathies for nationalist goals and suspicion of the sincerity of the intentions of the Swaraj Party. Muslim respect for C.R. Das was undoubtedly genuine and widespread,³ but within Calcutta the electioneering tactics of the Swarajists did little to reconcile Muslim and Hindu opinion. This was especially true in the turbulent central wards around Burra Bazar and Mechua Bazar where the most common of the Party's election slogans was 'Gow Mata Ki Jai' - an obvious appeal to Marwari concern regarding korbani.⁴

¹ BLCD, Vol.V, 21.11.1921 speech by Rezaur Rahman Khan.

² Ibid., Vol.XIV, 21.1.1924.

³ Sayeed, Khaled B., Pakistan the Formative Phase, 1857-1948 (1968), p.67.

⁴ Statesman, 1923, 29 November, p.8: 'Gow Mata Ki Jai - 'Long Live Mother Cow'.

A more important factor in the raising of Muslim doubts in the city, however, was the outburst of Hindu opposition to the terms of the Pact. The British authorities in Bengal reported in December 1923 that:

The Swarajists --- have over-reached themselves for the terms of the pact are so favourable to the followers of Islam that it has raised some suspicion among the faithful and intense resentment among a very large section of the Hindu community. So great is the dislike of the pact among the Hindus that several mass meetings have been held to condemn it and to impugn the honesty of purpose of the Swarajist leaders who are its authors and sponsors.¹

At the joint meeting of the Bengal Provincial Congress and Khilafat Committees which ratified the Pact in mid-December, sufficient opposition from his Hindu followers had been voiced to force Das to reiterate that the bulk of the provisions 'cannot come into effect until the attainment of full responsible government'- a statement which drew a quick protest from Mahomed Ali.² But Hindu opposition was not silenced by Das' hasty qualification. In his newspaper, the Forward, he argued that the Muslims gained 'nothing more than what they are entitled to get in fairness and justice', but few other Bengali Hindu journals apart from the Bande Mataram supported him.³ The Viswamitra feared that 'such pacts and compromises [were] likely to excite the rowdy elements among the Moslems to cry for more and more'; whilst the former champion of the communal rapprochement, the Amrita Bazar Patrika, declared 'that the educated middle class recognise in this pact a wanton disregard not only of the Hindu but of true national interests'.⁴

¹ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 25 of 1923, December.

² Ibid.; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1923, 30 December, p.5.

³ NNR, 1924, 25 December 1923, Forward, Bande Mataram.

⁴ Ibid., 23 December 1923, Viswamitra; Amrita Bazar Patrika.

Public protest meetings in Calcutta on 25 and 28 December echoed these sentiments: a meeting of Hindus at the University on the 25th resolved that the pact had 'shaken the very foundations of the Hindu religion',¹ and on the 28th the moderate political leader Sir Surendranath Banerjea thundered above the catcalls of Swarajist interjectors that 'the Hindu community of Bengal and I may say all India is ablaze with indignation....The pact was made in direct contravention of the conventions created at Lucknow in 1916'.² Meetings to denounce the Pact multiplied during the first two months of 1924. Typical of their tone was one organised by the Marwaris of Burra Bazar on 19 January which denounced the korbani provisions of the Pact and condemned

the obstinate attitude of the Bengal Swaraj Party in attempting to confirm the Hindu-Muslim Pact, which has been vehemently opposed by the Hindu public of India and rejected by the Cocanada Congress.³

Indeed, Das had failed to persuade the Cocanada session of Congress to ratify the Pact on a national basis in the face of opposition from Gandhi, who thought that 'a pact [was] not possible at this stage',⁴ and Hindu communal organisations such as the All-India Hindu Mahasabha which claimed that the pact went 'against Hindu socio-religious values'.⁵ Such statements only served to confirm the suspicion of Muslims in Calcutta that the opposition of Congress to the Pact was 'because of korbani and because it

¹Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1923, 25 December, p.5.

²Mussalman, 1924, 4 January, p.2.

³Statesman, 1924, 22 January, p.5; see also *ibid.*, 3 February, p.9; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1924, 6 January, p.6; *ibid.*, 16 January, p.3; *ibid.*, 17 January, p.6; *ibid.*, 27 January, p.9; *ibid.*, 5 February, p.3; *ibid.*, 13 February, p.6; *ibid.*, 7 March, p.7.

⁴*Ibid.*, 3 June, p.4.

⁵*Ibid.*, 15 February, p.7.

was under the influence of the Suddhi movement'.¹

Das, however, was determined to preserve the Pact in Bengal; and to secure the Muslim vote at the municipal elections in 1924 he continued to cultivate the community's support in Calcutta. At the Calcutta Khilafat Conference, held in March under the presidency of Mahomed Ali and Das, the Khilafat cause failed to gain much enthusiastic response from the audience. Those present, however, voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Das Pact and resolved that no attempts should be made to force Das to implement its provisions "before" Swaraj had been gained.² The Muslims of Calcutta were not prepared to concede any points on the issues regarding korbani, music before mosques or appointments to the Corporation but they were, for the moment, prepared to take into account the fears of Das' Hindu bhadralok supporters regarding their position in the government and administration of the province. The resolution was in fact an affirmation of Muslim support for a statement made earlier in March by Das in the legislative council when, in reply to a demand by Musharraf Hussain from east Bengal for the immediate implementation of the Pact, he said 'that the conditions of the Pact were meant to come into operation only upon the attainment of Swaraj'.³ In the same debate Das received the support of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy who, after informing the Speaker that 'I, for myself, Sir, am not a Swarajist',⁴ proceeded to extol the Pact, no doubt with an eye to the material rewards a Swarajist victory at the Calcutta municipal elections would bring his community.

¹ NNR, 1924, 11 January, Asr-e-Jadid.

² Indian Annual Register, 1924, January-March, pp.93-96b.

³ Bengal Govt, Administration Report, 1923-24, p.iii.

⁴ BLCD, Vol.XIV, 13.3.1924.

II

At the municipal election held in Calcutta in April 1924¹ the Swaraj Party not only won the majority of Hindu seats but also 10 of the 15 Muslim seats. Ten Muslim candidates had been nominated by the Congress Municipal Association, an electoral board organised by Das under the chairmanship of Huseyn Suhrawardy, and all were elected. Suhrawardy's role at this time is not clear as neither then nor in the future was he a member of the Swaraj Party or Congress, and it can only be assumed that his appointment was a shrewd move by Das to enlist Muslim support by the utilisation of the prestigious Suhrawardy name. Perhaps, indeed, Suhrawardy's non-alignment with the Swaraj Party on any official basis served to neutralise Muslim suspicions of the Hindu-dominated Swaraj Party, and enabled the party to canvass a broader spectrum of Muslim votes than would otherwise have been possible. Huseyn's relative Abdullah unsuccessfully contested the election as an independent, but both he and his brother Hasan held safe seats in the legislative council where he was being assiduously cultivated by the Swaraj Party. It seems doubtful if Abdullah in particular had any genuine interest in the Corporation, being much more concerned with gaining the position of Speaker in the provincial legislature.²

Of the ten Muslim Councillors elected with the support of the Swaraj Party, two were lawyers, namely Syed Nasim Ali of Das Pact fame and Abdur Razzack a brother of the trade union leader Mahomed Daud; five were up-country hide merchants: Ghulam Jilani Khan, Syed Mahomed Yakub, Shamsul Huq, M.M. Huq and S.M.Z. Huq; the brothers Shamsuddin Ahmed, a lawyer, and

¹After the 1923 reforms Calcutta City's boundaries were extended to include Cossipore-Chitpur, Manicktolla, and Garden Reach, and the number of wards was increased to 32 - see map, 'Calcutta Municipal Wards, 1924'.

²Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 112 of 1925, August.

Abdul Halim, a clerk - Bengali-speakers long resident in the city and previously prominent in the Khilafat movement - and Mahomed Hashim, secretary of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee before his imprisonment for six months in 1922. The remaining five councillors were independents: a popular physician Dr Khalil Ahmed, elected by the voters of his home district at Park Circus; two wealthy hide merchants - Sheikh Karim Buksh and Mahomed Hussain; a prominent Shia lawyer, Honorary Magistrate and member of the Oudh family, Unsud Dowla; and a young but highly respected lawyer S.M.S. Rahman.¹

The strongest vote for the Swarajist-supported candidates came from the central wards of the city in the area between Mechua Bazar, the Hooghly and Dharumtala St - the stronghold of up-country Muslim settlement - the old Manicktolla municipality, and the wards in the southern districts of the city which stretched from the Kidderpore docks inland to Ballygunge. The Muslim electorate of this area was predominantly Urdu-speaking and immigrant. It consisted mainly of merchants and artisans - reasonably prosperous, literate in Urdu only and barely influenced by the culture and society of either Bengal or the British - who had provided many of the Muslim participants in the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements in the city. All nine seats in these areas went to candidates sponsored by the Congress Municipal Association. The opposition was minimal and consisted only of a maverick Swarajist, Abdul Hamid, a member of the provincial Khilafat Committee, and Mahabubul Huque, a supporter of Nawab Chowdhury, who later became a convert to the Swarajist creed.

The other seat gained by the Swarajist candidates was in the area between Dharumtalla St and Park Circus. This electorate returned two members to the Corporation: one was

¹ Statesman, 1924, 22 January, p.8; *ibid.*, 19 March, p.9; *ibid.*, 25 March, p.8; Bengal Govt, Judicial Dept, December 1924, File no. J.4M-3, Progs B226-40.

a popular medical practitioner, Dr K. Ahmed, who stood as an independent; and the other was a wealthy hide merchant, Shamsul Huq. Huq's nationalist sympathies, material prosperity and respectable family background undoubtedly appealed to the Muslim professional class who had recently begun to move to the new suburb of Park Circus from the crowded wards of central Calcutta.

Elsewhere in the city the Muslim seats went to independent candidates without any opposition from the Swarajists. The reasons for this are not hard to find. Although the Muslim population in all these wards, which covered the northernmost area of old Calcutta and the incorporated municipalities of Garden Reach and Cossipore-Chitpur, comprised mainly Urdu-speakers, they were poor and mostly unenfranchised. The registered electors were mainly drawn from the ranks of the wealthy merchants, pensioned government servants and retired members of the professions, whose participation in post-war political movements had been minimal. All the councillors elected from these wards were members of prominent local families whose influence the Swarajists wisely refrained from challenging.

At the first meeting of the newly-elected Council on 11 April 1924 Das was elected Mayor, Huseyn Suhrawardy Deputy Mayor 'as a gesture towards the premier Muslim family in the city';¹ whilst Akram Khan, the leading Bengali Muslim nationalist agitator, and Moulvi Syed Muhammed Karim Aga, a prominent Persian merchant, were elected Aldermen.² In his congratulatory address to all four on behalf of the Muslim councillors Syed Nasim Ali commented that

it was very gratifying to his community...that the leader of the Swaraj Party in Bengal had been elected as the first Mayor of Calcutta....He also welcomed Mr Das because he was the only man in Bengal who was trying to bring about the unity of the two communities....it was Mr Das who was

¹Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.250.

²Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1924-September 1924, 11.4.1924, p.2; ibid., 16.4.1924, p.3.

at the bottom of the Hindu-Moslem pact and who had given effect to the request of the Mahommedans. It was Mr Das again who had tried his best to find out a Mahommedan as the Deputy Mayor.¹

The communal honeymoon in the Corporation continued for several months. On 23 April the Muslim councillors enthusiastically supported the appointment of Das' protege, Subhas Chandra Bose, as Chief Executive Officer for the Corporation and in seconding him Abdur Razzack remarked

that his community would be very glad if Mr Bose was appointed the Chief Executive Officer as they considered him the second man in Bengal who was trying to improve the position of the Mahommedan community.²

In July the prayer of the Mussalman, that the Swarajist Corporation would give the Muslim community 'its due share of the loaves and fishes of office',³ was in part answered when of the first 33 employment vacancies filled by the Corporation 25 went to Muslims amongst whom was Haji Abdur Raschid Khan, an east Bengali, ex-lawyer, Non-Cooperator and Khilafatist, who was appointed second Deputy Executive Officer.⁴

But the politics and apparent communal accord of the Corporation were an illusion. The Muslim councillors were the representatives of a small enfranchised group which comprised only the Muslim professional class and wealthier merchants and property owners of the city. The majority of Muslims in Calcutta were little influenced by, or interested in, the mutual declarations of respect and admiration which echoed across the council chamber of the Corporation. Their lives and opinions were moulded not by the sophisticated provisions of the Das Pact nor by the limited 'loaves and fishes'

¹ Ibid., p.5.

² Ibid., 23.4.1924, p.8.

³ Mussalman, 1924, 2 May, p.5.

⁴ Ibid., 25 July, p.4.

at the disposal of the Corporation, but by the realities of daily life in the city - by their ability to pursue traditional patterns of social and religious life, and by the nature of their relationship with members of other communal groups.

The pattern of Muslim political life in Calcutta between the advent of the Das Pact in December 1923 and the riots of 1926, which effectively shattered Das' dream, cannot be understood by an analysis of the refined voice of the Muslims of Calcutta in either the Corporation or the Bengal Legislative Council. Rather it must be explained by an examination of the state of communal sentiment amongst the groups which comprised the Muslim community in the city. The illusion of the period is that the sentiments echoed in the elite forums of provincial and municipal government set the pattern for Muslim behaviour in the province and city; but an examination of Muslim activity in both these institutions explains little in itself and clouds the image of the era if the influences of previously inarticulate groups upon the leaders of the community are not taken into account.

The experiences of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements had created a greater awareness amongst the generality of Muslims in Calcutta both of their own communal interests and of the potentialities of mass action and organisation. Groups of petty merchants and artisans who had been politically active in the period 1918 to 1923 were prepared to admit the validity of constitutional processes to voice their views by 1924. But they were also conscious that the spokesmen of their community were increasingly dependent upon their support, and were no longer simply the representatives of elitist groups or in positions of power on the sole basis of personal or family wealth and social prestige. In effect this meant that despite the declared allegiance of Muslim politicians and community leaders to a specific party or political philosophy their activities were often not, in the final analysis, dictated by party or philosophical loyalties so much as by

the demands of their community. Only if this fact is accepted can the apparent contradictions in the political behaviour of Muslim leaders in Calcutta and Bengal be understood. This does not mean that such men were cynical opportunists; undoubtedly many of them were men of principle with a genuine concern for the national ideal, but they were the representatives of a community which was not only faced with the problem of coming to terms with the concept of nationality, but which was also faced with the difficulties of maintaining a traditional way of life in the urban environment.

III

The salvaging of the communal rapprochement in the legislative council and Corporation was not matched by any similar movement amongst the mass of Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta. Hindu and Marwari resentment against the provisions of the Das Pact concerning korbani and music before mosques was matched by a widespread fear amongst Muslims of the city regarding the activities of Hindu communal organisations supported mainly by up-country non-Muslim migrants.

Both sides exhibited a tenderness of feeling regarding the sacredness of their own social and religious practices which resulted in the series of Hindu and Marwari protest meetings to denounce the Pact, and a small but vicious riot in Howrah early in January 1924. The occasion of the riot was the failure of a Hindu religious procession to silence its band when passing a mosque: enraged by the defiling of the mosque with the carcass of a pig shortly beforehand, the Muslim congregation attacked the procession and left one Hindu dead and five wounded.¹ The Hindu press was outraged and placed the entire blame for the incident on the Muslims

¹Statesman, 1924, 1 January, p.5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 25 of 1924, January.

'and the activities of fanatical maulvies'.¹

Somewhat hysterically the up-country Hindus and Marwaris of Calcutta envisaged the spread of violence to the city proper and the Marwari Association of Burra Bazar wrote to the Commissioner of Police warning of a Muslim plot to seize local Hindu temples. Supported by reports in the Bengali Hindu dailies, the Swatantra and Bharatmitra, the Marwari Association claimed that the city was plastered with Urdu posters detailing the plot. However, in a confidential report the authorities noted that 'in fact, the combined efforts of the police could only discover one copy and that was placed inside the courtyard of the Dharumtala St mosque'. Late in June therefore, after exhaustive enquiries, the Commissioner of Police replied to the Marwari Association that

on the subject of taking precautionary measures against any possible breach of the peace on the occasion of the coming Muhammedan festival of Bakr Id....I consider that [the planned] police dispositions will be quite sufficient to prevent any disturbance.

On the 23rd I saw three representatives of the Hindu community on the subject of communal tension in Calcutta. The only definite point brought to my notice at this interview was the Urdu poster [which] you think is calculated to create bad blood before Bakr Id. I have as yet received no information, other than your letter, which shows that this particular poster has received wide publicity... I would at this same time, like to sound a note of warning....It would be most unfortunate, in my opinion if either among the Hindu or the Muhammedan population of Calcutta, vague and indefinite rumours should be circulated about the possibility of trouble during Bakr Id.²

Suspensions were equally as intense on the Muslim side in Calcutta and many remained convinced that the bulk of Das' followers in the city were unwilling to observe the

¹NNR, 1924, 3 January, Dainik Basumati, Dainik Bharat Mitra; ibid., 1 January, Amrita Bazar Patrika; ibid., 4 January, Hitavadi.

²Bengal Govt, Political Dept, September 1924, File no.12C-55, Progs B20.

terms of the Pact. The growth of Hindu communal organisations in the general spirit of the Suddhi and Sangatham movements only served to confirm their suspicions, and in the wake of the Howrah riot tension mounted in the city with the arrival of the Arya Samaj leader Swami Biswanand. Though he was ostensibly in the city to organise a popular movement for the reform of temple management, the anti-Muslim overtones of his activities were obvious to all. He preached a more assertive spirit amongst Hindu youth based upon the cultivation of physical prowess and the development of individual means of self-defence, and as an example organised a procession through the central wards of the city past the Nakhoda mosque on 5 January to honour a visiting team of champion Hindu wrestlers from the Punjab. Many Muslims were convinced that the procession was specifically intended 'to annoy [them] at their morning prayers and to insult their religion', and it was only with difficulty that the Police persuaded Biswanand to re-route his procession away from any mosque. Furious, Biswanand complied but not before he had bluntly stated

that the Government not only in Bengal but all over India had definitely taken the side of the Muhammedans against the Hindus [and] that it was necessary for the Hindus to prepare themselves to protect their religion, their women and themselves.¹

Immediate conflict was avoided but suspicion remained on both sides. The Hindu press was generally provocative in tone, reports of Muslim outrages on Hindu women multiplied and Muslims were blamed for most cases of communal strife.² The Marwaris of Burra Bazar joined with up-country Hindus to form a vigilante committee to protect their women,³ and letters began to appear in the Hindu press urging Hindus

¹Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 25 of 1924, January.

²NNR, 1924, passim.

³Ibid., 6 May, Dainik Basumati.

and Marwaris not to rent houses or business premises to Muslims.¹ Frequent appeals appeared in the press for 'Hindus to organise against Mussalmans'² and it was even claimed that 'Moslem goondas have been perpetrating inhuman atrocities upon non-Moslems' in an attempt to wreck the Das Pact.³

The Muslim reaction to this mounting tirade was one of confused anger. The Urdu daily, the Asr-e-Jadid, formerly a staunch supporter of the nationalist cause, asked its readers:

Has the natural order of things been changed in the world? Or else how is it that the most dependent and conquered religion of many thousand years is issuing a challenge to the most powerful and conquering religion of the world!

A riot at Garden Reach between up-country mill hands, when 600 Hindus attacked a group of 300 Muslims who were allegedly performing korbani killed one and wounded 37,⁵ and an incident at Kankinarah, where the congregation of a mosque was deliberately taunted by the playing of music,⁶ did little to convince the Muslim community of the sincerity of Hindu intentions regarding the provisions of the Das Pact.

Inevitably the growing alienation of the mass of Hindus and Muslims in the city began to take a more sophisticated form than the continual press warfare and occasional riot. In the Corporation and provincial legislative council disillusionment with the Swaraj Party was occasioned by two issues, namely the defeat of the moderate ministry formed

¹Ibid., 11 June, Swatantra.

²Ibid., June-July, passim.

³Ibid., 11 June, Bijali.

⁴Govt of India, Home Poll (B), 284/iii of 1924.

⁵Indian Annual Register, 1924, July-December, p.75.

⁶Bengal Govt, Police Dept, November 1925, File no.5R-4 of 1924, Progs B70-77.

in January and the question of the employment of Muslims by the Corporation.

The moderate ministry was forced to resign in August when the three ministers - Fazl-ul Huq, A.K. Ghuznavi and S.N. Mallick - were defeated in a division of the house by Swarajist lobbying. The defeat of the Muslim-dominated ministry was not seen as a permissible political manoeuvre on the part of the Swaraj Party, but rather as a communal move.¹ Hypersensitive to Hindu opposition in any form, even avowedly staunch Muslim supporters of the Party were annoyed by its tactics in the legislative council and failed to remember that the whole point of Council Entry, as rationalised by Das, was to wreck the Reforms of 1919 more effectively than Gandhi's flagging Non-Cooperation programme.

Similar resentment was roused amongst the Muslims in the Corporation. Though Das had appointed 25 Muslims as against 8 non-Muslims in the first batch of positions filled by the municipality, Hindu opposition to this move soured Muslim appreciation of Das' attempt to fulfil his promise and the Mussalman noted: 'It seems that when Muslims are benefited communalism at once creeps in: when Hindus are benefited to the total exclusion of Muslims it is something different!'.²

Direct conflict between Hindus and Muslims in the Corporation, however, developed not out of the distribution of 'loaves and fishes', although this was undoubtedly a contributory factor, but rather out of the more mundane issue of the exhumation of a body buried beneath the floors of the Municipal Market in ward XIII.

¹ Statesman, 1924, 2 September, p.9; *ibid.*, 5 September, p.8; Bengal Govt, Administration Report, 1923-24, p.ii; Baker, D.E.U., 'Nation and Region in Indian Politics: a study of the Swarajya Party, 1922-1926' (unpublished M.A. thesis, W.A., 1966), pp.263-66.

² Mussalman, 1924, 25 July, p.4.

IV

The 'Pir Burial Dispute' first became a subject of public debate in Calcutta late in October 1924 when a Jewish councillor D.J. Cohen moved a resolution in the Corporation which called for the exhumation of the body of a beggar buried over the main drains under the meat section of the Municipal Market.¹ The Corporation appointed a committee which consisted of five Muslims - the councillors Syed Nasim Ali and Abdur Razzack, Abul Kalam Azad, the prominent divine Moulana Abu Bakr and the president of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee, Abdur Rauf - and six non-Muslim councillors to report on the issue. The report of the committee, which was submitted in December 1924, recommended that the body either be exhumed or the tomb properly sealed; however, all the Muslim members of the Committee dissented and urged that the question should be dropped as the site had become a shrine for the butchers of the market, all of whom were Muslims.²

The controversy centred upon the Muslim claim that the body was that of Dada Sahib a popular Madrassi pir who had been revered by the butchers of the market, and the demand of Hindu councillors that the authority of the Corporation should not be flaunted.³ The Muslims claimed that when the 'pir' died they had approached the deputy mayor, Huseyn Suhrawardy, for permission to erect the tomb, and, indeed, Suhrawardy not only authorised the burial but became president of the Grave Management Committee formed to administer the tomb.⁴ In retaliation against the adoption of the recommendations of the majority of members of the

¹Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1924-March 1925, 22.10.1924, p.1399; also known as Hogg Market and New Market.

²Ibid., 12.11.1924, p.1528; *ibid.*, 18.12.1924, pp.1867-76.

³Ibid., p.1869; Mussalman, 1924, 24 October, p.4; Statesman, 1924, 17 October, p.11.

⁴Ibid., 5 November, p.5.

investigating committee by the Corporation, the butchers allegedly threatened bloodshed, Muslim ratepayers organised a protest meeting at the Town Hall, and the Calcutta Khilafat Committee issued leaflets in Urdu which called upon the Muslim councillors to protect the religious interests of their community and bitterly denounced the Swarajist Hindu councillors.¹

In part the controversy appears to have been precipitated by the rather naive political activities of Huseyn Suhrawardy. Embarrassed by the furore he was in part responsible for, Suhrawardy attempted to refurbish his image in the Swaraj Party by organising a hartal amongst employees of the Corporation to protest against the recent arrest of Subhas Chandra Bose.² The irony of the situation was that Suhrawardy's activities on behalf of the Muslim butchers of the Municipal Market were probably intended to achieve the same end. The Market was a valuable source of contributions to the coffers of the Swaraj Party, and in August 1924 the British reported that over 15,000 rupees had been collected from stallholders in the Market - a collection which had particularly outraged the unwilling Muslim donors. Suhrawardy apparently attempted to lessen this feeling of outrage by giving his blessing to Muslim sentiments over the burial of the pir in the hope of reviving support for both himself and the Swaraj Party. Unfortunately the convoluted scheme backfired and only succeeded in adding to the Muslim sense of alienation from the Swaraj Party.³

The Hindu councillors refused to give way on the issue. They accused the Muslims of 'looking at the matter from a purely communal point of view',⁴ and based their own stand

¹ Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1924, 6 October, p.4; Mussalman, 1924, 5 December, p.7; *ibid.*, 5 November, p.5.

² Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 25 of 1924, November.

³ *Ibid.*, August; *ibid.*, September; *ibid.*, December.

⁴ Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1924-March 1925, 18.12.1924, p.1870.

on the principle of the authority of the Corporation to regulate such matters. The dispute dragged on in the council chamber throughout 1925 and was further complicated by controversies concerning Muslim demands regarding education and the implementation of the Das Pact.

In December 1924 the Muslim councillors led by Syed Nasim Ali attempted to persuade the Corporation to establish a separate system of Urdu-medium schools for Muslim children in the city with a fixed allocation of one third of the Corporation's education budget. Ali defended himself against charges of communalism when he stated that:

His idea of Hindu-Muslim unity was not the fusion of one community with the other, each losing its identity and its distinct characteristics, but his idea was that the two plants must grow side by side, and if it was found that one plant had grown bigger at the cost of the other, the other plant must be given the opportunity of having its proper place....It seemed to him that real unity would come when a Mussalman could be a true Mussalman and a Hindu a true Hindu. His idea was that if they started separate schools that would not stand in the way of unity and would be for the good of the Motherland.¹

But neither his demand, nor a similar one issued by a meeting of Muslim ratepayers on November 23,² were acceded to by the Corporation and the matter was shelved by referring it back to the Corporation Standing Committee on Education.³ In April 1925 Ghulam Jilani Khan attempted to remove the impasse created in this and other disputes concerning Muslim interests by the device of passing on controversial questions to the interminable discussions of Hindu-dominated standing committees, when he moved a resolution that the

¹Ibid., 17.12.1924, p.1847.

²Mussalman, 1924, 5 December, p.7.

³Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1924-March 1925, 17.12.1924, p.1864.

number of Mahommedan members in the different Standing Committees be fixed in proportion to their population within [Calcutta City] and that such members be elected by Mahommedan Councillors and Aldermen.¹

This resolution also failed, and both incidents served only to increase the tension between Hindus and Muslims in the Corporation based on the realisation of the representatives of the minority community that their voice counted for little in the Hindu-dominated body.

Outside the Corporation the activities of the Hindu Mahasabha did little to encourage communal harmony. In April 1925 a meeting of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, attended by 5,000 up-country Hindus and addressed by Lala Lajpat Rai and Pandit Malaviya, denounced communal representation and the Das Pact 'as injurious to and destructive of the growth of common nationality'.² The Hindu press gave the meeting much coverage and in addition devoted lengthy articles to the evils of korboni;³ whilst the Muslim press in turn bitterly attacked the Hindu Mahasabha and Arya Samajists who it claimed wished 'to drive the Muslims out of India'.⁴

The tragedy of the situation was that Hindus and Muslims who were genuinely concerned to preserve the spirit of the Das Pact proved incapable of achieving this goal. Perhaps the most fervent of Das' Muslim supporters were Bengalis such as Akram Khan and Mujibur Rahman yet their influence within the city had waned with the decline of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements, and they were themselves increasingly alienated from the Swaraj Party by

¹ Ibid., April 1925-September 1925, 3.4.1925, p.200.

² Mussalman, 1925, 14 April, pp.2 and 3; Statesman, 1925, 12 April, p.9; ibid., 14 April, p.9.

³ E.g. NNR, 1925, 1 April, Dainik Bharat Mitra.

⁴ Ibid., 17 and 24 April, Muhammedan; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 112 of 1925, April.

the failure of Das to start upon his promised programme of rural reform. In January 1925 Das had appointed Akram Khan to rally Muslim villagers to his scheme for village re-organisation,¹ but by March it was evident that the scheme would be stillborn as it of necessity 'involved hostile acts towards landlords which the important landlord element among C.R. Das' followers would not countenance'.² In April the Mussalman impatiently called on Das to start the programme,³ but by the following November the Swaraj Party had performed a volte face on the issue. This was brought about by the introduction of the Bengal Tenancy Act Amendment Bill into the legislative council. Ironically the bill contained many provisions for uplifting the position of the peasantry similar to those proposed earlier by Das, but it also contained provisions which placed the financial responsibility for many of these measures upon the landlord. Das was forced to espouse the cause of the Hindu landowning elite and fought the bill with the argument that it was an attempt by the British to drive a wedge between Hindu landlord and Muslim tenant!⁴

Such was the disillusionment of Das' Bengali Muslim supporters that in December 1925 Mujibur Rahman, editor of the Mussalman and former opponent of Muslim separatist tendencies, wrote regarding separate electorates that while

separate representation is bad in theory, it is not at all an ideal to be followed and we have no especial love for it. But it is a necessary evil - an evil which is to be maintained so long as there is mutual distrust between Hindu and Mussalmans - so long as the attitude of the generality of the Hindus towards Mussalmans is not what it should be.⁵

¹Ibid., January.

²Ibid., March.

³Ibid., April.

⁴Ibid., November.

⁵Mussalman, 1925, 25 December, p.7.

Amongst the Urdu-speaking nationalist sympathisers in the Muslim community of Calcutta the same realisation was becoming apparent. The attention of the mass of Muslims in the city was no longer wholly absorbed by the nationalist and Khilafat agitation and had turned inwards to the issues of community life in Calcutta. The Das Pact had attempted to resolve some of the more common causes of communal friction but suspicion on the part of Hindus and Muslims in the city had virtually invalidated it. Das proved unable to grant the full extent of Muslim demands in the face of opposition from his Hindu followers, with the result that his sympathisers amongst the Muslim leaders were forced to adopt a more communalist stance in reaction to Hindu intransigence and the impatience of their own followers.

Just as the Bengali Muslim nationalist sympathisers were driven towards a more communal outlook, the Swarajist Muslims of Calcutta found that the pressure of events was driving them towards a greater community of interests with the politically and socially conservative Muslims they had formerly opposed. This tragedy was further compounded by the death of Das in June 1925, and the split which developed in the Swaraj Party and involved two major factions gathered behind Das' successor as leader of the provincial Congress organisation and Mayor of Calcutta, J.M. Sen-Gupta, and his rival Subhas Chandra Bose. The already limited interest of Hindu Swarajists in the Das Pact was further submerged by the struggle for power which developed in the party and which involved a frantic search by both factions for support - often at the expense of party principles formulated by Das.

V

The extent of the alienation of Muslim Swarajists in the Corporation is perhaps best illustrated by the crises which developed in the second half of 1925 over the issue of the pir burial. In May 1925, in order to prevent a division

of the Swaraj Party bloc in the Corporation along communal lines, Das submitted the question of the pir burial to the Advocate-General of Bengal for an opinion.¹ In August the Advocate's opinion was submitted to Das' successor Sen-Gupta and stated that on legal grounds the body should be exhumed.² Sen-Gupta had no option but to accept the report, and on 14 August all the Muslim councillors, with the exception of Huseyn Suhrawardy, walked out of the council chamber in protest.³ On the 15th the nine Muslim representatives elected with the support of the Congress Municipal Association severed all connection with it.⁴ Even Azad issued a statement that he opposed the exhumation in view of the strength of Muslim sentiment although he stated 'I have always considered the burial an outrage and shame for the Muslim community'.⁵

Protest meetings were organised to support the walk-out and former Non-Cooperators and Khilafatists such as Abu Bakr and Abdur Rauf, a merchant and family friend of Azad, joined with conservatives such as the up-country merchant Nasir Ahmed, who had issued an anti-Swarajist leaflet in 1923, to denounce the 'Swarajist Corporation'.⁶ Indeed, the British noted that 'the Muhammedan community in general have adopted this thorny question as a rallying point for resisting Hindus'.⁷ Muslim frustration was further heightened by a spate of communal riots which occurred in

¹ Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1925-September 1925, 7.5.1925, pp.261-62.

² Ibid., 14.8.1925, pp.1952-99.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Statesman, 1925, 15 August, p.7.

⁵ Ibid., 19 August, p.3.

⁶ Ibid., 25 August, p.5; *ibid.*, 6 October, p.7; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 25 of 1923, November.

⁷ Ibid., 112 of 1925, September.

and around Calcutta between July and September in which the Hindus undoubtedly trounced the Muslims. The first riot occurred on 3 July when over 2,000 Hindus attacked 200 Muslims in the Kidderpore dock area over an alleged instance of korbani and badly wounded 38 of them.¹ In August the congregation of a mosque at Titagarh was soundly thrashed for protesting against the music of a passing Hindu procession,² and later in the same month the lesson was repeated by up-country Hindus at Kankinarah.³

However, due to the ability of Sen-Gupta to persuade his fellow Hindu councillors to shelve the pir burial issue, in spite of exhortations to them from newspapers such as the Amrita Bazar Patrika to 'stand firm',⁴ the Muslims were persuaded to return to the Corporation and the breach was apparently healed.⁵

But by the end of 1925 the attitude of Muslims towards the Swaraj Party was irrevocably changed. No longer could any aspiring Muslim leader identify himself closely with the party. Gone were the days when Muslim nationalist sympathisers could safely declare their support for the party and attack the more conservative elements within their community. As late as December 1924 supporters of the Swaraj Party under the direction of Huseyn Suhrawardy and Abdur Rauf had been able to disrupt a conference organised in Calcutta by the ex-ministers A.K. Ghuznavi and Nawab Chowdhury,⁶ but by the new year the attitude of the Muslims in the city had begun to change. Early in 1925 even Abdul Karim, one of the Muslim negotiators of the Das Pact, felt

¹ Ibid., Home Poll, 205 of 1926; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1925, 3 July, p.5; ibid., 4 July, p.2; ibid., 3 October, p.6; ibid., 7 September, p.5.

² Ibid., 25 August, p.5; Mussalman, 1925, 25 August, p.4; ibid., 27 August, p.5.

³ Ibid., 1 September, p.2; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1925, 1 September, p.5.

⁴ NNR, 1925, 6 October, Amrita Bazar Patrika; ibid., 4 October, Dainik Basumati.

⁵ Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1925-March 1926, 21.10.1925, p.1352.

⁶ Statesman, 1924, 31 December, p.7; Home Poll (Dep.), 25 of 1924, December.

constrained to issue a statement which clarified his political position as candidate for the 24-Parganas Municipal by-election. In a letter to the Mussalman he stated that

regarding the announcement in your paper about the Swarajya party having supported my candidature in the coming election I have received numerous enquiries as to whether I have signed the Swaraj creed....I have not signed the Swaraj creed. I have, however, agreed to vote with the Swarajists in matters of general national importance. I have been a nationalist ever since I entered politics, and this is the chief reason why the Swarajist agreed to support me under certain circumstances. As regards matters involving communal interests, I am under no commitment to any particular party and I shall act as a Muslim as well as national considerations may require.¹

Karim eventually withdrew from the election and the Swarajist candidate Mahabubul Huque did in fact win the seat. But the number of votes Huque gained was less than the total he received when he unsuccessfully contested the seat in 1923, and barely 25 per cent of those entitled to vote did so compared with 80 per cent at the previous election.² Huque's victory in September was further qualified by the defection of Abdullah Suhrawardy in the previous month from the Swaraj Party. The British thought this was due to his failure to gain election as Speaker of the legislative council after many Hindu Swarajist MLCs refused to fulfil their promise to vote for him;³ whilst this may have been part of his reason no less important a factor must have been his assessment of the current state of Muslim sentiment in the province, and particularly in his home city of Calcutta.

Yet further indications of the disillusionment of the Muslims of Calcutta with the Swaraj Party were the attempts made during 1925 to revive and re-organise the Bengal

¹ Mussalman, 1925, 21 April, p.5.

² Ibid., 10 September, p.3; ibid., 17 October, p.3; Bengal Govt, Appointments Dept, June 1924, File no.6R-4, Progs 1-14.

³ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 112 of 1925, August.

Presidency Muslim League, the provincial Khilafat Committee and the Calcutta Khilafat Committee as organisations to defend the interests of the community.

In August 1924 the president, secretary and assistant secretary of the Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee had resigned to make way for three staunch supporters of the Swaraj Party - namely Moulana Akram Khan, Haji Abdur Raschid Khan, and Mahomed Mohsin Alley - in an attempt to revive the organisation by binding it more closely to the Swaraj Party.¹ With the rapid decline of Muslim support for, and faith in, the Swaraj Party, however, the gambit failed and in August 1925 a further attempt was made to revive the committee by Abul Kalam Azad.² At the same time moves were afoot to revive the Calcutta Khilafat Committee which by mid-1925 was not only bankrupt but was under the presidency of the dissident Swarajist Abdullah Suhrawardy.³

In September 1925 fresh elections were held for the position of president of the Calcutta Committee with Azad, Abdur Rauf, Huseyn and Abdullah Suhrawardy and Y.C. Ariff, the shadowy but powerful labour leader, as candidates.⁴ The meeting was attended by several thousand Muslims and apparently broke up in confusion without the election being held.⁵ Later in October Azad, by means of a personal fiat, achieved the amalgamation of the provincial and Calcutta Khilafat committees,⁶ and on 15 November was secretly elected the president of the new organisation by a bare quorum of committee members.⁷ His high-handed tactics, however, did not help his cause and only added to the factionalism and intrigue which beset the community at this

¹ Mussalman, 1924, 29 August, p.7.

² Ibid., 1925, 22 August, p.4.

³ Ibid., 25 June, p.2; ibid., 10 September, p.4.

⁴ Ibid., 27 October, p.3.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p.4.

⁷ Ibid., 17 November, p.4.

time. The provincial Khilafat Committee in fact quietly vanished from the scene after this dispute; the Calcutta Khilafat Committee continued as an independent but insignificant organisation and Muslim attention in the city was turned to the revival of the Presidency Muslim League.

In January 1925 a meeting was convened of the surviving committee members of the provincial league elected in 1921, 'to consider how the League might again be an active and representative body devoted to the service of the community' under the chairmanship of Abdul Karim.¹ Azad attended this meeting but at the next, held in February,² he was absent, as it was increasingly apparent that the main body of support for the revived organisation came from the more vocal critics of the Swaraj Party such as Abdullah Suhrawardy, Mujibur Rahman, Abdul Karim, Mahomed Daud, Fazl-ul Huq and Syed Nasim Ali - men of diverse political leanings united by a negative attitude towards the nationalist cause as preached by the Swaraj Party.

Between February and December 1925 there is no evidence available to indicate the nature of steps taken to revive the League, but on 6 December a meeting was convened to elect officer-bearers.³ Against the background of the personal animosities made public by the fiasco concerning the Khilafat Committees the meeting was bound to be turbulent. About 100 leading Muslims attended and Azad's candidate, Haji Abdur Raschid Khan, was elected president. However, his election was challenged by Huseyn Suhrawardy and Mujibur Rahman, voices were raised and in the confusion the meeting had to be adjourned without the election of a full committee. Later evidence indicates that a committee faithful to Azad

¹Ibid., 20 January, p.2.

²Ibid., 19 February, p.4.

³Ibid., 8 December, p.6.

was elected at some stage but the League as a focus for Muslim interest was dead until revived in the 1930s under the aegis of Jinnah.¹

The latter half of 1925 was a period when the Muslims of Calcutta began to cast around for a viable alternative to the Swaraj Party. The Corporation disputes, communal riots, and failure of the Das Pact to satisfy the heightened expectations of Muslims in the city served to alienate both the Muslim middle and lower classes in Calcutta. Since 1919 the Muslims and Hindus of the city had been linked by two different kinds of political activity. Between 1919 and 1923 the communities had attempted to work together in Gandhi's anti-constitutional nationalist movement, which had involved direct political action by the mass of Hindus and Muslims in the city, but this had failed. By 1923 Das had recognised the failure of this programme, and in December of the same year he attempted to revive the political co-operation of the two communities by formulating the Das Pact. In essence he replaced Gandhi's programme of mass action with a formal political agreement which was to operate at the provincial level and within the framework of the existing constitutional structure. This in turn proved a failure and by the end of 1925 the Muslims and Hindus of Calcutta had drifted even further apart.

None of the Muslim ministers in the various ministries of the period - Fazl-ul Huq, Nawab Chowdhury or A.K. Ghuznavi - had widespread power bases in the city, and in any case they were tainted by their collaboration with the British. Feeling against the British still ran high amongst the Muslims of Calcutta, so that following their disillusionment with the Swaraj Party they were in fact alienated from both the nationalist and moderate streams of political activity in Bengal. The result was that leaders of the community turned inwards towards a more sectarian view of politics and grasped at various patently communal issues

¹ Ibid., 1926, 26 August, p.7; Indian Annual Register, 1926, January-June, pp.74-75.

in an attempt to achieve some form of organisational unity within the political world of Muslim Calcutta.

The attempted Khilafat and Muslim League revivals failed abysmally, but a more popular and nebulous focus of Muslim attention in the city was slowly emerging. The answer of Muslims elsewhere in northern India to the Suddhi and Sangatham movements had been the development of counter Tanzeem and Tabligh movements inspired by the romantic and backward-looking Urdu Muslim concept of the position of Islam in India. As early as April 1925 the Mussalman had urged the formation of 'a powerful tanzeem and tabligh society....immediately to save the Muslim community from the impending peril of being swallowed up by the Arya Samaj'.¹ And in July it reiterated the call when it wrote that:

We confess that, in 1920 and 1921, we were under the impression that the need for communal organisations - for communal political organisations at any rate - had ceased....But from our experience of the past few years - from the fact that the educationally and otherwise advanced community...has thought it necessary to carry on their communal propaganda - we have come to the conclusion...that communal organisations for the Mussalmans are indispensable, at any rate for some time to come.²

In May Dr Kitchlew, a prominent north Indian Muslim leader and friend of the Ali brothers, organised a meeting in Calcutta to urge the formation of a Tanzeem movement with the support of Sir Abdur Rahim, Nawab Chowdhury and Abdul Karim.³ In November of the same year, at a meeting of up-country Muslim millhands in Howrah, Y.C. Ariff and Abdullah Suhrawardy also expounded the need for such a communal organisation,⁴ but as the speeches at this meeting indicated the Tanzeem movement was in no sense a political

¹Mussalman, 1925, 23 April, p.4.

²Ibid., 23 July, p.4.

³Ibid., 20 May, p.5; Statesman, 1925, 16 May, p.10.

⁴Mussalman, 1925, 1 December, p.2.

movement or party in the same terms as the Swarajist creed or Swaraj Party. In spirit it was aimed at the preservation and defence of the culture and religion of the Urdu-speaking Muslims of India. It was the emotional response of a community which saw itself as fighting for existence, and which was also in the process of rejecting the leadership of both conservative loyalists and nationalist sympathisers.

Although the speeches at the Howrah labour meeting were admittedly the expression of one particular group of Muslims, and in part represent the traditional attitude of labour organisers amongst Muslims in the Calcutta area against involvement in political agitation and intrigue,¹ they did articulate the disillusionment of Muslims with their experience of political parties, politicians and political agitation to date. In his opening speech Y.C. Ariff

referred to the resolution that they had passed at a previous meeting to steer clear of politics, whether Swarajist or Khilafatist, and said that he agreed with them that they had first to improve their economic position by thrift...and then to think of politics

and was followed by an anonymous sirdar who denounced politicians and

said that they, the workers did not want to have anything to do with politics or political leaders. The political leaders, he said, only sought to benefit themselves, and they did not care for the poor workers.²

One suspects that this general feeling of dissatisfaction was shared by many Muslims across the Hooghly in Calcutta, and it would indeed partly explain the frantic search for a new means of communal expression which developed in 1925. That the search failed was made evident

¹For an example of this attitude: BLCD, Vol.XVII (4), 23.3.1924, Mahomed Daud, MLC (Labour): 'Sir, labour wants Mr. Babu and Maulvi in the Cabinet, that is, it wants Commoners for its interests...though I personally do not approve of dyarchy yet there is no other alternative for me than to support it'.

²Mussalman, 1925, 1 December, p.2.

by the riots which occurred in Calcutta during 1926. They were the ultimate expression of the community's disillusionment with the Swaraj Party, and of the frustrations engendered by the inability and failure of their leaders to provide them with an alternative means of expression either in the councils of the nationalist movement or by way of a united communal political organisation.

VI

The mood of the Muslim community in Calcutta during the early months of 1926 was one of increasing bitterness and frustration. A temporary but sharp increase in the price of basic foodstuffs such as rice and wheat caused widespread material distress amongst the poorer masses of both communities in the city,¹ whilst the spiritual distress of the Muslim middle-class mounted as a result of a fresh betrayal by the Swaraj Party. In December 1925 the Government announced its intention to reserve to Muslims a larger share of appointments in certain departments. The decision differed from one of the promises incorporated in the Das Pact only with regard to the time of implementation, but the whole scheme was bitterly opposed by Hindu MLCs, Swarajist and otherwise, to the chagrin of Muslims throughout Bengal.²

Throughout the period between January and April 1926 sentiment within the Muslim community swung irrevocably against the Swaraj Party. The Mussalman scorned it as 'the Party which turned out to be inimically disposed towards the Mussalmans',³ and few nationalist sympathisers within the

¹Chowdhury, A.C., Report on an Enquiry into the Standard of Living of Jute Mill Workers in Bengal(1930), p.25; Statistical Abstracts, 1929 to 1939, pp.423-24, 442; Buchanan, D.H., The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India (1934), p.355.

²Bengal Govt, Administration Report, 1925-26, p.ii.

³Mussalman, 1926, 1 March, p.4.

community dared voice their sentiments after the mutwalli of a mosque in Mechua Bazar called in the police to eject Azad when he attempted to explain the policies of the Swaraj Party to the congregation.¹

The months were also marked by fresh attempts to achieve some form of unity within the community. Amongst the Muslim merchants and artisans of the city regional and cultural organisations such as the Nadia and Dinajpur Muslim Associations, and the Tanzeem-ul-Mussalman of Ward VIII were established.² At a more sophisticated level previously inimical leaders such as Huq and Mujibur Rahman - who had written of Huq in May 1925 that he was 'by his very temperament, so fickle and indecisive, so weak and invertebrate, so devoid of tenacity and resolutions... emotional and sentimental'³ - temporarily settled their differences. They formed the Bengal Moslem Council Party which, although nationalist in sympathies, 'advocated Muslim communal demands'⁴ very much as did the popular Urdu daily the Asr-i-Jadid which claimed that although 'Muslims must organise on communal lines, we still, however, want Swaraj'.⁵

Other Muslim leaders in the city were also casting about for a new basis of support, and their activities were made all the more urgent by the approach of the elections to the legislative council at the end of the year. Sir Abdur Rahim and his son-in-law Huseyn Suhrawardy secured support from many up-country Muslims in Central Calcutta because of the interest they took in the Tanzeem-ul-Mussalman of Ward VIII,⁶ and shortly after the establishment of the Bengal

¹Ibid., 27 April, p.6.

²Ibid., 4 February, p.3; ibid., 2 March, p.6; NNR, 1926, 1 May, Matwalla.

³Mussalman, 1925, 30 May, p.4.

⁴Ibid., 3 March, p.5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 112/V/1926, April.

⁵NNR, 1926, 29 January, Asr-i-Jadid.

⁶Ibid., 1 May, Matwalla.

Muslim Council Party Rahim issued a manifesto for a rival Bengal Muslim Party. In this he claimed that 'it will think in detail for all sections and classes of the people', advocated a federal constitution for India and demanded a statutory majority share for Muslims in the government and administration of Bengal.¹ The basic difference between the two parties was in their attitude towards the British - Rahim remained attached to the British connection whereas Huq followed a more strongly anti-British policy patterned on that of the Swaraj Party.

The revival of Muslim communal organisations was, however, violently interrupted on 2 April by the first of a series of massive communal riots which disrupted life in the city for the next six months. As reported by the Calcutta police:

The immediate cause of the rioting was the failure of the band of an Arya Samaj procession to cease playing their instruments when passing Dinu Chamrawallas mosque in Harrison Road at the time of the Azan or 'invitation to prayer'....The passing of the mosque at the junction of Harrison Road and Central Avenue had been successfully negotiated; music had been stopped without difficulty and the procession passed in safety. They arrived at Dinu Chamrawalla's mosque, however, at the time when the muezzin was about to pronounce the Azan...and silence on the part of the band was again invoked. This time, however, the direction was not immediately obeyed...one drummer...continued obstinately to beat his drum and...supplied the spark to set off the powder train which events of the past few years had combined to prepare.²

Initiated by up-country Muslims and Hindus the riot spread across the city. Muslim boatmen from Kidderpore, a thousand strong, attacked strolling Hindus and the police post in the Eden Gardens,³ mosques and temples in Mechua

¹Indian Annual Register, 1926, January-June, pp.65-67; *ibid.*, July-December, pp.95-98.

²Govt of India, Home Poll, 11/XXV of 1926: contains a copy of the official police report on the riots.

³*Ibid.*, 11/VII of 1926.

Bazar and Burra Bazar were defiled and looted, homes and shops set alight, inflammatory leaflets were issued by both sides and the central areas of the city were given over to rampaging mobs intent upon murder and arson.¹

Further complications were caused by the fact that

business people of both communities were introducing from outside the province hired professional hooligans, called goondas, to protect their houses and these ruffians endeavoured to justify their pay by attacking members of the opposite community.²

The most remarkable features of the outbreak were the unprecedented attacks on religious institutions and the massive outbreak of incendiarism. In none of the previous riots in the city had temples, mosques or gurdwaras been attacked, yet between April 2 and April 15 some eight temples, three gurdwaras and ten mosques were looted and defiled, in addition to which Muslim mobs invaded and severely damaged the Presidency College and a nearby Sanskrit school.

The first attack on a religious institution occurred in the predominantly Muslim area of Mechua Bazar where a Hindu temple was attacked, its image of Shiva destroyed and all portable property removed. The frequency of such outrages increased and the next building attacked was a nearby Sikh gurdwara which was looted and then destroyed by fire. In Ward VII a mob of Muslims attacked a temple dedicated to Kali and were only driven off with the help of Bengali Hindu students resident in the area. In retaliation Hindus in the district mounted a series of destructive raids on Muslim institutions, and by the evening of April 3 religious buildings belonging to Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Jains were in flames throughout the central areas of Calcutta.

¹For a detailed description of the riots see Appendix IV.

²Lytton, the Earl of, Pundits and Elephants (1942), p.169.

Roving mobs drawn from all the Indian communities in the city were active throughout the period, and in the congested lanes and courtyards of central Calcutta and the dock areas looting, murder, desecration and incendiarism raged unchecked. Sikh cloth stalls, Marwari homes, Muslim workshops, doss houses, temples, mosques, buses, trams and moneylenders' offices all fell victim to the mobs who on one occasion between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. on April 3 had started more than 50 major fires.

By April 5 the trouble had extended to the dock areas along the riverfront and in Kidderpore. Hindu carters and Muslim crane drivers battled it out on the docks and ghats of the city, and in Kidderpore local Hindu residents were summoned to the defence of a temple by the loud blowing of a conch shell when a nervous priest sighted a mob of some 2,000 Muslims who were about to attack the building.

For the first time in the history of Calcutta, Bengalis, both Hindu and Muslim, were also involved in the rioting. From the limited reports available¹ it would appear that those involved were not outsiders, but rather the residents of the areas where the riots took place. The Muslims responsible for attacks on Hindu and Sikh religious institutions in the Mechua Bazar area were the petty merchants and artisans who lived in the shadow of the Nakhoda mosque; whilst the mobs who rampaged through Burra Bazar comprised Bengali students, Marwari merchants and clerks, and the up-country Hindu carters and durwans who lived in the area.

One of the greatest difficulties experienced by the police in controlling the situation was their inability to make arrests. All too frequently the mobs simply vanished into the laneways and bustees of the area, and it was virtually impossible for the authorities to gauge whether the assembled

¹The main sources of information on the riots are the various government reports already mentioned in the footnotes and the voluminous report included in the Indian Annual Register. The reports which appeared in local newspapers are lurid and unreliable, and unfortunately the files of the provincial Judicial and Police Departments, and court files pertaining to the prosecution of those arrested during the riots, were 'not available for scrutiny'.

congregation of a local mosque or temple was merely a pious gathering or a potential mob prepared to launch itself into the streets once more.

Indeed, the local mosque and temple appear to have been the focal points of communal organisation during the riots. Later investigations which implicated Y.C. Ariff and Huseyn Suhrawardy reported that they had been seen haranguing the congregations of various mosques. Men such as the Peshwari brothers, Mina and Allah Baksh, were likewise implicated, and it would seem that it was figures such as these prosperous up-country Muslim merchants and moneylenders who emerged as the passing leaders of the mobs; particularly when, as was the case with the Peshwari brothers, they were figures of local importance who as established merchants, artisans or moneylenders played an important role in ward politics and were usually on the management committee of their local mosque.

There are no reports available to indicate that the millhands from the areas which bordered on the city took any part in the riots which were confined to the central wards of the city and the dock areas. There was no massive invasion of operatives from Howrah or Garden Reach which indicates that the origins of the riots lay in the city itself, and which also indicates that there was no overall organisation. In 1918 the limited participation of the mill-operatives had been carefully cultivated, yet in 1926 they are absent - a point which would seem to reinforce the argument that the riots were a localised phenomenon, and that their organisation, if any, was mostly restricted to the ward level.

Order was not restored until the 15th by which time 44 people - 24 Hindus, 19 Muslims and one of 'doubtful nationality' - had been killed and 584, mostly up-country Hindus, wounded.¹

¹See footnote 2, p.164, source of most of the details concerning the riots.

The respite was temporary, however. A complete polarisation of the press occurred along communal lines. The feeling of the Muslim masses that they had been worsted, and the refusal of leaders of both communities to accept responsibility helped maintain the high level of tension.¹ So too did the nascent efforts of various groups of up-country Hindus - such as the tough Punjabi jamadars and durwans - to organise in self-defence.² The Government moved against the worst press offenders and prosecuted the Sultan, a Bengali daily edited by Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, for its provocative articles concerning Marwaris and the Hindu Mahasabha, and three other Muslim newspapers: the Hanafi, an Urdu daily, and the Islam Jagat and Muhammadi, both Bengali dailies. The Hindu press was even harder hit, and the Amrita Bazar Patrika and four other Bengali Hindu dailies felt the lash of official displeasure.³

Nothing, however, could stem the pent-up frustrations of the past few years and on 22 April the second phase of rioting exploded when a brawl between rival Muslim and Hindu teams of carters in Mechua Bazar developed into a repeat performance of the earlier catastrophe. Unlike the earlier round of rioting, however, this phase was not marked by attacks on religious institutions. Confrontations between the two communities took the form of running battles in the streets with swords, daggers, lathis, soda-water bottles and bricks accounting for most of the casualties. There were fewer outbreaks of incendiarism and the spontaneity of the earlier riots had vanished to be replaced by a determination on both sides to soundly thrash the other. The size of the mobs had increased, and the roving bands of

¹ Lytton, The Earl of, op.cit.; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1926, 4 April, p.4; Mussalman, 1926, 8 April, entire issue.

² Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 112/V/1926, October-November; Statesman, 1926, 27 April, p.7.

³ See footnote 2, page 164; Statesman, 1926, 18 May, p.5; Mussalman, 1926, 22 April, p.4.

several hundred which had characterised the first phase were replaced by larger groups which numbered several thousand. The scenes of the battles moved from the lanes and alleyways of the bazaars to the modern avenues which now cut through central Calcutta.

Peace was again restored on 9 May but this time the death toll was even higher with 66 dead and 391 wounded - the majority of casualties on this occasion were Muslims.

Both sides appeared exhausted by the bloodbath, and yet more was to come. The Hindu and Marwari communities had overcome their initial shock and began to organise in retaliation. The Marwaris struck at the Muslims through an economic boycott by refusing to rent houses or business premises to them and by dismissing Muslim employees.¹ The Commissioner of Police reported in May that:

the economic communal boycott which began early in April...still persists....It is reported that the Marwaris who have hitherto depended upon local Muhammedan dyers have imported a number of Hindu dyers from their own country. The boycott of Muhammedan bandsmen, tailors, coachmen and syces still continues.²

In addition the Hindu Mahasabha began to take a more overt stand against Muslim aggression. Throughout June leaders of the Mahasabha, such as Malaviya and Moonje, addressed public meetings in the city and called upon the up-country Hindus to organise. On 30 June Malaviya addressed a meeting of 6,000 up-country durwans and jamadars 'who had taken a prominent role in the previous riots' and urged them 'to be united and to sacrifice even their life for religion's sake'; whilst early in the same month Moonje urged the members of the Burra Bazar Hindu Sabha to 'throw off their mild manner' towards Islam.³

¹ NNR, 1926, 13 June, Dainik Soltan.

² Govt of India, Home Poll, 11/XXIII of 1926.

³ Ibid., 187 of 1927; *ibid.*, 11/V/1926, October-November; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1926, 27 July, p.3; Mussalman, 1926, 27 July, p.3.

Petty incidents of further communal strife in the central areas of the city did little to ease tension in Calcutta. An alleged korboni incident before a Sikh gurdwara late in June,¹ a series of Marwari protests organised by Byomkesh Chakravarti, former president of the provincial Home Rule League and ironically one of the earliest advocates of the communal rapprochement, against police restrictions on the annual Rajrajeswari procession through Burra Bazar in the same month,² and a flood of rumours and leaflets such as one which warned 'Moslems Beware! Otherwise the Hindus will eat you up'³ helped undermine the efforts of peacemakers throughout May and June,⁴ and kept alive the spirit of communal hatred.

An attempt by Malaviya and Sir Abdur Rahim to establish a Hindu-Muslim conciliation board failed miserably because of the

total inability of the popular leaders to restrain the members of their community. So strong was the communal fanatacism that to show moderation was to run the risk of losing popular favour, and this no leader had either the strength or courage to do.⁵

Just as the prosecution of the more offensive communal newspapers came too late so too did a Government Order issued on 6 June to restrict music before mosques in an attempt to remove one of the immediate causes of conflict.⁶ The order raised a furore amongst both Hindus and Muslims:

¹ Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1926, 24 June, p.5; *ibid.*, 26 June, p.5; *ibid.*, 27 June, p.5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 112/V/1926, January June-September.

² Statesman, 1926, 2 June, p.7; *ibid.*, 3 June, p.4; *ibid.*, 5 June, p.8.

³ Bengal Govt, Political Dept, December 1926, File no.12C-13, Progs B484-5.

⁴ Statesman, 1926, 1 May, p.7; *ibid.*, 1927, 23 April, p.14; *ibid.*, 1926, 8 May, p.5.

⁵ Bengal Govt, Administration Report, 1925-26, p.ix.

⁶ Indian Annual Register, 1926, July-December, p.84 gives the terms of the Government Order, see also Appendix IV.

the Hindus and Marwaris were furious at what they described as an infringement 'of their traditional rights' and organised a hartal on 3 June when the G.O. was first mooted, whilst the Muslims claimed that the restrictions were too limited and that music should be banned completely and not only at times of prayer.¹

The situation was not helped by a recrudescence of communalism within the Corporation. On 2 June, 64 councillors, Hindu and European, demanded that the recent activities of the Deputy Mayor should be investigated.² The allegations contained in the demand were never made public, but it seems that Huseyn Suhrawardy had indeed played a disreputable role in the riots which contradicted his proclaimed nationalist sympathies. The British authorities had in fact thought of expelling him from the province and the Commissioner of Police reported that:

During the disturbances in April Mr Suhrawardy, like many other people, showed himself to be a violent communal partisan. His activities, however, were distinct from those of others in the first place because he was found to be very intimately connected with two men of the hooligan-leader type, namely Mina Peshwari and Allah Baksh Peshwari.³

In addition the Commissioner reported that on 3 April Suhrawardy was found at the site of a looted Hindu shop 'and his attitude was such as to create suspicion that he had encouraged the looters'; on 13 July he made a violently anti-Hindu speech at the house of Sir Abdur Rahim and on 14 July Suhrawardy and Allah Baksh Peshwari visited Mechua Bazar 'and incited the Mahomedans to resist the procession and abused other Mahomedans who sought to dissuade them'.⁴

¹ Ibid., p.89; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1926, 6 July, p.5; Statesman, 1926, 16 May, p.10; ibid., 9 June, p.8; ibid., 3 June, p.4; ibid., 5 June, p.8; Mussalman, 1926, 15 June, p.2.

² Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1926-July 1926, 2.6.1926, pp.394-409.

³ Govt of India, Home Poll, 209/26 of 1926.

⁴ Ibid., the final quote refers to the procession which precipitated the third phase of the riots.

Rumours concerning Suhrawardy's activities had gained widespread public credence by early May, along with other similar ones concerning the labour leader Y.C. Ariff and the Deputy Executive Officer, Haji Abdur Raschid Khan, who was also secretary of the provincial Khilafat Committee. Such rumours and accusations drew the exasperated comment from the Mussalman that:

After the Calcutta riots a crusade against the Mussalmans has begun in the Calcutta Corporation. The Muslim Deputy Mayor must go. The faqir's dead body in the [Municipal Market]...must be exhumed and lately the fiat of the Amrita Bazar Patrika has gone forth that Haji Abdur Rashid Khan...must go because he [is] the Secretary of a public body, viz. the Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee....If any Mussalman expects to remain in the Corporation he must henceforth be slavishly subservient to the Hindu majority.¹

Muslim members of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and the All-India Congress Committee attempted to scotch the rumours and appealed to Sen-Gupta to 'calm the communal frenzy' of Hindu Swarajist councillors.² But their position was further weakened in the same month when, at the annual session of the provincial Congress at Krishnagar, the Das Pact was formally annulled.³ Sen-Gupta did in fact oppose the move and later managed to get the conference declared unconstitutional, but the damage was done.⁴

The result of the allegations against Suhrawardy in the Corporation was the resignation of the entire bloc of Muslim councillors, after a monster meeting attended by 'Muslim leaders of all shades of opinion' on 6 June at the

¹ Mussalman, 1926, 18 May, p.4.

² Ibid., p.7.

³ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 112/V/1926, May; Mussalman, 1926, 25 May, p.6.

⁴ Bengal Govt, Administration Report, 1925-26, p.x.

Town Hall which called on them to resign.¹ On 2 June Councillor Shamsuddin Ahmed stated in the Corporation 'that he had heard that to be in a minority was a great crime but he now found that to be a Mahomedan was a greater crime', and thereupon led the Muslim councillors out of the chamber.² On the 25th the councillors formally notified Sen-Gupta that:

In pursuance of the resolution passed at a public meeting of the Muslim rate-payers of Calcutta in the Town Hall on the 6th...we hereby send our resignations as a protest against the injustice of the non-Muslim Councillors who, having taken advantage of the minority of the Mahomedan Councillors in the Corporation despite our protest, have appointed a Committee of Enquiry into the conduct of the Muslim Deputy Mayor without framing any definite charges, and also we feel that we can serve no purpose by continuing to serve in the Corporation in such a helpless minority.³

The breach was finally healed in August when, at a secret session of the Corporation, the Muslim councillors were presented with the evidence against Suhrawardy which they apparently accepted.⁴ Face was saved by allowing Suhrawardy to resign voluntarily but Hindu and European feeling against him still ran high, and when on 19 August he attempted to speak on the riots in the legislative council the entire Hindu and European bloc - official and non-official - walked out.⁵

The immediate result of the Corporation dispute and the annulment of the Pact was the closing of Muslim ranks. The community united in early June to protest against the proposed impeachment of Suhrawardy, and in the same month leaders of various factions in the province and city joined with Sir Abdur Rahim to form the Bengal Provincial Tanzeem Committee.

¹Mussalman, 1926, 8 June, p.5.

²Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1926-July 1926, 2.6.1926, p.399.

³Ibid., Gazette, Vol.IV, 26.6.1926, p.222.

⁴Ibid., 7.8.1926, p.494.

⁵Indian Annual Register, 1926, July-December, p.238.

It was intended to be an organisation for Muslims in Bengal

on a purely non-political and non-sectarian basis [to] retain communal self-respect while cultivating friendly relations with sister communities...to eradicate un-Islamic customs and habits and to reform mosques and makhtabs.¹

The effect of this feverish affirmation of communal loyalties was to precipitate the third and final phase of the riots which lasted from 11 July to 28 July. The trouble started in central Calcutta 'on the occasions of the annual Jagannath Car festival on 11 July, when the embers of the Rath Jatra procession of Paikpara were attacked by Muhammedans in Duttabagan'.² Fighting spread throughout the central wards of the city again. Whilst instances of incendiarism and attacks upon religious institutions were rarer than in the previous riots the overtones of religious conflict were still strong. The worst days of rioting were July 11th, 15th and 21st: the first was the occasion of the Jaganath Car festival, the second the date of the postponed Rajrajeswari procession of up-country Hindu celebrants, and the last being the great Muslim festival of Mohurram. On all three occasions the police had to open fire upon brawling mobs of Hindus and Muslims with the result that more than 30 rioters were killed and wounded. Throughout the period the police and troops were 'frequently faced with the necessity of immediately dispersing large crowds of persons who were keyed up to the highest pitch of religious and communal frenzy', and whilst they successfully prevented further attacks on religious buildings, by the time law and order had been established the last phase of riots had claimed some 28 dead and 226 wounded.

¹ Bengal Provincial Tanzeem Committee, Aims and Objects (1926), reference by courtesy of Dr Hossainur Rahman. Amongst those present were Abu Bakr, A.K. Ghuznavi, Mujibur Rahman, Ghulam Jilani Khan, A. & H.S. Suhrawardy, Abdul Karim, Syed Nasim Ali, A.K. Fazl-ul Huq, Y.C. Ariff and Maniruzzaman Islamabadi.

² Govt of India, Home Poll, 11/XXV of 1926.

By July 28 the great communal riots in Calcutta were virtually over; further minor outbreaks occurred in September and October at Kidderpore and in the area of Mechua Bazar,¹ but both sides were exhausted and the city settled into a sullen peace so that by mid-October the Commissioner of Police could report to New Delhi that 'communal feeling appears to have improved appreciably and all armed pickets have been withdrawn from the streets'.²

Indeed, on the occasion of Durga Puja in Calcutta on October 18 over 400 Hindu processions moved peacefully through the city without incident, and the sight of the Nawab of Murshidabad and Maharaja Tagore driving together through the streets of central Calcutta provoked an enthusiastic response from the milling crowds.³

The contrasts between the riots of 1918 and 1926 are striking. Admittedly on both occasions the up-country Muslim and Hindu millhands of the contiguous industrial townships were notable only for their absence but here the similarity ends. The economic motivations of 1918 were not present, and from the first instance the pattern of the riots was distinctly religious. Marwari, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Bengali, Punjabi, Bihari - all were involved in the riots which were centred upon the destruction of individuals and property belonging to the opposing religious group. Little of this had occurred in 1918, just as the participation of Bengalis - Hindu and Muslim - had been minimal; but in 1926 religion and not race had been the primary factor in the riots. Certainly the role of the Bengalis diminished after the first phase when their temples and mosques had been indiscriminately subject to attack. With the decline of

¹ Statesman, 1926, 7 September, p.8; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1926, 19 October, p.5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 112/V/1926, January, June-September.

² Ibid., Home Poll, 11/XXIII of 1926.

³ Ibid.

overt attacks on religious institutions the main participants in the riots were up-country settlers in the city, as can be seen from the spread of the riots which rarely extended beyond the bounds of Wards VII-XI and ward XXV - the main centres of up-country settlement. Those most actively involved were in fact inhabitants of the city who responded to influence from beyond the borders of Bengal and to tensions peculiar to the urban environment. Indeed, Huseyn Suhrawardy quite clearly stated in May 1926 that the Muslim quarrel was not with the Bengali Hindus but rather 'with Marwaris, Hindusthanis and Arya Samajists'.¹ Again unlike 1918 economic motives are hard to find; certainly there were instances of looting and Marwari wealth attracted the animosity of many, but in spirit the riots of 1926 were much more communal with murder rather than loot as the main goal of the rampaging crowds of petty merchants, shopkeepers, hawkers and artisans who fought in the streets of the city.

The riots were in fact a purely urban and non-Bengali phenomenon - the mofussil remained relatively quiet,² as did the transient population of the mill areas. Perhaps the best summary of this fact was given by the local authorities when they wrote after the riots in an attempt to detail their causes that

the coming elections, the ever increasing competition among the middle-classes for that kind of employment of which Government employment forms so large a part, the growing claims of Muhammedans to take such a share in that employment as is justified by their advancement in education and their political needs, the attempt to create a united Mahomedan party, and the necessity felt by the Swarajya party to retain in their ranks as many Mahomedans as possible, all of these factors in the situation combined to create a desire in the mind of the respective leaders to secure a following

¹ NNR, 1926, 1 May, Matwalla.

² Throughout 1926 there were a series of communal disturbances in various parts of the mofussil precipitated mainly by Suddhi and Sangathan organisations, and conflict between Muslim peasants and Hindu landlords and moneylenders. The riots in Calcutta did not alter the pattern of communal conflict in the mofussil appreciably: Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 112/V/1926, passim.

among the masses, such as can only be attracted by appeals to the aggressive side of their religious emotions.¹

And that

the general cleavage between the two communities has been further emphasised and increased by the various communal movements which have been organised during the past two years. The most important of which is the Suddhi movement...by the formation... of the League for the protection of Hindu women... the implications of which are obvious, and the activities of the Cow Protection League....And also by the Das Pact which served only to increase the cleavage, since it deprived the Hindus of a number of posts, to which they believed themselves to be rightly entitled, and since it could not be brought into effect sufficiently speedily and completely satisfy the Muhammedans.²

The riots were an expression of the depth of despair into which the Muslims of Calcutta had been plunged by their inability to come to terms with the numerically and economically dominant communities in the city. They lived in Calcutta yet had no strong voice in the affairs of the city or community of interest with their co-religionists in the mofussil. Some link with their co-religionists in the mofussil may have increased their sense of identification with Bengal and undermined their reliance upon the Muslims of the northern Gangetic regions of India for a sense of communal identity which tragically involved the transference of problems peculiar to that region to the urban environment of Calcutta.

VII

Throughout the remaining months of 1926 the Hindus and Muslims of Calcutta prepared for the elections to the Bengal Legislative Council due in November. The Hindu nationalist

¹Govt of India, Home Poll, 209/26 of 1926.

²Ibid., 11/XXV of 1926.

press adopted a surprisingly conciliatory tone towards the Muslims no doubt in an attempt to win some support for the Swaraj Party.¹ In the Corporation also Sen-Gupta attempted to dampen Muslim hostility by hushing up the Suhrawardy dispute, and by firmly squashing attempts by some Hindu councillors to re-open the question of the pir burial. But the overtures of the Swaraj Party were in vain.²

After 'a heated discussion' in September, the Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee in a final burst of activity rescinded a previous motion that Muslims should stand as Congress candidates,³ and support for distinctly Muslim political parties mounted. Not only were Huq's Bengal Muslim Council Party and Sir Abdur Rahim's Bengal Muslim Party supporters canvassing Muslim votes but the Suhrawardy family, Abdur Rauf and Mujibur Rahman - who had split with Huq for some unknown reason - had formed yet another party, the Independent Muslim Party.⁴ All three parties based their election stand on opposition to the Swaraj Party. In supporting the Independent Muslim Party the Mussalman warned its readers to 'Beware of Muslim Swarajists' and to 'Vote for I.M.P. candidates. They are slavish neither to Hindus nor Bureaucracy!'⁵ A similar line was followed by Huq's supporters but ironically both parties were weakened by the suspicion of many Muslims regarding the previous Swarajist connections of their candidates, many of whom were suspected of only having resigned from the Swaraj Party to contest the election following which 'they were said to want to rejoin the fold'.⁶ Conversely it was reported that Sir Abdur Rahim's

¹ NNR, 1926, October-November, passim.

² Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.IV, 18.9.1926, p.770.

³ Mussalman, 1926, 16 September, p.3.

⁴ Ibid., 2 September, p.4; *ibid.*, 29 September, p.4.

⁵ Ibid., 6 November, p.5.

⁶ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 112/V/1926, January, June-September.

hand was strengthened 'not through attachment to the British but through hostility to the Hindus'.¹

So strong was Muslim feeling in Calcutta against the Swaraj Party, many of whose Hindu candidates campaigned under slogans such as 'Hinduism in Danger' and 'The Pact is the same thing as Cow-Killing',² that Huq's party being the least communal in tone virtually vanished from the Calcutta scene before the elections which developed into a straight out battle between the candidates of the Independent Muslim Party and the Bengal Muslim Party. In Calcutta there was only one Swaraj Party candidate for both North and South Calcutta, namely Abdur Razzack the Corporation councillor. In North Calcutta Sir Abdur Rahim soundly defeated Razzack and two independent candidates by securing 641 of the 648 votes polled, whilst in South Calcutta Huseyn Suhrawardy gained 728 votes compared with 182 for Rahim's candidate Shamsul Huq and 2 for Abdur Razzack.³ In the Muslim seats surrounding Calcutta the Swaraj Party put forward two candidates - Mahabubal Huque in 24-Parganas Municipal, and Qutbuddin Ahmed in Hooghly cum Howrah Municipal, the first being the previous incumbent and the second because of his reputed sway over the trade union movement. Both were soundly defeated by independent candidates.⁴

Admittedly the polling percentages in Calcutta were low,⁵ but the figures did reveal a complete rejection of the Swaraj Party on the part of the Muslims of the city. Support for the Suhrawardy and Rahim factions may not have been overwhelming, and the community was still divided by personal

¹Ibid., April.

²Huque, M. Azizul, A Plea for Separate Electorates in Bengal (1931), pp.6-7.

³BLCD, Vol.XXV, 11.3.1927; Statesman, 1926, 19 November, p.7.

⁴Ibid.; ALCC Papers, 1926, File no.G-52 (ii); Mahabubal Huque gained 18 votes and Ghulam Hussain Shah gained 544; Qutbuddin Ahmed gained 379 votes and A.R. Sattar gained 826.

⁵North Calcutta: 32 per cent; South Calcutta: 39 per cent.

rivalries¹ and the absence of any firm set of political convictions, but the break with the mainstream of the nationalist movement and the collapse of the communal rapprochement in Calcutta was complete.

¹E.g. Rahim's candidate for 24-Parganas Rural - Ghulam Jilana Khan, hide merchant and Corporation Councillor - was defeated by A.F.M. Abdur Rahman, another hide merchant, a supporter of A.K. Ghuznavi who led a dissident faction in Rahim's party which differed not in principles but in support for Rahim's leadership: Mussalman, 1926, 27 November, p.5.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STRUGGLE FOR MUSLIM UNITY, 1926 TO 1932

Muslim sentiment in Calcutta following the elections of November 1926 is best illustrated by two events early in 1927: namely the controversy concerning the formation of a provincial ministry early in January, and the elections to the Calcutta Corporation in the following April.

The ministerial controversy involved the arch-rivals Sir Abdur Rahim and A.K. Ghuznavi, elder brother of A.H. Ghuznavi and a wealthy zamindar from east Bengal. During the elections Rahim had taken full advantage of the legacy of bitterness left by the Calcutta riots, and appealed to the Muslim electorate on a distinctly communal platform.¹ The result was a sweeping victory for his party, which gained a majority of seats in the legislative council.² However, Rahim's influence over the Muslim MLCs was not complete; his son-in-law Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy had opposed him during the elections as had a coterie of legislators under A.K. Ghuznavi.

In January the Governor, Lord Lytton, invited Rahim to form a ministry, but to gain a working majority he needed the support of the Muslim and non-Swarajist Hindu MLCs, and this he was unable to secure. Rahim's role as arch-communalist had alienated Hindus of all factions and the Hindu press launched a vitriolic campaign against him: the Ananda Bazar Patrika warned the Muslims that 'no self-respecting Hindu member of the Council will agree to become his colleague',³ whilst the Dainik Basumati threatened that 'the Hindus will, by no means, tolerate 'Rahim Raj' in Bengal'.⁴ Within four days Rahim was forced to admit defeat

¹Bengal Govt, Appointments Dept, February 1928, File no. 6R-77 (1-5) of 1928, Progs A1-5.

²Broomfield, J., op.cit., p.280.

³NNR, 1927, 21 January, Ananda Bazar Patrika.

⁴Ibid., 23 January, Dainik Basumati.

and the Hindu press was jubilant. The Governor then approached Ghuznavi who managed to form a ministry with the support of the former Swarajist Byomkesh Chakravarti.

In Calcutta the Muslims interpreted Rahim's defeat as an instance of Hindu communalism, and they were infuriated by the appointment of Chakravarti whose involvement with the Hindu Mahasabha during 1926 was well known. Ghuznavi's action served only to turn the lukewarm support Rahim had received from the city's electors at the November polls into widespread sympathy. Apart from his own newspaper, the Hanafi,¹ previously critical journals such as the Asr-e-Jadid, Soltan and Mussalman added their voices to the chorus of protest which greeted Rahim's resignation.² In addition Mujibur Rahman and Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, both former Congressmen, joined with other leading Muslims in the city, during January and February, to protest against the political defeat of the man many of them had opposed at the recent elections.³ Muslim students demonstrated in various parts of the city in February and March against the 'Ghuz-Chak' ministry,⁴ and on 8 February a massive crowd of 50,000 Muslims gathered near the Town Hall to listen to a panel of speakers, led by Mujibur Rahman, denounce Ghuznavi and also Huseyn Suhrawardy who supported him.⁵

In the hour of his defeat Rahim had accomplished the seemingly impossible feat of uniting the Muslim community behind one political leader to an extent that had never been achieved before. Indeed, for several months he rode a wave of immense popular support; but it was a negative

¹ Ibid., 31 January, Hanafi.

² Ibid., 21 January, Soltan; ibid., 25 January, Soltan, Asr-e-Jadid; ibid., 29 January, Soltan; Mussalman, 1927, 1 February, p.5.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.; ibid., 8 February, p.5; ibid., 1 March, p.4; Statesman, 1927, 22 February, p.10.

⁵ Mussalman, 1927, 8 February, p.5.

support based on anti-Hindu sentiment which proved too ephemeral to provide a lasting bond between the divergent Muslim political factions which rallied to his defence. And by the end of 1927 factionalism had once more destroyed the unity of Muslim politics in Bengal. Personal antipathy between Rahim and other Muslim leaders was in part responsible for this; but so too was the convoluted politicking of Rahim himself, and the absence of any basic political philosophy, communal or otherwise, within the community in Calcutta and Bengal at large.

The immediate effect of the anti-ministerial agitation in Calcutta was to revive the bitter tensions of the riots of the previous years. Rahim was hailed as a hero and when he resigned in April from the legislative council in protest against police action in Ponabalia, east Bengal, which involved the death of several rioting Muslim peasants, his protagonists in the city gained another opportunity to show the strength of Muslim feeling. At a huge public meeting on the Maidan, Fazl-ul Huq and Mujibur Rahman joined with him to attack the ministry,¹ and, when it survived a vote of no-confidence in the legislative council, the Mussalman wildly denounced Ghuznavi's supporters as 'The Shameless Betrayers Who Muslim Bengal Will Not Forget'.²

The tangled web of Muslim politics in Bengal at this time is difficult to unravel. The ministerial controversy had precipitated an unlikely alliance between Sir Abdur Rahim, Fazl-ul Huq and Mujibur Rahman against the Ghuznavi ministry - which was also opposed by the Swaraj Party. In Calcutta Rahim undoubtedly had the support of the Muslim mercantile and professional middle-classes, for he stood as the champion of Muslim aspirations against both the entrenched Bengali Hindu upper-classes and, for the moment, more moderate leaders such as Ghuznavi who sought to work

¹Ibid., 10 March, p.5.

²Ibid., 15 March, p.5.

in co-operation with non-Swarajist Hindus and the Imperial authorities. Once in the opposition, however, there was a subtle change in Rahim's political manoeuvring. At one level he was a martyr at the hands of Hindu communalists, yet at another he was the pragmatic politician who was prepared to seek allies in any quarter to accomplish the destruction of the much hated ministry.

The Corporation elections of April 1927, and the subsequent by-election in north Calcutta, when Rahim regained his seat in the legislative council, are the best indicators of the tortured policy he attempted to follow. Shortly before the municipal elections Rahim organised the Muslim Councillors Association with the support of Mujibur Rahman, editor of the Mussalman, and Abul Kasem, Huq's friend who had supported Rahim against the Suhrawardy family in the November 1926 elections.¹ The Association gained the support of ten councillors,² all of whom were re-elected, and sponsored four other candidates - K. Nooruddin, brother-in-law of Khwaja Nazimuddin a wealthy east Bengali aristocrat and zamindar, and three merchants: Mahomed Ali Khan, Mahomed Raffique and Munshi Ramjan Ali Khan. Obviously Rahim was not unaware of the political changes wrought in Calcutta during the previous decade for the Association was deliberately organised to secure the support of Muslim groups in Calcutta which had become politically conscious in the years since the Great War.

In particular Rahim sought to conciliate the up-country Muslim mercantile groups of Mechua Bazar and central Calcutta, hence the nomination of four candidates from this area. Such men were the representatives of groups which had shown their first signs of political consciousness during the pre-war agitation concerning the Balkan Wars, and who

¹ Ibid., 22 March, p.4; NNR, 1926, 11 September, Dainik Soltan.

² Unsud Dowla, Dr M. Hossein, Sheikh Kerim Bux, M. Mahomed Hashem, M.M. Huq, M. Abdur Razzack, Shamsul Huq, S.M. Yakub, Ghulam Jilani Khan, M. Solaiman (who had replaced S.M.S. Rahman when he died in 1925).

subsequently had taken more vociferous and sophisticated roles in the riots of 1918 and the nationalist agitation which followed. The early 1920s had seen the 'politicisation' of the Muslim mercantile and artisan groups of central Calcutta - no longer were they a silent majority who could be readily discounted. Rather they were a politically conscious and experienced conglomeration of groups whose awareness had been extended from the group to the community by the political apprenticeship of the last ten years.

The four candidates put forward by the Muslim Councillors' Association secured election without difficulty, whereas the four Muslim councillors who refused to join Rahim's Association were defeated.¹ Three independent candidates also fought the elections, but only one, a prominent physician Dr S.Z. Ahmed, was elected; Mahomed Ishaque, a lecturer in oriental languages at Calcutta university, and Mahabubul Huque, a MLC suspected of leanings towards the Swaraj Party, were defeated.² In May councillor Ghulam Jilani Khan, a member of the Muslim Councillors' Association, died suddenly and his seat was gained by another nominee of Rahim - Mahomed Akbar. Popularly called the 'Fruit King of Calcutta' Mahomed Akbar was reputed to be 'the wealthiest Peshwari fruit merchant in the city',³ and exerted considerable influence amongst the up-country Muslim stallholders who sold fruit in the municipal markets and bazaars of Calcutta. In addition, as a leading member of the Peshwari community in the city, he was a vital means of contact for Rahim with the Punjabi and Pathan settlers in the central wards who held an important share in money-lending, carting and the leather trade.

¹Dr K. Ahmed, Abdul Halim, S.M.Z. Huque, Shamsuddin Ahmed.

²Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.V, 5.3.1927, p.650; ibid., 19.3.1927, pp.763,800.

³Statesman, 1927, 15 May, p.10.

One noticeable feature of the Corporation elections was the apparent absence of involvement on the part of Rahim's main rivals - the Ghuznavi and Suhrawardy families. In January Huseyn Suhrawardy and Abdul Karim had unsuccessfully attempted to organise a body of candidates for the elections,¹ but apart from that brief burst of activity there is no evidence of participation by members of either family. In part this can be explained by the nature of the support the Suhrawardies and Ghuznavies had in the city, and the personal antipathy which existed between Rahim and his son-in-law Huseyn Suhrawardy who had justified his support for A.K. Ghuznavi on the grounds that:

Sir Abdur Rahim has declared to all possible political people that he could not, on any account, co-operate with me or with the members of my party.²

In November 1926 Huseyn Suhrawardy had been elected MLC for South Calcutta, and, in January 1927, Y.C. Ariff won the Calcutta regional Muslim seat to the Imperial Legislative Assembly with the support of Abdullah Suhrawardy. Ariff's rival, Mahomed Raffique, had been sponsored by Rahim and was compensated for his defeat with a seat in the Corporation. From the results of these elections it would appear that the Suhrawardies main base of electoral support comprised the small and wealthy mercantile and professional sections of the Muslim community in Calcutta who formed the electoral body to the legislative assembly, and the majority of enfranchised Muslim electors to the legislative council in the southern areas of the city.

During the riots of 1926 Huseyn Suhrawardy had exerted some measure of influence over the Muslim mobs of central Calcutta;³ but this proved ephemeral and appears to have

¹Mussalman, 1927, 1 January, p.7.

²Ibid., 12 February, p.7: the party H. Suhrawardy refers to is the Independent Muslim Party.

³Bengal Govt, Police Dept., March 1926, File no.P.31-9 (1-3), Progs A26-28.

been valid only in the absence of leadership from the more prosperous merchants and artisans of the area. Once the riots were over and normal conditions had been re-established mob orators and the leaders of the moment passed from the scene, and the traditional voices of authority within the sub-communal groups reappeared. Indeed, the November elections and later the Corporation elections reaffirmed the fact that the more prosperous Muslims in this area were supporters of Rahim's brand of constitutional communalism rather than of Suhrawardy's ephemeral mob politicking. The position of the Ghuznavi family was somewhat different; they were based in east Bengal and, apart from the indirect influence the family exerted through its connection with the Suhrawardies, it had no distinct power base in Calcutta.

At the time therefore the Suhrawardy sphere of influence extended over the professional and wealthiest mercantile sections of the Muslim community in the city; whilst Rahim, temporarily at least, had the support of the recently politicised mercantile and artisan lower classes. In addition since the ministerial controversy Rahim had been the focus of Muslim attention and sympathy in the province to the exclusion of most other Muslim leaders of any prominence, including Huseyn and Abdullah Suhrawardy.

The north Calcutta by-election in May 1927 further illustrates the nature of Rahim's support in the city and his political tactics. Rahim was faced with two opponents - Y.C. Ariff, MLA, who was supported by the Suhrawardies, and Sheikh Abdul Wahab a relatively insignificant merchant who stood as an independent. In the final count Rahim gained 572 votes against 175 cast for Ariff and a meagre 4 for Wahab in an election where barely 44 per cent of the registered electors polled.¹ Shortly afterwards Ariff and Wahab issued a joint petition against Rahim's election, and alleged that he had gained the seat by means of 'corruption and bribery'.²

¹ Statesman, 1927, 4 May, p.9; *ibid.*, 8 May, p.9.

² Bengal Govt, Appointments Dept, February 1928, File no.6R-77 of 1927, Progs 1-5.

Specifically they charged that prior to the Corporation elections Rahim had entered into an agreement for mutual support with various Muslim councillors and would-be councillors; had 'bribed' Mahboob Alley to withdraw his candidature to the seat for north Calcutta; threatened various electors with violence, and had tried to induce Ariff to withdraw from the contest on the understanding that Mahomed Raffique would cancel his petition against Ariff's election to the Imperial Legislative Assembly. The allegations against Rahim were dismissed but in retrospect one suspects that more than a grain of truth was contained in them.

The ministerial controversy stirred Calcutta at a time when memories of the riots were still fresh and communal relations in the city were tense. The local Hindu press had reverted to its provocative comments once the elections were over,¹ and in December 1926 bitterly attacked Muslims in general as responsible for the assassination of Swami Shradhanand, the leader of the Arya Samaj, in northern India.² In January the leaders of the Muslim community were assailed as 'Hindu haters', 'murderers' and the 'instigators of all riots', and it was claimed that they were planning to establish a Muslim raj and forcibly convert the Hindus of Bengal.³ The Hindu community in Calcutta was called upon to organise in self-defence, and Shradhanand was extolled as a martyr for the Hindu cause. On January 1 Malaviya and Gandhi chaired a meeting at Burra Bazar at which 50,000 rupees was pledged for a memorial to Shradhanand;⁴ and later in the month Shamsuddin Ahmed earned the condemnation of the Hindu

¹ NNR, 1927, 21 December, 1926, Ananda Bazar Patrika, et al.

² Ibid., 25 December 1926, Ananda Bazar Patrika, Dainik Basumati, Viswamitra; ibid., 28 December 1926, Voteranga, Hindu Sabha, Swatantra.

³ Ibid., January, passim.

⁴ Mussalman, 1927, 1 January, p.3.

press¹ when he stated bluntly in the Corporation that 'the Swami was not a national leader but a communal leader and that was the feeling of the Mahommedan community'.²

The Corporation ignored Muslim sentiment, however, and early in February named a park after Shradhanand - a man the Muhammadi described as a 'murderer and assassin of Muhammedans'.³ The Mussalman complained that 'Muslim feeling had been trampled underfoot [and that] rank communalism was rampant in the Corporation'.⁴ However, there was little that the Muslims could do and this incident plus the ministerial controversy sent a fresh surge of anti-Hindu sentiment through the community in Calcutta. Rahim capitalised this feeling into direct support for himself through the medium of the Muslim Councillors Association and the Bengal Provincial Tanzeem Committee, which he and Mujibur Rahman revived in mid-April.⁵ The committee seems to have been of short duration but for a few months at least it channelled the anti-Hindu feeling of its several thousand up-country Muslim members from central Calcutta into a formal organisation under the direct control of Rahim. By mid-1927, however, Rahim's popularity had begun to wane, and the unity he had imposed on his community dissolved with the re-emergence of various antipathetic political factions.

¹Ibid., 22 January, p.4.

²Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1926-March 1927, 12.1.27, pp.2069-71.

³NNR, 1927, 11 January, Muhammadi.

⁴Mussalman, 1927, 3 February, p.5.

⁵Ibid., 21 April, p.5; ibid., 28 April, p.5.

II

In part Rahim's failure to unite the Muslims of Bengal behind one leader was due to his political opportunism, which negated any political programme he may have claimed to possess. Following the installation of the Ghuznavi ministry he had gained the support not only of the more extreme communalists within his community, but also of the nationalist sympathisers because of his proclaimed policy of 'constitutional obstruction to the present Government'.¹ He had posed as the champion of Muslim opposition to the bureaucracy and Hindu communalists, but in September 1927 he performed a volte face.

The 'Ghuz-Chak' ministry finally succumbed to the attacks of its Muslim and Hindu opponents in August, and in September Nawab Musharraff Hussain, an east Bengali landowner and friend of Rahim, formed a ministry with P.C. Mitter, a Hindu landowner and former supporter of the moderate politician Sir Surendranath Banerjea. Rahim gave the ministry his blessing and immediately earned the condemnation of many of his co-religionists. In Calcutta Mujibur Rahman and Fazl-ul Huq attacked him for siding with the bureaucracy, and his influence amongst the up-country merchants and artisans of the city suffered a sharp decline.² Anti-British sentiment was rampant amongst the Muslim masses of the city, and Rahim's support of a ministry which not only included a prominent Hindu landowner, but which was also pledged to support the bureaucratic system, shattered his image as the guardian of Muslim interests and opponent of the bureaucracy. He was assailed by the press of both communities as the eminence grise of Bengali politics,³ and his influence within Calcutta was severely reduced.

¹ Statesman, 1927, 4 May, p.9.

² Mussalman, 1927, 27 September, p.5.

³ Ibid.; NNR, 1927, 21 September, Amrita Bazar Patrika; ibid., 23 September, Soltan; ibid., 29 September, Muhammadi.

The Musharraf Hussain ministry lasted barely nine months before it too collapsed, and the reformed constitution was suspended. The constitution was revived later in 1927, but the pattern of shortlived ministries continued. However, the instability of ministries after 1926 was not a new development. What was unique was the dominant role played by the Muslim bloc in the legislative council after 1926, and the policy of rural reform pursued by all the ministries.

These developments were aided by two factors: namely the growing cohesiveness of the Muslim bloc, at least on matters pertaining to rural reform in which communalist and Nationalist Muslims shared a common interest; and the realisation of Muslim politicians in the council that they could gain a majority of votes with the support of the representatives of the depressed class Hindu peasantry who were also interested in rural reform.

The tragedy of these years lay in the fact that throughout Bengal there were a considerable number of Muslims prepared to seek an understanding with the Hindu community; but from 1926 onwards the political roles of the two communities were in a sense reversed. The Hindus rather than the Muslims took on the attitudes of an embattled community, and resisted political and economic changes in the province of the kind that might challenge their dominant position.

In Calcutta, where the Muslims were in a numerical minority and the landlord-tenant conflict was of no immediate relevance, the battle that was fought concerned the material benefits of urban life as represented by the powers of patronage which the Corporation exerted in the fields of employment and education. But Calcutta was more than this for it was also the only major city in Bengal. As such it was the centre for higher education, employment in government service and the professions, and the pivot of trade and industry in the province - and to date it had been firmly in the hands of the Hindu upper-classes. Obviously if the Muslims in the city were to gain a greater share in its government they had to seek some means of breaking the impasse

created by Hindu domination. For most of the Muslim leaders in the city this meant a closer identification with provincial politics either by means of supporting the established ministry or Congress. The rationale was that in the former case such support would undermine the land-owning basis of Hindu power, or in the latter instance that by reforming Congress from within voluntary concessions would be gained from the Hindus.

However, no matter what political loyalties they proclaimed at the provincial level Muslim leaders in Calcutta were dependent upon a broad spectrum of support within the city, which they were careful to maintain. The previous decade had witnessed the emergence of formerly quiescent sub-communal groups into the political arena, and in municipal politics they were now a factor to be reckoned with. In addition, the riots and mass political movements of the years since 1918 had amply illustrated the awesome, if temporary, power of the mob. No leader of the community could afford to ignore the future, and the indications were that popular participation in politics would increase rather than decrease.

This struggle for influence in the years after 1926 was coloured by several factors, not the least important of which was the increasingly intransigent attitude of the Hindu community. This invariably precipitated a counter intransigence amongst the Muslims and limited the occasions for compromise which at least some of the Muslim leaders in the city would have welcomed. Other important factors were the various personal feuds which engaged the attention of many Muslim leaders and also the dissolution of Congress into rival factions. Each faction attempted to outbid the other as the champion of Hindu interests in the province, to the detriment of their own political honesty and the efforts of Muslims who sought to identify with the nationalist movement.

III

Following the Corporation elections of April 1924 the Muslim councillors maintained their stand against the Swaraj Party, and entered into an alliance with the non-Swarajist Hindu and European representatives. In return for Muslim support for the election of Sir Rajendranath Mookherjea as mayor it was agreed that two Muslims would be elected Aldermen, the deputy mayor would be a Muslim,

and that certain other claims and demands for the Muslim community, such as especial facilities for primary education, bustee improvement [and] a certain proportion of appointments in the Corporation...would be wholeheartedly conceded to.¹

But something went drastically wrong. The Muslim's partners in the coalition failed to vote for any of the five Muslim candidates for Aldermen, with the result that only one Muslim - the trade unionist Mahomed Daud - was elected as an independent, along with the provincial Congress leader Sen-Gupta and three non-Swarajist Hindus. In the mayoral election the Muslim's partners failed to put forward a candidate and the election turned into a contest between Sen-Gupta and J.N. Basu, a prominent member of the Hindu Mahasabha, who was supported by some non-Swarajist Hindus and Sen-Guptas' rivals within the Swaraj Party.

Confused by the defection of their allies the Muslim bloc split. The majority abstained from voting in the contest, but three cast their votes for Sen-Gupta and tipped the balance in his favour. As a conciliatory gesture towards the Muslims Sen-Gupta then supported the successful bid of Unsud Dowla for the position of deputy mayor.² In response the entire Muslim bloc declared its qualified support for the Sen-Gupta faction on the understanding that the Muslims

¹ Mussalman, 1927, 7 July, p.4.

² Ibid.; ibid., 10 April, p.6; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 32 of 1927, April; Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1927-September 1927, 11.4.1927, p.1; ibid., 17.4.27, p.30.

would be given greater representation in the various Standing Committees - proof that they too could be as pragmatic as Rahim!¹

The new alliance proved as fragile as the old, however, for the Muslims were soon enmeshed in the fighting between the rival factions of the Swaraj Party in the Corporation. In the selection of a chief executive officer in May the Muslim councillors supported the re-appointment of the incumbent, Subhas Chandra Bose, and immediately came into conflict with the Sen-Gupta faction who branded them as the 'neo-champions of the Congress Party' for having dared to support the leader of a rival faction.² In August therefore when the Muslims called a special meeting of the Corporation to consider the question of Muslim employment their move was peremptorily squashed by Sen-Gupta who refused to discuss their grievances.³

For the remainder of 1927 and, indeed, until the Corporation elections of 1930 Muslim politics at the municipal level remained in a constant state of flux. Aware of their hopeless minority a rump of the Muslim councillors - twelve to thirteen strong with Razzack and Nooruddin invariably supporting Sen-Gupta and Daud sometimes with the Swaraj Party because of his union affiliations - attempted to gain temporary advantages by siding with a variety of Swarajist and non-Swarajist factions in the council chamber. Thus in September 1927 they joined with the non-Swarajist opposition to oppose the refusal of the Swaraj Party to appoint a chief executive officer who would not sign the Congress creed;⁴ and then abruptly swung to the support of Sen-Gupta when he agreed to

¹ Mussalman, 1927, 7 July, p.4; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 32 of 1927, May.

² Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1927-September 1927, 9.5.1927, pp.47-53.

³ Ibid., 13.8.1927, p.539; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 32 of 1927, August.

⁴ Ibid., September: Bose was arrested shortly after his appointment in May and a replacement had to be decided upon in September.

appoint a committee to consider the question of Muslim employment by the Corporation.¹ In January 1928, however, the Muslim councillors, led by Mahomed Yaqub, opposed a resolution sponsored by Sen-Gupta that the Corporation should observe the Simon Commission hartal on February 3. Yaqub argued that though the Simon Commission² was an insult to India and Indians

and they were as much Indian as others...they were opposing the resolution on the grounds that their Hindu friends had never systematically regarded their request to eliminate the differences between Hindus and Mahommedans.³

Again in February they came into conflict with Sen-Gupta over disputes concerning Muslim education in the city,⁴ and his opposition to the appointment of Haji Abdur Raschid Khan as deputy executive officer because of his previous connections with Huseyn Suhrawardy.⁵ But at the mayoral elections in April 1928 the Muslims voted for Sen-Gupta, to defeat a formerly favoured Hindu, Subhas Chandra Bose, in return for the election of Abdur Razzack as deputy mayor.⁶

Immediately after the elections, however, the old alliance between the Muslims, non-Swarajist Hindus and Europeans was resurrected.⁷ With the support of their new allies the Muslims gained 33 seats in the eight Standing Committees compared with the eight won by the factions of the Swaraj Party.⁸ This alliance in turn barely survived the year,

¹ Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', op.cit., 2.9.1927, pp.865-68; ibid., Gazette, Vol.VI, 10.9.1927, pp.717-33.

² Official title was The Indian Statutory Commission.

³ Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1927-March 1928, 30.1.1928, pp.1853-61.

⁴ Ibid., 22.2.1928, p.2167; Statesman, 1928, 1 March, p.16.

⁵ Calcutta Corporation, op.cit., 22.2.1928, p.2207.

⁶ Ibid., April 1928-September 1928, 2.4.1928, pp.4-5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), I/1928, April.

⁷ Mussalman, 1928, 16 June, p.4.

⁸ Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XII, 31.5.1930, pp.62-66.

and was fatally weakened when its non-Swarajist Hindu members defected to the Swaraj Party in disputes concerning the Simon Commission and Muslim education.¹

Through the year such quarrels frequently disrupted the new alliance, and also involved the Muslim councillors in heated arguments with the Swarajist factions.² However, at the all-important mayoral elections in April 1929 the Muslim councillors finally broke with their allies and once more voted for Sen-Gupta in return for which Abdur Razzack was again elected deputy mayor.³ Such was the confusion caused by the tactics of the Muslim councillors that even the Mussalman ventured the general remark that 'it did not quite understand the attitude and position of the Muslim Councillors who today are with one party and tomorrow with another'.⁴ For the remainder of the year Muslim loyalties in the Corporation remained fairly constant. No controversial topics disturbed the councillors, and, against the background of the Civil Disobedience movement and the first Round Table Conference, the Muslim representatives adopted an attitude of wait and see with an eye to the Corporation elections due in March 1930.

IV

The politics of the Corporation can best be understood in the light of the confused state of Muslim sentiment in Calcutta and the mofussil. The ministerial controversy had provided the community with some sense of political unity, and for a while it looked as if the Muslims might be able to

¹ Ibid., Vol. VIII, 1.9.1928, p.699; ibid., 'Minutes', April 1928-September 1928, 28.8.1928, p.1029.

² Mussalman, 1928, 13 November, p.4.

³ Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1929-September 1929, 10.4.1929, p.2.

⁴ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 17/1929, April.

organise a single political party to represent their interests. The Muslim Councillors Association was followed by the Bengal Provincial Tanzeem Committee, and in May 1927 the Bengal Presidency Muslim League was revived under the aegis of Sir Abdur Rahim, Fazl-ul Huq and Mujibur Rahman. A committee of 66 was established with Rahim as president,¹ but by the end of 1927 the organisation was virtually defunct having been split by Rahim's support for the Musharraf Hussain ministry and the controversy which developed over the Simon Commission.²

The Simon Commission proved the rock upon which the new found Muslim unity finally foundered, for it provoked leaders of all communities in the sub-continent, particularly the Muslims, into evolving definite plans for the political future of their communities. The commission was sent to India to assess the working of the Reforms of 1919, with a view to their future extension, by means of consultations with the representatives of the various provincial governments and communal groups. The exclusion of Indians from the commission provoked almost universal resentment in India, but nevertheless many leaders did agree to cooperate with it, and it was upon this decision to cooperate or non-cooperate that the Muslim community in Calcutta was divided.

In January 1928 the provincial Muslim League, still under the nominal presidency of Sir Abdur Rahim, decided to boycott the commission, at a meeting attended by Huq, Mujibur Rahman, Abdul Karim and Akram Khan, in accordance with a similar resolution recently passed at a secret meeting between Sen-Gupta and Rahim.³ In the following month the League also supported the hartal of February 3,⁴ but its action counted for little. The majority of Muslims ignored

¹Mussalman, 1927, 28 July, p.2.

²Ibid., 13 December, p.2.

³Ibid., 1928, 18 January, p.5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 32 of 1927, November.

⁴Statesman, 1928, 2 February, p.12.

the protest and their shops and stalls throughout the city did a flourishing trade on the day as did those of the Marwaris who also ignored the hartal.¹ In general the Muslim press supported the boycott;² so did A.H. Ghuznavi³ though his elder brother, A.K. Ghuznavi,⁴ opposed it and was joined in his condemnation by the Muslim councillors who voted against the Corporation decisions in February and August to boycott the commission on the grounds that

non-cooperation had been tried before but had failed....The Mahommedans had practiced non-cooperation with English education and the result was that they were now at the lowest rung of the ladder so far as political and economic progress and advancement were concerned [and] the Mahommedan Councillors were united in the opinion that their educational requirements should be put before the Education Committee of the Statutory Commission.⁵

It was clear that despite the decision of men such as Rahim, Fazl-ul Huq and Mujibur Rahman to cooperate with Congress in the early months of 1928, on the issue of boycotting the Simon Commission, the majority of Muslims in Calcutta did not share their opinion. Indeed, even such a fervent boycotter as Mujibur Rahman admitted at the annual session of the All-India Muslim League, held in Calcutta during December 1927, that despite his support for the boycott

I look upon separate representation through separate electorates as the corner stone of Muslim politics and am forced to admit with regret that between the two great communities of India there is still 'doubt, hesitation and pain'.⁶

¹Mussalman, 1928, 4 February, p.5; *ibid.*, 1927, 31 December, p.3; Bengal Govt, Administration Report, 1927-8, pp.7-8.

²NNR, 1927, November-December, passim; *ibid.*, 1928, January-February, passim.

³Mussalman, 1927, 15 November, p.5.

⁴*Ibid.*, 1928, 9 February, p.11.

⁵Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.VIII, 1.9.1928, p.699.

⁶Indian Annual Register, 1927, July-December, pp.438-51; Mussalman, 1927, 31 December, pp.3, 5; *ibid.*, 1928, 12 January, p.5.

Mujibur Rahman's speech indeed gives a further clue to the reasons for Muslim opposition to the boycott other than those given in the Corporation.

In May 1927 Mahomed Ali Jinnah had offered Congress a fourteen point programme which embodied certain concessions to Muslims in return for their acceptance of joint electorates with a reservation of seats. The nationalist press in Calcutta approved of the programme,¹ but many Muslims had second thoughts once the Simon Commission was appointed and the possibility of further constitutional reforms became evident.

At the Calcutta Khilafat Conference in August 1927 Mahomed Ali raged against Jinnah's programme, and he warned the Muslim community 'that a large section of their fellow countrymen were day and night planning and preparing for organised action in attacking Moslems whenever the opportunity presented itself'.² Also, in the following month, the Rangila Rasul court case in the Punjab convinced many Muslims that Hindu communalism once more stalked the land.³

Throughout 1928 the reaction of Muslims in Calcutta towards the Simon Commission clarified with the majority for cooperation and the minority against. In the legislative council, during a debate on the commission, Fazl-ul Huq and Sir Abdur Rahim spoke in favour of separate electorates⁴ - a viewpoint which alienated them from Congress later in the same month when it reiterated its call for a boycott and adopted the Nehru Report, which advocated joint electorates without a reservation of seats for Muslims. Huq, indeed, did not need the prompting of the Nehru Report to reverse his stand on non-cooperation for on August 3 he joined the legislative council committee which was appointed

¹ NNR, 1927, May, passim.

² Indian Annual Register, 1927, July-December, p.330.

³ Mussalman, 1927, 19 September, p.5.

⁴ BLCD, Vol.XXX, 1.8.1928; Indian Annual Register, 1928, July-December, p.277.

to assist the Simon Commission.¹ The Nehru Report did however influence the attitude of the Muslim press in Calcutta which, with the exception of the Mussalman, turned against the boycott and denounced Congress.²

The controversy raged throughout the last months of 1928 and came to a head in December. At the Calcutta session of the All-India Khilafat Conference held in that month, the violently anti-boycott and anti-Congress speeches of Mahomed Ali precipitated a brawl between the supporters and opponents of the boycott in which up-country thugs, hired by Mahomed Ali, Sir Abdur Rahim and Huseyn Suhrawardy, thrashed the supporters of Mujibur Rahman and other boycotters with lathis and folding chairs.³ By this stage the issue had become one of Bengali-speakers versus Urdu-speakers, of the Urdu traditionalists of Calcutta fighting the Bengali Muslim nationalist sympathisers of the mofussil; with men such as Mujibur Rahman prepared to seek joint electorates, because of the numerical majority held by the Muslims in the mofussil,⁴ and Urdu-speaking leaders such as Rahim and Huseyn Suhrawardy guided by sentiment in Calcutta, which was opposed to anything but separate electorates.

Early in December 1928 Rahim and Suhrawardy had made up their differences, and at the All-Bengal Muslim Parties Conference in Calcutta had rallied to the defence of separate electorates;⁵ whilst the opposition had stated their views at the Calcutta session of the All-India Muslim League in the same month.⁶ Meanwhile in Delhi A.K. Ghuznavi had

¹Ibid., p.278.

²NNR, 1928, September, passim.

³Mussalman, 1928, 22 December, p.3.

⁴Ibid., 18 August, p.3.

⁵NNR, 1928, 28 December, Soltan; ibid., 30 December, Hanafi.

⁶Ibid., 24 December, Hanafi; ibid., 27 December, Soltan; Indian Annual Register, 1928, July-December, pp.394-401, 417-21.

joined with Mahomed Ali to reject the Nehru Report at the Muslim All-Parties Conference,¹ and shortly afterwards a final showdown occurred at the All-India Khilafat Conference in Calcutta.

Mahomed Ali arrived in Calcutta on December 20 and on the 22nd he organised a meeting of the near-moribund Calcutta Khilafat Committee at which 30 delegates were elected to represent the Muslims of Bengal on the Central Khilafat Committee in Delhi - all 30 were opposed to the Nehru Report. On the 21st, however, the Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee - to which the Calcutta committee was constitutionally subordinate - had elected 30 delegates to the central body on the basis of their support for the Nehru Report! This meeting had been a full scale battle: tough Peshwari carters and shoemakers, under the leadership of Huseyn Suhrawardy and Mahomed Ali, had invaded the headquarters of the provincial committee, beaten several members, 'threatened to smash the faces' of others, and had driven the remaining members of the committee onto a second floor verandah where they finished their meeting behind a barricade of chairs and desks whilst the invaders sacked the rest of the building. The outraged members of the provincial committee unsuccessfully appealed to the Central Khilafat Committee, which supported Mahomed Ali, and then boycotted the Khilafat Conference on December 28 when Mahomed Ali denounced the Nehru Report and consigned its 'Nationalist Muslim' supporters to hell!²

V

By the end of 1928 the Muslims of Calcutta were divided into two major political camps: the Nationalist Muslims who were prepared for some compromise with Congress, and men

¹Ibid., pp.416-17.

²Ibid., pp.402-08; Mussalman., 1928, 22 December, p.3.

such as Sir Abdur Rahim, Huseyn Suhrawardy and Fazl-ul Huq who stood firm on the question of separate electorates, and who opposed any concessions to Congress demands as embodied in the Nehru Report.

The Nationalist Muslims of Calcutta were, for the most part, Bengali-speakers from the mofussil such as Mujibur Rahman, Moulana Akram Khan, Shamsuddin Ahmed, Jallaluddin Hashemy, Wahed Hossain, Abdur Razzack and K. Nooruddin. In the years between 1924 and 1928 their relationship with Congress had experienced many set-backs, and at times some of them had openly disowned it. Nevertheless, in spirit they remained closer to the more radical politics of the nationalist cause than to the moderate politics of communalists such as Rahim and the Suhrawardies, and by late 1927 most of them had re-established formal relations with the local Congress.¹ They first emerged as a distinct group in January 1928 when a number of 'Nationalist Muslims of Bengal' met at the house of Shamsuddin Ahmed to revive the Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee and organise the Muslim boycott of the Simon Commission.² The meeting was dominated by Mujibur Rahman and Akram Khan, and set up an ad hoc Khilafat committee, affiliated to the Central Khilafat Committee, whose members were later to be involved in the uproarious December meeting with the supporters of Mahomed Ali and Huseyn Suhrawardy. They were at the same time members of the provincial Muslim League, but their attempts to force a more pro-Congress political programme upon it were frustrated by Fazl-ul Huq and Sir Abdur Rahim, with the support of the Urdu-speaking Muslims of Calcutta. So they sought to revive the Khilafat committee as a rival provincial organisation for Muslims.³

¹Ibid., 1927, 22 November, p.6: all the above mentioned 'Nationalist Muslims' plus Azad, Haji Abdur Raschid Khan and 6 others were elected to the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee for 1928.

²Ibid., 1928, 5 January, p.3.

³Ibid., 1927, 13 December, p.2.

The Nationalist Muslims were motivated by class rather than communal interests, and they believed that Congress was a more viable political vehicle for social change than any other existing organisation. They saw themselves as the champions of the peasantry, the majority of whom were Muslim, whereas their opponents in Calcutta were, with few exceptions, more responsive to communal interests as articulated by the urbanised and Urdu-speaking Muslims of Bengal - the majority of whom lived in Calcutta. The distinction is of course over-simplified as the overwhelmingly Muslim composition of the class the Nationalist Muslims championed inevitably made them susceptible to communal pressures, and there were men such as Fazl-ul Huq in the opposition who moderated their communalism in an attempt to gain the support of non-Congress Hindus. In some ways the aims of both groups were similar: both wished to destroy the economic and political domination of the Hindu landowning classes, and to achieve this the small group of Muslim landowners was to prove itself prepared to sacrifice its class interests for the sake of the community - but here the similarity ended. The Nationalist Muslims sought a far-reaching social revolution in the province, whereas their opponents within the community sought only to replace Hindu economic and political domination with Muslim economic and political domination based on the talents of the Muslim mercantile and professional classes in Calcutta and the Ashraf families of the mofussil.

In fairness to Fazl-ul Huq it must be admitted that he stood somewhere between these two extremes. Basically he was sympathetic to the nationalist cause, but disagreed with the tactics of Congress. He was convinced that the only way to improve the economic, educational and political position of the Muslims in Bengal was by erecting a barrier of constitutional safeguards such as separate electorates, and various measures of legislative reform such as rural reconstruction based on land reform. Indeed, he attempted to moderate the communalism of his own stand by seeking an alliance with leaders of the Hindu peasantry who stood

in opposition to Congress and its Hindu landlord supporters.

The problem of the Nationalist Muslims in capturing the support of their co-religionists in Calcutta was compounded not only by their pre-occupation with social change and the mofussil, but perhaps more important still by the failure of the provincial Congress to give them any substantial support. Not only was the Bengal Congress split into three major factions behind Sen-Gupta, Subhas Chandra Bose and the 'Big Five',¹ which fought one another for support, but the Hindu landowning classes were haunted by the spectre of Muslim numerical superiority in the province, and bitterly opposed any moves towards social change and land reform.

So it was that when, in October 1927, the secretary of the All-India Congress Committee, Srinivasa Iyengar, attempted to organise a unity conference in Calcutta to settle outstanding communal grievances, it was virtually scuttled by the opposition of orthodox Hindu and Marwari landlord and mercantile organisations when concessions to the Muslims concerning korboni, music before mosques, and the Suddhi and Sangathan movements were mooted.²

Admittedly the hostility raised amongst the Muslims in Calcutta by this and previous incidents waned in the later months of the year when anger against the Simon Commission temporarily united Hindu and Muslim; but such fluctuations only serve to illustrate the fluid nature of Muslim sentiment at the time. It was not firmly set against Congress or the nationalist cause, and the Nationalist Muslims were determined to prove that Muslims could function as an integral part of Congress, but upper-class Hindu intransigence

¹The two best studies of the complicated factionalism in Bengal nationalist politics at this time are Bhola Chatterji's monograph, Aspects of Bengal Politics in the Early Nineteen-Thirties (1969), (83pp.), and Girija K. Mookerjee's Europe at War, 1938-1946 (1968), pp.218-20 in which he discusses the support the factions had in Calcutta.

²AICC papers, 1926-28, File no.G-64; Mussalman, 1927, 29 October, p.5; Indian Annual Register, 1927, July-December, pp.50-58.

in Bengal was such that the formation of any constructive policy of cooperation with the Muslims proved impossible.

During 1929 both the Nationalist Muslims and their opponents sought to establish themselves on a firm footing in the province. In February the Nationalist Muslims, led by Mujibur Rahman, attempted to gain the support of Muslim students in Calcutta with the formation of the Calcutta Muslim Young Men's Association,¹ under the auspices of a provincial body they had established in the previous year.² But the organisation met with little success,³ and indeed it seems that Fazl-ul Huq's attempts to organise the students in the form of district associations was more effective in rallying their support to a particular faction.⁴ In August Nationalist Muslims from Bengal extended their activities, however, and linked up with like-minded Muslims elsewhere in India at the conference of Nationalist Muslims in Allahabad;⁵ and in October they launched their first distinct organisation aimed against social and religious conservatives in the community. This was the short-lived League Against Mullaism which was aimed at

Moulvis, Pirs, Faqirs and other so-called religious leaders whose mentality and attitude of mind are based on 'Mullaism', and who thus mislead Muslims in the name of religion and keep them away from progress and solidarity.⁶

In addition the Nationalist Muslims captured control of the presidency Muslim League in December following the resignation the previous July of its president, Sir Abdur Rahim.⁷ Mujibur Rahman was elected president and the entire

¹Mussalman, 1929, 12 February, p.7.

²Ibid., 1928, 26 July, p.2; ibid., 16 October, p.7.

³Ibid., 1929, 12 March, p.6.

⁴Ibid., 1928, 6 September, p.2.

⁵Ibid., 1929, 5 October, p.3; AICC papers, 1929, File no.G-40.

⁶Mussalman, 1929, 5 October, p.7.

⁷Ibid., 5 October, p.7.

committee was made up of his friends and supporters.¹

But the opponents of the Nationalist Muslims were not idle. Earlier in the year they had gathered at the Calcutta home of a wealthy merchant, Abdur Rahim, and, under the chairmanship of Bengal's premier Muslim aristocrat, the Nawab of Dacca, they had formed a loose parliamentary alliance styled the United Muslim Party. The majority of leading Muslims in the province, with the exception of Sir Abdur Rahim and the Nationalist Muslims, attended, and a coterie of 18 led by Fazl-ul Huq formed a subsidiary party - the Bengal Praja Party - with the object of championing the cause of the Muslim and Hindu peasantry.²

The search for unity by the opponents of the Nationalist Muslims had been made all the more urgent in 1929 by the disarray in which the provincial elections of May had found the community. Split into rival factions by the controversies over the Simon Commission and the Nehru Report the Muslims had indeed cast a decidedly anti-Swarajist vote, but as the Statesman commented: 'No Mussalman has been elected under any party ticket and so it is difficult to guess who will go to which side.'³ The provincial Muslim League had put forward several candidates but only one, Shamsuddin Ahmed,⁴ gained election despite the caution with which the Nationalist Muslims proclaimed their sympathies for Congress. As Huseyn Suhrawardy pointed out:

Not a single Mussalman has dared to appeal to the electorate on the Swarajist ticket. Many Swarajists had stood as Muslim League candidates [but] not all Muslim League candidates [were] Swarajists or anti-ministerialists.⁵

¹Ibid., 3 December, p.2.

²Ibid., 2 July, p.4; Statesman, 1929, 4 July, p.8; NNR, 1929, 19 July, Muhammadi.

³Statesman, 1929, 20 June, p.7.

⁴Ibid., p.8.

⁵Ibid., p.7.

Indeed, in the final count 30 of the 39 Muslim MLCs declared their support for the ministry formed by the two east Bengali zamindars, Khan Bahadur C.M. Farouqi and Khwaja Nazimuddin, in partnership with the Hindu moderate Kumar Shib S. Ray.¹

In Calcutta Huseyn Suhrawardy easily held the constituency of South Calcutta against the opposition of Shamsul Huq, a Corporation councillor and former Swarajist;² whilst Sir Abdur Rahim's former constituency was won by Abdur Rahim - the wealthy hide merchant at whose home the United Muslim Party was later formed. Sir Abdur Rahim had refused to contest the seat on the grounds that 'there is no possibility of the candidates who will be elected from the Muhammedan constituencies acting together as an organised political body'.³ And when Y.C. Ariff resigned from the contest on the same grounds Abdur Rahim was elected unopposed.

The remaining months of 1929, and the early months of 1930, saw the virtual eclipse of the Nationalist Muslims in Calcutta. Muslim opposition to the Nehru Report,⁴ concern over the resurgence of aggressive Hindu communalism under the aegis of the Hindu Mahasabha, which had once more raised the cry of Hinduism in danger,⁵ and opposition to the boycott of the Simon Commission,⁶ had all combined to create a climate of opinion within the Muslim community in which any move for a reconciliation with Congress was well nigh impossible. Certainly the Nationalist Muslims were as concerned as other Muslims at the growing strength

¹ Ibid., 13 June, p.13; Suhrawardy gained 542 and S. Huq gained 387.

² Ibid., 16 May, p.12.

³ Ibid.

⁴ NNR, 1929, 14 January, Asr-e-Jadid; *ibid.*, 19 March, Jamhoor et al.

⁵ Mussalman, 1929, 27 August, p.5; *ibid.*, 1930, January-February, passim; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 17/1929, March; *ibid.*, April; *ibid.*, August.

⁶ *Ibid.*, January.

of Hindu communal organisation,¹ and in September of the same year they joined with Sir Abdur Rahim, Huseyn Suhrawardy and Fazl-ul Huq to organise the Palestine Day protest against the British and Jews in the Holy Land.² But the differences between the two groups were too great to be overcome, and the politics of the Muslim community in Calcutta came to be dominated by a loose political coalition gathered around the United Muslim Party and Huq's Bengal Praja Party, rather than by overt nationalist sympathisers.

The importance of this newly-established coalition was that, despite its brittle nature, it represented the first occasion on which the Muslims of Calcutta and the mofussil had united to form a common front. It included spokesman of the Muslim mercantile, artisan and professional classes from Calcutta alongside representatives of the landowning Ashraf families from the mofussil, and leaders of the popular peasant movement such as Huq. As far as Calcutta was concerned the coalition heralded the entry of the Muslim mercantile and artisan groups into the larger political arena of provincial politics through the medium of a province-wide and communal political party. No longer were the members of the Muslim professional class in Calcutta the sole spokesmen of their community: at last they had been joined by co-religionists who provided the coalition with a broader spectrum of support in the city.

At the beginning of 1930 the Nationalist Muslims formed their own provincial political party at Dacca,³ and from that stage onwards their activities were confined mainly to building up support in the mofussil. Fazl-ul Huq too was active in the mofussil where, with the support of depressed-class Hindus, he extended the influence of the Praja Party. In addition Huq sought to obtain more support

¹ Mussalman, 1930, January-February, passim.

² Ibid., 1929, 21 September, p.5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 17/1929, September.

³ Statesman, 1930, 4 June, p.9; Mussalman, 1930, 21 March, p.2.

from his co-religionists in Calcutta, and in 1930 he re-entered active politics in the city when he gained a seat on the Corporation.

VI

1929 was also a year of widespread industrial unrest in Bengal, particularly in the area around Calcutta where the majority of industrial concerns were located. The number of industrial disputes had risen sharply in 1928, and 1929 saw the first general strike in Bengal during which nearly 3,000,000 working days were lost and some 272,000 workers, mainly from the jute mills, staged a massive protest.¹

The main causes of the strike were not related to any sharp rise in prices, such as had occurred during and after the Great War,² but were directly related to the working system in the jute mills. Immediately after the 1914-18 war the mills had restricted their production in a successful bid to maintain high world prices, and in doing so had reduced the working week for mill operatives from 60 to 54 hours.³ To compensate the workers for the lost hours they were granted a bonus payment, khoraki, equivalent to the rate for six hours, and until 1928 the system worked well.⁴

At the end of 1928, however, the demand for jute products was so great that the 60 hour week was re-introduced, a reduced hourly rate of payment replaced the khoraki which

¹Labour Commission, 1929 (Evidence), Vol.V, part 2, p.126.

²Buchanan, D.H., The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India (1934), p.355.

³Labour Commission, op.cit., pp.127-28.

⁴Ibid., p.128.

was abolished, and the bonus incentive piece rate for the highly paid and skilled weavers was discontinued.¹ The trouble was that while the demand for jute products was high, market prices had begun to fall so that the mills sought to increase production while at the same time reducing the costs of operation. The position was further complicated by the grievances of workers concerning the absence of standardised wage rates between different mills,² and the lack of contact between the European managements and the workers, who were at the mercy of the sirdars, many of whom were blatantly corrupt.³

As mentioned there was no dramatic increase in the price of basic foodstuffs during this period, but the abolition of the khoraki payment was equally disastrous. The average worker barely made ends meet with khoraki, and was usually heavily indebted if he remitted money to his village and family.⁴ The reduced wages of 1929 turned desperation into despair and precipitated a spontaneous demonstration of worker protest, which caught the bureaucracy, management and political leaders of all factions off-guard.⁵

One of the most noticeable features of the 1929 general strike was the negligible impact it had upon the life of Calcutta. As in the previous spate of strikes during the early 1920s the Hindu and Muslim leaders of the city were remarkable only for their lack of involvement, and the organisation and finance of the strike remains something of a mystery.

¹Ibid., p.129; Gadgil, D.R., The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times (1948), p.243.

²Labour Commission, 1929, p.216.

³Ibid., pp.341-2.

⁴Labour Commission, 1929 (Evidence), Vol.V, part 1, pp.31, 121.

⁵Ibid., part 2, p.131.

To a large extent the strike appears to have been spontaneous with a leadership having emerged only after the movement had begun in the mills of the Kankinara area to the north of Calcutta in July.¹ The Kankinara Labour Union under Moulvi Latafat Hossein² took a leading part in the initial strike, but once it had spread to other mills the movement came under the control of 'Mother Das Gupta' - Miss Shalini Das Gupta a U.S. educated Ph.D. - who had the support of Dr B.C. Roy, one of the 'Big Five' faction leaders in the local Congress.³ Miss Das Gupta helped revive the moribund Bengal Jute Workers' Union, which had originally been established in 1923⁴ by men who were later involved with the Communist Party of India,⁵ when she realised the potential of the strike movement in August,⁶ and soon became the accepted leader of the striking workers. In September the mill management, under pressure from the Government, hammered out a settlement with Miss Das Gupta which in effect re-established the old hourly rate of work, recognised the 60 hour week, re-instituted the khoraki payment as a 10 per cent overall wage increase, and mollified the weavers by restoring their piece rate system of payment.⁷ By early October the strike was over despite the efforts of a dissident faction in Miss Das Gupta's union to discredit her and her 'bourgeoise' supporters, and who also claimed to have been the original founders of the union.⁸

In part at least the strike was encouraged by members of the Communist Party of India,⁹ but the split with Miss

¹Ibid., p.129.

²See page 117.

³Labour Commission, 1929 (Evidence), Vol.V, part 2, pp.132-36.

⁴Ibid., p.147.

⁵Meerut Conspiracy Papers, Bengal Exhibits, passim.

⁶Labour Commission, op.cit., p.144.

⁷Ibid., p.136; Buchanan, D.H., op.cit., p.354.

⁸Labour Commission, op.cit., p.147.

⁹Meerut Conspiracy Papers, Bengal Exhibits, passim.

Das Gupta was an indication that their influence was marginal, and they certainly did not provide her with the considerable funds she had at her disposal. The source of finance is still a mystery: the Bengal Jute Workers' Union charged no membership fees,¹ and though the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee gave 10,000 rupees to an earlier jute mill strike in January,² it was generally believed that most of the finance was provided by Marwari jute speculators, who were interested in prolonging the strike to force up the price of the stocks of jute products they held.³

Whatever the answers to these various mysteries are it seems certain that direct involvement by Congress and Muslim leaders was minimal. In part this was due to the factionalism in Congress which dissipated its energies and destroyed its unity of purpose. Certainly the leaders of the three main factions - Sen-Gupta, S.C. Bose and Dr B.C. Roy - were peripherally involved: but more often as rivals than as allies.⁴ There was also considerable suspicion of the motives of Congress on the part of some union leaders;⁵ the Kankinara Labour Union in particular was antipathetic towards Congress and in February 1929 its president, Moulvi Latafat Hossein, had declared in a debate on labour conditions initiated in the legislative council by a Hindu member of the Swaraj Party that:

I am pleased to see that a member of the Swaraj Party has brought this motion. I am not sure whether the mover really feels for poor labour or he wants more newspaper publicity for his lip sympathy for the working classes. There are very few politicians of his party who have been sincerely identified with the cause of labour.⁶

¹ Buchanan, D.H., op.cit., p.433.

² Mussalman, 1929, 29 January, p.2.

³ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 17/1929, August; Labour Commission, op.cit., p.146.

⁴ Ibid., pp.136-50; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 17/1929, August.

⁵ Ibid., January.

⁶ BLCD, Vol.XXXI, 11.2.1929.

On the Muslim side trade union leaders such as Mahomed Daud were involved in the strikes of 1928-29. Their position, however, was weakened by internal disputes in the unions they controlled, the fact that these unions were directed towards seamen and not mill operatives, and the confusion in Congress which weakened any possibility of joint action.

In 1926 the Bengal Mariners' Union and its subsidiary the Indian Seamen's Union, had been involved in a leadership struggle between its president Mahomed Daud and its secretary, an ex-seaman named Aftab Ali. Daud retained control of both unions, but Ali and several other committee members seceded and formed a rival body the National Seamen's Union of India. The quarrel was patched up in 1927 when Daud became the president of a single union - the Indian Seamen's Union - with Aftab Ali as its secretary. However, the unions' troubles were not over as during 1926 it had affiliated with the Bengal Trade Union Federation - the provincial committee of the All-India Trade Union Congress - and as a result it became involved in the faction disputes of the local Congress which controlled the provincial trade union federation.¹

Eventually the seamen's union severed its links with the central and provincial trade union organisations because of excessive interference in the unions internal affairs,² but several of its committee members retained their links with Congress and were consequently dragged further into the quagmire of its internecine disputes. Both the Swarajist Muslims Mahabubul Huque and Shamsuddin Ahmed were on the committee of the Indian Seamen's Union and were involved in

¹ Govt of Bengal, Administration Report, 1926-7, p.48; Mussalman, 1926, 23 October, p.7; ibid., 11 December, p.6; ibid., 25 December, p.7; ibid., 30 December, p.6; Joshi Papers, File no.25, 1926, letters dated 8, 9, 16 February 1926 and 9 March 1926; Saksena, R.N., Seamen in India (1951), pp.10, 94.

² Govt of Bengal, Administration Report, 1927-28, p.53; Labour Commission, 1929 (Evidence), Vol.V, part 1, pp.250-51.

strikes it organised during 1928;¹ whilst the general-secretary of the union, Abdul Matin Chowdhury, was one of the members of the Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee who clashed violently with Mahomed Ali and Huseyn Suhrawardy in December 1928. Daud, Mahabubul Huque, Aftab Ali and Shamsuddin Ahmed had also become closely identified with the Bose faction in Congress during 1927-28, and had alienated many of their co-religionists by supporting the boycott of the Simon Commission.² The involvement of Nationalist Muslims in the union lost it much sympathy amongst the Muslims of Calcutta and it failed to take any prominent role in the general strike of 1929.

The general strike illustrates several important facts about Muslim attitudes in Calcutta during the period. At the beginning and end of the 1920s the industrial areas which surrounded Calcutta were the scene of massive waves of industrial unrest: yet in both instances the Muslims of the city failed to give their co-religionists involved in the strikes any marked degree of support. Certainly on both occasions the number of Muslims involved was large - at least in proportion to their total percentage of the industrial labour force - but at no time did the Muslims of the city rally to the support of the Muslim labouring class of the contiguous municipalities.

In part this can be explained by the spontaneous nature of both series of strikes, and the fact that their causes were economic rather than communal or political. In addition the transient nature of the Muslim and Hindu mill population made organisational continuity difficult. Perhaps a more important factor, however, was the attitude of the Muslim population of Calcutta towards mass movements and the participation of the lower classes in politics. The disputes within the maritime trade unions during the

¹ Mussalman, 1928, 21 January, p.7; Meerut Conspiracy Papers, Vol.V, Exhibit 67.

² Ibid., Exhibits 26, 35, 1335.

late 1920s had revealed a hard core of opposition to overt political activity, particularly in liaison with Congress, on the part of many Muslim trade unionists, and doubtless Miss Das Gupta's activities aroused similar suspicions.

Political activity within the trade union movement had come to be equated with the radical social outlook of the socialists within the Communist Party of India and Congress. Muslim leaders in Calcutta may have favoured social change, but they looked askance at any restructuring of the social order: they wished to replace the Hindu elite rather than create an egalitarian society. The strikes of 1928-29 were a form of popular protest with which they had little sympathy. They wanted no part of any supra-communal social movement; and whilst they undoubtedly wished to improve the economic position of the workers they had no interest in rousing a political animal in which class consciousness may have ranked stronger than communal loyalties.

Certainly the Bengal Praja Party was a mass-oriented political organisation, but it was essentially Muslim in membership and directed against the Hindu landowning elite in Bengal.

The same argument can be applied to the maritime trade unions, and is nowhere better illustrated than by the factional disputes of the 1920s. The disputes were essentially a conflict between the class-conscious and politically active Nationalist Muslims who wished to alter society, and their opponents who sought material uplift within the framework of the existing social order.

The Muslims of Calcutta - from the Urdu-speaking artisan class to the anglicised professional class - were generally not interested in the form of social protest represented by the strike movement. The mobs generated by the community in previous years had not comprised the indigent or illiterate, who sought a new social utopia, but rather the petty merchant, artisan and student who wished to reap the material and political benefits of the existing social organisation. They had little in common with the impoverished and illiterate millhands of the

industrial areas, and were motivated by a different set of aspirations.¹

The Nationalist Muslims may have been sympathetic, but they were enmeshed in the factional disputes within Congress, bereft of any wide basis of popular support and short of finance. In addition their interests were, for the main part, bounded by Bengal and the rural masses rather than by the transient and semi-industrialised Urdu- and Hindi- speaking labouring masses of the Calcutta region.

VII

In March 1930 the third elections to the Corporation were held, and a new phase of municipal politics was entered upon with the emergence of Fazl-ul Huq as spokesman of the Muslim community.

In all 27 Muslims stood for election including 13 previous incumbents of whom 11 gained re-election.² The new councillors were Fazl-ul Huq, who secured a seat in the up-country Muslim stronghold in wards VIII-XII; Ebrahim Golam Hussain Ariff, an elderly Gujarati merchant related to Y.C. Ariff, who defeated Mahomed Solaiman for the seat which covered wards I-VIII; Sheikh Woozir Chaudhuri, a Bengali merchant, returned with Mahomed Hashem against the opposition of Munshi Ramzan Ali Khan to the double seat in wards XXVIII-IXXX; and M.G. Rasul, a journalist and former railway

¹My use of the term 'mob' within the urban context of Calcutta has been influenced by the work of George Rude. In particular two essays in his published collection Paris and London in the 18th Century: Studies in Popular Protest (1970), namely 'The Pre-Industrial Crowd', pp.17-34, and 'The Gordon Riots: A Study of Rioters and their Victims', pp.268-92, seemed pertinent to my arguments.

²Elected : Mahomed Raffique, Dr S.Z. Hussain, S.M. Yakub, S. Huq, Abdur Razzack, M.M. Huq, M.A. Khan, N.M. Hashem, Unsud Dowla, Dr M. Hossain, M. Akbar - defeated: M. Solaiman, M.R. Ali Khan.

worker, who won the seat for Cossipore-Chitpur. Apart from the defeated incumbents the only other unsuccessful candidates of any prominence were Mahabubul Huque and Huseyn Suhrawardy.¹

The interesting feature of the elections was the return of so many previous incumbents and Fazl-ul Huq, plus the defeat of the radical communalist Huseyn Suhrawardy and the Nationalist Muslim Mahabubul Huque. The results indicated that the Muslim electorate was far from dissatisfied with the political tactics of their representatives in the previous Corporation council, and in fact supported their policy of compromise with various non-Muslim factions. The vote was one for moderate communalists such as Fazl-ul Huq: men who, unlike Suhrawardy or Mahabubul Huque, were not identified with one or other extreme of the political spectrum, but who were pragmatically prepared to compromise with non-Muslim factions to further the interests of their community.

Another interesting aspect of the elections was the change it revealed in Muslim attitudes since the 1920s. The number of Nationalist Muslims elected had been sharply reduced to be replaced by a more strongly communal Muslim bloc in the Corporation. That the emergent bloc was motivated by a spirit of moderate communalism has been discussed, and yet it represented a distinct change from the nascent and fluid communalism of the 1920s. The Muslim councillors now had a stronger sense of communal identity which set them apart as a distinct bloc within the Corporation. During the 1930s this group consciousness strengthened to the extent that it was possible to observe the tactics of a sharply defined communal bloc, as opposed to individual Muslim action, more clearly than in the 1920s.

By 1930 the kind of Muslim councillor elected had also changed. In the 1920s past and present stalwarts of the nationalist movement had been elected in large numbers, but

¹ Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol. XI, 1.3.1930, p.600.

by 1930 the bulk of Muslim representatives were drawn from different backgrounds. The majority came from the up-country Muslim mercantile class and few of them had played more than a peripheral role in the various political movements since the Great War. Their contact with Congress had been marginal, yet they represented the recently politicised Muslim petty merchants and artisans of Calcutta. The result was that communal, rather than national interests, intruded more strongly than before into the politics of the Muslim bloc in the Corporation.

The full extent of the pragmatism of the newly-elected Muslim councillors is best illustrated by the storm which developed in Calcutta early in 1930 over the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Round Table Conference. Civil Disobedience was introduced by Gandhi as a non-violent campaign to disrupt both British rule and the series of Round Table Conferences, which had been organised by the British to discuss plans for constitutional reform.

Muslims throughout India were infuriated by the disruptive tactics of Congress, and saw them as yet another sign of the refusal of Hindus to face the realities of the communal situation. They feared that Congress wished to force the British to grant Swaraj before constitutional safeguards for the minority communities had been agreed upon.

The Muslims of Calcutta were certain that it was another plot inspired by the Hindu Mahasabha;¹ A.H. Ghuznavi and Abdullah Suhrawardy issued a statement which condemned the policy of Congress², and on April 15 the Muslims of the city - from merchant to gariwalla - ignored the Civil Disobedience hartal held on that day.³ In later months the attitude of the Muslim press mellowed somewhat out of respect for the

¹ NNR, 1930, January, passim.

² Statesman, 1930, 16 January, p.12.

³ Mussalman, 1930, 17 April, p.5; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 1938, no.248.

personal sincerity of Gandhi and antipathy towards the British.¹ But the Muslim representatives in the Corporation firmly opposed Civil Disobedience, and at a meeting of Muslim ratepayers in May they denounced the campaign, Congress and the 'tyranny of the Corporation'.²

Indeed, the 'tyranny of the Corporation' rather than Civil Disobedience was the main source of the councillor's grievances - with the programme of Congress providing an extra weapon in their hands for the immediate struggle within the Corporation. At the elections for mayor, deputy mayor and aldermen on 4 April 1930 the Muslim councillors had again become entangled in the cross-fire of Congress factionalism. In return for the promise of a Muslim deputy mayor and two Muslim aldermen, the Muslim bloc had backed Sen-Gupta and lost. Sen-Gupta was elected mayor, but in the meantime the dissident Congress factions had achieved a temporary accord and one of their own number was elected deputy mayor, and the Muslim candidates for the position of aldermen, Nationalist Muslim and communalist alike, were defeated.³

Huq was furious at the result of the elections, and he accused Sen-Gupta of breaking the pact he had recently agreed upon with Azad during one of the latter's infrequent visits to the city.⁴ He claimed the Hindu councillors had not had

the generosity to recognise the spirit in which the late Mr C.R. Das used to work with the Mahommedan community both in the Corporation and other fields of political activity in the country.⁵

¹ NNR, 1930, 13 March, Soltan; ibid., 11 June, Khadem; ibid., 9 July, Jamhur.

² Statesman, 1930, 29 May, p.10; Mussalman, 1930, 27 May, p.3.

³ Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, vol.XI, 31.5.1930, pp.62-66; ibid., 'Minutes', April 1930-September 1930, 8.4.1930, pp.2-7.

⁴ Ibid., Gazette, Vol.XI, 3.5.1930, supplement n.p.

⁵ Ibid.

Later in May the Muslims suffered a further humiliation when they failed to gain more than nominal representation in the various Standing Committees, and on May 13 Huq led the Muslim councillors out of the Corporation chambers.¹

On Sunday May 25 the dissident councillors held a meeting in the Town Hall at which Fazl-ul Huq launched a general attack on Congress, Civil Disobedience and the Corporation. He declared that:

For the first time in the history of this city, Moslem ratepayers and citizens of Calcutta had felt themselves constrained to rise in protest against the tyranny of a section of their countrymen in the conduct of the affairs of the Corporation. The Mahommedans of India were a long suffering race but their patience was now exhausted.²

Four days later Huq and the other councillors issued a formal statement that:

Moslem Councillors have been generally branded as opportunists, but our opportunism has only been a necessary corollary of the Congress policy... we have always felt that it was necessary for us, in defence of Moslem interests, to ally ourselves with the party which offered us the greatest opportunity for serving our community and protecting its interests. We have always realised that it is necessary to have as much representation of Moslem [interests] as possible in all Committees and offices in the Corporation in order to make the Moslem voice impressive and effective. In making alliances with non-Muslim groups we have always kept this point of view, but we emphatically deny that in doing so we were actuated with a selfish desire merely to scramble for seats. Bitter experience has taught us that Moslem interests have seldom been safe in non-Moslem hands [and] non-Moslem indifference to Moslem interests has always compelled us to adopt this policy in pure self-defence.³

¹Ibid., 17.5.1930, p.1208.

²Ibid., Vol.XXII, 31.5.1930, p.66; Statesman, 1930, 29 May, p.10; Mussalman, 1930, 27 May, p.3.

³Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XII, 31.5.1930, p.69.

Support for the Muslim councillors was complete amongst their co-religionists in the city.¹ Even the pro-Nationalist Muslim newspaper, the Mussalman, thought that the Swaraj Party had gone too far,² and on May 17 declared that though the Muslims were a minority in the Corporation 'they have been asserting themselves in a manner calculated to make the majority realise that the [Muslims] are a factor that cannot be ignored or trifled with'.³ The Dainik Soltan was less restrained in its comments and remarked bitterly that the Hindus in the Corporation were 'trampling upon the just rights and privileges of the Moslems at every meeting'.⁴ Indeed, so strong was Muslim feeling that when a hartal was observed in the city on May 6, to protest against the arrest of Gandhi, the Muslims refused to observe it; indeed, they made a point of keeping their shops and stalls open all day and well into the evening.⁵

In June, however, in the midst of Muslim agitation against Congress and Civil Disobedience, the dispute in the Corporation was settled and the Muslim councillors returned to the council to support Sen-Gupta. The Hindu councillors had agreed to allot the Muslims greater representation on the Standing Committees, and a larger, though unspecified, share of appointments to positions in the Corporation:⁶ thus a new alliance was created.

The alliance lasted barely three months before it disintegrated as the result of a dispute concerning the election of Subhas Chandra Bose as mayor in August 1930.

¹ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 18/VI/1930.

² Mussalman, 1930, 3 May, p.4.

³ Ibid., 17 May, p.4.

⁴ NNR, 1930, 15 May, Dainik Soltan.

⁵ Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 18/VI/1930.

⁶ Statesman, 1930, 19 June, p.21; Mussalman, 1930, 14 August, p.3.

This time, however, factional in-fighting had once more set Sen-Gupta and Bose against one another, and the unsuccessful Muslim candidate for mayor gained the vote of the Sen-Gupta faction.¹ Muslim opposition to Bose had grown with his espousal of Civil Disobedience and his policy of using employees of the Corporation as agents for that programme: particularly Hindu and Muslim teachers in Corporation schools who were threatened with dismissal if they did not 'join the Congress, use Khadder or do picketting'.²

The alliance in the Corporation was, however, weakened by developments outside the realm of the Calcutta municipality; for in the Bengal Legislative Council Muslim MLCs, under the leadership of Huq's Praja Party and with the support of depressed-class Hindus, were busy launching a series of bills against the economic dominance of the landowning classes in the province. In August 1930 the Bengal Primary (Rural) Education Bill, which placed the cost for the education of the children of Muslim and Hindu peasants on the estates of landowners, was passed in the face of bitter opposition from the Hindu Swarajists.³ This heralded a series of bills which panicked the Hindu landowning classes and forced the provincial Congress into a more intransigent attitude towards the Muslim community, for, 'since the patrons of the two major Congress factions were the chief spokesmen of the local [Hindu] landed aristocracy',⁴ it had little alternative but to champion their interests.

¹ Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XII, 23.8.1930, p.626; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 18/X/1930.

² Ibid., 18/VIII/1930.

³ McDonald, G. 'Communal Groups in the Bengal Legislative Council, 1927-1935' (1969), pp.22-31 et seq.

⁴ Chatterji, Bhola, Aspects of Bengal Politics in the Early Nineteen-Thirties (1969), p.17.

Such developments inevitably meant the negation of all that the Nationalist Muslims worked for in Congress. To their credit it must be admitted that they remained loyal to Congress in the early years of the 1930s in the vain hope that they could reform it from within, and continued to fight both Hindu and Muslim communalism. Perhaps, however, it would have been better if the anger that Akram Khan had directed at the Muslims of Calcutta when he wrote in 1931 that:

The Urdu-speaking non-Bengali Moslems are sitting tight on the very breast of Calcutta [and] are going to determine the destiny of $2\frac{1}{2}$ crores of Bengali Moslems...to fulfill their own selfish designs.¹

had been turned against the Hindu landowners whose view of the world was defined solely in terms of their class interests.

VIII

For the remainder of 1930, and the following two years, the issue that divided the two major communities in Bengal was that which concerned separate electorates.

In August 1930 Fazl-ul Huq was nominated as a Bengali Muslim representative to the second Round Table Conference in London. Despite a speech prior to his departure in which he 'openly accused the Hindus of being inimical to the interests of Moslems',² once in London he proved willing to compromise on the question of joint electorates, for which he received a rare accolade of praise from the

¹ NNR, 1931, 29 May, Muhammadi.

² Indian Annual Register, 1930, July-December, p.351.

Nationalist Muslims.¹ However, this praise was withdrawn when the presidency Muslim League decided that after all it would boycott the conference² - a decision which proved embarrassing when Gandhi and the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, reached an agreement for the discontinuation of Civil Disobedience, a political amnesty and the representation of Congress at the conference.

Gandhi's decision altered the complexion of the conference, and caused further communal tension when he supported the claim of the Nationalist Muslims for representation in London. The provincial Muslim League sought representation,³ but, in view of its demand for joint electorates without reservation,⁴ it was opposed by other Muslim organisations in the province: Huseyn Suhrawardy, as president of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee, protested against the representation of the Nationalist Muslims;⁵ whilst in May 1931, at the All Bengal Muslim Conference in Calcutta, Shaukat Ali, Fazl-ul Huq and Abdullah Suhrawardy, after 'a great reception from the Muhammedan community', came out with a firm demand for separate electorates.⁶

The question of separate electorates was of especial concern for the Muslims of Calcutta for, under the terms of the constitution adopted by the Corporation in 1924, the system of separate Muslim municipal representation was to expire at the end of 1932. In August 1930 Abul Kasem failed in an attempt to introduce a bill for the continuation of separate electorates in the legislative council,⁷ and a

¹Mussalman, 1930, 13 December, p.5; *ibid.*, 16 December, p.4.

²*Ibid.*, 1931, 1 January, p.5.

³Govt of India, Reforms Dept, 1931, KW to 35/31-R (XIV).

⁴Mussalman, 1931, 31 March, p.2; *ibid.*, 16 April, p.6.

⁵Govt of India, Reforms Dept, 1931, KW to 35/31-R (XIV).

⁶*Ibid.*, Home Poll, February 1931, 18/II; Indian Annual Register, 1931, January-June, pp.309-11; NNR, 1931, 29 May, Muhammadi.

⁷BLCD, Vol.XXXV, 15.8.1930.

similar move in February 1931 likewise failed.¹ By 1932 therefore it had dawned on the Muslims of Calcutta that they were bound to the compromise solution they had accepted in 1923. However, they were not prepared to give in easily, and sought to gain the advantage by agreeing to accept joint electorates with a reservation of an increased number of seats.

The failure of the second Round Table Conference, the withdrawal of the representatives of Congress, and the renewal of Civil Disobedience did little to ease communal tension. The attitude of Hindus and Muslims had hardened over the question of separate electorates. In Calcutta whilst the leaders of the Hindu bhadrolok busily agitated against Muslim demands in an increasing number of public demonstrations,² the Muslim community solidly supported the demand of men such as the Suhrawardies, the Ghuznavies, Fazl-ul Huq, Mahomed Daud and Latafat Hossein for nothing less than separate representation for the community.³

Further communal conflict in the Corporation complicated the situation. In April 1931 the Muslims had managed to get Abdur Razzack, albeit a Nationalist Muslim, elected deputy mayor, but later in the month the Hindu councillors made it patently clear that the entire Hindu bloc would oppose the continuation of separate Muslim representation after 1932.⁴ In August recriminations reached a new peak over the appointment of a deputy executive officer; the Muslim candidate, and acting deputy executive officer,

¹Ibid., Vol.XXXVI, 16.2.1931.

²Statesman, 1932, 4 August, p.12.

³Mussalman, 1932, 10 July, p.4.

⁴Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XIII, 18.4.1931, p.1055; ibid., 25.4.1931, pp.1089-90; ibid., 'Minutes', April 1931-September 1931, 22.4.1931, pp.48-52.

Abdur Raschid Khan, was replaced by a nominee of Congress though the decision was rescinded in October and Raschid Khan was gazetted as the permanent officer.¹ This minor victory was, however, obscured in the following April when Fazl-ul Huq was defeated in the mayoral contest.

Huq was soundly defeated in the contest by the candidate put forward by a united Congress front, Dr B.C. Roy, and suffered the further humiliation of seeing a former supporter turned Nationalist Muslim - S.M. Yaqub - elected deputy mayor, despite the opposition of the majority of Muslim councillors.² The weakness of the Muslim position was again clearly illustrated and Huq lashed out savagely at both the European and Hindu councillors, whom he believed had joined forces to defeat him despite a pact he claimed had been arranged between the Muslims and Congress regarding the elections.³ In part opposition to Huq may have been aroused by a certain amount of covert activity on his part aimed at the Nationalist Muslims; for shortly before the mayoral elections he had allied himself with communalist leaders from elsewhere in India in an abortive attempt to capture the presidency Muslim League from Mujibur Rahman and his supporters.⁴

In August 1932 the Muslims and Hindus of Bengal received the bombshell of news of the Communal Award. Child of the Simon Commission and Round Table Conferences the Award allocated the Muslims of Bengal 48.4 per cent of the seats in the proposed Bengal Legislative Assembly and reduced Hindu representation to 39.2 per cent of the seats - with nearly half of these set aside for depressed-class

¹Ibid., 24.8.1931, pp.781-99; ibid., October 1931-March 1932, 7.10.1931, pp.1102.

²Ibid., April 1932-September 1932, 11.4.1932, p.7.

³Statesman, 1932, 21 April, p.6; Govt of India, Home Poll (Dep.), 18/II/1932, February.

⁴Mussalman, 1932, 5 March, pp.4, 6.

Hindus. The Bengali Hindu upper classes were horrified by the proposal and furious at their reduction to a statutory minority. The Hindu press, without exception, totally rejected the Award with the Sakti stating bitterly that: 'The Indian Nation is in truth Hindu - the advent of the Moslems in India is a misfortune and of the English an accident'.¹

The Muslims on the other hand were jubilant. Protests were raised that they should have been awarded a majority of seats,² but these were merely a matter of form and the Award was readily accepted.³ The Nationalist Muslims added their denunciations to those of Congress but their reasons were certainly not the same. They had based their support for joint electorates on the fact that the Muslims were a numerical majority in the province and would benefit at some time in the future when the principle of one man, one vote was adopted: so it was that the Mussalman greeted the Award with the headlines 'Muslims Go To The Wall: Statutory Minority For Muslims in Bengal'.⁴

In Calcutta the immediate effect of the Award was to spur the Muslims to a renewed outburst of activity in support of communal demands. As the British noted:

Muhammedan opinion may be described shortly as satisfied...there are indications that the Muhammedan leaders are to make every endeavour to secure seats in constituencies which have hitherto [been] regarded as more or less closed to them, e.g. landlord and commerce seats. Attempts are being made, it is said, to found a Muslim Chamber of Commerce.⁵

¹ NNR, 1932, August, passim; ibid., 27 August, Sakti.

² Star of India, 1932, 17 August, p.1; ibid., 29 August, p.8; ibid., 19 August, p.8.

³ Ibid., 23 August, p.8; Govt of India, Home Poll, 41-4/32 and KW of 1932.

⁴ Mussalman, 1932, 17 August, p.5.

⁵ Govt of India, Home Poll, 41-4/32 and KW of 1932.

What they might also have added was that the Communal Award had encouraged the Muslims of the city to renew the cry for separate electorates in the Corporation. In August Abul Kasem raised the issue again the legislative council, but when he met with no success Huseyn Suhrawardy and Fazl-ul Huq organised a 'monster protest meeting' in the city on November 27.¹ The Muslim leaders in fact had little room for manoeuvre on the issue being bound by the compromise accepted in 1923, so that when the Government offered them joint electorates with 19 reserved seats - 44 per cent of those allocated for open contest, or 30 per cent of the total number of seats, when the Muslims compromised barely 26 per cent of the city's population³ and 16 per cent of the registered municipal electorate⁴ - they accepted. However, Fazl-ul Huq continued to grumble that they should have been offered 20 seats!⁵ Huq's grievance was certainly churlish as the compromise had been worked out at a meeting between representatives of the Government and the Praja Party from which he had been absent.⁶

¹BLCD, Vol.XL, 22.11.1932; Indian Annual Register, 1932, July-December, p.161; Star of India, 1932, 28 November, p.1.

²The total number of seats was 48 for the non-Muslims plus 21 reserved for the Muslims. Of this, however, 2 non-Muslim and 2 Muslim seats were for Garden Reach which was once more separated from the Calcutta Corporation in 1933. Thus excluding Garden Reach the number of elected non-Muslim seats was 46, and elected Muslim seats was 19.

³Census, 1931, Vol.VI, part I and II, p.105.

⁴Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1930-September 1930, 30.7.1930, pp.883-5.

⁵BLCD, Vol.XL, 16.12.32; Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol. XIII, 10.12.1932, p.150(b):

non-Muslim seats	: 46
Muslim seats (reserved)	: 19
Aldermen	: 5
Bengal Chamber of Commerce	: 6
Port Commission	: 2
Calcutta Trades Association	: 4
Nominated	: 10

⁶BLCD, Vol. XL, 16.12.1932.

But the Corporation was not the sole focus of renewed Muslim agitation in Calcutta. The question of separate electorates had also influenced Muslim trade unionists, at least those such as Mahomed Daud who led a union comprised solely of Muslims, into giving increased support to the principle of separate representation in the hope that they might gain a share of the seats allotted to labour interests.¹

In 1931 Huseyn Suhrawardy had attempted to wrest control of the Indian Seamen's Union from Daud but had failed.² However, the reaction of Congress to the Round Table Conferences had served to alienate Daud, especially after the abortive session of the All-India Trade Union Congress at Calcutta in 1931 when Subhas Chandra Bose had sought to force his particular brand of socialism upon the recently reconciled seamen's union.³ By the end of 1932 therefore Daud was moving towards collaboration with the Muslim communal leaders who were prepared to fight the battle for the representation of his union in the proposed Bengal Legislative Assembly. However, a more important issue at this stage was the question of the representation of Muslim commercial interests, the major portion of which were centred upon Calcutta.

In June 1932 the Government had indicated to Muslim commercial interests in Calcutta that it would consider giving them a seat in the proposed provincial legislative assembly,⁴ and in August the Muslim Chamber of Commerce was formed in the city.⁵ The membership comprised the most important Muslim merchants, manufacturers and bankers in Calcutta along with 'persons engaged in or connected with

¹See page 227 and chapter 6.

²Govt of India, Reforms Dept, 1931, KW to 35/31-R (XIV).

³Ibid., Home Poll, 18/VI/1931; ibid., 18/X/1931.

⁴Govt of India, Reforms Dept, 221/32-R of 1932.

⁵Bengal Govt, Appointments Dept, May 1934, File No. 1R-38, Progs 31-50.

art, science and literature', and soon accounted for some 90 members with a capital investment in Bengal of some 200 million rupees.¹ The new organisation claimed that its members controlled 75 per cent of Bengal's coastal trade, and had the 'major interest' in the salt, raw jute, rice, hide and skin trades in addition to the tanning and shellac industries.² It argued therefore that it was 'evident that for the Muslim commercial community in Bengal the question of representation in the [Legislative Assembly] is the question of life and death to their economic existence'.³

An exaggerated argument perhaps, but Muslim mercantile interests were served poorly by the three great chambers of commerce which regulated the city's trade and commerce. The Marwari Chamber of Commerce established in 1900 was exclusively Marwari;⁴ the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce established in 1887 rarely had an elected Muslim on its committee,⁵ although it held seats in various important bodies such as the Imperial Legislative Assembly, Bengal Legislative Council and the Calcutta Port Trust; whilst the Indian Chamber of Commerce, which had been founded in 1926, had barely a 10 per cent Muslim membership and was closely tied by political sympathies to Congress.⁶

¹Ibid., *ibid.*, May 1934, File no.1R-43 of 1933, Progs A3-5; *ibid.*, Commerce Dept, February 1933, File no.3C-2, Progs B155-61.

²Muslim Chamber of Commerce, Report, 1934, p.1; Bengal Govt, Appointments Dept, May 1934, File no.1R-38, Progs 31-50.

³Ibid.

⁴Cotton, C.W.E., Handbook of Commercial Information for India (1924), p.36.

⁵Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, Report, 1932, p.xxii; Mussalman, 1927, 16 April, p.7.

⁶Indian Chamber of Commerce, Report, 1926, p.1; *ibid.*, 1928, p.89; *ibid.*, 1930, pp.68-70; *ibid.*, 1932, pp.47, 61.

There is no evidence available to indicate the involvement of Muslim politicians in the foundation of the Muslim Chamber of Commerce, and it was dominated in the first instance by the wealthy Cutchi Memon community which had never been noted for its overt political activities.¹ In its first formal committee elected in 1933, however, one of its vice-presidents was Ahmed Ispahani whose kinsman, M.A.H. Ispahani, was soon to take a prominent role in local politics. Also amongst its committee members were A.R. Siddiqui, a merchant and barrister; Mahomed Raffique, MLA; A.F. Rahman, MLC, and K. Nooruddin, a former Alderman and Nationalist Muslim, and brother-in-law of Khwaja Nazimuddin. The latter three had been active in municipal politics at various times and in addition all four had contacts with leading provincial politicians such as Fazl-ul Huq, Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Suhrawardies and Sir Abdur Rahim.

The new committee represented the first public liaison of the Muslim professional class of Calcutta with the wealthiest section of the Muslim mercantile class in Bengal. Undoubtedly Muslim industrialists and merchants had provided finance and support for Muslim politicians on previous occasions, but this was the first time they had emerged to organise themselves on a definite communal basis. Their desire for a more prominent role in the economic fortunes of Bengal, and for political representation in its government, had precipitated them into direct action, and they found ready support from the Muslim professional class of Calcutta. The concentration of wealth represented by the membership of the Muslim Chamber of Commerce was doubtlessly attractive to the Muslim political leadership, as was also the network of contacts which existed between the Muslim mercantile community of Calcutta and other important commercial centres such as Bombay, Karachi, Madras and Rangoon.

¹Bengal Govt, Commerce Dept, February 1933, File no.3C-2, Progs B155-61.

By the end of 1932 the Muslims of Calcutta were stirring with renewed energy and vigour. In contrast to the 1920s Muslim political activity in the city had taken definite form around a variety of communal organisations, and large sections of the community were now actively involved in the political arena. Muslims of various economic backgrounds were caught up in the awakening of a separate communal consciousness at the political level. Through the medium of the Corporation, the maritime trade unions and the Muslim Chamber of Commerce a new unity of purpose was emerging within the community in which a wide variety of grievances and aspirations were for the first time blended into a more comprehensive sense of communal identity.

The Communal Award had raised the morale of the community, and offered the Muslim professional and mercantile classes of Calcutta a chance of greater political power in Bengal - a chance they were determined not to lose despite the storm of Hindu opposition which had been unleashed by the Award.

CHAPTER SIX

UNITY AND SEPARATISM, 1932 TO 1935

In March 1933, amidst the furore created by the Communal Award, the first municipal elections under the system of joint Hindu and Muslim electorates were held in Calcutta.

During the previous year communal sentiment in Bengal had suffered a further polarisation under the impact of the Communal Award. The Hindus were outraged by the proposed reduction of their community to a statutory minority, and the Muslims were grudgingly pleased by the increased representation granted to their community. At the same time, however, the Muslims were aggrieved that they had not been awarded an outright majority of seats in the proposed legislative assembly. In Calcutta the arguments for and against the Award raged as bitterly as in the mofussil, yet an important counter development in the city temporarily clouded the growing gulf of differences between the two largest communities in the city.

Under the terms of the municipal act of 1923 the Muslims of Calcutta had gained representation through separate electorates for a period of 9 years. From 1933 it was agreed that the Hindus and Muslims should share a common electoral role and joint electorates, though this was modified in 1932 to allow a degree of separate representation for the Muslims by means of a reservation of a set number of seats.

Such an arrangement confused the electoral activities of the Muslim leaders in the city for the Hindu vote had now to be considered. Admittedly the municipal and provincial organisations of Congress were divided by factional disputes which helped render their influence increasingly ineffective, but even in its debilitated state Congress possessed more effective means of mass organisation than any Muslim political body. Indeed, Congress was a factor to be considered by all Muslims who aspired to the post of Corporation councillor.

On the Hindu side also the Muslim vote could not be discounted; not necessarily because of any altruistic motives, but rather out of the practicalities engendered

by the power struggle within the provincial Congress. The two main factions in Congress were gathered about Sen-Gupta and Dr B.C. Roy, and both haphazardly sought the support of sympathetic Muslim candidates in the municipal elections. Their objective was to increase the voting strength of their particular blocs in anticipation of the vital vote for mayor, which followed the general municipal elections.

II

Prior to the elections the Muslim leaders of Calcutta, and indeed of the province, participated in a round of complicated manoeuvres calculated to rouse electoral support. In November 1932 'a group of young, energetic, patriotic and progressive men' met in Calcutta, under the leadership of Khwaja Nooruddin, Mujibur Rahman and M.A.H. Ispahani, and formed the New Muslim Majlis.¹ The immediate aims of this organisation were to sponsor a bloc of Muslim candidates for the election, to secure 'the just rights of Muslims in the Calcutta Corporation', and to join hands 'with progressive and nationalist bodies' to gain freedom for India.²

Until recently Nooruddin, brother-in-law of the east Bengali zamindar and politician Khwaja Nazimuddin, had been a supporter of the Nationalist Muslims. The unwillingness of Congress to face the communal problem and the furore which greeted the Communal Award, however, had alienated him from any close contact with the main body of the nationalist movement. In addition his experiences in the Corporation during the last few years had doubtless convinced him of the necessity of forming a distinct communal group to

¹Star of India, 1934, 6 October, p.9; Ispahani, M.A.H., Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah As I Knew Him (1966), p.4.

²Ibid.

represent the Muslims in the municipality. Along with a similarly disillusioned Nationalist Muslim, Mujibur Rahman, who edited the Mussalman, Nooruddin sought to offer the Muslims an alternative to the political stand of Congress on the one hand and the growing isolationism of the extreme communalists on the other.¹ Unlike Nooruddin and Rahman, however, Ispahani had not previously been involved in politics. He was the younger son of a wealthy merchant family of Persian origin which had settled in Calcutta at the turn of the century, having made a fortune in the indigo trade of southern India. After several years at Cambridge during the 1920s Ispahani had subsequently managed the London office of the family business before he returned to Calcutta in 1931.²

Ispahani appears to have been initially attracted to the New Muslim Majlis because of its forward looking policy: it identified strongly with the proclaimed political goals of Congress, particularly Swaraj, yet it also clearly enunciated communal demands. The voice of the Nationalist Muslims had been rendered ineffective within Congress by the indifference of its Hindu leaders; whilst the anti-Congress and more communalist Muslim leaders had largely abandoned their anti-British and anti-bureaucratic stand in exchange for a negative policy of anti-Hinduism. The Majlis was established to provide the Muslims with their own distinctive platform as part of the nationalist struggle, and was largely the response of the younger members of the Muslim mercantile elite of Calcutta against the intransigence of Congress and the overweening influence of the Ashraf leaders from the mofussil.

Other Muslim organisations and groups, however, soon emerged in Calcutta to rival the New Muslim Majlis. Early in February 1933 Huseyn Suhrawardy along with Abul Kasem;

¹Ibid., p.5.

²For further details of the family see p. 123.

Mahomed Raffique, a Corporation councillor; Mohsin Khan, secretary of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee; Khwaja Abdul Gani, a wealthy merchant of Park Circus and a supporter of the trade unionist Mahomed Daud; and Mujibur Rahman, formed the Calcutta Muslim Association as an alternative to the Majlis.¹

Unlike the latter body the new association was not noticeably nationalistic in outlook: rather it made an issue of defending the Communal Award and separate electorates whilst denouncing both the British and the Hindus.² Indeed, it was on the issue of separate electorates that Mujibur Rahman defected from the Majlis. Initially it was prepared to accept joint electorates in Calcutta as a fait accompli, and was willing to enter into negotiations with Congress over the Communal Award.³

One side effect of Rahman's defection was the closure of the Mussalman, which had latterly been financed by members of the New Muslim Majlis.⁴ Early in 1933 it was replaced by the English-language daily, Star of India, which was lavishly financed by A.H. Ghuznavi and several anonymous and wealthy merchants from Calcutta.⁵ The new journal supported Suhrawardy's association,⁶ and achieved rapid popularity at the expense of the Mussalman, which languished for want of finance and Rahman's editorial skills.

In addition to the two new groupings of Muslim leaders at least three others emerged to put forward candidates. The largest of these centred upon a number of Nationalist

¹Star of India, 1933, 6 February, p.5; *ibid.*, 20 February, p.5.

²*Ibid.*

³Ispahani, M.A.H., *op.cit.*

⁴Mussalman, 1932, 11 November, p.2.

⁵Indian Annual Register, 1933, July-December, p.211.

⁶Star of India, 1933, 28 March, p.5.

Muslims, amongst whom were Shamsuddin Ahmed, Abdur Razzack, Mahomed Hashem, S.M. Yaqub, Jallaluddin Hashemy, Mahomed Ali Khan and M.M. Huq, all of whom had been Corporation councillors and protagonists of the nationalist cause during the 1920s. The second group comprised men such as M.M. Momin, a wealthy Bengali businessman and an ex-municipal commissioner of Chittagong, and A.K. Fazl-ul Huq, both of whom were distinguished from previously mentioned groups by the nature of the support they received from the Hindu community.

In their bid for electoral success the candidates of the New Muslim Majlis - Nooruddin, Ispahani, A.K.M. Zakariah, a prosperous merchant with extensive business interests in S.E. Asia, Dr R. Ahmed, a physician and former Nationalist Muslim journalist, and Abdul Baset, a Bengali-speaking merchant from Beniapukur in ward XIX - had secured the support of the Roy faction in Congress.¹ The Nationalist Muslims on the other hand remained loyal to the Sen-Gupta faction which also supported Huq and Momin against candidates of the New Muslim Majlis and Ashraf leaders from the mofussil.²

Further loose groups of candidates also vied for seats: for example Fazlur Rahman, a former Corporation councillor and trade union organiser, and Syed Ahmed Ali, a relative of the east Bengali politician Nawab Farouki, both of whom received the support of Khwaja Nazimuddin and the British Municipal Electors' Committee which had been recently formed by the European electoral body.³ In addition there were a large number of independent candidates who ranged in prominence from the former Swarajist Mahabubul Huque to the obscure Arabic teacher Mahomed Tahir.

¹Ibid., 3 August, p.4.

²Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XVII, 4 March 1933, supplement.

³Star of India, 1933, 28 March, p.4.

Broadly speaking the Muslim candidates were divided into three categories: independents; those alligned with various factions in Congress; and lastly those who stood as the representatives of purely communal organisations and coteries led by men such as Huseyn Suhrawardy and the Ashraf politicians from the mofussil. The alliance of a large number of Muslim candidates with Congress was not symptomatic of a revived communal rapprochement, but was rather indicative of the pragmatism of men such as Huq and Ispahani who realised that for the present Congress held the key to success in the municipal elections. In addition personal alignments were also guided by the rivalries which existed between men such as Huq and Suhrawardy - and even between the ex-Nationalist Muslims- so that on the eve of the elections former critics of Congress such as Huq were championed by factions of that party along with former Nationalist Muslims such as Nooruddin. On the other hand some of its Muslim supporters of longest standing, for example, Mujibur Rahman and Mahabubul Huque, had aligned themselves with the more intransigent opponents of Congress.

The divisions amongst the Muslim candidates were in fact more a reflection of the factions which existed within the community independently of Congress, rather than of any deep-seated differences in political outlook: for above everything else all the candidates stood for the defence and extension of Muslim interests.

In the municipal elections, which were held in March 1933, the largest number of reserved Muslim seats went to candidates supported by the Sen-Gupta faction. They gained seven seats in the first count and eight in the second when the election of Abdul Baset to ward XIX was set aside in favour of Fazl-ul Huq.¹ Seven of the eight elected, with the

¹ Ibid., 3 August, p.4; Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol. XVII, 4 March 1933, supplement; ibid., 22 April 1933, p.976; ibid., Vol. XVIII, 22 July 1933, p.404; ibid., 3 August, 1933, p.517. Those elected: Shamsuddin Ahmed, S.M. Yaqub, M.A. Momin, M.M. Huq, Mahomed Ali Khan, Abdur Razzack, S.M. Hashem.

exclusion of Momin who defeated Syed Ahmed Ali one of Khwaja Nazimuddin's proteges, were former Corporation councillors, and only one candidate sponsored by the Sen-Gupta faction - Syed Jalaluddin Hashemy, MLC - was defeated. The second largest group of successful candidates was that which comprised the six independents amongst whom was the doyen of the Muslim community of Garden Reach, Unsud Dowla, and a retired army officer from Park Circus, Captain Dabiruddin Ahmed. Ahmed had been a nominated member of the Corporation since 1928, and in the elections defeated Fazlur Rahman another protege of Khwaja Nazimuddin. The remaining independent candidates were all obscure figures about whom little is known or remembered,¹ nevertheless, they defeated rival candidates of local prominence such as Mahabubul Huque and the former councillors Mahomed Solaiman and Dr Mahomed Hossain.

Of the remaining seats four went to candidates sponsored by Suhrawardy's Calcutta Muslim Association,² whilst three went to candidates of the New Muslim Majlis, namely M.A.H. Ispahani, A.K.M. Zakariah and Dr R. Ahmed.

K. Nooruddin, leader of the Majlis, had stood for election but was defeated in ward XIV by Shamsul Huque, a member of the Calcutta Muslim Association. However, after the elections Nooruddin was elected Alderman with the support of Dr B.C. Roy's faction which had won the majority of open seats in the Corporation.³

Superficially the election results would seem to have been a rebuff for the communalist cause amongst the Muslims, yet was this so? The Calcutta Muslim Association fielded four candidates and secured four seats, whereas the avowedly pro-nationalist New Muslim Majlis, which put forward a

¹ Hafez Aminuddin, Basar Ali, Mahomed Muslim, Dr S. Hossain.

² The former councillors Mahomed Raffique, Mahomed Akbar, Shamsul Huque and S.Z. Ahmed.

³ Star of India, 1933, 28 April, p.4; Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XVII, 29 April, 1933, p.1007.

similar number of candidates, gained three seats and lost one to the Calcutta Muslim Association. In addition amongst the successful candidates supported by a Congress faction were included men such as Fazl-ul Huq and Momin both of whom were champions of communal rights and critics of Congress, though admittedly not of the nationalist goal of independence. Of more immediate importance, however, was the failure of candidates put forward by Ashraf leaders from the mofussil such as Nawab Farouqui and Khwaja Nazimuddin to gain election, and the return of so many former councillors. Eleven of the newly-elected councillors had sat in the previous council where, Nationalist and communalist alike, they had united to form the first distinct Muslim bloc in the history of the Corporation.

The return of so many former councillors would seem to indicate a vote of approval for the development of a communal sense of identity within the Corporation, along with the rejection of interference in the affairs of the urbanised Muslim community by their co-religionists in the mofussil. The vote was a victory for the Muslim mercantile class of Calcutta who amply illustrated their independence of the mofussil, disdain for the allies of the bureaucracy and wariness of Congress by returning a majority of members from their own class along with men such as Fazl-ul Huq, Momin, Suhrawardy and Ispahani, who were critics of the bureaucracy and Congress, and champions of the communal cause, albeit in differing degrees.

The tenuous nature of the various Muslim electoral alliances was made clear immediately after the elections when the struggle for position of mayor occurred in April. The majority of Muslim councillors appear to have sunk their differences and decided to use their increased voting strength in the Corporation to elect a Muslim mayor, with the support of the European bloc and the non-Swarajist Hindus.¹

¹Star of India, 1933, 10 April, p.5; *ibid.*, 12 April, p.1; *ibid.*, 29 April, p.1.

Momin emerged as the favourite, and the Muslims were confident of success particularly as the rival Congress factions appeared unable to agree on a joint candidate.¹

At the last moment, however, Congress united to sponsor S.K. Basu as mayor, and, with the vote of four Nationalist Muslims² and a dissident member of the Majlis,³ he was elected. In addition at the subsequent election for the position of deputy-mayor another candidate of Congress - Abdur Razzack - was elected in place of Mahomed Raffique who had received the majority of Muslim votes.⁴

These elections provoked a bitter outcry in the Muslim press led by the Star of India,⁵ and in the succeeding months of 1933 the Muslim bloc in the Corporation began to exhibit a new cohesion and unity in a determined effort to use the full force of its increased representation. In June Momin resigned from the Finance Standing Committee in protest against the paucity of Muslim representation in all the standing committees, and later in the month he was followed by three Nationalist Muslims - S.M. Yaqub, Shamsuddin Ahmed and Mahomed Ali Khan - who resigned from the Services Standing Committee after they had failed to persuade the Hindu councillors to agree to fix a percentage rate of Muslim recruitment and employment by the Corporation.⁶

The action of the Nationalist Muslims was particularly noteworthy as until April they had been strongly attached to the Sen-Gupta faction in Congress, but throughout 1933

¹Ibid., 20 April, p.5.

²Mahomed Ali Khan, Abdur Razzack, Shamsuddin Ahmed and S.M. Yaqub.

³Abdul Baset.

⁴Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1933-September 1933, 29.4.1933, pp.1-8.

⁵Star of India, 1933, 13 May, p.5.

⁶Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1933-September 1933, 7.6.1933, pp.285-99; ibid., 7.8.1933, p.813.

disillusionment with the organisation permeated their ranks. There was a noticeable tendency for them to identify more closely with exponents of the communal cause such as the leaders of the Majlis and men such as Fazl-ul Huq, whilst at the same time they continued to proclaim their nationalist sympathies. The relentless attacks of Hindu leaders upon the Communal Award, which newspapers such as Sen-Gupta's Advance denounced as 'the result of a well laid conspiracy [and] intended for the purpose of thwarting India's freedom movement', and the constant dismissal of communal differences as 'not the essential problem',¹ made the position of the Nationalist Muslims untenable.

In addition the persistent refusal of the Hindu bloc in the Corporation to discuss the grievances of the Muslims regarding employment roused widespread Muslim resentment in the city. Popular protest meetings were organised by Haji Mahomed Akbar, councillor and 'Fruit King of Calcutta', and were an obvious indication to the Nationalist Muslims of the strength of feeling amongst their co-religionists in the city.² Further signs of the direction which Muslim sentiment in Calcutta was taking were not wanting: the membership of the New Muslim Majlis swelled to several thousand during the year, and was drawn mainly from the educated Muslim youth of the city especially after the Majlis opened an employment bureau for them in May 1933,³ whilst later in the year Huseyn Suhrawardy, Abul Kasem and A.K. Ghuznavi attracted crowds of more than 10,000 when they held rallies in support of the Communal Award.⁴

The exasperation of the Muslims with the Hindus, inside and outside the Corporation, mounted and was typified by a letter which Fazl-ul Huq wrote to the Statesman in October

¹ NNR, 1934, 19 January, Advance.

² Star of India, 1933, 20 May, p.4; *ibid.*, 22 May, p.4.

³ *Ibid.*, 25 May, p.3: no exact membership figures are given.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 November, p.5; Statesman, 1933, 5 October, p.9.

when he stated that:

I am prepared to be hanged if I cannot demonstrate to the satisfaction of any judge that the Hindus of Bengal constitute the very personification of communalism based on intense selfishness.¹

The New Muslim Majlis took a leading role in the agitation concerning the employment of Muslims by the Corporation. In May 1933 they had organised an employment bureau for younger educated Muslims, to counter the claim of Hindu spokesmen that the limited number of Muslim employees in the service of the municipality was due to the absence of literate and qualified Muslim applicants. Also in succeeding months the Majlis carried on a propaganda through the columns of the Star of India,² and organised a series of rallies to air Muslim demands.³

Muslims of all factions joined hands to support the Majlis, and, on November 19 at the Town Hall, the leaders of the organisation, along with Momin, Abdul Karim, Abul Kasem,⁴ G.H.C. Ariff, Mahomed Raffique, Shamsuddin Ahmed, Mahomed Akbar and Huseyn Suhrawardy, issued a joint statement which condemned the attitude of the Corporation towards the Muslim community.⁵ Early in December 19 Muslim councillors, who had all attended the Town Hall meeting, called upon the mayor and formally requested that a special meeting of the Corporation should be held to consider the question of Muslim employment.⁶

The dispute dragged on into 1934. The Muslim councillors, under the leadership of Momin, demanded a 50 per cent reservation of recruitment for their community until Muslims filled one third of the positions offered by the Corporation,⁷

¹Ibid., 12 October, p.6.

²E.g. Star of India, 1933, 22 September, p.1.

³Ibid., 16 November, p.10.

⁴In 1933 he was nominated by the Government to the Corporation.

⁵Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XIX, 2.12.1933, p.117.

⁶Ibid., 'Minutes', October 1933-March 1934, 22.12.1933, p.1600.

⁷Ibid., 9.12.1933, pp.1970-80.

whilst the Hindus countered this argument with the bald declaration that the 'Muslims of Calcutta were mainly Urdu-speakers with no right to be considered'.¹ However, in February 1934, the Muslims finally managed to force a vote on the proposal, and though they voted as a bloc, with the exception of Zakariah who abstained, they were defeated on the grounds that the proposal 'would be ill-advised and injudicious on broad general grounds of policy and would also be hardly practicable'.²

The role of the Corporation in the political life of the Muslims of Calcutta had radically altered by the early 1930s. In the years immediately following the Great War it had been the forum of elitist politics with the mass of politically active Muslims in the city more interested in the nationalist agitation than in the municipal debates. By the 1930s, however, nationalist politics were an integral part of the discussions within the Corporation where the representatives of the various communities were no longer the spokesmen for elitist communal sub-groups, but rather were men with a far broader basis of support in the city.

IV

One of the most distinctive features of Muslim political life in Calcutta during 1933 was the strengthening and solidarity of the distinct Muslim bloc in the Corporation. At the time of the elections the community had appeared hopelessly divided once more, but under the impact of disputes concerning the Communal Award and the failure to gain concessions from the Corporation a growing sense of unity began to permeate the ranks of Muslim leadership.

¹Ibid., 9.1.1934, p.2082.

²Ibid., 1.2.1934, p.2248.

The New Muslim Majlis provided the nucleus around which this occurred. Originally led by men with declared nationalist sympathies, the Majlis had vainly sought to work with Congress, but it soon fell victim to the factional disputes within that organisation which so often made its sponsorship of the Muslim cause inconsistent and erratic. The Nationalist Muslims found themselves in a similar position, as did mavericks such as Huq and Momin, with the end result that the rivalries and political differences which separated such groups palled in significance when compared with the increasing gulf between the interests of the Muslims and Congress.

In retrospect it is tempting to read into this situation a history of two well-defined hostile camps which were moving apart fast in sympathies and aspirations; but the story is much more complex than this. A genuine and widespread sympathy for nationalist goals existed amongst Muslims as did a strong anti-British sentiment.¹ But Muslim sentiment was also compounded by the determination of the leaders of the community that the Muslims in Bengal should enjoy the political and economic benefits of their numerical superiority, and the reaction which this determination stirred in the ranks of the Hindu elite. In Calcutta men such as Momin, Ispahani, Huq, Nooruddin and various Nationalist Muslims sought at different times to achieve the demands of their community through collaboration with Congress, but in the Corporation and legislative council such attempts failed with monotonous regularity.

In many ways the Communal Award, and the intransigent attitude which was adopted towards it by the majority of Hindu leaders, marked the point at which the interests of the two communities proved irreconcilable. The Award boosted the morale of the Muslims in Bengal, and it precipitated the community's leaders into efforts to increase its

¹Govt of India, Home Poll, 39/11/33: 1933 report on Muslim sentiment in Bengal.

representation in the proposed provincial legislative assembly by securing a number of seats reserved for special interests such as labour and commerce. The obvious opportunities for political advancement, which were offered by the Communal Award, were sufficient at this time to convince the leaders of the Muslim community in Calcutta and Bengal of the urgent need for united communal action. The bankruptcy of the shadow play of factional politics which they had indulged in during the previous decade was apparent to all, as was the realisation of the need for greater Muslim unity in Bengal.

The initial impact of the Communal Award upon the political life of Calcutta had been minimised by the implementation of the revised electoral procedure for the Corporation which ushered in a short-lived period of Hindu-Muslim political co-operation: by the end of 1933 this had passed, however, and the Communal Award proved a bond which helped unite the Muslim community and divide it from Congress.

In the Corporation by late 1933 the Muslim Majlis, with its growing network of ward associations in the city,¹ gathered the majority of Muslim councillors under its wing. Meanwhile outside the Corporation and within the Presidency Muslim League, the Muslim Chamber of Commerce and the trade union movement old rivalries were being healed, or at least camouflaged, and Muslim activists were stirring to secure the benefits of the Communal Award for their community.

At the Horwah session of the All-India Muslim League, held in October 1933, Huq appeared on the platform 'and was greeted with rapturous cheers',² in contrast to the jeers which had driven him from the same organisation in 1921.³ Huq's speech was mainly a condemnation of the activities of

¹ Star of India, 1934, 6 October, p.9.

² Ibid., 1933, 23 October, p.4.

³ See pages 110-11.

the Hindu Mahasabha, and of the Communal Award for not providing the Muslims of Bengal with a statutory majority in the legislative assembly. He was joined on the platform by Abul Kasem, a former friend from whom he had been alienated since the provincial elections in 1926,¹ Sir Abdur Rahim, the Nawab of Dacca, Sir A.K. Ghuznavi and the doyen of the Suhrawardy family, Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy.² In their speeches both Huq and Kasem stated that the Muslims were prepared, despite some dissatisfaction, to accept the Communal Award, and warned the Government not to yield to threats of the Hindus who were making every possible attempt to 'gradually wipe Mussalmans out'.³

The Advance, newspaper of the Sen-Gupta faction, dismissed the meeting as unrepresentative of the Muslims of Bengal and warned the community against 'being bamboozled by the foolish threats and challenges of men such as Kasem and Ghuznavi'.⁴ But there can be little doubt that in general terms the resentment expressed at the meeting was felt by most leaders of the Muslim community in Bengal and Calcutta.

What the Advance failed to observe was that on the platform at the Howrah meeting were representatives of the Muslims of Calcutta and of the mofussil. Not only had 1933 witnessed a growing cohesion amongst the Muslim leadership of Calcutta but it was also a year in which the bonds between the city and mofussil were strengthened. The Muslim merchants and professional men of Calcutta were not unaware that the politics of the Corporation offered them limited scope and that, if they were to make any impact upon the

¹See page 184.

²Star of India, 1933, 23 October, p.4.

³Ibid., 26 October, p.9; Indian Annual Register, 1933, July-December, p.211.

⁴NNR, 1933, 24 October, Advance.

politics of Bengal, they needed to enter the larger arena of provincial politics. However, just as the Muslims of Calcutta needed the numerical support of their co-religionists elsewhere in Bengal, the Muslims of the mofussil were conscious of the need to secure the impressive financial resources and expertise of the Muslim mercantile and professional classes in the city.

In November the Presidency Muslim League held its annual session to elect office-bearers. Admittedly the meeting rejected the Communal Award and separate electorates - but in the latter case only in favour of joint electorates based upon universal suffrage, which would have secured a Muslim majority vote.¹ What was more important about the meeting, however, was the composition of the elected committee: it included representatives of all the Muslim factions who had participated in the earlier municipal elections, many of whom had been bitter personal rivals for years. The president was the elderly Moulvi Abdul Karim, and amongst the vice-presidents were Fazl-ul Huq, Momin and the ex-Nationalist Muslims Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Akram Khan and Mujibur Rahman. Other office-bearers included Dr R. Ahmed of the Muslim Majlis, Akram Khan's son Moulvi Khairul Anam Khan, Abdur Raschid Khan and S. Zaman, both of whom were employed by the Corporation in executive positions and had been proteges of rival factions in Congress. Other committee members included K. Nooruddin, Shamsuddin Ahmed, Jalaluddin Hashemy, MLC, and M.A.H. Ispahani.²

The denunciation of the Communal Award by the Presidency Muslim League was different in tone from that of its all-India parent body. In essence, however, both rejected the idea of the Muslims being maintained as a statutory minority in the proposed legislative assembly, and the differences

¹Indian Annual Register, 1933, July-December, pp.217-18; Statesman, 1933, 30 November, p.19.

²Star of India, 1933, 29 November, p.12.

between the two were more apparent than real. Further support for the Award was forthcoming from other Muslim groups in Calcutta during 1933 when the Muslim Chamber of Commerce and the Muslim maritime trade unions made moves towards gaining representation in the new provincial assembly - moves which were supported by a cross-section of Muslim leaders in the hope that the total Muslim representation in the assembly would be increased.

V

The lascar population of the Calcutta region in 1933 stood at approximately 55,000 - all of whom were Muslim. Just over 23,000 of these men were organised into five unions: the Indian Seamen's Union (ISU) with 15,000 members; the Bengal Mariners' Union (BMU) with 5,000 members; the Indian Quartermasters' Union (IQU); the Indian Seamen's League (ISL) and the Indo-Asiatic Seamen's Committee (IASC) which had a combined membership of nearly 3,500.¹ The BMU, ISU and IQU were in effect a federation of unions under the leadership of Mahomed Daud and Aftab Ally, but throughout 1933 and 1934 all three were dogged by disputes which weakened their unity: first with Joshi's National Trade Union Federation and then with rival claimants for leadership such as Huseyn Suhrawardy.

Nevertheless, all three were united in their demand for separate representation in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, and in September 1933 they submitted a joint memorandum to the Government. They claimed five of the eight seats set aside for labour representatives in the provincial assembly plus one seat in the Imperial Legislative Assembly 'for the seafaring community of Bengal'² - a somewhat exaggerated claim

¹Bengal Govt, Appointments Dept, October 1934, File no.1R-54, Progs A43-54.

²Govt of India, Home Poll, File no.18/x/1933 of 1933; ibid., Reforms Dept, File no.221/32-R of 1932.

in view of the fact that the Muslim seamen constituted barely 11 per cent of the labour population which the provincial government proposed to enfranchise.¹

The unions' organisation and bargaining power were weakened by the disputes which wracked them during 1933 and 1934, and which led to a temporary multiplication of rival unions. In June 1933 dissident members of the BMU, supported by Joshi, established a rival union, the Inland Mariners' and Waterside Workers' Union, and succeeded in getting the BMU disaffiliated from the provincial committee of the National Trade Union Federation although it remained a member of the central body.² In the following November further defections occurred when Huseyn Suhrawardy caused a split in the ISU and IQU by challenging the leadership of Aftab Ally, a former Nationalist Muslim, and established a rival IQU.³ At the Bombay session of the National Trade Union Federation in December 1933 Daud forced a confrontation with Joshi over the incident concerning the disaffiliation of the Bengal Mariners' Union the previous June. Daud rejected Joshi's leadership as 'undemocratic', withdrew the BMU from the all-India body and, with the support of several other dissatisfied unions from the coalfields of Bengal and Bihar, he formed the All-India Trade Union Federation with: 'The avowed policy [of co-operation] with Government and employers' organisations with a view to establishing harmonious relations between the employers and the employed.'⁴

In the same month the rival Indian Quartermasters' Union founded by Huseyn Suhrawardy was reconciled with the parent body under the presidency of Suhrawardy.⁵ From this

¹ Bengal Govt, Appointments Dept, October 1934, File no. 1R-54, Progs A43-54.

² Govt of India, Home Poll, File no. 18/VII/1933 of 1933.

³ Ibid., 18/XI/1933 of 1933.

⁴ Ibid., 18/I/1934 of 1934; Star of India, 1934, 5 January, p.9.

⁵ Govt of India, Home Poll, File no. 18/I/1934 of 1934.

stage onwards he emerged as an important, if controversial, figure amongst the Muslim trade unionists in Calcutta.

During 1934 the breach between the federation of unions, which included the BMU, ISU and IQU, and the National Trade Union Federation was healed. The rival Inland Mariners' and Waterside Workers' Union was formally amalgamated with the Bengal Mariners' Union in September 1934,¹ and the various maritime trade unions were reaffiliated with Joshi's all-India organisation. But by April 1935, following the unification of the All-India Trade Union Congress and the National Trade Union Federation on a distinctly socialist platform,² the reconciliation was in ruins.

The final break was in part due to the activities of Huseyn Suhrawardy, following his election as president of the Indian Quartermasters' Union in December 1933, and of the Indian Seamen's Union late in 1934.³ His position was further strengthened by the support he received from Fazl-ul Huq, who was patron of the Bengal Mariners' Union in 1934,⁴ as well as founder-president of the Indian Seamen's Welfare League - a small seamen's saving cooperative - which he placed under Suhrawardy's direction early in 1935.⁵

Like Daud, who was now in retirement, Suhrawardy was wary of union involvement in the nationalist movement. But unlike Daud he was more overtly communal in sympathies and conservative in social outlook: for example, when he attacked the labour programme of Congress in 1934 he stated that the

¹Ibid., 18/X/1934 of 1934; Joshi Papers, File no.81, letter dated 6.1.1935.

²Govt of India, Home Poll, File no.18/IV/1935 of 1935.

³Ibid., 18/VI/1935 of 1935.

⁴Ibid., 18/VIII/1935 of 1935.

⁵Ibid., 18/V/1935 of 1935; Joshi Papers, File no.81, letter dated 6.1.1935.

Moslems of Bengal...did not have any sympathy with a movement which might tend to upset the existing social structure....They must have a definite labour and agriculturalist policy which at the same time would be based on the continuance of the present social system.

Proof of Suhrawardy's increasing influence came in December 1934 when he successfully negotiated the settlement of a strike which included 6,000 stevedores at the Calcutta docks. The strike had been organised by the Port and Dock Workers' Union, a communist-controlled union which had been formed in March 1934 to rival the Dockers' Union led by Aftab Ally.² Ally's organisation had been supported by Congress, and Suhrawardy stole a march on both unions when he negotiated a settlement and led most of their members into his own Calcutta Dockers' Union. He bitterly denounced the 'Red Flag' Port and Dock Workers' Union, and declared that his own union was to work 'for the furtherance of healthy relations between employers and workers'.³ Part of his success undoubtedly was also due to the concern he displayed for unemployment amongst the lascars and stevedores of Calcutta of whom 59,000 out of 172,000 were unemployed in 1935.⁴

But Suhrawardy's success drew the envy of his rivals in the trade union movement, especially those of more pronounced nationalist sympathies, and in July 1935 Jalalluddin Hashemy and Faiz Ahmed defected from the Indian Quartermasters' Union to form the National Quartermasters' Union.⁵ Suhrawardy's anti-socialist outlook and his opposition to

¹Statesman, 1934, 5 July, p.16.

²Govt of India, Home Poll, 1934, File no.12/5; *ibid.*, 12/5/34 of 1934; *ibid.*, 18/XII/1934; Star of India, 1934, 15 January, p.7.

³Govt of India, Home Poll, File no.18/VI/1935 of 1935; *ibid.*, 18/I/1935 of 1935.

⁴*Ibid.*, 18/VI/1935 of 1935; Saksena, E.N., Seamen in India (1951), p.25.

⁵Govt of India, Home Poll, File no.18/VI/1935 of 1935.

social change had alienated the nationalist sympathisers amongst the Muslim trade unionists, particularly after April 1935 when the All-India Trade Union Congress and the National Trade Union Federation had been reconciled and had jointly condemned Congress for being socially reactionary.¹ Both union organisations had immediately sought to conciliate the former Nationalist Muslims and Hashemy had been appointed secretary of the Bengal committee of the All-India Trade Union Congress.²

Suhrawardy's position was further complicated by a resurgence of the rivalry between himself and Fazl-ul Huq. In July 1935 Suhrawardy's influence in the Bengal Mariners' Union was undermined when Huq and Faiz Ahmed were elected president and secretary respectively to replace the Nawab of Dacca and other office-bearers who shared Suhrawardy's conservative social views.³ In addition the union was reaffiliated to the National Trade Union Federation.⁴ Suhrawardy still controlled the Indian Quartermasters' Union and the Calcutta Dockers' Union,⁵ but their combined membership amongst the 5,000 Muslim stevedores and 55,000 lascars in the Calcutta area was limited, and it in no way compared with the large number of registered members of the other Muslim maritime trade unions.⁶ When the Government finally allocated Muslim maritime unions representation in the provincial assembly the Calcutta Dockers' Union and the Indian Quartermasters' Union were excluded from the electorate which comprised the membership of the Bengal Mariners' Union and the Indian Seamen's Union.⁷

¹Ibid., 18/IV/1935 of 1935.

²Ibid., 18/X/1935 of 1935.

³Ibid., 18/VII/1935 of 1935; Bengal Govt, Administration Report, 1935-36, p.XXVIII.

⁴National Trade Union Federation, Report of the Third Annual Session, Calcutta, 1937, p.47.

⁵Govt of India, Home Poll, File no.18/VII/1935 of 1935.

⁶Bengal Govt, Appointments Dept, October 1934, File no.1R-34, Progs A43-44; *ibid.*, Commerce Dept, February 1936, File no. 2R-14, Progs B1-4.

⁷Ibid., Appointments Dept, December 1936, File no.1R-362, Progs B584-86.

The decision was a great victory for Huq, who by this time had assumed the role of general patron to all the maritime trade unions in Calcutta, and it helped broaden the basis of his popular support in the city. The exclusion of Suhrawardy had curtailed the influence of the socially-conservative Muslim faction within the city, and secured for Huq the support of the more socially radical Muslims who filled many of the top positions in the unions.

However, although the elimination of Suhrawardy marked a defeat for the cause of the socially-conservative Muslims, the recognition of the special political interests of the unions was a victory for the communal cause in general. The representation of the unions in the proposed legislative assembly bound further groups within the Muslim community to the defence of communal interests. Whilst the addition of a large number of nationalist sympathisers to Huq's following may have helped radicalise his own interest in social change and uplift, there can be little doubt that in turn the necessity of defending their claims to special representation bound such Muslims closer to the communal cause and set them further apart from the supra-communal nationalism preached by Congress.

Along with the Muslim maritime trade unions the only other Muslim 'special interest' which gained separate representation in the Bengal Legislative Assembly was the Muslim Chamber of Commerce. Unlike the maritime unions, which gained representation with relative ease due to the long-recognised importance of the Bengali Muslim lascar community, the Chamber of Commerce experienced considerable difficulty.

When first established it gained ready recognition from the Government, and immediately lodged a request for a seat in the provincial assembly;¹ and, following representation to the Viceroy,² it gained seats on the Calcutta Port Trust,

¹ See pages 229-32.

² Star of India, 1933, 4 January, p.4.

the Managing Committee of the Calcutta Madrassah and various other semi-official organisations,¹ despite opposition from the leading non-Muslim mercantile bodies in the city.² But in 1935, when the Provincial Delimitations Committee presented its report on the allocation of seats in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, the Chamber of Commerce found itself at the centre of a bitter storm of controversy stirred up by the opposition of Hindu mercantile interests to the claims of the Muslim merchants and industrialists of Calcutta.

The first signs of trouble occurred early in 1935 when the Calcutta Port Trust rejected a demand by the representative of the Muslim Chamber of Commerce that the recruitment of Muslims by the port authorities should be fixed at one third of the total intake. The Port Trust not only rejected the Muslim request, but also denounced the principle of separate representation, a sentiment which was echoed by the Hindu members of the Provincial Delimitations Committee.³ As early as 1933 the Hindu committee men had written notes of dissent which dismissed the claims of the Muslim Chamber of Commerce on the grounds that it was a communal organisation, as yet had not proved its worth, had been deliberately organised to capture a seat in the provincial assembly, and its membership comprised mainly non-Bengalis.⁴ In 1935 when the final evidence regarding claims to special representation was being considered the Hindu opposition was reinforced by criticism from the Indian Chamber of Commerce, couched in similar terms to the notes of dissent written in 1933,⁵ and the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce which

¹Muslim Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1934, pp.2-6.

²Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1933, p.10; ibid., 1934, pp.271-3.

³Ibid., p.144.

⁴Govt of India, Reforms Dept, 1933, KW to 82/33-R, Vol.II.

⁵Ibid., Indian Delimitations Committee (1936), Vol.III, pp.164-6; Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1935, pp.35-6.

ridiculed Muslim claims and stated that:

The Muslim Chamber consists for the most part of non-Bengali Mahommedans; it has been in existence for barely a year [sic] and during this time it could hardly have been said to have established itself as a body of commercial opinion carrying the weight and authority entitling it to the allocation of one seat in addition to which its members are predominantly non-indigenous to the province.¹

The Hindu members of the Delimitations Committee made a final effort to minimise the claim of the Muslim Chamber of Commerce in June 1935 when their leader N.K. Basu summarily stated that the Muslim merchants of Calcutta 'were of no importance'.² But their opposition failed, and in July the Chamber's representative before the Committee, A.H. Ghuznavi,³ was advised that it had been awarded one seat in the provincial assembly and three of the fifteen provincial votes for the Bengali commercial seat in the Imperial Legislative Assembly.⁴

The Muslims were jubilant,⁵ but not so the Hindu commercial community; and in November 1935 its representatives in the Corporation pushed through a resolution which declared that:

The allotment of one seat to the Muslim Chamber of Commerce, a communal organisation as its nomenclature signifies, disturbs the balance of communities in the legislature proposed under the terms of the Communal Award [and] the Muslim Chamber of Commerce dominated as it is by non-Bengalee Mahommedans will provide a scope for outsiders to exercise influence in the political and administrative life of Bengal.⁶

¹Ibid., p.171.

²Muslim Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1935, p.144.

³Govt of India, Indian Delimitations Committee (1936), Vol. III, p.193.

⁴Muslim Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1935, pp.49,135: Muslim Chamber of Commerce, 3 votes; Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, 6 votes; Marwari Association, 3 votes; Bengal Mahajan Sabha, 3 votes.

⁵Ibid., p.144.

⁶Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1935-March 1936, 15.11.1935, pp.1545-48.

VI

In the Corporation, during the early months of 1934, the differences between the Hindu Nationalists and the Muslims had been exacerbated by the united opposition of the Hindus to any concessions to Muslims on the vital issue of employment by the municipality. However, in April 1934 the unity of the Hindu bloc was shattered over the question of the mayoral election. The Sen-Gupta faction, led since his death in July 1933 by S.C. Ghose, proved to be the weakest in numbers and sought the support of the Muslim councillors by promising to vote for their mayoral candidate - Fazl-ul Huq.¹ The New Muslim Majlis, which by this time had come to the conclusion that:

Whatever the Hindus did in the Corporation, however communal in nature, was lauded as genuine nationalism but when we demanded the same rights, we were branded as communalists,²

threw its support behind Huq. So did Momin who organised several meetings amongst the up-country Muslim merchants and artisans of the city to advance Huq's cause.³

At the election on April 11 a member of the Sen-Gupta faction gained the chair and ruled that the ten nominated councillors could not vote. It was an unconstitutional ruling and the nominated councillors, the European bloc and the rival Congress faction, led by Dr B.C. Roy and B.K. Basu, left the council chamber in protest. In the absence of the 49 dissident members a rump council of 40 voted in Huq as mayor with S.C. Ghose as deputy mayor.⁴ The Muslim community of the city was delighted and on April 13 the Presidency Muslim League organised a mass meeting, attended by over 20,000 Muslims, at which Akram Khan congratulated Huq on

¹Statesman, 1934, 12 April, pp.3-4.

²Ispahani, M.A.H., op.cit., p.9.

³Star of India, 1934, 2 April, p.5; *ibid.*, 9 April, p.4.

⁴Statesman, 1934, 12 April, pp.3-4; Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XIX, 14.4.1934, supplement.

his elevation to the mayoralty.¹ The dissident councillors were far from pleased, however, and under the leadership of Abul Kasem they organised a petition to the Government against the recent elections.²

On May 11 the election was set aside on the grounds that the nominated members should have been allowed to vote, and on May 17 fresh elections were held.³ The meeting was a complete farce with the rival groups gathered at opposite ends of the council chamber; each elected its own chairman who fought the rival candidate for possession of the chair with the aid of his supporters, paper weights and musty volumes of debates. Abuse in Bengali, Urdu and English was hurled around the chamber and with the dignity of the Corporation shattered the meeting was closed, and the struggling councillors were ejected from the building with the help of municipal durwans.⁴

The Government immediately suspended the council until July, and the rival groups launched campaigns to rouse support. The Sen-Gupta faction held meetings at which Huq was depicted as the innocent victim of the British bureaucracy and big business⁵ - the opposition candidate having been Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, a prominent local business magnate - and began to negotiate with the nominated councillors and the European bloc for support.⁶ However, support for Huq was not forthcoming: the nominated and European councillors were prepared to vote for Momin, but refused to support Huq as they were still bitter about his earlier electioneering tactics.

¹ Ibid., 21.4.1934, p.878.

² Statesman, 1934, 19 April, p.7.

³ Ibid., 17 May, p.8; Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XIX, 19.5.1934, supplement.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ NNR, 1934, 21 May, Moslem.

⁶ Star of India, 1934, 17 May, p.5; *ibid.*, 21 May, p.1; *ibid.*, 1 June, p.8.

In July a third attempt to elect a mayor and deputy mayor was made. Sarkar and B.N. Roy Chowdhury were easily elected in spite of the opposition of the Muslims and the Sen-Gupta faction. Huq was naturally disappointed but took comfort from the fact that:

For the first time in the history of this Corporation Mahommedans have shown a solidarity of which the community may well be proud. I hope that this solidarity will continue and that the Mahommedan members realising that they are a very small minority in the midst of hostile influences will maintain their solidarity in order to uphold the best interests of their community consistent with the advancement of the country as a whole.¹

In what remained of 1934, and until April 1935, the Corporation remained a quiet forum of dull debate with neither side eager to precipitate another confrontation; but outside the red brick building on Corporation Street the new-found solidarity lauded by Huq was steadily permeating the community. In various parts of the city local associations of Muslim ratepayers were organised by Muslim councillors such as Momin, Fazl-ul Huq and Raffique who founded the Muslim Ratepayers' League in Kidderpore and the Beniapukur Muslim Association in ward XX.² These organisations provided a convenient means of communication between the Muslim leaders and the mass of their followers in the city for they operated through the local mosque. On Friday evenings in particular, when the congregation was at its largest, the mosques of Kidderpore and Beniapukur were the scenes of intense political discussions which invariably resulted in the presentation of petitions to the local authorities in support of the Muslim councillors.³ The

¹ Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', July 1934-September 1934, 4.7.1934, p.12.

² Star of India, 1934, 6 November, p.5; *ibid.*, 19 November, p.5.

³ Govt of India, Reforms Dept, Franchise, 1935, File no.8/2/35-F.

Muslim Majlis had also begun to recruit extra members in and around the city,¹ and in July Fazl-ul Huq, Momin and Aziz Rahim - son of Sir Abdur Rahim - formally joined the organisation.²

In May the Nationalist Muslims in the city had quarrelled with Azad when he publicly attacked Huq whilst on a visit to the city,³ and there was a perceptible shift in favour amongst them in support of Huq's plans for social reform and rural uplift in cooperation with the Hindu depressed classes.⁴ The attitude of the Hindu leaders towards the Communal Award did little to conciliate them, and the demands of organisations such as the All-Bengal Hindu Conference, which sought joint electorates on a restricted property franchise, or failing that separate electorates with Hindu-Muslim electoral parity, served only to widen the credibility gap between the two communities.⁵ Former Nationalist Muslims such as Mujibur Rhaman publicly equated Hindu communalism with the Congress-directed nationalist movement,⁶ and early in 1935 the final break occurred between the local Congress leadership and the main body of Nationalist Muslims. The occasion was the Bengal Provincial Conference, held at Dinajpur in north Bengal, when a resolution which condemned the Communal Award was passed in the face of angry protests from the Muslim delegates who walked out en masse.⁷

¹Star of India, 1934, 6 October, p.9.

²Ibid., 27 July, p.7.

³Ibid., 2 May, p.5.

⁴NNR, 1934-1935, passim.

⁵Statesman, 1935, 7 February, p.20; ibid., 14 February, p.9.

⁶Star of India, 1934, 25 September, p.8.

⁷Statesman, 1935, 25 April, p.22; Govt of India, Home Poll, File No. 18/IV/1935 of 1935.

VII

During 1934, Fazl-ul Huq, Sir Hasan Suhrawardy and Huseyn Suhrawardy were involved in a dispute with the university authorities in Calcutta which concerned Muslim representation in the Senate. The dispute dragged on for several years and was of significance because the Senate had an important voice in setting the guide-lines for general educational policy throughout Bengal. The Muslims claimed increased representation in order to counter moves such as a recent decision of the Senate which removed Urdu from the list of vernacular languages to be used in tertiary and secondary examinations. But the Hindu press, led by the Advance, claimed that any increase in Muslim participation in the deliberations of the Senate would mean that 'the temple of learning will be reduced to a market place and cease to be a place for men of learning and honour'.¹

Disillusioned Nationalist Muslims joined in the argument, and they launched a general attack on the upper-class Hindu cultural bias of the university, and the monopoly of education held by the Hindu intelligentsia and land-owning classes.² In October 1934 Huq and the Suhrawardies organised a mass meeting of Muslim students from all parts of Bengal to form the All-Bengal Muslim Young Men's Conference in Calcutta, in the wake of which the Star of India warned that:

Hindu Nationalist papers might try to hide their fear behind a mantle of verbal abuse; but they know full well that the tide of Muslim power in Bengal has turned and that the Muslims have at last a reasonable chance of coming into their own.³

Out of this flurry of renewed Muslim activity at the communal level the figure which emerged most strongly was that of Fazl-ul Huq. He was a leader of charismatic qualities

¹ NNR, 1934, 23 March, Advance, et al.

² Star of India, 1934, 22 September, p.1; *ibid.*, 1935, 9 November, p.9; *ibid.*, 14 November, p.6; 14 December, p.12, 16 December, p.8.

³ *Ibid.*, 1934, 9 October, p.2: also gives details of the students' conference.

in both the city and the mofussil. Erratic, volatile and at the centre of most political controversies since his entry into provincial politics in 1912, Huq was by this time the focus of Muslim political interest in Bengal. Amongst the rural masses and the Nationalist Muslims Huq gained support because of his demands for rural and social reform; whilst in Calcutta his activities in the Corporation and amongst the maritime trade unions had assured him of a broad basis of popular support, which ranged from the lascar community of the Kidderpore docks to the up-country Muslim mercantile and artisan groups of central Calcutta.

Huq's genuine sympathy for the peasantry, be it Hindu or Muslim, his western education, powers as an orator, and contacts with the Ashraf families of the mofussil and metropolis, raised him head and shoulders above all other leaders of the community. He was the only figure who appealed to Muslims from both rural and urban Bengal at a time when the community realised the need for solidarity. Certainly his relations with the Suhrawardy family were rarely good, especially after he had ousted Huseyn Suhrawardy from any prominent position in the Muslim trade union movement in 1935, but this did not prevent either of them from working together at the time in defence of communal interests - particularly when the Communal Award was under attack from Hindu leaders, and the need for Muslim unity temporarily obscured such personal rivalries.

VIII

In April 1935 the annual mayoral elections were held in Calcutta. The Muslim councillors were determined to get one of their number elected mayor and formed the Muslim Councillors' Party, under Nooruddin, with the object of putting Fazl-ul Huq forward as their candidate.¹ The idea of

¹Ibid., 1935, 1 April, p.1.

the party had first been formulated at a meeting of the Muslim Majlis in February at which leading merchants, industrialists, trade unionists and politicians in the city had supported a resolution, proposed by M.A.H. Ispahani, which called for Huq's election as mayor.¹

Rumours spread that the rival factions of Congress had united to put forward their own candidate, and meetings of Muslim ratepayers' associations in Kidderpore and Beniapukur urged the Muslim councillors to actively support Huq against Congress.² Indeed, the Congress factions had united to sponsor a candidate, but to the surprise and satisfaction of the Muslim community it was Huq.³

On April 30 Calcutta gained its first Muslim mayor - Fazl-ul Huq - who was elected by a unanimous vote in the absence of the European and nominated councillors who boycotted the election.⁴

The reasons for the action of the reconciled factions of Congress are obscure. At the best one can surmise that it was a genuine gesture of conciliation on the part of the Hindu leaders, and at the worst that Huq's election was not so much a sop to Muslim sentiment as to dissidents within Congress, who threatened to perpetuate the breach within the organisation in the absence of a candidate suitable to both factions. Most likely the truth was compounded of both these considerations; certainly events in the Corporation during 1935 illustrated the fact that the extent of Hindu willingness to compromise with the Muslims on issues of any importance was strictly limited, and in fact the whole facade of cooperation crashed disastrously in December 1935.

¹Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XXI, 23.3.1935, p.760.

²Star of India, 1935, 3 April, p.4; *ibid.*, 19 April, p.5.

³*Ibid.*, 22 April, p.1; Statesman, 1935, 2 May, p.12.

⁴Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', April 1935-September 1935, 30.4.1935, pp.2-3.

In his early months as mayor Huq performed a volte face in his public attitude towards Congress. In September 1934 he had dramatically resigned his seat in the provincial legislative council to successfully contest a seat in the Imperial Legislative Assembly, in order to fight the 'machinations of Pandit Malaviya' in national politics and the agitation of Congress against the Communal Award.¹ However, by June 1935 he was openly extolling the virtues of Congress: at a meeting in the Calcutta Town Hall on June 3 he told the Muslim audience that Congress was 'the most nationalistic organisation and that it deserved the support of every Indian, irrespective of religion'.² Again in July at a gathering in Noakhali he urged Muslims to join Congress as it was 'the only party concerned over India's welfare'.³

However, in this instance Huq was out of sympathy with his followers in Calcutta. Muslim resentment had been aroused by the opposition of Hindus to the claim of the Muslim Chamber of Commerce for a seat in the Bengal Legislative Assembly; in addition the university controversy raged on to reach new heights of bitterness in November when the Senate moved to abolish makhtabs in the city in favour of non-sectarian schools.⁴ The opposition of the Hindu leadership to the Communal Award also showed no sign of abating, and in the Corporation the Muslim councillors soon found that the presence of a Muslim mayor did nothing to sway the Hindu majority in favour of Muslim demands.

In the last half of 1935 the Muslim councillors made various attempts to settle the perennial question of the employment of Muslims by the Corporation.⁵ The negotiations

¹Star of India, 1934, 22 September, p.1.

²Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1935, 4 June, p.8.

³Ibid., 18 July, p.10.

⁴Star of India, 1935, November, passim.

⁵Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XXI, passim; ibid., 'Minutes', October 1935-March 1936, passim.

were fruitless, however, and in August the Muslim representatives requested a special meeting of the Corporation to discuss their demands for the reservation of one third of the annual rate of recruitment until 25 per cent of those employed in municipal service were Muslims.¹ However, the meeting was continually blocked by the Hindu councillors until Huq indicated his displeasure by walking out of the council chamber in the middle of a debate on celebrations to mark the Golden Jubilee of Congress.² As a result on December 13 Momin was permitted to move a resolution which contained the Muslim demands, with the promise of sympathetic consideration from Congress, after which it was agreed that a Special Committee should be appointed to consider the issue.³

The Muslims were exasperated by this time-honoured method of compromise, but they agreed to the proposal. Their patience failed, however, when the Hindu majority demanded that it should appoint the Muslim members of the committee, and a violent debate reminiscent of the election scenes of 1934 ensued. Eventually Huq's temper snapped and he roared at the stunned councillors that they should

let the whole thing be cabled to England about this communalism in the Calcutta Corporation.... Let the people in England see that we cannot discuss a simple communal question in a dispassionate manner and yet we want self-government in India.⁴

The silence that followed this outburst was only temporary and soon invectives were once more bouncing around the chamber and only ceased when Momin led the Muslim councillors out of the Corporation. Huq attempted to adjourn the meeting but he was ignored by the remaining

¹Ibid., 25.11.1935, p.1665.

²Ibid., 13.11.1935, p.1500.

³Ibid., 13.12.1935, pp.1777-84.

⁴Ibid.

councillors; and when they proceeded to nominate a committee he left the chamber.¹

At the next meeting of the Corporation on December 16 only three Muslims attended - Huq, A.K.M. Zakariah and a nominated councillor Mahomed Saadatullah - and the mayor submitted a letter of resignation from 15 Muslim councillors.² In addition Huq announced his own resignation as an elected councillor though he retained his position as mayor.³

In their letter of resignation the 15 councillors stated that:

We feel the time has come for us, the Moslem members of the Calcutta Corporation, to make a statement regarding the circumstances in which we have been forced to take the extreme step of tendering resignation of our office as Aldermen and Councillors of the Calcutta Corporation.

For years past, there has been a strong and widespread feeling in the community that appointments in the Calcutta Corporation were being made to serve the interest of political parties and factions, and in open violation of all principles of equity and justice. Those who have had any opportunities of being acquainted with the state of affairs in the Corporation know very well that these suspicions are not groundless.

Vacancies are seldom advertised, and the outside world knows nothing as to when vacancies occur and how they are dealt with; all we find is that in many cases persons with indifferent qualifications are pitchforked into the highest posts merely because they happen to be backed by political parties in or outside the Corporation. Moslem candidates practically never get a chance, because Moslem Councillors in the Corporation are in a hopeless minority, and they are generally outside the political sections or schisms that divide the Corporation.

From time to time, the representatives of the Moslems in the Corporation have been trying to protect the interests of the community by having a definite percentage of appointments ear-marked for Moslem candidates. In spite, however, of the best efforts that

¹Ibid.

²Statesman, 1935, 19 December, p.7; see illustration.

³Calcutta Corporation, 'Minutes', October 1935-March 1936, 16.12.1935, p.1786; ibid., Gazette, Vol. XXIII, 11.1.1936, p.236.

have been repeatedly made, all attempts to induce the Corporation to recognize the legitimate claims of Moslems have always ended in utter failure.

In this connexion we wish to emphasize the essential fact that the Moslem members in the Corporation have never thought of pushing the claims of incompetent Moslems or of impairing the efficiency of the various services by ever suggesting a lowering of the standard of recruitment. We have reasons to believe that non-Moslems have been appointed on many occasions by ignoring the claims of better qualified Moslems. Even at the present moment, if a thorough investigation were undertaken it will be found that there is a greater percentage of graduates and undergraduates amongst the Moslem employees than amongst the non-Moslems holding similar or higher positions in the Corporation.

In order to make one more attempt to obtain justice and fair treatment for Moslem candidates, twelve Aldermen and Councillors submitted a requisition to the Mayor under Section 38 of the Calcutta Municipal Act with a view to consider the whole question of Moslem appointments. After several adjournments, this meeting was finally held on Friday, December 13, at 5 p.m.

To avoid acrimonious discussion the Mayor called an informal conference of a dozen Councillors and Aldermen, representing various groups, to arrive at an agreed solution of the problem. After prolonged discussion it was decided that Khan Bahadur M.A. Momin would move his resolution seeking to fix a percentage and the Hon. Mr. B.K. Basu would move an amendment for reference of the matter to a small committee of seven Aldermen and Councillors. It was expected that all causes of friction and controversy would cease to exist, and that the amendment of Mr. Basu would be accepted by the House quietly and without much comment.

When the matter came up before the meeting, the proceedings were marked by disorderly scenes. In spite of repeated appeals from the Mayor, members began to indulge in personal attacks and recriminations and some of the members treated the whole proceedings with levity and contempt. It was evident that most of the members who were present were in no mood to take things seriously, and some even attempted to stultify the proposals by suggesting wild amendments. The Moslem members present in the meeting left the House as a protest and the amendment of Mr. B.S. Nahar was passed in a House from which all the Moslem members had already retired.

The Moslem members of the Corporation feel that it will serve no useful purpose for them to occupy seats in a Corporation where they are openly subjected to the oppressive domination of an unsympathetic majority. The Corporation may decide to act in any way they like, but we, on our part, cannot consent to be party to a

state of things which is condemned by our conscience and which we can not sincerely and honestly approve.

We have, therefore, decided to tender our resignation which we request the House to accept.

The letter dealt only with the immediate grievance of the community regarding employment, but it was indicative of the more comprehensive communal spirit which now permeated the Muslim community of Calcutta. Indeed, it was proof of the fact that Muslim communal consciousness in the city by the end of 1935 was not a sentiment espoused solely by a select group of religious fanatics and political conservatives. Rather, it was an attitude fostered in the minds of a variety of Muslim groups - from the up-country Muslim traders of central Calcutta to the Bengali-speaking lascars of Kidderpore - who found their aspirations for political, economic and social advancement in Bengal opposed by the Hindu elite. For a variety of reasons, many of which were not necessarily complementary, these groups had found solace and strength in an identification with a larger cause - that of their community at large.

Just as 20 years earlier Gandhi had realised the potential of mass agitation and had attempted to rally the diverse peoples of India to the cause of the nation, the Muslims of Calcutta by 1935 were well on the way to evolving their own cause which would transcend the interests of the component groups within the community.

In 1918 the cry which rallied the community had been 'Islam in Danger', and it had evoked a crude response from large numbers of Muslims in the city. However, its appeal was limited, and once the immediate religious and economic grievances had faded any comprehensive sense of community consciousness had also waned to be replaced by more immediate interests centred upon the various sub-groups within the community.

By 1935, however, the situation had radically altered. The cry was no longer the simplistic 'Islam in Danger', based upon ill-defined religious sentiment, but was rather the more definite 'Community in Danger'. The new spirit

CORPORATION AGAIN IN LIMELIGHT

MOSLEMS RESIGN

"FORCED TO TAKE THE STEP"

"The Secretary to the Corporation has received a signed statement by 15 Moslem Councillors tendering their resignation."

This announcement was made by the Mayor (Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq) at a meeting of the Calcutta Corporation.

"I find," he added, "that events are precipitating towards a situation which may compel me also to resign. But until that contingency arises I propose to go on with the work, particularly because there has been a heavy accumulation of arrears which I wish to get rid of as soon as possible."

"Unfortunately once again," the Mayor continued, "we are very much in the limelight, and on this occasion under circumstances which, I think, every patriotic Indian will deeply deplore."

WHY THEY RESIGNED

MOSLEM COUNCILLORS' STATEMENT

The following is the full text of the statement submitted on Saturday night to Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq, Mayor of Calcutta, by 15 Moslem Councillors of the Corporation. It has now been issued for publication:

"We feel the time has come for us, the Moslem members of the Calcutta Corporation, to make a statement regarding the circumstances in which we have been forced to take the extreme step of tendering resignation of our office as Aldermen and Councillors of the Calcutta Corporation."

"For years past, there has been a strong and widespread feeling in the community that appointments in the Calcutta Corporation were being made to serve the interest of political parties and factions, and in open violation of all principles of equity and justice. Those who have had any opportunities of being acquainted with the state of affairs in the Corporation know very well that these suspicions are not groundless."

"Vacancies are seldom advertised, and the outside world knows nothing as to when vacancies occur and how they are dealt with; all we find is that in many cases persons with indifferent qualifications are pitchedforked into the highest posts merely because they happen to be backed by political parties in or outside the Corporation. Moslem candidates practically never get a chance, because Moslem Councillors in the Corporation are in a hopeless minority, and they are generally outside the political sections or schisms that divide the Corporation."

"HOSTILITY" TO MOSLEMS

"From time to time, the representatives of the Moslems in the Corporation have been trying to protect the interests of the community by having a definite percentage of appointments earmarked for Moslem candidates. In spite, however, of the best efforts that have been repeatedly made, all attempts to induce the Corporation to recognize the legitimate claims of Moslems have always ended in utter failure."

"In this connexion we wish to emphasize the essential fact that the Moslem members in the Corporation have never thought of pushing the claims of incompetent Moslems or of impairing the efficiency of the various services by over suggesting a lowering of the standard of recruitment. We have reasons to believe that non-Moslems have been appointed on many occasions by ignoring the claims of better qualified Moslems. Even at the present moment, if a thorough investigation were undertaken it will be found that there is a greater percentage of graduates and undergraduates amongst the Moslem employees than amongst the non-Moslems holding similar or higher positions in the Corporation."

"In order to make one more attempt to obtain justice and fair treatment for

(Continued in next Column).

EARTH TREMORS AT QUETTA

MIDNIGHT SHOCK

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.
QUETTA, Dec. 17.

A severe earthquake shock was felt here shortly after midnight. The shock was also felt at Yaru, 30 miles north of Quetta, but on a much smaller scale.

Suriab, another station south of Quetta, also felt the shock but no other place south, east or west of Quetta noticed it.

A much less severe shock, that on December 11, was experienced even at Chaman, 80 miles north of Quetta and at some other places. It is probably due to the fact that the epicentre of this morning's shock was several miles north of Quetta and nearer to Chaman.

The recurrence of shocks even six months after the great earthquake has been responsible for causing alarm among the residents—especially the ignorant ones—though secure in the earthquake-resistant huts in which they are now living.

(Continued from previous column.)

Moslem candidates, twelve Aldermen and Councillors submitted a requisition to the Mayor under Section 38 of the Calcutta Municipal Act with a view to consider the whole question of Moslem appointments. After several adjournments, this meeting was finally held on Friday, December 13, at 5 p.m.

DISORDERLY SCENES

"To avoid acrimonious discussion the Mayor called an informal conference of a dozen Councillors and Aldermen, representing various groups, to arrive at an agreed solution of the problem. After prolonged discussion it was decided that Khan Bahadur M. A. Monim would move his resolution seeking to fix a percentage and the Hon. Mr. B. K. Basu would move an amendment for reference of the matter to a small committee of seven Aldermen and Councillors. It was expected that all causes of friction and controversy would cease to exist, and that the amendment of Mr. Basu would be accepted by the House quietly and without much comment."

"When the matter came up before the meeting, the proceedings were marked by disorderly scenes. In spite of repeated appeals from the Mayor, members began to indulge in personal attacks and recriminations and some of the members treated the whole proceedings with levity and contempt. It was evident that most of the members who were present were in no mood to take things seriously, and some even attempted to stultify the proposals by suggesting wild amendments. The Moslem members present in the meeting left the House as a protest and the amendment of Mr. B. K. Basu was passed in a House from which all the Moslem members had already retired."

"The Moslem members of the Corporation feel that it will serve no useful purpose for them to occupy seats in a Corporation where they are openly subjected to the oppressive domination of an unsympathetic majority. The Corporation may decide to act in any way they like, but we, on our part, cannot consent to be party to a state of things which is condemned by our conscience and which we can not sincerely and honestly approve."

"We have, therefore, decided to tender our resignation which we request the House to accept."

(Signed: M. A. Monim, Abul Kasem, M. A. R. Ismail, K. Nooruddin, R. Ahmad, S. M. Yaqub, Shamshul Huq, Syed Zafar Ahmad, S. Hassan, Mohammad Ali Khan, M. A. Faruk, M. M. Haq, A. K. M. Zakaria, Md. Nasir, Sr. Basir Ali.)

MR. A. K. FAZLUL HUQ CALCUTTA MAYOR SAID TO HAVE RESIGNED

A representative of the Statesman was informed by the Mayor of Calcutta (Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq) on Tuesday that he had sent in his resignation to the Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Corporation.

He declined to be drawn into a discussion in the subject.

FALLING INCOME OF CALCUTTA PORT

SIR JOHN WOODHEAD'S MISSION IN DELHI

FROM OUR DELHI OFFICE.
TUESDAY.

Sir John Woodhead, Finance Member, Government of Bengal, is on a short visit to New Delhi. On Tuesday morning, he had a long conversation with Sir Frank Noyce and Mr. A. G. Clow of the Industries and Labour Department when the question of the jute industry in Bengal was discussed.

In the afternoon Sir John saw Sir Sir John Woodhead, Mohammad Zafarullah Khan, Commerce Member and, it is understood, represented to him the present position of the Port of Calcutta, the revenues of which are dwindling.

It may be recalled in this connexion that a conference representing the railways, shipping and commercial interests has been called by the Commerce Member for Friday next, when the question of the rail-shipping competition will be discussed. The conference has primarily been called to elicit the point of view of the various interests concerned.

RATE "WAR"

It is interesting to note that while the shipping interests have been blaming the railways for undercutting them and taking away their traffic, the railways retort that they have suffered from similar treatment by the shipping companies in the past. Commercial interests, on the other hand, prefer the status quo as they benefit most by the "rate war."

The conference, will thus represent three conflicting interests and the task of the chairman, the Commerce Member, is not likely to be an easy one. The conference is, therefore, not likely to take any decisions, but only to formulate the demands made by the various interests for decision in due course.

A jute manufacturers' deputation will wait on Sir Frank Noyce, Member in charge of Industries and Labour, on Thursday. The deputation will be headed by Mr. H. H. Burns and will consist of Messrs. Scott, Morgan and B. M. Birla.

DIFFERING VIEWS

LEADERS' DEFINITIONS OF PATRIOTISM

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.
MADRAS, Dec. 16.

Two different views were expressed at the opening of the Tamilnad Provincial Congress Swadeshi Exhibition at Congress House, Madras, yesterday.

Mr. S. Satyamurthi referred to Swadeshi as "the uniform of patriotism" and said it had come to stay. It was, he added, the religious duty of every Indian to procure all his requirements from swadeshi articles and if these were unobtainable to get swadeshi substitutes and to use his best endeavours to see that Indian articles took the place of foreign articles in his home at the earliest possible moment.

In contrast to these views Mr. Jamal Mohamed, who opened the exhibition, said: "You will agree with me that the swadeshi spirit is to be fostered but only on the basis of economic necessity and never in the spirit of hatred of everything foreign. The necessity of international goodwill and harmonious relationship between the various countries of the world is being increasingly felt and advocated, particularly at the present and at any time ours should not be the country to do anything prejudicial to this international spirit of goodwill and harmony."

REVISED TARIFF VALUES

IMPORTANT NOTICE

RESULTANT INCREASE IN DUTIES

NEW DELHI, Dec. 17.

A Gazette of India Extraordinary publishes the revised tariff valuations for imported articles which will come into force from January 1, 1936, and will operate until the end of that calendar year.

This notification, which is published by the Commerce Department under section 2 of the Indian Tariff Act, supersedes notifications of the same department on the subject of tariff valuations issued this time last year and also during the current year. These tariff values have been based entirely on current prices. Important changes, however, are noticed in the case of coconuts and coconut oil.

The present tariff on coconut (husked) imported from the Straits, Dutch East Indies and Siam, per 1,000 is Rs. 44; this has been raised to Rs. 55 per 1,000. In the case of unhusked coconuts from the same countries the existing tariff of Rs. 62 has been raised to Rs. 67-2 per 1,000.

CALCUTTA WEATHER

	Shade Temp.		Sun. Temp.		Wind		Rainfall
	Max.	Min.	Max.	Min.	Dir.	Vel.	
10-24 Hrs.							
Wed. Dec. 11	83	61	84	6			31.6
Thurs. 12	83	60	82	0			38.5
Fri. 13	83	61	79	0			5.6
Sat. 14	81	60	79	0			35.6
Sun. 15	82	61	78	0			35.6
Mon. 16	81	58	81	0			35.6
Tues. 17	80	55	83	0			35.6

In the case of coconuts from Ceylon the present valuation is Rs. 28-8 per 1,000 and this figure has been raised to Rs. 45 per 1,000.

For coconuts (other than Maldives) the existing rate of Rs. 22-12 has been raised to Rs. 30 per 1,000.

Regarding copra or coconut kernel from any source, the present tariff value of Rs. 6 per cwt. has been raised to Rs. 9 per cwt.

The valuation of coconut oil, which is now Rs. 10 per cwt. has been raised to Rs. 13.

EFFECT OF REVALUATION

The effect of these changes in the tariff will be that the amount of duty to be paid will be proportionately increased.

The only other important change is in respect of sodium hydro sulphide. The tariff on this chemical, which is largely used in the textile industry, is Rs. 42 per cwt. and has been reduced to Rs. 31 per cwt.—Associated Press.

CALCUTTA

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was compounded of a set of frustrations which encompassed all groups within the community. The immediate threat was not to Islam the religion but rather to the economic, social and political aspirations of the various Muslim groups in Calcutta which had become more articulate and politically conscious since 1918. The political experiences of the last 17 years had taught them the value of concerted action, so that following their alienation from Congress they now looked outwards from the sub-communal group to the community at large for a means of achieving their goals.

By the end of 1935 the entire Muslim bloc in the Corporation, including Huq in his capacity as mayor, had resigned. Never before in the Corporation had Muslim leaders exhibited such a comprehensive degree of unity. In the years since 1918 the Muslims of the city had sought to find a political modus vivendi by a variety of means, the principle one being in some sort of compromise with Congress. By the end of 1935, however, such attempts had been abandoned. In 1918 the Muslim community of Calcutta was largely isolated from its co-religionists elsewhere in Bengal, but by 1935 its leaders had expanded the scope of their interests from the municipal to the provincial level, and in succeeding years the Ashraf families of Calcutta and the mofussil renewed their links in an attempt to seize control of the province from the Hindu minority.

However, in Calcutta during the years between 1918 and 1936 the leadership of the Muslim community had undergone radical changes. In 1918 a handful of wealthy merchants and aristocratic pensioners, loyal to the Imperial authorities, had been the spokesmen of a relatively inarticulate community. By 1936 on the other hand new groups of Muslims had been introduced into the political arena, and the leaders of the community were subject to increased pressures from below. Merchants, artisans, ratepayers and trade unionists who had been silent in 1918 had found various means of expression by 1936 and demanded that any leader of the community heed their voices.

In Calcutta this meant that the Corporation was of increased importance from the viewpoint of Muslims by 1936, whilst for Bengal as a whole it meant that the relatively wealthier, better organised, more articulate and non-Bengali Muslims of the city had begun to emerge from the cocoon of the metropolis and were set to enter upon a new phase of politics which was destined to dramatically alter the history of the province.

CONCLUSION

with their heritage of Moghul culture and memories of power lost, looked down upon the mass of their Bengali-speaking co-religionists and the immigrant Urdu-speaking Muslims of Calcutta.

All three groups provided the main spokesmen of the community before 1918, and were regarded by the British as the 'representatives' of the Muslims of Calcutta. In fact they were not so much the representatives of the community in general, but rather were the representatives of the three most articulate Muslim groups within the city. The mass of Muslims in Calcutta were inarticulate and divided into a variety of geographic, occupational, linguistic and racial groups which ranged from the tall, pale-skinned, Pushto-speaking Pathan moneylenders of Mechua Bazar to the dark and lithe Bengali-speaking lascars of Kidderpore.

Prior to 1918 all of these sub-communal groups had, except for one instance, remained largely anonymous in the public life of the community and Calcutta. The one instance was the occasion of the Balkan Wars when the various Urdu-speaking Muslim mercantile and artisan groups of central Calcutta had been stirred by the wave of Pan-Islamic sentiment which swept Muslim India at the time.

Local agitators such as Abul Kalam Azad, who identified with none of the three dominant Muslim groups in Calcutta, and north Indian agitators such as the Ali brothers, capitalised upon the concern of the poorer Muslim mercantile and artisan groups and involved them in their first experience of mass politics. The experience proved ephemeral, but it revealed that the supposed spokesmen of the Muslims in the city had little measure of contact with the majority of their co-religionists. They exerted influence more because of their relationship with the British and their ability to prosper within the urban environment, than because they had any great community of interests with their fellow Muslims.

This point was made even more sharply by the events of the years 1918 and 1919 which swept aside the traditional Muslim leadership in Calcutta. In 1918 north Indian Muslim agitators involved the Urdu-speaking Muslim masses of Calcutta

in a huge and tragic outbreak of rioting which was prompted by a medley of religious, economic and anti-British grievances. The old leadership proved incapable of controlling the Muslims of central Calcutta and, following an interregnum of north Indian Muslim domination, a new leadership emerged within the city in 1919. Admittedly the new leaders were drawn from the previously dominant Muslim groups, but they identified with the community at large rather than with the particular interests of their parent groups.

Their role was facilitated by two major political developments in the sub-continent: namely the advent of Gandhi and the growth of the backward-looking Khilafat movement amongst the Urdu-speaking Muslims of the land. With its evocation of the past glories of Islam and anti-British overtones the Khilafat movement swept the Urdu-speaking Muslims of India into the mainstream of the nationalist struggle against foreign rule. Gandhi was of vital importance because he offered the Muslims the moral and practical support of the Hindu community in their struggle against the British, and by his sympathetic attitude towards Muslim aspirations he captured the support of the younger Muslim leaders throughout British India.

Gandhi also provided the inspiration and agitational means, through his programmes of hartals and Non-Cooperation, whereby the mass of previously inarticulate Muslims could express their grievances. The younger Muslim leadership, which had become increasingly disillusioned with British rule over the last decade, eagerly grasped the hand of friendship offered by Gandhi; and from 1918 to the mid 1920s the communal rapprochement and the nationalist programmes of agitation provided the political creche for a large number of Muslim groups in Calcutta.

This development was particularly evident in the central areas of Calcutta where Muslim settlement was concentrated. The immigrant lower class Muslim mercantile and artisan groups of this part of the city provided a fervent and articulate following for the proponents of the romantic Khilafat movement and the anti-British nationalist agitation.

But the chimera bred by the attempted amalgamation of the Khilafat and nationalist causes proved an unruly beast. With the failure of the Non-Cooperation programme and the settlement of the Khilafat issue no leader in India proved capable of sustaining the communal rapprochement. It had served a primary purpose of introducing increasing numbers of Hindus and Muslims into the political arena, but in this process were sown the seeds of communal dissension.

The Muslims of Calcutta were swept into the hybrid movement on a wave of religious and economic frustration, and once these stimuli had faded their heightened sense of communal and political consciousness turned inwards away from the national scene to the more familiar world of the community and the sub-communal group. The experiences of the last few years had revealed both the bankruptcy of the old form of elitist leadership, and the importance of mass action in the sense that the limited power and influence of the sub-communal group acting independently had been clearly revealed. With the breakdown of the communal rapprochement Muslim interest in Calcutta slowly began to centre upon the concept of the community as the only alternative focus of Muslim attention.

In Calcutta the waning of the Hindu-Muslim political liaison led to a splintering of the Muslim leadership, a multiplication of political factions and, in 1926, of a violent outburst of communal hatred. The Muslims of the city had apparently slipped into a morass compounded of aimless factional bickering, anti-Hindu and anti-British sentiment, and a general frustration with their economic and political role in the city.

Undoubtedly this was true, but several important changes had occurred, and were occurring, within the community. Firstly throughout these years there was a growing sense of communal consciousness - the ways and means of its expression may have differed, as is evinced by the multiplication of Muslim political factions, but nevertheless all the factions were primarily concerned with securing greater support in the city by furthering distinctly communal demands. Secondly

the leadership of the community had altered radically. The majority of leaders were still drawn from the mercantile and professional families, but they no longer served as the representatives of these groups alone; rather, in their attempts to secure a broader basis of support, they championed the interests of a broader spectrum of sub-communal groups in recognition of the increased social and political consciousness of many of their co-religionists. This forced upon them the task of espousing the aspirations and grievances of these groups, and led most noticeably to the increased importance of the Calcutta Corporation as a forum of Muslim expression in the city.

Factionalism, intrigue and the conflicting interests of various Muslim groups made the development of Muslim communal unity in Calcutta a slow process; but external factors, which principally involved the Bengali Hindu community, spurred the flagging spirit of communalism to life.

The attitude of the dominant Hindu groups in Calcutta and Bengal towards the Muslim community was a vital factor in feeding the spirit of Muslim communal sentiment. After the failure of the communal rapprochement in the mid 1920s various attempts had been made to heal the breach between the two communities, but all were in vain. The Muslims were not without blame, especially the more fanatical Urdu-speakers of Calcutta and the mofussil, but overall the dominant landowning Hindu elite may perhaps be considered more culpable. The Hindu elite feared for its dominant economic, political and social position in Bengal, particularly with regard to the threats, imaginary or otherwise, posed by the numerically superior but impoverished Muslim masses. These fears were a decisive factor in moulding Hindu attitudes in Bengal and Calcutta, and largely account for the intransigent attitude of the Hindus towards the demands and grievances of the Muslims of the province.

The refusal of the Hindu elite to make any major concessions to Muslim sentiment negated all attempts by nationalist sympathisers amongst the Muslims to achieve a

modus vivendi between the two communities. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the dismal debates and conflicts which absorbed the Hindu and Muslim Corporation councillors in the decade between 1926 and 1935.

Muslims in Calcutta felt frustrated in the fields of education and employment, to mention but two major sources of contention; whilst elsewhere in the province the predominantly Muslim peasantry found its attempts to improve its economic position were bitterly opposed by the Hindu landowning elite who provided the hardcore of support for the nationalist movement in Bengal.

Admittedly for a while Muslim leaders such as Fazl-ul Huq managed to lead a supra-communal peasant movement based on class rather than communal interests, but this proved to be an illusory alliance. The real struggle for domination in Bengal was between the urbanised and upper-class Muslims and their Hindu counterparts. The peasantry of both communities were inarticulate, and the leadership of them eventually fell to the wealthier and more articulate members of their respective communities.

In Calcutta the late 1920s and early 1930s witnessed a growing realisation amongst the Muslims of the futility both of factional politics and attempts at compromise with the Hindu-dominated mainstream of the nationalist movement. The ministerial controversy of 1927 and the Simon Commission, Nehru Report, the Round Table Conferences, the Communal Award and the question of municipal reform, all of which occurred in subsequent years, had revealed the full divergence of Hindu and Muslim interests. In addition such events underscored the pressing need for Muslim solidarity if any gains for the community were to be achieved in Calcutta and Bengal.

This growth of Muslim parochialism in Calcutta was matched by a growth in communal consciousness amongst the Muslim masses of the mofussil. Ironically this had been initially precipitated by Fazl-ul Huq who had championed their class interests in the late 1920s. Alone, however, Huq had proved incapable of defeating the opposition of the Hindu landowners. Faced by the antipathy of Hindu nationalist

politicians in the Bengal Legislative Council he was forced to seek the support of other Muslim leaders and the representatives of the depressed-class Hindus.

Huq's Muslim allies, though mainly drawn from landowning Ashraf families in the mofussil, were more than willing to sacrifice their class interests in return for the influence they gained by posing as champions of their community. What had originally been a class-based movement was rapidly transformed into a communal confrontation, with the Muslim peasantry ranged against the Hindu community as represented by the great landowners and the provincial Congress organisation.

The increasing influence of the more communally oriented Muslim leaders in the rural struggle eventually alienated most of Huq's Hindu followers. More important still, however, the nebulous concept of 'community', which was evoked during the struggle, helped bind the Muslims of Calcutta and the mofussil closer. The result was that by the early 1930s the political horizons of the Muslims of Calcutta had expanded from the sub-communal group to the community in the city and thence to the community at large in the province. The nascent alliance was compounded of a variety of often conflicting interests for what had the Bihari carters of Mechua Bazar in common with the Muslim peasants of Mymensingh apart from religion? Yet all were united by a negative attitude towards the political, economic and social domination of the Hindu elite.

In Calcutta the process of 'politicisation' amongst the various Muslim groups had not occurred only in the turbulent period immediately after the Great War, but it continued steadily in subsequent years. This was particularly evident among specific groups such as the Muslim lascars, waterside workers, merchants and municipal electors of the city.

The history of maritime trade unionism amongst the Muslims of Calcutta is one of intrigue and factionalism, but it is also one of the slow emergence of a number of distinctly Muslim trade unions which by 1932 had definitely adopted the communal cause in a deliberate attempt to achieve political

gains. Thus by the mid 1930s Muslim leaders who preached a distinctly communal creed had gained the support of such unions by supporting their claims to separate representation in the reformed constitutional processes which the British planned to implement in 1937.

The same can be said of the growing communal consciousness of Muslim commercial interests which, in 1932, gave rise to the formation of the Muslim Chamber of Commerce in Calcutta. Such an event was evidence of the growing importance of economic conflict and rivalry between Muslim and Hindu mercantile groups in the city as a factor in the growth of communalism.

In the field of Corporation politics also the impact of the Muslim masses in the city continued to grow. The municipal reforms of 1923 and 1932 had not extended the franchise to any great extent; nevertheless, increasing numbers of Muslims had focussed their attention upon the activities of the Corporation which had been converted by Hindu leaders into a bastion of the nationalist movement. Muslim members of the Corporation were not slow to realise the psychological impact of street demonstrations, rallies and petitions upon their fellow councillors and the press. The result was a carefully cultivated extension of Corporation politics into the streets, homes, mosques and schools of Muslim Calcutta. Thus the spread of Muslim electors associations, ward associations and mosque associations in the early 1930s bound the Muslims of the city more closely to the cause of the community. The Corporation had in fact gradually lost much of the Olympian aura which had surrounded it in 1918, and by 1935 was the focus of interest, if not the forum of expression, for the greater proportion of the city's inhabitants.

The political and social history of the Muslims in Calcutta between 1918 and 1935 is one of an exotic urban minority group which underwent a piecemeal, and by no means predictable, process of political awakening and growing communal self-consciousness. These developments in turn led, under the impact of the community's inability to come to

terms with their Hindu compatriots, to the development of a greater sense of communal self-reliance and identity. Such sentiments spread beyond the bounds of the city to encompass the Muslims of the mofussil with whom their co-religionists in Calcutta had little in common beyond a shared religion and a fear of Hindu domination - both of which were later to be major justifications for the establishment of a separate Muslim state in Bengal.

POSTSCRIPT

In the years between 1935 and 1947 communal relations in Calcutta and Bengal deteriorated tragically. The communal unity exhibited by the Muslims of Calcutta in the municipal dispute of 1935 was symptomatic of a new found communal consciousness and confidence which, combined with a despair of achieving a modus vivendi with the Hindus, was to sweep vast numbers of Muslims into a ready acceptance of the concept of Pakistan.

In Calcutta the majority of Muslims firmly supported the walk-out of the councillors, and communal leaders from all parts of the province seized the opportunity to further the cause of Muslim unity. At a mass meeting on the Maidan on January 19, in the presence of the dissident councillors, with the sole exception of Huq, the Nawab of Dacca clearly enunciated Muslim sentiment. He declared that:

The Mayor and the Muslim councillors deserve to be warmly congratulated on their resignation from a corporate body in which the rights of the Moslems have been deliberately and tyrannically trampled under the heel of so-called nationalism which is nothing but communalism and vested interests of the darkest dye.

The situation with which we are faced today has taken a long time to develop. The action of the Mayor and the Muslim councillors has been the culminating point in a series of futile endeavours to convince their Hindu colleagues who are in an overwhelming majority that such a continued denial of justice to the Moslems would be against the best interests of the nation, the cause of which the Congress Party profess to serve and which the Muslims have been no less anxious to uphold. Das, Bose [Subhas Chandra] and Sen-Gupta treated us with consideration, but not their successors and if in a comparatively limited sphere as the administration of a city municipality, Congressmen have been unable to rise above narrow communalism and partisanship, what can we expect, if tomorrow, in the larger political field the Congress comes into power?

I shall not be wrong if I say that the Moslems of Bengal as a whole are watching with keen concern the outcome of this struggle for Moslem rights in the 'Citadel of Swaraj'.¹

¹Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XXIII, 25.1.1936, p.315.

His speech lucidly set forward the wider interpretation given the municipal dispute by the Muslims of Bengal, and indicated that for once the community was not dealing with an immediate grievance, but rather was looking into a future in which Swaraj now loomed as an attainable goal.

It would perhaps be naive to interpret the speech as the first clumsy gropings towards the concept of Pakistan, but it did nevertheless reveal the degree of Muslim alienation from the Congress and the Hindus. In addition Dacca's speech was not directed at an audience comprised solely of Urdu-speakers, social conservatives and religion fanatics, but rather at the representatives of a wide variety of groups from within the community. He was warmly supported by the leading Muslims of Calcutta such as Nooruddin, Momin, Ispahani and Huseyn Suhrawardy, as well as members of prominent Ashraf families from the mofussil, trade unionists, disillusioned nationalist sympathisers and respected divines. Such men represented a wide spectrum of political and social views, but all were united in their suspicion of Congress and an increased awareness of the need for the Muslims to function as a distinct communal bloc in the politics of Bengal and India.

Just as in the period 1927 to 1935, in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, the question of tenant interests had enabled both communal and secular Muslims to work together, the larger issues stirred by the municipal dispute confirmed this liaison and extended it to include further groups such as the trade unionists and the former Nationalist Muslims. The main significance of the dispute, as far as Calcutta was concerned, was that it sealed the bonds between the leaders of the city and the mofussil, and bound the future of the Urdu-speaking urban community to that of their Bengali-speaking co-religionists in the rural areas.

The Hindus of Calcutta were slow to realise the extent of Muslim alienation, and until the eve of the municipal elections, late in February 1936, they refused to accept the

resignation of the Muslim councillors.¹ Admittedly at first they had some cause for optimism, as on February 9 A.K.M. Zakariah withdrew his resignation, and Huq entered into negotiations with the Hindus for a settlement.

But the optimism was misplaced. Zakariah was denounced at a mass meeting on the Maidan, and when he entered the Corporation on February 12 he was assaulted by a gang of Muslim students.² In addition the negotiations with Huq were undermined by his own alienation from his community. At first he had been hailed as a hero but when, on February 6, he opposed a resolution, sponsored by the Nawab of Dacca, Ispahani and Suhrawardy, that the Muslims should boycott the forthcoming municipal elections his image was severely tarnished.³ A public statement in which Huq condemned the resolution as 'impolitic and ill-advised' did little to improve his relations with other Muslim leaders. The statement went on to declare that:

The resolution has been passed at the instance of the Khilafat Committee and the New Muslim Majlis. With due deference to these two institutions I cannot but say that even the two put together do not represent even a minute fraction of the Muslim ratepayers of Calcutta....For them to seek to impose a mandate on those who are willing to undertake civic duties is, in my opinion, a worse tyranny than what is imputed to the Hindus in the Corporation....I have nothing but praise for the public spirit and energy shown by the Khilafat Committee and the Majlis. But let them spare the poor ratepayer in Calcutta and direct their guns against the Port Trust, the Government, and the non-official Europeans, who are worse culprits than the Corporation Hindus.

I appeal to the Nawab Bahadur [of Dacca] to intervene and suspend the resolution till at least the wishes of the ratepayers have been consulted.⁴

¹Ibid., 11.1.1936, p.235; ibid., 18.1.1936, p.260, ibid., 25.1.1936, p.313; ibid., 1.2.1936, p.356; ibid., 8.2.1936, p.396.

²Ibid., 15.2.1936, p.431.

³Ibid., 1.2.1936, p.356.

⁴Ibid., 15.2.1936, p.431.

In part Huq's appeal gained some response from the Muslims who, on February 18, met Hindu representatives at the residence of the Nawab of Dacca. The Muslims refused to withdraw their boycott resolution, but they did agree to further negotiations if the Corporation would immediately appoint two Muslims to senior posts in the municipal administration and agree to re-open the question of Muslim employment. The leaders of the two major factions in Congress accepted these conditions, but unfortunately when they raised the resolutions in the council chamber they failed for want of a quorum.¹

The Muslims were furious,² and Huq, whose house had already been besieged by mobs infuriated by his attempts at conciliation,³ abandoned his efforts to seal the breach. Under pressure from Dacca, 'who had been appointed titular head of the boycott movement' by Nooruddin, Ispahani and Suhrawardy, Huq withdrew his candidature as Alderman and denounced the municipal elections.⁴

II

The elections proved to be a fiasco. The New Muslim Majlis and the Calcutta Khilafat Committee, under Huseyn Suhrawardy, canvassed the community to secure a complete boycott and were largely successful in their efforts.⁵ Five of the nineteen Muslim seats remained vacant after nine candidates were persuaded to withdraw; twelve seats were

¹Ibid., 22.2.1936, p.471.

²Ibid., 29.2.1936, p.512a.

³Ibid., 8.2.1936, p.396.

⁴Ibid., 11.4.1936, p.740a; Ispahani, M.A.H., Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah As I Knew Him (1966), p.11.

⁵Ibid., p.10.

filled without contest, and only two were filled as the result of any contest.¹

Ispahani's claim that the Muslim boycott was complete 'except for a "Quisling" and a few hackney carriage drivers, barbers and butlers who were elected by default and not by merit'² was true as far as the number of Muslim voters was concerned, but it was only partially true as a description of the men elected. Thirteen of the new councillors were complete nonentities but six of them had been elected to previous councils and ranged from the arch-communist 'Fruit King' of Calcutta, Mahomed Akbar, to the Nationalist Muslim Jalalluddin Hashemy.³ These men, however, committed political suicide by such action and soon vanished into the oblivion wished upon them by their co-religionists. Demonstrations were mounted against them, their homes were ransacked and Abdur Raheem, a nominated councillor who was later elected as deputy mayor and had been involved in municipal and communal politics since 1913,⁴ was attacked in the street by members of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee.⁵

As a result of the elections the attention of Muslims in Calcutta passed from the Corporation to the next centre of confrontation with the Hindus: the first elections to the reformed Bengal Legislative Assembly, which were held in January 1937. In the intervening period, however, vital changes in the leadership of the Muslim community throughout India were occurring.

Since the halcyon days of Hindu-Muslim political cooperation in the early 1920s the Muslims of India had been

¹ Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XXIII, 29.2.1936 (supplement).

² Ispahani, M.A.H., op.cit., p.10.

³ Jalalluddin Hashemy, Mahomed Akbar, A.K.M. Zakariah, Mahomed Hashem, Shamsul Huque and M.M. Huq.

⁴ See p.10.

⁵ Calcutta Corporation, Gazette, Vol.XXIII, 25.4.1936, pp.825-30; *ibid.*, 2.5.1936, p.853.

leaderless at the national level and divided into a multitude of rival factions. By the first years of the 1930s this lack of unity had waned. Futile attempts at conciliation and confrontation with the Hindus had created a climate of opinion within the Muslim community which favoured a greater degree of intra-communal unity, and which found a champion in the person of Mahomed Ali Jinnah, an anglicised Muslim from Bombay.

Without examining the details of Jinnah's rise suffice it to say that he was the first Muslim since Mahomed Ali who offered his co-religionists a national leadership, and the first ever who proposed a national and communalist policy for his community. Jinnah revived the moribund All-India Muslim League, and in 1936 he embarked on a whirlwind tour of India to conciliate divergent political factions within the community to secure a victory for the League at the provincial elections due in January 1937.

In August 1936 Jinnah visited Calcutta and at the Town Hall made a speech which, although it was conciliatory towards the Hindus, made it clear that the Muslims considered themselves a distinct political entity separate from Congress. Jinnah declared that:

Ours is not a hostile movement. Ours is a movement which carries the olive branch to every sister community. We are willing to co-operate, we are willing to coalesce with any group or groups, provided their ideals, their objects are approximately the same as ours.¹

The combination of 'olive branch' and Muslim political assertiveness were vague enough to appeal to Muslims of differing political persuasions. The result was that during his visit Jinnah secured the support of Ispahani, who led the New Muslim Majlis, and of Fazl-ul Huq, who had retreated from active politics in Calcutta to the mofussil where he

¹ Sen, S., The Birth of Pakistan (1955), p.107.

continued to receive the warm support of the peasantry.¹

One important group of Muslim leaders in Bengal, however, at first remained aloof from Jinnah's All-India Muslim League and the Presidency League which Ispahani had revived.² This group consisted of Huseyn Suhrawardy, Khwaja Nazimuddin and the Nawab of Dacca, who, shortly before Jinnah's visit, had formed the United Muslim Party.³ However, once Huq's Praja Party, with its considerable following among the Muslim and Hindu peasantry, had agreed to support Jinnah, the attitude of the leaders to the United Muslim Party changed. They realised they stood little chance of securing more than a handful of rural seats in the forthcoming provincial elections, and eventually they joined the Bengal Muslim Parliamentary Board which had been set up by Ispahani.

The Board had nine members: four from the United Muslim Party - Nazimuddin, Dacca, Akram Khan and Huseyn Suhrawardy; two from the Praja Party - Fazl-ul Huq and Shamsuddin Ahmed, and three who sat as Jinnah's representatives, namely Ispahani, Nooruddin and a prominent merchant Abdur Rahman Siddiqui. These last three had been members of the Majlis which by now had merged with the Presidency League. Eventually the United Muslim Party also liquidated itself and only the Praja Party, with its large Hindu peasant following, retained its separate identity.⁴

¹ Ispahani, M.A.H., op.cit., pp.18, 23; Sayeed, K.K., Pakistan: The Formative Phase, 1857-1948 (1968), p.94.

² Ispahani, M.A.H., op.cit., p.23.

³ Ibid., p.17.

⁴ Ibid., p.30.

III

At the provincial elections in 1937 the Muslim Parliamentary Board had considerable success. Between them the component parties secured 74 of the 119 seats. The Muslim League accounted for 39 and the Praja Party for 35, in addition to which at least seven of the 45 independents were strongly sympathetic to the coalition.¹

In Calcutta Huseyn Suhrawardy and Ispahani easily captured the two Muslim seats,² whilst their supporters Nooruddin and Mohamed Solaiman secured two of the contiguous Muslim seats and the third went to Suhrawardy who now held two seats.³ This double victory proved of great importance, for beneath the surface of the coalition conflict had broken out between Fazl-ul Huq and the leading Ashraf families in the mofussil. Khwaja Nazimuddin decided to fight Huq for the leadership of the Muslim rural masses and contested his home seat at Barisal. Nazimuddin was soundly defeated, however, and he only entered the Assembly by securing the seat of North Calcutta when Suhrawardy opted to retain his second seat.⁴ The opposition which faced the successful Muslim candidates in the Calcutta area had been minimal. Six of the rival candidates were obscure figures of no prominence, whilst the remaining three - Mahomed Raffique, Shamsul Huque and Mahomed Saadatullah - were compromised by their membership of the Corporation and suffered humiliating defeats.⁵ A further member of the Presidency League also secured a Calcutta seat: Abdur Rahman Siddiqui, who was elected to represent the Muslim Chamber of Commerce.

¹ Govt of India, Reforms Dept, Franchise, 1937, File no. 20/III/36-F.

² Calcutta North; Huseyn Suhrawardy, 3743/6929 votes; Calcutta South: M.A.H. Ispahani, 4069/6486 votes.

³ 24-Parganas Municipal: Huseyn Suhrawardy, 1884/3082 votes; Barrackpore: Mohamed Solaiman, 1885/3078 votes; Hooghly cum Howrah: Nooruddin, 1856/2322 votes.

⁴ Bengal Govt, A Brief Summary of Political Events in the Presidency of Bengal During the Year 1937 (1938), p.4.

⁵ Govt of India, Reforms Dept, Franchise, 1937, File no. 20/III/36-F.

Following the elections Huq formed a ministry. His quota of Muslim seats plus the support of the depressed-class Hindu representatives gave him the largest following in the Assembly. Jinnah remained faithful to their pre-election agreement, and the representatives of the League promised him their votes for which they gained three ministerial appointments.¹ Once the ministry was formed Huq began to adopt a more overtly communal stance. The failure of Congress elsewhere in India to form provincial ministries with the support of representatives of the Muslim League infuriated him, and at the Lucknow session of the All-India Muslim League in 1937 he

threatened to retaliate against the Hindus of Bengal for the supposed dangers to Muslim interests under the Congress Governments.²

Also shortly after this he claimed during a speech in Calcutta that Congress was

determined to crush and subdue the Muslims and that the Mahasabha was devoting its energies to the frustration of Muslim hopes and the suppression of the legitimate rights...of... Muslim India.³

In part Huq's language may have been a result of increasing pressure from his more communalist colleagues; but whatever the cause such statements served only to undermine the unity of the Praja Party whose Hindu supporters were already dissatisfied with the distribution of ministerial portfolios.⁴

¹Huq: Education and Chief Minister; Nazimuddin: Home Minister; Dacca: Health Minister; Huseyn Suhrawardy: Finance, Commerce and Labour Minister.

²ALCC Papers, 1938, File no.6-32.

³Ibid.

⁴Bengal Govt, A Brief Summary of Political Events in the Presidency of Bengal During the Year 1937 (1938), p.5.

The political history of Bengal, and by now Calcutta was an integral part of the provincial political arena as far as the Muslims were concerned, was marked in succeeding years by an increasing divergence of interests between the Hindus and Muslims. Huq's ministry survived until 1941 when, following a quarrel with Jinnah and the resignation of his fellow Muslim ministers at the instance of Jinnah, Huq had to resign. His attempt to reconcile sectional Hindu and Muslim interests failed because of tensions within Bengal, and also because of the interference of Jinnah who used Bengal as a pawn in his struggle for Muslim rights at the national level.¹

Although Huq lost the support of the majority of Muslim MLAs he still retained sufficient votes to form a new ministry which survived until 1943. In that year, as a result of the gradual alienation of many depressed-class Hindus by the rapid growth of a more intransigent spirit of Muslim communalism, and quarrels between Huq and Governor Herbert, Huq again resigned.² This time however he was unable to rally sufficient support. His main rivals Khwaja Nazimuddin and Huseyn Suhrawardy formed a Muslim League ministry with Nazimuddin as Chief Minister. In 1945 this ministry collapsed as a result of conflict between its progenitors, and Suhrawardy became the last Chief Minister of a united Bengal.

IV

It is virtually impossible to write of a separate Muslim political history in Calcutta during the years after 1935. By then the Muslims of the city had entered provincial politics in liaison with Huq and the Ashraf families of the

¹ Sayeed, K.B., op.cit., p.213; Huq, Fazl-ul, Bengal Today (1944), p.6.

² Ibid., pp.7-35.

mofussil. The immediate interest of all the Muslim groups was to destroy the economic and political stranglehold of the Hindu elite. The ultimate goals of the Urdu-speaking merchants of Mechua Bazar, of peasant leaders such as Huq, of demagogues such as Huseyn Suhrawardy and of the disillusioned Nationalist Muslims may have differed, but in their confrontation with the Hindu elite they used the common weapon of communalism.

In Calcutta Congress made belated attempts to conciliate Muslim nationalist sympathisers and trade unionists, but it was too late. Mujibur Rahman was won back to the cause,¹ but the Urdu-speakers firmly rejected all overtures.² Ironically leaders of Congress in the province had finally come to realise the need to conciliate the peasant masses, and in May 1937 one official of the party reported that:

I feel that Muslims in Bengal may be mobilised only through peasant movements. There is hardly any middle class Muslim youth who can be diverted to Congress. We should however try to bring in a number of Muslims to make the Bengal Congress a real mass organisation. It would also help us when Subhas [Chandra Bose] returns to Calcutta as he also entertains similar ideas.³

Such belated considerations were of little value. The accession of the former Nationalist Muslims and Huq to the Muslim League coalition had strengthened the hand of the more intransigent communalist Muslims. The Nawab of Dacca again took a leading role in the activities of the maritime trade unions;⁴ while Huq and the Bengali-speaking former Nationalist Muslims provided a vital link for the Ashraf families and the Urdu-speakers of Calcutta with Muslim peasant organisations in the mofussil.

¹ALCC Papers, 1937, File no.26, letter dated 16.4.1937.

²Ibid., File no.54, letter dated 3.8.1937.

³Ibid., letter dated 21.5.1937.

⁴Bengal Govt, Administration Report, 1935-36, p.XXVIII.

Eventually Huq's understanding with the Muslim League collapsed, but at the same time the Praja Party was undergoing a piecemeal disintegration, and finally fell victim to the upsurge of Hindu and Muslim communalism. The spoils of this disaster were gathered by the Muslim League. Firmly entrenched in Calcutta, where the spirit of Muslim assertiveness appealed to the business instincts of Muslim merchants and industrialists, who first espoused a 'Buy Muslim' campaign and then the cause of a separate Muslim state,¹ the League rapidly extended its influence into the mofussil where it championed the cause of the Muslim peasantry with an arrogant brand of communalism.

Huq and the former Nationalist Muslims were caught in an unenviable position. Huq retained considerable personal support but his supra-communal party was in ruins. Its Hindu supporters had been alienated by his own flirtation with the more extreme brand of Muslim communalism and a parallel rise in Hindu communalism which overwhelmed their class interests. The Muslim peasantry had been seduced by the Muslim League who, while espousing the class conflict of peasant versus landlord, had the additional weapon of communal sentiment.

The former Nationalist Muslims suffered a similar fate. Alienated from Congress they pursued their activities amongst the Muslim peasants and were largely responsible for bringing them, and other groups such as the lascars, into the orbit of the Muslim League. The Ashraf families of the mofussil, and the Urdu-speakers of Calcutta, played a vital role in these events. Dacca, Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy and Ispahani all adopted the cause of the Muslim peasant, yet their aims were radically different from those of the former Nationalist Muslims. They had no interest in social reform and were only concerned with seizing the dominant economic and political roles held by the Hindu elite. For such men

¹Sayeed, K.B., op.cit., p.95.

the defence of communal interests, and later the espousal of Pakistan, were conceived largely in terms of the economic and political gains they would achieve.

Too late men such as Mujibur Rahman and Abul Hashem, son of Abul Kasem, brother-in-law of Huseyn Suhrawardy, and the 'young socialist General Secretary of the provincial Muslim League',¹ realised the full meaning of the Muslim political revival. Rahman returned to Congress in 1937, and was followed by Hashem in 1943 after he had waged 'a battle royal inside the Bengal Presidency League against the group led by the Nawab of Dacca and Khwaja Nazimuddin', who were also supported by the Muslim merchants and industrialists of Calcutta.² In Hashem's case the dispute was to have further consequences for when he was forced to migrate to East Pakistan in 1950, after communal riots in Burdwan, he was imprisoned for several years by members of the coterie he had angered in 1943.³

Other former stalwarts of the nationalist movement remained with the Muslim League. Akram Khan allied himself with Nazimuddin and became a leading newspaper editor in East Pakistan; whilst Aftab Ally continued his trade union activities in the new state amongst the lascars, most of whom originally came from the area.

Perhaps the ultimate tragedy of these years was that whilst the concept of Pakistan gained support first from the Urdu-speaking Muslims of Calcutta and the mofussil, the state itself was made possible by the mass support of the peasantry whose political interest had been aroused by men such as Huq and the Nationalist Muslims. None of these men envisaged the final fruit of their work, and certainly once East Pakistan had been established it was the 'Bihari', or Urdu-

¹ Ibid., p.209; interview with Abul Hashem at his home in Dacca, 1.10.1970.

² Ibid., 2.10.1970; Sayed, K.B., op.cit., p.209.

³ Interview with Abul Hashem at his home in Dacca, 2.10.1970.

speaking, Muslims rather than the Bengali-speaking Muslims who tasted the fruits of victory.

Large numbers of Muslims from Calcutta migrated to the new state where, along with local members of Ashraf families, they gained political and economic control. The Ispahanis, along with Gujarati and Memon families, established a virtual economic monopoly, whilst M.A.H. Ispahani was later the Pakistan High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. Nazimuddin and Huseyn Suhrawardy quarrelled shortly after Partition, when Nazimuddin became Chief Minister of East Pakistan, but later Suhrawardy was amply rewarded when he became Prime Minister of Pakistan. Huq also achieved political power in the new state, first as Advocate-General of East Pakistan and later as Governor of the Province and Interior Minister for Pakistan. His enmity with Suhrawardy and the Dacca coterie, however, did not decline, and in his final years his proclaimed sympathy for the peasant masses and the general body of the Bengali people alienated him from the 'Bihari' elite.¹

A host of other 'Bihari' Muslim emigres from West Bengal and Calcutta soon replaced the vanquished Hindu elite in East Pakistan, and a determined attempt was made to undermine the Bengali culture of the region. Eventually, however, the growth of a small Bengali-speaking Muslim middle class, which filled the lower ranks of the administration and professions, combined with discontent at the misgovernment of the province by the 'Bihari' elite to breed a revolutionary situation in which the emigre Urdu-speaking Muslim population fell victim to the bloody birth of Bangla Desh.

¹ Interview with Faizul Huq, son of Fazl-ul Huq at his home in Dacca on 2.10.1970; also with Syed Azizul Huq, nephew of Fazl-ul Huq, at his home in Dacca on 1.10.1970.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX IOccupation or means of livelihood of the Muslims of Calcutta, 1901.

I. Government Service: 5,443 (figs include dependents).

II. Pasture and Agriculture: 5,931

III. Personal Service: 45,954 (indoor servants: 28,013).

IV. Preparation and Supply of Material Substances: 118,239.

1.	Provision of animal food	5,472	
2.	" " vegetables etc.	6,227	
3.	" " drinks, spices etc.	5,351	
4.	Lighting	329	
5.	Fuel and forage	2,070	
6.	Building	23,603	
			a. masons
			b. bricklayers
			23,307
7.	Vehicles and vessels	1,435	
8.	Paper	2,030	
9.	Books and printing	9,277	
10.	Watches, clocks, etc.	257	
11.	Carving and engraving	763	
12.	Toys and curiosities	321	
13.	Music and musical instruments	107	
14.	Glass bangle sellers	561	
15.	Necklaces, beads, threads	387	
16.	Furniture	142	
17.	Harness	143	
18.	Tools and machinery	2,061	
19.	Arms and ammunition	310	
20.	Wool and fur	456	
21.	Silk	309	
22.	Cotton	2,437	
23.	Jute, hemp etc. (operatives)	12,668	(10,604)
24.	Dress (incl. tailors)	24,465	
25.	Gold, silver, precious stones	2,157	
26.	Brass, copper, bellmetal	315	
27.	Tin, zinc, etc.	371	
28.	Iron and steel	936	
29.	Glass and chinaware	694	

30.	Earthen and stoneware	224
31.	Wood and bamboo	596
32.	Carpenters	3,580
33.	Canework, matting, etc.	503
34.	Gums, wax, resins, etc.	212
35.	Drugs, dyes, etc.	1,241
36.	Shoe, boot, sandalmakers	1,018
37.	Horn, hide, bristle sellers	2,118
38.	Bone	1,255

V. Commerce, Transport and Storage: 73,210

1.	Commerce	11,755
	a) general merchandise, bankers, accountants	(4,606)
	b) shopkeepers, hawkers	(6,291)
2.	Railway	3,354
3.	Road	20,484
	a) cart drivers	(13,115)
	b) cart owners, etc.	(6,853)
4.	Water	30,796
	a) boat and barge	(15,962)
	b) ships officers, crew	(12,518)
	c) dockyards	(1,164)
5.	Porters	4,671

VI. Professions

1.	Religion	1,213
2.	Education	1,186
3.	Literature	926
4.	Law	608
5.	Medicine (doctors)	1,698 (715)
6.	Engineering and surveying	761
7.	Music, acting, dancing	843

VII. Unskilled Labour 18,842

VIII. Means of subsistence Independent of Occupation

1.	Property and alms	7,475
2.	At State expense	3,185

Occupation or means of livelihood of the Muslims of Calcutta, 1901, by Ward.

1. Largest single group in the building trade where they form a majority. Comprise a third of jute mill workers (circa 400) and general labourers and a majority of tailors, cart drivers and tramway employees.
2. Form majority of tailors and transport workers; also more than a quarter of constables, durwans and Public Service menials.
3. Form majority of masons, bricklayers, bookbinders, tailors, leather goods dealers, tannery operatives. Also nearly 50 per cent of textile workers and dealers in hides, horn, bone and bristles.
4. Form majority of butchers, slaughters, match and candle-makers, firewood and charcoal dealers, suppliers of animal fodder, masons, bricklayers and transport workers. Also nearly 50 per cent of textile and dress workers, carpenters and general labourers.
5. Form majority of river transport workers and over 25 per cent of transport and storage workers.
6. Form majority of bakers, bricklayers, masons, booksellers, publishers, greasers, tailors, cart drivers, boatmen and porters with over a third of textile workers, jute workers, general transport and storage workers and general labourers.
7. Form majority of masons, bricklayers, printers, bookbinders, tailors, leatherworkers, general transport workers, cart drivers, and boatmen with over a third of general labouring population.
8. Form majority in animal fodder trade, food trade, lighting, firing, foraging, fuel, bricklayers, masons, cart transport, general transport, paper manufacture, bookbinding, printing, textile work, general labouring, hawking with over a third of those engaged in commerce, as middlemen and brokers, and in the professions.
9. Much the same as Ward 8 except that the Muslims have an even greater share in the professions and commerce.

10. Largest number of Muslims employed in domestic service where they form nearly 45 per cent of those so employed. Same percentage in food trade, building and textile industries and in transport.
11. Muslims poorly represented in all occupations.
12. Much the same as Ward 11 except that they form a majority of those engaged in bookbinding, road transport and storage.
13. Form majority of those engaged in textile trade, tailoring, transport, storage and as cart drivers. Form nearly 50 per cent of workers in personal service, the food and drink trade and the building trade.
14. 'Many respectable Muslims'. Form majority of those engaged in Public Service, personal service, building trade, tailoring, textile trade, bookbinding, printing, general transport and unskilled labour. Also form more than 40 per cent of those engaged in the professions and commerce.
15. Much the same as Ward 14 except that Muslims form the majority of those engaged in the professions.
16. Much same as Ward 15 although Muslim majority narrower.
17. Muslims in less proportion than Ward 16 but still form majority of those in transport and personal service.
18. As Ward 17.
19. Muslims poorly represented in all fields, but survey incomplete.
20. Muslim majority in Public Service, building trade, transport, storage, tailoring, personal service and the professions especially education, medicine and engineering.
21. Form majority in tailoring, transport, building trade, bookbinding, printing and personal service.
22. Poorly represented in all occupations except tailoring.
23. As Ward 22.
24. Form majority in personal service, tailoring, building trade, bookbinding and printing.

25. Form majority amongst tailors, stationers and dockyard labour.

Throughout the city they form:

67 %	of those engaged in building trade
60 %	" " " " water transport
53 %	" " " " associated industries
51 %	" " " " tailoring, textile and dress trade
49 %	" " " " drug and gum trade
44 %	" " " " general road transport
44 %	" " " " animal care and provedoring

references: Govt of India, Census of India, 1901, vol.VII, part 1, pp.160-73, 200-491; ibid., vol.VII, part 4, pp.96-97; Bengal Govt, Education Dept, April 1919, File no.1E-2, Progs 1-10.

APPENDIX II

'Ethnic groups' listed by M.K.A. Siddiqui in his unpublished seminar paper 'Caste among the Muslims of Calcutta', pp.4-8, presented to the Indian Anthropological Society, Calcutta, January 22-30, 1970.

I. Foreigners:

- A. Afghans (i) Jalalabadi
 (ii) Qandhari
 (iii) Ghaznavi
 (iv) Mazarsharif

B. Arabs

C. Tibetans, Chinese and others.

II. Indians:

A. North Western Region

- (i) Pakhtoon
- (ii) Peshwari
 - (a) Sayed - Priests
 - (b) Awan - Muleteers
 - (c) Kakazai - Tribals
 - (d) Kalal - Potters
 - (e) Kashmiri - Traders
- (iii) Kashmiri - divided into a large number of occupational backgrounds.
- (iv) Punjabi
 - (a) Rajput
 - (b) Jat

B. Western Region

- (i) Rajasthan
1. groups wearing ghagra (shirt) of specified colour.
- (a) Shekhawati - Red - Nilgar
- (b) Madi - Black - Nilgar
- (c) Manikar - Banglemakers
- (d) Sonar - Goldsmiths
- (e) Lohar - Blacksmiths
- (f) Dhobi - Washermen
2. groups not wearing ghaghra
- (g) Besati - Hawkers and traders.

(ii) Gujerati, economically dominant

1. sectarian-cum-ethnic groups

- (a) Dawoodi Bohra - Traders
- (b) Imami Ismaili Shia - Traders,
very small group.

2. groups sharing sects with others

- (c) Halai Memon - Traders
- (d) Cutchi Memon - Traders
- (e) Sunni Bohra - Traders
- (f) Asni Ashari Bohra - Traders

C. Southern Region

- (i) Tamils
 - (a) Marakkayar - Traders
 - (b) Rowther - "
 - (c) Labbai - "
- (ii) Malayali
 - (a) Thanagal - Saiyids
 - (b) Musalliyar
 - (c) Mapilla
 - (d) Rowther
 - (e) Keyi

D. Northern Region (Gangetic valley provinces)

- (i) Groups claiming foreign origin -
having no traditional occupation and
not organised on the basis of caste
panchayat (council) - represented in
all sects and most regional groups.
 - (a) Saiyid
 - (b) Sheikh
 - (c) Moghul
 - (d) Pathan.
- (ii) Groups of indigenous origin, recruited
from superior ruling and fighting
castes, coming from particular areas
with some sort of caste organisation
often taking shape in formalised
institutions.
 - (a) Qaum-e-Panjabian (Delhi),
economically dominant
 - (b) Qaum-e-Panjabian (Anivala),
economically dominant
 - (c) Rajputs
 - (d) Jats
 - (e) Malik.

(iii) Groups with traditional occupations, with traditional caste organisations of varying strength.

1. Groups that do not pursue traditional occupations in Calcutta but continue to do it elsewhere

- (a) Momen - Weavers
(numerically most dominant)
- (b) Ranki Kalal (Iraqi) - Distillers, monopolise the hide and skin trade.

2. Occupational groups that continue to pursue traditional occupations, besides adopting other occupations, and which generally have strong caste organisations

- (c) Darzi - Tailors - Bengali and non-Bengali
- (d) Kharadi - Woodworkers
- (e) Qasab and Qureshi - Butchers, third strongest numerical group
- (f) Chik - Goat and sheep butchers
- (g) Rai - Greengrocers, second strongest numerical group
- (h) Besati - Stationary peddlars
- (i) Mansuri - Cotton carders
- (j) Churihar and Shishgar - Glass bangle makers and dealers
- (k) Nikari - Fishmongers, very small group
- (l) Dafali - Drum makers and priests of certain sects
- (m) Hajjam - Barbers and surgeons
- (n) Dhobi - Washermen
- (o) Mirshikar and Chirimar - Bird trappers and dealers, very small group

- (p) Mirasi - Musicians, very small group
- (q) Qalander - ?
- (r) Faqir - Beggars and mendicants
- (s) Patwa - Painters
- (t) Sheikhjee - Dairy product dealers
- (u) Mea - " " " also an ethnic and regional group
- (v) Ghosi - Dairy product dealers
- (w) Lal Begi - Sweepers, an 'unclean' group on the borderline of Islam and Hinduism.

APPENDIX III *

Extract from "Independent" dated Allahabad, the 2nd Oct. 1921.

Mahatma Gandhi has issued the following appeal to the Mussalmans of India:-

To the Mussalmans of India.

Dear countrymen - While the arrest of Maulanas Shaukat Ali and Mahomed Ali has touched every Indian heart I know what it has meant to you. The brave brothers are staunch lovers of their country, but they are Mussalmans first and everything else after, and it must be so with every religiously minded man. The Brothers have for years past represented all that is best and noblest in Islam. No two Mussalmans have done more than they to raise the status of Islam in India. They have promoted the cause of the Khilafat as no two other Mussalmans of India have. For they have been true and they dared to tell what they felt even in their internment in Chindwara. Their long internment did not demoralise or weaken them. They came out just as brave as they went in, and since their discharge from internment they have shown themselves true nationalists and you have taken pride in their being so.

The Brothers have by their simplicity, humility and inexhaustible energy fired the imagination of the masses as no other Mussalman has.

All these qualities have endeared them to you. You regard them as your ideal men. You are therefore sorry for their separation from you. Many besides you miss their genial faces. For me, they have become inseparable. I seem to be without my arms. For anything connected with Mussalmans Shaukat Ali was my guide and friend. He never once misled me. His judgement was sound and unerring in most cases. With the Brothers among us I felt safe about Hindu-Muslim unity whose work they understood as few of us have.

* "Bamford Report", pp.207-212.

The Duty of Muslims:

But whilst we all miss them we must not give way to grief or dejection. We must learn, each one of us, to stand alone. God only is our infallible and eternal Guide.

To be dejected is not only not to have known the Brothers, but it is if I may venture to say so, not to know what religion is.

For do we not learn in all religions that the spirit of the dear ones abides with us even when they physically leave us? Not only is the spirit of the Brothers with us but they are serving better by their suffering than if they are in our midst giving us some of their courage, hope and energy. The secret of non-violence and Non-co-operation lies in our realising that it is through suffering that we are to attain our goal. What is the renunciation of titles, councils, law-courts and schools but a measure, very slight indeed, of suffering. That preliminary renunciation is a prelude to the larger suffering - the hardships of a goal life and even the final consumption on the gallows - if need be. The more we suffer and the more of us suffer, the nearer we are to our cherished goal.

The earlier and the more clearly we recognise that it is not big meetings and demonstrations that would give us victory but quiet suffering, the earlier and more certain will be our victory.

I have made your cause my own because I believe it to be just. Khilafat, I have understood from your best men, is an ideal. You are not fighting to sustain any wrong or even misrule. You are backing the Turks because they represent the gentlemen of Europe, and because they are Mussalmans and will not assimilate the modern spirit of exploitation of weaker people and their lands. In fighting for the Turks you are fighting to raise the dignity and the purity of your own faith.

Non-violence

You have naturally therefore chosen pure methods to attain your end. It cannot be denied that both Mussalmans and Hindus have lost much in moral stamina. Both of us have become poor representatives of our respective faiths. Instead of each one of us becoming a true child of God, we expect others to live our religion and even to die for us. But we have now chosen a method that compels us to turn each one of us our face towards God. Non-co-operation presumes that our opponent with whom we non-co-operate resorts to methods which are as questionable as the purpose he seeks to fulfil by such methods. We shall therefore find favour in the sight of God only by choosing methods which are different in kind from those of our opponents. This is a big claim we have made for ourselves and we can attain success within the short time appointed by us, only if our methods are in reality radically different from those of the Government. Hence the foundation of our movement rests on complete non-violence whereas violence is the final refuge of the government. And as no energy can be created without resistance our non-resistance to government violence must bring the latter to a standstill. But our non-violence to be true must be in word, thought and deed. It makes no difference that with you non-violence is an expediency. Whilst it lasts, you cannot consistently with your pledge harbour designs of violence. On the contrary we must have implicit faith in our programme of non-violence which presupposes perfect accord between thought, word and deed. I would like every Mussalman to realise, whilst the occasion for anger is the greatest, that by non-violence alone can we gain complete victory even during this year.

Nor is non-violence a visionary programme. Just imagine what the united resolve of seven crores of Mussalmans (not to count the Hindus) must mean. Should we not have succeeded already if all the titled men had given up titles, all the lawyers had suspended their practice and all the schoolboys had left their schools and all had boycotted councils? But we must recognise that with many of us flesh has proved too weak. Seven crores are called Mussalmans and twenty-two

crores are called Hindus, but only a few are true Mussalmans or true Hindus. Therefore if we have not gained our purpose, the cause lies within us, and if ours is, as we claim it, is a religious struggle we dare not become impatient save with ourselves, not even against one another.

The Brothers, I am satisfied are as innocent as I claim, I am of incitement to violence. Theirs therefore is a spotless offering. They have done all in their power for Islam and their country. Now, if the Khilafat or the Punjab wrongs are not redressed and Swaraj is not established during this year, the fault will be yours and mine. We must remain non-violent but we must not be passive. We must repeat the formula of the Brothers regarding the duty of soldiers and invite imprisonment. We need not think that the struggle cannot go on without even the best of us. If it cannot we are neither fit for Swaraj nor for redressing the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs. We must declare from a thousand platforms that it is sinful for any Mussalman or Hindu to serve the existing Government whether as soldier or in any capacity whatsoever.

Boycott of cloth

Above all we must concentrate on complete boycott of foreign cloth whether British, Japanese, American or French or any other, and begin, if we have not already done so, to introduce spinning wheels and handlooms in our own homes and manufacture all the cloth we need. This will be at once a test of our belief in non-violence for our country's freedom and for saving the Khilafat. It will be a test also of Hindu-Muslim Unity and it will be a universal test of our faith in our own programme. I repeat my conviction that we can achieve our full purpose within one month, by a complete boycott of foreign cloth. For we are then in a position, having confidence in our ability to control forces of violence, to offer civil disobedience, if it is at all found necessary.

I can therefore find no balm for the deep wounds inflicted upon you by the Government other than non-violence translated into action by boycott of foreign cloth and manufacture of cloth in our own homes.

APPENDIX IV

The Calcutta Riots *

The following extracts from the report of the Commissioner of Police, on the Calcutta riots from the 2nd to 15th April 1926 was published in the Calcutta Gazette for general information:-

Communal rioting between Hindus and Muhammadans broke out suddenly on the 2nd April and continued for several days, on a scale which is unprecedented in the history of Calcutta.

The immediate cause of the rioting was the failure of the band of an Arya Samaj procession to cease playing their instruments when passing Dinu Chamrawala's mosque, in Harrison Road, at the time of the 'Azan' or "invitation to prayer", preparatory to the four o'clock public worship, but it is unreasonable to suppose that this small incident could possibly have been the sole cause of such extensive riots as those which followed. On the contrary, there can be no doubt that this was purely the occasion and that the cause must be sought in more remote circumstances.

To appreciate what followed it needs to be stated at the outset that the first collision took place between up-country Hindus and Muhammadans and that by far the greater portion of the rioting and attendant crime has been confined to this section of the population of Calcutta.

Outbreak of Riots

As has been stated, the immediate cause of the outbreak was the playing of instruments in front of the Dinu Chamrawala's mosque by the Arya Samaj procession. The passing of the mosque at the junction of Harrison Road and Central Avenue had been successfully negotiated; music had been stopped without difficulty and the procession passed in safety. They arrived at Dinu Chamrawala's mosque, however, at the time

* Indian Annual Register, 1926, January - June, pp.70-84, Ibid., July - December, pp.83-85.

when the 'muezzin' was about to pronounce the 'Azan' - the invitation to Mahammadans to join in prayer - and silence on the part of the band was again invoked. This time, however, the direction was not immediately obeyed and the musicians continued to play their instruments. Some Muhammadans then came out from the mosque and remonstrated with the processionists, and ultimately the Police Inspector in charge, with the assistance of the leaders of the procession, succeeded in stopping the music. One drummer, however, continued obstinately to beat his drum and, by so doing, supplied the spark to set off the powder train which the events of the past few years had combined to prepare.

Narrative of Important Events

April 2nd, - From this stage onwards, it is difficult to speak with certainty as to the exact sequence of events, but the following narrative of the more important events, has been carefully compiled from the statements of two European eye-witnesses of the outbreak and from a series of reports from unconnected sources and it may, therefore, be accepted as a record which approximates as closely to the actual sequence of events as any human record of events happening in such quick succession could possibly do.

It seems clear, then, that the first militant act was committed by some Muhammadans in front of the mosque, who threw some clods of earth which they took from the road and they were followed almost immediately by another Muhammadan who threw an empty packing case at the procession. At this the processionists broke loose, the neighbouring shops and buildings were looted and brickbats and soda-water bottles were hurled at the mosque, smashing some of the window-panes and glass ornaments. They attacked the Muhammedans standing near the mosque and freely belaboured them with lathis and stones. The Muhammadans were then joined by a large number of their co-religionists living in the locality, who poured into Harrison Road from the by-lanes. In the initial stages of the rioting, two cart-loads of new bricks arrived on the scene - apparently destined for some building under construction - and the combatants on both sides helped

themselves freely to the contents. There appear, however, to have been other stores of ammunition in the vicinity, and it is alleged that bricks were thrown from the roof of the house adjoining that occupied by Babu Madan Mohan Barman - a prominent figure in the Hindu Mahasabha - by men who subsequently ran on to the roof of the latter's house. Finding the situation entirely beyond his control, the Inspector in charge of the procession hastened at once to Jorasanko police-station, from where he telephoned to the police headquarters Lall Bazar and mobilised the police-station staff, numbering about twenty-five constables, with whom he returned to the scene of the riot.

The battle raged furiously for some minutes, but the Muhammadans, who were now numerically superior to their opponents, put the processionists to headlong flight and thereafter remained in control of the street. Trams and buses were stopped and the Hindu occupants were freely belaboured. Hindu pedestrians were also seized and beaten and the situation became so grave that in a very short time the shops were closed and all the vehicular traffic was suspended.

Dy. Commissioner Assaulted

A strong contingent of police consisting of sergeants and constables of the traffic police then arrived in charge of Mr. F.D. Bartley, Deputy Commissioner, Head-quarters, and all rioting in the immediate vicinity was quickly put down. In the process, however, Mr. Bartley was struck on the eye by a brickbat and a sergeant who was near him was also injured, while a Gurkha constable who endeavoured to protect Mr. Bartley was stabbed from behind and seriously wounded. Piquets were posted on all important crossings and other strategic points and the situation was brought under control.

Sporadic rioting continued, however, in the side streets and by-lanes until mid-night, and individual Mahomedans and Hindus were waylaid and assaulted by members of the opposite communities.

Shortly after the arrival of Mr. Bartley, it was noticed by the Inspector of the Jorasanko police-station that the Hindu temple in Mandir Street, and the idol of Siva contained therein, had been damaged. This outrage appears to have been committed by local Mahomedans, who raided the temple, assaulted the Oriya servant who was present there, broke the image of Siva with stones and iron weights and took away all the movable articles inside the temple, as a measure of revenge for the damage inflicted on the Dinu Chamrawala's mosque.

In the meantime, the news of the riot had spread to other parts of Calcutta and sympathetic rioting arose. At about 7 a.m. a disturbance took place behind Madan's Theatre in Corporation Street and there was considerable excitement in the New Market. At about 8 p.m. the dead body of an unknown man was forcibly pushed into a tram-car on Lower Chitpur Road near Tara Chand Dutta Street and a sweet-meat shop looted in Phear's Lane. At 10.30 p.m. a large mob armed with "lathis", including a number of Khilafat volunteers, passed along Central Avenue towards Zakaria Street and subsequently proceeded along Harrison Road towards Chitpur Road, but, although their attitude was menacing, no actual collision took place and at a suitable opportunity they were intercepted and disarmed. At 11.30 p.m., a Hindu boarding-house at No. 36, Central Avenue, was attacked by a mob armed with brickbats, and a "bania's" shop was looted. During the course of the day, a constable of the Howrah Armed Police, in plain-clothing, was stabbed by a Mahomedan near Howrah Bridge.

Renewal of Hostilities

April 3rd - After a comparatively quiet night, rioting again broke out at 8 a.m., on the 3rd April, at the junction of Harrison Road and College Street, at Rajabazar and near Sealdah Railway Station - the reason for the renewal of hostilities being that a party of Hindus, including a few Sikhs, on hearing a rumour to the effect that the Sikh Gurdwara in Mechua Bazar had been set on fire, attacked and damaged the Jumma Pir Dargah in Clive Street. This thoroughly

enraged the Mahomedan population, who proceeded immediately to take revenge for this outrage. They threatened the Pareshneth Temple in Badri Das Temple Street and set fire to the Siva Temple in Mandir Street which they had damaged on the preceding day. Thereafter, they set fire to a number of Marwaris' and Hindus' houses. On Circular Road, a crowd of Mahomedans, who had collected near the Tram Depot, stopped a motor bus and assaulted the up-country conductor. A Bengali passenger, who came to the latter's assistance, fired a revolver which slightly wounded another passenger, but, nevertheless, had the desired effect of scaring away the mob. A Sikh driver of an Improvement Trust lorry was also dragged from his conveyance and beaten with "lathis" and stabbed. At about 9.30 a.m., a posse of police from Jorasanko police station were heavily stoned by a crowd of Mahomedans, who refused to disperse when ordered to do so, and a constable was somewhat seriously wounded. Shortly after this, a Hindu constable was stabbed at the junction of Harrison Road and Chitpur Road and an unknown Mahomedan was attacked and stabbed by a Hindu mob at the junction of Mullick Street and Cotton Street. Both these men died shortly after their admission into hospital. Two determined attacks were made by the Mahomedans on the Kali Temple at Kalitola, but they were repulsed by a large band of Bengalis, (most of whom were students), who had armed themselves with sticks and "lathis" in order to repulse attacks of this nature. At about 11 a.m. a crowd of Mahomedans broke into the Sikh Temple in Mechuabazar Street and the Sikh Gurdwara in Syed Sally Lane looted the gold and silver idols and other movable property inside the temples, destroyed the religious books, including a copy of the "Granth Saheb", and set fire to the buildings. They also looted and set fire to the Sikh cloth-shops on the ground floor of the Gurdwara in Syed Sally Lane. Information of this incident was conveyed by the Sikhs to a Police piquet stationed in Harrison Road, who immediately rushed to the spot and dispersed the mob. The fire was quickly extinguished by the Fire Brigade, but the temple in Mechuabazar Street was again set on fire by the Mahomedans and ultimately had to be guarded by Police. The

news of these outrages roused the Sikh community, who live chiefly in Bhowanipur, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that they were restrained by the Police from participating in the rioting. A large party of Sikhs, numbering about 400, succeeded in reaching the scene of the first outrage, but their participation in the hostilities was avoided by placing some of them inside the Temple and sending the remainder back to their homes.

From 10 a.m. onwards, the situation became increasingly grave and, as all the reserves of Police had, by this time, been exhausted, it was decided at about noon to requisition the aid of the Military authorities. A detachment of infantry and two armoured cars were posted on the streets and another detachment was held in reserve for use in emergencies.

Sikh Gurdwara Desecrated

At about mid-day, a mob of Mahomedans entered the Sikh Gurdwara at No. 9, Bagmari Road, and damaged and desecrated the Temple. At about 1 p.m. a large number of Mahomedans invaded the Presidency College grounds and assaulted the Hindu "durwans". Three of them were seriously wounded and one of them, the head "durwan", was so badly wounded that he died in hospital the next day. Shortly after this, a large crowd of about 500 Mahomedans attacked the "Sukumar Bhaban", a Sanskrit School in Baitakbana Road, and drove out the inmates, who escaped over the compound wall. The mob then proceeded to loot and damage the property. At about 2.30 p.m. two Marwaris were stabbed at the junction of Circular Road and Mechuabazar Street, and both subsequently died. Immediately after this incident, a postal mail van was attacked in Mechuabazar Street by a mob of about 200 Mahomedans who stopped the van by placing a dust-bin in front of it and stabbed the Sikh driver so seriously that he died the next day. The Police piquets posted near the spot attempted to intervene, but they were powerless to control the mob, who then proceeded to break open the van with the object of looting the contents. Fortunately a section of the Fire Brigade arrived at this juncture and were able to rescue the mails.

At about 3 p.m. a curious incident occurred; between two and three thousand Mahomedans had collected in front of the Nakhoda Masjid and a lorry containing a number of Mahomedans, who had been rescued from a Hindu quarter by a party of Police and were being escorted for safety, arrived there. Immediately after the rescued persons had descended from the lorry, three shots were suddenly fired at the Police from the Musafirkhana at No. 110, Lower Chitpur Road and a Hindu constable was mortally wounded and died that evening. No clue regarding the identity of the perpetrator of the outrage has yet been obtained and none is expected, and this incident will remain an act of gross treachery which is entirely inexplicable.

At about 4.30 p.m., a Mahomedan was attacked by a Hindu mob on Harrison Road and his left hand was chopped off.

Throughout the day, looting, incendiarism and murder occurred freely, whenever the rioters were out of sight of the Police or Military piquets, and no less than nine other persons were killed during the course of the day, in addition to those mentioned in the foregoing narrative.

By 4 p.m. the situation was more under control and, although the atmosphere was very electric, outbreaks of rioting became fewer in number. A general and continuous panic prevailed in the disturbed area, however; wild rumours abounded, frequent alarms occurred and these combined to produce a situation, in which anything might happen without the slightest warning and which taxed all the efforts of the Police to keep it under control.

During the evening, about 150 up-country Hindus attacked the Sona Pir Dargah at Durga Charan Mitter Street, but, before they could effect any appreciable damage, the police arrived on the scene and dispersed the rioters. The only other important event during the evening was the murder of a Hindu in front of the Y.M.C.A. building in College Street.

A day of Alarm

April 4th - At 1.30 p.m. on the 4th, an alarm was raised that the mosque in Wellington Square was being attacked, and a number of Mahomedans immediately hastened towards the spot. Mr. B.N. Banerji, Assistant Commissioner, South District, relying on his influence with the Mahomedans of the locality, by whom he is generally respected, attempted to induce these persons to return to their homes, but the latter paid no heed to him, assaulted him and knocked him down. Fortunately, a party of Police arrived on the scene and rescued the Assistant Commissioner.

Some of the rioters were chased into neighbouring shops and allegations of looting on the part of these constables were subsequently made to the Commissioner. A search was immediately instituted by the Deputy Commissioner, South District, and it is a regrettable fact that certain articles belonging to the shops were found in and immediately outside the building occupied by the constables attached to the Taltolla police station. The property was not found in the exclusive possession of any one of the constables and the latter's version is that the articles had been left there until the officer-in-charge should find time to take charge of them. There is no doubt that the charge of looting is true, and four constables have been dismissed.

At about 8 a.m. rioting broke out at Jagannath Ghat between Mahomedan and Hindu carters, until the latter were dispersed by the Police. The boatmen in that locality also took part in the disturbance and a Hindu was stabbed while he was bathing at the Ghat. At about 11 a.m. the Jain Temple at Belgachia was attacked by the Mahomedans, but the Police were quickly on the scene and dispersed the rioters. Shortly afterwards, a Mahomedan was mortally wounded by a Hindu mob in Shibtella Street, who also stole a double-barrelled gun belonging to another Mahomedan resident of that locality. During the course of the morning, the mosque in Nimtolla Street was attacked by a Hindu mob, who damaged the building and set it on fire, and, shortly afterwards, a mosque at Posta in Strand Road was attacked by Hindus and damaged. A

posse of Police were quickly despatched and they quelled the disturbance but, doing so, two Hindu constables were injured. At about 1.30 p.m. a riot broke out in Rajabazar and, in the process of dispersing the mob, three other constables were wounded. At about the same time, a serious riot broke out in Eden Hospital Road between Hindus and Mahomedans and brickbats were freely exchanged. The Shiva Temple in that neighbourhood and the Shitalamoni Temple in Prem Chand Boral Street were threatened and the mosque in the compound of the Medical College was attacked by a Hindu mob, but no harm was done in any case. A strong Police force quickly arrived on the scene and dispersed the crowd. At 6 p.m. the Nimtolla mosque was again attacked and set on fire, but the fire was extinguished and the rioters dispersed before much damage could be done. At about 8 p.m. a large crowd of Mahomedans were again going to attack the Jain Temple at Belgachia, but the Police received previous intimation of their intention and a large force was despatched in time to baffle their attempt. At about the same time, a crowd of 300 or 400 low class Hindus demonstrated in front of a house in Maniktolla Street which was partly occupied by Mahomedan tenants and in which some Mahomedan refugees from shops looted in the vicinity had taken sanctuary. The Hindu proprietor of the house directed the mob to disperse and threatened them with a rifle. As they paid no heed to his commands, he fired three blank shots, but this only served to infuriate the mob, who made a determined attack on the house. The proprietor then fired eight ball cartridges from his rifle with the result that four persons were injured, one of whom was seriously wounded.

During the course of the day, two Mahomedans and three Hindus were killed or received mortal injuries, and a large number of shops were looted. A 'majhar' at the junction of Upper Chitpur Road and Baranashi Ghosh Street was entirely razed to the ground and a Hindu Shiva was placed on the site, but this was subsequently removed at the instance of certain influential Hindus of the locality.

State of Panic

A state of panic prevailed throughout the disturbed area to an even greater degree than on the previous day. Wild rumours flew from mouth to mouth, frequent alarms occurred and business was entirely suspended. Very few people were seen on the streets and all attempts by leaders of communities to restrain their followers still failed to have the slightest effect.

On this date, the Chief Presidency Magistrate issued an order under section 144, Cr. P.C. prohibiting the assembly of more than five persons in any part of the disturbed area, and this order was enforced with effect from 5 p.m. This had a very beneficial effect and removed from the streets the large crowds which had previously collected there and had been productive of so much trouble, but individual cases of assault and disturbances in by-lanes still continued.

During the following night, a small temple of Radha Kissen in Watgunge Street was secretly desecrated by Mahomedan 'Goondas' and this was responsible for a good deal of feeling in the Kidderpore neighbourhood on the following day.

April 5th - On the 5th April, the rioting extended to the river-side. At about 7.30 a.m. some Hindu carters assaulted a number of Mahomedan boatmen at Nimtollah Ghat and at about 10 a.m. some Hindu Durwabs of Messrs. Marshall and Sons assaulted some Mahomedan crane drivers employed in the Port Commissioner's Jetty. At about 11 a.m. on this date about 2,000 Mahomedans, armed with lathis and brickbats, assembled at the junction of Manicktolla and Narkeldanga Main Road and declared that the Police should be attacked, as they were guarding Hindu temples and generally assisting the Hindu combatants. Brickbats were thrown at Inspector J.N. Roy and some constables, four of whom were injured, but a force of soldiers arrived almost immediately under the command of the Assistant Commissioner, North Suburbs, and the crowds dispersed. At about 5 p.m. some five hundred Mahomedan boatmen from boats moored near Babu Ghat attacked the police outpost in the Eden Gardens with lathis and brickbats and,

having driven the staff from the building, proceeded to loot the contents. Information was immediately sent to Lall Bazar and a small contingent of Auxiliaries and Police Sergeants soon arrived on the scene in charge of Mr. F.D. Bartley, Deputy Commissioner, Headquarters. The rioters put up a determined opposition to the efforts of the newly arrived patrol to disperse them and the patrol was heavily stoned, but they ultimately succeeded in driving the crowd down the gangway on to the pontoon. On this the rioters took up their stand and continued to shout defiance and to hurl stones at the patrol, whom they repeatedly tried to rush. The patrol thereupon fired and succeeded in dispersing the rioters by this means.

In the disturbed area, the full effect of the Chief Presidency Magistrate's order under section 144, Cr. P.C. began to be appreciated on this date and the day was comparatively uneventful. Some brickbats were thrown into the Taltola police station and some Mahomedans with a herd of cattle were attacked by Hindu rioters on the Strand Road. Sporadic looting and assaults continued, however, and the panic remained undiminished. As a consequence of this, the day was full of false alarms and this fact was not conducive to a speedy return to normality.

Incident Averted

April 6th - On the 6th April, a number of incidents occurred, which might easily have developed into very serious situations, but fortunately the Police were, in most instances, on hand in time to prevent serious rioting. Thus considerable tension arose in Kidderpore, where some Mahomedans threw stones at the Hindu temple in Watgunge Street, which had been desecrated on the previous day, and a number of members of both communities prepared to fight, but the Police arrived before hostilities commenced and dispersed the crowds. Shortly afterwards, a large number of Mahomedans, armed with lathis, collected near the mosque from Hem Chandra Street, but they were quickly dispersed by the Police. Thereafter, a horn or conch-shell was blown from the Panchanantola temple and Hindus of the locality

immediately collected there, out of fear that the temple was about to be desecrated. Mahomedans also arrived in large numbers and both parties were armed with lathis, but the Police were able to disperse the crowd after a brief exchange of brickbats. Again, at about 9 p.m., some 200 Mahomedans attacked the Shiva temple at the junction of Amberst Street and Sitaram Ghosh Street with brickbats and soda water bottles, but a contingent of soldiers and Police were immediately despatched to the spot and the mob was dispersed.

At 11.15 p.m., there was a disturbance in Nikasipara in North Calcutta, because the local Mahomedans feared that a body of Hindus were about to attack the Nikasipara mosque, while the Hindus had collected on receipt of a false rumour that the Mahomedans were about to loot their shops. The Police were immediately on the scene and the mobs were reassured and dispersed.

In two cases, more serious offences were committed. A party of Hindus attacked the mosque in Armenian Street with brickbats, but the disturbance ceased immediately on the arrival of the Police, and a Peshwari beggar was stabbed and killed in Harrison Road by some unknown Hindus.

April 7 - On the 7th April, there was a further decrease in open rioting. Some stones were again thrown at the desecrated temple in Watgunge Street, but further trouble was averted by the Police. A Mahomedan was found dead on Baranashi Ghosh Street, and another Mahomedan was stabbed at Posta by a party of Hindus and died in hospital the same day.

April 8th - On the 8th April, the situation had still further improved and the only event of importance was the murder of a Mahomedan in Upper Chitpur Road by a party of Hindus.

April 9th to 11th - On the 9th, one Mahomedan was wounded; on the 10th one Hindu and one Mahomedan; the 11th passed without any reported casualty; on the 12th two Hindus and one Mahomedan were wounded.

Thus ended the sporadic rioting which attended the later stages of the communal strife which began on Good Friday, the 2nd April. The Id-ul-Fitr on the 14th passed off peacefully and most of the troops were withdrawn that evening. The 15th was also without incident and the complete withdrawal of the troops from the streets late that afternoon may be said to mark the conclusion of the first phase of the riots.

It is to be observed that the foregoing narrative is by no means an exhaustive account of the innumerable incidents which occurred during the course of the riots in the various parts of Calcutta. It would be impossible to give a full list of such incidents in the sequence in which they occurred, and the narrative has therefore been confined to a recital of events which serve to convey some appreciation of the course and the character of the riots.

Measures Taken to Quell the Riots

Information regarding the outbreak of the riots was received by telephone at Lall Bazar at 3.50 p.m. on the 2nd April (Good Friday), and the Armed Police were immediately ordered to stand by. A patrol consisting of 20 Sergeants and 20 Constables from the Reserve Traffic under the command of Mr. F.D. Bartley, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Headquarters, was despatched at once to the scene of the outbreak and they were followed very shortly afterwards by another patrol consisting of 1 Inspector and 10 Constables of the Traffic Police. These patrols proceeded at once to quell the original riot and they were reinforced at about 4.30 p.m. by 2 non-Commissioned Officers and 20 Sepoys of the Armed Police, with whose assistance they were enabled to bring the situation under control. By these means all open rioting was stopped for the time being, but sporadic disturbances then broke out in the side streets and by-lanes, and a force consisting of 4 Sergeants and 30 Constables of the Mounted Police was therefore despatched at 5.30 p.m. for patrol duty. At about 7 p.m. the rioting began to extend beyond the scene of the first outbreak to other quarters of the town, and all Traffic Police were therefore withdrawn from posts in the city were held in reserve at Lall Bazar. As the disturbances

still continued, at 9 p.m. a force of 40 Constables of the Traffic Police and 10 Sepoys of the Armed Police were despatched to the disturbed area, and at 9.30 p.m. another force, consisting of 24 Sergeants, 7 Head Constables and 70 Constables of the Traffic Police, went out under the command of the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Headquarters. In addition to the above, a number of small patrols were from time to time despatched to various parts of the disturbed area, on receipt of telephone messages to the effect that disturbances were taking or about to take place.

At about 10.30 p.m. the situation was comparatively quiet and the majority of the Police were therefore withdrawn, leaving a force of 10 Sergeants and 20 Sepoys of the Armed Police and 2 Sergeants and 15 Constables of the Mounted Police to assist the district police in the disturbed area throughout the night.

At about 8 a.m., on the following day, the 3rd April, rioting again broke out, and during the course of the next two hours a total force of about 150 Police was despatched to reinforce the piquets in the disturbed area. By 10 a.m., general rioting was taking place over a large area and, as the police piquets were insufficiently mobile, five motor lorries were hired for the purposes of conveying patrols quickly to the place where they were required, and each of these were equipped with a force of 4 Sergeants, 5 Sepoys of the Armed Police and 10 Constables of the Traffic Police. Two of these motor patrols and four motor cycle patrols each consisting of 8 Sergeants in a motor-cycle and a side-car, patrolled continuously throughout the disturbed area, while these motor patrols and two motor-cycle patrols were held in reserve at Lall Bazar for despatch to danger spots on receipt of requisitions by telephone. All possible reserves at the disposal of the Police, including a force of 100 recruits and constables undergoing refresher course at the Police Training College were pressed into service in connection with the riots. By this time, some five to six hundred police were concentrated in the main disturbed area of

the North Town and this arrangement continued till the rioting had subsided. The district police in other quarters of the town and suburbs were standing by to deal with sympathetic outbreaks in their jurisdiction and were reinforced from Headquarters where necessary, while all reserves were held in readiness at Lal Bazar.

It soon became manifest, however, that these forces were insufficient and, at about noon, it was found necessary to requisition military assistance. This was readily given and a force of 350 officers and men of the North Staffordshire Regiment and four armoured cars, manned by crews provided by the Calcutta Presidency Battalion were placed at the disposal of the Police. In addition a light Motor Patrol, consisting of about twenty men with two Lewis guns was provided by the Calcutta Presidency Battalion and a Lewis gun patrol was obtained from the Calcutta Scottish.

On the 4th April, a contingent of one hundred men of the Eastern Frontier Rifles, under the command of Captain L.Y. Bazett, was received from Chinsurah, and twenty Armed Police were lent by the Superintendent of Police, 24-Parganas. This force continued to be employed throughout the period of the riots and, on the 6th April, a further reinforcement of 200 men was obtained from the Eastern Frontier Rifles at Dacca.

A Network of Patrols

With these reinforcements, it was possible to establish a network of patrols throughout the affected area. Military piquets were stationed at all strategic points throughout the day and night and these were maintained at sufficient strength to furnish constant patrols radiating from the fixed posts and linking up with the neighbouring piquets.

Unarmed parties were sent out regularly from Lal Bazar and from police stations to patrol both the main streets and every side street where trouble had occurred and a number of reconnoitring parties patrolled all the threatening areas throughout the day and night.

The remaining military forces were held in readiness at Lall Bazar, where information of almost all alarms was received by telephone. As necessity arose, they were sent out in flying patrols, under officers from police Headquarters, to the places from where the alarms were reported. In these cases, they dealt with the situation as they found it on arrival and, when peace had been restored, they returned to Lall Bazar after making local arrangements to prevent any fresh alarms or outbreak of rioting.

From the morning of the 3rd April, there were few collisions between large bodies of the two contending parties and the great majority of the disturbances were entirely sporadic in character; they subsided as suddenly as they arose, and the difficulties with the belligerents were greatly enhanced owing to the excellent cover afforded them by the labyrinth of small lanes and alleys which characterise that portion of the city. The particular feature of this warfare which was most difficult to control was the stabbing of individuals by small roving bands of the opposite community; who pounced on their victims without the slightest warning and vanished in a moment. As the assailants in each case immediately sought shelter amongst their co-religionists, it was impossible for a patrol arriving even within a few moments of the occurrence to ascertain whether they had gone or to obtain the slightest clue to their identity. It has been freely suggested that firing should have been resorted to more frequently by the Police, but the foregoing description will serve to show that this suggestion utterly ignores the realities of the situation. The most that could possibly be done was to keep flying patrols continuously operating in the affected area and to search for bad characters and lethal weapons in the gulleys down which the assailants had disappeared.

Throughout the riots, members of the public have frequently complained that fixed piquets did not rush to their assistance when they raised an alarm, but this criticism too is equally uninformed and ignores the many other considerations that determined the conduct of these piquets.

As has been stated elsewhere the first phase of the riots may be said to have closed with celebrations of the Id festival on the 14th April on which day the greater portion of the troops were withdrawn; on the following day and on the 16th April the detachments of the Eastern Frontier Rifles were permitted to return to their respective stations.

Effect of Military Forces

The reinforcement of the Police by Military Units had a very beneficial effect on the situation. The appearance of British troops on the streets, and particularly on the armoured cars provided a grim and effective warning to the rioters, which went far from being unheeded, and on innumerable occasions their presence alone was sufficient to disperse menacing crowds,

In addition, however, to their moral effect and to their undoubted effectiveness in quelling actual riots, the mobility of the armoured cars made them of special value to outlying unarmed piquets, with whom they were constantly in touch, and they also formed a valuable reconnoitring unit.

Throughout the first phase of the riots, the armoured cars did excellent work and their utility in dealing with street riots in a town like Calcutta cannot be over-estimated. The type of car at present used is possibly a little cumbersome and not adapted for narrow streets, but it is of immense use in the broader thoroughfares.

The greatest effect of the military forces was, however, achieved during the process of re-establishing normal conditions in the affected area, and there can be little doubt that the return to comparative normality would not have been achieved within so short a period without the feeling of security which was induced by their presence on the streets.

Communities Participating in the Riots

In the first instance, the rioting was confined to the two communities who first came into conflict, namely, the Mohamedans and the Arya Samajists, but the conflict became almost immediately a struggle between Mohamedans and up-country Hindus. This state of affairs continued until 10 a.m. on the 3rd April, when the Kali Temple at Kalitola was attacked by Mohamedans. This outrage thoroughly roused the Bengali Hindus, who had hitherto taken no part in the struggle and against whom the Mohamedans had displayed no animosity whatsoever, and they took up the cause of their up-country co-religionists. Their part in the struggle was, however, confined almost entirely to the defence of their religious institutions and in only a few instances did they participate in any retaliatory measures.

Casualties among the Public

So far as can be ascertained, the total number of casualties from the rioting which took place between the 2nd and 12th April was 44 deaths and 584 injuries sufficiently serious to warrant admittance into hospital. Of the dead persons twelve were killed outright, while the remainder died in hospital, and they include 24 Hindus, 19 Mahomedans and 1 person of doubtful nationality.

The persons admitted to hospital consisted of 327 Hindus, 238 Mahomedans, 1 Anglo-Indian, 2 Jews and 16 persons nationality is not known.

Appended is a statement of the casualties giving the dates on which they occurred:-

Date				Injured	Death
2-4-26	...	...	...	171	...
3-4-26	...	...	...	195	...
					28
4-4-26	...	...	...	134	...
5-4-26	...	...	...	41	...
6-4-26	...	...	...	17	5
7-4-26	...	...	...	15	4
8-4-26	...	...	...	9	3
9-4-26	...	...	...	1	...
10-4-26	...	...	...	2	...
12-4-26	...		...	3	...
				588	40
				4-died	
				subsequently	4
				584	44
			Total		

It would be unsafe, however, to assume that these figures represent the total casualties resulting from the riots, since a number of dead bodies may have been thrown into the Ganges, a considerable number of injured persons were undoubtedly treated at their homes, instead of being sent to hospital, and a large number of persons were dressed and discharged at the hospitals without any record being kept of their cases.

Police Casualties

The total number of Police Casualties amounted to 2 deaths and 91 injuries. The injured persons included Mr. F.D. Bartley, Deputy Commissioner, Headquarters, Mr. B.N. Banerjee, Assistant Commissioner, South District, 1 Inspector, 21 Sergeants, 4 Head Constables, 60 Constables and 3 Sowars.

Arrests

The total number of persons arrested in connection with the first phase of the riots is 500, of whom 327 are Mohomedans and 173 Hindus. This figure bears no relation to the number of persons engaged in the riots nor to the number of offences committed, but the difficulties in the way of securing evidence against the rioters are obvious and require no comment. Of the persons arrested, 153 were released on personal recognizance to appear on the 30th April for discharge. 347 persons have been sent up for trial and details

of the sections of law under which they will be prosecuted are given below:-

Sent up for trial under sections 302, I.P.C., (9 accused in one case and 1 accused in another) - 10.

Sent up for trial under sections 147 and 148, I.P.C. - 203

Sent up for trial under sections 457-380, I.P.C. - 8

Sent up for trial under sections 454, I.P.C. - 9

Sent up for trial for minor offences, i.e. sections 29, 54A and 68 of the Calcutta Police Act - 117.

Looting

Throughout the period of the riots, looting of shops was freely resorted to by members of both Communities. In many cases, the object was purely to cause damage to a member of the opposing community, but, in many other cases, the motive was plunder by the unruly element of the population, who took prompt advantage of the unsettled conditions in that quarter. The total number of shops looted amounted to 197, of which 106 belonged to Mahomedans and the remaining 91 to Hindus. It has not been possible to arrive at even an approximately accurate estimate of the total loss sustained and enquiries in this connection are still being made. While many persons have omitted to give information to the Police regarding the looting of their shops, others have greatly exaggerated their losses and, in these circumstances, it would be unsafe and mis-leading to offer any estimate without further investigation.

Goondas

An important feature of the riots was the vigorous participation therein by the "goonda" element of the population, who speedily realised the opportunities for looting and violent crime which were offered by the conditions then prevailing and proceeded to take full advantage of these opportunities.

Attack on Religious Institutions

The most remarkable feature of the riots was the number of religious institutions attacked by members of the opposing communities, and this may be taken as symptomatic of the great animosity existing between the followers of the rival religions. Attacks on Hindu temples have always been a feature of Indian history, although their frequency has decreased very considerably since the British occupation, but they have never occurred in Calcutta, and it would be difficult to find, within recent times, in the whole of India a parallel to the events that have taken place in Calcutta during the outbreak of communal frenzy, since, during the course of seven days, no less than three temples and three gurdwaras were attacked or desecrated and five others were threatened.

Attacks on mosques, however, have not occurred since the beginning of the 18th century (1712 A.D.) when the Sikhs under the leadership of Banda, a 'bairagi', destroyed a number of 'masjids', in revenge for the destruction by Aurangzeb of Hindu temples. From the date until the present time, destructive attacks on mosques have been practically unknown, but in the present instance five mosques were attacked and attempts were made to attack two others, while attacks were made on three "daryabs", one of which was entirely razed to the ground. These acts of vandalism have unquestionably intensified to an unprecedented degree the bitterness and hatred existing between the two communities of which they are themselves the symptoms, and it is impossible to say how long this acute antagonism will continue.

A full list of the temples and mosques destroyed or desecrated is given below:-

Temples

- (1) Shiva Temple at crossing of Zakaria Street and Mandir Street - Twice desecrated.
- (2) Radha Kissen Temple in Watgunge Street - Once desecrated; twice threatened.
- (3) Kali Temple in Cornwallis Street - Once attacked; twice threatened.
- (4) Jain Temple in Belgachis Road - Twice threatened.
- (5) Shiva Temple in Amberst Street - Threatened.

- (6) Pareshneth Temple in Badri Das Temple Street - Threatened.
- (7) Shiva Temple in College Street - Threatened.
- (8) Sitalamani Temple in Prem Chand Boral Street - Threatened.

Gurdwaras

- (1) Tara Singh Sangar in Mechusbasar Street - Desecrated.
- (2) Hari Narain Singh Sangat in Syed Sally Lane - Twice set on fire and three times attacked.
- (3) Gurdwara in Belgachia Road - Desecrated.

Mosques

- (1) Dinu Chamrawala's Mosque in Harrison Road - Desecrated.
- (2) Massaripatti Mosque in Upper Chitpore Road - Attacked.
- (3) Nimtollah Mosque - Twice desecrated.
- (4) Amposta Mosque at Posta - Attacked.
- (5) Medical College Mosque - Attacked.
- (6) Canning Street Mosque - Attacked.
- (7) Armenian Street Mosque - Attacked.

Dargahs

- (1) Jumma Pir Dargah in Clive Street - Desecrated.
- (2) Sona Pir Dargah in Durga Charam Mitra Street - Desecrated.
- (3) Majhar at crossing of Baransashi Ghosh Street and Upper Chitpore Road - Destroyed.

Incendiarism

Another remarkable feature of the riots was the extraordinary degree to which incendiarism was resorted to by the rioters and, there is no doubt that, but for the splendid efforts of the Fire Brigade, an enormous conflagration causing incalculable losses in human life and property would have resulted. Incendiarism has been employed by the conflicting parties in previous disturbances, but the extent to which this means of revenge was employed in the present instance is entirely unprecedented. During the four days ending the 6th April no less than 151 fires were caused by the rioters and, although the resources of the Fire Brigade were strained by this unparalleled call on their services

and despite the difficult conditions under which they were frequently called upon to work, the Fire Brigade succeeded in all cases in confining the fires to the premises of origin. The first fire caused by rioters occurred on the 3rd instant and, between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. on this date, the Fire Brigade extinguished no less than 51 fires, which probably constitutes a world's record. The control of this extraordinary wave of incendiarism would have been impossible, however, but for the very commendable foresight of the Chief Officer, who, at the first sign of danger, arranged for the maintenance of the maximum pressure of water in all the water mains in the disturbed area and allotted additional machines and staff to the Fire Brigade which received most of the calls.

The method chiefly employed by the incendiaries was to break open a window or a door and to throw into the premises a piece of cloth which had been saturated with kerosene oil and then ignited, but in many instances petrol was poured into the premises and set on fire.

It is interesting to record that although the crowds frequently behaved in a threatening manner when fires, which they had ignited, were being extinguished, they did not interfere except on one occasion when the Fire Brigade were extinguishing a fire in the Jumma Pir Dargah near the junction of Harrison Road and Clive Street. On this occasion, the Fire Brigade were severely stoned, but fortunately only two members of the staff were wounded and their injuries were comparatively slight. In many cases, the Fire Brigade found, on arrival, that people in the premises had been cut off by the flames, but in all cases they arrived in time to rescue these people from danger. On at least three of these cases, the inmates had been actually locked in by the incendiaries. It is difficult to estimate how many lives they were thereby enabled to save, but the number must have been considerable.

Valuable services were also rendered by the Ambulance Department of the Fire Brigade throughout the riots, in conveying wounded persons to hospitals. All the members of the staff were mobilised for duty in connection with the

riots and, although they were frequently in positions of considerable danger, they performed their duty with unremitting zeal and were responsible for the safe conveyance of about 400 wounded persons to hospital.

The great efficiency displayed by these two departments and their ability to prove equal to the demands of an unprecedented situation reflect the greatest possible credit on Captain B.A. Westbrook and afford eloquent testimony of his powers of organisation.

A material factor in the successful manipulation of the Fire Brigade and the Ambulance Department was the efficient working of the Fire Alarm System, which is maintained in conjunction with the Telephone Company. Several thousand messages were transmitted to the Fire Brigade Headquarters, but in no case was there any material delay, and, since any such delay might have resulted in a serious conflagration in cases where fires broke out in congested areas, the thanks of the public are due to the telephone operators for their arduous and efficient work in this connection.

Conduct of Sikhs

Another feature of the riots, which is worthy of comment is the conduct of the Sikhs, who throughout the riots conducted themselves with most commendable restraint in spite of considerable and repeated provocation.

The whole Sikh community in Calcutta are to be congratulated on the restraint which they exhibited in the face of such severe provocation, and great credit is due to the leaders for their powers of control and for the very commendable public-spiritedness displayed by them.

On the 13th April, the procession of the Sikhs was forbidden by the Commissioner of Police, in view of the danger of the situation at that time. The Sikhs were far from willing to acquiesce in what they considered to be a further concession to outrageous Mahomedan demands and there was some talk of defying the order, but ultimately saner counsels prevailed and the procession was postponed.

Indian Press

Possibly the most disappointing feature of the riots, in view of the desire of Government to promote the growth of self-government in India, was the irresponsibility displayed by the Press. So far, indeed from assisting the authorities in controlling the situation, the whole of the vernacular press, in a greater or less degree, devoted their energies to inciting the followers of their respective religions, and to fomenting the existing attitude of disobedience towards the authorities engaged in restoring law and order. Some of the newspapers were admittedly worse than others, but all took full advantage of the absence of any legislation to control their productions and, on the 9th of April, the Honourable Member convened a conference of journalists, for the purpose of impressing on them their duties in regard to the riots. This Conference had a salutary effect but almost all the vernacular press continued their former propaganda, though in a subdued degree. Their chief offences were the publication of inflammatory leaflets issued by the opposite community. It is impossible to over-emphasise the danger of this form of propaganda, since the majority of the persons engaged in the rioting are almost wholly illiterate and derive their information from the newspapers which a few of their number are able to read aloud to them, and the natural result is that they are spoon-fed with highly sensational and extremely biased reports which they are only too ready to believe.

Leaflets

Towards the conclusion of the first phase of riots both the contending factions began to indulge in a highly mischievous and dangerous form of propaganda by means of anonymous leaflets which advocated the commission of murder and other acts of violence, in retaliation for the excesses committed by the opposing party. These leaflets have been very numerous and have taken a variety of forms such as notices, 'fatwas' and communiques regarding incidents or defining the general situation. They have been published in almost all the languages employed in Calcutta, and even

the less dangerous types, such as the pamphlets issued by the various Relief Committee's explaining the functions of these Committees, in connection with the riots, have played an important part in exacerbating the existing tension between the two communities.

Defence Parties

Immediately after the outbreak of attacks on religious institutions on the 3rd April, proposals were made to organise defence parties for the protection of Hindu temples. Some defence parties were actually formed, notably the 'Bray Club' in the jurisdiction of the Bartola police-station, the South Calcutta Defence Force under the presidency of Mr. S.N. Haldar, and another band of Bengali youths, who, under the leadership of Pulin Das, Nanda Ghash and Nea Ghosh, defended the Kali temple in Kalitola.

Early in the riots, the Commissioner of Police was approached by Mr J.M. Sen Gupta, Mayor of Calcutta, with a proposal that the latter should organise volunteer defence parties for the protection of mosques and temples and to assist in the work of restoring order. In discussing this proposal, the Commissioner explained to Mr Sen Gupta the necessity, firstly, for recruiting these volunteers equally from both communities and, secondly, for their enrolment as "special constables" under the control of the Police authorities. Mr. Sen Gupta expressed considerable doubt regarding his ability to provide the necessary Mahomedan contingent and, in subsequent correspondence with the Commissioner, made it clear that in no case could he sanction the subordination to official control of any volunteer recruited by him. In the special circumstances existing at present, the employment of such independent bodies would be fraught with many obvious and serious dangers and Mr Sen Gupta's attitude made it impossible to pursue the matter any further. Attempts are still being made by the Police, in co-operation with prominent Hindu and Mahomedan gentlemen, to organise mixed defence parties of properly enrolled volunteers. Apart, however, from the difficulties of recruitment, it is impossible to say, without experience, how

far such volunteers could be usefully employed in a communal disturbance.

It has been alleged that the refusal of the Commissioner of Police to recognise unenrolled volunteers deprived the public of a certain measure of protection. This contention, however, entirely ignores the obvious dangers inherent in the employment of bodies of men liable to be swayed by communal feeling and entirely divorced from effective control. These dangers so greatly outweigh the advantage of such protection as might have been afforded by these volunteers that the allegation carries its own refutation.

Exodus of Members of the Public from Calcutta.

Even in the early days of the riots, the panic in the disturbed area was so great that a number of people left their residence for other localities and, from the 3rd instant until after the conclusion of the riots, there was a daily exodus of people of all classes from the portion of Calcutta. Generally speaking, the Marwaris and the Hindus intended that their departure should be purely temporary and proceeded to their garden houses or to the houses of their friends outside the disturbed area, until such time as it should be possible for them to return. Many Mahomedans, however, have left the city with the intention of remaining absent for some considerable time and have returned to their original homes. It is impossible to compute, even approximately, the number of persons who have thus left their homes in Calcutta, either temporarily or permanently, but it is safe to say that their numbers have run into many thousands.

This report would be incomplete without some reference to the adverse criticism which has been freely levelled against the Police by all sections of the community. Criticism of this character is not lacking, even in normal times, and from the very nature of the riots, it was only to be expected that there would be outbursts of unbridled criticism, since the Police were required to hold the balance between two violently opposed factions, whose members were

blinded to all reason by religious prejudice and were impatient of any sort of control.

It must, nevertheless, be admitted that, in the nature of things the great preponderance of Hindus in the force, whether officers or constables, does afford some ground for the apprehensions of the Mahomedans that, in a communal crisis of this nature, Police measures may be conducted in a partisan spirit. It would, however be grossly untrue to assert that this spirit influenced, to any appreciable extent, the general conduct of the Police in the present riots. It would be too much to expect that individual members of the force should not entertain sympathies for their co-religionists engaged in the struggle or that, in a force numbering some 5,000 officers and men, these sympathies should not influence their actions in some isolated cases, but, generally speaking, it can be fairly maintained that the members of the force have subordinated their personal feelings to their sense of duty and have conducted themselves with most commendable impartiality in extremely trying circumstances.

The general body of criticism has been so vague and general in character that it has been impossible to undertake any investigation into the great majority of the allegations levelled against the Police, either individually or collectively. Such of the allegations, however, as have been supported by evidence are being carefully examined by responsible officers, but, in almost all instances, these allegations are found to be entirely baseless. The delay in examining these charges is due, firstly, to their vagueness, and, secondly, to the fact that practically the whole Police force have been continuously and fully engaged in quelling the riots.

Mention has already been made of the one outstanding case, in which it has been found that constables were guilty of removing articles from shops which had been looted. These constables have been dismissed, in default of sufficient evidence to warrant criminal prosecution.

As against this instance of a true allegation, the following may be quoted in illustration of the baseless

charges which have been so freely levelled against the force, even by persons of public prominence and high position:-

On the 4th April Mr H.S. Suhrawardy, Deputy Mayor of Calcutta, personally complained to the Commissioner that the Police and the Military had that day looted a shop at No 37, Kengrapatti, Burra Bazar. The Assistant Commissioner of the Detective Department (Mr Hartley) and Inspectors Robertson, Mahns, and P.N. Mukherjee, all of the Detective Department were immediately deputed to accompany Mr Suhrawardy to the scene of the alleged occurrence. A full enquiry was held without delay and it was found that the charge was entirely baseless. The shop in question was intact and a large number of the local residents testified that no looting whatever had taken place in that particular locality that day. The Assistant Commissioner found, however that two cloth-shops, at No 47, Kengrapatti, had been looted on the previous day, but an eye-witness of the occurrence, who was produced by Mr Suhrawardy, declared that no Police or Military were in the locality when the looting took place.

The Second Phase of the Riots, 22nd April - 9th May

Shortly before 1 p.m. on the 22nd April, rioting again broke out throughout the disturbed area. The immediate occasion was a brawl between some Hindus and Muhamadans near the junction of Mechua Bazar Street, Cotton Street and Upper Chitpur Road. Considerable uproar and excitement followed on the heels of this incident and all important shops in Chitpur Road and Cotton Street were immediately closed. The Deputy Commissioner, North District, the local police and a force consisting of 1 Inspector, 6 Sergeants, 10 sepoy of the Armed Police and 10 constables were quickly on the scene and the rioting was immediately put down. Two of the drunken Mohammadans who participated in the brawl were arrested and the crowds were dispersed.

The atmosphere in the disturbed area continued to be very uncertain even after the conclusion of the first phase of the riots and a force had accordingly been kept permanently posted on all important crossings to patrol that area both day and night. When the second phase of the riots broke out on the 22nd April, therefore, the district police under the command of Mr. H.C. Hunt, Deputy Commissioner, North District, who was immediately on the scene, were enabled to cope with the initial outbreak. Reinforcements were, however, immediately rushed out from Lall Bazar, on receipt of a telephonic message from one of the armed piquets. Strong piquets were posted at all important junctions and a reserve force was stationed at Batra Bazar thana. When the rioting began to spread beyond the scene of the original disturbance, further measures were adopted and by 2 p.m. all available reserves had been mobilised and every possible precaution taken. In addition to the piquets stationed on all important crossings, fifty men from the North Division, Port Police, had been drafted into Harrison Road: motor lorries had been hired, and motor patrols put into operation, and the whole of the Traffic Police, Armed Police and Mounted Police had been recalled from their normal duties and made to stand by at Lall Bazar.

In view, however, of the number of by-lanes and gulleys with which that part of Calcutta is honeycombed this force was unable to prevent the commission of isolated assaults which then began to occur. Other contingents of force were added later from Dacca and other places.

Moreover, the large number of individual assaults, which particularly characterised the second phase of the riots, required the establishment of an even closer network of patrols than previously and it was essential that as many as possible of these should be in charge of persons capable of exercising initiative. The decision to retain their services for a period of three months has been arrived at in consideration, firstly, of their moral effect and secondly, of the grave possibility of further outbreaks of rioting within this period, and particularly on the occasion of the "Bakr-ld" and "Muharram".

Communities Participating in the Riots

As in the case of the first phase the rioting was confined almost entirely to the Mohammadans and up-country Hindus. The Bengali Hindus participated to a greater degree than in the first phase, but generally speaking, they remained on the defensive, the Sikh community remained completely aloof from the struggle and in only one isolated incident did a member of this community participate.

Casualties among the Public

No less than 66 persons were killed, or died as a result of injuries received, during the second phase of the riots and 391 persons were so seriously wounded as to warrant their admission into hospitals. The dead persons included 30 Hindus, 31 Mohammadans and 5 persons of doubtful nationality, while the persons admitted into hospital consisted of 172 Hindus, 213 Mohammadans and 6 persons whose nationality is not known.

It is unlikely that these figures represent the total casualties resulting from the rioting which occurred between the 22nd April and 3rd May.

Police Casualties

The casualties amongst the Calcutta Police force were comparatively slight and consisted of one death and four serious injuries. A number of other officers received minor injuries, but they were not admitted into hospitals and their cases have not been included.

Arrests

The total number of persons arrested during the second phase of the riots was 567, of whom 398 were Mohammadans and 169 Hindus. A large number of these had to be discharged for lack of evidence, but 360 persons, including 272 Mohammadans and 88 Hindus, were sent up for trial.

Individual Assaults

The chief characteristic of the second phase of the riots was the very large number of attacks on individuals by small roving bands of the opposite faction. These assaults were, almost without exception, committed in apparently deserted streets, out of sight of the police, and frequently just after a police patrol had passed and, in view of this fact and of the difficulties attaching to the control of the form of crime which have been indicated in the report on the first phase of the riots, many of the assailants succeeded in escaping the legal liabilities of their action. Such methods as were possible, however, were adopted. "Goondas" and other persons known to be addicted to this form of crime were rounded up and prosecuted whenever evidence subsequently proved available, and the localities in which the assaults were committed were raided immediately afterwards for suspicious persons and for illegal weapons. As is apparent from the narrative, these measures ultimately achieved their desired effect and the numbers of assaults decreased in proportion to the increase in the number of arrests.

Looting

Instances of looting, however, were considerably less frequent than in the first phase of the riots, and throughout the whole period of the second phase, only 21 cases of looting occurred. In some of these cases, the premises were deserted at the time when they were looted and the extent of the damage caused, therefore, is difficult to compute; whereas in other cases, the value of the property looted was almost certainly exaggerated. The difficulty of obtaining even an approximately accurate estimate of the total damage still remains, therefore. But it is improbable that the figure was less than Rs. 10,000.

"Goondas"

As in the first phase, the "goonda" element of the population participated freely in the rioting, and the fact that all the available police were fully occupied in the suppression of open rioting and other acts of violence made it difficult to deal with them effectively. Such of the "goondas" as came actively to notice during the riots were, of course, arrested and where evidence was sufficient, were placed on trial but the leaders and the main body of the "goondas" still remained.

Despite great difficulties, however, forty-eight bad characters including several of the most notorious "goonda" leaders in Calcutta, were arrested, of whom twenty-five were proceeded against under the Goondas Act or were prosecuted under the ordinary law while forty-three others were elected to leave Calcutta.

Attacks on Religious Institutions

It is gratifying to record that the series of attacks on religious institutions, which formed the most remarkable feature of the first phase of the riots, was not repeated during the second period.

Incendiarism

Instances of incendiarism were also strikingly less frequent than in the first phase of the riots, and the total number of fires during the second period which can be definitely attributed to the rioters was fifteen only. In no case did the fires assume serious proportions and they were quickly extinguished by the Fire Brigade. The Ambulance Department also had considerably less to do than in the first phase and the total number of calls made on them was 172.

Allegations Against Police

Four separate complaints were lodged in court on the 17th May by Mohammadan residents of Mechua Bazar, accusing inspector R.D. Khosia of Sukea Street police-station of the

commission of murder, trespass and assault on the morning of the 27th April, shortly after the murder of Head Constable Bharat Roy. Three of these complaints were lodged before Mr. A.Z. Khan, Additional Chief Presidency Magistrate, who after a preliminary enquiry summoned the Inspector for trial, and all three cases are still pending. The fourth complaint, which accused the Inspector of murder and trespass, was lodged before the Chief Presidency Magistrate, who after examining the complainant's witnesses, dismissed the charge as being palpably false and a deliberate attempt to implicate the Inspector.

Charges under sections 448 and 824, Indian Penal Code, were also preferred against Sub-Inspector M.S.A. Ahmed, of Burra Bazar police station by a Marwari "bania", and this case is at present being tried by Chief Presidency Magistrate.

Scavenging by Bengali Boys

One of the worse features of the second phase of the riots was the almost entire suspension, for a number of days, of the conservancy arrangements in the disturbed area, in consequence of the fear of the Hindu sweepers and scavengers that they would be attacked by Mahomedans during the performance of their duties. The interruption of these arrangements threatened a serious general epidemic and remedial measures speedily became imperative. As soon as they asked for them, the Corporation authorities were furnished with police guards to protect such of their scavenging staff as could be persuaded to go out and the menace was successfully averted. In certain instances, Bengali youths displayed commendable public spirit by voluntarily assisting in removing refuse.

THE 3RD PHASE OF THE CALCUTTA RIOT

The following are extracts from the report of the Calcutta Police Commissioner on the communal riots in Calcutta from the 11th to the 25th July 1926. The main disturbances during the period related to the Rath Jatra procession at Paikpara, Rajrajeswari procession at Burrabazar and the Maharram procession. After describing the incident of the disturbances, the Commissioner described the measures taken to quell the riots and the help rendered by the military authorities. Casualties showed 28 deaths, (20 Hindus, 8 Mahomedans) and 226 wounded, (94 Hindus and 132 Mahomedans). There were numerous cases of assault on the Police officers and men, but fortunately the injuries were in no case very serious.

From the fact that a large proportion of the disturbances took place during the holding of religious processions, it is self-evident that numerous conflicts between large bodies of opposing communities occurred and that the police were frequently faced with the necessity of immediately dispersing large crowds of persons who were keyed up to the highest pitch of religious and communal frenzy. In these circumstances, the only effective means of dispersing the mobs and avoiding more serious conflicts was to resort to the use of firearms. The first instance of firing by the Police was on the 15th July during the Rajrajeswari procession. The Police were forced to open fire four times in one day, the result being one man killed and several wounded. During the Rath procession, ten rounds of ammunition were fired with the result that four Mahomedans and two Hindus were wounded. On three other occasions, the Police had to fire to disperse the crowd. On the 21st July, during the Muharram procession the Police had to fire eight times with the result that three men were killed and 13 wounded. The Commissioner states there can be no question that firing was necessary in all the above instances and in each case, it was both sufficient to secure the object in view and at the same time strictly limited to the necessities of the situation. There were four instances of shooting by members of the public, in which two men were

killed and five wounded.

With reference to the attitude of the Indian Press, the Police Commissioner says:- "After the April riots it was hoped that a better spirit and a greater sense of responsibility would develop among the editors of the Indian Press; but this hope was not realised and journals of both communities continued to display a regrettably hostile spirit. The inflammatory articles which were published by both communities were greatly to be deplored and there can be little doubt that they contributed materially to the maintenance of the tension which led to the July riots. The disturbances in the Pabna District furnished ample material for bitter communal criticism and the Government were compelled to undertake a number of prosecutions for the articles. In this connection, 13 prosecutions were sanctioned. In ten of these cases, the offending journals were Hindu and three were Mahomedan. There is at present an improvement in the general tone of the vernacular press; but it is difficult to say whether this is due to the above prosecutions or to the absence of rioting or other materials for communal criticism. Experience of the July riots has shown, however, that any communal disturbances in Calcutta are almost certain to be accompanied by a flood of inflammatory articles in newspapers of both the contending factions and during the riots a number of new journals were started which are definitely communal in tone. Ordinary law clearly provides no adequate check for the suppression of publications of this character and its limitations in this respect are manifestly fully appreciated by the offending journals".

As to the dislocation of business caused by the riots, the Commissioner states the effect on wholesale business was more material and the present riots have still further postponed readjustment of the dislocation caused by the previous riots. The small dealers are not prepared to carry large stocks of goods and bigger merchants are, therefore, saddled with such heavy stocks that they do not feel justified in ordering further supplies. This fact was clearly brought out at a meeting of the Marwari Chamber of Commerce

on the 28th July when it was decided that no Marwari merchant should order supplies of piece-goods for a period of four months under pain of serious penalties.

Govt. Communique on 'No Music Before Mosque'.

The following resolution was issued by the Government of Bengal on the 6th June 1926 :-

It is only in recent years that the controversy about music before mosques has become important in Calcutta. This subject is now attracting a great deal of attention, and, in fact, it was the immediate occasion of the disturbances in April, 1926. On the 17th May His Excellency the Governor convened a conference unsuccessfully to arrive at a conclusion which would be acceptable to both the Hindu and Mahomedan communities. In dissolving the conference His Excellency expressed a hope that the two communities would, after mutual discussion, be able to agree and inform him of their agreement. This hope has not been fulfilled.

In matters of religion the Government maintain an attitude of strict neutrality, and only intervene when the claims of one community clash with those of another, and when the persistence in mutually incompatible claims threatens to endanger public peace. Such a situation now exists, and it is necessary, therefore, for the Government of Bengal to announce, with as much detail as the circumstances of the case permit, the nature of the orders which will hereafter be enforced in Calcutta in this respect.

After referring to the law giving authority to the Commissioner of Police for regulating music at processions in Calcutta, the Resolution says:-

It was arranged at the conference on the 17th May that written statements regarding the personal experience of those who are acquainted with this subject should be received and considered by the Government. A large number of statements have been received, and they have been carefully

considered. The Hindu community claim that music is an essential part of their religious observances, and is, therefore, a necessary feature at all their religious processions. They have claimed the right and asserted the practice of playing music before mosques without hindrance at all hours of the day. The Mahomedan community consider that music disturbs the devotions of those who are at prayer in mosques, and they claim the right and assert the practice of the stoppage of music before mosques at all hours of the day, and not only on the occasions of public worship.

There is, therefore, a definite conflict of statements as to the actual practice in the past, and it is clear to the Government that this conflict is largely due to the fact that very recently the subject has not attracted much attention in Calcutta, and the two communities have generally been prepared to accommodate one another. These conditions no longer prevail, and circumstances have arisen which make it necessary for the Government, in the fulfilment of their responsibility for the preservation of the peace to arrange for a clearer definition of the instructions which will in future be observed by those conducting processions in Calcutta.

The terms of the licence will remain unaltered; but, in order to prevent uncertainty, it will be necessary in all doubtful cases for the Commissioner of Police to ascertain and lay down for the guidance of those conducting the procession what are the hours of public worship.

The Government interpret the word, "public worship" as meaning recognised congregational worship, and are not prepared to admit a claim which has been put forward that the time of public worship extends throughout the day. In the case of mosques the hours of the five recognised Mahomedan prayers will be specified. In other respects the Commissioner will, according to the law, be guided by the requirements of the public peace and convenience with due regard to established practice. In all cases it has not been established to the satisfaction of the Government that the general

practice has gone beyond the terms of the licence. At the same time the Commissioner of Police will retain the fullest discretion to secure compliance with such orders as he may give in accordance with the law. If, however, a particular procession exercises its privileges in a manner which is calculated to give offence that procession and others will incur the risk of having its privileges curtailed in future. On the other hand, the Government do not intend that such restrictions as may be imposed on those conducting Hindu processions shall be extended on account of the demand made by Mahomedans for the imposition of further restrictions. The Government have given special consideration to the case of the Nakhoda Mosque in Chitpore Road, and have decided that, in consequence of its size, importance and situation, an exception to the general rule will be made in the case of the mosque, and that all processions passing it at any time of the day will, when doing so, be required to stop their music.

These orders relate only to Calcutta. In other places different conditions have resulted in the establishment of different practices, and such practices will not be modified as a result of these orders.

The existence of this dissension is a matter of serious concern to the Government of Bengal. It is, in their opinion, damaging to the reputation of the people of Calcutta for good citizenship, and it is the earnest wish of His Excellency in Council that at an early date the two communities will show greater readiness to meet one another's wishes and will thereby restore the amicable relations which until quite recently have subsisted between them.

Feeling in the Mofussil

The Government of Bengal, in a communique on the state of communal feeling in the mofussil, state:- It is true that during the past two months an intense state of anxiety has prevailed in many districts, especially in Eastern Bengal; that both Hindu and Mahomedan communities have been upset by rumours which they have heard, and that there are resultant feelings of irritation and distrust which constitute

a danger to public peace. But it is also true that during this period there have been very rare occasions in the whole of the wide area affected in which a breach of the peace has occurred.

While the Government do not minimise the insult to religious feeling which is implied by the destruction of images, the public should be careful not to over-estimate the significance of many of those incidents. In numerous cases they have attracted far less attention in the places where they have occurred than they have done in the Press. There is abundant evidence of the success of the joint efforts of Hindus and Mahomedans in preserving peace and restoring confidence.

Instructions have been given to District Magistrates to reply promptly to requests to verify stories which are referred to them for verification by editors of newspapers. If hereafter false rumours are published in the Press without enquiry the Government will act on the assumption that those who publish them had not reasonable grounds for believing in their truth.

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Hashem, Abul : son of Abul Kasem, Dacca, 1-2.10.1970.

Huq, Faiz-ul : son of Fazl-ul Huq, Dacca, 2.10.1970.

Huq, Syed Azizul : nephew of Fazl-ul Huq, Dacca, 1.10.1970.

Mukherjea, Dr Ajita Ranjan : former Secretary to the
Bengal Legislative Assembly, Calcutta, January-
September 1970.