

THESES, SIS/LIBRARY
R.G. MENZIES BUILDING NO.2
Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200 Australia

Telephone: +61 2 6125 4631
Facsimile: +61 2 6125 4063
Email: library.theses@anu.edu.au

USE OF THESES

**This copy is supplied for purposes
of private study and research only.
Passages from the thesis may not be
copied or closely paraphrased without the
written consent of the author.**

**THE DECLINE OF THE MUSLIM LEAGUE AND THE ASCENDANCY
OF THE BUREAUCRACY IN EAST PAKISTAN**

1947-54

A H AHMED KAMAL

JANUARY 1989

**A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY OF THE
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

DECLARATION

This thesis is my own work.



A H Ahmed Kamal
31 January 1989
Canberra

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the career of the Muslim League in East Pakistan from 14 August 1947, the day it assumed political power, to the election of 8 March 1954, when it was massively defeated by a newly-formed United Front. Exploring the decline of the popularity of the League is one objective of the thesis. In the process, it also seeks to explain the nature of 'politics' in East Pakistan. In particular, the emergence of a state bureaucracy with paternalistic and undemocratic tendencies, is documented and analysed. This is shown to be a lasting legacy of the British Raj and of Muslim League politics in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The process through which the bureaucracy grew stronger by the day also entailed the growing alienation of the people from both the government and the ruling party, the League. Explaining this alienation is another concern of the thesis.

These themes are highlighted in a series of chapters devoted to certain specific and important issues that the League government had to deal with during its stay in power: politics of food procurement and distribution, abolition of *zamindari* and other exploitative feudal relationships, the problem of controlling water resources in a flood-prone country, and finally, the relationship between the people and the regulative institutions of the state such as the police and its auxiliaries. An examination of these issues usefully complements what students of East Pakistan politics have (rather selectively) emphasised so far: the Language movement of the 1950s, the crisis of federalism and problems of jute marketing. An argument is eventually built up on the nature of the state and 'nationhood' in East Pakistan. The preponderance of the bureaucracy in the colonial style of government, the peculiar history of Muslim nationalism in the subcontinent, the lack, in the League's history, of a tradition of anti-imperialist struggle and ideology, and finally, the weak nature of the ML's organisation and mass base, are all seen as factors that contributed significantly to the growing 'undemocracy' of which both East Pakistan, and later Bangladesh, were unfortunate victims.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the course of this thesis I have incurred many debts: to Ranajit Guha, my former supervisor at the Australian National University, who made it possible for me to study at ANU and created in me a deep interest in history; to Dipesh Chakrabarty of Melbourne University, under whose supervision I wrote this thesis, and who offered me constant encouragement, advice, criticism and above all, comradeship during my stay in Australia. I am also grateful to David Marr, my other supervisor at ANU, to Gavan Daws and Anthony Reid for their support and encouragement.

Thanks are due to Gyan Pandey, Sally Hone, Julie Stephens, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Sumit Sarkar, Soumyen Mukherjee, Mohammed Ali Taslim, and Tanika Sarkar, for their words of encouragement and constructive criticism at different stages of writing this dissertation.

I am grateful to Tajut Islam Hashmi, Aminul Huque Faraizi and Adrienne Cooper for letting me read their unpublished theses and allowing me to use some of their research findings. Kaveri, Raju, Qamrun, Abrar, Ria, Subhash, Rais and Qamrul have sustained me with their friendship. They made my stay in Australia comfortable and enjoyable. Sanjay Seth deserves a special mention for not only offering me valuable moral and intellectual support through all the various stages of despair and frustration but also for introducing me to Australian life and politics. My thanks also go to Doreen and John Cope who developed a caring friendship with all the members of my family. In Bangladesh Ratan Lal Chakrabarty, Sayeedur Rahman, Mesbah Kamal, Salimullah Khan, Afsan Chowdhury, Akhtar Hossain Khan, Tridib Dastidar, Mahfuzullah, Asad Chowdhury, Anu, Rahman Chowdhury, Shamsuzzoha Manik, Abdus Shahid, Monowar Hossain, Kamal Siddiqui, Shanta, Shireen Huq, Badruddin Umar, KM Mohsin, Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, Abu Jafar, ABM Khalid, Muniruzzaman Mia, Salahuddin Ahmed, Ali Ahmed, Atoar Rahman, Abul Ahsan Chowdhury, Refat, Nasim, Kazi Qamruaazman,

Mahmudur Rahman, Jafrullah Chowdhury, Farhad Mazhar, Kamal Mahmud and host of other friends deserve special thanks for their deep interest in the project and for helping me in my search for research material. In spirit, they have participated in my project. I am also thankful to Zanibul Huq Chowdhury, former Deputy Commissioner of Chandpur, for allowing me to work in the Chandpur District Record Room.

It makes me sad to think that my friend Syed Aminur Rahman, former Deputy Commissioner of Comilla, who arranged for my access to some confidential documents in the Comilla District Collectorate and who was deeply interested in this thesis is no longer there to read it.

I would like to thank the staff of the Bangladesh Secretariat Record Room, where most of the research was done, Comilla District Collectorate Record Room, Dhaka District and Police Record Room, Chandpur District Record Room, Dhaka University library, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies library and the Bangladesh Observer library. Thanks are also due to the staff of the Bangladesh War of Independence Project for working overtime to make documents available to me. I am grateful to the staff of the Menzies Library, Pacific and South East Asian History library at the Research School of Pacific Studies at ANU and the National Library of Australia.

I am grateful to Margaret Hall formerly of the South Asian History Section of the RSPacS at ANU. Julie Gordon and Dorothy McIntosh undertook the arduous task of typing most of the chapters, my special thanks go to them. Last minute cooperation with typing and editing from Abbas, Kashem, Shahidullah, Chandan, Salma, Rushidan, and Pat Duggan was of great help; I thank them all. For institutional support for this project I am grateful to the authorities of the Australian National University and Dhaka University.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the members of my family who had to bear our long absence from home. I am specially grateful to my ailing mother, who had been a constant source of courage for me during the whole period of my stay abroad. She has

bravely put up with my absence at a time when she had hardly overcome the grief of my father's demise.

The support, love, care, and courage I have received from Thoon is beyond description. Shithi and Kishan were a constant source of joy in our life. Iku's stay in Canberra was a great help and pleasure for all of us. They have all stood by me in a time of difficulty.

PREFACE

For the past can never cease to be present to us, and we are still asking ourselves: How could such a thing happen? - Gunter Grass 'What Shall We Tell Our Children? (1979)

This thesis originates in a feeling of dissatisfaction about a state of stagnation that seems to have set in in East Pakistan scholarship, especially since the emergence of Bangladesh.¹ The eventful twenty four years between the last day of the Raj and the creation of Bangladesh-the life span of East Pakistan- are now treated mainly as a background to the emergence of Bangladesh and Bengali nationalism in its post-colonial phase. Descriptions of this background, again, have become stale and static. Bengali politics and nationalism are traced back to the Language movement in East Pakistan in the early 1950s and to the step-motherly attitudes of the authorities in West Pakistan. All histories of Bangladesh are written as if we knew everything that was there to be known about what went wrong with East Pakistan, why East Pakistan as a political framework became untenable. As a result, the history of this 'background' has taken on a certain predictable quality; it is no longer a dynamic field of investigation were new mines of information are quarried everyday and the findings passionately disputed or where the contours change continually as new layers of history expose themselves to the historians gaze.

Yet, as I attempt to show in this thesis, there were many other issues apart from the Language movement and 'internal colonialism' that contributed to the growing Bengali disenchantment, firstly, with the Muslim League and all that it stood for, and secondly, with the political framework of East Pakistan. Issues to do with linguistic nationalism and economic exploitation of East Pakistan have been worked over, and I do not have much to add to the current literature on these subjects. What I document is a process of competition that took place in East Bengal society over the control of the three key resources of the nation: land, food and water. Actors in this competition were many and interest groups emerged around the different factors of class, ethnicity, factions and

political parties depending on the context. What also consistently emerged, however, was an elementary popular urge towards participation in the political process of East Pakistan, an urge that was continually quashed by an increasingly authoritarian state.

The Muslim League came to power in East Pakistan in August 1947, championing not only the cause of the Muslims, but also that of democracy, liberalism, and self-determination for East Pakistani people. In little over six years' time, it was voted out of power, and within five years of that, democracy itself was overthrown in East Pakistan. The State became a military regime. The process through which the state lost its representative character and became alienated from the people was also the one that resulted in the political decline of the Muslim League. This thesis documents this process by looking at certain key episodes in the early history of East Pakistan. All of these episodes show how, on different occasions, a high-handed, ex-colonial bureaucracy, including the regulative agencies like the police, proved itself to be entirely unsuitable for the historical task of protecting and fostering a fledgling democracy. Nor was the political leadership, given the history of Muslim nationalism, up to their task. The result was a political culture where the bureaucracy emerged as a most enduring and predominant element.

It is this that makes the present exercise relevant to the recent history of Bangladesh. It is a country that has seen repeated attempts at reestablishing democracy fail in the face of opposition from military-bureaucratic forces. Yet forces of populism have been persistent and sometimes strong. In all the disasters that the country has faced, both recently and in its colonial past -floods, famines, epidemics and even the green-house effect- evidence has always been there of popular initiatives and actions, of an unfulfilled urge on the part of the mass towards a participatory style of politics. For a nation that is now living dangerously and far beyond its means, the question of unleashing the 'creativity of the masses' in solving national problems has once more become crucial.. 'It is the magic of nationalism', writes Anderson, 'that turns chance into destiny'.² The nationalism of the Bengali ruling class has proven itself to be bankrupt. What felt like

'destiny' in 1971 now looks like a missed historical opportunity. If there is still any magic left in Bengali nationalism, it must come from the 'nationalism' of the masses, who have so far been allowed only a limited role in the Bengali quest for self-determination. This thesis is an attempt to raise this question by examining a certain stage in the 'prehistory' of Bangladesh.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 The name of East Bengal was officially changed to East Pakistan in 1956. Prior to that it was referred to both ways in government documents. In the present study both names have been used.
- 2 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, London, 1983, p. 19.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
PREFACE	vii
LIST OF MAPS AND TABLES	xii
ABBREVIATIONS	xiii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. INDEPENDENCE IN EAST BENGAL: INITIAL PERCEPTIONS AND RESPONSES OF THE PEOPLE	10
3. FOOD, PEASANTS, AND POLITICS	44
4. DEARTH, POLITICS, AND POPULAR RESPONSE	88
5. PEASANT REBELLIONS AND THE MUSLIM LEAGUE GOVERNMENT	134
6. WATER CONTROL, POPULAR PARTICIPATION AND THE BUREAUCRACY	168
7. POLICE, PEOPLE, AND PROTEST	205
8. TOWARDS A CONCLUSION: THE MUSLIM LEAGUE AND ITS RULE	251
GLOSSARY	273
BIBLIOGRAPHY	277

LIST OF MAPS AND TABLES

MAPS

1	East Pakistan: administrative divisions - following page	13
2	East Pakistan: showing river network - following page	170

TABLES

3.1	A district-wise breakdown of levy demand and internal procurement of rice and paddy in East Pakistan in the year 1948-49	54
3.2	Percentage of families with land above 10 acres	55
3.3	Land ownership in the Province of Bengal in 1940	56
3.4	Religious composition of rent receivers in East Bengal	72
4.1	Year-wise breakdown of incidents of looting of food-stuff and property valued at less than Rs 200	116
4.2	Crime figures in the Province of East Bengal	117
4.3	Complicity of rural police in crimes in East Bengal	118
7.1	District-wise breakdown of use of firearms by the Police in the Province of East Bengal, for the years 1948-51	212
7.2	Year-wise breakdown of criminal cases brought against the police in East Bengal between 1948-53	223
7.3	Year-wise breakdown of cases of forcible rescue from police custody in East Bengal	227
7.4	Year-wise break down of number of escapees from the prison and police custody in East Bengal between 1948-53	229

ABBREVIATIONS

ADC	Additional Deputy Commissioner
ADM	Additional District Magistrate
ARCP	Assistant Regional Controller of Procurement
ASI	Assistant Sub Inspector
BIDE	Bangladesh Institute of Development Economics
BIDS	Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
BSRR	Bangladesh Secretariat Record Room
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CO	Circle Officer
CPI	Communist Party of India
CrPC	Criminal Procedure Code
CSP	Civil Service of Pakistan
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DIB	District Intelligence Branch
DM	District Magistrate
DML	District Muslim League
DO	Demi-Official
DSP	Deputy Superintendent of Police
EBLA	East Bengal Legislative Assembly
EPR	East Pakistan Rifles
FIR	First Information Report
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOEB	Government of East Bengal
HE	His Excellency
Home Poll	Home Department, Political Branch of the Government of East Pakistan
IB	Intelligence Branch
MCA	Member Constituent Assembly

ML	Muslim League
MLA	Member Legislative Assembly
OC	Officer-in-charge of Police Station
PEA	Partially Excluded Area
PM	Prime Minister
Progs	Proceedings of the Government of East Pakistan
PS	Police Station
PUB	President Union Board
Rs	Rupees
SDC	Sub-deputy Collector
SDO	Sub-divisional Officer
Sec	Secretary
SP	Superintendent of Police
UF	United Front
UP	Union Parishad