In this concluding section, an attempt is made to put together the threads of discussion in earlier chapters and to identify the major highlights of the branch concern in this research has been to portray the nature of legislative politics under the new regime ushered in by the 1935 Act. Since the legislature was witness to the partition of Bengal, the politics of partition has also formed part of the research although the partition issue goes beyond the narrow limits of legislative politics.

In line with the promise of responsible government, Provincial Autonomy was introduced within the constitutional framework. The people of Bengal as well as the people of India hoped that their aspirations would be fulfilled, but in practice the new legislature had to function under constitutional restraints and in the shadow of strife-torn provincial politics. The legislature was virtually an imposed institution without much relevance to the growing political aspirations of the people. The interested elite who accepted the legislature had to find out in the newly introduced legislative process their bases, platforms and workable ideologies. The parliamentary programme, the manifestos issued by the parties at the time of the election were more or less identical, though there were differences in degree. For example the Krishak Proja Party had more agrarian orientation. Since no party was in absolute majority in the election of 1937, coalition was imperative. Although in paper there was no basic
difference in programmes and manifestos the Congress did not stretch its hands of co-operation to the Krishak Proja Party, while its leader A.K. Fazlul Huq invited the Bengal Congress first to join the coalition. Then Fazlul Huq had to form coalition with the League. There was in fact a strong opinion in Bengal that the Congress and the Krishak Proja Party should form a coalition Government. The leadership in Bengal Congress was not averse to the idea. But all-India leadership of the Congress was suffering from a complex of ideological purity which was opposed to coalition. There was strong pressure from the Congress High Command which the provincial leadership could not resist. Had the coalition been a reality, the polarisation of political forces in Bengal could have developed on completely different direction. This might have created opportunities for the end of communal politics in Bengal. Unfortunately however, the Hindu-Muslim relation in later years became strained due to the prejudice of the Hindus on one side and suspicion from the Muslims on the other. All-India politics had its quota of manipulative influence on provincial politics, as the country had been passing through a traumatic phase of communal disharmony at the fag end of imperial rule.

In evaluating the activities and character of the Bengal Legislature it must be borne in mind that it had to work under the constitutional framework imposed by the alien rulers. The legislature had an unusually long life due to war. During the period, national and international storms had been blowing and the Bengal Legislature could not afford to remain unconcerned.
about these. Bengal's political arena was the storm-centre of the British Empire. Political unrest in provincial life, Indian domestic political turbulence and international tensions were all reflected in the sensitive legislative institution.

None of the political parties in these days were cadre-based. Their 'mass-bases' were more sentimental than anything else. The leadership of all the parties, not excluding the Krishak Proja Party which was more rooted in peasantry, essentially came from the middle class. Nearly the fourteen per cent only of the total population constituted the electorate as per the provision of the Government of India Act, 1935. Since the commoners had no say in the election, the legislators could afford to keep some distance from them. The party allegiance of some legislators was minimal. This apart, due to the clever game of the European group who used to maintain the balance, the legislature had exhibited a degree of flexibility. The politics of defection became deep rooted in the body politic of Parliamentary Democracy from its early phase.

It must, however, be admitted that the individual competence of some members was very high by any standard. The level of debate, in many respects was very much mature and lively.

The Ministry that came into being after the 1937 election consisted of men of high calibre. Fazlul Huq as the leader of the House was magnanimous also. He, unlike many others, never hesitated to withdraw any expression from the House when the Opposition felt hurt. Sometimes in the face of the scathing criticism of the Opposition he could remain submissive. As for
instance on 21 September, 1942 when Suhrawardy and others from the Opposition were attacking him in the House he replied calmly:

'I therefore make an earnest appeal to my friends of the Opposition to write on a piece of paper all the bad things that they may wish to say about me and I can try to correct myself'. Three Budgets, presented by the Finance Minister, N.R. Sarkar deserved attention for their structure and content. During the discussion of the fourth Budget H.S. Suhrawardy as the Finance Minister admitted that no one in the House was a greater authority in Finance than Nalini Ranjan, who happened to be an Opposition member at that time. Suhrawardy himself was concise, business-like and logical in his own way and also unemotional.

The wide vision of the Huq Ministry was evident from their appointment of the Fland Commission to study the land tenure system in Bengal. The recommendations of the Commission though not implemented, had influenced and are till now influencing any other reform measures in land system not only in Bengal but also of India as a whole. The appointment of John Mathai Committee to study the industrial problems and prospects of industries in Bengal, including the assessment of future demand of electricity, speaks of the far-sightedness of the first Huq Ministry. Even Tulsi Goswami, the Finance Minister of Nazimuddin Ministry deserves admiration for his announcement of the appointment of P.C. Mahalanobish Committee to do a sample survey of the crop pattern of Aman and Jute after the famines.

The Huq Ministry has been remembered by the people of the two Bengals, particularly by the peasantry, for some of its
spectacular legislations, many of which are progressive even in present day's standard. The Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act, the Bengal Money Lenders' Act, and the Agricultural Debtors Amendment Act are the more-talked-of legislations till now. The Co-operative Societies Amendment Act was also an important legislation. The establishment of Debt Settlement Boards added glory to Huq Ministry. Whatever criticisms were made in the House for Opposition's sake, the land legislation and debt legislation were applauded by a large section of the Opposition also. Even in the estimate of some Congress leaders, Congress provinces were no match for the Huq Ministry in this respect.

Except the above mentioned Acts there were some Bills which faced severe criticism; notable among those were the Calcutta Municipal Bill and the Secondary Education Bill. Anyway, the former was passed but the latter could not get through mainly due to Congress opposition. The main purpose of the Secondary Education Bill to establish Secondary Education Board was foiled. But it is interesting that after the partition when the Congress came to rule West Bengal, they initiated a Bill to this effect and it was passed.

The endeavour of the Huq Ministry for the development of education, particularly compulsory free primary education, deserves special mention. The budgetary allotment to Education, Public Health and Public Works were noteworthy. It must be said to the credit of the Huq Ministry that efforts made in introducing compulsory primary education, though in a limited scale, were of singular importance. Provision of funds for the promotion of
communal harmony by the second Huq Ministry was also significant.

Many non-official Bills were presented in the House during the period under discussion. The non-official Poor and Unemployment Relief Bill had been passed. The presentation of a good number of non-official Bills in the House speaks of the capabilities of the individual legislators. One of the Bills, discussed in the Assembly was the Dowry Prevention Bill, which was reflective of the progressive nature of the Legislature in those days.

Admission of so many adjournment motions and discussions on them revealed the alertness of the members as well as receptiveness of the Speakers on contemporary problems.

The Opposition in the House played a dignified role. The Leader of the Opposition during the first Ministry of Fazlul Huq, Sarat Chandra Bose, was dignified in every respect. Santosh Kumar Basu, Pramatha Nath Banerjee and Abu Hussain Sarkar as Speakers from the Opposition commanded hearing. Nalinakshya Sanyal was the most irrepressible interrogator who often had put the chair into evident discomfort. The oratorial gifts of Shyamaprasad Mookerjee made the whole House hang on to him while he was on his legs.

The European members played vital role in the Assembly and they were fully conscious of it. But their leader, George Campbell had the peculiar gift of concealing undoubted partisanship under the veneer of disinterested impartiality.

From the proceedings of the Assembly, another striking feature may be evident that members were fully conscious of the
rights and privileges offered to the legislature by the Government of India Act 1935. The Speakers, Azizul Huq and Nausher Ali, were fully conscious of their responsibility in maintaining the dignity of the House and at the same time, in protecting the legitimate rights and privileges of the members. During the debate on the Money Lenders Bill, when a Chamber representative, D.P. Khaitan backed by the Europeans, was trying to forestall the proceedings on the plea that some of the provisions were beyond the purview of the provincial legislatures' competence, the ruling of the Speaker Azizul Huq is noteworthy indeed. On another occasion he took exception to introducing a Bill in the Upper House for he considered it to be a Money Bill.

The next Speaker Nausher Ali refused to admit the placing of Budgets in March and July 1943 due to infringement of the rules of the House. In 1945 his ruling in forestalling the budget discussion compelled the Ministry to resign. His historic ruling was admired by many as bold and criticised by some others as partisan.

On the whole three basic characteristics of parliamentary democracy had come to light. First, the proceedings show that ruling party had respect for the Opposition as well as for the individual members. For example, when the Congress-sponsored non-official Poor and Unemployment Relief Bill came to the Lower House from the Upper House, the Speaker was hesitant to admit the same. But on the request of the Home Minister, Nazimuddin, the Speaker Azizul Huq permitted consideration of the Bill and it was passed. Secondly, there were instances to show that the members more or
less showed a sense of joint responsibility in the proceedings of the House. When the Money Lenders Bill was passed many Opposition Members applauded it. Thirdly, as reflected in the Legislature through the interferences of the Governors there were obstacles in the way of their functioning. The Legislature as a whole tried to follow the norms and practices of Parliamentary Democracy within its limited scope. However, the Legislators were fully aware of their limitations and many of them, notably Fazlul Huq and Shyamaprasad Mookerjee expressed dissatisfaction with the powers bestowed on them and characterised provincial autonomy as a 'mockery'.

Intermittent strained relationship between the Central leadership and the Provincial leadership dominated the political horizon. The Congress Working Committee could not see eye to eye with the Bengal Congress. After the resignation of Subhas Chandra Bose from the Presidentship of the Indian National Congress, the Working Committee had nominated an ad hoc Committee. But the majority of the Congress ranks had been working under the suspended B.P.C.C. The picture of the League politics was no better. There were constant frictions between the Bengal League and the all-India leadership of the League that had been supporting the non-Bengalis and the aristocrats amongst the Muslims.

At the administrative level, the Provincial Governments expressed their helplessness in solving the problems of the province within the limited constitutional powers. It is revealing that since 1937, almost all the Finance Ministers from Nalini Ranjan Sarkar to Ashok Mitra (1977-86) have been clamouring for more financial powers to the states. It may also be noted here that the Government of Great Britain earlier had appointed a
Committee with Niemeyer as Chairman to determine the fiscal powers of the Centre and the Provinces in India. Apparently, it provided improved source of income for the provinces. But ever since its implementation, the feelings of discontent grew among the leaders of Bengal. The Finance Minister in the Fazlul Huq and Nazimuddin Ministries repeatedly stated that the Niemeyer Award had been unfair to Bengal. During the Budget debates, many members, including the Anglo-Indians had expressed their dissatisfaction that although Bengal had been contributing a lot to the Central Revenue she had been deprived of getting her due share from Central allocation.

Under the pressure of the Indian Nationalist Movement, the British Government was compelled to introduce Provincial Autonomy. Nevertheless, they were always guided by their imperial design. So much so, that the Act of 1935 had made Ministries responsible to the people but they were not endowed with requisite power. In Bengal Legislative Assembly, the European members including the Anglo-Indians were represented through special representation and got more weightage. They were 26 in number but they always acted as a bloc and were deciding factor in the Assembly. They had their own commercial and other interests in their mind. So they acted in a planned manner. Moreover, the Governor, with his special constitutional power, had become extraordinary authority over the Provincial Government and sometimes played the game-maker's role in Provincial politics as could be seen from the action of John Harbert in the removal of the Chief Minister, Fazlul Huq. Even Casey and Burrows had obvious imperial bias. The Governors were out to crush the spirit of national unity which
might ultimately be disastrous to their power and position. Understandably, the British rulers could not tolerate any democratic, patriotic and egalitarian urge of the Provincial Legislature.

The partition of Bengal was no doubt linked up with the development of all-India politics. Yet, what happened in Bengal had its roots in the nature of Bengal politics also.

Calcutta was the Centre of political activities. Here the presence of a Muslim Ministry in a predominantly Hindu city was not quite acceptable to the Hindu elites. In the forties and particularly after the election of 1946, Hindu-Muslim alienation reached a high peak. The British rulers had their hands in stoking communal conflict. During the riot of August 1946, it was the Governor who delayed military action, but the Chief Minister Suhrawardy, was blamed for the delayed action.

Inspite of communal disturbances the Muslim League in 1946 tried repeatedly to form coalition Government with the Congress in Bengal. Some Bengal Congress leaders were inclined towards this, but it did not actually materialise. The ultimate tragedy was the failure to save 'united Bengal' to which even the 'sole spokesman' of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah had given consent. So the germ of partition of Bengal was not lying within Bengal. It was somewhere else and that could be found in National politics as well as in the British Imperial strategy. The all-India Congress leadership tried to forestall the 'United Bengal' move as was clear from the correspondence of Sardar Patel.
As the negotiations had been going on to work out the modalities of Indian Independence and the issue of partition of India was debated at the national level, the Bengal Legislature seemed to have been caught in the cross-fire of over-arching national politics and immediate provincial politics. Bengal for economic reasons wanted to remain as an integrated entity. The Bengali Muslims were ready to have a United Bengal as they were in a majority. But the Hindus in Bengal seem to have been suffering from minority psychosis. Hence, after the election of 1946 and particularly after the Calcutta riot, most of the Hindu Legislators particularly the Hindu-Sabhaitees, strongly gave vent to their communal feelings. Suhrawardy and many of the League members pleaded for an all-party Government. Ultimately, when the imperial regime, the Congress party and the League High Command decided to come to a settlement the Bengal Legislature stood as a helpless on-looker and merely reacted by voting for or against partition. The Hindu members voted for the partition of Bengal and the Muslim members voted against it. In the same manner, they had to vote for the joint or separate Constituent Assembly. In this election also, the Hindu and the Muslim members voted differently. The Hindu members voted for a joint Constituent Assembly, but the Muslim members opposed it. The voting game was only a ritual and the Bengal Legislature had to succumb to the imposed decision of partition.