CHAPTER THREE

CONSTITUTION OF CHIEF COMMISSIONER IN ASSAM
CHAPTER III

CONSTITUTION OF CHIEF COMMISSIONERSHIP IN ASSAM

Before we proceed to discuss the circumstances leading to the creation of the Chief Commissionership in Assam, it may perhaps be worthwhile to trace the origin of Chief Commissionership as a form of Local Government. There were three different types of Provincial or Local Governments - Governorship, Lieutenant Governorship and Chief Commissionership. The Indian Provinces were reconstituted from time to time with Local Government in one or other of these forms.

In theory all the portions of British India which were not included in a Governorship or Lieutenant Governorship were treated as under the immediate authority and management of the Governor General in Council who could give necessary orders and directions for their administration. Thus the Chief Commissioners were delegates of the Governor General in Council, appointed without any reference to any Act of Parliament.

At first the title given to such delegates was Commissioner as in the case of Mountstuart Elphinstone when appointed to administer the territories in the Doonan conquered from the Peshwa in 1818. The title of
Chief Commissioner was first used in 1882, when John Lawrence was appointed the head of the Executive Government in the Punjab, in substitution for the former Board of administration under a President. On the annexation of Oudh in 1856, the administration was entrusted to a Chief Commissioner. In 1861, the Central Provinces and in 1862, the British Burma were organised on the same lines. This style was apparently adopted to distinguish the head of the Administration from the Financial and Judicial Commissioners who were appointed at the same time. The title of Commissioner was appropriated to subordinate officers in charge of considerable areas or Divisions sub-divided into Districts.¹

In 1884, an Act of Parliament empowered the Governor General in Council with the sanction of Secretary of State to take any territory in British India under his immediate control, and provide for its administration. It was under this statutory provision that Assam was separated from Bengal in 1874 and the Northwest Frontier Province from the Punjab in 1901.²

The territories subject to the Government of the Presidency of Fort William in Bengal were reconstituted

²Ibid. PP.32-33.
according to the Act of 1833. These were divided into two
distinct Presidencies, namely the Presidency of Fort
William in what came to be denominated as the 'Lower
Provinces of Bengal', that is to say, Bengal proper, Bihar,
Oriya, Assam and Chota Nagpur, and the 'Presidency of
Agra'. Each of these two Presidencies was to have a
Governor in Council. But the Presidency of Fort William
continued to be administered locally by the Governor
General of India himself until a separate Lieutenant
Governorship of Bengal was created under the Charter Act
of 1833. With the expansion of the British Empire in India
and the higher organisation of Government, the defects of
this system became more and more apparent. The Governor
General who was responsible with his Council for the
Government of the whole of British India, could not give
close personal attention to the administration of a large
Province like Bengal.

Lord Dalhousie inspite of his indefatigable
ergy and passion for work, found his dual functions so
far beyond his powers that he used to appoint a Deputy
Governor even when he was in Bengal although the practice
was to appoint such a Deputy Governor only when the

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3 & 4 Will.IV, c. 86, s. 38, as quoted by Hisar, 38.
4 Ibid. s. 38.
Governor General was away from the Presidency. This arrangement relieved the Governor General, but involved frequent changes in the personnel of the head of the Government. The system was also productive of curious anomalies. The Government of Bengal had a separate Secretariat but practically no political authority. The Governor had no independent financial powers. He had to obtain the sanction of the Government of India, of which he himself was the head, to even trifling new expenditures. It is no wonder that Dalhousie remarked: "Everything, all the world over, moves faster now-a-days than it used to do except the transaction of Indian business." 6

The complete separation of the administration of Bengal from the general administration of India dated from 1843, in which year Lord Ellenborough assigned a separate Secretariat establishment to the Bengal administration, by which the whole civil business, including public works, was to be transacted. 6

Lord Dalhousie urged that he should be relieved of direct responsibility for the administration of Bengal. Effect was given to his recommendation in the Charter Act of

6O'Kelley, L.S.S., History of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa under British Rule, Chapter XIV. P. 423.

Papers Relative to Administration of Bengal, Vol. 40. House of Commons, 256, 1867. 88; Minute by William Grey, 13 March, 1868, page 270.
1853. This empowered the Court of Directors to appoint a separate Governor and also provided that until a Governorship was constituted the Governor General might appoint a Lieutenant Governor from among the officers having ten years service or more. The power to appoint a Governor was not exercised and for nearly sixty years Bengal was under the administration of a Lieutenant Governor. In 1854 a permanent Lieutenant Governor was appointed thereby separating entirely the local administration of Bengal from the office of the Governor General and the Governor General ceased to be the Governor of the Presidency of Fort William. The jurisdiction of the Lieutenant Governor was reduced by detaching Tenasserim. Arakan remained under the Lieutenant Governor till 1862. Sambalpur, with its dependencies, was transferred to the Central Provinces in the same year. Assam remained a part of the Province of Bengal till 1874.

Prior to the formation of the Chief Commissionership in Assam, the total area of Bengal was 2,48,231 square miles, with a population of 6,68,56,000.

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Ibid. 717 & 18 Vict. C.77. 6.6.

O'Malley, Chapter XV, Pp. 422-427.

(according to the Census of 1872)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Area in square miles</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Density of Population per square mile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>85,483</td>
<td>3,67,00,733</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behar</td>
<td>42,417</td>
<td>1,97,34,101</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>25,901</td>
<td>43,17,999</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chota Nagpur</td>
<td>42,901</td>
<td>38,25,671</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>35,130</td>
<td>22,07,458</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste and country not censused</td>
<td>17,389</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,48,531</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,66,56,889</strong></td>
<td><strong>369</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 17,389 square miles of wild and sparsely inhabited country, of which no census was taken, 6,343 represented the wild portion of Lakhimpur, 6,341 the Sunderbans, and 3,715 the Cashar Hills. The census was not taken in some of the eastern border districts because of political difficulties. A full census could not be taken in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Oare Hills. Some of the Assam tribes beyond the ordinary land revenue settlement were not counted. In the farthest district of Upper Assam (Lakhimpur) considerable tracts of the country inhabited by tribes owing nominal allegiance but in practice not under
direct administration, were excluded. Owing to administrative accidents, the Tarai under the Darjeeling Hills and the adjoining Bhutan Duars (ceded by Bhutan after the late war) were not properly censused. Sikkim, Hill Tipperah and the Nagas and the quasi-independent tribes of Assam were neither counted nor estimated. 10

Altogether, under direct and indirect British administration, the population of Bengal aggregated in round numbers to 67 millions. 11

The Province administered by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal was divided into eleven Commissionerships (exclusive of Calcutta), 54 districts, besides the tributary states, the native state of Ooosh Behar and the Sunderbans. In the executive and judicial administration of Bengal, there were, exclusive of High Court, 33 Divisional and District Judges, 235 subordinate Civil Judges; 54 Collector Magistrates; 54 Joint Magistrates and Deputy Collectors, and 347 Assistant or Deputy Magistrates and Collectors. The police force employed numbered about 33,000 men of all grades.

The annual revenue of Bengal was £ 1,60,00,000 (exclusive of municipal taxation), and the annual civil

10Ibid., P.517.
11Ibid., P.517.
expenditure amounted to £ 80,00,000. The Lieutenant Governor had also to exercise supervision and control over the following departments -

Public Works Department including Railways,
Department of Public Instruction,
Medical,
Jails,
Ecclesiastical,
Registration,
Marines (including Pilots etc),
Survey,
Opium,
Forest,
Emigration, and
Customs.

The Public Works Department was administered through a separate Secretariat. The expenditure on the establishment in 1866-67 was £ 1,54,776, and the total expenditure of the department was £ 10,00,000. The control of this department included not only that of ordinary public works, but also correspondence connected with the working of the railways and irrigation.

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In Bengal the supervision over the medical department was not of ordinary routine affair. The duties connected with the work were important because of the existence of a good number of mofussil dispensaries and on account of frequent incidence of epidemic diseases and management of large hospitals at the Presidency.

The extent, variety and importance of European interests in Bengal added very greatly to the work and anxieties of the Government.\(^{13}\)

By far the most difficult and irksome of the duties of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal were those connected with European commercial and planting interest. The members of this class by their demand on legislature, by their social influence, by their organs in the Press and their influence in England manifestly required the strongest government in Bengal that India could afford to provide.\(^{14}\)

Apart from these duties and responsibilities connected with the internal administration of the country, the Government of Bengal was confronted with the frontier problems and difficulties of great magnitude. Throughout the whole length of its northern and eastern frontier from

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\(^{13}\)Ibid, p.270.

\(^{14}\)Ibid, No.5 - Report of the Special committee, 14 November, 1867, P.195.
Darjeeling to Chittagong a distance of 1,000 miles, Bengal was “bordered by wild and barbarous tribes from whose raids the country has never hitherto been secure, when it has not yet been found possible to subdue by conciliation, and when we can seldom punish satisfactorily by hostilities.”

The Government of Lower Bengal meant the Government of a country which was about the size of France and much more populous; or more than three times as large and twice as populous as England and Wales. Bengal had a sea coast of 800 miles long, which was more than all that Germany possessed with large and fertile islands on it. Among the many rivers that traversed Bengal are the Ganges and the Brahmaputra which rank among the greatest rivers in Asia. On the borders of Bengal is the highest mountain in the world. The coal and iron fields of Bengal were equal "in extent to the whole of England."  

Each of the four principal languages namely Bengali, Hindustani or Urdu, Oriya and Assamese were spoken by many millions of the people under the Government of Bengal. There were many other languages spoken over less extensive areas. The variety of races and languages under

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16 Ibid, Memorandum by H.R.L. Frere, No.8 of 2nd December 1867, P.202-203.
Bengal was nearly four times as great as was ever reckoned under the old Austrian empire.

The millions of people inhabiting Bengal, though probably the most docile people in the world, were not mere agricultural machines. The natives of Bengal were intellectually superior to many other people. "Indeed the Bengalees proper, who form the great majority, are, in point of intellect, among the most remarkable nations in the world." There is not a question relating to philosophy or the theory of law and morals which had not been intelligently discussed by the writers and thinkers of Bengal. Sir H. H. Prere explained the difficulty of dealing with such people. He sincerely believed that to govern, in any sense, such a country and people was a task not inferior to that of governing a large nation in Europe. Very inadequate and weak administrative machinery was provided for this vast and populous country—"a country which, except in its capacity for rebellion, would certainly rank, if it could be dropped into Europe, amongst the richest, largest and most populous, and not least civilised nations of the continent." Bengal, he wondered, had anything but the shadow of an administration.18

17 Ibid. P. 203.
There was no such great anomaly in India as the existing Government of Bengal.\textsuperscript{19} Bengal was not and had not been properly administered. Great injustice was done to her. "She has been the milch cow, as it were, of the Government of India."\textsuperscript{20}

Owing to various circumstances, the attention of the Home Government was directed to the working of the machinery of administration in the Presidency of Bengal. In such a Presidency the increase of commerce, of European Settlement and of internal communication would of itself have sufficed to render it necessary to consider whether that machinery did not require expansion and amelioration in details. The necessity of providing relief to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal either by altering the machinery of the executive administration or by reconstituting the territories became paramount. The immediate factor which drew the attention of the Home Authorities who questioned the soundness of the existing machinery of administration was the utter failure of the Bengal Government to check the disaster caused by the Orissa Famine of 1866.\textsuperscript{21}

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\textsuperscript{19} R.A.H. H.C. 256 Vol. 49 of 1867-68, Governor of Bengal to the G.O. of India, Encle. No. 2, in No. 1 of 8 July 1867, P. 165.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., Memorandum by J.D. Gordon, private sec. to the G.O. of India, of 30 July 1867, P. 170.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., Sec. of state to the G.O. in council, Public No. 10 of 16 January 1868, P. 223.
\end{flushright}
Orissa was administered by the Commissioner in subordination to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. The premature cessation of rains in 1866 was the main cause of the famine. The Government followed the policy of non-interference and did not consider the desirability of price control or import of food grains through Government agency. The strict adherence of this policy, coupled with geographical isolation of Orissa and the inefficiency and neglect of the local officers and of the Bengal Government, resulted in this disaster.22 The Government of India censured the Board for not performing their duties properly. The famine shocked the public feelings and an instructive review of the system of Government established in Bengal was given by a commission appointed to investigate all the circumstances and to suggest the measures necessary to prevent the recurrence of such a disaster.

They found that the system of administration was very different from other provinces. Elsewhere the Government was strong and active. In Bengal, government was weak and vacillating. It had little executive machinery; it reigned but did not govern.

The weakness of the local executive was not compensated for by a strong central government. The

Lieutenant Governor, assisted neither by an executive council, nor by a secretariat equal to that of Bombay or Madras was overwhelmed by the details of daily work. Naturally it was not possible for him to give close attention to the administration of the districts that was expected from the head of the administration. He was no doubt, assisted by an important administrative body in the Board of Revenue but this proved a broken reed in 1866. The proceedings of the Board of Revenue as well as the Conduct of Barlow (the Magistrate of Puri) and Sir Cecil Beaton (the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal) were severely criticised by the Famine Commission. The whole system suffered from the defectiveness of the information available on any particular problem and also from the reluctance of the Government to take direct action.

Sir George Campbell's Orissa Famine Report brought to light many serious defects of the Bengal administrative system. 23

Thereafter, Sir Stafford Northcote, the Secretary of State for India, appointed on the 16th September, 1867 a special committee of his council to discuss certain proposals regarding the administration of Bengal. The Committee was asked to draw up a report on the measures for

23Pal, Dhar, Administration of Sir John Lawrence in India (1864-1869), 1902, Chapter V, Pp. 84-96.
the improvement of the system of Government in Bengal
and if they thought proper, in other parts of India also
on the basis of the documents connected with these questions
such as the Report on Orissa Famine by Sir George Campbell
and some private letters which the Secretary of State
received from India and from persons in England bearing
upon the subject. The Secretary of State himself indicated
the matters to be investigated.

"Assuming that the Seat of Government of India is
still to be at Calcutta, with periodical migrations to
Sinda", he enquired,

(1) Whether it would be desirable to place the
administration of Bengal under a Governor and Council, on
a footing similar to those of the Presidencies of Madras
and Bombay or to a Lieutenant Governor as it was.

(2) If the existing arrangement was to continue,
whether the jurisdiction of the Lieutenant Governor might
be reduced by the erection of Assam and the neighbouring
districts into a chief commissionership, or by the transfer
of Behar to the North West Provinces, or in any other manner.

(3) Should the Board of Revenue be maintained,
or should a single commissioner of Revenue be appointed or
should the Lieutenant Governor have a council, of which
one member should be entrusted with the charge of Revenue
business?
(4) Whether the Secretariat should be increased and if so to what extent.

Some other points of administrative reforms of minor importance were also raised by the Secretary of State for the consideration of the committee.24

Let us note the views expressed by different persons on this subject.

It appears from the correspondence between Sir John Lawrence, the Governor General of India and Sir William Grey, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal that the former had no objection to Orissa being made into a Chief Commissionership, except on financial grounds and in that case Assam was to be divided into two or three commissionerships instead of the existing one.25

The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal was opposed to the abolition of the Board of Revenue unless accompanied by a fundamental change in the arrangements of the Bengal administration. He was strongly in favour of a full Government for Bengal, with a Legislature and an executive Council.26

References:


According to Sir G. Tule, the administration suffered from the absence of knowledge of the people on the part of the officers and consequently, of the sympathy in their wants. He pointed out that Bengal had not been permeated by the new views adopted by the most enlightened men in the British Indian Administration on the basis on which North West had been created a separate Government, and the Punjab and Central Provinces came into existence.

He believed in the reduction of the territorial limits of the Lieutenant Governorship not only as a means of giving relief to the overburdened Government but as affording the means of doing justice to the outlying portions of the Province. These were Assam in which might be included the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Cachar, and so far the British were connected with it, Manipore; second, the south western Agency or Chota Nagpur; third, Cuttack or Orissa. Of these three tracts, the separation of Assam and constitution of a separate administration for it under the Governor General in council seemed to him to be most desirable; absolutely necessary, he asserted. The large extent of the country, the difficulties of distance and communication rendered it impossible for the Lieutenant Governor, considering his other duties, to give close attention to the administration of so valuable but so
utterly neglected a province. The creation of a Chief Commissionership in Assam under the Governor General was justified, according to Yule, by the number of 'savage tribes' in or surrounding the Province.

The effect of such a Local Administration, he asserted, would be particularly beneficial to the large body of tea planters in Assam, Cashar etc whose number would increase as soon as the then existing difficulties were removed. He also added that this body of planters were not and could not be expected to be satisfied with a rule from so remote a place as Calcutta.

The importance of Chota Nagpur by no means demanded separation. There was no difficulty of supervision on the part of the Lieutenant Governor because of its proximity to Calcutta.

The separation of Orissa was also not essential in consideration of the size of the division and its closeness to Calcutta.

Yule was not in favour of giving an executive council to the Government of Bengal. 27

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J.D. Gordon, the private secretary to the Governor General and Viceroy of India opined that the size and importance of what was termed 'Lower Bengal' deserved a Government with an executive as well as a legislative council. But the more desirable arrangement for the present at least, would be to increase the strength as well as pay of the Secretariat of the Lieutenant Governor, aided by the formation of a Chief Commissionership comprising Assam and most of the country north of the Brahmaputra and Cashar under the Government of India.

Gordon did not find any justification for a chief commissionership in Orissa. 28

Sir F. Halliday believed that the presence in the same place of the supreme and a subordinate Government affected the good working of the Governments. There was in Bengal an "imperium in imperio" with all its inevitable consequences. The two Governments, namely, the Supreme and the Subordinate Government could not rule together. A weak Government like the present one in Bengal could not meet the ever increasing difficulties created by the residence in Bengal of English men of all kinds and the ever growing complications of interests between them and

28 Ibid. Memorandum by J. D. Gordon (Enc. No. 4 in No. 1) of 30 July 1887. P. 170.
the Indians. He pointed out that if the present territorial jurisdiction of the Government of Bengal was considered too large then Assam might be separated and otherwise provided for. He added that Bengal might be placed on a footing of equality with that of Madras or Bombay if the supreme Government was transferred from Bengal but personally, Sir Halliday was not in favour of removing the Secretariat of the Supreme Government from Calcutta. 29

In a subsequent memorandum, he stated that the importance of the Government of Bengal was not less than that of Madras or Bombay and it needed a strong and efficient constitution. 30

Sir George Campbell, the President of the Famine Commission, in his further report suggested some remedial measures for overcoming the weakness of the executive administration in Bengal. He discussed at length the ways and means by which the length of the official chain might be shortened and the local executive might be strengthened. He asserted that the


main reliance must be placed on an effective administration of the districts. He would like to make the Police a department of the magistrate's office, and entirely subordinate to him. By diminishing at least one of the official grades between the district magistrate and collector and the Local Government, he would place the Superior Inspecting Officers in more direct personal communication with the head of the local Government. He was in favour of establishing closer relations between the Government of India and the local Government of the Province in which the Government of India was stationed.

The essential point in the suggestion of Sir Campbell appears to be that he would like the Governor to be advised and aided by heads of departments individually instead of being advised by such bodies as a court or board of revenue and assisted by "irresponsible secretaries."

Opposing the idea of formation of Chief Commissionership by reducing the territorial limits of Bengal he said: "There is no room either in Assam and the Eastern Frontier, or on the Western Frontiers of Bengal for a Chief Commissionership in the sense of a separate administration subject only to the Government
of India and I do not see how these distant territories could be united under one Chief Commissioner.\(^{31}\) He suggested that by placing under the Commissioner of Assam, Cachar, the Duars and Cooch Behar, the charge might be made quite large enough for a commissioner under the Government of Bengal with enormous powers and a high salary. Similarly, he would also like to enlarge the charge of the Southwest Frontier agency by adding to it the Cuttack Tributary Meahals and the hilly parts of the border districts of Midnapore, Bankoorah and Sheerbeen.

If, however, it was considered desirable to diminish the area of the Bengal administration the "most fitting change", would be the transfer to the Northwest Provinces of Bihar, which was completely different from Bengal in physical character, people, language and institutions and in all these respects very similar to the Northwest Provinces. Bihar was also very much nearer to Allahabad, the then seat of the Government of the Northwest Provinces than it was to Calcutta. He was convinced that Bengal might be more efficiently administered if Behar was separated from it. In regard to Orissa and Assam, he pointed out that "the language of both those provinces approached much more nearly to

\(^{31}\)Ibid, Further Report on the Famine in Bengal and Orissa in 1866, No. 4, Pp. 177-82.
Bengalee than to any other; and by judiciously localising officers as far as possible, the whole country from Puri to Dibrugarh may probably be administered without very great difficulty in regard to language and other local peculiarities. 32

On the whole, Sir Campbell considered that the union of the country from Agra to Patna in one Great Government of "Hindostan", would be the best arrangement, - "leaving to Bengal, Bengal proper and the cognate provinces." 33

The special committee appointed by the Secretary of State recommended that the administration of Bengal should remain as it was under a Lieutenant Governor without a council. Two members of the Committee - Arbuthnot and B. Frere, however, dissented from this view. The committee with the exception of these two members were not in favour of placing Bengal on a footing of equality with that of Madras or Bombay as it was incompatible with the presence of the Supreme Government in Calcutta.

The committee proposed some administrative reforms with a view to strengthening the executive Government and creating some link between the Government and its subjects.

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
They suggested that the overburdened Lieutenant Governor of Bengal might be relieved to a great extent by placing Calcutta (by which they meant the port, the shipping, the municipality, the mint, the treasury, the customs and such other parts of the administration as were of imperial rather than local character) entirely under the Governor General in council. They were in favour of abolishing the Legislative Council of Bengal, giving to the Lieutenant Governor legislative powers for executive purposes. They would like to make the Lieutenant Governor an additional member of the Viceroy's Council when assembled to make laws and regulations.

As a means of relieving the Lieutenant Governor still further the committee proposed to reduce his jurisdiction by the formation of a Chief Commissionership in Assam. They, however, left it to the discretion of the Governor General in council to decide whether the Chief Commissioner thus appointed should remain subordinate to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal or under the immediate supervision of the supreme Government.

The committee thought that a single individual should be substituted for the Board of Revenue. They also expressed their opinion in favour of equalising the salaries and position of the Judge and Collector and Magistrate. They recommended for the distinct separation
of the judicial from other branches of the service.

To remedy the serious evil of the absence of official link between the Government and the people, the committee suggested for "the large and more systematic employment of natives of education." The committee considered the appointment of only Europeans to majority of lucrative posts as a great evil. 34

W.U. Arbuthnot and H. B. Frere did not concur in the Report of the special committee. They believed that most of the difficulties could be removed if a suitable site for the headquarters of the Government of India could be discovered. But they would allow present arrangement to continue with some adjustments. They strongly advocated the establishment of a full Government in Bengal, that is to say, a Governor with two members of council. The Governor of Bengal should correspond direct with the Secretary of State. He should have a legislative council with the same power as the legislative councils of Madras and Bombay. In short, they were in favour of placing Bengal on a footing of equality with that of Madras and Bombay and were opposed to the plan of separating Calcutta from Bengal. 35

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35 Ibid. Memorandum by Mr. Arbuthnot and Sir Bartle Frere, No. 6 - of 18 September 1867. P. 197.
Sir Stafford Northcote, the Secretary of State for India entertained liberal views. In his letter of 14 November 1867 to Sir F. Currie, chairman of the special committee, he stated that he was personally strongly impressed with the belief that the proper organization of the Local or Presidency Governments was the great want of India.

As regards Bengal he thought that it was entitled to the form of Government which was best suited to it. Prima facie, it seemed to him that if the constitution of Governor and council was good for Madras and Bombay, it should be good for Bengal and if it was good for Bengal, this should not be refused to her even for imperial reasons, unless the strength of those reasons were conclusively proved. He gave his views in favour of the Presidency form of Government for Bengal. He believed that the Government of Bengal might be efficiently carried on if some moderate additional powers were given to the local Government in respect of local affairs leaving the arrangements of the Supreme Government as they were. 36

In a separate lengthy memorandum on the Draft Report of the Special Committee on the Government of Bengal, R. Frere forcefully pleaded for the best and the most complete

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36Sir Stafford Northcote to Sir F. Currie, Chairman of the Special Committee - No. 7 - of 14 November, 1867. P. 198-199.
form of local Government for Bengal. Judging from his own experience, he did not think that the presence of the Supreme Government in Calcutta would create the slightest difficulty if the Government of Bengal was placed on a footing of equality with that of Madras or Bombay. He ridiculed the idea of depriving the Lieutenant Governor of all control over the natural capital of Bengal. He was very much opposed to the scheme of transferring the jurisdiction of the Lieutenant Governor to the overburdened Governor General. He believed that the work still left to the Lieutenant Governor by the proposed scheme was far beyond the power of any mortal man to perform properly and his chance of performing it will be diminished, and not increased, by depriving him of the jurisdiction over the city of Calcutta. He gave an elaborate description of what the Government of lower Bengal meant. He sincerely believed that to govern, in any sense, such a country and people was a task not inferior to that of governing a large nation in Europe. To him it was not less important than the administration of Spain and Italy.

He was convinced that the administrative machinery provided for such an important province and people was very inadequate or disproportionate.37

With such a weak administrative machinery for a vast and important country he was not surprised at a break down like that of Orissa: Frere continued to say that there was a time when the English men were justly proud of the Bengal administration and they turned to the council proceedings of those days when British statesmen like Cornwallis and Philip Francis discussed the affairs of Bengal with Indian administrators like Warren Hastings and Lord Teignmouth. But with the expansion of the Indian empire, Bengal gradually fell into the hands of a single administrator.

The domestic policy and administration of Bengal, bigger and more populous than France, which had been hard work for Warren Hastings and Francis, Cornwallis and Teignmouth, and the large councils which sat and debated with them, "could not have been confided to fewer hands than those of a single civilian."36

Sir B. Frere recommended for the introduction of the old system of a Governor with authority in all domestic affairs aided, as it were, by councils. Experience was in favour of councils. The administration of Bengal was much better under the earlier Governors General, aided by a council. The administration by a

36 Ibid.
single man was unfortunate. Being an admirer of the Madras system of Government, Frere put forward very elaborate and convincing arguments in favour of council form of Government and finally recommended for remodelling the Government of Bengal as nearly as possible on the footing of the Government of Madras.

As regards Assam he was in favour of organising it as a Chief Commissionership under the Government of Bengal and he would like to place under it all those districts where the prevalent dialect was one of the Inde-Chinese or monosyllable languages.

Sir B. Frere would not recommend the transfer of Behar to the Northwest Provinces, which were already too large. He would retain Behar under Bengal. 39

H. S. Maine strongly urged the establishment of a full Government in Bengal, like that of Madras and Bombay. He remarked that "if there be any Province fitter than another for such a Government, it seems to be Bengal proper." He pointed out that it was distinct from the rest of India by the character of the races inhabiting it, by its peculiar revenue settlement, and by its special

material interests. He maintained that the concession of a full Government would have a very good effect on English public opinion which knew little of Lieutenant Governors or Chief Commissioners but understood the responsibility of Governors for their Provinces. He sincerely believed that the Government of India could not undertake to superintend in detail the administration of Bengal proper.

Naina was in favour of constituting Bengal a full Government and placing Assam which was undoubtedly entitled to a more independent administration on the same footing in connection with Bengal which Sindh had long held in connection with Bombay. He was entirely against abolishing the Bengal Legislative council. 40

The Secretary of State, in his Despatch to the Government of India, dated 16th January, 1866 invited the latter's opinion on the questions relating to the reorganisation of Bengal administration. Before enumerating these questions, the Secretary of State stated in general terms, some of the suggestions on the subject which had occurred to him or had been urged on him by persons whose authority was entitled to respect.

He referred to the suggestion made by some that 
the Government of Bengal would be very much strengthened 
if it was placed on a footing of equality with those of the 
Presidencies of Madras and Bombay. Advocates of this view 
urged that a Lieutenant Governor without the assistance of 
a council could not effectively superintend the executive 
administration of a country "exceeding most independent 
sovereignties of the world in extent and in population and 
presenting very diversified features both socially and 
politically."\(^{41}\)

He also mentioned the objections raised by others 
against the establishment of a Government of this type in 
Bengal as it was incompatible with the presence of the 
Supreme Government at Calcutta. It was thought that even the 
then system under which two legislative bodies sat in the 
same place and had jurisdiction over the same class of 
subjects was anomalous, and to some extent, mischievous; 
and it was feared that such anomaly and mischief would be 
greatly increased by the establishment of the full 
Government in Bengal. The Secretary of State, however, 
suggested that the Governor and council of Bengal would sit 
at Calcutta.

\(^{41}\)Ibid. Secretary of State to the G.G. in council, 
Public Moll0, of 16th January, 1866, P.22S.
Assuming that the Seat of the Supreme Government would remain at Calcutta, the Secretary of State enquired:

Whether Bengal should be placed under a Government similar to that of the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay.

If the Governor General in council were not of that opinion whether the present form of Government for Bengal and the present relations between it and the Supreme Government should be maintained, or,

whether the administration of Bengal should be taken over by the Government of India and if so what arrangements need be made to give effect to that system.

Or, whether it would be expedient to restore the former relation between the Governor General and the Presidency of Bengal that subsisted before 1853 by making the Lieutenant Governor a member of the council of the former with the title of the Deputy Governor of Bengal.

In that event, whether the legislative council of Bengal should be abolished and the Lieutenant Governor should possess legislative power for limited purposes, all other legislation for Bengal being entrusted to the general legislature.

The Secretary of State also expressed his doubts as to whether the condition of the outlying portions of
the Presidency which were not comprehended within the old limits of Bengal and Behar would not render it necessary to have some separate provision for their administration. 42

The members of the Government of India and the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal separately recorded elaborate minutes on the subject amounting to 94 pages printed foolscap, to which justice cannot be done without fuller analysis than space permits. They exhibited their differences of opinion upon some of the more important questions. Therefore, the Minutes, in extenso, were sent home to the Secretary of State in March, 1868, without giving any collective expression of their opinions. 43

Let us go through the relevant points of the Minutes before making our own comments on the subject under discussion.

In the course of his Minute dated 19 February 1868, Sir John Lawrence, the Governor General, stated his views, on the questions raised by the Secretary of State.


He did not recommend that Bengal should be placed under a Government similar to that of the Presidency of Madras or of Bombay.

He was in favour of maintaining "the present form of Government for Bengal and the existing relationship between it and the general Government of India."

He rejected the suggestion that the Local administration of Bengal should be placed in the same hands as the general Government of India.

Nor was he disposed to recommend the restoration of the relations which formerly subsisted between the Governor General and Bengal, by making the Lieutenant Governor a member of the Governor General's Executive Council with the title of the Deputy Governor of Bengal.

As regards the Legislative council of Bengal, Lawrence opined that there was no real advantage in maintaining a separate Legislature for Bengal. He thought that it did not possess the same weight as the other local Legislatures. The Legislative council of India, he argued, could better perform the functions of the Legislature of Bengal. The business of the Legislative council snatched away some of the valuable time of the Lieutenant Governor which might be more
usefully employed if the Bengal council was done away with. The Viceroy was prepared to give the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal the same powers of summary legislation as were to be conferred on the Lieutenant Governors of Punjab and other provinces, reserving great questions for the general Legislative council of India.

Lawrence did not suggest that the Governor General should take a more direct part in the administration of Bengal. But he should retain full authority to interfere by way of supervision and control, whenever it might be deemed necessary to do so.

Finally, Lawrence made the significant recommendation of reducing the territorial jurisdiction of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. He would like to "separate Assam, Cashar and certain adjacent districts, now belonging to Bengal, from the Lieutenant Governorship and place them under a Chief Commissioner, subject to the control of the Governor General in council, recasting administration." 44

The Viceroy was strongly in favour of maintaining Calcutta as the capital of India. There was not, in his judgment, any one place in India, the advantages of which could compare in the aggregate with

those of Calcutta. Sir John Lawrence had already transmitted home his remarks on the subject through a memorandum which he prepared on the basis of certain papers sent to him confidentially by the Secretary of State, relating to the future Government of Bengal. He pointed out therein that for many parts of India and Bengal among them, the best form of Government was a personal administration by a single head, without a council.

He cited the example of the successive lieutenant Governors of the North western Provinces who were able to administer better without a council than with one. He referred to his own experience in Punjab where as the head of the Government he was able to manage far better as he was aided and advised by departmental chiefs who were his subordinates and not colleagues.

Lawrence stressed upon the point that unlike Madras and Bombay, Bengal proper was in "immediate proximity to the seat of the Government of India." He apprehended that to accord to that Government the status than proposed would be "to introduce some elements of embarrassments into the relations between the Government

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48 Ibid., pp. 227-228.

He could not but doubt the expediency of having on the same spot with the Government of India, a Governor in council for Bengal on a status similar to that of Madras and Bombay, that is with a certain degree of independence and with the privilege of corresponding direct with the Secretary of State. He was of the opinion that from the imperial point of view the office of the Governor General should be preserved in an effectively powerful position.

The Governor General held that the excessive burden of the Lieutenant Governor might be lightened by relieving him of Assam and Cachar, and by erecting those outlying provinces into a chief commissionership, subject immediately to the Government of India. This project, he believed, would not only lessen the excessive area of the Lieutenant Governorship of Bengal, but would be a signal benefit to Assam as a whole. In support of the separation of Assam from Bengal, he added, "By reason of the isolated position of these districts, of their ethnical and topographical peculiarities, and of their growing interests, they cannot be supervised from Bengal, and the
requisite supervision can be afforded by nothing short of a separate local administration.\textsuperscript{47} Such an administration should be under a chief commissioner subordinate to the Government of India. If such officer was placed under the Government of Bengal, the new administration could not be expected to thrive. He pointed out that the Government of India was in a better position to help the development of its economic resources.\textsuperscript{48}

Thus Lawrence preferred the alternative of diminution of territory as a means to relieve the Government of Bengal to strengthening it by giving the same a governor and council.

Sir W.R. Mansfield suggested the withdrawal of the privilege from Madras and Bombay of direct correspondence with the Secretary of State as he was strongly opposed to diminishing the authority and prestige of the Governor General directly or indirectly.

If the above suggestions were accepted, he would be in favour of substituting a Governor in Council in Bengal for the Lieutenant Governor without a council.

As regards the legislative council of Bengal he was of opinion that the same should be continued.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. Pp. 230–232.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. P. 232.
With respect to the outlying provinces Sir Mansfield considered it proper to leave them under the Governments to which they had become accustomed. The relations of trade between Assam and Calcutta being what it was, he thought it better to leave Assam under the Government of Bengal, which had for a long time been engaged with the difficulties of the planter interests and the development of the resources of the province.  

Sir W. Muir entirely agreed with the Governor General in thinking that a Governor or Lieutenant Governor without a council, was the most active and efficient form of local government. He also concurred with the Governor General in suggesting that Assam might with advantage be separated from Bengal and constituted a Chief Commissionership, subject to the control of the general Government of India.  

Major General, Sir H.M. Durand, the military member of Viceroy's council considered it very inexpedient to separate Assam from Bengal in view of their close connections. A Chief Commissioner, even if appointed, could not do much to restore its prospects unless the Government of Bengal co-operated with him and this could

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be expected if Assam remained under its authority.

Sir Durand observed that the real improvement of the Bengal administration lay deeper than in refinements of the machinery of Government. "This top dressing, so to speak, does not touch the root of the evil." He pointed out that officers were few and their relations with the people distant, and functionally barred by the prevailing rights and interests of the intermediate and the more influential class, with whom the fiscal relations of the local government were close and constant. He remarked that the European functionary was, by the system, more isolated from the masses in Bengal than he was elsewhere in India. 51

H.S. Maine, who was in charge of the Legislative Department of the Government of India for nearly six years at the time of writing the Minute was strongly opposed to the abolition of Bengal Legislature and the transference of its functions to the supreme council. The effect of the transfer of the Bengal business to the Supreme council would be, according to him, to break it down altogether. He rightly characterised the overburdened Supreme Legislature "Parish-Vestry" business of the North west, the Punjab, and the Chief Commissionership. He gave

convincing arguments in favour of retaining the legislative council of Bengal. 62

O.W. Taylor recommended for upgrading the Government of Bengal by making the Lieutenant Governor a full Governor, assisted by an Executive Council, after the model of the Governments of Madras and Bombay. He was in favour of giving Bengal a strong government in the form of a Governor and Council. He was opposed to the question of the abolition of the Bengal Legislative Council.

As regards Assam and Cashmar, he would like their transfer to the immediate control of the Government of India under a Chief Commissioner, if Bengal remained a Lieutenant Governorship. But if Bengal was placed on a footing of equality with that of Madras and Bombay, he thought, in view of the intimate commercial and social relations between Assam and Bengal, it would be better to leave the Commissioner, as then, under the Government of Bengal. If it were considered necessary to relieve the Government of Bengal by reducing its territorial jurisdiction, Taylor would prefer to transfer Behar to the North-western Provinces, with whose people and language it had more in common. 63


W.W. Massey was of opinion that the constitution of the Government of Bengal should not be altered. He thought that it would not be expedient to restore the relations which formerly subsisted between the Governor General and the Presidency of Bengal, by summoning the Lieutenant Governor to the council of the former. He was in favour of retaining the Local Legislative Council. 54

Referring to the question of erecting Assam into a Chief Commissionership under the Government of India, H.S. Maine, in his further Minute, although not venturing a confident opinion thereon, declared himself opposed to any such idea. 55

He had no doubt that an English Governor General would try his best to make Assam, at all risks, the centre of a flourishing tea industry. But he did not like the Government of India becoming a partisan either of European or of native interests. He wished it to play the role of a moderator and an arbiter. He lent his full support to the arguments Sir William Grey had advanced in favour of an organic change in the form of Bengal Government. 56

55 Ibid., Further Minute by H.S. Maine, (Enc. No. 8 in No. 11.) of 16 March, 1868. P. 263.
56 Ibid.
In the course of a well reasoned and lengthy Minute of 13 March, 1866, Sir William Grey, then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, forcefully argued against the abolition of Bengal Legislature. On the contrary, he strongly urged that the number of local legislatures should be increased in accordance with the intention of the Indian Councils' Act of 1861. In his opinion, the policy of the legislation of 1861 was a right policy and he regretted that it was being reversed and set aside. "Under every government," he urged, "there should be a local legislature separate from, though of course comprising, the executive authority." 57

Referring to the suggestions made by the Secretary of State in his Despatch - No.10 - dated 16th January, 1868, that the administration of Bengal be placed in the same hands, as those of the Government of India and that the relations which formerly subsisted between those two Governments be restored, he raised very strong objections to a reamalgamation of the Government of India and that of Bengal.

The combined business of the general Government of India and that of the local Government of Bengal as they were in 1863, led Lord Dalhousie to declare it to be "a burden which it was not in mortal men to sustain." 58


This combined business, Grey believed, must have increased three or four times meanwhile and if what Lord Dalhousie said about this was true in 1863, the same was more so in 1868 when Sir Grey recorded this Minute. Quoting extensively from Lord Dalhousie in support of his arguments, he came to the conclusion that the idea of amalgamation was most capricious and least justifiable.

Taking into consideration what Bengal was with its vast material interests, its large and powerful European community, its educated native classes, the only question which should strike anybody was, how could the separate Government of this great and advanced province be most efficiently provided for.

Before proceeding to answer this important question, Grey turned to the suggestion that separate provision should be made for the outlying portions of the presidency under the immediate authority and control of the Government of India.

Grey was opposed to the above proposal. He thought that the Government of India was already overburdened with business of small and local characters; and he believed that the existence of the chief commissi onerships led the Government of India insensibly to interfere with the internal administration of the Lieutenant Governorship to
a greater extent than was necessary. This interference, Grey said, was possibly due to the frequently manifest tendency to equate the position of the Lieutenant Governor with that of the Chief Commissioner.

He deprecated the Government of India taking upon itself the immediate control of any fresh territory. On the contrary, he recommended that it should resign as early as possible the control of those which still remained with it.

As regards the particular case of the Provinces in question, he thought that there were special reasons against their creation into Chief Commissionerships under the immediate authority of the Governor General in council. He referred to the case of the outlying districts on the north-eastern and eastern frontier. There were six districts in Assam proper, the Khasi and Jaintia hills, the three British districts of Cooch Behar Commissionership, including the permanently settled district of Goalpara and the district of Cachar.

Grey said that the grounds on which the territories were taken under the immediate authority of the Governor General in council applied with greater force

*ibid. P.274.*
to the Western Duars, the Eastern Duars and the tract belonging to the district of Darjeeling than they did to Assam. There might arise difficult questions in connection with the settlement of land revenue as to the relative rights of the state and of individuals in respect of the Duars, and a great part of the tract belonging to the district of Darjeeling which were recently acquired territory. He pointed out that it was with reference to the settlement of such points as these that Lord Dalhousie considered it proper to keep administration of the new provinces in the hands of the Governor General in council.

In this view, Grey did not find any justification for bringing Assam under the immediate authority of the Governor General in Council. If the case of Assam was to be considered in an exceptional way, for the existence of an extensive cultivation of tea in the province that ground was equally or more applicable to Cashar.

He considered it to be a great mistake to create one Chief Commissionership out of the several districts, so inaccessible to each other, and having no sort of connection with each other. The people of Assam proper, the people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the people of Cashar, the people of the Garo Hills, the people of the Duars, were

60Ibid. P.274.
essentially distinct, each from all the others. Nor would it be a convenient arrangement to make one Chief Commissionership out of the tea districts only, that is to say, the six districts of Assam and the district of Cachar. 61

It appeared to Grey to be a singular proposal that the Government of India should take under its immediate management six half populated districts, yielding a revenue of about £3,20,000 a year. He stated that the revenue of Assam had been increasing during the last few years at an unusually rapid pace and so there was no possibility of more rapid development of revenue under the management of the Government of India. He did not understand how the material prosperity of Assam could be more quickly advanced under the immediate management of the Government of India except on the supposition that the Government of India would spend more money on Assam if it was placed under it than it would spend if Assam remained with Bengal.

Grey thought that there was some misconception in regard to the question of the material prosperity of Assam. According to him, the people of Assam were undoubtedly better off than in most other parts of India. They were so well off and the population was so sparse,

61Ibid. P.276.
that there was a great want of labouring population, which
created the great obstacle in the way of expansion of tea
plantation in Assam.

The means of communication in Assam were not
worse, or much worse than they were in many other parts of
Bengal. "What is wanted to give life to the province is a
labouring population," he asserted. If the Government did
not do anything in this respect, Grey thought, it was a
matter of perfect indifference whether Assam remained
under the Government of Bengal or was transferred to the
care of the Government of India. But if labour at a
moderate price could be provided, he believed, the
material prosperity of Assam would also be promoted so
far as cultivation of tea could promote it, quite as well
under the Government of Bengal as under the Government
of India.

Grey further elaborated his point by stating that
Assam was a very sparsely populated province where land
was most abundant. The people were generally well off and
cared only to cultivate so far as to meet their own wants.
A foreigner, starting a special cultivation of his own,
such as tea, found that he must import foreign labour. He
had also to take some expensive measures to keep his
labourers free from sickness and death. These added to the
cost of the foreign labour which "rendered it nearly, if
not quite, impossible to cultivate at a profit." And referring to the cultivation of tea in Assam, Grey remarked: "the new born interest in Assam, is unquestionably due solely to this new phase of European enterprise."62

Grey pointed out that the creation of Chief Commissionership in Assam would lead to much more inconvenient division of management between the Government of India and the Chief Commissioner than the existing one between the Lieutenant Governor and the Commissioner. A person interested in Assam affairs would, under the proposed arrangements, have to go in one matter to the Chief Commissioner in Assam and in another matter, to the Government of India - perhaps at Simla - where now he would resort to the local Government at Calcutta alone. He explained that this division would not conduce to public convenience particularly with reference to tea industry which was for the most part not only conducted and controlled from Calcutta but was entirely dependent upon Bengal for all that it needed including labour. In view of these special difficulties, Grey opined that: "It would be unreasonable and inconvenient for the Government of India to take a petty province like Assam under its

He strongly recommended that Assam "should be placed on the same footing in connection with Bengal, which Scinde (Sindh) has long held in connection with Bombay." This, he believed to be a system, according to which the Commissioner of Assam should be made independent of the central departments in Calcutta, such as the Board of Revenue, the Inspector General of Gaols, the Director of Public Instruction, and the like; should be given his own officers for such departments so as to make him free from all control excepting only that of the local Government. 64

Then Sir William Grey proceeded to discuss the proposal whether Bengal should be placed on a footing similar to that of the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay. According to him the best form of Government for Bengal was that which existed in Madras and Bombay Presidencies i.e., a Governor and a Council. He did not anticipate any difficulty from a council, if selected with ordinary care.

He felt that the provinces and the communities comprised within the Lieutenant Governorship of Bengal had a claim to the best form of Government which could be

63Ibid. P.275.
64Ibid. Pp.275-76.
given to them. He asserted that full justice could only be done to the large and important interests of the Lower Provinces of Bengal by the constitution of a full Government with an executive as well as a legislative council. He believed that a Governor in Council would have a very decided influence and weight with the community as well as with the Government of India which was essential in a province like Bengal with powerful and conflicting interests. He held that the machinery of administration would certainly work more efficiently by raising the status of the local government. Inviting attention to the provisions of the Indian councils Act, 1861, which enjoined upon both the Governor General and his Council to visit other parts of India, Sir William Grey emphasised the undesirability of the Government of India being present at all times in Bengal. 65

Thus, Sir William Grey upheld the principle of local legislation, opposed the restoration of the authority of the Governor General over the Presidency of Bengal as its governor which subsisted prior to 1833; opposed the formation of Assam into a Chief Commissionership under the immediate authority of the Government of India and advocated the establishment of a full Government for Bengal like that of Madras and Bombay.

65Ibid. Pp. 276-77.
In this, he had strong supporters in the persons of Sir Bartle Frere and Sir Henry Maine whose views and opinions on the subject have already been discussed.

In the course of his second Minute recorded on 23rd March, 1868, Sir John Lawrence tried to refute the arguments of Sir William Grey in favour of a council form of Government (for Bengal) and against the territorial dismemberment of the existing Government of Bengal by the creation of one or more Chief Commissionerships under the immediate authority of the Government of India. He reiterated his opinion against giving Bengal a full Government of the type of Madras and Bombay on the ground that "if the Bengal Government were to be made too independent, the weight and prestige of the Government of India would be affected."

Continuing his opposition to the council form of Government, Sir John recommended the formation of Assam into a Chief Commissionership under the direct control of the Government of India with a view "partly to relieve Bengal, but mainly to benefit Assam." He added that if it was considered necessary to give further relief to the Government of Bengal, Behar, which had "no real affinity to Bengal proper," might be separated and together with some parts of the Province of Benares constituted into a separate Lieutenant Governorship as was done temporarily by
Lord Canning in 1857-88. 66

Sir John Lawrence advocated the cause of an absolute central authority yielding with great effect the vast economic and military resources of the country against internal and external dangers. He foresaw "possible combination of troubles, widely different from those of 1857, but equally formidable." He was a staunch supporter of the theory and practice of centralisation. The Governor General, he argued, should be the head of a strong central Government and not of a loose confederation of local Governments so that the "immense interest connected with our Eastern Empire might not be jeopardised." 67

The very strong case made out by Sir William Grey for maintaining the territorial integrity of the Lieutenant Governorship of Bengal by upgrading the status of the local Government was not refuted by the Governor General or the Members of the Government of India.

In the discussion of the matter in the supreme council, four members out of seven were found to be opposed to the reproduction of Bombay and Madras constitution in Bengal. 68

67 Ibid. P. 288.
It may be noticed from the above that the lengthy discussion boiled down, in the main, to two distinct proposals - one being that of upgrading the status of Bengal Government to that of Madras and Bombay, the other being that of reducing the territorial extent of the Government; both being aimed at making the Government more efficient.

But these discussions proved to be altogether academic and infructuous. As the opinions of the Members of the Government of India differed from one another, they failed to give any collective expression and the question did not come within the range of practical politics. The whole issue was possibly shelved at least for the time being. It was revived when George Campbell took over as Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in 1871 during the Viceroyalty of Lord Mayo, who succeeded Sir John Lawrence in 1869.

Lord Mayo turned to be a radical reformer. He found in John Strachey, a strong supporter. Lord Mayo once said that his 'whole desire' was to make the Government suitable to the wants of the people. But the question of the reforms in the Bengal system had been so long delayed. On the approach of Sir William Grey's retirement, Lord Mayo recommended the name of Sir George Campbell, the author of the most important parts of the Report of the Famine Commission and well known as a great reformer. The Home
Government approved the choice and thus Campbell was offered the post by the Secretary of State. Sir Campbell was heartily glad to accept the post in 1871. He looked upon himself as undertaking a kind of special mission to carry certain reforms. He stated that his period in Bengal was in many respects the most active and interesting part of his life.

According to Campbell, the Bengal Government was in every way a great charge—by far the greatest local Government in India. The total population of the Bengal Provinces was upwards of seventy millions. The largest of the ten Commissionerships into which they were divided had nearly as many people as the whole of the Bombay Presidency. All the world had heard of the three Provinces forming the old Bengal dominions - Bengal, Behar and Orissa to which was added Assam in 1826.

Campbell who had been President of the Famine Commission and in that capacity had proposed sweeping alterations in the method of governing Bengal initiated as Lieutenant Governor a series of measures which tended to transform completely the character of the administration.

The effectiveness of the head of a local Government depended on his relations with the Viceroy.

Kayo who acted with the single aim of doing his best according to his light and gifts had his cordial concurrence and support in the measures initiated by Campbell who ruled Bengal during chief part of Mayo's Viceroyalty. The two acted in close harmony and helped each other in turning these aspirations into administrative realities. The preceding Lieutenant Governor, although not satisfied with the existing system, had not seen his way to making any radical changes in it. 70

The Road Cess Act, the Census of 1872, the establishment of a native civil service, the extension of the subdivisional system, the promotion of primary education, the collection of statistics of all kinds were only a few amongst the sweeping reforms Sir Campbell introduced. All these involved an entire departure from the laissez-faire policy of his two immediate predecessors and rendered it impossible to defer any longer the question of reforming the Bengal administration. 71

The chief features in the new system was explained to be a more active one for the protection of the poorer classes, the recall to life of the District officer and the centralisation of power in his hands. The Lieutenant


Governor had expressed the view that "the Government itself should be strengthened; the present excessive length of the official chain should be shortened."

The general plan by which the two objects of strengthening the Government and shortening the chain might best be carried out simultaneously was by amalgamating with the Government, the very highest office, - the first link in the chain i.e. the Board of Revenue; also perhaps the executive functions of the High Court. Thereafter he would bring the next link, the Commissioners, somewhat to the position of the Board, their number being reduced and their salaries increased. The next step would be to strengthen the position of the Magistrate Collectors of the districts, who would then be supervised by Commissioners themselves directly under the Government. Thus, there would be three links from Magistrate Collector upwards, viz. Magistrate Collectors, Commissioners and Government instead of the present four links, viz., Magistrate Collector, Commissioner, Board and Government.78

Sir Campbell's approaching departure brought into renewed prominence the question of relieving the Government of Bengal of some of its burdens. He expressed

a decided opinion that it was necessary either to strengthen that Government or to reduce its functions.\textsuperscript{73} "So great a Government cannot be efficiently carried on by one man alone," he asserted.\textsuperscript{74}

Mayo in these circumstances revived the question of reforming the Bengal Administration by reducing its territorial extent and recommended to the Secretary of State that Assam be created into a Chief Commissionership under the immediate authority of the Government of India. The Secretary of State communicated his approval to the above proposal in his letter No. 101 of 15 August, 1871.

It was proposed to form a new Chief Commissionership, out of the Bengal territories which should comprise all Assam; the extreme eastern portion of Bengal proper, Sylhet and Cachar; and the hilly country between and surrounding these territories. It was a measure which besides taking away a good deal of territory, would relieve the Government of Bengal of

\textsuperscript{73}Campbell, Sir George, \textit{Memoirs of my Indian career,} (Edited by Sir Charles B. Bernard). Bengal - 2nd period of Administration 1863, P. 279.

\textsuperscript{74}Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1872-73, Part III, P. 2.
much political and frontier work. Campbell, however, "always had doubts whether another distribution might not have been better." He pointed out that apart from the objection to cutting off some purely Bengali territories, it might be said that Assam had much natural linguistic and commercial connection with Bengal. Moreover, it was from Bengal that Assam drew the labour which was essential for her development. On the other hand, Campbell thought that the relation between Bengal and Behar, though old, was somewhat unnatural. His own idea that Behar was to be ceded from Bengal if territorial readjustment was necessary was forcefully pleaded by him in his further Report on the Famine in Bengal and Orissa but knowing that the Government of India were not prepared to give effect to such a radical change, he, apparently with reservations, "acquiesced in this arrangement" and thus, the province of Assam came into being.

However, administrative arrangements and territorial readjustments could not be finalised until 1874 in which year, Campbell, before leaving Bengal, handed over the territories that were to form the new Chief Commissionership.

76Campbell, Sir George, Memoirs of my Indian career, Bengal - Second period of Administration, Chapter XIII, P. 279.

76Ibid.