CHAPTER FIVE

CONSTITUTION OF THE PROVINCE OF EASTERN BENGAL AND ASSAM
CHAPTER V

CONSTITUTION OF THE PROVINCE OF EASTERN BENGAL AND ASSAM

Four years after the transfer of South Lushai Hills from Bengal to Assam, the substitution of Oriya for Hindi as the court language of the district of Sambalpur suggested the transfer of Orissa to the Central Provinces, and led to the examination of various proposals for the redistribution of existing Provincial jurisdiction. It was Sir Andrew Fraser, Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces who reopened the subject of reducing the size of Bengal, when in 1901, in an official letter he suggested that Orissa should be transferred from Bengal to the Central Provinces. Early in 1903, Sir Fraser, then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, submitted a detailed scheme for reducing the territorial jurisdiction of Bengal on the lines previously suggested by Sir William Ward. These discussions were still in progress when the arrangement was concluded with the Nizam by which the Government of India acquired permanent administrative control over Barar. This led the Government of India to consider the question of territorial redistribution on more comprehensive lines.¹

reasons which led them to reopen it was explained very
fully and clearly by the Government of India to the
Government of Bengal, on 3rd December, 1903. The Government
of India narrated at length the leading facts which
demanded the need for relief to the Lieutenant Governor of
Bengal, H.H. Risley, Home Secretary to the Government of
India, pointed out that the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal
was called upon to administer an area of 1,89,000 square
miles (1,61,000 British territory) with a population of
7,84,93,000 (7,47,44,000 in British territory) and a gross
revenue of 1,137 lakhs (land revenue 505 lakhs).

The Government of India considered it too heavy a
burden for any single individual and believed that it could
not be discharged save at the expense of efficiency. They
thought that relief could be afforded, not as suggested on
several previous occasions, by organic changes in the form
of government but only by actual transference of territory.
This led them to discuss various schemes of territorial
readjustment mainly with a view to lighten the excessive
burden of the Government of Bengal.

After examining the various schemes of territorial
redistribution, Risley turned to the Province of Assam which
was severed from Bengal in 1874. Assam contained an area of
56,000 square miles (nearly 53,000 British territory), a

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2No.3678 H.D. (Public) dated 3rd December, 1903.
Chief Commissioner's Home Proceedings, July, 1904. No.337.
population of 61,26,000 (63,41,000 in British territory) and a gross revenue of 128 lakhs (land revenue 86 lakhs). The Government of India thought that Assam, the smallest province in British India had a claim to gain in any scheme of redistribution. In their opinion the smallness and backwardness of Assam should go in favour of her territorial expansion. "It is to its contracted area, to its restricted opportunities, to its lack of commercial outlet, to its alien services, and to the predominance in its life and administration of a single industrial interest depending in the main upon imported labour, that what has been described as the parochialism of Assam is due." The Province required a maritime outlet in order to develop its industries in tea, oil and coal. The paying portion of the Assam Bengal Railway were in the south and the whole line, if it was to be utilised in the interest of the Province, should be placed under a single administration. Another important cause of Assam's weakness was that she was dependent for her services upon Bengal. The creation of a self contained service for Assam was the paramount necessity.

The creation of Assam into a vigorous and self contained administration, capable of playing the same part on the North East Frontier of India that the Central

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Ibid. P.153.
Provinces had done in the centre, and that Punjab
formerly did on the North west, was the main object of
the Government of India. Then they proceeded to explain
the means by which this object might be secured
coincidently with a relief to the overburdened Lieutenant
Governor of Bengal.

The Chittagong Division consisted of four
districts with an area of 11,770 square miles, a
population of 47,37,000 and a land revenue of 31½ lakhs.
The native state of Hill Tipperah with an area of 4,000
square miles, and a population of 1,73,000 was attached
to it. The Government of India had no doubt that if it
were attached to Assam, the local government would be
encouraged to promote the development of the Chittagong
port in her own interests. Then if the Assam Bengal Railway
was placed under a single control, the interests of the
province would be enhanced. Lastly, there was no
distinction between the conditions of the people and the
administration, in the Chittagong Division and those in
the neighbouring Assam districts of Sylhet and Cashar. The
system of land settlement and tenure would be the same in
both the areas; and the inhabitants were identical in race,
religion and language.

With a view to remove the fear that the people of
Chittagong would suffer by being subjected to an inferior
standard of law and administration, the Government of India
assured that (1) there would be no change either in the class of officers appointed, or in the administration of law, (2) Chittagong would not be removed from the jurisdiction of the Calcutta High Court. In regard to the loss of control of the Bengal Board of Revenue and the deprivation of what Sir A. MacKenzie in Bolton's letter of 13th August, 1896 described as "its fractional interest in the Bengal Council," the Government of India had under their consideration some alternative proposals if Assam was enlarged to the full extent which the Government of India contemplated. Proceeding further Risley stated that the addition of Chittagong Division to Assam could not provide her with a self contained and independent service. On the other hand, the union of Oriya speaking people under Bengal would add substantially to its population in the south, while the transfer of the greater part of Chota Nagpur and the whole of the Chittagong Division with Hill Tipperah would reduce the population of Bengal by about five millions. Thus, no substantial relief could be afforded to Bengal by the above mentioned arrangement. To attain the two objects of improving the services of Assam and reducing the responsibilities of Bengal, the Government of India proposed to incorporate with Assam the districts of Dacca and Mymensingh.

These two districts of Eastern Bengal contained an area of 9,000 square miles and a population of 65,64,000 and a land revenue of Rs. 17 lakhs. 5

We have discussed in Chapter IV the views of both Sir William Ward, the Chief Commissioner of Assam who suggested their amalgamation with Assam in 1896 and Sir Henry Cotton, the successor of Ward who opposed it very strongly in 1897. Apparently, the views of Cotton carried more weight with the Government of India, who after matured consideration dropped the scheme of Ward.

Even J. B. Fuller, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam, who very strongly advocated the transfer of Chittagong Division to Assam hesitated to recommend the larger scheme which was put forward in 1896, that Assam should take over Dacca and Mymensingh in addition to Chittagong Division. He remarked "the change would be in effect rather the annexation of Assam by Eastern Bengal than the transfer of Eastern Bengal to Assam." 6

The large European population which had its business and its residence in Assam gave the province something of "the character of a British colony," and it would, indeed, appear that Assam owed its constitution as a separate province to a recognition of the special needs

5Ibid. P. 156.
6Chief Commissioner's Home Proceedings, July, 1904, No. 236, Pp. 139-43.
of this section of the community. Fuller apprehended that the larger scheme was likely to bring about great modifications in the character and probably in the name of the province. Apart from other considerations he stressed upon the resentment of the people of Dacca and Mymensingh whose interest the transfer would affect.\(^7\)

The Government of India advanced the following arguments in favour of the transfer of Dacca and Mymensingh.

1) If Dacca and Mymensingh were joined to Assam, the latter would possess a definite and intelligible western boundary.

2) The transfer would enable Assam to have a self-contained and independent service and that service would possess three separate commissionerships, which would be its prime appointments. These would be (1) the Brahmaputra valley or Assam proper; (2) Dacca to which would be added Sylhet and Cashar; (3) Chittagong.

3) Chittagong would develop into a port of Assam as well as the port of Dacca and Mymensingh.

4) The Government of India believed that from the administrative point of view the people of the districts in question would be materially the gainers if they were brought under the administration of Assam.

\(^7\)Ibid.
Risley was, however, conscious that the publication of the proposal would give rise to serious opposition and keen criticism. He admitted that the change would doubtless be represented as one of retrograde character tending to place a "highly advanced and civilised community under a relatively backward administration." The objections of the people were deserving of consideration, but Risley was prepared to disregard them successfully and wisely as was done in the case of Sylhet and Cashar.

If the proposal regarding the transfer of territory from Bengal to Assam were carried out, Assam would gain 24,770 square miles in area, 114,74,000 in population and Rs. 404 lakhs in land revenue.

The publication of these proposals was the signal for an outburst of public resentment. The Government of Bengal admitted the existence of a good deal of agitation against the scheme of transfer of territory from Bengal to Assam. The people of Bengal of all ranks and shades of opinion were united in their opposition to the scheme. Protest meetings were reported from towns and villages in every district. The Indian National Congress recorded its protest in its annual sessions in 1903 and 1904.

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9Ibid.
The Government, however, sought in vain to pursue and conciliate the people by initiating discussions and holding conferences with the leaders of East Bengal on the lines suggested by the Government of India. As these conferences proved of no avail, Lord Curzon visited Chittagong, Dacca and Mymensingh in the middle of February, 1904. In a series of speeches delivered in reply to public addresses, he hinted at the establishment of a Lieutenant Governorship with a Legislative council and an independent revenue authority. The scheme which he envisaged involved the transfer to Assam of a tract of country extensive enough to justify the larger project as above indicated.\(^\text{10}\)

It was not only the people of Bengal who stubbornly protested against the scheme, public opinion in Assam was also greatly opposed to the project. At this stage, we may be permitted to turn our attention for a moment to the official and representative public opinion in the Assam and Surna valleys.

J. B. Fuller, the Chief Commissioner of Assam repeated forcefully his arguments in favour of a union between Assam and the neighbouring districts of the Chittagong Division.\(^\text{11}\) Of the two gentlemen of the

\(^{10}\)Parl. Papers ed. 2746 H.C. Vol. 82 of 1904.- No. 2. P. 642.

Surma valley who were consulted in this regard by the Government, one was in favour of the union; the other opposed it, but according to Fuller, his objections were directed with greater force against the inclusion of Dacca and Mymensingh. The representatives of the Assam valley were strongly opposed to the larger project. They were apprehensive that in a larger province the particular interests of their class might receive less attention. The basis for this fear was at the prospect of the union of the districts of Dacca and Mymensingh with Assam which, with its overwhelming population, would, in effect, reduce Assam to the position of a tailpiece of the larger province. After making personal enquiries, Fuller came to the conclusion that the local interests would not strongly oppose if only the Chittagong Division was transferred to Assam.12

The inclusion of Dacca and Mymensingh along with Chittagong Division would have the effect of nearly trebling the existing population of Assam. Mélitus and Colonel Maxwell, two senior officers of the Assam Commission were strongly in favour of the larger scheme.

Fuller, as head of the administration of Assam, however, faithfully represented the opinion of the people

12Ibid, P.197.
of the province when he said that the public opinion in the Assam valley was strongly opposed to the project. He tried to explain the causes of their antipathy by pointing out that the town of Dacca was inaccessible from the Assam Valley and that there was no community feeling between the Assamese and the people of these districts. The people of the Assam Valley genuinely objected to the wide extension of the provincial boundaries on the ground that with larger and more complicated interests to be tackled, the administration would find little time and opportunity to give their attention to the districts of Assam. He recommended that the name Assam which was known throughout the world should be retained whatever might be the scheme finally adopted. 13

Davis opposed the scheme on the ground that "Assam would be lost in Eastern Bengal." This apprehension was also entertained very strongly by the three Assamese gentlemen who had been consulted by Fuller and whose opinions were entitled to respect. The local opinion of the Surma Valley was also opposed to the larger scheme of redistribution. 14

The public opinion of Assam was better reflected in the resolutions passed by the different representative

14 Ibid.
public organisations and municipalities which were called upon by the Assam administration to give their opinions.

By a resolution dated 14th February, 1904, the Assam Association, Gauripur, rejected the proposed scheme of redistribution and declared its agreement with the arguments put forward by Cotton in his note dated January 26, 1897 against the transfer of Chittagong Division to Assam.

They further opined that the Bengal form of Administration was too highly developed, too legalised and too impersonal for a backward province like Assam and that the cause of Assam and the interest of her people would greatly suffer if the highly advanced districts of Dacca and Mymensingh were united with it. 15

The Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha opined that the Chittagong and Dacca had been integral part of Bengal since time immemorial. The people were very much opposed to separation. When the Government of India did not like to separate Orissa owing to her political association with Bengal for a century, there was certainly very much less ground for cutting up Bengal proper into two portions.

The Sabha urged that if the Government were determined to add Chittagong Division to Assam, the name

15 Ibid. No. 267. Pp. 208-209. From Raja Prabhat Ch. Barua, President, Assam Association to the Chief Commissioner Assam dated, the 15th February, 1904.
'Assam' should be retained for the new province.

The Sabha concluded their observations by affirming that the people were very much opposed to the addition of the districts of Dacca and Mymensingh to Assam.16

In the judgment of Silchar Municipality, the distinctive features of Assam would disappear, if the area and population under its administration were enlarged as proposed. The addition of Bengal districts to Assam would require very comprehensive changes in the administrative machinery involving heavy expenditure.

Quoting from an observation made by the High Court of Calcutta in their Minute of 30th June, 1896, the Municipality pointed out that Assam, even as it were then constituted, comprised communities of very conflicting interests and if the Chittagong Division was added to it, it would further increase the already existing conflicts in Assam and create administrative difficulties.

The Silchar Municipality also questioned the feasibility and or desirability of creating a self contained service for Assam by enlarging the

16 Ibid. No.269, Pp.209-211. From Rai Jagannath Barua Bahadur, President Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 10th February, 1904.
jurisdiction of the province even by adding Dacca and Mymensingh. From the point of view of the interests of the present districts of Assam, it was opposed to the establishment of the proposed Lieutenant Governorship with its headquarters at Dacca which would attract the greater portion of the attention of the head of the administration much to the neglect of the interests of Assam districts. 17

The Municipal committee of Sylhet observed that any territorial addition which might further the material and intellectual improvement of the people of Assam should be accepted. Judging by this standard, it was of the opinion that Chittagong Division which was well connected by communication with Assam should be annexed to it.

Turning to Dacca and Mymensingh which in no way would help the development of the resources of the province, the committee did not like their incorporation with Assam. 18

But the Government of India did not take into consideration the public opinion and henceforth gave up


the pretence of consulting the same. Lord Curzon and his aides continued their efforts in strict secrecy and they widened further the scope of transferring territory from Bengal to Assam.

It was the Bengal Government's letter of 6th April, 1904, which carried the idea a stage further and proposed to give up to the new province the whole of the Dacca and Chittagong Divisions and the districts of Parnia, Bogra and Rangpur, forming the eastern half of Northern Bengal. At the same time Sir Andrew Fraser deprecated the transfer of any of the British districts of Chota Nagpur to the Central Provinces, while he accepted the additions of territory from Madras. 19

The Government of India proposed to the Bengal Government to add to the area to be transferred as suggested above the districts of Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Malda, Jalpaiguri and the state of Goosh Behar. According to the Government of India the extended scheme presented the following advantages 20:

1) It would give the new province a population of over 31 millions, leaving Bengal with a little more than 54 millions.


2) The new province would have a well defined river boundary for almost the entire length of its western frontier. The new boundary would possess the further advantage of corresponding in its central portion, with the well recognised geographical and social distinction and for a part of its length it would mark the point where Bengali ceased to be spoken and Hindi began.

3) It would bring within the Eastern Province the bulk of the characteristic Muhammedans of Bengal who formed 78 percent of the population of Rajshahi, 50 percent of Dinajpur and 48 percent of Malda. Not only would it give Dacca a central position in relation to the rest of the Province, but it would tend in course of time to confer on that city the special character of a provincial capital where Muhammedan interests would be strongly represented, if not predominant.

4) It would bring within the new province the whole of the tea industry, with the exception of the gardens in the Darjeeling districts the conditions of which were peculiar.

5) It would bring under one Government the greater part of the tract within which jute was cultivated.

6) By adopting this boundary, the necessity for breaking up the then existing Commissioners' Divisions...
could be avoided.  

The effect of the proposal noted above in relation to area and population is shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Province</th>
<th>Area in square miles</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>66,243</td>
<td>61,26,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Bengal :</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Dacca Division</td>
<td>18,040</td>
<td>1,07,93,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Chittagong Division (including Hill Tippera)</td>
<td>16,850</td>
<td>49,11,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Bengal :</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Rajshahi Division (including Cooch Behar except Darjeeling)</td>
<td>17,499</td>
<td>88,13,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) District of Malda</td>
<td>1,699</td>
<td>2,84,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,06,840</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,10,29,433</strong></td>
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</table>

Bengal (at the time) including the feudatory states  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Area in square miles</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,00,297</td>
<td>7,84,93,410</td>
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Add from Central Provinces.  

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<th>Population</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13,722</td>
<td>16,08,391</td>
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Deduct :-

a) Eastern and Northern Bengal.  

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<th>Area in square miles</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80,297</td>
<td>2,54,02,090</td>
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b) Hindi speaking feudatory states of Chota Nagpur.

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Area in square miles</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11,004</td>
<td>5,93,177</td>
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</table>

Balance  

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Area in square miles</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,41,000</td>
<td>5,41,16,534</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bengal as thus reconstituted would have a population exceeding that of the United Provinces by over 6 millions instead of as now by 20 millions, while the new province with a population of over 31 millions would occupy a fourth position in order among the larger provinces of India. 21

Fuller was in complete agreement with the revised proposal. He put forward an additional ethnological argument in favour of the proposed boundary line that it would include almost the whole of the area over which the Tibeto Burman tribes, known collectively as the Bodos have extended. These races formed a most characteristic feature in the population of the existing Province of Assam. He also mentioned that the new scheme would bring together the tea growing areas of the Dmae and of the Assam Valley and this was of much practical importance. It would be characterised by a prominence of Musalman interests, he added. Finally, Fuller suggested that the districts of the Surma Valley namely Sylhet and Cachar, the Garo Hills, the Khasi & Jaintia Hills, the Lushai Hills, and the State of Manipur which were under the direct charge of the Chief Commissioner should be formed into a new Commissionership. There appeared to Fuller political advantages in placing Manipur on the same level as Tipperah. 22

21 Ibid. P. 141.
The effect of this scheme would be to give the new Province five Commissionerships and protants, to enhance its attractions so far as the prospects of promotion were concerned. The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in his letter of the 26th September, 1904, concurred generally with the views of the Government of India.

The Government of India finally recommended to the Secretary of State that the new Province should consist of the present Chief Commissionership of Assam and Eastern and Northern Bengal - the Chittagong, Dacca and Rajshahi Divisions excluding Darjeeling but including the state of Hill Tipperah and the district of Malda which then formed part of Bhagalpur Division. It would comprise an area of 1,06,540 square miles and a population of 31 millions, of whom 18 millions would be Muhammadans and 12 millions Hindus. They suggested "The North Eastern Provinces" as the name of the new province. The Province of Bengal, while losing these large territories on the east, would gain on the west from the Central Provinces the Oriya speaking district of Sambalpur and five Oriya states of Patna, Kalahandi, Sonpur, Bahra and Bairakhol. She would also surrender to the Central Provinces the five Hindi speaking states of Jashpur, Sarguja, Udaipur, Korea and Ghang Behar. Bengal would, according to the new scheme, be left with an area of 1,41,580 square miles and a population of 34 millions, out of which the Hindus numbered 42 millions.
as against 9 million Muhammadans. It would thus appear that the Government of India abandoned those portions of their original scheme which contemplated the transfer of certain areas included in the Madras Presidency and the transfer of Chota Nagpur to the Central Provinces.

The revised scheme of the Government of India was never laid before the public for criticism. It was "conceived in secret, discussed in secret and settled in secret, without the slightest hint to the public."24 The final scheme, said Lord Morley in Parliament "was never submitted to the judgment of anybody in Bengal."25

The Secretary of State in council gave his sanction to the general principles involved in the proposals apparently with some reservations. He suggested the name of the new Lieutenant Governorship as "Eastern Bengal and Assam" instead of "The North Eastern Provinces" as proposed by the Government of India. He also substituted a Board of Revenue of two members for a single financial Commissioner.26 Albeit the Secretary of State accorded his sanction to the general principles involved in Curzon's proposals, he felt it incumbent upon him to consider an alternative proposal so

25 Ibid.
prominently suggested in the discussion of 1867-69 and regretted that the same had not been thoroughly examined.

The alternative proposal referred to aimed at affording relief to the Lieutenant Governor by making over certain portions of the Province to the charge of the Commissioners invested with powers corresponding to those which under Act V of 1869, might be delegated by the Government of Bombay to the Commissioner in Sind. It would be possible, the Secretary of State suggested, to entrust to a Commissioner a substantial part of the work of the Government reserving for the central controlling authority only those general questions of principle and method, or special classes of administrative problems which it might be desirable to retain in the Lieutenant Governor's hands. In short, the Secretary of State might have preferred the creation of a province on the model of Sind in the Bombay Presidency. But "in total disregard of the dynamics of new India", Curzon proceeded to carry out the partition.

The revised scheme of partition was conveyed to the public in the form of a Government Resolution, dated 19th July, 1905.

The Resolution read:— A new province would be created with the status of a Lieutenant Governorship.

27 Ibid.

consisting of the Chittagong, Dacca and Rajshahi Divisions of Bengal, the district of Malda, the State of Hill Tipperah and the Chief Commissionership of Assam. Darjeeling would remain with Bengal. The name of the new Province would be "Eastern Bengal and Assam", the capital of which would be situated at Dacca and subsidiary headquarter at Chittagong. It would comprise an area of 1,06,540 square miles and a population of 31 millions of whom 18 millions were Mohammedans and 12 millions Hindus. It would possess a Legislative council, and a Board of Revenue of two members and the jurisdiction of the Calcutta High court would be maintained. The existing province of Bengal while losing these large territories on the east and of the five Hindi states of Chota Nagpur namely Jashpur, Sarguja, Udaipur, Korea and Chang Bhakar, gained on the west from the Central Provinces the Oriya speaking district of Sambalpur and five Oriya states of Patna, Kalahandi, Sonpur, Barara and Bairakhol. It would now comprise an area of 1,41,680 square miles with a population of 54 millions out of whom 42 millions were Hindus and 9 millions Mohammedans.

The Government of India accepted the name 'Eastern Bengal and Assam' and proposed to fix the strength of the

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new Legislative council at fifteen.\textsuperscript{30}

Under a Proclamation made on 1st September, 1905, the Government of India constituted the territories at present under the administration of the Chief Commissioner of Assam to be a province which should be called and known as the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Upon the constitution of the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, the districts of Dacca, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Bakarganj, Tripura, Noakhali, Chittagong, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna and Malda which then formed part of the Bengal Division of the Presidency of Fort William, should cease to be subject to that Division, and should thenceforth be subject to and included within the limits of the Lieutenant Governorship of the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam.

The proclamation also provided that under the Indian Councils Act (1861) there would be a Legislative Council with 16 Councillors whom the Lieutenant Governor might nominate according to the provisions of the Indian Councils Act of 1892.

The new Province came into existence on 16th October, 1905 with Joseph Hampfylde Fuller, C.S.I., C.I.E., as its first Lieutenant Governor. Thus, Bengal was

\textsuperscript{30}\textbf{Parl Papers. H.C. Vol.81 of 1906, Despatch No.5, dated the 3rd August, 1905. P.877.}

The area of the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam has been shown in Map No.3.
partitioned.

The people of Bengal and the people of Assam, however, refused to accept the Partition as a settled fact. There was country wide agitation of an unprecedented character. It is a fact that a section of the Muslims, headed by Salimullah, the Nawab of Dacca, who was won over by Lord Curzon became the supporter of the partition. The first Lieutenant Governor Fuller faced a critical situation. Instead of adopting a policy of tact and conciliation, he preferred to follow a policy of repression. Public meetings were forcibly dispersed. He openly favoured the Muslims. He described the Musalmans and Hindus, like his two queens of Indian legends, the first being the Suo (favoured) and the second, the duo (neglected)\(^{31}\) For the first time in history a religious feud was established between them by the partition of the province. "For the first time the principle was enunciated in official circles: Divide and Rule."\(^{32}\) The High court of Calcutta was constrained to ensure the racial bias judicially displayed by a District Judge. The Authorities did not take any step to check such dangerous propaganda. Riots followed, Hindu shops were looted, lives were lost, women spent night concealed in tanks.\(^{33}\)


\(^{33}\)Ibid.
After exhausting all constitutional means the Bengalis adopted the boycott movement. The original conception of boycott was mainly an economic one. Like the boycott, the Swadeshi or a patriotic movement was organised, the object of which was to foster the growth of Indian industry and prevent the consumption of foreign goods. The movement gradually broadened in its character and tendencies. There was nothing objectionable in it on principle, but it was antagonistic to British interests. As a result the Anglo-Indian officialism identified Swadeshi with sedition. Considerations of space do not permit any discussion of the Swadeshi movement and Indian Nationalism which acted and reacted upon each other. It is also beyond the scope of the present work to narrate the development of nationalism in the hands of a band of leaders like Tilak, Arabinda Ghosh, Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal. Only the broad trends of the movement may be touched upon.

Bengal was in a great ferment when Minto took over charge from Lord Curzon who vacated the Viceroyalty on the 18th of November, 1905. A liberal Government came to power in England in December following. Many educated Indians believed that with Morley as the Secretary of State, their grievances would be redressed. But the people were disappointed. There was no words of conciliation and no hope of any modification of the partition.
The Indian National Congress passed resolutions condemning the partition of Bengal in 1903, as well as in 1904. It was the policy of boycott which formed an integral part of the Swadeshi movement that brought about a split in the congress rank in the annual session of the Congress at Benares in 1906. Gokhale, the leader of the Moderates, who presided over the session, condemned Lord Carnan's administration. The Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress met in 1906 in a very tense atmosphere. It was marked by a distinct cleavage between the Moderates and the Extremists. The Extremists who were more popular in Bengal were joined by eminent leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Klaparde from outside Bengal. Bipin Chandra Pal was at his best in preaching the new policy of his party through his eloquent speeches. With the entry of Arabinda Ghosh in the Extremist party, it acquired such strength and vigour as could give it an all-India outlook and stature. The Congress Session in Calcutta could transact its business rather smoothly because of the presence of Dadathai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man who somehow patched up the differences between the Moderates and the Extremists. In this Session, the Indian National Congress by adopting a resolution identified itself with the Swadeshi Movement and accepted its programme as its own. But at the Surat Session of the Indian National Congress in 1907 the so called extremists routed the
moderates and the congress split up without transacting any business. So far there was no breakdown of law and order. But the feeling of resentment was so strong that the situation was rendered far more serious by the growth of terrorism and the gradual development of a spirit of militant nationalism. There ensued a period of political unrest and communal strife in Bengal. The troubles were not confined to Bengal alone. The situation in the Punjab also grew very tense. But let us concentrate our attention on Bengal and Assam with which we are concerned here.

The agitation for the annulment of the partition of Bengal gathered momentum and assumed a national character under the able leadership of Lokamanya, Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Indian Nationalism had attracted support of the masses for the first time and adopted revolutionary techniques other than terrorism. According to S. Gopal, "The future lay with the type of nationalism that had now developed in Bengal. ................. Indian nationalism moved away from both mendicant resolutions and stray bomb outrages to ardent, broad-based revolutionary pressure." 34

The Government of Lord Minto did not interfere with Partition as it was a 'settled fact,' but in dealing with Sir Bampfyde Fuller, the first Lieutenant Governor

of Eastern Bengal and Assam whose policy of repression knew no bounds, Lord Minto showed courage and statesmanship. In accepting the resignation of Fuller who was firm in his belief that the Viceroy would not dare take this extreme step, Minto showed himself at his best.

Lord Hardinge succeeded Lord Minto as Viceroy on 23 November, 1910. Lord Morley also resigned his office as Secretary of State in November, 1910, and Lord Crewe succeeded him.

Lord Hardinge, after his arrival at Calcutta, could form his own idea of the situation and realised that the grievances of the Bengalis had assured an 'undeniable reality'. Lord Crewe also expressed his deep discontent with the administration of justice in Bengal. Lord Hardinge was convinced of the necessity of modifying Partition and the removal of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi. A clear exposition of the policy of the Government of India was given in their despatch, dated 25 August, 1911, to the Secretary of State.35 The despatch said:

"........ To sum up, the results anticipated from the partition have not been altogether realised, and the scheme as designed and executed, could only be justified by success. Although much good work has been done in Eastern

35 For the full text, Cf. Mukherjee, P. Indian Constitutional Documents, pp. 377-90, the passage within inverted commas is quotation from the Despatch.
Bengal and Assam, and the Mahomedans of that province have reaped the benefit of a sympathetic administration closely in touch with them; those advantages have been in a great measure counter-balanced by the violent hostility which Partition has aroused amongst the Bengalis. For the reasons we have already indicated, we feel bound to admit that the Bengalis are labouring under a sense of real injustice which we believe it would be sound policy to remove without further delay."

At long last, the Government of India realised their own mistake and decided to undo the great wrong done to Bengal. With the true insight of a statesman Lord Hardinge made three recommendations:

(1) To reunite the Bengali-speaking districts of the Presidency, having an area of 70,000 square miles and a population of 42 millions under a Governor in council.

(2) To constitute a Lieutenant Governorship in council comprising Bihar, Chota Nagpur and Orissa, with a Legislative council, over an area of 1,13,000 square miles and a population of 35 millions, and,

(3) To restore the Chief Commissionership of Assam with an area of 66,000 square miles and a population of only 5 millions.

In making these recommendations, the Government of India was guided by a desire to do away with too big
administrative units and to provide convenient units of provincial administration. They realised the necessity of giving the Hindi-speaking people a separate administration. The Secretary of State in his secret letter of 1 November, 1911 gave his general sanction to these proposals and desired the Governor General in council to have them announced at the Coronation Durbar. The magnificent Durbar, held on 12 December, 1911 was chiefly memorable for the announcement of His Majesty the King Emperor regarding the amelioration of the partition and the establishment of a Governorship for the Presidency of Bengal, restoration of Chief Commissionership in Assam, creation of a new Lieutenant Governorship in council administering the areas of Bihar, Chota Nagpur and Orissa and the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi.

These administrative changes were given effect to by three notifications issued on 22 March, 1912 and an Act passed by the Government of India on 25 March, 1912 and finally by an Act of Parliament, - the Government of India Act, 1912. This Act placed the new Governorship of Bengal on a footing of equality with those of Bombay and Madras and provided an Executive Council for Bihar and Orissa and

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36 Sec. of State to Government of India, 1 November, 1911, P. 597 (od. 5979 of 1911).

37 Ibid. P. 582.
authorised the creation of Legislative councils in the provinces under Chief Commissioners. Accordingly Assam and Central Provinces got a Legislative Council.

The partition of Bengal developed into a political weapon which aimed at checking the growing solidarity and self-consciousness of the Bengali speaking population. There remains no doubt on the real motive for partitioning Bengal when the proposal for the formation of Chief Commissionership in Bihar and the transfer of Orissa to the Central Provinces was rejected on the ground that "it would tend still further to consolidate Bengali influence and the so called national sentiment. Instead of breaking up the present combination of political agitators and creating wholesome centres of Provincial opinion, it would strengthen the predominance of the political organisations in Calcutta." It is also evident that there was the motive of bringing about a rift between the Hindus and the Muslims.

Judging the scheme from Assam's point of view an impartial observer would find it detrimental to her interests in the sense that Assam was practically annexed to Eastern Bengal and her needs were subordinated to that of the larger part of the new province. The truth is that

there never was any real desire to ameliorate the Bengal Administration.

The public opinion in Assam was very much opposed to its amalgamation with Eastern Bengal apparently out of apprehensions of losing its identity. Here again, the truth is that there never was any real desire on the part of the Government to respect public opinion.

Leaving aside the views of so many Indian authorities and critics on the subject, we may turn our attention to the opinion of a person who was well conversant with the administrative needs and requirements of both Bengal and Assam. He was none but Sir Henry Cotton who had a distinguished record in the Indian Civil Service for 36 years and had the honour to rise to the office of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, and four years after his retirement sat as a member of the House of Commons. The arguments put forward by Cotton in his note dated January 26, 1897 against the transfer of Chittagong Division from Bengal to Assam remained unanswered. Cotton who considered the whole question purely from administrative point of view outright rejected the proposal of transfer. He vehemently criticised the scheme of partition which according to him was repugnant in the last degree to the inhabitants of the country affected, in whom there is a sense of patriotic pride in their province, their ancestry and their future. The measure was carried out against their
will and inaptitude of their protests.  

"If the proposals of the Government of India were bad enough, the manner in which they were carried out was worse still.  

The impression is reinforced by the statement of C.J. O'Donnell, M.P., that the measure "was forced through by a flagrant act of contempt for the House of Commons."  

That the partition of Bengal and the constitution of the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was not justifiable by any standard was amply proved by the fact that it had to be annulled only after six years.


41 Ibid.