Chapter III

Partition of Bengal: Partition Agitations and the Role of the Ulama

Ever since the constitution of Assam as the Chief Commissioner’s province in 1874, the Presidency of Bengal comprised of Bengal Proper, Bihar and Orissa and Chota Nagpur. Inspite of the separation of Assam which had taken with it the Bengali predominant districts Goalpara, Cachar and Sylhet, Bengal remained the most populous province of British India having an area of approximately 1,89,900 sq. miles and a population of approximately 78 and a half million. The feeling in the Government was that it was administratively too unwieldy to be administered by a single person and that was why perhaps the plan was ‘officially’ to reduce the size of the province and its population. In fact proposals to redraw the map of Bengal started as early as after the Orissa famine of 1866 when Sir Stafford Northcote suggested “a reduction in the size of the vast presidency of Bengal” which at that point of time included Bengal, Bihar Orissa and Assam on grounds of administrative convenience and efficiency. Again the partition of Bengal in 1874 saw the bifurcation of the province to create the Assam Chief Commissionership. Again in 1892 in connection with the transfer of the south Lushai Hills from Bengal to Assam, officials suggested that certain other parts of Bengal, viz., the whole of the Chittagong division should be transferred to Assam, an idea to which

1 R. C. Majumdar, History Of The Freedom Movement in India, Vol.2 p.3
2 S. Sarkar, Swadeshi Movement In Bengal, p.9
Chief Commissioner War added the districts of Dacca and Mymensingh. However, all these plans came to nought with administrative reluctance and lethargy.

But again in 1901, the entire exercise of a fresh look at the question of boundary adjustment of the Bengal province was revived with the administration engaging in territorial adjustment of the provinces of Bengal and the Central province. In 1902, the 24th of May, Curzon circulated a note in which he suggested an overall look at the enormous Bengal Presidency and territorial readjustments wherever possible. Possibly the idea was to transfer one or two districts to Assam. Fraser in his note on 28th of March 1903 urged for the transfer of the Chittagong division along with Dacca and Mymensingh and possibly “for the first time highlighted the political benefits of the scheme. His scheme found favour with Curzon who accepted his ideas and were contained in the note that Curzon gave entitled ‘Viceroy’s Minute on Territorial Redistribution in India (19 May / 1 June 1903)’. It was this Minute which formed the basis for Risley’s letter of 3rd December 1903 proposing the transfer of the Chittagong division along with Dacca and Mymensingh to Assam. This was subsequently reviewed and Risley suggested that even Bakarganj and Faridpur be transferred to be made part of Assam and they together be constituted into a Lieutenant-Governor’s Province. This idea of transfer of certain other districts to the new-proposed province was also considered and subsequently it was clear that the list of transferable districts would be further amended to include Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Malda, Jalpaiguri and Cooch-Behar, which would along with

---

3 S. Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement In Bengal*, p.9
4 Ibid, p.10
5 Ibid, p.9-14
the earlier proposed districts constitute the new province. The Secretary of State gave his consent to this proposal on 9th June and on the 19th July 1905, the Government of India announced its decision to set up the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, the formal proclamation coming in on the 1st of September and on the 16th of October 1905 Bengal was partitioned.

Partition of Bengal has generated a great deal of debate on the question of motive, the principal rival views varying between administrative and economic conveniences and political manipulation. But whatever they could be Curzon and Risley were very clear in their mind. Ostensibly the decision was purely administrative and economic. Risley in his note on the 31st of March brought out the commercial benefits of the scheme and with the bringing in of Assam Bengal Railway under one administration, Curzon in his letter addressed to the Secretary of State wrote, “Government by one man is infinitely better then Government by three men if it can be so managed. What we want in India is personal knowledge of localities and personal touch with the people. This can only be gained by the familiarity of the Head of the Administration with the places and people under his chare. With the triumvirate as a ruling power this is quite impossible and Bombay and Madras are both in my view, illustrations that the weak points are in excess of the merit of the system”6. But the proposal of political convenience with the division of Hindus and Muslims and the creation of a province to unite the people of Muhammadan faith had been found much attractive by Risley. He found it a way by which the new province would make the Hindu minorities less threatening for the British

---

Empire. This was as much admitted in his notes, dated 7th February 1904 and 6th December 1904.

Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in several different ways. That is perfectly true and is one of the merits of the scheme. The only rejoinder that I can think of is that Bengal is very densely populated; that Eastern Bengal is the most densely populated portion, that it needs room for expansion and that it can only expand towards the East. So far from hindering national development we are really giving it greater scope, and enabling Bengal to absorb Assam.7

And again,

It is not altogether easy to reply in a dispatch which is sure to be published without disclosing the fact that in this scheme as in the matter of the amalgamation of Berar to the Central provinces one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.8

In Curzon’s words the scheme “would invest the Mohammedans in East Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussalman Viceroy and Kings”.9 The attempt of the colonial state towards ensuring a communal divide was not overlooked by the native press, with the Bengalee observing,

Sir Bampfylde Fuller’s Government made no secret of its intention and proclaimed from the house tops its partiality for the Muhammadans. The policy of patting the latter on the backhand ‘hammering’ the former (i.e. the Hindus)

---

7 S. Sarkar, opcit p 17-18, also see J. R. McLane The Decision to Partition Bengal in 1905, in Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1965
8 Ibid
9 Ibid
was pursued in a reckless manner. Even the Colonial Judicial Administration became communally prejudiced.

But for the strong imperialist Curzon, it was a carefully conceived and crafted political move. "The Bengalis who like to think themselves a nation, and who dream of a future when the English will have been turned out and a Bengali Babu will be installed in Government House Calcutta of course bitterly resent any disruption that will be likely to interfere with the realization of this dream. If we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying on the eastern flank of India, a force already formidable, and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future".

Agitation in connection with partition of Bengal commenced with the publication of the proposal to transfer the Chittagong and Dacca divisions from the province of Bengal, on the 12th of December 1903. Public criticisms against the proposal vent the air as agitators took to public meetings and sending memorials and telegrams to the Government and to the sympathetic press. Not only the professionals, who had so long dominated the arena of politics in colonial India, but also the landlords, led and joined the protests. In fact in the initial years the movement was characterized by participation of both the Hindus and the Muslims against these proposals. Protest meetings were held in towns and villages. Pamphlets and leaflets opposing the scheme and pointing out the grave evils arising from it were issued in hundred possibly in thousands.

---

10 A. K. Neogy, Partition of Bengal, p.236
11 Ibid, p.238
12 Curzon to Brodrick quoted in S. Sarkar, Ibid, pp. 19-20
On the 12th of December 1903, when the proposal was published in the Government of India Gazette, there seem to be some expectation of the announcement among the agitationists with certain articles appearing in some of the newspapers earlier in the year referring to the scheme of the government to partition Bengal. As early as in February 1903, protest meetings were held in Chittagong under the presidency of Jatra Mohan Sen, Secretary of the Chittagong Association. An official Report on the Agitations noted, "The Superintendent of Police Chittagong reported in February of that year that the rumour of the impending transfer was causing discontent among the people, as they objected to being called Assamese".

Four leading newspapers of Calcutta, the Bengalee, the Amrita Bazar Patrika, the Indian Mirror and the Hindu Patriot, protested against the division of the Bengali race and the principal vernacular papers such as the Sanjibani and the Bangabasi expressed unwavering hostility to any partition scheme in general terms. The Amrita Bazar Patrika in its issue of 14th December called on the people of East Bengal to hold public meetings in every town and village and prepare petitions for submission to the Government, signed by lakhs of people. In fact no less than five hundred meetings were held in East Bengal alone within the first two months. The first signs of protests in the mofussil areas was reported from Mymensingh, which was organized simultaneously with Bengal Landholders Conference held on the 17th of December in which it was decided to appoint a committee to carry on a sustained and systematic agitation against the proposals. The Charu Mihir, a vernacular newspaper published from Mymensingh called upon the

people to raise a violent agitation. *Sanjibani* in its issue of 7th January 1904, strove to engage the sympathies of the Zamindars by warning them that in a non-regulation province the permanent settlement could be abolished by a mere Gazette Notification and it seemed that this had the desired effect with many land holders being opposed to the partition since the inception of the proposals.  

As early as January 1904 the papers began to report protest meetings from towns and villages in the mufassils, though the guidance for the protests was Calcutta based. The Indian Association of Calcutta, led by its secretary Surendranath Bannerjee were among the first of the popular leaders who joined issue with the landholders and tried to work up an agitation. Circulars were issued to the association branches in the mofussils instructing the local leaders as to how to faster the movement, which gave detailed instructions to the mufassal, people to hold meetings and adopt resolution and send telegrams to the Calcutta newspapers. Specimens of such resolutions, petitions and telegrams were also enclosed with such instruction. There was little doubt that the meticulous planning of the Association succeeded to a great extent in stirring up the masses to meet and protest in large numbers. Among the most influential landlords who were opposed to the partition from the very outset were Maharaja of Mymensingh, the Maharaja of Cassimbazar, the Maharaja of Nattore, Mr. Lal Mohan Ghosh Barrister at Law, the Maharaja of Susang and the Roy Brothers of Bhagyakul in Dacca. Even the Bengal Chamber of Commerce members came out to give assurances of support to the

---

Anti-Partition agitations.\(^1\) Generally, however, the protests were initially the handiwork of the “local bar, and school masters”\(^2\), i.e., basically the English educated middle class along with many landlords, “who shared the views and ambitions of the advanced section of the Bengalis, but on the whole was devoid of lawlessness and violence”.

By the time Curzon came into East Bengal to visit East Bengal, there was already some differences of opinion among the agitationists. Almost coinciding with the visit of the Viceroy to Dacca, Chittagong and Mymensingh, the Nawab of Dacca led some of the residents of the Eastern districts of Bengal to declare their support in favour of alternative scheme for partition. Curzon tried to win the support of the Muslim population by pointing out that the scheme “would invest the Muhammadans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussulman Viceroy...”\(^3\) and again by offering “the Bengali people instead of being the pre-dominant element in one local administration would in future become the predominant element in two”\(^4\) and indicated his resolve to ignore the popular sentiments regarding the scheme. The Amrita Bazar wrote that the viceroy’s utterances had “chilled the people and dashed their hopes to the ground”\(^5\). A month after the Viceroy’s visit therefore, the first of the great protest meetings was held at the Calcutta Town Hall on the 18\(^{th}\) of March 1904. Delegates were elected in the mufassal to attend the meeting, with Mymensingh alone sending as many as 123 delegates. The meeting declared that territorial redistribution was

---

1. Home Pol Cont. No. 25, 1906
3. Viceroy’s speech at Dacca on 18\(^{th}\) Feb
4. Curzon Mymensingh 20\(^{th}\) Feb, quoted in S. Sarkar, Swadeshi Movement, p. 18
absolutely unacceptable and that “the remedy lay in organic changes in the form of government, such as the conversion of Bengal into a Governorship with an Executive Council”. The visit of the Viceroy therefore, instead of allaying the fears of the Bengali agitators, increased their anxiety. Another meeting was held at Calcutta on the 10th of January 1905 to coincide with the visit of Sir Henry Cotton at the Town Hall on the question of partition. But by the first three months of 1905, agitations had substantially subsided. But the publication of the Partition Proposal and on the 8th of July 1905 and an announcement that it had received the sanction of the Secretary of the State revived the movement, with the Bengalee leading the way on the 7th of July declaring that it was a grave national disaster. Though the proposals as approved had not then as yet reached the newspaper offices, the Bengalee received the news that the whole of eastern and northern Bengal along with the whole of Assam was to be formed into a new Lieutenant Governorship. In an article published on the 12th of August, the Bengalee declared, that there was no longer any hope of the Bengali race to develop by sympathy and it must be a case of development by “antagonism or political nirvana”. At first the agitation against partition was taken up by the Bengali vernacular newspapers. Though the official reports suggested absence of any proper agitation, there was none the less prevalence of strong feeling against the proposal, as was reflected in the reports of the Superintendent of Police of three districts of the Chittagong Division as also the magistrate of Bakkerganj in their reports for July 1905.

20 Report on Agitations in Bengal dt 25th Jan.1906
21 Ibid
The first meeting against the announcement was reported from Dinajpur on the 21st of July presided over by the Muhammadan Zamindar Syed Hafizur Rahaman Chaudhuri at which it was decided to send telegrams to the leading newspapers to express the disapproval of the partition. Rangpur witnessed a meeting on the 23rd protesting against the decision of the government. Protest meetings were also reported early from Faridpur, Pabna and Mymensingh. 22

After consultations among the leaders, at Calcutta, notices were sent out to all districts in Bengal to elect delegates to attend a mass meeting at the Calcutta Town Hall. The meeting initially fixed for the 1st of August was held on the 7th of August by which time the leaders had conceived the idea of starting a boycott of European goods as a method of expressing their displeasure at the action of the government and drawing the attention of the British public to their grievances. The proposal for a boycott of English goods was initiated as early as February 1905 by a ‘Punjabi agitator’ Tahil Ram Ganga Ram. Though not considered then, in the August 7th meeting, one of the resolutions adopted was to institute a boycott of English goods23. The agitations reached its climax on the day of the partition, i.e., 16th of October. There was a great meeting to lay the foundation of the National Federal hall, the ceremony being accompanied by the tying of ‘rakhis’ or yellow thread on the right wrist as an emblem of the perpetual union, which was to exist between the Bengalis of both the provinces. Shops were closed for the day and a large part of the population kept the day as one of fasting. The movement galvanized a majority of the population of undivided Bengal. The impact of

22 Ibid
23 Ibid
movement was felt in Assam as well, a province that was as much affected by the proposal as Bengal. Correspondent of the Bengalee who made a tour of the principal towns of Assam valley, during the beginning of the movement, “it was found that the attitude of the people of Assam on the whole towards partition and Swadeshi Movement was favourable. The Swadeshi-Anti-Partition Movement characterized by hartals, processions, Swadeshi, boycott and national education had also found support in the Assamese people. At Dhubri, Goalpara and Gauhati, the Bengalee correspondent reported that much enthusiasm could be witnessed among the buyers for the purchase of Swadeshi goods. Inspite of the stalls were being stacked with foreign goods, there were no buyers for the same. At Gauhati, the correspondent reported the use of rock salt instead of Liverpool salt, Benaras sugar instead of foreign sugar and homespun cloth instead of English mill products. The enthusiasm could well be comprehended by the reports that the Head Priest of the Kamakhya Temple at the Nilachal Hills, appealed to the priests, the grocers and the sweat meat sellers not to accept foreign goods or to indulge in the sale of the same at the Nilachal Hills. Swadeshi shops and enterprise were opened. In Tezpur and Barpeta, students and local shopkeepers took the leading part in popularizing the use of indigenous goods.

In Sylhet the Bande Mataram Samiti was formed in 1906 to encourage swadeshi and the ideas of nationalism. The Surma Valley Association formed on 11th of August 1906 played a significant role in rousing political consciousness of the people of the Surma valley and provided a political platform for the nationalist leaders of the valley in

---

25 Ibid, pp. 186-187
the initial years of the anti-colonial struggle. Besides being accompanied by *Ramkirtan* and *Bande Mataram* slogans, Swadeshi Movement and physical training of youths in the art of *lathi* and sword play. It called for Swaraj as enunciated by Naoroji in the Calcutta Session of the Congress in 1906 and called upon the members of the Association to bring out a team of dedicated workers who would move about in the villages to preach “the gospel of Swaraj, Swadeshi and Boycott – spreading education amongst the masses …”.

In its resolutions it whole heartedly supported the Swadeshi Movement to generate *atmashakti*". In so far as national education was concerned, Sylhet National School was established at the residence of Sachindra Chandra Singh with the syllabus and examinations under the National Educational Committee. Circulars including the Carlyle Circular prohibiting the students and teachers from participating in Anti - British agitations led to the foundation of similar National Schools at Habiganj, Srimangal, Baniachang and Lakhai. These schools were supported by liberal donations of the middle class swadeshi sympathizers and agitationists. These national schools were undoubtedly nerve centres of political agitation and students and children formed a major portion of the anti-partition volunteer force.

In all these agitations however it was not a Hindu show as the government had alleged. In fact, the government in all its reports tried to display a pro-partition attitude of the Muslim community, which was reflected in its Report submitted by the Inspector

---

26 Ibid, p.171
General of Police on the Partition agitations\textsuperscript{27}, which tried to undermine the composite nature of the agitations, when it noted,

great efforts were made by the leaders of the agitation to enlist the sympathies of Muhammadans on their side. In their reports of meetings the Indian newspapers ... exaggerated the numbers, have laid particular stress on the Muhammadan participation. This in a large proportion of cases, was in reality extremely insignificant.\textsuperscript{28}

A large number of Ulama became engaged in the anti-partition agitations and moved in the interiors of Eastern Bengal to preach the gospel of Swadeshi and Anti-Partition. There is no doubt that though the movement was initially generated by the English educated elite, the success of the same was ensured by the participation of and programmes in the rural areas. For this end both the swadeshi and the pro-partition agitators involved the Ulama to carry forward their respective messages. These Ulama who had firmly entrenched their position in the Bengali rural Muslim society would play a key role in the success or failure of the Swadeshi movement and their main centre of activity, the mosques would become the nerve centre of both anti and pro-partition agitations. From the very beginning there was a section of the Muslim community who were led by the likes of Maulvis “Abdul Rasul, A. H. Ghaznavi, Maulvi Liaquat Hussain, Maulvi Dedar Bukhsh, Abul Kasem, Abul Hussain, Din Mahammad, Dr. Gaffur, Ismail Siraji, Khan Bahadur Mahomed Yusuf and many others”\textsuperscript{29}, who worked along with the

\textsuperscript{27} Home Poll Con. No. 25/1906, NAI
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid
\textsuperscript{29} J. Maitra, \textit{Muslim Politics in Bengal 1855-1906}, p.244
Congress and the Hindus in the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement. Recognizing the importance of mosques in the social life of the Muslims, it is significant that offering of prayers against partition were reported from the Mosques in Mymensingh in January 1904 and in Barisal and Serampore in August 1905. In the first wave of meetings, which followed the announcement of the partition pronouncement in July 1905, Muslims including the landlords were reported to be participating and presiding over the gatherings. Reports indicating the same were reported from Kishoreganj, Bora, Madaripur, Banoripara, Khankhanpore and Tamgail. In Bogra, the publication of the Partition resolution was received with disfavour and the first protest meeting in the town was presided over by a Muhammadan Syed Hafizur Rahman Chaudhuri. On the 12th of August 1905 a boycott meeting was held which was presided over by Mazibar Rahman Chaudhuri. In Burdwan, Abul Kasem took the lead in organizing anti-partition agitations along with Babu Uma Charan Banerjee, principal of the Raj College. The attitude of the Nawab of Dacca being pro-partition was one of the reasons for the agitations being less general but the visit of Abdul Gaznavi along with Babu Surendra Nath Banerjee and Hon’ble J. Choudhury generated enthusiasm in the students and the lawyers who were urged to organize boycott meetings in Khulna one Ali Ahmad Khan, the head master of Mirzapur Middle English School took a prominent part in trying to persuade the Muhammadans in joining the Anti-Partition Movement. The appeal of the Swadeshi agitators were intended to touch the religious scruples of both the Hindus and the Muslims did create an impact. In Rajar Bazaar the cries of Bande Mataram mingled

---

30 Home (Poll) Conf. No. 25 / 06, NAI

68
with Allah ho Akbar under the leadership of Maulvi Abdul Rasul and in a Tangail village, in a reply to a question posed by a Muslim, a Hindu speaker replied that Hindus who did not treat Muslims as equals were infidels. The district of Tippera proved to be a hot-bed of agitations with aid by articles in the local newspapers the Pro-Swadeshi preachings of a Serjganj Muhammadan and a few local Muhammadans, the picketing of shops by students the active cooperation of the Panchayat presidents, the misrepresentation that the government had ordered boycott etc, the boycott movement soon spread through the length and breadth of the district. Participation of Muslims could be traced to almost all aspects of the movement be it the establishment of Swadeshi business enterprise as in case of united Bengal Company of Guznavi or Educational institution as in case of Abdul Rasul who was among the first to call for a National University. Maulvis Abul Hussain and Liakat Hussain were the most enthusiastic of the Muslim leaders and who continued his agitation well into 1912, his protests concluding only with the annulment of the Partition of Bengal and the newly carved province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Khuraja Aikulla, brother of Nawab Salimullah of Dacca moved the Anti-partition Resolution of the Congress in 1906. The first anniversary of the Swadeshi Bandhab Samitiy celebrated on the 6th of August 1906 was presided over by Syed Motahar Hossein who had been described as the pride of Barisal and the ‘ornament of the Mussalman society’. While there was no doubt that the efforts of the government in trying to display the benefits of a Muslim majority province for the community was

31 S. Sarkar, Swadeshi Movement, p. 425
32 Home (Poll) Conf. No. 25 / 06, NAI
33 S. Sarkar, Swadeshi Movement, p. 426
34 Home Poll, 13th Nov 1912, NAI
35 J. Maitra, op. cit, p. 245
bearing fruit, Muslim leaders continued to be associated with the Swadeshi movement and one such meeting in Calcutta was presided over by Khan Bahadur Mahomed Yusuf who was also the president of the Central National Muhammedan Association but it is also true that Khan Bahadur was subsequently replaced as president of the Association for attending and presiding over the said meeting. Dedar Bux a teacher in Calcutta who had called for Hindu Muslim unity as combination of intelligence and strength was appointed as ‘preacher’ by the Hoogly Howrah District Association addressing numerous meetings at Tamluk, Bagnan, Rajshahi and Malda in the early months of 1907. Hedayat Bux a teacher from Dacca and Maulvi Maniruzzaman belonging to the editorial staff of ‘Soltan’ figured in a lot of swadeshi orators against whom the government of Eastern Bengal and Assam wanted to take action. While Abul Husain and Abdul Gafur alarmed official circles by his anti-British tirade, Syed Abu Muhammad Ismail Hussain Siraji of Serajganj preached the Swadeshi cause with his poetry.

"Matri Bhasha Praner Bhasha –
Eha Pabitra o Pujyo.

IIhar Sheba na Korte ghorotano Adharmo Hai”37

But for this attitude of associating with the movement to annul partition and in favour of Boycott and Swadeshi, these leaders among who many were learned Islamic

36 S. Sarkar, opcit., 430-31
37 Islam Pracharak, Paus Magh 1309 B S (1902), p. 244, quoted in C. P. Sarkar, The Bengal Muslims A Study In Their Politicisation p. 14
scholars and *Aleem*, that they were taunted and harassed by both the Government and their pro-partition coreligionists.  

But in general, the decision of the Government was welcomed by the Muslim masses in general. Nationalist minded Muslims who were involved with the Swadeshi movement were working mainly as individuals and for which they had to face severe retribution and ostracisation among their coreligionists. In fact, the case of Khan Bahadur Mahomed Yusuf having to declare that he was presiding over a Anti-Partition Swadeshi meeting in his private capacity and finally having to face the punishment of replacement from the post of President of the Central National Mahomedan Association. That maulvi Abdul Jabbar replaced him serves to prove the point that it was the maulvis and mauals who had come to the forefront of the pro-partition agitations and were driving out the pro-swadeshi Muslim leadership from any Muslim-organizational position that they were holding. Further it is also true that efforts by Maulvi Liakat Hussain to form *Anjuman-i-Islamia* did not bear fruit.

The attitude of the Muslim masses were generally conditioned by their interaction with the Hindus through generations. The Hindus never treated the Muslims with equality and dignity and were violently against some of their practices. "Hindus ostentatiously throw away the water in their *hookkas* when they meet a Muslim, the sacrifice of cows horrifies them and the Zamindars often deal harshly with Muslim peasants celebrating *Bakr Id.* … and no one objects to the daily slaughter of ‘thousands of the bovine animals’… by professional butchers in almost all towns of the country … Hindus do not...

---

38 J. Maitra *op. cit*, p. 246
always accept even educated Muslims as their social equals and their literature is full of abuse of the Yavanas”. Therefore in Majibar Rahman’s opinion, these, inspite of being “small matters” constituted in their agglomeration a “gigantic thing”.  

The boycotting movement spreading to the moffusil areas and villages was never adopted willingly by the Muhammadans. In September 1905, the magistrate in Backerganj reported that the Muhammadans were getting annoyed at being bullied by the Hindus but the Muhammadans generally refuse to take part in it and on the 16th of October about 15,000 Muhammadans assembled at Dacca for prayers for the peace and prosperity of the new province. With picketing becoming general there came frequent complaints of insults offered to policemen in Mymensingh. While reports also indicated various complaints of oppression and intimidation by Zamindars over the Muhammadans. The Mihir-o-Sudhakar, a Calcutta based Moslem Journal in its issue of 2nd February 1906 gives an account of a meeting of Muslim labourers at Kushtia in the Nadia district where the Muslim decided that they would cease to perform for the Hindus certain acts of labour which they had hitherto been performing for them. At village Magurghona in the Khulna district at the time of Bakr Id, Hindus objected to the sacrifice of cattle though it was a common practice for years without opposition. The Hindus having failed to stop the sacrifice, caught the Muhammadan Maulvi the following day, misbehaved with him and finally tore his Koran. As retaliation it was resolved in a meeting in a neighbouring village that henceforth the Mohammadans would refuse to salute the Hindus and decline to submit to any Hindu authority. In Barisal on the 27th

---

39 S. Sarkar, p. 348
40 Rep on Agitation against Partition, 25/06, NAI
February about 400 Muslims assembled to discuss the Magurghona incident and served an ultimatum to the government to punish the guilty or else they would obtain redress themselves as they were ready to die for their religion. A meeting at Calcutta on the same issue saw a gathering of over 10,000 Muslims. The Superintendent of Police Nadia reported clear indications of traveling *maulvis* and leading Muhammadans making efforts to improve the conditions of their fellow poorer coreligionists, the first result of which was the refusal of the Muslim labourers to perform customary menial jobs for the Hindus. It was clear that the decision of the government was welcomed and supported by the Muslims who were galvanized into an awareness of their unique position as a result of this decision and their participation in a movement supporting the government decision. But at the same time the relation between the two communities were greatly strained. The proposal saw the emergence of Muslim communalism and the entry of the *maulvis* into a political movement against their hitherto social role. Both at the elite and popular levels, the decision to partition Bengal affected the Muslims. While at the level of the elite educated Mohammadan who were mostly in government service and aspirant for power were in favour of partition for it was taken to be a declared government policy to prefer Muslims over Hindus in the new province. At the other level separatist ideas and ambitions filtered down to the masses through the local *Anjumans* dominated by *mullahs* and this had merged well with the strong tide of Anti Hindu Revivalism that was working in the Bengali Muslim rural society as a result of the strategic campaign of Islamisation undertaken by they *mullahs* and *maulavis* among the Muslims of Bengal since the mid

---

41 Home Poll, A No. 25 / 06
19th century\textsuperscript{42}. While at the elite level Muslim communal identity was manifested in the emergence of the Muslim League three months after the Simla deputation, at the popular level, it was manifested in the activities of the maulavis who entered the political scene through all issues which saw a conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims be it on question of Partition of Bengal or riots between groups of rival communities as at Mymensingh in April-May 1906 which was ably recognized at the official level as Fraser wrote to Minto, “Ignorant and uneducated Mahomedans follow their leaders more readily than Hindus”, provided these leaders “cooperate with the Imams and leaders in the mosques”\textsuperscript{43}. This communal movement led by a lethal combination of “aristocratic leadership and anti-landlord demagoguery ably declared in the words of the “Islam Pracharak” in 1905, “under British rule we are undeniably dwelling in great peace and happiness”\textsuperscript{44}. Thus, when riots broke out the pro-partition propaganda came out in Islam-Pracharak in “Bengali Hindus have begun inhumanly oppressing tyrannizing and coercing poor innocent Muslims. On the pretext of their Swadeshi movement they have destroyed and are still destroying the foreign clothing, foreign sugar and foreign salt of hundred of hundreds and hundreds of Muslims, who have been forced to pay through the nose for inferior indigenous salt, inferior indigenous sugar and inferior indigenous cloth. These oppressions have been borne under duress, but how much longer can they be borne? In order to coerce them into accepting the Hindu live, the Hindus have, following the outbreaks of Camilla, began using greater force to destroy the foreign made

\textsuperscript{42} R. Ahmed, \textit{The Bengal Muslims}, 10. 6-183
\textsuperscript{43} S. Sarkar, \textit{op. cit}, p.441
\textsuperscript{44} Mustafa Nururl Islam, ‘Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as reflected in the Bengali Press, 1901-1930, p.47
belongings of Muslims. As a result, flare-ups occurred at first in such places as Magna and Chatiyara in Tippera and Jemalpero Dewananj and Bakshiganj in Mymensinh. In each of these places the Hindus at first trampled on the Muslims but afterwards in a few areas received beatings in return. No one can blame the Muslims for this.45

Everything in the context of Swadeshi / Boycott or the Peasant Land lord conflict came to be identified on communal lines, as that of the Hindu versus Muslim tussle. It is in this that the maulvis played a significant role.46 The role of the maulvis was glaring and lay exposed in the Ishwaranj and Nandail Riots in Mymensingh. “Report of the District magistrate Mymensingh on the same examined in detail the role played by these religious preachers”47 and noted, “The disturbances may be summed up as the effect of the preaching’s of Muhammadan maulvis raising up at once religious enthusiasm, social and agrarian discontent and political ambition... it is the cause that a Muhammadan Maulvi and a Hindu convert have been preaching lately in the affected are ... I believe in perfect correctness that the agitator Maulvi (Samirudding) and a much more educated person, Maulvi Mohamed Ismail, Secretary of the Mymensingh Anjuman Islamia, were at first much opposed to the so called “Partition” of Bengal and actually advocated the “Swadeshi” movement but a little experience of the methods used in supporting the latter and a more attentive consideration of the intentions and effects of the former, have led them to change their views and to look upon the creation of the new province as a

45 Ibid. p.50-51
46 A. K. Neogy, op. cit, p.252
47 Home Pub (A), July 1906, No. 124, NAI
measure that will greatly benefit their community ... *Maulvi Samiruddin* in a public meeting used the phrase “so long we have been kept down by the Hindus”... 

The disturbances was preceded by a *waz* or a religious meeting of the Muhammadans. The sober and respectable people it appears retired on the conclusion of the preaching of the *maulvi* while the disreputable portion of different and distant villages remained to commit acts of violence in execution of the exhortations of the *maulvi* ...” the result of these exhortations being attacks on the houses of prostitutes (for *maulvis* exhorted that they be either driven or reclaimed into society as wives) and the carrying away of Muhammadan servants from Hindu homes, in the words of *Maulvi* Samiruddin in his lecture at Shahganj, “we have been so long trying by means of entreaties to prevent the Muhammadans from serving the Hindus without effect. Let us now by force do what we have failed by entreaties”. Explaining the impact of the *maulvis* and the modus operandi, this report submitted,

“Annually a large number of Muhammadans versed in the Koran are turned out by the Madrassas at Dacca and Chittagong. They come to a village, start a school and preach crusade against idolatry still practiced by a majority of the Muhammadens. Their appeals take effect on the wealthier and the thinking portion of the population.

The present disturbance ... is not in any way connected with Swadeshi but that the eyes of the Muhammadans have been opened, by the preachings of the *Maulvis*, to the
exactions of the Hindu landlords".\textsuperscript{50} Anti Landlord operation as a consequence to anti swadeshi agitations led by the \textit{maulvis} was also evident in Bakshiganj and Dewanganj, where the disturbances was characterized by the plunder of the rich by the poor peasants living in the char areas of Jumna and Brahmaputra, probably as a result of the preachings of \textit{maulvis} and disloyal talk of the Hindus against the government\textsuperscript{51}.

It is clear that the population in the districts of Eastern Bengal was galvanized on communal lines the \textit{maulvis} or preachers playing a key role in the process. Communalism was firmly rooted in Bengal in its "Agrarian Base" which was facilitated by the \textit{Ulama}. The efforts of these individual \textit{maulvis} no doubt helped to defeat the forces of Swadeshisism that arose on the bed rock of the Anti-Partition Movement as Islam \textit{Pracharak} in 1908 declared, "Does the Islamic religion enjoin you to burn anyone's foreign goods, to throw them into the river, to tear them up or smash them into pieces? Does the Islamic religion teach you to obstruct foreign goods coming into the country or to impede foreign trade? No never, such unnatural injunctions are alien to and impossible in, the Islamic religion, which on the contrary declares such conduct sinful"\textsuperscript{52}.

With Swadeshism as an economic movement defeated and having galvanized the rural population into a tenant landlord antagonism, the \textit{Ulama} spared no effort to defeat Congress agenda of annulling partition as the \textit{Charu Mihir} of 22\textsuperscript{nd} May 1906 reported

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid}
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Home Pub (A), July 1907, 13, 14, NAI}
\textsuperscript{52} N. Islam, p. 51
“The maulvis go about preaching that the end of the British rule in India is at hand and that the day is coming for the revival of Islam”53. The general attitude was one of appreciation of the British rule which had given the Muslims the vision of regaining political power and they were now thus discovering virtues in it. This was ably reflected in an article published in the Islam Pracharak in its 8th year,

“The special feature of the administration and rule of the benevolent British government is that it rules all races, whether Hindu, Muslim, Jew or Christian with impartiality and without discrimination. In exchange for the surrender of our sovereignty, we have acquired from them noble and magnanimous qualities and if we can emulate those great qualities then subjection to them will be felt to be a source of great joy”54.

Therefore all the Ulama organizations in the form of various Anjumans came out in support of the proposal to partition Bengal inspite of stiff local opposition as reflected in this memorial sent to the Private Secretary to the Viceroy by Moulvi Syed Erfan Ali, Secretary Birbhum Anjuman-i-Islamia,

“Muhammadan community recognized the sagacity and wisdom of His Excellency. I on behalf of the influential Association beg ... to congratulate his Excellency on the fruition of his gracious noble plans ...dt.10th Aug. 1905 ... beg most earnestly to have permission for taking prompt steps to keep aloof the Muhammadan

---

53 S. Sarkar, p. 456
54 M. N. Islam, op. cit, p. 48
community from seditious affair and make them stand in the position they are – A loyal subject to the British Crown”, 55.

There were reports of disturbances from Dewanganj where the Maulvis incited the Muslims ryot population to rise against the landlords. An official report noted,

“The Muhammadans have no special leaders and not to be under the influence of anyone except perhaps a few fanatical maulavis”, 56 and submitted to the government of India on the Mymensingh riots that, “Preachings of Maulavis had much to do with the riots and stirring up of the Muhammadan peasantry”. 57 The Magistrate in his report observed,

As to the cause of the outbreak I am strongly of the opinion that it was due to preachings of Muhammadan fanatics going about and urging Muhammadans to convert Hindus to their faith. Several villagers named the place and time where Maulavis had addressed large meetings attended by Muhammadans. 58 Reporting further, the Magistrate concluded,

But I am convinced that preachings of religious crusade caused the initial excitement out of which the disturbances sprang 59.

In Bakshiganj also there was large scale looting of Hindu money lending shopkeepers who had associated themselves with the Swadeshi movement by the Muslim ryots. Similar incidenices were also reported from Dewanganj where the looters were...

55 Home Pub (B) 1906 Jul. No. 228-231, NAI
56 Home Poll (A) July 1907, No. 6-16, NAI
57 Ibid
58 Ibid
59 Ibid
Muhammadans living in the char areas of Jumna and Brahmaputra rivers. “It is probable that the preachings of ignorant maulvis and disloyal talk of the Hindus of the town made them ready to believe that Hindus had forfeited any claim on government to be protected”.60 In Rajshahi there were reports of forcible conversion under instructions of the mullahs,

“At a place called Nandigram a Hindu barber was forcibly converted to Muhammadanism” under the incitement of “Ahmed Hossain, a native of Nadia and a religious fanatic”.61 In the Bogna district there were reports of certain Roshan Fakir who went around the town to proclaim by bearing of the drum that Muhammadans should not buy any thing or do any work for a Hindu. There were also reports and enquires being made about the presence of Muhammadan Maulvis in Pabna.62 Muhammadan meetings of a religious nature were also reported from the district of Faridpur.

On the 9th of April 1909, a mass meeting (attended by as many as 5,000 Muslims) was held in the grounds of the Ahsan Manzil, which was the residence of the Nawab of Dacca, for a discussion on the Reform scheme. The speeches made and resolutions passed were solely concerned with the representation of Muhammadans besides asking for a separate electoral college for the Muhammadan community. The meeting recorded its disapproval of the Congress led agitation for the annulment of Partition of Bengal with

60 Home Poll F. R, ending 3rd June 1907, NAI
61 Home Pol. A July 1907 No.188 NAI
62 Ibid
the opinion “that any modification of the partition would be a serious blunder and would be disastrous to the country at large and to the Muhammadan community in particular”.  

On the 19th of April there were reports of a Muhammadan preacher throwing an idol into the river which was commonly venerated by both the Hindus and the Muslims at the Mirzapur village in Khanjanpur police station of the Dacca district, which was a cause for considerable commotion” in Hindu community of the village. The scheme of these maulvis was to make the rural Muslims of Bengal much more puritan in their outlook and conservative in their approach. In fact all efforts were devoted to removing any shared tradition practiced by both the Hindus and the Muslims as W. C. Smith noted,

When a religious reformer appeared in a village, he attacked with unrestrained zeal those aspects of the Moslem religious practices that they shared with the Hindus. He emphasized with the ardour of intense conviction the fundamentals of Islam i.e., the points at which it differed from other faiths. Lower class Islam emerged from the reform purer, but more communalist.  

It was amply clear that it was the Ulama who carried the pro-partition movement and the Muslim League on their shoulders since 1906. Official reports indicated that the Mullahs were actively campaigning in favour of the Partition. “There was a large Muhammadan religious meeting and a ‘Maulad Sharif’ in connection with the Shobbarath at Wellington Square at about 3 p.m. Everything passed of quietly here. The Maulavis Abu Bakar and Shah Arshad Ali addressed the crowd and told them to take no

---

63 Home Poll, June 1909, No. 125-128, NAI
64 W. C. Smith, ‘Modern Islam in India’ London, 1946, p.161
part in the agitation against the government." By 1907 this campaign was reaching a feverish pitch and were having a tremendous impact in the rural areas. In the Pabna district, it was reported that local maulavis were delivering speeches encouraging the Muhammadans to kill the cows in their own villages and were advising the co-religionist villagers to keep away from the landowners. Two Maulavis from Jessore were brought by a local Muhammadan land owner to Pharispara in the Dinajpur district where they delivered five lectures to audience consisting about 500-1500 Muhammadan inhabitants from the surrounding villages. The Maulavis spoke principally on religion but in course of their lectures also advised the audience to sever all connections with the Hindus, an exhortation which was of much impact. Official reports reported the arrival of Maulvi Nawab Ali Choudhuri to participate in a movement against the Swadeshi Movement. Maulvi Nawab Ali Chaudhuri Khan Bahadur who was invited by the Muhammadans at Sirajganj who were organizing Pro-partition movement, was accompanied by Maulavi Abdul Hamid the editor of Muslim Chronicle and Maulavi Mofakhor Eslam. They were conducted about the town in a procession of about 3,000 Muslims. On the 24th a mass meeting was organised at the Idgah as a counter demonstration against the Swadeshi movement presided over by Maulvi Nawab Ali Chaudhuri Khan Bahadur which was attended by as many as 10,000 Muhammadans. In his long presidential address, the Maulvi touched on the administrative grievances of the partition of Bengal, “the evil effects of boycott, the false character of the boycott and the necessity of wider education

65 Home Department, Public-A 1906, June, No. 169-186
66 Home Public, April-A, 1907, No. 207-210
among the Muhammadans. In his speech he also paid stress on the need to form branches of the all India Muslim League and for starting a national fund for financial assistance to this nascent Muslim All India organization. Maulvi Choudhuri also emphasized on the need for communal solidarity and for fostering among the Muslims, the spirit of enterprise in professions which had hitherto been the sole preserve of the Hindu lower professional classes like blacksmith, goldsmith, carpentry and artisanship. The president Maulvi Choudhury, was followed by Maulvi Afzal Ali Khan of Sirajganj who moved the resolution about partition. He tried to indicate evidences of the,

Insincerity of the Hindu professions of goodwill towards the Muhammadans and the attempts made by them to win over the Mohamedans after, the partition in, order to serve their own political ends. After illustrating the above by numerous instances he drew a vivid picture of the miserable plight to which the Mahomedans would fall if at any future time the British government were to severe their connection with the country. 68

Maulvi Khalimuddin Khan who was yet another speaker refuted the arguments forwarded by the Swadeshi leaders in support of their boycott of foreign goods. He argued against the alleged impurity of foreign salt, sugar and clothes while submitting that there was no inconsistency between Islamic ways of life and faith and the use of these foreign articles. The gathering was also addressed by Maulavi Mufakhoul Eslam and Maulvi Abdul Hamid, who spoke on the importance of the Muslim League as an organization representing the aspirations of the Muslim community and of a movement

67 Eastern Bengal and Assam Police Abstract, No.11, dt. 16th March 1907,NAI
68 Ibid
for reinforcing communal solidarity and enterprise. Syed Saaduddin Abul Fazal the Zamindar of Raipur addressed the gathering and so also Maulvi Abdul Jalil Khan who expressed his gratitude to the British government and specially the East Bengal and Assam government on behalf of a circular assuring wider employment of Mahomedans in public service. 69

Similar sentiments can also be seen in the memorial dt 8th Aug. 1905 of the Kakinara Mahomedan Association led by Moulvi Zahiruddin Ahmed. In Assam Muslim Associations like the Anjuman-i-Islamia Silchar, Sylhet Anjuman, Muhammedan Association of Maulvi Bazar and the Anjuman-i-Itehad of Habiganj took part in the pro-partition agitations. Incitement of Muslim leaders like Nawab Salimullah of Dacca and the other supporting maulvis from Bengal assisted by a favourable administration facilitated the pro-partition agitations. The Muhammadan Defence Association and the Muslim League played a significant role since its inception to rouse sentiments in favour of the partition of Bengal. The Anjuman-i-Islamia of Silchar sent delegates to attend pro-partition meeting at Dacca on the 16th of October organized by the Provincial Muhammadan Association of Eastern Bengal and Assam. On the same day at Maulvi Bazar, Habiganj, Sunamganj and Sylhet pro-partition meetings were organized by a section of the Muhammadans in response to the appeal of the Bengali Muslims 70. By 1911, however, it was clear that the movement both for and against partition had relatively subsided, though the Ulama on both sides continued their agitations till the annulment of the partition. While on one hand, Maulvi Din Muhammad addressed several

69 Ibid
70 S. K. Bhuyan & S. P. De, Political History of Assam, Vol. 2, p191
meetings at Bajitpur which stirred ill feelings between Hindus and Muslims, as did Maulvi Nurul Husain of Jamalpur and Basarat Ullah of Atapara campaigning at village called Murail, Maulvi Liakat Hussain continued his tirade against the partition and in favour of Swadeshi. But save for a few Ulama, by 1908-09, most of the Ulama who had initially supported the Swadeshi movement had turned against it. Maulvi Din Muhammad’s case could be cited as a prime example. With the outbreak of the revolutionary activities or even terrorist movements the Muslim masses and its traditional leadership did not find favour with the distinct Hindu flavour, which the anti-colonial Swadeshi movement was taking. The Anjumans in Eastern Bengal came out openly against the revolutionary activities. The Anjuman-i-Islamia Comilla passed resolutions expressing outrage and condemning the throwing of a bomb on European ladies by Kudiram Bose at Muzzafarpur.

When partition was annulled it was a great set back to the pro-partition Muslims. It raised doubts in the Muslim minds about their technique of collaboration in their interaction with the British Government. For the Nawab of Dacca, Salimullah, it was a great set back as he lamented: “But it is not the loss of these opportunities merely, heavy as that is, that forms the burden of grief over the annulment of the partition. It is the manner in which the change has been brought about without even warning or consulting us which adds to the poignancy of our grief”.

---

71 Home Poll (A) May 1910, 140 – 141 & Home Poll Jan 1910, 141-142, NAI
72 Home Poll, Sept. 1911, 1 NAI
73 Home Poll (B) June 1908 No. 6-7 NAI
74 Speech of Salimullah at the All India Muslim League Session, Calcutta, 3rd March 1912, Mussalman 8th March 1912 referred in ‘Muslims and Bengal Politics.’ Abu Alam, JNU Thesis, p.112
The Ulama, inspite of this setback did not retreat into the Magtabs or Madrassahs. The Swadeshi movement had brought them out of their hitherto held social and educational role and made them active participants in political decisions and movements. It was in this sense that for them, it was a key to move from one stage to the other in the society of Bengal and Assam. There was to be no looking back. If domestic issues were absent and the scenario calm in the country, the Ulama now focused their attention to international issues which would make them partners in the movements of Pan Islamism which would strike Indian shores over the Balkan crisis.