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He spent two years in jail from 1971 to 1973 after the fall of East Pakistan. From 1975 to 1985 Dr Husain taught at Mecca Ummul-Qura University as a Professor of English, having spent three months in 1975 as a Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge University. Since his retirement in 1985, he had been living quietly at home and had in the course of the last ten years published five books including the present Memoirs. He breathed his last on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1995. A more detailed account of the author's life and career will be found inside the book.

## *Publishers Note*

The publication of Dr Syed Sajjad Husain's memoirs, entitled, **THE WASTES OF TIME** began in the first week of December 1994 under his guidance and supervision. As his life was cut short by Almighty Allah, he could read and correct the proof of only the first five Chapters with subheadings and the remaining fifteen Chapters without title together with the Appendices have been published exactly as he had sent them to the publisher. The title of the memoirs was chosen by Dr Husain himself and is taken from Shakespeare's Sonnet No. XII.

Ramadan, 1415 H.  
February, 1995 A.C.

# THE WASTES OF TIME

## REFLECTIONS ON THE DECLINE AND FALL OF EAST PAKISTAN

Syed Sajjad Husain

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(Appendices will be added to this eBook version soon)

## Preface

As I have explained in the text of the book, these memoirs were written in 1973 in the Dhaka Central Jail where I was being held as a ‘collaborator’ for not supporting Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his campaign against Pakistan. I was not a politician; had never been a member of any political party; but I had agreed at the request of the Yahya government in July 1971 to visit London and the USA to explain to those whom I might meet that the struggle in East Pakistan was a struggle between those who were determined to wreck Pakistan and those whose loyalty to its ideology would not let them align themselves with a movement against its integrity.

The mood that dominated me in prison was one of outrage, anger, frustration, and hopelessness. Physically disabled by an abortive attempt to assassinate me, tortured by the feeling that all I had believed in had crashed in ruins around me, and that we had suffered a defeat from which it would be impossible to recover in the foreseeable future, convinced that the change of 1971 could bode no good to my people, oppressed by the thought that I could see no ray of hope, I sat down to record my reflections on the whole series of events which had culminated in the disaster of December 1971.

I wished to be as frank as possible. I little hoped that the book I was writing would ever see the light of day, but I felt that I owed a duty to posterity, that I must put on record all that I knew and had heard. I spared neither friend nor enemy. My only object was to analyse the reasons why we failed to preserve a state which represented the dreams of so many and which had cost so much in blood, sweat and tears. I was also staggered by the opportunism and nauseated by the hypocrisy of people who until the very last moments of united Pakistan had so volubly defended it and who now went about assuring the victors that they had all been secretly hoping for this denouement.

Twenty one years have passed since this record was composed in the solitudes of prison life. What tortures me now is that what I foresaw has materialised. The poverty, squalor, and meanness of our present existence should be a stern rebuke to those who fought in 1971

to end what they called the yoke of Pakistan and who, disillusioned by what they see around themselves, assert that the independence Bangladesh enjoys is not worth preserving. Some privately confess their error; but fear of embarrassment prevents many from being openly contrite. They have sunk into a worse despair than I experienced in 1973.

I, who opposed the movement of 1970-71, believe, however, that Bangladeshi nationalism, as a secular expression of Muslim nationalism, the sentiment which down the decades and centuries has given the population of the eastern region of Bengal a consciousness of their identity as separate cultural group, can give us the emotional stability as a nation that we need. Despair is no answer to anything. We must believe in ourselves.

If those whom I have criticised find my language strong, I would ask them to remember that I wrote under great emotional stress; they may try and imagine the shock and horror of seeing one's ideals disintegrating before one's eyes.

I owe a word of explanation, and also perhaps of apology, for the many gaps in my narrative and also for the book's abrupt conclusion. The fact is, I could have filled in these gaps only by continuing to work on the book after my release from detention on December 5, 1973. This I had no intention of doing. For I realized that what I could write at home as a free man would be different in temper from what I wrote as a prisoner without any hope of immediate freedom. It is because of this that I had no time during the last few days of my detention to discuss in some detail Mr Bhutto's role in the events leading to the crackdown of March 25, 1971, the nature of the crackdown itself, how having done nothing to stem the tide of disintegration in the period between December 1970 and March 25, 1971, the Army suddenly swung into action, when it had little hope of being effective. Nor have I said much about the nature of the elections held in 1970 which were a gigantic fraud perpetrated on the public of East Pakistan. No one who was alive in 1970 and can recall those events as a responsible adult can forget how in its anxiety to win anyhow the semblance of a popular mandate, the Awami League first drove all its rivals from the field by recourse to open militancy and

violence so as to have a walkover. Nor will they forget how inspite of the devastating cyclone in Khulna and the coastal areas which took a toll of nearly a hundred thousand lives, Shiekh Mujibur Rahman insisted that the elections must go ahead as scheduled and threatened to stir up a frightful agitation unless Yahya agreed.

There are many other events of this nature which I had not dealt with when I learnt that we would be released under a general amnesty in the first week of December 1973. As I have explained already, I decided against adding to my manuscript outside the jail but I thought that a general conclusion about the reasons which resulted in East Pakistan's fall should be added, however abrupt it may sound.

When I left for Britain in June, 1975 on my way to Saudi Arabia I carried the manuscript with me in hurriedly typed form and deposited it with friends lest it should be lost or destroyed. I am deeply grateful to them for having preserved it with care for nearly twenty years. It was only in 1992 that I thought of getting it back for publication, if possible.

The text which is now in print is exactly as it was on the day I was released from the Dhaka Central Jail in 1973.

I cannot say how deeply indebted I feel to friends who have undertaken to publish these memoirs. I am particularly grateful to Tajammul Hussain, Muhammad Ashraf Hussain, Editor of the Bengali monthly *Natun Safar*, Mesbahuddin Ahmad and Muhammad Abdul Motalib for their help in the matter.

If I can see this book in print before I die (I am now nearly 75) one of my wildest dreams will have been fulfilled.

If history, a hundred years hence, proves my fears and apprehensions about my motherland to have been untrue, nobody will be happier in his grave than myself.

December 1994

- Syed Sajjad Husain

## Postscript

A few hours after I concluded writing the above preface I came across one of the latest publications on the tragedy of 1971. My immediate reaction was that it called for some notice. The author is Hasan Zaheer and the title of his work: *The Separation of East Pakistan*. Published from Karachi by the Oxford University Press in 1994. the book purports to give a survey of the causes which led to Pakistan's disintegration and provides interesting details about behind-the-scenes deliberations which precluded General Yahya's decision to suppress the Awami League revolt by recourse to force.

What surprised me, rather painfully, is that Mr Hasan Zaheer, an ex-member of the Central Superior Service of Pakistan who claims to have spent some of the happiest years of his life in the Eastern Wing concludes his Prologue in the following terms. '...it was a verdict against the twenty-four year history of repression, obscurantism, and disregard of the people's will, and on the futility of the use of force in resolving national issues. An unhappy chapter in the history of the Muslims of South Asia had ended. A new one had begun, redeeming the covenant entered into by the Muslims of the subcontinent at the Lahore Session of the All-India Muslim League on 24 March 1940, and reiterated in 1941 at the Madras Session, to create separate "Muslim Free National Homelands". On this day the second Muslim Homeland had emerged: a new nation was born.'

Taken at their face value these words amount to an exercise in apologetics but actually go far beyond a mere *mea culpa*. They betray at one and the same time a lack of faith in the two-nation theory which constitutes the basis of Pakistan, a complete distortion of the causes of the upsurge of 1971, a measure of intellectual naiveté and immaturity in the interpretation of Indian history.

Although I have dealt with those issues in the course of my memoirs, it would not be irrelevant to ask how an officer who during his first tour of duty discovered nothing in the behaviour of East Pakistanis suggestive of any hostility towards non-Bengalis could say that the 24 years of Pakistan was for this wing a period of repression and obscurantism.

Secondly, why did it not occur to him to enquire why the Hindus of West Bengal wanted no share in the Bengali nationalism of which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman considered himself the chief spokesman.

Did it not also occur to Mr Zaheer that if the Bengali speaking population of East Pakistan could legitimately stake out a claim to separate nationhood, not only Pakistan, as it is today, but even the Indian Union can have no right to function as a single state? Would Mr Zaheer let the Sindhies and Pathans secede on the same analogy? Would he recognise the right of the Telegus and Tamils or the Maratti speaking Maharastrians to set up their own nation states?

Finally, if Mr Zaheer has perceived nothing anomalous in the yoking of the Bengali Hindus of West Bengal with Punjabi Sikhs and Hindus, where was the illogicality of the Muslims of East and West Pakistan forming a single state?

I have had occasion in my memoirs to say that it was the idea of so many linguistic units being integrated into a single polity which has always struck me as illogical, especially when this integration was pursued in the name of a fictitious Indian nationalism.

Like many others Mr Zaheer has described the establishment of Bangladesh in 1971 as the fulfilment of the essence of the Lahore Resolution of 1940. Can he provide a single instance from Europe, Asia or America of a small state like Bangladesh coming into existence and surviving without the willing consent of larger states around it? Holland, Belgium and Denmark in Western Europe and Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in Eastern Europe owe their continued existence to the balance of forces between the great European powers France, Germany and Russia. During the second world war, Germany in a single swipe made short work of the three states of Western Europe, while the Soviet Union swallowed up the three in East Europe. Holland, Belgium and Denmark were liberated by the Allied Army in 1945 but Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia had to wait for the fall of communism in the Soviet Union to regain their independence.

Central America and the Caribbean are a mosaic of small states which in the same way as the small states of Europe owe their survival to the balance of power among the bigger states in the region.

Even Belize has been granted recognition as an independent state and it is protected by assurance of support from Britain and America.

The same is true of the map of Africa where there are giants like Nigeria and also tiny states like Guinea-Bissau or Siera Leone. They are all survivals from the period of European colonialism. They have frontiers which are artificial and cut across tribal boundaries. This has been at the root of much political instability but nevertheless no one has proposed redrawing those demarcation lines lest it lead to the opening of a Pandora's Box.

Shift your gaze now to the Indian subcontinent and consider what has happened since 1947 to Junagarh, which joined Pakistan in exercise of its rights under the Independence Act of 1947 and Travancore in the South which in exercise of the same rights declared itself independent. Reflect on the fate of Kashmir which has continued to bleed for over 47 years without any end to its agonies being in sight. Think how Mrs Indira Gandhi annexed Sikkim upon a flimsy pretext.

Can anyone in his senses imagine that an independent East Pakistan in 1947 without a civil service, a police force and encircled by a hostile country, many times its size which did not want it to detach itself from British India, could have survived even for a week?

Yet such is the intellectual naiveté of those who wish to discover an *expost facto* rational justification for" Pakistan's break-up in 1971 that they argue that the implementation of what they read into the Lahore resolution would have prevented the sad happenings of 1971.

Mr Hasan Zaheer has spoken of the exploitation of East by West Pakistan. But nowhere do I find evidence of his knowledge of conditions in Eastern Bengal before 1947. There is no reference to the terrible famine of 1943 which reduced this region practically to a shambles; he does not discuss the educational and economic backwardness of Bengali Muslim; nor, looking further back into history, does the author take into account the impact of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 upon the Muslims. It is these factors which, as I have shown in my book accounted for the unbounded enthusiasm with which we hailed the Pakistan movement as a panacea, and means of

deliverance from the political oppression of the British and the economic oppression of the new land-owning Hindu aristocracy.

The protection of Bengali was never an issue in the separatist movement which culminated in Pakistan. Anyone with a modicum of common sense would understand that there was no question of Bengali being under threat in a United India. As Mr Basant Chatterjee has shown in his book *Inside Bangladesh Today*, the language issue was seized upon on the morrow of Pakistan's establishment as a weapon with wish to destroy the new state. And the bungling of the new leaders of Pakistan brought ample grist to the mill. On this analogy, one might as well argue that the chief reason the American colonies separated from England in the 18th century was their anxiety to preserve the purity of the English Language.

I was amused to find Mr Zaheer referring casually to a proposal early in Pakistan's life that Bengali be written in Arabic script so as to strengthen the bonds of cultural unity between the two wings. In the first place this proposal never got off the ground as a serious suggestion. Secondly, the shallowness of Mr Zaheer's knowledge of the question at issue is underlined by his assertion that what was proposed was a change from Devanagiri to Arabic. I am sure this would tickle even those who might accept his views on the political relationship between the two wings. The script used in Bengali has never been called Devanagiri by anyone. It is a form of the alphabet used throughout the subcontinent in languages, which do not use Arabic script. Devanagari is associated in modern times with Hindi and Maratti particularly. A person who does not know the difference between Devanagiri and Bengali scripts is hardly qualified to pass judgment on the language issue which was so cleverly and skilfully manipulated to subvert Pakistan's foundation.

Mr Zaheer's pretensions claim that much research has gone into mea culpa is also exposed by his failure or omission to take into account what Indian writers themselves have said about the methods used to fuel the rebellion in East Pakistan. If he had at all taken care to consult Basant Chatterjee and Jyoti Sen Gupta, he might have avoided some gaffes.

It is surprising that in spite of his claim that he read Asoka Raina, who gives a fairly detailed account of the Agartala conspiracy, he reiterates the view that it was wrong to involve Mujibur Rahman in the case. Nor does he appear to have read the speeches of Mujib himself in which after the establishment of Bangladesh, he repeatedly told the public with an air of pride that the creation of the independent state of Bangladesh represented the fulfilment of a dream he had worked for ever since 1947.

I have referred in an appendix to a similar mea-culpa by Lt. General Matinuddin. Both he and Mr Zaheer bring to light interesting details as does Rao-Forman Ali's *How Pakistan Got Divided*. But none of them has offered any explanation which refutes my thesis that East Pakistan's fall primarily owing to the subversive activities of a bunch of quislings aided by Pakistan's international enemies. Their greatest diplomatic triumph lay in the success they won in convincing a large number of supine but emotionally immature people, young and not so young that East Bengal needed to end its links with Pakistan by violent means in order to be really free. Most of them feel utterly disenchanted today.

Syed Sajjad Husain

## CHAPTER I: How I survived on December 20<sup>th</sup>

*'When in disgrace with fortune' - Shakespeare*

I confess that as I embark upon what is going to be an exploration into my present and past I have no clear idea what I really intend. I certainly do not wish to attempt an autobiography. It is no use concealing from myself at this age- (I shall be fifty four next January 1974) - that nothing in my life deserves the importance of a record such as in my view an autobiography should be. I have been a witness to great events, but in the events which I have observed, mine has been by and large a passive, unimportant role. Not only do I have an innate horror of the limelight; I feel honestly that I have not on my own initiated or executed any major move in the drama in which I have often found myself entangled, and what could such a person as myself record by way of autobiography which would thrill, enchant, absorb or even deeply interest a reader?

As a matter of fact I am not thinking of any readers at all. How really could I? I write this in prison in 1973 under circumstances which make it extremely improbable that this manuscript would ever reach a publisher who would venture to print what I write. I know that no publisher in my own country would dare touch it. As for publishers abroad, in what was till yesterday the western wing of my country, how could they possibly be interested in such a personal record as mine, particularly when I cannot lay claim to any degree of political eminence? A historical review of the period which my life covers would be of much greater value and interest to them. But this I am not in my present condition competent to undertake. I do not have the materials I would need for it; I do not have access even to my own diaries. Nor are the few books available in the jail library of much help. On the other hand, to try and reconstruct the past on the basis of one's personal, necessarily unreliable memory, would be dangerous. I would stumble at every step, mix up dates and names, give inaccurate information about men and events and mislead where a historical work should enlighten, confuse where such a review should help remove doubts and obscurities.

Then why write at all? I confess again that the principal reason why, after a good deal of hesitation and vacillation, I have decided to put these reminiscences on record is because I want to occupy myself with a definite task to ward off the periodic attacks of boredom which are one of the afflictions of prison life. Reading does not always help. For one thing one does not have enough books to read in prison, not books of the right kind, books which could sustain one's interest in a subject over a period of time. Stray novels, a stray volume of history, some biographies and so on are all that you get. To pursue anyone subject is impossible. If your interest is aroused by a volume on British history, you could not expect to study the subject in depth, the next volume would not be obtainable. Desultory reading, which in the circumstances is impossible to avoid, generates sooner or later a feeling of dissatisfaction, and then the prisoner finds himself once again a prey to that boredom which he dreads.

The second reason for venturing to write about my experience is that I hope some day, after the dust of all contemporary controversies has settled, some one might light upon my manuscript and obtain from it a view of the events of me last quarter century different from the usual version which he would probably be familiar with. A faint hope, really, but a hope is after all a hope.

As I look around my cell, Number 2 in the block known as New 20 in the Dhaka Central Jail, I keep wondering even now, nearly two years after I was arrested, how real my surroundings are. I hate exaggeration but cannot help remarking that there is an air of Kafkaesque unreality in all that has happened since that fateful day in December 1971, when a group of armed gangsters burst into my room by breaking a door open and led me away.

They were fully armed and carried modern automatic weapons. Neither myself nor my family could at all have thought of resisting them. But they presumably were under the impression that we would offer resistance. The first words spoken to me were a command that I should hand over whatever arms I had. But I had none.

The date was 19 December, 1971, three days after the surrender of the Pakistan army, and the time about 3.30 in the afternoon. I was in an upstairs room talking to my eldest daughter.

There was all of a sudden a hubbub outside, on the staircase, and I came out to the landing to see what it was all about. I saw a number of armed men arguing with my wife and a cousin of mine, trying to push their way up. I realised in a flash what they wanted and thought for a moment of going down, but I suppose the instinct of self-preservation led me to withdraw into the room. The moment I had done so my daughter bolted the door and said I was not to go out. I told her that it was no use resisting, and that it would be best for me to give myself up to the gang. She would not listen and started crying and interfering with my efforts to unbolt the door. In the meantime there began a tremendous banging on the other door giving on the roof terrace, and before I could open it they had smashed down one of the wooden panels, and they shouted in a stern voice, "Come out." As I emerged from the room, one of the men seized me by the collar, and dragged me, unresisting, down the staircase and then out of the house into a jeep waiting outside. I went as I was, waving a farewell to my family, feeling, as I did so, that I would never see them again. A large crowd had collected around the jeep; it consisted mostly of people from our neighborhood; they watched silently as I was pushed into the vehicle and stepped aside as the engine started.

The jeep turned down the by-lane which meets Nazimuddin Road near the north-eastern corner of the Dhaka Central Jail compound, and moved through Bakhshi Bazar towards the University Campus. As we travelled, I heard my captors asking each other whether I was really the person they thought I was. I assured them that there had been no mistake and said I had no reason for trying to confuse them about my identity.

I was feeling somewhat dazed but even then nursed the illusion, faint I confess, that they wanted me for interrogation only.

We arrived in a few minutes at the Science Annexe Building, where they all got down, myself with them, and I was led up to a large room on the second floor. Five or six of my captors followed me into it and then the door was bolted from the inside.

The young man who was holding me by the collar suddenly slapped me across the face with tremendous force, identifying himself as a former University student and said that four or five years ago he

had saved me from a beating, but that I was an unrepentant swine and had not mended my ways and therefore deserved now to be shot as a traitor. All this was news to me, but I did not fail to acknowledge my gratitude to him for the kindness which he claimed to have done me, and inquired why I had been seized. A volley of accusations followed. They said I was responsible for the deaths of University teachers and students killed by the Pakistan Army, and that I had even been supplying girls to the soldiers from the women's hall for immoral purposes. I was--dumb-founded. I told them that they might kill me if they wished, but their accusations were all false, and I was prepared to face a trial. They must have thought it useless to engage in further argument with me; for without answering me, they proceeded with their work.

I was stripped of my cardigan, shirt, and vest and relieved of my watch, cuff-links and spectacles. They blindfolded me, using my own handkerchief for the purpose, tied my hands together behind my back, and began to beat me with a strap of leather, also hitting me with something hard on the knuckles. After they had exhausted the first flush of their fury on me, everybody left the room excepting one armed guard and this time I heard the door being bolted on the outside.

I was feeling parched, and asked for a drink. A cup was brought in and lifted up to my lips, and I drank a little water. When I felt myself really alone with my guard, I asked him to remove the bandage from my eyes so that I could see his face. He seemed to hesitate a little, but finally loosened the bandage. I could now see him, a young man in his early twenties, in *lungi*, obviously a rustic, now a member of an armed band. I asked him who he was. He introduced himself, if that is the word, as a student from a rural college in Mymensingh district and volunteered the remark that he felt sorry for me. His voice was not insincere. When asked why they had arrested me, he said he did not know what the charges against me were; he had, on the instructions of his unit commander, joined the group detailed to raid my residence, and did not know anything beyond this. He confessed that the sudden capitulation of the Pakistan army had come as a surprise, the Mukti Bahini having almost given up hope of winning a victory.

The young man went on to assure me that he did not think I would be shot straightway; I would be given a chance to answer the charges against me. In any case, he said, he for one would not be able to carry out an order to shoot me.

Needless to say, this was far from reassuring. If they had decided to kill me, and of this there could no longer be any doubt, a single conscientious objector like this young man won't be of much help. But it was nevertheless in those dreadful moments some comfort to know that for a spell at least one had for company someone who appeared to possess some human feelings. I spoke to him, uselessly I knew, about what I had done to save the lives of the University staff at Rajshahi. The only thing he could do was to repeat twice or three times that he won't have the heart to shoot me.

Some one came in, the bandage on my eyes was tightened, and the new arrivals--- it was actually more than one person-- took over from the young student. They were a sterner lot. When I asked to see their faces, they uttered a blood curdling oath, threatening to put me to the torture, saying sarcastically that no God that I believed in could save my life. I lapsed into silence and awaited further developments.

Time passed. I could feel the hours go by. Some one put the lights on. I could perceive a difference in the gloom. I began wondering what would happen next. Were the executioners waiting for the night to advance?

When the noise of traffic outside almost ceased and the time must have been about 11.30 or so, two new men, more authoritative in their gait, entered the chamber, walked up to me, and tied my wrists with stronger twine, gagged me and led me out, I thought, to be executed. I asked them, when they were busy tying me up, what I had done to deserve this punishment. Their answer was, 'Mr Vice-Chancellor, you have lived too long'. According to them, it was I who master-minded the conspiracy that led to the deaths of Mr Munir Chowdhury and other' University teachers on 14 December; it was I who arranged for the women's hall to be raided in November. My denials were dismissed as lies.

I followed them out into what was obviously the corridor--- I knew the lay-out of the building--- we walked some distance, and then

they entered another room. One end of the rope with which I had been tied was secured to something firm, and I was made to sit down on the floor. I had been allowed to sit on a bench in the other room. One of the two men said something to the other, and went out. The man left behind bolted the door, and I heard him spreading a blanket or sheet on a bench and lying down. He was soon asleep snoring.

*'Thou hast nor youth nor age,  
But, as it were, an after-diner's sleep,  
Dreaming on both.'*

*Shakespeare*

My punishment, I could see now, was to follow the pattern set in totalitarian states, the execution would take place at dawn. Having satisfied themselves that there could be no danger of my being able to escape, my captors proceeded to treat me as a cat treats a captive mouse. The way my guard went to sleep bore ample testimony to their self-assurance and self-confidence. They wanted me, before they killed me, to experience the refinements of torture which certain knowledge of imminent death can cause a victim.

Calmly I awaited my fate. My knuckles hurt; the wrists had been bound so tightly that the rope or twine seemed to cut into the flesh; I could not change at all from one position to another without excruciating pain. There was nothing I could lean against. The floor struck cold. In my efforts to achieve a comparatively less painful position, I lost track of the pair of loose slippers I had been wearing. I tried sitting cross-legged, then stretched my legs for relief, and again went back to the cross-legged position, varying the posture of my body as frequently as my condition would permit, taking care at the same time not to wake up the fiend guarding me, lest worse torture should follow.

The irony of the situation, the sudden reversal of the world I used to live in, intrigued me. Here was I, captive in the hands of a ferocious gang, awaiting death; even twenty four years ago it had never occurred either to myself or to anyone in my circle that such a thing could happen at all. History is full of strange surprises, and though strange events keep happening off and on, we are always

caught unprepared when they happen to ourselves. I had been compelled by air-raids to move on 15 December from the official residence of the Vice-Chancellor in Ramna to 109 Nazimuddin Road, our house in the old town, and even then, a few hours before the actual surrender of the Pakistani army, in spite of the gloomy forebodings about the future and the sinister rumors that were spreading, we had continued to nurse the hope, to prove an illusion so tragically, that somehow disaster would be averted. How, we had no idea. But the overthrow of an established State by violence was something quite outside our experience and comprehension. These things happened elsewhere, in South America or the Middle East; our own homeland, we believed in the depths of our hearts and souls, would be immune from them.

As the night grew still, faint echoes reached me occasionally of distant gunfire. Dogs barked somewhere. A lone rickshaw tinkled past the building where I was being held.

I thought of my family, my wife and children, who must fend for themselves as best as they could in this crisis. I had no property, I did not own a house and had hardly any bank balance. I felt guilty at the realisation that I was leaving my family wholly unprovided for. Was the plea that I had tried to live honestly, not even seeking to earn extra money at the expense of my normal duties, a sufficient excuse for the lapse of which I now found myself guilty? Whatever consolation I derived from the fact that I could not be charged with dishonesty, would the fact be of material use to my family? I did what any man in my situation would do: committed them to God's care. Yet the knowledge that they were utterly helpless in the new dispensation that had just been born, was frightfully mortifying, and continued to haunt me throughout the night.

Almost equally painful was the collapse of the ideal that Pakistan represented to me. Even if I survived my present ordeal by a miracle, how could I live in the midst of the debris which the fall of Pakistan had thrown up around me? Physical survival was difficult enough but life in an environment which was going to be hostile, where everything would be a mockery of the beliefs and ideals we cherished, would be equally, if not more of a problem. A man must

have something not only to live by but also to live for. What could a person like me live for after the fall of Pakistan? This was no mere rhetoric. Our lives were so bound up with the history of Pakistan, with the ideals which had inspired the movement out of which it had grown, and with the principles which sustained it, no matter what the shortcomings of those called upon to translate them into action, that it was well-nigh impossible to contemplate a life divorced from this background.

I felt utterly forlorn. I remember thinking of E. M. Forster whose philosophy of 'Only Connect' as a solution to the hatreds which divide mankind we had made great play with in class with students. Foolishly, I now perceived, I too had come to believe that once human beings got to know one another on personal terms, hatreds would cease, animosities abate. But this obviously didn't help in a crisis. My captors who were preparing to execute me were mostly Dhaka University students, to whom I was no stranger. This seemed to have added to their fury against me. All that we used to say about tolerance had not restrained them from beating me up and torturing me.

The moments crawled by. Surprisingly in the midst of all this, with the threat of death hanging over me, I caught myself dozing twice, for a fraction of a second each time. My companion snored on-happily. Throughout the night jeeps and cars kept arriving and departing, I suppose with more victims like myself. For I remember the young student who had been with me in the other room had told me that there were many others held as prisoners in this building which had been converted temporarily into a Mukti Bahini camp. There were occasionally sounds of groups of people marching up or down the staircases. Judging by the echoes of their laughter or talk wafted across to my ears, they were a jubilant crowd engaged in celebrating their victory.

Strangely, despite the fear of imminent death, I did not feel my heart palpitating. The feeling of dryness in my throat which I had experienced on my arrival at this camp now completely disappeared. The only thing that mattered was that I should be able to die a quiet dignified death. I did not believe in heroics, and I saw no point, now that there was no escape, in being hysterical. I sought to draw what

comfort and spiritual solace I could from the few verses from scripture which I knew by heart. I wondered what death would be like. I prayed to God to let me die quietly without much suffering. In a few hours from now I would know--if the dead can have knowledge---what mysteries the country from whose bourne no traveller returns held.

Some cocks crowed in the distance and I realised that the night was drawing to a close; my executioners would soon arrive. Sure enough, a jeep could be heard entering the compound of the Science Annexe Building. I felt certain that this signalled the approach of the dread hour. A man walked noisily up to our room, knocked, and was let in by his companion inside who had been awakened by the knock. They unfastened the rope---one end of which was tied round my wrists--- from the post to which it had been secured and asked me to stand up and follow them.

I didn't find my slippers, but without bothering about them moved out with them in my socks. I was guided down the staircase and taken to where the jeep stood waiting. There were other people there. I was pushed into the front seat, but a minute after, asked to get down. This time I was lifted onto the back of the vehicle and made to squat on the floor, with, it seemed, a number of armed men on either side. The jeep drove off.

I had heard of people being taken by the Mukti Bahini for execution to Gulshan and other outlying areas of the city, and could not judge from the movements of the jeep what was the distance we travelled before it came to a stop. I was helped to dismount and ordered to stand up.

Two fellows exchanged a few words, the gist of which, as far as I understood them, was that further precautions were necessary to prevent me from screaming. The gag in my mouth was tightened. I now prepared myself for the inevitable shot that would end my life, once more committed my wife and children to God's care, repeated the *Kalima-e-Shahadat* silently, praying for a quick death.

Some one stabbed me in two or three places on the chest lightly. I felt a spasm of pain; surprisingly it wasn't as great as I had feared it would be; an instinctive cry of ah! muffled by the gag, escaped me. Almost simultaneously I was dealt a tremendous crippling

blow on the spine: slightly to the left of the centre and the whole body from the wrist downwards went numb. I lost all sensation, and must also have lost consciousness immediately. For I cannot recall how I fell or when I overbalanced or what else happened to me.

The next thing I remember was that I was lying flat on my back on what seemed to be a road, with blood trickling down my chest, my waist and legs completely, so it appeared then, paralysed. I heard myself moaning feebly. I thought my life would ebb away gradually, and I would slowly bleed to death. Every moment I expected the heart to stop beating, the muscles to contract. I decided to keep repeating the Kalima as long as my consciousness lasted.

To my surprise, I soon discovered that I was taking a usually long time to die. Somebody seemed to be kneeling beside me watching. Was he waiting to see whether the blows I had received were enough? Would he deal me another blow as a kind of *coup de grace*?

So strong is man's instinct of self-preservation that it crossed my mind that if I stopped moaning my enemy might leave me alone and I might survive.

I stopped whatever sounds I had been trying to utter, and lay as still as I could. Some minutes later I felt that the man who had been watching me had left. I wondered what I should do now.

I was not quite sure yet that the crisis was really over, or that my assailants had moved off from the area. Fifteen to twenty minutes passed; I could hear a push-cart being rolled along; a couple of rickshaws seemed to be plying about. The first impression created in my mind was that I had been abandoned on the outskirts of the city near a village. When I could hear sounds more clearly indicative of human footsteps, I decided to attract the attention of passers-by as best I could rather than allow myself to be overrun by passing vehicles or animals. I pushed the gag in my mouth a little outwards by my tongue and cried: 'Who's there?' Some people came over and remarked, 'Isn't the fellow dead yet?' I said I wasn't dead, and would they please remove the bandage from my eyes and the gag from my mouth? They appeared to hesitate for a moment and then someone came forward to untie both bandages.

I opened my eyes, and saw that the place where I lay was the square in front of Gulistan Cinema Hall on Jinnah Avenue. The time must have been about 5.15 or 5.30. The avenue, one of the chief thoroughfares in Dhaka, was deserted except for a few early morning strollers. The bandage from my eyes had been taken off by a youth of about seventeen or eighteen, one of a small group of five or six people present. I asked them to untie my wrists. They wanted to know who my assailants were. I committed an indiscretion unwittingly by saying that they belonged to the Mukti Bahini. No sooner had I said so than they got frightened, and began to look around. They declined to interfere pleading that if they tried to help me, the Mukti Bahini who, they believed, still lurked somewhere in the neighbourhood, would shoot them. I urged them not to hesitate to help a man who was almost dead, and would perhaps not survive long. The youth came forward again to untie my hands, in spite of the objection of the others, and as he was doing so, they remarked that there was another officer like myself whose body lay on the ground near by. The other person must have heard this; he answered: 'I am Hasan Zaman'. I realised that we must have been in the same jeep together and subjected to the same kind of punishment.

I lay near the railed-off enclosure where the famous Dhaka cannon stood mounted on a masonry platform. I caught hold of the railing and brought myself up to a sitting position.

The problem was how to remove myself to safety. I asked the spectators whose number kept increasing to get me a rickshaw which could take me home or at least to the Baitul Mukarram Mosque. One fellow who looked rather aggressive replied that they would do nothing further, that since it was the Mukti Bahini which had punished me, I must have fully deserved the treatment. I thought their attitude might change if I told them who really I was. But the information had a contrary effect on the spokesman. His tone became more aggressive; he began reeling off the lies they had heard from Radio Joy Bangla about how I had collaborated with the Pakistan army in getting some University staff killed and started lecturing me on the disastrous consequences of such collaboration. All I could do was to protest against the falsehoods, but I achieved no effect.

Desperately I myself called a passing rickshaw. But the crowd waved it away. The situation was taking a precarious turn. At this time I sighted a truck-load of Indian soldiers passing through Jinnah Avenue and shouted for help. But I failed to catch their eye, and the truck sped away. Whatever was I going to do? I said to the crowd that they might at least ring up my people at home and ask them to come, and repeated my telephone number. No one responded.

Fortunately, some one who vaguely appeared to be a man from our neighbourhood now came to my rescue. He boldly hailed a rickshaw, lifted me into it (I was incapable of moving on my own) and himself jumped in and held me tight, while I clung to the side of the vehicle as best I could. The crowd did not interfere. We moved off. As I was being carried to the rickshaw I had a glimpse of Dr Hasan Zaman standing up by himself and moving in the direction of the Baitul Mukarram Mosque. He had luckily escaped the kind of paralysis which had been my fate.

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## CHAPTER II: I return home a wreck

*Tell me, mine own,*

*Where hast thou been preserved? Where lived?*

*how found*

*Thy father's court*

*- Shakespeare*

My family, who had given me up for dead, were of course overjoyed to see me back home. But as I was lifted down from the rickshaw and carried in, they were alarmed to notice that I was a complete wreck. My chest and back (I had received six stab wounds) were still bleeding. My legs dangled like a couple of attachments not properly fixed. I was laid down on a mattress on the floor, given a warm drink, and covered with a blanket. People rushed in from all around to have a look. Strangers who would never have thought of entering our house, unasked, came in and gazed at me.

In the meantime Indian army officers who had been informed of the abduction the previous evening and had sent out search parties to trace me, arrived on learning that I had got back. The local hospital doctor was sent for; but he began vacillating and came only when he heard of the presence of the Indians. He however declined to bandage my wounds without an X-ray examination, saying that it would be most inadvisable to do anything before the injuries had been X-rayed. The real reason why he hesitated was that he did not want it said of him that he had attended to a person punished by the Mukti Bahini. His hesitancy did not prove much of a problem, for presently an Indian doctor attached to the Army medical corps arrived, washed and bandaged my wounds, and within half an hour arranged for an ambulance to carry me to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment.

I was put in Cabin No.10, and Cabin No.11, next door, was placed at the disposal of the four Indian soldiers guarding me. They were with me for a week, at the end of which a contingent from the Babupura police outpost took over.

I was in hospital from 20 December until the morning of 30 January when I was removed to the Dhaka Central Jail.

The period I spent in hospital was uneventful except for small incidents. One was my transfer, decided upon at short notice, from Cabin 10 to Cabin 19 when early in January one of the Bangladesh ministers Khondokar Mushtaque decided, it seems for political reasons, to retire temporarily in a huff from active politics. The transfer was carried out after 8 P.M. I had not regained the ability to walk; so they put me on a trolley and pushed it out of Cabin 10. A day or two later, an unauthorized group of militant students who wanted a cabin for somebody, forced my guards to vacate their room. From then on, the police party used to camp outside my cabin on the veranda.

Of course after the Indian guards left, the presence or absence of the police party made little difference to my safety. Their vigilance was not strict; anybody could walk in without the least obstruction, and for long periods, every one of the four policemen expected to stand sentinel outside my room would be absent I protested once or twice, but soon realized that protests from a 'collaborator' would make things worse. I should add that I had learnt from a newspaper announcement which appeared on 21 December that I had been arrested as a 'collaborator'. There was not a word about the assault: nor was the fact that I was in hospital mentioned. The public must have been under the impression that I was in jail.

During the first week I was in great pain. My shoulders, chest, back and the area around the waist, ached; there was a continuous tingling in the soles of my feet- (which persists to this day); and the lower limbs were utterly numb. I could not move my left leg, nor was there much sensation in the left foot. The nights were particularly painful. I had to try and sleep on my back; the legs felt so heavy that I could not turn from one side to another, and if anyone helped me to turn, the pain on the lower side would be unbearable.

The wounds on my chest and back, four in front and two in the back, turned out to be not deep and healed in a week. I found that the left knee had been so twisted that although there was technically no fracture, I could not stand erect. But the worst affliction was the damage to the internal organs which rendered micturition a torture.

The agony was sometimes so great as to make me long for an early death.

It was nearly three weeks before my knees were firm enough to let me stand erect for brief spells. I had to teach myself to walk in the way toddlers learn to walk, first supported by others, then by myself but with the help of a staff. I was not steady on my legs; to this day this weakness persists, but after daily exercises I learnt to waddle about from one end of my small cabin to the other. I could in about three weeks, walk in this manner to the bathroom without assistance.

Occasional incursions by young people, mostly from the Mukti Bahini, drawn by curiosity, were another problem. They would dash past the guards, look at me and leave. It was clear that they were highly critical of the colleagues who had bungled by not being able to finish me off. The risk was that some of them might take it into their hands to rectify the error. I was obliged to keep the door bolted most of the time.

My wife and children visited me daily in the afternoon. A few relations, one colleague from the University, Dr Azizul Huque and an old acquaintance from the Calcutta Islamia College days, Mr Saidur Rahman, also called. But I could realise that most of my relations were too scared to come.

While I was still in Cabin No.10, a hirsute young man came one day to see me, touched my feet in the usual Eastern manner, and introduced himself as a former pupil. I forget his name. He said he had been detailed to shoot me during the civil war; he had also reconnoitred the area around my residence but had decided on second thoughts to wait until the war was over. He was courteous but firm. Their plan, he stated, was to liquidate all 'collaborators', in fact, anybody who could be suspected of having collaborated with West Pakistan over the last twenty-three years, and purge Bangladesh of corruption and treason. I thought it inadvisable to argue, but only pointed out that the programme might prove difficult to carry out. 'We have', the young man replied, 'lost over twenty-thousand people in the civil war, all members of the Mukti Bahini, and we would have no truck with collaborators'.

The visitor who really gave me a fright was another young man, not so hairy as my pupil, but with blood-shot eyes such as one associates with frenzied or drunken fanatics. He dashed into my room on two occasions, accompanied by others, on one occasion by some young women, just stared at me, and when asked who they were, said pointing to his companions, 'These are the people who have freed the country.' He would not be drawn into further talk. I felt alarmed. On both occasions he dashed out of the room, as he had dashed in, like a gust of wind.

That all young people did, not even then, take the same view of what happened on 16 December, became evident from the conversation of a youth who visited me towards the end of December. He was a stranger, shy, aged about seventeen. He said he had been planning to study English literature in the University, but he was not sure that academic work was any use now. 'We have lost our freedom'. When, to test him, I reminded him of the feelings of other young people of his age, he said that with the Indian soldiers all around, he could scarcely believe that the surrender of the Pakistan army had brought Bangladesh independence. 'We have sold ourselves into slavery.'

This youth, I must say, was an exception in those days to the generality of young Bengali manhood or womanhood. Indian propaganda had infected the minds of some of our own relations. They naively swallowed the fantastic lies they heard about me, although they were almost daily in contact with me. A nephew, son of a cousin, came one day to repeat what he had heard about the women's hall, how girls were supplied to the army from this source, with my knowledge and consent. 'Of course', he commented half quizzically, 'I don't think this can be true of you'. His tone however suggested that he wasn't prepared to dismiss the story as wholly baseless. I could only express my astonishment at his naiveté. He had studied economics in the University, and proceeded with great show of scholarship and a flourish of statistics to demonstrate to me how East Pakistan had been fleeced by West Pakistani capitalists.' It has taken a civil war to convince people like you and my father of the truth of our grievances. Now that the yoke of Pakistan has been thrown off, you'll see

Bangladesh growing from strength to strength.' I told him that I would be happy to see peace and tranquillity re-established after the horrors that we had been through but I could not share his shallow optimism. He was disappointed that even the terrible ordeal that I had passed through had not cured me of my old beliefs.

Stories reached me daily of the horrors let loose on Pakistan minded groups by the guerrillas, of vengeance, murder and shootings, of spiralling prices, indiscriminate arrests and of the general breakdown of law and order. No one except persons like ourselves felt dismayed by all this. There was a general tendency to think that a brief period of anarchy or what looked it, was not unusual after a protracted and bitter civil war, and that the situation would presently right itself. The term 'civil war' was seldom used; the more common appellation for what happened during the nine months from March to December was 'war of liberation'. The Pakistan army was referred to as the army of occupation, and the naive young men who fought against it were freedom fighters. Supporters of the Awami League who had lain low during the conflict now came forward in their thousands to greet the victorious survivors and erect memorials to the dead who were all described as martyrs. No matter how a young man died during those nine months; no matter what his character and status; no matter whether he was known to be a criminal or a rogue, if his name could be shown to have been associated at any stage with any phase of the 'war of liberation', he was a martyr with a claim upon the grateful remembrance of his countrymen. A strange situation, but who would in this country of the insane pretend to wisdom and sanity?

One cheap, and therefore popular, way of demonstrating the new nation's gratitude to the dead was to change the names of roads, parks, schools, colleges and other institutions overnight without the slightest regard for either tradition or euphony. Such names as Jinnah, Iqbal, Ayub Khan were naturally anathema to the younger generation; they were effaced wherever they occurred and replaced by those of the new heroes. Dhaka University students took the lead in this campaign by renaming Iqbal Hall and Jinnah Hall after Zahurul Huq and Surya Sen. Sgt. Zahurul Huq, a young army officer and one of the accused in the Agartala Conspiracy case had been killed during the trial. Surya

Sen was the name of a terrorist who organised and led a raid on the Chittagong armory back in the thirties; the students were anxious to honour him as one of those whose example they had done their best to emulate during the 'war of liberation'. Most painful of all for us was the proscription which fell upon the word Islam and its derivatives. The stink of communalism in these terms was considered unendurable. The name of the Islamic Intermediate College, where in the High Madrasah attached to it, I had had my schooling--- a historic institution with nearly a century of tradition behind it, was overnight changed to a horrid monstrosity, 'Kabi Nazrul College'. Intended to honour a great literary figure, Qazi Nazrul Islam, this hybrid, compounded of the first part of the name with the definite article of the second attached to it, would shock anyone with the slightest acquaintance with Arabic and Persian; it was a sad reflection on the level of culture among the new elite.

Changes of this kind were daily announced. As I read about them, I felt disquieted because, partly, of the manner in which old traditions were being profaned, and partly of the hurry exhibited. How foolish to imagine that the effacement of a few names could transform the spirit of a people!

Significantly, Christian and Hindu names were spared. Notre Dame College, St. Gregory's School, Ramkrishna Mission Institutions were not thought to stink of communalism. The discrimination against Islam was carried to lengths which subsequently drew protests from the Awami League circle itself.

Of the small group of people, apart from my own family, whose loyalty to me during this period remained unaffected by the change in my fortunes, I was particularly touched by the devotion of a young man whom I had given a job in the University of Rajshahi. His mother used at one time to work in our family as a maid; I had known him as a little child. After he grew up- he was about twenty- I tried to help him in various ways, getting him not only a job but also a wife. But the solicitude he showed in this crisis had been beyond my expectations. Mukhtar rushed down from Rajshahi on hearing of the assault, and spent nearly a month with me nursing me night and day,

not caring whether his job lasted. It was on his shoulders- he was a strong, well-built youth-that I used to lean when re-learning to walk.

The daily visits of my wife and children sustained me greatly. We mutually rediscovered each other. To have constant, ocular proof of the attachment of the children, the realisation that they really loved me, not as a matter of duty or because custom demanded it, was---how should I put it? ---no expression that I might use would be equal to the emotion I intend to convey--- let me compromise by saying, soothing to my nerves and spirit and heart. It filled me with emotions which sometimes were a torture. I felt that I had done little to deserve this attachment not only not having laid up enough treasure for them but having many a time in the past been extremely selfish, spending more on myself than on them. I have never been demonstrative, but even an undemonstrative parent or husband would have done more. My family used to keep itself to itself, seldom mixing with outsiders, not from motives of vanity---we had little to be vain about--- but because we often felt bewildered by the fast-changing ways of the world around us. The result was that my wife and daughters, deprived of whatever protection I afforded them, were now comparable to some carefully nurtured hot-house plants jolted out of their sheltered existence into an environment hostile and unfriendly. How were they going to survive? What readjustments would they be called upon to make in the pattern of their life? Of the artificialities which society now-a-days favoured, they were innocent; the tricks and stratagems which passed for cleverness and smartness were unknown to them. I felt uneasy, distressed even, when I thought of all this.

An elderly relation arrived one day to assure me that an amnesty would in all likelihood be announced upon the return of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Dhaka from Pakistan where he was still held prisoner. (This was in the first week of January) He was a gouty old man, with a weak heart. He wept, not trying to conceal his tears, when he saw me. I was touched. Months afterwards, the same man declined point-blank to append his signature as a witness to a petition to the High Court challenging my detention. Surprising? Was the emotion he displayed early in January then entirely insincere? I would

never have suspected the old man of being such a superb play-actor. But these are the surprises and paradoxes of which life seems full.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, hailed all over as the father of the nation, President of the Republic of Bangladesh, was released on 9 January from Rawalpindi and arrived in Dhaka by way of London the following day. The reception accorded him, when the R.A.F. transport plane carrying him touched down at Tejgaon Airport was hysterical. The press estimated the welcoming crowd to have exceeded half a million. From the airport he drove straight to a meeting at the Ramna racecourse, where thousands waited to hear him. I followed the proceedings on a small portable radio set I was using in my cabin. The elation of the cheering crowds, the atmosphere of revelry, the sense of final victory won in the face of stupendous odds were conveyed to me not only by the commentary broadcast but by the sounds, indistinct but insistent, transmitted direct of a large mass of men vociferously celebrating a great event.

I strained my ears so as not to miss a syllable of the new President's speech. It filled me with foreboding about the shape of things to come. What I heard was the speech of a victorious party leader who had led his faction to a triumphant conclusion to a struggle, and was determined to teach his rivals a lesson. There was not a word about the expected amnesty. On the contrary he referred pointedly to those who had acted as witnesses in the trial against him in West Pakistan. No general forgiveness; no exhortation to the entire nation to forget the bitterness of strife, to bury the hatchet, and dedicate itself now exclusively to the task of reconstruction. That the Sheikh would repeat his usual grievances against the Pakistan army was understandable and no surprise. But where, I asked myself, was any proof that now he had won after what had been a civil war between federalists and secessionists, he viewed himself as the President of the state, the architect of a new Republic, who, whatever his role in the past, was called upon by circumstances to rise above factional jealousies and divisions and help his people to achieve peace? Even while urging the erstwhile guerrillas to lay down their arms, assured them that the task of routing and mopping up the enemies would be taken over by the regular state forces, an assurance obviously intended

to suggest that the enemies would not be forgiven. Particularly sinister was the reference to his trial, already mentioned. If those opposed to the Awami League or the Sheikh himself deserved punishment, few could escape, and as subsequent developments showed, few did. Thousands continued to be arrested and hauled up on trumped-up charges of having obstructed the war of liberation. The Collaborators Order promulgated in January empowered the police to detain anybody it pleased without warrant or specific charge; anybody could get one arrested. All one needed to do was allege that the person incriminated was a collaborator. Swift punishment followed. If the fellow was lucky, he found his way into the Dhaka Central jail. Those not so lucky were straightway liquidated; many were publicly lynched.

Lest anyone ever reading these lines should suppose that I have distorted the truth, I would mention that there was in the Sheikh's address an invitation to his people to take up urgently the task of rebuilding their 'Sonar Bangla', also a summons to peace, a warning that further lawlessness would be ruinous. But when saying these things, he seemed to exclude from his purview those who had disagreed with him. Am I exaggerating or imagining things? No; apart from the direct reference to the witnesses in his trial, there were hints, rather plain than subtle, that the opponents of the Awami League were to be treated as a class apart. The legislation that followed, the arrests and executions certainly showed that the apprehensions aroused in my mind were far from baseless.

I shuddered when I thought of the immediate future. It was very clear that the guerrillas had not yet had their fill of blood.

I had serious problems of my own to worry about. A day or two after I was abducted, another, or maybe the same gang again raided our house, this time at two o'clock in the night. I do not know to this day all the details; they have been deliberately kept from me. But I understand that they first rang up my wife saying that they knew she was sheltering other miscreants. The children were truly scared; they were sent away to neighbouring houses before the gang arrived. I am told that my wife had to pacify them by paying them a bribe. The actual size of the sum paid has not been disclosed to me.

This was followed by a raid by a police party who came to arrest my cousin, Mr S. Qamarul Ahsan, politician and writer who had been staying with us. Apprehending that he would meet with the same fate as myself, he hid himself as best he could. The whole house was turned topsy-turvy, every room searched, even wardrobes ransacked. My cousin was ultimately traced down to a dark pantry where he lay cowering.

Immediately afterwards came yet another raid, this time, in search of another cousin, Mr S. Manzurul Ahsan, a member of the Nizam-e-Islam Party. He had gone into hiding. So they arrested his elder brother, Mr S. Fakhrul Ahsan, a lawyer aged about sixty, who had never in his life dabbled in politics. He was let off after questioning. The police believed Mr Fakhrul Ahsan knew Manzur's whereabouts, which was not correct at all. There was an element of poetic justice in the humiliation suffered by Mr Fakhrul Ahsan. Ever since my arrest, he and his children had been trying to be on the right side of the new law by adopting a positively hostile attitude to my family. One instance, among many, of the way close relations fell apart in the civil war and its aftermath. All these Ahsans' were my cousins and my wife's brothers.

Mr Fakhrul Ahsan was transported to the police station in my car, and while he was returned, the car was not. The fact that it was owned by me provided sufficient justification for its confiscation in the eyes of the police. It took my wife a month and a half and nearly half a dozen petitions to various authorities to get it back. The restoration was facilitated by a fortuitous circumstance. The car had been bought and registered in my wife's name.

After Mr Qamarul Ahsan was arrested, there remained no one among our near relations to whom my wife could turn for help or counsel.

Of the dangerous unfriendliness of the environment in which we lived in those days, further proof was provided by the attacks, both oblique and direct, which appeared every now and then in the press. 10th January, the day Sheikh Mujibur Rahman reached Dhaka, was singled out by the Dainik Bangla, an influential daily with a wide circulation, for the reproduction in facsimile of a document showing

that I had received payment for my trip to Europe in 1971. The intention was patently malicious; it was to draw the attention of thousands on that day, of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself, if possible, to my 'treachery'. I heard a group of Medical College students discussing the document and repeating sarcastic remarks intended for my ears.

These incitements to hatred had their effect on the hospital atmosphere. Groups of young people would sometimes hover menacingly about my room, uttering threats. On one occasion, one of the policemen on duty reported that a man, obviously a drunkard, had made an attempt to snatch his rifle away, his avowed purpose being to enter my cabin and shoot me and the children who were with me. He looked really concerned.

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### CHAPTER III: Betrayal and sycophancy all around

About the middle of January, the intellectuals, teachers, doctors and engineers who had run off to India during the Civil War began returning. Among them were Professor Ali Ahsan, head of the department of Bengali at Chittagong University and Dr A. R. Mallik. Both were my personal friends, the first a cousin who had grown up with me. Neither of course cared to call or to make an inquiry. I had not expected anything of the kind. After all we had been on opposite sides in the Civil War. Professor Ahsan was reported to have attacked me personally in his broadcasts from Calcutta. What hurt me now was the attitude he adopted on his return to Dhaka. One informant said he had, quite without justification, - for no one had approached him--- made it clear that he won't lift his little finger to help a 'collaborator' like me out of my present difficulties. This was malicious malignity. Another person who saw me soon after a meeting with him suggestively hinted that I owed my downfall to the counsels of certain friends who had misguided me. The friends named were people who were as close to Mr Ali Ahsan as to myself. Of course, the whole story was a figment of his imagination, and if I had swallowed the bait, those people would be in prison now.

Mr. Ali Ahsan's apostasy, the somersault he has turned in his efforts to get on the right side of the new political line, are, though explainable in the light of the changes of 1971, very surprising nevertheless. I last met him at Narayanganj at the house of his brother-in-law, Mr Abdul Ali, early in March 1971 when the drift towards a civil war had become clear. He shared the view that the coming events portended no good for Pakistan, and expressed alarm at the dangers looming ahead. He was known to be a wily, rather unscrupulous, but extremely astute person. He had at one time been the chief organiser of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Pakistan. Although the Pakistan branch was disbanded when it was discovered that the Congress received payment for its work from the CIA, Mr Ahsan continued to champion causes opposed to left-wing parties in the country. It was he who immediately after the establishment of Pakistan had called for a ban on Tagore. When the climate changed, he tried to retrieve his

position by demanding emphatically that the country should adopt Bengali immediately as the medium of instruction in the Universities. People were aware of these facts, and I too knew that last thing one should expect of Mr Ali Ahsan was consistency. He would shift from one position to another, and could shrewdly guess in advance how the wind blew. But that he would repudiate the whole of his own past, by saying that whatever Pakistan represented was false and insincere was unexpected. At least, in spite of my intimate knowledge of his character, of his lack of scruple, I had not expected it.

Yes, I know enough history and psychology to realise that people caught in the kind of crisis that a civil war is, do compromise, avoid reasserting or asserting views apt to get them into trouble, or even lapse into silence. But only turn-coats or opportunists change their principles at every plunge and swoop of the vessels they ride. I do not know the circumstances, which only a few weeks after I met him forced him to flee to India. There could be nothing in his past records which, he need have felt, would attract the wrath of the army. Was then his decision to follow Dr Mallik, his Vice-Chancellor, into exile prompted by a shrewd calculation as to Pakistan's ultimate chances of victory in the conflict?

Dr Mallik, the man who is believed to have persuaded, even forced some of his colleagues to cross over into Agartala with him, was a slightly different proposition. Intellectually, he had always been inclined towards the Awami League school of thought. An exponent of Bengali nationalism, he held that Bengal had had a raw deal from Pakistan. I remember a discussion with him at Karachi towards the end of 1970, before the elections, when after listening to his tirade against the rulers of Pakistan, I asked him point-blank whether he wanted disintegration. His answer was in the negative. I cannot say whether it was sincere or meant only to mislead me. As for his grievances, the fact which he cannot truthfully deny is that he, like thousands of other Bengalis, owed almost everything in his career to Pakistan. But for Pakistan, he would have been destined to end up as a civil servant belonging to the lower echelons, or as a college lecturer. Here was he, a Vice-Chancellor, enjoying a position and a degree of influence far beyond anything he could have dreamt of in an undivided India with

Hindus to compete with. But instead of dissuading his friends in the Awami League from pursuing courses detrimental to the country's unity and solidarity, he had actively supported them, and, after the Army crack down, been busily organising the forces against Pakistan on foreign soil. What a fall! What a tragedy! And what blindness! How could he, a student of history, one who had himself written a book on the condition of Indians, particularly Bengali Mussalmans in the nineteenth century, ever imagine that a Bengal under the tutelage of India would afford the people of this region greater privileges and benefits than they enjoyed as part of Pakistan? Dr Mallik was not a man who did not understand politics or economics or whose attitudes need have been determined by slogans or press statements. But what difference did his past background make to his decision eventually? None that I could see or appreciate.

Of a piece with the unfriendliness of Mr Ali Ahsan was the attitude of Dr Muzaffar Ahmad Chowdhury who was appointed Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University, in the third week of January as far as I remember. The appointment itself was irregular. The formality of terminating my services was considered unnecessary. I didn't exist as far as they were concerned; here was a true instance of unpersoning in the Orwellian sense. It was announced that Dr Muzaffar Ahmad Chowdhury was taking over from my predecessor, Mr Abu Sayeed Choudhury, who had resigned early in March 1971 before the Army crackdown. I felt amused. Be that as it may, I thought I should write to Dr Chowdhury, an old colleague, a letter of congratulations and did so, requesting him to allow my family to remove from the Vice-Chancellor's residence all our goods and belongings. We had been forced to evacuate the house in a hurry. Most of our utensils, furniture and crockery were left behind. Most valuable of all to me were the books, the collection of a life-time, perhaps not worth an impressive sum in terms of money, but they were books I had collected over nearly thirty-five years, well-thumbed volumes of emotional interest to the possessor. My letter to Dr Muzaffar Chowdhury was not answered, and when my family tried to contact him on the telephone, he wasn't available. Once my daughters who went to see him personally were turned away. The Vice-Chancellor's Secretary, a young man who had

worked under me also, expressed his helplessness in the matter. The University engineer, who has the responsibility of looking after all official residences, said that nothing could be taken out without an inventory having been made first. The matter dragged on, and it was not until Dr Muzaffar Ahmad Chowdhury was on the point of leaving the University job, about three months later that finally we were allowed to recover some of the things. By this time, a number of articles had mysteriously disappeared. The books which were on the bedroom shelves were not allowed to be inspected or removed by my children who had gone to fetch them.

One evening a police inspector arrived to inquire whether I knew the whereabouts of a gun, said to be the property of the permanent secretary to the Vice-Chancellor, who had fled to India during the troubles. I was taken aback. The fact is that this Secretary, before he left, had deposited a bed-roll with the Vice-Chancellor's care-taker, and inside the roll, unknown to anybody, was a gun. No one told us about the bed-roll, which we had seen once or twice, but never touched or made any enquiries about. After we evacuated the house, the caretaker must have opened the bed-roll on the sly and removed the gun whose existence he alone must have suspected. When the Secretary came back after 16 December the bed-roll was without the gun of course, and the easiest explanation of its disappearance in those difficult days when feelings against 'collaborators' ran high was that I had concealed it. Luckily, for me, the police inspector turned out to be a sensible person who dismissed the story as utterly improbable and had a shrewd suspicion of the truth. His visit to my cabin was a formality intended to furnish confirmation of his own theory. He left after an apology.

I thanked God that there were even then a few people left who did not seize upon the chance of implicating a 'collaborator' in further trouble.

Some other University employees also tried their level best not only to annoy but to create positive difficulties for me. Chief among them was Mr Nuruddin, Registrar. On 17 or 18 December, even before the abduction, I learnt from him on the telephone that he had, without even asking my permission, placed the Vice-Chancellor's residence,

hastily evacuated by me on 15 December at the disposal of Indian army officers. The Registrar knew fully well that we had left our things behind; he made no arrangement to have them locked up, or even to have an inventory prepared. He assumed as soon as the Pakistan army surrendered, that my authority as Vice-Chancellor could be flouted with impunity, and when the request for accommodation came from the Indian Army authorities, proceeded without a moment's hesitation to indulge in the first hostile act he could think of. The fact is, there were other residences available, and certainly nothing need have prevented him from ringing me up and asking my consent. No; that would have meant acknowledging my position as Vice-Chancellor at a time when Mr Nuruddin thought I had collapsed.

Though personally an Urdu-speaking man, he had for sometime past identified himself with the anti-Pakistani forces in the University. There were reasons for this. A dismissed officer from the police service without academic qualifications beyond the ordinary Bachelor's degree, he got into the University as a deputy registrar by falsely representing that he had been unjustly treated in the police service and had resigned rather than compromise on matters of principle. When he saw the leftist forces in the ascendant. he lined up with them, with such success that a myth was created by them about his incredible efficiency and integrity. They wanted him groomed for the post of registrar, and when the old registrar retired, he became the obvious choice as successor. But owing to the antipathy of Dr M. O. Ghani, Vice-Chancellor, towards the forces backing Mr Nuruddin, he failed to obtain the post. The man chosen by Dr Ghani to fill the office however proved unsuccessful, and resigned. There was no alternative then but to allow Mr Nuruddin to act as Registrar pending the advertisement of the post anew. It was at this point that I came in. Mr Nuruddin worked under me as acting Registrar, but I knew that I could never expect to command his loyalty. So when the Pakistan army surrendered and Mr Nuruddin thought that I had lost my foundations, the least he could do was to create some annoyances for me.

When early in January I sent to the University--- this was before the appointment of any new Vice-Chancellor---for my pay for

the month of December, Mr. Nuruddin on his own ordered that I should be paid only for the period up to 19 December.

There was nothing for it but to put up with these signs of disloyalty and enmity. I was in the eyes of persons like Mr Nuruddin the symbol of a discredited past. What else could they do but disown me? That I had miraculously survived the ordeal of 19 December must have been a deep disappointment to them. To have expected anything else from persons like them would have been, for me at least, a betrayal of lessons I learnt from Shakespeare and Dante. Loyalty, consistency, broadmindedness are rare qualities; they are found in exceptional individuals. When we express surprise at someone's disloyalty, we betray our own ignorance of human nature, and do the person concerned both a disservice because we appear to be unnecessarily sarcastic, and tend to mar whatever image he has; honour because by pitching our expectations from him so high we really prove that in our eyes he must have enjoyed the reputation of an angel though incapable of such conduct.

News used to trickle in almost daily during January of the return of University teachers who had gone into exile or been in hiding during the Civil War. I have already mentioned Dr Muzaffar Ahmad Chowdhury. Others who returned or surfaced in January included Mr Abdur Razzaq of the Department of Political Science, Dr Sarwar Murshid of the Department of English, Mr Nur Muhammad Miah of the Department of Political Science again, and Dr Ahmad Sharif and Dr Muniruzzaman of the Department of Bengali.

My relations with Mr Razzaq had at one time been particularly close. He was several years my senior. When I came up to the University as a young first year student in 1938 Mr Razzaq was already a lecturer. He was then an active Supporter of the Muslim League, a fanatical admirer of the Quaid-e-Azam, or Mr M. A. Jinnah, as he was then known, and there developed between us a bond of sympathy and friendship transcending the teacher-pupil relationship. He soon established himself in our circle as the chief theoretician of the creed of Muslim separatism, a mentor and guide to young Muslim scholars. He could be a charming friend and possessed varied gifts. Excellent at both chess and cards, he won friends easily. His

unorthodox ways, his defiance of convention in matters of dress and behaviour even his temperamental indolence, helped earn him admirers. Besides his eclectic tastes as a scholar, the wide range of subjects on which he could hold forth, gave him in our eyes a position not equalled by anyone else. When early in 1940 or 1941 Muslim League minded students decided to establish a fortnightly organ of their own called Pakistan, Mr Razzaq was on the Board of Advisers. He used to write for us occasionally. But more than his writings, we valued his counsel, his moral and intellectual support. When Nazir Ahmad, Manager of the fortnightly was stabbed to death by a Hindu fanatic in 1943, he contributed a moving tribute to his memory to the special issue we published on the occasion.

It was after his return from England in 1950 that I began to be aware of a subtle change in his attitude. But I myself left for Europe soon afterwards, returning in October 1952 after my doctoral work: so I had little idea then of the extent and magnitude of the change he had undergone. But as the years passed, we began to drift slowly apart politically, though we remained friends personally. During the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965, Mr Razzaq came into my room in the University one day, and tried seriously to convert me to the creed of Bengali nationalism and the cause of secession. He said Pakistan was no longer a working proposition. The selfishness and myopia of the West Pakistani leaders, particularly the Ayub regime, had made it clear that Bengalis and Punjabis could not live together under one polity. The only way out was for the Bengali-speaking people of East Pakistan and India to work for the establishment of a separate independent state. I was surprised and shocked. I remember countering by saying that to sentence Pakistan to death on the basis of Only seventeen years' experience seemed to me a rash and hasty step. Pakistan, I pointed out, had been decided upon as a solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem after two hundred years of bitterness during British rule, not to speak of the antagonism between the two peoples during seven hundred years of Muslim ascendancy in the sub-continent. Assuming, I said, that every argument he had advanced against the Punjabis was correct, assuming also that all his data were accurate, how could one allow a brief span of seventeen years to outweigh the history of two hundred

years? I maintained that I for one should like to give Pakistan a fairer and longer trial before concluding that it had failed.

Mr Razzaq was disappointed by my reply. This was the last time we talked with each other seriously. A year and a half later, I discovered one day that he would not speak to me. It is no use concealing that I felt emotionally hurt. I hadn't expected that Mr Razzaq would let our differences on a political issue affect our personal relations. But he did, and I thought I should put up with this as best I could. Hence forward he used to cut me dead whenever we ran into each other, as, working in the same University, we could not avoid doing occasionally.

After the army crackdown, I heard that Mr Razzaq had gone into hiding, and when my services as Vice-Chancellor were transferred from Rajshahi to Dhaka in July 1971, he was still absconding.

To this day, I feel puzzled when I think of Mr. Razzaq's volte face. How could he have disowned his own early history, forgotten his own research on the subject of Hindu-Muslim relations and had even told me on one occasion that he would prefer to have himself beheaded in a Muslim Theocracy rather than support a United India?

*Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.* The truth of this Shakespearean saying was demonstrated lately (1973) when a doctorate *honoris causa* was conferred on Mr Razzaq by Delhi University. The intention was to honour him for his services in connection with the dismemberment of Pakistan. What a strange climax! The other Bangladeshi honoured in the same way at the same ceremony was Mr Zainul Abedin, the artist.

Soon after Mr Razzaq surfaced, I heard that my cousin Mr Qamarul Ahsan had been bailed out. That brought me a great sense of relief. There was now at least one grown-up educated male who could be of some use to my family. The other cousin, Mr Manzurul Ahsan, surrendered to the police when fear of assaults by the Mukti Bahini abated a little.

The Eid-ul-Azha was drawing near. This was to be the first big festival since my hospitalisation. It was impossible for us to think of festivities, or to contemplate buying clothes or having special food. But I insisted, in the interests of the children, on some semblance of

observance being kept up. I did not want them to be exposed to too great a shock. The youngest one was only eight. Neither she nor the other one who was ten could fully comprehend the nature of the tragedy that had overtaken us. I thought that as long as we could we should try to cushion the shock of it.

Eid day was naturally a particularly gloomy day for me. I had hardly any appetite for pilaff or curries. I thought of my fate and of the fate of thousands of others like me, either killed by the Mukti Bahini or languishing in prison, cut off from their kith and kin. The more I thought about it the greater my sense of desolation.

The University and colleges were due to reopen early in February. As the hostels re-filled with boarders returning to Dhaka, the atmosphere in the city grew warmer. I could feel the rise in the temperature from my hospital cabin. Groups of students, long-haired, with thick beards on their chins, some of whom must have been in the Mukti Bahini, now started appearing in the corridors of the Medical College. Their attitude towards me, as far as I judged from their looks, was unfriendly and aggressive. The doctor who had advised me to go downstairs for half-an-hour a day for X-ray treatment rescinded his recommendation on the ground that the risk for me might be too great. I agreed with him. One day---- the date was 29 January--- he stopped in my cabin on his regular beat and said he would like to have a talk with me. When we were alone, he said that now that I could move about a little, he was going to discharge me from the hospital. He had been under great pressure from the authorities to do so but he had resisted it so far on humanitarian grounds. Since it was now clear that I was no longer a bed-ridden patient, he could not justify further delay. Besides, he pointed out, with so many students returning, I would be continually exposed to risk in the Medical College hospital. The last argument was incontrovertible. I finally yielded. But I said, could he wait till next Monday? He was unable to do so and a discharge certificate was issued the same day, and I prepared for my transfer to the Central Jail.

The police party said the transfer would be carried out after dark. My wife and children came for a last visit. At nine in the evening

however I was informed that the arrangement had fallen through, and that they would take me out of the hospital the following morning.

That night I did not have a wink of sleep. Though technically under arrest since 20 December, I had had so far the usual privileges enjoyed by hospital patients, of which the most precious were the daily visits by my family; my meals except breakfast, used to come from home. Now it would be real prison life, of which I didn't have the vaguest idea. I tossed about in bed trying desperately to shut my mind off, but all kinds of thoughts, buzzed in my head like a swarm of bees, keeping me awake. The temperature in the cabin felt at one time so stiflingly warm that I put the fan on. But it brought no relief.

The police sub-inspector from the Ramna police post who was detailed to take me to the Central Jail called on 30 January at eight-thirty. I left as I was, not even bothering to shave. The van carrying me had to pass by our house at 109 Nazimuddin Road, and at my request it stopped for a minute before our gate to let me bid my family a final farewell. I left forlorn and desolate as the vehicle resumed its journey.

## CHAPTER IV: Interior of the inferno

*'I had not thought death had undone so many'*  
- T.S. Eliot

The interior of the Dacca Central Jail exceeded my worst fears. The primitive lavatories with their low standard of sanitation combined with an unimaginable lack of privacy were the greatest shock.

I was placed in a block called Seven Cells with five others of whom four turned out to be old acquaintances. Two were from the University. That was some comfort. The others were Division One prisoners; I was not granted this status until five days later through the instrumentality of my wife who had written to the Home Department. Normally, it is the Inspector-General of Prisons who decides whether a prisoner is to be placed in Division one or Division two, but in the case of the class of prisoners that I represented, stigmatised as 'Collaborators', the new Government reserved to itself the right to classify the detained. A few, a very limited few, had the good luck to achieve the privilege of Division One right from the beginning, but in the majority of cases, whatever the prisoner's social status, he was made to live the life of an ordinary prisoner for periods varying from a few days to a few months before promotion to Division One. I was lucky to be assigned on the first day to a cell rather than a common dormitory, known in the jail as *Khata*.

Prisoners in the *Khata* belong to the lowest circle of this Inferno. Their life is scarcely distinguishable from that of animals. They sleep and eat in the open, perform other physical functions almost in the open, and are exploited as slaves. They tend the prison gardens, mow the lawns, sweep the roads, wash the latrines. carry water in pails from cell to cell, and perform such other chores as they are called upon to undertake. Except when bed-ridden, they are never excused from work. Slackness, if detected, is severely punished. Very few escape beatings. Warders delight in the indiscriminate use of the baton. Most of the warders are semi-literate persons drawn from the

lowest social ranks. Association with criminals degrades them further so that as far as morality and ethics are concerned there is little to choose between warder and prisoner.

Most of these warders were fanatical Awami League supporters. They had been for months fed on propaganda against us. When we arrived, they started treating us as the worst kind of criminals they had ever seen. Some restraint had of necessity to be exercised in respect of prisoners in Division One, but *Khata* prisoners of the class called 'Collaborators' became the victims of a campaign in which sadism, malice, cruelty, arrogance all played their parts. When ill they were refused medicine or even any respite from hard labour. Persons who could hardly drag themselves from one spot to another were compelled to undertake work that would appear strenuous even for a tough young man of twenty-five. To hard labour and beatings were added vilification and abuse. Upon the slightest pretext the warders poured on their heads the filthiest expletives and the foulest swear-words.

I found myself gradually acquiring a strange kind of lingo for communication. Warders were known in this jail as *Mian Sahebs*; ordinary prisoners attached as factotums to prisoners in Division One were called *Faltus*, a word whose lexical meaning was 'extra'. Prison kitchens were referred to as *Chowkas*. It took me a whole week to get used to this vocabulary. Each prisoner upon his admission into the jail was produced before the 'case-table' which meant a place where either the jailer or one of his subordinates took down in a register his particulars. The words 'case-table' were corrupted into something like cash tepol. When I first heard the term, I actually thought it was a new word not known to me, and since I was made to understand what it signified, I ceased to bother about its etymology. Then one day, hearing someone pronounce it a little differently, I began to isolate the syllables mentally and arrived at the truth. It was quite a lesson on phonology.

The jail hierarchy was an interesting study. At the top was the Inspector General of Police, Olympian, invisible, a person whom prisoners seldom, if ever, meet. He is concerned with prison administration in the country as a whole and has very little to do

directly with this or any other jail. Under him is the Deputy Inspector General who inspects the jail every day, going round the cells. When I first arrived the DIG used to visit the cells every morning between nine and ten. Later, the visits became weekly affairs; our cell was visited every Friday known in the jail as File Day. The DIG is supposed to supervise or oversee things; he does not directly interfere in details. Next to him stands the jailer, the most important and powerful functionary in the prison. His pay hardly exceeds two to three hundred rupees a month; he does not enjoy the rank of even a gazetted officer, i.e. an officer whose appointment is announced in the official gazette. But inside the jail, he wields really unlimited powers, is feared as a monster by the prisoners and worshipped by his subordinates as god. His word is law. It is he who minds the details of administration, who awards or withholds such facilities or privileges as prisoners are entitled to enjoy, who controls the staff, punishes the wayward and recommends promotions for the faithful and loyal. He is assisted by about half a dozen deputy jailers who have no real powers although they do their best to harass prisoners. Between the jailer and the DIG, there is another officer, known as the Deputy Superintendent whose main duties the supervision of the factories and mills operated by the jail. Occasionally in the absence of the DIG, he deputises for him.

Between the deputy jailers and the *Subedar* or Chief head warder, the functionary next in rank, there is a big hiatus, in pay and status and qualifications, but he too insists on being treated as an 'officer', and has been known to resent any infringement of his prestige. *Subedars* are usually literate, but literacy is all the educational qualification they possess. The number of *Subedars* is limited to two or three. Next come the head warders, popularly known as *Jamadars*, the chief pillars of administration, who oversee the work of the warders, act as intermediaries between prisoners and jail authorities, look after sanitation, administer punishments and have to be at the beck and call of the jailer round the clock.

A jail differs from other administrative establishments in one fundamental respect. Its machinery has to be kept functioning from sunrise to sunshine without remission or intermission. Every few

hours, guards change, fresh batches of warders and chief warders take over from those on duty before, prisoners are counted, registers checked, and bells rung. The two most important-counts are those that take place at six in the morning and at six in the evening. Warders on duty immediately before the counts are not permitted to leave the jail premises until the figures have been checked and found correct. Surprise inspections by the jailer or deputy jailers keep the negligent on their guard. Derelictions of duty are punished by immediate suspensions or even dismissals.

Prisons, like everything else in this country, are riddled with corruption: incompetence and inefficiency are evident in every aspect of their administration; but I was struck by the fact that whatever their other deficiencies, the warders and head warders perform their routine duties without fail, almost mechanically, from force of habit. The loudest complaints are heard from those who are put on duty at night between nine and three; they grumble continually; but seldom do they fail to turn up punctually. The worst offence, from the administrative point of view, that they occasionally commit is to fall asleep; if caught, they are immediately punished. I suppose it is fear of swift punishment, which no offence can escape, which acts as a deterrent against slackness. In any case, the mechanical punctuality of the warders in a world where punctuality was at a discount and mocked at as a sign of idiocy rather than envied as a virtue, could not fail to arouse my admiration.

Mr Nirmal Roy, the jailer, handsome, outwardly polished, was a man in his late forties or early fifties. He told us one day that he had been in the Dacca Central Jail in various capacities for over fourteen years. He naturally possessed an intimate knowledge of all its secrets. He knew all the tricks that either prisoners or jail staff could possibly resort to in order either to evade the rigour or their punishment or to shirk their duties. He was feared on this account. His attitude towards the 'collaborators', which was one of unmixed hatred, was well concealed behind a mask of courtesy and polished manners. Only once or twice did he lapse. It is reported that once when introducing Dr Hasan Zaman to the DIG during a weekly inspection, he proceeded, until checked by a sharp rebuke from Dr Zaman himself, to describe

him as a murderer responsible for the deaths of a large number of people. Other reports of the same kind reached us from time to time, but apart from these instances, one could hardly tell from the way he talked to us, that at heart he regarded the 'collaborators' as a species of vermin.

Other members of the jail staff were much less careful. The doctors attached to the jail hospital were frankly and openly hostile. The man usually referred to as Captain Samad was positively aggressive. Sick prisoners who were obliged to go to him for treatment were always roundly abused, seldom given the medicines they needed, told that they deserved to die. Sometimes he would go to the length of inquiring sarcastically how many patients he had killed or helped kill. Occasionally the patients, driven to desperation by his rudeness, hit back. He was reduced to temporary silence on one occasion when in reply to an inquiry of the sort mentioned, a prisoner told him that he had shot about a hundred but regretted having failed to dispose of him.

The compounder, a man named Abdur Rahman, who has since retired, regarded himself as the chief representative agent of the Awami League in the prison, the chief personal spokesman for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Outwardly, he preserved towards us an attitude compounded of pity and a dash of contempt for our lack of political foresight, but behind our backs, all reports agreed, he was vituperative and fulminated against our alleged misdeeds. On one occasion in the presence of my cousin, Mr Qamarul Ahsan whom he did not know, he spoke contemptuously of me as a person who, notwithstanding a poor academic background (a third class M. A. degree he alleged) had by flattering the authorities risen to eminent office. He was surprised when my cousin contradicted him, but the contradiction did nothing to shake his conviction. That however did not prevent him from exploiting my service. When I was in the jail hospital in April 1972, recovering from an attack of acute dysentery and colitis, Mr Abdur Rahman came to see me one day and asked me to help his daughter who was taking the Higher Secondary examination by composing a few essays in English for her. I dictated from my bed four compositions on topics considered suitable by Mr Rahman. I felt vastly amused when, a few days later, he returned to tell me that the

compositions had been approved by his daughter. He could conceive of no higher compliment to my intellectual attainments!

Of the many restrictions and deprivations that are inseparable from prison life, the most galling seemed to me initially the rule which would not permit a prisoner to have his own safety razor for shaving. I was relieved of all my blades by the chief head warden who examined my baggage on the day I was admitted. He said that if I were elevated to Division One, I would be allowed to borrow one blade at a time for use in the presence of a head warden who would take it away after my shaving was over. But in fact those were never restored. Likewise, all the medicines I had with me had to be deposited with one of the deputy jailers. Most of them were never given back. Later when on account of the general scarcity of medicines in the country, the jail authorities failed to supply even those recommended and prescribed by their own doctors, this particular restriction was withdrawn and we were encouraged to obtain our own supplies from home.

Actually to this day, I do not know what exactly prison rules are, and what rights and obligations the prison code prescribes. In spite of repeated requests, the prison code was never shown to us. What facilities and privileges we could enjoy seemed to depend wholly upon the caprices of the officers. Sometimes they would object even to such things as green coconuts; on other occasions they would connive at cooked food which is believed to be absolutely inadmissible. Different officers i.e. deputy jailers, interpret the rules differently. One man, Taj Muhammad, made the lives of most of us miserable by summarily refusing to let this, that or the other thing in according as he wished. His rudeness was a byword throughout the jail.

Most people soon divined the truth that bribes were an Open Sesame to all manner of privileges. If proper bribes were paid to proper persons, one could have anything, regardless of rules. Some cynics used to observe that women were the only luxury which the jail authorities were unable to supply. Wine, such prohibited foods as beef, cooked fish, eggs, butter, cheese, could all be had easily, provided one lubricated the administrative machinery in the appropriate manner.

Bribery and corruption have been refined in the jail into a system. From the jailer to the warders everyone has a stake in it and

receives a share of the takings according to a graduated scale. Helping oneself to the produce of the jail gardens is not regarded by any jail employee as a crime. The contractors who supply rice, oil etc. are obliged to contribute handsomely to keep the contracts. All this in a sense is in the day's work in the prisons. But what we saw in the first six months of 1972 was, for us at least, a truly astonishing phenomenon. As hundreds of 'collaborators' and non-Bengalis daily poured into the Central Jail and the prison population swelled gradually to 14 thousand, the jail staff rose from peak to peak of affluence and prosperity.

The Dacca jail has a capacity of 1966. On December 16, 1971, the day the Pakistan army surrendered, a band of over-enthusiastic guerrillas had forced the jailer to throw the jail gates open and set everybody free. We were told that every prisoner, robbers, thieves and murderers, left, with the exception of some inmates of the madhouse. The number of prisoners fell suddenly almost to zero. Then came day by day a stream of new prisoners labelled 'collaborators'. The non-Bengali population of Mirpur and Muhammadpur areas in Dacca, were arrested *ell masse*, men, women and children, and driven by truck and lorry to the jail like cattle. Most of the women were sent to special concentration camps. The men and some of the children were brought to this jail.

Many of the adults had money with them, large bundles of currency notes. Some carried as much as five or six thousand rupees. They were relieved of all this without ceremony at the jail gates by the warders. Those who succeeded in entering with the notes in their possession, had, according to the rules, to deposit all they had with one or other of the deputy jailers. Then began another game. The deputy jailers entered whatever figure they pleased in the registers regardless of the sums received. Five thousand would be reduced to five and the poor prisoner could do nothing about it. The difference between entry and receipt was pocketed by the jail staff. We heard that whenever possible the individual officer who received the deposits tried to monopolise the takings, but in other cases, the loot was shared out according to an agreed system.

When the non-Bengalis discovered what was happening to their deposits, they started tearing the currency notes up or burning them rather than hand them over to the new robbers. Large fortunes must have been burnt to ashes in those few months. Sometimes prisoners suspected of having notes on their persons which they were reluctant to surrender were severely beaten; many submitted to the beatings rather than yield and confess that they had currency notes. Later, they destroyed what they had.

Estimates of what the jail staff earned in this period vary of course; no one can possibly know the truth. But such figures as fifty, sixty, seventy thousand have been mentioned to us by the warders themselves. Some of the warders who because of the nature of their duties failed to obtain a share grew envious and spread extraordinary stories about their colleagues. The truth is that only those who were on duty at the gates and had to handle the new arrivals could have opportunities either of earning money on their own or of receiving a share of the receipts.

A new source of corruption was the bribes offered by wealthy persons for the sake of small privileges. There were quite a few millionaires among the 'collaborators'; besides, there were business executives, civil servants, lawyers, teachers, men who were fairly affluent. The privations of jail life, the discomforts to which they had never been used, forced them to offer money to those who did them small services. One millionaire, owner of several jute mills, was reported to have spent over twenty thousand rupees to bribe the officials in the Home Ministry who had the responsibility of classifying 'collaborator' prisoners. He had been placed in the *Khata*, to begin with. Another who was even richer, put in train a regular system of monthly payments to all the staff he had anything to do with, from the jailer downwards. This gentleman, Mr Abul Qasem, had been a member of the Malek Cabinet in 1971; but all his acquaintances said he had no strong political convictions and was essentially an opportunist. Maulana Nuruzzaman used to speak of him as a religious hypocrite who sometimes affected to be a free thinker, and sometimes when any danger loomed ahead, surpassed everybody in his piety; when the danger passed he relapsed into apostasy.

A Council Muslim Leaguer in pre-1972, Mr Qasem was an industrialist and owned a chain of mills. Originally a refugee from Assam, he had worked his way up into the inner sanctum of Pakistan politics by dint of his shrewdness. What is surprising is that no one could suspect till he was arrested what he really had been, that is, a man with no faith in the basic principles of Pakistan. When Dr Malek formed his cabinet in September 1971, Mr Abul Qasem had seemed an obvious choice. After all, had he not been the General Secretary of the East Pakistan Council Muslim League? What Dr Malek himself, Maulana Nuruzzaman and others said about him now seemed to reflect the lack of judgment and foresight characterising the past policies of Pakistani leaders.

Mr Qasem's use of bribes was a serious embarrassment to other prisoners who could not follow in his footsteps. They were discriminated against by the jail staff almost openly. When Mr Qasem fell ill he had no difficulty in spite of a recent Government order to the contrary in getting himself transferred to the Dacca Medical College Hospital. The warders who guarded his cabin used to receive ten rupees apiece everyday. Others suffering from worse ailments were brusquely told that no transfers to outside hospitals could be allowed. Dr Malek, a man in his seventies, was refused permission to undergo an operation for hernia.

Bribes were used by others besides Mr Abul Qasem, but not so openly. The exact details will perhaps always remain a secret, but we know from personal experience how true all this is.

Corruption of a slightly different kind flourishes among both warders and convicts in respect of food. Warders from the chief head warder downwards have their regular shares out of what is supplied to prisoners. Milk, meat, fish, tea, whatever is cooked for prisoners, has to be distributed among warders in accordance with an immemorial tradition. The tradition is so old that the illegality of the matter has almost been lost sight of. This has gone so far that should any warder miss his share accidentally, he feels defrauded of his dues, and protests openly. Some of them seriously object if tea, for instance, is offered in tumblers other than those meant for the use of Division One prisoners.

I must say however that we found the younger warders far less unscrupulous in this matter than the old ones. The latter have no sensibilities; they are as greedy as they are brutal. Years of exposure to the company of criminals, reinforced by their own lack of such refinement as education confers, have so coarsened them that it is difficult to call them fully human. The younger warders retain some freshness; it was pleasant to talk to some of them; they did not appear wholly devoid of human sentiments. But the others were so much dead wood, utterly indifferent to such values as decency, courtesy, shame and honour. It is amazing how a brutal environment can brutalise human beings.

I am not forgetting that these people are recruited from the lowest rung of the social ladder; they have little education; and the pay they receive could hardly be expected to enable them to live decent lives. But their counterparts outside, who do not have even a fraction of the economic security that they enjoy, are so markedly different. They seldom are so consistently and uniformly evil. What I have seen with my own eyes forces me to conclude that it is the environment in which these warders work which so degrades them.

Seasoned convicts serving long sentences, who by reason of their good conduct in prison, which really means ungrudging obedience, have earned the confidence of the jail authorities, share some of the duties of warders. They oversee the work of other convicts, enjoy freedom of movement within the jail precincts and can even administer light punishment on their own initiative. I noticed that they were feared even more than the warders. They are also employed to spy on the latter and can get defaulting warders suspended. These convict overseers are in their own way as corrupt as the warders. Their criminal record in the outside world apart, they develop inside the jails propensities of a different kind, staking out a claim to whatever good food is available. They have to be given extra portions of bread, curry, meat, fish and milk.

It is these corrupt men who had the responsibility of handling an enormous population of fourteen thousand prisoners labelled 'collaborators' suddenly thrown upon their mercy. Any compunctions they might have had in dealing with prisoners in such large numbers

were neutralised by the conviction that these ‘collaborators’ were ‘traitors’ who had betrayed their country and obstructed its liberation from its enemies. That seemed to justify them in treating them exactly as men would treat a large herd of cattle.

Prisoners who could not be housed in the existing cells were accommodated in makeshift bamboo huts which barely protected them from rain and cold. Open-air latrines were constructed along the walls, and as these filled up, the overpowering stench of human excreta hung like a pall over our heads. When a wind blew, it carried the stench further so that for hours on end there would be no place in the prison where one could escape this affliction. A jail with a capacity of 1966 could hardly cope with fourteen thousand. The old kitchens were not large enough for the cooking of as much food as was needed now. The ovens were kept working round the clock, but there were weeks when despite their utmost efforts the cooks could not supply even one meal a day for all. Some had to wait thirty six hours or so for their turn. Water was scarce. Most people could not have a bath even once in a month, nor enough water to drink. One day, I heard a really frightful story about the desperate straits to which hunger and thirst reduced men. A prisoner, not able to stand his thirst any longer is said to have forced himself to drink filthy water from a drain.

Those who were attached to Division One prisoners like ourselves as *Faltus* were comparatively better off. We tried to give them a share of what was supplied to us. Also there were better facilities for bathing and washing in these cells, from which they profited. But we were unable to help the others. So desperately short was water that on several occasions we were constrained to refuse to let outsiders use our supply. We knew this was unkind and cruel. But in this terrible struggle for survival, pity at one’s own expense could only mean further suffering and we had to steel our hearts against the usual emotions aroused by the sight of human misery. The fact is that gnawing at our minds was the fear that if we allowed our sympathy to outstrip our resources we ourselves would be reduced to the same plight. I felt sometimes that I was becoming brutalised gradually.

The majority of these prisoners were from Mirpur and Muhammadpur areas, uprooted wholesale from their homes, their

wives and children. Many were subjected to physical tortures before imprisonment. Their misery knew no bounds. Separated from their families of whom they had no news, they passed their time in a kind of mental stupor. Nothing seemed to matter to them. They had no idea why they had been arrested. They were non-Bengalis, technically, having originally migrated to East Pakistan from the Bihar and Uttar Pradesh provinces of India. But their children, that is, the second-generation immigrants, spoke Bengali almost as fluently as the native speakers. One could perceive from their speech and habits how far the process of racial and linguistic assimilation had gone. Yet they had been rejected, their relations killed, their homes destroyed, their property confiscated on the grounds that they had not joined the Awami League in its rebellion against Pakistan.

On the first day I came into the jail, I had with me temporarily for a few hours a middle-aged man as my *Faltu*. He was a recent arrival, strongly built, very healthy. Within a couple of months, the man was reduced almost to skin and bone, not because of the food, but owing mainly to his constant worry on account of his wife and teen-aged daughters. He had not the vaguest notion where they were, or whether they were alive at all. Had they been able to escape molestation? Poor Ehsan- that was his name- could only cry in anguish and eat his heart out in the intervals of his prison work. Words were the only consolation we could offer him. Before his imprisonment, he had been a fairly prosperous trader with a house of his own.

Ehsan’s case was typical of hundreds of others. The mental agony from which they suffered threw their physical sufferings into the shade. The blank despair on their faces, the hopelessness about the future, was not paralleled by anything in my experience. When I thought of them I forgot my own misery.

Man’s powers of adjustment and accommodation are so incredibly great that within a few months many of them--- (there were exceptions like Ehsan) ---- learnt to rally and to live a kind of normal life. They mastered all the prison tricks, came to know what uses to make of lies and falsehoods and how to procure extra portions of food. I would hardly blame them. What was the alternative? Slow death, illness, misery. If by a little deceit and dishonesty in an environment

where these were the only currency understood they could lighten their difficulties, how could one find fault with them?

The smokers among them suffered more than the non-smokers. People are known to have traded good shirts or other valuable articles for a single cigarette. Extraordinary services could be obtained in this way. Division One prisoners who were allowed to have cigarettes supplied to them from home soon started exploiting this weakness among their *Faltus*. One rich man, I know, used to distribute about five packets of cheap cigarettes a day among the various people who worked in the kitchen or did other jobs around his cell in order to buy such luxuries as a regular supply of hot water for his bath, extra portions of meat and fish, and such other services as he needed from time to time. Warders and head-warders treated him with extra consideration for the same reason.

To my surprise, I discovered one day that a religious leader who never smoked himself had taken to using cigarettes in the same way. I understood. What objections could I raise against a universal practice even though it amounted to bribery?

Imprisonment and occasional beatings were by no means the worst aspect of the fate of the non-Bengali population. Many had of course been liquidated straightway. Those sent to the Central Jail were from time to time subjected to identification parades in the presence of guerrilla leaders. They picked out whomsoever they wanted, herded them into waiting trucks, and took them away for execution. This went on until the summer of 1972. The worst barbarities of which the Nazis in Hitler's Germany used to be accused were repeated and exceeded on our soil. Not the slightest attempt was made to find for these actions a legal excuse. It was vengeance and blood-lust unconcealed and unalloyed. We seemed to be back in the world of the *Nibelungenlied*.

There is reason to believe that among the prisoners there was a sprinkling of spies who constantly tried to incite them to protest and violence in order that they might be subjected with some justification to further torture and punishment. A grim tragedy occurred one morning early in March 1972 through the machinations of these *agents provocateurs*. Some prisoners were induced to adopt a rebellious attitude; they were indiscriminately fired upon; at least eight died on

the spot, among them a student from the University of Dacca whom I had met the morning before. A young warder, one of the coarsest specimens, described to me afterwards with relish how he had shot the rebellious prisoners and finished off one man who had been wounded in the leg at first. He explained that he did not want any witnesses to survive, and, rather than risk inconvenient questions at any inquiry, had put an end to this man's life by a second shot. Actually, most of these who died had nothing to do with the alleged rebellion. Prisoners had been attacked unawares. The warders had used the incident as a pretext only.

The ripple of excitement created by this incident, of which an entirely false and distorted version appeared in the press, passed off quickly. Everyone seemed to take the line that there was nothing for it but to resign oneself quietly to all this. Protests were useless, and difficult to organise. In a few days' time people stopped talking about it altogether. I realised that our sensibilities were gradually being brutalised and deadened.

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## CHAPTER V: A crowd is not company

Oscar Wilde says in *De Profundis*, a book I translated into Bengali later, that the worst thing about jail life is not that it hurts the emotions, but that it kills them turning the heart to stone. The exact words would be worth quoting if I had the book with me. The more I saw of this Central Jail the deeper my fear that the multitude detained as 'collaborators', most of them splendid young men, would gradually be turned into real criminals by the coarseness, brutality, vileness and deceit which they daily experienced. Everyone I talked to said that he was fairly resolved to take revenge against his captors, against those who had betrayed him. They made no secret of what they meant to do. Some said that the first task they would undertake upon their release would be to eliminate the man or men who had got them arrested. After what they had gone through and seen, the instinctive horror and distaste with which normal human beings recoil from thoughts of violence were no longer operating as a brake upon their desire for vengeance. And what advice could an old man like myself offer? Unlike ourselves they had given no hostages to fortune; they had no wives and children to think of; many of them had lost their parents in the turmoil following 16 December. Those whose parents were alive did not care what happened to them. Their own desire was revenge, revenge at any cost however long it might take.

There was talk of the Biharis being sent away to West Pakistan, which is all that was left of Pakistan now. In speech after speech the Prime Minister disowned them, declaring that Bangladesh could not tolerate the continued presence of a large community of what he termed Pakistanis on its soil; Pakistan was urged to take them off its hands. The inhumanity of the proposal went remarked in the Press. If the logic of the Prime Minister's suggestion were accepted, every time there was a civil war in a country, a section of the population could be driven into exile on the grounds that they had not supported the winning side. If the International Red Cross had not come to their rescue, thousands would have perished in the concentration camps into which the Biharis were herded. They had to depend on the meagre rations of wheat, rice, milk and other edibles

which the Red Cross supplied. The supply was neither regular nor adequate, not because of the fault of the Red Cross, but because of dishonesty at this end. We heard that many children died in the camps.

As news of these barbarities reached us daily, I wondered whether Sheikh Mujibur Rahman really desired any solution other than the kind of Final Solution that Hitler had chosen for the Jews. What manner of a man was this leader, now styled the Father of the Bengali nation by his followers, who could thrive only on violence and hatred? Clearly, a state led and presided over by such a person could possibly have no peaceful future. He had reduced a prosperous area to a ruin, depending entirely on the world's charity, with its industries dislocated, its agriculture asphyxiated, its trade and commerce choked, its communications disrupted, and he claimed this had been a marvellous achievement entitling him to the admiration of all peoples!

With the hordes of non-Bengali prisoners who filled the Central Jail in 1972, I had few direct contacts. Prison restrictions allowed neither them nor me, or for that matter any others in my Block to move freely and see one another. We felt their presence, heard the murmur of their voices, smelt them, but the majority of them remained invisible, unknowable, inaccessible, except on Eid days when all Muslim prisoners were permitted to congregate for prayers for about an hour or so. Those who were closest to me were the persons detained like me in Seven Cells. The blocks called Six Cells and Old Twenty were within hailing distance of Seven Cells, the Sixth block being only two yards away, and occasionally in the mornings or afternoons, with the warders looking the other way, we met on the lawns. These meetings were considered violations of prison rules, but some of the head warders connived at them. There were others who growled if the caught anyone outside his block.

It was in the course of these morning and afternoon 'outings' that I made my first acquaintance with some well-known politicians of the old school. The best known among them were Mr Fazlul Qader Chowdhury, Mr Khan Sabur and Khwaja Khairuddin. I had never seen them before. Their names were of course familiar, but having always given a wide berth to politicians, I had no opportunities of getting to know them personally. There were others like Mr A. T. M. A. Matin,

who once held the post of Deputy Speaker in the Pakistan National Assembly, Mr Shafiqur Rahman, an established Dacca lawyer, connected with the Council Muslim League, Mr A. Matin of Pabna, Mr S. B. Zaman, formerly of the Awami League, Mr Nasiruddin Chowdhury of Sylhet and Mr Faikuzzaman of Faridpur who all had a political background. Mr Akhtar Farukh, formerly Editor of the Jamaat-E-Islami daily Sangram, Mr Shah Azizur Rahman, lately of the Bangla Jatiya League, Maulana Masum, a religious leader, Mr Ainuddin of Rajshahi; Mr Mujibur Rahman and Mr Musharraf Hussain, members of the Malik Cabinet; Mr Ibrahim Hussain, a contractor turned politician were also among those whom I had opportunities of studying at fairly close quarters. Mr Nasiruddin Chowdhury and Mr Ainuddin were the only two among those mentioned who were not strangers.

In the block called Seven Cells were two University teachers, Dr Qazi Din Muhammad and Dr Mohar Ali; a banker and a Police Superintendent.

We were a motley crew, differing in age, background, outlook, education, social status and culture. Although we had all been arrested as 'collaborators', it would be wrong to infer from this that we shared a common political attitude towards Pakistan and the principles on which it stood. Mr Hafizul Islam, the banker, for instance, was a firm believer in the Awami League's theory that for twenty-three years East Pakistan had been exploited and fleeced by West Pakistan. He could reel off a whole array of tendentious data and figures calculated to prove the Awami League complaint. His offence was that he had been cited as a witness in the trial against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in West Pakistan and he is believed to have been arrested on the Sheikh's personal orders. He was also the first in this group to be released; he left on 9 March 1972. Likewise, Mr Shamsuddin, the Police Superintendent, held views which were far from orthodox from the Pakistan point of view. In the beginning, some fellow prisoners eyed him with suspicion fearing that he might be a spy planted on us. I do not think this is true, but nevertheless the fact remains that his excessive religious devotions and nocturnal vigils, coupled with the remarks he occasionally let fall, filled us with vague misgivings.

Mr S. B. Zaman, a wealthy contractor had been elected to the National Assembly in 1970 on the Awami League ticket, but after the army crackdown in March 1971, he did not follow his party-men into exile. On the contrary, he issued several statements denouncing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's extremism and pleading for the maintenance of Pakistan's integrity. His educational attainments were not very high, and he was more interested in money and business than in politics. A pleasant young man (he was about thirty-five), he seldom gave the impression of being seriously preoccupied with political issues. Circumstances had thrown him into the company of political rivals, and in the bitterness of his present mood, he often criticised both the Sheikh and his followers in strong terms, but one could always feel that these criticisms were not the expression of deep convictions.

Like Mr Zaman, Mr Shah Azizur Rahman did not belong to the Muslim League. He had had a chequered career. Originally a Muslim Leaguer, he had joined the Awami League when the latter seemed on the verge of sweeping the polls; then for reasons not understood he had deserted the Sheikh and allied himself with Mr Aaur Rahman Khan. He was known to have supported the demand for a sovereign Bengal, which was, considering his original affiliations, strange. The constant changes in his politics showed that he was at best an opportunist, concerned only to extract the maximum benefit possible from the party in power. His judgment was not however sound. Had it been so, he would not have resigned from the Awami League when it was about to score its greatest triumph. In the face of these facts, how could anyone take his present diatribes against the Awami League seriously? Moody, temperamental, nervous, hypersensitive and jealous, he occasionally gave way to violent and prolonged fits of weeping. Remorse, despair, helplessness, all combined to make him undesirable company. These moods involved him fairly frequently in heated arguments with his fellow prisoners, arguments often escalating into noisy quarrels.

Mr Zaman used to spend a part of the night weeping. The first day I heard his sobs I thought someone had unexpectedly received bad news from home for which he had been unprepared. Then I discovered that each day, in the evening, as soon as the cells were locked up, Mr

Zaman, left alone to grapple with his worries, broke down and sobbed for hours uncontrollably. These fits ceased gradually after he became used to the routine of prison life.

Mr Abdur Rahman Bakul, a lawyer from Faridpur, who was in our block, had the same emotional weakness. But he seldom sobbed. In his case it was sighs and lamentations that kept his neighbours awake.

Mr Ainuddin of Rajshahi who was transferred to our block in September 1972 surprised us by a theory he had developed on the utility of sobs. His practice was to wake up late at night, between two and three, pray, and then spend an hour sobbing loudly. The sounds were fairly alarming. When asked why he did so, he explained that this was the best manner of moving God to pity. Of course, after we told him that God who knew the innermost secrets of men's hearts hardly needs violent demonstrations of one's grief or helplessness, he agreed to mitigate the rigour of his practice.

I have, however, digressed from my main point, which is that the men imprisoned together and indiscriminately labelled as 'collaborators' did by no means subscribe to the same political opinions or view the events of 1971 in the same light. Most of them appeared to have no strong convictions. Given an opportunity, they would defect to the Awami League. In their criticism of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman one could perceive many subtle undertones. Very few had yet been able to free themselves from the spell of Awami League propaganda, and, whilst denouncing the Sheikh's politics, would almost unconsciously quote Awami League theories about the exploitation of East by West Pakistan. I felt puzzled.

Their lack of principle or conviction, their selfishness, the narrowness of their outlook, their inability even in jail to agree upon anything threw a revealing light upon the factors which had tended to the disintegration of Pakistan. Essentially they were small men called upon by circumstances to deal with big issues, and they had failed. Treachery, conspiracy, treason, subversion had of course all been there. I am not even suggesting that a stronger set of men could have altered the course of events in 1971. Perhaps not. But it is doubtful whether those events would have been put in train in the same way had

the men who supposedly were wedded to the ideology of Pakistan been less selfish, less narrow-minded, and possessed greater strength of character. I found that there was not one man among these politicians who was universally respected or who escaped the barbed sarcasm of back-biters.

Mr Khan Sabur, a withered old man of over sixty-five, suffering from a thousand and one ailments, was spoken of as a pervert and a drunkard, a professional smuggler who did not mend his ways even when he was a member of the Pakistan Central Cabinet. Strange, frankly vulgar stories were repeated to us, by those who claimed to have known him for years, of the sensual orgies in which Mr Sabur indulged stories of how every evening in Rawalpindi his chums, drawn from all parties, foregathered at his residence for drinks. He is said to have maintained his secret links with Calcutta even during the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965. The smugglers in his pay continued throughout the twenty-three years of Pakistan to carry rice and jute over across the borders in Khulna. That is how he made his fortune.

These were serious allegations. The men who repeated them were Mr Khan Sabur's colleagues; it was difficult to dismiss the stories as downright falsehoods. Even allowing for a discount of fifty percent, there remained enough to shake one's confidence in Mr Khan Sabur as a political leader. It is true that Mr Khan had always been publicly opposed to the Awami League, had always asserted his faith in the ideology of Pakistan. But, if a fraction of what I heard was true, how could the public have confidence in him? The wide disparity between his professions and his practice naturally struck people as a shocking instance of political hypocrisy, and as the rumors about this gained currency, disenchantment with what was termed the sacred ideals of Pakistan grew.

Mr Khan Sabur was hardly an all-East Pakistan, much less a national figure. His influence was confined to the Khulna area. Those who knew said he had a fairly powerful hold upon this region. The Awami League had of course swept him off in the General Elections of 1970, but every one agreed that Mr Khan Sabur retained quite a sizable following in Khulna. As I heard this, I again wondered how he could, in spite of his record, still have followers. Some clue to the

secret of his influence was provided by the adulation which he received from two men in this jail, both erstwhile protégés. One was Mr Aftabuddin, the mill-owner, and the other Mr Ibrahim Hussain. I was told that the former in particular owed everything he had to Mr Khan Sabur's patronage, and was one of the few who had not forgotten his favours. Mr Ibrahim Hussain's attachment was partly political. Not a profound thinker, he took Mr Sabur to be sincerely what he affected to be, an idealist of the rightist school, fallen now on evil days because of his unswerving loyalty to his ideals. The devotion of both was touching, and I felt that a person who could inspire such loyalty could not be dismissed as a mere nobody. However, he might have procured this loyalty; it was in politics a great asset. And not in politics only. For whatever the context the ability to command the loyalty of fellowmen is an exceptional gift worthy of praise.

But the sort of patronage that men like Mr Khan Sabur used could be employed for limited purposes only and was no counterweight to the lack of political honesty and personal character. That is where they failed so notably. High office (Mr Khan Sabur had been a member of the Pakistan Cabinet and enjoyed enormous powers) did not avail to offset the shortcomings, and to the end he remained a small man, concerned with intrigues and cliques, more anxious to stop a rival like Mr Munim Khan from becoming more powerful than he was than to plan a strategy for the defence of Pakistan. In jail he sometimes spoke bitterly of his sufferings, saying how he longed to die rather than face further humiliation, but we heard that he had secretly been trying to reach an accommodation with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The idealism of Mr Fazlul Qadir Chowdhury, who died in prison in July 1973 was less open to exception. He was better known throughout this region than Mr Khan Sabur and was more of a national figure. Whereas Mr Khan Sabur could not in his own right as a politician, have obtained a hearing from audiences outside his own area, this was not true of Mr Chowdhury. A six-footer, quite a giant of a man, he commanded a presence which was impossible to ignore. It is not that people did not say that he has not used his official position and influence to make money. But no one said he was a confirmed

criminal like Mr Khan Sabur; no stories of sex perversion were spread about him. A man from Chittagong, where he enjoyed a personal popularity transcending party differences, he had in his ways some of the coarseness and vulgarity of the common folk of his area. He guffawed loudly and was prone to descend to personalities. The worst criticism about him that I have heard was that he was a bully. But those who knew him intimately declared that underneath a rough exterior Mr Fazlul Qadir Chowdhury had a soft and generous heart. But what redeemed in the public's eye his failings such as they were was his unwavering loyalty to the ideology of Pakistan which he had embraced in his early life. He had consistently followed the Muslim League, and when the party split during the Ayub regime, he had chosen to join the officially backed faction called the Convention League. What was of greater importance was that his faith in the ideals of Pakistan had shown no cracks till the end.

That was perhaps the reason why I felt rather disappointed and a little shocked when on the day his trial opened he made a statement in court compromising his position as a Pakistani leader. He said he had supported Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his declaration of independence. The statement, intended as a defence against charges of treason and murder, all trumped up, could hardly have made any difference to the judge's verdict in the circumstances which prevail today (1973), but it lowered Mr Chowdhury in our eyes and saddened us. Though it was absolutely clear from his conversation afterwards that his convictions had not changed, his action in court, the result probably of a temporary panic, pointed to a fundamental weakness in Muslim politics. Could one imagine a Congress leader of comparable stature in pre-1947 days getting panicky in the same way? Some of them preferred to be hanged rather than recant. But not for Mr Chowdhury the courage, heroism and valour of a martyr. Now that he is dead, I often recall with regret this blot on his otherwise unblemished record as a loyal Pakistani.

Mr A. T. M. Matin who had once been elected Deputy Speaker of the Pakistan National Assembly was rather a businessperson than a professional politician. Apart from the fact that he had held high office

for a short period, he had no title either to fame in his own right or to eminence.

There was something rather unattractive about him. It wasn't certainly his looks. His features not very distinguished though, were not uncommonly ugly. But there was an indefinable air of smallness about him, which struck most people. Outwardly, he was very religious. He spent the greater part of the day and also the night in prayer, but his devotions inspired no admiration, for he succeeded in generating the suspicion that he was a hypocrite, more concerned to create an impression than anxious to go through religious exercises from a sense of conviction. When he talked he pretended to have held views which, if followed, would have prevented the tragedy in which we are involved. Mr Matin was in the same block with me for several months. But I never felt drawn towards him. We sensed that there was an invisible barrier between us which made communication impossible. Mr Matin was a bundle of superstitions, dreaded crows as harbingers of evil, and tried frantically to drive them off if they landed on the roof-top. He was also a believer in evil spirits and some of the prayers he said were designed to ward them off. These were accompanied with gesticulations of various sorts.

His political views appeared to be a tissue of contradictions. He inveighed against the political unwisdom of Field Marshal Ayub Khan and strongly as he deplored the treachery of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, occasionally he would utter sentiments in respect of the treatment of East by West Pakistan which were difficult to differentiate from the Awami League creed. He was continually sending emissaries to the Prime Minister at the same time that he condemned him as an Indian agent.

How exactly should one calibrate him? I must do him the justice of stating that Mr Matin did not look forward to a political future. But it is his political past, such as it was, which showed to what depths Pakistani politics had fallen.

Mr Nasiruddin Chowdhury whose claim to eminence rested on the fact that he had once served as a minister in one of the successive provincial cabinets which had ruled before Ayub Khan abrogated the Constitution, was far more outspoken than Mr Matin. His personal

habits were disgusting. Of hygiene and cleanliness he had no idea. His filthiness was not accounted for by his comparative poverty. He would quite unashamedly pick up cigarette-ends from the floor and smoke or chew them; would eat any leftovers however dirty; seldom washed his clothes, and used the same *lungi* for days on end without the slightest effort to keep it clean. His behaviour showed signs of abnormality. But I found his political views free from cant and hypocrisy. In his defence of the ideology of Pakistan, he was never apologetic like Mr A. T. M. Matin, nor did he ever give the impression of having been influenced by Awami League propaganda about disparities between East and West Pakistan. He gave one day a reasoned analysis of the politics of East Pakistan which struck me as one of the best I had heard. There were times when one could not help loathing him but there were also times when one admired the strength of his convictions.

There were many others, abler than Mr Nasiruddin Chowdhury who lacked his convictions. Mr Abdul Matin of Pabna, whom we used to call Millionaire Matin to distinguish him from his namesake, Abdul Matin was a wealthy person with a long record as a politician. A self-made man, he had risen to affluence from very small beginnings, and his manners betrayed a vulgarity and coarseness which many found repellent. I tried to swallow his daily boasts about his wealth with the tolerance of a Chaucer. They amused me. As a politician, millionaire Matin was interested in elections and tactics, but I seldom had the feeling that he understood or cared about principles. Circumstances had induced him to cast his lot in with the Muslim League, but he could probably have fitted in with the Awami League equally well. I am not trying to throw doubt on his loyalty as a Pakistani. I mean that a person like him without strong intellectual convictions, who had been attracted to the League fold by the prospect of business opportunities, might as well have joined any other party with the same opportunities to offer. Mr Matin had a habit of spreading the wildest rumours with the assurance that they were incontrovertible truths, and though on almost every occasion the rumours were exploded and found to be without a shred of fact in them, he remained incorrigible.

Of the groups of lawyers detained in the area around Seven Cells, the best known in Dacca was Mr Shafiqur Rahman. Every one

respected him for his professional integrity and competence. When there were questions of law to discuss, we all consulted him. He was very helpful, going even to the length of drafting our statements for us. Deeply religious, quiet, with an equable temper, Mr Shafiqur Rahman was the perfect antithesis of the usual run of politicians in this country who believe that being noisy is an essential part or a politician's gifts. He is the one person who succeeded triumphantly in avoiding till the end squabbles with fellow prisoners. He had all the gifts that success in politics demands. But he was too quiet, too sober. Reason and passion are both equally important in political life, and it is passion that he seemed to lack. He would, as he often did, impress the judges in Court, but to rouse a crowd to action, one needed something else which was wanting in him.

Crowds are seldom interested in logical analysis; they demand fiery rhetoric and are moved by appeals to such sentiments as hatred and patriotism. Brutus, the philosopher in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* proved no match for Antony. Mr Shafiqur Rahman would make an excellent behind-the-scenes broker but I doubt judging from the temper of our people, whether people like him would cut much of a figure in public life. Which may be a pity, but it is no use imagining our public to be different from what they are.

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## CHAPTER VI

After I was transferred from Seven Cells to the block known as New Twenty, I came in contact with several other men who had played an important part in East Pakistan politics. They were Dr Abdul Malik, the last Governor of East Pakistan, Mr Akhtaruddin, a member of the Malik Cabinet, Khawaja Khairuddin, President of the East Pakistan Council Muslim League, and Maulana Nuruzzaman also a Council Leaguer. The youngest in this group was Mr Akhtaruddin, who was in his middle forties. I had known him as a student in the University. He was a member of the team of four students whom I led to Burma on a goodwill mission in 1953. Dr Malik has been known to me personally since 1962 when he was Pakistan's Ambassador in the Philippines. It was during a visit to Manila in that year that I came to have some insight into his political views. Deeply religious, he had then warned me that Pakistan's overtures to China following the Sino-Indian conflict, might prove embarrassing in the long run. Wasn't Pakistan, he asked, playing a dangerous game in trying to form an alliance with a communist state which rejected the very basis of Pakistan's existence, namely, religion?

I know there are no simple answers to political questions. China turned out in 1971 to be a strong friend. Yet it is questionable whether the leftist forces would have been as strong as they are today if the Pakistan government, because of the orientation of its foreign policy, had not given the leftists the patronage they received so openly. Communist literature was officially propagated; the idea that communism was panaceas was allowed officially to be cultivated. The government's theory was that by so doing it would help strengthen Sino-Pakistani relations. It did, but the leftists who did not all belong to the Chinese school joined hands with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in breaking Pakistan up in 1971.

Dr Malik was a man of great integrity. Never accused during his long political career of corruption and dishonesty, he had been one of the trusted lieutenants of the Quaid-e-Azam who was included in the first Pakistan Cabinet. There was scarcely an aspect of Muslim League politics which he did not know. Among those surviving today,

his knowledge of the difficulties and problems besetting the new state of Pakistan in the late forties is unrivalled, Dr Malik had never been a popular politician. Interested mainly in labour movements, he had an intimate acquaintance with trade unionism. Quiet, sober and steadfast, he had among political opponents earned a sobriquet which was both a term of vilification and a compliment; he was called Malik the obstinate, Dr Malik had once been in the Congress and taken part in mass movement, but had never been quite a front-bencher. Successive administrations sought his co-operations; he was readily trusted. What he lacked, his critics said, was the ability to get great imaginative projects launched and executed. He was too quiet. I noticed a temperamental likeness between him and Mr Shafiqur Rahman who is of course much younger.

Dr Malik's appointment as governor in the difficult period of 1971 had been due to a number of factors. Mr Nurul Amin is believed to have refused that office; others proved much too controversial. Dr Malik alone among the possible names had the courage to face the responsibilities of the position. But everybody said that someone slightly different would have met the needs of the hour better. It is perhaps true that he failed to arouse in the public any enthusiasm over the Pakistan issue; but could anyone else have stemmed the tide? His choice of Ministers proved unfortunate. They were perfect non-entities of whom with one or two exceptions the public had never heard before. They neither commanded their confidence nor did they have the competence to discharge the routine duties of their office satisfactorily. Dr Malik's defence was that he had tried his best to select a team whose honesty and integrity would be unimpeachable. But his judgment had erred even here. For among his ministers were men like Mr Abul Qasem neither noted for his honesty nor possessing that strength of conviction which is such an asset in a crisis, was Mr Obaidullah Majumdar a rank Awami Leaguer. His inclusion was intended to demonstrate to the world that a reaction against the extremism of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had set in among his own followers. But actually it had a contrary effect. People thought that only a handful of self-seekers and opportunists had been found to join the Cabinet. The 'credibility gap', as they now-a-days say, between

Cabinet and public was definitely widened by the conduct of these obscure politicians.

Like Mr Obaidullah, Mujumdar, Mr Solaiman, Labour minister in the Malik Cabinet, was a supporter of the Awami League thesis on East and West Pakistan relations. During his trial he made a long statement in Court expounding his political philosophy, which was, to those who did not know his his background, an unpleasant surprise. Not only did he say that he subscribed to the same political views as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; he asserted that he had been forced to join the Malik Cabinet by the Army who would have shot him if he had refused. This was wholly untrue. Neither the public outside nor the Court believed him. By resorting to a falsehood of this kind, he only exposed himself to ridicule.

Mr Akhtaruddin was next to Dr Malik himself perhaps the only man who sincerely believed what he professed. But he had no standing in politics. He was not, however a wholly obscure figure. He used to be looked upon as an up and coming figure, likely to merge into the limelight in the future, but he was far from being a person who could command the allegiance of a sizeable body of opinion in East Pakistan.

What I am trying to convey is that the Malik Cabinet despite its intentions, was terribly handicapped by its mediocrity. The ministers did not draw crowds, their speeches inspired no idealism; their actions produced no thrills. The Cabinet had been sworn-in in September 1971 at a time when the internal crisis in the country was rapidly moving to a climax. Its existence made little difference to the situation. Had its members been more forceful personalities, the charge that they were puppets could not have been cast in their teeth by the enemy.

Naturally, the choice of these men to guide the country's destinies at this difficult juncture reflected little credit on the governor. The failings of the ministers had to be atoned for vicariously by him.

In his conversations with us, Dr Malik sometimes admitted that that the men selected by him had not been the best possible; he showed himself completely disillusioned about some.

Prison had only steeled his own political convictions. He was more religious than ever before. He said that Pakistan's cardinal

blunder consisted in its failure to realize what a grievous mistake it was to deviate from the ideals of its founder. When the word Islam became a mere political label, when religion came to be invoked as a weapon even by hypocrites who openly defied its injunctions in speech and action alike, then it was that the public who instinctively recall from hypocrisy and can't revolted.

Maulna Nuruzzaman turned out to be the boyhood friend of one of my cousins. I had heard of him, and had imagined him to be an old bearded savant. He had a beard, of course, but it was not very impressive. His figure had an athletic look about it; there was hardly any sign of fat in his body; he appeared sprightly, I rather lean, and supple. His movements, brisk and hurried detracted from the conventional image of a religious leader as a grave and serious person, soft-spoken and tolerant. The Maulana possessed a powerful vocabulary of invective and was prone to employ it against his rivals. He found it difficult to relate an anecdote---and he knew a large number---without resort to expletives and swear-words, which lent it colour but shocked more inhibited people. He had been connected with the Jamiat-Ulama-e-Islam which had been set up as a counterpoise to the Congress-minded Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Hind, and this connection had enabled him to make the acquaintance of a large number of All-India religious figures. Maulana Nuruzzaman had always been in the Muslim League until expelled from it by political enemies and thereafter he had gravitated towards the Pakistan Democratic Party. He owned his detention in prison to his ideological affiliations alone; for he could not be accused of any of the offences listed in the Collaborators Order.

The Maulana was a friendly figure, knew English fairly well and appeared to be very different from the average Mullah or divine. On better acquaintance I discovered however that family background (he was descended from a line of divines) and education had given him a rather narrow outlook; it was rather difficult to discuss religious matters rationally with him. He was a literalist or fundamentalist; he wanted no allegorical or symbolic interpretation to be put on the Quran or the Hadith, and felt infuriated if anyone did so. Literalism was carried by him to lengths where it bordered on the absurd. Passages in

the Quran whose context suggested that they were intended to convey some truth symbolically would be taken by him to mean exactly what the words appeared to connote lexically. If anyone hinted that they were susceptible of a different interpretation he would howl, protest and express alarm at the decline of the Faith. Some of us wilfully said things which we knew would wound the Maulana's feelings; it was amusing to watch his reactions. I used to quote Shakespeare and Freud occasionally to counter his arguments, and I believe he felt really hurt at the thought that any Muslim would invoke non-Muslim writers to make a point in discussions or religion or philosophy.

Maulana Nuruzzaman, despite his knowledge of English, was at heart not markedly different from the traditional divines in our society who showed an utter ignorance of all modern thought. A person may reject modern thought, as many Catholic teachers do, yet not be an obscurantist; he would study modern trends in philosophy, try to understand them and then reject them. On the other hand, one may blindly cling to an old mode of thinking by refusing to face modern challenges or by being wholly unaware of them. It is to the second category that Maulana Nuruzzaman belonged. Listening to him one could guess how and why religious scholars in modern society had alienated the sympathy of educated youth. The trouble with them was that they could not speak to University-trained young men and women in their idiom. The communication barrier was a formidable one. The scepticism so natural to youth was condemned by them outright as atheism or apostasy. Their attitude, harsh and unbending, led many inquiring minds to drift away from orthodoxy. They could preach to the converted. It was impossible for them to realise that arguments based entirely on the Quran and Hadith could be employed effectively only for those who unquestioningly accepted their authority. Non-Muslims and sceptics needed to be convinced by an appeal to something else, and in this the divines were wholly wanting. To try and silence a critic by reference to a solemn passage in the Quran is a futile exercise, if the critic is a non-Muslim or a rationalist Muslim.

Maulana Nuruzzaman persuaded me once to study a book on Islam by Maulana Abdul Khaliq and a series of lectures by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi. Both works answered to the description of

devotional literature, and were from my point of view disappointing, the first less so than the second. Maulana Khaliq had addressed himself exclusively to the very devout and was concerned only to restate the basic tenets of the Faith for their edification. Maulana Thanvi, on the other hand, had the attitude of a person who believed that his discourses would allay the doubts and misgivings of doubters and waverers; he would in places invoke history and philosophy to emphasise a point. But I had all along the feeling that he completely ignored the existence of the world outside Islam. His knowledge of general history did not strike me as profound; nor did the discourses I read show that he was well versed in modern logic and philosophy. I may be entirely wrong, for I am judging him by the few discourses which had come my way, and have not yet read his major works. I was impressed by this style though. I could see how, given a God fearing Muslim audience, he could make a tremendous impact on it.

The divorce between theology and contemporary thought has gone further among Indian and Pakistani Muslims than among any other comparable community. Muhammad Iqbal seems to have been the only exception. But he was not a theologian, and although his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* helped thousands of educated Muslims to see the basic issues of Islam in a new light, it did little to open the eyes of the orthodox theologians themselves. They for their part were so alarmed by the implications of Iqbal's thinking that a section among them condemned him as a heretic exactly as their forefathers had condemned Sir Syed Ahmad Khan as a heretic in the nineteenth century. The trouble seems to me to be that they do not or are incapable of differentiating essentials from non-essentials in Islam, and fear that any criticism of non-essentials implies an attack on the essentials also.

Time and again Maulana Nuruzzaman would astonish me by advancing what appeared to me to be wholly puerile propositions. These could not possibly survive logical scrutiny. But that little bothered the Maulana. I find it possible to admire the unalloyed simplicity of an unlettered person's beliefs. Such simplicity can often be touching. The simplicity of the Maulana was of a different kind, compounded in almost equal proportions of the child-like faith of the

unlettered and the ignorance of the semi-literate. He thought that to apply one's critical faculties to the elucidation of religious issues was dangerous tendency apt to lead to heresy or apostasy.

I have intentionally devoted a great deal of space to Maulana Nuruzzaman, for he seems to me to typify an important class in our society. Their utility cannot be denied outright; yet they seem also to have been responsible for much that is undesirable.

Having said all this, I must admit that I learnt a great deal from the Maulana about the background of our politics. He knew a great many sordid details about the personal lives of men prominent in the public eye, details of which I had been wholly unaware but which now helped me to understand much that had been incomprehensible before. Listening to him, I often marvelled at my own naiveté and simplicity in matters political. He debunked many imposing and august personages, and did so with such circumstantial proof in support of his thesis that it was impossible to disagree with him. He had little respect for either the learning or the practical commonsense of the late Dr Shahidullah, and regaled us with many anecdotes bearing on his foolishness. The best of these concerned a discussion in Islamic theology, in the course of which Dr Shahidullah is reported to have invoked repeatedly the authority of *Sharh-i-Baqaya*, a famous commentary on a standard theological work. Maulana Ishaq is said to have pointed out that instead of consulting the Sharh or commentary, they could more usefully turn to the original book for guidance. Upon this, Dr Shahidullah inquired what the Baqaya was. He had never heard of the original book, and had unthinkingly taken the words *Sharh-i-Baqaya* or Commentary on the Baqaya to be the title of an original work, which showed how shallow Dr Shahidullah's knowledge of theology was. The Baqaya is so well-known a work that not to have heard of it was a surprise. It is also considered so difficult that most people consult the commentary rather than the original. Dr Shahidullah appears to have belonged to this group.

There were other stories of this kind about Dacca University teachers of thirty or thirty-five years ago which I enjoyed enormously. They helped me re-live that past; a past which now seems almost prehistoric. Shared memories can be a wonderful bond, and both

Maulana Nuruzzaman and myself felt that cutting across our philosophical differences there existed between us a tie forged by these memories of the past.

Politically, he did not appear to me to understand in concrete terms what he wanted. He always relapsed into vagueness when pressed to explain what he meant by Islamic administration. I used to tell him off and on that while loyalty to Islam was certainly to be welcomed, it could not be of much help in practical politics unless translated into such concrete realities as rights, duties and obligations. He considered such an exercise superfluous. The rights, duties and obligations were, he held, clearly enumerated in the Quran, and what need could there exist of further elaboration? To the objection that the Quran refers only to universal principles and seldom discusses details, he had no answer. He thought what is stated in the Quran was adequate and refused to countenance further investigation. At this point, his temper would register a change, he would begin to look offended, and I would withdraw feeling that a quarrel over abstractions was not worthwhile in prison. It was impossible to extract from him a satisfactory explanation of how political and economic problems in a modern society would be tackled in conformity with Islam's tenets.

The truth is that most of those who believed in Islam as a practical code were content to be vague and abstract and feared to be drawn into discussion on concrete issues. They were incapable of logical analysis or definition. The apparent conflict between Quranic commandments and the principles drawn from modern political theory frightened them, and they suspected that those who spoke of modern theories were at heart sceptics.

I found this tendency also in Khwaja Khairuddin who was my next door neighbour in New Twenty for about four months. I had never known him before except by name, but in a few days we became good friends, discovering that we share many attitudes. We had the same horror of physical uncleanness, a common weakness for cheese, and a shared faith in the validity of Islam. He understood and sympathised with my eagerness to view Islam in the light of modern thought, although his outlook was far more orthodox than mine. He was also much better read in the theology and early history of Islam

than I was; his knowledge of Urdu, his mother tongue, gave him in this respect a decided advantage over me enabling him to read standard works on theology which, with my inadequate command of Urdu, I found it difficult to tackle.

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## CHAPTER VII

Khwaja Khairuddin was a member of the Ahsan Manzil family, closely related to the late Khwaja Nazimuddin, Governor General and later Prime Minister of Pakistan. He had become President of the Council Muslim League in East Pakistan. Among the surviving politicians of the old school, he was the most popular in the city of Dacca and commanded a personal following transcending party labels. He had been Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's chief antagonist in the elections of 1970, had lost but the large number of votes cast for him had given some measure of his personal popularity. Having been Vice-Chairman of the Dacca Municipality for a long time, he knew the city inside out, and was considered even now (1973) to be a dangerous person who could perhaps sway popular opinion against the Awami League.

When I arrived at New Twenty, his trial had already begun. He showed me the statement he had prepared for delivery under Section 342, and readily accepted the few amendments and additions I suggested. It was a bold document. I was struck by its refreshing candour. Of course, like all statements of this kind, it contained some rhetoric but what distinguished it from the statements of Dr Malik and some of his ministers was that its author made no secret of his faith in Pakistan and Islam and put no deceptive gloss on the part he had played in the conflict of 1971. He said he believed in democracy and had opposed the dictatorship of Ayub Khan, but could not conceive of carrying his opposition to the point of destroying Pakistan. Painting a lurid picture of the horrors of Civil War unleashed by the Awami League and of the sufferings in terms of life and property that had followed, he asked whether those who like him had rejected the Awami League creed did not today stand fully vindicated.

When he prepared his statement, Khwaja Khairuddin was little aware of the effect it would produce on the public outside. His argument against those who had advised caution had been that whatever he said would make no difference to the judge's verdict, and he saw no reason why he should unnecessarily disgrace himself by disowning his past and resorting to hypocrisy. Events proved him

right. Thousands flocked to the Court to watch his trial; his boldness, his frankness, his refusal to recant struck a responsive chord in their hearts. The feelings of remorse which agitated their minds, their reaction against Awami League corruption, tyranny, found a vicarious outlet in Mr Khairuddin's criticism of the present regime. We heard daily from him of strangers greeting him in court and in the mosque where he said his early (Zohr) afternoon prayers, of people vying with one another for the honour of shaking his hand.

We heard before vaguely of a change in the climate of political opinion outside. The reports that Khwaja Khairuddin brought almost daily from Court confirmed the impression we had been developing. What did these signs portend? Could it be true that people had got disenchanted with their Sonar Bangla so soon?

The boldness of Khwaja Khairuddin's court statement was well matched by the nonchalance and unconcern with which he viewed the court proceedings. The prospect of a long term in prison, most probably twenty years, did not spoil his good humour or interfere with his enjoyment of good food. I admired the resilience which enabled him to switch his mind off from lawyer's arguments and judge's remarks without the least appearance of effort.

He was frankly and openly a kind of *bon viveur*, fond of good food, good talk and good company. He spoke with pride of his ancestry, claimed that he was a politician by right of birth and thought that his antecedents gave him privileges denied others. He genuinely believed himself a true aristocrat. I think that despite his courtesy, which was not affected and reflected good breeding, there was a slight disdain in his attitude towards those not as well-born as himself. He referred to money with an air of frankness which was unorthodox, talked with unashamed nostalgia about the wealth and grandeur of the Ahsan Manzil family in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and even spoke of his father's indulgences with some pride, implying that wine and women were the natural prerogatives of the rich, to which only the prudish poor could object. For his own part he said repeatedly that he was a teetotaller and had never had any affairs with women since his marriage.

I listened to all this with interest and tried mentally to size him up. Much as the leftists may inveigh against the privileges of birth, it is impossible to deny that in our society, constituted as it is, a person such as the Khwaja enjoyed certain natural advantages. The common people with long collective memories looked up to him as a man fitted to lead. It was these advantages that his ancestors had fully exploited. Of those who had gone into politics, three alone possessed exceptional gifts, Khwaja Salimullah, Khwaja Nazimuddin and Khwaja Shahabuddin.

Nawab Salimullah who helped found the Muslim League in 1906 was a truly gifted man with a vision. It was he who had worked tirelessly to get the province of East Bengal and Assam launched, realising that what the under-privileged Muslims of East Bengal needed was a habitat freed from the political and economic domination of the Calcutta Hindus. Khwaja Nazimuddin had a good education and had worked his way up from municipal politics. Though people sometimes called him a mediocrity, no one questioned his competence or honesty. His younger brother Khwaja Shahabuddin had received hardly any formal education but was regarded as one of the shrewdest of men. He rose by dint of merit to the position of governor of the N. W. F. P. in Pakistan. The others from this family, such as Syed Abdus Salim, Syed Abdul Hafiz, Khwaja Nasrullah, Kalu Mian Saheb and Nawab Habibullah dominated the political scene by right of birth alone. Their scheming, manipulations and stratagems at a period when Muslims of good family counted for a force to reckon with, no matter what their personal qualifications opened doors not accessible to others. The franchise in those days was limited; constituencies from which members were elected to the Bengal legislature were in fact pocket boroughs which could be made to return whomsoever the dominant group in the province favoured.

The Ahsan Manzil family began to face a serious challenge in 1935 when the franchise was extended to include elements not quite loyal to the landed aristocracy. The defeat of Khwaja Nazimuddin by Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq in the elections of 1936 constituted a landmark in provincial politics in that it pointed to a definite shift in popular sentiment. But the family's political ascendancy finally ended with the

general elections of 1954 when the Muslim League was virtually wiped off the slate. The Khwajas as a group had no position in the United Front, the coalition of political parties which won those elections, but individually they continued to function as political entities. Khwaja Shahabuddin held ministerial office under President Ayub Khan, and when the question arose of organising an opposition to the Convention Muslim League of the President, it was on Khwaja Nazimuddin that the choice fell.

Regardless of changes in the provincial scene, the Ahsan Manzil family had continued till the elections of 1970 to enjoy in the city of Dacca a popularity which, as I have said before, cut across party labels. When Khwaja Khairuddin and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman engaged in a straight tight, many predicted that here at least the Sheikh would suffer a reverse. He won by a big margin, but it is doubtful whether the victory was real or fictitious. The elections had been rigged; the Awami League had resorted openly to intimidation and impersonation on a large scale. The same thing had happened elsewhere too. As the reaction to Khwaja Khairuddin's trial showed, his popularity had not been wholly reversed, and now that the reigning party's hold on the country was weakening, it was beginning to rise to the surface again.

Whether this popularity, in which gratitude for personal favours received from either the Khwaja himself or his family was a component element, signified support for the principles for which he stood, could not be said with certainty. Those principles could be broadly divided into two categories. First, there was his conviction that Pakistan had been a piece of exceptional good luck for the Muslims which they had failed to preserve. As far as this went, one had reason to believe that public sentiment in 1973 had decidedly swung over to those who subscribed to this view. But it is not clear, as I write, whether people in general want to return to the paternalism of the old days, with a few families like the Khwajas determining the country's fate among themselves. This was also what he partly supported.

Khwaja Khairuddin sometimes gave the impression of believing that modern economic theories were all wrong. As a man with an intimate acquaintance with municipal politics, as a

businessman fully conversant with the mysteries of letters or credit and foreign exchange accounts, he knew at first hand how economic forces operated. But it seemed to me---- I may be wholly wrong---- that he had no conceptual understanding of these forces, and tended to underrate the demands for equality or socialism. He believed in Islamic Justice, and spoke glowingly of the example set by the *Khulafa-e-Rashidin*, but like Maulana Nuruzzaman seldom let his mind dwell on the implications of Islamic justice in a modern context. He would often quote a verse from the Quran or a saying of the Prophet to illustrate a point and emphasise how insistent Islam was on the removal of inequalities and economic wrongs. This was all to the good, but provided no answer to the problem of applying these excellent ideas in a modern society. Reconstruction on Islamic lines sounds inspiring as a slogan but unless one thinks out the details, such enthusiasm is likely to be no good.

There was of course a vital difference between him and Maulana Nuruzzaman. The latter was wholly unresponsive to modern thought; Khwaja Khairuddin was not. I remember in this connection a discussion on the meaning of the word Truth in the light of the Quran. I had said---- rather indiscreetly, it now seems--- that the Quran calls upon men to probe the realities around them and understand them in the light of their intellect. The Maulana took this to mean that science in my view had a supremacy over the revealed word of God, and insisted that nothing could be less true. Science's function, he maintained, was a subordinate one, and where a conflict between reason and faith was evident, man must unhesitatingly prefer faith to reason. As he talked on, the Maulana's tone became almost acrimonious. I realised that I had inadvertently used words which had touched him on the raw, and that no useful purpose would be served by continuing the discussion. Khwaja Khairuddin was a listener, and I guessed from a word or two that he occasionally flung in, that his own attitude was far more flexible than the Maulana's.

I discovered one day that Khwaja Khairuddin despite his criticism of communism had never read a book on the subject. I persuaded him to read Crew Hunt's *Theory and Practice of Communism*, of which I had a copy in jail. It was the right kind of

literature for one who did not wish to be converted to communism but wanted a fair resume of the arguments for and against it. Maulana Nuruzzaman would have considered time spent on such a book a total waste.

The chief deficiency in Khwaja Khairuddin as a politician was his ignorance of Bengali. It is not that he does not know the language at all. He speaks it fairly fluently with an accent, but the dialect he uses is Colloquial Dacca, which is not what is employed for written communication. He cannot read the language, though when newspapers and books are read to him he can understand most of the material. It seems to me that his failure to master Bengali in an area where Bengali was spoken even before the tragedy of 1971 by over ninety-five per cent of the population was symptomatic of the complacency of Pakistani leaders. Khwaja Nazimuddin, Khwaja Shahabuddin and others from the Ahsan Manzil family had never bothered to acquire Bengali except of the rudest variety, and it was this fact that the Awami League exploited in full measure in its campaign against them and against the Muslim League. As the tide of linguistic nationalism rose in East Pakistan, these people appeared less and less and an integral part of the provincial scene, and it was possible to stigmatise them as agents of Urdu imperialism.

Mr Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy knew even less Bengali than the Khwajas, but clever man that he was he overcame the shortcoming by himself fanning the names of regionalism. Such was the effect produced that most people do not even remember today that Mr. Suhrawardy was perfectly innocent of the regional language.

Now the fact that neither Khwaja Khairuddin nor other members of his family who were involved in politics ever thought of acquiring Bengali is an instance both of amazing short-sightedness and of linguistic arrogance. It is true that there was a time, not too long ago, when the Muslims of this area contemplated adopting Urdu as their cultural language. It is also true that there had always existed in some urban centres in Bengal such as Dacca and Murshidabad small Urdu-speaking pockets. But Bengal had been for centuries overwhelmingly Bengali-speaking. A politician who had to depend on people's suffrage cannot except at his own peril ignore this truth. In

the nineteenth century, even right down to the times of Nawab Salimullah, when the character of politics was aristocratic, it little mattered what language leaders at the top spoke; they were treated by the populace as demigods, privileged beings who could use any dialect they pleased and yet claim the allegiance of their followers. But this position began to change the moment the question arose of seeking popular support for views advocated by the leaders. You could not have an effective hold on your following if you had to employ interpreters as intermediaries. The public made allowances for those like Maulana Muhammad Ali or the Quaid-i-Azam who did not belong to the province. But how could a local leader expect to be believed when he said he had identified himself completely with the interests of the local people if he did not speak the local language?

To believe that the Ahsan Manzil family did not understand this simple truth would be an affront to their intelligence. But I am persuaded that what prevented them from acting upon it and adopting a more realistic outlook was linguistic arrogance, a survival from the belief that the Muslims of the sub-continent had but one cultural *lingua franca*, which was Urdu, and that local languages could never have the prestige or importance which attached to it. Whatever justification such a belief might have had in the nineteenth century, it ceased to be relevant in the twentieth, at least in the eastern parts of the subcontinents. Those who did not recognise this truth clung vainly to an illusion. How tragic in its consequences the illusion turned out to be is known to those conversant with the history of the language movement in East Pakistan.

One had sometimes the feeling that even in prison Khwaja Khairuddin did not fully comprehend the important part that language had played in the collapse of Pakistan. I never heard him, when he tried to chart his future planning to master Bengali. He thought occasionally of migrating to Karachi but this was only in moments of despair. His roots, he said time and again, were in Bengal and unless forced by circumstances to leave, he could not easily reconcile himself to the thought of giving up Dacca for good. But he showed no serious awareness of the hard truth that whatever happened, persons who

dreamt of engaging in any meaningful work in this area had to have a command of the local language.

But these shortcomings notwithstanding, he seemed to me the only person now surviving who because of his personality and outlook could possibly do something to arrest the drift towards anarchy and paganism, the only person around whom elements opposed to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would willingly rally.

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## CHAPTER VIII

Another promising man in New Twenty was Mr Akhtaruddin Ahmad. A barrister by profession, he had married into the Ahsan Manzil family, his wife being the daughter of Khwaja Nasrullah, son of Nawab Salimullah. He was in his middle forties. His family belonged to Barisal district.

I noticed that he had turned extremely religious. What surprised me even more was that in his reaction against the indifference towards religion of his earlier days, he had swung over to a form of religious bigotry and superstition. Not knowing any Arabic and not having much knowledge of religious texts even in translation, he had begun to develop an uncritical reverence for everything associated with them. In his present frame of mind, he was deeply suspicious of rationalism in any form; he would not condemn even the wildest pranks of Muslim fanatics, lest he should offend against some unknown canon.

A discussion one day on what is meant by civilisation revealed how far his surrender to faith had taken him. He argued that we had no right to regard even the most primitive communities as uncivilised. Did they not possess feelings of love, sympathy and charity? Did they not in their own ways worship God? I pointed out that while love, sympathy and charity were undoubtedly essential to civilisation, the word had another signification which implied the possession by the civilised of certain material goods and technical skills. Thus a community which did not know the use of metals or the wheel, which did not know agriculture or how to build houses, could be designated as primitive and uncivilised. Mr Akhtaruddin emphatically disagreed, saying that these criteria had been set up quite arbitrarily and that God did not classify communities into uncivilised and civilised. I found it difficult to pursue the argument; I realised that I was talking to someone determined not to allow what he had learnt in school and college to influence his judgement. I fell back finally upon the plea that communities which had not arrived at the acceptance of God should at least be called uncivilised, no matter what their technical

accomplishments. This seemed to satisfy him or at least helped me to get out of his labyrinthine logic.

It was this mixture of logic and unreason, of truth and fancy, that characterised Mr Akhtaruddin's attitude. In purely worldly affairs, he behaved as any lawyer like him would; he was shrewd, intelligent, bold. But mention religion and he immediately relapsed into a state which bordered on the puerile. Obviously shaken by the tragedy of 1971 and the misfortunes which had befallen him, he was seeking some relief in a surrender to religious authority, hoping to derive from this source both consolation and a solution to his troubles. People in Europe and America who join the Catholic Church after a period spent in the communist movement display the same distrust of rational thinking in religious matters. Very few defect from communism to Protestantism. Catholicism with its rejection of rationalism as a religious test provides a surer refuge from the dogmatism of Marxism. The parallels must not be stretched too far, but it helps one to understand what had happened in the case of Mr Akhtaruddin.

I watched him day after day going punctiliously through all the rituals of the Faith, praying, fasting, studying the Scriptures, listening to others reading from theological works. Yet all this left the other side of his life unaffected; it didn't appear that he valued truthfulness, kindness, courtesy, charity any more than others. When he discussed politics, he did not give the impression of approaching it from an unorthodox angle because of his piety. Here, I said to myself, was clear evidence of a dichotomy between the spiritual and the secular aspects of a man's life, such as had plagued the rulers of Pakistan for two decades. But I hoped that his intelligence, his legal training and an innate boldness in his attitude towards things would enable him to play a useful part in the future.

Of obscurantism as well as religious simplicity, the most striking instance that I came across in prison was Maulana Mukhlesur Rahman. He was best known as the founder of an orphanage at Tejgaon on the outskirts of Dacca, which was heavily bombed in December 1971 by the Indians. Over three hundred, most of them young children, are reported to have lost their lives in this raid. A man of over seventy-five, Maulana Mukhlesur Rahman was in many ways

a remarkable personality. He told us that he had been jailed seven times before. He began his life as a Congressite, drifting into the *Terrorist Movement* of the twenties (he seemed now somewhat ashamed of his association with the Terrorists, for he was reluctant to answer questions on this phase very frankly). He was connected with the *Khilafat Movement* of the thirties; it was to this that he owed his first baptism in prison life. Subsequently as far as I could gather from his conversation, he worked for the peasant movement led by Mr A.K. Fazlul Huq, retaining however his faith in the Congress ideals. Nineteen hundred and forty-six found him fighting the Muslim League on the Pakistan issue as an independent. According to his own story, he renounced politics after the establishment of Pakistan, sold his business soon after (he had been a timber merchant), and decided to devote himself to missionary work.

The Tejgaon orphanage founded by him early in the sixties combined missionary work with the care of orphans the aim being to train the children in Islam. It depended on public charity, and, before December 1971, used to provide a home for over seven hundred children and adolescents, male and female. The Maulana had gathered around him a band of dedicated workers who looked upon him as a spiritual teacher.

Wholly self-educated, Maulana Mukhlesur Rahman knew Urdu very well, could read, understand and write English, and had a good acquaintance with Arabic and Persian. He had tried, he used to say, to study all the commentaries on the Quran. Talking to him, one realised that formal education has its advantages. For the Maulana having read things unsystematically, mainly on his own, without much guidance, had developed into a curious bundle of paradoxes and contradictions, an odd mixture of learning and ignorance, a fantastic blend of enlightenment and superstition. He held, quite rightly it seemed to me, that love of one's fellow beings was of the essence of religion; he himself was kind and considerate in his behaviour. But with this went an intolerance towards anything that appeared to him contrary to the letter of the religious law. It was difficult to convince him that his own interpretation of a point might not be accurate, that there were other authoritative sources than those he knew or that one could without

being a heretic subscribe to a viewpoint entirely different from his. I got into trouble one day by saying that the ablutions insisted upon before prayer had a symbolic significance in addition to their purificatory function. They were, I said, meant to be a conscious mental preparation for the devotions. He felt upset at the use of the term 'symbolic'. It was new to him; he had never encountered it in the books he knew. His protest took the form of a solemn declaration that what I said amounted to heresy. It took me quite sometime to explain what symbolism meant but I don't believe he was satisfied. On a different occasion, irked by our attempt to place a philosophical construction on a Quranic statement, he roundly announced that philosophy was the root of all evil and its study should be banned in an Islamic society. We found some of his interpretations amusing. Thus he declared one day that he was doubtful whether singlet and *lungi*, which was our common dress in prison in the summer was the right apparel for a person praying; the Prophet had insisted on the appropriateness of a worshipper's garments. He was silenced only when it was pointed out that there was no mention of singlet or shirt in the Hadith and that any argument in favour of one or the other would be a sort of heresy. This time we beat him on his own ground.

The fact is that Maulana Mukhlesur Rahman found it both unnecessary and dangerous to think. He tried to cling for spiritual safety to what the authorities said. It never occurred to him that the authorities themselves differed on many points, and that his own selection of some of them in preference to others involved the exercise of judgement and discrimination. Occasionally his religious intolerance, limited in prison necessarily to words rather than actions most of the time, became really troublesome. He would utter plainly discourteous sentiments without bothering to understand that they could hurt.

At the same time that I am saying this, I would observe that there was in him a kind of otherworldly simplicity, naiveté and guilelessness, which won him admirers. It was not affectation. The utter helplessness he betrayed in certain matter proved it. He did not know, for instance, how to make himself a cup of milk out of milk-

powder, or how to distinguish between a cardigan meant for women and one intended for males. Canned food frightened him.

What was amazing was that this man, with his intolerance, simplicity and naiveté possessed also extra-ordinary powers of organisation. His orphanage, a ramshackle affair in many ways, was a remarkable institution, an educational experiment a combination of school and polytechnic and monastery, served loyally by his followers. They were subjected to repression after the establishment of Bangladesh on account of their attachment to Islam, pursued by the Mukti Bahini and the police, and persecuted. The orphanage was pillaged. But this experience had done little to reduce the Maulana's fervour or the ardour of his zeal. At seventy-six, he looked forward to paying a visit to Britain to open a branch of his mission.

On the subject of Pakistan, his attitude was ambivalent. He deplored the tragedy that led to its breakdown, but would repeat the crudest stories about Pakistani soldiers. He fully accepted the Awami League sponsored myth that millions of people were tortured and killed and thousands of women molested. He told me how a friend of his, an ardent Awami Leaguer had discovered in December 1971 a concentration camp for women in the Chittagong area where six hundred females, completely nude were found cowering in terror. When approached by their rescuers, they waved them away, asking them to come with clothes. An astonishing story, if true, of human cruelty and barbarity. But I asked him why such a fact had never been made public, when the Awami League went about daily saying how over two hundred thousand women had been dishonoured by the Pakistani army. A report of this sort vouched for by eye-witnesses would impress foreign audiences better than vague descriptions. Here was something in which truth outdistanced action. But the puzzling fact remained that it had been carefully withheld from the public so far. Certainly, this could not be due to any anxiety on the Awami League's part to save Pakistani soldiers from discredit. Could be that the Maulana's friend had invented the whole thing to persuade him of the wickedness of the Pakistanis?

After listening to my analysis, the Maulana agreed that what he had been told must have been pure falsehood. But his initial readiness

to swallow this astounding lie was proof both of his simplicity and of the ambivalence of his attitude towards the concept of Pakistan.

These were a cross-section of my companions in prison for two years. The more closely I watched them, the greater my feeling of isolation and loneliness. It is not that they were not friendly. Except for minor hitches on rare occasions which are perhaps unavoidable when large numbers of people from differing backgrounds are thrown together, we got on fairly well. But I felt that I little understood their minds; they for their part must have had the same feeling about me. What depressed me most of all was the realisation that we were not agreed even after the terrible experiences of 1971, on what Pakistan had meant to us.

*"We are merely cheated of our lives by drunkards."*

*-Shakespeare*

Never before in the history of the Dacca Central Jail had so many educated people been so packed into its cells. There were five Ph. D's, all University teachers; there were barristers trained abroad; one High Court Judge; several senior Civil servants; the Director General of Radio Pakistan, Dacca; a Doctor who was an M. R. C. P.; Lawyers; scores of theologians and over a hundred College and University students. These people were utterly unlike any prisoners the jail staff might have seen in the past, and caused them both embarrassment and difficulties. Hate them as they might, they knew they were not criminals and intellectually and socially much superior to themselves as well as to the present ruling clique. Of these only a very small fraction about a hundred and fifty at the most, were placed in Division I; the rest had to fend for themselves as best they might in the *Khata*.

Although we never met, except on Eid days, and that also very briefly (for we were herded back into our respective cells immediately after the prayers), news of what was happening in the *Khata*s reached us regularly through the *Faltus* who spent their nights with them. The first impression I formed on the basis of these reports was that their faith in Pakistan rested on much stronger foundations than was the

case with the better-known people, of some of whom I spoke earlier. Allowing again for hyperbole and exaggeration, it appeared that very few of these men were prepared to recant or anxious to purchase their freedom by repudiating their past. They did not regret having supported Pakistan; they did not believe that Bangladesh was a good thing; they were convinced that worse trials lay ahead; they were determined, no matter what happened, to preserve their loyalty to their ideals.

Less educated prisoners, many of whom had joined the Volunteers' Corps known as Razakars, shared this determination. Even the most persecuted ones, those whose homes had been pillaged or who had lost their parents or relations in the Civil War, showed no weakening. Their firmness was both a rebuke to weaker spirits among Division One prisoners and a comfort to those who tended to be despondent about the future. Particularly remarkable seemed to me the fortitude of a family of four brothers, the youngest a child of thirteen, who had lost their father, a brother, and a brother-in-law. All three, noted in their locality for their piety and theological learning, had been abducted and later slaughtered. The father had been the superintendent of a religious seminary, a Madrasah in Dacca district. Their house and property had also been plundered. Left behind at home were the mother, the widowed sister with several young children, and another unmarried sister. But I was amazed to notice that neither Baker, a young man of about eighteen who worked as *Faltu* for us for about a couple of months, nor his brother whom I met later betrayed the least sign of backsliding. He did not think he had been misguided in his loyalty to Islam and Pakistan; he bore his sufferings with forbearance, trusting to God's mercy and justice. Baker knew the Quran by heart. His courtesy, his patience his humility were a lesson at least to me.

I remember another young man, Mujib who looked after me for several weeks in the jail hospital. He was also an ex-Razakar. He had visited Agartala in 1971 in disguise and had seen with his own eyes how bearded Muslims suspected of Pakistani sympathies were caught and sacrificed before the goddess Kali. The experience had only redoubled his determination to free East Pakistan from the yoke of the tyrants who had subjugated it.

Baker and Mujib were typical of hundreds of young men languishing in prison on vague charges. Many of their comrades had been tortured to death after the establishment of Bangladesh. Those who found their way into prison were lucky to have escaped a worse fate. But their courage remained undaunted. The more intelligent among them had already started planning their future. They did not know when their present agony would end. A long absence in prison, of two or three or twenty years, seemed to be in prospect. But they were certain that deliverance would eventually come, and they were preparing themselves for the tasks that lay ahead.

They and their more aged compeers transformed the prison into a vast monastery by their devotions and spiritual exercises. Day and night the chanting of scriptures and the repetition of the prayers went on. They prayed in the intervals of their prison labours; those who did not know the formulae for prayer turned to others for assistance. Each evening after the cells were locked up there arose from them a chorus of voices repeating verses from the Quran from memory, the sound of congregational prayers, the rhythmic repetition of set formulae. Those who had any training in theology were persuaded to give discourses on religion. Only an insignificant minority consisting of people picked up indiscriminately from the streets who actually had nothing to do with politics did not cooperate.

In this respect there was not much of a difference between *Khata* and Division. Prisoners of either category exhibited a religious zeal remarkable for its fervour, an attachment to the institutions of prayer and fasting notable for its ardour.

Much of it was undoubtedly sincere. Many confessed that adversity had opened their eyes. Some doubtless belonged to that group of weaklings who turn to God in moments of crisis and relapse into Godlessness when the crisis passes. Freed from prison they would probably resume their old sinful ways. It is also worth remarking that as far as their general conduct was concerned, the majority did not appear to me to have undergone any sea-change. They conformed to the usual pattern so ubiquitous in our country, which was composed of religiosity, piety, hypocrisy and deceit. How could it change so quickly?

But of one thing I felt sure. There was no element of hypocrisy in their support for the ideal of Pakistan and Islam. Naturally, they understood and interpreted both in the light of their own experience and background. A sophist might trace flaws in their beliefs, a logician inconsistencies in their convictions, a materialist contradictions in their ideas. So analysed and scrutinised, very few would be seen to hold logically irrefutable beliefs. Ordinary men are not logicians or philosophers. They have only an instinctive awareness of the essence of things. Pressed to say why they prefer one set of beliefs to another, or one kind of ideology to another, they would give the most elementary arguments, the crudest theories. A well-trained theoretician could tear those arguments and theories to pieces in the twinkling of an eye. But logic and conviction are different propositions. And in the present instance these people had nothing to gain by being insincere about Pakistan. Apostasy would pay better. Some well-known persons who escaped arrest had turned a somersault and started refuting their own past utterances to ingratiate themselves with the present regime. A typical example, judging from the scanty newspaper reports reaching us in prison, was Principal Ebrahim Khan. A strong supporter of the Muslim League before 1971, a man whose fulsome flattery of President Ayub Khan had embarrassed his circle, he now in his old age, turned his back upon his past and was saying that the 'liberation' achieved by the Awami League fulfilled his own vision of the destiny of the Bengali people. Couldn't he like many others have remained silent? Or did this indeed reflect his true beliefs? Either way he revealed himself as a 'great hypocrite' a turncoat, a liar. If what he said now was true, he must have been lying during the twenty-three years that Pakistan lasted; and if his present utterances were meant to ward off his enemies and to draw a red herring across their trail, he was employing a hypocritical device for self-defence. A dignified posture of detachment and reticence would have been more appropriate at his age.

When I thought of him, I contrasted him, to his disadvantage, with his friend and contemporary, Mr Abul Kalam Shamsuddin who rose to fame in the thirties and forties as the editor of the daily Azad. No man held stronger beliefs on the question of Pakistan. There was a

time shortly after 16 December 1971, when I thought he must have been arrested or killed. But he had luckily survived. But no newspaper reported any statement or speech by him to the effect that the events of 1971 had brought him deliverance from the bondage that Pakistan was. One could sympathise with his reticence and respect him for it.

Dewan Muhammad Azraf was also playing a role not unlike Principal Ebrahim Khan's. He went about presiding over seminars and meetings in celebration of the victory of the Bengalis. He too like Mr. Ebrahim Khan had been a strong Pakistani. But he seemed more circumspect and cautious than the latter. Principal Ebrahim Khan had a daughter, Khalida Edib Khanam, who had earned notoriety in the Pakistani period as a woman of easy virtue, who used her sexual charm to seduce politicians. Newspapers reported her now issuing statements of one sort or another, calculated to draw a veil over her past and earn her the favour of the present rulers. Leopards cannot change their spots; nor can men (and women) their habits. Dramatists, poets and novelists, Homers, Dantes, Shakespeares, Moliers, Balzacs and Dickens chronicle their antics, record their acrobatics, and draw philosophical conclusions from them. But the only truth which keeps its validity down the ages, I mean the only truth about human nature is '*plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose.*'

Although the kind of heroism which defies death is rare all over the world, it is rarer in our society. There is an element of baseness in our character which prevents us from rising to great occasions, from responding to the dictates of honour, from thinking of anything but the most abject humiliations as a way out when confronted by a crisis. We recant easily; we lack firm convictions; we vacillate between right and wrong even when we know what is right and what is wrong. I shall never forget the sycophancy and hypocrisy of Rajshahi University teachers in April 1971 in the presence of the Army. The compelling motive behind the things they said and did was fear undoubtedly, but fear by itself does not wholly explain it. Men in other societies in a similar predicament have been known to behave differently. There was Nazim Mahmood, my Public Relations Officer, a rank atheist if there was one, a left-winger who surprised us all by deciding never to be without a cap in his waking hours and

punctiliously attending all congregational prayers. A born coward, he thought cap and prayer would be an ideal disguise for his pusillanimity.

It is against this background that one must judge the firmness displayed by the so-called 'Collaborators' in prison, particularly those in the *Khata*. I rejoiced to think that all our men were not poltroons, that adversity, (and it was adversity of the most tragic kind) had really steeled their nerves and strengthened their sinews. This firmness was specially discernible among men between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five with a religious background. Those trained in the seminaries called Madrasahs stood out easily as a class apart. Their cool poise, their imperturbable courage, their indomitable optimism were encouraging omens. These young men were determined not to let their ideals die.

But why had these ideals suffered what they believed to be a temporary but calamitous reverse?

There was a great deal of soul-searching in progress among us. There was no one who was not preoccupied with the analysis of the causes which had led to the present situation. Everyone thought of himself, of course, first but no one denied that his fate was bound up with the country's. Only a small group, among whom the most prominent were Mr Obaidullah Majumder and Solaiman, members of the erstwhile Malik cabinet, isolated themselves from the rest of us and openly said that they had blundered by aligning themselves with Pakistan at the moment of her death. They thought their salvation lay in confessing their crimes and obtaining a conditional absolution from the Sheikh, their surrogate for God. But the others, whose convictions were stronger, while bewailing their fate, did not know what had happened exactly.

Their assessments differed widely. Being wise after the event is a common human weakness, and many of us displayed astonishing degrees of hindsight. Mr A.T.M.A. Matin, the former Deputy Speaker, a comparatively unknown figure in the country's politics found himself able to quote chapter and verse for the advice he claimed to have given the politicians in power from time to time, which, if followed would have averted disaster. The conspiracy against Pakistan

should have been firmly nipped in the bud before it could flower into the demonstrations of 1969; Sheikh Mujibur Rahman should have been installed in power after the elections of 1970 in advance of the Constituent Assembly Session and permitted to rule and face an inevitable erosion of his popularity. Maulana Nuruzzaman maintained with great cogency that the seeds of Pakistan's disintegration lay in her failure to reconcile the practice of her rulers with the principles and ideals on which it had been founded. Some said the weakness shown in the handling of the language issue in the period from 1948 to 1950 had delivered the State into the enemy's hands. Some felt in retrospect that a quick settlement on the basis of the Awami League's Six points would have saved Pakistan. Some, while condemning the conspirators, spoke bitterly of the excesses committed by the Pakistan Army. A number of people held strongly that President Yahya and Mr Bhutto had betrayed an utter bankruptcy of statesmanship and played into Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's hands. A few thought the uprising of 1971 was made inevitable by the step-motherly treatment that East Pakistan had received from the Centre; they deplored the arrogance and political myopia of the West Pakistan leaders.

As regards the electoral crisis of 1970, opinion was divided. The fact that the parties opposed to the Awami League had failed to unite and form a joint front which could have been an alternative to it was seldom discussed, and if discussed, glossed over. The leaders seemed secretly ashamed of their part in the episode. None could say with a clean conscience that he for his part or on his party's behalf had given a lead worth following. Everybody had been guilty of the same sort of blindness and selfishness. While disaster threatened, they had bickered over trifles, over the distribution of seats, the proportion that each claimed was due to him, not realising that the danger looming ahead was likely to exterminate them all, and that only by uniting could they hope to overcome it.

The opinions these people expressed went to show that few had yet recovered from the stunning effect of the 1971 tragedy, even fifteen months after it, most seemed to blink when they tried to see the 1971 events in perspective. Nothing like them was known to them.

Wrestle as they might with the political and economic factors behind them, they still found them incomprehensible.

Historical perspective is impossible to command unless a certain amount of time has elapsed, unless one can stand at a certain distance from the events which one tries to judge. This applies to events of all kinds. But perspective can be of two kinds, closer and remoter. How an event of yesterday will look five hundred or a thousand years hence is very uncertain. Political changes in ancient Greece wear for us a complexion utterly unknown not only to the immediate successors of Herodotus and Thucydides and Polybius but even to the men of the Middle Ages. But assessments, fairly impartial, are perhaps possible when the events assessed cease to be topical in a narrow sense. Surely, the forces at work behind the First World War can be studied today with some detachment; the rise and fall of Napoleon must appear more distinctly for what it portended than it did to the men of the nineteenth century.

In the case of the 1971 tragedy neither kind of perspective is achievable today. We are both too near it in time and too involved to see the whole truth. But we realise bitterly and poignantly that a tragedy of the greatest magnitude entailing the enslavement of our homeland through the machinations of a group of Quislings has occurred.

To the question what made for the success of the Quislings there is no clear answer. It had seemed in 1971 that an overwhelming proportion of the East Pakistani public had been won over by them. But prison experience showed that there were in 1971 thousands of patriots willing to fight and die for the preservation of the country's freedom. Why have they proved so ineffective?

In asking this question, I am voicing a doubt whose legitimacy itself will be challenged by many. They would say that the tragedy of 1971 meant the subjugation of a free area by superior military force, that the Quislings or fifth columnists inside could by no means have brought about the downfall of Pakistan but for the intervention of India. Much as I would like to accept this view, it is impossible for me to shut my eyes to the fact that vocal opinion inside East Pakistan had turned predominantly anti-Pakistani. One could sense the public's

hostility towards the very idea of Pakistan in the way people talked and behaved. India's triumph lay in first bringing about this change in the climate of opinion and then exploiting it militarily. The first in my own opinion represents a much greater achievement than the second. Given superior military power, one country can conquer and subjugate another. Germany had subjugated France, Belgium and Holland in the Second World War. But did Germany succeed in subjugating the spirit of France or Belgium or Holland? There had been collaborators in these countries. Marshal Petain of France was the most notorious among them. A small section of the French public had also been behind the marshal. But no historian has been able to discover existence of a large body of French opinion supporting Hitler. Even Marshal Petain or M. Laval had never spoken of Hitler as the liberator of France, as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman spoke of Mrs. Indira Gandhi as the liberator of Bangladesh to the acclamation of thousands. Eminent foreigners like Andre Malraux and Jean Paul Sartre had viewed the conflict in East Pakistan as a war of national liberation. Although no figure of comparable stature in Britain or the U.S.A. had announced his adherence to the cause of Bangladesh in the same unequivocal terms, there is no gainsaying the fact that the British and American press had by and large sided with the rebels. Some members of Parliament in Britain and a few Senators in the U.S.A. had not refrained from displaying open parties sympathies. A summary condemnation, characterising all of them as parties to the conspiracy against Pakistan, would not be convincing. They have been the dupes of a campaign mounted against Pakistan's unity and integrity by her enemies, but the question that needs probing is; why did the campaign fool so many? What devices did it employ? What stratagems did it resort to in order to obtain such remarkable results? Can we isolate them?

There are, it seems to me, several aspects to the issue. Some such as the developments on the international front which determined the attitudes of the U.S.S.R., the U.S.A. and China we would find it difficult to judge correctly without further detailed information. Why did Russia decide to urge and help India to break Pakistan up? How to account for the lukewarm support given to Pakistan by both the USA

and China? The part that India played is easier to understand against the background of her hatred for Pakistan. The role assigned to the Quislings headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is also clear. They were carrying out a behest on their masters' behalf. What is more complicated is the reason why the population of East Pakistan allowed itself to be blinded by Sheikh Mujib's propaganda.

Younger people under the age of thirty who had no clear recollections of what East Bengal had been like were less to blame than their elders. The latter knew that before the establishment of Pakistan, East Bengal had been a hinterland to Calcutta, feeding her industries with her jute, tea and hides and skins, supplying her markets with her fish, poultry, eggs, meat and vegetables, providing a captive market for finished goods flowing out of her mills and jobs for the unemployed. Undeveloped, virtually without rail and road communications, East Bengal had a definitely subordinate role assigned to her in the economy of the undivided province of Bengal; demands for improvement and development used to be openly opposed and resisted on the grounds that expenditure in this area would be uneconomic. Yet the myth sedulously propagated by the Awami League had aimed at painting the progress that took place in the Pakistan period as retrogression. Facts were suppressed; statistics distorted; and people were persuaded that East Pakistan was being ruthlessly exploited by the non-Bengali businessmen who had invested millions in this area. Investment which East Pakistan badly needed was termed capitalistic exploitation. How the province could have got on without outside capital, how the new industries could have been financed, where the entrepreneurial skills would have come from—were questions conveniently avoided. The worst and most vocal critics of the Pakistan regime were the new class of Bengali capitalists nursed into existence by the Central Government. Forgetting how they had come into being, they started fretting at the presence of non-Bengali rivals and dreaming of growing richer overnight by throwing them out.

It is a sad story of betrayal, treachery, foolishness, myopia, deception on one side and lack of forethought, unconcern, ignorance, want of sympathy, arrogance on the other. Together, they led to the

cataclysm and tragedy of 1971, from which deliverance, if it comes at all, would be a slow process.

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## CHAPTER IX

The whole sequence of events from the sowing of the seeds of conspiracy to its final flowering in 1971 had been leavened by the creed of Bengali nationalism. Intellectuals and students swore by it, some actually sincerely dedicating themselves to its service, convincing themselves that in it lay the salvation of their race. Here again was something, part myth and part truth, which was never subjected to logical analysis, or dispassionate examination. Its adherents brought to bear upon it a blind faith approximating to religious obscurantism; those who opposed it made the cardinal error of under-estimating its power and influence among the young and underrating its potentialities as explosive ammunition. I would confess myself that although I had perceived how dangerous it could prove, I did not give it the importance it had already acquired in the eyes of our youth, and found myself caught unprepared when the explosion finally came.

*‘ ... but nature should bring forth,  
Of its own kind, all poison, all abundance,  
To feed my innocent people.’*

*-Shakespeare*

The peculiar brand of nationalism which was employed as a weapon against Pakistan in the Awami League's campaign is difficult to understand except as a political ruse. Linguistic nationalism can have its own mystique; it can inspire men to heroism; it can breed a lofty idealism; it can provoke wars, inter-communal conflicts, and civil strife. But was Bengali nationalism a nationalism in this sense?

We have always thought and felt, and maintain even today, that in the context of the subcontinent with the complex pattern of its history, feelings of group solidarity based on religion and historical memories are a stronger force than linguistic bonds. Occasional conflicts between different language groups such as the Assamese and Bengalis, Hindi and non-Hindi areas, have been noticed in recent times, but they were wholly unknown even in the nineteenth century.

Regionalism of a kind flourished, explainable more in terms of geography and religion than in terms of language. India has always been a mosaic of states and nationalities, upon which from time to time powerful rulers have tried to impose some kind of administrative unity. The ancient Maurya empire was no more based on language than was the Mughal or the British empire. Every time central control weakened, the empire split into fragments; the fragments themselves were not linguistic, and owed their size and character to the personality and influence of the dissident chiefs. The Chola and Chera kingdoms in the south in the pre-Muslim period, the Vijayanagar kingdom which survived into the Muslim period, the Bahamani kingdom and the fragments into which it split later, the Maratta dominion, the Khalsa or Sikh kingdom, the kingdom of Bengal-to mention only a few---did not correspond with any well-known or recognisable linguistic boundaries. They were regional principalities with their limits defined by the power of the ruling chief, expanding or contracting according as the strength of his arms waxed or waned.

The kingdom or Sultanate of Bengal, whose name is deceptively linguistic as well as geographical, comprised areas now situated in the Hindi-speaking province of Bihar and the Oriya-speaking province of Orissa. Its eastern periphery extended into Assamese territory. Except for the name it differed in no material respect from the principalities carved out of the Mughal or the earlier pre-Mughal empire at the Centre by powerful dissident Viceroys who set themselves up as independent rulers. No historian either Muslim or British has spoken of language playing a part in the rise and growth of these regional states. The Marattas were a West-Indian group of fanatical Hindus, the Sikhs religious community recently converted from Hinduism, the former could perhaps lay some semblance of a claim to being a racial group; the Sikhs were racially of the same ethnic extraction as the Punjabi Muslims.

India had a multitude of races; but race and language were not coterminous. The huge northern tract stretching, say, from the western borders of Bihar to the eastern borders of the Punjab was a cauldron of races and languages. If the languages spoken could be treated as variant forms of basic Hindustani, what common description could fit

the variety of racial groups seen here? The Rajputs had a purer strain of Aryan blood in their veins than the others. Around the capital city of Delhi and in and around such cosmopolitan centres as Agra, Lucknow and Allahabad could be noticed a mixture of many racial characteristics. The descendants of Aryans mingled with the descendants of Turks, Mughals, Persians and Pathans.

This pattern of language and race intermingling was repeated also in the south. The four principal languages, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kanarese, do not correspond to racial divisions. The dominant racial group in the south is Dravidian, and the languages, too, are Dravidian in origin. But the political history of the south did not follow either a racial or a linguistic line. A vague north-south sentiment has always existed but it is not to be explained in terms of race or language. The semi-independent principality of Hyderabad in the British period used to contain a fair proportion of Muslim inhabitants descended from the northern Mughals and Turks and Afghans; the language they spoke was Urdu. Yet they shared the south's suspicion of the north to the same degree as the Dravidians. When in the late twenties or thirties of the present century, there was a proposal to invite settlers from Bihar to correct the imbalance between Hindu and Muslim communities, it was strongly opposed by the local Muslims. Echoes of the old *Mulki* versus *Ghair-Mulki* or local versus non-local issue are heard occasionally even today.

Conditions in the Indian subcontinent to this day resemble the situation that obtained in Europe at the end of the Middle ages after the disintegration of the Roman empire. Chaucer in England, Dante in Italy, Rabelais in France, while cultivating their own regional language in preference to Latin, thought of themselves as Europeans first. England being an island (or rather part of an island), Chaucer had a keener awareness of his singularity as an Englishman than had Dante or Rabelais. Italy in the modern, twentieth century sense was non-existent in Dante's day, and Dante's patriotism, such as it was, centred round the city of Florence. These Europeans felt that transcending the regional differences of which regional languages were a manifestation, there existed a common European culture which they shared. The idea that culture in England was different from culture in France or Italy

would have shocked all three of the writers named. To repeat a commonplace, the foundation of the common European culture of those days were the Graeco-Roman heritage and Christianity. Upon those foundations, there grew in the course of the next four centuries the fabric of national states reflecting language and race divisions. But not wholly, though. Switzerland is a well-known exception. Less well-known but equally significant is the example of Holland which owes its survival as a separate state largely to the play of European politics. Likewise, the Austro-Hungarian empire continued right onto the twentieth century to defy the pull of race and language. While Hungary today can be said to be an expression of Magyar nationalism, how do we account for the existence of a separate Germanic Austria? Hitler's *Ausschluss* did not obliterate the evidence of Austrian separatism and Austria, speaking the same language as the two German states, West Germany and East Germany has obtained international recognition for her right to a separate political life.

Believers in linguistic nationalism may not consider the Austrian or Dutch or Swiss solution ideal. But are the vicissitudes of history less important than the theoretical claims of language and race in the formation and evolution of states?

But for the arrival of the British in the eighteenth century, the history of India might have followed a course not wholly different from the pattern of European history. The dissolution of the Mughal empire might have been followed by the rise of a large number of successor states in different areas based on the influence of the dissident chiefs and the interplay of local politics. It had actually splintered into a number of such fragments. The kingdom of Ali Vardi Khan in the east comprising Bihar, Orissa, and Bengal roughly, the Nawabdoms of Agra and Oudh, the dominion of Ranjit Singh in the Punjab, the Marattas in the West, Hyderabad, Mysore---these might have survived as separate sovereign states but for the Franco-British struggle in Europe and its consequences in the subcontinent. ..

I am not trying to indulge in nostalgic retrospection or to justify or deplore any developments. What seems clear to me is that the rise of linguistic nationalism in India is a very recent phenomenon. The only kind of unity, apart from the unity superimposed on her by

great empire-builders, which India has over had was unity deriving from her religious culture. The Maratta and the Tamil, the Rajput and the Bengali were Hindus acknowledging the supremacy of the Vedas and the Upanishads, accepting the Gita as a practical code, looking upon the Mahabharata and the Ramayana as both epic and scripture. This unity was however partial; it did not embrace the entire population; it was flawed by the existence of several million Muslims who could not possibly, without resort to apostasy, accept the Vedas, Upanishada, Gita nor even the epics. If one ignored the small Christian and Zoroastrian communities, the only bonds of unity among the diverse language and racial groups inhabiting the subcontinent were the bonds deriving from Hinduism and Islam. If you removed them, what remained appeared immediately to be confusion of languages and races and local customs.

The exponents of the Congress brand of Indian nationalism used to be extremely critical of the view that the Muslims in India constituted a separate nation. Jawaharlal Nehru in both his Autobiography and the book called *The Discovery of India* spoke eloquently of Indian unity and ridiculed those who questioned its reality. But what evidence could he adduce of unity except the evidence of a common religious culture among the Hindus, which, he like the rest of the Hindu leaders thought, was not a religious but a secular culture? That is where the difficulties began. Acceptance of the culture of Vedas and the Upanishads and the Gita was no proof of religious outlook but acceptance of the Quran was. The one was indigenous, the other was not. It followed therefore that whatever the Hindu scriptures prescribe could be accepted, and even practised without the danger of one's being taunted with religious obscurantism, but a person who felt that he could not without violence to his convictions offer his adhesion to those beliefs and practices, cut himself off from the stream of Indian culture and became a communalist. The Hindus were numerically stronger; they could claim, without appearing to depart from the truth, that their beliefs and practice represented the beliefs and practices of the sub-continent as a whole. Protest as the Muslims might, they were in the context of the subcontinent a minority.

The debate which ultimately forced the Muslims to demand partition as a solution had been a protracted one, prosecuted on the Congress side with a ruthless disregard of Muslim sentiments and the employment of a type of logical casuistry with which it was sometimes difficult to contend. While basing the whole of their case in favour of a common Indian nationhood upon Hindu culture and civilisation, the Congress spokesmen refused to countenance similar arguments on behalf of the Muslims. Where, it was repeatedly asked by the Muslims, was this Indian culture as divorced from religion? How flippantly the question was treated can be seen from the answer Jawaharlal Nehru gave in his Autobiography where he went so far as to assert that his own people in Kashmir were like the Muslim meat-eaters. This was intended to refute the common Muslim contention that the dietary habits of the two communities were different. Now the word used by Nehru was 'meat', a word used in England to signify 'beef'. Nehru knew exactly what his statement would convey to Western readers, and as far as readers at home were concerned, they would not suspect the truth, but would suppose that what he said was that certain groups of Hindus did not avoid mutton or goat or poultry. There does not exist either in Kashmir or elsewhere in India any group among the Hindus who eat beef. Individual westernised Hindus may do so, but to say that the Hindu population of any area did it was a blatant lie. But this did not prevent a sophisticated person like Nehru from giving currency to it for obvious political purposes.

There is another example I remember from his autobiography, which is equally ridiculous. Dismissing lightly the argument that the Muslims of India possessed a culture distinct from that of the Hindus, he went on to say that the only difference between the two that he had noticed was in respect of the water-containers they used. The type favoured by Muslims had a protruding snout; the Hindus did not want snouts to be attached to theirs. An amazing *reductio ad absurdum!*

Given the diversity of her culture, language, race and religion, there were a number of possibilities open to India. Those who desired the continuance of the artificial fabric of administrative unity erected by the British could have worked for the establishment of a multi-national federation or union, recognising the right of each nationality

whether linguistic, racial or religious, to retain its individuality. But what the Congress and Hindu leaders, advocated from the beginning was a national state. India, they insisted in the face of facts, was a nation. The more the Muslims and other communities objected, the greater their opposition to the multi-national concept. There was little to choose, in this respect, between such outspoken champions of Hindu chauvinism as Pandit Malaviya and Moonje and the so-called liberal wing of the Congress represented by the Nehrus. While Malaviya and Moonje openly spoke of the political destiny of Hinduism, the Nehrus, father and son, avoided reference to religion, asserting that there existed a secular, cultural basis for a common Indian nationhood. Their analysis of this basis showed that they were incapable of making distinction between secularism and Hinduism. Preference for the culture of the Vedas was secularism, but one exposed oneself to the charge of extra-territorial allegiances by betraying a preference for things associated with Islam.

The second course that Indian history might have taken was the disintegration of the British empire into a number of successor states on racial lines. That would have meant presumably the establishment of a Dravidian state in the south, and several separate states in Assam with its diversity of races, a united Bengal, a number of states in the region to the west of Bengal upto the eastern boundaries of the Punjab, and a Punjabi, a Pathan and a Maratta state. These formations would not all have been linguistically homogeneous. Apart from the obvious example of the south, there were numerous languages and dialects in the northern areas spoken by people belonging to the same racial groups.

If language is considered a more important criterion than race in the formation of states, then there should have been as many separate states as there were principal languages. The Congress was theoretically committed to the reorganisation of the administrative structure of India on linguistic lines but it never accepted the theory that each language group had a right to a separate political life as sovereign state. The Congress thesis from beginning to end had been that India created by Great Britain must remain one, and that upon this base they would construct a nationalistic state. Administratively

federal, the units forming the state would however be severally the expression of a monolithic nationhood. It is little remembered today that the separation of Burma from India under the Constitutional Reforms of 1935 was opposed by the Congress. Burma had never before been either culturally or administratively a part of India, but what attracted the Congress leaders was the tempting image of a greater India extending from Peshawar to Mandalay, over which they felt they would, upon the retirement of the British from the scene, rule. Why then approve of the detachment of territories which somehow had been tagged on to it? Undoubtedly, the motive behind its criticism of the separation of Burma sprang from the same sentiment of Hindu chauvinism, which induced it also to oppose tooth and nail any concessions to Muslim feeling on other issues.

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## CHAPTER X

The Muslim demand for partition was arrived at almost reluctantly. It was not until the Muslims had experienced at first hand the Congress interpretation of Indian nationalism under Congress governments formed in Bihar, the U.P., the C. P, Bombay, Madras and Assam that opinion swung in favour of a drastic solution. The idea of partition was first voiced in the Lahore Resolution of 1940, after the Congress ministries had resigned in 1939 upon the outbreak of the Second World War. The proposal was tentative, a feeler rather than an irrevocable demand, purposely vague in respect of its details, designed to test political reactions. But no sooner had it been put forward than there began a hysterical outcry against the Muslims as traitors, fifth columnists, and so on. Misunderstanding between the two communities widened, and reached a stage where communication between them became virtually impossible.

It is not to be supposed that the Congress leaders who were neither immature nor inexperienced did not understand the psychology behind the Muslim demand. But they were not prepared to compromise. Mr Gandhi characterised the demand for partition as a demand for vivisection, and as was usual with him, the image of mother India was invoked to inflame Hindu religious feeling against it. Dr Rajendra Prasad wrote a book called *India Divided*, painstakingly enumerating the points against partition, but showing no perception of the facts which had provoked the demand. Pandit Nehru thundered against it in characteristic fashion, mouthing theories and doctrines likely to appeal to Western audiences but refusing to answer the Muslim charges against Hindu overlordship. Mr C. Rajagopalachariar alone among the elder group of Congress politicians appeared to understand the nature of the forces at work, but his was a voice in the wilderness.

But for all its attachment to the myth of unity, it was the Congress which wrecked the Grouping Scheme of 1946. This was the last constitutional chance of preserving the facade of an undivided India. Sponsored by the Cabinet Mission, it was accepted by the Muslim League and initially also by the Congress. But as soon as they

realised that it meant a Muslim majority in the eastern group comprising Bengal and Assam with the possibility of the Muslims opting out of the Union, they went back on their acceptance. First, they put forward an interpretation of the powers of the Groups and provinces which was not upheld by the sponsors. A conference at London failed to convince them that the Muslim League was right in insisting that the wording of the Grouping formula gave each Group power to withdraw from the Union at the Centre if it decided to do so. Next, they resorted to the plea that whatever the sponsors might say they would stick to their own interpretation. Finally there was the notorious statement by Pandit Nehru in which he declared that whatever the previous agreements, once the Constituent Assembly met it would consider itself free to shape the political structure of India without being tied down to any commitments. This was a clear warning that the Congress was in no mood to honour any assurance. Maulana Azad in his *India Wins Freedom* has termed the statement a tragic blunder which sealed India's fate and rendered partition inevitable. For after this, how could the Muslims have any faith in the Congress?

Having wrecked the Grouping Scheme the Congress's next move was to demand the partition of the Punjab and Bengal. Until the arrival of Lord Mountbatten there had been no talk of the partition of the provinces. Intended to disconcert the Muslim League, this move was sprung as a surprise upon it at the eleventh hour, when the British Government seemed on the verge of agreeing to Pakistan as a way out of the constitutional impasse. The Sikhs in the Punjab and the Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal under the leadership of Mr Shyamaprasad Mookherjee led the vanguard in this tactical action. Within weeks the movement assumed an intensity which showed that it had been carefully planned to unnerve the Leaguers and create an unforeseen obstruction. That the Muslim League was at first dismayed by it is proved by the tacit support given by the Quaid-e-Azam to the sovereign Bengal plan of Mr Suhrawardy. A divided Punjab as an adjunct to undivided Sindh, Baluchistan and the N. W. F. P. could survive without much difficulty, but a divided Bengal, shorn of its capital city, Calcutta, and separated from the west by nearly a

thousand miles of Indian territory would surely be a problem. If the Bengali Muslims could arrive at an accommodation with the Hindus and create an independent state in the east, they could be free of the danger of domination by the brute Hindu majority at the centre. We who were then young did not relish the sovereign Bengal move; we wanted Pakistan; even a truncated, moth-eaten Pakistan seemed to us a better alternative to the sovereign Bengal plan. I remember criticising Mr Suhrawardy and Mr Abul Hashem, the chief sponsors in strong language in the *Comrade*, the English Weekly recently revived by Maulana Akram Khan. But the point worth remarking is that the plan though blessed at first by Mr Sarat Bose, was rejected by the Congress High Command.

The idiots who hold the Muslim League responsible for partition intentionally overlook these historical facts. Supporters of Bengali nationalism should in particular never forget that but for the insistence on the partition, Bengal as an entity would have stayed intact. Commenting on partition of the province on the morrow of Independence Day in 1947, I wrote in the *Comrade* (which I used to edit unofficially from behind the scenes) that the ultimate destiny of the districts sundered from East Bengal lay in a return to their parental unit.

As one surveys the history of this period in retrospect, one is met by the insistence of the Congress on doing everything in its power to block a settlement, which might have saved India's unity. Much is being made today of Bengali nationalism, both in Bangladesh and India. But if it were a reality, why wasn't it invoked to prevent the partition of Bengal in 1947? The very Hindus who had launched a terrorist movement in 1905 to force the British Government to repeal the creation of the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam on the plea that it involved cutting up in two halves what was a unit, now in 1947 demanded that rather than face the possibility of living under a Muslim-majority government in a Sovereign Bengal, they must be allowed to stay in India with such areas of Bengal as they could claim on the basis of their numerical preponderance in them. No one talked of the unity of the Bengali race; no tears were shed over the

vivisection of the motherland. The adherents of the Bandemataram cult were nowhere visible on the horizon.

It is a sad commentary on the political sagacity and maturity of the Muslims that they have managed to forget all this. When immediately after the Partition of 1947, the Hindu Press in Calcutta began expressing concern at the fate of the Bengali Muslims in East Bengal, and talked of the indissoluble ties of language and race, the Muslims proved an easy prey to the propaganda.

The Indians began by painting a dismal picture of the subservience to which the Bengali-speaking Muslims of East Pakistan would be reduced in the event of Urdu being declared Pakistan's state language. The Bengali-speaking Hindus of West Bengal saw no threat to their identity in the adoption of Hindi as the Indian state language. This was perverse logic. We seemed to be back in the world of Humpty Dumpty. But the so-called intellectuals of East Pakistan failed to see through the Indian game and immediately took up the cry that Bengali had to be saved from the threatened onslaught. A myth was concocted almost overnight about a conspiracy against the Bengali language.

The second move in the game was to build up an equally fictitious image of a Bengal overflowing with milk and honey which had been delivered over to Pakistan. The so-called Bengali scholars claimed to discover almost everyday more and more evidence of a rich cultural heritage in Bengal's past now exposed to risk. The fact that the province had not yet recovered from the devastating famine of 1943 and the ravages of the Second World War was conveniently overlooked. Nor did anybody care to draw attention to the recurring cycle of famines and shortages which has been a constant in Bengal's history. Only about 43 years before the 1943 famine, there had been at the turn of the century a terrible famine of the same kind which had taken a heavy toll of human life. Stories of similar food shortages at twenty-five or fifty year intervals form the staple of Bengal's literature. But the illiterate public in Bengal have a short memory and are apt to forget inconvenient truths. They love day-dreaming. Oblivious to the picture of this barrenness and starvation, the image they love to

cherish of Bengal is that of an inexhaustible granary where no one goes hungry.

Yet in spite of the myths sedulously propagated by one class of creative writers, overpopulation and hunger appear to have been Bengal's fate down the centuries. The seventeenth century Calendar poems are revealing documents and knock the bottom clean out of these myths. They usually describe a cycle of twelve months in the life of a man or woman drawn from the poorer section. Their realism is stark and uncompromising. The men and women who figure in them are ill-clad and ill-led, subsisting on food which elsewhere would not be considered adequate even for the lowest animals. living on the outskirts of civilisation and completely lacking in the capacity or intelligence to have an appreciation of their condition.

The basis of the myths about Bengal's proverbial wealth is the fertility of her soil. Fertility is indisputably an asset, but it has to have some relation to the population that the land is required to support. What is plentiful for a population of a million would obviously be inadequate for five or ten million. Bengal's problem has always been an ever-widening disproportion between her resources and an ever-increasing population. On this account, despite the apparent fecundity of her soil, she has always had a problem feeding her people.

Secondly, she has always been subject to nature's ravages which every year neutralise the abundance of her harvests. Situated at the top of a triangle formed by the land mass of India and Burma, she has to contend with visitations from the Bay of Bengal and the Himalayan mountains, in the form of cyclones, tidal bores, tornadoes and monsoon rain. Harvests are apt to be washed away by devastating floods or mined by tornadoes and cyclones. I cannot recall a single year ever since my generation came to maturity when there has not been in one part of Bengal or another either a flood or a cyclone exacting a terrific toll of life and property. There is no month in the year which can be considered absolutely safe. A depression in the Bay of Bengal is a warning that something untoward might be in the offing. If the area is lucky, the depression heads south-east towards Burma or south-west towards the Madras coast. Or it may weaken. If these things do not happen, one must prepare for the inevitable, a storm or

cyclone or a tidal bore. The tidal bore and cyclone of November 1970 which carried off nearly half a million people was only one in a regular series. Losses of fifty or forty thousand lives, accompanied by the destruction of tens of thousands of homes, from cyclones or tornadoes cause no surprise. The decade beginning with the year 1954 was particularly noted for a succession of devastating cyclones, each accounting for thirty or forty thousand lives on an average.

While heavy rain leading to floods and inundation is one of her problems, Bengal has also to grapple occasional droughts. The north-western regions comparatively dry, and there are years when during sowing season there may be little or no rain. Failure of rain even in the south at the appropriate season not uncommon. Drought or flood both mean the same ultimately, failure or loss of crops and consequent starvation.

In recent decades, with density of population exceeding 1500 per square mile, the acreage of cultivable land has shrunk dangerously. The proportion or ratio that is considered economically safe in developed countries between cultivable land and land used as housing lot is much greater than the proportion here. Sizable farms are rare. An average holding consists of an acre or half an acre somewhere in the vicinity of a homestead, and from this the peasant tries with his primitive techniques to extract a living. Tilling means barely scratching the soil with a ploughshare. The average yield per acre in this country is one of the lowest in the world.

No one in Bengal can remain or is unaware of these facts. Poverty here is universal. The so-called well-to-do classes are distinguished from the utterly destitute by their ability to have two square meals a day. Of wealth in the Western sense, or in the sense in which the word is understood outside, there is no evidence. The owners of 'Stately Homes', the landlords, now an extinct class, were able to maintain some show of opulence only because they did not have any standards of good living to live up to. An ugly brick pile, without furniture, ill kept, unclean and unhygienic, shorn of the conveniences which are indispensable for real comfort, was their idea of luxury and grandeur.

The average Bengal's conception of elegant living is limited to a cottage made of 'clay and wattles' surrounded by fruit trees, adjoining a pond and supported by an acre or two of farmland. His ancestors believed, (and it is a belief firmly embedded in his consciousness) that perfect felicity meant being able to live on the harvest from the farmland, fish from the pond, fruit from the orchard, and milk from the cows bred on the homestead, without being required to procure anything from outside. Essentially agrarian in origin, these ideas could flourish best in a society isolated from the rest of the world, caring neither to learn from it nor to give. But as mediaeval Bengali literature shows, this felicity, such as it is, was available only to a few. The rest of the population lived in utter poverty. They were so poor that they had no money to buy food even at prices which would be considered fantastically, unimaginably cheap. Their destitution was made worse by their lack of enterprise or adventurousness. The idea of immigrating to places elsewhere never occurred to them. They were content to stay where they had been born, and attachment to the soil of the motherland came to be recognised as the highest form of patriotism. Sometimes this attachment was carried to ridiculous lengths. People did not believe even in crossing the big rivers. The Padma, the Brahmaputra, the Meghna were the great dividing lines between one area and another which were not to be overstepped. Enclosed within the boundaries of their insulated world, people progressively sank into a kind of rustic idiocy, fancying their own ideas to be the only valid ones imaginable, their own notions of luxury and elegance to be the ultimate standards in such matters. Search in Bengali literature, mediaeval or modern, for something a little removed from dimness and squalor, and you are apt to be painfully disappointed. Bankim Chatterjee, Tagore and Sarat Chatterjee, the three greatest figures in modern Bengali literature, universally so recognized, give no evidence in their portrayal of Bengali life of the existence at any level of high living standards or of arts and crafts of a high order.

Bankim and Tagore wrote a great deal about the upper classes in their fiction. Besides, there is Tagore's autobiography to judge by. His father's *Reminiscences* is also a valuable social document. That

Tagore belonged to the highest Hindu caste and was descended from a family of landlords is not in dispute. His reflections on culture may easily be taken to mirror the highest social standards of which the Bengali Hindus of modern times could conceive. Now what do these reflections disclose? Not, I am afraid, even the kind of culture noticed among the country squires portrayed by Fielding or Jane Austen. I do not mean intellectual culture alone. The material Standards which Tagore and his father describe, despite a wealth of servants and maids, are not comparable to the standards reflected in Tolstoy's portraiture of his early life. Socially, Tolstoy belonged to the same class as the Tagores. But what a difference between the two! Behind the description of luxury and opulence as they understood them one can dimly make out the spectre of poverty! A battalion of servants and maids were made possible by meannesses and economics in other areas; the servants and maids were expected not to dress adequately; a piece of cloth to wrap around their bodies was all they were entitled to, and a liveried footman or maid was an idea wholly beyond them. Carpets and tapestries were little appreciated; crockery unknown; brass pots of coarsest design but rinsed bright were the highest ideal in domestic comfort.

The difference between a man who was poor and a person considered rich consisted in the latter's having a sufficiency of plain fare twice or three times a day, milk, rice and fish. Cookery as an art had not been cultivated. Hospitality implied giving a guest rice and pulses which he was expected to cook himself; if he accepted cooked food, one entertained him to milk-based sweets of the crudest variety.

Bengal's first contact with Muslim culture dates from its conquest by the Muslims in the thirteenth century. So marked was the gap between her traditional culture and the way of life of the newcomers that the local inhabitants who chose to cling to their caste system with its taboos remained ignorant of the new values in spite of centuries of Muslim rule. A few who accepted service under the Muslims adopted some of the superficialities of the new life; they learnt to understand what cooking meant or what such eatables as cheese or ice cream added to the pleasures of the palate; but to the majority of the

Hindus the Muslims continued over the centuries to represent an unholy, extraneous mystery.

During the Civil War of 1971 there was a great deal of talk in the American Press, particularly in such journals as Time and Newsweek, about the revolt of the Bengalis against the attempted imposition of an alien culture upon them by the Punjabis. In so far as the term Bengalis connoted Bengali Muslims, this was of course a plain lie, there having been no difference between the culture of one section of Muslims and another in Pakistan. In so far as the statement referred to the original culture of the local inhabitants, there was not much in it which one could consider worth defending. There was in either case no truth in the allegation that the inhabitants of East Pakistan were being forced to accept a way of life repugnant to them. What had indeed been happening since the adoption of policy of industrialisation by Pakistan was that the crust of old customs and superstitions was gradually breaking up, people were beginning to understand the advantages of modern comforts; polished floors were being substituted for mud and sand, bamboo being replaced by cement concrete, porcelain taking the place of brass and bell-metal chairs and tables being substituted for cane mattresses. New roads, better communications, the influx of capital from abroad, the growth of industrial townships, the arrival of new skills and techniques, had begun to erode the traditional pattern of life and end the old isolationism. An air of cosmopolitanism filled the atmosphere. Bengalis, both Hindus and Muslims, were being forced increasingly to come into contact with foreigners whose ways and judgements were so different. The opening of airports in remote areas like Lalmonirhat or Shaistanager, the setting up of a paper mill at Chandraghona or a newsprint mill at Khulna, the establishment of a network of jute mills all over the province, the discovery and utilisation of gas at Haripur and Titas disclosed new potentialities at the same time that they opened up possibilities of change never foreseen.

It was this that appeared to be a threat to the Bengali way of life. A reaction against it developed in the form of xenophobia which really was a mask for the feeling of inferiority which the Bengalis experienced in relation to outsiders. An ambivalent attitude was

exhibited towards these people. No one could deny either openly or secretly that Bengal, overwhelmed with a large population, needed foreign capital for development, since she had no capital herself. On the other hand, the presence of outsiders who seemed to possess both money and skill was keenly resented. To rationalise the resentment, they created the myth that the outsiders were not really helping in the development of her resources, but fleecing Bengal. There had existed, they maintained, back in the dim past of Sonar Bangla, a Golden period when the country lacked nothing. The outsiders had eaten her resources away, reduced her to destitution and poverty and degraded her to her present position. The myth took hold on the imagination of the public. In their lucid moments, of course, they remembered how relentless the realities around them were. But the natural bent of their minds towards romanticism and emotionalism gave rise to puerile fancies, without the slightest foundation in fact, about the wealth and resources of the motherland. The Indian conspirators kept fanning this puerilism, taking advantage of the inevitable frictions, which the advent of foreign capital produces in any society.

As the campaign against Pakistan advanced, and the number of people old enough to remember what the pre-Pakistan past had been like dwindled, and the memories of even the older generations were overlaid by other sentiments, the myth about a Golden Period completely crowded out the reality. I recall an address given by Dr Muzaffar Ahmad Chowdhury at a meeting in Banglabazar, Dhaka organised by the Khadi Pratisthan, a Congress affiliate, towards the end of 1968 or during 1969, in which he bewailed the misery of Bengal's condition. She had been reduced to a waste land, he said, pauperised; there was hardly any life left in here. Two years later in October 1970, I heard at Rajshahi a speech by one Abdul Hai, a Jamaat-e-Islami worker which not only echoed the same sentiments but repeated the same lamentations in more forceful language. This was a strange collusion between a downright communist pledged to the destruction of Pakistan's ideology and an organisation which claimed to stand by Islam and opposed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the grounds that his programme was calculated to dismember Pakistan.

A stray incident, this, but it showed how far the rot had gone. Towards 1970, people became so hysterical that any suggestion that the Awami League doctrine of extreme autonomy boded ill for the future of East Pakistan was regarded by all and sundry as rank treachery towards the Bengalis. All political parties took up the Awami League cry that full autonomy was what East Pakistan needed; some of them offered open support to the six-point Programme without realising that the six points were in actuality a formula for secession. We know that many of the leaders or parties other than the Awami League were secretly apprehensive that the country was going downhill towards disintegration, but they dared not say so for fear that they would be accused of betraying the interests of their province. This was a measure of the Awami League's success.

Truth is believed to be stranger than fiction, but here in East Pakistan, idealism beyond all proportion, had eclipsed the truth. Conspiracy, ignorance, romanticism, xenophobia, continued to impress on the minds of the old and young alike the image of a Bengal whose phenomenal riches had down the ages attracted the greed and cupidity of outsiders, whose people, crippled and hamstrung by exploitation were capable potentially of surpassing all other races in artistic and intellectual achievements.

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## CHAPTER XI

*'In my beginning is my end'- T. S. Eliot*

The more one tries to understand analytically the chain of events leading to the fall of East Pakistan in 1971, the more puzzled one is apt to feel. I am not alluding to the logistics of war; I am not referring to tactics and strategy. What I have in mind is the reversal in the feelings of the people that the Awami League had successfully brought about as regards the historical necessity of Pakistan. The Awami League did not represent the whole of East Pakistan, but it had by 1970 achieved, by a combination of political tactics and subversion, a position which had become unchallengeable. Those who opposed it did not dare to call its bluff, its rivals sought to beat it on its own ground by trying to prove themselves more ardent champions of provincial interests than the Awami League itself.

I remember the crowds which marched continually through the streets of Dacca in 1968 and 1969 shouting that they wanted deliverance from the yoke of Rawalpindi. 'The yoke of Pindi'! How did they come to believe that they had been chained to Rawalpindi against their wishes? What was it exactly that they wanted to renounce or repudiate? Across the border, the Indian press and politicians benevolently encouraged the rebels, assuring them of their sympathy and moral support in their struggle against tyranny and repression. Oblivious of the past role of the Hindus, the East Pakistani masses started to think that their friends lay in India, and that once they could free themselves from Pakistan's clutches, they would, with India's help, march from strength to strength. Those of us who had not lined up with the rebels could only feel bewildered at the turn events were taking.

I do not know whether there is another instance in contemporary history of the kind of political fickleness which the people of the region have displayed. Once before in 1911, the Hindus of Bengal had outwitted them forcing the British to annul the partition of 1905 and depriving the Muslims of Eastern Bengal of whatever chance of political and economic progress they had obtained in the

province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Behind the denominational labels represented by the words Hindu and Muslim, lay a deep abiding antagonism between the backward undeveloped regions in the east and the comparatively more advanced areas in the west. Geographically also the two regions showed marked differences; Eastern Bengal was riverine, with a moist atmosphere, a humid climate, used to annual inundations and cyclones. Western Bengal was comparatively dry, with less humidity, fewer rivers, more urban in its ways, partly because of the influence of the great industrial city of Calcutta. The British had for historical reasons and in their own commercial interest concentrated on the development of the west. The new society which the imperial masters had fostered into being had grown up around Calcutta. The Hindus who collaborated with the new conquerors in building up a new system of administration in place of the Mughals, desired the relationship between Eastern and Western Bengal to be perpetuated into a permanent pattern. Lord Curzon in proposing the creation of a new administrative unit comprising Eastern Bengal and a part of Assam had been actuated by considerations of administrative convenience. But seeing that what he wanted would redound to the advantage of Eastern Bengal, an area where the population was predominantly Muslim, the Hindus immediately opposed the proposal. Terrorism and second thoughts about the advisability in the long run of alienating the Hindus eventually compelled the British to go back upon what they themselves had termed a 'settled fact'.

When announcing the annulment of the partition in 1911 along with the transfer of the imperial capital from Calcutta to Delhi, the British promised Eastern Bengal a University as a consolation. This was intended as an assurance that her educational development would be taken care of. But even this small concession---if concession it can be called at all---proved unacceptable to the Congress. A delegation on its behalf waited on the Viceroy impressing on him the folly of an expensive institution like a University in a backward area populated mainly by illiterate peasants. They said all this in the memorial presented on the occasion, adding that a University at Dacca would materially injure the Calcutta University, reducing its revenues. An astounding, shameless argument, perhaps unsurpassed in both

effrontery and selfishness by any other known development in the history of Hindu-Muslim relations! Imagine the situation for a moment. They had gained their object of an undivided Bengal, but even within the framework of unified administrative structure. they demanded--- yes expressly demanded--- that the eastern part of it must not be given any opportunities of educational progress!

When after years of delay the University was finally set up in 1920 rather 1921 when it was formally inaugurated, the Hindus promptly termed it Mecca University. Their reason for so describing it was that it had, along with the usual departments of English and Bengali, a department of Arabic and Islamic studies, which they thought, would benefit the Muslims exclusively. In point of fact it was staffed predominantly by the Hindus. The number of Muslim teachers outside the two departments of Arabic and Islamic studies and Urdu and Persian, did not exceed four or five in 1921. There were Dr Shahidullah in Bengali, Mr A. F. Rahman in History, Dr M. Hasan in English and Qazi Motaher Hussain in Mathematics. I cannot recall any other names. When we came up in 1938, that is, seventeen years later, this figure of five had increased but slightly. Dr Shahidullah was continuing in Bengali; Mr Rahman had left; Dr Mahmud Hussain had replaced him; in English, a young man, Mr Jalaluddin Ahmad, had been appointed to the post of Lecturer Class II. Mr Mazharul Huq in Economics and Mr Abdur Razzaq in political Science were two additions. Dr Fazlur Rahman, who later resigned, briefly joined the department of history for a few months in 1938. In Science, Qazi Motaher Hussain was still the lone Muslim teacher continuing as a Class II lecturer.

In the interests of historical truth, I would say that the comparative exclusion of Muslims from the University faculty was not wholly the result of Hindu intrigue and conspiracy. Trained Muslim talent was rare, so rare that it was difficult to find suitable candidates for vacancies. Against one Muslim candidate who seemed to meet the required qualifications, the Hindus could fill half a dozen with better qualifications and greater experience. Muslim members of the University Governing Body, called the Executive Council, had a tough time justifying the appointment of a person like Mr Jalaluddin Ahmad

who had a second class degree. Mr Abdur Razzaq was a headache to Hindus and Muslims alike. His unconventional ways, lack of discipline, and habitual negligence provoked criticism from the former and caused embarrassment to the latter. Mr Mazharul Huq got into trouble on several occasions because of his refusal to conform to rules. There were times when the appointment of even a Muslim clerk in the University was regarded as a triumph by the Muslims and as a serious inroad into discipline by the Hindus.

The University was in the thirties a small organisation with fewer than a thousand students on its rolls. The majority were Hindus. Of the three Halls of residence, one was reserved exclusively for Muslims, one for Hindus, and third, though supposedly non-denominational actually meant a Hindu Hall. There were far too few Muslim students. Salimullah Muslim Hall, with residential accommodation for two hundred and fifty, was seldom filled to capacity. Dacca Hall, renamed after Dr Shahidullah in 1970, though cosmopolitan in theory, was used by non-Muslim students only. The Hall meant exclusively for Hindus was called Jagannath Hall.

It was in the forties that the enrolment of Muslim students began to swell. A second Hall for them was demanded, but when the demand came up for consideration before the provincial Cabinet which had to sanction money for it, Mr Nalini Ranjan Sen, the Finance Minister opposed it and suggested instead an additional cosmopolitan Hall. Khwaja Nazimuddin, however, insisted that what they needed immediately was a second Hall for Muslim scholars, and he refused to be sidetracked into an academic discussion on the merits of communal versus cosmopolitan Halls. This second Muslim Hall, named after the Chief Minister, Mr A. K. Fazlul Huq, was temporarily housed in the University building itself; the first floor was vacated for the use of Muslim students. That is how Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall had begun its life before the construction of the present premises.

The period from 1936 to the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 was both at home and abroad a period of stresses. At home Congress rule in a major part of India proved beyond doubt that it was impossible for Hindus and Muslims to live together politically. The price demanded of the Muslims was that they

must give up their identity as a separate cultural group. Their chief national language, Urdu, was threatened; their religion could not be practised freely; the Vidya Mandir Education Scheme seemed designed to convert Muslim children to a form of diluted Hinduism. But what was the solution? A few constitutional safeguards? How could one believe that the Congress would respect them when they had control over the army? There was vague talk of separatism. But what form could it take? We did not know the answer.

Abroad the rise of Hitler in Germany, the Spanish Civil War, and the ever deepening crisis in Central Europe appeared to be pushing the world towards a fresh conflagration. Hitler's cynical disregard for treaties, the rearmament of Germany, the persecution of the Jews, and the strange racial theories, propagated by the Nazis, represented a setback, a retrogression in the history of civilization such as had seldom been experienced since the sixteenth century. Italy's Abyssinian campaign had exposed the impotence of the League of Nations earlier, and now Hitler, a much stronger force than Mussolini, was putting an end to its life.

The situation in the Far East was also grim. Japan continued her aggression in China, was talked of a co-prosperity sphere in the east, which was her way of masking her imperialistic designs. But it seems to me in retrospect that we, young College students, were much less aware of happenings in the Far East than of those in Europe. The newspapers we read stressed events in Europe more prominently than the corresponding drama in the Far East. At least that is the impression I have.

For news in those days we depended on the Calcutta Statesman, an English language daily modelled on The Times of London. Edited by Europeans, it maintained a standard of journalism far ahead of its Indian contemporaries. There were scarcely any Muslim newspapers worth the name. The Star of India, an evening Daily, had been founded in the late thirties by Khwaja Nazimuddin; no qualified Muslim could be found to edit it. Mr Pothan Joseph, a south-Indian Christian was appointed to the editor's post. The Azad, a Bengali daily owned by Maulana Akram Khan had since 1936 been battling courageously for Muslim rights, but it had a limited

circulation, but its coverage of international news was unsatisfactory. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, Forward, the Ananda Bazar Patrika, Jugantar and the other Hindu dailies used to fulminate day in and day out against the Muslims. Any concessions given to them were criticised; if a job, even a minor one, went to a Muslim, and if somewhere in the establishment there happened to be a Muslim, this was held up as an example of nepotism or communalism. Mr A. K. Fazlul Huq had a rough time as Chief Minister justifying the appointment of Muslim clerks or officers to redress partially the balance between Hindu and Muslim bureaucrats.

Until the Muslim League ministry in Bengal under the 1935 constitutional Reforms opened up fresh avenues for them, Muslim graduates had little to look forward to. I remember a scene in 1933 or 1934; a young man who had obtained a first class degree from the University of Dacca came once to see a relation of ours, Khan Bahadur M. A. Momen. The latter was a very important person holding high office and having influence in high places. The young man introduced himself as the most unfortunate person in the whole province and, when asked why he thought so, said that he had wasted a valuable part of his life earning a good degree which was now proving useless in practice. This mood was symptomatic of the despondency facing the Muslims.

The political future seemed as bleak as the economic. The Hindus were reluctant to part with a fraction of the undue advantages they had gained; the Muslims were expected to be content to remain a minority in the provincial legislature. The Communal Award announced by Mr Ramsay Macdonald had been denounced even by such persons as Rabindranath Tagore. Its only fault lay in the fact that it represented an attempt to do political justice to the minority communities. The Congress said it was inspired by divide-and-rule motives. They particularly resented the weightage given to lower-caste Hindus and the recognition of their right to separate electorates.

Speaking for myself, I had the feeling in those days that separate representation, or agreement on the distribution of political power within the framework of a United India promised us no salvation. Of Partition we had not yet started to think. But though we

offered emotional support to the Muslim League and felt attracted by the personality of Mr M A Jinnah, vagueness about the future continued to worry us. Mr Jinnah's famous press debate with Mr Nehru on the issue of the separate identity of the Muslims thrilled us. Mr Nehru had asserted that there were in India only two parties the British and the Congress, and Mr Jinnah had replied that there were actually four, the British, the Hindu, the Muslim, and the princely States. The thrust and parry of their polemics was a matter of absorbing interest to us students. But we, at least I, felt troubled by the thought that no final solution seemed in sight. My dissatisfaction at one stage grew so great that I was almost convinced that if we had to live in a United India, we must do our best to forget that we, Muslims, had a separate identity of our own.

It was at this point that speculation about partition as a solution began. My heart throbbed with a strange excitement. I remember that first serious criticism of the partition plan in the Statesman of Calcutta by one Mr Alakh Dhari. He pooh-poohed the whole idea, saying that Hindu and Muslim communities were so intermingled that it was impossible to separate them politically except by cutting India up into small jigsaw bits. I wrote a long letter to the Editor, pointing out why Mr Dhari was wrong and why partition seemed the only way out of the intractable communal problem. It was, if my memory serves me right, the first letter of this kind to appear in the Statesman. I felt tremendously elated. I had not yet earned my first University degree, and the thought that circumstances had forced upon me temporarily the honour of being a spokesman for my people was exciting. I have lost my copy of this letter. Like much else, it disappeared in the confusion of 1971. But, I remember that I had claimed both Hyderabad and Kashmir for the Muslims as well as areas like Bhopal and certain districts in the United Provinces where Muslims were numerically preponderant.

The date and year of the letter have escaped my memory. Most probably, the time was immediately before the adoption of the Lahore Resolution of 1940. But I am not sure. What is clear is that we were very vague and uncertain as to how the Muslims were to organise themselves into separate States. We visualised a number of such states

dotted all over the Himalayan sub-continent and had no idea whether they would form a federation or exist as independent entities. The point worth remarking is that no sooner had partition been mooted as a possibility than we began to breathe freely, realising that this was a way out of the complexities of Indian politics.

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## CHAPTER XII

The partition idea was accompanied by a clearer and sharper elucidation of the nature of Muslim separatism. Mr Jinnah declared that the Muslims of the sub-continent by virtue of their culture and civilisation, their history and traditions, their art and architecture, their laws and enactments, their moral code and social norms, a separate nation entitled to all the privileges that such a group could claim. I am unable to quote the exact words he used, but the precision of his definition, the comprehensiveness of his phrases, his incisive diction, and the air of authority with which he spoke still ring in my ears.

This definition served many purposes. The most useful service it performed was to force us to reappraise realities and to acknowledge what had always been staring us in the face, while we had been literally beating about the bush. What other definition could have so clarified the nature of the political problem in India? Yet it must be emphasised over and over again that the definition was not original. Over seventy-five years ago Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had said the same thing. The Hindu writers and thinkers had asserted the same truth repeatedly. Turn to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the Bengali novelist, or to R.C. Majumder, the Bengali historian, and you would have the same eloquent exposition of Hindu-Muslim differences. About a thousand years ago, Alberuni, the great Muslim scholar, had been struck by the same fact.

When discussing the question intellectually, Hindu scholars could seldom avoid facing the truth. They acknowledged that even in areas where Hindus and Muslims shared the same language, as in Bengal or the V.P., their social life, religious institutions, personal laws, dietary habits and even dress differed so markedly as to destroy the basis of the thesis that they could live together harmoniously as a muted political organism. The differences originated in religion but as such Western writers as Ian Stephens have acknowledged, their ramifications were so extensive that the term religion as understood in modern Europe and America conveyed no idea of their nature. The Westerner has no comprehension of the caste system. Its rigid orthodoxy, the xenophobia which it expresses and strengthens, its

exclusiveness, its inhumanity pass a European's understanding. He would not understand why beef-eating should lead to riots; he would not realise why one human being should feel ceremonially polluted by being thrown into accidental physical contact with another.

Yet the trouble was that the same Hindus who admitted intellectually that Hindu-Muslim differences were vital and far-reaching, would not concede that logic demanded that those two peoples should not be forcibly encased in a single political framework. Politically, they insisted Hindus and Muslims were one nation. Culturally, they recognised, they were not. But they planned so to reconstruct the cultural edifice as to exclude from it elements which were not Hindu in origin. Urdu, a symbol of Hindu-Muslim cultural syncretism, was not acceptable to them; it had to give way to Hindi in Devanagiri characters. Even Nehru and Sapru, whose mother tongue was Urdu, gradually retreated in the face of growing Hindu chauvinism. Gandhi suggested a dishonest compromise: Hindustani in both Urdu and Devanagiri scripts. The point at issue was whether a language, developed through Hindu-Muslims cooperation, drawing for its vocabulary, syntax and grammar upon Persian, Hindi and Sanskrit, could at all be accepted as India's common language. The answer the Hindus gave was a plain negative. I suppose they had a right to reject Urdu if they did not like it. But the unresolved question which the Congress never faced honestly and frankly was how in the face of this total repudiation of whatever smacked of Muslim influence, the Muslims could have the assurance that their cultural identity would be preserved.

Perhaps they didn't want the identity of the Muslims to be preserved. Could there be any doubt about it? If the most liberal Hindus like Nehru and Sapru displayed mental reservations about the necessity of safeguards about Muslim culture and in spite of their knowledge of history, spoke of an Indian, meaning Hindu culture, what could one expect from ordinary, less sophisticated Hindus?

It was this realisation, daily reinforced by news from Muslim minority provinces that led us to rally round the League and respond unanimously to the demand for partition.

But am I right in using the expression 'unanimously'? Perhaps not. For a section of opinion, represented by the so-called nationalist Muslims and such religious organisations as the Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Hind, still adhere to the view that political separatism was a barren, dangerous creed. In the face of the oppression practised by Congress governments, their voices grew increasingly feebler; they sounded less and less logical. But they persisted till the end in maintaining that the League's two-nation theory was untenable.

As the Second World War became more intensified, and the fortunes of the parties began to alter dramatically, the political climate in India registered changes. The Congress ministers had resigned in a huff in 1939 on the plea that the Viceroy had dragged India into war without consulting her public leaders, but till 1942 they maintained an attitude of 'wait and see'. After Japan entered the lists against the allies, and when it seemed that they were about to be defeated, Mr Gandhi proclaimed his doctrine of 'Quit India'. His policy was to strike at Britain when she was weakest, an understandable tactic in an Indian nationalist, but the moral hypocrisy with which he sought to mask his opportunism appeared nauseating to me. The same man had said in 1939 that the thought of ancient institutions like the Houses of Parliament being destroyed by German bombs was unendurable to him. He had also regretted the idea of political blackmail. But what was 'Quit India' but blackmail of the worst kind? Why could not Mr Gandhi have been more honest? Mr Subhas Bose who joined the Japanese and organised the Indian prisoners of war into an army of collaborators showed himself from this point of view far more consistent. He had always been of the view that Britain's difficulties must be put to political use. Mr Gandhi's hypocrisy on the issue was typical of the man and provides an illuminating insight into the workings of Congress policy.

The 'Quit India' movement led to a crystallisation of political loyalties among students. The Hindus in a body in compliance with the Congress directive started abstaining from classes. We, on the other hand, felt that to let the University be paralysed in this manner was to enable the Congress to score an important point. We decided to keep the classes going, compelling Hindu teachers, by our presence in class

rooms, to mind their work. They did not have the courage to ask us to join the boycott; but we knew that they came to the lectures most reluctantly.

About this time a group of Muslim students, among whom the most prominent was Nazir Ahmad of Noakhali, founded a fortnightly Bengali Organ of their own called Pakistan. It was a bold venture. The resources at the disposal of the founders were small, but their enthusiasm and idealism made up for what was lacking financially. Mr Mazharul Huq, the young lecturer in Economics whose name I have mentioned before, agreed to act as Editor. I do not remember at what stage I was brought in, but I soon found myself writing editorials for it. Nazir Ahmad said he liked my impersonal style. Mr Jasimuddin, the poet, Mr Abdur Razzaq of the department of political Science, Mr Ali Ahsan--they were all persuaded to contribute. Mr Abdur Razzaq was no writer; I do not think that in all the three or four years that the paper lasted he wrote more than two or three articles. Mr Jasimuddin used to contribute poems. Mr Ali Ahsan wrote literary articles occasionally; he was incapable of writing coherently on political subjects. Nazir Ahmad wrote a great deal, mainly under a pseudonym in satirical vein. It was on Mr Mazharul Huq and myself as regular contributors that the burden of providing sufficient copy for each issue fell.

I had some previous experience of journalistic writing, but mostly in English. Writing for 'Pakistan' was a different proposition. One had to think clearly of political issues and the method of resolving them in order to be able to say anything effective. This was amateur journalism guided by idealism. But clearly the experience seemed to us emotionally satisfying. We were serving a great impersonal cause, a cause to which unhesitatingly we could devote ourselves without any risk of being accused of egotism, and this sense of unselfish service carried us forward.

To strengthen the Pakistan movement further, some of us founded a literary organisation called the East Pakistan Literary Society. A similar society called the East Pakistan Renaissance Society had been formed earlier in Calcutta with Mr Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, editor of the Azad, as President. Ours had the same aims and objects, but we did not want to be relegated to a subordinate role

by calling ourselves a branch of the Calcutta organisation and launched our Literary Society as an independent body. These two organisations were however to co-operate and collaborate in their activities. I was asked to act as President of the Dacca Society; its General Secretary was Mr Ali Ahsan.

Our aim was to bring about a reawakening among Muslim writers and to inspire them to write consciously about their own life instead of copying Hindu authors. We also held that the idiom spoken by Bengali Muslims was in substantial respects different from the idiom used by the Hindus, and we wanted this to be the basis of our literature. We said copying the language and imagery of the Hindus imposed on the Muslims restraints which fettered their self-expression. These points we put forward in our manifesto.

In January 1943, we organised a Conference at the Salimullah Muslim Hall. It proved a great draw. Men and young students came to it from as far away as Mymensingh. Presided over by Mr Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, editor of the Azad, this literary gathering helped us in the crystallisation of the views that had been fermenting in our minds. In the address which I read I drew an analogy between our movement and the Irish Literary Revival of the eighteen nineties. I said that men like Yeats and Synge had without repudiating the general inheritance of the English language asserted the right to use Irish mythology and folklore and even the idiom spoken in Ireland in their writings and had produced works whose literary value the world recognised. Our aim, I pointed out, was the same: not to reject the traditions of the Bengali language but to encourage Muslim writers to use their own idiom and to draw upon their own history.

The discussions and papers received much publicity in the Azad. The Pakistan movement in Bengal now assumed the proportions of a truly national movement---embracing the political as well as cultural aspects of the Muslim nation's life. We felt elated.

Soon afterwards, a grim tragedy struck, a reminder that there were many hurdles to cross. Nazir Ahmad was stabbed to death by a Hindu on the University premises on 2nd February 1943.

There could be no doubt that this was no accidental killing, but a carefully planned assassination designed to deal a crippling blow at the Pakistan movement in the University.

The chain of events leading up to the assassination was as follows. On 31<sup>st</sup> January the women students of the University not organised in those days as a separate Hall, had arranged some kind of a celebration at Curzon Hall. Male students had been invited. The Mussalmans discovered to their surprise that although the students in whose name the function was being held, included both Muslims and Hindus, everything calculated to wound Muslim susceptibilities featured in the programme. The fact that the political atmosphere outside was charged with electricity was ignored. On the dais stood painted pots symbolising Hindu ideas of plenty and fertility. Not content with this, the organisers opened the proceedings with *Bandemataram*, an idolatrous hymn taken from Bankim Chatterjee's novel, *Anomia Moth*, in which mother Bengal was evoked in the likeness of the goddess Durga. The hymn had a long history, and its use at political gatherings by the Congress had earlier been the occasion for much rioting. The decision to start the programme of the evening with *Bandemataram* could not possibly have been due to an oversight; it was intended to warn the Muslims that the Hindus would not easily without a struggle concede their demand for separatism.

When *Bandemataram* began, Muslim students rose in protest in a body and started to leave. Suddenly the Hindus attacked them with hockey sticks and batons. They were caught unawares, and the only way open to them was to beat a retreat. Against hockey sticks and batons, an unarmed group was powerless. Tension spread. But the University authorities did not take a very serious view of the incident; no steps were taken to suspend classes for a few days to let tempers cool.

The Muslims, smarting under the unwarranted insult inflicted on them, planned reprisals and on 2<sup>nd</sup> February when lectures in the University resumed after a day's intermission, rioting broke out in the class-rooms. Nazir Ahmad, who did not believe in sporadic fighting of this kind had been opposed to retaliation in kind. Real retaliation, he thought, would consist in the realisation of the demand for Pakistan.

But he had been overruled by others. He was attacked from behind while trying to separate two fighting groups.

The assassin must have been a trained killer. The spot chosen by him was the small of the back from where the heart could be reached easily, and plunging his knife in, he had twisted it round.

The first reports reaching us were to the effect that Nazir had been slightly wounded. But he succumbed to the injury within a couple of hours at the Mitford Hospital, and when we visited the ward where he lay, it was a dead body that was handed over to us.

We were stunned. Grief, anger and consternation mingled in our emotions. At the funeral on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, scores of students; who had never known Nazir personally sobbed openly. We felt forlorn, realising vividly that there lay a grim struggle ahead, which would be far different from the sort of arm-chair politics we had known hitherto.

Nazir was one year my junior in the University, a student of the M. A. final class in Economics when he died. I had passed my M. A. examination in 1942, and about this time was looking for an opportunity of employment in the University. Nazir had built up for himself an unrivalled position as a social and political worker. His organising ability was impressive. In the Hall he used to enjoy the reputation of an unfailing friend, a generous patron and a most sympathetic companion. Students of divergent shades of opinion, who, left to themselves wrangled and bickered, found it possible to co-operate and labour with him in causes which on their own they would ignore. The creed of Pakistan had fired him with a missionary zeal, and awakened in him a power of self dedication he had never tapped before. Anyone talking to him on the subject would have felt the magnetism of something impersonal and strong which had suffused his whole being with a more than earthly radiance.

His death threw the whole student movement into disarray. We decided to keep the Pakistan alive at any cost. A special memorial issue was brought out two or three days after his burial. Mr Jasimuddin contributed a moving elegy, Mr Ali Ahsan, Mr Abdur Razzaq, Mr Mazharul Huq and myself gave assessments of his character and personality. Both Salimullah Muslim Hall and Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall students held condolence meetings. The Salimullah Muslim Hall

Union amended its Constitution and resolved to observe 2<sup>nd</sup> February as Nazir Day officially every year. Meetings of this kind were held in Noakhali district and also other areas.

Although Nazir's death was doubtless a serious setback, it served to strengthen the idealism he represented and acted as a fillip to the Pakistan movement. Nazir was crowned in our eyes with a martyr's halo and became a symbol of all that we stood for.

This killing was by no means the first of its kind. About a year earlier, a science student returning from the laboratories in the afternoon between 2 and 3 when the streets on the campus were deserted, had been stabbed to death right outside Jagannath Hall. His name, if my memory serves right, was Motahar. I did not know him personally. He had no connection with politics, and owed his death to the insensate lust for blood that the Hindus nourished. Hitherto, killings in the occasional riots in the town had been confined to slum areas; schools and colleges were regarded as inviolable sanctuaries where learners and teachers could pursue their sacred mission undisturbed by madresses elsewhere. The assassination of Motahar destroyed the illusion.

Do what we might; the void created by Nazir's death became increasingly wider. Political excitement and enthusiasm continued unabated, but no successor appeared who could unite desperate elements into a harmonious and effective group. I well remember how in 1941 when Mr A. K. Fazlul Huq whose political instability was a byword in Bengal deserted the Muslim League and formed a coalition ministry in alliance with the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, Mr Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, Nazir had organised a demonstration against a member of the ministry, Nawab Khwaja Habibullah. No one else would have done it. Nawab Habibullah was a locally powerful man; his family, thanks to the services of his father, Nawab Salimullah and his grandfather Nawab Ahsanullah, had a firm hold on the affections of the town population. But Nazir was not daunted. True to our apprehensions, there was a counter-demonstration by the Nawab's followers at the Dacca Railway Station where we were waiting to receive him with black flags. We were beaten, attacked with knives, and chased off. But though the majority dispersed, Nazir stood his

ground till the end in the face of these threats and did not leave till after the arrival of the minister. It was strength of this kind that others lacked, a sort of quiet obstinacy and inflexibility whose existence one could not suspect from the outside.

1943, the year of Nazir's death, was the worst of the war years from 1939 to 1945, a grim memory on account of the famine which reached its climax in July-August. Prices had been rising since the end of 1942. In January 1943 when rice climbed from Rs. 5 a maund to Rs. 10, most people thought this was a temporary phenomenon, which would right itself as soon as the new crop was harvested. Instead, the price of rice continued to rise steeply week by week, even day by day, till by June it reached the staggering figure of Rs. 80. High prices were accompanied by an acute scarcity. Rice was just unobtainable. Men and women, reduced to desperate straits, started trekking from the worst affected areas to more prosperous zones. There was a mass migration of hungry multitude into Calcutta. Hungry, shrunken figures moved ghost-like from door to door in search of food. There were no riots, no civil disturbances. Frustrated in their search, the hungry ones lay down on pavements, exhausted and weary, and died like flies.

The famine's incidence was limited to Bengal. It was entirely man-made. The scorched-earth policy adopted by the British Government, the buying-up of supplies for the armed forces, hoarding by traders, lack of transport facilities for the movement of food grains within the province---all these contributed to the disappearance of rice from the market. The Government's preoccupation with the war-effort and consequent apathy to the sufferings of the people aggravated the problem. Mr A. K. Fazlul Huq was still in power as Chief Minister; Mr Suhrawardy held the portfolio of food. But regrettably, though not surprisingly, neither showed either the imagination to comprehend the magnitude of the crisis or the drive and organising ability to tackle it. Ugly scandalous rumours were heard of their involvement in shady rice transactions with Marwaris. Mr Fazlul Huq was actually implicated in a case against a blackmarketeer, and strictures on his character were passed by the High Court. Mr Suhrawardy escaped formal criticism of this kind, but the stories about him were equally persistent. The fact is that contrary to the image which political

developments helped both to acquire, neither was personally a man of character, neither was above reproach, neither was honest. neither was free from avarice. It would be ungenerous of me to underrate their political importance or their achievements as leaders. But truthfulness demands that their weaknesses should be recorded. These weaknesses also provided a clue to the subsequent evolution of Muslim politics. Mr Fazlul Huq and Mr Suhrawardy were essentially egotists believing not in ideas but in themselves as men of destiny. They possessed personal gifts and talents above the average and they knew this and derived from the knowledge a contempt for those around them. They felt they could turn and twist their followers round their fingers, play upon them as they pleased pandering to their prejudices and ignorance, exciting their fears and apprehensions, stimulating their hopes and optimism as it suited them. Both were gifted actors; their histrionics were a marvel as well as a delight to the Bengali audience. Mr Fazlul Huq was a greater adept at the game than Mr Suhrawardy. Of far-sighted political vision or deep-rooted convictions there was no trace in either. They, like others, made use of such slogans as democracy, adult suffrage, peasants' rights; but there is nothing in their careers to show that any of these things represented an unshakable ideal with them, which they would not barter away.

That was also the reason why both fell out ultimately with Quaid-e-Azam M. A. Jinnah. The Quaid-e-Azam was a statesman concerned not with immediate political gains but with larger issues. His character was as irreproachable as theirs was tarnished. He gave the Muslim public a political ideal designed to enable them to live in security in future; he was not at all interested, like them, in ministries and portfolios or in shady transactions. He was incorruptible. His honesty and sincerity and vision were in themselves a rebuke to them, and they shrank and cowered in his presence exactly as a downright sinner shrinks and cowers in the presence of a saint.

Both must be held accountable to a large extent for the sufferings of the famine-stricken people. Powerless to do anything to alleviate their plight, they clung to office selfishly, and added to the muddle. If they had resigned, the responsibility of tackling the famine situation would have been thrown squarely upon the British. But

instead of either realising how powerless they were or how the facade of responsible self-government in the province was used by the British to shirk and evade their obligations, they continued to shut about and make utterly idiotic speeches. It is estimated that more than a couple of million people perished. There was afterwards an inquiry into the famine, whose findings confirmed all the popular suspicions about its origins.

The famine had little effect upon the country's politics however. Both Congress and Muslim League continued to jockey for position and prepare for the final showdown which seemed inevitable after the war.

At Dacca we kept the Pakistan issue going as best we could. The controversy in the Press over Nazir's death had the effect of pushing some of us into the limelight. An unexpected attack came from the Morning News, a Muslim Daily owned by Mr Abdur Rahman Siddiqui. In a strong editorial, he took the Muslim students of Dacca to task for their cowardice and said Nazir had died an inglorious death with his back turned to the enemy. This was too much for us to endure. I wrote back a long rejoinder recounting the incidents leading to his death and demanding that the paper should publish it in the interest of truth. Not only was the letter published, but it was accompanied with an editorial in which profuse apologies were extended to the Muslim students of Dacca for the unmerited strictures on their character.

There could be no gainsaying the fact that the Pakistan movement aiming at the assertion by the Muslims of their political and cultural identity had now developed into a mass movement. The Muslim students were acting as its vanguard. Leaders like Mr Fazlul Huq and Mr Suhrawardy still continued to vacillate; their jealousies and tantrums, their intrigues and unscrupulousness irritated the younger generation, who had a better awareness than they of the far-reaching issues at stake. How widely the movement had spread became clear only later, in the elections of 1946, but as far as one could judge from the temper of the times, the Muslims had rallied solidly behind the Quaid-e-Azam in his demand for a separate Muslim state in the Indian subcontinent.

The enthusiasm for Pakistan was greatest in Bengal and the Muslim minority provinces. The reason, as we usually say, is not far to seek. In the Punjab, the NWFP and Sind, where the Muslims were in a majority not only were the Hindus less in evidence, as the dominant class, but it is the Muslims who had succeeded in putting upon the public life of those areas a definitely Muslim stamp. This was true even of the Punjab. There was no feeling among the Muslims that they were culturally weak, that the Hindus could swamp them. In Bengal, on the other hand, in spite of their numerical strength, the Muslims were the under-dog, economically, educationally, politically and culturally. They smarted under a double yoke: the political slavery of the British and the economic slavery of the Hindus. They found themselves in a blind alley; all roads leading to it were blocked. Their only hope of deliverance lay in completely throwing off the shackles which bound them and seeking their destiny in a new context.

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## CHAPTER XIII

*There is a tide in the affairs of men  
which taken at the flood leads on to fortune*

*-Shakespeare*

In the summer of 1944, while recuperating from a serious, surgical operation on my thigh, I received an invitation from Mr Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, editor of the Azad, to preside over the literary session of a Conference- the East Pakistan Renaissance Society of Calcutta were organising for July. I was flattered. Obviously the invitation was a reciprocal gesture, a return for the honour we had done him at Dacca in January 1943. I was only twenty-four, had been to Calcutta only once before in connection with the printing of a biographical volume on Nazir in 1943 and possessed little experience of public conference in a metropolitan city. But the invitation had been extended to me as the President of the East Pakistan literary Society, and I accepted. At one stage when my recovery from the operation seemed to be taking an unusually long time, I wrote to Mr Shamsuddin saying that I would like to be excused. But they were prepared to wait for me, and after this I had no further excuse for wanting to avoid the engagement.

I dictated from my bed an address. I spoke freely of the problems faced by Muslim writers, and discussed the programme undertaken by the East Pakistan Literary Society. My tone was bold, frank and free from mental reservations. Mr Abul Kalam spoke highly of the address, and said that it struck the right note.

The Renaissance Conference was held early in July, in the first week, as far as I recall, at the Islamia College. I had not yet fully recovered, walked with a limp, and had to have my thigh bandaged. About the same time I was interviewed at the Writer's Building for a lectureship in the Bengal Educational Service, and was accepted. I found myself posted at the Islamia College itself.

The change from Dacca to Calcutta was a big change. Calcutta was metropolitan, whereas Dacca was a small place. But in one respect I, as a Dacca University alumnus, felt vastly superior to the people around me: Calcutta could provide no exact parallel to the kind of

movement that we in the University of Dacca had built up. Here the main focus of the Pakistan movement was the daily Azad building. There around Maulana Akram Khan, a veteran scholar and journalist, a theologian who was also a fine prose-writer in Bengali, a group of intellectuals met daily to discuss the future and to plan the strategy of the Pakistan movement. I joined them, and was soon invited to contribute to the Azad as a lead-writer. This was an excellent opportunity of doing something worthwhile for the movement and reaching a much wider audience than I could have reached. through the fortnightly Pakistan of Dacca. I found the work exciting and intellectually satisfying.

The Islamia College as an educational institution was a much smaller place than Dacca University; it was after all a college. The staff was cosmopolitan, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Bengali, non-Bengali, but the student body was entirely Muslim. Discussions in the Senior Common Room reflected the debate in progress outside on the political future of India. The Chief spokesman of the Muslim point of view was Professor Zahurul Islam of the Department of History. He had whole-heartedly embraced the Muslim League creed. Other Muslim teachers were less vocal than Professor Islam, but with the solitary exception of Professor Kazimuddin, they all supported the League. Professor Kazimuddin whose subject was philosophy and who was fairly widely read person, was Congressite in outlook. He was in fact not a Muslim except in name; he openly declared his opposition to any form of organised religion and believed in intellectual atheism. The strangest figure in this group was Mr. Saidur Rahman, a lecturer in philosophy who was far more of a free thinker than Professor Kazimuddin; his criticism of Muslim institutions was ruthless and devastating. But his politics was orthodox, and he proved one of the strongest supporters of the Muslim students' movement. The explanation is that logic seldom plays the most important part in such affairs: emotion and social affiliations are a stronger force than logic in politics. Of the other senior teachers whose support of the Pakistan movement did much to sustain it I remember best Professor Nazir Ahmad of the department of History, Professor Mir Jahan of the same department, Mr Sultanul Islam, lecturer in Economics, and Professor

Tahir Jamil who taught English. The last named was Calcutta Bengali who spoke Urdu. Mr Sultanul Islam's mother tongue was also Urdu, though his family came from Comilla; they had been in the metropolis for two generations and typified Muslims in urban areas who adopted Urdu when they became aware of the need for a medium of expression free from the stamp that a succession of powerful Hindu writers had put on Bengali in the nineteenth century.

Professor Tahir Jamil was a kindly person who treated me with affection. Mr Sultanul Islam, several years my senior and a confirmed bachelor, was ebullient, full of youthful energy, bold.

The Principal of the Islamia College was Dr I. H. Zuberi, a man from the U.P. in his early thirties, who, I learnt, had very shortly before my arrival been appointed to the post. I heard occasional whispers about the unscrupulous manner in which he had ousted his predecessor, an able and respected scholar, Mr Zacharia, a Christian from Madras. It was dangerous to criticise the Principal openly in a government college and few did so in my presence, considering me too young to share the college secrets, but I did gather that Dr Zuberi was not viewed as a very clean person. He for his part tried to make up for it by backing the students and openly encouraging them to organise meetings and processions in support of the Pakistan movement.

Of the younger colleagues, I shall mention two: Mr Abu Rushd Matinuddin, lecturer in English and Mr. Abdul Majed, lecturer in Islamic History and Culture. Mr Matinuddin was a distant cousin of mine. His family had migrated to Calcutta three generations ago; they had lost all contact with the countryside, spoke Urdu at home, and betrayed in their ways a curious, uneasy compromise between East and West. Mr Matinuddin himself, educated in the University of Calcutta, preferred writing in Bengali, had literary ambitions, and had already published a book or two. His fiction was immature; there was an air of aridity in it; his characters lacked emotion and vigour. But such was the dearth of Muslim talent in those days that all these inadequacies and shortcomings notwithstanding, Mr Matinuddin was patronised in Muslim literary circles as a promising writer. His attitude towards the great political movement was lukewarm. He had no strong convictions, and showed no understanding of the two-nation theory.

By and large he preferred to move with the crowd, was not critical of the concept of Pakistan, but was not prepared to take risks on its account either. These mental reservations undoubtedly help explain his betrayal of Pakistan in 1971 as her Cultural Attaché in Washington.

The other man, Mr Abdul Majid was frankly a Hindu. Though he taught Islamic History and Culture, he possessed no comprehension of either Islam or Islamic culture, frequently bewailed the developments which divided Hindu from Muslim, and said he felt more drawn to the Hindus than to the Muslim community to which he nominally belonged. He remained true to his salt, and, after he joined Dacca University subsequently, did all he could to undermine Pakistan's psychological foundations. I do not blame him; he had made no secret of his views and attitudes, and if Pakistan's rulers in their stupidity chose to turn a blind eye to his past, it was their fault.

Mr Matinuddin's was a case of real treachery. He pretended, when Pakistan came, to accept it without reservations, extracted from it advantages such as he could not have hoped for, and then fell an easy prey to Awami League propaganda about exploitation and economic repression.

The Hindu teachers participated in the discussions on Pakistan. They were outspoken in their criticism, but we were on the whole a friendly crowd, who could afford to be frank with one another. The fact is that until the Great Riots of 1946 no one suspected that we were moving towards a dangerous explosion. Our talks were academic; we all seemed to be several removes from the realities outside.

The Islamia College, despite its position as a Muslim intellectual centre, did not have the importance that Dacca University had as the hub of the political world at Dacca. It was one among many institutions working in the great metropolis, and the fact that it was a state college restrained the teachers from being excessively vocal in their support of the Quaid-e-Azam. The line had to be drawn somewhere. I with my Dacca University background could not help feeling somewhat shackled.

The Place where I could frankly exchange views freely with like-minded persons was the office of the Azad. Each evening in Mr Abu1 Kalam Shamsuddin's room there met for discussions men like

Mr Abul Mansur Ahmad, Dr Sadeq, Mr Mujibur Rahman and Mr Abdul Maudud. Young writers like Mr. Farrukh Ahmad, Mr Ahsan Habib, Mr Abul Hussain and Mr Ghulam Quddus, also dropped in occasionally. Visitors from outside Calcutta who called from time to time included Mr Ghulam Mustafa, the well-known poet. Mr Abul Mansur Ahmad was a veteran author and journalist, a friend of Mr Shamsuddin's. Though a supporter of the Pakistan movement, he was apt to be critical of its leaders and sometimes gave utterance to unorthodox opinions. Dr Sadeq taught economics, and used to supply data in support of the demand for Muslim separatism. The pamphlet on the Muslim claim to Calcutta, issued by the Renaissance Society later, was mainly his work. Mr Mujibur Rahman was assistant editor of the Azad, several years younger than Mr Shamsuddin.

Of the young writers mentioned, the most fervent supporter of the Pakistan ideas was Mr Farrukh Ahmad, the poet. He wrote a popular song with the refrain 'Larke Lenge Pakistan' (we shall fight for and win Pakistan). In his early youth, he is believed to have led a dissolute life for sometime. Then he was thrown into contact with a mystic and underwent a conversion. There was something in him of the vehemence of the English poets of the eighteen-nineties as described by W. B. Yeats. Farrukh Ahmad was a mixture, mutatis mutandis, of Lionel Johnson and Earnest Dewson. Mr Ahsan Habib and Mr Abul Hussain considered themselves modernists. The latter had a University degree in Economics, and was the best educated of the groups. The attitude of both vis-à-vis the Pakistan question was slightly ambivalent. I think that in their heart of hearts they considered the demand for Pakistan to be a reactionary trend not compatible with their notions of progress and cosmopolitanism. Mr Ghulam Quddus, who died recently, was a communist. What drew him to the Azad circle was the idea of trying to understand the psychology of the Muslims who were insisting on separatism.

One regular non-Muslim visitor was Mr Basudha Chakrabarty. He joined the Azad staff later as a lead-writer. Mr Chakrabarty possessed that rare gift: the capacity to understand and sympathise with a point of view different from one's own and to defend it if one felt that it was right. I gathered from the conversations I heard that he

saw the logic behind the Muslim demand for Pakistan and agreed that this was the easiest way in the circumstances of ending the interminable communal riots which had made a nightmare of life.

The points and issues we debated were the viability of the proposed Muslim state, its future policy, the kind of political, social and economic structure it should try to build up. There was no question of anyone, at least in this group, demanding a separate state in the east. We all realised that a separate state in the east would be an absurdity likely to be strangled in its swaddling clothes by India. Besides, the demand for Pakistan had arisen from the idea of the Muslims of India being a nation, and how could there logically arise a demand for two states for them? Of course, the fact that the main concentrations of Muslim population were separated by Hindu territory was a serious problem; no one underrated it. But we seriously considered the possibility of creating a corridor between them. Either, we argued, the two parts of Pakistan could be given a strip of territory running from Bengal to the Punjab (there were recognisable Muslim belts in the U.P. which rightly the Muslims could demand); or India and Pakistan might sign an agreement granting the latter the right of passage through northern India. The air corridor which later came to be established between East and West Pakistan was a kind of materialisation of this idea.

Those who maintain today that the idea of a united Pakistan was a departure from the spirit and letter of the Lahore Resolution are surely distorting history. I do admit that a handful of men like Mr Abul Hashem had raised the question of a separate eastern state, but when the Pakistan movement got into its stride in right earnest, they lapsed into silence. Everybody realised instinctively that in the circumstances prevailing then, the demand for a separate Muslim state in the east would have meant not only weakening the demand for Pakistan but also virtually counteracting it.

## CHAPTER XIV

Pakistan, one must not forget, was less a territorial than an ideological concept. It was not the sum-total of a number of demands for self-determination for Muslims scattered all over India; it was inspired by the feeling, whatever the sentiments of the Bengalis today, that the Muslims of India constitute one single nation. The Muslims of Bengal identified themselves wholly with their co-religionists elsewhere and lent their full and whole-hearted support to this theory.

What we continually discussed, debated and analysed was the nature of Muslim nationalism. None of us in the Azad group, or for the matter of that in the Dacca University Circles, were fanatics in the religious sense. Some of us, I confess, were not regular in the observance of the prescribed rituals, and we resented being maligned as obscurantist. Of course, we believed in religion, and strongly rejected the myth that religion itself was an antiquarian matter. Most Hindus or nationalist Muslims, such as they were, did not dare attack religion; they themselves professed religious beliefs. Where they differed with us was in maintaining that religion could not form the basis of nationhood in India.

This refusal to accept religion as the criterion of nationhood arose partly from semantic confusion, partly from perversity, partly from hypocrisy and selfishness, Nationalism was a new concept unknown in India before. We heard from the West that its constituents were language, race, religion, traditions and territory. Europe had split up into fragments on account of nationalism, but none of the fragments answered to a single description. None had features reproduced in their entirety elsewhere. The fact was, as European writers themselves recognised, that each national state in Europe was the end-product of a long historical process in which race, language, religion and tradition had played a part sometimes jointly, sometimes severally. The Netherlands had split off from Spain, of whose empire it had once been a part, for religious, economic and political reasons. Switzerland mosaic of linguistic nationalities was originally brought together by religion. Most of these nations took shape gradually in the course of the eighteenth century; a few frontiers were redrawn after Napoleon's

overthrow early in the nineteenth. Although wars and revolutions continued throughout the nineteenth century to alter the configuration of Europe's map, the salient points have not changed much since. Another important fact demanding emphasis is that with the weakening of religion in Europe, particularly because of the rise of Protestantism, as R.H. Tawney has demonstrated in his *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, there gradually occurred a dissociation between the spiritual and the secular, the like of which India had not experienced. Lending money at interest or usury was once viewed with disfavour on religious grounds; the treatment of industrial workers was considered a matter that concerned the Church vitally. Now-a-days nobody in Europe is prepared to give the ministers of the Church a say in either of these matters. Whether this represents progress or retrogression is a point that posterity will decide. I would admit that a large number of people in the modern world are inclined to consider the restriction of religion to strictly personal matters as a sign of progress.

The problem in India, we felt, was different. The dissociation between the spiritual and the secular which characterised Europe's modern history was unknown here. Religion among both Hindus and Muslims signified really a complete code of life, governing every aspect of individual and social behaviour. No Hindu felt at home among Muslims, no Muslim among Hindus. This did not mean that either individually or as a group they were continually at war with one another but it meant certainly that there existed between them deep differences on every level of their being which made perfect assimilation impossible. The exclusiveness of the Hindu caste system was an additional difficulty.

Now nationhood could only be the expression of a pre-existing unity. It could not be imposed from above upon a multiplicity of disunited groups who had no sense of internal cohesion among themselves. Some of the people who desired India to be one politically might have had entirely idealistic motives; they were not all thoroughbred knaves. But what they desired was to ignore facts and construct a political fabric which they thought would correspond to their vision of the future.

As I have said earlier, the demand of separatism had evolved gradually and represented the climax of a long historical process. The problem that bothered us in Calcutta was how the future State of Pakistan was to be organised. We realised that there was little or no hope of Muslim pockets scattered over being granted the right of self-determination. They would not have been viable either politically or economically. The real issue was how the principal Muslim areas in the West and in the East and also Hyderabad in the south were to be fitted into the framework of a Muslim national state. The Muslims of Bengal, surrounded by Indian territory, could not by themselves form a separate independent state unless Assam to the east could be claimed for the Muslims. Some of us in the Azad Circle tried to make out a case for the inclusion of Assam in the Pakistan State on the grounds that with a Muslim Bengal intervening between it and the rest of India, it could not have any physical links with the Indian state. Besides, the most important group in Assam were the Muslims. The rest of the population consisted of aborigines and tribals who neither ethnically nor culturally were Hindus. They had either to be given the right of self-determination or if they had to be incorporated in either of the two proposed successor states, Hindu and Muslim, they could as well be grouped with the Muslims as with the Hindus.

Left to themselves, the tribal population of Assam who disliked the Hindus, might have favoured incorporation in Pakistan. The idea of a viable eastern state with the Hindu and Muslim communities fairly balanced might even have appealed to the Hindus of Assam. But the greatest stumbling-block in the way was the Congress attitude. The Congress did everything conceivable to decry the idea of partition---which is not surprising---but also to convince the Hindus that Pakistan would be synonymous with race hatred, religious bigotry and political repression. It saw nothing unreasonable or unethical in Muslim minorities living in India, but the thought of a substantial number of Hindus being subjected to Muslim rule was unacceptable to it.

Those amongst us who feared that the demand for the inclusion of the whole of Assam had little chance of being accepted, argued cogently that the Bengali-speaking areas of that province which were contiguous to Bengal and where the Muslims were numerically

preponderant had at least to be allowed to join Pakistan. These areas included the district of Sylhet, Goalpara, Kachar and Cooch Behar.

When it became clear that under no circumstances would the Hindus voluntarily agree to accept Pakistan's citizenship, some of us concluded that the best course would be to carve out as homogeneous a state as possible from Bengal and Assam. In the pamphlet issued by the East Pakistan Renaissance Society, which has been mentioned before, it was proposed to exclude parts of Burdwan Division from East Pakistan. These parts were overwhelmingly Hindu. But a claim was staked out to such Bengali-speaking areas of Bihar as Purnea, where the Muslims preponderate.

About this time, the Pakistan idea began to be examined seriously by the Hindus. Articles and books were written on the subject. Dr Ambedkar's analysis of the demand for Pakistan and Dr Rajendra Prasad's *India Divided* set forth facts and figures calculated to show that Pakistan would not be economically viable and politically stable. Our retort was that these arguments were a subterfuge designed to counteract the Pakistan movement, and that we would have Pakistan even if it turned out to be economically and politically weak. We were convinced that the data advanced by these writers were 'slanted' in a particular way from motives of political enmity. The Azad started publishing a different set of facts and figures, and each day in the editorials that we wrote we sought to rebut the criticism of the opponents of Pakistan. It was our group who were concerned with theories, who constantly tried to justify the case for Pakistan intellectually. No Muslim politician, either in Bengal or outside, wrote anything that could be pitted against the books by Ambedkar and Rajendra Prasad. As a matter of fact most of the Muslim politicians considered intellectual exercises of this kind useless. Mr Abul Hashem and Mr Suhrawardy in Bengal were possibly capable of writing books. Mr Hashem did write books later but on different subject. Sir Muhammad Azizul Huq who was the author of the book *The Man behind the Plough* on Agriculture in Bengal had the right kind of mental outlook, the kind that usually leads to self-expression in writing. But he died at an early stage in the Pakistan movement's history and we in Bengal were left to fend for ourselves as best we

could. The first book on Pakistan by a Muslim in Bengal was Mr Mujibur Rahman's *Pakistan* in Bengali. It was an able exposition of the political background of the movement and contained also an analysis of the economics of the Muslims areas. It also sought to outline the politics which Pakistan was expected to follow when established. I am not aware of any comparable work in English published from any part of India. Mr Noman's book on Muslim India came later, and dealt with a slightly different issue, it was in the main an examination of the historical forces operating behind the emergence of what ultimately crystallised into the Pakistan movement but it contained no direct reference to the movement itself. I write from memory but I think what I have said is correct.

Most political movements originate in the way the Pakistan movement originated, out of a common urge shared by millions of people; they do not develop out of copy-book maxims. But at one stage or another a thinker or theoretician comes forward, rationalises the tendencies reflected in them, propounds theories to explain their genesis and forecasts their evolution. These theories, once formulated, provided the formulation-is correct and realistic, acquire an autonomous importance, becoming in their turn significant factors - worth reckoning with in the movement's growth. The labour movement in England grew in this way. The Fabians of the eighties-nineties to whom the movement owes so much were not its founders, but were theoreticians who advanced rationalisations, in terms of contemporary political thought, of the impulses whose manifestation the labour movement was. The communist movement was itself no exception to this rule. The movement did not owe its origin to Karl Marx and Engels. They nursed it and formulated theories about it and provided philosophical framework which, as is well known, has acquired a strength all its own and given rise to movements of various kinds all over the world.

Intellectual formulations of this sort are necessary, for without them, a movement begins to decay. The reason, it seems, is that after the onrush of feeling which expresses itself in a desire for political action has been exhausted, people start thinking and looking for intellectual justification for their desires. If the justification is not

forthcoming from the thinkers, the movement generated by their desires languishes for lack of intellectual nourishment.

This explanation may sound much too simple. It may very well be objected that if a movement has sprung out of a popular impulse, it should not for its continuance need intellectual nourishment of this kind. This is very true, but the trouble is that many movements have shallow roots, and, however, violent they may appear, represent nothing but passing fancies. Those who have studied the psychology of crowds know how whimsical, mercurial crowds are. A distinction must consequently be made between a temporary sensation, a sudden violent upheaval in the public mood caused by an entirely unimportant incident, and a real, far-reaching movement.

It is the latter that calls for nourishment. Such movements do not die away, nourishment or no nourishment, but they are apt to weaken or languish temporally and suffer a set-back.

In the case of the Pakistan movement, the absence of a philosophical formulation of its basis continued from the beginning to be a handicap. The writings of Iqbal apart (and he died before the Lahore Resolution was adopted in 1940) there was, as I have said, very little that the intellectuals received by way of a rationalisation. Simple arguments drawn from the usual European definitions of nationalism found many of us gasping for breath; they did not know the answers. The answers were simple but no one had taken the trouble of recording them in the kind of idiom that intellectuals understand.

There were two kinds of arguments that we were called upon to refute. First, there were the people who, confused by the Western definition of the word religion and also out of sheer political perversity, kept repeating that religion was a private concern and should not be mixed up with politics. Almost equally troublesome was the attitude of a section of the Ulama or Muslim theologians who opposed the Pakistan movement on the ground that it was, in their view, the expression of an inferiority complex. The Muslims, they said, were destined to triumph and subjugate the whole world, India included. Why then should they seek to withdraw from the broader Indian scene and look for safety in Partition? The whole idea, they argued, was contrary to the militant spirit of Islam. This was the

simplicity of faith carried to the extremes, but the Congress found it useful and exploited it. It was this argument that was the principal stock-in-trade of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. It is difficult to suppose that he himself believed in it sincerely; but in his addresses to fellow theologians, he employed it effectively.

To get bogged down in abstract arguments over the exact place of religion in politics would be, however, to give an entirely wrong impression of the issues facing us in India. It was the intractable communal problem, occasionally and lately frequently exploding into riots and violent upheavals which compelled the Muslims ultimately to demand Partition. Circumstances had forced upon them the conclusion that the two nationalities, Hindu and Muslim, could not live together.

Our adversaries always sought to confound the world by trying to distract attention from the realities towards abstractions and theories. Those who approached the problem theoretically played into their hands, for theoretically, it admitted of different answers, and the answer favoured by the modern West was that religion ought to be relegated to the background. We said that in fact in most countries in the West, in the United Kingdom certainly, religion kept its importance, and no one could get away unscathed if it were assailed frontally. But so thick is the hypocritical smokescreen concealing the facts of British social life that it was difficult to get anyone to see the truth if he chose to be obstinate. England had expelled James II in 1688 because it did not want a Catholic monarch, and although today the whole story appears somewhat unreal in the light of the indifference towards religion that most Englishmen display, how would they react if a ruling king or Queen proposed to embrace Catholicism or better still, any of the other religions, Islam or Buddhism or Judaism? There could be no doubt that the outcome of such a decision by the monarch would be an upheaval leading to an abdication. Theoretically, England is a theocracy, the Head of State being also the Head of the Church.

These facts notwithstanding, we found it difficult to convince most Britons that the basis of nationhood in India could be none other than religion.

I attempted an analysis of these issues in an article I wrote for Morning News in 1945 or 1946, entitled "Tests of Nationhood"; it attracted the attention of my colleagues at the Islamia College and also of my friends outside. I was concerned to rebut Mr Gandhi's thesis that the Muslims of India, the majority of whom were converts from Hinduism, could not claim to be a nation apart. I said, if I remember what I wrote then, that given the circumstances that obtained in India, a change of faith amounted to a change of nationality, and that if the idea of a person changing his nationality were not considered absurd, in spite of the fact that in most cases such a change between, say, England and France, or Germany and France, entailed no change of dress, food, religion or culture, one could not logically object to the Muslims regarding themselves as a nation apart when conversion from Hinduism to Islam had necessarily to be accompanied by so great a change in the convert's life. My premise was that the differences between the way of life of the Muslims and the way of life of the Hindus were fundamental and far-reaching. When a Hindu decided to leave the fold of Hinduism and join the fraternity of Islam, he must needs renounce the whole of his past life, not only his ideas about God and the hereafter, but his faith in untouchability and the caste system and had also to adapt himself to a whole series of revolutionary changes in the pattern of his conduct. He had to learn to live differently, eat and dress differently, change his ideas about marriage and reorganise his home differently. These transformations carried him further away from his past life than a change of nationality ever did anywhere.

I would again emphasise that what we were concerned with was not an abstract problem as to whether it was possible to conceive of an ideal political system under which Hinduism and Islam could coexist. The problem before us was whether in the face of the insoluble difficulties that the history of India presented, and the obstinacy of the caste Hindus, there could be an alternative to the solution in the Muslim proposal, namely, division of the subcontinent into a Hindu and a Muslims state.

All the arguments or nearly all, that came from the other camp dealt with theories, ideals, might-have-beens, and other fantasies. The

age demanded an urgent end to the strife that was turning India into a waste land, and this was not recognised. Of course, in saying the real nature of the problem was side-tracked, I am understating the truth. The Hindus knew what was at stake. They wanted, in their heart of hearts, to impose a solution on the Muslims forcibly, and this, they thought, they could do once the British got out of the way. The Hindu Mahasabha made no secret of their intentions. The Congress, more circumspect and cautious, aimed at the same consummation but by different methods. And I would add that there were in the Congress some self-deluded idealists who probably thought that a common nationality could be forged out of the two feuding groups.

My article in "Morning News" was one among many that we in the Azad group wrote trying to combat the theories put forward by the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha. In the meantime, events marched inexorably towards a crisis, a showdown. When the war ended in 1945, we in India thought that the crisis would not take long to arrive. The Labour Government in England under Attlee had promised India independence, and now that England had time to turn to the problem of post-war reconstruction, it proposed to tackle the Indian issue in right earnest. The Cripps offer of 1940 in the midst of the war had not evoked much of a response; it had been hedged round with far too many reservations. But from the Muslim point of view it had represented a land-mark, the first acknowledgment that a new and drastic approach to the communal problem was called for. But although Cripps was a member of the Labour Party, the offer he carried to India in 1940 had been made under the auspices of a Conservative Prime Minister, Churchill and there was no knowing whether Labour would resile from that position. We felt rather apprehensive about the future.

About this time, Muslim opinion in eastern India had reached near-unanimity on the question of Pakistan. The Muslims of Hindu-majority provinces like Bihar, the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, Bombay and Madras were equally unanimous. Of course, the so-called nationalist factions represented by such persons as Maulana Azad and Mr. Asaf Ali continued to oppose the demand for Pakistan. But by 1944 or 1945 they had ceased to have any following.

It was the governments in Muslim-majority provinces that gave us a great deal of trouble. The Unionists in the Punjab, the Khudai Khidmatgars under Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan in the Frontier Province and various groups in Sind were proving both recalcitrant and hostile. Public opinion in these provinces used to be solidly with the Muslim League but the Governments continued in the face of the change in the political climate to pursue a sterile and unimaginative course. The elections held in 1946 led to a change in the Punjab and Sind, but the League failed to win the N.W.F. Province. The Khan brothers, that is, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and his brother Dr Khan Saheb proved hard nuts to crack. This was a serious disappointment to us.

In Bengal the 1946 elections practically swept Mr A. K. Fazlul Huq off from the political scene. He had dissociated himself from the League in 1941 following a dispute with the Quaid-i-Azam over his membership of the Viceroy's War Council and had since stood aloof, occasionally issuing ridiculously vituperative statements against Mr Jinnah. But these actions increased his own isolation from the Muslim masses. How deeply the Muslims of Bengal were committed to the Pakistan movement was demonstrated fully by the results of the 1946 polls. Mr Huq had been for nearly a half a century before a kind of uncrowned king in Bengal, unassailable, invulnerable. Parties formed and reformed around him, and he loved to reshuffle them, changing his label and ideology, and choosing whatever designation he pleased. The emergence of the League with a definite ideal and programme unnerved him, and as people realised that Mr. Huq had nothing but his own eccentricities and egoism to offer as a substitute for a clear political programme, they moved away from him, leaving him high and dry, at liberty to posture and clown as he liked.

Mr Huq's defeat could not be credited to any local politician. None equalled him in personal talent, and but for the Quaid-e-Azam and the League, Mr Huq would have continued for many years to play the same game. He was able to stage what we call a comeback only after the deaths of Mr Jinnah and Mr Liaquat Ali Khan when there was no one who could outmatch him and when the Muslim League itself became embroiled in internecine dissensions. Judged historically, the defeat and later the re-emergence of Mr Huq constitute two milestones

in Muslims history, the first event marking the beginning of their temporary reawakening from the usual stupor in which they have perennially imprisoned and the second their capitulation to the ancient forces of evil.

The decks having been cleared of nationalist Muslims and such other elements as helped confuse the issues, the League demanded in authoritarian tones that it alone had the right to speak for the Muslims, and that the demand for Pakistan had behind it the support of an overwhelming majority of them. This claim could no longer be ignored or brushed aside. The usual pretexts used against it had all been swept off. We felt that we were fast moving towards a climax.

One of the most important acts of the Labour Government in Britain was to appoint a New Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, a much younger person than Lord Wavell, more energetic and imaginative, with connections with the British Royal family. The decision to dismiss Lord Wavell must have been prompted to a large extent by the failure of the Cabinet Mission in the summer of 1946.

The Cabinet Mission episode is both a disgraceful and a remarkable chapter in British-Indian history. It represented the last and most imaginative attempt by the British to preserve Indian administrative unity; its failure was due to the obstinacy of the Congress in refusing to accept any arrangement which appeared to conciliate the Muslims. Its record is however marred by deceit and trickery to which the Cabinet resorted in their dealings with the Muslim League. Were it not for the Mission, some Muslims might have nursed the illusion that in staking the future of the Muslims on Pakistan the League was taking unnecessarily large risks. The unsavoury Cabinet Mission interlude convinced the most hard-boiled sceptics that the Muslims were up against a formidable combination---Britons and Hindus, and removed that last residue of doubt about the correctness of the Muslim League's stand.

First there was the tangle over the formation of the Viceroy's Council. Lord Wavell had declared on 16 June 1946 that he would proceed to form a Council with the co-operation of those parties which accepted the Cabinet Mission's statement of 16 May 1946 and while he sought the assistance of all, he announced that he would not hesitate

to go ahead even if some of the parties declined to join the Council. When it turned out that the Congress itself was not cooperating he went back upon his public announcement and let the other parties, especially the League, down. Even the Calcutta Statesman owned by the British felt constrained to protest and term Lord Wavell's recantation an instance of bad faith.

Secondly there was the controversy over the interpretation of the grouping clause in the Cabinet Mission's statement of 16<sup>th</sup> May. According to the original Mission Plan, anyone of the three groups of provinces, A, B, and C could opt out of the Union. The Congress agreed to this at first, but the moment the Muslim League accepted the Mission Plan, it started saying that the groups once formed could not have the right to opt out. This interpretation was contrary to the language of the proposals and also to the explanation offered by the Mission. But the Congress insisted that they were right. A final attempt was made by the British Government in December 1946 to resolve the issue; a conference was held in London and attended by Mr Jinnah, Mr Nehru and Sardar Baldev Singh on behalf of the Sikhs. The Government upheld the League's view but the issue of the Conference proved politically abortive, because the Congress was not prepared to accept this interpretation.

What followed was again a betrayal of the Muslims. Instead of proceeding with the Plan, the Government abandoned it. From the League's point of view, this was a moral triumph for it. The responsibility of wrecking India's unity could now be fastened squarely on the Congress. The League had demonstrated that in the interest of the peaceful settlement it was prepared to compromise on the Pakistan issue i.e. to sacrifice its principles but this had proved no good.

The real reason why the Congress backed out of the grouping plan was the fear that it might enable the Muslims of Bengal and Assam to secede from the Union with the entire block of eastern India, the Muslims having numerically a slight edge over the non Muslim population of the two provinces taken together. Rather than expose India to the risk, the Congress decided to plump for what it thought was lesser evil, Partition, which would mean the exclusion from the

Union of only Muslim majority areas. It is also clear in the light of subsequent developments that they must already have thought of countering with a demand for the partition of Bengal should the British Government decide in favour of Pakistan.

To the Mussalmans of Bengal the shifts and twists in Congress policy came as a salutary shock. The Congress, it was now clear beyond all doubt, was less interested in India's unity than in blocking the Muslims' chances of economic and political survival. It was not prepared to take any risks: the eastern group might or might not have opted out of the Union, but so intense was the Congress's distrust of the Muslims that it would not even contemplate the possibility of a movement of this kind.

It is sad to reflect that in after years, in spite of the Congress's role in the period immediately preceding August 1947, our enemies accused the League of having been intransigent and obstinate. It was the Muslims of Bengal who were charged by the Awami League and its supporters with the crime of dividing the so-called Bengali people.

To go back to the main story however. The arrival of Lord Mountbatten lent a new urgency to the situation. Britain, it seemed, was anxious to wriggle out of the Indian tangle and might throw the minorities to the wolves if no settlement was reached. First, the new Viceroy had a round of discussions with the leaders. He impressed on them the supreme importance of a peaceful settlement, sounded them out about the possibility of an understanding within the framework of a united India and emphasised that the Labour Government was determined to end British rule in India. These discussions produced no positive results and the Viceroy flew home to report on the Indian situation to the British Cabinet. We awaited the next acts in the drama with baited breath.

## CHAPTER XV

In the middle of 1946, I forget the exact month; Maulana Akram Khan bought the rights of the late Maulana Muhammad Ali's English weekly 'Comrade' and decided to revive it. I was asked to resign from the Islamia College and join the Azad staff and run the weekly. The offer was tempting but I felt on reflection that it would be better to practise free-lance journalism and retain my job at the Islamia College. I was not quite sure where my true vocation lay, but the idea of giving up my academic life completely did not appeal to me. Journalism had its attractions. To a young man of twenty-five, as I then was, the freedom that journalists appeared to possess seemed to contrast with the constraints of service under the Government, but I realised that abandoning the academic career would involve the renunciation of the dreams with which I associated the scholar's life, the detachment I inwardly craved, the ambition which I entertained of exploring uncharted provinces and landscapes as a seeker of knowledge.

While declining to resign from the Islamia College, I agreed to do all I could unofficially to run the Comrade. I remained its editor de facto from the day it was revived to the day I left Calcutta in September 1947 for the M.C. College, Sylhet to which I was transferred after the establishment of Pakistan.

The Comrade's policy, it is almost needless to say, was to support the Muslim League in its demand for Pakistan, to explain the Muslim position to the English-speaking world and to encourage forces making for unity and solidarity among the Muslim population of the subcontinent. I used to write the first editorial. The second leader was contributed by Mr Mujibur Rahman Khan whose name appeared on the paper as its editor. His English was shaky but the grammatical and idiomatic deficiencies were to an extent offset by the maturity of his political views. Dr I. H. Zuberi, Principal of the Islamia College, offered to write a column under a pseudonym. He must have been fired by the ambition of emulating the example of Mr Altaf Hussain whose fortnightly column in the Statesman "Through Muslim Eyes by Shahed" served as a sort of tonic to the English-reading intellectuals. Not only did he wield a powerful, vigorous pen, his

forthright views, the sincerity of his beliefs, his unflinching faith both in the ideal of Pakistan and in the leadership of the Quaid-e-Azam helped sweep many cobwebs away, strengthened the waverers and doubters, and lent fresh encouragement to the faithful. Shamsheer which was the pen-name adopted by Dr Zuberi proved however utterly disappointing from the literary and the intellectual points of view alike. Dr Zuberi's language was immature; his views lacked the air of conviction which characterised Shahed's writings. We received occasional contributions mainly on cultural topics also from Abu Rushd Matinuddin. A young College student, Mr Shafi Husain, who was a neighbour of mine, wrote a delightful column on science.

We had on the whole a dedicated band of workers who turned the Comrade into a lively weekly reflecting current opinion. But the principal burden of interpreting political events fell on me. This was in addition to my commitments as a leader-writer for the Azad. But I was young enough and energetic enough to be able to cope with this work. Besides the intoxication of the political atmosphere, the intense excitement generated by day-to-day developments was an effective antidote against any kind of boredom and strain. '*Bliss was it in the dawn to be alive and to be young was very heaven*'. If this was true of Wordsworth as a young man watching the outbreak of the French Revolution, we reacted to the events of 1946 and 1947 in the same spirit. The possibility of what was widely believed to be a wild dream being realised within our lifetime was too thrilling to be fully comprehended. We were riding on the crest of a wave. Danger of shipwreck still loomed ahead, but as 1946 moved to a close and as Lord Mountbatten spoke in urgent terms of the determination of the British Government not to stay in India beyond 1948, we appeared to have steered clear of the main shoals.

But had we really done so? I have not so far mentioned the greatest single event of 1946 which, to use a current cliché rendered the polarisation between Hindus and Muslims absolutely final and decisive. This was the chain of communal riots beginning with the great massacre in Calcutta on 16 August 1946, which spread throughout eastern India. 'Riot' is actually a euphemism for what was in fact civil war. The casualties in dead and wounded ran into five

figures in most places. Hundreds of homes were burnt and razed to the ground; whole villages wiped out. The barbarities were appalling. Not until the Civil War in East Pakistan in 1971 were they exceeded anywhere in the subcontinent. The terrible explosion of fury which swept the whole region from one end of Bihar to Calcutta left us stunned and numb.

Communal riots have been since the beginning of the 19th century an endemic feature of public life in the subcontinent. The scale and magnitude of the clashes which broke out in 1946 were however altogether different.

The massacre in Calcutta in August 1946 which set off a chain reaction throughout eastern India and was later in 1947 to lead to even more gigantic clashes in the Punjab came as a terrible surprise to us. The Muslim League had fixed 16<sup>th</sup> August for protest meetings throughout India to mark its disillusionment with the British Government over Lord Wavell's retreat from the promises he had made regarding the formation of his Executive Council. The purpose of these meetings, it said, would be to tell the Muslim public that constitutionalism had failed and that they must be prepared henceforth for Direct Action. The term Direct Action, as understood by all in the context of Indian politics, signified demonstrations, agitations, jail goings, defiance of the Police and civil disobedience. 16<sup>th</sup> August was not to mark the beginning of any Civil Disobedience movement itself; it was to be a day on which the League would proclaim formally its decision to renounce constitutionalism.

The proposed change in Muslim League policy was viewed by the Hindus with consternation. They feared that Pakistan would now become inevitable, and they were determined to frustrate the new move as best they could. On the Muslim side, the decision to enforce a general strike on August 16<sup>th</sup> and the attempt to compel Hindu, Sikh and other non-Muslim communities to co-operate was certainly a mistake. This was the work of Calcutta leaders and had nothing to do with Muslim League policy at the Centre.

On the morning of 16th August, I walked to the Maidan there being no trams on that day on account of the strike to attend the public meeting which had been announced. It was not until I crossed Park

Street that I saw any sign of trouble. The streets that I passed through were of course deserted, but there was no trace of violence. In Chowringhee, however the situation looked different. Defiant Sikhs were reported to be trying to frustrate the strike by keeping the shops open. I heard that clashes had already occurred in Bowbazar, Harrison Road, Dharamtola, and that men had been killed. How many no one could say. But people looked scared and dismayed. As groups of men from distant areas came in more reports of the same sort spread. Attendance at the Maidan meeting was not expected to be good. After a few addresses---most of them perfunctory---we were asked to disperse and defend ourselves as best as we could from attacks by non-Muslims.

I decided to walk back to my residence in Broad Street by way of the Lower Circular Road. I saw a mob breaking a wine-shop open with staves and shovels. Some people ran helter-skelter intent on pillage, so it seemed. I thought it best to hurry back home and not to get caught in this crowd.

Park Circus looked a safe haven. I felt relieved and concluded that the violence I had seen was sporadic and would soon die down.

During the next four days, reports reached us hour by hour of killings, pillage and other forms of violence. No newspapers arrived either on the 17<sup>th</sup> or on the subsequent three days. On 21<sup>st</sup> August somebody brought us a single sheet printed on one side: this was what the Statesman had been reduced to. With great difficulty the paper had succeeded in bringing out this sheet, and the news it contained stunned and frightened us into near-paralysis. Over ten thousand people were reported to have been massacred in those four fateful days. This was just an estimate, probably a very conservative one. Of the gruesome, blood-curdling barbarities, the Statesman could only provide hints; authentic reports were impossible to obtain. The whole city of Calcutta appeared to have gone absolutely mad, all feelings to humanity and neighbourliness to have been flung to the winds; the primitive impulses of cruelty and hatred had for four days reigned supreme. Men, women and children, none had been spared. Groups of marauders consisting especially in Hindu areas of educated youths had

set houses on fire, beating the inhabitants to death, throwing children into the conflagration.

It was unbelievable, inconceivable, yet true. Fear, hatred, vengeance, political enmity had combined to turn Calcutta's population into beasts temporarily, and we reaped a terrible harvest. Administration completely collapsed. The police not only failed to maintain order; they participated in the killings, Hindus on the Hindu side and Muslims on the Muslim.

At the end of those terrible four days, Calcutta was found to have divided itself into clearly demarcated Hindu and Muslim zones inaccessible to each other. The barbarities went on, on a somewhat reduced scale, for several weeks afterwards. Unwary pedestrians who ventured or strayed into a 'wrong' area seldom succeeded in reaching their journey's end; their corpses would usually be discovered a day or two later in a manhole or a drain.

Of course, the Hindu Press, almost in chorus blamed the Muslim League for what was happening. The fact that there was a Muslim-dominated government in Bengal was seized upon and held up as it irrefutable proof of its guilt.

Hardly had the Calcutta riots stopped when there began a systematic massacre of the Muslims in Bihar. Organised bands of armed Hindus roamed the countryside liquidating the Muslim population, and subjecting them to the most frightful atrocities imaginable. In many places, rather than be forced to watch their families being butchered before them, parents persuaded the children to commit suicide along with themselves.

Most estimates put the figure of dead at 50,000. Some people believed the real figure to have been higher.

The astonishing thing was that instead of doing anything to stop this pogrom, the Congress kept denouncing the Muslim League for its two-nation theory and its demand for Pakistan and blamed the Muslims for setting the whole process in motion. Mr Gandhi went off to Noakhali where a minor riot had occurred after the Bihar massacres. The cry of distressed humanity in Bihar left him unnerved. Here the victims were all Muslims, and the killers all Hindus. In Noakhali total casualties, even according to reports in the Hindu Press, did not

exceed a hundred to two hundred. Mr Gandhi had his own scale of values: a massacre of over fifty thousand was judged by him to be a minor affair as against the incident which had claimed a hundred lives.

This series of riots, as I have said, was really the beginning of the much-dreaded civil war towards which India had been drifting for years. As one reviews these events in retrospect, one is irresistibly struck by a paradox. The greater the symptoms of a countrywide convulsion, the greater grew the intransigence of the Congress, the more obstinate its refusal to agree to any compromise. As India tended to fall apart, the Congress kept insisting that the country was indivisible. Mr Gandhi said that partition would be sinful vivisection, to which he could never reconcile himself.

These statements worried us but little. We knew that they were only last-ditch efforts to prevent the inevitable. But there was cause for serious concern from the point of view of the consequences which Congress obstinacy was likely to produce. If this obstinacy continued, carnage on a larger scale throughout India would become unavoidable. But this did not seem to bother the Congress. We viewed the future---the coming year or two with hope and apprehension.

It was on this note that the year 1946 ended.

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## CHAPTER XVI

*Bliss was it in that dawn  
to be alive!*

-- *Wordsworth*

Lord Mountbatten quickly convinced the Indian leaders that he meant business when saying that he would advise His Majesty's Government to withdraw from India as early as possible. He was a man of action. Having come to the conclusion that independence had to be granted to India and could not be delayed, he resolved to complete the transaction in as short a time as possible. His energy impressed everyone, but his impatience seemed fraught with menace.

Mr Attlee's Government, who had originally announced that Britain would not stay in India beyond 1948, surprised many by deciding to quit a year earlier. The speed with which Lord Mountbatten, as Mr Attlee's principal agent in India, carried through this programme could not but evoke admiration, but it was also viewed with serious concern. Such speed was bound to lead to major violent dislocations; no one could foresee how the entire administrative machinery would be disrupted and how long it would take to put it in order again.

As the subsequent sequence of events made clear, the holocaust in the Punjab and the neighbouring princely states that cost several million lives was directly attributable to the callousness which marked the Government's attitude. Other lapses apart, this unseemly hurry so upset things that public order broke down completely. The way the Government reacted to criticism---(and few dared criticise the time-table for the transfer of power for fear of being dubbed anti-Indian)--- was to shrug their shoulders and declare that having asked for independence and partition, the Indians had no business to object if the British Government proceeded to dismantle their establishment as speedily as possible.

First in this historic sequence came Lord Mountbatten's announcement that the British would definitely quit on 15 August 1947 and that they would hand over to two successor states, India and

Pakistan. Pakistan was now within our reach, almost within our grasp. But we were dismayed at the details revealed by the Viceroy. Bengal and the Punjab were to be partitioned; a referendum was to be held in the Frontier Province and in the district of Sylhet. Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah in his 3 June broadcast described the proposed new Muslim State moth-eaten and truncated Pakistan, but he called upon the Muslims not to lose heart, but make the best of a bad bargain.

The demand for the partition of the Punjab and Bengal had been raised at the eleventh hour by the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha jointly to frustrate the Pakistan scheme. They were under the impression that the Muslims would be so unnerved by it as to resile from their demand for Pakistan and accept a compromise. In Bengal the initiative in this move was taken by Mr Shayamaprasad Mookherjee who belonged to the Mahasabha. But the Congress supported him both tacitly and openly.

To the Muslims of Bengal, who remembered how in the first decade of the century the Hindus had worked to undo the partition of 1905, the Hindu agitation in favour of partition in 1947 came as an eye-opener. Maulana Akram Khan issued a statement opposing the move in strong language, but it was no use. Mr Suhrawardy and Mr Abul Hashim put forward the scheme of a sovereign Bengal. At first, some Congress leaders seemed to approve but they soon backed away. To us in the Azad group the Sovereign Bengal idea, whatever the motives that inspired it, seemed a betrayal of the Pakistan ideology. I wrote a strong editorial in the Comrade attacking the scheme and denouncing Messrs. Suhrawardy and Hashem. We felt that in suggesting a Sovereign Bengal they were repudiating the basic principle of Muslim self-determination and asking us to accept the theory of a common Hindu-Muslim nationality. If one rejected the theory that the Muslims were a separate nation entitled to a separate national home, the principal plank behind the demand for partition was knocked out. How could Bengal demand the right to contract out of the Indian Union when the other states stayed in?

It is said that Mr Suhrawardy and Mr Hashem persuaded the Quaid not to object to the Sovereign Bengal scheme and it is said further that he tacitly approved. To these Bengali leaders a Sovereign

Bengal seemed a better alternative to a geographically fragmented Pakistan. I do not know under what conditions the Quaid agreed to waive his objection. One can at the most guess that Mr Suhrawardy must have pleaded that a Sovereign Bengal would not be materially different from the kind of autonomous state envisaged in the Lahore Resolution of 1940, and what was after all in a name? Call it Bengal or Pakistan, what mattered was that this area should be independent and not a part of the Indian Union.

I have no doubt in my mind that this betrayed a serious flaw in Mr Suhrawardy's thinking and in this lay the germ of Pakistan's disintegration. Neither the Muslim League nor the Congress had championed the cause of linguistic nationality in India. Yet Mr Suhrawardy thought that Bengal was to be treated as an exception and given the right to contract out of the Indian Union because it claimed to be linguistically homogeneous. I am not at all surprised that the Congress High Command rejected the scheme. If Mr Suhrawardy thought that an independent state in eastern India would be in reality Pakistan, call it what we liked, the Congress from its point of view objected to it on the self-same grounds. They had reason to fear that the principle of linguistic nationality would prove a more fissiparous and centrifugal force than the principle of religious nationality. The Pakistan scheme could at best split India in two; linguistic nationality would have led to fragmentation all over and reduced India to a jigsaw puzzle.

The most serious object from our point of view to the Sovereign Bengal Scheme was that it demonstrated to the rank and file of the Muslim League Party that the demand for Pakistan was after all a sort of bargaining counter and that all they had been told about the Muslims being a separate nation with their separate culture and civilization was hypocrisy. This was the view that the Awami League and the conspirators against Pakistan exploited in later years. The spectre of Bengali nationalism which made short work of the foundations of Pakistan in the period from 1968 to 1971 could not have acquired the divisive and destructive force it displayed but for the Sovereign Bengal Scheme. The shift from religion and culture to language was so fundamental a change in the Muslim position that

although temporarily in 1947, it was rejected, it undermined their moral strength like an invisible cancer and exposed them to enormous risks.

The fate of Hyderabad in 1948 clearly showed how a Sovereign Bengal, if it had come into being, would have been treated by India. Isolated from the rest of the world, almost encircled by the Indian Union it would have been swallowed up in a short time upon the pretext that India could not afford to have right in its midst an unstable political entity with a large Hindu population fretting constantly at the control exercised over them by the Muslims. I doubt whether the state would have lasted even six months.

Even supposing that the willing consent of the Bengali Hindus had been obtained initially, the state would have been embroiled in the revival, in a new context, of the old rivalry between the two communities: an advanced Hindu community and an economically and politically backward Muslim community. The Muslims with their numerical strength would have tried to wrest from the Hindus a share in the economic life of the state and that would almost certainly have led to a renewal of inter-communal strife. Muslim peasant against Hindu landlord, Muslim businessman against Hindu industrial tycoons, Muslim clerks against Hindu officers; this had been the common feature of life in Bengal during the first forty-five years of the 20th century. What political magic could possibly resolve these antagonisms?

Mr Sarat Chandra Bose and Mr Kiron Shankar Roy, both from the Bengal Congress, were reported to be supporting the Sovereign Bengal Scheme. But within a week or so it was announced that the scheme had been rejected by the Congress High Command.

We heaved a sigh of relief. But we felt that the mischief whose seeds were sown now would one day sprout into a positive danger to the new state of Pakistan.

The first signs of this manifested themselves in the articles which now began to appear in the press about the shape of things to come. Hitherto it had been assumed universally that if Britain withdrew after transferring power to two successor states, Hindi and Urdu would be obvious choices as State languages: Hindi in India and

Urdu in Pakistan. Some Bengali intellectuals, Mr Abu Rushd Matinuddin among them, who would not have objected to Hindi if India had remained united, now came forward with the suggestion that the two wings of Pakistan should adopt Urdu and Bengali as their state languages. Mr Matinuddin discussed the issue in an article published in the Comrade, arguing that any other arrangement would be unrealistic. Other writings in the Bengali newspapers in the same vein indicated the turn that thinking among a section of Muslims was taking.

We supposed in all sincerity that this was a legitimate attempt to anticipate and resolve some of the difficulties that the new state might face, never suspecting that these suggestions were part of a grand design. Mr Badruddin Umar, son of Mr Abul Hashem, in his book on the Language Movement has recorded how immediately upon the establishment of Pakistan, the Communist Party of India convened a meeting in a Muslim hotel in Calcutta to plan its future strategy. Some people claim, not Mr Umar, that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was present at this gathering. Be this as it may, it is certain that our enemies were busy as early as 1947 surveying the situation and formulating a scheme as to how to reverse the results of the partition. Mr Umar's book and the revelations it contains are an effective answer to those who honestly believe--- and there are some even in West Pakistan (which is all that is left of Pakistan now) who thought so--- that the Awami League's movement for secession represented a reaction against the neglect and indifference shown towards East Pakistan by the Centre. The communists were shrewd enough to foresee some of the problems that would arise in future. Their strategy was so planned that as these problems appeared they turned each to account to sow discord between the various nationalities in Pakistan, particularly between the two wings. They were assisted by the lack of imagination which characterised the politics of the Centre after the deaths of the Quaid-e-Azam and Mr Liaquat Ali Khan. The location of the capital at Karachi was turned into a grievance; an unnecessary controversy was stimulated over the choice of the State Language; East Pakistan's failure to utilise development funds was interpreted as subtle move initiated by the Centre itself, to perpetuate its

backwardness; the use of foreign exchange earnings from jute for expenditure on Central government projects was termed robbery. Each time a controversy of this kind was created; the Central government reacted by saying something which showed that they were unable to comprehend the workings of the East Pakistani mind or had no idea about the real aim of the conspirators.

In 1947 however the conspirators had to be content with the support of an infinitesimal fraction of the population. The overwhelming majority were lined up solidly behind the Muslim League. If the elections of 1946 had swept the decks clear of such dissidents as Mr A. K. Fazlul Huq, the referendum in Sylhet confirmed the popular support behind it. Sylhet was a Jamiat-e- Ulama-i-Hind stronghold. Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani exercised over its Muslim population a degree of influence almost unequalled anywhere else. He was a theologian, was regarded as savant and respected widely for the rectitude of his private life. Politically he belonged to the same school of thought as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad but was much less interested in secular politics than the latter. But his religious influence did not avail to persuade the electorate to vote against Pakistan. The irony of historical processes is thrown into sharp relief by the part played in the Sylhet referendum by men like Maulana Bhashani who subsequently supported the secessionists.

Victory in Sylhet produced a sense of elation shared by the entire nation. About the same time the Muslim League won a resounding triumph in the plebiscite in the N.W.F. Province. But these successes were overshadowed by the tragedy that overtook the Punjab and the neighbouring princely states. A systematic campaign to liquidate the Muslim population was launched in this area under the direct auspices of the ruling chiefs and party leaders. Hundreds of thousands were put to the sword. The Central Government watched helplessly and refrained from effective counter-measures against these barbarities in spite of frantic appeals from the Quaid-e-Azam. The barbarities committed against defenceless villagers were appalling in the extreme. There began now a mass migration of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs from east to west and from west to east, resulting in a complete population exchange between East and West Punjab.

Calcutta after being quiescent for a few months after the holocaust of August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1946, erupted again. Sporadic rioting went on from week to week. Normal urban life was paralysed. People could not move freely. The whole city became divided into isolated Hindu and Muslim zones, regarding one another with distrust and hostility. As the first preparations for the birth of two independent states, India and Pakistan, began, animosities between the two communities became intensified. The Mountbatten announcement of June 3, 1947 made clear that Calcutta would not come to Pakistan's share of Bengal. This was a sad blow to our hopes, but, as advised by the Quaid-i-Azam, the Muslims decided to make the best of a bad bargain.

A real piece of mischief, from which many evils germinated in later years was the notional division of Bengal announced on the eve of Independence on 15<sup>th</sup> August. It was stated that the real boundaries would be determined by the Radcliffe Commission and that in the meanwhile to facilitate the transfer of power on 15<sup>th</sup> August certain areas such as Khulna, Murshidabad and Chittagong Hill Tracts would be notionally assigned to one or other of the two states. It was on this basis that Khulna with a 51% Hindu majority celebrated Independence Day with the Indian flag and Murshidabad with a 56% Muslim majority hoisted the Pakistan flag. A few days later the position of both areas was reversed, Khulna going back to Pakistan and Murshidabad being restored to India. The exercise was wholly unnecessary and only served to sow seeds of distrust and hatred between the Hindu and Muslim populations of these regions. That they were human beings subject to emotional upsets was wholly ignored.

All over Calcutta, Muslim officers and businessmen whose homes were in areas falling within the Pakistan boundaries, began hectic preparations for their departure. Maulana Akram Khan decided to wait for all this hurry to die down before starting to transfer his establishment to Dacca, the capital of East Bengal. He said Mr Bidhan Roy, the West Bengal Chief Minister was a friend of his and he would have no problem sorting things out. In the event, he was cruelly disillusioned. For Bidhan Roy soon issued an order forbidding any newspaper plant to be moved out of Calcutta. The result was that when

the Maulana finally quit Calcutta, he had to leave everything behind and start again from scratch at Dacca.

But I am anticipating. To return to the main story--- Independence Day dawned in Calcutta amid scenes which were unforgettable. There were no rejoicings, there was an air of artificiality in the manifestations of public jubilation over the attainment of independence. The Muslim population, gripped by fear and wracked by thoughts of the bleak future that awaited them, participated in Jai Hind demonstrations. I found small Muslim girls who only a week ago had been shouting Pakistan Zindabad waving Indian flags at Sikhs and Hindus, who occasionally acknowledged their greetings condescendingly. But all the humiliation was offset by the thought that in Pakistan itself, at Karachi, Lahore, Dacca, their friends were celebrating the birth of an independent Muslim state, which symbolised the hopes of the entire Muslim community of India. This was indeed the mood in which the Muslims of the "minority" provinces had hailed the Pakistan movement and worked for its success.

Every train from Sealdah now carried Muslim passengers leaving for Pakistan, the returning trains bringing back to Calcutta Hindu officers who had sought transfers to places in West Bengal. Most Muslim teachers at the Islamia College where I worked left before 15<sup>th</sup> August. I found myself in a quandary. I had earlier declined to go to Krishnanagore when under the notional division that place had been a part of Pakistan. But no fresh orders having arrived, I was obliged to wait. I spent my time walking about in the streets, watching people's reactions to the new situations, and of course there was work for the Azad and the Comrade to do.

Finally in September came a letter from the office of the Director of Public Instruction located temporarily in Chittagong, asking me to join the M. C. College at Sylhet. I was relieved. But there was a snag. The letter stated that I was being given a fresh appointment and that the period I had spent at the Islamia College would not count towards the length of my service. To have this injustice remedied I decided to travel to Sylhet by way of Chittagong and seek an interview with the Director of Public Instruction.

I felt terribly excited. This was going to be no ordinary journey. I was leaving Calcutta behind, maybe for good, and embarking upon a new career---it was new for all practical purposes---in a new country. Sylhet had never since the days of the first partition of 1905 been a part of East Bengal: how would the people welcome a man from outside? Then there was the intoxicating thought of what it felt like to be in a free country. Like everybody else, I was full of dreams about Pakistan's future, its economy, society, culture and literature. I had no doubt in my mind that Pakistan was going to be an ideal state, utopian in its achievements and that it would avoid the meanness that marked the performance of Congress governments in India. I felt that our attitude towards the Hindu minority in Pakistan must be such as would shame India into an awareness of their lapses and serve thus to protect Muslim minorities in India.

Certainly, we wanted Pakistan to be an Islamic state. But I did not want the term Islamic to be used in a narrow theocratic sense. None of my friends did. There were differences among us over the degree to which theologians should be allowed to have a say in the shaping of the new state. Some spoke vaguely of enforcement of Quranic laws. But we all believed that Pakistan would achieve a reconciliation between the Quranic laws and modern jurisprudence. We certainly did not advocate the rejection of modern science or philosophy.

I realise in retrospect that there was much woolliness in our thinking, much nebulosity, much inconsistency. But we believed that we judged the mood of the Muslim public correctly in emphasising that the state of Pakistan must have Muslim ethos and that it must be a place where the Muslims would not have to live in constant danger of being slaughtered or assaulted on account of the fact that they were Muslims. The masses genuinely identified their vision of perfect political, social and economic bliss with the ideal sketched in the Quran, and they desired a straightforward enforcement of Quranic commandments and injunctions, regardless of whether this involved the rejection of modern progress. But the middle classes and the educated elite were much less clear in their minds as to how modern progress---which they had no intention of sacrificing---- was

to be made compatible with religious orthodoxy. As subsequent events showed, the vacillations in the mind of the educated classes, their lack of a sense of direction, were to prove Pakistan's Achilles' heel.

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## CHAPTER XVII

*Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds*  
- Shakespeare

If I were writing a history of the Pakistan movement, I should record in detail the stages by which the new state disintegrated. That would involve a close examination of its politics and economics and social evolution. The bungling and delays over the framing of a Constitution, the erratic politics that led to an accentuated public misunderstanding of the motives of men at the helm of affairs, all this should find a place in a history of the decline and fall of Pakistan. Mine, however, is an attempt to explain, primarily to myself, the nature of the rot that undermined its foundations and brought about a complete reversal of the feelings of the East Pakistan population. I do not deny that mistakes were made. I do not deny that the Government showed occasionally a callousness towards the trends of public feeling which one could only describe as astonishing. But none of these factors would account satisfactorily for the happenings of 1971 without reference to a conspiracy and without presupposing that there were agents at work both within and without the state who were determined to destroy it and took clever advantage of the lapses and errors and shortcomings of those on whom the responsibility of building up Pakistan devolved.

The offensive against Pakistan took three forms: cultural, political and economic. On each front a subtle strategy was pursued. The enemy's first task, while appearing to be vitally concerned about the survival and prosperity of the new state, was to plant suspicions, to stir up misgivings, to create issues. If the attempt succeeded, the suspicion or misgiving would be carefully nurtured, allowed to grow, made to appear real. At this stage other issues would be brought in embracing a wider spectrum of the national life. It was also noticed that lest public interest in the issues should die down, a carefully planned succession of newer diversions was created, each contributing to the effect aimed at, namely, that the people of East Pakistan. were

being slowly bled white economically, enslaved politically, and subjugated culturally.

The enemy's greatest allies in this campaign were our complacency, good faith, naiveté, stupidity, insensitiveness and failure to act decisively at the right moment. Without such allies to assist them, they would never have scored the triumph they did. We need, therefore, to recognise that we owe our misfortunes as much to the enemy's scheming as to our own blindness in the face of danger. In the pages that follow, I shall try in my own way to analyse the enemy's campaign, the three aspects of it separately, I would deal first with the cultural aspect.

The main cultural weakness of the present generation (or rather the last two generations) of Muslims in Bengal consists in their neglect of the classical languages, Arabic and Persian. This has tended to cut them off from the rest of the Muslim community outside Bengal, to rupture those bonds, subtle and invisible which sustain a people's sense of spiritual cohesion. A Muslim, lacking in Arabic and Persian, even at second hand, came gradually to forfeit the feeling that he was part of larger cultural entity. He forgot Islamic history; he ceased to take pride in the achievements of Muslim peoples elsewhere. Jawaharlal Nehru notes in his Autobiography published in 1935 that one of the greatest bonds among Muslims was a shared pride in the past achievements of Muslims. Since 1935 new trends in education, de-emphasising the importance of Arabic and Persian, had considerably eroded this pride. These trends were at work all over India, but outside Bengal they did not produce the same effects.

The reason is that whereas non-Bengal Muslims had in Urdu a substitute which at least offered partial compensation for the loss caused by the decline of classical Muslim scholarship, the Bengali Muslims had nothing like it in their armoury. For one thing Urdu itself represented a Muslim achievement. The main writers were Muslims; the ambience they created was steeped in Muslim traditions; many of the renowned Arabic and Persian classics were available in Urdu translation; much of the vocabulary, as a matter of fact most of the nouns and adjectives were drawn from Arabic and Persian; the imagery Urdu poets used was borrowed directly from those two

languages. Secondly, owing to these reasons, an Urdu-speaking Muslim, even when cut off from Arabic and Persian was never deprived of that sense of pride in his own heritage without which social cohesion cannot last. His Bengali counterpart, on the other hand, saw nothing around him except evidences of Hindu achievements. Though Muslims started cultivating the Bengali languages as early as the sixteenth century, and though it is also true historically that without the patronage of Muslim-rulers Bengali would never have made any progress, the fact remains that the number of outstanding Muslim writers in Bengali is comparatively small. The Muslims contributed little to the literary renaissance in Bengal which took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

To the generations that grew to maturity before the First Great World War the absence of Muslim achievements in Bengali did not matter much. The educated section among them were conversant with Arabic and Persian as well as Urdu. Many of them had adopted Urdu as their own. Consequently the fact that vis-à-vis the Bengali Hindus the Muslims could lay claim to no outstanding work in Bengali did not affect their *amour propre*. They believed honestly that it was in Urdu among the languages of the sub-continent that the expression of the Muslim genius was to be found. The 19<sup>th</sup> century renaissance in Bengal had its counterpart in the rise of the powerful school of Muslim writers in Urdu, among whom the best known for political reasons was Hali. Hali in Urdu brought the Muslims the same sort of message as Bankim Chatterjee did for the Hindus. Hali's *Musaddas*, a political poem whose purport was to urge the Muslims to shake off their torpor performed the same service for the Muslim community as Bankim's novel *Ananda Math*. No Muslim who knew Ghalib, or Meer or Sauda or Shibli Nomani could feel small on account of a Michael Dutt or Bankim among the Hindus.

The new generation of Muslims who knew neither Arabic and Persian nor Urdu and who depended solely upon Bengali felt however completely cut off from the Muslim heritage preserved in these languages. Had they succeeded as the Muslims of northern India had done in translating the chief Muslim classics into their own language, their sense of alienation would not have been so great. But what was

available in Bengali ---apart from a body of verse narratives written in an idiom despised by the present generation---consisted solely of the works of Hindu authors expressing a civilization different from theirs and exuding a flavour, subtle, indefinable, elusive where not pronounced, which derived from Hindu mythology, epic and scripture. To have to accept it as their own meant wrenching themselves from their background. But to the majority it did not mean a wrench at all. Not having known what their own heritage was like, they did not feel that they missed anything by not being acquainted with the classics in Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

I have mentioned earlier in this account how we in the forties founded the East Pakistan Literary Society in the University of Dacca with a view to popularising the kind of idiom that Muslims used among themselves. Ours was no revolutionary demand. We were repeating in our manifesto the claims put forward earlier by such writers as Qazi Nazrul Islam himself or Abul Mansur Ahmad. Now the fact is that these people had grown up in a Muslim atmosphere. They themselves did not know much Urdu, or Persian or Arabic, but they had as children breathed the essence of Muslim culture, imbibed the rhythms of Arabic Qasidas and Persian Gazals, and assimilated unconsciously the manifold influences summed up in the word Islam. Their standards of judgement, their modes of thought were cast in an Islamic mould. Had Muslim Bengal produced a succession of powerful writers like Nazrul Islam, the problem would have solved itself. But a single Nazrul Islam as against a galaxy of Hindu luminaries was not much help. Nor was Nazrul Islam a reliable guide. A great individualist, he could not be fitted into any theory; he wrote as he pleased, said what he liked. If some aspects of his practice could be adduced to strengthen the case for a Muslim idiom in Bengali, there were other writings which lent support to the other view.

The process I am trying to describe could be a fascinating study in group psychology. Here was a society in transition, undergoing a slow change from one kind of culture to another through a process of education, being alienated from its cultural inheritance and involuntarily affiliated to an entirely different culture. The Pakistan movement on the political plane was an attempt to arrest the

Muslim's conversion to Hinduism, but in Bengal language introduced additional complications. It is not that we were not aware of them. But I doubt whether man like Mr Fazlul Huq or Mr Shaheed Suhrawardy, both of whom were thoroughly steeped in classical Muslim scholarship, were alive to the problem. Most of the prominent Muslims of their generation, Khan Bahadur Abdul Momen and Mr Abul Qasem of Burdwan, Sir Abdur Rahim, Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi had had a pseudo classical education, with its emphasis on Urdu and Persian. Sir Abdur Rahim, though he belonged to a Midnapur family spoke Urdu at home. The other three, while fluent in Bengali, belonged also to an Urdu-centred world. They would never have thought of regarding the Hindu writers of the nineteenth century as representing their own cultural heritage.

The attitude of Mr Abul Qasem's son, Mr Abul Hashem, was very different. He was one of the main spokesmen of the new self-consciousness among Muslims as Bengalis. To him Tagore rather than Ghalib, Bankim rather than Hali appeared to be the true voice of his people. The non-Bengali Muslims were viewed by people like him as strangers with very little in common with the Bengali Muslims.

It was this change of attitude towards their past and traditions which made the language movement of the fifties both possible and powerful. As the new generation nursed on Bengali classics exclusively came to maturity and started occupying positions of authority, the entire cultural atmosphere underwent a perceptible change.

Immediately upon the establishment of Pakistan, the conspirators stimulated subtly a public debate on the state language issue. The adoption of Urdu, they claimed, would pave the way for the cultural and economic subjugation of the Bengali Muslims. The more important jobs would go to those whose mother tongue was Urdu and gradually the Bengali Muslims would be ousted from all positions of power. Young men in the University of Dacca fell a prey to this propaganda and started worrying.

Those of us who never suspected---to our utter shame---that the controversy could really have been inspired by ulterior motives felt shocked when a handful of students--- four, it is reported---protested

noisily when, addressing the Dacca University Convocation in March 1948---the Quaid-e-Azam declared that Urdu alone could be the lingua franca of Pakistan. It was for us inconceivable that as early as March 1948 anyone in Pakistan could dare insult the Quaid-e-Azam publicly. Yet the incident did take place and its sequel practically sealed Pakistan's fate. Although everybody felt horrified, no action at all was taken against the culprits. They were allowed to continue in the University, no reprimand was administered to them. On the contrary, the Government of East Bengal, then headed by Khwaja Nazimuddin, apparently took the view that such youthful exuberance deserved to be overlooked and pardoned. The Government should have known that misbehaviour with the Quaid-e-Azam had incensed the entire population of East Pakistan, and any punishment meted out to the miscreants would have received the approbation of an overwhelming majority. Many felt genuinely puzzled at the Government's failure to act, realising clearly that the tolerance shown would be misconstrued and used as a springboard for further mischief in the future.

This was the time when Pakistan was locked in a grim life and death struggle with India over Kashmir. Her administration was still shaky. The stupendous refugee problem in West Pakistan was straining her resources to the utmost. India had first withheld her share of the Imperial Bank of India assets; the military stores and equipment which had fallen to her share had been misappropriated. Nehru talked almost daily of settling the problems created by Partition by force of arms. If a country needed cohesion and solidarity at any period, this was when it was needed most in Pakistan. But without the slightest reference to these national issues, the conspirators proceeded stage by stage to work up the language agitation.

The most effective weapon in their armoury was not love of Bengali among Muslims but economic fear. I know personally that a considerable section favoured Urdu for cultural reasons. But they were silenced by the arguments that Urdu would spell economic deprivation, unemployment, industrial backwardness and second-class status in general for Bengali Muslims.

The way the issue was handled by the Government was unimaginative and showed a complete lack of understanding on its

part about the implications of the problem. The government relied much too heavily on patriotism, believing that all they needed to do in order to counteract the enemy's designs was to draw attention to the dangers to Pakistan's existence. I have myself always felt, and said on many occasions that the official statements on language policy were wholly uncalled for. English continues even today to be the language of administration in both Bangladesh and Pakistan and yet the tragedy is that those of us who advocated a realistic approach to the problem and urged the retention of English were denounced as reactionaries. I remember that I became almost as unpopular in East Pakistan as in the West. Even persons like Dr I. H. Qureshi and Dr Salimuzzaman Siddiqui---persons whom I respect---came to think of me as a fanatical Supporter of English who for obvious professional reasons wanted the status quo to be perpetuated. Yet how far is this from the truth, I always felt that the creation of an additional problem like the language problem---so sensitive, explosive and potentially dangerous---- at a time when Pakistan's hands were full and before it had been consolidated betrayed an absence of statesmanship. Why could not the government have declared, specially after the Convocation incident, that there was no question of English being immediately replaced by Urdu, and that the issue would be resolved in the light of public opinion at some convenient date in the future if it was at all desired to do away with English. I have never understood why so much emotion was allowed to be generated over an issue which had little relation to the immediate facts. Even those who wanted Urdu or Bengali realised that no immediate change could be made, and that the country would have to retain English for pragmatic reasons for many years to come.

To me the whole controversy had an air of un-reality. To ruin the present for the sake of a future not even dimly discernible seemed to me neither practical wisdom nor sound idealism. The problem before us was how to consolidate the disparate national groups which constituted Pakistan into a psychologically united single national entity. Seeing that English, a foreign language, had fortuitously acquired a position which helped preserve the facade of national unity, should we have disturbed it? Urdu or Bengali outside the context of Pakistan was meaningless. If Pakistan survived, then alone the

question of Urdu or Bengali as the State language would have significance. All our efforts initially should have been directed towards the avoidance of centrifugal, and divisive issues and the strengthening of all those elements--whatever their origin---which made for unity. Instead we went madly ahead, in both wings of Pakistan, to create, sometimes to resurrect, the deadliest impediments to national unity. Political leaders as well as educators alike began a self-defeating campaign against English. Each step they took, each declaration they made, weakened the forces of national cohesion and strengthened the enemy.

The thoughtlessness of non- Bengali officials in the East Pakistan Secretariat served to lend colour to the enemy's propaganda. The thoughtlessness was a compound of arrogance and naiveté: arrogance bred by the conviction that Urdu alone was and could be a true vehicle of Muslim culture; naiveté arising from their eagerness to share what they considered valuable with the Muslims of Bengal. The backwardness of the local population came to be viewed as a sign of their ethnic inferiority. Hitches between Bengali and non-Bengali Muslims--- often the result of business or professional rivalry----were seized upon by the enemy as proof of the sinister designs of the Urdu-speaking classes, and fanned and magnified into serious clashes. Such hitches occurred everywhere in India; they are inevitable whenever people belonging to different linguistic groups mix in a city. But nowhere outside East Pakistan were they given the same importance. It was the attitude of the Urdu-speaking officials which rendered the enemy's mischievous interpretations of minor incidents plausible and credible. Mr Fazl-e-Karim Fazli, the provincial Education Secretary, alienated considerable body of public opinion by aggressively advocating the adoption of the Arabic script of Bengali. The fact is that apart from the enemies, many people, who, left to themselves, might have favoured such a change, resented the idea of having to be told how to write Bengali by one who did not know the language himself. Mr Fazli's intentions were patriotic; he wanted a single script for the country, believing that unity of script would make for greater cultural unity. But his suggestion came at a time when the conspirators

were busy stirring up suspicions about the non-Bengalis, and it proved additional grist to their mill.

I am intentionally and deliberately using the term conspirators repeatedly, and, as I have said earlier, I have no doubt in my mind that there was conspiracy on foot. How else does one explain the proceedings of the Literary Conference held in 1949 at the Curzon Hall, Dacca where the Chairman, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah propounded his theory of Bengali nationalism? The Joint Secretaries were Mr Ajit Guha and Syed Ali Ashraf, Mr All Ahsan's younger brother, then a lecturer in the Department of English, Dacca University, I was at the Conference myself, having only a few months earlier in September 1948, resigned from the Sylhet M. C. College and joined the University. What I heard pained and disappointed me. I took a serious view of Dr Shahidullah's remarks and replied to him in a signed article published in the *Azad*. I said that Dr Muhammad Shahidullah's views clearly marked a departure from the two-nation theory, and were aimed at undermining the basis of Pakistan. If, I argued, we were to regard ourselves as Bengalis first, how could we accept the basis of Pakistan? It seemed strange to me that so soon after the establishment of the new state through a process involving a great deal of sacrifice and bloodshed, a person like Dr Shahidullah should begin openly, publicly, questioning its basis. What, I asked, was the motive behind this revival of the controversies which had preceded the creation of Pakistan?

Dr Shahidullah, politically always a simple-minded man, who had uttered those remarks without fully realising that they could be interpreted as a frontal attack on Pakistan's basic ideology got scared when my protest appeared in the *Azad*. He thought I had intentionally exposed him to the risk of arrest by drawing attention to the implications of his speech. For nearly two years afterwards he refused to talk to me directly eyeing me with suspicion as a sworn personal enemy.

One of the delegates from Calcutta to the Curzon Hall Conference was Kazi Abdul Wadud. He had always been opposed to Pakistan and had chosen after 14<sup>th</sup> August 1947 to stay in Calcutta rather than move to Dacca like other Muslims. I had great respect for

him. He was not a hypocrite; he made no secret of his views, and practised what he professed. When we met him, he said he was delighted that a conference of this kind was being held so soon after the establishment of Pakistan. He felt that this showed that the Muslims were having second thoughts about it and were beginning to realise that they were culturally affiliated to the other part of Bengal.

I do not remember who else from Calcutta attended. But the significance of the Conference lay in the fact that its organisers had succeeded by a combination of hypocrisy and an appeal to the linguistic feelings of a section of the Bengali Muslims, in firing the first salvo in the campaign against Pakistan. Nothing was said openly against the ideology of Pakistan. References to politics were carefully avoided. The Conference was treated as a "literary" affair, and those who spoke laid stress on language and literature. A great many, who would have denounced the organisers had they suspected the conference's real purpose, were taken in by the subterfuge. They saw nothing in a discussion on Bengali literature. But it was clear to me and to other members of the old *Azad* group that the offensive against Pakistan had been opened.

Unfortunately, in spite of my article and editorial comment in the *Azad*, which exposed the real motives of the organisers, the government chose to treat Curzon Hall affair as a minor incident which deserved to be ignored. And this, notwithstanding the fact that the East Pakistan Secretariat at the highest level was manned about this time almost exclusively by non-Bengali officials. There could be two explanations. Either the Nurul Amin Cabinet did not realise what was happening and was opposed to action against those conspirators. Or the Secretaries, who knew no Bengali did not care who said what in Bengali as long as they continued to hold the reins of power.

Seen in retrospect this Conference had far-reaching effects. Had the organisers been properly snubbed; had they been made to understand that their real designs had been uncovered, they would, I believe, have retreated. But having found that an offensive against Pakistan, carefully camouflaged, could be mounted and sustained with impunity, they grew bolder and planned a more open strategy. They however knew that they had to proceed cautiously, preparing the

public mind first for any step they took, and they fully exploited the advantages that the problems of a new country struggling for survival afforded.

Nothing spectacular, however, happened in 1949 or 1950. I myself left for the United Kingdom for higher studies in September 1950 and have no personal knowledge of events during the next two years. In February 1952, I read in the *Times* a brief report on the riots which culminated in the incidents of February 21. I felt worried, but frankly did not realise the magnitude of the developments. Later on my return home in October of the same year I heard some details. To this day, however, I have not been able to understand the logic of the events that led to police firing on a student crowd on February 21. Why did Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Prime Minister, have to make a public declaration in favour of Urdu? There had been no clamour for a declaration either for or against Urdu; it was not an urgent issue. Yet the Prime Minister's adviser had thought that a plain, unequivocal pronouncement would resolve the doubts and end the disputes on the state language question. The result was exactly the opposite. There now flared up an agitation marked by the worst of feelings towards West Pakistan, and the Press in East Pakistan, not excepting the English language newspaper, *The Pakistan Observer*, (owned by Mr Hamidul Huq Chowdhury) in chorus denounced the champions of Urdu as exploiters and tyrants.

I am writing on the basis of what I heard and read on my return home in October 1952, by which time the excitement of February had considerably subsided. But the incidents of the 21<sup>st</sup> February in which several young men lost their lives left behind a legacy which for the conspirators against Pakistan proved a rich and inexhaustible mine. The slogan which spread from town to town and from village to village was: 'We demand Nurul Amin's; blood'. Mr Nurul Amin, the provincial Chief Minister whose administration had been responsible for the firing became in the students' eyes a symbol of evil, tyranny and hatred. Students have been killed before in this subcontinent. Hundreds of them were arrested during the Civil Disobedience Movement of the thirties led by Mr Gandhi. Terrorism in the twenties claimed many victims. The Quit India movement of 1942 also led to

violent deaths. But never before had any political deaths been exploited as the deaths of three of our students at Dacca in 1952 were exploited. The reason is of course not far to seek: the incident of 1952 had been a godsend to our enemies who now could embroider it, exaggerate it, magnify its significance and hold it up as often as they liked as an instance of Pakistani bad faith towards the Bengali language and the Bengali people.

The Government for its part did not care to weigh the incident's importance, and took no steps to bring the real facts to light. What I learnt from unimpeachable sources indicates that the incident of 21<sup>st</sup> February was a plain case of defiance against law and order by an unruly mob, and had nothing directly to do with the Bengali Language. It is true that the mob had collected with a view to staging a demonstration in front of the provincial Assembly building in favour of Bengali but they were fired upon not because the Government was determined to suppress the Bengali language but because they were threatening to defy traffic rules and create a violent disturbance. Whatever the reasons, the firing assumed the semblance of the frontal and brutal assault on a cultural group, and provided endless ammunition for those who aimed at working up people's feelings against Pakistan.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

The movement in favour of Bengali attracted men even from such rightist groups as the Jamaat-e-Islami, who did not realise that they were walking into a trap. What would possibly be wrong, they said, in supporting the claims of Bengali as a state language? A language was a precious inheritance, and those who spoke Bengali had the right (why shouldn't they have it) to demand that their mother tongue must be given its rightful place in the political life of Pakistan. That is the way most people viewed the issue.

There was a time when those of us who could perceive the real drift of events, felt that perhaps a concession to the rising sentiments in favour of Bengali would help arrest the rot that had set in. But we were wrong. Each concession that was made was regarded as a victory by the conspirators who used it as a stepping-stone to the next stage in their campaign. No matter what was done to conciliate the students, the enemy was determined to press ahead.

In spite of the lukewarm efforts made by the Nurul Amin government to control, not suppress, the language movement, it spread. Shahid Minars or monuments were built in public places to commemorate those who had died on 21<sup>st</sup> February. Educational institutions were singled out for special attention. Every school and college had its own monuments, to which worship was paid ceremonially and formally on the anniversary of 21<sup>st</sup> February and other solemn occasions. State-supported institutions also were allowed to join in the game. These ceremonies evolved into a mystic cult, combining the appeal of the occult with the attraction of a romantic myth. Young people who took part in them discovered that they could thereby achieve an importance and a notoriety which otherwise would be beyond their reach. The imaginative ones among them derived from them, a deep psychological satisfaction which seemed to render their lives meaningful. Each language monument-- (no matter how obscene their shape and structure, for most of them resembled phallic emblems)-- became a visible symbol of something the, young believed to be holy and sacred, mysterious and full of tremendous potentialities.

One reason why no strong administrative action was taken against this growing threat to Pakistan's unity was because those in power, I mean the officers themselves, the administrators as distinguished from the Muslim League, ministers, had begun to be infected by the virus of linguistic propaganda themselves. Teachers in the University of Dacca were fully on the side of the students. Some of them later confessed to having taken a leading part in organising the 21<sup>st</sup> February demonstration. They kept up their encouragement to the students, elaborated the philosophy behind the movement, and built up the cult of Bengali nationalism. Young CSP (Central Superior Service) officers drew their inspiration from the same sources.

Finally--- and there is an air of doom about it---some of the young men who had participated in the language movement were recruited into the Superior Service, the East Pakistan Government, on the advice of its Secretaries, having decided that participation in that movement could not be considered proof of their disloyalty to Pakistan. Nothing could possibly have suited the conspirators better. You could engage in intrigues against the state, and express as a student sentiments prejudicial to the continuance of Pakistan, and yet claim the indulgence of the state you sought to destroy on the ground that whatever you did as a young man was to be condoned as youthful exuberance. Mr A. K. M. Ahsan, one of the three or four young men who insulted the Quaid-e-Azam at the 1948 Convocation was not only appointed to the CSP but in 1970 when General Yahya was looking ground for some East Pakistani civilians to be promoted to the position of Secretary in the Central Secretariat, he figured on the list a handsome reward for his subversive activities, indeed! Likewise, Mr Rab, another person promoted to the same position, was well-known for his rabid antipathy towards the ideology of Pakistan.

I do not know why, but the fact remains that from the time that President Ayub fell under the spell of Mr Altaf Gauhar and Mr Qudratullah Shahab, two CSP officers with leftist tendencies, a sustained and systematic effort was under way to woo the leftists and ignore the rightists. The latter were either taken for granted or treated as fools whose clumsy loyalty to the ideology of Pakistan appeared to the administration to create more difficulties than it solved. Mr Altaf

Gauhar's principal confidant in East Pakistan was Mr Munir Chowdhury. He acted as an intermediary between Mr Gauhar and the entire leftist movement in East Pakistan and must have convinced him that the suspicion harboured against them was baseless. Or is it possible that Mr Gauhar himself had secretly come to the conclusion that the disintegration of Pakistan was a consummation to be desired? I should not feel surprised if this turns out to be true. Mr Gauhar may have served President Ayub Khan loyally, but that does not prove that he did not as a leftist entertain beliefs antithetical to the continuance of Pakistan. There is nothing in Mr Gauhar's record as a civilian to demonstrate that he had any convictions regarding Islam or the ideology of Pakistan. He was personally a competent person, sophisticated, well-educated, but without any morals. Early on in his career in East Pakistan as a deputy secretary, he had earned notoriety as a womaniser, and had got into a scrape over an affair with a member of visiting Thai dancing troupe. It is rumoured that the Government was obliged to pay heavily in order to extricate him from a first-rate scandal.

Laxity in morals was in the CSP circles never considered a serious lapse. Mr Gauhar continued, in spite of this unsavoury episode, to rise, and when he left East Pakistan to join the Centre, he left behind him a sizable following of admirers drawn principally from the leftist groups who hoped to profit from his personal weaknesses for wine and women. They were not disappointed. Mr Gauhar did not forget his chums, and when President Ayub placed him in a position of authority which enabled him virtually to rule Pakistan, his lieutenants had a wonderful time, basking in the President's favour and pursuing their nefarious games under his nose. Dainik Pakistan, the Bengali Daily founded and owned by the Press Trust of Pakistan, was manned almost exclusively by leftists. Anyone who knew Bengali well enough to understand subtle hints, allusions, innuendoes and understatement, could see how the campaign against Pakistan was being conducted through an official organ.

It was no use pointing these things out to the administration. The enemies controlled both Press and administration. Outsiders would consider this an unbelievable paradox: a government wedded to

Islam and the ideology of Pakistan trying on the one hand to counteract to campaign against them and on the other encouraging and promoting activities calculated to bring about results they were most anxious to avoid. For proof one has only to examine the files of the Dainik Pakistan and also to a lesser degree 'Morning News', another Press Trust News paper. As long as Morning News continued to have a non-Bengali nationalism, but the news columns which Bengali editor, its editorial columns were at least immune from the virus of Bengali nationalism, but the news columns which Bengali reporters filled with their poison spouted forth a candid stream of lies calculated to sustain the myth of colonial subjugation by the West Wing.

The other man whom I have mentioned, Mr Qudratullah Shahab, proved equally useful to the leftists. A story writer in Urdu, he wanted around him admirers and flatterers and did all he could to eliminate from positions of authority anyone who did not see eye to eye with him. He gave President Ayub the idea of Writers' Guild which could be used to procure him the support of the intellectuals. Though one could see through the game, I would admit that in a country such as Pakistan where the majority of the writers were indigent, an officially backed organisation capable of doling out patronage could have achieved its object. But again Mr Shahab's own sympathies turned it in next to no time into a leftist stronghold.

I recall vividly the first Conference where the decision to form the Guild came formally adopted. This was in January 1959. I was one of the delegates from East Pakistan, and found myself on the Constitution Committee along with two other representatives from this Wing. They were Mr Jasimuddin and the late Mr Ghulam Mustafa. Mr Abul Hussain attended the meetings of the Committee as an observer. Mr Shahab proposed that the Central Executive of the Guild should consist of five or seven members each from Urdu and Bengali and three each to represent the regional languages. The proposal sounded innocuous, but I realised that the moment it was adopted the leftists would start saying that East Pakistan as such had been denied the representation which was its due. For Urdu and the regional languages, Punjabi, Sindhi and Pushto, all meant West Pakistan. That would give the West fourteen or sixteen votes against five or seven for East

Pakistan. Neither Mr Jasimuddin nor Mr Ghulam Mustafa would point this out. Finally I opened my mouth and quietly told Mr Shahab that his proposal would produce adverse reactions. He was startled by my objection. He demanded to know what was my alternative. I said that since the Writers' Guild as an organisation would in any case have a semi-political status, the best course was to adopt the principle of parity between the two Wings; that would be least calculated to breed misunderstanding. Any other arrangement, I said, would unnecessarily tarnish the Guild with a stigma which would make its functioning difficult.

No sooner had I concluded my remarks, than Mr Shahab stood up. He was shaking with anger. Pointing an accusing finger at me, he commanded: "You must not mention the word parity again. All that went wrong in the last ten years has been in the name of parity".

Mr Shahab was, I should mention in parenthesis, then Secretary to General Ayub Khan. His power and influence were unlimited.

To cross swords with him meant taking a real risk. His tone indicated that he had been offended by my remark. But I felt that to retract would be an abdication of judgement. I insisted that unless he agreed to modify his proposal, I could be no party to it. This made him absolutely furious. He threatened to walk out. I said he could do as he liked, but in my opinion the proposal he had put forward would exacerbate feeling in East Pakistan and give a handle to those who constantly complained of discrimination against this province by the West. Finally, discovering that I would not resile from my stand, Mr Shahab, in a fit of assumed exasperation, offered me the majority of the seats on the Executive Committee rather than agree to parity. I retorted by announcing my acceptance. Mr Shahab felt cornered, and sought a way out of the imbroglio by finally acceding to parity; eleven for East and eleven for West Pakistan.

The occasion was made memorable for me by the utter failure of Mr Jasimuddin and Mr Ghulam Musfata to back me up. I knew that outside the Committee they, particularly Mr Jasimuddin, would have been the first to stigmatise Mr Shahab's proposal as evidence of Western colonialism. But they would not open their lips. On the

contrary, Mr Jasimuddin who poses as one of the great champions of Bengali nationalism extended his support to Shahab when he was called upon to express his views. I could only feel disgusted.

The incident was typical of the manner in which relations between East and West Pakistan were progressively poisoned. The Bengalis would not protest openly, when they felt that something wrong was being done, but believed in confabulating secretly among themselves and complaining conspiratorially of discrimination and injustice. In the present instance, I am quite convinced that had Mr Shahab's proposals been carried through, the Bengalis would have reacted by adopting a pose of injured innocence. But now that I took upon myself the risk of voicing their grievances, they, in their characteristic fashion started flattering Mr Shahab and pretending that I had exceeded my limits in raising the question of a fairer distribution of seats.

Mr Shahab took his revenge against me later. First, after the first three years I was dropped from the executive. The next step taken was to eliminate me from the panel of judges for the Adamjee Literary Prizes and appoint Dr Sarwar Murshid, the present (1973) Vice-Chancellor, Rajshahi University, one of the chief henchman of the Awami League in the University as a substitute.

I have given some details of this incident intentionally. It shows how things drifted in Pakistan and how the leftists came to power in East Pakistan with the blessings and support of the West Pakistanis themselves. It also throws light on the reasons why the language movement grew from strength to strength, thriving on the nourishment it received from the Centre itself.

I have, however, anticipated things and should go back to an earlier phase in the movement's history.

The first anniversary of the 21<sup>st</sup> February incident, which I witnessed myself, passed off comparatively quietly. Precautions were taken against open demonstrations and the government appearing determined to suppress any signs of unrest, nothing was done overtly. But by 21<sup>st</sup> February 1954 the atmosphere had changed. Celebrations were planned on an elaborate scale. The government tried to stop them

swooping down on the University and arresting a large number of students from their class-rooms.

One could notice an ambivalence in the attitude of the police officers. They combined their official, outward ruthlessness with a sneaking sympathy for the students they arrested or beat, believing that the latter were fighting in a good cause.

The next phase in the movement's growth occurred after the general elections of 1954. Mr Nurul Amin and the Muslim League were swept off the board in these elections, a United Front composed of the Awami League, Mr A. K. Fazlul Huq's Krishak Proja Party and other groups captured the provincial Assembly and formed a government. The first thing they did was to declare 21<sup>st</sup> February official holiday; a monument on the spot where the students had died was promised. Actually, when a couple of months later, growing alarmed at the new government's activities, the Centre felt obliged to denounce it, construction had already started.

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## CHAPTER XIX

The imposition of Section 92A and the replacement of Chaudhri Khaliqzaman by Iskander Mirza as Governor could not stop the rot. The monument remained unfinished; the masonry platform and the concrete columns which had been erected becoming in their unfinished form a symbol and reminder of the repressive attitude of the Centre. So year by year, fed secretly by the homage of the young, and the devotions of the conspirators, the language movement grew.

Finally the Central Government changed its mind, and decided that perhaps surrender to what they now considered to be sentiment universally shared, would remedy this cancer and renew people's faith in its goodwill. When General Azam Khan was appointed Governor he announced the acceptance of 21<sup>st</sup> February as a provincial holiday, and a Committee was set up to review the whole question of the language monument. Dr Mahmud Hussain, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dacca was the Chairman. A cross-section of people from different walks of life were represented on the Committee; Mr Munir Chaudhury and myself were chosen to represent the University. Among other members were Mr Ali Ahsan, Director of the Bengal Academy, Mr Zainul Abedin, Principal of the College of Fine Arts, Khwaja Khairuddin, Vice-Chairman of the Dacca Municipality and Mr Musa Sharfuddin from the government.

We considered various proposals, talked to the architects who had drawn up the plans for the monument, examined the site and inspected the murals on basement walls painted by an artist called Hamidur Rahman. Neither the architectural plan nor the murals impressed me or the majority of the members. The design seemed to me to have been pictorial--- rather than architectural or sculptural: Approximately twenty-five feet high, four columns bent about the middle at an angle of 20° and joined together by means of iron bars which would hold in place panes of stained glass: neither the symbolism nor the actual spectacle could arouse any sensation except one of disgust and horror. We were told that light reflected from the stained glass on to the masonry platform below would symbolise the

blood of the martyrs. Mr Hamidur Rahman who conceived the design seemed to have been carried away by the idea of reflection. He had no experience of architecture; he thought that what appeared to him to be a good idea could be impressively translated into architectural terms. That he knew little about the arts was evident from his total unawareness of the fact that every art is conditioned by the medium in which the artist works. A musician whose medium is pure sound cannot aim at effects achievable in words only; a poet who uses words cannot rival a painter: a sculptor must suit his creations to the nature of the stone or metals he employs, and an architect has to remember that his medium is much less ethereal than sound, much less symbolical than words. The man who overlooks this is no artist.

It was suggested by Mr Musa Sharfuddin that a beautifully designed mosque or minar on the site would both be a lovely architectural landmark and transform the place into a hallowed spot. Mr Zainul Abedin speaking for the Bengali nationalists rejected the suggestion out of hand. He warned us that any alteration in the original plan would be viewed as an act of treachery and produce the most violent reaction conceivable.

The Chairman, Dr Mahmud Hossain who had expressed himself horrified by the frescoes which depicted scenes of unrelieved barbarity, now felt that in view of the warning given by Mr Zainul Abedin further discussion would be pointless; the Committee should wind itself up by recommending that the original plan be implemented.

Such was the atmosphere that we dared not object. So construction was resumed and the hideous monument built---- one of the ugliest I have seen anywhere in the world. Stained glass proved unobtainable; so the iron bars remained bare. The whole structure had a ribbed look. The reason why Mr Zainul Abedin had so strongly opposed the idea of a mosque or even a minar was because a mosque or minar would have had Muslim associations, and the Bengali nationalists did not want to be reminded that the population of East Pakistan was overwhelmingly Muslim. What was at first puzzling was why in their rejection of the architectural style called Islamic, they should have chosen a design that was aesthetically a monstrosity. After all, there were thousands of monuments in the non-Muslim world

which could have served as models. The fact, as I realised soon, was that the nationalists wanted to be original, and what is more important, those responsible for the design of the monument were a set of immature, ill-educated persons who thought that passion and emotion made up for lack of knowledge and taste. They were not far wrong. For millions accepted the monument. What did it matter whether a few of us thought it ugly and hideous? It reflected, they would perhaps argue, proletarian taste, and if those brought up in an atmosphere of bourgeois values were disgusted by it, they could not care less.

Meanwhile the language movement acquired among the students the proportions and status of a national festival.---(I don't think the word is inappropriate. Those who congregated annually to mourn the dead displayed a festive spirit, and danced and sang-- in a manner not suggestive in the least of feelings of sorrow).--The Central Government adopted a policy of appeasement. First there were the Adamjee Literary Prizes which were given annually. Then came the Central Board for Development of Bengali, a centrally financed organisation charged with the duty of preparing text-books in Bengali for use in colleges and universities. The Bangla Academy, financed provincially also instituted a series of prizes designed to encourage creative writing. The Ahmad Dawoods, an industrial group, followed with the announcement of more prizes for works of a serious nature.

But these measures failed to remove the suspicion that the Central Government really aimed at the destruction of Bengali culture. The greater the investment in Bengali, the greater was the belief that a conspiracy against the language was being planned. The press chose not to publicise the patronage that Bengali writers were receiving but any action taken to check or prevent open sedition was certain to be immediately interpreted as an attack on Bengali culture. I will mention two instances.

One was the controversy over Tagore. Lately, Tagore had become in the eyes of East Pakistan's educated youth the exclusive symbol of Bengali culture. The anniversaries of his birth and death were celebrated by them with a degree of enthusiasm far surpassing anything seen in West Bengal. The Government watched the movement taking shape and did nothing to counteract it. But the

conspirators knew what they were really aiming at and nurtured the movement carefully. Two objects were pursued simultaneously. One was to convince our youth that the Pakistani theory about cultural differences between Hindus and Muslims was baseless. Didn't Tagore appeal equally to all Bengalis alike irrespective of their religion and caste? The second object was to insinuate that the Central Government wished to cut them off from this magnificent literary inheritance because of its hatred for Hindus. This was easy to do. Young students were encouraged to overstep the bounds of propriety and decency in their pursuit of the Tagore cult. If authority frowned on the practice, this was an attack on Bengali culture. For instance, they would insist on mixed gatherings at these cultural functions carrying their freedom to lengths of which society strongly disapproved. But objections based on conservatism were interpreted as deliberate interference with Bengali culture. On the other hand, they felt baulked in the absence of such 'interference'.

The Tagore Centenary is a case in point. No one interfered. The Chief Justice of the Dacca High Court cooperated as Chairman. I contributed an article explaining that there were numerous instances in the world of the same language being shared by more than one country. I mentioned Belgium, France, Switzerland and Canada for French; Austria and the two Germanys for German; Britain and the United States for English. I said that each of these countries possessed a distinctive national personality, yet they could enjoy a common literary inheritance without being troubled by questions of what was national literature and what was not. Why, I asked, couldn't we study and savour the poetry and prose of Tagore as an integral part of the literature written in Bengali without having to disown its distinctive culture as a part of Pakistan?

I didn't realise that the purpose of the organisers in persuading me to write on Tagore was not to exhibit the variety of opinions on him, but to extract from me, and exploit for sinister political purposes, a confession-- (they thought it was a confession, though I spoke sincerely without any ulterior motives in mind) to the effect that Tagore was a part of the common literary inheritance of the Bengalis. Their immediate purpose having been served during the Centenary

Celebrations, my essay was excluded from the anthology on Tagore published subsequently by Dr Anisuzzaman of the Dacca University Bengali Department.

The sinister design behind the Tagore Celebrations became clearer in 1967 in the course of a controversy sparked off by Khwaja Shahabuddin who then held the portfolio of Information and Broadcasting. The India-Pakistan war of 1965 had added to tension between the two countries, and the Government, quite naturally, was anxious not to encourage sentiments of friendship towards an enemy state. The minister was reported to have said--(I haven't seen the exact text of his speech)--- that Radio Pakistan would not broadcast any songs, whatever their authorship, which offended against the national ideology of Pakistan. No one at first paid any attention to the statement; such utterances formed the staple of speeches from Government benches. But the Pakistan Observer selected the item for special display and gave it a headline which was calculated to infuriate the Tagore fans. The headline said: 'Tagore banned from Radio Pakistan'. No indications of this sort had actually been issued, but the news had the effect of touching off a veritable conflagration. Protests followed, loud and vociferous; youth organisations all over East Pakistan were alerted against what was termed a massive assault on Bengali culture; meetings were held daily, resolutions adopted calling for a retraction. Khwaja Shahabuddin whose knowledge of Bengali is limited, appears to have been unnerved by this reaction, and proceeded to give a clarification on the floor of the National Assembly which actually made matters much worse. Instead of firmly sticking to a pronouncement to which only subversive elements could really object, he offered a sort of apology for the misunderstanding he had created. His clarification amounted to an abject surrender to the conspirators, whose jubilation now knew no bounds.

Those in East Pakistan who had dared deplore the unseemly outburst of fanaticism from the Bengali nationalists felt betrayed and humiliated. A group of forty writers and University teachers had issued a statement claiming that Tagore was an "integral part of Bengali culture". There were other things in the statement clearly announcing their repudiation of Pakistani culture and Pakistani

nationhood. I felt that such a declaration ought not to be allowed to go unchallenged. Five of us, myself, Mr K. M. A. Munim of the Department of English, Dr Mohar Ali of the Department of History, Professor Shahabuddin, Deen of the Faculty of Law, and Mr A. F. M. Abdur Rahman, Reader in Mathematics warned the public in a three-sentence statement that the words used by our friends were capable of being construed to mean that they did not believe in any difference between Pakistani and Indian culture. We felt that such sentiments were liable to be used in propaganda against our national state. The reaction against us was as violent as it had been against the minister. We were denounced as Ayub's agents. The full text of our statement was published in Morning News alone; other newspapers merely said that we had backed the Government in the controversy. This was considered an unpardonable offence.

This controversy led to a further polarisation between the two groups in the University--- the group that had ceased to be loyal to Pakistan and the group which firmly adhered to the two-nation theory.

From this time forward, the language movement as a separate cultural movement in defence of the Bengali language ceased to have any significance. Its protagonists openly came forward to espouse straightforward separatism. To our surprise and agony, the Press, radio, TV and other mass communication media mounted a direct offensive against the ideology of Pakistan which left us breathless. The Government seemed powerless to intervene, or to care. Day by day the situation grew worse. The group which dominated the radio, TV and press, ---- consisting of such persons as Munir Chowdhury, Rafiqul Islam, Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, Neelima Ibrahim---- who all belonged to Dacca University---- constituted themselves into the guardians of Bengali culture assuming the responsibility of unearthing conspiracies against it and exposing the foes.

One of the curious manifestations of this development were the reaction to the work of a Committee on Spelling Reform set up Dacca University in 1967 at the instance of the late Dr Shahidullah. Now it was difficult to characterise Dr Shahidullah as an enemy of the Bengali Language but the seemingly impossible feat was accomplished by strategy which was as unethical as it was novel.

The Committee was a large one consisting, if I remember aright, of over fifteen members including Mr M.A. Hai, Professor of Bengali in the University of Dacca, Mr Munir Chowdhury, Dr Enamul Huq, Mr. Ibrahim Khan, Mr Abul Qasem and myself. Mr Hai, Mr Munir Chowdhury and Dr Enamul Huq constituted themselves into a group apart and openly declared that they would not cooperate. Their reasoning was peculiar. They were not prepared, they said, to consider any proposal of reform whatsoever. The time was not propitious. They were reminded that, all three of them had served on the Bangla Academy Spelling Reform Committee some years ago and were signatories to the proposal circulated on its behalf. They replied quite unabashedly that the situation had changed and they did not feel that they could support those proposals now. We were taken aback. The extent of their intellectual dishonesty was difficult to measure and even more difficult to comprehend. But none of the three---and Dr Enamul Huq was a man in his sixties--- had the slightest scruple in going back upon what they had themselves suggested as member of the Bangla Academy Committee.

The Shahidullah Committee Ultimately came up with proposals identical with those of the Bangla Academy and urged that they should be implemented at an early date. When presented to the Academic Council, they were, apart from the votes of Mr Abdul Hai and Mr Kabir Chowdhury, Munir Chowdhury's elder brother, unanimously approved. The following day I wrote for the University a press statement explaining the aim the Shahidullah Committee had in view. Dr Shahidullah had unfortunately been stricken with paralysis before the Committee could complete its work and could not take part in the controversy which now developed. But the proposals which the Committee approved were his. Of the members, he was the best fitted, by reason of his knowledge of oriental philology and the history of Bengali orthography what lines spelling reform should follow, and we thought it best to acquiesce in his ideas. I myself played a minor role in all this, and did not attend more than the first two of the committee's meetings. I had no intention of being embroiled in a controversy, and although spelling reform was an idea after my heart, I did not wish the whole scheme to be wrecked by openly championing it. I knew that

because of the manner in which my part in the earlier Tagore controversy had been misunderstood, I was liable to be singled out for attacks.

In the event, despite all this precaution I took to avoid open involvement, I could not escape the inevitable reaction. Mr M. A. Hai and his henchmen organised a demonstration against me within a week of the Academy Council's meeting. One day between 12-30 and 1, while at lunch in my room in the Arts Building, I heard a group of students about 20 to 30 strong marching down the corridors shouting slogans against me. I stepped out of the room and demanded to know what it was all about. The demonstration, an assortment of students drawn from departments other than my own, would not look me in the face and passed on. I felt amused.

Now it must be made clear in the most unmistakable terms that all this passion and excitement over Bengali and the imaginary threat to its future was confined to the student community. They had the support of a section of the educated classes, mainly teachers, lawyers and civil servants. But as far as the peasantry and industrial workers were concerned, there was not the least interest in the issues. How could they possibly understand all this talk about the Bengali language being in danger? They perceived no change in its status in so far as it affected them; it continued to be used in the courts and post offices; their children who attended primary schools learnt it, no one saying that Bengali wasn't to be taught. However much the students tried, they could not get anyone from this section of the community interested in the language movement. The peasants, in particular, watched with complete unconcern the construction of language monuments in village schools, and I feel sure that if the government had taken steps to explain to the peasantry how a new pagan cult was being nursed into life by our rebellious youth, they would have risen as one man against them and destroyed the monuments. But the policy of the Central and Provincial governments was to retreat continually allowing the outside world to form the impression that in this matter the students alone represented public opinion. I venture to say that had a referendum been held on the language issue even as late as 1958, an overwhelming majority would have voted for Urdu as the only state

language of Pakistan. But those at the helm of affairs were afraid of going to the people with a problem of this kind. They were so completely out of touch with them that they dared not speak boldly to them in opposition to the students whom they dreaded. Mr Nurul Amin became utterly demoralised after the 1952 firing and spent the subsequent period up to 1970 trying to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of youth, disowning his part in the firing. Mr Fazlur Rahman, the Central Education Minister who held strong views on the language issue, was not a popular politician. One could not imagine him swaying the public by emotional speeches. He thrived best in sequestered political lobbies where his talents for personal contacts on a limited scale, for outwitting rivals by setting one group against another, could have free play. Khwaja Nazimuddin did not know Bengali very well and was incapable of handling intellectual issues. The other men in the provincial or Central Cabinet were mentally negligible. The early death of Mr Habibullah Bahar, the only writer included in the first East Pakistan Cabinet was a real loss from this point of view. He alone could perhaps have beaten the students on their own ground, combining as he did a fervent faith in the ideology of Pakistan with a good record as a successful writer in Bengali.

Call them what you will, bad luck, wrong judgement, lack of foresight, alienation from the public, failure to gauge the trends of popular feeling,--- these factors combinedly helped transform a minor incident into a major event in Pakistan's national life, adding daily to the conspirator's strength, and paving the way for the upheaval of 1971.

## CHAPTER XX

*'Deaf, dumb, blind, they do not understand*

*- The Quran*

The political offensive against Pakistan began almost simultaneously with the cultural. It is not possible wholly to disentangle one from the other, but the main political developments can be distinguished.

First, immediately upon the establishment of Pakistan even before the new government at Dacca had started functioning properly, a campaign against the Two-Nation theory was put in train. This theory, it was said, was no longer valid in the new context, and, if persisted it could lead to further fragmentation of Bengal. Didn't the Hindus form about eight to nine percent of the population? If they were a nation apart, couldn't they demand the right to form a state of their own?

Notice how subtly the campaign was carried on! The larger context of India and the history of the Two-Nation theory were now played down. The theory was sought to be pushed to its logical conclusion village by village, town by town, hamlet by hamlet. Those who did not know the past or could not remember it clearly would of course be misled. It was as though you held that since the French and German were two separate nations with their national states, every French minority in Germany and vice versa had the right to secede!

The Congress had used the same argument against the whole idea of Pakistan. The Hindu leaders had said repeatedly that the Hindus and Muslims were so mixed up in the population that it was impossible to distinguish purely Muslim or exclusively Hindu zones, and it therefore followed, according to their logic, that an independent homeland for the Muslims was an absurdity! Now that Pakistan had materialised, they continued to employ the argument to weaken the ideological basis of the state in the eyes of its inhabitants.

Not daring however to suggest openly that Pakistan should be scrapped, they urged that its survival depended on the speed with which it could be consolidated. And didn't consolidation demand that

the system of Separate Electorates should go, that Hindus and Muslims should have the same political rights and learn to think of themselves as citizens with a common loyalty? Unexceptionable logic! The younger generation in particular, students in the Universities who studied political theory and textbook definitions of nationalism were impressed by them and felt embarrassed at the contrast which political realities around them appeared to present to text-book maxims. Public memory is short, and by 1950 the whole background of the struggle for Pakistan ceased to be common knowledge. Even those who knew the facts were swept off their feet by propaganda and began making the silliest statements on the electoral issue. Mr Suhrawardy himself took it up and finally convinced the Pakistan National Assembly by an array of subtle arguments that in its own interests Pakistan ought to terminate the separate electorates system. Thus at one stroke before the foundations of Pakistan had been consolidated and a common Pakistani nationalism forged, the whole basis of the new state was placed in jeopardy.

One of the arguments used by Mr Suhrawardy was that the abolition of Separate Electorates would dispense with the necessity of reserving any seats in the provincial or National Assembly for the non-Muslims, and lead actually to an increase in the number of Muslim members. This wasn't untrue. But in order to win the confidence of Hindu voters, the Muslims were now obliged not only to lay less stress on the fact that they were Muslims, but also to disown many of their past political beliefs. You could not possibly approach a Hindu electorate for votes with the plea that Islam heeded consolidation, or that special measures were necessary for the protection of Muslim cultural interests. The emphasis now was on 'secularism'. Secularism as interpreted in the Indian context meant that whereas Hindus were free to talk about their religion and philosophy, references to Muslim traditions were believed to betray a narrowness of outlook unworthy of twentieth-century man!

The whole controversy over the place of religion in the subcontinent's politics was carefully re-opened. Again, the plan employed was to isolate the issue from its context and focus attention on pure abstractions. Young students, who learned from their teachers

that religion was a private affair, were urged to consider the absurdity of having states and governments founded on this ephemeral basis. Yes, they saw, religion was certainly the private concern of individuals; how could their elders have made the blunder of accepting it as the basis of Partition in 1947?

One must make it clear that in the years following the establishment of Pakistan and the migration of upper class Hindus to India, the Hindu as a rival to the Muslim in Indian history came to appear something mythical. Very few Muslim children came directly into contact with them. Untouchability or the caste system, described in their text-books as curses which bedevilled political and social life in the subcontinent, were impossible for them to comprehend. Do what the Muslim League leaders might, it was not at all difficult to convince this post -1947 generation that the differences between Hindus and Muslims had been exaggerated. The sufferings of the Muslims at the hands of Caste Hindus in undivided India became a myth treated with a certain degree of skepticism.

This disbelief about the reality of Pakistan's basis crystallised gradually into a theory. Mr Qamaruddin Ahmad's book on *The Social History of East Pakistan*, which I have had occasion to mention earlier, was the first book to question the two-nation theory in print. He was followed by Mr. Badruddin Umar in a series of books in Bengali in which he offered in modem "progressive" terms an analysis of the culture and politics of the Indian subcontinent with particular reference to East Pakistan and scoffed at the ideas which had gone into the making of Pakistan. In the first book called *Sanskritir Sankat* (Crisis in our culture) he declared that there was absolutely no difference between the patterns of Hindu and Muslim social life except in respect of the ceremonies these two communities observed at weddings. He maintained in the face of all known facts that they ate the same food and dressed alike and even hinted indirectly that they worshipped in the same way. It was, he observed, owing to the machinations and wickedness of communal leaders that the Muslim community had been persuaded that their heroes in Indian history were different, that they constituted a different nation, and so on. Strange arguments! Apart from the question whether Hindus and Muslims

were different nations, to deny that they had differences in their social and religious life was so outrageous and astonishing a lie that it was difficult to conceive of an educated person making such a statement. It was like saying that since either rice or wheat or potatoes, meat or fish, milk, etc., formed the staple of people's food all over the world, all this talk about the Russians and Americans having different dietary habits was nonsense. Stripped down to essentials, all human beings appear alike. Do we not all have to eat in order to keep ourselves alive? Do we not dress to protect ourselves from heat and cold? Do we not need shelter and build houses to dwell in? Do we not group ourselves into families and clans of one sort or another?

But why do I labour the point? What Mr Umar said represented sheer perverseness, but perverseness with a design. For the arguments he employed, dressed up in 'progressive' garb appealed to the unwary and the immature.

I was asked by Mr Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, then Head of the Department of English at Rajshahi University to review Mr Umar's book for Mr Rahman's *Purbamegh*. I did so, trying to refute some of his arguments, opening my comments with the remark that Mr Umar's book reopened political controversies which we thought had been settled by the Partition of 1947. A rejoinder from the author followed in the next issue. The tone was impolite and acrimonious; Mr Umar said that if he was taking the readers of his book back to the pre-1947 period, I, by my arguments, appeared to carry them back fourteen hundred years across history to the first Islamic century. There was no answer to the points I had made, but at the same time he sounded frightened at my forthright assertion that he was no believer in the ideology of Pakistan. He pretended dishonestly that he was no traitor, which was precisely what he was.

While men like Mr Umar at Rajshahi University and Mr Abdur Razzaq at Dacca University continued to snipe at and sometimes openly attack the basis of Pakistan, our politicians went on committing one blunder after another. The search for an ideal constitutional formula answering to the exact needs of the stage was itself a major blunder. Why couldn't they have adopted a pragmatic approach and suitably amended the India Act of 1935 stage by stage? What exactly

was the necessity of an all-perfect Constitution which would meet all points of view and appear satisfactory from every angle of vision? In spite of the example of Britain before them, pragmatism appealed to none. Seven years were wasted on drafts and discussions, and meanwhile popular frustration at their failure to produce a Constitution and their seeming determination to cling to power indefinitely mounted. Intrigues against the ruling Muslim League began. Mr Suhrawardy broke away from it and formed his Awami Muslim League. Not content with this, he asserted that the Constituent Assembly had by its incompetence forfeited the right to form a Constitution. Encouraged by his attitude those in the Punjab who had been intriguing against the Muslim League Party prevailed upon Mr Ghulam Muhammad, first, to dismiss Khwaja Nazimuddin and next to dissolve the Constituent Assembly itself and order fresh elections. The whole structure of constitutionalism, slowly built up over the years and sustained by the example and influence of British practice at home crumbled.

From this to the emergence of General Ayub Khan as dictator in 1958 was but a logical inevitable step. The astounding thing is that the whole process was accelerated and furthered by the supposed champion of democracy, Mr Shaheed Suhrawardy. Not only did he hail Mr Ghulam Muhammad's dismissal of the Nazimuddin ministry as a legitimate exercise of his power by the Governor-General; he later swallowed his own dismissal by Iskander Mirza and considered it no humiliation to accept office under a former protégé, Muhammad Ali of Bogra. He didn't care even to defend the Constitution of 1956 to which he himself was a party.

It was only when finally in 1958 General Ayub swept constitutional pretexts away and arrogated all power to himself that he seemed to awaken. Study of the history of his period would prove that it was not love of constitutionalism or democracy that ultimately roused Mr Suhrawardy from his torpor, but it was the conviction that there existed little chance of his being able to recapture power under the new dispensation. Having helped to wreck the foundations of both democracy and constitutionalism he started belatedly to criticise President Ayub at a time when the latter in his turn, regardless of his

part in the unleashing of the forces of violence, was trying to give the country some semblance of political stability.

The parties which had done little or nothing to defend democracy when the first blow against it was struck by Mr Ghulam Muhammad, combined in 1968 to organise and launch a united campaign against President Ayub. This was a tragic exhibition of myopia for which it is difficult to find a precedent. For 1968 the issue was no longer whether Pakistan should have a presidential or a parliamentary form of government but whether it would survive at all. The writing on the wall, as they say, could no longer be misinterpreted, far less ignored. But it was actually ignored.

The Agartala Conspiracy of 1967 preceded in 1966 by the announcement of the Awami League's Six-Point Programme which amounted virtually to be an open declaration in favour of secession was scarcely given any thought. On the contrary, most opposition parties maintained either overtly or indirectly that the conspiracy case was nothing but a political ruse designed to eliminate Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from the stage. It's sad to reflect that even the Muslim League, now split into the Convention League, Council League and Qayyum League, behaved in a manner which clearly showed that the import of the Agartala case was little appreciated.<sup>6</sup> Some members of the party insisted that they would attend the Round Table Conference convened in February 1969 only on condition that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was released and the conspiracy case withdrawn. And this, in spite of the upsurge in February in East Pakistan in which Awami League workers and their supporters reduced the law and order fabric of the province to a shambles. The case was actually withdrawn, and the Awami League saw, to its surprise, that it could win the day by unreasonableness and violence. Sheikh Mujib attended the Round Table Conference, and refused to agree upon any terms, and upon his return to Dacca denounced Mr Nurul Amin, Mr Hamidul Huq Chowdhury and others, who had urged his release in emphatic terms, as traitors to the Bengalis.

The stage was now set for the denouement which followed in 1970 and 1971.

Historians who will in future investigate the events of this period---at least non-partisan foreign historians---- should try to unravel a number of mysteries which would shed light on the conspiracy against Pakistan which the Awami League was slowly maturing. The whole argument that injustices were perpetrated upon the Bengalis in the Constitution of 1956 falls to the ground when one considers that one of its Chief supporters--and I should say architects was Mr Suhrawardy himself. This Constitution embodied the principle of parity, which was one of his pet formulae; also it did away with the system of separate electorates which had hitherto been regarded as the sheet anchor of Muslim League policy.

Besides, Mr Abdur Razzaque and Dr Muzaffar Ahmad Chowdhury from the University of Dacca were both associated with the constitution- making process as advisers. They have not to this day disclosed what precise recommendations of theirs, the Constituent Assembly rejected. Their voluble criticisms of the Constitution are seen for the futile exercise in academic cynicism that they were, when one reflects that they themselves had no positive suggestions to make. Their attitude was typical of the usual Bengali attitude to things: that is indulgence in impractical criticism combined with an incapacity for any kind of positive suggestion. Where, one would like to know, was the blue-print for the future which would have turned Pakistan into a well-integrated happy state?

The second question which needs investigating is why Mr Shaheed Suhrawardy and his Awami League connived at the intrigues of Mr Iskander Mirza and General Ayub Khan which set in motion the whole process culminating in the establishment of a military dictatorship in Pakistan in 1958. Was it just malice towards Khwaja Nazimuddin? How far wrong would one be in discerning in it something sinister, a deliberate move designed eventually to wreck Pakistan?

Why did the man, I mean Mr Suhrawardy, who had no qualms about joining Mohammad Ali of Bogra's Cabinet under the auspices of Major General Iskandar Mirza refuse to cooperate with President Ayub Khan? Say what Mr Suhrawardy's supporters might, what was the qualitative difference between Mirza and Ayub?

President Ayub Khan's seizure of power in 1958 was certainly responsible for many of the evils of the subsequent years. But one would have thought that one of the few good things he did was to introduce the presidential system of administration. Mr Suhrawardy had expressed himself in favour of this system at an early stage in Pakistan's history. But the moment President Ayub introduced it, he started, in a manner characteristic of the Bengali love of mischievous cynicism, discovering in it a threat to civil liberties, a danger to the whole future of the country and much else. In spite of the obvious fact that the parliamentary system had not been working satisfactorily and had brought the state to the verge of political and economic collapse, now everybody who didn't like President Ayub Khan, joined Mr Suhrawardy in his criticisms, and the press and politicians alike, forgetful of past history, indifferent to all current problems, insistently demanded a return to the same discredited order as a panacea for all ills. Mr Nurul Amin and Mr Hamidul Huq Chowdhury in the eastern wing, Chaudhury Muhammad Ali and Mian Daultana in the Western were equally emphatic that nothing but the restoration of the parliamentary system could pull the country out of the morass into which it was fast sinking on account of the machinations of the Awami Leaguers.

A third mystery which future historians have to probe is why non-Bengali industrialists in East Pakistan, the Adamjees and Ispahanis and others, went out of their way to finance Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's campaign. Was it fear of a triumphant and revengeful Awami League that actuated them? Was it any sympathy with the Awami League's principles? The latter explanation must be rejected out of hand as being too implausible. But if it was fear and the belief that support for the Awami League was a sort of long-term investment which accounts for the pouring of the wealth of these misguided business houses into the Awami League coffers, one can only smile in retrospect, at their lack of understanding, at their utter failure to comprehend the nature of the forces operating on the political plane. Sheikh Mujib in his speeches had been saying openly that he wanted an end to exploitation. The Adamjees and Ispahanis thought that what the Bengalis behind the Sheikh demanded was a

share in the fleshpots. Of the grim and sinister spectre of Bengali racialism they had no idea.

The Central and provincial governments in their turn contributed no little to the Awami League's strength. President Ayub, apparently in a move designed to conciliate the Bengalis, declared the removal of inter-wing economic disparities to be one of the administration's constitutional responsibilities. Acting obviously under instructions for him, Mr Monem Khan, governor of East Pakistan, dilated upon these disparities in every speech he made, pointing out that their real architect was Chaudhary Muhamma Ali. The idea seems to have been to achieve two objects simultaneously, to score off Chaudhri Mohammad Ali, one of President Ayub's political enemies, and to underline the Government's genuine anxiety to grapple with a problem they had received as a legacy from the former premier. The effect of the governor's speeches was, however, entirely contrary to that which he intended. The Awami League was seen to be a true champion of East Pakistan's interest and its campaign appeared based on incontrovertible facts. Secondly, the Awami League was again seen to be right in its demand that East Pakistan must be granted almost the status of a self-governing dominion in order to be able adequately to counteract central neglect and exploitation.

Governor Monem Khan, usually painted as Sheikh Mujib's arch-enemy in East Pakistan did the most to popularise him and establish his credentials in the public's eye. It never occurred to him or to any one--- yes, I think never is the right word---to examine critically the whole question of inter-wing disparities or the political soundness of the demand that East Pakistan's representation on the National Assembly must be proportional to its population. Both issues were made use of by persons who believed that East Pakistan was being denied her legitimate dues. I shall discuss the disparities Issue in the next section, but I have always felt that as far as the demand for proportional representation was concerned, it could have been inspired only by either naive or wholly disingenuous motives.

Those who naively supported the demand took a short-sighted view of the future. The difference in population figures between the two wings was marginal; sixty million in the east against over fifty in

the west. The advantage which the difference of ten million could give the eastern wing could easily be wiped out by an increase in the west. Those who set so much store by East Pakistan's population figures should have been prepared for a possible reversal of the positions, but I have not heard any one---with one exception---openly arguing against the demand on this ground. The exception was Mr Abul Mansur Ahmad, who even after the fatal elections of 1970, pleaded for a return to the parity formula. That formula alone, he said, could effectively balance one wing against another politically and make for stability. The fact is, those who insisted on proportional representation in the name of democracy were not interested in the survival of Pakistan. They wanted a state of chaos which they knew---and they were proved right by the events of 1970 and 1971--- would lead to disintegration.

There is another factor to which among well-known politicians, only Mr. A. K. Brohi drew public notice in a written statement. The claim that East Pakistan had a larger population, he said, ignored the fact the province contained a sizable Hindu minority accounting for nearly six to seven, (according to some, ten) percent of the total figure. As far as the Muslims were concerned, West Pakistan had a definite edge over the east. Now the question was---- and it was a question which demanded serious consideration----- how could you claim numerical superiority by including in the enumeration a minority opposed to the very concept of Pakistan? Left to themselves, the Hindu minority would have voted for Pakistan's dissolution without hesitation. How could one, therefore, propose that in a matter so vitally concerning its survival they must be given a decisive say?

I am certain that the so-called 'progressives' would term the argument reactionary and undemocratic. Apparently, the democratic logic of numbers is on their side. But it is because the leaders of Pakistan fought shy of facing facts openly and preferred to be hypocritical rather than state the real danger of proportional representation that disaster struck.

The first blow in the campaign came from President Yahya. Neither Sheikh Mujib nor anyone else had expected that the issue of representation would be decided in the manner in which he resolved it

by announcing the formula of 'One Man, One Vote'. The matter was to be discussed and decided by the National Assembly itself. But no, rather than wait, President Yahya announced simultaneously two measures, both far-reaching, which upset the entire constitutional framework and paved the way for real chaos. The first I have already mentioned. The second, equally prejudicial to the country's stability was the dissolution of the one-Unit structure in the Western Wing. Having in this way disposed of both fundamental issues, President Yahya still went on pretending that the new National Assembly had before it the solemn task of framing a Constitution. There was little to do really.

Why President Yahya acted in the manner he did is a mystery which again future investigators with access to secret state papers might be able to solve.

To the charge that East Pakistani politicians and intellectuals could offer no plan about the future which could have saved this wing from the neglect and exploitation of which it is supposed by the Awami Leaguers to have been the victim, the usual reply, from these circles, is to point to the Six-Point Programme itself. Now apart from partisans, no one can possibly be expected to accept the view that the Six Points were a positive contribution to stability. In the first place, the whole purpose of the Six Points was not to strengthen the state but to accelerate the process of its disintegration. For what did the points amount to? East Pakistan was to have a separate currency, a separate foreign trade policy; the Centre was to have no powers at all in relation to this area, not even the power to levy taxes for such Central purposes as still fell within its jurisdiction; even a separate militia was bargained for. Indeed, had a Constitution based on the Six Points been framed, East Pakistan would have been transformed virtually into an independent dominion with hardly any links with the Centre. Whatever the Plan's merits in the eyes of its adherents, to call it a contribution to national stability would be a plain travesty of the truth.

Secondly, it must be borne in mind that this Plan, such as it was, came in 1966 after the India-Pakistan War of 1965. Assuming that its makers did not really want Pakistan to breakup, an assumption impossible to accept in the light of what happened in 1970 and 1971

and also in the face of the disclosures about their motives that the Awami League leaders have made since 16<sup>th</sup> December 1971,---- how does one explain away the period from 1947 to 1966, a period of over nineteen years? A critical and minute examination of the events of the epoch, almost week by week would only bring to light the insinuations innuendoes, complaints, recriminations and accusations against the Centre, which helped build up a climate of hostile opinion, and which now are seen to have been purposely broadcast and repeated to prevent Pakistan's consolidation. Of positive thinking there is no evidence.

What, on the contrary, the Awami Leaguers, assisted by the left-wing journalists, fanned all the time was the cult of Bengali nationalism. Here again their dishonesty was transparently plain. They didn't contend that the entire subcontinent needed reorganising on linguistic lines, or that each major language group in Pakistan and India called for recognition as a separate nationality with a right to self-determination. The theory was applied to the Bengalis of Pakistan only. The Bengalis in West Bengal in India could stay where they were; the Marathis, the Tamils, the Andhras---all belonged to the Indian nation and nothing illogical could be seen in their union into a single State of the disparate language groups which inhabited India. The Nagas ethnically, linguistically and culturally differed from the rest of India but they received no support, although they had been struggling for secession since 1947; their leader Dr Phizo lived in exile in London, while Indian tanks, armoured cars, heavy artillery and bombs helped 'pacify' Naga villages. The disputed area of Kashmir was also left severely alone. No, India had a right to be one, and anyone who pleaded for pluralism either politically or culturally was a reactionary. But Pakistan with precisely the same demographic composition as India had to be viewed differently. Never in political history before has the jaundiced eye been so powerfully at work as in India and Pakistan, weighing the same problems in the two countries in different scales and insisting on different conclusion.

However insincere the motive of the Awami Leaguers, the cult of Bengali nationalism grew from strength to strength, owing to a combination of fortuitous circumstances. The first of these was the geographical distance between the two wings. The second was the

failure of the Central Government to comprehend the nature of the nationalism and predict its course. The third was the habit politicians in the West Wing developed of administering pin-pricks to East Pakistanis which served to irritate and annoy. The fourth was the government's unwillingness to refute the lies about the economic situation sedulously spread by the enemy. The fifth was an attitude of guilty-mindedness among West-Wing politicians and administrators towards the end. The sixth, and most dangerous of all, was the complacent belief that nothing could really shake Pakistan's foundations. The seventh and last was utter ignorance in the upper echelons of the administration of the forces gathering against Pakistan on the international front.

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## EPILOGUE

Lord, give me courage  
 that I may face life;  
 give me strength  
 that I may bear the burdens  
 thou imposest on me;  
 give me forbearance  
 that I may stay unperturbed  
 when provoked;  
 give me tolerance  
 that I may view, unexcited,  
 the great human comedy;  
 give me patience .  
 that I may not lose my equanimity  
 when confronted  
 by trials.  
 Protect me, O Lord,  
 from the tongue of those who  
 malign Thee;  
 from the contumely of those  
 who are vain and proud;  
 from the hatred of those  
 who are ignorant;  
 from the ferocity of those  
 who forget Thee;  
 from the stupidity of those  
 who know not but think that they know;  
 from the dullness of the unintelligent.  
 But save me, Lord, above all,  
 from the hatreds within me,  
 from the pride in my own heart, from the ignorance in my own mind,  
 and the flames of greed, avarice  
 and malice which burn me.

**Syed Saijad Husain**  
**12-05-1973**

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

### **PROFESSOR SYED SAJJAD HUSAIN**

Descended from the family of a famous saint, Shah All Baghdadi, whose tomb on the outskirts of Dhaka at Mirpur, is visited daily by hundreds, Syed Sajjad Husain was born on 14 January in 1920 at Alukdia, a village in Magura District in Bangladesh. When he was four, his parents moved to Dhaka District.

Dr Husain received his secondary education at the Dhaka High Madrassah and graduated from Dhaka University with Honours in English in 1941. He took a first class in the M A examination in the same subject in 1942.

When Mr M. A. Jinnah visited Dhaka in the winter of 1936 on his mission to reorganise the Muslim League, Dr Husain had his first opportunity of hearing the leader and was immediately won over to the cause of Muslim nationalism. He was one of the first to welcome the Pakistan scheme in a letter to the Statesman of Calcutta in June 1941.

In 1942 with him as president, the Muslim students of Dhaka University founded the East Pakistan Literary Society whose purpose was to disseminate the message of Pakistan. The society held a conference in January 1943 which proved a huge success.

About this time Muslim students had established a fortnightly in Bengali which was called Pakistan. Dr Husain was regular contributor. The fortnightly was run by a promising Muslim student Nazir Ahmad, who was stabbed to death on 31 January 1943 by Hindu hoodlums on the University premises, the first martyr in the cause of Pakistan.

Syed Sajjad Husain and his friends brought out in 1943-44 a memorial volume on Nazir Ahmad which in spite of all its immaturity provides a glimpse into the idealism of Muslim youth in the 40s.

Syed Sajjad Husain was invited to preside over the Literary Section of the East Pakistan Renaissance Society Conference held in July in 1944 Calcutta. He was then only 24.

In the same month (July 1944) he joined the Islamia College as a lecturer in English. He was invited at the same time by (now deceased) Mr Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, editor of the leading Muslim

daily, the Azad, to write editorials for the paper regularly, Dr Husain continued to do so until the achievement of Pakistan in 1947.

In addition to his work as a free lancer on the Azad, Dr Husain used to contribute articles on Muslim nationalism to the Morning News and the Star of India and write editorials for the weekly Comrade.

Upon the establishment of Pakistan Dr Husain was transferred from the Islamia College to Sylhet M.C. College where he spent one year from September 1947 to September 1948.

But as soon as a vacancy was advertised in Dhaka University in 1948. Dr Husain applied for the job, and it was here that the greater part of his working life was spent. From lecturer he rose to Professor in 1962.

The only time when he was absent from the University on leave was from 1950 to 1952 when he was working at Nottingham University (U.K.) for his Ph.D. degree. His thesis: Kipling and India, was published in book form by Dhaka University and is mentioned as an authoritative interpretation of Kipling in the Concise Cambridge History of English Literature, edited by Richard Churchill.

In 1969 Dr Husain was appointed Vice-Chancellor of Rajshahi University and at the height of the crisis of 1971 he was asked to take over at his own alma mater at Dhaka.

Despite threats, Dr Husain refused to resile from the conviction that the dismemberment of Pakistan would spell the ruin of the Muslims of East Pakistan.

Three days after the fall of Dhaka, he was seized by the guerrillas from his residence on December 19 in the afternoon, subjected to physical tortures throughout the night and 'executed' in the morning of December 20. The assailants had planned to kill him by crushing his spinal cord, but the blow aimed at him having missed its target by a fraction of an inch he survived. He was also given stab wounds in six places to add to his agony before his 'death'.

When he recovered his senses Dr Husain found himself completely paralysed from the waist down. He was brought home by a passer-by and admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment under orders from the Indian army. It was not until the

middle of month of January 1972 that he could use his legs again to walk with the aid of a walking stick.

On January 30, he was transferred to the Dhaka Central jail on charges of 'collaboration' with the Pakistan army and released under a general amnesty on December 5, 1973. In the meanwhile he had been dismissed from the university formally.

In 1975 he was appointed a Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge University as a stop-gap while waiting to join Ummul-Qura University in Mecca as a Professor of English.

The paralysis of his legs was never completely healed; his left knee dislocated, and other effects of the spinal injury he suffered began to trouble him seriously by the beginning of 1985. He was forced to resign his job in May 1985 and returned home permanently.

Dr Husain travelled in Europe, America and Asia. He visited the USA in 1956 on a leadership grant, China as a member of a Pakistani delegation to the October Day Celebrations in 1910; Japan to attend a conference on Religion in 1970; Iran twice in 1970 as the leader of the RCD team and in 1971 to attend the monarchy anniversary; Burma in 1954 as the leader of a student delegation; India in 1962 as a member of the Pakistan Delegation to the Commonwealth Educational Conference in 1962; Manila in the Philippines as a delegate to a PEN conference; Poland in 1917 as a delegate to the Professors of English conference in Pozniak. In 1977 Dr Husain participated in the conference on education in Mecca.

At Dhaka he was one of the founding members of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan; he served a term as its Secretary. He organised a PEN conference at Dhaka in 1955 after himself attending a PEN conference in Holland in 1954.

He also visited France, Belgium, Switzerland and Italy. His publications in English include the following:

1. Kipling and India
2. Mixed Grill (collection of essays)
3. Dhaka University Seminars on Contemporary Bengali Literature, ed.
4. Homage to Shakespeare, ed.
5. Crisis in Muslim Education (joint author)

6. A Young Muslim's Guide to Religions in the World
7. Islam in Bengali Verse
8. Civilization and Society
9. Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts
10. Annotated Anthology of English Poetry for Arab Students
11. A Guide to Literary Criticism

Dr Hussain is also the author of the following:

1. Article on Bangladesh in the Encyclopaedia Britannica
2. Chapter on Pakistani writing in English in the Commonwealth Pen (published in the USA)
3. East Pakistan, editor
4. Pakistan: An anthology, ed.

In his retirement, Dr Husain wrote regularly for both English and Bengali newspapers in Dhaka and also reviewed books for the Muslim World Book Review published from Leicester (UK). During the period from 1975 to 1985, Dr Husain collaborated anonymously with the late Dr Matiur Rahman in the writing of a series of books and booklets on the tragedy of 1971. These are:

1. Bangladesh Today: A Lament and an Indictment
2. Second Thoughts on Bangladesh
3. Iron Bars of Freedom
4. Two dialogues ala Plato on the Hindu-Muslim problem
5. The Role of India and Big Powers in the East Pakistan Crisis of 1971

Dr Husain wrote in prison an account of the decline and fall of East Pakistan to which he gave the title of The Wastes of Time. His Memoirs of 1971 in Bengali was published in Dhaka in 1993.

He responded to the final call of the Almighty Allah on 12th January, 1995 while he was busy writing on the life of the holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

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(Appendices will be added soon)