

The Muslim rule in Bengal established a system of drain of resources to north India. Most Muslim rulers in Bengal were immigrants from the Middle East. They either acted as agents of Delhi-based empires or used Bengal as the base in their bid for political supremacy in north India. The Muslim rule, therefore, contributed to a significant drain of resources from Bengal to north India. The system of unilateral transfer of resources from Bengal did not, however, cease with the end of Muslim rule. It continued with increased intensity to new destinations in post-Muslim Bengal. Each shift in the pattern of economic drain was accompanied by a new social configuration. The realignments of social groups were supported by ideological reorientations: Cultural dichotomy and polarization of social forces fortified each other.

Opinions differ on the degree of Islamization of the Muslim society in medieval Bengal. According to a school of historians, the Muslims in medieval Bengal, regulated their life in accordance with the basic tenets of Islam (Ali 1985, Vol. IB; Rahim 1963, Vol. I). Relying on Mukundaram's pen picture of the daily life of the Muslims of Hasanhati, these historians maintain that the Muslims in medieval Bengal scrupulously performed the prescribed religious rites and ceremonies. Literary sources also refer to the proficiency of the mullas in the scriptures. The critics of this interpretation maintain that it oversimplifies the complex religious life of common people by altogether ignoring syncretistic tradition that blended an alien faith with folk beliefs and rituals in Bengal.

Asim Roy (1983) and Richard M. Eaton (1994) suggest that the degree of Islamization in medieval Bengal has been exaggerated in the traditional literature. There are two types of historical sources which support this hypothesis. First, there is a vast corpus of religious and semi-religious literature in Bengal which articulated a syncretistic tradition that combined the elements of folk religions with that of Islam. Secondly, the descriptions of Muslim life by the British administrators as well as the Muslim fundamentalist reformers in the nineteenth century attest to the existence of folk beliefs and practices among the unlettered Muslim peasantry in Bengal (Ahmed 1981, pp 39-71). The main conclusions of Roy and Eaton are as follows:

1. The new converts in Bengal were not spiritually inspired by ideals of Islam. As Roy puts it: "Conversion in Bengal, as elsewhere in South Asia, involved more an immediate "change

of fellowship" than a "spiritual experience". Eaton argues that the term conversion is misleading in the context of Bengal because the Muslims in Bengal did not wholly reject their pre-Islamic beliefs and replace them by altogether new ideas. In the words of Eaton, "Indeed the idea of Islam as a closed system with definite and rigid boundaries is itself largely a product of nineteenth and twentieth century reform movements, whereas for the rural Bengalis of the pre-modern period, the line separating "non-Islam" from "Islam" appears rather to have been porous, tenuous and shifting" (1994, p. 273).

2. Muslims in Bengal were exclusive products of neither Islam nor Hinduism but of a single folk culture. Folk Islam in Bengal hardly had any connexion with the dogmas of religion. A number of Muslim cultural mediators presented an indigenous version of Islam to the masses of Bengali believers. In the process Allah was identified with "Gosai" (Master), "Prabhu" (lord), "Niranjan"(one without colour), "Iswar" (God), "Jagat Iswar" (God of the Universe) and "Kartar" (creator). An attempt was also made to relate the Islamic concept of *nabi* (a receiver of the divine message) and *rasul* (receiver of a scripture) to the Hindu concept of *avatar* (incarnation of God). Historical myths and cosmogonical ideas presented in medieval Bengali literature were deeply influenced by indigenous traditions.
3. Both Roy and Eaton identifies three stages of Islamization in Bengal. According to Roy, the first stage of Islamization was confined to a change of commensal and connubial relations of the converts. The second stage witnessed the emergence of a syncretistic tradition that resolved the conflicts between exogenous Islamic great tradition and endogenous little tradition. The final stage ended in a victory of the fundamentalist and revivalist forces in Islam that cleansed the effect of folk traditions which were inconsistent with the spirit of classical Islam. Eaton identified the stages as (1) inclusion, (2) identification, and (3) displacement. The inclusion refers to the process of acceptance of Islamic superhuman agencies alongside indigenous divinities. The identification process blended Islamic and indigenous superhuman agencies in a syncretistic tradition. Through the process of displacement, local superhuman agencies were finally weeded out and fundamentalist Islam triumphed.

The syncretistic model of Islam in medieval Bengal as propounded by Roy and Eaton provides very useful insights into the process of interaction between endogenous and exogenous forces. It, however, suffers from four serious limitations. First, it underestimates the significance of conversion to Islam. Any contact with a Muslim—not to speak of formal conversion to Islam, involved loss of caste status. Manu, the great Hindu law giver, directed that none should converse or sit with a person who loses caste, give him his inheritance or so forth, or have any ordinary casual contact with him. It was further laid down that a man falls himself if he associates with a fallen man (Manu 1991, pp. 268-269). The punishment for losing caste is not confined to the present birth alone, it continues in future births. Even the performance of virtuous deeds would not automatically lead to restoration of caste status in this birth. In Manu's view, the lower caste may reach the status of birth in higher caste after the seventh generation (Manu, 1991, p. 243). For the Hindus, the change of social groups was much more difficult than a radical transformation of inner faiths. As Bouquet (1964)—a scholar on comparative religion, rightly argues, "Despite efforts to represent it as in essence a universal faith, Hinduism is in its outlook as much restricted as Judaism. True, it has certain fundamental ideas which might be easily transplanted, but as an institutional system it is, as much as Nazism, a matter of 'race and blood' and is properly confined to those who belong to some specific caste, so that the only way of admission is to be incorporated as a member of a fresh caste. Once inside this rigid hierarchy, one can believe or disbelieve as much or as little one likes. Room is made for the grossest idolatory and superstition, and equally for non-theistic philosophy and for pious theism"(p. 146). In the same vein, Gait wrote in the census report of 1911, "The Hindu word "dharma" which corresponds most closely to our word "religion" connotes conduct more than creed. In India, the line of cleavage is social rather than religious, and the tendency of the people themselves is to classify their neighbours, not according to their beliefs, but according to their social status and manner of living. No one is interested in what his neighbours believe, but he is very much interested in knowing whether he can eat with him or take water from his hands"(1913, Vol. I, pt. 1, p. 113). Given the severe penalties of loss of caste status resulting from conversion, it is highly unlikely that a person would embrace Islam without strong spiritual urge or a genuine change of heart. Conversion

to Islam must have given new meaning and intensity to their lives. It is not, therefore, correct to assume that conversion to Islam entailed merely the change of social groups and not spiritual solace and illumination.

Secondly, the syncretistic model ignores altogether the fundamentalist tradition that existed side by side with the syncretistic tradition. The proponents of syncretistic model focus exclusively on a particular genre of medieval Bengali literature. It is true that the syncretistic genre was the most numerous among the writings of Muslims in medieval Bengal. It is also inevitable that in the process of composing books on Muslim myths, history and tradition in Bengali language, indigenous concepts and terms would creep in. However, even the authors of syncretistic works like Syed Sultan ultimately drew on Islamic and not on Indian ideas. Apart from the syncretistic literary sources, there were in medieval Bengal a large number of works of liturgical and didactic in nature which were faithful to fundamentalist tradition. The following works of this genre deserve special mention: Afzal Ali's *Nasihah*, Khwandkar Nasr Allah Khan's *Musar Swwal* and *Sharia Nama*, Shaikh Muttalib's *Kifayat*, Syed Alawal's *Tuhfa*, Khwandkar Abdul Karim's *Hazar Masail*, Shah Abdul Hakim's *Shihab*, Hayat Mahmud's *Hitajnan* etc. The existence of fundamentalist tradition is also attested by hagiographical literature. The biographers of Shaikh Nur Qutb mention that he used to lay great stress on the strict observance of the *shariat* in letter as well as in spirit. This was also enjoined in the *Khilafat Namas* sworn by the designated representatives of Nur Qutb-i-Alam in the following manner:

"I do pledge before the Shaikh (or Pir) that I shall withhold my hands, tongue and eyes from what is unlawful and I shall not cause injury to anyone with my hands and tongue and shall not do any work against the *Sharia*. And I shall offer prayer punctually and avoid the company of evil (persons)" (Quoted in Latif 1993, p.79).

Thirdly, syncretistic beliefs and rituals did not make the Muslims fully acceptable to their Hindu neighbours. There are two minor sects whose common beliefs and practices were shared by Hindus and Muslims. "Bauls" who believed in the simple man's search for what they described as the "Man of my heart" (*Maner Manush*) were drawn from the lowest strata of the Hindus and Muslims (Sen 1961). The Kartabhaja sect which was founded by Aul Chand and Ram Smaran Pal recruited followers from both Muslims and non-Muslims

(Latif 1993). However, these minor sects remained outside the mainstream society and was often looked down upon by the orthodox members of both Hindu and Muslim communities.

"There is", said the sixteenth century poet Jayananda, "age-long conflict between the Brahmins and the *Yavana* (the Mussalmans)" (Latif 1993, pp. 95-96). The Muslims and their associates were promptly excommunicated by the orthodox Hindus who treated Muslims as *Yavanas* and *Mlechhas* implying untouchables. New mixed sub-castes were often formed to incorporate the excommunicated associates of Muslims. The *Pir 'ali'* Brahmin subcaste is a case in point. According to legends, Pir Ali Khan, himself a converted Muslim feudal lord, commanded the presence of some orthodox Brahmins at his house at a time when beef was being cooked. He arranged the cooking in such a manner that the smell of beef-cooking pervaded the courtyard where the Brahmins assembled. Since the Hindus believe that smelling was half-eating, the assembled Brahmins were polluted on charge of beef-eating. Some of them accepted Islam to avoid social stigma; other ostracized Brahmins formed a sub-caste of their own and were known as *Pir 'ali'* Brahmins (Rahim 1963, Vol. I, pp 313-314). Similarly the Sher Khani subcaste of Brahmins included the associates of emperor Sher Khan. *Srimant Khani* Brahmins of east Bengal were polluted because of their social relationship with the Muslim feudal lords. The rigid caste system of Hindus precluded any meaningful dialogue between Islam and Hinduism. The Islamic syncretistic tradition could not altogether smooth out the trauma of conversion from Hinduism to Islam.

Finally, both Roy and Eaton hypothesise that un-Islamic practices, beliefs and rituals were rampant in the initial stages of Bengali Muslim society because of the pervasive influence of indigenous faiths and traditions. They maintain that weeding out of un-Islamic practices in the final phase of Islamization was unique to Bengal. There are, however, two major weaknesses of this thesis. First, Islam came to Bengal seven hundred years after its birth. The classical tenets of Islam were already modified in many ways long before Islam came to Bengal. Many of the un-Islamic practices did not originate in Bengal. As Ali rightly argues, "The existence of such innovations and superstitions have too often been explained as the result of Bengali Muslims being mostly converts from Hindus etc. who are said to have retained many of their previous un-Islamic beliefs and practices. Such a view is clearly superficial. A little closer

look would at once show that the innovations and superstitions that are noticeable among the Muslims of Bengal were in a large measure imported by the immigrant Muslims themselves, though these received further accretions from un-Islamic beliefs and practices" (1985, pp 799-800). The sufi practices, pirism, shrine-worship etc. did not originate in Bengal, they constituted essential ingredients of Islam which was propagated in Bengal. Roy-Eaton hypothesis, therefore, overstates the effects of syncretistic tradition. Secondly, the revivalist and fundamentalist movements that purified Islam in Bengal were not at all indigenous in origin, they were also imported from outside. Similar revivalist and fundamentalist surges in the nineteenth century Islam could be noticed among the Tariqa-i-Mauyahidun (Wahabis) in Arabia. Sanussi in north Africa, Salfis in Egypt and Syria, Fulanis in Sudan and Nigeria, Tariqa-i-Muhammediyah and Ahla-i-Hadis in north India and Paduri and Muhammadiyah in Indonesia (Khan, M.A. 1992). The movement to purify Islam was not, therefore, at all unique to Bengal. Muslims throughout the world passed through similar Islamization process.

An analysis of the competing interpretations on the degree of Islamization of Muslim society in Bengal suggests that it is not correct to assume that fundamentalism followed syncretism. On the other hand, fundamentalism and syncretism existed side by side and competed with each other. Fundamentalism by decrying everything local in the un-Islamic land of Bengal—its language and culture including personal and family names, espoused extra-territorial loyalties. The urge for restoration of the pristine purity of Islam prompted the believers to look towards the Middle East in quest of their Islamic roots. The extra-territorial propensities among the Muslims of Bengal were encouraged by Muslim immigrants who constituted the ashraf in Bengal. This tendency is evident in Urdu language which was the mother tongue of the ashraf in Bengal. As a perceptive student of Muslim culture rightly observed, "Urdu poetry exuded the nostalgia for lands that had been left behind long ago but never forgotten. It sang of the cooler lands where roses bloomed and nightingales sang, where lilies made the air fragrant and tulips carpeted the forests, where the plane trees brightened the autumn with their red leaves and cypresses stood sentinel on the running springs" (Qureshi 1965, pp 12-13). However, many Muslims in Bengal appreciated the absurdity of such nostalgia. As a local Bengali Muslim writer in the beginning of this century argued, "Many of us are still

deluded. When going to sleep in the mango groves or bamboo forests of Bengal they still dream of Baghdad, Bokhara, Kabul and Kandhara" (Quoted in Islam 1973, p. 226). The inner contradictions of Bengal Muslims were further intensified by economic and social changes since the emergence of the Muslim rule.

From the sociological point of view, four distinct phases in the evolution of Muslim society in Bengal may be identified. The first phase which lasted from 1204 to 1757 A.D. was characterized by the domination of a coalition of immigrant Muslims (who were styled as *ashraf*) and the Hindu upper castes. The second phase which lasted from 1757 to 1870s witnessed the domination of a coalition of the British rulers and upper caste Hindu gentry. The third phase which started in 1870s was distinguished by conflicts between Hindu and Muslim elites as well as conflicts between the Muslim elites themselves. The final phase which started in the 1940s witnessed the ultimate triumph of the vernacular Muslim elite.

The immigrant Muslims occupied the apex of social hierarchy in Bengal during the Muslim rule. In fact, foreign origin, even if remote, was considered as a sufficient condition for *ashraf* identity in Bengal. The Muslim elites who were primarily urban consisted of government officials, urban sufis, ulama (religious officials) and foreign-born soldiers. The size of the immigrant Muslim elite in Bengal was small. They were divided into innumerable factions which were competing with each other. In the absence of well-defined village government, it was very difficult to run local government including collection of land revenue without the active cooperation of local intermediaries. It was also easier for the Muslim rulers to control the Hindu intermediaries who were politically powerless. This is why, the running of day to day administration was left in the hands of Hindu upper castes. The Kayasthas who were dominant land-holding caste prior to the Muslim conquest were mainly recruited for these jobs. According to Abul Fadl, the sixteenth century Mughal historian, most of the Bengal zamindars were Kayasthas. He was of the opinion that the Kayastha caste included remnants of Bengal's ruling dynasties such as the Sena, Pala, Chandra, Varman etc. As early as the fifteenth century, a Sufi saint lamented, "The vanquished unbelievers with heads hanging down, exercise their power and authority to administer the lands which belong to them. But they have also been appointed (executive) officers over the Muslims in the lands of Islam and they impose their orders on them.

Such things should not happen" (Quoted in Eaton 1994, p. 50). The Muslim rule in Bengal was thus in effect a coalition of immigrant Muslims and upper caste Hindus. Throughout the Muslim rule the Hindu upper classes were treated with respect (Rahim 1963). During the Sultanate period (1204-1577 A.D.) the Hindu nobility was considered equal to foreign-born Muslim nobility. In the initial years of Mughal rule, some Hindus were displaced from the upper echelons of administration. However, Hindu domination at the grass-roots was not disturbed. In the later stages of Mughal rule, Hindu upper castes were firmly entrenched in the highest tiers of Bengal's political and social hierarchy.

Because of the significant drain of resources from Bengal to Delhi, economic exploitation intensified during the Muslim rule. Tax/GDP ratio is estimated at about 43.8 percent in the hey days of the Mughal rule in Bengal (Khan 1992). The main victims of this exploitative system were locally converted Muslims and lower caste Hindus. Contrary to popular beliefs, local converts to Islam most of whom came from lower caste Hindus, did not get any economic relief from the Muslim rule. They continued with the old hereditary professions even after their conversion to Islam. The converts from lower castes were not accepted into Muslim nobility in Bengal. Both the local converts and lower caste Hindus continued to be exploited with increasing intensity by a coalition of immigrant Muslim nobility and collaborationist Hindu upper castes specially the Kayasthas. Resistance to intense exploitation could not crystallize for two reasons. First, there was no effective organization at the grass-roots to mobilize the exploited. In *raiayatwari* villages of north India, resistance was often organised by the village leadership (Habib 1985). Similarly, resistance to outside exploitation was more frequent in tribal areas where some form of collective leadership existed. Secondly, economic exploitation in medieval Bengal did not proceed along communal lines. The immigrant Muslims and upper caste Hindus jointly exploited locally converted Muslims and lower caste Hindus. The organization of resistance under communal leadership was, therefore, precluded.

Because a proficiency in the Arabic and Persian languages was essential for grasping the fundamentals of Islam, local converts had to depend on the immigrant Muslims for interpretation of Islamic principles. All Muslim immigrants were not, however, devout Muslims. The administrators and the soldiers were primarily interested in worldly

affairs. The ulama kept alive the tradition of Islamic fundamentalism though the majority of local converts were largely influenced by syncretistic tradition.

The social life in Bengal was characterised by the primacy of individuals. The villagers had, therefore, been accustomed to religious dissent and heresy. The Hindu and Muslim communities could, therefore, easily work out a *modus vivendi*. However, the rapid expansion of Islam posed a challenge to both Hindu and Muslim religious leaders. The orthodox Hindus, despite their political reconciliation with Muslim rulers despised the Muslims as *Mlechhas* (Rahim 1963). The Muslim religious leaders were also scornful of the customs and practices of local converts. "The natives of this country", asserted a Muslim historian in the eighteenth century, "are of shabby tastes, shabby habits and shabby modes of dress" (Eaton 1994, p. 170). Despised by both Muslim nobility and Hindu upper castes, the converts to Islam in Bengal faced a dichotomy of faith and habitat. This duality of mind can be traced in the medieval Bengali literature from the fourteenth to seventeenth century. The conflict between religion and language is evident in the writings of Shah Md. Saghir, Muzammil, Syed Sultan, Muhammad Khan, Shaikh Muttalib, Abdul Hakim, Abdul Nabi etc. These inner conflicts of the Muslims of Bengal were initially confined to cultural sphere, they did not surface in the political and economic arena till the advent of the British rule.

Whereas the Muslim rule in Bengal divided the Muslims socially and economically, the British rule united them unwittingly. The early British rulers in Bengal unleashed a reign of terror in the economic sphere. "The conduct of the company's servants upon this occasion", observed the British historian James Mill, "furnishes one of the most remarkable instances upon record of the power of interest to extinguish all sense of justice, and even of shame" (Quoted in Dutt 1960, Vol. I, p. 21). The sea-change in economic structure of Bengal under the British rule deprived the Muslim aristocracy of all political and economic privileges. The British administrator W.W. Hunter observed that before the British rule in Bengal impoverished *ashraf* families were difficult to find and after seventy-five years of British administration solvent families are rare (Hunter 1945). The economic distress of the Muslim *ashraf* under the British Raj narrowed the gulf between declassed Muslim aristocracy and exploited Muslim peasantry.

The British rule in Bengal accentuated the fundamentalist and extra-territorial loyalties among the Muslims in three ways. First, the communal dimension of economic exploitation of Muslim peasantry during the Muslim rule was obscured because Hindu exploiters of Muslim peasants themselves were the intermediaries of Muslim rulers. The disappearance of the Muslim rule in Bengal pitted the Muslim peasants against Hindu and Christian exploiters and thereby stimulated communalism. Secondly, revolutionary improvements in the transportation system brought the Muslims of Bengal closer to the wider world of Islam. This was noted by the nineteenth century British administrator H.H. Risley who rightly observed, "Even the distant Mecca has been brought, by means of Messrs. Cook's steamers and return tickets within reach of the faithful in India and the influence of Mohamedan missionaries and return pilgrims had made itself felt in a quiet but steady revival of orthodox usage in Eastern Bengal" (1981, Vol. I, XXX). Finally, the world of Islam was in ferment in the nineteenth century. The Islamic revivalist movements like Tariqa-i-Mauyahidun (which is popularly known as Wahabi movement) arose in the Middle East to purge all religious corruption with the avowed objective of returning to the simplicity of the faith as propagated by the prophet. Fundamentalist creeds that galvanized the faithful in the wider world of Islam easily percolated to Bengal through the institution of hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca).

The leadership of the fundamentalist upsurge among the Muslims of Bengal came from the lower rungs of Muslim aristocracy. Following Ahmed (1981), the Muslim aristocracy in Bengal in the 19th century may be divided into three categories: Mughal ashraf or exclusively Urdu speaking urban elites, who were the descendants of foreign immigrants; the mofassil gentry who aspired to emulate the Mughal ashraf but were conversant with local ways of life because of their close link with the local population as zamindars and social superiors; and the lesser ashraf who were locally settled descendants of the immigrants in rural areas. Despite their foreign ancestry and romantic attachment to foreign languages, the lesser ashraf spoke Bengali. Crippled by the economic dominance of Hindu intermediaries, the lesser ashraf took the initiative in organizing politically the Muslim peasants and in purifying them ideologically.

The Faraidi movement led by Haji Shariatullah and his son Dudu Mian, the Tariqa-i-Muhammadiyah led by Mir Nisar Ali alias Titumir, Ahli Hadith movement led by Maulana Vilayat Ali, the Tayuni

movement led by Maulana Keramat Ali disseminated fundamentalist versions of Islam in the nineteenth century. The Faraidi and Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya reformers also organized political resistance against the exploitation of Hindu landlords and the British rulers. The immediate gains of fundamentalist reform movements among the Muslims in the nineteenth century were limited. The abortive revolts could not at all shake the political framework established by the Raj. Ahmed concluded that the reformists succeeded in converting only a fraction of the Muslim population to fundamentalist doctrines (1981, p. 70). Nevertheless, these movements had two profound consequences on the evolution of Muslim society in Bengal. First, the political movements organized by the fundamentalist reformers mobilized for the first time, the Muslims of Bengal along communal lines. They aroused new awareness and political consciousness among the Muslim peasants in Bengal. They demonstrated for the first time the potentialities of fundamentalist ideology in mobilizing amorphous Muslim masses. Secondly, fundamentalist reforms promoted extra-territorial loyalties among the Muslims in Bengal. By denouncing local cults and practices among the Muslims, these reformers emphasized the need for renouncing the immediate milieu in favour of the dictates of the faith which existed in its pure form in the Middle Eastern countries. These extra-territorial loyalties were reinforced by the Muslim ashraf. Despite their differences over political strategies, all sections of Muslim aristocracy espoused fundamentalist Islam. The overwhelming majority of the ashraf were the descendants of the immigrants from the Middle East. They retained their alien habits and customs; they used to speak in Urdu and never accepted Bengali as their mother tongue. They despised not only local customs and practices, but also the vernacular and local ways of life.

Apart from the Faraidi and Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya uprisings of the Muslim peasants, Bengal in the nineteenth century also witnessed two general peasant uprisings (the Indigo Revolt (1858-60), and the Pabna Riots (1872-73) which were participated by both Hindu and Muslim peasants. However, the real contradiction in the nineteenth century Bengal did not arise from the conflict between the British imperialists and landlords on the one hand and the peasants on the other side. The ultimate contradiction in this society arose from the scramble for power among the middle classes which originated from the changes introduced by the imperialist rulers.

The middle classes in Bengal differed from their western counterparts in two significant ways. First, the middle class in Europe primarily originated in urban areas. It consisted of merchants and industrialists together with the intellectuals and persons belonging to learned professions. The main source of their livelihood did not come from agriculture though some of them purchased landed estates for the sake of prestige and livelihood. The middle classes in Bengal had their roots in the agrarian system. Secondly, the middle class in European countries was homogeneous. Because of uneven economic development of regions as well as of communities, the middle classes in Bengal were heterogeneous and were at odds not only with other classes but also with each other. Three distinct middle classes arose in Bengal at the turn of the nineteenth century—Hindu *bhadralok*, Muslim *ashraf* and the Muslim *jotedars* who constituted a vernacular elite.

Though the Hindu upper castes enjoyed special privileges as intermediaries under the Muslim rule, the Hindu middle class in Bengal was primarily a product of the system of property relations established by the Permanent Settlement in 1793. The Hindu middle class since the nineteenth century used to style itself as *bhadralok* (gentlefolk) in contradistinction to others whom they contemptuously labelled as *chotolok* (lowly persons). From the economic point of view, the *bhadralok* comprised heterogeneous groups such as urban professionals, rural zamindars and taluqdars, westernised intelligentsia, traditional gentry, well-to-do notables and ordinary clerics. The term *bhadralok* was described by Broomfield in the following manner: " a socially privileged and consciously superior group, economically dependent upon landed rents and professional and clerical appointment; keeping its distance from the masses by its acceptance of high caste proscriptions and its command of education; sharing a pride in its language, its literate culture and its history; and maintaining its communal integration through a fairly complex institutional structure that it had proved remarkably ready to adapt and augment to extend its social power and political opportunities" (1968, pp. 12-13). In recent studies, the usefulness of "bhadralok" paradigm has been questioned because the term is inexact and diffuse. Despite wide differences in economic status of various groups, the *bhadralok* in Bengal who were also known as *babus* acted as a pressure group till the middle of the 20th century. They were bound together by several ties. First, the *bhadralok* status was linked to

Hindu upper caste exclusiveness. The bulk of the bhadralok belonged to the Brahman, Kayastha and Baidya castes. According to the census of 1921 the total number of bhadralok stood at nearly three millions (about 6.5 percent of total population and about 15 percent of total Hindu population). Secondly, though most bhadralok derived their income from agriculture, they did not cultivate their own land but lived off the rental income generated from their land. The bhadralok was averse to manual labour (Porter 1933, pp 287-289). Thirdly, the bhadralok was an aristocracy based on education and culture. The bhadralok developed a thirst for western education. During the Muslim rule, the Hindu aristocracy mastered the Persian language to serve as scribes at Muslim courts. They readily discerned the potentialities of English language as the lever for power that provided privileged access to government employment and consequently some measure of authority under the Raj.

Despite its inherent weaknesses, the bhadralok played a highly creative role in the Bengali renaissance in the nineteenth century. "If Periclean Athens; "rhapsodized Sir Jadunath Sarker", was the school of Hellas, "the eye of Greece, mother of arts and eloquence" that was Bengal to the rest of India under British rule, but with a borrowed light, which it had made its own with a marvellous cunning. In this new Bengal originated every good and great thing of the modern world that passed on to the other provinces of India. From Bengal went forth the English-educated teachers and the Europe-inspired thought that helped to modernize Bihar and Orissa, Hindustan and Deccan. New literary types, reform of the language, social reconstruction, political aspirations, religious movements and even changes in manners that originated in Bengal, passed like ripples from a central eddy, across provincial barriers to the furthest corners of India" (Sarkar 1976, p. 498). Nineteenth century Bengal telescoped renaissance, reformation, and counter-reformation in a short span of time. The leading lights of this intellectual ferment which included Rammohan Roy, Michael Madushudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, Vivekananda, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, R.C. Dutt, Akshay Kumar Mitra, D.L. Roy, Girish Chandra Ghose and above all Rabindranath Tagore were all Hindu bhadralok. Modern Bengal itself was thus created by the bhadralok. Nevertheless, the bhadralok was neither respected by the British Raj nor loved by the rural masses. Isolated from the rest of the society and exclusively preoccupied with myopic selfish interests, the bhadralok

in Bengal gradually drifted from nationalism to communalism. As Chatterji (1995) rightly argues that communalism in Bengal was not exclusively confined to Muslims, a parallel Hindu communalism developed in Bengal under the leadership of the bhadralok who were animated by revivalist ideologies. In its quest for a glorious Hindu past, the bhadralok denigrated the Muslim rule and romanticized the achievements of pre-Muslim rulers. Aurobindo Ghose propounded political Vedanta which identified the nation with mother Goddess Kali. Bepin Chandra Pal and Sarala Devi introduced Kali Puja and Shivaji festivals. The Bengali terrorists who were drawn primarily from the bhadralok were inspired by Sakta philosophy. Some bhadralok political leaders like C.R. Das drew their inspiration from vaisnavism and teachings of Ramkrishna and Vivekananda. The crux of difference between Hindu bhadralok and abhadra (non-bhadralok) lay in culture—a quality of mind nurtured by English education. The Muslims were considered distinctly inferior to Hindus. Hindustan asserted the distinguished bhadralok novelist Sarat Chandra Chatterji, "is the homeland of the Hindus" (1392 B.S., p. 2136).

There were two distinct Muslim middle classes in Bengal: the ashraf (traditional aristocracy) and the vernacular elite which consisted primarily of educated jotedars. The traditional aristocracy were mainly the descendants of immigrants Muslims. As mentioned earlier, there were three components of the ashraf: urdu-speaking Mughal ashraf, bilingual mofassil gentry and Bengali-speaking lesser gentry. Culturally, the urdu-speaking Mughal ashraf were the role models and trend-setters. They were concentrated mostly in towns like Dhaka, Calcutta, Murshidabad and Hoogly. In the absence of any countervailing group, the immigrant ashraf became the natural leaders of Muslim community in Bengal. Because of its feudalistic roots, the urdu-speaking Muslim ashraf in Bengal was fundamentalist in religion and reactionary in politics. Nevertheless it imposed its ethos on the incipient vernacular elite through the process of acculturation.

The vernacular elite among the Muslims of Bengal surfaced at the turn of the nineteenth century. They were the products of the economic changes which resulted from the emergence of international economy in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Muslim peasants in eastern Bengal were benefited by the expansion of jute exports in the closing decades of the nineteenth century (see

Table 11). Jute was not new to peasants of Bengal. However, the cultivation of this crop was limited by domestic demand. The dramatic rise in demand for jute in the international market led to a significant expansion of jute cultivation in Bengal. The increase in export of this commercial crop largely benefited the surplus farmers in eastern Bengal where the Muslims were in a majority (Khan 1982, pp 117-118). Agriculture in eastern Bengal was further commercialised by the introduction of the railways. These economic shifts contributed to the emergence of a new middle class among the Muslims of Bengal. Opinions, however, differ on the appropriate nomenclature of this class. Broomfield described it as a "parvenu class"—"fat cats" among the generally poor rural populace (1992, p. 365). Hashmi (1994) describes them as jotedars. Broadly speaking, jotedars comprised different types of intermediaries and surplus farmers. Legally all jotedars holding more than 33 acres of land were presumed to be tenure-holders or holding land directly under a proprietor or zamindar. Most jotedars acted as intermediaries in rent-collection between the landlords and small and marginal farmers. Many jotedars were also money-lenders. Some of them were rich peasants and were known as *talukdars*, *haoladars*, *latdars*, *basunias* and *mandals*. Thus Hashmi's jotedar class includes a wide variety of economic interests. However, jotedars did not become automatically middle class. It is only the educated jotedars who actively asserted their middle class identity. It is, therefore, more appropriate to describe this class as a vernacular elite.

The vernacular elite may be differentiated from the nonvernacular elite in several ways (Jahan 1994, pp. 58-59). First, the vernacular elite speaks in local language, the non-vernacular elite speaks in foreign language. The difference is not merely linguistic, their cultural orientations also differ. Even if the vernacular elite is educated in foreign language, it remains loyal to local culture and is not absorbed by foreign culture. Secondly, the vernacular elite usually originated in rural areas and small towns. The nonvernacular elite comes from the urban areas. Thirdly, the nonvernacular elite is usually more well-off than the vernacular elite. The main source of livelihood of the vernacular elite is agriculture whereas, the nonvernacular elites derive their income from urban professions or rent from rural areas. The vernacular Muslim elites in Bengal in early decades of this century consisted primarily of the educated jotedars and surplus farmers.

Table 11. Export of jute from Bengal, 1855-57 to 1905-14

Period	Average quantity of annual jute exports (in million cwt)
1855-1864	.082
1864-1874	3.89
1875-1884	6.28
1885-1894	6.29
1895-1904	12.11
1905-1914	15.14

Source : Khan, Akbar Ali. *Some Aspects of Peasant Behaviour in Bengal: A Neo-classical Analysis* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1983), p.2.

The newly acquired affluence of rich farmers in east Bengal encouraged the spread of literacy among the Muslim jotedars at the turn of the century. Between 1882-83 and 1912-13, total number of Muslim students increased by 55 percent whereas total number of non-Muslim students increased by only 2.9 percent. The share of Muslim students in all educational institutions increased from 27.6% in 1882-83 to 40.5% in 1912-13 (see Table 12). The educated Muslims in rural eastern Bengal constituted the core of newly emerging vernacular elite. There was a complex love-hate relationship between the traditional Muslim aristocracy (ashraf) and the vernacular Muslim elite. Initially, the vernacular elite used to ape the traditional aristocracy in the hope of being coopted by the aristocracy. Most of the educated Muslims from rural areas used to marry into urban ashraf families. However, the aspirations of the ashraf and vernacular elite were dissimilar. Influenced by their feudalistic past, the ashraf were pro-landlord. Thwarted in their upward mobility by Hindu-landlords, the vernacular elites were opposed to landlordism. The urdu-speaking ashraf looked down on local practices and rituals. The Bengali-speaking vernacular elites were proud of their cultural heritage. The ashraf espoused Islamic fundamentalism, the vernacular elites were sympathetic to Islamic syncretistic tradition. The ashraf were pro-British. The vernacular elites were inspired by anti-imperialist movements. Despite the initial honeymoon between the ashraf and vernacular elites, differences between these elites were bound to surface. They were initially united only by the threat of Hindu domination.

The rivalry between the Hindu bhadralok and the ashraf came to the fore during the partition of Bengal agitation (1905-11). The official

aim of the partition of Bengal was to tone up administration in a unwieldy province with a population of 78 million and an area of 189,000 square miles. Unofficially one of the goals of partition was to undermine emerging Hindu nationalism. As one of the officials at the time of partition wrote: "Bengal united is a power, Bengal divided will pull several different ways. ...one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule" (Quoted in Moon 1989, p.935).

Table 12. Percentage increase in enrolment of Muslims and non-Muslims, 1882-83 to 1912-13

Type of education	Growth rate of Muslim pupils between 1882-83 to 1912-13 (in %)	Growth rate of Non-Muslim pupils between 1882-83 to 1912-13 (in %)	Percentage of Muslim pupils in 1882-83	Percentage of Muslim pupils in 1912-13
Primary	55	-12.0	23.3	43.2
Middle vernacular	24	-55.0	13.6	31.6
Middle English	869	247.0	13.1	34.8
High School	729	292.0	8.8	19.45
Professional	747	322.0	2.2	5.13
Colleges				
All types	55	2.9	27.6	40.5

Source : Ahmed, Rafiuddin, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.150.

The Muslim middle classes under the leadership of Nawab of Dhaka supported the partition in the hope of currying favour of the Raj. To the Hindu bhadralok who had extensive economic interests on both sides of the partitioned Bengal, the move to segregate the Bengali-speaking areas in east Bengal was a jolting blow. They viewed it as a sinister design to weaken the political clout of the bhadralok who spearheaded the struggle for national independence. The preservation of the unity of the Golden Bengal that nourished the bhadralok community became the rallying cry of Bengali nationalists. Initially, the anti-partition movement was non-violent. As the movement gained momentum, the dark anger of the Hindu middle class found its expression in terroristic activities. The emotionally surcharged atmosphere culminated in communal riots.

The partition ultimately turned out to be a defeat for all. The Raj had to eat the humble pie and annul the partition. To the Muslims the

annulment of the partition was a major disappointment. It virtually shook their faith in the bonafides of the British Raj. To the Hindu bhadralok of Bengal, the annulment was a pyrrhic victory. As Satyamurthy puts it, "The net results of these developments in Bengal during the first decade of this century, so far as the bhadralok leadership of Bengal was concerned, lay in the exposure of its isolation, its inner contradictions and the essentially opportunistic character of its politics" (1979, p. 223).

The communal politics of confrontation and violence which erupted during the partition of Bengal was interrupted by a brief honeymoon of the two communities. The anti-British non-cooperation movement of the Indian National Congress coincided with the romantic bid of Indian Muslim leadership for restoration of the caliphate in Turkey. This created a strange coalition of the Hindu middle class and the Muslim aristocracy in South Asia. The atmosphere of confrontation further eased in Bengal with the emergence of the charismatic leadership of Chitta Ranjan Das who had the foresight to appreciate political potential of the Muslim middle classes. In 1923 Das signed a pact with Fazlul Huq, Suhrawardy and other Muslim leaders. The pact which is known as the Bengal Pact provided a mechanism for ensuring due representation of the Muslims in politics and administration (Rahim 1979, pp 232-39). The spirit of Hindu-Muslim rapprochement evaporated with the death of C.R. Das in 1925. Even if Das were alive, it is unlikely that he would have succeeded in containing the communal backlash. The main reason for the failure of Bengal Pact was that the communal issue was the crux of all-India politics. It was, therefore, not possible to have a provincial solution to the communal tangle. Furthermore, the autonomy of the provincial leaders in Bengal was considerably eroded in the context of all-India politics. The political mobilization of masses was contingent on the ability to raise financial resources. The large traders who had the capacity to finance political parties in Bengal were outsiders. The Hindu business magnets in Bengal owed their allegiance to Gandhi and the Muslim financiers were supporters of Jinnah (Gordon 1974). Consequently it was very difficult for provincial leaders to survive without the blessings of all-India leaders. Local leadership was virtually paralysed and the contradictions of all India politics were superimposed on the dilemmas in Bengal society.

The honeymoon of the Hindu and Muslim middle classes was short-lived. There was recurrence of communal riots in the 1920s

and 1930s. According to nationalist historians, communalism in Bengal was generated by the divide and rule policy of the British rulers. This view oversimplifies the complex communal relations. The communal tangle in South Asia was not created by the British rulers though they might have taken advantage of its existence. McLane's assessment of the British policy on this issue seems to be sensible: "This choice was not as consciously devious as the phrase 'divide and rule' may sound. The choice was not usually conceived in terms of helping or discouraging communalism. Rather, British behaviour followed the traditional logic of searching for influential Indian support and of satisfying "legitimate" aspirations. Legitimacy, however, was a relative concept and it varied with the changes in the political and social condition of India" (1992, p. 345).

In the post-Khilafat-movement Bengal, two types of conflicts between the middle classes in Bengal surfaced. First, there was a direct conflict between the Hindu bhadralok and the Muslim middle classes for economic opportunities and jobs. This conflict was exacerbated by the world-wide Great Depression in the 1930s. The dramatic slump in agrarian prices forced the peasants to withhold payment of rent in cash. Rent collection fell off drastically which undermined the economic status of Hindu landlords as well as the intermediaries. The Muslim creditors also refused in many places to repay their loans to Hindu money-lenders. These chaotic conditions encouraged the Muslim jotedars to flout Hindu bhadralok in rural areas. The newly emerging vernacular elite also started competing with the bhadralok for scarce government jobs. Economic imperatives resulted in a direct confrontation between Hindu bhadralok on the one hand and the Muslim ashraf and the vernacular Muslim elite on the other hand.

Conflicts also developed within the Muslim middle classes. The outward unity of Muslim ashraf, vernacular elite and the unlettered Muslim peasantry was fragile. The interests and ideological orientations of these disparate Muslim groups were not similar. Unlike the jotedars and peasants, the ashraf in Bengal spoke urdu. The vernacular Muslim elite favoured agrarian reforms to curb the exploitation of Hindu bhadralok; the ashraf was a champion of the status quo. Islamic universalism enchanted the ashraf, the vernacular elite and peasants were intensely attached to their indigenous cultural heritage. Because of the absence of corporate institutions in the rural areas, it was not easy to mobilize politically amorphous Muslim masses in

Bengal. The only means of arousing such masses, was to appeal to religious sentiments and emotions. In this emotional environment, the natural leadership of Muslim masses in Bengal lay with the immigrant ashraf who monopolized the religious leadership. Initially the vernacular Muslim elite in Bengal was too weak to compete with the ashraf. As the number of educated Muslims from the rural areas swelled, there was increased challenge from the vernacular Muslim elite to the traditional aristocracy. These contradictions found expression in the political rivalry between the Muslim League and Krishak Praja Party and intra-party feuds within Muslim League itself.

The Pakistan resolution of 1940 was the outcome of political confrontation of two communities. It was a desperate move by the Muslims of South Asia to wring political and economic concessions from the Hindu majority. It was a bargaining ploy and not a precise constitutional formula. As Penderel Moon rightly argues, "There is some evidence that Jinnah put forward the demand for Pakistan partly as a tactical move with a view to extracting from Congress constitutional concessions that would ensure a sharing of power with the League both at the centre and in the provinces. The fact that six years later he was ready at one stage to accept something less than an absolutely independent Muslim State suggests that in 1940 he was not irrevocably wedded to this extreme demand; and some Muslim leaders were certainly not in favour of it" (1989, pp. 1091-1092). The Lahore Resolution demanded that geographically "contiguous units be demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and Eastern Zone of India should be grouped to constitute Independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign" (Wolpert 1984, pp. 184-185). The same demand was reiterated in the Madras Session of All India Muslim League which described the demand for Pakistan in the following manner: "the establishment of completely independent states formed by demarcating geographically contiguous units into regions which shall be so constituted with such territorial adjustments as may be necessary, that areas in which the Mussulmans are necessarily in a majority, as in the North Western and Eastern Zones of India shall be grouped together to constitute independent states as Muslim Free National Homeland in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign" (Qureshi 1969, p. 133).

From the constitutional point of view, the Lahore Resolution as reconfirmed by the Madras Resolution asserted that South Asia consisted of many nations and not two nations. It was in fact a blueprint for the balkanization of South Asia and not merely for its partition into two units. However, the operational mechanism for implementing Lahore Resolution was deliberately kept vague. The acceptance of the resolution was facilitated by the vagueness of the resolution which promised everything to everybody. Both the ashraf and the vernacular elite in Bengal endorsed the Lahore Resolution; but they did it for different reasons. Their interpretations of Lahore resolution were not similar. The ashraf led by feudal elements and financed by non-Bengali Muslim traders supported the proposal for the establishment of a state for the Muslims of South Asia. The vernacular Muslim elite maintained that the Lahore Resolution proposed the establishment of Bengal as an independent and sovereign state and not the partition of Bengal (Ahmed 1975, pp 59-73). As Chatterjee rightly observed, "In fact, the very vagueness of the 'Pakistan' idea made it a slogan of inordinate power. It could mean different things to different people and there were almost as many images of Pakistan as Jinnah had followers" (1995, 226).

The ground-swell among the Bengal Muslims in favour of Lahore Resolution was based on an alliance of the ashraf and the vernacular Muslim elite. This alliance was cemented by ever-increasing threats of Hindu militancy as well as the vagueness of Lahore Resolution which was perceived to be acceptable to all. So long as Pakistan was a dream, both the ashraf and vernacular elite were enchanted by it. The ashraf dreamt of the deliverance from Hindu tyranny in an Islamic state. The vernacular elite believed that the implementation of the Lahore Resolution would culminate in the establishment of an independent and sovereign Bengal. The second partition of Bengal in 1947 came as a sudden shock to vernacular Muslim elite who supported Lahore Resolution. In their view, it was the outcome of double betrayal. They felt that the Muslims of Bengal were betrayed both by their coreligionists in other parts of South Asia and by the upper caste Hindus in Bengal itself.

The constitutional framework envisaged in the Lahore Resolution was radically altered in 1946 by the Delhi convention of Muslim legislators under the leadership of Jinnah. This convention recommended that "two Pakistan Zones" on the North East and North West of India where the Muslims were predominantly in a majority be

constituted into a sovereign independent country rather than independent and sovereign countries. The constitutional validity of this measure was dubious. The Muslim League fought elections on the basis of its manifesto and the Lahore Resolution. Neither the manifesto of the All India Muslim League nor the Lahore Resolution was formally amended to incorporate basic shift in League's policy. The modification of Lahore resolution in such an adhoc manner was interpreted as an interim measure (Ahmed 1975, p. 136). It was thought at that time that the constitutional framework for the Indian Muslims could be easily finalized once the Hindu-Muslim issue was settled. The "moth-eaten and truncated" Pakistan that came into being in 1947 was inconsistent with aspirations of the vernacular Muslim elite in Bengal.

For the all-India Congress leadership, one Pakistan was preferable to many independent and sovereign states. Such balkanization would have undermined the very basis of an united India. However, the decision to partition Bengal was not foisted by the All-India Congress leadership on Hindu bhadralok. Ironically, the bhadralok who had fought valiantly for undoing the partition of Mother Bengal in 1906 themselves courted the second partition to forestall Muslim domination in an united Bengal. Under the Mountbatten Plan for the partition of India, the Bengal legislators were given the option to decide whether they wanted partition of Bengal. The Muslim legislators voted to incorporate the undivided Bengal in Pakistan, whereas the Hindu legislators voted to divide Bengal (Hashim 1974). As Chatterjee (1995) rightly suggests, the second partition of Bengal was accelerated not only by Muslim separatism but also by Hindu communalism in Bengal.

Pakistan which emerged constitutionally as one country in 1947 was in fact "a double country". The two wings were not only separated from each other by more than one thousand miles, they were also culturally, economically and socially different. "The cure, at least as far as the East Bengalis were concerned, proved to be worse than the disease" (Satyamurty 1979, p. 223).

The dream of Pakistan united the Muslims of Bengal; its realization divided them, As the threat of Hindu domination receded in Pakistan, the fragile unity of the ashraf and the vernacular elite fell apart. The first confrontation took place over the issue of state language. As Kedourie observed, language is "the outward sign of a group's peculiar identity and a significant means of ensuring its con-

tinuity" (Kedourie 1960, p. 71). The ashraf-vernacular elite controversy over the language issue, therefore, triggered a violent outburst.

The ashraf maintained that the Urdu which was the lingua franca of the immigrant Muslims in India should be the state language of Pakistan. As the Bengali was an offshoot of the Sanskrit language, the ashraf counted it as a Hindu language. The vernacular elite was apprehensive that the introduction of Urdu as a state language would be economically and culturally suicidal for them. They considered the move as an affront to the proud cultural heritage of the Bengalis. The vernacular elite manipulated these fears to challenge the leadership of the ashraf. The controversy over the language issue was not, however, new. As early as the seventeenth century, Poet Abdul Hakim advised those who were uneasy with the Bengali as mother tongue to migrate to other countries. Even within Muslim League itself, language controversy surfaced before the adoption of Lahore Resolution. In the Lucknow session of the All-India Muslim League in 1936 a resolution proposing Urdu as the language of Muslim India was moved. The resolution was strongly opposed by the delegates from Bengal. On the direct intervention of Jinnah, it was ultimately resolved that "wherever Urdu language is the language of the area its unhampered development and use should be upheld, and where it is not the predominant language, adequate arrangements should be made for teaching it as an optional subject" (Zaheer 1994, p. 23). This controversy continued after the adoption of Lahore Resolution. Dr. Mohammad Shahidullah, the distinguished Bengali linguist advocated as early as July 1947 to make Bengali the state language of Pakistan (Umar 1992, pp 422-423). Language movement in the 1950s finally resolved the dichotomy between indigenous and extra-territorial loyalties among the Muslims of Bengal. It resulted in an unequivocal triumph of the loyalty to the habitat and mother tongue. Through Language Movement, rightly observed Umar, the Bengali Muslims "returned to their homeland" (1969, pp. 8-11).

The relationship between east and west wings of Pakistan was the mirror-image of Hindu-Muslim relations in the undivided subcontinent. In British India, the Muslims of Bengal asserted their religious identity to escape from the economic exploitation of the Bengali Hindus who shared the same mother tongue. In the united Pakistan, the Bengalis of East Pakistan reaffirmed vigorously their cultural and linguistic identity to resist the economic exploitation of their coreligionists who spoke in a different tongue. Though history repeated

itself in Pakistan, the lessons learnt from Hindu-Muslim confrontations were forgotten. Neither in undivided India nor in undivided Pakistan could the dominant economic classes sacrifice their short term interests. Between 1949-50 and 1969-70, economic disparity ratio between East and West Pakistan increased from 21.9% to 61% (see Table 13).

Table 13. Disparities in per capita income between East and West Pakistan

	East Pakistan	West Pakistan	Disparity	Disparity ratio $(2 - 1) \times 100$
	(1)	(2)	(2-1)	1
1. 1949-50	288	351	63	21.9
2. 1954-55	294	365	71	24.1
3. 1959-60	277	367	90	32.5
4. 1964-65	303	440	137	45.2
5. 1969-70	331	533	202	61.0

Source : Rehman Sobhan 1992, p.717.

The widening of disparity was attributed directly to the discriminatory role of the state and the drain of resources from east Pakistan to west Pakistan. The vernacular elite provided the leadership in mobilizing the masses against economic deprivation and cultural discrimination. The dominant middle classes in Pakistan by its uncompromising support to a regime of exploitation paved the path for dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971.

An analysis of political dynamics of the Bengal Muslims during the last century clearly indicates that the masses were often manipulated by interest groups. The British rulers also occasionally exploited the Hindu-Muslim discord. The Muslim ashraf mobilized the Muslim masses to protect its own interests against Hindu domination. The vernacular elite in its turn organised resistance against the economic and cultural domination of the ashraf. Nevertheless, the evolution of Bangladesh cannot be explained by instrumental factors alone. Bangladesh was not invented by political elites to legitimize their powers. The contradictions which were exploited by the elites in Bangladesh were not made by them, they were deeply rooted in the history of Bangladesh. They may not be "primordial" in the literal

sense. Nevertheless there is no uniqueness in the birth of Bangladesh. What Renan said about nation-states is equally true about Bangladesh: "Man, sirs, does not improvise. The nation, even as the individual, is the end product of a long period of work, sacrifice and devotion" (Hutchinson and Smith 1994, p. 17).