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Author(s): Amalendu De

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*Bengali Intelligentsia's Attitudes  
to the Permanent Settlement*

IN THIS ARTICLE, the term 'intelligentsia' is used in a typical Bengali sense: besides the English-educated, it covers those who acquired knowledge through classical learning among Hindus and Muslims of the upper and middle classes and constituted the core of the educated community. For various reasons Hindus became dominant in these strata.

While Cornwallis introduced the Permanent Settlement in 1793 he "could not get the ancient zamindars, who had already been broken, to toe his line." So he created a new class of landholders who,

unhampered by tradition or conscience ('roots that clutch'), could be ruthless, with whom he could mortgage the future of agricultural development for all time; who, he fondly hoped, would, with time, which was not in an hour-glass, but in perpetuity, eventually transform itself into a squirearchy, and whom he could trust to reduce the country to an agricultural land and to draw more and more people away from indigenous trade, commerce and industry and leave the spheres so abandoned to be filled up by manufactured imports from England and abroad.<sup>1</sup>

With this object in view "the zamindars were given full proprietary rights over the estates." Both economic and political considerations had influenced Cornwallis to go ahead with this scheme.

To be more precise the aims of the Permanent Settlement were to ensure the security of government revenue and to encourage the new class of rich men in the city, who had money in their hands, to invest in the purchase of zamindari or any other intermediary right. The ruling circles hoped that this diversion of money capital to the agricultural channel would serve a two-fold purpose: (a) "It will keep India an agricultural country, a raw material appendage to British industry and a market for Britain's industrial goods"; (b) it would induce the landholder to improve his estate and thereby solve the agricultural crisis.<sup>2</sup> Further, it would create a new class of landholders attached to the British rule "from motives of self-interest" and who would have "no motive for wishing for a change."<sup>3</sup> It was recognized by the ruling circles that "it was absolutely necessary to establish a social basis for their power through the creation of a new class whose interests, through receiving a subsidiary share in the spoils (one-eleventh, in the original intention) would be bound up with the maintenance of English rule."<sup>4</sup>

### *NEW MIDDLE CLASS*

No doubt the purpose of the Permanent Settlement was to act "as a bulwark against revolution". This was clearly explained by Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India:

If security was wanting against extensive popular tumult or revolution, I should say that the Permanent Settlement, though a failure in many other respects and in most important essentials, has this great advantage at least, of having created a vast body of rich landed proprietors deeply interested in the continuance of the British dominion and having complete command over the mass of the people.<sup>5</sup>

The subsequent events of Bengal proved that the proponents of the Permanent Settlement, on the whole, made a correct assessment of the situation.

As a result of the alliance of British rule with landlordism a new 'social basis' was created in Bengal. Within a few years of its introduction the Permanent Settlement had stimulated sub-infeudation. It became a marked feature in the land system of Bengal by 1806-1807.<sup>6</sup> One of the objectives of the Permanent Settlement was stated to be the creation of the Bengali middle class. By 1930 its existence became distinctly visible as a social force. The number of big zamindars and tenure-holders was small. There was, however, a very large class of small zamindars and tenure-holders who formed a middle class. An encouragement was given to the growth of intermediate tenure-holders. In despatch no. 14 of 9 July 1862 the secretary of state clearly stated that "it is most desirable that facilities should be given for the gradual growth of a middle class connected with the land, without dispossessing the peasant proprietors and occupiers...The proprietors, the tenure-holders, and other

middle-class people who stand between the zamindars and the cultivators have built up the social and economic structure of Bengal.”<sup>7</sup> There was no doubt that “one of the social results of sub-infeudation has been the impetus to the increase of a middle class in a country possessing little or no manufacturing industry.”<sup>8</sup> It was quite clear that the zamindars and other tenure-holders were greatly benefited by this system. The revenue assessment fixed permanently in 1793 was about Rs 286 lakhs. But the growth of population, the extension of cultivation with the reclamation of wasteland, the increase in the value of agricultural produce on account of the improvement in the means of communication and the opening of new markets and the fall in purchasing power of money, greatly increased the rent roll of the zamindars from Rs 318 lakhs in 1791 to Rs 1472 lakhs in 1904. On the other hand land revenue rose during this period from Rs 286 lakhs to Rs 323 lakhs only.<sup>9</sup>

### *Moneylenders and Professionals Join in*

The gross income of the landlords had increased so much that it allured the prosperous lawyers, merchants and other professionals, who had savings to invest, to purchase zamindari estates. A good number of these landholders left the management of the estates in the hands of their agents. They purchased zamindaris partly to secure a higher profit and partly to acquire special honour and social prestige attached to it. Thus, most of the savings of the community were diverted to “the purchase of landed rights.”<sup>10</sup>

But the Permanent Settlement failed to encourage the zamindars to undertake the improvement of land, promote agriculture and ameliorate the economic conditions of the ryots. Besides, taking advantage of the poverty of the people, moneylending became the most important factor in rural economy. The zamindars, merchants and rich people took part in moneylending business. The successful *mahajan* (moneylender) speculated in lands. The main feature of rural economy was that the moneylending interests were mixed up with landed interests. This close link between zamindaris and moneylending interests made the land system much more complex, the entire brunt of which was shouldered by the ryots.<sup>11</sup> A new middle class emerged out of this complex land system and this particular class played a vital part in the foundation of modern Bengal.

The main concern of the government during the period 1793-1859 was to safeguard their revenue. The ryots were left to “the mercy of the zamindars.” This was clearly revealed in all the legislation passed until the Rent Act of 1859.<sup>12</sup> Though economically this period (1793-1859) “commenced disastrously for the zamindars” yet gradually a feeling of security developed due to the regulations made in favour of the zamindars. As “large areas of jungle and wasteland were brought under cultivation, the zamindars’ margin of profit increased.” By the

middle of the nineteenth century zamindars became "far less vulnerable to the Sale law."<sup>13</sup>

Another period began from 1859. The revenue history of the period 1859-1938 was "concerned mainly with the statutory development of rights given to occupancy raiyats, and later to under-raiyats."<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the amount of protection afforded to the ryots by these acts (1859, 1885, 1928 and 1938) were insignificant. The number of non-occupancy ryots was much higher in comparison with other ryots. Naturally, the zamindars could easily derive benefit out of this system. Even though these acts recognized several rights of the ryots, the main structure of the land system that originated in 1793 remained unchanged.<sup>15</sup>

### *ATTITUDES IN THE 19TH CENTURY*

At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries a predominant section among the Muslim intelligentsia comprised those who had acquired vast knowledge in Islamic theology. Of them the most prominent were : Shariat Ullah (1781-1840), Titu Mir (1786 - 1831) and Doodoo Meeah (1819 - 1862). They were the leaders of the religio-social reform movements in the Muslim society of Bengal. Shariat Ullah and his son Doodoo Meeah led the Faraizis, and Titu Mir led the Wahhabis in Bengal. From 1818 to 1870 vast areas were affected by the Faraizi and Wahhabi movements which greatly inspired the Muslims of rural Bengal with new ideas. Mainly religious in character, directed towards purifying Islam in Bengal by removing un-Islamic influences from it, these came to acquire, with the inclusion of an economic and political programme, a mixed movement, socio-economic and political. In the agrarian sphere these movements stood for defending the socio-economic interests of the peasants against the zamindars and European indigo planters.<sup>16</sup> They asserted "a kind of equality amongst themselves." This 'levelling system' had an appeal to the 'lower classes'. The Faraizis not only resisted "successfully the levy of all extra or illegal cesses by the zamindars and talookdars, but with equal ability to pay their land rent" they gave "much more trouble than others in collecting it." They would withhold it altogether if they dared, for it was a favourite maxim with them that "the earth is God's who gives it to his people—the land tax is accordingly held in abomination, and they are taught to look forward to the happy time, when it will be abolished". The Faraizis proclaimed that land belonged to the tillers of the soil.<sup>17</sup> Thus they directed their movement against the zamindari system. But the Faraizi-Wahhabi leaders could not properly explain for what political and economic reasons the British were successful in establishing their dominion in Bengal. Because of this, the two movements registered "reactions, not remedies, to the situation then existing."<sup>18</sup>

But these religio-social reform movements, which acquired anti-British character, lost their tempo by the end of the nineteenth century.

The Muslim leaders realized that the British rule was firmly established in India and it would be impossible to regenerate the Muslims by launching an anti-British struggle. So Nawab Amir Ali Khan Bahadur (1817-79) Abdool Luteef (1828-1893) and Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928), three prominent leaders of educated Bengali Muslims, directed their attention to the strengthening of the position of the Muslims mainly through educational reforms within the framework created by the British rulers. Actually, Nawab Amir Ali's National Mahomedan Association (1856), Abdool Luteef's Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta (1863) and Syed Ameer Ali's Central National Mahomedan Association of Calcutta (1877), represented the interests of upper and middle-class Muslims. Remaining loyal to the British administration they wanted to improve the lot of the Muslims.<sup>19</sup> They never made the land system created by Cornwallis the target of their attack. The Muslim writers bitterly complained that the Muslim zamindars, mostly indolent, were surrounded by the Hindu *amlas* (clerks) and they could easily dispossess them of their zamindaris. Consequently, a few Muslim zamindars "were in a very prosperous condition."<sup>20</sup> Thus the Muslim intelligentsia was more concerned with the sad plight of the Muslim zamindars than with the precarious position of the ryots under the Permanent Settlement.

### *Advocacy of Muslim Educational Reforms*

There were, however, some who raised their voices against zamindari oppression. Of them, perhaps the most prominent was Mir Mosharraf Hussain, a renowned author. His drama entitled *Jamidar Darpan* (The Mirror of Zamindars), published in 1872, was written in the background of the revolt of the peasants of Pabna in 1872-1873, and exposed the zamindars' oppression of the ryots.<sup>21</sup> No doubt Mir Mosharraf Hussain stood by the side of the *projas* (peasants) and deeply sympathized with their suffering.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, as he was himself the son of a zamindar, he could not rise above his class limitations. His deep sympathy for the oppressed people was mixed with his personal anger against certain influential persons known to him as well as his profound respect for British rule and the Europeans. This peculiar combination of contradictory elements in his character was clearly reflected in his writings.<sup>23</sup>

Another noted man was Syed Amir Ali. Though he was not basically opposed to the land system created by the British, he raised his voice in support of the ryots. However, he upheld their cause not from any class angle, but because most of the Bengali ryots belonged to his own 'faith'. His attitude was clearly revealed when he took part in the debate on the Tenancy Bill in 1883. He delivered his address on this subject as a member of the governor-general's council.<sup>24</sup> The main direction of his speech was against the Hindu zamindars. He did not say anything about the oppression practised by the Muslim zamindars. Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century Syed Amir Ali gave a

communal colour to the land question.<sup>25</sup>

It would be quite clear from official and non-official sources that the stalwarts of the Muslim community in nineteenth-century Bengal tried to create and strengthen the position of the Muslim upper and middle classes like their Hindu counterparts did, mainly through educational reforms and diversion of money to agriculture. Their main purpose was to stabilize the social and economic basis of the Muslims. They were well aware that the Permanent Settlement had opened new possibilities before them. So they did not demand its replacement, though some of them portrayed zamindari oppression in their writings or speeches.

### *Aware, but Ambiguous*

A similar attitude was expressed by the educated Hindus. A large number of tracts and articles on the sad plight of the ryots were written by them throughout the nineteenth century. Rammohun Roy, Iswar Chandra Gupta, Akshoy Kumar Datta, Harish Chandra Mukherjee, Nobin Kristo Bose, Sisir Kumar Ghose, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Sanjib Chandra Chatterjee, R C Dutt, Bhudev Mukherjee and others wrote books and papers on this particular subject.

From Rammohun's account we get an idea of the social and economic conditions of his times. He was well aware of the difficulties of the ryots under the Permanent Settlement and even spoke of the removal of their difficulties. Yet he never demanded its abolition. Defending the Permanent Settlement, Rammohun Roy made the following statement in his evidence in 1839: "If it (the Permanent Settlement) had not been formed, the landholders would always have taken care to prevent the revenues from increasing by not bringing wastelands into cultivation and by collusive arrangements to elude further demands; while the state of the cultivators would not have been at all better than it is now."<sup>26</sup> He did not feel any urge to revise his attitude towards the Permanent Settlement even after witnessing the socio-economic tensions generated by the Faraizi-Wahhabi movements.<sup>27</sup>

Another noted author was Iswar Chandra Gupta. From 1831 to 1859 he regularly wrote articles on this subject in his paper *Sambad Prabhakar*. He, of course, said that the ryots had fallen into a miserable condition as a result of the land laws enacted by the British and the emergence of new middlemen under the impact of the Permanent Settlement. At the same time Iswar Chandra Gupta wrote articles in support of the zamindars, which clearly show that he could not distinguish between the zamindars and the ryots as separate classes.<sup>28</sup>

The 'Young Bengal' leaders who talked of the American and French Revolutions had no concrete proposals to reshape agrarian life with the object of solving the problems created by the zamindari settlement, though at a later stage many of them wrote papers on the subject. In fact, no authoritative discussions on agrarian questions are to be found

in the proceedings of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge (1838 - 1843).<sup>29</sup>

In 1850 Akshoy Kumar Datta wrote three articles under the title "*Palligramastha Prajader Durabasta*" in the *Tatvabodhini Patrika*, in which he discussed the oppression by zamindars and indigo planters.<sup>30</sup> Similarly Harish Chandra Mukherjee, editor of the *Hindoo Patriot*, wrote innumerable articles on the agrarian question.<sup>31</sup>

### *Literati on Agrarian Issues*

Nobin Kristo Bose, one of the secretaries of the Bethune Society, wrote in 1859 a lengthy paper on the land system. Referring to various classes of middlemen and the mahajan, he had discussed the "oppressive exactions of the zamindars". In order to implement "Lord Cornwallis's benevolent views and intentions" into practice he had pointed out the necessity of a detailed survey of the province. He suggested that to render justice accessible to all, the judicial machinery should be recast and moulded anew. He admitted that the most desirable situation for a cultivator would be peasant-proprietorship. But he came to the conclusion that "it would be impossible, for the present at least, to endow the peasantry with the absolute ownership of their several allotments of land." Therefore, he suggested: "It would be necessary, for this purpose, on the part of the legislature to compel the zamindars to make a similar settlement with their ryots as government concluded with them in 1793." Bose wanted only to "give the ryot a firmer hold on his farm, and ensure to him the fruits of his labour."<sup>32</sup>

Besides, several articles on agrarian issues were published in the proceedings of the Social Science Association (1867-1871), and in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Bengal Magazine*, *Bangadarshan*, *Someprokash*, *Sadharani* and other papers.<sup>33</sup> Analyzing the causes of the peasant revolt of Pabna in 1872-73, *Hindoo Patriot*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Sadharani* and some other papers correctly exposed the defects of the laws and of the administration. But these journals did not realize the necessity of eradicating the ills by replacing the zamindari system.<sup>34</sup> No doubt the *Sadharani* always took a pro-praja stand. Yet, it did not demand the abolition of landlordism. It wanted to solve the rift between the zamindar and the praja mainly by removing the oppressive powers of the zamindars.<sup>35</sup> By the end of 1861 the *Hindoo Patriot* took a pro-zamindar attitude. Kristo Das Pal, an advocate of the Bengal zamindars edited the *Hindoo Patriot* from November 1861 till his death on 24 July 1884.<sup>36</sup> In this connection we must particularly refer to the courageous role of the *Grambarta Prakashika*, which for long twenty-two years (started on 1 Baishakh 1270 B S), under the editorship of Harinath Majumdar, exposed the oppression engineered by the zamindars, mahajans and indigo planters, and reminded the government of its responsibilities towards the projas. This paper stirred the minds of the rural people for

its pro-peasant views. No other paper of the time stood so firmly by the side of the peasants. Harinath Majumdar, popularly known as Kangal Harinath, lived in rural areas. He did not belong to the elites of Calcutta.<sup>87</sup>

### *Indifferent and Conservative*

In 1864, Sanjib Chandra Chatterjee discussed in detail the condition of the ryots before the advent of the British and the consequences of the land laws enacted under the new regime, and suggested some remedies to ameliorate their sufferings.<sup>88</sup> In 1874, R C Dutt criticized the Permanent Settlement for the misery of the peasants, though after some time he changed his mind and supported it.<sup>89</sup> In 1881, Abhay Charan Das and in 1883 Tarini Das Banerjee discussed the relations between the zamindars and the ryots in their works.<sup>40</sup> Bhudev Mukherjee also discussed the sufferings of the ryots. But he divided the zamindars into groups—good and bad. He was only critical of the bad ones.<sup>41</sup>

In this connection we have to attach special importance to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's tract entitled *Bangadesher Krishak* which appeared *Bangadarshan* in 1872, and was published in book form in 1892. In the introduction of this book Bankim Chandra wrote that the condition of the peasants he discussed in 1872 did not prevail in 1892: there was no such oppression by zamindars; their powers were reduced by new legislation; there was much improvement in the position of the peasants. The new act mentioned here by Bankim Chandra was the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. There is an account of the land system, oppression by the zamindars and sufferings of the peasants in this work. Bankim Chandra also clearly stated that the Permanent Settlement should have been made with the *projas* instead of the zamindars.<sup>42</sup> At the same time he admitted that it was too late to rectify the mistake committed in 1793. The Bengali society was founded on that mistake. The abolition of the Permanent Settlement was likely to cause very dreadful disorder. He was not a supporter of a social revolution. So he would not tender such a wrong advice to the English as to subvert the settlement which had been made permanent, thereby forfeiting the confidence of the people throughout India. He would give such an advice only when he would desire ill of them or of the society.

Thus, though Bankim Chandra sympathized with the suffering ryots, he was a staunch defender of the social structure created by the Permanent Settlement.<sup>43</sup> Again, nowhere in his book did he express any apprehension of the ways in which the land system was nourishing separatism in Bengal, especially in eastern Bengal. Nor did he give any indication how far the Tenancy Act of 1885, which he welcomed as a landmark, helped in transforming the main basis of the land structure. On the contrary, this act fully preserved the sub-infeudation which had already been set in motion. The question was, by keeping it

intact how far was it possible to alleviate the sufferings of the peasants? It was obviously something that did not disturb Bankim Chandra. Not alone in adopting this attitude he shared an indifference to the peasant problems like most of the writers of the century.<sup>44</sup>

The zamindars of Bengal and Bihar were greatly alarmed when various drafts were prepared by several authorities for a new tenancy act during 1880-1883, and discussion started around the final draft in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1883. The zamindars were strongly represented in the council. They could easily raise their voices against the bill. The British Indian Association nominated Kristo Das Pal to represent their case in the council. Another powerful spokesman was the Maharaja of Darbhanga. After Kristo Das Pal's death Raja Peary Mohan Mukherjee of Uttarpara took his place. But there was none to represent the cause of the ryots. As the Tenancy Bill of 1883 proposed to confer some occupancy rights on the ryots the zamindars opposed it vehemently both inside and outside the council. The Hindu, Muslim and Christian landholders organized a protest meeting at the Calcutta Town Hall on 29 December 1883, and adopted the following resolution:

That this meeting desires to record its opinion that the government has entirely failed to show that any grounds exist for introducing into the Bengal Tenancy Bill revolutionary provisions which are a novel departure from the ancient custom, and the existing law relating to landlord and tenant, and which will most injuriously affect all classes of the community who are in any way interested in the land.<sup>45</sup>

This was, in short, the attitude of the Bengal zamindars at the end of the nineteenth century.

### *IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY*

The government was, however, quite satisfied by the performance of the zamindars. During the Santal Insurrection (1855-1856) and the Sepoy Mutiny (1857-1858) the landholders of Bengal remained loyal to the government.<sup>46</sup> It is known from a large number of official reports (1873-1883) prepared by the officers in charge of Burdwan presidency, Rajshahi and Dacca divisions that the government admitted that "the wealth and prosperity of the country have marvellously increased beyond all precedent under the Permanent Settlement."<sup>47</sup> Naturally, the government had left the main structure of the land system unchanged, although on several occasions they conferred some rights on the ryots. It is also revealed from these reports that the sole purpose of the government was to minimize the tensions between landlords and tenants.

Though from the beginning of the twentieth century the educated people of Bengal boldly came forward to assert their rights in the political sphere, their attitude towards the Permanent Settlement remained more or less the same as in the nineteenth century. As serious efforts were

made by the leaders to forge Hindu-Muslim unity during the Swadeshi movement (1905-1911), the Non-Cooperation movement (1919-1922) and also at the time when Swaraj Party (1923-25) took predominant part in Bengal politics, it is appropriate to discuss this question with particular reference to these periods.

The most influential among the leaders of the Swadeshi and anti-partition agitation were the Hindu zamindars who feared that after partition, zamindaris might be abolished in the Muslim-proja dominated eastern Bengal. The attitude of the leaders of this movement was clearly revealed in the address of welcome submitted to Lord Minto on 16 January 1906 on behalf of the Bengal Landholders' Association on the occasion of his assumption of office of viceroy and governor-general of India. Showing their unbounded loyalty to the British crown and confirming their "belief in the justice of British rule" the deputationists drew the attention of the newly appointed viceroy to the feeling of unrest pervading the province immediately after its partition. They had expected that the Indian industry would receive due encouragement from the administration and the government would render great help to the cause of education including technological studies. They also pointed out: "Owing to the beneficence of the Permanent Settlement, Bengal has been a prosperous province."<sup>48</sup>

An analysis of the programme of Swadeshi and anti-partition agitation would make it clear that the leaders tried to build up national education and industry while keeping intact the zamindari system, without realizing that the existing land system created impediments to the capitalist mode of production.<sup>49</sup>

### *Swaraj Party on the Land Question*

It is well known that a new spirit of Hindu-Muslim fraternity developed during the *Khilafat* and Non-Cooperation movements (1919—1922). But the situation abruptly changed with the abandonment of the 'mass civil disobedience' in February 1922. Within a short time the Swaraj Party led by C R Das and Motilal Nehru emerged and in March 1923 announced its programme. It was divided into four parts: "Destructive Aspects"; "Constructive Aspects"; "For National Regeneration"; and the "Final Blow". It urged upon the people to boycott law courts and government-controlled schools and colleges, renounce government posts, boycott foreign cloth, establish national institutions, produce *khaddar*, revive cottage industries, form labour and peasant unions, establish Congress committees and to give the final blow to the government by staging a long-continued hartal on a nationwide scale. Nowhere in this programme was any reference made to the zamindari system. No mention was made of this particular issue in the 'Hindu-Muslim Pact' announced in December 1923. By giving more weightage to the majority community in the legislature and administration the Swarajists wanted

to solve the communal question.<sup>40</sup>

However, they did not altogether remain indifferent to the land problem. In the programme of work in the legislative council under the leadership of C R Das, it was decided that in matters of tenancy legislation it would not wait for government initiative, but should consult other parties and arrive at decisions that "should be acceptable both to landlords and formulate the demands in the form of a bill for acceptance by the council." The Swarajists tried to satisfy both the landlords and the tenants within the framework of the zamindari system. But C R Das could not implement this idea into practice due to his premature death on 16 June 1925. After his death the Swarajists decided to give effect to the party's tenancy programme and accordingly appointed a committee "to study tenancy problems in Bengal, and to arrive at decisions that should be acceptable to tenants and landlords." They proposed to frame a bill in accordance with the recommendations of the committee, to be introduced at the next session, and the committee was requested to submit its report by November 1925.<sup>51</sup> But the Swaraj Party failed to take any decision on the land system and could not prepare any report.

### *Zamindars Get More than Sympathy*

However, when in November 1925 it was announced in the *Calcutta Gazette* that a tenancy bill would be placed before the council, *Forward*, the English mouthpiece of the party, came out with an editorial article "Tenancy Bill" saying that one of the ostensible objects of the proposed amendment of the tenancy act was to stop vast amount of litigation and that "no one will object to giving occupancy right to the raiyat by securing for the landlord at the same time simple, efficient and equitable means for realizing his rents without the unnecessary harassments. There is nothing in the present bill which will discourage suits for rents or place the rights of raiyats beyond litigation." The *Forward* also said that the committee of 1921 had admitted "there are no disturbed agrarian relations or bad feeling between landlord and tenant at present." But, "the present bill, if it is passed into law, will, we fear, create bad blood between them." The *Forward* felt no necessity for making any radical change in the land system, without realizing that it made rural areas fertile breeding ground for communal and caste tensions.<sup>52</sup>

Swarajists were not only sympathetic towards the zamindars, they even expatiated on the 'progressive role' of the zamindars in the national struggle. This attitude towards the zamindars was clear even during the lifetime of C R Das. In fact, a considerable number of Bengal zamindars belonged to the Swarajist fold, some of them elected to the Bengal Council with the Swarajist support. Discussing the role of the zamindar members of the Bengal Council one of the contributors of the *Forward* made the following observation in an article entitled "Bengal Council: Its Work" in the issue of 13 April 1924:

It cannot, however, be overlooked that much of the strength of the opposition was due to the attitude of the zamindars. Their independence and courage have been phenomenal, and the country owes them a deep debt of gratitude that they have made such a bold stand in spite of the known difficulties and delicacy of their position. Their sympathy for the poor of the province, their efforts to ameliorate the hopeless condition of the masses augur well for the improvement of the village, and directly contradict the mischievous lie that the nationalist movement is a middle-class movement for the purpose of safeguarding middle-class rights. The speeches of Kumar Shiv Sekhaheswar Roy have still the vigour of old times, while the argument of Rai Harendranath Chaudhuri are as full of information and vitality as ever. Babu Sailaja Nath Roy Choudhuri, Kumar Arun Chandra Singha, Babu Prasanna Deb Raikut, Babu Taraknath Mukherji, Babu Satya Kishore Banarji, Rai Satyendra Nath Roy Choudhury Bahadur, Babu Abinash Chandra Roy, among others were always to be found championing the people's cause, and their sympathy and their co-operation have been of such vital value to the nationalist movement that it cannot be overestimated. By associating themselves with the progressive movement they have proved themselves natural leaders of the people and have shown conclusively that the zamindars are determined to occupy their proper place in the province. All honour and glory to them.<sup>53</sup>

### *Precursors of Congress Policy*

It is clear from this article that the Swaraj party attached great importance to the progressive role of the zamindars and it felt the necessity of getting their assistance in the national struggle. The Swarajists believed that the main task before the country was "the problem of political emancipation."<sup>54</sup> Keeping intact the Permanent Settlement they thought of removing the bitterness and conflict between the landlords and the tenants through legislative measures, and thereby wanted to enlist their support. The Swarajists were not aware of the complications that might crop up if they failed to successfully tackle the agrarian question with which the interests of the major portion of Bengali population were linked up. At least no well-thought-out discussion was available in their programme, speeches and writings. Perhaps they had shelved this question for the post-independence days. Naturally in spite of their best efforts for maintaining cordial relations between the Hindus and the Muslims, the Swarajists could not show any new path to the people by keeping Bengal politics free from communal passion.<sup>55</sup>

The Congress also did not favour any radical change in the land system by abolishing landlordism. There was no doubt that the peasants of Bengal responded with great zeal to the call of the Congress during

the Non-cooperation days (1919-1922). No other period of Bengal had witnessed such a popular enthusiasm in the countryside. Unfortunately Congress leaders of Bengal could not lead the peasants by rising above their class interests. The Congress took no lesson from the subsequent events and did not revise its stand. The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee adopted a programme of village uplift by solving the land problem.<sup>59</sup> At the Gauhati session of the Indian National Congress (1926), the communists moved a resolution demanding complete independence for India in which they included a clause urging the abolition of landlordism. This resolution created a great stir in Congress circles. Expressing great surprise J M Sen Gupta, a veteran Congress leader, remarked: "Zamindars contribute money to the Congress, still they are to be destroyed!"<sup>57</sup> This resolution was defeated by overwhelming votes. At Gauhati it was laid down that the Congress shall:

(e) take steps to improve the condition of agricultural tenants by introducing and supporting measures to secure fixity of tenure and other advantages with a view to ensure a speedy amelioration of the condition of the tenants; and (f) generally, protect the rights of labour, agricultural and industrial, and adjust on an equitable basis the relations between landlords and tenants, capitalists and workmen.<sup>58</sup>

Again, when the Amending Act of 1928 was passed, it became quite patent that to the Congress members of the Bengal legislature the interests of the zamindars were much more important than that of the ryots.<sup>59</sup> Congress members were so much satisfied with the provisions of this Act that one important leader of the Swaraj Party said that as the "occupancy raiyats were given all rights in trees," it would "strike their imagination" and they would remain fascinated with the benevolent attitude of the Congress towards the ryots. No doubt the ryots were rustic, but they were not foolish. The pro-zamindar attitude of the Congress completed the process of alienation of ryots from the Congress. Since then the Congress never got back the support of the Bengal ryots.<sup>60</sup>

### *Enter Fazlul Huq*

In the vacuum created in rural Bengal by the typical pro-zamindar attitude of the Congress entered a group of educated Muslim politicians. A K Fazlul Huq, who wholeheartedly joined politics in 1913, was their spokesman. He took up the land question as an important issue for the consolidation of his position among the rural masses, particularly among the Muslim peasants. Since 1915 he tried to organize the krishak-projas against the zamindari-mahajani system. Gradually the nucleus of the proja movement was formed in different districts of Bengal. Under this direct initiative two big rallies of the projas were respectively held in 1921 (in a village of Barisal district) and in 1926 (in a village of Dacca district). In order to give a concrete shape to the movement Fazlul Huq

founded a political organization in 1929 known as the Nikhil Banga Krishak Proja Samiti. Considering the political situation of the country he coined the two words *krishak* and *proja*. The leadership of this samiti was mainly in the hands of the educated Muslim middle class. The term *proja* was applicable to all categories of people. So there was no difficulty for educated people to become *projas*. On the other hand the peasants belonged to a different category. Taking together the interests of the *projas* as well as of the *krishaks* Fazlul Huq added new colour to Bengal politics. The extension of franchise right to the six annas-rent-paying tenant by the Government of India Act 1935 had opened new opportunities before the Krishak Proja Samiti. To mobilize this section of peasants behind the samiti, Fazlul Huq started a campaign for the abolition of landlordism. In the election manifesto of the Krishak Proja Samiti, published in 1936, it was clearly laid down:

14. Thorough overhauling of the Bengal Tenancy Act in the interest of the agriculturists ensuring the vesting of proprietary rights in the tillers of the soil and including (i) the abolition of the zamindar's right of *nazar* and *salamy* right of pre-emption; (ii) tenants' right of mutation of name without additional payment; (iii) reduction of rate of rent.

15. To take adequate and effective measures against illegal exactions by the zamindars, moneylenders and their representatives.<sup>61</sup>

### *Muslim League and Communist Positions*

With this programme Fazlul Huq moved from one corner of Bengal to the other, and stirred up the rural masses against the existing land system and the moneylending business. The *krishak* *projas* greatly responded to his call, and returned Huq and his followers to the Assembly. Unfortunately, after assuming responsibility as chief minister of Bengal in 1937 he could not go ahead with his programme. Though the ryots got some privileges by the Bengal Tenancy Act (1937-1938), their financial difficulties were not removed. As the *jotedar* class was powerful in the Krishak Proja Samiti they did not allow the samiti to implement its programme. Similarly the other partner of the Bengal cabinet, the Muslim League, was absolutely under the control of the zamindars, *jotedars* and merchants whose interests were linked with the existing land system. In order to enlist support of the general Muslim masses the League leaders sometimes spoke of the abolition of landlordism, but in practice they took no initiative for constructive land reforms. They utilized the land system merely as a weapon to realize their narrow political objectives. Besides, the Congress members of the legislature also remained indifferent to this question. Under these circumstances no concerted efforts were made to change the existing land system. Consequently, rural Bengal was engulfed in communal tension.<sup>62</sup>

The peasant uprisings in Bengal had a long history. Throughout

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a series of resistance movements were organized by the peasants and tribals of Bengal. Nevertheless no efforts were made to organize the peasants in a separate organization. However, in some areas of Bengal, Congress and Communist workers separately took the initiative in organizing the peasants during the period 1920-1934. As an impact of the khilafat and Non-cooperation movements on the peasants a section of Congress workers felt the necessity of building up a separate peasant organization. But Congress leaders took no initiative. At last in 1936 the Communists decided to form a separate class organization for the peasants. In March 1937, the first session of the Krishak Sabha was held at Patrasaer (in the district of Bankura). Since then the Communists consistently fought for the abolition of landlordism and distribution of lands to peasants without compensation. Though in various parts of Bengal they raised the level of consciousness of the peasants, they could not give a new direction to Bengal politics by diminishing the grip of the League and the Congress on the masses.<sup>63</sup>

### *Middle-class Views on Zamindari, 1938-1940*

Though the Proja-League ministry remained silent on abolition of landlordism, peasants began to organize movements in support of the demand. As a result, the Bengal cabinet had to revise its policy. On 5 November 1938 was appointed the Land Revenue Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Francis Floud, "to examine the existing land revenue system of Bengal in its various aspects, with special reference to the Permanent Settlement." On 21 March 1940, the commission submitted its report. The majority came to the conclusion that "whatever may have been the justification for the Permanent Settlement in 1793, it is no longer suited to the conditions of the present time." They stated that the zamindari system

has developed so many defects that it has ceased to serve any national interest...No half measures will satisfactorily remedy its defects. Provided that a practicable scheme can be devised to acquire the interests of all classes of rent-receivers on reasonable terms, the policy should be to aim at bringing the actual cultivators into the position of tenants holding directly under government. We recognize that this proposal involves a fundamental change in the rural economy of Bengal, affecting vitally the whole social and economic structure of the province, that it can only be carried out gradually over a term of years, and that it would be a most formidable administrative understanding, which will tax to the full all the resources of government.<sup>64</sup>

How did the Bengali landholders and middle class react? The Land Revenue Commission recorded the evidence of associations representing the landlords, tenants and lawyers, and selected gentlemen to whom a questionnaire had been sent. It was revealed from the mass of

documents published by the Bengal Government in six volumes in 1940 that the Bar Associations, the Landholders' Associations, Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha, Bangiya Brahman Sabha, Middle Class Peoples' Association (Mymensingh) the Peoples' Association (Dacca) the Peoples' Association (Khulna) and experienced revenue experts like Sir Nalini Ranjan Chatterjee (ex-high court judge, Calcutta), Rai Bahadur M N Gupta, Rai Bahadur K P Maitra and Rai Bahadur J N Sircar "were not in favour of the abolition of the Permanent Settlement." They feared that the abolition of landlordism would mean the disintegration of the economic and social structure on which modern Bengal was built. Referring to the Census Report of 1931 they argued that out of a population of 50 million, it would upset the lives of more than 15 million landholders, large and small. This would completely destroy the very basis of the educated middle class of Bengal spelling disaster to the province as a whole.<sup>65</sup>

However, the Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha, Dacca District Muslim Federation, Rajshahi Muhammadan Association, Anjuman-i-Islamia (Mymensingh) Anjuman Ettifaque-e-Islam (Nadia) Bakarganj District Proja Party and the Secretary of the Nikhil Bangiya Krishak Proja Samiti, and few other individuals like Dr Nares Chandra Sen Gupta (advocate, high court) and Dr Sarat Chandra Basak (senior government pleader, high court) advocated the abolition of the zamindari system.<sup>66</sup> But, considering the total composition of the Bengali intelligentsia they voiced the feeling of a small segment. The Bar Associations of Calcutta and mofussil areas, and the Landholders' Associations of various districts were actually the most predominant section of Bengali elite.<sup>67</sup>

### *Repercussions and the Denouement*

It is clear from the facts stated above that by and large the Bengali intelligentsia did not favour the abolition of Permanent Settlement. The nationalists and the militant nationalists belonging to the Congress or other revolutionary organizations, for their obvious class-position in Bengali society, did not seriously take up the land question. They could not comprehend the fact that unless effective steps were taken to solve the land question in a region where the majority of landlords were Hindus and the majority of ryots Muslims, it would constantly be the breeding ground of separatism, encouraging politicians to utilize the socio-political situation to serve their narrow interests. The zamindars and other landholders never attached importance to this particular aspect, eager as they were to protect the main structure of the land system. It was stated in 1940 both by Sir Bijoy Chand Mahtab and Brajendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury in their dissenting note to the Floud Commission:

To make extinct the great landholders in the province may not be

difficult, although they might deserve greater consideration as they and their ancestors contributed in no small measure in the past to the establishment of many of the charitable and educational institutions to be found in the province today. But with the disappearance of all intermediary landlords, who have formed the backbone of the province and the intelligentsia, and are the creators of modern social and political Bengal, we shall be running the definite risk of a social upheaval of a magnitude which requires very careful thought, for with an undeveloped Proja Party and Raiyats' Associations we might easily usher in Communism which would become a menace to the state itself. The province is not ready for such a revolutionary step and that is why we consider the proposal of state purchase as unsound in practice, premature and inopportune.<sup>68</sup>

### *Communalism Unhampered*

They could not realize that if they fail to erect a new land structure by replacing the Permanent Settlement, then really an unusual social-political upheaval would engulf Bengal, as a result of which, in the near future, the whole basis of Hindu zamindar and middle class, particularly of east Bengal, would be endangered. Since 1936-1937, especially after the adoption of the Pakistan Resolution in March 1940, it became clear that the Muslim League leaders fully utilized the land issue to strengthen their position among the Muslim ryots.<sup>69</sup> As a result of the land system the political and communal questions were so much mixed up that the whole of Bengal politics became complex and generated ill feeling between the Congress and the League leaders. So we find a very pathetic picture of Hindu-Muslim tension throughout the year 1946-47. During this time in several districts of east Bengal the Muslim peasants refused to cultivate the lands of the Hindus. In some places the Namasudra peasants were instigated not to cultivate the lands of the caste Hindus. For various reasons Hindu-Muslim bitterness poisoned rural life in Bengal. In the midst of growing communal tension, Congress workers, reared up in nationalist tradition, were greatly bewildered. They wrote letters to Mahatma Gandhi for advice and guidance. But no way out was found.<sup>70</sup>

When the communal fire was destroying the very basis of Bengali life just at that time, on 21 April 1947, the Muslim League ministry moved in the Bengal legislature the Zamindari Purchase and Tenancy Bill. It made a provision to purchase the zamindari estates by giving adequate compensation to the owners. But before the select committee submitted its report on this bill the Sword of Damocles had fallen on Bengal. The official announcement of 3 June 1947 prepared the ground for the partition of the province.<sup>71</sup>

It would be clear from the preceding paragraphs that the stalwarts of nineteenth-century Bengal tried to build up a new Bengal keeping

intact the Permanent Settlement created by the British. On the other hand the freedom fighters of twentieth-century Bengal wanted to achieve independence by shelving this problem. One of the objects of the Permanent Settlement was to create a dependable class. No doubt this class remained loyal to the British throughout the nineteenth century. Though in the twentieth century they took part in the freedom struggle they did not demand a total change of the social structure built up on the Permanent Settlement. It indicated how in a feudal and colonial society the colonial legacy remained as a powerful social factor. In analyzing the role of the intelligentsia during the period under review these inherent contradictions should be taken into consideration. This would help us to understand why the nationalist leaders, in spite of their best efforts, completely failed to arrest the progress of communal riots, which ultimately led to the partition of Bengal.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Census of India*, 1951, vol IV, pt I-a, p 439.

<sup>2</sup> Minute of Lord Cornwallis, February 1790, in *The Fifth Report*, vol I, Madras 1883 pp 609-626; *The Zemindary Settlement of Bengal*, 2 vols., Calcutta 1879; C D Field, *Landholding and the Relation of Landlord and Tenant*, Calcutta 1883, ch XXI; N K Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, vol II, Calcutta 1962, ch VII; Bhowani Sen, *Evolution of Agrarian Relations in India*, New Delhi 1962, p 63.

<sup>3</sup> Minute of Lord Cornwallis, op.cit., pp 624-625.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., R P Dutt, *India Today*, Bombay 1947, p 192.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *India Today*, pp 182-193.

<sup>6</sup> F Buchanan, *A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of the District, or Zila, of Dinajpur, in the Province or Subha, of Bengal*, Calcutta 1833, ch VII-VIII; S G Panandikar, *The Wealth and Welfare of the Bengal Delta Comprising the Districts of Mymensingh, Dacca, Bogra, Pabna, Faridpur, Bakargang, Tippera and Noakhali*, Calcutta 1926, pp 126-127; N K Sinha, op.cit., vol II, ch VII; Amalendu De, *Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth-century Bengal*, Calcutta 1974, pp 15-18, 85-86 (henceforth abbreviated as *Roots of Separatism*).

<sup>7</sup> *Report of the Land Revenue Commission*, Bengal (hereinafter *Report*) vol I, Alipore 1940, pp 338-339.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p 339.

<sup>9</sup> B H Baden-Powell, *The Land Systems of British India*, vol I, Johnson Reprint Corporation, New York 1972, p 439; Panandikar, op.cit., pp 123-124; Radhakamal Mukherjee, *The Changing Face of Bengal; a Study of Riverine Economy*, Calcutta 1938; *Roots of Separatism*, p 16.

<sup>10</sup> Panandikar, op.cit., pp 125-127.

<sup>11</sup> Field, op.cit., pp 819-820; *Report*, vol VI, Alipore 1941, pp 435-450; N K Sinha, vol II, p 209; *Roots of Separatism*, p 17.

<sup>12</sup> Field, op.cit., ch XXVII-XXVIII; *Report*, vol I, p 24 (*vide* Reg. VII of 1799, Reg. V of 1812, Reg. XI of 1822, Report of the Select Committee of 1830 etc.) On the resumption and settlement, Permanent Settlement, rent suits, wastelands etc. see *Proceedings of the Board of Revenue* (hereinafter *P B R*) 1786-1858, in State Archives, West Bengal.

<sup>13</sup> Field, op.cit., ch XXVIII; *Report*, vol I, pp 25-30; Baden-Powell, op.cit.; S Gopal, *The Permanent Settlement in Bengal and Its Results*, London 1949; *Roots of Separatism*, pp 17-18. See Rent Act of 1859, Tenancy Act of 1885, Act of 1928 and Act of 1938.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal, Thirteenth to Nineteenth Century*, Calcutta

- 1972; Amalendu De, *Bengali Buddhijibi O Bichchinnatabad*, Calcutta 1974, pp 61-142 (Henceforth abbreviated as *Bangali Buddhijibi*); *Roots of Separatism*, pp 19-22.
- <sup>17</sup> *Proceedings of the Judicial Department* (hereinafter as *P J D*), O C no. 25, 29 May 1843, p 461; O C no. 99, 7 April 1847, p 147.
- <sup>18</sup> K A Nizami, "Socio-religious Movements in Indian Islam (1763-1898)" in S T Lokhandwalla (ed.) *India and Contemporary Islam*, Simla 1971, pp 107-108.
- <sup>19</sup> A R Mallick, *British Policy and the Muslims of Bengal 1757-1856*, Dacca 1961; Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, Cambridge University Press, 1968; Enamul Haque (compiled), *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif, His Writings and Related Documents*, Dacca 1968; *Bangali Buddhijibi*, ch 2; *Roots of Separatism*; Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884-1912*, Dacca 1974.
- <sup>20</sup> Sheikh Abdus Sobhan, *Hindu-Muslim*, Calcutta 1888; Qazi Abdul Mannan, *Adhunik Bangla Sahitye Muslim Sadhana*, Dacca 1969; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya, 1757-1918*, Calcutta 1378 B S; *Roots of Separatism*, p 43.
- <sup>21</sup> Mir Mosharraf Hussain, *Jamidar Darpan*, Ashraf Siddiqi, (ed.) Dacca 1958; Munir Chaudhuri, *Mir-Manash*, Dacca 1968.
- <sup>22</sup> Mir Mosharraf Hussain, *Jamidar Darpan*; Mir Mosharraf Hussain, *Udasin Pathiker Maner Katha*, A K M Samsul Islam (ed.) Dacca 1370 B.S.; also articles contributed by Mir Mosharraf Hussain to the *Grambarta Prakashika*.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid; Munir Chaudhuri, op. cit., p 55.
- <sup>24</sup> *Legislative Proceedings of the Council of the Governor-General*, March 1885, p 157; Ameer Ali, "The Life Problem of Bengal", in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, September 1883, pp 421-440; Sufia Ahmed, op.cit., pp 111-113.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> *Report*, vol III, Alipore, 1940, p 159; S B Sarkar (ed.), *Rammohun Roy on Indian Economy*, Calcutta 1965; Bhabatosh Datta, *The Evolution on Economic Thinking in India*, Calcutta 1952; B N Ganguli, "Rammohun Roy on India's Contemporary Economic Problems," *Economic and Social Development*, Essays in honour of Dr C D Deshmukh, Bombay 1972; *Bangali Buddhijibi*, ch 1.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Files of *Sambad Prabhakar*; Benoy Ghose, "Sambad Prabhakar Patrikar Samajik Bhumika," in *Itihasa*, vol 9, no. 4, 1366 B S.
- <sup>29</sup> A C Gupta (ed.), *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, Jadavpur 1958, pp 16-32; Gautam Chattopadhyay (ed.), *Awakening in Bengal in Early Nineteenth Century (Selected Documents)*, vol I, Calcutta 1965, vide Introduction and other papers.
- <sup>30</sup> Akshoy Kumar Datta, "Palligramastha Prajader Durabastha", in *Tatvabodhini Patrika*, Baishakh, Sravan and Agrahayan, 1772 Sakabda (A D 1850).
- <sup>31</sup> Files of the *Hindoo Patriot*.
- <sup>32</sup> Nobin Kristo Bose, "The Landed Tenure in Bengal", an article in *The Proceedings of the Bethune Society*, for the sessions of 1859-60, 1860-61, Calcutta, 1862, pp 45-74.
- <sup>33</sup> *Transactions of the Bengal Social Science Association, 1867-1871*, Calcutta (The first session of this association was held in July 1867); Files of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*; *Bangadarshan*, *Someprokash*, *Sadharani*, *Bengal Magazine* (1872-1882).
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid; *Roots of Separatism*, pp 77, 104.
- <sup>35</sup> Files of *Sadharani* (1873).
- <sup>36</sup> Files of *Hindoo Patriot* (1861-1884); Ramgopal Sanyal, *The Life of Babu Kristo Das Pal*, Calcutta 1887, pp 115, 167.
- <sup>37</sup> Files of *Grambarta Prakashika* (1872-1874); Kungal Harinath Majumdar, *Harinath Granthavali*, pt I, Calcutta 1308 B. S.; Jaladhar Sen, *Kungal Harinath*, Calcutta, no date.
- <sup>38</sup> Sanjib Chandra Chatterjee, *Bengal Ryots; Their Rights and Liabilities*, Calcutta 1864.
- <sup>39</sup> For views of R C Dutt on the Permanent Settlement see the following works and a letter dated 12 May 1900 written by him:  
i) *The Peasantry of Bengal* (Calcutta 1874). In this work R C Dutt criticized the Per-

- manent Settlement. ii) *Famines in India* (Calcutta 1900). R C Dutt observed in this work: "If the object of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 was to create a thoroughly loyal class of landlords and a prosperous class of peasantry in Bengal, that object has succeeded beyond all expectation." iii) *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule*, (London 1901). In this work R C Dutt strongly defended the Permanent Settlement. iv) A letter of R C Dutt dated 12 May 1940, in *Land Revenue Policy of the Indian Government*, Calcutta 1920.
- <sup>40</sup> Abhoy Charan Das, *Indian Raiyat. Land Tax, Permanent Settlement and the Famine*, Calcutta 1881; Tarini Das Banerjee, *Zamindar and Raiyat of Bengal*, Calcutta 1888.
- <sup>41</sup> Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, *Banglar Itihasa*, pt III, Chinsurah 1310 B S, pp 26,34, 56.
- <sup>42</sup> Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Bangadesher Krishak*, reprinted and edited by Sadhan Chattopadhyay, Calcutta 1957, pp 4-5, 84-85.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp 84-85.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid; *Roots of Separatism*, pp 51-52.
- <sup>45</sup> *Proceedings of the Bengal Legislative Council (P B L C)*, 1883-1902; Ram Gopal Sanyal, op.cit., p 167; Sufia Ahmed, op.cit., p 111. On the role of Raja Peary Mohan Mukherjee see Nilmani Mukherjee, *A Bengal Zamindar*, Calcutta 1975.
- <sup>46</sup> Files of *Hindoo Patriot* (1855-1859); *Report*, vol III, p 170; K K Datta, *The Santal Insurrection of 1855-57*, Calcutta 1940; S B Chaudhuri, *Civil Disturbances during the British Rule in India (1765-1857)*, Calcutta 1955; P C Joshi, *Rebellion 1857: a Symposium*. New Delhi, 1957; Sukumar Mitra, *1857 O Bangladesh*, Calcutta 1960.
- <sup>47</sup> *Report*, vol III, pp 126-128.
- <sup>48</sup> *The Bengalee*, 17 January 1906, p 3.
- <sup>49</sup> Muzaffar Ahmad, *Samakaler Katha*, Calcutta, 1963; Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar*, Calcutta 1970; *Bangali Buddhijibi* ch 3: Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1903-1908)*, New Delhi, November 1973.
- <sup>50</sup> *Report on the Administration of Bengal (R A B)* 1922-23, Calcutta 1924 pp XV, XXIV; *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, June 1925; *R A B*, 1923-24, Calcutta 1925, pt I, pp i - iii; Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, "A Study of Deshabandhu Das" in *Forward*, Saturday 18 July 1925, p 10; Maulavi Abdul Karim, *Letters on Hindu-Muslim Pact*, Calcutta 1924; R C Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol III, Calcutta 1963, pp 220, 281-282; Muzaffar Ahmad, *Qazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, Calcutta 1965, pp 363-364; Abul Mansur Ahmad, op.cit., Maulana Azad discussed in detail the background of the Hindu-Muslim Pact and threw interesting light on the actual working of C R Das's mind. Azad wrote that C R Das showed no hesitation in preparing this pact. Muzaffar Ahmad wrote that most of the Hindus including Congress workers were opposed to it. This was revealed at the provincial conference held at Krishnagar in 1926. Maulavi Abdul Karim discussed the Muslim reaction to the pact.
- <sup>51</sup> *Forward*, Wednesday, 26 August 1925, p 3; *Forward*, Sunday, 27 March 1927, p 17; Rajen Sen (compiled), *Desahbandhu Chittaranjan Das, A Collection of Deshabandhu's Speeches*, vol I, Calcutta 1927.
- The members of the committee set up by the Swaraj Party for its tenancy programme were : (1) Rai Harendranath Choudhury (24 Parganas, Hindu Rural), (2) Rai Satyendranath Choudhury Bahadur (Barisal, Hindu Rural), (3) D N Roy, Bar-at-law (Jessore, Hindu Rural), (4) N C Chunder, Attorney-at-Law (Calcutta, Hindu Urban), (5) Jogendra Chandra Chakravorty (Dinajpur, Hindu), (6) Rajibuddin Tarafdar (Bogra, Mahomedan), (7) Kader Bux (Dinajpur, Mahomedan), (9) Hemanta Kumar Sarkar (Nadia, Hindu).
- <sup>52</sup> 'Tenancy Bill', editorial article in *Forward*, Tuesday, 24 November 1925, p 4; 'The Situation in East Bengal' an article in *Forward*, Saturday, 23 April 1927, p 4; see also files of *Forward* 1924-1927; Files of *Atmashakti* 1926-27; Abul Mansur Ahmed, op. cit., pp 45-55; Muzaffar Ahmad, *Prabhandha Sankalan*, Calcutta 1970 The *Forward* was the English daily and the *Atmashakti* was the Bengali weekly of the

Swaraj Party. The view of the *Ganabani*, a Bengali weekly edited by Muzaffar Ahmad, sharply differed from the views of the organs of the Swaraj Party. Muzaffar Ahmad thoroughly analyzed the economic reasons behind the communal trouble. In an article entitled "The Situation in East Bengal" the *Forward* criticized the *Ganabani* for ascribing the communal trouble "almost wholly to economic causes." Both the *Forward* and the *Atmashakti* criticized Muzaffar Ahmad for his stand on the land and communal questions. Poet Nazrul Islam stood by the side of Muzaffar Ahmad, and Nazrul wrote a long letter to the editor of the *Atmashakti* in which he criticized the role of the *Forward* and the *Atmashakti*. This controversy throws interesting light on the attitude of the intelligentsia towards the land system and communal question. During this time Muzaffar Ahmad clearly analyzed "the impact of the land system on Bengali life and demanded the abolition of landlordism (*vide* Muzaffar Ahmad, *Prabandha Sankalan*; *Letter of Nazrul Islam* dated 8 Bhadra 1333 B S to *Atmashakti*).

<sup>53</sup> "Bengal Council: Its Work" by Whip, an article in *Forward*, Sunday, 13 April 1924 p 11.

<sup>54</sup> "Middle-class Unemployed", an article in *Forward*, 12 April 1924, p 4.

<sup>55</sup> Files of *Forward*, 1924-1927.

<sup>56</sup> *Forward*, Sunday, 22 November 1925, p 3; Atul Chandra Gupta, *Jamir Malik* Calcutta, 1351 B S, pp 11-12.

The programme adopted by the Deshabandhu Village Reorganization Fund Committee, started by the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee from September 1925, was: to open day and night schools, medical relief centres, charka spinning centres, arbitration board for settlement cases, agricultural cooperative and credit societies, and cooperative purchase and sale societies. (*Forward*, 22 November 1925).

<sup>57</sup> Muzaffar Ahmad, *Samakaler Katha*, p 119; Muzaffar Ahmad, *Prabandha Sankalan* pp 74-75, 206.

<sup>58</sup> Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress (1885-1935)*, vol I, published by Congress Working Committee, Allahabad 1935, p 17.

<sup>59</sup> Atul Chandra Gupta, op.cit., pp 11-12; *Report*, vol I, pp 28-29; *P B L C*, 1925-1928. In 1912 the high court pointed out the necessity of amending the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. Accordingly, a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Sir John Kerr. This committee drafted a bill which was introduced in the legislative council in 1925. It was referred to the select committee. Then it was referred to a small committee, which submitted its report in July 1927, and finally the Amending Act of 1928 was passed (*Report I*; *P B L C*).

<sup>60</sup> Atul Chandra Gupta, op.cit., pp 11-12; *Bangali Buddhijibi*, p 326.

<sup>61</sup> Amalendu De, *Pakistan Prastab O Fazlul Huq*, Calcutta 1972, appendix A (pp 244-246), ch I, henceforth abbreviated as *Pakistan Prastab*; Abul Mansur Ahmed, op.cit.; Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937*, Dacca 1972.

<sup>62</sup> *Proceedings of the Bengal Legislative Assembly (PBLA) (1937-47)*; *P B L C (1937-47)* Muzaffar Ahmad, *Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*; Abul Mansur Ahmed, op.cit.; Muzaffar Ahmad, *Prabandha Sankalan*; Abul Mansur Ahmed, op.cit.; *Pakistan Prastab*; *Bangali Buddhijibi*, pp 326-327; Badruddin Umar, *Chirasthayi Bandobaste Bangla Desher Krishak*, Dacca 1379 B.S. pp 37-41, 44.

<sup>63</sup> Muzaffar Ahmad, *Krishak-Samasya*, Calcutta 1937; Memorandum submitted to to Floud Commission by the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha, in *Report*, vol VI, Alipore, 1941, pp 3-72; Muhammad Abdullah Rasul, *Krishak Sabha Itihas* Calcutta, 1376 B S; Muzaffar Ahmad, *Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, pp 344-45, 351-361 395-400; Sunil Kumar Sen, *Agrarian Struggle in Bengal, 1946-47*, New Delhi 1972; Badruddin Umar, op. cit.

It is quite known to all that Muzaffar Ahmad played a prominent part in organizing the peasants on a class basis. After the Non-cooperation Movement a section of

Congress workers turned their attention to the Krishak and Proja movements. In November 1925, the Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress was founded. The *Langal*, a Bengali weekly, was the organ of this party, with poet Nazrul as director. The first issue of *Langal* was published on 25 December 1925. Manubhusan Mukhopadhyay, a friend of Nazrul, was its editor. The *Langal* upheld the cause of the downtrodden people, workers and peasants. Nazrul's famous poems 'Samyabadi' and *Krishaker Gan* were published in this paper. In January 1926, an attempt was made to found the Bangiya Krishak Sramik Dal. In the second session of the *Nikhil Bangiya Proja Sammelan*, held at Krishnagar, Nadia, in February 1926, the Bengal Peasants' and Workers' Party was founded. It was not affiliated to the Congress. The Labour Swaraj Party was merged with this organization. The following members took part in founding this organization: Muzaffar Ahmad, Abdul Halim, Kutubuddin Ahmad, Shamsuddin Husayan, Samsuddin Ahmad, Soumendra Nath Tagore, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, Dr Naresh Chandra Sen Gupta, Atul Chandra Gupta and poet Nazrul Islam. In 1928, the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party was established. Most of workers engaged on these fronts were associated with the Communist Party of India. But the landholders did not like the word *Langal* as a title of a paper. Nor did they welcome the Peasants' and Workers' Party. We would get a clear idea about the typical character of a Bengali middle-class youth in the 1920s from the conversation between Sabyasachi and poet Sashi of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's *Pather Dabi*. Sabyasachi, the main character of the novel, advised Sashi to compose songs not for the peasants and workers, but for the educated *bhadraloks* (*Pather Dabi*, eighth edition, p 357). Sarat Chandra Chatterjee gave an adverse hint, through Sabyasachi, toward the *Songs of the Ploughs* (for a detailed study of the typical attitude of the Bengali, *bhadraloks* towards the peasants see Muzaffar Ahmad's *Qazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha* pp 396-400). Perhaps at a later stage Sarat Chandra Chatterjee changed his attitude. He stated that the economic growth of the entire Bengali society was obstructed due to the activities of the zamindars, talukdars and innumerable middlemen created by the Permanent Settlement (See Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's unpublished articles collected after his death, quoted in "Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay", an article by Saroj Mukherjee, published in the *Ganashakti*, evening daily of Calcutta, 17 September 1975, p 2).

The peasant movement in Bengal took a concrete shape in 1937. On behalf of the presidium of the first session of the Krishak Sabha, Muzaffar Ahmad submitted a document under the title "Krishak-Samasya" before the delegates assembled at Patrasaer on 28 March 1937, which was endorsed by all. The members of the presidium were: (1) Bankim Mukhopadhyay, (2) Dr Bhupendra Nath Datta, (3) Syed Ahmad Khan (Noakhali), (4) Niharendu Datta Majumdar and (5) Muzaffar Ahmad (*Krishak-Samsaya*, op. cit.).

On behalf of the Kisan Sabha the following members met the Floud Commission on 22 March 1939 and gave their oral evidence: (1) Bankim Mukhopadhyay, (2) Rebati Burman, (3) M A Rasul and (4) Bhowani Sen, *Report*, vol VI, op. cit., p 62).

It is clear from this account that a small section of Bengali intelligentsia firmly stood by the peasant.

<sup>64</sup> *Report*, vol I, pp 1, 3, 41-42.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 227, 231, 319, 337-341.

Referring to the census of 1931 Radha Kumud Mookerji wrote thus in a note in 1940: "According to the Census Report, non-cultivating proprietors of land who receive rent in cash or kind number 7 lakhs 83 thousand. Each of these has to support a large number of working and non-working dependants, ranging from five to fifty in accordance with the size of his income. Considering that there are more than 1 lakh revenue-paying estates, and 27 lakhs of tenures, the number of rent-

receivers, the zamindars, tenure-holders, and the rent-receiving raiyats together with their dependants, may be estimated at more than 1 crore 50 lakhs of people, or a third of Bengal's total population''. ( *Report*, vol I, pp 337-338). It gives an idea about the size of the middle classes of Bengal connected with land.

- <sup>66</sup> *Report*, vols III-VI. For Dr Naresh Chandra Sengupta's views see his work *Juga Parikrama*, vol II, Calcutta 1961, pp 220-234.
- <sup>67</sup> *Report*, vols III-VI.
- <sup>68</sup> *Report*, vol I, p 233.
- <sup>69</sup> J H Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-century Bengal*, Bombay 1968; *Pakistan Prastab; Bangali Buddhijibi*, ch III.
- <sup>70</sup> *Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose's Diary and Gandhi Papers*, vol II (1945 to 1947), pp 139-203, in the Asiatic Society, Calcutta.
- <sup>71</sup> Pramatha Chaudhuri, *Rayater Katha*, Calcutta 1354 B S., Badruddin Umar, op.cit., Amalendu De, *Swadhin Bangabhumi Gathaner Parikalpana : Prayash O Parinati* Calcutta 1975.
- <sup>72</sup> *Bangali Buddhijibi ; Roots of Separatism*.