CHANGING PATTERNS OF ADMINISTRATION IN RURAL EAST PAKISTAN

by

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P R E F A C E

Here is a study of administrative changes in the East Pakistan area from the Seventeenth Century to the present. It summarizes the major administrative decisions made, and identifies the implementing orders, commission reports, and other Governmental actions taken.

The study was developed almost wholly from sources extant in the area, and so points the inquiring local scholar or administrator to the footnoted documents in which can be found such greater details as may be wanted on any particular facet of the study.

We, the three representatives of the sponsoring agencies bringing out the report, appreciate the thoroughness with which the author, Mr. Elliot Tepper, has done his work. We commend it to the reader as a useful study, for it provides a factual background against which to understand the administrative renaissance now underway in East Pakistan.

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for Operations and Research
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INTRODUCTION

The present study was made while the author was in residence for one year at the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, Comilla, East Pakistan, under the auspices of the Africa-Asia Public Service Fellowship Program, Maxwell Center for the Study of Overseas Operations, Syracuse University. The topic and broad outline of the study were suggested in September 1964 by Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Academy and later again its Director. Dr. Khan indicated he would like to have the Academy's rural administration experiment placed in historical perspective, and analysed from the point of view afforded by such perspective. Complete freedom of investigation was provided.

This study was conducted entirely within Pakistan, primarily East Pakistan. Whenever possible, secondary sources used are by Pakistanis. Although it may be necessary for thoroughness of research to go to Calcutta and London, at least limited historical research is possible from local resources. Particularly useful in this respect have been the Government of East Pakistan Secretariat Archives, the British Council, the University of Dacca Library, and the District Collectorate and Academy libraries in Comilla. To the men who aided me in gaining access to these valuable reservoirs, my thanks are due. Thanks are also in order to the many officials of government and government-related institutions at all levels of the provincial administration who kindly endured my endless questions, and even expressed interest in the outcome of my efforts. The Academy faculty and staff were especially helpful.

Dr. Richard Wheeler, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan, was kind enough to make helpful suggestions on organization and to read several rough-draft chapters while he was in residence at the Academy under the Fulbright programme. Dr. Khan read most of the rough draft. Neither of these men, busy in their own pursuits, should be held responsible in any way for the errors of fact or opinion which may remain.

Elliot Tepper

Comilla
24 August, 1965

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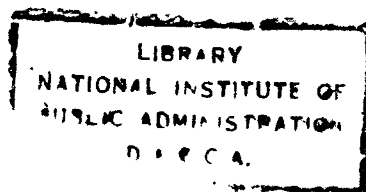

PART I

AGRICULTURAL ADMINISTRATION

Chapter 1

LAND REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

Few more vexing problems have faced the governors of Bengal than revenue collection. Realization of revenue, particularly land revenue, has historically been the primary objective of administrators. For the British, it was the initial raison d'etre for territorial aggrandizement in Bengal. Maintenance of law and order flowed naturally as a second objective; orderly revenue collection was impossible without it. As additional burdens of general administration fell upon the British governing staff, the new duties had to be shouldered by a structure essentially geared for these two original purposes. Many advances in civil administration and in attempts to establish local self-government were made in the name of correcting administrative weaknesses resulting from the province's system of revenue collection. A discussion of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 and its aftermath is therefore a fitting beginning for the study of rural administration in what is now East Pakistan.[1]

Brief Review of the Pre-British Era

To understand the evolution of the British system of land revenue collection in Bengal, it is necessary to study preceding systems at least briefly. Hindu practice rested on the recognized right of the sovereign to a portion of all crops grown within his realm. Rights and customs varied throughout the sub-continent. In Bengal, collection was made through a village headman from producers whose rights to the land were considered inalienable and hereditary as long as the tax was paid. The headmen relayed the tax to whatever local or distant power had enforced suzerainty. With the exception of the period of the Sena Dynasty, (c. 11th Century) payment was made in kind, usually at the rate of one sixth the total crop "found on the threshing room floors." Early Muslim conquerers disturbed this pattern as little as possible. Substitution of rulers--rent-receivers--was made at the top, with perhaps a few more layers of rewarded soldiers interposing between the payers and ultimate recipients.

[1]Most of the historical material presented here can be found in the body of the Report of the Land Revenue Commission, Bengal, Vol. I, or in a scholarly statement presented by a member of the Commission, Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji, as an appendix in Vol. II. Other useful sources are listed in the Bibliography at the end of this report.

Major attempts at reform first came from Sher Shah Suri in the 16th century. Grandson of an Afghan freebooter, he conquered Bengal from a base in Bihar, and built up a kingdom that stretched over much of Northern India. He proved to have a strong bent for administration as well as warfare. Chief among his reforms was a scheme to measure out and record all land and crop yields under his domain. This was to be followed by an annual fixed assessment, based on average crop yields per unit of land. Much of his five year reign was occupied by warfare, however, and his death in battle in 1545 prevented widescale implementation of the plan. The great Mogul Emperor Akbar's long reign (1555-1605) and his desire for an orderly empire led to more far-reaching reforms. In an effort both to increase revenue and decrease rebellions, Akbar's Revenue Minister, Todar Mall, introduced assessment by measurement and also a separate collecting staff extending from the Imperial Court to the village fields. Provincial governors were simultaneously deprived of a source of power, and of a monopoly of administrative offices. Only the second of these reforms was applied in Bengal, however. When the province was added to Akbar's empire in 1576, the existing method of lump assessment was maintained, but the Governor was obliged to share power with revenue officials of equal rank.

Conditions following Akbar's death presaged British penetration into Bengal. A century later, as Aurangzeb neared the end of his reign (1658-1707), Akbar's great system still stood, but was showing signs of weakness. With the death of Aurangzeb, the Mogul Empire entered a "time of troubles." Effective power at the center lapsed and disintegration followed. In Bengal, considerable independence had already been asserted. The posts of Governor and Collector--Nawab and Diwan--had been rejoined, and the combined office was becoming hereditary. The practice of farming out revenue collection increased. One Nawab, Murshid Kuli Khan, tried to eliminate intermediary landlords and establish his own revenue collection staff, but the attempt failed. The system remained partially Mogul and partially corrupt, in a situation of increasing political instability.

The British East India Company arrived in Bengal before Aurangzeb claimed the imperial throne. By the end of Aurangzeb's reign, the Company had taken the decisive steps which led to territorial occupation, and eventually to dominion. The Company began as sea-based traders. A trading port, or factory, was established at Hooghly, near present day Calcutta, in 1650. For some time the Company relied on written commissions, called _farmans_, from the Imperial Court or Nawab of Bengal to pursue commercial interests. Particularly pleasing was a _farman_ received from Aurangzeb in 1680, which led to the establishment of a branch of the Company in Bengal, separate from the earlier operations in Madras. When anarchical tendencies progressed to the point where _farmans_ were of questionable value, other means for safeguarding trade had to be found. Military conquest was one solution, and a limited step in this direction was sanctioned in the 1680's. A military defeat resulted, and the Hooghly factory was burned to the ground; the Company personnel retreated to Madras. A change in Nawabs brought an invitation

~~for the Company~~ to return to Bengal. In 1690 representatives of the Company took possession of three villages as the site for a new factory. Calcutta was founded, and the stage set for a new type of expansion policy.

The Company's position was insecure, costly, and inadequate for the responsibilities it had to discharge. Occupation of the factory site was dependent on the continued good will of the Nawab and another _farman_ from Aurangzeb. Maintenance costs were rising, especially after construction of Fort William was begun in 1696. Also, the population of the towns was increasing, yet the Company could levy no taxes. The Company Council in Calcutta sought to remedy the situation by seeking privileges similar to those held by other landlords in the surrounding area. On 14 December 1697, the Council wrote to London:

> "Our endeavours have been fruitless hitherto in procuring the Nabab's and Duan's (Nawab's and Diwan's) consents for a firm settlement in this place, and we have no hopes for the grant for it so long as this Duan continues. We have endeavoured to gain two or three towns adjacent to us ... the rent whereof will amount to about 2,000 or 2,500 rupees yearly, which is a means to increase your Honour's revenues ... for, although we do make some small matter out of your bazar by grain fines, etc., yet we cannot lay any impositions on the people, though never so small, till such time as we can pretend a right to this place..."[2]

In deciding "to gain two or three towns adjacent to us", the Company had decided, of course, to enter the Mogul revenue system. The Company's representative put his case before the Nawab in strong terms, and was successful:

> "The Prince having given us the three towns adjacent to our settlement, viz. Calcutta, Chuttanutti and Govindpore, or more properly may be said the Jimmidarship of the said towns, paying the same rent to the King as the Jimmindars successively have done; and at same time, ordering the Jimmindars of the said towns to make over their right and title to the English upon their paying to the Jimmindars one thousand rupees for the same; it was agreed that the money should be paid, being the best money that was ever spent for so great a privilege..."[3]

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[2] W. K. Firminger, _Historical Introduction to the Bengal Portion of the Fifth Report_, 1917. (Reprinted in Calcutta: Indian Studies, Past and Present, 1962), p. 79.

[3] Ibid, p. 80

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Once the Company became a land-based revenue collector, the nature of its operations altered. Control over territory opened new avenues for profit, and supported a larger military force. Enhanced military strength in turn permitted extension of Company control over further territory. Officials of the Company inserted themselves into the political intrigues which accompanied increasing weakness of the Mogul court. The Battle of Plassy in 1757 showed that British-controlled troops could be a determining factor in local military conflicts. The Company simultaneously extended financial control by being granted zamindari rights to the area known as 24 Parganas, near Calcutta.[4] Burdwan, Midnapore and Chittagong were added in 1760. The Company had gained control of the financial and military resources which had supported the Nawab, and made the Nawab himself a political dependent. Still the Company maintained that it was acting only as a zamindar. In 1765 the Emperor completed the logical sequence begun in 1698, and appointed the Company to be Diwan of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

The Permanent Settlement, 1793

The Company as Diwan incurred difficulties as soon as it tried to make innovations. The Company was simply unable to obtain the information which it needed to alter revenue arrangements. There were no problems in the first few years, as the system continued to be operated without change. The former Diwan was retained as Naib (deputy) Diwan, and the Company's previous sixty seven years as zamindar guaranteed familiarity with the machinery's operation. Suspicion that the Naib Diwan was defaulting led to the desire to know more about actual revenue conditions in the province. Supervisors were appointed in 1769 to "make an exhaustive report." They failed completely in their task: "It was not in the interests of the indigenous revenue agents ... to reveal the sources and secrets of their living."[5] The need for such knowledge increased. A famine of epic proportions in 1770 and further evidence of corruption by the Naib Diwan led the Company to make some changes. The Company decided in 1772 to "stand forth" as Diwan and collect revenue through its own staff. The former Naib Diwan was dismissed. To determine true land value, it was decided to auction off lands to Revenue Farmers for a five-year period. This also proved ineffective, if not disastrous, although the settlement period was later varied at times from one to five to ten years. Overbidding followed by defaulting resulted. Twenty years of experimentation brought no solution that was generally satisfactory.

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[4]Pargana was a revenue unit under the Mogul administrative system.

[5]Ibid, p. 191.

Lord Cornwallis was sent to Calcutta in 1786 to reform the Company's administration. The Court of Directors in London informed him of their disapproval of the "disposition to innovation and experiment" and that they preferred "steady adherence to one principle to frequent changes." They also indicated that they considered "a Permanent Settlement of a reasonable and fair revenue to be the best, for the payment of which the hereditary tenure of the possessor is to be the only necessary security."[6] Several more years passed while officials tried to determine what annual levies could be applied, but the basic decision on method of collection had been made. Two alternatives were possible: the Company could create their own staff of tax-collectors and deal directly with the producers; or they could rely on an intermediary agency to do the collecting, in the traditional manner. The first alternative had been attempted, and found impossible. In 1793, the second alternative was adopted. Collection of land revenue was turned over to zamindars. They were responsible for realizing annually a permanently established cash fee and turning it over to the Diwan. One tenth of the total could be kept by the zamindar as his payment, plus any additional funds resulting from new lands brought under cultivation.

Other terms of the Permanent Settlement put to rest some long simmering arguments. When the Company first became zamindar, in 1698, they exercised traditional rights under Mogul custom. In exchange for a lump sum payment, they could:

1. Collect rents from raiyats (farmers)
2. Make use of waste land as they wished
3. Impose petty taxes, duties, fines.

There was no question of assuming ownership rights. Zamindars became revenue collectors, not proprietors, even if the zamindari became hereditary. Exactly this point was long debated by British officials in the experimentation period, leading at one time to a duel between two of the Company's most senior officials (Hastings and Francis). Under the Permanent Settlement, zamindars became proprietors, and gained partial property rights. Given the landed-aristocracy origin of both Cornwallis and the Court of Directors, and the resemblance of the Mogul system to English practice, the decision is not surprising. Given additionally the Company's overriding concern for trouble-free, certain revenue, the decision assumes an air of inevitability.

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[6]Ibid, p. 203.

Two implications were clear in the terms of the Permanent Settlement. One was that the varied types of revenue collectors existing at the time of the Settlement were to be uniformly given the same duties and privileges, thereby creating a uniform landlord class. The other was that the raiyats' position was far less certain than the zamindars'. Zamindars were guaranteed possession as long as they paid their revenue by sunset on the last day fixed for payment. This became known as "The Sunset Law." Raiyats were guaranteed very little. The Settlement intended to ensure the raiyats of their customary privileges, and for that reason the zamindar's proprietary rights were not made absolute. More specifically, the authors of the Permanent Settlement wanted to confirm customary rights of occupancy, and prevent enhancement of the tax rate or imposition of arbitrary assessments. Definite provisions to do so, however, were not included in the Permanent Settlement. Adequate information on customary rights and rates had never been ascertained.

Once the Company turned over revenue collection to zamindars, gathering further information on raiyats became nearly impossible. For many years, the Company did not really care to do so. The Permanent Settlement was bringing in revenue regularly, and the only adjustment that was seriously enforced was a regulation strengthening the position of the zamindars in collecting land tax from the raiyats. This was the "Haptam" regulation of 1799, giving zamindars wide and arbitrary powers.

In 1830 a Select Committee of the House of Commons made a number of suggestions for reform. It found that "In the permanently settled districts, nothing is settled, and little is known but the Government assessment," which they considered to be due to the "error of assuming that the rights of parties claiming an interest in the land were sufficiently established by the custom and usage of the country to enable the Courts to protect individual rights." Among other things, the Select Committee recommended that the offices of village patwari and kunango (two traditional record keepers) be reestablished. They had been abolished after 1793, and no records were available. However, these suggestions were ignored.

By the middle of the 19th century the need for further adjustments could no longer be postponed. Public pressure in London and a wave of agrarian unrest in Bengal led to a series of Acts designed to define the occupancy rights of raiyats. The first was the Rent Act of 1859. Further agrarian unrest broke out in East Bengal, particularly on indigo plantations. Jute was beginning to affect the economy by then, which also was a contributing factor. In 1873, riots occurred in Pabna district after the Natore estate was divided up among five new zamindars, who then tried to enhance the rent. This led to the Tenancy Act of 1885. By the turn of the century, cases resulting from defects in this Act concerning right of transfer were clogging the courts, and revisions were slowly produced. The Tenancy Act of 1885 was amended in 1928, and again in 1938.

The Bengal Land Revenue Commission, 1940

As early as 1800, the Court of Directors in London had serious doubts about the Permanent Settlement. The ryatwari system developed in Madras seemed sounder to them, and they recommended its adoption in any territories additionally gained by the Company. The Bengal staff refused to consider it. As noted, the Select Committee in 1830 also had doubts about the system. In 1938, Parliament convened a special Commission to consider further amendments to the Bengal Tenancy Act, and to investigate generally the land revenue system of Bengal. Two hundred and forty years after the East India Company became zamindars of the Three Towns, the Company's successors sent a Commission to Bengal with these instructions:

> "Whatever may be our final recommendation for the modification or improvement of the present land revenue systems, we are bound to give full consideration on its merits to the proposal to abolish the zamindari system in its entirety."

Under the Chairmanship of Sir Francis Floud[7] the Land Revenue Commission (1940), Bengal, gathered evidence throughout the province, and toured much of the subcontinent for comparative purposes; most of their actual touring in the province was in East Bengal--Mymensingh, Dacca and Bakerganj districts. The findings of the Floud Commission provide a good picture of conditions in Bengal after 150 years under the Permanent Settlement.

It was openly admitted that the Settlement had been of advantage: "Government was ... saved the trouble of collecting the rents; and has been able to collect the revenue practically cent per cent."[8] Brought forward were a list of arguments that the Settlement had also been of disadvantage to Government, and to the development of Bengal. The Floud Commission maintained that fixing land revenue in perpetuity had resulted in great financial loss to the government. The established tax figure did not yield a fair share of the total land revenue and was "substantially less" than that taken in non-permanently settled areas. Government thus did not receive what it ought to, and did not benefit from any increment in land value. Administratively there were problems also. The province's courts were overburdened with litigation, since there was no certainty of respective rights; and

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[7]Sir Francis died on 17 April 1965 at the age of 89, while this chapter was under preparation. Mr. Hatch-Barnwell, presently the Chairman of the East Pakistan Agricultural Development Corporation, served as Secretary to the Floud Commission.

[8]Vol. I, p. 32.

Government was out of touch with rural conditions, since there was no revenue staff to provide detailed information. The province as a whole also suffered. Tax laws favored land-owners, so a bias was created in favor of investment in land instead of industry. And since the Government didn't benefit from improving agriculture production, there was little incentive for spending public money on agricultural improvement.

The Settlement was bound to have placed individual cultivators to great disadvantage. That was not the intention of the Settlement's authors. They hoped the Courts would determine and then protect the raiyat's customary rights. They also felt that the raiyats had a natural advantage over the zamindars: land was abundant and cultivators were sought after. While the first assumption proved false--the Courts were no more able than the Company to determine customary rights--the second assumption proved initially correct. In the years immediately following 1793, many zamindars were unable to collect adequate revenue, and large numbers of estates changed hands. For that reason the "Haptam" regulations were issued. This eliminated whatever natural advantage the raiyats possessed. By the time Acts were passed to protect the raiyats' position, their natural advantage had largely disappeared. Cultivable waste lands were no longer much available. The Floud Commission quoted with agreement a statement made by the Government of India in 1909: the Permanent Settlement placed "the tenant unreservedly at the mercy of the landlord..."[9]

The strength of the landlords illustrated the weakness of the system. Quite contrary again to the original intention, the proprietors and the cultivators of land grew increasingly distant from one another. The Floud Commission considered it one of the "most serious defects" of the Permanent Settlement that a large number of rent receivers interposed themselves between the raiyat and the zamindar. Subinfeudation had occurred in "fantastic proportion." In Districts such as Bakerganj, as many as fifty or more intermediaries existed. Illegal exactions on the cultivator were imposed by all revenue collectors, including the zamindar at the top. The total result of the system made the raiyats an increasingly depressed class, losing more and more of their rights. The Commission concluded "a large and increasing proportion of the actual cultivators have no part of the elements of ownership, no protection against excessive rents, and no security of tenure." This led to a summary conclusion on the Permanent Settlement itself:

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[9]Ibid, p. 36.

> "The truth is that the present system, while containing some of the features of both the landlord and tenant and the peasant proprietorship systems, possesses most of the disadvantages and few of the advantages of either system. Under it the actual cultivator has too often the worst of both worlds."[10]

With findings such as these, and the sentiment of the government, it is not surprising that the Floud Commission recommended abolition of the Permanent Settlement. It felt that regardless of any original justification, the system had developed so many defects, and was so unsuited to present conditions, that it no longer served any national interest. Abolition, it was realized, would vitally affect the whole social and economic structure of the province. Progress would therefore have to be made slowly. But there would have to be progress, and no half-measures would be sufficient. The Floud Commission envisioned a new direction for Bengal's revenue collection: "the policy should be to aim at bringing the actual cultivators into the position of tenants holding directly under Government."[11]

The Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee, 1944-45

The Permanent Settlement came under further attack within four years. Looking forward to a post-war reconstruction period, the Government of Bengal appointed an administrative investigating committee in 1944. Its general charge was "to ensure the efficient government of the province of Bengal on modern and progressive lines." The Rowlands Committee (from its Chairman, Sir Archibald Rowlands) found several reasons for the province's administrative difficulties:

1. Insufficient resources had been devoted to administration. The ratio of higher administrative cadres to the population was lower than any other province except Orissa, and since 1900, the per capita expenditure on Government in Bengal was lower than any other major province. "The plain fact is" the Report says, "that in the past, Bengal has not been so much badly administered as under-administered."[12]

2. Inadequate means of communication are available, perhaps more so than anywhere else on the subcontinent.

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[10]Ibid, p. 39.

[11]Ibid, p. 42.

[12]Report of the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee, 1944-45, 1962, p. 5. "NIPA Reprint No. I."

3. Districts such as Mymensingh are too large.

4. Unstable political conditions often prevented Government action.

To this imposing list was added one further complaint: "The main handicap, however, under which Bengal has labored for a century and a half is the absence of the Revenue staff which exists in every other province where the land is not permanently settled." In this attribution, the Rowlands[13] Committee was echoing the Levinge Report of 1913.[14] But where the Levinge Report sought to correct the problem by creating the post of Circle Officers, the Rowlands Committee chose to strike directly at the root of the problem: "the administration of the Districts in Bengal is clogged at every turn, and we cannot too strongly urge that Government should give earliest possible effect to the decision, which they have already taken, to adopt the majority recommendation of the Floud Commission."[15]

The 1951 State Acquisition Act, and Its Aftermath

No steps on land reform could be taken until after independence was attained, although a land reform bill was introduced in the provincial legislature in 1941. The new provincial government put the subject high on its priority list. In February 1950 the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act was passed. On 16 May 1951, the Permanent Settlement lapsed into oblivion. The Government was empowered to acquire all rent receiving interests down to the cultivator of the soil. The cultivator was to be confirmed as proprietor, and was henceforward to pay land revenue taxes directly to the Government; the cultivator was to have no right to create further rent-receivers; compensation would be paid by Government to former zamindars.

Abolition of the Permanent Settlement left the Government with an old problem: that of obtaining factual information on which to base revenue collection. The Government had to create its own collection staff, and begin compiling an accurate record of rights. Some aid was derived from the Settlement Records begun in the early part of this century. The takeover of estates

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[13]Ibid, p. 6.

[14]See Chapter 7.

[15]Ibid, p. 9.

was initiated in two stages, 1951 and 1956, which was to provide time for recruiting a staff. The province now has a line of command stretching from the Board of Revenue through Divisional and Deputy Commissioners to thana Circle inspectors and tehsildars who are usually in charge of two unions. Apparently the system is still weak in places. Revenue collection rates have been unsatisfactory, and it has recently been announced that further administrative changes will be made. A gazetteted officer specifically charged with revenue collection will be placed in each thana, to be known as Revenue Circle officer. Also, improved information will be gathered through a revision settlement. Rajshahi District has been chosen as a trial area.[16]

The province now has a government which seems willing to come to grips with the hard task of revenue administration. It may not be completely fair to say that the zamindari system caused Bengal's indigenous institutions to wither, or prevented adequate new ones to develop. It is certainly true, as the Floud Commission pointed out and its minority report emphasized, that some of Bengal's most fundamental problems cannot be directly traced to the Permanent Settlement: overpopulation, underemployment, shortage of land, poor farming techniques. However, it is equally true that the Floud Commission's basic objections were sound, and that the Permanent Settlement encouraged the growth of a badly stunted administration. The Permanent Settlement came to mean non-interference in zamindari estates.[17] Regardless of the occasional good will of some zamindars, and convenience of the system to the government, abdication of responsibility could not be accepted by an independent government concerned with the welfare of its citizens and development of the country.

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[16]Speech by the Revenue Minister, Government of East Pakistan in the East Pakistan Assembly. Pakistan Observer, June 25, p. 8. Circle Officers (Revenue) were first stationed in Dinajpur under an order of 23rd December, 1961.

[17]Land Revenue Commission, Vol. I, p. 33.

Chapter 2

AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMMING

The absence of detailed knowledge of agricultural conditions, which was a by-product of the Permanent Settlement of 1793, did not prove a severe handicap for the British in Bengal as long as revenue collection was their primary interest. When the provincial government wanted to influence agricultural production, however, the absence of useful information, provided elsewhere in British India by revenue staffs, proved to be a serious stumbling block. To meet this situation, a special department was established to deal with government programs affecting agriculture.

From the very outset, administrative machinery for dealing with agriculture faced difficulties in operating effectively. The Director of the first Department of Agriculture in Bengal complained in 1885 that he had been provided with so little funds and staff that the department might exist only long enough to print "a first and last report." He also feared that the department would suffer from lack of cooperation with other parts of the administration: "Without the cooperation and support of local authorities, officers of a special department cannot effect much in the way of agricultural improvement."[18] Problems of financing, staffing, and administrative relationships were fated to linger.

Pre-Independence History

Disastrous failure in the agricultural sector first provided impetus for the formation of agriculture departments. The first suggestion for doing so came from the Famine Commission of 1866. The idea was considered premature. In 1869, a suggestion came from cotton traders in England that departments of agriculture be established in each province, to promote the growth of cotton. Lord Mayo, the Governor-General, was interested in the idea, but the Secretary of State preferred a Central Department. A Department of Revenue, Agriculture, and Commerce actually functioned as a branch of the Government of India from 1871 to 1879. It had little effect beyond efforts at gathering statistics, and the agriculture section was dropped when financial difficulties forced a reshuffling of portfolios. In 1878 another famine struck. The

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[18]Government of Bengal, First Annual Report of the Agriculture Department, 1886, (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1886), p. 3.

subsequent Report of the Famine Commission of 1880 was a landmark for agriculture administration and development on the sub-continent. Among other things, the report strongly insisted on the revival of a department of agriculture at the center, and the simultaneous formation of subordinate departments in each province. On this occasion, the Government of India first accepted only the idea of a central department; the Secretary of State, recalling the earlier experience, urged the establishment of provincial departments. The Government of India responded by issuing a Resolution on 8 December 1881, defining the duties of provincial departments as being agricultural inquiry, agriculture improvement, and famine relief.

Bengal accordingly instituted a provincial Department of Agriculture in 1885, as part of the Department of Land Records. The collection of statistics was its main activity, although it also sent students for training to England and the United States. Despite its first Director's fears that the Department would die after the first year, it seems to have enjoyed uninterrupted existence from 1885 onwards; its sphere of activities, however, was limited. The Royal Commission on Agriculture (the Linlithgow Commission) in 1928 commented, "In general, it may be said that, prior to 1905, the staff of the Agricultural Department in Bengal was far too small to make any impression on the vast area of the province."[19]

In 1900 famine struck for a third time, and altered the course of departmental activities. The Famine Commission of 1901 recommended that each provincial agriculture department strengthen its staff of experts to permit research. This would move the departments beyond the restrictions of statistics gathering and famine relief. The proposal also fitted well with the ideas of the Governor-General, Lord Curzon. After 1905, there was a great expansion of both the imperial and provincial departments. In 1906, the Department of Agriculture in Bengal was separated from the Land Records Department, and its staff of experts increased. Work of the reformed department in Eastern Bengal and Assam actually began in 1908, with its headquarters for experiments at Dacca.[20] Under the Government of India Act of 1919, the Department came under popular control, and an elected non-official was appointed Minister.

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[19] India, Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1928), p. 26.

[20] From 1905 to 1912, the eastern part of the province of Bengal, the part that is now essentially East Pakistan, was joined with Assam as a separate province.

Departmental organization fluctuated during the same period. Until the first World War, expansion had been quite steady. The war effort upset the smooth operation of the department, and economic dislocation following the war caused a severe retrenchment. The Director of the Department reported to the Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1926 that the Department's staff had been depleted by nearly 50%.[21] By the time of the Floud Commission in 1940, the Department had regained its strength, and had extended its regular organization to the district level, with demonstrations reaching in some cases to the union level. For administrative purposes, the province was divided into three circles, each under a Deputy Director: the Eastern Circle, headquartered at Dacca; the Western Circle, headquartered at Calcutta; and the Northern Circle, headquartered at Rajshahi. The primary duty of the Deputy Directors was disseminating the results of research amongst the cultivators. Each district was in the charge of a District Agriculture Officer. Many districts had Government Farms, and every district had a few trained demonstrators.[22] A more detailed picture of the mofussil[23] operation of the Department can be seen by the administrative structure of the Eastern Circle (Dacca and Chittagong Divisions) in 1938-39:

- 1 Deputy Director of Agriculture
- 7 District Agriculture Officers, plus two extras in Mymensingh District
- 49 Agriculture Demonstrators (9 temporary)
- 5 Special Demonstrators employed by District Boards, Court of Wards, Zamindary Estates
- 10 Government Farms
- 1 District Farm in each district
- 35 Union Board Farms[24]

It should be noted that regular administration stopped at the district level.

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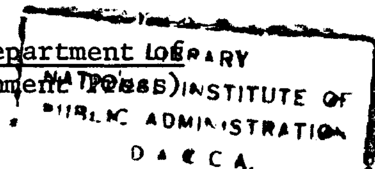
[21] India, Evidence Taken in the Bengal Presidency, (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1927), p. 46, questions 18145 to 18158. The Director reported that District Agricultural Officers were reduced in number from 63 to 31, and demonstrators from 180 to 80.

[22] Bengal, Department of Agriculture, A Short Survey of the Work, Achievements, and Needs of the Bengal Agriculture Department: 1906-1936, (Alipore: Bengal Government Press, 1937), pp. 5-7.

[23] Mofussil is a common term in South Asia meaning rural countryside.

[24] Compiled from The Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, 1938-1939, (Alipore: Bengal Government Press).



The programs of the Department centered around research and extension activities (extension was known until fairly recently as "demonstration and propaganda" in Departmental terminology). Research was designed primarily to develop improved strains of the staple crops. Jute received special attention, but paddy also was studied. Research was mostly undertaken at Dacca; extension was concerned mainly with dissemination of improved seed. District Farms and hired demonstrators working on them were the means for spreading information and material. Striking a balance between these two phases of departmental activity proved difficult. The Bengal District Administration Committee 1913-1914 (the Levinge Report) complained that the Department devoted too much of its resources to research, and too little to demonstration. It felt that Deputy Directors should be responsible for developing and directing a demonstration staff, rather than just managing District Farms. In 1940, the Floud Commission similarly concluded that "we cannot help thinking that the Agriculture Department has tended to concentrate too much on research work, and not enough on propaganda, distribution of improved seeds, and marketing."[25]

By everyone's admission, however, the Department faced severe difficulties in performing its duties. For example, at the time of the Linlithgow Commission in 1927, Bengal was the only major province without an agriculture college. Staffing problems were acute. The Department's top research staff in Dacca numbered only six. By the Director of Agriculture's own admission, the demonstrators, on whom much reliance was placed for extension purposes, were poorly trained.[26] The Levinge Report had called for an increase in the Department's demonstration staff; the Linlithgow Commission showed interest in the effect of retrenchment on the Department's activities; the Department itself, just before the arrival of the Floud Commission, requested an increase of staff; and the Floud Commission, noting "it would take five years to train up a staff equal to that employed in the provinces which we have visited," recommended training additional staff as early as possible.[27]

Finances, of course, presented the Department's most serious problem. The Linlithgow Commission compiled figures which showed that the Bengal Agriculture Department had one of the slowest rates of budget increase on the sub-continent--Rs. 2.4 lakhs[28]

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[25]Bengal, Report of the Land Revenue Commission, Bengal, (Vol. I), (Alipore: Bengal Government Press), p. 102.

[26]Minutes, op.cit., p. 8, questions 17546-17570.

[27]Land Revenue Commission, op.cit., p. 102.

[28]Approximate rupee equivalents: 1 rupee = $0.21; 100,000 rupees = 1 lakh = $21,000; 10 million rupees = 1 crore = $2.1 million.

between 1920-1927, compared with approximately Rs. 5½ lakhs for the Central Provinces and Berar, Rs. 12 lakhs for the Punjab, and Rs. 13¼ lakhs for the United Provinces.[29] By 1940, the disparity was just as glaring. The Floud Commission reported that the Bengal Department's budget of Rs. 9 lakhs compared with Rs. 22 lakhs in Madras, 38¼ lakhs in the Punjab, and 26¼ lakhs in the United Provinces.[30] A closer look at the yearly budgets reveals an even more unsettling picture.

Table No. 1. Totals, Yearly Budget, Bengal Department of Agriculture (in Rupees)

	Receipts	Voted	Charged
1937-38	76,663.75	745,179.85	58,213.66
1938-39	54,394.12	1,144,179.40	87,575.35
1939-40	83,785.60	1,146,395.20	75,175.90
1940-41	73,389.65	1,415.904.20	78,228.75

Source: Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture.

Apparently, by 1940 the Department of Agriculture was spending only a part of the budget voted to it by the Provincial Assembly, and the bulk of that part was spent on simply maintaining itself.

History since Independence

Agricultural administration has been in flux since Independence. Before Partition, World War II and the independence movement absorbed sufficient attention and resources to continue the near-paralysis of the late 1930's. For a full decade following Independence, the agricultural sector continued to be neglected; political problems and an emphasis on industrialization diverted attention elsewhere. Once again, however, natural calamity intervened. In 1956, two floods inundated much of the province and severe food shortages resulted. In 1957 the Department of Agriculture was allocated increased funds,

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[29] Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, op.cit., p. 36.

[30] Land Revenue Commission, op.cit.

Table No. 2

Yearly Expenditure, Bengal Department of Agriculture
1937-1941
(In Rupees)

Year	Superintendence		Direction		Experimental Farm		Experiments and Research		Uplift	
	Voted	Charged	Voted	Charged	Voted	Charged	Voted	Charged	Voted	Charged
1937 to 1938	55,034	43,653	*	*	182,648	6,981	73,276	81	--	--
1938 to 1939	219,809	42,069	73,622	38,534	201,623	6,418	150,588	--	11,983	--
1939 to 1940	229,346	39,478	60,976	28,953	220,154	6,445	154,904	--	9,905	--
1940 to 1941	24,346	25,159	61,781	31,650	217,758	6,679	154,943	--	10,462	--
TOTAL	528,535	150,358	196,379	99,137	822,183	26,523	533,711	81	32,350	--

*Figure Missing

Source: Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture.

and the Department began expanding its staff and programs. Research and extension had remained its principal activities. From 1957 to 1959, the Department laid the foundation for additional programs of seed multiplication, plant protection, a tractor and pump scheme, and extension of crops to new areas.

While the government provided funds which permitted the Agriculture Department to advance, it simultaneously moved to bypass the Department. The first attempt to do so was under the Village Agriculture and Industrial Development Programme (V-AID). Pakistan's many problems of rural development were deemed too complex to be solved by piecemeal efforts of individual departments. Consequently a new agency was created in 1952 which was responsible, among other things, for increasing the productive output of farmers. It was to work closely with all the departments, primarily by providing a link between the villager and the departmental officers. In effect, the V-AID program was to take over the extension duties of the various departments, including Agriculture.[31] The V-AID agency marked a new approach to rural development, and a new element in agricultural administration.

From the outset, the new agency had difficulty in accommodating itself to the existing bureaucracy. Agricultural administration proved particularly vexing. While V-AID struggled to acquire a staff and field a program, the Department of Agriculture steadily expanded its own extension activities. Relations between the two organizations were tense, not cooperative. In 1959 open competition appeared: the East Pakistan Department of Agriculture began its own program of union level extension agents, in direct rivalry with V-AID's Village Level Workers. In May 1959, the Director of the General Ministry of Food and Agriculture drew the issue more sharply. He told an all-Pakistan Seminar on V-AID that it was necessary to overcome the belief that sanitation and social problems were as important as agriculture. If V-AID wanted to help the country, it should concentrate on the programs of the Agricultural Departments.[32]

Matters soon came to a head, and resolved themselves. In July 1959, the East Pakistan Agriculture Directorate held a conference of its departmental officers. Partly it was an introspective meeting, revealing continuing defects within the Directorate: all the main speakers stressed the need for better coordination between extension and research staffs; and bottlenecks were reported in seed multiplication. The Conference was also critical of V-AID,

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[31]For further discussion of V-AID, see Chapter 9.

[32]Pakistan, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Altaf Hussain, "How Nation Building Departments can Make Best Use of Village AID" in Report of the All-Pakistan Seminar on Village Agricultural and Industrial Development Programme, 18th-23rd May 1959, Dacca Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, p. 26.

revealing heightened internecine turbulance within agricultural administration: "The Circle Deputy Directors stated that they had given the present system of getting the job done by a village level worker in the V-AID areas a fair trial and found that it did not work well." Complaints were raised that V-AID workers did not cooperate with the thana agriculture officers, and that departmental staff could not compete with V-AID's superior financial resources. "The House was of the opinion," concluded the Conference, "that the entire work should come under the Agriculture Directorate."[33] In November 1960, the Report of the Food and Agriculture Commission at least partially concurred, by recommending that V-AID withdraw from the agriculture field.[34] The following year the whole V-AID program was discontinued.

Disappearance of V-AID did not simplify agriculture programming. Recurrent food shortages highlighted the decline in agriculture productivity in the 1950's, and necessitated expenditure of scarce foreign currency reserves. Government decided to reverse this situation, and appointed the Food and Agriculture Commission in the summer of 1959. The Commission was told that "increased production from the land is now a matter of the highest national priority," and it was given wide powers of investigation, and scope for recommendations.

All existing elements of agriculture administration were found wanting by the Food and Agriculture Commission:

> "...early in its deliberations, it became apparent to the Commission that the most serious stumbling blocks in the way of increased production were organizational. This is not to imply that economic, social and technical questions do not equally enter into the problem....But the central fact confronting the Commission is that the considerable knowledge, already available at higher levels, is not being made use of owing to the lack of an effective instrument for the transmission of that knowledge to the cultivator and the means of using it."[35]

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[33]"Proceedings of Departmental Officers Conference Held in Assembly Hall of the East Pakistan Agriculture Institute From 6th July 1959 to 13th July 1959", (East Pakistan, Agriculture Directorate), (Dacca, 1959), pp. 24-25.

[34]"Report of the Food and Agriculture Commission", Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, November, 1960, p. 221.

[35]Ibid, p. 7.

Accordingly, the Commission advocated creation of another new agency, to undertake all agricultural extension and supply functions.

The Commission supported its recommendation with a number of persuasive arguments, but most hinged around the apparent inability of existing agencies to provide effectively the essential "five firsts" of increased productivity:

Better Seed
Fertilizer
Plant Protection
Better Cultivation Technique
Short and Medium Term Credit

The Commission contended that these essentials are interrelated, and must be presented in a single "package". The V-AID structure and cooperatives could not handle even their allotted roles; the Agriculture Department in East Pakistan "approaches in numbers the minimum requirement for such work but...lacks the knowledge and facilities to do the job."[36] Therefore, the Commission saw no alternative than again bypassing the established bureaucracy, and creating a new administrative unit: a semi-autonomous corporation with wide ranging authority and ample finances. It was to begin operation in selected Project Areas, eventually covering the whole rural country-side. The Agriculture Development Corporation was to "organize supplies needed by the farmer and to provide him with technical knowledge which will enable him to change his methods."[37] Organization was to stretch from a Provincial Chairman to Union Assistants in each union. The government accepted this basic proposal, and an ADC began operation in each wing in 1961.

Creation of the ADC in East Pakistan did not automatically clarify the administrative picture. On the one hand, the new corporation faced organizational and staffing difficulties for several years, and could not begin to play a large role in implementing agricultural programs. At the beginning of the Third Plan Period, 1965-1970, the ADC has staff only down to the District level in most districts, and has been largely unable to perform distribution tasks. Some success has been attained in the procurement of seeds, plant protection equipment and chemicals. On the other hand, the Department of Agriculture has expanded its programs rather than curtailing them sharply, as recommended by the Food and Agriculture Commission. Front line staff has been increased, and the projected abolition of the

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[36]Ibid, p. 155.

[37]Ibid, p. 214.

Crash Programme will provide a surplus of Union Agriculture Assistants.[38] The Department still has large numbers of ill-trained personnel at the union level, but shows no signs of withering away. It is likely that the next Plan Period will see further adjustments required in the rationalization of agricultural administration.

While organizational positions remained in flux, there can be little doubt that the government's increased attention to the agricultural sector has borne fruit. The stagnant situation of the mid-1950's has now given way to a situation of accelerated output. Figures presented in the Outline to the Third Five Year Plan show that the annual growth rate in agriculture in the country as a whole went from 1.0 per cent in 1950-60 to 3.1 per cent during 1960-65.[39] Per capita income in East Pakistan, which was declining before 1960, is now experiencing a net improvement of 2.3 per cent per year. Overall regional income in East Pakistan previously had failed to match population increase, at 2.0 per cent, but had risen to 4.9 per cent in the first four years of the Second Plan.[40] A study (as yet unpublished), prepared by foreign advisors connected with East Pakistan's planning body, shows the improved situation more clearly. The province has moved near self-sufficiency in rice; the gross value of major crops was nearly 30 per cent higher in 1963-64 than the low point of 1955-56. A close examination of available data shows a healthy 3.5 per cent growth rate in the agriculture sector as a whole between 1959-60 and 1963-64, and the same rate for rice production.[41]

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[38]Current position of the Department of Agriculture staff in East Pakistan: one Director, four Deputy Directors, eighteen District Agriculture Officers (two in Mymensingh District), sixty Subdivisional Agriculture Officers, and 4053 Union Agriculture Assistants. The Crash Programme was begun in 1960-61 on the recommendation of the Interim Report of the Food and Agriculture Commission.

[39]Government of Pakistan, Outline of the Third Five Year Plan, August 1964, p. 3.

[40]Ibid, p. 12.

[41]Walter Falcon and Carl Gotsch, "An Analysis of East Pakistan Agriculture During the Second and Third Plan Periods," Draft Copy, March 1965.

Whether these estimates ~~are fully valid or not, several conclusions can be drawn.~~ Quite clearly, the agriculture sector has rebounded from a serious slump. Just as clearly, there is some relationship between the increased production rate and organized government efforts to raise production; programs of improved seed, irrigation, fertilizer distribution and plant protection have been at least partially successful. By inference, this leads to a more relevant conclusion--agriculture in East Pakistan is readily responsive to increased inputs, if proper channels are available to reach the producer. The present promising achievements have been accomplished with an uncoordinated administrative system that is just really beginning to function in the mofussil. What course agriculture administration takes next can have profound importance for the prosperity of the province.[42]

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[2]For further discussion, see George M. Platt, Administration ricultural Development in Pakistan, Maxwell Graduate School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, August 1962.

Chapter 3

THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

The cooperative movement in Bengal was begun, and has essentially remained as, a government sponsored program designed to complement other aspects of agricultural administration. Two provincial governments initiated the study and introduction of cooperatives in South Asia. The Madras Presidency deputed Mr. Frederick Nicholson (later Sir) to tour Europe to study agricultural financing by land banks. In reports issued in 1885 and 1892, he advocated the establishment of a system of rural cooperative banks, based on a scheme flourishing in Germany. The United Provinces had on hand Mr. H. Dupernex, who had prior experience with European cooperatives. He also issued a report on behalf of his provincial government, advocating cooperative financing institutions. Madras proceeded to organize mutual loan cooperatives. Bengal's first few societies began operating before the turn of the century, following the relatively successful Madras example.

The Government of India turned its attention to the subject as a result of the Indian Famine Commission of 1901, on which Frederick Nicholson served. The Report of the Commission strongly advocated formation of agricultural banks along the lines of European Mutual Credit Associations. The Governor-General, Lord Curzon, created a committee to study the proposal and the existing pioneer societies. Under the chairmanship of Sir Edward Law, and with both Nicholson and Dupernex as members, the committee recommended the formation of cooperative credit societies. It also prepared model designs for rural and urban cooperatives, and drafted appropriate model legislation. The central government acted upon these suggestions, and the Cooperative Societies Act became law in March 1904. The Act set precedents which permanently influenced the subcontinent's cooperative movement. The purpose of cooperatives was stated in the preamble to be the supply of agricultural credit. Formation of cooperatives was to be initiated by a government official, known as a Registrar, who was also to be responsible for their supervision and a yearly audit. A second Cooperative Societies Act was passed in 1912, to permit formation of non-credit societies, and to provide wider federations of societies and banks, which could lead to less need for government supervision. However, the program was to remain essentially a government sponsored scheme for the extension of rural credit.

History and Organization

The pre-independence history of the Department of Cooperatives in Bengal can be given briefly.[43] Both the Governments of Bengal and of Eastern Bengal and Assam appointed Registrars shortly after the Act of 1904 was passed. After Act II of 1912 came into effect, Central Banks were formed in the countryside. In 1918 the Bengal Provincial Cooperative Bank was formed, as an apex agency for the Central Banks. The Bengal Cooperative Organisation Society followed, as a provincial federation of primary and central societies. The Department was a transferred ministry under the Government of India Act, 1919. In 1936, a draft Bill on cooperatives in Bengal was prepared. It was introduced in the Bengal legislature in 1938, and passed in 1940. Until then, the Department remained governed by the Cooperative Societies Acts of 1904 and 1912, and the guidelines prepared by the Imperial Committee on Cooperation in India, 1915 (the Maclagan Committee).

The organization of the Department began at the top with the appointment of a Registrar. The post-First World War retrenchment eliminated for a time the position of Deputy Registrar and cut deeply into operational field staff. The staff consisted of an Assistant Registrar for each Commissioner's Division and an auditor and supervisors on the same basis. The 1935 Annual Report of the Registrar called for the establishment of smaller administrative units than divisions, and for the creation of audit circles of 100 societies per charge. Neither suggestion seems to have been implemented, although the audit circles were mapped out. The organization of the cooperative structure started at the other end, with the primary agricultural credit societies (non-agricultural societies will be dealt with separately). By statute, the societies were village based, had unlimited liability and were managed by an elected group of members, known as the managing panchayat. Originally, the Registrar's staff initiated the organization of societies. After Central Banks were established in sufficient number, about 1912, they undertook this task.

The Central Banks acted as agents of the Department for supervision as well as organization of societies, and as agents of the societies for the supply of capital. Funds for the Banks came from the Provincial Government, member societies, and individual cooperative members. The Registrar testified before the Linlithgow Commission in 1926 that his goal was to have a Central Bank for each thana; however, there were never more than 118 Central Banks established before World War II. Above the Central Banks was the

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[43]The whole question of cooperation in Bengal has been given thorough discussion in J. P. Niyogi, The Cooperative Movement in Bengal, Macmillan and Co., London, 1940. This book is recommended to anyone having further interest in the subject. The term "Department" refers to the government agency charged with supervision of cooperatives. That agency has at times shifted its position, and is currently a Directorate under the Department of Agriculture.

Provincial Cooperative Bank in Calcutta, which served as a central financial clearing house. There was also a provincial-level agency for publicity purposes, the Bengal Cooperative Organization Society.

Despite changes in the cooperative law made by Act II of 1912, the program of the Department remained primarily the supply of agricultural credit to unlimited liability village societies. Other activities were undertaken of course; anti-malaria societies flourished around the Calcutta area. Irrigation societies made positive contributions. The Registrar in 1926 planned to create a series of marketing and wholesale societies, with a central outlet in Calcutta, but the plan did not materialize. Sales and supply societies were established in several places (Chandpur, in Comilla District, was the first to operate such a society, registering in report year 1924-25). These remained only a small part of the Department's activities, however. During the years from 1915-25, for example, a period of rapid expansion, agriculture credit cooperatives maintained a steady 85-90% of the total. In 1937, the figure stood at 21,255, versus 2828 non-agricultural cooperatives. In 1940, when expansion nearly halted, the figure was 34,228 versus 3067.[44]

Serious problems appeared in the operation of the Department's program. For some time, the cooperative movement in Bengal showed signs of health. In 1925, after 20 years of organizational activity, there were 11,081 societies of various types, reaching every section of the province (Chittagong and Dacca Divisions were considered particularly outstanding areas). They contained nearly 386,000 members, with a working capital of Rs. 6,18,38,550. The Registrar noted in 1925 that membership and actual cash employed had doubled since 1920, and he was full of confidence for the future: "It cannot now be denied that progress of the movement in this country compares favourably with progress in Western countries." By 1930, however, the Registrar was complaining that average membership per agricultural credit society was slipping (from 25 in 1925 to 23.8), and that the quality of societies was also steadily declining.

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[44]Figures are from Annual Reports of the Registrar. The relative prosperity in finances and membership of the urban societies, despite their small number should be noted. In 1937 they had 303,713 members and Rs. 54,028,567 in working capital, against 507,312 members and Rs. 61,843,273 working capital for the agricultural societies. In 1940 the non-agricultural cooperatives had working capital of Rs. 64,892,185, actually exceeding the figure of the agricultural cooperatives, Rs. 62,573,350. These were particularly bad years for the agricultural sector as a whole, so the figures are somewhat misleading. However, even though the non-agriculture cooperatives failed as badly in the long run as the agriculture cooperatives, in the short run they quite consistently demonstrated a comparative financial vitality.

The same year, the Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, 1929-1930, presented a list of defects in the movement, including a sharp increase in amount of overdue loans. By 1935, expansion was curtailed, and the audit cess recovered less than expended for its collection--Rs. 3,51,167 recovered against Rs. 3,82,943 spent. By 1940 the whole Departmental machinery nearly ground to a halt. Few further loans were extended, few new societies organized. The Cooperative Department ceased to function seriously as a rural credit extension agency for close to 17 years. In 1945, the Rowland Committee found that "the cooperative movement is almost a corpse."

Some figures presented by the Department itself reveal the deteriorating situation more fully. There are at least three categories by which the movement can be judged. These are presented in table form below. It can be seen from Table 3 that among other things, the number of fully successful societies never approached the number of clear failures, that the amount of reasonably successful societies, "A" and "B" groups, never exceeded 10% after 1917, and dropped steadily lower in percentage in the duration recorded. Table 4 shows the increase in unsound societies, plus the difficult time the Department faced in trying to cope with the burden. Table 3 shows in both figures and percentage the implications behind the qualitative assessment of Table 5, and the cause for liquidation of large numbers of societies. Collection of loans from 1922 onward never exceeded far beyond one third of the outstanding amount, except in the jute boom years of 1924-1926. The amount of overdue loans was high, and it increased to the point where it became obvious that a credit system was not in operation.

Causes for Failure

Defects in the cooperative movement did not go unnoted. The Linlithgow Commission, speaking about the cooperative movement as a whole, stressed the need for sound education in the principles of cooperation, and for a high standard of efficiency in business management. The Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee in 1930 listed as major defects the illiteracy of members and their ignorance of cooperative principles, heterogeneous membership, and the delay in obtaining loans by primary societies. The Department itself often complained of lack of staff, and failure to separate long and short range loans. Unlike most other major provinces, Bengal did not conduct an enquiry into the working of cooperatives after the department was transferred to popular control in 1919. However, the Department itself presented a long list of perceived defects, in the introduction to a bill drafted in 1936, when the movement was clearly faltering. In the absence of other official enquiries, and because the Department's own

~~Table No. 3~~

Agricultural Societies: Audit Classification
1917-1935

1. Class A: "Societies as near perfection as we can hope to go."

2. Class B: "Approach Class A but fall short of them in some essential quality."

3. Class C: "Average societies by no means free from faults, but with the capacity to eliminate their faults.

4. Class D: "Those in which immediate reconstitution is necessary. These societies have practically to begin all over again.

5. Class E: "Hopeless and dangerous, and generally immediate liquidation is their fate."

6. Societies under probation (U.P.).

Year	Total Number of Societies	A	B	C	D	E	U.P.	Percentage of A & B Class Societies	Percentage of C Class Societies
1917-18	3,060	16	279	1,745	210	195	615	9.6	57.0
1918-19	3,440	27	295	2,227	274	205	412	9.3	64.7
1919-20	4,529	36	377	2,468	290	261	1,097	9.1	54.4
1920-21	5,277	49	392	3,066	391	318	1,061	8.3	58.1
1921-22	5,694	49	380	3,768	486	333	678	7.5	66.1
1922-23	6,159	63	432	4,189	605	320	550	8.0	68.0
1923-24	6,726	68	456	4,232	634	371	965	7.7	62.9
1924-25	9,811	110	630	5,401	656	487	2,527	7.5	55.0
1925-26	11,136	132	797	6,531	726	492	2,458	8.3	58.6
1926-27	13,366	150	787	7,384	863	575	3,607	7.0	55.2
1927-28	15,657	152	850	8,458	1,108	687	4,402	6.3	54.0
1928-29	16,889	166	855	10,177	1,427	807	3,457	6.0	60.2
1929-30	19,156	178	928	11,614	1,884	901	3,651	5.7	60.6
1930-31	20,129	136	721	12,491	2,319	1,054	3,408	4.2	62.0
1931-32	20,159	95	475	13,816	2,889	1,440	1,444	2.8	68.5
1932-33	19,976	62	389	14,406	2,708	1,521	890	2.2	72.1
1933-34	19,859	62	503	14,179	2,757	1,676	682	2.3	71.3
1934-35	19,769	46	397	13,910	2,787	1,859	770	2.2	70.3

Compiled from J. P. Niyogi, Cooperative Movement in Bengal, pp. 57-5[illegible]

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Table No. 4

Liquidation Proceedings, 1912-35

Year	No. of Societies Liquidated	No. of Liquidation Proceedings Pending
1912-13	1	5
1913-14	2	7
1914-15	4	9
1915-16	43	50
1916-17	39	85
1917-18	29	106
1918-19	81	184
1919-20	38	185
1920-21	63	228
1921-22	147	368
1922-23	53	403
1923-24	44	431
1924-25	66	448
1925-26	112	386
1926-27	75	409
1927-28	102	465
1928-29	182	595
1929-30	141	638
1930-31	180	785
1931-32	178	938
1932-33	239	1,125
1933-34	167	1,289
1934-35	121	1,369
1935-36	86	1,411
1936-37	49	1,439
1937-38	78	1,500
1938-39	66	1,559
1939-40	81	1,614

Source: J. P. Niyogi, Cooperative Movement in Bengal, p. 44; and Annual Reports of the Registrar.

~~Table No. 5~~

Collection and Overdue Loans from Members of Agricultural Credit Societies

Year	Amount due at Beginning of Year, Rs. Thous.	Overdue Rs. Thous.	Amount Repaid During Year, Rs. Thous.	Collection, %	Overdue, %
1922-23	1,06,52	40,04	36,12	33.9	37.5
1923-24	1,21,31	44,73	38,51	31.4	36.3
1924-25	1,48,35	51,78	62,71	41.8	34.4
1925-26	1,73,44	49,26	79,95	45.5	28.3
1926-27	2,11,17	50,10	79,93	37.8	23.7
1927-28	2,64,51	67,45	93,49	35.5	25.4
1928-29	3,12,65	92,12	1,14,77	36.7	29.4
1929-30	3,43,17	1,18,29	1,00,50	29.2	34.4
1930-31	4,01,80	1,60,04	56,79	14.1	39.8
1931-32	4,32,44	2,43,88	46,87	10.8	56.3
1932-33	4,33,08	2,95,80	36,55	8.4	68.3
1933-34	4,28,42	3,46,59	36,36	8.5	80.9
1934-35	4,25,01	3,40,00	29,79	7.0	79.9
1935-36	4,15,52	3,10,47	30,48	7.3	74.7
1936-37	4,03,91	3,26,68	31,03	7.6	80.8
1937-38	3,99,12	3,45,81	25,72	6.4	86.6
1938-39	3,87,76	3,43,79	20,07	5.2	88.6
1939-40	3,88,12	3,42,87	45,66	11.7	88.3

Source: J. P. Niyogi, Cooperative Movement in Bengal, p. 27; and Annual Reports of the Registrar.

considered opinion might now be of interest, the whole list is presented here.

1. Defective organization:

   a. in selection of members signing the application; and
   b. in subsequent enlistment of members.

   Apart from the question of giving them a sort of preliminary training in cooperative principles and practices, an accurate estimate of their character, assets, liabilities and repaying capacity is not taken into consideration in the selection of members.

2. Indiscriminate distribution of loans, resulting in under-financing or over-financing of individual members.

3. Appropriation of large loans by office-bearers of societies.

4. Misues of loans.

5. Unwillingness of the office bearers to take stringent action against recalcitrant or habitually defaulting members.

6. Unwillingness of the general body of members to place an insolvent society into liquidation.

7. Absence of encouragement of thrift amongst individual members.

8. Lack of business principles and responsibility in the management of the societies.

9. Defective audit due to neglect or indifference of members to the enquiries made by the audit officer.

10. Appointment of incompetent salaried officers by non-official boards of directors.

11. Absence of effective restriction on borrowing and lending by the society.

12. General indifference of the Committee of Management to follow departmental instructions.[45]

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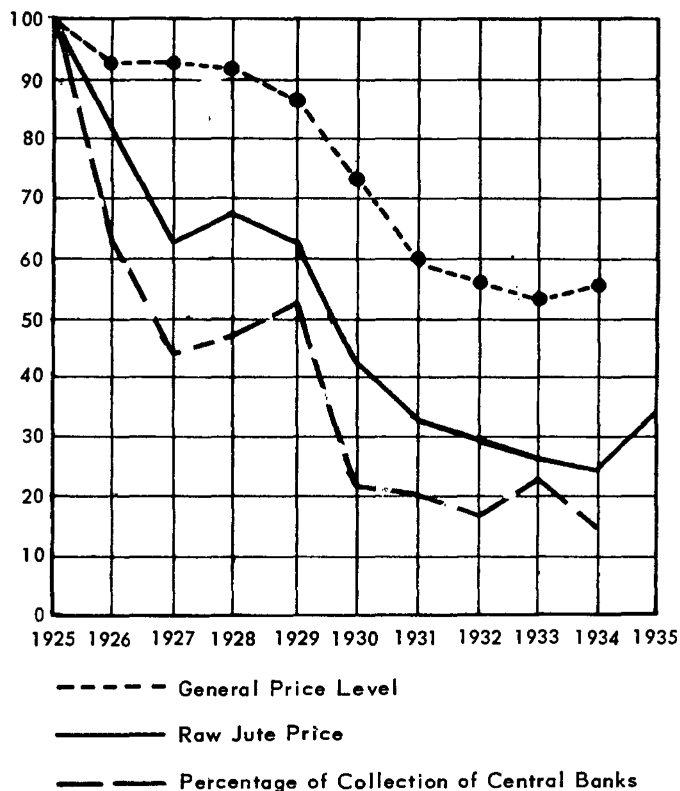
[45]Bengal, Agriculture and Industries Department, The Bengal Cooperative Societies Bill, 1936, (Alipore: Government Press, 1936), p. 1.

~~The Department hoped training of both members and staff would be~~ forthcoming; meanwhile, it advocated strengthening the powers of the Registrar. The Floud Commission agreed in 1940 that the office of the Registrar needed strengthening. It added that societies were often established too rapidly, and without sufficient investigation, and echoed the Department's complaints about long and short term loans, need for staffing and for cooperative education. The Rowland's Report in 1945 repeated most of these suggestions, and emphasized that cooperatives should be run on business lines. It also recommended that the department below the Registrar be organized into two parts, dealing with credit and non-credit societies.[46]

One problem beyond control of any agency was the drastic effect of the world-wide depression in 1929. The overseas market for jute collapsed, and with it went the rural economy of Bengal. Jute so dominated the financial structure of the agriculture sector that even non-jute producers were striken by the fall in jute prices. The following graph illustrates the striking correlation between jute prices and the percent of loans collected from primary societies by Central Banks, 1925-1935.



SOURCE: J. P. Niyogi, The Cooperative Movement in Bengal, p. 105.

[46]Report of the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee, 1944-45, op.cit., pp. 75-82.

Even when general prosperity returned to the province after 1935, cooperatives could not regain their strength.

Reviewing the figures presented earlier, however, it would seem that the great depression dealt a death blow to a seriously ill system, rather than initiated a fatal illness. As noted, the number of sound societies did not rise above 10% after 1917. In 1928, the year before the depression began, nearly 30% of loans were overdue, and that was a 7% improvement over the situation existing in 1922. The boom years in jute price, 1924-26, still failed to bring collections near the 50% mark, yet the rate of enrollment of new societies was continued unabated from 1929 to 1934, the "bust" years of the depression. By the department's own figures and directives, the cooperatives in Bengal were over-financed, under-supervised, inaccurately assessed as to types of credit needed, and lacking in knowledge of thrift or cooperative principles. None of these problems were corrected before the whole movement was set awash by the aftermath of the depression, the rigors of war, and the painful birth of a new nation.

Despite defects, the cooperative movement was given strong support by those most concerned with agricultural improvement. Lord Linlithgow, who had personally found disturbing trends in Bengal's cooperatives,[47] is generally credited with authorship of the famous phrase from the Royal Commission Report, "If cooperation fails, there will fail the best hope of rural India." The report added later,

> "Where the problems of half a million villages are in question, it becomes at once evident that no official organization can possibly hope to reach every individual in these villages. To do this, the people must be organized to help themselves and their local organizations must be grouped into larger unions, until a machinery has been built up to convey to every village whatever the different departments have to send it. It is by such a system and such a system alone that the ground can be covered. Only through the medium of cooperative associations can the teaching of the expert be brought to multitudes who would never be reached individually.[48]

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[47]Question 19495. The Chairman, to R. B. J. M. Mitra, Registrar of Cooperatives "Have you seen any tendency on the part of the credit societies to degenerate into machines for the provision of easy credit?" Answer, "Yes...in many areas they are degenerating into credit machines." <u>Minutes</u>, op.cit., p. 143.

[48]Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, op. cit., p. 468.

The Floud Commission, writing in 1940, at the depths of the Department's difficulties, made several recommendations for its reorganization. The supervising staff should be strengthened, and should undertake education and training in cooperative principles, as well as in organizing new societies; loans should be short-term and for productive purposes only; linking credit and marketing should be studied. "We recognize that the reorganization of the cooperative department may take time," the Report concludes, "but we are in favor of as rapid an extension of the cooperative movement as is consistent with sound organization and management."[49]

Cooperation Since Independence

Along with most other Departments, the Cooperative Department after partition was immediately faced with serious dislocations caused by loss of facilities and personnel. The Registrar and Deputy Registrar of undivided Bengal both opted for Pakistan in August 1947, but vacancies were created in many subordinate posts. The entire apex banking and administrative structure remained in Calcutta, and had to be recreated. Despite manpower shortages and frequent change in top-level officers, the Department began functioning at once. A new Provincial Cooperative Bank was established in 1947, in Dacca, and began operation in 1948. A Training Institute for departmental officers was established in the same year at Pubail, Dacca District, under the Second Five-Year Plan. A Cooperative Training College replaced the Pubail Institute in 1960. It moved to Comilla in 1963. In 1952, Thana Audit circles were created. By the mid-1950's the Department once again had sufficient staff to reach the union level throughout most of the province. After 1960, district level officers were given the title of Territorial Assistant Registrars, with Assistant Inspectors assuming the positional equivalent of Thana Cooperative Officers.

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[49]Report of the Land Revenue Commission, Vol. I, op.cit., p. 158. A comparative survey shows that at the time of the Floud Commission, Bengal had by far the greatest number of societies of any province, with fewer in the process of liquidation than most, but with one of the lowest number of class "A" and "B" societies. Number of societies: Bengal 30,707; Punjab 24,322; Madras 13,759; United Provinces 10,858. Only four others had over 2,000 societies. Number under liquidation: Bengal 5.1%; Central Provinces and Berar 27.8%; Bombay 15.3%; Madras 10.1%; United Provinces 9.6%. Class "A" and "B" societies: Bengal 1 and .1%; Bombay 5.5 and 25.2%; Madras 3.9 and 15.4%; Punjab 2.2 and 14.2%; Central Provinces and Berar 3 and 5.2%. See Review of the Cooperative Movement in India, 1939-40. Reserve Bank of India, Bombay, 1941, Appendices A and B.

Partition brought with it old problems and new opportunities. The new Province inherited over a quarter of a lakh of primary agricultural societies. Half of them were crop-loan societies organized in the late 1930's as an emergency measure; most were in debt; and only 113 were considered reasonably solid financially. ~~(See Table 6, below.)~~ At a conference at Dacca in November 1947, the decision was made to abandon the old system, ~~and start over~~ again with fundamentally different types of societies. "The entire cooperative movement is being reorganized", the Registrar announced, "especially at the bottom." He continued:

> "The old credit societies, which have outlived their usefulness and are in a state of chronic stagnation, are being gradually wound up. A network of Cooperative Multipurpose Societies, conceived in terms of tackling the various needs of the agriculturist, are under formation on a union basis."[50]

Since the new societies were not village based, it was felt they should be of limited liability, and be capable of performing functions, such as marketing and supply, beyond the provision of credit. Central Multipurpose Societies were envisioned in each Subdivision to assist the primary societies. Financing would be done by Central Banks. Over 1,500 Union Multipurpose Societies were established by the end of 1949, and five Central Societies. By 1954, they surpassed the old rural credit societies in membership, and in 1957 surpassed them in number of societies. (See Table 7 below.) By 1961, the Union Societies covered nearly every union in the Province, and Central Societies nearly every subdivision.

The reformed Department was not without problems. Staffing shortages at all levels brought inexperienced men into positions of authority, and continuity of office was lacking; four different men held the post of Registrar between 1947 and 1951, and the total had gone to nine by time of the Revolution in 1958. Financing was also deficient. It was not until 1957 that funds from the State Bank of Pakistan permitted a significant loan program to be undertaken. The Department also noted weakness in its program. After a decade of seeking to promote a cooperative movement expanded in scope and effectiveness, the Department was speaking in terms of "revitalizing" East Pakistan's cooperatives. The Registrar reported that in the year 1959-60,

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[50]Annual Report of the Registrar, 30 June, 1948, p. 4.

Table No. 6

Position of Cooperative Movement in East Pakistan 1947-48

1.	Total No. of Societies, All Classes	31,905
2.	Central Banks	83
3.	Producers Unions	27
4.	Total Non-Agricultural Societies	3,196
5.	Primary Agricultural Societies	26,687
a.	Loans Advanced to and from Members	Rs. 28,66 Lakhs
b.	Loans Recovered	Rs. 37,95 Lakhs
c.	Loans Outstanding at Close of Year	Rs. 1,88,15 Lakhs
d.	Loans Overdue at Close of Year	Rs. 1,52,10 Lakhs
e.	Percentage of Overdue Loans Total Amount of Loans Due by Ultimate Borrowers	Rs. 80.00 %
f.	Classification of Societies	A. 9
		B. 104
		C. 16,787
		D. 4,889
		E. 4,292
		U.P. 606

Source: Annual Report of the Registrar, 30 June 1948.

Table No. 7

Operations of Cooperative Credit Societies in East Pakistan (#1)

	No. of Societies		Membership		Share Capital		Working Capital (In Lakhs of Rupees--$21,000)		Reserves	
Years	Multi-purpose	Primary	Multi-purpose	Primary	Multi-purpose	Primary	Multi-purpose	Primary	Multi-purpose	Primary
1947-48		26,664		658,125		41.42		381.01		153.79
1948-49	1,617	25,824		633,436		41.43		367.41		145.54
1949-50	2,570	22,897	285,960	410,940	13.49	39.02	26.24	329.02	4.13	125.04
1950-51	3,146	18,471	316,351	449,267	15.24	34.73	34.88	289.31	4.24	108.50
1951-52	3,740	14,238	318,010	351,328	19.85	26.46	72.21	214.68	6.22	77.62
1952-53	3,864	12,643	495,207	322,414	27.88	24.11	143.90	186.17	9.93	60.58
1953-54	3,898	12,132	525,123	294,268	28.00	22.23	120.04	168.09	7.44	52.46
1954-55	3,744	8,085	524,094	188,378	29.09	15.25	113.70	106.76	8.85	36.96
1955-56	3,238	3,438	527,986	87,240	30.90	8.44	112.82	57.26	12.16	19.91
1956-57	3,197	1,989	529,827	48,226	30.71	5.67	107.71	36.83	11.55	12.08

Source: Government of Pakistan: Credit Enquiry Commission Report, Karachi, September 8, 1959, p. 23.

> ~~"A policy of consolidation and qualitative~~
> improvement rather than quantitative expansion was followed. The Movement, however, continued to be mainly guided and initiated at the instance of the Government, specially in the field of providing Agricultural Credit among farmers of inadequate means. The Movement in the Province has continued to be essentially a Credit Movement."[51]

The Department was far from alone in being critical of the progress of cooperatives in post-partition East Pakistan. The Provincial Government commissioned a two-man team from the International Labour Office to prepare a Survey of the Cooperative Movement. Written in 1955, the Survey took the Cooperative Department severely to task, and dismissed its efforts as essentially useless, if not actually harmful. In a complaint quite different from that just noted by the Department, the Survey came to "two distressing conclusions":

1. That the formation of the tens of thousands of cooperative credit societies in East Pakistan was simply due to the credit hunger of the masses, who are ready to accept loans in whatever form and whatever conditions they are given. It is evident, therefore, that the huge amount of societies formed does not convey that at any time in the history of cooperation in the Province the Credit Movement had much to do with genuine cooperative effort.

2. That the whole cooperative credit structure, at the apex, secondary and primary level, is a colossus on a foot of clay.[52]

The Department was accused of following practices which brought the whole movement into disrepute: failing to collect loans or interest on loans; failing to emphasize thrift; inadequate efforts to train staff or members in cooperative principles. More fundamentally, the Department was said to be creating a "paper movement," and even the paper was improperly

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[51]Annual Report of the Registrar, 1960, p. 1.

[52]Dr. A. H. Ballendux and R. K. Harper, A Survey of the Cooperative Movement in East Pakistan, Government of East Pakistan, p. 3. No date or place of publication given.

supervised. Spurred by the desire for rapid expansion, the Department organized large numbers of societies by proferring loans, then keeping a percentage of the loan as share capital. The loans were seldom repaid; further capital was seldom invested. While the survey gave approval, with hesitation, to the new Union Multipurpose Societies, it urged that expansion be undertaken slowly, and after experimentation in a pilot program.

The Government of Pakistan established its own enquiry in February 1959, under the Chairmanship of the Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan. The Credit Enquiry Commission found that "the Cooperative credit movement has in many places become more or less stagnant at the primary level."[53] It cited as evidence the fact that cooperatives in East Pakistan were providing a "negligible" 0.6 percent of existing institutional credit, and had almost no resources of their own. Union Multipurpose Societies relied on "book-entry" share capital; deposits increased very slowly, revealing lack of confidence in them by the public; and overdues already constituted more than two-thirds of totals outstanding (see Table 8). Since the earlier village-based, unlimited liability credit societies had been such a failure, the Commission favored experimenting with the new union level, limited liability, societies. However, the societies should be restricted to supply of credit only, and not be assigned marketing and supply functions, which were beyond the capacity of management committees. This same suggestion was repeated by the Food and Agriculture Commission Report in 1960, which found that even the Department's primary task of credit supply had been met with "only a modicum of success in West Pakistan, and none at all in East Pakistan."[54]

Despite all the criticism, no one has suggested that cooperation be abandoned in East Pakistan. On the contrary, post-independence Pakistan has placed great hope for rural development on the future growth of cooperatives. The First Five-Year Plan, 1955-60, was quite enthusiastic about the prospects for cooperatives. The Second Five-Year Plan began operation in 1960, following the rather negative comments on the Credit Enquiry Committee. The Plan was still hopeful in outlook: "The best prospect for solving the problem of rural credit lies eventually in setting up cooperatives." But it was cautious in tone: "A prerequisite of success, however, is that cooperatives must function under sound management."[55] The Second Plan called for reform of cooperative banking institutions and expansion of

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[53] Government of Pakistan, Credit Enquiry Commission Report, Karachi, 1959, p. 6.

[54] Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Report of the Food and Agriculture Commission, 1960, p. 178.

[55] Government of Pakistan, Planning Commission, The Second Five-Year Plan, 1960-65, p. 178.

Table No. 8

Operations of Cooperative Credit Societies in East Pakistan (#2)
(In Lakhs of Rupees--$21,000)

Year	Deposits Held at the End of the Year		Borrowings Held at the End of the Year		Advances Made During the Year to Individuals		Advances Outstanding from Individuals		Amount Overdue		Profit or Loss	
	Multi-purpose	Primary	Multi-purpose	Primary	Multi-purpose	Primary	Multi-purpose	Primary	Multi-purpose	Primary	Multi-purpose	Primary
1947-48		16.83		168.92		19.73		188.15		152.10		- 16.99
1948-49		15.81		164.62		15.45		177.13		143.86		- 8.08
1949-50	2.57	14.64	6.05	150.32	7.31	9.37	4.88	162.66	1.60	135.07	+ 1.57	- 9.95
1950-51	3.21	21.89	12.19	129.19	10.19	3.29	11.31	141.53	3.37	118.05	+ 0.92	- 11.99
1951-52	10.53	11.86	35.62	98.74	30.13	8.31	31.51	92.51	5.85	78.38	+ 3.12	- 4.72
1952-53	7.69	9.83	98.39	91.65	66.31	7.26	94.04	96.71	27.95	78.80	+ 2.12	- 6.55
1953-54	10.10	8.81	74.51	84.60	7.92	2.31	68.81	88.48	52.39	78.63	+ 2.39	- 0.25
1954-55	6.63	5.57	69.10	48.98	6.36	1.63	60.06	56.00	47.30	49.25	+ 0.14	- 0.83
1955-56	7.09	3.49	62.66	25.41	7.77	1.75	56.94	32.12	44.17	28.40	+ 0.49	- 0.25
1956-57	4.28	3.21	61.17	15.87	15.63	2.16	62.00	20.44	43.04	14.24	+ 1.11	-Rs. 30

Source: Annual Reports, Registrar, Cooperative Societies, East Pakistan.

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primary societies. The Third Five-Year Plan, 1965-70, closely echoes the outlook and tone of its predecessor. "Properly conceived and evolved, cooperation can transform the entire social structure and accelerate the process of social and political change, so vital to the real objectives of economic growth." Credit cooperatives, being the core of the movement, are scheduled to receive greater attention than before. The credit and marketing structure is therefore to be doubled in number over the proceeding plan period. The Outline of the Plan adds:

> "The Third Plan provides for a considerable expansion in the size and scope of the cooperative program, but the success of the program in its broader scope will depend a great deal on improvements in the institutional framework of the program."[56]

After sixty years experience, and nearly twenty years operation under an independent Government, cooperatives remain very much the bearers of high expectations, and remain very much on trial.

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[56]Government of Pakistan, Outline of the Third Five-Year Plan, 1965-1970, August, 1964. p. 227.

PART II

LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT

Chapter 4

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Under Company rule and the Permanent Settlement, whatever indigenous political institutions had existed in Bengal withered away, and government officials remained remote and forboding figures to the general populace. In 1858, after the traumatic experiences of the mutiny, Parliament swept away the shadowy vestiges of both Mogul and Company rule. A Secretary of State for India was appointed, and governing the subcontinent became a direct function of Crown and Parliament. Governing rural areas, in territory not controlled by princely states, became a more immediate problem than before. In Bengal, the problem was perhaps as acute as anywhere else in British India, The Bengal Administration Report of 1871 comments:

> "Many things done by tahsildars in other parts of India are not done at all and many things we should know from them we do not know...it has happened that in the province we have held the longest...we have less knowledge of the familiarity with the people than in any other province, that British authority is less brought home to the people, that the rich are less restrained and the poor and weak less protected than elsewhere, and that we have infinitely less knowledge of statistical, agricultural and other facts."

As for village governing bodies, the Report adds:

> "in the plains of Bengal...these institutions seem to have been very much weakened even anterior to British rule and in the last one hundred years of British rule and the Zamindaree theory of property, they have almost disappeared. It cannot be said that in the more important provinces of this administration there are absolutely no self-government institutions. Some traces yet remain: some things are in some places regulated by village Panchayats and by headmen, elders. But more and more, the Zamindary agent supplants the old model and the landlord takes the place of the indigenous self-rule."[57]

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[57] Government of Bengal, Bengal Administration Report, 1871-72, Calcutta, pp. 44 and 192.

As noted earlier, one approach to these problems was to create special departments dealing with agriculture. The Permanent Settlement was itself modified, and eventually eliminated. Concurrently, and haltingly, the Government explored other means of effectively administering rural Bengal.

The Village Chaukidari Act of 1870

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the lack of administrative personnel had grown acute. Governing authorities had difficulty in performing one of their most basic tasks: maintenance of law and order. The 1860's were a period of agrarian unrest, and the Government of Bengal decided action was necessary. In 1869, the province was subdivided into several police districts, each with its own police department. In 1870 the Village Chaukidari Act[58] was passed (Act VI of 1870, Bengal Code). Under its provisions, the District Magistrate was empowered to create a new body known as Chaukidari Panchayat. It was to consist of five villagers selected by the District Magistrate and to cover an area of several villages.[59] The sole function of the Panchayat was to assess and collect a local tax to pay for the village watchmen, the chaukidari. Members who were appointed and refused to serve could be fined fifty rupees. A person refusing to pay the tax could have his property distrained, and sold for arrears. Persons deemed too poor to pay a tax of one half anna per month were exempted from paying the tax.

As a result of the Act, Chaukidari Panchayats were established in most of the Presidency, thereby becoming the first local bodies in rural Bengal. They were never popular with villagers, as is natural for an agency so constituted. There was no thought of representative government in their creation. They were established for the specific purpose of helping the administration maintain law and order. Later attempts to use them for other purposes failed because of these stumbling blocks. However, they did form precedents upon which to build: a series of local bodies, covering a union of villages, in close association with the chief officer of the district.

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[58]Chaukidar is spelled in a variety of ways. This report has attempted to follow the spellings used in the various source materials. The same may be said of tehsildar. Programme is the normal British spelling for the American's program, etc.

[59]Although an amending action in 1892 tried to restrict the Panchayat's jurisdiction to one village, the union remained in force. The amendment also introduced the option of election of the members with the approval of the District Magistrate, but the option does not seem to have been often taken.

The Government of India's Resolution on the Constitution of Local Boards, 18 May 1882

Lord Ripon's famous Resolution on Local-Self Government had several antecedents; it was a complex mixture of personalities, ideologies, historical circumstances, and administrative imperatives. The years following the Mutiny in 1858 were marked by a conservative, paternalistic mood held by most of the European community on the subcontinent, and by occasional liberalism in London. Governor-Generals like Lawrence and Mayo initiated moves toward increased self-government but these were half-heartedly implemented by those in control of the administration. Still, Gladstone sent Lord Ripon to India with the thought that it was England's "weakness and calamity" that "we have not been able to give India the blessings of free institutions."[60] The years were marked by unrest and bloodshed. Almost exactly ten years before the Ripon Resolution, Lord Mayo was assassinated, followed by the Chief Justice of the Bengal High Court.

The Famine Commission of 1880 had noted the lack of local bodies, and urged the extension of local self-government as a means to facilitate relief from distress. Lord Ripon found that his Finance Member also believed it was of great importance to associate Indians with the government of the country, and the two began several exploratory moves.[61] Then he put his ideas in the form of the Resolution on Local-Self Government of 1882. The resolution made clear that the Governor-General in Council wanted to bring responsible local government to the rural countryside. While declining to outline firm regulations of universal application "in a country so vast and in its local circumstances so varied," Lord Ripon laid down clear principles that influenced the discussion of local government from that time forward. He raised fundamental issues concerning rural administration: the proper jurisdiction of the basic unit of government; the advisability of elections; the extent and method of government control; and the functions of local self-governing bodies.

On the question of jurisdiction, he was most emphatic: "...the cardinal principle, which is essential to the success of self government in any shape, is this, that the jurisdiction of the primary boards must be so limited in area so as to ensure both local knowledge and local interest on the part of the members". Applying this principle, the district was rejected

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[60]Persival Spear, ed., The Oxford History of India, 3rd edition. (Oxford, University of Oxford Press, 1958), p. 689.

[61]See S. Gopal, The Vice Royalty of Lord Ripon: 1880-1884. (Oxford University Press, London, 1953), pp. 89-92.

as too large. The basic unit of administration should be at the largest the subdivision, taluk, or tehsil (thana). Smaller areas would be even more suitable. The Government of India desired that a network of local boards be extended to these areas, "charged with definite duties and entrusted with definite funds."

Questions of election and control are intertwined. Lord Ripon states "the local boards, both urban and rural, must everywhere have a large preponderence of non-official members. In no case ought the official members to be more than half". Although there is merit seen in the system of appointing non-official members, members "should be chosen by election wherever ...it may be practicable to adopt the system of choice". Men of high quality can be encouraged to stand for election by increasing the prestige of the local boards. (Paragraphs 12, 13, and 16.)

With elected non-officials holding three-fourths of the seats, how can government maintain control? The Resolution says that "the true principle to be followed in this matter is, that the control should be exercised from without rather than from within. The Government should revise and check the acts of the local bodies, but not dictate them". Executive authorities should have the power of sanction over certain types of activity, such as raising loans, and the right of absolute supercession, after obtaining consent from the supreme government. To carry the principles of election and absence of internal control one further step, the resolution calls for non-officials to be selected chairmen of all local bodies. (Paragraph 17.)

The rationale given for having non-official chairmen is fundamental to the resolution's whole viewpoint; as long as officials are chairmen of local bodies, members will not take a real interest in its proceedings, or get training in the management of local affairs. Lord Ripon began his resolution by saying that he did not expect the programs of local government to be, at first, better managed than if kept solely in the hands of government officers. "It is not, primarily, with a view to improvement in administration that this measure is put forward and supported. It is chiefly desirable as an instrument of political and popular education". (Paragraph 5.) The ultimate aim, however, was to relieve the burdens of administration by fostering genuinely effective self-help:

> "The task of administration is yearly becoming more onerous...The cry is everywhere for increased establishments. The universal complaint in all departments is that of overwork. Under these circumstances it becomes imperatively necessary to look around for some means of relief; and the Governor General in Council has no hesitation in stating his conviction, that the

> only reasonable plan open to the government is to induce the people themselves to undertake, as far as may be, the management of their own affairs; and to develop, or create if need be, a capacity for self-help in respect of all matters that have not, for imperial reasons, to be retained in the hands of the representatives of Government". (Paragraph 6.)

The Bengal Local Self Government Bill of 1883

A bill to give effect to the Ripon proposals was introduced in the Bengal Council in February, 1883.[62] It warrants attention as the first detailed legislative proposal for the establishment of self-governing bodies in rural Bengal. Its stated purpose was to give the people of Bengal a substantial interest in, and responsibility for, the administration of their own affairs, and to provide for the establishment of local self-government on a sound and practical basis. As originally written, the bill faithfully reflected Lord Ripon's views. Two new institutions were provided for. Both were to cover geographically small areas, be primarily composed of elected members, be chaired by a non-official, and were to wield extensive authority within their defined jurisdiction.

More specifically, the bill provided for a committee to administer a union of villages within an area of about twelve square miles. Local affairs, of immediate interest to the villagers, were to be managed by this new union committee. They were to control the primary schools, ponds, roads, tanks and drains of the union, and to be generally responsible for sanitation, and registration of vital statistics. Members were to be elected by the villagers. Above the Union Committees was to be a second level of administration, no larger in area than a subdivision. This body, known as a Local Board, was to have general control over the Union Committees within its jurisdiction, and could compel them to perform their duties. Its members also were to be predominantly elected. Union committees, where formed, were to act as electoral bodies for the Local Boards. Control of the local bodies by the civil administration was to be recognized, but external. Local officers would have the right to inspect the working of the Local Boards, and suspend or prohibit any action considered dangerous to the public interest. A Central Board in Calcutta was to be established for general supervision of the Local Boards.

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[62]The contents and an analysis of the Bill are provided in The Bengal District Administration Committee Report, 1913-1914, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1915, pp. 81-82, paragraphs 98-99.

Union Committees were thus intended to be the basis for local self-government in Bengal. Accordingly, while the Bill was still under discussion, a special officer was dispatched to begin the formation of a network of such bodies. In 1883, 180 Unions were created in selected areas, including, in East Bengal, Munshiganj subdivision, Dacca district. Informal elections were even held, under the supervision of the District Officers' concerned. The Bengal Government supported this measure, and on 31st March, 1884 passed a Resolution commending the officer who formed the Unions.

The action proved premature. Strong opposition was presented by Lord Kimberly, the Secretary of State. He opposed the creation of a Central Board in Calcutta, and the absence of more direct control by the District Officers. He also wanted to create a Committee at the district level, and gave to it the powers originally intended for the Central Board. The District Magistrate would chair the District Committee. Sir Rivers Thompson, the recently appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, tried to defend the integrity of the Bill originally presented, although he was a personal opponent of Lord Ripon.[63] He argued that Local Boards could not function efficiently and independently under the supervision of the proposed District Committees; and that Subdivisional Boards should be adhered to as the largest ordinary unit of administration.

The Lieutenant Governor proposed a compromise: maintain the subdivisional boards, but transfer their supervision to the Commissioner of the Division, within certain precisely defined limits. The District Magistrate could then be brought into closer contact with the Local Boards, as an agent of the Commissioner. The Government of India accepted this proposal, but the Secretary of State in London continued to press for the creation of District Committees. He did agree that the District Committees could be made units of control rather than administration.

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[63]Considerable antagonism was raised between the Viceroy and the officials of the Bengal Presidency over the Ilbert Bill, which would have allowed local judges to try Europeans in some cases. The controversy threatened at one point to prevent the passage of the Local Self-Government Act. For a detailed analysis of the course of the debate on the Bill before passage, especially the roles played by the Lt. Governor and others, see Mrs. Rokeya Rahman Kabir, "Local Self-Government in Bengal," <u>The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan</u>, Dacca, Vol. III, No. 1, June, 1962, pp. 138-185.

The Secretary of State's will prevailed, without this last concession. The Bill was sent to a Select Committee, which spent a year in recasting it. Colman Macaulay, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, reintroduced it in the Bengal Council in March, 1885. It was passed in April as Act III of 1885 (Bengal Code), received the assent of the Governor-General on 11th July, 1885, and appeared in the Calcutta Gazette 29 July, 1885.

An Act to Extend the System of Local Self-Government in Bengal, 1885

The final Act was considerably transformed during its stormy gestation period. The alterations were to have lasting effect. When they became known an Indian member of the Bengal Council attacked the Act's contents, intentions, and even its name:

> "The Government hands over for administration to local bodies certain departments which it has created, with responsibilities and funds. There is nothing in this Bill to give it a greater claim to so pretentious a name than many other measures that have been from time to time passed by the Legislature, each making an advance on that which preceded it. It appears to me that the system proposed by the Bill will not meet the general desire of the people. A large number of opinions elicited considered it too narrow and it will incite expectations which may not be fulfilled. From the administrative point of view it is no improvement as it scarcely relieves the Executive of any portion of its labours."[64]

If Ripon's Resolution is used as a criterion, as it usually is by critics, including the one just quoted, then the Act is indeed far from perfect. It calls for a three tier system of local bodies, rather than two; the third tier is not only considerable larger than a subdivision, the intended maximum area for Ripon, but is trict where the primary unit of administration. The Lieutenant-Governor is required to establish a District Board in every District where the Act is in force.

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[64]Speech by Joy Parkash Lall, 14 March, 1888. Legislative Council. Proceedings of the Government of Bengal 1884-85, p. 88. Quoted in Kabir ibid, p. 180.

At his discretion, two subordinate bodies could also be established over smaller areas within the district: Local Boards over a Sub-division; and a Union Committee over any village or group of villages.

The functions of the respective agencies reflect their relative position. The District Boards were charged with several duties of importance to local affairs, as Ripon had intended for the lower bodies. Public schools, sanitation, roads, tramways, hospitals, repair of Government buildings, tolls, public streams, famine relief and other such items came automatically or at direction from the Local Government (Provincial Government) under the jurisdiction of the Boards. The lower bodies were made entirely dependent on the District Boards. Local Boards had no specific functions except to receive reports from Union Committees:

> A Local Board as the agent of and subject to the control of the District Board, shall so far as the funds at its disposal permits make due provision for all matters transferred to its control and administration under this section. (Paragraph 101.)
>
> Except as otherwise provided by this Act, a Local Board shall not incur any expenses or undertake liabilities, to any amount exceeding the limit imposed by the District Boards. (Paragraph 102.)

Union Committees were made responsible for maintenance of village roads, and maintenance and management of public primary schools within the union. Other duties could be delegated from the Local Board which was supervising that union.

Ripon's insistence on a large non-official elective element was maintained by the Act, but in modified form. The District Board was to consist of no less than nine members, all appointed if no Local Boards exist within the District. Where Local Boards existed, they were to act as an electoral college, choosing whatever proportion was decided on by the Provincial Government. If the whole District was covered by Local Boards, then they must elect at least one-half of the District Board. Local Boards consisting of not less than six members were to be two thirds elected. Members of the Union Committees under the jurisdiction of the Local Board would act as an electoral college.[65]

[65]Members must be at least twenty one years of age, live in the area, have paid at least one rupee cess (based on ownership of land) in the previous year, have at least Rs. 240 income per year, or be "a member of a joint undivided family, one of the members of which is qualified for election as in this section is provided, is a graduate of or licentiate of any university, or holds a certificate as a pleader or mukhtar". Chapter I, paragraph 3.

Union Committees, consisting of not less than five or more than nine members, were to be elected from the residents of the Union. The Commissioner could appoint members if the full membership failed to be chosen by election.

In the question of control, there was a marked departure from the principles of the 1882 Resolution. The Act itself does not fully reveal the departure. It calls for control to be exercised primarily through external means. The Commissioner of the Division, through the District Magistrate, could inspect books at any time, and quash an act passed against the public peace or a group of persons. The provincial government could supercede either a District or Local Board found to be incompetent or defaulting in the performance of its duties. The possibility of internal control is presented by the provision that the Chairman of the District Board can either be appointed by the provincial government or elected by the members of the Board from among their own members, subject to the approval of the provincial government (paragraph 22). Local Boards were to elect their own Chairmen from among their members, subject to the approval of the Lieutenant Governor, or a Board might request the Lieutenant Governor to appoint a Chairman (paragraph 25).[66]

Perhaps the most serious criticism of the Act of 1885 on a basis other than direct reference to the Resolution of 1882 is the amount of authority left to the discretion of various officials. Only District Boards were made mandatory, and only a few functions and finances were definitely turned over to them. Control might or might not be directly exercised by the civil administration. Given this amount of leeway and the generally conservative outlook of the administration prevailing for fifty years or so following the Mutiny, it is not surprising that various of Lord Ripon's principles were disregarded.

The question of official chairmen is a case point. Sir Rivers Thompson decided that for the first year of the act only, District Magistrates would be appointed chairmen of the District Boards. In each succeeding year this practice was maintained. Similarly, the District Boards found themselves depending, almost entirely on the Road cess for income. With such meager resources they were unlikely to delegate any functions and funds to the Local Boards, and these bodies were thus even more unlikely to provide funds for Union Committees. And as will be seen, the option to establish these two bodies was itself rarely taken.

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[66]No mention is made of a Union Committee Chairman in the original Act. An amendment passed by the government of (West) Bengal in 1908, which was extended to East Bengal in 1914, provided that Union Committees elect their own Chairmen from among the members. It became paragraph 41A.

The Act of 1885 remains a landmark. It introduced the concept of local government in rural Bengal, and defined its outlines. In gradual stages, District Boards extended throughout most of the province. Repeated elections were contested, and policy initiated by the successful members. When change in local government came, it was based on the provisions of this document, and until 1962 effected by amending it.

Chapter 5

YEARS OF TRANSITION: THE MORLEY-MINTO ERA

The first of this century's great commissions had before it as an example the Ripon Resolution of 1882, and twenty-five years of that Resolution's neglect. As noted, the heart of the Resolution was the establishment of a network of rural bodies which would eventually be able to assume the administration of local affairs. The civil administration was asked to sacrifice efficiency for a time, in favor of the political education of these new bodies. Government control was accordingly also to be limited. Creation of truly responsible local self-government was seen as the only way that the crushing burden of administering the countryside could be shared. In Bengal, the Act of 1885 was passed to give effect to these concepts.

Apparently the requested sacrifice was not made. The usually thorough annual Bengal Administration Report provides the information that the year 1900-1901 was a prosperous one for Bengal, that 40,000 people died of plague in North Bengal, and that a new system of advances for the growth of poppy had proven successful and was extended to all of the province. No mention is made of local self-government. The following year's Report did make a comment, and it was a telling one. District Boards were functioning satisfactorily. But, "The utility of the various Local Boards has been less marked, and in recent years the policy has been to abolish those formed for the Sadar Subdivisions of districts in cases in which such a course is recommended by the local authorities." About Union Committees, the Report was even more blunt: "Union Committees, with but few exceptions, have failed, through want of opportunity or desire to serve any useful purpose."[67]

Due to the partition of Bengal in 1905, some statistics are available which reveal to what degree local bodies had failed in the area that now forms much of East Pakistan. At the time of division, District Boards had been most successful: out of forty-two in the whole of Bengal, thirteen were in the eastern part of the province. Out of 104 Local Boards, twenty-seven were in East Bengal. In all of Bengal's 70,000 villages, just

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[67] Bengal Administration Report: 1901-1902 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1903), p. VIII, para. 33.

fifty-four Union Committees had been established; in East Bengal there were only nine.[68] Quite clearly, rural bodies had failed to develop to the point where they could govern themselves, or share the duties of administration. The problems of Ripon's day remained unsolved; his solution remained untried.

The Royal Commission upon Decentralization, 1907-1909

Bengal's situation was not unique. Nowhere in British India had local government taken firm root. In fact, in municipal areas, Bengal was probably a little ahead of other provinces. Literacy and political consciouness were relatively high. Rural Bengal, on the other hand, was still behind the other provinces. Little had happened to correct the problems caused by the absence of subordinate staff or village agencies. Meanwhile the partition of Bengal not only aroused fierce opposition, but also more clearly revealed the weak state of the administration. With the need for administrative reform everywhere still pressing, Parliament constituted a special inquiry commission composed of senior Indian Civil Service members.[69] It was appointed to consider the existing relations for financial and administrative purposes between the central and provicial governments "and the authorities subordinate to them;" to consider whether these relations could be simplified and improved "by measures of decentralization or otherwise," in order to adapt the system of government to meet the requirements and promote the welfare of the different provinces; and "without impairing its strength and unity to bring the executive power into closer touch with local conditions."[70] The Royal Commission upon Decentralization in India began its inquiry on 18 November, 1907.

Evidence was gathered throughout the subcontinent, until 1909. Then the Commission presented a series of proposals, some of which were aimed directly at improving rural administration. In broad outline, it was proposed that the subdivision become the primary unit of administration; that personnel be increased to operate the

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[68]Bengal Administration Report; 1905-1906 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press) p. XI, para. 36.

[69]C. E. H. Hobhouse, M. P. Undersecretary of State for India, Chairman; Sir Frederick Lely, KCIE, CSI; Sir Steyning Edgerly, KCVO, CIE, ICS; R. C. Dutt, CIE; W. S. Meyer, CIE, ICS; and W. L. Hichens.

[70]Report of the Royal Commission upon Decentralization in India (London: HMSO, 1909) Vol. I, p. 4.

smaller units; that efforts be made to create panchayats as the lowest level of administration; and that departmental efforts be coordinated by the civil administration for greater efficiency The Report thus moved along three fronts in an effort to correct longstanding administrative bottlenecks.

One effort was directed toward the extension of the civil administration below the district level.[71] The Decentralization Commission recommended that the subdivisional system be universally applied. The subdivisional officer should be a Collector of first instance, dealing with all revenue matters and subordinate officers beneath him, subject to appeal to the District Collector. Subdivisional officers therefore should dispose of all matters with which the tahsilder cannot deal; they should deal with the appointment and removal of village officers, and of junior clerks within the subdivision; they should hear appeals in criminal cases from second and third class magistrates; they should reside permanently within their charges. The tahsildars' position should also be strengthened. Where they deal with civil suits, they should be relieved of that duty. They should be the disposing officer for the subdivisional officer at his discretion and subject to his appeal. Financial and appointing powers, however, should not be delegated by the subdivisional officer to his tahsildars. As most tahsildars seemed overworked, they should be given larger powers, fewer judicial duties, and reduction in the size of their charges.

The Commission took special note of the peculiar condition existing in divided Bengal. Charges corresponding to tahsils of other provinces were absent, due to the land revenue settlement. Direct communication between the administration and the people was thus left to the police. The Commission therefore recommended the creation of a new subordinate agency of the civil administration: "We propose to remedy this by the creation of circles, within the subdivisions, which would be in the local charge of sub-deputy collectors, who would hold the same position here as the tahsildars elsewhere."[72]

A second effort was in the direction of creation of a series of local bodies.[73] The Commission proposed a three tier system. District Boards were to remain, but with somewhat diminished authority. Subdistrict boards were to be everywhere created, and were to be the primary agencies for local administration. They were to cover the area of a tahsil or taluka (thana) unless

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[71] Report of the Royal Commission upon Decentralization, Vol. I HMSO, 1909. Chapter XIV, "Sub-divisional and other Subordinate District Officers", pp. 303-304, paras. 55-65.

[72] Ibid, p. 304, para. 65.

[73] Ibid, "Village Organization", Chapter XVIII and "Rural Boards", Chapter XIX, pp. 306-308.

subdivisional boards already were in existence. At the lowest level, village panchayats were to be created, and "artificial" agencies such as unions and sanitation committees were to be abolished. District and sub-district boards were to have substantial elective elements, but be chaired by the District and Subdivisional officers. Panchayats were to be chaired by village headmen, and the other members informally elected. Each of the upper two levels was to have authority to pass on its own budget, have independent control within its jurisdiction, and be the appeal body for the body below it.

Except for two elements, these recommendations are distinctly Riponian. Lord Ripon had deliberately sought to remove official control from the local boards. He said in private correspondence:

> "The point of the resolution to which I attach most importance is that which relates to the District Officer and the Chairman...If the boards are to be of any use for the purpose of training the natives to manage their own affairs they must not be overshadowed by the presence of the Burra Sahib."[74]

The Decentralization Committee just as deliberately sought to maintain official control:

> "We deem it essential that the movement should be completely under the eye and hand of the district authorities. Supervision of affairs in the villages is, and should remain, one of the main functions of tahsildars and Subdivisional officers."[75]

A difference in emphasis can explain the difference in approach. Lord Ripon stressed the need for local bodies in order to relieve the administrators, and therefore equally stressed the need to make them effective by making them representative and responsible. The Decentralization Committee stressed only the former aspect.[76]

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[74]Quoted in Hugh Tinker, The Foundations of Local Self-Government in India, Pakistan, and Burma. (University of London, the Athlone Press, 1954), p. 46.

[75]Op.cit., p. 240.

[76]Ibid, p. 239.

A third effort by the Commission was to increase coordination by indicating clear lines of authority.[77] At the provincial level, Bengal's "Conference of Commissioners" was recommended for general adoption. At the divisional level, the Commissioners were to be given enlarged power and authority for coordination (rather than being abolished, as had been advocated). They were especially to be entrusted with the coordination of the work of the various special departments within their divisions. Commissioners were to be given full right to call for any information from the departmental officers. The departments were to supply the Commissioner with information "spontaneously" when new programs of importance were contemplated. The Commissioner's views were to be given fullest consideration. He should be able to veto any action of any department that he considered undesirable, subject to appeal to the Provincial Government.

The District Collector's office also was to be strengthened. He should be recognized as the head of the district in all administrative matters, with powers corresponding to those of the Commissioner. The universal application of the subdivision system would relieve the district officer of many detailed administrative duties, leaving him mainly as a supervisory, controlling and appellate authority. Therefore, he should be given a variety of powers which had been left to the Commissioner. "The general presumption should be that, in cases which come up to him, the Collector should be the deciding authority." Collectors should be given larger financial authority, and their office establishments improved. The Collector also would be the final authority in matters relating to village officers.

The Decentralization Commission's leisurely pace and cautious conclusions indicated no sense of urgency. The broadest proposals echo Ripon's Resolution made a full twenty-seven years earlier. The quarter of a century that had passed witnessed great change in the Indian scene, but little change in either administrative structure or attitude. The proposals for reform in the structure were well thought out but they made no provision for reform in attitude. As had happened earlier, implementation of the proposals was left to the provincial governments, which ultimately meant to the administrative staff. This was the group least likely to inaugurate major change. Paternalistic traditions of the 19th century lingered on into the 20th century.

The Indian Councils Act, 25 May, 1909

Winds of change began to stir the British authorities. The division of Bengal in 1905 caused unexpected political unrest.

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[77]Ibid, "Commissioners", Chapter XII, pp. 301-302, paras. 35-36 and "Collectors", Chapter XIII, pp. 302-303, paras. 46-51.

In the same year, the Indian National Congress, meeting in Benares, made a series of demands for increased representation in provincial legislative councils, and for these members' nominees to be included in the Council of the Secretary of State for India. On 1 November 1908, the fiftieth anniversary of direct rule by the Crown, the King-Emperor announced that representative institutions would be extended to the sub-continent. Meanwhile, a change of government in London brought an admirer of Lord Ripon to the post of Secretary of State, and a believer in administrative reform to India as Viceroy.

Before the Decentralization Commission released its report, Lord Morley, the new Secretary of State for India, made several announcements pertaining to local self-government. These subsequently became embodied in legislation, after lengthy correspondence with Viceroy Lord Minto, and heated debate in Parliament. The Indian Councils Act of 1909 was the end result. It was the heart of what are commonly known as the Morley-Minto Reforms. As indicated by its title and antecedents, the Act dealt with the enlargement of legislative councils by adding elected members. The operative section of the Act reads:

> "Be it enacted, as follows:
>
> The additional members of the Councils for the purpose of making laws and regulations (hereinafter referred to as Legislative Councils) of the Governor-General and of the Legislative Councils already constituted, or which may hereafter be constituted of the several Lieutenant-Governors of Provinces, instead of being all nominated by the Governor-General, Governor, or Lieutenant-Governor...shall include members so nominated and also members elected in accordance with regulations made under this Act."

The first Schedule of the Act provides that the maximum number of nominated and elected members should be fifty in the Legislative Council of the Bengal Division of the Fort William Presidency, and fifty for the Legislative Council of the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam.

Little of direct immediate relevance to rural administration was contained in the Act. From this view, the Decentralization Committee was far more important. The Council Reforms did mark the beginnings of a changed attitude, however. Partially, the Morley-Minto Reforms reflected Morley's Riponian antecedents; partially it reflected Minto's concern for more effective administration through improved provincial government--a continuation of cautious paternalism. The limited reforms also reflected a yielding to nationalist demands for more representative government. This was a new departure, later to have an impact on all phases of

British rule. For the first time, the elective principle was given legal recognition; the possibility of a non-official majority was raised; and the right to cross-examination on substantive administrative matters was given.

Under heavy fire in Parliament, especially from Lord Curzon, Secretary of State Morley stoutly denied that his proposals might lead to responsible government, perhaps even to Parliamentary government: "If my existence, either officially or corporeally, were prolonged twenty times longer than either of them is likely to be, a Parliamentary system in India is not the goal to which I for one moment would aspire."[78] In considerably less than twenty lifetimes, the subcontinent achieved Parliamentary government; in less than twenty years it took long strides in that direction. The Morley-Minto Reforms, though firmly anchored in the past, were the first hint of a major change in the offings.

The Government of India's Resolution on Local Self-Government Policy, 28 April 1915

The hint was not immediately taken. In 1910, the Decentralization Commission's proposals were remanded to provincial governments for discussion. Lord Morley then indicated that the time had come for a general review of the results obtained by the policy of Lord Ripon's government. After correspondence, the Government of India combined its view of the Commission's proposals with a comment on the main problems confronting local self-government. The resulting Resolution did little to indicate that effective measures would be taken.

The Resolution reported that, in general, both the provincial governments and the Government of India were in favor of the Decentralization Commission's proposals, and outlined each major point. It indicated that substantial progress and vitality existed everywhere. It also summarized the obstacles to progress:

> "The smallness and inelasticity of local revenues, the difficulty of devising further forms of taxation, the indifference still prevailing in many places towards all forms of public life, the continued unwillingness of many Indian gentlemen to submit to the troubles, expense and inconveniences of election, the unfitness of some of those whom these obstacles do not deter, the prevalence of sectarian animosities, the varying character of the municipal areas..."[79]

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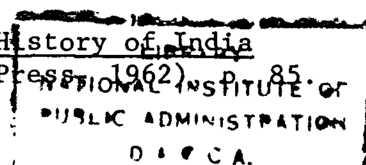
[78] C. H Phillips, Select Documents on the History of India and Pakistan, Vol. III. (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 85.

[79] Ibid, p. 95.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The total effect of the Resolution thus was only to hope that eventually Lord Ripon's proposals might be implemented, and it overlooked the possibility that their delay might have been caused by overcentralization and the nature of traditional administration.[80]

Due to this oversight, the Resolution confidently repeated the action of its predecessors: "With this general commendation, the Government of India are content to leave the matter in the hands of local Governments and Administrations." The Chief Secretary to the Government of West Bengal had already given clear indication what would happen to any reform measures left in his hands: "My feeling is that it is never sound in Indian Administration to go too fast."[81] Even the Lieutenant-Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam, who initiated the preparation of schemes that were to alter permanently Bengal's administration, said that he had "no wish to dabble in constitution-making experiments", and that he considered "that the necessity of very cautious measures, and of following approved and tried lines, is clearly indicated."[82]

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[80]See Tinker op.cit., pp. 97-98.

[81]Government of India, Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Royal Commission upon Decentralization in Bengal, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1908, p. 7, para. 82. Testimony of the Honorable Mr. E. A. Gait, ICS, Chief Secretary to the Government of (West) Bengal, 20 December, 1907.

[82]Government of India, Papers Relating to Constitutional Reform in India, Vol. III, Letter from Honorable Mr. A. C. Lyon, CSI, ICS, Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, to Secretary, Government of India, Camp Dacca, 14 March 1908, on behalf of Lieutenant-Governor Sir Lancelot Hart. (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing 1908) Ag. 1205.

Chapter 6

YEARS OF CHANGE: THE NATIONAL SCENE

The transitional years ended for the British Raj. The Resolution of 1915 was the last to be passed in a mood of relative relaxation. The Morley-Minto era was a mixed projection of the 19th century into the 20th. World War I ushered in a new era, for India as for the rest of the world. Over one million Indian soldiers joined the allied armies; one hundred million in pound sterling were given outright for the war effort. Freedom, liberty and self-determination were the concepts of the day, mobilizing nations and undermining empires. Within India, G. K. Gokhale, the National Congress leader who welcomed the Morley-Minto concessions as "large and generous" died in 1915. Leadership passed to B. G. Tilak, who had only recently been released from six years' imprisonment for incitement to violence. He joined with Mrs. Annie Besant's demand for immediate home rule.

Moreover, Islam suddenly sprang to life as a revolutionary political movement. Muslim leaders had held aloof from Congress and bhadralok[83] agitation. Turkey's misfortunes roused a pan-Islam movement that began to stir the subcontinent; in 1913 young members of the Muslim League successfully urged colonial self-rule as the new League Policy. As the war continued, it became clear that British forces were threatening the very existence of the Caliphate, the seat of authority for orthodox Islam. A large scale Khilafat movement emerged. Congress leaders quickly showed sympathy for the movement, and the two groups joined forces for the time being. In 1916, they held a conference and adopted a joint scheme for the extension of self-government. The British were thus faced with a coalition of two aggressive nationalist organizations, demanding reform.

The British, of course, had been promising reform. The councils established after 1909 were well received at first, until their weakness and India's new nationalism became apparent. In 1911, further reforms were indicated. The transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi had not been done in spite, the Government of India claimed. It was part of a long range plan urged by the Government. In a

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[83]Literally bhadralok means "big people". The term usually refers to educated middle and upper middle class Hindus.

dispatch to the Secretary of State, 25 August 1911, the issue of meeting nationalist demands was raised.[84] It was admitted that the "just demands" for a larger share in governing the country would have to be met. The question was how to make a devolution of power without impairing the supreme authority of the Governor-General in Council: "The only possible solution of this difficulty would appear to be gradually to give the Provinces a larger measure of self-government, until at last India would consist of a number of administrations, autonomous in all provincial affairs with the Government of India above them all, and possessing power to interfere in cases of misgovernment, but ordinarily restricting their functions to matters of Imperial concern." Moving the capital was seen as a step towards self-government, as all great Central Governments had separate capital sites. When this dispatch came under sharp criticism in Parliament, especially from Lord Curzon, it was specifically denied that federalism was a settled policy. It was seen as "simply the inevitable trend and tendency of things in India."[85] The inevitability of this trend did not show itself by government action, or by the Resolution of 1915. The Congress-League demands of 1916 were intended to encourage the inevitable.

Britain yielded the following year. A new Secretary of State for India was appointed, a known Radical. The need for change was widely recognized. Austen Chamberlain, the Conservative leader, prepared a policy statement on India. Lord Curzon put it in final form. On 20 August 1917, the Secretary of State, Edwin Montagu, rose in Commons to announce the new policy:

> "The policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire."

Formal acceptance of this goal was a major advance. Perhaps even more important was the rest of the statement: "They have decided that substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as possible." The Secretary of State accordingly left for India to discuss the issue personally with the Viceroy and others.

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[84]Cd. 5979, pp. 6-7. Printed in Phillips, Selected Documents, pp. 90-91.

[85]Lord Crewe's reply to Lord Curzon, Parl. Debates, H. L., Vol. II, Col. 243-4, Printed in Phillips, Selected Documents, pp. 92-93.

Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms, 1918

Montagu and a small party spent eight months touring the subcontinent. He and the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, prepared a report on their findings and conclusions. It was signed at Simla, 22 April 1918. Usually referred to as the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, it reviewed the evolution of British administration, commented on the intentions and contents of previous reforms, and made a series of proposals for future development. The whole Report was in keeping with the announcement of 20 August 1917, and with the changed attitude that announcement reflected. As usual, the introduction was a review of the background to the current problem. British administration was traced from its Mogul antecedents to the existing structure. Political events were analyzed, including the sudden growth of nationalism and the consequent need for a new look at existing relations. The Morley-Minto Reforms received careful scrutiny, to see if they were successful in their goal of associating the people, in a real and effective manner, in the work not only of occasional legislation, but of actual everyday administration.

The reformed Councils were found wanting: "No one can deny that as an embodiment of the representative principle, the present electoral system has great defects."[86] The franchise had remained greatly restricted; the work of calling into existence an electorate remained to be done. In both the central and provincial legislatures, the Government had enforced unanimity over the official members. The creation of an "official block" hindered the free working of the councils, and was irritating to both the officials and elected members. The new institutions began with good will on both sides, but lacked some prerequisites for success. No general advance was made in local bodies. Provincial finances were not really set free. No widespread admission of Indians to the public services took place, although there was some progress made. Provincial governments could not really affect financial and administrative matters, because the Government of India itself had not been released from Parliament's control. All of this led to a sense of unreality, which was deepened by the urge for elected members to gain moral victories rather than passing good legislation. The Report adds that the Councils had done much better work than might appear to critics. However, "they have

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[86] Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms, (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1918) p. 53.

failed to satisfy Indian opinion, and their continuance can only lead to a further cleavage between the Indian members and the government, and a further cultivation of criticism unchecked by responsibility."[87]

The Resolution of 1915 also was seen as a step in the right direction, and also to have failed to fulfill expectations; the existing system left responsibility for implementation to provincial governments, while initiative and resources were left with the Government of India. The structure once again led to ineffectiveness.[88] "The old structure does not admit of development," concludes the report. "All that could be done with it would be to increase the size of the non-official part of the councils--a step that would deprive those responsible for the government of the country of any power of obtaining necessary legislation. We must therefore create a new structure. That means time for the fresh material to form; real work for it to do, so that it may harden; and retention of genuine powers of guidance, supervision, and, if need be, of intervention, until such time as the task is complete."[89]

Change in the structure was not intended just for national and provincial levels, although most detailed attention was directed there. Part of the Report's findings were of direct relevance to rural administration. For over one hundred years, the system had primarily depended on the civil administration, particularly the Indian Civil Service. The civil service seemed to the authors of the Report to be in firm control. With the exception of the departments and some government officials, ICS members held almost all the positions of superior power. Its critics accused it of considering itself as the Government; "but a view which strikes the critic familiar with parliamentary government as arrogant is little more than a condensed truth."[90] The Indian Civil Service was trained to rule, to assume responsibility, to guide a government it considered as one with itself.

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[87]Ibid, p. 66.

[88]Ibid, p. 7.

[89]Ibid, p. 67.

[90]Ibid, p. 82.

In rural areas, especially, administration rested with the District Officer. He was found to be the central figure for rural education, dispensaries, sanitation, country roads, bridges, water supply, drainage, tree planting, veterinary work, ponds, fairs, ferries, etc. The system had worked well in some respects; a government officer was within reach of almost every inhabitant of the country. The system also had great defects. The District Officer was seriously overworked. He could not possibly control the whole system of government and closely supervise an army of subordinates. Despite utmost vigilance, petty corruption and oppression could not be prevented. Since people are slow to complain, they suffer rather than resist. "Strong as it is, the official system is too weak to perfect the enormous task before it without the cooperation of the people."[91]

The Report's solution is Riponian. It found that local self-government had failed to make itself effective in the rural areas. "The avowed policy of directing the growth of local self-government from without rather than within has, on the whole, been sacrificed to the need for results: and with the best intentions the presence of an official element on the boards has been prolonged beyond the point at which it would merely have afforded very necessary help, up to a point at which it has impeded the growth of initiative and responsibility."[92] The Report thus disagrees with the Decentralization Commission on the question of official chairman. The problem of an overworked administration could be met, at great expense, by decreasing the size of the districts and increasing the supervisory staff. But general improvement could not come until public opinion was aroused. "Clearly, our first and immediate task is to make a living reality of local self-government."[93]

In the proposals which followed the report's analysis, the greatest space was devoted to the suggested scheme of dyarchy. Provincial autonomy was to be fostered by extensive devolution of functions to the provinces, along with an expanded elective element in provincial councils, based on an expanded franchise. Election would be direct, rather than through the agency of local boards acting as electoral colleges, as was the case under the Morley-Minto reforms. The provincial governments were to be given taxation and legislative authority over certain fields which were "transferred" from the central government.

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[91] Ibid, p. 81.

[92] Ibid, p. 80.

[93] Ibid, p. 82.

Other subjects the government retained as "reserved" functions. Little more was said in detail about matters affecting rural administration. However, the whole new scheme rested on the assumption that responsible government should be extended progressively but gradually, starting at the lowest level and working upward. Thus, the four fundamental principles of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report are:

> 1. There should be, as far as possible, complete popular control in local bodies and the largest possible independence for them of outside control.
>
> 2. The provinces are the domain in which the earlier steps towards the progressive realization of responsible government should be taken. Some measure of responsibility should be given at once, and our aim is to give complete responsibility as soon as circumstances permit. This involves at once giving the provinces the largest measure of independence, legislative, administrative, and financial of the Government of India which is compatible with the due discharge by the latter of its own responsibilities.
>
> 3. The Government of India must remain wholly responsible to Parliament, and saving such responsibility, its authority in essential matters must remain indisputable, pending experience of the effect of the changes now to be introduced in the provinces. In the meantime the Indian Legislative Council should be enlarged and made more representative and its opportunities of influencing Government increased.
>
> 4. In proportion as the foregoing changes take effect, the control of Parliament and the Secretary of State over the Government of India and provincial governments must be relaxed.[94]

Local Self-Government Policy of the Government of India: Resolution No: 41, 16-5-1918

The Montagu-Chelmsford proposals were the most far-reaching that had yet been made. If accepted, they would pledge the British Government to granting India eventual self-rule; to the immediate

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[94]Ibid, pp. 123-125.

grant of extensive powers to provincial governments; to extending the necessary powers for the growth of responsible government; and to the withdrawal of most official control from local bodies. Local Self-Government would at last become "a living reality". The proposals were not the first to be made. Others were put forward and adopted, with little effect. Implementation had proven to be a bottleneck in the past. Without the cooperation of the Government of India, implementation could once again be delayed.

Early indications were disquieting. The Secretary of State attended a meeting on political agitation. Present were the people most important for the operation of the reform proposals; the Viceroy, Governors, and Lieutenant-Governors. "It was a gloomy proceeding", Montagu reported. If their opinions were right, then the whole reform proposals were wrong. "Their scheme dated from a day before Parliamentary institutions dawned in India". Montagu felt that these men must learn to be politicians, they must learn to defend themselves, instead of thinking of repressive measures. He complained they did not speak his language; that if their ideas were correct, "we need not discuss political reform any further."[95]

Apparently these difficulties were overcome. The new Resolution on Local Self-Government Policy, 1918 was submitted by the Government of India to the Secretary of State before publication, and received his approval. In its introduction, the Resolution repeated the declaration of 20th August 1917, and called attention to the Viceroy's subsequent comment in the Imperial Legislative Council, 5th September 1917:

> "His Excellency the Viceroy explained that there were three roads along which an advance should be made towards the goal indicated in the (Secretary of State's) pronouncement. Of these the first road was in the domain of local self-government, the village or rural board, and the town or Municipal Council. The domain of urban and rural self-government was the great training ground from which political progress and a sense of responsibility have taken a start and it was felt that the time had come to quicken the advance, to accelerate rate of progress and thus stimulate the sense of responsibility in the average citizen and to enlarge his experience."[96]

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[95]E. Montagu, An Indian Diary, pp. 215-217. Reported in C. H. Philips, Selected Documents, op.cit., pp. 265-266.

[96]Ibid, para. 4.

The Resolution was intended to indicate the steps now to be taken towards self-government.

As usual, the Resolution began with a quick review of pertinent history: Ripon's Resolution of 1882, and its subsequent neglect; the Royal Commission Upon Decentralization's inquiry of 1907-1909, and the following Government of India Resolution on Local Self-Government, 1915. In view of the declaration of the Secretary of State and the Viceroy, a new policy statement was necessary. The new policy reiterated old principles. The primary purpose of local self-government is to train the people in the management of their own local affairs. Political education must take precedence over departmental efficiency. Local bodies should therefore be as representative as possible of the people whose affairs are being administered. They should have real, not nominal authority entrusted to them. Control should be at a minimum, and Government should therefore withdraw unnecessary external control, and totally substitute external control for internal control. Greater use should thus be made of elected chairmen.

More specific proposals followed from these general principles. Substantial elected majorities should prevail in both municipal and rural boards. This was suggested by the Decentralization Commission and endoresed (rather mildly for rural boards) by the Resolution of 1915. The suggestion should now be accepted and carried out by local governments. As a corollary, the Government wished to add that the franchise should now be extended. The electorate for both municipal and rural boards reportedly was only six per cent. In contrast with both the Decentralization Commission and the 1915 Resolution, the Government now urged that wherever possible, chairmen of local boards be elected rather than official. Where appointment still was a necessity, it should be of a non-official. In addition, certain external controls should be relaxed, pertaining to budget, taxation, public works and local establishments.[97]

On the question of panchayats the Resolution also had suggestions. It noted that the Decentralization Commission devoted special attention to the establishment of panchayats as organs to develop corporate village life. The Resolution interpreted this to mean that panchayats were not to be agents of local self-government in Ripon's sense of the word. With this interpretation, the Resolution agreed: "The Government of India consider that...in respect of panchayats attention should

[97]Ibid, para. 5-20.

be confined either to individual villages or to villages which are so closely connected that their people habitually act together."[98] Moreover, on contradiction to the Resolution of 1915, panchayats should not have any clearly defined relationship with other administrative bodies; "indeed they should be kept apart as much as possible". The Resolution thus wanted to bring such local bodies into existence but not for any self-governing purpose at all; panchayats were "to develop village life". The Government of India therefore had no objection to other local bodies being organized, such as circles and unions, for local self-government purposes.[99] No particular recommendation was made for their establishment.

Actually, the Resolution left the whole question of agencies below the subdistrict (subdivisional) level rather unclear. Union Boards and Circles were seen as useful adjuncts of District and Local Boards, "relieving them of duties which can better be discharged by committees dealing with smaller areas". At the same time, panchayats were to be brought into totally separate existence. Any necessary legislation for their establishment was to be unconnected with acts relating to municipal or rural boards. Yet panchayats were to be assigned important duties of local government: village sanitation, health, ponds, education, and petty civil and criminal cases were to be turned over to them, along with possibly a portion of the land cess and even supplementary taxing power.[100]

Despite such occasional vagueness, the general message of the 1918 Resolution was clear. The Government of India deemed it time to proceed in the field of local self-government. Each of its points referred to previous suggestions and indicated it was now time to implement them, sometimes in altered form. The Government agreed that uniform application would be impossible, and was therefore willing to allow provincial governments to make modifications "in specific cases and for specific reasons." The Government would not, however, let the traditional excuse of local circumstances further delay implementation of reforms: "...in the absence of such specific occasions a substantial advance should now be made on the lines laid down."[101] London and Delhi were in agreement. The next step was up to the provincial governments.

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[98]Ibid, para. 20.

[99]Ibid, para. 24.

[100]Ibid, para. 23.

[101]Ibid, para. 3.

Chapter 7

YEARS OF CHANGE: BENGAL

Annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911 ended Curzon's experiment in reorganization, and left in suspension several schemes for administrative reform prepared by the short-lived government of Eastern Bengal and Assam.

The Levinge Report, 1913-1914

By order of 23rd October, 1913, the Government of Bengal convened a group of senior Civil Service Officers and charged them with the following specific duties:

> "To examine the conditions prevailing in the districts of Bengal; to compare them with those existing in other Provinces (more particularly in those areas in which the land revenue is permanently settled), and to report in what respects the administrative machinery can be improved, whether by the reduction of inordinately large charges, by the creation of new subordinate agencies or otherwise, with the special object of tax bringing the executive officers of Government into closer touch with the people."

The enquiry officially was known as the Bengal District Administration Committee, 1913-1914. Their Report took its informal title from its chairman, the Honorable Mr. E. V. Levinge, C.S.I., I.C.S., Member of the Executive Council, Bihar and Orissa.[102] It began work the following month, and submitted its Report in May, 1914. The Levinge Report was a landmark for Bengal's administration. Its findings amply documented the nature and dimensions of Bengal's difficulties. Its conclusions and recommendations provided specific remedies.

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[102]Other members: H. V. Lovett, C.S.I., Commissioner, United Provinces; N. D. Beatson Bell, C.I.E., Commissioner, Bengal; K. C. De, Collector, Bengal; C. E. Low, C.I.E.; E. N. Blandy, Assistant Collector, Bengal, Secretary.

The countryside was uneasy at the time, and had been for the previous ten years. Political discontent had crystallized into conspiracy and sedition. A religious revivalist movement laid the base for terrorism and nationalist demands. East Bengal was seething. An anti-British revolution was underway. The Report dealt with these activities in some detail.[103] Most of the trouble was perpetuated by young members of the Hindu middle class, the bhadralok. This group had been quick to take to English education. In the first few years of this century, they were stirred by Swami Vivekananda, whose teachings were designed to create a Hindu renaissance. Then came Japan's victory over Russia in the war of 1905, which gave a sharp fillup everywhere to Asian nationalism. Anti-British feeling was just coming to a head at that time in Bengal. The bhadralok as a group were strongly opposed to Viceroy Lord Curzon's educational policy, and to his proposed separation of East and West Bengal. These two measures succeeded in alienating rising Bengali nationalism, and led to the first mass anti-British demonstrations, to the Swadeshi movement, and to terrorism.[104] The Report comments "...when the partition came, it proved 'a match'...which set fire to a large quantity of combustible material."[105]

After the partition in 1905, the center of revolutionary activities shifted from Calcutta to Dacca. The new province was wracked with violence and the threat of violence.

A conspiratorial organization was formed in Dacca, the Anushilan Samity. Its avowed aim was "to shake the British Empire to its foundation." Its membership was young, Hindu, well-educated and fanatical. Its weapons were propaganda and terrorism. Branches spider-webbed the countryside, including an active Samity in Comilla. The Report's account of the

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[103] Bengal District Administration Committee Report, 1913-1914 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1915) Chapter II, pp. 3-19.

[104] Curzon badly misjudged Bengali and other nationalist sentiment. "My own belief" he said in 1900, "is that Congress is tottering to its fall and one of my great ambitions...is to assist it to a peaceful demise." His education measures called for increased nomination to educational boards, thus displacing educated Bengalis. His partition proposal upset both European and Hindu Bengali circles. Instead of helping Congress to its demise, he forced it into the streets, and therefore into becoming a mass movement. See Cambridge History of India, pp. 758-759.

[105] Op.cit., p. 4.

Comilla branch provides a good view of the organization's methods and effectiveness:

> "Trouble recommenced with a series of dacoities in the Bakergonj district. Then followed the arrest of a gang of political dacoits near Comilla and the Wari find of arms, when a quantity of ammunition, some jewelery taken in a recent dacoity and important documents were discovered. On the evening of the 14th January 1913, an informer was shot dead at Comilla in front of a leading pleader's house. No one attempted to seize the assassin, who escaped scot-free. A member of this Committee was informed by a respectable resident of the town that 'the apathy of the people was noteworthy...about a hundred boys of the town were mixed up in the affair.'"[106]

When the Dacca Samity was smashed, another organization replaced it and further political dacoities were perpetrated. East Bengal proved fertile ground for young revolutionaries.

Part of the reason for the receptiveness to revolutionary activity was attributed by the Levinge Report to the state of development of rural East Bengal: "Communications are more precarious, more scanty and more inefficient than those of any part of India known to us."[107] Mighty rivers traverse the whole area. The population is teeming, and mostly scattered in multitudes of villages. These villages are usually on the banks of a stream or marsh, built on whatever high ground is available. Houses are often hidden in thickets of bamboo, undergrowth, or fruit trees. Huge tracts of land are completely submerged during the rainy season, and only a few roads remain unsubmerged. "It is easy for wary dacoits to choose their time and prey, to effect their purpose and to disappear, leaving no tracks behind."[108]

A large part of the province's unrest was attributed to the state of administration in rural East Bengal. The Levinge Report came to a familiar conclusion, and documented it: "Altogether this difficult country, the most thickly populated rural part of

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[106]Ibid, p. 9.

[107]Ibid, p. 12.

[108]Ibid, p. 12.

India, was administratively starved."[109] The Committee's findings can be grouped into four headings:

1. Certain administrative units are unwieldy.

The Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam had been created as an administrative convenience. The Administration Committee found that units within the province were also difficult to manage. Mymensingh district was a case in point. A proposal to divide it had been made nearly forty years previously. Dacca and Chittagong Divisions combined totaled 17,432,146. Population density in parts of Dacca district exceeded 1,900 per square mile.[110]

The Committee pointed out that districts which had given the most trouble politically were the particularly large ones. "We have no hesitation in thinking that, had these districts years ago been divided into manageable areas, the campaign of sedition and dacoity would have met with less success. The political crimes would have been impossible in a well-managed, compact district, divided into police circles of a convenient size surrounded by other districts similarly organized."[111]

2. The Civil Administration is understaffed.

In the giant Mymensingh District there were no troops, no mounted police, and "a remarkable paucity" of civil servants. A covenanted officer in charge of a subdivision was an exception. In Dacca and Chittagong Divisions just before the partition, in October 1904, there were only twenty-five covenanted officers; twenty-one Europeans, four Indians. In January 1905 the number had risen to thirty-one; seven were Indians. By January 1908 there were still only thirty-nine and nine of these were young officers without full powers. In the same area in 1905, there were a total of twelve British police officers. The various government departments were similarly handicapped. The new province contained twenty-six million people and was divided into fourteen districts. The departments had a combined total of ninety-two Europeans stationed in them.

The Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam set about correcting this situation. It had strengthened the civil and police staff, and developed plans for the reform of Anglo-Vernacular schools (which had become centers for anti-government

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[109]Ibid, p. 16.

[110]Ibid, p. 17.

[111]Ibid, p. 18.

activity) and for the appointment of an increased number of officers at levels below the district. In 1911, the partition was annulled and these reform proposals were brought to a stop. They were remanded for further consideration due to the changed circumstances.

3. Subordinate agencies of the civil administration are lacking.

The Committee heard a steady stream of testimony indicating that government officers were out of touch with the people and circumstances within their jurisdiction. Bengal remained without a tahsildar staff, due to the Permanent Settlement of 1793. Decreasing the size of districts and increasing the number of covenanted officers would not in itself give the District Officers the same advantages of their counterparts in other provinces. "There are in Bengal no subordinate executive and magisterial officers corresponding to the Tahsildars of the United and Central Provinces, who belong to the people, live among the people, are embarrassed little by case-work and are continuously in contact with representatives of all classes."[112] Even where subdivisional officers were in residence, their case work was heavy and transfers frequent; "their tours are rather rushes out and back than marches from one village to another."

This problem was particularly acute in Eastern Bengal. The Committee found that systematic touring by officers in the interior of their charges was the exception rather than the rule. Very little camping was done. Testimony bore out this conclusion. The Commissioner of Dacca said that when he was in charge of Mymensingh District, he had seldom left the high road during a period of three years. The Collectors of Bakerganj, Dacca and Mymensingh agreed that the pressure of work kept them from touring. Subdivisional officers had the same complaints. The Collector of Bakerganj added that the use of greenboats tended to keep tours confined to certain fixed lines of waterways, and thus rendered them unfruitful. The Collectors of Faridpur and Dacca felt the widespread absence of inspection bungalows was a primary factor for the deficiency of touring; in East Bengal, tent camping is impossible during much of the year.[113] "The result is", concludes the Committee in language reminiscent of an earlier report, "that the only representatives of Government with whom the people come into contact outside the courts and offices at headquarters, are the thana police, who are neither a popular agency nor a suitable link in the chain between the people and the District officers."[114]

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[112]Ibid, p. 19.

[113]Ibid, pp. 27-73, para. 92.

[114]Ibid, p. 74, para. 93.

4. Local self-government had generally failed in Bengal.

Evidence presented to the Decentralization Commission had given a general view of the failure of local bodies to develop, either as agents of rural administration or as expressions of local ability. The Levinge Report corroborates this view in some detail. It found, as had its predecessors, that village organizations had disappeared in Bengal, due to the Permanent Settlement. It noted that the only existing local institutions were those "artificial" ones created by the British--the Chaukidari Panchayats and Union Committees. The history and weaknesses of each are presented. As one of the few such accounts available, it is worthy of attention.

Chaukidari Panchayats, created by Act VI of 1870, had been successfully established throughout the Presidency. Unlike the Panchayats existing elsewhere in India, these bodies were not village-based, but covered small groups of villages not otherwise organically bound. The union seemed to be small enough, however, to be managed by the panchayats, and the expanded area gave more scope for selecting members. "The system has been accepted by the people, and all whom we have consulted agree that, instead of attempting to introduce any radical change, it will be wiser to utilize existing materials."[115] The need for change was obvious. It was as clear to the Administration Committee as to the Decentralization Commission that any agency whose only job is to assess and collect taxes is not likely to be popular. For the previous thirty years, reports had repeatedly drawn attention to the difficulty in inducing the most influential men to serve on the Panchayats.

Several suggestions for reforms had been made. Two Committees on police reform, in 1882 and in 1890, recommended removing the taxing power and introducing elections. The chaukidari tax would be collected by a separate agency composed of paid local officers. Members of the panchayat would then be chosen in a formal election, subject to the approval of the District Magistrate. These proposals both met with heavy opposition, and were abandoned. In 1902-03, the subject was renewed by the Indian Police Commission. It also found that Bengal's panchayats had been a comparative failure. In addition to reasons noted by the other police commissions, it said that the failure was partly caused by lack of interest in the panchayats by District Officers. Drawing on the example of more successful panchayats elsewhere in the subcontinent, it recommended that the powers of panchayats be gradually expanded, that petty criminal cases be turned over to them, and that village headmen be actively involved.[116]

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[115] Ibid, p. 76, para. 95.

[116] Ibid, pp. 77-78, para. 95.

From these suggestions came an interesting footnote in the history of Bengal's local government. In 1904, Presidency panchayats were introduced in selected places in the province. The intention was to raise the prestige of the panchayat by increasing the prestige of its president. The unpleasant duty of collecting taxes was transferred to a member of the panchayat nominated by the other members. The President was invested with certain powers under the Criminal Procedure Code (Sections 64, 127, and 128), including the right to arrest persons committing offences in his presence, and to order the dispersal of unlawful assemblies. Various other miscellaneous local duties were assigned to him, and he had the right to communicate directly with the District Magistrate, and to have the chaukidars parade in front of him.

The Levinge Report considered these to be steps in the right direction, as they involved the panchayats in activities besides regulating chaukidars, and increased the attractiveness of serving on the panchayats. However, two serious weaknesses remained. The presidency panchayat system did not go far enough in giving real responsibility to the panchayats, and the panchayats lacked adequate supervision. It was clear that the Presidency panchayats were failing: "although the presidents were in many cases willing and able, they were groping in the dark, and, in the absence of the supervision which was so essential to the success of the system, their early struggles for more light soon degenerated into the apathy springing from neglect."[117]

Union Committees were showing even less signs of life. Those formed while the Bill of 1883 was under discussion were not heard of after the passage of the Act of 1885. It was decided to wait until the larger bodies, which were more important under the revised scheme, were working properly. In 1889, there was discussion about utilizing Union Committees as an agency for improving village sanitation. No action was taken until 1894. On 4 January 1894, the Bengal Government issued an order that one or two Union Committees be established in each subdivision of Presidency, Burdwan, Dacca and Chittagong Divisions.[118] Again little action was taken. A threatened water famine in 1896-97 renewed the discussion, and suggestions were made to levy taxes to spend on sanitation, water supply, and other aspects of village improvement. The Government of India did not favor the idea, and a famine the following year diverted attention from the subject. In 1904 the proposal was renewed. The Levinge Report notes that at that time there were

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[117]Ibid, p. 79, para. 96.

[118]Bengal Government Resolution No: 3600 L.S.G.

a total of fifty-eight Union Committees in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Their areas varied from one and a quarter to fifty square miles; population varied from 4,004 to 85,555. Their total combined expenditure for 1903 came to Rs. 18,000.00 most of which had been granted by District Boards. Since their creation, they had managed to raise only Rs. 339 by local contributions; "the Committees were admittedly of very little use."[119]

In 1908 an amending act (Act V, B.C.) added wider powers to the Union Committees for improving village snaitation. (This Act did not apply to East Bengal until 1914, after the partition had been rescinded.) Little advantage was taken of these powers. The Levinge Report says "of the 61 Union Committees in existence in 1913...few are doing any useful work." Their expenditure in that year amounted to Rs. 35,484. District Boards contributed Rs. 31,412 of this amount. The taxing power permitted under Section 118C of the amending act yielded only Rs. 3,685. Of the 61 Committees, 50 realized nothing at all from local taxation. At the end of 1913, the combined closing balance of the Committees was Rs. 14,000.[120]

Several conclusions were drawn from the apparent failure of Union Committees. Fault could be attributed to their lack of clearly defined obligatory duties; the existence of other bodies doing similar work; the reluctance of District Boards to allocate funds; and discussion but no action by the Government to correct these situations. However, the Report considered the chief reason for the Union Committees' failure resulted from the changes made in the Bill of 1883. The Union Committees were deprived of a definite place in the scheme of local self-government. The Report made its opinion clear and emphatic:

> "We think it was a mistake to make the District Board the administrative unit of local self-government, and to leave the smaller bodies dependent on its charity and with no clearly defined position in the general scheme. This was to begin local self-government at the wrong end, for the system ought to start from the bottom and work up, as was originally intended in 1883, rather than from the top and work down."[121]

Serious debate on fundamental issues began anew, after a lapse of thirty long years.

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[119]Op.cit., p. 84, para. 100.

[120]Ibid.

[121]Ibid, p. 83, para. 99; pp. 84-85, para. 101.

Detailed proposals for administrative reform followed naturally from these conclusions. Unwieldy administrative units and paucity of staff were treated as two aspects of one problem. Rather than increase the number of positions such as Assistant Deputy Magistrates, the Report firmly recommended the reorganization of some existing units into a more compact and manageable size. Each would have its own regular administrative staff. An examination of their exact suggestions would be of interest to students of East Pakistan's administration; some of them are still being debated. It is possible here to provide only a summary. "The district and the sub-divisional boundaries are not sacrosanct," declares the Report, "and the sooner this is realized the better."[122] Therefore, in what is now East Pakistan, it was proposed that Mymensingh should be divided into three districts and the subdivisions increased from three to nine.[123] Dacca and Bakerganj should both be divided into two districts and their subdivisions each increased from four to six. Tippera, Faridpur and Pabna should each open a new subdivision. All of these proposals should be implemented "at once", the Report indicated. They should not wait until the introduction of other proposed reforms or the construction of masonry buildings.[124]

The Levinge Report also linked the remaining two problems, with permanent consequences for the future of Bengal's administration. Absence of subordinate agencies and the failure of local government were seen as two aspects of the same basic problem. Members of the Committee were convinced that the magnitude of the difficulties required fundamental changes, and they proposed a major reorganization in the management of rural affairs. Their findings clearly showed that the government was out of touch with local conditions, and that local self-government had neither the supervision nor responsibility to make it a success. Their suggested remedy fused these two elements. The Committee moved in a pure evolutionary manner, building carefully from the past. By combining supervision with responsibility, however, a new element was injected into the old dialogue on how best to govern rural Bengal.

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[122]Ibid, p. 38, para. 53.

[123]Current government maps of East Pakistan do indeed show Mymensingh divided into three districts: Tangail, Nasirabad, and Quaidabad; however, as of this writing, Mymensingh still remains one large, unwieldy district, with a population of over seven million. The first proposal for its division was made by Sir Richard Temple in 1876.

[124]Ibid, p. 40, para. 54.

There were immediate antecedents for the Levinge proposals. The starting point was the Royal Commission upon Decentralization. Paragraph 601 had suggested the formation of Circles within subdivisions; Paragraphs 699-702 suggested that village panchayats should be constituted. On 22 March 1910, the Government of India asked the provincial governments to express their views on these proposals. Both the Governments of Bengal and of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam responded with schemes for implementation. The Government of West Bengal preferred to move cautiously, and recommended a slow extension of the President panchayat system. Police Administration Reports of 1909 and 1910 severely criticized the system for causing laxity in law enforcement. The Government of India in June and July of 1911 advised that steps be taken to remedy the system's defects, and commended the introduction of a "Circle System". The Government of West Bengal complied by deputing a special officer to oversee the experimental introduction of Sub-Deputy Collectors into selected areas where the Presidential panchayat system was in effect. The new officers were charged with the duty of controlling and guiding the Presidents. Ten such officers began working after the idea was approved in a Commissioners Conference in October 1911.

The Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam presented a much more detailed plan, prepared by the First Member of the Board of Revenue. It called for the Circle Officers to live in their circles rather than at headquarters, and for a fusion of the Union Committees and Chaukidari Panchayats, to avoid friction between the two bodies. It was to have been introduced in Barisal Sadar, Nator, and Chandpur, but the reconstitution of Bengal Province intervened. The Lieutenant-Governor of the divided province of West Bengal became the head of the reconstituted province, and he dropped the scheme advocated by the former Government of East Bengal and Assam. Instead, the more cautious Circle System was extended experimentally to several areas in East Bengal (including Comilla). A special officer was again deputed to oversee the experiment. His report was presented a week before the Administration Committee began its investigation, and the Committee was given specific instructions to consider the experiments.[125]

The experiments were found wanting, but hopeful; defects existed but could be corrected. Circle Officers had been assigned to posts but not given clear duties. The experiments had been too cautious to accomplish anything. "In our opinion", the Report says, "no real system has so far been introduced, least of all a Circle System."[126] Yet great merit was seen in the full introduction of such a scheme.

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[125]Ibid, pp. 103-109, paras. 116-123 and J. N. Gupta, I.C.S., Report on the Experimental Introduction of the Circle System into Selected Subdivisions of the Presidency of Bengal (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1914), paras. 1-13.

[126]Op.cit., p. 106, para. 119.

"We ourselves are entirely convinced of the soundness of the 'Circle System' proposed by the Eastern Bengal and Assam Government, and we can see no better way of introducing a real system of village administration, and of making the members of the panchayats useful alike to their fellow villagers and to the Government."[127] The Committee added some modifications to the original plan, then presented its proposals. The revised "Circle System" was to be composed of a subordinate level government officer living within a compact charge, supervising the activities of new local bodies which were to be entrusted with enhanced powers.

The Report had definite opinions about the proposed new subordinate post. It should be occupied by a Sub-Deputy Collector with magisterial powers, to be known as a Circle Officer. Each Officer should remain in his circle for five years. He should be supplied with a free house, a clerk and two peons. No travel allowance should be given for journeys within the circle, but a local allowance of Rs. 75.00 per mensem should be provided. Hard work would be expected. The Circle Officer should tour not less than twenty days per month, and visit each union at least once a month. Various duties could be assigned him: control of stamp vendors, enquiries connected with excise, income tax, land acquisition, agricultural loans, compilation of statistics, and other miscellaneous duties that the District and Subdivisional officers might wish to make over to him. The Report especially emphasized three aspects of the Circle Officer's work; he was in no way to be considered connected to the staff at headquarters, to become desk-bound; the circle itself should be small enough to permit personal supervision, perhaps no larger than a revenue thana; and the primary function of the Circle Officer was to be supervision of the proposed new rural administration system. The Circle Officer himself was a key element in that system.[128]

The first step in correcting previous defects was the creation of the Circle Officer post; local bodies would now be given necessary supervision. The next step was to enhance the powers of local bodies by giving them real responsibility for local affairs. To do so, a new basic unit should be created. The plan proposed by the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam advocated fusing existing Union Committees with Chaukidari Panchayats. The Levinge Report went farther. It envisioned a combined panchayat that would have sufficient authority "to secure the performance of those functions essential to village

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[127] Ibid, p. 106, para. 119.

[128] Ibid, pp. 125-129, paras. 148-152.

municipal life." Positive responsibility was to be added to the negative duties of chaukidari revenue collection. Specific recommendations were made to give Union Panchayats police and chaukidari, judicial, executive, and local self-government functions. A secretary (munshi) and a fixed portion of the Public Works cess would be provided. The Union Panchayat was no longer to be an honorary body performing minor and unpleasant tasks. It was to become a representative body dispatching duties of most importance to village life.

The Union Panchayat was also to be an integral link in rural administration. The committee's proposals were designed to reverse the error it felt was imbedded in the Act of 1885, which "started local self-government at the wrong end". A three-tier system was again envisioned, but with primary responsibility located at the lowest level, resting with the new Union Panchayats. Unions should be mapped out in each district, on an average of ten to twelve square miles in size, and encompassing entire revenue mouzas (units). The five to nine members were to be two-thirds elected, by wards. The other third should be appointed by the District Magistrate, to ensure membership of persons qualified to deal with the panchayat's judicial functions. Since Local Boards had been found ineffective, they should be abolished. District Boards could not provide adequate supervision, however, so new boards should be constituted at the circle level. The Circle Boards would be composed of 15 members, two-thirds of whom would be elected by members of the Union Panchayats from among their number. The other third would be nominated by the District Magistrate. Unlike the old scheme, Circle Boards would be bodies of control, and Union Panchayats would not be optional appendages of the District Board. The union level agencies were designed to be "the real working bodies."[129]

On the remaining aspect of rural administration, the working of the nation building departments, the Committee also had a brief comment. It was in keeping with the whole tone of the Report's firm attitude, and belief in the importance of local self-government: "We are convinced that it is only in the wholesale extension of the system of Union Committees under close and careful supervision, and in the proper use by them of the powers which the law gives them, not in the multiplication of departmental agencies, such as Sanitary Inspectors and the like, that any real progress is possible."[130]

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[129]Ibid, p. 123, para. 143.

[130]Ibid, p. 87, para. 103.

The Levinge Report had weaknesses. The relationship between the District Magistrate, District Board, Circle Board and Union panchayats was not fully explained. Taxing power and independent income for Union panchayats was not fully dealt with. Nevertheless, the Report inquired thoughtfully and in detail into the problems of rural administration. Moreover, special reference was given throughout to the problems of East Bengal. The Committee spent much of its time there, called many witnesses from there, and based its most important suggestions on reports made by officers there. Munshiganj and Tippera Districts were suggested starting points for the new Circle system. It would be more than thirty years before either theory or East Bengal would receive such attention again.

The Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919

A Bill for extending local self-government was introduced into the Bengal Legislative Council several weeks before the Government of India's Resolution on Local Self-government, 1918. Sir S. P. Sinha (subsequently Lord) brought a Bill forward on 24 April, 1918. It was referred to a Select Committee for further consideration. Sir Henry Wheeler reported for the Select Committee on 21 January 1919. Shortly afterward the recast Bill became Act V of 1919, Bengal Code. While the passage of the Act may have reflected the spirit of the Resolution of 1918, and the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, the Act's contents were clearly inspired by the Levinge Report.

During the years just prior to the new Act, local bodies had undergone rapid growth. In 1904, there were only fifty-eight Union Committees in Bengal. By the beginning of 1917, the number had risen to 156, and by the end of that year to 198. By the time the village self-government Act of 1919 was passed, there were 383 Union Committees. Within two years of the Act's passing the number had increased sharply, to 2,000.[131] Before 1919 these were all nominated bodies, but their increase showed interest on the part of the provincial government. In the same period, experiments were also conducted in freeing local bodies from official control. In 1916, a non-official was appointed Chairman of the Murshidabad District Board in place of the District Magistrate--the first time that the option to do so had been exercised since the local Self-Government Act of 1885 was passed. Murshidabad and four other

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[131]a. Naresh Chandra Roy, Rural Self-Government in Bengal (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1936), pp. 143-144.

b. The Administration of Bengal Under the Earl of Ronaldshay, 1917-1922 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1922), p. 67.

c. Report of the Administration of Bengal, 1921-1922 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1922), p. 82, para. 156

Boards were then given the right, in 1917, of electing their own chairmen. Since the "experiment was followed by no disastrous results", the privilege was expanded to fifteen more Boards in 1920, and to the remaining Boards in 1921.[132] Self-government in Bengal thus moved ahead of other provinces, after years of trailing behind.

The close relationship between the Levinge proposals and the Act of 1919 was not, of course, mere coincidence. A Bill to give effect to the Levinge recommendations was prepared shortly after the Report's publication. When a new Lieutenant-Governor was appointed on 26th March, 1917, he found the Bill "on the stocks". A tour of his new charge impressed him with the unhealthy conditions existing everywhere, and the absence of any local organization to deal with the problems, or to act as a link between the district administration and the people. He then proceeded to press for the Village Self-Government Bill, "of which he claimed to be the foster father."[133] Sir S. P. Sinha accordingly introduced the Bill in 1918, then left to join Lloyd George's Coalition Ministry as Undersecretary of State for India. The Bill was then turned over to the care of Sir Henry Wheeler, who effected some changes in it while in the Select Committee. He was opposed to the sudden abolition of Local Boards, and was therefore also opposed to the creation of Circle Boards. With the creation of the new Union Boards, he felt the subdivisional bodies would have more to do. Circle Boards would thus be superfluous.[134] The recast Bill passed without other serious modification.

The Village Self-Government Act initiated the second major attempt to create a network of self-governing bodies in rural Bengal. Existing agencies, the Chowkidari panchayats and Union Committees were abolished by the Act, and replaced by a new body, the Union Board (Articles 2, 5 and 6). As this action had been anticipated since the publication of the Levinge Report, the Union Committees that had been organized since 1916 all were made co-terminous with the Chowkidari panchayats. Panchayati unions had been created in every district under the Act of 1870. They were intended each to cover a compact area of ten to twelve

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[132] Bengal Administration Report, 1921-22, ibid, p. 83.

[133] The Administration of Bengal Under the Earl of Ronaldshay, op.cit., p. 63. The Earl's full name was Lawrence John Lumley Dundas.

[134] N. C. Roy, op.cit., pp. 144-145.

square miles, with a population of 6,000 to 8,000 people. Unions did not divide revenue units, mourzas, and where possible were not themselves divided by swamps or large rivers. These units were deemed proper for the Union Boards as well, although they were to be first examined to see if alterations were desirable.[135]

Each Union Board was to be composed of not less than six nor more than nine members, the exact number being fixed by the provincial government. Not more than one-third of the members could be nominated, guaranteeing at least a two-thirds elected majority. Nominated members were to be chosen by the District Magistrate. Election was to be by all males over twenty-one in the union who had paid at least a rupee land tax, and at least another rupee tax assessed by the new Board or old Chowkidari panchayat. The chairman of the Union Board was to be elected from among its members. (Articles 6, 7, and 8.)

The new unit was to have the combined duties and powers of the two agencies it displaced. Primary functions were to be supervision of the chowkidars; maintenance of sanitation and health conditions, maintenance of roads, bridges, and waterways; establishment and maintenance of schools and dispensary, at its discretion; and to supply information as needed to the District and Local Boards. (Articles 26-33)[136] In addition to receiving grants from the higher bodies, the Union Boards were required to levy a yearly union rate, at a high enough level at least to pay for its chowkidars. The tax was to be on owners or occupiers of buildings. No more than eighty-four rupees could be assessed to any person. Anyone judged by the Union Board to be too poor to pay a half anna per month could be exempted. (Articles 37 and 38.)

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[135]In addition to N. C. Roy's book already mentioned, an excellent source of information about the Act of 1919 is S. G. Hart's Self-Goverment in Rural Bengal (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar and Sons, 1927). The author was a member of the I.C.S. in Bengal. Although privately published, his book was intended to be a handbook for officers involved in the operation of the new law. Not only is the act presented as originally passed, it is also thoroughly and authoritatively annotated. The information used above is from an annotation on page ten.

[136]At its discretion, the provincial government could also select two or more members of Union Boards and constitute a Union Bench or Union Court to try a wide variety of minor offenses. Fines up to Rs. 25.00 could be levied, and defaulters sent to jail for seven days (Articles 65, 72, and 73).

Control of the Union Boards could be exercised in several ways. Levinge's proposal for the creation of a Circle Officer's post was given legal sanction. The primary obligation of the new officer was to guide the work of the Union Boards, and be a link between the district board, district magistrate and the thana police. Each Circle Officer was put in charge of two or more thanas, comprising twenty-five or more unions.[137] Under the Village Self-Government Act of 1919 he was to see that proceedings of the Union Boards were in conformity with the law, and he could be delegated further powers by the District Board, District Magistrate, or the Local Board. (Articles 51-53.) Books, proceedings, and records should be open at all times to the chairmen of either superior board and to Commissioners or District Magistrates.

Control of the Union Boards differed from the Act of 1885 in other respects than the Circle Officer's role. As noted, the Levinge Report's proposal for the creation of Circle Boards as primary administrative units was not accepted. Instead, Local Boards were to be given control over Union Boards. (Article 50.) The battle in the Select Committee in 1918 was meant to reverse the battle lost in the Select Committee of 1883. However, the logic of Sir Henry Wheeler's agreement was not rigorously pursued. The Act of 1919 did not strip the district of any administrative functions. Article 58 gave the District Magistrate the authority to suspend any order or act of a Union Board, on the same grounds as did the Act of 1885: that such act or resolution might cause injury or annoyance to the public, or lead to a breach of the peace. The difference in the Acts is in the added provision that the District Board might also be a contravening authority.

The Act of 1919 thus took some major steps, and left remaining a few ambiguities. The village was definitely abandoned as a unit of administration, in favor of a small union of villages. A new local body was brought into existence, replacing unpopular and ineffective predecessors. The new unit was given expanded powers, an independent income, and a specially established class of government officers to provide supervision and guidance. Moreover, the establishment of the new agencies was made mandatory. Once the Act was declared in effect in a given area, and unions created, Union Boards were to be established. However, an important question remained: was local self-government being imposed from the top down, or growing from the bottom up? Bengal was to have a three tier system of rural local bodies. The relationship between them was not made clear. A definite answer on the primary locus of decision-making had not been provided.

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[137] S. G Hart, op.cit., p. 6.

TWENTY YEARS UNDER THE REFORMS

Local government seemed nearly a forgotten subject by the third decade of this century. Most attention had shifted elsewhere. Agitation during the first decade reached official ears in muted tones, and led to the muted reforms of 1909. The ripples of nationalism swelled into a tide in the second decade, and moved the British to promise eventual responsible government. The tide reached a crest in the 1920's and 1930's, and threatened to sweep all before it. Talk no longer was of political education and gradual evolution. Nationalists now demanded independence, and were prepared to take action to achieve it. The British tried to find a way to check the current, yet not drown in the attempt. Improved rural bodies and local reforms would not suffice. Demands were at provincial and national levels, and it was at these levels that further steps had to be taken.

Constitutional advance was to have taken place in carefully measured stages. The 1919 Government of India Act called for a statutory commission to be established after ten years. It was to have examined the working of dyarchy, and to make appropriate recommendations for further advance. Only five years passed, however, before dyarchy received its first critical examination. The Reforms Inquiry Commission of 1925 divided sharply in its opinion. A majority of five, headed by Chairman Sir Alexander Muddimar (the Home Minister), felt dyarchy had not yet been proven either a success or failure. A minority of four, including M. A. Jinnah, felt dyarchy was a manifest failure, and demanded major changes. Pressure on the British increased. After another three years, Parliament decided it could wait no longer, and amended the Government of India Act of 1919 so that a Commission could be established "within" rather than "at the end of" ten years. The Indian Statutory Commission was thus established.

The Indian Statutory Commission

What had happened to force the British pace? The Act of 1919 was passed in the teeth of an outburst of violence; Gandhi's first passive resistance campaign degenerated into mob action in the Punjab and Gujurat, and was met with an act of senseless brutality at the Amritsar Massacre. It was an inauspicious beginning for the proposed reforms. Elections to the new councils were scheduled for August 1920. Gandhi regrouped his Hindu-Sikh-Muslim coalition, took control of Congress machinery, and launched a non-cooperation

movement. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were considered too small a move toward real independence, and an attempt to divert attention from the nationalist struggle. Non-cooperation was designed to wreck the Reforms by boycotting the elections. The attempt failed; a group of Moderates splintered off from the Swarajists and entered the new ministries. The movement faltered as the councils sustained themselves, and nearly ended when Gandhi was arrested in 1922. When second elections were scheduled in 1923, a new tack was attempted. Congress decided to destroy the Reforms by standing for elections, then obstructing the operation of Government. Despite the beginning of Muslim-Hindu antagonism, the attempt was quite successful. The Swarajists operated from within the Government, and demanded self-rule as a price for cooperation. Britain's haste in appointing the Statutory Commission in 1927 did not mollify nationalist opinion; there was no representative from the sub-continent appointed to its membership. Communalism and a moderate faction weakened non-cooperation within the councils, but the movement as a whole gathered renewed energy. Gandhi rejoined Congress, and in 1930 defied British law by marching to the sea at Nandi to make salt. The Indian Statutory Commission report coincided with the launching of the Civil Disobedience campaign.

Bengal did not remain aloof from the political agitation. It was one of the centers of the struggle, and closely mirrored the national scene. Non-cooperation in the first elections failed to prevent ministries from being formed, but measures could be passed only with difficulty. Swarajist tactics were more successful in the second elections. C. R. Das led a group of forty-three candidates to victory, the largest single party in the legislature. They all refused to accept ministerial posts, and moved to block as many activities as possible. They were more successful in the Bengal Council than anywhere else. Budgets were defeated for both transferred and reserved ministries, and dyarchy nearly collapsed. Meanwhile, political crimes resumed in 1924. Communalism and personal rivalries weakened the Swarajists in the elections of 1927 and 1929, but ministries still could be formed only after prolonged negotiation.[138]

Sir John Simon, as Chairman, presented the Statutory Commission's Report. Provincial dyarchy was to terminate. Unitary governments were to be elected in each province, under an increased franchise. A federal system was to be established at the Center, with membership partially elected by the Provincial Councils, and partially nominated. The Chief Executive would remain the Governor-General in Council. In effect, near autonomy was granted in the provinces, but not at the center. Both volumes of the Simon Commission Report were dominated by consideration of nationalist demands (although the nationalists themselves later rejected the recommendations). The communal issue also tore through the volumes like a jagged scar. Local self-govern-

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[138] Government of India, Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, (I.S.C.) Vol. I; Calcutta, 1930, pp. 205-207.

ment was discussed, but no recommendations were put forth; there was no demand made at that level. Both the Civil Service and the departments were discussed, but not in regard to extension or coordination; the issue was the degree of "Indianization."[139]

Much was happening, however, beneath the swirl of national events. In Bengal, the Village Self-Government Act of 1919 came into full force. The first twenty years of the rural boards existence was a formative period. Trends emerged which influenced later developments. Questions which remained from past experiments were at least partially answered. When the issue of independence was settled, governing the largely rural province again came to the fore; experience gained during the dyarchy years and after was taken as a guide, and thus warrents attention here.

Role of the Circle Officer

As noted, a major innovation of the Levinge Report was the proposed creation of the Circle Officer's post. In initially accepting the proposal, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal defined the officer's role in these terms: "His primary function will of course be to watch over and guide (rather than to inspect and control) the presidents in their official business. It will be for him to establish friendly relations with the presidents, and to deal with them as far as possible, in a personal manner and on a footing of equality." The Chief Secretary also appended a long list of functions "in respect of which he will be required to exercise supervision, and to act as the direct official superior of the presidents and his channel of communication with the higher authorities."[140] The Village Self-Government Act omitted the concept of Circle Boards, but accepted the concept of Circle Officers. An attempt was thus to be made to solve the province's long standing need for a subordinate government agency, and to vitalize local self-government by providing it with guidance and supervision.

The experiment took firm root. From the outset, the Circle Officers played an active role in implementing the Village Self-Government Act. They helped form the unions themselves, then were

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[139] I.S.C., II, pp. 311-315. A study has recently been published which gives a thorough account of the recommendations made by various commissions on the reform of the Civil Service. See M. A. Chaudhury, The Civil Service in Pakistan, National Institute of Public Administration, Dacca, 1963, especially Chapters III and IV.

[140] Memo to Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, No. 1403P, March 19, 1913, quoted in Md. Anisuzzaman, The Circle Officer (Dacca: National Institute of Public Administration, 1963), pp. 16-17. This volume gives a review of the Circle Officers' past and present role

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responsible for sub-dividing them into electoral wards. Circle Officers proved instrumental in all phases of the elections, and were apparently equally active in general supervision. N. C. Roy reports that many non-officials distrusted the Circle Officers, and wanted them reduced in number or the post abolished. Roy disagreed. Writing in 1936, he concluded "The agency of the Circle Officer is therefore now essential for supervising purposes."[141]

In this comment, he was echoing an official opinion of the Government of Bengal made in 1927. The Simon Commission asked each of the provinces to prepare a report on the working of the Reforms. The only complaint the Bengal provincial government had about Circle Officers was the shortness of their supply. Union Boards could not be established faster because Circle Officers had to be recruited in large numbers, "and new boards could only be started as the services of these officers becomes available." As intended by the Levinge Report, the Circle Officer was found to spend most of his time on tour, and was acting as "guide, philosopher and friend" to the Boards. Creation of the new post apparently was a classic case of a solution fitting a need. Within eight years of their official recognition, the government proclaimed them an integral part of Bengal's rural administration: "The Circle Officer was to be, and has actually proved to be an important, perhaps an essential, feature of the whole system."[142]

Union Boards

Creation of Union Boards was another innovation of the Levinge Report accepted in the Village Self-Government Act. The Levinge Report intended to open a new era in local government by establishing vital new representative bodies at the union level. These were to be the primary units of rural administration, the base on which higher authorities would build. Extensive responsibility and finances were to be entrusted to them. With modifications, these were the concepts behind the operation of Union Boards until their dissolution in 1962. Judged rigidly by these criteria, the experiment would be pronounced a failure. A more detailed consideration of the Boards' operation, however, partially offsets this harsh conclusion.

One point to the credit of Union Boards was the fact that they were established at all. The Union Committees recommended by the Local Self-Government Act of 1885 were never very widespread, despite recurrent official commendation. Moreover, until the mid-1930's,

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[141]Naresh Chandra Roy, Rural Self-Government in Bengal (University of Calcutta, 1936), p. VIII.

[142]Government of Bengal, Appointment Department, Reforms, Report on the Working of the Reformed Constitution in Bengal, 1921-1927, Calcutta, 1929, p. 65.

establishment of the Union Boards was actively opposed by the Swarajists, who saw them as merely another way for the British to impose fresh taxes. Establishment was further impeded by the periodic absence of a Minister of Local Self-Government from 1924 to 1927. Some progress was made even during that period, however; by 1927, approximately one-third of the province had the new Boards. The number jumped to two-thirds by 1930, and was close to four-fifths by mid-1940. All areas of rural East Bengal had Union Boards on the eve of World War II. Using as a base the figure of 6478, the number of unions created under the old Choukidari Panchayat Act, the following figures give an indication of the rate of advance of Union Boards in Bengal:

1927	-	2874
1930	-	4308
1933	-	4701
1937	-	5046
1940	-	5126

The province thus had one of the most complete systems of local self-government on the subcontinent. At the time of the Simon Commission Report, Bengal was recognized as a leader in this respect, along with the United Provinces and Madras.[143]

A second point in favor of the Union Boards was evidence of their popularity. No local governing body in modern history, or perhaps for all of history, had actually been received with any enthusiasm. Choukidari Panchayats were definitely unpopular, even though they were to be found throughout the province. Union Committees, where formed, were most often met with indifference. However, on the basis of a slowly expanding franchise (2,570,800 eligible voters in 1932-33; 5,436,808 in 1939-40) increasing numbers of people were involved in the electoral process. After the Circle Officer subdivided unions into wards, and prepared electoral rolls, candidates could present themselves to the public. Usually every ward was contested. Voting interest was high; a turnout of 80-85 percent was common.[144] By 1940, a total of 45,992 persons held seats on Union Boards, indicating that nearly one hundred thousand candidates had sought election the previous year.[145] Even though the total number voting was still comparatively small, the response was indicative of genuine interest in the new local bodies. A new phenomenon, if not the new era hoped for by the Levinge Report, had entered the political scene: "The interest of the people in local elections has turned out for sometime to be immense. The Bengalees (sic) are now impregnated with politics."[146]

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[143]I.S.C., I., p. 306.

[144]N. C. Roy, op. cit., p. 150. The 1932 electoral figure is from same source.

[145]Resolution Reviewing the Reports of the Commissioners of Divisions on the Working of Union Boards in Bengal, 1939-40 (Alipore: Bengal Government Press, 1941), p. 53. The 1940 electoral figure is from the same source.

A quick survey of the tasks performed by the Union Boards is also instructive. Responsibility for hiring and paying choukidars was made compulsory by the 1919 Village Self-Government Act and performance of this obligation occupied much of the time and resources of the Boards. Various welfare activities could be taken up optionally upon a two-thirds vote of the members. A broad range of such activities was in fact carried out by the Boards, although with varying degrees of emphasis. Water supply received a great deal of attention, showing responsiveness to an intense village need. Roads, bridges and waterways within the union were also usually administered by the Boards. It is interesting to note that in both of these activities, individual ward members played an active role in bringing forth projects, and that the Union Board prepared an overall scheme for approval by higher authorities. Schools were also established and maintained, and various types of "preventive" sanitation measures carried out.

Finances were a primary stumbling block to the further evolution of Union Boards as municipal agencies. Automatic revenue came only from the choukidari cess. Both a welfare cess and grants from District Boards were left to the discretion of the Boards concerned. Bengal enjoyed a period of prosperity during most of the 1920's and part of the 1930's, and revenue from these two sources was adequate to permit Union Boards to undertake projects in all the areas mentioned. Nevertheless, close to half the revenue always went toward payment of choukidars and dafadars and the total amount available to the average Union Board at the peak of prosperity, for all purposes, was only Rs. 2,000.00.[147] In effect, Union Boards remained an experiment; they were provided with just enough powers and finances to become municipalities in microcosm.

Judged by this evidence, the first twenty years of Union Board operation was somewhat more of a success. Undeniably the total effect of two decades' efforts were far from revolutionary. Bengal still lacked an effective system of rural administration. Too little funds, too little attention, and perhaps too little thought had been devoted to the true needs of a primary unit of rural government. What had been clearly determined by the experiment was that the union was an appropriate level for local government in the province, that properly constituted agencies could attract enthusiasm from their constituents, and that local leadership had the interest and capacity for executing at least the rudiments of true municipal functions. "Local Self-Government can hardly be said to have proved itself very useful yet in Bengal," said the Rowland's Report in 1945, "but the Union Boards

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[147]Hugh Tinker, op. cit., p. 203.

seem to us the most promising of these institutions."[148]

Local Boards

Subdivisional boards were given a new lease on life in the Village Self-Government Act. The Levinge Report had called for the abolition of Local Boards, and their replacement at the thana level by Circle Boards. After twenty years, that lease had almost expired. It proved impossible to vitalize a body which was totally dependent on the District Board for funds, and which had few useful functions to perform. Finances and authority were both too meager to be divided three ways. Union Boards soon developed the habit of bypassing the Local Boards and dealing directly with the District Board. The Village Self-Government Act of 1919 did not correct the defects which had sapped the life of earlier Local Boards. Local Boards consequently slowly died out.[149] In 1938, for example, the Department of Public Health and Local Self-Government (a combination adopted from English practice) reported:

> "With the gradual development and expansion of the system of Union Boards throughout the province, the idea that Local Boards, with their present limited powers and resources, have outlived their utility as intermediary institutions in the scheme of local self-government has fast been gaining ground, and during the year under report, several District Boards moved government to abolish Local Boards in their jurisdictions."

Even in full failure, the Local Boards' operations warrant more than an obituary. Of course, it is instructive to note why they failed--their lack of obligatory functions or independent source of income; the unwillingness of District Boards voluntarily to delegate authority; their jealousy of the more affluent Union Boards, which in turn led the Union Boards to go straight to the District Boards for aid. Surprisingly,

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[148]Government of Bengal, Report of the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee, 1944-45 (Government Press, Alipore, 1945), p. 35. Reprinted by National Institute for Public Administration, Dacca, 1962. [The Report took its informal title from the name of its Chairman, Sir Archibald Rowlands, KCB, MBE.] To correct the Union Boards' weakness, the Report recommended placing a Circle Officer in every thana, and ending the appointment of nominated members altogether. Nominations ended in 1946, but it was not until January 1962 that East Pakistan planned to have one Circle Officer in each thana.

[149]There were 84 such boards at the time. By 1940, the number had dropped to 70. The Local Boards' membership in 1940 consisted of 766 elected members and 426 nominated members, including 65 officials.

there is even something to be learned from their limited sphere of activities. Membership to the Local Boards was chosen by open election. As in the case of Union Boards, these elections were hotly contested, revealing an interest in participating in even relatively unimportant local institutions. Also, these elections encouraged a trend that was becoming increasingly noticeable in the inter-war years. The election wards for the Local Boards were individual thanas, adding new dimensions to the old police units. (Health Committees were also established by Sub-divisional Officers on a thana basis.) Once elected, members chose their own chairmen, in all of East Bengal. The Boards were also responsible for preparing a Public Works scheme for the whole sub-division, which was sent to the District Board for approval. Local Boards did not sink from view without leaving a mark on the Province's administrative history.

District Boards

A prime goal of the Levinge Report was to correct the mistake it perceived in the 1885 Local Self-Government Act. Failure of local institutions to thrive was attributed to the attempt to start local government from the top down--from the district level down to the union level. The Circle system was proposed specifically to reverse that situation. The 1919 Village Self-Government Act only partially accepted the Levinge proposal. In effect, it modified the old system rather than introducing a new system. The lowest tier was reorganized to make it more effective; the middle tier was left intact, which led to its withering away; the third tier was altered in its composition, but left with its authority unimpaired. The result was opposite from the hopes of the Levinge Report. "In all provinces except Assam", reported the Simon Commission, "the most important unit of self-government in rural areas is the District Board."[150] If anything, the district in Bengal under dyarchy was further enhanced in its position as the primary unit of administration.

District Boards blossomed under the Reforms. Until then, the Boards closely reflected their ancestry, the District Road Committees created under the District Road Cess Act of 1871. Building and maintaining roads preoccupied District Boards until well into the 1920's. Then a variety of other activities came to the fore. Medical relief, sanitation and education bulked ever larger in yearly budgets. For example, comparing the period from 1917-1920 with the period from 1924-1927, expenditure on communications (roads) dropped by over rupees three lakhs. In the same time periods, expenditure for medical purposes went from under rupees seven and one half lakhs to over rupees eleven lakhs, and public health from under rupees two lakhs to nearly three and one-half lakhs.[151] Expenditure by District Boards on education

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[150] I.S.C., I, p. 305.

[151] Report on the Working of the Reformed Constitution in Bengal, 1921-27, op. cit., p. 78.

and public works was Rs. 11,845,811 in 1923; Rs. 14,349,155 in 1929; and Rs. 16,263,527 in 1937.[152] By 1940, the Government of Bengal was warning the District Boards about neglecting communications in favor of welfare activities.[153]

"Whatever may have been the cause," reported the Government of Bengal to the Simon Commission, "there has been a remarkable change for the better in the attitude of the people toward public health, and a great advance in the work done by the Public Health Department... When District Health Officers were first appointed in 1920 and 1921, District Boards, which were required to pay half of their salaries, were inclined to regard them as expensive luxuries. They are now welcomed everywhere."[154] The "remarkable change" does not seem hard to explain. The Reforms were working as planned. Local self-government and the welfare departments[155] were transferred to the care of such capable men as Mr. A. K. Fazlul Haq, Sir Surendra Nath Banerji, Mr. P. C. Mitter, Nawab Saujid, Nawab Ali Choudhuri, and Mr. A K. Ghuznavi. At the same time, District Boards began electing their own chairmen for the first time, and contained an elected majority as well. The combination was sufficient to broaden the scope of District Board activity.

While the Boards increased the variety of their activities, they could not significantly increase their extent. As in the case of Union Boards, the District Boards were severely handicapped financially. Their primary source of revenue was the traditional land cess. Since fixing the cess was a costly procedure, it stayed at the same level for long periods. District Boards could have increased the public works cess, but did not often choose to do so. That left them with a static, inelastic yearly revenue. For example, the combined total spent on education and public works in the years 1923 and 1927 (noted above) showed an increase of Rs. 4,417,716. Land cess revenue in the same year increased by only Rs. 1,906,863.[156] Only large scale government grants permitted the Boards to implement their expanded programs. District Boards had more authority, and desire to use it, than yearly income could support.

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[152]Hugh Tinker, op. cit., p. 171.

[153]Resolution Reviewing the Reports on the Working of District and Local Boards in Bengal During the year 1937-1940, p. 7.

[154]Report on the Working of the Reformed Constitution in Bengal, 1921-1927, op. cit., p. 174.

[155]Public Health, Medical, Education, Registration, Agriculture and Industries, Excise and Public Works. These were grouped and regrouped under various Ministries.

[156]Hugh Tinker, op. cit., p. 171.

Paucity of funds was indication of a deeper malaise. Performance of the District Boards under dyarchy raised the question of control once again. Under elected chairmen, the general level of administration declined. Not only were no new taxes imposed, but existing taxes were not collected as regularly. Evidence of corruption appeared. Supervision was lax. For this, the Simon Commission left two explanations for their successors to ponder. The first was that "not a few of the failures and defects of local self-government...may be traced to the inability to realize the importance of having a competent and well paid official analogous to the English Town Clerk or Clerk to the City Council." The District Magistrate as chairman had been the district's chief executive officer as well as the Board's presiding officer. With government resources and staff, he could be both. Without adequate staff, non-official chairmen could only preside. Extensive touring and supervision was impossible for an unpaid, part-time elected chairman. The Commission's second explanation also dealt with the District Magistrate's role. He had been not only chairman of the local authority, but also an agent of the provincial government. With his removal from all contact with the District Board, the Ministry for Local Self-Government lost the instrument for enforcing its will. No other official had replaced this function. The only recourse open to the Minister was the extreme step of suspension and dissolution (invoked only three times in twenty years). "Where spur and reign were needed" the Simon Commission Report concludes "the Minister was only given a pole axe."[157]

Appendix I for Chapter 8

CONSTITUTION OF THE UNION BOARDS IN TIPPERA DISTRICT, 1939-40

Total area in square miles under u.b.s.	2,484.85
Population of u.b.s.	2,978,706
Number of rate-payers	413,398
Number of members:	
Official	3
Non-official	2,200
Total	2,203
Hindus	691
Muslims	1,497
Others	15

INCOME OF UNION BOARDS IN TIPPERA DISTRICT, 1939-40
(Rupees)

Opening balance	37,806	
Pound receipts	4,530	
Ferry receipts	41	
Union rate:		
Under sec. 37(a) of the V.S.G. Act	3,25,110	
Under sec. 37(b) of the V.S.G Act	94,828	
Rents of chaukidari chakran lands	---	
Total		4,62,315
Contributions:		
From government	17,423	
From District Boards under sec. 33 of the V.S.G. Act	4,371	
From District Boards under sec. 45 of the V.S.G. Act	15,793	
From other sources	24,290	
Total		61,877

Miscellaneous receipts:		
Fees and fines under sec. 34	1,017	
Penalties under sec. 41	96	
Receipts of the Union Bench	5,667	
Receipts of the Union Court	7,046	
Remuneration received for process serving	4,674	
Advance recovered	7,485	
Loan receipts	22,758	
Others	11,096	
Total		59,839
TOTAL INCOME		5,84,031

EXPENDITURE OF THE UNION BOARDS IN
TIPPERA DISTRICT, 1939-40
(RUPEES)

Item		
Establishment charges:		
Dafadars and chaukidars		
Salaries	2,47,787	
Equipment	7,291	
Other establishment	42,447	
Total		2,97,525
Collection charges	36,593	
Pounds	180	
Ferries	1,050	
Roads:		
Original	30,773	
Repairs	33,528	
Water supply:		
Original	32,695	
Repairs	6,495	
Drainage:		
Original	4,667	
Repairs	2,786	
Conservancy	1,366	
Other sanitary measures	3,384	
Schools	2,053	
Dispensaries	7,231	
Union Bench	2,384	
Union Court	2,202	
Remuneration disbursed for process-serving	4,741	
Advances	7,000	
Interest and repayment of loans	22,469	
Miscellaneous	25,124	
Total		5,24,246
Closing balance		59,785
GRAND TOTAL		5,84,031

Chapter 9

V-AID AND BASIC DEMOCRACIES: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Pakistan and India became independent successors to the British authority in 1947. With Independence came the desire in Pakistan for both continuity and change. Continuity was sought in the constitutional sphere. The new government of Pakistan initially took as its model the Government of India Act of 1935, which resulted from deliberations following the Report of the Simon Commission in 1930. For local self-government, the system of District and Union Boards was retained, as well as the acts and statutes which supported them. Change was sought in the sphere of social welfare. Improvement of the social and economic condition of the country became a prime goal of the government. To effect this goal several steps were taken, foremost among these being the establishment in July 1952 of the Village Agriculture and Industrial Development Programme (V-AID). Since the program was aimed at the villages, it had definite impact on rural administration. Agriculture administration was particularly affected, as is shown in the discussion of Agriculture Programming.[158] However, V-AID also had profound implications for local self-government.

V-AID, Local Government and Development

Creation of V-AID resumed a dialogue begun a decade before Independence, and even earlier. Various development projects began springing up in the 1920's and 1930's at the initiative of interested individuals such as F. L. Brayne and Spencer Hatch. Government entered the field in 1935, with a grant from the Central Government of one crore of rupees to several provinces on a matching basis, for village improvements. Bengal responded in 1938 with the establishment of a Rural Reconstruction Department. An I.C.S. officer, Mr. T. I. M. Nurannabi Chaudhuri was its first Director. Much further government involvement was indicated by the Report of the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee, 1944-45 (The Rowlands Committee): "What is... clear is that the main emphasis in the activities of Government henceforward will be in the development field and directed to the full utilization of the material and human resources of the Province."[159]

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[158] See Chapter 2.

[159] Government of Bengal, Report of the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee, 1944-45 (Bengal Government Press, Alipore, 1945). Reprinted by the National Institute of Public Administration as "NIPA Reprint Series I", Dacca, 1962, p. 7, para. 62.

The Rowlands Committee therefore proposed that a series of steps be taken to reorganize the province's administration. One of them was to disband the Rural Reconstruction Department:

> "Rural reconstruction is not to our mind, a separate activity of Government. It is the function... or the end result of the activities of the several 'Nation Building' Departments. In our judgement, it is unsound to have a Director of Rural Reconstruction, with a separate staff parallel to, but with no control over the representatives of the technical departments, and indeed, almost wholly independent of the District Officer. With such a set-up there have been, as there was bound to be, friction and conflicts of jurisdiction and action."[160]

Accordingly, development activities were to be integrated into the civil administration, and made an essential duty of local governments. The District Officer was to be made responsible for rural reconstruction, through his own subordinates and as coordinator of the technical officers. To aid him, Circle Officers were to be increased in number, and the Union Boards were to be strengthened so they could become the basic unit of administration in the province.[161] These suggestions were only partially implemented before Partition. The Department of Rural Reconstruction was disbanded, but little else was done.

The V-AID Programme once again made rural reconstruction--now renamed community development--a separate activity of government. In concepts and methodology, if not fully in terminology and extension techniques, V-AID was a lineal descendent of the former Department of Rural Reconstruction.[162] The logic of charging a separate agency with development tasks was followed through with rigor. At the Center there was a Chief V-AID Administrator (although he held the rank of joint secretary within the Ministry of Economic Affairs, rather than presiding over a new Ministry as originally envisaged). Both provinces were under Provincial Directors, who supervised a specially recruited development cadre. Each province was divided into a number of development blocks, in the charge of development officers. Within each block

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[160] Ibid, pp. 32-33, para. 80.

[161] Ibid, p. 33, para. 82, and p. 35, para. 86.

[162] The last Director of the Department of Rural Reconstruction said in 1957 "The V-AID is proceeding today precisely on the same principles on which Rural Reconstruction was carried on in Bengal before Independence." For further discussion of pre-Independence development activity, see Government of East Pakistan, H. S. M. Ishaque, ABC of Rural Reconstruction, 2nd Edition, East Pakistan Government Press, 1957.

V-AID's activities were primarily carried out by a group of Village Level Workers, who were called "the spearheads" of the Programme. Within each village of a block, a Village Council of Elders was to be created. The program was back-stopped by several training institutes, and financed by central, provincial, and foreign governments. The objectives of the V-AID Programme, as stated by its own Five Year Plan were:

> "... to solve the problems of the villages by helping the villagers to help themselves individually and as communities. It is an attempt to look at the village as a whole through the eyes of its people and in the light of their vast store of accumulated knowledge and wisdom. It uses the principles of community organization and development which are based on human experience and thus avoids the mistakes of past efforts at community development. It aims at coordinating the total resources of the Government and the people for a concerted and determined effort to reconstruct village life in Pakistan."[163]

Emphasis in V-AID was on self-help, "felt needs" and coordination of departmental activities. Civil administration was involved only tangentally; the District Officer was made chairman of a district advisory committee. Local government was completely bypassed. The need for departmental coordination had been pointed out by every major commission that dealt with Bengal. Development would be impossible, they emphasized, without a more concerted and comprehensive approach. When V-AID failed in its attempt at coordination the province was left with serious problems: mutually exclusive departments trying to operate separate and sometimes conflicting programs in the mofussil; a civil administration unconnected with, and often unconcerned about, development programs; and a system of local self-government badly weakened by neglect and political interference.

The Basic Democracies Order, 1959

Political interference in local government was not the fault of V-AID; it was just one by-product of the political instability which beset Pakistan in the years following Partition. Against great odds, Pakistan survived as a nation. After a decade of independence there was doubt whether the nation could progress. Bickering at the highest levels of power resulted in disruptive tactics that affected all levels of administration, and government machinery began moving toward dead center. On 7th October, 1958, the Commander in Chief of the Army, Mohammad Ayub Khan, assumed full powers of government. The National Assembly was prorogued, the Constitution abrogated, and Martial Law instituted. Sweeping reforms were called for. At the

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[163]Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Village AID Administration, "Village AID Five Year Plan, 1955-56 to 1959-60"

national level a new constitution was drafted which broke completely with the British parliamentary form in favor of a Presidential system.[164] On 27 October, 1959, a new system of local government was introduced, for the third time in East Bengal since 1885. The venerable acts on which the earlier attempts had been based were repealed.

Pakistan's new government was more concerned with change than constitutional continuity. The old scheme of local government was found wanting, and was discarded. The President announced to the nation that the new scheme was "designed to prepare the base on which an upward pyramid of sound political system can be developed." The name Basic Democracies was given "for the obvious reason that we wanted it to grow and evolve from the first rung of the political and economic ladder so that it finds roots deep among the people, starting at the village level."[165] The revised system of local government, however, was far from a series of sui generis "Revolutionary Councils" or "Military Tribunals," so familiar in other present day developing countries. The basic form was a clear adaptation from previous local institutions. The innovations were based on past experience and in response to specific problems.

The Union Council: The lowest tier of the Basic Democracy hierarchy, the Union Council, bears strong resemblance to the Union Board originally created by the Bengal Village Self-Government Act of 1919.[166] A union consisting of approximately 10,000 persons is the basic unit of government, and is divided into electoral wards containing approximately 1,000 persons each. Franchise qualifications are simplified, and amount to universal adult suffrage: any citizen (male or female) over twenty-one years of age, of sound mind and having residence in an electoral ward can vote in a Union Council election, or stand for office.[167] Councils sit for five years. The Ordinance as originally issued in 1959 returned to the system of nominated members that had

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[164]For an account of Pakistan's constitutional difficulties before the Revolution, see Herbert Feldman, A Constitution for Pakistan, (London and Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1955). For an account of the formation of Pakistan's present constitution, particularly with reference to the Constitution Commission, see G. W. Choudhury, Democracy in Pakistan (Dacca, Green Book House, 1963).

[165]Broadcast on 2 September, 1959. Quoted in Government of Pakistan, Ministry of National Reconstruction and Information (Basic Democracies Wing), "Scope and Functions of Basic Democracies and their Contribution to Development" (Rawalpindi: Government Press, undated).

[166]For a fully annotated version of the Basic Democracies Order including all relevant statutes, see Afzal Mahmood, Basic Democracies (Lahore: All Pakistan Legal Decisions, 1964).

[167]The franchise was broadened in 1956, before the introduction of Basic Democracies.

been abolished in 1946. An amending order in 1962 ended the system of nomination however, and all members are now elected. The Union Council elects from among its own members a chairman, and in East Pakistan since 1963, a vice-chairman. In civic functions, the Union Council resembles the former Punjab Village Panchayat Act of 1939, only in expanded form. Schedule Three of the Basic Democracies Ordinance lists thirty-seven municipal functions which the Councils may perform, including a final catch-all phrase, "Any other measures likely to promote the welfare, health, safety, comfort, or convenience of the inhabitants of the Union or of visitors." Few aspects of village life are beyond the reach of permitted functions. Additionally, the Union Council has mandatory duties to help in revenue collection, village police protection, and, more vaguely, in development efforts: "A Union Council shall be responsible for agricultural, industrial, and community development in the Union, and may, for that function, perform such functions as may be prescribed." (Article 30). Limited judicial duties, somewhat less than exercised by the former Union Benches, were added under the Conciliation Court Ordinance, 1961. A major new dimension was added by the 1962 Constitution, which provided that people chosen as Basic Democrats were to be the Electoral College for the Presidency, and for legislative assemblies. Financing the operation of the Councils remains much the same as under the former Acts, with the District and Union Bodies sharing the proceeds of the local rate on land (Article 59). Currently the District Council receives 65 percent of the rate in East Pakistan, and the Union Councils 35 percent. In addition, some twenty-three further taxes may be collected by the Union Councils. (Article 60, and Schedule Five).

Potentially, the Basic Democracies Ordinance provided rural East Pakistan with the strongest and most effective local body yet seen in the area. The Union Council is popularly elected under a broad franchise, has wide authority for community welfare, and ample taxing powers to support its programs. It also plays a more definite role in the scheme of provincial administration than previously. Government has removed all internal controls, provides for supervision and guidance (Articles 73-74), a full-time paid secretary (Articles 44-47), and for schools to give regular training to both Basic Democrats and Council staff (Article 71). The schools were originally V-AID training institutes. Moreover, the Ordinance is flexible, and leaves room for adjustment to future exigencies. For example, there is provision for the transfer of functions from Government to local councils, and vice versa (Article 37). Particularly in the area of development work, the Union Council was provided with scope for experimentation: business activities are specifically permitted, planning work and agricultural committees are encouraged (Articles 30 and 36).

For all this positive potentiality, however, there is still potential for weakness as well. Most of the functions of the Union Council are optional, and assured income is only from the land cess. A powerful District Council remains the primary agent of administration, and an even more powerful government at higher levels can easily view the Union Councils only as convenient administrative adjuncts. A

case study in 1962 by Mr. A. T. R. Rahman at the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, Comilla, has shown that in the Union Councils examined, primary budgetary emphasis was on roads and tubewells, that no new taxes were assessed and collected, and that little feeling of responsibility existed.[168] In these respects, the Union Council of today bears strong resemblance to its predecessors in the inter-war decades. While restoration of local government to its previous level would be an improvement over the fifteen years preceding Basic Democracies, it seems far below the present needs of the country, or the expectations of the country's leaders.

The Thana Council

Establishment of the Thana Council as the second tier of the Basic Democracies scheme is an innovation in the administrative history of East Pakistan. Since the gradual abolition of Local Boards at the subdivisional level, local government reverted to a two level system. Lord Ripon had originally envisioned a major unit at the subdivisional level or lower, as did the Decentralization Commission in 1908. The Levinge Report of 1913 advocated Circle Boards, which presumably would have covered two thanas or more. None of these suggestions bore fruit. The thana became an increasingly important administrative division in the dyarchy years, and gained further importance as the development block area in East Pakistan under the V-AID Programme. The first detailed suggestion for creation of a council at the thana level in East Pakistan, however, does not seem to have come until May, 1959. Mr. Akhter Hameed Khan, Director of the Academy for Rural Development, Comilla, and former Provincial Director of V-AID, sent a note on reorganization of local bodies to the Chief Secretary of East Pakistan. In the note the need for coordination of administrative and development work was stressed. This type of coordination by Union Boards would be possible "only if there is a chain of coordinators running from the Provincial center through the Divisional Headquarters, the District Headquarters, the Subdivisional, the Circle and finally, the Thana Headquarters." A coordinating officer was needed at the thana level, he added, and then proposed:

> "The coordinating officer should preside over a thana council composed of the departmental officers, including the police, and the Presidents of all the Union Boards of the Area. This Council need not have any taxing powers. Its executive powers also need not be very extensive as the Chairman of the Council, that is the coordinating officer, and the other departmental officers, will have sufficient legal powers. Moreover the Union Boards who will

[168] A. T. R. Rahman, Basic Democracies at the Grass Roots (Comilla: Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, 1962), p. 15.

> be carrying out the actual work in the field will also be powerful legal bodies. The Council as a body will be chiefly for the sake of planning, coordination and also a kind of moral and social leadership."[169]

The composition and functions assigned to Thana Councils by the Basic Democracies Order closely reflect these original suggestions. Article 13 provides that all Chairmen of Union Councils and Town Committees serve ex officio on the Thana Council, and that the District Officer appoint official (departmental) members, not to exceed in number the representative members. The Council is clearly an official agency, presided over by the government officers now charged with coordination. The Sub-divisional Officer is ex officio chairman of all Thana Councils within his jurisdiction, and the Circle Officer is ex-officio vice-chairman, serving as chairman in the absence of the Sub-divisional Officer. Article 32 states that the Thana Council is responsible to the District Council concerned, and can by direction from the government or the District Council perform any of the District Council's functions. This latter possibility raises interesting speculation about the future evolution of rural administration, and demonstrates once again the flexibility of the Basic Democracies Ordinance. But for the present, the pertinent clause for Thana Council operation is the one that states "A Thana or Tehsil[170] Council shall coordinate the activities of all Union Councils and Town Committees in the thana or tehsil, as the case may be, and shall in this behalf perform such functions as are likely to promote the purpose of this Order."

The District Council

District administration, centering for local government and other purposes on the District Council, remains the primary level of rural administration under the Basic Democracies Ordinance. In form, the District Council has undergone considerable metamorphosis. The former District Boards, which had largely gone defunct by 1958, had been entirely elected bodies, with the chairman elected from among the Board members. In 1959, the District Council became an entirely nominated body under the chairmanship of the District Officer. Originally membership consisted of official and appointed representatives, with union and town council chairmen comprising one-half of the appointed members. An amendment in 1962 changed the composition to officials and elected members only, with the elected members chosen from among

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[169]See A. K. M. Mohsen, The Comilla Rural Administration Experiment: History and Annual Report, 1962-63 (Comilla: Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, October, 1963), Appendix C-I, p. 87.

[170]Tehsil is the West Pakistan equivalent of a thana, but is usually more extensive in area.

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themselves by an electoral college consisting of all union level chairmen in a district. The elected members are to comprise at least one-half of the District Councils being reconstituted in 1965. The District Council therefore now has a composition parallel to the Thana Council. A further adjustment in 1963 provided that a vice-chairman be selected by vote from among the elected representatives.

In functions, the District Council has powers similar to both the Thana and Union Council, only on a larger scale. There are twenty-seven mandatory civic duties to be performed by the District agency, plus an optional further list of seventy functions, (Article 33 and Schedule Four, Parts I and II). In addition, the District Council is charged with the duty of coordinating the activities of all local councils and municipal bodies within its jurisdiction, and generally to review the progress in various branches of administration within the district (Article 34). As noted, the Council receives a sizeable portion of the land tax to enable it to perform its duties, and may levy other taxes. Under the Local Council's Services clause, the Council is to be provided with a full-time paid Secretary; as this clause has not yet become operative, the Basic Democracies Department has placed an official at the district who serves, among other things, as secretary to the District Council.

For some people, the return to an official chairman and nominated official members would be seen as a retrograde step. As related earlier, District bodies began coming under popular control in Bengal as early as 1916, and even that action was thirty years later than originally intended. Moreover, the advantage to be gained by rejoining the Collectorate staff with Council affairs can now be mitigated by the increasingly diverse demands made upon the Deputy Commissioner. Chairmanship of the District Council is only one of his many duties. Efficiency of council operations will therefore not automatically increase, while initiative by the members may decrease. A report on local councils prepared in 1963 at the request of the Secretary of Basic Democracies and Local Government concludes that "District Councils and municipal committees... have been plagued, as were the old district and municipal boards, with lack of planning, inefficient administration, and a shortage of funds.[171] As in the case of the Union Councils, these findings seem to indicate little net gain over pre-independence local bodies.

On the other hand, however, the present composition of the District Council is well suited to its duties in other spheres than local government. The District Council has a key role to play in administration and coordination for development under the Basic Democracies scheme. The juxtaposition of elected representatives with administrative and departmental officers quite clearly can facilitate the smooth perfor-

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[171]Richard O. Niehoff and George M. Platt, "Local Government in East Pakistan," a study of District Councils and Municipal Committees, made at the Request of the Secretary of Basic Democracies and Local Government, January 1964 (Mimeo, MSU), p. 3.

mance of these duties. If the system functions as intended, popularly elected leaders can wield more influence, more effectively, than under former local councils.

The Divisional Council

The fourth and highest Basic Democracy tier is also an administrative innovation.[172] The role of the division as an administrative unit, represented in the office of Divisional Commissioner, has long been debated. Witnesses before the Royal Commission upon Decentralization in 1908 suggested abolishing the position, but the Commission report advocated strengthening it instead. The Rowlands Report in 1945 also recommended abolishing the Commissioner's post. By establishing a council at the divisional level, with the Commissioner as its Chairman, the question seems settled for the moment. The purpose of the Divisional Council quite clearly is to help complete the chain of coordination for administrative and development purposes. It has no other assigned or optional duties. In composition it also is similar to the district and thana councils, with its elected members chosen by the elected members of District Councils.[173]

Basic Democracies, Local Government, and Development

With the introduction of Basic Democracies, East Pakistan has once again embarked on an experiment in local government. Both President Ayub's stated intentions and the structure of the new system indicate that the province has entered another period of tutelage, of education, in local self-government. For that purpose, the Union Councils seem well designed. The franchise is broad, the scope for exercise of important municipal functions has never been greater. However, the Basic Democracies Ordinance indicates a larger role than this for the local councils. For the first time, local councils have been integrated, from bottom to top, into the provincial governing apparatus. Elected representatives at successively higher levels have an opportunity to influence government policies which affect them, and to be a party in the implementation of these policies.

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[172]The Ordinance as enacted in 1959 included a fifth tier, a Provincial Development Advisory Board consisting of senior officials and appointed members, some of whom were Union Councilors and Chairmen (Part IV, Articles 69, 70, and 71). This tier was discontinued when Provincial Legislative Assemblies were reconstituted in 1962.

[173]A motion was recently introduced into the National Assembly by the Senior Cabinet member, Minister for Information, Khwaja Shahabuddin, to prohibit dual membership in District and Divisional Councils. Pakistan Times, July 21, 1965, p. 1. Presumably the electoral college for the Divisional Councils would then be the same as for District and Thana Councils, or else the system of nomination, ended in 1962, will be resumed.

Indeed, it is the local council's role in coordination and development that is the most unique feature of the Basic Democracies scheme. The Government of Pakistan has deliberately and carefully moved to create an instrument for development, along lines indicated by the Rowlands Report. Local government has been charged with development duties, and integrated with department and line administration to facilitate performance of that duty. Since 1962, the Deputy Commissioner has been recognized as the chief coordinator at the district level, and the Circle Officer has been designated "Circle Officer (Development)" and charged with coordination duties. Basic Democracies can be viewed as a development scheme as much as a school for local government--although in fact the scheme will only work properly if development and local government functions work in tandem.

The problem now is to make the system work. The hold of the past is strong in East Pakistan, and the deadening pull of inertia is all-pervasive. Departments need not only coordination, but a means to implement their programme under severe human, financial and spatial restrictions. The civil service must face the burden of increased responsibilities while simultaneously learning to function as "officers-in-council." For local government, perhaps most of all, a way must be found to wrench free from the aura of the past, and move beyond the bounds of its earlier limited sphere of activity.

PART III

THE COMILLA EXPERIMENT IN RURAL ADMINISTRATION

Chapter 10

THE SETTING AND THE PROGRAMME

Since 1959, the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development has been conducting experiments to evolve future administrative patterns for rural East Pakistan. Before examining those experiments, it might be helpful to recapitulate the situation existing at the time the experiments began.

Despite a tropical lushness reminiscent of Rousseau's ideal state of nature, rural life in East Pakistan has often been more nearly Hobbesian--poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Under the terms of the Permanent Settlement of 1793, village economic and social structures decomposed. Before 1858, civil authorities left administrative matters mainly to the great landlords brought into existence under the Permanent Settlement. After the Mutiny of 1858, civil authorities remained both too few in number (especially as "native" personnal were suspect) and conservative in outlook. For this reason, detailed attention to the mofussil was still not possible. For the same reasons, attempts to establish local self government failed to take root; harried and half-frightened bureaucrats were unwilling to yield any significant responsibility. With the twentieth century and rising nationalism came a change in attitude. Nation building departments were given emphasis, and in 1919 a new local government system was introduced. The departments remained understaffed, underfinanced, and in an awkward position vis-a-vis the line administration. Local government showed signs of life, but made little total impact.

After Independence in 1947, the Permanent Settlement was abolished, and village social and economic structures suffered a second great shock. A period of prolonged political instability upset the operation of local government, local administration, and the departments. The Revolutionary Government established in 1958 brought political stability, and in 1959 promulgated a new system of rural administration, aimed at regeneration of the countryside. Until then, the nation building departments, which possess much of the available human and physical resources needed for development, continued to present their programs in a diffused and sometimes conflicting manner. The civil authorities inherited a lengthy tradition of colonial detachment, and preoccupation with revenue and law and order administration. Local government had remained circumscribed for want of funds and responsibility. And all this was against a prevailing backdrop of a predominantly rural agricultural population, living in terrain that is often inaccessible, on isolated and fragmented plots of land, and with a higher production

rate for children than foodstuffs. For a government concerned with economic and political development, the situation in 1959 could best be called preparatory.

The background and evolution of the experiment at Comilla has been fully documented in a number of publications.[174] Physically, the Academy itself is split into two branches. The Academy proper is located at Kotbari, five miles from Comilla town, near the Tropic of Cancer and the border of Tripura State (India). Under both V-AID and Basic Democracies, the Academy has been designated an in-service training institute to give government officers an insight into the problems and processes of rural development; this training is given at Kotbari. Several miles away is the headquarters of the Academy's action program, located at a former Ghandian retreat called Abhoy Ashram. The Academy staff is composed of persons with unusually diverse talents: several government officers trained in cooperation and development under the V-AID Programme; a group of social scientists; and a Director of proven administrative talents and long standing interest in social change. The Academy opened on 27 May, 1959 housed temporarily in Comilla town but soon moved to Abhoy Ashram. Within a short time, permission was sought to undertake field experiments. In December, 1959, the provincial government acted favorably on the request, and the Academy was given operational control over the thana in which it was located, to use as a testing ground.

The purpose of the experiment is to give relevance to the Academy's training program, and to attempt to provide working models of institutions necessary for rural development in East Pakistan. The Academy's methodology is to initiate small scale pilot projects within the thana, drawing on the combined experience of the government officers on the staff, and utilizing the research abilities of the Academy faculty. The approach is highly pragmatic, with emphasis on achieving results which can be duplicated elsewhere. Financial support has come from the provincial government, the Departments of Agriculture, Cooperatives, and Basic Democracies, and the Ford Foundation. Long-range technical assistance additionally has come from the East Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (EPWAPDA), a team of Japanese farm experts supplied by the Colombo Plan, and a series of advisors provided by the Ford Foundation under a contract with Michigan State University. The experiments themselves can be grouped under three main headings: vitalization of the Basic Democracies scheme, to ensure administrative coordination; creation of economic institutions necessary for the modernization of agriculture; creation of a training institution for the widespread provision of skills needed for development.

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[174]See the Annual Reports of the Academy from 1960 to 1965, and "The Academy at Comilla--an Introduction", 1963.

Coordination, Basic Democracies, and Development

Comilla Kotwali[175] Thana Council was constituted in April, 1960, and began operation in the following June. As noted, the concept and composition of this new institution closely followed suggestions made originally by the Director of the Academy. It was only natural, therefore, that the Comilla Thana Council be placed under close observation. The initial response was found to be disappointing. Although union council chairmen were regular in their attendance, the official members--thana-level officers of the nation building departments--were often absent. The Academy requested district department chiefs to direct subordinates to comply with their new duties imposed by the Basic Democracies Ordinance. Official attendance improved, but the performance of the Council remained unsatisfactory. Meetings were disorganized and vague in purpose. What was more disconcerting was clear evidence that the concept behind the Thana Council had not been grasped. "The officers gave lectures on their departmental programmes," an Academy staff member noted, "still assuming that reports were for their superiors only and that the other Council members had nothing to say regarding their work."[176]

Several steps were taken to improve the operation of the Thana Council. In December 1960, the Academy established a formal connection with the Thana Council and Thana Civil Administration, and began to give guidance to Council activities. Agenda were firmly fixed and circulated well in advance of meeting days. Department officers were required to present to the Council a detailed monthly report of their activities. A weekly coordination meeting was established, in which department officers presented reports to the Circle Officer. Within a short time, these efforts began to show signs of success. The monthly agenda included more and more items, and meetings extended in length until they required nearly a full day. Several departments' schemes discussed at the Thana Council meetings were implemented through the Union Councils. When the V-AID Programme requested that a long-range development plan be prepared, the Thana Council began to function as a planning coordination unit, although abolition of V-AID in July, 1961 made the plan moot.

Once the Thana and Union Councils began to give evidence of being workable institutions, they provided impetus for another phase of the Academy experiment. One of the most pressing needs

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[175] "Kotwali" means "headquarters" and signifies that Comilla thana is the district seat.

[176] Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, A. K M. Mohsen, Training Officer, "The Comilla Rural Administration Experiment: History and Annual Report: 1962-63" (Comilla: October, 1963), p. 19.

of farmers in Comilla Thana has been protection from an annual flood. The need was expressed in Union Council meetings, and began to be a regular unscheduled item on the Thana Council agenda. Earlier petitions for government action failed to achieve adequate results. When the issue was raised at the thana level by Union Council chairmen, a plan of corrective action was prepared, sanctioned and implemented. In early 1961, the Thana Council reached an agreement with WAPDA and a neighboring Thana Council, and coordinated a dam-building effort, using labor hired by the Union Councils. Evidence of successful planning and execution of an earth-moving venture motivated the Academy to attempt a larger scheme of a similar nature. In late 1961, the Kotwali Thana Union Councils prepared a ward-by-ward plan for minor irrigation, road-building, and drainage projects. The Thana Council consolidated these into an overall thana plan, with the technical advice of the department officers. The Academy undertook a series of training sessions, again with the aid of department representatives. The Department of Agriculture provided funds, and the Union Councils hired and supervised labor through a series of project committees. The Subdivisional Officer and Circle Officer, as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Thana Council, were ultimately responsible for overall operation of the program.

Successful completion of this pilot project in 1961-62 led the government to extend it to a ten crore rupee provincial project in 1962-63, and to a twenty crore rupee project in 1963-64. West Pakistan started a provincial program in 1963-64. The Rural Public Works Programme has now become a regular budgeted item and Rs. 150 crore are to be spent during the period of the Third Five-Year Plan. Much of the initial training was done by the Academy, and the techniques developed in Comilla Thana were published[177] and circulated by the Basic Democracies Department.

From the point of view of economic development, the Rural Public Works Programme has great significance. To date over Rs. 50 crore has been pumped into the rural economy of East Pakistan.[178] The money has primarily been spent on labor-intensive projects, in periods of peak unemployment. The program is aimed at removing one of the province's chief impediments to progress. Without a sound communication and drainage infrastructure there is small incentive or scope for commercial agriculture.[179]

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[177]East Pakistan, Basic Democracies and Local Government Department, "Works Programme Through Basic Democracies, 1963-64" (Circular 44), (Dacca: East Pakistan Government Press, 1963).

[178]Finances have been provided by US-AID from counterpart funds made available from sale of wheat. This method of financing provides adequate funds, while acting as an anti-inflationary measure by supplementing the local grain supply.

[179]A recent book by Colin Clark and M. R. Haswell, Agriculture in a Subsistence Economy (Oxford University Press, 1964), emphasizes that a sound communication system is the necessary prerequisite for economic development.

From the perspective of administrative history, the Public Works Programme is of equal importance. The Thana Council impinges on East Pakistan's administrative structure at a critical point and in a critical manner. Civil and departmental hierarchies for the most part stretch down only to the thana level. They have not been able in the past to work very effectively with one another, or to ascertain and meet the needs of the general population. Local self-government has remained stunted. The Basic Democracies scheme was deliberately contrived to overcome these problems. However, the contrivance could easily have remained inert. The Pilot Works Programme presented a way to bring the whole system to life. Once the Thana Council began functioning even in a rudimentary way, it became responsive to the needs of the Union Councils. The Works Programme offered new scope for Union Councils to express local needs, and the Thana and District Councils new scope for meeting these needs. The Rural Works Programme brought into full play the local government, development, and integrative machinery of the Basic Democracies Ordinance. With persistence on the part of the government, to ensure operation of the Thana Council, and further expansion of local government, already strengthened by the Works Programme, the machinery should continue to prove its worth.

Economic Organization

Village society in East Pakistan has remained largely isolated, self-contained, and unapproachable. Removal of the zamindars after 1950 made the villages even more isolated as they lost their social leaders and financiers. For political and general administrative purposes, the union has been proven a viable unit. To affect rural life fundamentally, however, the village itself must somehow be reached. The Cooperative Department tried organizing first at the village level, then in post-Independence days, at the union level. The efforts met with notable lack of success. The V-AID Programme tried to introduce an agent from outside the village, who would organize small groups for economic and social purposes. This effort also proved generally ineffective. Nevertheless, the Academy initiated a major pilot project aimed at opening a channel to the villages. For modernization, it was considered a necessary step: "Economically, the village is explosive, for socially the old leadership and the old institutions are now completely helpless. In some cases they have totally disappeared. Introducing new skills and new implements and new methods will require a complete reorganization of the social and economic structure of the village."[180]

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[180] Akhter Hameed Khan, "The Basic Principles of the Comilla Programme", A speech given at the Academy on 13 February, 1963 to a missionary group from the Oriental Institute Sagardi, Barisal, East Pakistan, mimeo, undated.

The vehicle chosen to carry this heavy burden is a network of cooperatives. The Comilla cooperatives are designed to avoid the weaknesses of previous organizational attempts. A two-tier system has been established: a number of village-based primary societies scattered throughout the thana, and a thana level central cooperative association located at Abhoy Ashram. This two-tier system offers several advantages. The village seems to be the natural cohesive social and economic unit in East Pakistan, but a village cooperative society alone would be too weak to stand. The addition of the central association permits the village to be used as a social group, for the introduction of innovations, and to grow stronger as an economic unit. The village offers an effective organizational base; the central association provides servicing, training and supervised credit, and enforces discipline. Villagers organize for their own economic self-interest, and choose their own leaders; the central association provides the support needed to make the village member prosper.

Considering the troubled history of cooperatives in Bengal, the Comilla Pilot system warrants closer examination.[181] No attempt is made to enlist entire villages into cooperatives. Interested individuals who wish to do so may join together and elect a manager, accountant, and chairman. Before a society can be registered however it must pass through a probationary period. Neither registration nor loans are given until the society has had regular weekly meetings, with members in compulsory attendance, and until each member has a steady weekly record of savings. After registration, both weekly general meetings and weekly individual savings remain compulsory. Loans are given to societies as a whole on the basis of an investment plan mutually prepared and approved at a weekly meeting. The society sends its plan to the central association, which issues the loan at once, if approved. The central association closely watches to see that the loan is used for the intended purpose, and that it is repaid on time. Most of the loans are on a short-term basis, and for agricultural improvement. Long-term loans are provided for major investments such as tubewells. Once the society is registered, it sends its accountant and manager to the central association for training once a week, on a continuing basis. In addition, the primary society selects one of its members to be a "model farmer", who also goes weekly to Abhoy Ashram for training, and observation of improved techniques used on the Academy's experimental farm. The model farmer is given simply-written lesson sheets to take for use at the primary societies' weekly meeting. As the village

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[181]For more complete information, see the reports issued annually since 1960-61, entitled "A New Cooperative System for Comilla Thana", 1961, 1962, 1963 and 1964.

cooperative grows stronger, it is able to take advantage of the other modernization services offered by the central association, such as irrigation and mechanization of agriculture. As the central association grows stronger, it is able to offer more services. Processing units have recently been started, beginning with a rice mill, dairy and cold storage plant.

In 1964, the experiment added a new dimension by separating urban non-agricultural cooperatives from the central association, and forming a new thana-level cooperative federation for special societies. Urban societies had been operating since 1961. The vitality they demonstrated, and the differing nature of their problems led to the creation of the separate central association for them. It is hoped that this new federation will become a working model for mofussil population centers.[182]

The Comilla pilot cooperative experiment, which has the interest and financial support of the provincial Cooperative Department, seems to have developed a relatively effective system of rural credit, and of extending improved farming techniques into the villages. Capital and savings have accumulated much faster than the Academy expected. Repayment rate on loans--a critical criterion--has exceeded 99%[183] Loans have been extended promptly and at a comparatively cheap rate (12%-19% versus 60%-100% charged by moneylenders), for productive purposes, and have been regularly repaid. At the same time, primary societies have steadily increased the number of people selected for training.

A Thana Level Training Institution

The capstone of the Comilla rural administration experiment is a further innovation in thana-level institutions. In 1960 the venue of the thana council was shifted from Comilla Town Hall to Abhoy Ashram, to enable closer observation of its operation. In April 1961, the Circle Officer moved his office to Abhoy Ashram, as his Thana Council duties increased. Thana-level department officers found that they had to spend greater

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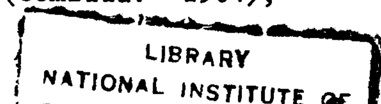
[182]An outstanding success story by rickshawpullers' society is described by M. Nurul Huq, Cooperation as a Remedy for Rural Poverty (Dacca: East Pakistan Cooperative Union Ltd., March 1963), pp. 1-40.

[183]Pakistan Academy for Rural Development "Rural Cooperative Pilot Experiments, Fourth Annual Report, 1964", (Comilla: 1964), p. 27.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amounts of time at the Abhoy Ashram. Both the Thana Council and Central Cooperative Association, as they gained momentum, proved capable of absorbing expertise and material offered by the nation-building agencies. In January, 1963, five departmental officers shifted from scattered locations in Comilla town to Abhoy Ashram.[184] In February, 1963, the complex of institutions centered at the Ashram became officially known as "The Kotwali Thana Training and Development Centre."

The Centre brings into proximity the regular service arms of government and the territorial administrative officer charged with their coordination. At the same site are the only two channels of communication presently existing that reach the rural countryside. The Thana Council has demonstrated that for select problems it can be an effective medium for expression of the civic needs of local government, and for responding to those needs. The two-tier cooperative system has provided an organizational link to individual villages that is strong enough economically and socially to permit adoption and utilization of at least some of the services necessary for agricultural modernization. The central association can provide the supervision and discipline necessary to build the system, but the department officers must provide the continued technical training and supplies needed to make the system a success. In effect, the cooperative structure permits the farmers to select their own extension agents, and send them to the thana center for the required training.

The thana center completes the chain of institutions that the Academy so far feels are necessary for rural development. Again, in view of existing problems and previous history, this innovation seems well designed. If properly functioning, the Basic Democracies machinery can provide a communication and drainage infrastructure. The two-tier cooperative system creates an organizational unit capable of initiating change. The Thana Training and Development Centre provides the human and physical resources, and in a more convenient and coordinated manner than before. The thana center is flexible. As new pilot programs prove their worth and are adopted by the government, they have a ready-made administrative niche. (This happened with an Academy family planning program, but not, as yet, with a women's program, or an education program designed along the lines of the rural works program.)

For these reasons, the provincial government in 1963 adopted the thana center concept, and plans to build one in every thana, under the rural works program. Each building is to have office space for the Circle Officer and thana department officers,

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[184] Agriculture, Plant Protection, Animal Husbandry, Fishery and Education.

classrooms, thana council headquarters, a meeting hall, and looking to the future, headquarters for a central cooperative association. Nearby are to be a demonstration farm and fish tank, and housing for all the government officers. When announcing the establishment of the Centres, the Secretary of Basic Democracies summed up previous administrative difficulties, and hopes for the future:

> "To date no systematic effort has been made to harness this general urge (for economic development) and direct it into fruitful channels so as to reach a chartered goal of economic improvement. This is primarily because of lack of administrative and organizational facilities at this vital level--the thana. In order to meet this deficiency it is necessary to set up in each thana an institution which may place all the offices and officers of the government for catering to the needs of economic improvement of the villages. Such a centre will become a symbol of national and local effort towards development. This centre will become in the eyes of the people in respect of economic betterment what the police station has been to law and order administration."[185]

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[185]"Works Programme Through Basic Democracies," op.cit., p. 48.

Chapter 11

CONCLUSION

East Pakistan has been described as an old land within new boundaries.[186] The description is apt for the province's administrative structure as well. An old system evolved by foreign rulers for colonial ends must adapt to the needs of a modern nation-state. Among the many recently independent nations, Pakistan has been blessed with an unusually serviceable set of institutions. Certainly, they must receive a large measure of credit for the country's remarkable recovery from the unpropitious circumstances accompanying Independence. Still, the pattern of administration in East Pakistan, particularly of rural administration, had to be altered if the traditionally neglected countryside was to undergo the process of modernization promised it by the government.

The approach to rural development evolved by the Academy for Rural Development at Comilla has indicated the future direction that might be taken by local administration. The Comilla approach is essentially an institution-building experiment giving heavy emphasis to coordination and training. The full-thrust of the program has been to make the thana a vital unit of administration, and an effective unit for development. In evolving this approach, the Academy has proceeded quite differently from those who have previously tried to influence village conditions. The Academy has remained determinedly experimental. No concept is advocated for adoption that has not been tested in field conditions, and analyzed in academic reports. To borrow an American idiom, it is also a "hard-minded" approach. There is no talk of enlisting the rural masses in projects using self-help and voluntary contributions; if a service is rendered, it is paid for. (The rural works program is the most widely-known product of this attitude, but the principle is consistently followed.) There is no talk of providing poor peasants with a "friend, philosopher and guide"; the stress is on organization, supervision, and discipline. In addition, the approach is cautious. The temptation, and urging from the government, to expand quickly the pilot projects has been resisted. There seems to be no desire in Comilla to create paper movements.

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[186] Harouner Rashid, B A. (Cantab), C.S.P. East Pakistan: A Systematic Regional Geography and Its Development Planning Aspects (Lahore: Sh. Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1965), p. 1.

Although the Comilla experiment is only in its sixth year, it already has met with a measure of acclaim. The Director of the Academy has been presented the Magsaysay Award by the Philippine Government, and an honorary Doctorate of Laws by Michigan State University. On 12th March 1963, President of Pakistan Mohammad Ayub Khan, accompanied by the provincial Governor, spent a full day personally inspecting the Academy, and was favorably impressed: "It is the first time that I found the ideas that were only vaguely present in my mind put into practical shape in a realistic and pragmatic manner to help people stand on their own feet and better their lot...I hope that your experiences are put into practice throughout the country; in that lies our real salvation, and you can rest assured that I, on my part, will do all that is possible to support this noble cause."[187]

Several aspects of the experiment have been put into practice. As noted, the rural public works program has been adopted by both wings of the country, thana training and development centers are being built throughout East Pakistan, and major elements of the Comilla family planning project have been adopted for nation-wide application. Ready for consideration for wider adoption is a school works experiment that met with success in Comilla thana, and a women's program involving literacy, health, homemaking and economic improvements. The entire Comilla "package" of institutions has also been given wider testing. In September 1962, a C.S.P. officer was placed on deputation at the Academy to prepare a trial expansion plan. Three widely separated thanas in the northern part of the province--Natore, Gaibandha and Gouripur--were chosen. Each was the site of a V-AID Training Institute. After officers were selected and trained at the Academy, the expansion test began, in July 1963. The transplantation was successful enough to encourage further expansion, and on 8th May 1964, the National Economic Council approved a proposal to extend the total Comilla program to the other twenty thanas of Comilla District. The expansion was officially launched in December 1964. Meanwhile, the government continues to send its officials to the Academy for orientation, including each year's probationers for the Civil Service of Pakistan (C.S.P.) and the East Pakistan Civil Service, Class II (Circle Officers). Various departments, including Agriculture and the Cooperative Directorate, also regularly send their officers for instruction. These training courses, and construction of thana training and development centers, lay the groundwork for further expansion of the Comilla program if the government decides to do so.

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[187]Letter to the Director of the Academy, 22nd March 1963. Printed in full in Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, "Fourth Annual Report", June 1962-May 1963 (Comilla: East Pakistan, 1963), p. V.

The staff of the Academy, of course, are not the only people concerned about the management of change in East Pakistan. The "Comilla approach" has been subjected to a variety of criticism. Among the more relevant comments are charges that the experiment costs too much money, is too slow, and depends on the talents of a charismatic leader.[188] Some counterpoints for the monetary argument are that the Government of Pakistan has, wisely enough, abandoned the idea that you can revolutionize the countryside "on the cheap", that both research and rural development are costly; that agriculture is East Pakistan's greatest industry and requires capital input, and that the question is not to spend as little money as possible, but to allocate scarce resources in an effective manner. The complaint about slowness is an obvious one. Sustained low productivity in agriculture in the face of mounting pressure on the land adds a strong element of urgency to development efforts. The Comilla Cooperatives reach only part of the population and take time to mature. Some counter-arguments that can be raised are that the institutions built or strengthened by the Comilla experiment have made significant changes in the thana, even after taking the first year or two to evolve effective working principles; that considering the previous fifty years of disappointment in the cooperative field, and twenty years in rural reconstruction attempts, the six years invested by Comilla are not a long time; that any development effort will need a strong economic organization in the villages in order to succeed; and that it is better to build sound and lasting institutions than raise false hopes through hastily conceived programs that prove to be ephemeral, as has happened in the past. Another failure may prove more costly than the extra investment of time. As for the accusation that Comilla is a "one-man show", this, too, has a list of counter-arguments. There is no doubt that Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan is the catalytic agent providing energetic force at Comilla. He is an unusual blend of methodical administration and poetic greatness, and he has stamped the program with practicality and vision. But any program that is to succeed in East Pakistan will require able leadership; it is the nature of the program itself that needs examination. The approach developed at Comilla is intended to be deeply imbedded in the existing administrative structure, and to generate at every point the leadership needed to maintain itself. It seems to have been successful on both counts in the

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[188]Some others are that the Academy is communistic, because it deals with cooperatives; that it is an American-front organization because of the American advisors; and that it is un-Islamic, as the cooperatives charge interest.

four thanas so far involved. However, the district expansion plan will provide the acid test of the charisma theory.

From a longer historical view, there is further cause to raise questions about present trends in East Pakistan's pattern of administration. The component parts of both the Basic Democracies hierarchy and the Comilla experiment have been discussed. Looked at as a whole, there seem to be certain potential problems inherent in the present structure. One is the composition of the councils from the division downward. The existing arrangement is necessary for Basic Democracies to discharge both local government and development functions. As noted earlier, for development needs the system is well designed. However, this province has a long and vigorous history of political participation. Bengalis have been "impregnated with politics" for at least three decades, and are accustomed to electing office-holders at all levels of government (except for the top post, following parliamentary practice). It seems likely to be only a matter of time before there is an increase in the present minority demand for wider voting influence. Perhaps when and if that demand comes, the existing structure through the divisional level can be left intact, and adjustments made at the provincial level. By the time the demand is raised to turn the present divisional, district and thana councils from administrative bodies into full agencies of local government, traditions of local government may be strong enough to sustain development duties. In any event, this is long range speculation, and for the immediate future the system is unlikely to require major alteration.

A second and more pressing problem is the danger that the whole system may bog down because of over-centralization. Suggestions for delegation of decision-making, from the Royal Commission upon Decentralization (1908) to the Government of Pakistan's Committee on Re-organization of Provincial Administration (1960),[189] seem to have resulted more in changes in nomenclature than in substance. The system still smacks of Akbar and Curzon. If the logic of the Basic Democracies Ordinance and the Comilla rural administration experiment is to prevail, then the thana level officers of both the civil and servicing arms of government must be given adequate freedom to shoulder responsibility.

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[189]See Government of East Pakistan "Report of the Implementation Sub-Committee on the Re-organization of the Provincial Administration, Vol. I" (Dacca: September 1960).

A third problem, which is bound up with the preceding two, is the future of the thana council. Once the special injection of funds through the works program ceases, there is danger that the thana council will suffer the same fate as the earlier intermediary bodies, the Local Boards. With no independent funds and with duties conferred in general terms, the thana council may be squeezed out of the administrative picture. The land cess remains inadequate to divide three ways. Perhaps in the future a special municipal fund may be placed at the disposal of the thana council, made up from mandatory subscription collected from existing tax sources of the district and union councils. In the meantime, continued operation of the works program for the next ten years or so should clarify the thana council's value.

A fourth problem, which has come to occupy widespread attention, is the role of the bureaucrat as a change-agent. Pakistan has perhaps gone farther than any other new nation in Asia, with a civilian government, in integrating development tasks into the line administration. The question naturally arises whether the tradition-bound successor to the venerable I.C.S. can adopt a development orientation. While this is no doubt an important question, the answer to which still hangs in the balance, the problem seems to be one which the government has well in hand. A series of training institutes have been established for the express purpose of imparting development skills and attitudes to government servants at all stages of their careers. One gets the impression from visiting these institutes that they are making good headway in their task. The nationalism of government officers has been a great aid, and the new moral tone imparted by the Revolution of 1958 has brought renewed confidence in the ability of the government to make progress. The whole concept of continuing a "guardian class" in a democratic society may be questioned, but that is a separate matter and one which seems to have little practical relevance in Pakistan for the foreseeable future.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to take a long view specifically of the Academy's frontier experiments in rural administration. A brief analysis of the mechanics and contributions of each part of the program has been given. The real strength of the approach comes when it is viewed as a totality. The need for a comprehensive and integrated attack on rural problems has been often stated but never attempted. Instead, reliance has been placed on ad-hoc committees or emergency programs. When these wither away, inertia reclaims the ground it has lost, and long periods of increased apathy and resignation follow. The Comilla efforts at institution-building, backstopped by field-testing, are designed to be

inter-supportive and integrated. They are also carefully evolutive, growing from the existing machinery in a manner intended to maximize the utility of available resources.

This comprehensive approach will not automatically produce a regenerated countryside. At the very least, the success of Comilla's development endeavors depends on continued government stability. The support promised by President Ayub Khan can unlock the dynamism that seems built into the program. No amount of structural tinkering alone can fulfill the promise of a better life inherent in the Pakistan Movement. But the Basic Democracies Ordinance and the innovations introduced at Comilla appear to have reduced proven impediments to development efforts, and to have gone a long way toward establishing administrative conditions conducive to economic and social change.

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