

Emergence of Separatist Movement in East Pakistan: Impact of Jinnah's Leadership

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Abstract

This paper offers a study of the impact of leadership of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on the Bengali Separatist Movement in its preliminary stage during the first year of the life of Pakistan when Quaid-i-Azam served as its first governor general. It would be examined whether the lingual, constitutional, economic and governmental issues, which later became a source of discontent that caused the Bengali Separatist Movement grow, were addressed by the Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah in a proper way and he did not found those mistakes which his successors in the leadership of Pakistan committed. It would also be observed that visionary leader of Quaid-i-Azam's rank could understand the danger to the integrity of Pakistan posed by the feelings of provincialism, communism and Hindu influence in the eastern wing of Pakistan that was remote from its western part through a distance of one thousand miles.

The paper will also provide a critical analysis of the steps of Quaid-i-Azam which he took for the purpose of the solidarity of newly born state of Pakistan but which steps were allegedly used as a negative propaganda against the founder of Pakistan in order to give air to the ideas of separatism in the Bengalis. In this context the Quaid's decision for the selection of Karachi as the capital of Pakistan and his use of powers as the governor general of Pakistan would be analyzed.

Key words: Leadership, Movement, Separatism, Jinnah, Bangladesh, Pakistan

Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah is undoubtedly, one of the greatest politicians in the history of the world. Undaunted by the huge odds presented by his political adversaries, he achieved such success that few politicians can boast of. (Siddiqui, 2009, xix) Hodson (1969, 37-38) credits him with the whole process of the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan by observing: "Of all the personalities in the last act of the great drama of India's re-birth to independence, Mohammad Ali Jinnah is at once the most enigmatic and the most important." Pethick-Lawrance, who as Secretary of State for India had turned down the demand for Pakistan, acknowledged: 'He had, of course, immense powers of intellect and also of persuasive eloquence which he used with such effect that the idea [of Pakistan], which was at first as idea only, became in the end a reality.' (Burke, 2009, 1 xiii)

As a politician he attained world stature and won a permanent place in history. He did not only win independence from colonial rule for an existing country, but performed the extraordinary feat of bringing an altogether new independent country into existence against seemingly impossible odds. (Burke, 2009, xix) It was the dangerous situation at the time of emergence of Pakistan that Nehru told General Sir Frank

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Messervy that 'his deliberate plan would be to allow Jinnah to have his Pakistan, and gradually make things so impossible economically and otherwise for Pakistan that they would have to come on their bended knees and ask to be allowed back into India. But at that time Quaid-i-Azam's contemporary scholars considered him so linked with the preservation and existence of Pakistan that on his death Bernard Shaw wrote to Nehru that "if he [the Quaid-i-Azam] has no competent successor you [Nehru] will have to govern the whole Peninsula." (Nehru, 1960, 517)

Quaid-i-Azam's Pakistan could not be kept unified in the result of successful separatist movement in East Pakistan in 1971. This separation posed many questions for historians and scholars. One of those questions is how Quaid-i-Azam contributed for eradicating separatist movement which was emerging during his days. The answer to this question can be helpful to assess the qualifications of this great leader as well as it can clear some doubts created by some scholars.

Understanding the Challenge of Separatist Movement:

During almost one year of Pakistan's early life, which was the last year of Quaid-i-Azam's life, no one should have thought that a separatist movement in East Pakistan had started. Likewise it is not natural to expect from Quaid-i-Azam to predict the rise of such movement even when its leaders did not have an idea of that kind. What one can expect from Quaid-i-Azam is that he must have full understanding of the likely threats and dangers to his new-born state. According to Ayesha Jalal (as cited in Alqama, 1997, 88), Quaid-i-Azam, more than anyone else knew, "that the greatest threat to Pakistan's survival would be internal, not external."

However the internal issues, he viewed, were exploited by India and Communists for the purpose of forced reunion of India and Pakistan. He deemed the ideas of provincialism and their projection the conspiracy of the enemies of Pakistan. He thought that having failed to prevent the establishment of Pakistan they had turned their attention to disrupt it by creating a split amongst its Muslim people through encouraging provincialism.

The method for the achievement of this end, he thought, was to bring about a revolt of Muslims against the Muslim League and the Pakistan Government, failing that to make the leaders of Pakistan realise the folly of two nation theory and change their ways and force them once again to agree to join the Union of India and thereby create a single India by war. (Afzal, 1980, 439-40) At the time of first language agitation he informed the Bengalis frankly and openly that they had got amongst them 'a few communists and other agents financed by foreign power. He pointed out that the idea that East Bengal should be brought back into the Indian Union had not been given up. (Oxford University Press, 2009, 146)

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Quaid-i-Azam's viewpoint to prevent Separatism:

Pakistan was made up of two blocks of territory. Quaid-i-Azam was forced to get this moth-eaten country as a compulsion because he could miss a chance to achieve a separate state for the Muslims of India. Soon after the creation of Pakistan, it was facing the problem of geographical remoteness between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. For the solution of this problem Quaid-i-Azam stressed upon bonds of unity based on religion. The measure to contest the conspiracy of India and Communists, he suggested, was attachment with the 'faith' Islam. It is apparent from his speech telecast to the Australian people that he was conscious that a question might rise in the mind how the unity of far fetched wings of Pakistan was possible. He said that he could answer the question in a single word "faith"; faith in God Almighty, faith in us, and faith in our destinies. He viewed that common Muslim history, customs and traditions of both wings had such ideas, views and physical trends which shape a nation (Salamat, 1992, 72-73) that can face any challenge of separatism.

To him the close contact between the people and leaders of both wings could be helpful to integrate the existent geographical split. He declared that he, as the Head of the State, and Pakistani Ministers must establish closer contact with people of East Pakistan through staying there. Likewise Bengali government and people must establish the links with West Pakistan and the Centre. (Dil & Dil, 2000, 611)

Quaid-i-Azam saw a strong Pakistan Muslim League as the barrier to the curse of provincialism because mushroom parties led by men of doubtful past could destroy what had been achieved or capture what had been secured. He stressed that under the circumstances there should have been only one political party i.e. Pakistan Muslim League because it had made sacrifices for the cause of Pakistan. He told that Pakistan Muslim League could give right lead to people. He advised the people not to believe in new mushroom-like political parties organised by erstwhile anti-Pakistan elements, to avoid domestic controversies petty quarrels and provincialism. (Afzal, 1980, 463-64)

He deemed the danger from some Bengali Muslim politicians who were indifferent because they had vested interests and they were afraid that they might lose in case of solidarity of Pakistan. Therefore they had sold themselves to the enemy and worked against Pakistan. (Dil & Dil, 2000, 610)

Issues promoting separatist movement and Quaid-i-Azam:

Some writers allege that Quaid-i-Azam initiated certain policies which in turn gave air to separatist movement in East Pakistan. Firstly they attach Quaid-i-Azam with the act of delay in the constitution making. (Islam, 1987, 10-11) Many, however, acknowledge that the presence of Quaid-i-Azam, if he lived longer, could have prevented the rise of separatist movement in East Pakistan by introducing a balanced

constitution. A prominent Bengali leader Abul Mansur Ahmad had no doubt that had Quaid-i-Azam lived for another year, he would have given a secular democratic constitution paving the way to integrate Pakistan into a well-knit, modern, and progressive nation. (Ahmad, 1975, 43) And indeed Quaid-i-Azam had underlined the importance of constitution-making, the crux of which was the relations of the federating units with the Centre, but his demise did not let him bring about the resolution of East-West issues which were emerging. (Zaheer, 1994, xvii)

Secondly it is alleged that Quaid-i-Azam chose Karachi as Pakistan's capital without taking the note of wishes of Bengalis. While in fact Quaid-i-Azam did not select Karachi due to any discrimination with Bengalis or because of any personal liking of the city. When Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz (1971, 237) asked Quaid-i-Azam to make Lahore the capital of Pakistan he dismissed the idea telling the reason of making Karachi the capital that Sindh was the only province which had invited him to locate the capital in Karachi.

Thirdly sowing the seeds of authoritarian rule is taken another mistake of Quaid-i-Azam in context of Bengali separatism. According to some scholars Pakistan, unlike India, opted for the British-Indian Viceregal system of government and Quaid-i-Azam, instead of becoming the Prime Minister of Pakistan, took up the role of the Governor General. This new role provided that office with an enormous degree of effective powers which are normally absent in a parliamentary democracy. The powers and influence that Quaid-i-Azam exercised were far beyond those associated with that office. (Ahmad, 1959, 4-5), (Islam, 1987, 12) He not only took the initiative in forming the Cabinet, but also in formulating its policies, took certain departments under his direct control and also brought Section 92A into legislation. (Islam, 1990, 113) (Ahmad, 1972, 2) In the subsequent years of Pakistan's political history his exercise of absolute power had its dangerous effects on his successors who frequently abused such powers. These anti democratic tendencies became the modus operandi of the state machine. Therefore Quaid-i-Azam is considered as much responsible as his successors for the death of democracy in Pakistan which contributed to the disintegration of the country. (Ahmad, 1972, 61) (Faruque, 1972, 7)

But this is not the complete story. The Quaid-i-Azam had been a democratic leader and he had spent his whole life working and struggling as a constitutional and democratic campaigner. Therefore after emergence of Pakistan how could he demonstrate himself as a dictator? Indeed despite his immense prestige as Pakistan's founding father Quaid-i-Azam never exceeded the limits of his authority as Governor General laid down by the India Independence Act. The Constitution of Pakistan as well as the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan had conferred him with these powers. Pakistan was a newly born country that was facing various hostile forces which were active to disrupt it in the very beginning. It, therefore, needed arrangements which could secure it from the dangers of disruption in the very start. An eminent historian

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Dr. Ian Talbot (1999, 128) views that the strengthening of executive authority in the early months of Pakistan's independence by Quaid-i-Azam was quite justified as necessary if the state was to function at all.

In fact both the civil services and the armed forces had to be organized from top to bottom in Pakistan unlike in India where a structure already existed. This naturally concentrated great power in the hands of the armed forces and the bureaucracy, and they put it to political use through conspiracy and with consummate cleverness. Quaid-i-Azam was not a supporter of the designs of these forces. Badruddin Umer considers him the greatest obstacle in the fulfilment of these designs and observes that Jinnah's early death removed the greatest obstacle in the way of these forces. (Umar, 2004, 240-41)

The nation had trust on Quaid-i-Azam and no finger of objection was raised during his life time, nor any one else except him was able to help the nation start its journey as a free nation. Moreover Quaid-i-Azam's actions were not directed against Bengali people and any other ethnic or provincial entity of the federation. He remained always fair to Bengalis. In order to keep the opposing factions united and free of prejudices he lectured both sides sharply for their intolerant attitudes and insisted that East Pakistanis must be given the opportunity to take their full share in national affairs. (Williams, 1972, 19) He had to take constitutional actions just against those political elements that had lost their mandate or were creating disturbances for smooth functioning of the government.

Fourthly some charge that Quaid-i-Azam managed to relegate the Centre more powers than the provinces. Industry, Agriculture, Internal Commerce, Education, Health and Communication were put under the Central Government in addition to Defence, Foreign Affairs and Currency and deprived the provinces of their only flexible sources of revenue. (Islam, 1990, 113) (Ahmad, 1972, 2) Abul Mansur Ahmad (1975, 7) alleging that Quaid-i-Azam himself initiated one federal state of Pakistan on the basis of so-called provincial autonomy, thereby reducing Eastern zone to the position of a province from that of a region in violation of clear language of the Lahore Resolution suggests that Quaid-i-Azam could, if he so wanted, have set up two Governments for two regions making himself Governor General of both, spending six months at Karachi and six months at Dhaka. But this suggestion is so impractical that none who is aware of minor objective conditions of Pakistan can recommend it. Moreover Quaid-i-Azam did not adopt any permanent constitution of Pakistan and arrangements made under Government of India Act 1935 were just interim and were to be replaced with new Constitution.

Fifthly to Talukdar (1987, 36-39), Quaid-i-Azam alone is held responsible for the Bengali discontent because it was he who, being all powerful, avoided the Bengalis representation in his cabinet, and did not nominate Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy as

Prime Minister. In the matter of fact being popular leader of Muslim public Quaid-i-Azam did neither need to use his powers to decrease anyone's political representation nor did he have any personal grudge with Suhrawardy. On the contrary Quaid-i-Azam facilitated fair chances for Suhrawardy's rise. There is evidence that when Suhrawardy suggested to the viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, that he would try to persuade the Congress and Bengali leadership generally for a United Bengal as an independent state outside both the Indian Union and Pakistan, Quaid-i-Azam did not react adversely. Suhrawardy tried and failed. (Feldman, 2001, xix) As far as representation in the cabinet is concerned Quaid-i-Azam offered Suhrawardy the portfolio of rehabilitation in central cabinet but he declined and went to Calcutta. (Choudhury, 2005, 35)

The frustration of Suhrawardy that resulted because of Khwaja Nazimuddin's election as the leader of PML Assembly party instead of Suhrawardy on August 5, 1947 is the first step for the establishment of strong leadership against PML that afterwards supported Bengali Movement. Quaid-i-Azam, as Suhrawardy stated on July 9, 1948, not only forced Khawaja Nazimuddin on the seat of Bengal but also finished his opposition. Defending Quaid-i-Azam's position on these elections, S. M. Ikram (1970, 207-08) gives three causes of the election of Nazimuddin. Firstly, Isphahni used all of his sources to make Nazimuddin succeed. Secondly, seventeen members of Sylhet had voted for Nazimuddin. And thirdly, Surawardy had angered two of the ministers of his cabinet, Fazlurehman and Hamidulhaq. Their votes played decisive role in the election of August 5, 1947. (Choudhury, 2005, 26) Quaid-i-Azam was quite impartial in the election. He, through his statement on July 28, 1947 had fully authorized the Provincial Assembly to elect their leader according to their own wishes. (Afzal, 1980, 426)

On the contrary of these allegations some actions and ideas of Quaid-i-Azam to accommodate the Bengalis were praiseworthy. In order to respond to Bengali demands for more adequate representation, and also to obstruct the likely separatism, Army should have been made a true national institution. In this regard main problem, in the days of Quaid-i-Azam was that British had not given East Bengal fair and just chance of recruitment to the Bengalis and consequently Bengalis had not proper representation in armed forces. Quaid-i-Azam greatly felt that East Bengali had been considered as negligible in quality and quantity for military purposes. He observed that the martial spirit of Bengalis, like many other great qualities was oppressed, suppressed. He suggested Bengalis that in free Pakistan they had every opportunity to revive their martial spirit and show to the world what Bengal could do. (Oxford University Press, 2009, 141)

It was this vision of Quaid-i-Azam that was followed and government took remedial steps for Bengali's representation in Pakistan army and on February 15, 1948, the East Bengal Regiment (first exclusively Bengali Infantry Regiment) was raised. (Siddiqi,

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1996, 7) The government lowered the standards for recruitment and set up recruitment centres in various parts of East Pakistan to attract the Bengali youth to the defence services. When it found the response discouraging, the CAP, on Liaquat's initiative who viewed that the cause of slow response was not lack of enthusiasm or determination but the absence of the facilities in the province, (Dil & Dil, 2000, 623) a committee to probe into the issue and recommend methods to accelerate recruitment was appointed. (Afzal, 2001, 123)

Quaid-i-Azam's Role on Language Agitation:

The Bhasha Ondolan, the movement which campaigned for the use of Bengali in the domain of power in East Bengal and fought to make it one of the official languages of the state, alongside Urdu, was not merely, or predominantly, a linguistic one, it was a political campaign of the greatest significance for the new state. It was in fact East Bengal's first challenge to the hegemony of the Urdu speaking Bengali aristocracy and West Pakistani ruling elite. (Rahman, 1996, 79)

Bengali nationalist movement was originated from the attempts for preservation of a cultural element; the Bengali language. In the days when the Bengali organisations were formed the most burning issue that vexed the Bengali mind and created one of the first tests for Pakistani leadership in the context of East Pakistan was the question of national language of Pakistan. The discontent that it generated and the protest that followed over it were the first signs of Bengali Nationalism. It brought the various discontented groups together and contributed to bridging the gap between the nationalist intellectuals and the masses. (Das, 1981, 91)

The first signs of the Bengali disapproval of Urdu as the only national language, which was supported by ruling PML leaders, appeared in the Pakistan Educational Conference called by the Central Minister of Education at Karachi in November 1947 the Bengali representatives opposed Urdu as the only national language. These signs of opposition to Urdu and support to Bengali did not take long to appear on the streets. Writers such as Hasan Zaheer (1994, 21) conventionally link the language agitation to the 1948 demonstrations, notwithstanding Tariq Rahman, (1996, 85) on the reference of Badruddin Umar, maintains that first meeting of the students for Bengali language was held on 6 December 1947.

However the very first demonstrations supporting Bengali language started in fact on December 12, 1947 after some minor political leaders, one of whom was connected with National Guards of PML, in a fairly large gathering at Dhaka announced in the name of Government that a meeting would be held to support the adoption of Urdu as the State language for Pakistan. This announcement caused immediate resentment

among the pro-Bengali elements and a fight started in which twenty persons were injured. Consequently a fairly large crowd of student-demonstrators proceeded to the Secretariat and eventually broke into its compound. On the intervention of two provincial ministers the demonstrators demanded them to resign and roughly handled them. Eventually after a harmless raid on the office of Finance Minister the crowd dispersed in the evening. This incident resulted in processions, demonstrations, smaller meetings and strikes in all educational institutions of Dhaka next day when troops were ordered out and section 144 was enforced for 15 days. (UK's Officiating Deputy HC in Dhaka, 1947)

The next activity in support of Bengali language, which a number of writers also deem as the start of the language controversy, (Akanda, 1976, 3) took place in reaction to the declaration of Urdu as the national language on 25 February 1948. (Government of Pakistan, 1998, 35) and the rejection of a motion of a Bengali Hindu member of CAP Dharendra Nath Datta, in the first session of the CAP on 23 February 1948, to allow Bengali to be used in the Assembly along with Urdu. (Umar, 2004, 32) (Mahmood, 1989, 8) Speeches in the assembly revealed resentment at alleged step-motherly treatment of Eastern Bengal. (OPDOM, 1948) On 24th February a protest strike was organized in Dhaka. The students of Dhaka University, various other schools and colleges demonstrated and denounced the language policy of government. An all-party committee entitled the State Language Committee of Action (SLCA) was set up with the objective of achieving national status for Bengali. The committee representing all shades of opinion _ leftists, rightists, and centrists was constituted of two representatives each from the Gono Azadi League, Democratic Youth League, Tamaddun Majlis, Dhaka University Halls as well as the East Pakistan Muslim Students League. The SLCA resolved to protest a general strike, all over East Bengal on 11 March. (Zaheer, 1994, 21-22) (Umar, 2004, 32)

From March 11 to March 15 the support of Bengali language invoked the disturbances in East Pakistan. Baton-charge on student demonstration on 11 March resulted into the injuries to prominent political and student leaders like Fazlul Huq, Shamsul Huq, Oli Ahad and Sheikh Mujib. In protest to the arrests, ban on papers *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and *Swadhinata* and police repression, students all over East Bengal went on strike and demonstrations took place in Dhaka from 13 to 15 March while general strike call was called by the SLCA for 15 March. On 16 March the police opened fire, used tear gas and made lathi charges on student demonstrators at the gate of East Bengal Assembly. About 15 students were injured not having bullet injury. (Umar, 2004, 33, 48)

The disturbance was eased and agitation for Bengali language was, to a large extent silenced due to a compromise between the SLCA and government of East Pakistan on 15 March. The agitation though was short-lived, showed for the first time the strength of the students, the main spokesmen for the Bengali interests. "It helped foster a kind

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of linguistic nationalism in East Pakistan. It made the students a potent political force and set the pattern of student-literati-professional alliance which was used successfully in all subsequent agitations. Above all, it supplied a universally popular issue, a cause under which all Bengalis could unite, a cause which helped bridge the elite-mass gap.”(Jahan, 1972, 43)

Quaid-i-Azam correctly understood the causes and possible results of language controversy when he said,

The language controversy is really an aspect of a bigger problem...that of provincialism... if we begin to think of ourselves as Bengalis, Punjabis, Sindhis etc., first, and Muslims and Pakistanis only incidentally, then Pakistan is bound to disintegrate. Do not think this is an abstruse proposition; our enemies are fully alive to its possibilities which I must warn you they are already busy in exploiting. (*Quaid-i-Azam*, 1963, 90)

But Quaid-i-Azam’s solution for the language agitation is questioned by many. Considering the language agitation the work of political saboteurs, Quaid-i-Azam praised that Prime Minister and his Government had decided to ‘put it down firmly’. While the question whether Bengali shall be the official language of East Pakistan, to Quaid-i-Azam, was a matter for the elected representatives of the people of the province to decide. He was clear that the question would be decided solely in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants of the province at the appropriate time. But he made it very clear that the state language of Pakistan was ‘going to be Urdu and no other language’ because ‘without one State language, no nation can remain tied up solidly together and function.’ (Dil & Dil, 2000, 609-10)

Quaid-i-Azam felt that Nazimudddin had accepted the demands of the students under duress, and the resolutions of the Provincial Assembly were not binding on the central government. He, therefore, presumably on the advice of some non-Bengali Secretaries refused to accept the terms of Agreement of 14th March 1948. He during the meeting with the students argued that there could not be a stable government without one State language for the whole country and Urdu should be accepted because it was not the language of any province of Pakistan, and hence there should have been no jealousy among the different peoples of Pakistan. (Zaheer, 1994, 22) (Ahmad, 1970, 100)

About Quaid-i-Azam’s speech in Dhaka, according to Oldenburg, “Quaid-i-Azam was not really addressing the question of which language would be the State language of Pakistan. Rather he was addressing the question: Why has the demand that Bengali be made a state language arisen all of a sudden. Moreover no decision was taken by Quaid-i-Azam on the issue of language. He only made a statement on the issue and it remained a statement and nothing beyond it. (Alqama, 1997, 131, 138)

Of course the language controversy cooled down after the visit of Quaid-i-Azam, but it, Hasan Zahreer (1994, 22) rightly concluded, could not be resolved altogether. The stray notes of his Dhaka visit, jotted down by Quaid-i-Azam in his notebook, made it plain that he was given a one-sided briefing on the issue. He was given a picture which depicted the demand for Bengali as one of the two state language as nothing more than a conspiracy of disgruntled Language leaders, the Hindus, the communists, and the anti-Pakistan elements in Calcutta. (Zaheer, 1994, 22)

Notwithstanding Quaid-i-Azam's point of view for the solution of language controversy went against his highly praised and sane intrinsic worth; he was not prejudiced against Bengali language and was able to resolve the issue wisely and amicably. He had resolved such a situation already in 1937, when in Lucknow session of the All-India Muslim League, a resolution proposing Urdu as the language of Muslim India and the official language of the Muslim League was moved and strongly opposed by the Bengali delegates. Quaid-i-Azam himself had intervened, and in the result of his intercession the final version of the resolution had only asked that 'wherever the Urdu language is the language of the area, its unhampered use and development should be upheld, and where it is not the predominant language, adequate arrangements should be made for teaching it as an optional subject.' (Zaheer, 1994, 23) (Pirzada, 1990, 279) (Sayeed, 1960, 210)

Nevertheless Quaid-i-Azam, in very short time of his leadership of Pakistan after the creation, overall had the abilities to prevent the separatist movement. Most of his actions did not provide the chance for development of the Bengali Movement. He never discriminated against the Bengali for giving representation in institutions of the state like army and bureaucracy. Unlike some of his successor and contemporary military leaders of Pakistan, he had eulogized the martial spirit in Bengalis. He said to Bengalis on March 20, 1948, "the Martial spirit of Bengalis is historically known and especially the part played in history of the past Bengal. You have every opportunity to revive your martial spirit." (Bhurgari, 2002, 109)

His personality eased the language agitation. He did not do any injustice to East Pakistanis and his alleged authoritarian acts as Governor General were general and need of time. They were not unconstitutional at all and no clue of his bad intention for Bengalis is found yet. In the light of his performance as a leader of freedom movement and as governor general it is safe to argue that if life gave him chance he could use his status and abilities to curtail the Bengali Movement.

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