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Linguistic Minorities and Conceptions of Belonging in Eastern India: The strategic deployment of 'identity' by the Bengali-Bihari community during the transition from colonial rule to independence (1912-1957)

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it). The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotation from it is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. This thesis may not be reproduced without my prior written consent. I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party. My thesis has been run through Grammarly to check for spelling and grammar errors. I declare that my thesis consists of 89,052 words.

Statement of inclusion of previous work

I can confirm that short sections from chapters 3-6 have been included in an article published in the Indian Economic and Social History Review, Volume 60.

Table of Contents

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Abbreviations

AICC- All-India Congress Committee

CUS-Chhotanagpur Unnati Samaj

DCC- District Congress Committee

IMP- Independent Muslim Party

KPP- Krishak Praja Party

LSS- Lok Sevak Sangh

MLA- Member of Legislative Assembly

MP- Member of Parliament

PCC- Pradesh Congress Committee

UP- United Provinces (colonial era), Uttar Pradesh (independent era)

Introduction

India has long been renowned for its linguistic and cultural diversity. One of the major tasks tackled by twentieth-century governments of the country was reconciling this diversity with national unity. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the politics of language have received a great deal of careful attention from scholars. Scholarship to date has centred around communities that identified as speaking the language of the 'majority' in a circumscribed area. There has been no shortage of movements considered to have linguistic identity as their driving force, from those that were opposed to the 'imposition' of specific languages, such as the anti-Urdu Hindi language movement of the colonial United Provinces, to the vigorous demands to create linguistic states in independent India, such as the Telugu-speaking Andhra State. By contrast, this dissertation analyses the language politics of the state of Bihar and interrogates how linguistic *minorities* navigated the transition from colonial rule to independence.

It focuses on the linguistic minority community in Bihar that identified themselves as Bengali. Bengalis in Bihar were not a monolithic community, and the different responses from distinctive sections of the Bengali community to various challenges faced made that evident. First, there were large communities of Bengalis settled in the regions of the state that bordered Bengal. Bengali was the predominant language in these areas (particularly the Manbhum Subdivision). The Lok Sevak Sangh (LSS), a party, formed by Bengali ex-Congressmen in the early 1950s, which claimed to represent Bengali opinion in the province, primarily drew its MLAs from this region. Second, there were Bengali communities settled in areas where Adivasis were the predominant population, such as the Santhal Parganas and parts of the Chhotanagpur Plateau (excluding the Manbhum District). Apart from these areas, which were relatively close to the Bengal border, there was a third Bengali population in cities and towns such as Gaya, Monghyr, and Patna. These Bengalis tended to serve in the administrative structures of the Raj (and later independent India) and in educational institutions.

Through an analysis of the histories of Bengalis in Bihar from 1912 to 1956, this thesis makes arguments about minority rights, the Hindi language movement, and language politics in Bihar. Firstly, it places a linguistic minority that is also an internal diasporic community at the centre of the discussion, allowing for the exploration of conceptualisations of both Indian and Bihari identities. This thesis argues that linguistic minorities transformed their practice of politics due to partition. Bengali-Bihari references to minoritism and

minority rights were almost entirely jettisoned, despite the demographics of Bihar remaining relatively unchanged.

Secondly, it traces the role played by location on politics in the post-colonial era and argues that partition encouraged the ascent of 'territorial' politics. Pre-independence, Bengalis in Bihar, regardless of location, were generally more willing to speak out against what they deemed 'discriminatory' behaviour on the part of the government. In the independent era, however, this scattered coalition fractured, with Bengalis from different regions falling on opposing sides of various debates. Bengalis on the border began to demand separation of their territory from the state of Bihar, while non-border Bengalis backed the government's demands against the transfer of territories to West Bengal.

Thirdly, the consolidation of non-border Bengali support for the Government of Bihar's priorities demonstrates how partition made it increasingly necessary for minority groups to align with the most powerful political groups in the region they inhabited. Additionally, the rhetoric used by these non-border Bengali-Biharis regarding linguistic states demonstrates the desire of linguistic minorities to retain linguistic heterogeneity in order to better protect their positions within the state. These groups raised fears that 'culturally' nationalist (linguistically homogenous) states would likely become oppressors of minorities while culturally heterogeneous states provided minorities with a degree of security.

Fourthly, the analysis of the strategic deployment of Hindi language policy and (more broadly) the Hindi movement in Bihar demonstrates that despite ostensibly centring around the same language, the Hindi movements in India were different based on the priorities of the province/state it developed in. Unlike the Hindi language movement developed in the United Provinces/Uttar Pradesh, which had a distinctly anti-Muslim and anti-Urdu bent, the one developed in Bihar appeared more concerned with retaining territory within Bihar's borders. This, consequently, meant there was little push to sanskritise the language. Instead, the proponents of Hindi in the province emphasised the 'broadness' of the category of Hindi, even placing Urdu within that category on occasion.

This chapter discusses the historiography and arguments relating to citizenship and minority rights, linguistic territorialism, the Hindi-language movement, and Bihari politics. In order to understand the specifics of the arguments made, the chapter begins with a brief outline of the background and main events of the period.

Background and Summary

Between 1912 and 1957, the politics of Bengalis in Bihar revolved around four distinct issues: access to government employment, requirements for Bengalis to produce domicile certificates in order to gain access to tertiary education or government jobs, the official language of administration in various parts of the state, and the redistribution of territory along linguistic lines. During the colonial era, Bengali-Biharis were particularly concerned with the first two issues and lobbied British officials to abolish the need to prove domicile in Bihar for Bengalis seeking access to education or government employment. They also demanded that Bengalis be given the same rights to employment as any other Bihari. They alleged that after the separation of Bengal from Bihar in 1912, officials responsible for hiring government employees had discriminated against Bengali candidates and that the procurement of domicile certificates was a complicated and challenging procedure that materially disadvantaged their community. In order to make these two demands, Bengalis in Bihar developed narratives of historic Bengali belonging to the province. In the colonial era, Bengalis in Bihar tended to focus on these two demands regardless of which region they inhabited. P.R. Das, a Bengali settled in Patna, emerged as their spokesperson during the relatively contentious investigation into the 'Bengali-Bihari issue' in 1938-39 and Bengalis in other parts of the province did not challenge his leadership.

However, this changed in the independent era. The Indian constitution granted citizens the right to work in any state and the Government of Bihar was forced to abandon the domicile certificate system. Therefore, the latter two issues, linguistic realignment and the official language of the country and the state, became far more significant to Bengali-Bihari politics. This led to the fragmentation within Bengali politics in the state, and the location of the Bengali community became significant in the realignment that followed. Bengalis in Manbhum, led by the LSS initially emphasised the need for administration in Bengali in the region and demanded they receive education in Bengali. Members of the Government of Bihar dismissed these demands as they were increasingly worried that linguistic realignment would result in the transfer of territory from Bihar. Therefore, they were unwilling to concede that Manbhum had large numbers of Bengali speakers. Bengalis on the border then began demanding the amalgamation of Bengali-speaking territory with West Bengal. On the other hand, Bengalis in regions where Bengali was not the predominant language spoken positioned themselves against linguistic realignment. They deployed narratives developed during the 1920s and 1930s of Bengali belonging in Bihar to oppose linguistic realignment and more generally supported positions the Government of Bihar took around language

policy. To explain why these changes occurred in the Bengali community in Bihar, this thesis will first briefly summarise the background and the events that will be covered.

In 1905, the British partitioned Bengal. The western half was predominantly Hindu, while the eastern half was predominantly Muslim. The Congress, dominated by the Bengali *bhadralok*, strongly opposed this partition and began a long-drawn-out agitation against it. The *bhadralok* were upper-caste, educated Hindu Bengalis who had emerged with substantial privilege after the advent of East India Company rule, which caused significant reordering of Bengali society in the eighteenth century. In late 1911, the British government announced that the partition would be reversed. However, the capital of the country would be shifted to Delhi, and two new provinces, Bihar & Orissa and Assam, would be created out of territory that was previously the Bengal Presidency. Over the previous decades, Hindi and Urdu-speaking Bihari elites had consistently demanded the separation of Bihar from Bengal as they claimed there had been historic underinvestment in Bihar. The British appeared to accept the accuracy of this, and the rationale senior officials provided for the granting of the state of Bihar partly rested on the idea that 'native' Biharis had received insufficient resources due to Bengal proper absorbing the bulk of any funding available,

With the hiving off of Bihar & Orissa in 1912, many Bengalis found themselves residents of a province that was not their ostensible 'homeland'. This was because educated Bengalis had made their way across what had been the vast Bengal Presidency in order to secure jobs, particularly jobs in government administration. Additionally, it was difficult to classify polyglot areas on the borders of the regions of Bihar and Bengal as being either primarily Bihari or primarily Bengali, and some predominantly Bengali-speaking areas were transferred to Bihar & Orissa. Consequently, a relatively significant portion of the Bihar population identified themselves as Bengali. The redrawing of borders immediately threatened the relatively privileged position previously enjoyed by Bengalis in the province, whose communities tended to have higher levels of education than those identified as Biharis. As a part of the rationale for Bihar's separation from Bengal included giving Biharis opportunities that had been denied to them due to the relative privilege of Bengalis in terms of education and employment, officials began to put in place policies that materially impacted the ability of Bengalis in the province to gain access to tertiary education and employment in government services. From 1913, memoranda from British officials declared that it was vital that 'natives' of the province received the highest priority when it came to hiring employees of the Government of Bihar.

By the late 1910s, domicile certificates were put in place that required jobseekers who were 'not natives' of the province to prove that they were 'domiciled' in the province by demonstrating their lack of ties (such as property or close family) to other provinces and their desire to permanently settle in Bihar (evidence included the purchase of property in Bihar and the enrolment of children in school). The requirement to procure the certificates was singularly unpopular with several sections of the Bengali population in Bihar, who often claimed that due to the long histories of settlement of Bengali communities in the province, they could not be considered 'outsiders' who were simply domiciled in the area. Given the seeming ineptitude of the government bureaucracy, the task of procuring a certificate could often be time-consuming and frustrating and lead to Bengalis in the province losing out on certain job opportunities. On occasion, Bengalis accused officials considered 'native' Bihari of purposefully lingering over the process to deny Bengalis job opportunities. On the other hand, certain sections of the Bihari elite, especially those who had lobbied for the division of Bihar from Bengal, continued to object to what they viewed as an 'overrepresentation' of Bengalis within the government services of Bihar. These positions encouraged tensions that, although not violent, were enough to attract the attention of Congress leadership.

Congress leaders were concerned with these debates as they spoke to an issue that was present across India: after large amounts of migration across hundreds of years, several communities had settled in regions that were not their ostensible linguistic homelands. In 1938, the Congress tasked senior party member and future President of India, Rajendra Prasad, with settling this 'Bengali-Bihari issue' (as it was known). Prasad's investigation had the impact of solidifying narratives both about and within the Bengali community in Bihar. The narratives developed by Bengalis in Bihar, presented by their 'spokesman' P.R. Das, reiterated Bengali claims regarding historical settlement and suggested that it was vital that Bengalis be given the same 'rights' to employment as Biharis as all 'Indians' must be treated equally. Elite Biharis contested this narrative and suggested that Bengalis were the historical oppressors of Biharis. They particularly focused on Bengalis settled on the border, who they claimed had forced their language on populations that were previously not Bengali-speaking. The investigation took over six months and came to several conclusions. This included a recommendation to abolish domicile certificates. However, the outbreak of war and the resignation of Congress Ministries meant that none of the report's suggestions were implemented.

With British proclamations and the release of Congress leaders after the war, it appeared to several Indians that independence was imminent. This led to growing demands

that the independent government of India should redistribute states along linguistic lines. Independence in 1947 exacerbated these demands, and West Bengal made claims to Bihari territory, partly under the linguistic principle and partly because the state had a significant refugee crisis caused by partition. These demands became particularly vociferous after 1952 when the Government of India announced that the borders of states would be redrawn along linguistic lines. This led to certain sections of the Bihari population reiterating narratives put forth during the Prasad investigation of the 1930s around the Bengali imposition of their language on the populations of certain border areas. In contrast, other sections used narratives of Bengali belonging developed during the same period to argue that linguistic reorganisation was unnecessary as Bengalis were also 'Biharis'.

The pre-independence period had seen Bengalis across the state protest against domicile certificates, seemingly broadly in agreement across the state. In the independent era some Bengalis from the Manbhum area began demanding the amalgamation of the Bengali-speaking regions of Bihar with West Bengal. The LSS claimed to lead this group, and the party was quite successful in the elections of 1952 (despite standing against the popular Congress). This electoral success suggests that their claims of having significant Bengali support were not entirely unfounded, although it was clear that this was primarily confined to Bengalis within the Manbhum Subdivision. According to the pro-amalgamation Bengali organisations and figures, their demands for the merger of Bengali-speaking territories with Bengal were spurred by the Hindi-ising policy of the Government of Bihar, which spokesmen for these organisations claimed was an attempt to eradicate Bengali in the border regions to ensure they would remain a part of Bihar.

On the other hand, Bengalis in areas where Adivasis were predominant, as well as cities and towns such as Patna and Monghyr, which would definitely not be transferred to West Bengal, strongly supported the Government of Bihar's position, which opposed any transfer of territories from Bihar to Bengal. This thesis will refer to this group as non-border Bengalis. This group generally followed the pattern of the priorities of the predominant communities in the areas they inhabited. For instance, elite Hindi and Urdu-speaking inhabitants of districts that were not located on the borders of Bengal and Bihar were opposed to the transfer of territories on the grounds that this would be detrimental to Bihar's economic health. Therefore, Bengalis in those areas generally opposed transfers of territory to West Bengal. Similarly, in predominantly Adivasi regions, Bengali representatives expressed their opposition to territorial redistribution. This was because Adivasi groups consistently opposed any transfer of territories to Bengal as their primary aim was the creation of a separate state

of Jharkhand, and the division of Adivasi lands could be a significant impediment to achieving this aim. The fate of the Manbhum Subdivision remained controversial as both Bengalis and Adivasis settled outside the subdivision claimed it as 'their' territory, the former on the basis that most people in the area spoke Bengali and the latter on the basis that the population, regardless of which language they spoke, was primarily Adivasi. Adivasis in the subdivision were divided, with some joining the LSS and demanding separation, while others (mainly members of the Congress) were anti-amalgamation.

Historiography

Citizenship, nationality, and minority rights during the transition from colonial rule to independence

The rhetoric and attitudes around minority rights underwent a marked change from the early to the mid-twentieth century. This has received significant scholarly attention, with a particular focus on how Muslims and Dalits navigated this era. This dissertation seeks to include the perspectives of linguistic minorities in the broader context of colonial constitutional reforms, independence, partition, and the redrawing of Indian state boundaries. It analyses the ways in which Bengalis in Bihar negotiated their security and attempted to reinforce their relatively privileged positions within administrative and educational structures during this period amidst the rapidly occurring political changes. An exploration of the politics of this community (which held a diverse range of opinions despite being relatively small) allows us to chart the ways historical actors broadened, contested, and manipulated the definition of minority. It also demonstrates the impact the demand for and the eventual formation of a separate Muslim nation of Pakistan had on minorities beyond Muslims.

Questions and issues surrounding India's abundant 'minority communities' became central to Indian politics over the twentieth century, with the partition in 1947 appearing to be the culmination of the practice of 'minority' politics during the colonial era. The 'minority' question both plagued and provided certain opportunities for governments both at the state and national levels. The rationale of British colonial rule in India shifted during the nineteenth century, with the 'civilising mission' becoming a central part of the reasoning behind continued British rule in India.[1] Intertwined with this civilising mission was legal reform in

[1] David Arnold, 'European Orphans and Vagrants in India in the Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 7.2 (1979).;Harald Fischer–Tiné, 'Britain's Other Civilising Mission: Class Prejudice, European "Loaferism" and the Workhouse–System in Colonial India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 42.3 (2005).

India, which, as Sandra den Otter states, 'was a principal justification enumerated by defenders of British conquest and dominion.'[2] However, in order to prevent dislocations in the lives of Indians and opposition to British rule, the actual legal framework developed by the British was not based on individual rights but rather on existing Indian laws (especially 'personal' laws that dealt with aspects of life such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance), which often did differ from community to community.[3] With the codification of law, the British entrenched differences between communities within the colonial legal system. Similarly, as Bernard Cohn, Nicholas Dirks and Ronald Inden attest, the census solidified the boundaries between different communities by asking Indians to sort themselves into different communities, castes, and religions.[4] While Norbert Peabody (in agreement with Cohn to some extent, who discusses Indian agency in the creation of identity in the colonial period) has criticised the depiction of Indians as passively accepting of British attempts to categorise in Dirks and Inden's work (suggesting that Indians themselves were undoubtedly involved in the development of these frameworks of difference), it is nevertheless clear that the colonial era witnessed the increasing codification of difference based on 'identity' within India.[5]

Therefore, the debates around rights due to different communities abounded during the colonial period. Further complicating matters was the existence of several communities (more clearly defined after the introduction of the colonial legal system) in India that were numerically small and lived in regions where they were dramatically outnumbered by members of other groups considered the majority. The British gave the presence of these 'minority' communities as a vital reason for their continued presence in India, with the argument that leaving the subcontinent would ensure the tyranny of the majority (caste Hindus) over these numerically small communities in India. Several constitutional reforms enacted by the British granted minorities specific rights supposedly in order to ensure their

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As Fischer-Tine and Arnold discuss in their articles, these justifications for colonialism also involved the airbrushing of European settlers in India, presenting them as a homogenous elite ruling class in India, when there is significant evidence of a large 'poor' class of Europeans.

[2] Sandra den Otter, 'Law, Authority, and Colonial Rule', in *India and the British Empire*, ed. by Douglas M. Peers and Nandini Gooptu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 1.

[3] Elizabeth Kolsky, 'Codification and the Rule of Colonial Difference: Criminal Procedure in British India', *Law and History Review*, 23.3 (2005).

[4] Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987) p.224-254.; Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton University Press, 2001).; Ronald Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 20.3 (1986).

[5] Norbert Peabody, 'Cents, Sense, Census: Human Inventories in Late Precolonial and Early Colonial India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43.4 (2001).

protection.[6] The rights given to minority communities included providing separate electorates for Muslims (and an attempt to provide separate electorates for Dalits) and provisions where the governors of any province could intervene in government business if it were likely to negatively impact minorities.[7] Richard McAlexander suggests that, towards the end of the colonial period, the British purposefully attempted to distribute power away from those they had originally favoured and argues that the colonial power did this to reduce ethnic conflict in the post-colonial period (that was rapidly approaching).[8] Andrew Muldoon, Carl Bridge, and D.A. Low have contested this view and argue that the British did not implement these constitutional reforms to allow Indians to gradually adapt to 'self-governance' but to fragment the Congress.[9] The nature of constitutional reforms and British conceptions of minorities resulted in the creation of relatively robust minority political institutions, including parties like the Muslim League and the various Dalit parties led by B.R. Ambedkar. The category of 'minority', therefore, became central to Indian politics during the latter years of the colonial era.

Secondly, several debates with regard to 'locals' and 'outsiders' were simultaneously occurring across the British Empire and parts of princely India. These related to issues surrounding minority politics and often involved complex disputes where the main topic of contention was whether those marked as 'outsiders' could claim belonging in certain territories. These issues emerged partly because the growth of the British empire resulted in the creation of specific migratory pathways and partly due to the codification of difference between various communities. The settlement of Indians in parts of Africa and their fate during and after colonial rule has received a great deal of attention;[10] however, similar debates around belonging have emerged in parts of South and Southeast Asia as well. The relative proximity of these 'settler minority' groups to their ostensible homelands meant that the

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[6] Tay Jeong and Choong Kyo Jeong, 'Ethnic Empowering Policies and Postcolonial Political Exclusion in the British Empire: An Analysis of Ethnic Police Recruitment and Communal Legislative Representation', *Nations and Nationalism*, Online version of record before inclusion in issue (2023).
[7] James Chiriyankandath, '"Democracy" under the Raj'.
[8] Richard J. McAlexander, 'A Reanalysis of the Relationship between Indirect Rule, Ethnic Inclusion, and Decolonization', *The Journal of Politics*, 82.4 (2020).
[9] Andrew Muldoon, *Empire, Politics, and the Creation of the 1935 India Act : Last Act of the Raj* (Ashgate, 2009); Carl Bridge, *Holding India to the Empire : The British Conservative Party and the 1935 Constitution* (Oriental University Press, 1986); D.A. Low, *Congress and the Raj : Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-47*, 2nd edn (Heinemann, 1977).
[10] John C. Hawley, *India in Africa, Africa in India: Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanisms* (Indiana University Press, 2008); Robert Blanton, T. David Mason, and Brian Athow, 'Colonial Style and Post-Colonial Ethnic Conflict in Africa', *Journal of Peace Research*, 38.4 (2001); Ravi K. Thiara, 'Imagining? Ethnic Identity and Indians in South Africa', in *Community, Empire and Migration: South Asians in Diaspora*, ed. by Crispin Bates (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

issues gained a different dimension from those discussed in other parts of the British Empire. The most famous of these debates in South Asia (and one that contributed to a drawn-out civil war) was the discussions around whether Tamils 'belonged' to Sri Lanka. Sujit Sivasundaram traces the ways in which the identity of the 'Malabar' (a term that later became Ceylon Tamil) as a 'foreigner' was created through the encounter between the colonial British state and Sri Lankan society.[11] This categorisation and the persistent narratives that framed 'Malabars' (or Tamils) as 'outsiders' in Sri Lanka who were overrepresented within the administration mirrored the narratives developed around Bengalis in Bihar to a large extent. This feeling of difference became especially pronounced in the 1920s and 1930s when there was high unemployment in Sri Lanka, and several sections of the Sinhalese population demanded that the government give 'native' Sinhalese employment rather than the 'alien' Tamils.[12]

While the situation of the 'Ceylon' Tamils was somewhat unique (with ancient histories of Tamil settlement in Jaffna in particular), similar debates around the belonging of Tamils emerged in parts of Southeast Asia like Burma and Malaya. As with Sri Lanka (and most of the world), Burma too experienced economic shocks in the 1930s leading to high unemployment. This led to increased tensions between the Indians (who were predominantly Tamil) and the Burmese population, who viewed this community as interlopers. Like Bengalis in Bihar, Tamils in Burma also pointed to their 'contributions' to 'the development' of the country to defend their rights (particularly with regard to property) in Burma.[13] In Darinee Alagirisamy's study of the Self-Respect Movement in Malaya, she demonstrates the ways in which Periyar's movement influenced the conceptualisation of Malayan-Tamil belonging as the rhetoric used by Periyar presented Malaya as a permanent home for Tamils. She suggests that Periyar asked his audience in Malaya to 'reflect on India from Malaya instead of thinking of a return to the homeland.' Amarjit Kaur explores how Indians in Malaya conceptualised their belonging in the twentieth century and, like Alagirisamy, reveals the complex ways in which this group layered their identities and, consequently, did not fit perfectly into the neat categories created by the colonial encounter with the British.[14] While these Indians in Malaya

[11] Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Ethnicity, Indigeneity, and Migration in the Advent of British Rule to Sri Lanka', *The American Historical Review*, 115 (2010), p. 429.
[12] Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi, 'Construction of Tamil and Sinhalese Identities in Contemporary Sri Lanka', *Pakistan Horizon*, 63 (2010).
[13] Taylor C. Sherman and Raphaëlle Khan, 'India and Overseas Indians in Ceylon and Burma, 1946–1965: Experiments in Postimperial Sovereignty', *Modern Asian Studies*, 56.4 (2021).
[14] Darinee Alagirisamy, 'The Self-Respect Movement and Tamil Politics of Belonging in Interwar British Malaya', *Modern Asian Studies*, 50.5 (2016).

continued to make claim to aspects of their Indian identity (such as identifying strongly with their linguistic communities), they also claimed Malaya as a homeland.

This issue of groups claiming belonging outside their ostensible 'homeland' was not one that only impacted territories outside India and 'settler' Tamils. Even within India, there were several conflicts between groups that claimed to be the original inhabitants of a province, disadvantaged by a privileged 'outsider' minority. These privileged 'outsider' groups were a particular target of those who claimed to be native as they tended to retain ties, (linguistic, cultural, and religious) to other parts of India but, nevertheless, claimed belonging in territories that they seemingly did not have cultural or linguistic connections to. While not a part of British India, transformations wrought by the colonial state significantly influenced the politics of the princely state of Hyderabad. The mulki versus non-mulki conflict had its roots in the reforms carried out in the late 1800s by Nizam Salar Jung II, who hired officials trained in British India to modernise Hyderabad's administration. The conflict between the 'natives' (mulkis) and the 'outsiders' (non-mulkis) would inform Hyderabadi politics for a century and was not based on antipathies created by differences in religion or language.[15] The conflicts arose (much like between Bengalis and their Hindi and Urdu-speaking Bihari counterparts) due to different rates (and style) of education between the mulkis and the non-mulkis, which eventually resulted in the significant increase in non-mulki influence in Hyderabad after the death of Salar Jung in 1883.[16] The Congress undoubtedly witnessed the mulki movement in Hyderabad that demanded jobs in the administrative structures, mainly go to 'natives' that emerged in the early twentieth century. Therefore, the party was aware that these issues of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' might prove to be a problem in an independent India. These issues were not restricted to Hyderabad, as both the Madras Presidency and the Central Provinces were multicultural and multilingual provinces that housed communities that had already begun to express discontent with their situation. These include Telugus, who, a *Times of India* article written in 1939 noted, claimed they did not receive 'justice at the hands of the Madras Government in the matter of a share in the administration and in the beneficial schemes undertaken by the state.' 'Beraris in C.P.' were, according to the same article ', worse than bitter about the proportion of the provincial revenue spent on Berar'.[17]

[15] Karen Leonard, 'Hyderabad: The Mulki-Non-Mulki Conflict', in *People, Princes and Paramount Power*, ed. by Robin Jeffrey (Oxford University Press, 1978).
[16] *Ibid*.
[17] 'Bengali-Bihari Controversy: Congress Attitude', 3 January 1939, *Times of India*, 9.

These two aspects of colonial politics, the focus on the protection of minorities and the debates around who was 'local' and who was an 'outsider', coalesced to inform Bengali politics in Bihar. During Rajendra Prasad's investigation into the 'Bengali-Bihari' issue in 1939, there was significant claim-making, which, first, began the development of narratives around belonging in Bihar that would persist through the transition period between colonial rule and independence. Bengali-Biharis would deploy these narratives for different purposes but they, nonetheless, established a basis and a framework for claiming Bengali belonging in Bihar and to a broader Bihari community. Bengali organisations and publications in the state often demanded equality with their Bihari counterparts (the abolition of domicile certificates) on the grounds of histories of settlement and consequent belonging to the state. Secondly, they invoked histories of Bengali service to the state, demanding the British treat the community as a minority like the Anglo-Indians who, according to some Bengali-Bihari publications, received special treatment on the grounds of their historical service within the administration.

Although colonial authorities claimed it as a central reason for the continued presence of the British in the subcontinent, the category of 'minority' in the Government of India Act (1935) was not necessarily strictly defined. For instance, there was an underlying assumption that minorities were at a disadvantage due to the numerical inferiority of their community. However, the Government of India Acts did not explicitly give deprivation as a criterion for minority status. Additionally, the Acts did not specify the nature of the community (religious, linguistic, caste) that received these benefits. This allowed communities to make claims through the category of 'minority' and demand greater protection from the government, regardless of whether the government had envisioned these groups when putting forth laws around minorities. This is demonstrated in Bihar by the appeals made by Bengali organisations and figures to the Governor of Bihar based on the duty of protection provincial governors had for minority communities. In order to access this protection, these Bengali-Biharis often claimed historical belonging in the territory that now constituted Bihar.

This claim to the category of minority was reflective of the way many communities navigated the constitutional changes in India, but as it was within the context of a multilingual Bihar, it also demonstrated the conceptualisation of the Bengali-Bihari community as another part of Bihar's multicultural society.

The senior Congress leadership in the state, including the Premier S.K. Sinha, on the other hand, objected to claims that the government was discriminating against Bengalis, pointing to the still not insignificant numbers of Bengalis in the services in Bihar. As a

counterpoint to the narratives of historical belonging developed by Bengali-Biharis during this period of claim-making, narratives of Bengali oppression of 'local' Biharis in the border districts of Bihar were advanced by senior politicians within the structure of the Congress in Bihar, with claims put forward that Bengalis had forcibly imposed their language on these areas. This rhetoric spoke directly to the debates across India around more educationally advanced 'outsiders' settling in certain regions and disadvantaging the 'original' inhabitants of the provinces. It effectively undercut Bengali claims to belonging in Bihar, as it presented Bengalis as quasi-colonisers and not a minority community in need of government protection. Additionally, in contrast to the state of affairs in UP, Hindu Bihari public figures and publications opposed to Bengali demands explicitly included Muslims within the wider Bihari community and presented Urdu and Hindi as two sides of the same coin. The rhetoric deployed by these politicians marked Bengalis as outsiders. The histories of fraught relations between Bengal and Bihar likely contributed to the development of these narratives of Bengalis and encouraged (as the anti-Urdu Hindi language movement did in UP for Hindus) the creation of Bihari 'identity' that excluded Bengalis to ensure unity.

The war years saw the emergence of the demand for Pakistan. The process by which Pakistan was created and the motivations of key players have been analysed closely, with historians in disagreement as to whether or not the leader of the Muslim League, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, truly wanted Pakistan or if he was simply using the threat of separation to achieve his aims of parity for Hindus and Muslims within a broader Indian federation. Nevertheless, scholars tend to frame this movement as one that propagated 'nonterritorial' conceptions of nationality and nationhood. As David Gilmartin states, the 'two-nation theory' on which the demand for Pakistan was based 'embodied a fundamentally nonterritorial vision of nationality.'[18] Similarly, Ayesha Jalal describes the movement as fundamentally a 'nonterritorially defined' one.[19] Given the fact that scholars regard Pakistan as a paradigmatic minority movement in South Asia, the spatial aspects of minority mobilisation have, to some extent, been elided. After the brutality of partition and the tragedies that accompanied the transfers of populations, the location of the minority became an increasingly important aspect with regard to how these groups engaged politically.

[18] David Gilmartin, 'Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 57.4 (1998), 1081.
[19] Ayesha Jalal, 'Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imagining', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27.1 (1995), 74.

The association of minority politics with the brutality of partition also resulted in a shift away from claims to rights on the basis of the minority category. As Gyanendra Pandey states, after independence, the 'Muslim League mentality' was deemed entirely 'unacceptable'.[20] However, politicians continued to debate the question of what to do about numerically small communities living in the same area as larger homogenous communities continued in the post-colonial era. As Rochana Bajpai demonstrates, constitution-making in the post-colonial era in India was primarily marked by a 'retrenchment' with regards to minority group rights, describing the period between 1950 and 1980 as a 'moment of containment' of group rights rather than a period when these were systematically disassembled.[21] While the constitution did continue to ostensibly protect the right of linguistic minorities to 'conserve' their 'language, script, and culture', the experiences of partition, and consequently, the negative association with minority demands resulted in communities no longer using this category as the main basis for their claims.[22] This is evidenced by the way in which the Muslim community in Hyderabad navigated the early independent era. Taylor Sherman's analysis of Muslim conceptions and claims of belonging in Hyderabad after the departure of the British from the subcontinent indicates that some sections of the Muslim population in Hyderabad suggested it was politically necessary to align themselves with 'those in power' (the Congress), in order to 'secure a future for Muslims' in the state.[23] Therefore, rather than associate themselves with 'minority' politics and act as spokesmen for 'Muslim interests', Congress Muslim candidates in Hyderabad restricted themselves to dealing with broad 'questions of democracy and development', and some Muslims chastised explicitly Muslim organisations for involving themselves in politics (regardless of the stance taken by these organisations).[24]

These two aspects of independent politics, the increasing importance of location to minority political mobilisation and the turn against minority movements emerged in a significant way in Bengali politics in Bihar. However, unlike most of the case studies examined by other historians that deal with questions of 'insiders' versus 'outsiders', this community was grappling with issues of 'internal' migration within a space recognised as a

[20] Gyanendra Pandey, 'Can a Muslim Be an Indian?', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41 (1999). 618.
[21] Rochana Bajpai, *Debating Difference: Group Rights and Liberal Democracy in India* (Oxford University Press, 2011).
[22] *Ibid*., 58.
[23] Taylor C. Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India: Negotiating Citizenship in Post-Colonial Hyderabad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 131.
[24] *Ibid*., 136.

single country rather than 'external' migration to a different country in the imperial system. Imperial migration, while significant, was not as common as internal migration within India. Migration within the British imperial system was also complicated, as immigrants were considered 'subjects' rather than 'citizens', and the rights due to these groups were not the same. It was possible within the confines of the imperial system to have vastly different rights for different subjects, and immigration was an area where this was abundantly clear.[25] However, independent India produced a written constitution that enshrined several of the rights demanded by Bengalis in Bihar (including the right to employment). Therefore, there were certain rights that Bengalis in Bihar were confident of retaining, and there were no great fears around violent expulsion. Internal migration and the presence of 'outsiders' did not entirely disappear in post-colonial India. While complicated by considerable amounts of violence during the accession of Hyderabad to the Union of India, the mulki versus non-mulki conflict in Hyderabad did not entirely dissipate. Both Hindus and Muslims who identified as mulkis opposed what they viewed as an influx of non-mulkis after the invasion of Hyderabad and demanded jobs be given to 'Hyderabadis'. As with Bengalis in Bihar, there were allegations raised by mulkis that non-mulkis were being given false certification as mulkis and essentially stealing jobs meant for natives of the province. This culminated in the Mulki Agitation of 1952, which functioned (as the demands for the re-'nativising' of Bihari government structures) across religious lines.[26] Consequently, an analysis of Bengalis in Bihar presents us with another important post-colonial perspective on how communities living within a state that was not their ostensible homeland (but living in a country that was) navigated the transition from colonial rule to independence.

Unlike the colonial era when the Bengali community in Bihar essentially made similar demands and expressed solidarity with one another across the province, post-partition, the physical space inhabited by the various Bengali-Bihari groups became an important indicator with regard to the political positions held by different parts of the Bengali community. Bengalis in the border regions were far less likely to support the Hindi policies and the territorial demands laid out by the Government of Bihar, while Bengalis who were not settled in border regions were usually very supportive of both. This allowed non-border Bengalis to reinforce their positions as Biharis as well as Bengalis and ensured that Bengalis in Bihar would, at the very least, remain a part of the structures of power, even though

[25] Mark Frost, 'Imperial Citizenship or Else: Liberal Ideals and the India Unmaking of Empire, 1890-1919', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 45.6 (2018).
[26] Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India*, 110.

several Hindi- members of the Congress in Bihar (who largely dominated the organisation in the province) often did rail against the preponderance of Bengalis in services in the province.

Linguistic Territorialism and the Reorganisation of States

In examining the reorganisation of Indian states through the lens of Bihari politics we can observe that there was significant dissent to the relatively broad consensus regarding linguistic realignment. Members of the Bengali community in Bihar emphasised notions of belonging unrelated to linguistic affinity and arguments around the importance of culturally heterogeneous states for the benefit of India as a whole. This dissertation will also examine the ways in which communities that claimed to be 'majority' communities engaged with linguistic territorialism and the demands made by linguistic minorities. Therefore, Bihar was the site of significantly different understandings of belonging, nationality, and citizenship than what is commonly considered the Indian mainstream, as well as being a region in which a large proportion of its politicians and citizens conceptualised the ordering of the Indian nation entirely differently. This indicates that the commonly held notion by most political figures at the time (not just in India but worldwide) that territory, culture, and language were inherently linked was not necessarily universally accepted. This thesis will trace claims of belonging and notions of community that involved histories of settlement and contributions to a province's arts, administration, and business as opposed to conceptions of belonging that developed through a shared language.

In 1920, the Congress, at the urging of Gandhi, reorganised the state-level party along linguistic lines. The fact that these linguistic Pradesh Congress Committees implicitly represented territory (albeit one that's borders were not actually drawn) and a linguistic group emphasised the supposed inherent connection between specific languages and specific regions.[27] This support for linguistic states became explicit in 1927 when the Congress committed to the redrawing of borders along linguistic lines after the achievement of independence. [28] With the separation of Sindh and Bombay, as well as Bihar and Orissa, into separate provinces in 1936, the linguistic principle also appeared to have been accepted to a certain extent by British administrators.[29] Nevertheless, although linguistic reorganisation appeared to be uniformly popular with both the Congress High Command Pradesh Congress

[27] Katherine Adeney, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict Regulation in India and Pakistan* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
[28] Robert D. King, *Nehru and the Language Politics of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 62.
[29] Bandita Devi, *Some Aspects of British Administration in Orissa, 1912-1936* (Academic Foundation, 1992); Ishtiaq Ahmed, *State, Nation and Ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia* (Pinter, 1996).

Committees, there was somewhat less enthusiasm from Congress leadership in Bihar, who were aware that the variety of languages spoken in the state could lead to demands for separation of regions from Bihar. There were already calls by 1921 for a separate Maithili-speaking province of Mithila in the north-eastern part of the province,[30] and the abundance of languages (including Bengali and a multitude of Adivasi languages such as Ho, Mundari, and Oraon) spoken in the southern part of the province was also a cause for concern.[31] By 1939, the Adivasi Mahasabha based in the Chhotanagpur Plateau in the south had begun to demand a separate Adivasi state of Jharkhand be carved out of the south of Bihar.[32] These southern regions were vital to Bihar as they housed the bulk of the province's industries and were mineral and coal-rich. Bengali-dominated organisations, such as the Congress District Committee of Manbhum, and publications, such as the *Bihar Herald,* rarely demanded separation of Bengali-speaking areas from Bihar and cautioned against support for linguistic provinces, suggesting that this might be harmful to the Indian unity being created by the independence campaign that gained steam through the first half of the century.

Nevertheless, as the British did not fully accept the linguistic principle in dividing up Indian populations (preferring to change borders only if it was beneficial to their overall agenda), it was only after independence that linguistic movements to create states reached their apotheosis. Often raised in most analyses of these twentieth-century language movements in India are the inherent connections developed by the proponents of these movements relating to language.[33] Sumathi Ramaswamy, in her exploration of the Tamil movement in South India, emphasises the significance of the renaming of the Madras State in the late 1960s and demonstrates the support it received across the state. The name settled on, Tamil Nadu, literally translated to the land of Tamil.[34] Similarly, Oliver Godsmark explicitly identifies the Marathi movement for a separate state of Maharashtra as one aimed at creating a 'new province' to 'mark out an exclusive domain for Marathi speakers…to which they

[30] Paul Brass, *Language Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge University Press, 1974).
[31] B. P. Mahapatra, 'Munda Languages in the Census', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute*, 51/52 (1991); Shailendra Mohan, 'Patterns of Language Use Among the Tribal Communities of Jharkhand', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute*, 66/67 (2006).
[32] L.N. Rana, 'The Adivasi Mahasabha: The Launching Pad of the Jharkhand Movement (1938-49)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 53 (1992).
[33] See *Interrogating Reorganisation of States: Culture, Identity, and Politics in India*, ed. by Asha Sarangi and Sudha Pai (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011) for more details on the variety of language movements and demands for separate states that occurred in Indian in the twentieth century.
[34] Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India (1891-1970)* (University of California Press, 1997).

would intrinsically belong, and in which their particular interests would be best served'.[35] He suggests that the 'idea of Samyukta Maharashtra was…one example of a number of concomitant demands based around similarly exclusivist notions of belonging'.[36] In her book on the Andhra movement for a separate Telugu-speaking state, Lisa Mitchell also alludes to the importance placed on creating a separate territory for Telugu speakers, where they would not be oppressed by Tamil speakers.[37]

However, most scholars of India acknowledge that with regard to the ordering of the populations, the development of this kind of 'regionalism', which was centred around language, was not the only option. As anthropologist Bernard Cohn states in his influential work on India, despite the assumption that regionalism arises due to the natural connection of speakers of a certain language as well as the efficiency of having speakers of a certain language under a single administration, this ignores the fact that in most provinces and states in India, the 'presence of a significant number of speakers' of a language 'other' than that of 'a dominant language within a circumscribed area' is not rare.[38] Mitchell concurs, suggesting that 'emotional attachments to language, far from being naturally inherent in speakers' relationship to words, are historically situated.'[39] She also suggests that, given the nature of demands upon which the creation of newer states have been based, the 'legitimacy' of language as a foundational category has, to some extent, begun to erode.[40]

This dissertation will demonstrate that linguistic minorities have regularly questioned the 'legitimacy' of language as a category for separation. Linguistic territorialism was not universally accepted, and communities often used the frameworks created by the Congress to challenge these categories. Arguments against 'provincialism' were often used by linguistic minorities to question the basis of linguistic territorialism as these fit into broader Congress fears regarding the viability of India's unity. Oliver Godsmark and Riho Isaka demonstrate that the arguments used by Gujarati businessmen in Bombay City to oppose linguistic realignment were largely based on the rationale that the redrawing of boundaries would be

[35] Oliver Godsmark, *Citizenship, Community and Democracy in India: From Bombay to Maharashtra (c.1930-1960)* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 1.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] Lisa Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue* (Indiana University Press, 2009).
[38] Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 106.
[39] Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India*, 214.
[40] *Ibid*.

detrimental to Indian unity more broadly.[41] These complexities, produced by contested borders and the politics of language, are also evident in analyses of Hindu Sindhis in Bombay State. In their traditional role as merchants, Hindu Sindhis, like Bengalis, migrated across the empire, with a significant portion settling in the Presidency of Bombay, which Sindh was a part of until 1936.[42] After partition left this community without a 'homeland' to return to, even larger numbers of Sindhis settled across various parts of Bombay State. Uttara Shahani argues that, like non-border Bengalis in Bihar, large sections of the Sindhi population strongly opposed the division of Bombay along linguistic lines, with claims that this would only encourage 'provincialism'.[43] Hindu Sindhis also had a complex (and, on occasion, contentious) relationship with the Congress, which was in many ways similar to Bengali-Biharis' own ambivalence towards the party. Narratives of being inadequately represented by the Congress were produced by both communities, reflecting the inherent difficulty the Congress had with appealing to linguistic minorities despite the wide perception of the organisation as an 'umbrella party'.[44]

The parallels between Sindhis in Bombay and Bengalis in Bihar are particularly evident in the post-colonial politics of Bengalis not settled on the borders of Bihar and West Bengal. This faction of Bengalis often deployed arguments developed during the domicile certificate debate (albeit shorn of any mention of minority rights) around Bengali belonging in Bihar to bolster the government's opposition to linguistic realignment. Bengali politicians from non-border areas alluded to histories of settlement and administrative and artistic contributions to the state to demonstrate that regardless of their mother tongue, Bengalis had always been a part of the fabric of Bihari society. This allowed these Bengalis to both support the government (preventing them from being seen as disloyal to Bihar) while simultaneously refuting the claims around Bengali opportunism and the forcible imposition of Bengali on border regions. A line of argumentation that Bengali-Bihari organisations and figures in non-border areas used was that Indian unity would be fundamentally harmed by further divisions of India along linguistic lines. These Bengali-Biharis often claimed that these changes to borders would be detrimental to linguistic minorities across India as they suggested that more culturally heterogeneous communities provided greater security for minorities.

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[41] Godsmark; Riho Isaka, *Language Identity and Power in Modern India, Gujarat (c. 1850-1960)* (Routledge, 2022).
[42] Mark-Anthony Falzon, '"Bombay, Our Cultural Heart": Rethinking the Relation between Homeland and Diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26 (2003).
[43] Uttara Shahani, 'Language Without a Land: Partition, Sindhi Refugees and the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution', *Asian Affairs*, 53 (2010).
[44] Rita Kothari, *The Burden of Refuge: Sindhi Hindus of Gujarat* (Orient Blackswan, 2007).

The Deployment of the Hindi Language in Indian Politics

Bengali-Biharis were not the only people in Bihar who opposed linguistic reorganisation. Senior Hindi and Urdu-speaking Bihari politicians (who tended to come from elite classes and castes) rejected any demands made to territory by West Bengal. They often made similar claims to the non-border Bengalis regarding the dangers of dividing the Indian populations by ethnicity and language, suggesting that this would encourage separatism and prevent Indians from developing a singular identity. The Hindi language movement that developed in Bihar reflects the priorities of these relatively elite Hindi speakers with regard to linguistic reorganisation. The movement in Bihar, therefore, had different underpinnings to the one that developed in the United Provinces (later Uttar Pradesh) as it was more concerned with broadening the definition of what being a Bihari entailed in order to preserve the maximum amount of territory within the state of Bihar.

Scholars of India have often emphasised the significance of UP within the broader histories of the country. This is partly due to the fact that UP produced a host of national-level politicians across the political spectrum. Both Jawaharlal Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan, the first prime ministers of India and Pakistan, respectively, began their political careers in UP. As D.A. Low states, 'it is not very difficult to see why it [UP] should have played this major role [in the politics of India]' as it was 'the largest of the states, the least exclusive, and, for internal Indian purposes, the most centrally placed strategically.'[45] This view of UP has 'nationalised' narratives developed there, and these are viewed as applicable to the rest of the country.

As several historians have posited, the Hindi movement developed in UP in the nineteenth century was largely born out of Hindu opposition to the use of Urdu in the administration of UP. Christopher King's *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* details the way in which the Hindi language movement emerged and argues that the 'contradictions in government policy' which retained Urdu as the language of governance while educating the vast majority of (Hindu) students (for the purpose of governance) in Hindi led to 'perceptions' of 'uneven rates of social change' and therefore animosity against Urdu (and by extension Muslims).[46] Similarly, William Gould

[45] D.A. Low, 'Introduction', in *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, ed. by D.A. Low (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1968), p.4.
[46] Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

and Francesca Orsini highlight the anti-Urdu bent of the Hindi language movement in the early twentieth century. In his book, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*, Gould examines the complicated relationship between the ostensibly 'secular' Congress and Hindu nationalism and demonstrates the ways in which Congress politicians in UP 'sought to mould movements of agitation such as civil disobedience through an overarching set of idioms, including a new and broadened sense of the 'Hindu community'.[47] Central to this idea of a 'Hindu community' was Hindi as the language of Hindus. Politicians from the province such as Sampurnanand and Purushottam Das Tandon, apart from being virulently anti-Urdu, explicitly discussed the importance of 'retaining a good quota of sanskritised Hindi in any national language' in order to appeal to, as Sampurnanand stated, 'the people of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bengal, and Madras.'[48]

Similarly, Orsini, in her examination of 'Hindi politicians', emphasises how these figures presented Hindi as a 'cultural symbol' of India. She traces how they argued that its propagation would 'protect' (in the words of Hindi politician Sampurnanand) India's 'ancient civilisation, language and other national components'[49] Both these historians argue that Hindi played an important role in the ways in which these politicians conceptualised India as a nation.[50] The practicalities of adopting the language aside, Hindi symbolised a return to the past glories of 'Hindu' India before the advent of Muslim 'invaders'. Therefore, animosity towards Urdu was an obvious product of these ideologies, as was the desire to make Hindi as 'pure' and de-persianised i.e., sanskritised, as possible. The response from southern states, particularly Madras/Tamil Nadu, further solidified this narrative, as opposition to the homogenisation of India through 'Hindi imperialism' was emphasised during the anti-Hindi language movement of the 1960s. The fears of the opponents of Hindi were not related to territorial imperialism- for instance, no one in the south truly believed that Hindi states would attempt direct rule- but to 'cultural' imperialism.

The historians discussing the strategic deployment of the Hindi language make compelling arguments; however, it is possible to expand and nuance our understandings of the Hindi language movement and its interactions with minority politics by examining other Hindi-speaking states like Bihar. King largely glosses over the Hindi movement in Bihar,

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[47] William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24.
[48] William Gould, 'Congress Radicals and Hindu Militancy: Sampurnanand and Purushottam Das Tandon in the Politics of the United Provinces, 1930-1947', *Modern Asian Studies*, 36.3 (2002), p.639.
[49] Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2012).
[50] Gould, 'Congress Radicals and Hindu Militancy'.

stating, 'while Urdu existed, the Muslim element of the population lacked size or importance' and, therefore, the 'Nagari script' was accepted without a great deal of controversy by the 1880s.[51] Orsini places Bihari politicians like Rajendra Prasad into the 'Hindustani' camp rather than the Hindi camp, despite the fact that he founded the *Hindi Sahitya Sammelan* in Bihar and produced quantities of literature in support of Hindi as the national language of India.[52] However, unlike UP, the Hindi movement in Bihar did not produce an anti-Urdu reaction on the same scale. Proponents of Hindi in the province (from across the political spectrum) often demanded an unsankritised version of Hindi, which is perhaps why they have been classed as pro-Hindustani, rather than pro-Hindi. Hitendra K. Patel has examined the Hindi movement in Bihar to some extent, but his work is largely confined to the role played by the Hindi-Urdu conflict in contributing to communalism in the province. His analysis of the Hindi movement in Bihar mostly follows along the lines of analyses of the Hindi movement in UP, stating the 'Hindi movement' that developed in UP 'was very important in shaping the communal mindset… of educated people in Bihar'.[53]

Aishwarj Kumar is perhaps one of the few historians who have examined the Hindi language movement in a specific Bihari context. In his article 'A Marginalised Voice in the History of 'Hindi'' he identifies the reasons why Bihar has often been ignored in these histories of the language, stating that it has received little attention in studies of the Bengali presidency as it is often considered a part of the 'Hindi-belt' but once it is subsumed into that category 'it has suffered a from a token gesture by scholars, whereby, although it finds mention by name in their works it does not receive close examination by them'.[54] Kumar unpacks complex relationships between 'Hindi' (the definition of which remained relatively fluid even into the twentieth century), Urdu and other 'local' Bihari languages like Bhojpuri, Maithili and Magahi in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He argues that the 'harmonious co-existence of Hindi and Urdu' in Bihar was due to the fact that Patna was a significant centre of 'Persian and Urdu culture', which encouraged a more composite culture, where Hindus were not unwilling to use 'Urdu' words and expressions in their work.[55]

This dissertation aims to build on the work of Kumar and discuss the complex ways in which Hindi was deployed in the province in the twentieth century. While Kumar attributes

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[51] *Ibid*. p 77.
[52] Orsini *The Hindi Public Sphere, 237*.
[53]Hitendra Patel, 'Aspects of Hindu Mobilisation in Modern Bihar', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 65 (2004), 799.
[54] Aishwarj Kumar, 'A Marginalised Voice in the History of Hindi', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47 (2013), 1709.
[55] *Ibid*., 1712.

the lack of anti-Urdu sentiment to the composite culture of Patna and the authors who were allowed to flourish within this context, this dissertation argues that histories of elite Hindu-Muslim cooperation in Bihar, especially in the context of attempts to separate Bihar from the large Bengal Presidency is particularly pertinent when examining the development of the Hindi movement in Bihar. This cooperation, accompanied by the fact that portions of Kishanganj, an area with a relatively large Muslim population, would very likely be moved to Bengal in the event of the reorganisation of states, meant that the basis of the Hindi movement in Bihar was not anti-Muslim and anti-Urdu but largely anti-Bengali and anti-transfer of territories. The territorial aspect of the Hindi movement in Bihar meant that the spread of Hindi in the bordering regions was vital in order to retain territory within Bihar. However, as Bihar housed a multiplicity of languages, the arguments often did not concern the 'purity' of the Hindi used. Instead, the debates focused on whether or not the various languages spoked were closer to Hindi or closer to Bengali. This resulted in elite Hindu, Hindi-speaking politicians in Bihar presenting Hindi as a broad category that multiple languages could fall under. Urdu was portrayed as not just a relation of Hindi but practically the same language, and Muslim Biharis were explicitly included in the broader Bihari community. Bengalis, due to the long histories of animosity, were presented as outsiders who had oppressed the people of the border regions of Bihar by forcing their language on them. This allowed the Government of Bihar and both Hindu and Muslim Bihari politicians to undercut Bengali claims to the border regions.

The Overlapping Politics of Different Linguistic Communities in Bihar (1912-1957)

Bihar's cultural and linguistic diversity meant that a variety of politically active groups attempted to put forth their claims during the time period covered. This thesis primarily focuses on the section of Bihar's population that identified as Bengali and will examine how the politics of this community overlapped and intersected with the politics of other communities in the state, including Adivasis and those who claimed Hindi and Urdu as their mother tongues. As Bengalis were a significant linguistic minority in areas where Adivasis had large populations, the relationship between organisations and figures claiming to represent these groups was complex. This thesis will analyse these relationships and evaluate the transformations that occurred over the transition to independence. Several scholars, such as Vinita Damodaran, Stewart Corbridge, and Louise

, have examined Adivasi politics and the movement to create Jharkhand in depth.[56] This dissertation seeks to contribute to these broader histories of the Jharkhand movement in Bihar by discussing the interactions between Bengali and Adivasi organisations. It argues that a facet of minority community politics involved the rhetorical use of 'mistreatment' of communities other than their own to emphasise the broader failings of the government with regard to minority communities more broadly.

This dissertation demonstrates how strategic alliances developed between Bengalis and Adivasis in the colonial era, with senior Adivasi politicians such as Jaipal Singh defending Bengali positions during the Bengali-Bihari controversy that erupted in 1939. In turn, Bengali newspapers, such as the *Behar Herald,* provided Adivasis (in particular Singh) with a platform for their demands and, in its editorials, consistently supported the creation of an Adivasi state. However, the relationship fractured in the post-colonial era, as Adivasi organisations strongly opposed the redistribution of Manbhum to West Bengal, expressing significant antipathy to demands made by Bengalis settled on the border. Although non-border Bengalis did not support the transfer of territories, as these organisations, publications, and figures attempted to align their priorities with those of the Government of Bihar, support for Adivasi demands for Jharkhand immediately ceased when it became clear that state boundaries were being redrawn. Tracing these transformations in political alignments nuances the broader discussion of Adivasi politics in the state and demonstrates how communities attempted to 'de-marginalise' themselves by defending the rights of other communities. For instance, Jaipal Singh was able to connect Bengali issues around employment to broader failings on the part of the Bihari state with regard to communities that the elite Bihari Hindus in positions of authority did not identify as entirely 'Bihari.'

Although Bihar is most famous now for being the site of vigorous caste politics, between the 1930s and the 1950s, caste-based coalitions had not fully solidified in Bihar, and the dominance that Biharis would have over national caste associations and the development of robust caste-based political parties able to contest state and other local elections was still a

[56] Stewart Corbridge, 'The Continuing Struggle for India's Jharkhand: Democracy, Decentralisation and the Politics of Names and Numbers', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 40 (2002) examines the fracturing of the Jharkhand movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s and discusses Jaipal Singh's decision to merge his Jharkhand supporting political party with the Congress; Vinita Damodaran, 'The Politics of Marginality and the Construction of Indigeneity in Chotanagpur', *Postcolonial Studies*, 9 (2006) analyses the impact of the 1937 elections on the creation and consolidation of the Adivasi Mahasabha and the ways in which 'Jharkhandi' identity was constructed, partially around the contrasts between the 'indigenous' Adivasis and the 'outsider' *dikus* who were framed as colonisers; Louise Tillin, *Remapping India: New States and Their Political Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) traces the various phases of the movement for a separate state of Jharkhand, with particular focus on the renewal of the movement in the 1970s and '80s.

few decades away.[57] Due to a combination of Congress co-option and landlord violence, caste organisations failed to create mainstream political organisations in Bihar and were largely subsumed into the Congress (elite-caste dominated) in the first half of the twentieth century. This thesis will include lower-caste and Dalit voices, such as Congressman, independence activist, and first excise minister of Bihar, Jaglal Choudhury. However, views from these Dalit politicians tended to align with those of the Congress, albeit with more focus on creating equality for Dalits and other members of the non-dvija (twice-born) castes. Additionally, given the fact that there were large populations of both Kurmis and Bengalis in parts of southern Bihar, the alleged oppression committed by Bengalis was also often discussed in relation to their actions towards Kurmis. This encouraged the creation of a broad anti-Bengali coalition and allowed elite Hindus and Muslims to frame the issue as 'Bengali versus Bihari' rather than 'Bengali versus upper class and caste Biharis'.

Finally, this thesis will examine the interactions between the elite class of Biharis, both Hindus and Muslims and Bengalis in Bihar. Unlike other parts of the country, upper-caste Hindus and elite Muslims were often politically aligned, especially in the early decades of the century. During the movement to separate Bihar from the Bengal Presidency in the 1910s, members of both these communities lobbied British officials for independence from Bengal, alleging rule from Bengal had resulted in 'backwardness' in Bihar. The men who spearheaded the movement included eminent Bihari figures such as Sachchidananda Sinha, Syed Hasan Imam, and Syed Ali Imam. However, Bihar was not immune to the communalism that exploded in the late 1930s and 1940s. In 1938-39, there were a series of rural communal riots in Bihar, a pattern that was repeated in 1946, shortly before partition.[58] The Congress response to the Muhammad Yunus' Independent Muslim Party's decision to accept office in 1937 after the Congress had decided not to form a government exacerbated tensions between communities.[59] Despite the fact that the reins of government were handed

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[57] Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (Columbia University Press, 2003). That is not to say there were no attempts to create caste coalitions in Bihar. Through the first few decades of the twentieth century, caste organisations based around Ahirs/Yadavs (a cow-herding caste) and Kurmis (a cultivation and agricultural caste) registered organisations in Patna. These two castes combined with the Koeris, another agricultural caste that occupied roughly the same position in the social hierarchies, fought the district board elections in Bihar in the 1930s. While their candidates were largely unsuccessful, these three castes continued to work together, forming a political party, the Triveni Sangh, in 1934. However, the Congress' creation of the Backward Caste Federation in 1935 'deprived the low caste movement of some of its leaders by co-oting Kurmi leaders (such as Birchand Patel) and Yadavs (such as Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav)'. This led to the Triveni Sangh struggling in elections, and even in areas where their candidates were successful, upper-caste landlords were quick to respond violently, effectively cutting the movement off.

[58] Vinita Damodaran, *Broken Promises: Popular Protest Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar (1935-1946)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 43.

[59] Mohammad Sajjad, *Muslim Politics in Bihar: Changing Contours* (Routledge, 2014).

over to the Congress without incident after the party reversed its decision on office acceptance, the brief period saw some hysterical newspaper articles from papers aligned to the Congress and pronouncements by Congress members alleging the IMP government intended to Islamise Bihar primarily by making Urdu another official language of the state.

Partition caused further tensions between the two communities as violent communal riots broke out in the state, and almost a million Muslim Biharis moved from Bihar to East Pakistan.[60] However, unlike the United Provinces, Bihari Muslim politicians (who usually belonged to relatively elite classes) did not move en masse to Pakistan. This allowed Muslim politics in the province to reconstitute and lobby for certain issues deemed relevant to the Muslim community, such as making Urdu an official language of the state (which did eventually occur in 1980).[61] Additionally, the impending linguistic reorganisation and the fact that it was likely a part of Kishanganj, a section of Bihar with a sizeable Muslim population, would be transferred to Bengal meant that the Congress government (which was primarily manned by elite Hindus) had to continually reiterate notions of Muslim Bihari belonging in the province. This allowed Muslim politicians space within political structures to make other demands (such as those around language), as senior Hindu Congressmen had implicitly accepted that Muslims were not 'outsiders' during the period of linguistic realignment. This further changed the priorities of proponents of Hindi in Bihar, who often included Urdu as a language marker for Biharis and continually emphasised the 'Bihari-ness' of Muslims. These unique aspects of the Hindi language movement in Bihar will be further explored later in the conclusion.

Sources and Methodologies

In order to develop the arguments discussed in the introduction, a variety of official and non-official sources in English, Hindi, and Bengali have been consulted (and included as a part of the analysis after translation to English). This thesis has aimed to use a variety of different languages to present different perspectives on the issues faced by Bengalis in Bihar. Particularly significant is the use of Hindi and English in the Legislative Assembly of Bihar. The use of English was common in the colonial era as that was the official language of the Assembly at the time. However, after independence, the use of English became more

[60] Lord Ennals, 'Biharis in Bangladesh: The Third Great Migration?', *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs. Journal*, 8.2 (2007), p. 239.
[61] Mohammad Sajjad, 'Language as a Tool of Minority Politics: Urdu, in Bihar, India, 1951–1989', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs,* 34 (2014).

contested. Bengali representatives from areas where Bengali speakers were a minority (including some Adivasi areas) switched entirely to Hindi, representing, to some extent, their desire to align themselves with those in positions of power in Bihar. For instance, the Congress leadership in Bihar often emphasised the importance of propagating Hindi. Bengalis who opposed the Government of Bihar's positions, especially those living in border regions, on the other hand, refused to use Hindi and continued to speak in English in the Legislative Assembly. Hindi speakers in the Assembly did not regard this kindly, and they expressed their outrage during contentious debates. However, some of the most anti-linguistic realignment politicians in the Assembly did not always use Hindi (with some, such as Murali Manohar Prasad, speaking exclusively in English) and faced no backlash from other members. Therefore, it becomes clear that the choice of language used became deeply politicised for linguistic minorities, with Bengalis who opposed the government speaking in English and Bengalis who supported the government speaking in Hindi.

Although this thesis does closely examine various legislative assembly debates, it also includes a host of other sources from various archives in India and the United Kingdom. These are official government reports and memos from the Appointments and Education Department of the Bihar State Archives. This thesis has analysed documents from the National Archives with a focus on those pertaining to language policy and demands for linguistic states. All-India Congress Committee papers from the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library that deal with the politics of Bengal and Bihar have been analysed, as well as the personal collection of M.K. (Pyarelal) Gandhi. In addition, Lok Sabha, Bihar Legislative Assembly, Bihar Legislative Council, and West Bengal Legislative Assembly debates in English, Hindi, and Bengali have been examined. A range of unofficial sources have been consulted, including letters from significant figures involved in the debates on Bengalis and Biharis, reports from Catholic missionaries in Jharkhand and a variety of newspapers such as *The Behar Herald* (English language based in Patna), The Searchlight (English language based in Patna) *Mukti* (Bengali language based in Manbhum), *Ghar Bandhu* (Hindi language based in Ranchi) and *Times of India* (English language based in Bombay). Although this thesis has attempted to use sources consistently, there is a significant gap in the records of the *Behar Herald* between 1950 and 1954.

This thesis will consist of six chapters. The first chapter will explore the ramifications of the divisions of the large Bengal Province in 1912 on Bengalis in Bihar and focus on the development of the domicile certificate system that was to have an outsize impact on Bengali politics in the province until independence. It discusses the growth in tensions between

Bengali-Biharis and Biharis, who considered Hindi and Urdu as their mother-tongues and provides context for the later interventions made by the Congress into the 'Bengali-Bihari issue'. The second chapter examines the impact of constitutional reforms in 1935 in Bihar and analyses the growth in the demand for linguistic states, the Bengali-Bihari deployment of the category of minority to demand protection from the government, and the Bengali-Bihari response to the Congress victory in 1937. The third chapter discusses the Congress investigation into the 'Bengali-Bihari' issue between 1938-39 and explores the development of Bengali-Bihari narratives to bolster their claims of belonging in the province. The fourth chapter deals with the aftermath of the war, independence, partition, and the impact of the West Bengal refugee crisis on Bihar. It explores early demands for linguistic states and the beginnings of the Government of Bihar's purported attempts at the 'Hindi-isation' of areas with predominantly Bengali speakers. The fifth chapter examines the impact of the decision of the Government of India to reorganise states along linguistic lines on Bengali politics in Bihar and discusses the reasons for the political fragmentation of the broader community. The final chapter explores Bihar's response to the release of the States Reorganisation Commission report and alternative approaches to territorial reorganisation that were put forth by an anti-linguistic realignment coalition that was developed in Bihar.

Chapter 1: The Separation of Bihar from Bengal: Development of histories, claims of belonging, and employment policies in Bihar and Orissa (1909-1934)

Introduction

This chapter examines the years after the separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal. It will analyse how Bengalis settled in Bihar navigated the rapidly changing political landscape between 1912 and 1934. It identifies how these demands from various Bihari communities overlapped and diverged and demonstrates how 'identity' was deployed strategically to make specific claims. This chapter will explore three aspects of claim-making in Bihar's early years. The first section examines the elite Hindu-Muslim coalition that demanded separation from Bengal, which deployed narratives of Bengali oppression of Biharis to justify this demand. The explicitly (and understandably) anti-Bengali nature of the movement was made clear and would have a significant impact on how Bengalis enacted politics in Bihar across the next few decades. The second section will trace the debates regarding Bengalis and administration and British officials' views of Bengalis in Bihar. It analyses the reasons behind the emphasis placed on the difference between 'Biharis' and 'Bengalis' in official British circles, ways in which Bengalis in Bihar responded to the tightening of rules around the procurement of certificates as well as the Bengali response to the change in the language of administration in certain parts of Bihar. The third section will examine the different demands made concerning the language of education from several communities in Bihar and the response of the Government of Bihar & Orissa to these demands.

Across three sections, this chapter makes three interventions. Firstly, this chapter provides context for the animosity between Bengalis in Bihar and their 'native' counterparts, which the Congress increasingly viewed as an issue through the 1930s. It discusses early claims to 'belonging' made by Bengalis in the context of increasingly strict domicile requirements. It reveals that these claims (unlike those beginning to emerge in other parts of the country) were not predicated on the link between language and land. Scholars have explored the development of identities that combined the two in detail. This includes Sumathi Ramaswamy's discussions of Tamil, where she quotes a lullaby from the late 19th century which states specifically that '[T]he language of our home is Tamil; the language of our land is Tamil'.[1] The Tamil language and the land are inextricably linked. Similarly, in Oliver

[1] Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India (1891-1970)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 11.

Godsmark's exploration of the movement for Maharashtra, he identifies this early part of the twentieth century as a period when members of the Maratha community in Bombay State stopped 'their demands for separate electorates…in favour of the creation of a separate province for Marathi speakers'.[2] This chapter will demonstrate that simultaneously, in some communities, non-linguistic understandings of belonging were developed and expressed. These understandings were highly significant for minority communities that often did not reside in their ostensible linguistic homelands.

An analysis of the development of non-linguistic conceptions of identity will be the second intervention this chapter makes in the broader historiography. It demonstrates how Bengalis in Bihar deployed strategic claims to belonging in order to achieve greater security within a rapidly changing political context. Bengali-Bihari individuals and organisations utilised the 'identities' they could conceivably claim to protect their privilege regarding access to employment and education. Due to histories of education within this community- as well as the fact they tended to be upper-caste descendants of Bengali administrators who had moved to Bihar for employment by the government- Bengalis had a significant advantage in procuring jobs in government service. In an attempt to ensure the split from Bengal did not erode these advantages, several Bengalis and Bengali organisations began to develop narratives around long histories of residence as well as service to the state to bolster their claims to belonging in the Bihari context, which then allowed them to oppose the strict domicile certificate requirements imposed by the state on 'non-Biharis'.

Thirdly, this chapter argues that, despite narratives of heightened Hindu-Muslim tensions on the 'national' stage, elite Urdu-speaking Muslims and elite Hindi-speaking Hindus in Bihar explicitly included the other community in Bihari historical narratives. Both Bihar's neighbours, the United Provinces and Bengal, saw increasing communal polarisation during this period, and the focus paid to those two states in broader Indian scholarship leads to the 'nationalising' of these narratives. The Swadeshi movement in Bengal was not particularly popular with the Muslim population of Bengal, primarily due to the coercive tactics used by leaders (who were more often than not upper caste Bengal Hindus) to encourage the population to boycott certain goods. As Manu Goswami states, the framework built by the upper-caste Hindu Bengalis of the movement relied heavily on specifically Hindu imaginings of an Indian past as well as the association of Hindu practices with the Indian

[2] Oliver Godsmark, *Citizenship, Community and Democracy in India: From Bombay to Maharashtra (c.1930-1960)* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 46-47.

nation and 'marked a sharper crystallisation of the conflictual construction of Hindu and Muslim identities and their hierarchical differences within the national space'.[3]

Similarly, as Christopher King discusses, in the United Province, the Hindi language movement involved significant antipathy to Muslims and the Urdu language on the part of Hindi-speaking Hindus, which continued to develop throughout the nineteenth century.[4] Francesca Orsini and William Gould explore the ways in which senior politicians deployed narratives around the Hindi language in north India and argue that the movement undoubtedly had an anti-Urdu (and consequently anti-Muslim) bent.[5] However, the narratives that emerged in Bihar were different, with elite Hindus and Muslims of the province lauding Bihar's 'non-communal nature'. Senior Hindu politicians, such as Sachchidananda Sinha, explicitly included Muslims in the broader community of 'Biharis'. Instead of marking Muslim rule as responsible for the decline of Bihar, Hindu upper-caste Bengalis, in particular, were identified as being both 'outsiders' in the province and having oppressed Biharis for centuries.

This dissertation will broaden discussions around the *bhadralok* class by examining this Bengali *bhadralok* diaspora, many of whose families had lived for several generations in the province of Bihar, and the ways in which they navigated a rapidly changing political landscape. Several historians have examined this group through various lenses including social, cultural, and political ones. For instance, Joya Chatterji discusses the significant role played by the *bhadralok* in the partition of Bengal in 1947.[6] This group emerged as one of the most significant in Bengal during the British era as the East India Company's rise to power in the eighteenth century fundamentally transformed power structures in Bengal. They dismantled the old Nawabi structures and made a relatively 'clean sweep' of not only the 'old Bengal elite' but also the 'meanest administrative officials'.[7] The British largely replaced them with elite Hindus known as the *bhadralok*. This category has often been used to describe the Bengali Hindu 'educated middle class'. Those classed as *bhadralok* included 'groups dependent on landed rents and professional and clerical employment'.[8] Due to the

[3] Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 266.
[4] Christopher King.
[5] Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*; Orsini.
[6] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition (1932-1937)* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).
[7] Eric Stokes, 'The First Century of British Colonial Rule in India: Social Revolution or Social Stagnation?', *Past & Present*, 58 (1973), 141.
[8] J.M. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 5-6.

relative broadness of this definition, it is difficult, as J.H. Broomfield states, to class the *bhadralok* either as an 'economic' or 'occupational caste'.[9] He instead describes them as a 'status group.'[10] As Tithi Bhattacharya suggests in her wide-ranging study on this group, the prioritisation of education tied this community together.[11] However, unlike the landed *bhadralok,* the professional and clerical sections of the community could not rely on rents to earn a living and consequently had to seek out work. This prioritisation of education meant that a vast number of Bengalis were qualified to (and desired to) carry out (the relatively better-paid) government work. However, the jobseekers significantly outnumbered the jobs available in and around Bengal proper. This led to a stream of migrations away from the Bengal region and into the hinterlands of the province. As Gordon Johnson states, Bengalis 'not only settled their own province under the Company's rule but went with that rule into other parts of India, arranging contracts, staffing administrations, and later pleading in courts and teaching in schools'.[12]

The bulk of this migration was 'internal', which meant that Bengalis tended to settle in areas within the vast Bengal Presidency. Not all these areas were considered 'Bengali-speaking.' Nevertheless, as these areas were a part of the Bengal Presidency, Bengalis, particularly those in government service, found there were few barriers to employment. This situation transformed after the reversal of the 1905 partition of Bengal in 1911 and the subsequent hiving off of Assam and Bihar & Orissa from the province. Many Bengalis still resided in the newly created province. Several had families that had lived and worked in Bihar for generations, and the difficulty of properly identifying the linguistic make-up of polyglot border regions meant that many Bengali-speaking communities inhabited areas that had become a part of Bihar. The separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal and the accompanying attempts of the Hindi-speaking Bihari elite to fashion a specific Bihari identity (that explicitly excluded Bengalis) encouraged several members of these Bengali communities to present their own conception of Bihari identity that was not at odds with aspects of Bengali culture they continued to identify with. While the views of Bengalis in Bihar certainly were not homogenous, through the next few decades, Bengali organisations and leading figures in the community continued to assert their identities as 'Biharis' to

[9] J.M. Broomfield, 'The Frustration of the Bhadralok: Pre-Independence Politics in Bengal', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 39.1 (2016), 218.
[10] *Ibid*.
[11] Tithi Bhattacharya, *Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
[12] Gordon Johnson, 'Partition, Agitation and Congress: Bengal 1904-1908', *Modern Asian Studies*, 7 (1973), 534.

demand the right to work in the province without any barriers as well as appeal to protection from the Governor of Bihar as a 'Bengali' minority community.

The movement for Bihar and the split from Bengal (1905-1926)

This section will discuss the movement for the separation of Bihar and the narratives developed by elite Hindus and Muslims in the region. It argues that the movement encouraged lower levels of communal tension in Bihar, with Bengalis generally painted as the oppressors of 'native' Biharis. Several scholars have viewed the partition of Bengal in 1905 and the subsequent Swadeshi movement as a foundational episode in Indian history.[13] While the movement has often been considered the precursor to the Gandhian mass movements that occurred later in the century, the response was not uniformly positive, with the Hindu-revivalist aspects sharpening communal tensions. Similarly, the Hindi language movement that emerged in the nineteenth in the United Provinces had distinct anti-Urdu (and anti-Muslim) underpinnings. The extensive analyses of both the Swadeshi and Hindi language movements, however, have resulted in the tendency to 'nationalise' these narratives and present rising tensions between Hindus and Muslims as an 'Indian' phenomenon.

In contrast to this, the movement for the creation of Bihar seemingly defied trends towards increasing communalisation of politics. It was led by a multireligious coalition of leaders that included Hasan Imam, Ali Imam, and Sachchidananda Sinha, who often emphasised Bihar's uniqueness with respect to communal tensions. Reflecting this, the relations between Hindus and Muslims in the region were markedly less contentious than those in the United Provinces (UP) and Bengal. Representatives from both communities often raised the issue of Bengali 'overrepresentation' in the Legislative Council, questioning the government's enforcement of the rules, with Bengalis presented as the other rather than their 'Bihari' counterparts from other religions.

In order to make the arguments, this section will first briefly discuss the redrawing of boundaries in Eastern India in 1911-12. For several decades towards the end of the nineteenth century, rule from Bengal was resented by elites in regions that did not identify as Bengali. In particular, (although there were some attempts to create specific regional policies for education and administration around language in non-Bengali regions by Bengali and British

[13] Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1903-1908)* (People's Publishing House, 1973); Goswami; Andrew Sartori, 'The Categorical Logic of a Colonial Nationalism: Swadeshi, (1904-1908)', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 23 (2003); David Ludden, 'Spatial Inequity and National Territory: Remapping 1905 in Bengal and Assam', *Modern Asian Studies*, 46 (2012).

officials), there was growing antipathy towards the Bengalis who manned the administration, especially from elites in the areas that did not receive the same educational or professional opportunities as those from Bengal.[14] This led to demands from non-Bengali elites across the presidency to separate from the Bengal 'proper' from non-Bengali areas such as Assam, Bihar, and Orissa in the early years of the twentieth century.[15] The common narrative presented in British official circles regarding the fundamental unwieldiness and inefficiency of the large Bengal Presidency further encouraged these demands for the divisions of the territory. This desire to divide Bengal was also exacerbated by the 'incessant' *bhadralok* demands for reform.[16] The partition of Bengal would, according to British officials, both blunt the power of the *bhadralok* and solve the issue of Bengal's unmanageable size.[17]

British officials eventually partitioned Bengal into eastern and western portions in 1905. This produced a strong response from Bengal, culminating in the Swadeshi movement, spearheaded by the *bhadralok*. This movement served to unite moderate and extremist factions within Bengali politics, and some attempts were made to begin grassroots movements in the countryside through social work, patriotic festivals, songs, and plays.[18] However, the coercive enforcement of the Swadeshi movement and the material benefits reaped by some sections of the Muslim population in the Eastern part of Bengal resulted in a growth in support from Muslim Bengalis for a separate East Bengal. Additionally, the Hindu chauvinist aspects of the movement marked Hindu Bengalis as particularly anti-Muslim within broader Indian Muslim narratives.

Nevertheless, the continued opposition from several sections of elite Hindu Bengali society encouraged British officials to revisit the idea of partition. [19] In 1911, partially to appease more moderate Indian political opinion, British officials decided to amalgamate the two halves of Bengal. Yet, the issue of the size of the Bengal Presidency remained, as well as the potential for Hindu Bengali leaders to effectively organise in the large presidency.

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[14] Aishwarj Kumar, 'A Marginalised Voice in the History of Hindi', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47.5 (2013).
[15] Mohammad Sajjad, 'Muslim Resistance to Communal Separatism and Colonialism in Bihar: Nationalist Politics of the Bihar Muslims', *South Asian History and Culture*, 2.1 (2010).
[16] Johnson, 'Partition, Agitation, and Congress' 549-550.
[17] As Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India and architect of the first partition of Bengal stated in a letter written in 1904, the Bengalis were the 'wirepullers' of the Congress and that their power was relatively unchecked in Bengal where, 'they dominate public opinion in Calcutta; they affect the High Court; they frighten Local Government; they are sometimes not without serious influence over the Government of India.' Quoted in Johnson, 'Partition, Agitation, and Congress', p. 550.
[18] Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*.
[19] Sartori, 'The Categorical Logic of a Colonial Nationalism'.

Therefore, British officials decided to carve the non-Bengali speaking areas, such as Assam, Bihar and Orissa out of Bengal.[20] Leaders in Bihar greeted this decision with approval.

Despite the proximity of the centre of the Swadeshi movement to Bihar, the response was not as enthusiastic as could possibly have been expected. British officials suggested that the movement had 'failed to enlist the sympathy of the Biharis'.[21] As Narendra Jha argues, Bihar's leaders, hoping to secure a 'sympathetic hearing' from British officials, largely 'confined' their activities 'within constitutional limits' during this period of unrest in Bengal.[22] Consequently, the growth of antipathy between religions associated with the Swadeshi movement did not occur in Bihar. Additionally, the tensions between Urdu and Hindi proponents in UP (bordering Bihar) did not notably influence politics in the Bihar region of Bengal Province. Most Bihari elites, regardless of religion, were instead focused on demanding the separation of their region from Bengal. In 1908, prominent Bihari public figures inaugurated the first Behar Provincial Conference to demand the separation of Bihar from Bengal. Syed Ali Imam was unanimously elected president. The meeting was attended by several notable figures in Bihar, including Imam's brother Syed Hasan Imam, Mazaharul Haque, Sachchidananda Sinha and Deep Singh (who went on to briefly become Chief Minister of Bihar in independent India). The Committee was constituted again in 1909, with Sinha as chair. It continued to meet yearly to demand the creation of a separate Bihar.[23]

The multireligious make-up of this coalition accounts for the relative strength of Muslim politics in the province, even after partition in 1947 saw communal relations deteriorate. These histories of cooperation between Biharis of different religions and the creation of a common historical narrative of working together to create the state of Bihar was significant when reconciliation after partition became necessary. Aryendra Chakravartty has described these elite groups of Biharis as the 'literati', who were generally 'middle-class' and 'English-educated' professionals who were 'drawn to the study of history'.[24] Chakravartty demonstrates the ways in which this group fashioned a history of Bihar that was intertwined with 'national' histories of India. This group, which included Sachchidananda Sinha, a prominent lawyer, journalist, and politician from Arrah, wrote several essays and editorials

[20] F.A. Eustis and Z.H. Zaidi, 'King, Viceroy, and Cabinet: Modification of the Partition of Bengal, 1911', *History*, 49.166 (1964).
[21] 'The history of the organisation against the partition of Bengal to the close of 1905 (1906)', in Political Department, *West Bengal State Archives*, File no. 25/06, page 22 in file.
[22] Narendra Jha, *The Making of Bihar and Biharis: Colonialism, Politics, and Culture in Modern India c. 1870-1912* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 203.
[23] Sajjad, *Muslim Politics in Bihar: Changing Contours*.
[24] Aryendra Chakravartty, 'Provincial Pasts and National Histories: Territorial Self-Fashioning in Twentieth Century Bihar', *Modern Asian Studies*, 52 (2018), 1351.

that primarily focused on the glorious ancient histories of Bihar, especially the Mauryan and Gupta eras with the implication that due to the significant power they wielded they were Indian empires with power based in Bihar, rather than regional rulers. In 1912, in an article in the *Hindustan Review*, Sinha referred to Emperor Chandragupta Maurya, as the 'great Beharee conqueror' as well as a 'great leader of Indian nationalism'. There was a renewed focus on creating organisations to preserve uniquely Bihari ancient history. The Bihar and Orissa Research Society (BORS) was set up in 1915, primarily through the patronage of the colonial state, and included a host of Bihari notables in its ranks. This focus on ancient histories of Bihar and their interweaving with larger Indian histories served to provide the new province with historical legitimacy and present Bihar's past as 'foundational to the Indian national imagination'.[25]

Apart from the development of narratives around this 'great' Bihari past, Sinha continually emphasised the Bihar region's non-communal nature compared to other parts of the country. In October 1910, he spoke at the Beharee Students Conference, stating that the 'outstanding feature' that 'followed the course of events during the last few years' was the 'gradual disappearance of the veneer of artificial unity… except in your province, Behar, where true unity is fairly complete as the result of the joint self-expression of the individualism of both the Hindu and Mussalman communities, a state of affairs which nowhere else in India has yet come into existence.'[26] Sinha was the editor for the Hindustan Review, a journal published in Allahabad and wrote articles on various topics mostly relating to Bihari politics. In an article on eminent figures in Bihar, Sinha singled out Ali Imam for praise, detailing Imam's long personal history that situated him firmly as an Indian. Sinha wrote that Imam's family came to India 'before the Moghul Empire was founded' and particularly emphasised that his ancestor Syed Hasan Khingsawar lay 'buried in Ajmere'. He added that his 'tomb on the hill' was 'still venerated as that of a saint'.[27] Sinha's retelling of Imam's family history presents the family as inherently Indian, especially given the focus on Imam's ancestor's tomb as a sacred site within India. Sinha suggested Imam's manifesto for the creation of Bihar 'gave expression to the genuine feelings of by far the largest number of thoughtful people in the province of Bihar.'[28] His language indicates his belief in (and his desire to present) Muslim Bihari leaders as representative of the Bihari population, regardless

[25] *Ibid*.
[26] Sachchidananda Sinha, 'Address to the Behar Student's Conference on the 8th of October, *Hindustan Review*, 22 (1910), 509.
[27] Sachchidananda Sinha, 'Men in the Public Eye'. *Hindustan Review*, 22 (1910), 641.
[28] *Ibid*., 644.

of religion. This rhetoric from Sinha and the multireligious coalition formed to demand Bihar indicates that politics in Bihar at the time diverged from 'national' trends of greater polarisation between Hindus and Muslims in India.

This group viewed the separation of Bihar from Bengal as a victory; however, the preponderance of Bengalis in service continued to be an issue for them. This fact, accompanied by narratives of the exploitation of Bihar when it was a part of the Bengal Presidency, led to increased tensions between 'native' Biharis and Bengalis. Although the Government of Bihar did identify Bengalis in service as an issue and did attempt to reduce their numbers through tightening requirements for jobs for those not domiciled in the province, this was nevertheless not considered adequate by some sections of the Bihari population. In 1919, a member of the Bihar Legislative Council, S. K. Sahay, complained that a large proportion of posts in the service were 'filled by persons' who were 'not native to the province.'[29] This remained a complaint through the years. In January 1925, Muhammad Zaharul Haqq questioned the government regarding the proportion of Bengalis in service compared to their proportion of the population.[30] Both Muslim and Hindu members of the Legislative Council raised similar concerns regarding Bengalis across several years, indicating that the coalitions developed in opposition to rule from Bengal continued to exist and that concerns regarding the number of Bengalis in service had not disappeared.

These complaints aligned with narratives developed during the movement for Bihar regarding the exploitation of Bihar by Bengal (and, by extension, Bengalis). In a speech on the budget made in February 1926 in the Bihar Legislative Council, Sachchidananda Sinha claimed that 'in the past Bihar suffered terribly in the utilisation of her financial resources owing to her administrative association with Bengal from 1765-1912.'[31] He added that under 'local influence which was naturally predominant, a disproportionately large amount of the joint revenues in and around the metropolis, and neglected the needs of Bihar, which was regarded as a backwards part of the combined provinces.'[32] These narratives and the number of Bengalis in service increased tensions between Bengalis in Bihar and some sections of the

[29] 'Appointment of non-Biharis', 22 January 1919, *Bihar Legislative Council Debates 1919,* p.1. (page numbers are according to their position in the document not the actual number on the page as these have been split up during digitisation) http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/547 (Accessed on 21 January 2022).
[30] 'Percentage of domiciled Bengali community to total population and of officers of that community to total strength of Bihar and Orissa civil service', 13 January 1925, *Bihar Legislative Council Debates 1925*, p.1. http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/5731 (Accessed on 21 January 2022).
[31] Sachchidananda Sinha, 'The Present Financial Condition of Behar and Orissa' in *Speeches and Writings of Sachchidananda Sinha: Second Edition*, ed. C. Y. Chintamani (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1942), 395.
[32] *Ibid*.

Bihari population. It allowed the rest of the linguistically and culturally diverse Bihari population to unite against a group with distinct surnames and a significant presence in administrative institutions with which Biharis from different walks of life were likely to interact. Like the attempts to unite the disparate, caste-ridden Hindu society in UP by depicting Muslims in the province as the 'other', the histories of Bihar with Bengal, as well as the preponderance of Bengalis in government services, allowed the interests of both 'native' Bihari Hindus and their Muslim counterparts in the province to coalesce.

Language of Administration, Domicile Certificates and Theories of 'Overrepresentation': Changing realities for Bengalis in Bihar after 1912

Apart from complaints raised by some elite Biharis regarding Bengalis in service, the movement of British policy towards greater emphasis on 'representation' meant that officials viewed the abundance of Bengalis in service as a significant issue. This section firstly analyses the impact of broader trends of differentiation upon conceptions of identity with regard to Bengalis and Biharis and the way in which these conceptions materialised in hiring policies. The Indian Councils Act (passed in 1909) introduced elections (with an extremely limited franchise) to legislative councils and introduced separate electorates for Muslims. Given the focus on ensuring equal communal representation within the act, the matter of equal representation became increasingly crucial across all British territories in India. Therefore, the preponderance of Bengalis across services in Bihar was seen as a significant issue not just by elite Biharis, who believed they were not getting their fair share of jobs in the province, but also by British officials. Secondly, this section argues that British officials tied the classification of 'dialects' to this priority of reducing Bengali influence in the province. Officials began to increasingly suggest that specific 'tribal' languages such as 'Kurmali' were dialects of Hindi rather than Bengali.

The early twentieth century and anti-British Swadeshi movement had seen a shift in British official attitudes towards upper-caste Hindu Bengalis, who they viewed as the main drivers behind the movement. British officials began portraying Bengalis as an unrepresentative, overeducated minority whose influence needed to be curtailed. The government and Hindi-speaking elites widely disseminated the claim that educated but unemployed Bengalis from Bengal proper came to Bihar to take jobs in services. This rhetoric served to ingrain narratives of Bengalis as oppressors within the state of Bihar. The colonial government began to make changes to the official language of the areas that bordered Bengal. This was often changed to Hindi, regardless of the linguistic make-up of the

region. The Government of Bihar's response to perceived issues of 'overrepresentation' of Bengalis in service in Bihar was to tighten the rules around domicile and government service. Bengalis opposed this shift in policy and, throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century, consistently made claims of belonging in Bihar to demand the abolition of domicile certificates. While never exploding into widespread violence, tensions continued to rise in Bihar between Bengali Biharis and their Hindi-speaking counterparts over the next thirty years. This resulted in a doubling down on claims of historic settlement from the Bengali community in Bihar.

The early years of the twentieth century saw a renewed focus from British officials on defining and investigating different categories of Indians, with the census of 1901 playing an essential role in this. In 1906, the Liberal Party won the general election in a landslide and appointed John Morley Secretary of State for India. Dismayed at the support of moderates for the anti-partition movement and widely regarded as more sympathetic than the Tories to Indian nationalists, the newly elected government decided to reform the legislative councils to allow more Indians to join. Herbert Hope Risley, the Home Secretary under both Lord Curzon and Lord Minto, was charged with drafting a proposal for greater Indian self-government. A highly influential member of the Indian Civil Service, Risley had previously been involved in the decision to partition Bengal. The British administration in India charged him with conducting an ethnographic survey of Bengal in 1885. As a result of his work, he was appointed the Census Commissioner for the 1901 census, where he formulated the questions and prepared the report. While he is most famous for his racial theory of caste, positing that endogamy within castes meant that different castes were also distinct races, [33] Risley put forth several theories arguing that differences in language and speech were indicative of certain communities belonging to different races. This was regardless of the proximity of these populations to one another. In his book, *The People of India*, he stated that 'the mere fact that speech is a physiological function, depending in the last resort on the structure of the larynx' supported this theory.[34] This further solidified the idea of fundamental differences between Indian communities in the minds of many British officials and, to some extent, reiterated the notion that Bengalis and Biharis were essentially different races of people. Therefore, British officials did not treat Bengali claims to belonging in the area recognised as Bihar with seriousness on the basis that ethnically Bengalis could not be

[33] Herbert Hope Risley, *The People of India* (London: W. Thacker and Co., 1908).
[34] *Ibid*.,9

anything but 'outsiders' in Bihar. While C.J. Fuller, in his analysis of the role played by Risley's racial theory in the formulation of colonial policy, does not place the onus entirely on Risley for the creation of difference between Indian communities, the renewed focus on representation of and differentiation between various communities during this period influenced provincial governance.[35]

This is evident in the policies pursued by the Government of Bihar over the next few years. The colonial narrative of middle-class Bengalis (who were primarily held responsible for the anti-partition movement) being singularly unrepresentative of Indians was continually reiterated. This undercut Bengali (regardless of the province they inhabited) demands for a greater say in governance. In March 1912, soon after the separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal, the Governor of Bihar, Charles Bayley, passed an order (and later issued the accompanying Circular 3A) stating 'that all future vacancies which might occur should be filled up, unless it was really impossible to do so, by natives of the province' and that 'when a qualified native of the Province is available he should invariably be appointed in preference to an inhabitant of any other part of India'.[36] The rules were tightened further with an order issued in April 1913 that 'all vacancies in the secretariat and in the offices of Heads of Department other than those in the Upper Division filled by promotion from the Lower Division, should be advertised. The memo further declared that 'for five years permanent vacancies in the Upper Division of the Secretariat should be filled alternately by promotion from the lower division and by recruitment from outside after the publication of necessary advertisements.'[37] This was designed to transform the make-up of the Bihar Provincial Service and reduce the influence of Bengalis, especially non-domiciled ones, as promotions for non-domiciled employees were still allowed (even between departments).

While the circulars and orders passed did suggest 'bona fide domiciled Bengalis' were equally entitled, the Government of Bihar nevertheless expressed dissatisfaction with the proportion of Bengalis still in service. The census of the Bihar and Orissa Provincial Service was also conducted in early 1913, indicating that the number of Bengalis in the higher ranks of service was not proportional to their population in the province, and this was an issue that had to be solved eventually. 120 out of 315 members in the provincial executive

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[35] C. J Fuller, 'Anthropologists and Viceroys: Colonial Knowledge and Policymaking in India (1871-1911)', *Modern Asian Studies*, 50 (2016).
[36] 'Memo sent to undersecretary, 14 December 1917, Appointments Department, Appointment of Ministerial Officers in Bihar and Orissa Since the Creation of the Province, Proceeding B, File Number 3M/57/17, Nos. 380/419 in *Bihar State Archives (BSA)*, page 62-63 in file.
[37] *Ibid*., 63.

and judicial branch were Hindu Bengali, while only 52 were classed as Hindu Bihari.[38] The 1901 census that attempted to count the entire Bihari population (rather than just civil servants, which the census in 1913 covered) had indicated that around 6% of the population were Bengali speaking, while they had nearly 40% of the higher-ranking jobs in the province.[39] In 1913, the services census stated that 57 of the 315 were Bihari Muslims. Although Bihari Muslims also had a higher proportion of jobs in the senior levels of service when compared to their population, with 22% of the jobs and only 12% of the population, it marked the numbers too low, and it was suggested that more Muslims should be encouraged to find employment in the service. The views presented in the report echoed the debates around the importance of Muslims as a significant minority, which needed representation '"in excess" of their numerical strength'.[40] The report also commented on the lack of Adivasis (defined only as Santhals, Mundas and Oraons) in service but did not present this phenomenon as a pressing issue.[41]

Some sections of the Bengali community certainly felt that these shifts in government policy did not solely prevent non-domiciled applicants for government services from gaining jobs but also resulted in discrimination against Bengalis who had long settled in Bihar. On the 6th of April 1914, a Bengali member of the Legislative Council, Rai Bahadur Nishi Kanta Sen, suggested that the government had passed over Ishan Chandra Ghosh, a candidate for the Provincial Executive Service from Purnea, for an appointment despite being highly qualified. He stated that 'in the district of Purnea, besides other castes, over two thousand families of Bengali *Sat-Gops*' had been 'permanently settled for over hundred years'.[42] *Sat-Gops* (or Sadgops) is a Bengali Hindu dairy farming caste broadly equivalent to the Yadav caste. This argument not only put forth the narrative of Bengali belonging in Bihar but also demonstrated that Bengalis from all levels of the caste system were present in Bihar, and the issue was not just a question of high-caste Hindu Bengalis seeing their power eroded in the new province. While the various circulars produced by the government technically did grant domiciled Bengalis the same rights as their non-Bengali counterparts, it was evident that they already believed they were being discriminated against due to their supposed 'outsider'

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[38] 'Statements showing the distribution of members of the Provincial Service by caste and race in Connection with the Royal Commission', May 1913, Appointments Department, Proceeding A, File Number PSC20, *BSA*, page 14 in file.
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] Fuller, 'Anthropologists and Viceroys', 251.
[41] *Ibid*.
[42] 'Appointments held by domiciled Bengalis in the Provincial Service', 6 April 1914, *Bihar Legislative Assembly 1914,* p.1. http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/966 (Accessed 29 January).

status. It is also an early example of Bengalis using strategic claims of historical belonging in the province to counter what they viewed as discrimination by the government against Bengalis.

The First World War and India's significant contribution to the effort renewed calls for greater Indian representation in the bureaucracy and government. This process of 'Indianisation', as W. Murray Hogben suggests, was a slow one due to British officials 'distrust of Indians in the elite role of diplomatic agents and guardians.'[43] However, Hugh Tinker described 1917 as a 'watershed' and stated that 'India did achieve -during the next thirty years which were to pass before independence- a positive sense of mission'.[44] On the 20th of August 1917 Edwin Montagu, the Liberal Secretary of State for India, announced the British Government's commitment to '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 realisation of responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.'[45] A year later, on the 6th of August 1918, this was reiterated, and it became evident that there was likely to be an expansion of the roles of Indians in services.[46] The passing of the Government of India Act in 1919 cemented this trend. This renewed the focus on hiring practices, especially at the provincial level, as the emphasis on the concept of 'self-government' was not necessarily viewed as simply governance by Indians but as a government that was adequately representative of the population it managed. As Bengalis, regardless of domicile status, were considered to inherently be 'outsiders', the fact that they had a significant proportion of jobs in government was seen as an issue.

A report on the 'existing orders regarding the recruitment of the natives of the province' was prepared in December 1917 at the behest of the Lieutenant Governor, Edward Albert Gait, who expressed his disapproval of recent hiring practices at the Public Works Department (PWD). He stated in a letter on the 4th of December that the orders had 'hitherto proved ineffectual and further orders of some kind' were 'necessary' and that 'if we go on as we have been doing, we shall never get an indigenous Secretariat.'[47] The Lieutenant

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[43] W. Murray Hogben, 'An Imperial Dilemma: The Reluctant Indianization of the Indian Political Service', *Modern Asian Studies*, 15.4 (1981). p. 768.
[44] Hugh Tinker, 'India in the First World War and After', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3.4 (1968), p.105-106.
[45] 'Mr Montagu's Statement', *Hansard*, 6 August 1918, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1918/aug/06/mr-montagus-statement (Accessed on 20th May 2022).
[46] *Ibid*.
[47] 'Request from Governor for information on existing orders regarding the recruitment of the natives of the province', 4 December 1918, Appointments Department, Appointment of Ministerial Officers in Bihar and Orissa Since the Creation of the Province, Proceeding B, File Number 3M/57/17, Nos. 380/419 in *BSA*, page 60.

Governor identified Bengalis as not 'indigenous' to Bihar, with the implication that they were an entirely separate community from 'true' Biharis who needed better representation.

The memo sent in response to the Governor's request suggested that the rules set thus far were not adequate, especially as Circular 3A (circulated in 1912) appeared to have several 'loop-holes' which allowed those not 'indigenous' (as the Governor described them) to enter in service. The report stated that there were two main issues with Circular 3A. The first was that the criteria for what entailed 'qualified' was 'not fixed'; therefore, 'the officer making the appointment was left with more or less absolute discretion to declare that a particular candidate was not qualified for a particular appointment'.[48] He also suggested the part of Circular 3A that stated 'that men already in the service of the Government of the Province [before 1912] are entitled to such promotion as they are qualified to receive' was being too widely interpreted. He stated that 'it appears that many officers have taken it to mean that Govt. have no objection to the transfer of a non-domiciled employee from any Govt. office in the Province, to another on promotion even though in the latter office he is appointed for the first time and the promotion did not come as matter of course under same rule or order or even within the limits of reasonable expectation.'[49]

The report recommended that both these issues should be examined in order to limit the number of non-domiciled employees, suggesting that the practice of cross-departmental promotion for those who were non-domiciled should be curtailed and a 'rigorous' test to prove domicile should be put in place.[50] The officer in charge could determine if the candidate was truly settled in the province by reviewing evidence of possession of property in the province, the intention of the candidate to remain in the province, and whether the candidate's children were being educated in the province. The government approved this. However, while tightening domicile rules could possibly lower the number of non-domiciled Bengalis, the government still grappled with the issue of the large number of domiciled Bengalis in service.

The Appointments Department quickly produced several more memos. One, sent to the Governor on the 23rd of January 1918, indicated that 'the ideal' was that 'appointments which fall to each class should be roughly proportional to their numbers'.[51] Another, sent on

[48] 'Memo sent to undersecretary', page 63-64 in file.
[49] *Ibid*., 65.
[50] *Ibid*., 76-77.
[51] 'Memo sent to chief secretary', 23 January 1918, Appointments Department, Appointment of Ministerial Officers in Bihar and Orissa Since the Creation of the Province, Proceeding B, File Number 3M/57/17, Nos. 380/419 in *BSA*, 81.

the 7th of February, was more specific and recommended limiting the appointment of domiciled Bengalis to 'one-eighth' which was 'double the proportion of Bengalis to their whole population'. The report suggested, quite controversially, that this made 'allowance for their superior intelligence' despite it being more than their proportion of the population.[52] The language used across the memos continued to identify the proportion of both domiciled and non-domiciled Bengalis in service as a significant issue. There were also suggestions in the memos that 'local opinion' did 'not draw a very definite distinction between the domiciled and the non-domiciled Bengali and the appointment of the former probably' excited 'nearly as much opposition as the latter'.[53] The conflation of Bengalis who had likely settled in the province for generations with 'outsider' Bengalis demonstrated how British officials undermined claims of Bengali belonging in Bihar despite being aware of the long histories of settlement (which British officials traditionally facilitated).

On the 2nd of September 1918, a circular, Order no. 11a, was issued by the Government of Bihar, stating that 'no person should be regarded as domiciled in the province unless he can produce a certificate to that effect from the district officer of the district in which he claims to be a resident.'[54] This gave the district officer a great deal of discretion over the issuance of certificates, as it further stated that

> 'the district officer may consider whether the family owns a place of residence in the district where the members have been residing for not less than three years and whether they have been educating their children in the schools or colleges of the province, but such considerations should not be regarded either as sufficient or absolutely necessary in order to establish a claim to domicile.'[55]

The government also made promotions across departments subject to special dispensation. This severely curtailed employment prospects for Bengalis who were already members of the service before the separation of Bihar from Bengal.

Some Bengalis in the Bihar Legislative Council opposed these changes to employment laws and demanded the withdrawal of the order. They suggested that it discriminated against both domiciled Bengalis and non-domiciled Bengalis, who now had fewer avenues for advancement. In July 1920, Bengali member of the Legislative Council

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[52] 'Memo from H.M. Appointments Department', 7 February 1918, Appointments Department, Appointment of Ministerial Officers in Bihar and Orissa Since the Creation of the Province, Proceeding B, File Number 3M/57/17, Nos. 380/419 in *(BSA)*, page 92 in file.
[53] Memo sent to chief secretary', page 87 in file.
[54] 'Domicile of Non Biharis in Bihar and Orissa', 22 March 1922, *Bihar Legislative Council Debates 1922*, p. 1, http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/4702 (Accessed on 12 January 2022).
[55] *Ibid*.

Rai Bahadur Sharat Chandra Sen suggested that Governor Bayley had 'held out hopes that those officers of the Government that were drafted from outside the province at the time of its creation should have the same rights and privileges as would be enjoyed by the natives of the province in the matter of service'.[56] This statement, particularly the use of the word 'drafted' further emphasised Sen's perceived sense of injustice against Bengalis as it suggested that, contrary to mainstream opinion, which indicated that Bengalis attempted to take jobs away from 'natives' of the province, when in fact they were simply fulfilling their duties by accepting posts in Bihar.

Additionally, members of the Legislative Council raised concerns regarding the procurement of domicile certificates. In March 1922, Ganesh Datta, a Bengali-Bihari lawyer from Nalanda who would eventually go on to become the Minister for Local Self-Government for Bihar and Orissa, suggested in the Legislative Council that there was 'a feeling among the people that the Government very carelessly grants certificates and sometimes their [Bengalis] claims' were 'overlooked.'[57] However, the government stood firm, with the Chief Secretary of Bihar stating that 'under the rules prescribed by the Government to regulate appointment to all posts for which recruitment is not made under any special rule or order, no person who is not native or domiciled in the province can be appointed to any post without the sanction of Government'.[58] However, senior members of the administration regarded this as inadequate, and the rules were tightened further in February 1923 after the issuance of circular no. 111-1215-A, with a greater burden of proof placed on Bengalis. When questioned about the reasons for the changes in rules in a debate in the Legislative Council in August 1923, ICS officer (and future Governor of Bihar) J.D. Sifton claimed these changes were due to the complaints of people 'jealous of the number of Bengalis already in service'.[59]

These issues would continue to arise, and several sections of the Bengali population in Bihar became increasingly upset with what they viewed as discriminatory practices of officials in Bihar. While technically, Bengalis who had settled in the province did not need to provide domicile certificates, in practice, the government encouraged all those with identifiable Bengali names to apply. In 1933, during Questions and Answers in the Bihar

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[56] 'Rights and privileges of non-domiciled Bengali officers', 30 July 1920, *Bihar Legislative Council Debates 1920*, p.1, http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/1298 (Accessed on 12 January 2022).
[57] 'Domicile of Non Biharis in Bihar and Orissa', p. 2.
[58] *Ibid*.
[59] 'Rules Regarding Domicile Certificates', 28 August 1923, *Bihar Legislative Council Debates 1922,* p.1. http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/4190 Accessed on 17 April 2021).

Legislative Council, Bengali member Babu Radharanjan Das asked, rather pointedly, if 'anyone of this province having merely a Bengali surname' was 'presumed to be a non-domiciled Bengali.'[60] While the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, W. B. Brett, denied this was the case, he did state that 'unless the officer was aware of the facts it' was 'advisable to have an enquiry made'.[61] His statement implied that, in practice, Bengalis in Bihar were not technically receiving the same treatment as 'native' Biharis.

The government also tended to use Hindi as the primary language of administration (apart from English) across the province, which led to issues in the polyglot regions of Bihar soon after its separation from Bengal. Official behaviour in Dhanbad, a subdivision of Manbhum district, was the particular focus of Bengalis who were unhappy with the treatment of their community. Manbhum was a district that bordered Bengal. The census of 1911 recorded that 72 per cent of the inhabitants were Bengali speakers. While there were more Hindi speakers in Dhanbad than in the rest of Manbhum, the 1911 census recorded a majority of non-Hindi speakers in the subdivision.[62] There were also a variety of other dialects and languages spoken in Dhanbad, such as Kurmali and Santhali, which led to further disputes. In 1914, Bengali member of the Legislative Council Sharat Chandra Sen implied that the government was pressuring the Raja of Jharia (whose zamindari was located near Dhanbad) to support their decision to change the language of the record of rights from Bengali to Hindi. Sen also raised the case of Nuni Kurmin, a woman, who he claimed had given a statement to the courts in Bengali, but it had been recorded in Hindi. Herbert Coupland (a Settlement Officer responding on behalf of the government) disputed this and suggested that given the defendant's name was 'Kurmin' she likely gave her statement in Kurmali. He stated, 'This, though written in Bengali, is regarded by Sir George Grierson, the highest authority on the subject as a form of Magahi, not Bengali'.[63]

To some extent, these statements by Coupland misrepresent Grierson's views on the subject. While Grierson classed Kurmali as a dialect of Magahi, he also suggested that Bihari languages such as Bhojpuri, Maithili and Magahi resembled the Bengali language more

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[60] 'Domicile Certificates', 31 Aug 1933, *Bihar Legislative Council Debates 1933*, p.4. http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/127958 (Accessed on 17th April 2021)
[61] *Ibid*.
[62] 'Number of schoolboys in the Dhanbad Sub-division whose mothertongue is Bengali and Hindi, respectively', 13 March 1914, *Bihar Legislative Council Debates 1914,* p.1, http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/834 (Accessed on 17th April 2022).
[63] 'Recording in Hindi of a statement delivered in Bengali by Nuni Kurmin', 6 April 1914, *Bihar Legislative Council Debates 1914,* p.1, http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/973 (Accessed on 17th April 2022).

closely than Hindi.[64] Manbhum Gazette, published in 1911, similarly set out this view of Magahi as a variant of Hindi. It stated that the 'Magahi form of Hindi' was spoken in the western part of Manbhum and its main 'dialect' was 'Kurmali', also known as 'Khotta, Khottahi or even Khotta Bangala'.[65] Although Kurmali was explicitly identified as close to Bengali, the position held by Coupland and the one set out in the gazette, indicated that British officials regarded any language spoken within the borders of Bihar (that was not definitively Bengali) as a 'dialect' of Hindi. This identification of Bihar with Hindi was an important aspect of narratives developed throughout the twentieth century. The official narratives developed around language worked to solidify barriers between 'Bengali' and 'Hindi' identities.

There was further protest from Bengalis in early 1921 when the government announced that the record of rights in Dhanbad would be prepared in Hindi rather than Bengali. Shivdas Banarji, a Bengali member of the Bihar Legislative Assembly, pointed to the fact that landlords and raiyats in the Dhanbad subdivision objected to these changes. He also claimed that the administration, especially the Board of Revenue, had conducted business in Bengali. However, the government, represented by the Secretary of the Revenue Department, John Hubback, dismissed both the demands of the landlords and raiyats and the claim that the Board of Revenue had ever issued notices or conducted any administration in Bengali. This dismissal of Bengali demands underscored the attitudes of British officials towards Bengalis in Bihar, mainly viewing them as a group that did not have valid grievances.

British officials' narratives about Bengalis in Bihar echoed the debates around the Partition of Bengal and the Minto-Morley reforms. They largely dismissed Bengalis as unrepresentative and not 'indigenous' to the province, despite Bengali claims to the contrary. This view would be highly influential throughout the next few decades, encouraging tensions (albeit generally non-violent ones despite some claims to the contrary) between Bengalis in Bihar and their 'native' Bihari counterparts. Despite claims to the contrary, the concern exhibited by British officials regarding Bengali 'overrepresentation' in the service regardless of status of domicile served to blur distinctions between domiciled and non-domiciled Bengalis,

[64] Aishwarj Kumar, 'A Marginalised Voice in the History of Hindi', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47 (2013), 1729.
[65] H. Coupland, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Manbhum*, (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911), 72.

Language and Education in Bihar (1912-1936)

It was widely recognised through the nineteenth century that the Bihar region of the Bengal Presidency was particularly underserved in terms of education. The Report on Administration in Bengal (1871-72) highlighted this issue, stating that 'in Behar' there was 'barely one village school to every 15 or 20 villages', while in western (majority Hindu) Bengal 'there was one village school to every two villages'.[66] The bulk of educational facilities, particularly higher educational facilities, were undoubtedly concentrated in Bengal proper. With the separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal, the Government of Bihar began to build more institutions of higher education and made attempts to provide greater access to primary education. There was a renewed focus on support for Hindi vernacular education within the borders of the province. However, Bengalis in Bihar suggested that those who ran Bihar's educational institutions were discriminating against their community (regardless of Bengali domicile status). As with employment, technically domiciled Bengalis were entitled to the same rights to education as other Biharis. Consequently, Bengalis raised questions regarding attempts from institutions to increase the proportion of non-Bengalis and the fairness of government policy in the Legislative Council. The increased focus on Hindi teaching also led to growing concerns in Adivasi-populated border regions, where the bulk of education had been previously carried out in Bengali. In a reflection of politics within the province, the government placed a great deal of focus on the importance of teaching Urdu as well. There was also an emphasis on the similarities between Hindi and Urdu rather than attempts to differentiate the languages. Education became a significant subject during this period as, under the Government of India Act 1919, which instated a system of dyarchy, some departments 'transferred' to the control of Indians. Therefore, as a 'transferred' subject, education became a site upon which Indians could project their views of the nation.

The *First Quinquennial Review on the Progress of Education in Bihar and Orissa* was published in early 1917. It suggested the separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal had been highly beneficial as 'their educational needs' were no longer 'subordinated to those of the more advanced districts under the Government of Bengal'.[67] It stated that this had 'given a great impetus to progress', laudatory language that was fairly standard for government reports at the time.[68] The report provided a list of improvements made to education in Bihar,

[66] *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1871-72* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1872), 218.
[67] *First Quinquennial Review on the Progress of Education in Bihar and Orissa* (Patna: Bihar and Orissa Government Press, 1917), 3.
[68] *Ibid*.

including the soon-to-be-established Patna University. However, it raised numerous issues with education in the province and suggested that the war had impacted investment in education. The report stated there were still improvements to be made, particularly with regard to secondary vernacular education and teacher training. It also highlighted issues with Bengali education. There were several demands for high and middle vernacular Bengali-medium schools, and the report suggested they had to 'fill the vacancies in a staff of some 1700 [Bengali] teachers.'[69] However, Bengali was not a subject in most teacher training schools in Bihar, which led to a discrepancy between the demand and supply of Bengali-speaking teachers. The seeming indifference from the government increased the dissatisfaction felt by certain sections of the Bengali population due to what they viewed as discriminatory education policies. The issue of a lack of support for Bengali educational institutions would be raised continuously over the next few decades by Bengalis in Bihar, who became increasingly worried about the erosion of what they viewed as their fundamental rights.

However, it was not just people classed as Bengali who objected to the support given to Hindi over Bengali. Some areas of Bihar, particularly Adivasi regions with histories of education in Bengal, such as the Santhal Parganas, appealed to the government to change the language of education back to Bengali. Despite acknowledging in the 1910 Santhal Gazette that the district was polyglot and Hindi was not widely spoken, upon separation from Bihar, Hindi education across the province was encouraged regardless of the language used. Education in the Santhal Parganas was particularly affected as even the 'Bihari' languages spoken in the regions, such as Maithili, were 'influenced' by 'Magahi' and 'partly also by Bengali'.[70] After repeated petitions, the Government of Bihar decided in 1930 that the schools in Pakur and Jamtara subdivisions would 'teach Bengali instead of Hindi.'[71] In a letter to the Secretary of the Government of Bihar written in 1938, Kesav Hazari, a member of the Santhal Pargana District Committee and its Education Sub-Committee, suggested the period of encouraging Hindi education had significantly impacted Santhali education. He stated that replacing Bengali with Hindi in 1914 had resulted in the 'manifest setback of aboriginal education' and the language of education had to be changed back to Bengali in 1931 as it was deemed untenable to continue with Hindi.[72] This, he claimed, was because

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[69] *Ibid*., 85.
[70] L.S.S O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Santhal Parganas* (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1910), 66.
[71] *Report of the Progress of Education in Bihar and Orissa* (Patna: Superintendent Printing Press, 1931), 46.
[72] *Ibid*.

Hindi was a 'foreign tongue' while Bengali was 'their second mother tongue', which meant that the 'unfortunate Santhal children of Bengali areas who attended school from 1921 to 1930 had to do uphill work in receiving their education in a foreign tongue.'[73] This, in turn, led to 'less and less Santhal parents willing to send their children to school' as they struggled significantly with their studies.[74] The fact that some sections of the Adivasi population did have a similar interest in the Bengali language as those living in Bihar classed as Bengalis, as well as the fact that both communities tended to be concentrated in similar regions, encouraged leaders in those communities and organisations claiming to represent either Adivasis or Bengali to align on occasion. These alignments will be further explored, particularly in Chapter 3.

The 1917 report also emphasised a different aspect of mainstream politics in Bihar, where there was the understanding that the relative lack of hostility between Hindus and Muslims would allow schemes that would not necessarily be encouraged in other provinces. The 1917 report stressed the importance of training all teachers in Urdu, with schemes such as the appointment of Urdu teachers in Guru training schools. Training schools had been an essential part of secondary and primary education policy in colonial India, with the first schools set up in the middle of the nineteenth century. Schools run by Gurus and traditional Muslim *maktabs* were considered inferior institutions to both vernacular and English schools; however, the report recognised the importance of these institutions given the relative lack of access to education across Bihar and provided facilities for the training of these teachers.[75] Training teachers in Guru schools in Urdu also highlighted the fact that these institutions often taught both Hindu and Muslim students and suggested that the divisions between these communities were not necessarily as defined as in other parts of the country.

Attitudes to Urdu from Hindu politicians from Bihar were also markedly different. This was evident in the language used by Rajendra Prasad, a senior Congressman from Bihar who would go on to become the first President of independent India. Although Prasad was largely viewed as a right-wing Congress politician, his rhetoric on Urdu and Hindi often emphasised the fundamental commonalities between the languages rather than the differences. This is perhaps why, despite his support of Hindi as the national language as well as his leadership of Hindi organisations in Bihar, historians of the Hindi language, such as Francesca Orsini, place him in the camp of 'Hindustani' rather than 'Hindi' politicians (such

[73] *Ibid*., 206.
[74] *Ibid*.
[75] *Ibid*., 88.

as P.D. Tandon and Babu Sampurnanand). Prasad's views on language, however, reflected the political trends in Bihar, which encouraged alliances between elite, educated Hindi-speaking Hindus and Urdu-speaking Muslims. Unlike other parts of the Hindi-belt, where the distinctions between Hindi and Urdu were emphasised, Prasad claimed that Hindi and Urdu were both inherently Indian and, therefore, belonged to all Indians regardless of religion. In a speech called '*Hindi aur Urdu ki ekrupta'* (The uniformity of Hindi and Urdu) delivered at a meeting of the Bihar *Hindi Sahitya Sammelan* in 1926, he stated that he was 'not ready to believe that Urdu was the property of Islamic civilisation or Muslims' and that Hindus had no 'relationship' with the language or that Muslims had no 'rights' to Hindi.[76] The rhetoric of ownership of both communities over both the languages he used emphasises the different attitudes of pro-Hindi politicians in Bihar towards the language and the focus placed on similarities between the languages rather than attempting to differentiate the languages.

There was, however, differentiation between Bengali Biharis and 'indigenous' Biharis. The tightening of domicile rules significantly affected Bengali education in the province. While the Government of Bengal had previously encouraged Bengali students to leave Bengal proper and study in different parts of the province (especially Patna), this was now strongly discouraged. The passing of the Government of India Act in 1919 also had an impact on education as it was one of the 'transferred' subjects put under the purview of provincial officials. Stephen Legg suggests that while dyarchy appeared to be narrow constitutional reforms that in actuality did not alter a great deal, the transferred or 'nation-building' duties that provincial councils had control over were vital to the growth of the nationalist movement and that the politics of the provinces were largely responsible for nationalist political engagement with the system (whether they were supporting it or attempting to undermine it).[77] Therefore, during the 1920s, education increasingly became the focus of Indians who were making attempts to define their country and their position within it. In Bihar, the language of education and the funding available for it became hotly contested.

Apart from the admitted lack of support for primary Bengali educational institutions and the difficulties encountered by non-domiciled Bengalis in gaining admission to universities, some sections of the Bengali community also felt aggrieved with the

[76] Rajendra Prasad, *Sahitya*, *Shiksha Aur Sanskriti* (New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2008), 68, translated from Hindi.
[77] Stephen Legg, 'Dyarchy: Democracy, Autocracy, and the Scalar Sovereignty of Interwar India', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 36 (2016), 47.

complications the community began to face with regard to access to higher education. The domicile requirement, accompanied by the pervading belief that there were too many Bengalis in public life in Bihar, led domiciled Bengalis to face issues when attempting to access educational facilities. In 1920, the issue of domiciled Bengalis being given little opportunity to study at the Bihar School of Engineering was raised in the Legislative Council by Purnendu Narayan Sinha, who was also a renowned member of the Theosophy Society. However, the government dismissed these complaints, despite admitting that 'Under the present rule preference is ordinarily given to Biharis, hence if a large number of qualified Biharis apply for admission a domiciled Bengali boy's chance of admission is small'.[78] In July 1921, the Temple Medical College in Patna refused to admit domiciled Bengalis until 'all suitable Biharis' had been granted admission.[79] While this policy was quickly withdrawn it emphasised the attitudes towards Bengalis from official institutions. Given their community's relatively higher levels of education, the government did not necessarily view the group as one that needed special attention paid to their educational requirements.

Through his question in 1923, Bengali member of the Legislative Council, Kumud Chandra Mazumdar, also indicated that some parts of the Bengali community perceived the burden of obtaining a domicile certificate as having reduced some students' chances of attaining scholarships.[80] These issues would recur over the next decade. In 1934 the matter of restrictions with regards to admission of domiciled Bengalis in the Temple Medical School was once again raised, with claims from Bengali member of the Legislative Assembly Manindra Nath Mukharji that admissions of domiciled Bengalis had been capped at eight. While this was disputed by the government representative, in the same debate Sachchidananda Sinha suggested that the government should frame rules for 'the guidance of the Selection Committee' of the college as this would take into consideration 'caste, race' and 'community'.[81] His language implied that the Bengalis had (until that point) enjoyed a more

[78] 'Admission of domiciled Bengali boys into the Bihar School of Engineering', 30 July 1920, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1920*, p.2 http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/1406 (Accessed on 20 April 2022).
[79] 'Admission of domiciled Bengalis into the Temple Medical School, Patna', 29 July 1921, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1921*, p.1 http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/3108 (Accessed on 20 April 2022).
[80] 'Ineligibility of Bengali students for scholarships', 29 August 1923, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1923*, p.1 http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/4229 (Accessed on 20 April 2022).
[81] 'Restrictions in the admission of domiciled Bengali students to the Patna Medical College and other institutions' 19 February 1934*, Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1934,* p.1-2 http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/7901/ (Accessed on 20 April 2022).

privileged position than was their due, and in the interest of fairness, their numbers in education should be reduced.

The policies that replaced Bengali with Hindi in education also affected those who were not considered Bengalis. Colonial education policies within the province contributed to the formation of future political alliances and influenced the attitudes of organisations and figures (who claimed to represent specific communities) towards one another. The tendency to minimise the differences between Urdu and Hindi while explicitly marking Bengalis and anything related to Bengali culture as 'non-Bihari' encouraged the development of narratives of belonging within the province, with Bihari Muslims classed as Biharis while Hindu Bengali-Biharis were presented as outsiders.

Conclusion

The years after Bihar's separation from Bengal were significant in the development of narratives regarding belonging and identity within the province. Both Hindu and Muslim politicians led the movement for separation from Bengal and this, consequently, fostered an environment of relative communal amity. This was dramatically different from the trends in the neighbouring Bengal and United Provinces where tensions between Hindus and Muslims rose sharply in the early twentieth century. This divergence in political trends in the region demonstrates that there were different conceptions of what an Indian community could look like. Muslims and Hindus were not presented as having inherently incompatible goals, and narratives were developed that explicitly included both these religious communities within the Bihari community. Therefore, the development of political coalitions took a different path in Bihar, with suggestions that issues (such as tensions between Hindi and Urdu speakers) were not significant. The dominance of upper-caste *bhadralok* Bengalis across politics and services allowed some sections of Hindu Biharis and Muslim Biharis to align against them and present them as outsiders in the province.

The movement encouraged the presentation of Bengalis in Bihar by other elite Biharis as oppressors whose education and networks allowed them to gain an unfair advantage when it came to employment within the government. This view was perpetuated by British officials, in part due to the mistrust engendered by the Swadeshi Movement (for which British officials held upper-caste Bengalis largely responsible) and also due to the colonial policies developed after the Minto-Morley reforms. The British focus on 'proper' representation impacted governance in Bihar and a great deal of attention was paid to the preponderance of Bengalis in government service. The histories produced by 'native Biharis'

reflected this anti-Bengali sentiment and often either entirely ignored the period during which Bihar was governed from Bengal or depicted it as a period of oppression for true Biharis. Bengali responses to this were to present proof of long histories of settlement of Bengalis within the province. This would continue over the next decades, with Bengali claims of belonging becoming increasingly explicit. Apart from the tendency of significant 'native' Hindu and Muslim figures and organisations in Bihar to develop alliances, other future political alignments also had their origins in this period. The demand for Bengali teaching from some sections of the Adivasi population in Bihar presaged Adivasi support for Bengali claims of discrimination and Bengali backing for a separate Adivasi state of Jharkhand.

The development of the independence movement in the 1930s, as well as constitutional reforms and elections, meant that several groups put forth a variety of claims across the country, with Bihar being no exception. The demand for a separate Adivasi state of Jharkhand, which was raised in the late 1920s, grew in the 1930s, and tensions between Bengalis in Bihar and their Hindi-speaking counterparts also increased. The acceptance of the Communal Award by the Congress High Command, which saw the alienation of the Bengal PCC from the mainstream Congress, further disillusioned Bengalis from the Congress Party (even those in Bihar). In 1935, the British government passed the Government of India Act, which introduced elected governments and assemblies for the provinces. Although this was still a relatively narrow constitutional reform, with the bulk of power still retained by British officials, it nevertheless encouraged Indian politicians to develop visions for the country's future. The next chapter will explore the period between 1932 and 1937 in Bihar within the context of larger Indian politics. It will examine the responses from different sections of the Bihari population to the Communal Award, the passage of the 1935 Government of India Act, the provincial elections of 1937, and the formation of provincial governments. It will demonstrate how different political alliances developed during this period and the increasing rigidity in the conceptions of community.

Chapter 2: Constitutional Reform and Elections: Strategic Bengali claims to the term 'minority' and the response to the Congress victory in Bihar (1928-1937)

Introduction

The British government had written a review of the Montague-Chelmsford reforms into the Government of India Act, passed in 1920, and so ten years after their implementation, British officials had to re-examine the provisions within it and decide if the system of dyarchy had been successful. In 1928, the British government sent the Simon Commission to India to investigate the impact of reforms and provide recommendations regarding future constitutional changes. The lack of Indians on the Commission immediately made it a somewhat controversial body; nonetheless, it provided Indians who were not members of robust political organisations a platform to make demands. The growth in support for independence and the mass movements led by Gandhi in the 1920s added some impetus to these reforms as well. During this period, Congress became a far more successful organisation, with Gandhi encouraging the involvement of the masses in the struggle for independence rather than restricting Congress's work to attempts to influence constitutional reform. It was not just that Gandhi had a broad appeal; he also reorganised the Congress along linguistic lines, which scholars, such as Katherine Adeney, suggest improved the party's effectiveness when it came to the mobilisation of the masses.[1]

However, the increased effectiveness of the Congress was not the only result of these decisions to use language as a way to organise. The changes to the Congress organisation, accompanied by the party's explicit support for the reorganisation of India along linguistic lines in 1927, encouraged the growth of linguistic territorialism where linguistic and territorial identities became increasingly conflated and gave rise to demands around the redrawing of India's internal boundaries.[2] Bihar was not unaffected by the political transformations in this period, and several communities within the state responded to these broader shifts in Indian politics, especially those centred around language and identity. This chapter will explore how Bengalis in Bihar and other communities navigated these years of constitutional change. While the constitutional reforms remained relatively narrow, they nonetheless provided a platform for Indians to make various demands.

[1] Adeney, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict Regulation in India and Pakistan* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
[2] Robert D. King, *Nehru and the Language Politics of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.

The scholarship on the various constitutional reforms in India tends to either focus on how constitutional reforms caused the development of the Indian political structures or on how Indians employed these constitutional structures to achieve their specific aims. However, scholars usually restrict themselves to discussions of the practice of politics within legislatures and analyses of the structuring of Indian political parties. The proponents of the Cambridge School, such as Anil Seal, focus on the development of political processes in India during the interwar period. Seal concludes that due to Britain's imperialistic imperatives, colonial officials built a system 'which interlocked its rule in locality, province and nation', and Indian nationalism out of necessity created a 'matching structure of politics.'[3] He argues that 'vertical connections' made by groups with varying levels of power and authority effectively bound both provincial and central politicians together, especially with the advent of elections, which enfranchised greater and greater numbers of people as the years progressed. Therefore, as he states, 'However, much it may have blustered to the contrary, the Raj was designed to respond to some pressures from its subjects, who were thus encouraged to organise to treat with it'.[4] By suggesting that 'Indian nationalists created matching' political structures, Seal argues that imperial constitutional reforms fundamentally changed the relationship between the local, provincial and national in India into something more interconnected. James Manor largely appears to agree with Seal and suggests that the British created a system that was both accommodative and coercive out of necessity. Like Seal, he demonstrates the impact of the Raj on nationalist politics and the Congress in particular, stating that the necessity of an organisational presence at every level and in every arena trained the party for a future of accommodative politics.[5] Other historians, such as Judith Brown, highlight the importance of the reorganisation of Provincial Congress Committees (PCCs), which led to a more effective and accommodating organisation.[6]

However, several historians have deconstructed this view of change wrought from above. Seal is often associated with the Cambridge School, which has been criticised, in particular by historians of the Subaltern Studies Group, for reinforcing colonial narratives by ascribing proactive change almost solely to the colonial government and treating Indians as

[3] Anil Seal, 'Imperialism and Nationalism in India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 7 (1973), 347.
[4] *Ibid*., 336.
[5] James Manor, 'How and Why Liberal and Representative Politics Emerged in India', ed. by James Manor, *Political Studies*, 38 (1990).
[6] Judith M. Brown, *Modern India : The Origins of an Asian Democracy* (New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

reactive.[7] Stephen Legg suggests that the system of dyarchy as well as the period of provincial autonomy, has possibly been 'underconsidered' due to the fact that its analysis is often associated with the 'damned' Cambridge School and also because it is no longer seen as quite as necessary to examine the 'subaltern-suppressing geographical imagination of an elite nationalism'.[8] He indicates that, while dyarchy appeared to be a failure, the transferred or 'nation building' duties that provincial councils had control over were vital to the growth of the nationalist movement and that the politics of the provinces were largely responsible for nationalist political engagement with the system (whether they were supporting it or attempting to undermine it). He, therefore, places a great deal of importance on the ways in which dyarchy aided in the transformation of provincial politics, although autocracy was a fundamental part of the system. Ultimately, he suggests that the Government of India Act of 1935, which he describes as a 'refined form of dyarchy', was a vital link to the postcolonial federation.[9] Similarly, Jon Wilson demonstrates that these provincial councils did have a measure of power and, on occasion, could make the British act against their own self-interest. He points to the fact that the provincial assembly in Madras in the 1920s refused to increase taxes even though Congress' temperance campaigns had cut the tax revenue of the province by a significant amount.[10] Arvind Elangovan, in his analysis of the constitutionalism of B.N. Rau, an eminent Indian statesman, examines the contradictions between the 1935 Act as a pragmatic tool of the British and a constitution for a more democratic Indian society and argues that both 'imperialism and anti-colonial nationalism…refused to submit to the supremacy of the law, an essential component of Rau's constitutionalism'.[11]

Across three sections, this chapter makes three contributions to the broader historiography of constitutional change. This chapter moves beyond discussions of the constitutionalism of nationalists and of other groups and communities who formed relatively robust political organisations and focuses on the ways in which smaller, more loosely defined groups navigated this period of constitutional change. Firstly, Bengali-Biharis in the province were quick to use constitutional provisions to demand what they viewed as their rights. They continued to express significant anger at the domicile certificate requirement and

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[7] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography', *Nepantla: Views From the South*, 1 (2000), 12.
[8] Stephen Legg, 'Dyarchy: Democracy, Autocracy, and the Scalar Sovereignty of Interwar India', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 36 (2016),47.
[9] *Ibid*., 62.
[10] Jon Wilson, *India Conquered: Britain's Raj and the Chaos of Empire* (Simon & Schuster, 2016).
[11] Arvind Elangovan, 'Provincial Autonomy, Sir Benegal Narsing Rau, and an Improbable Imagination of Constitutionalism in India, 1935–38', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 36.1 (2016), 68.

assert that as a ‘minority’ community, they deserved ‘protection’ from discrimination. Some Bihari-Bengalis voice resentment at the fact that other ‘minority’ communities had access to protections (such as separate electorates) that the government did not afford to their community. This chapter argues that Bengalis in Bihar continued to make strategic use of identities that they could conceivably lay claim to in order to make the demands around education and employment in the province. Due the protections for minorities in the Government of India Act (1935) as well as the material benefits of being considered native to the province, they found it beneficial to explicitly identify as a Bengali-Bihari ‘minority’ when making demands of the government. By incorporating the language of the constitution in their rhetoric, especially the rhetoric associated with minority rights, Bengalis in Bihar found new ways to demand the abolition of domicile certificates.

Secondly, this chapter demonstrates the importance that Indians who were not organised in tight political groupings placed on appealing to the Congress. This was due to the fact that the Party was increasingly viewed (especially after the 1937 election) as likely to take over the running of the country after independence. Therefore, claim-making was layered, and appeals were calibrated to specific audiences. When making claims to the Congress, Bengalis in Bihar were quick to present a composite understanding of their identity, basing their claims on being Bengali-Bihari rather than solely a Bengali minority. The ubiquity of Congress rhetoric, even in the language used by Bengali-Biharis when appealing to British officials, further demonstrated the view of Indians at the time that appealing to the Congress was paramount.

Thirdly, this chapter sheds light on the inherent difficulties of reorganising linguistically through an exploration of the relationship between various District Congress Committees (DCCs) and discusses the opposition to the redrawing of DCC boundaries from certain parts of the Congress that emerged in this period. These issues around the jurisdiction of Congress PCCs in the late colonial era foreshadowed problems that would arise in the postcolonial era around which areas states could claim on a linguistic basis.

The first section of this chapter discusses the impact of the Simon Commission on claim-making in Bihar. This section will then examine the disagreements regarding the jurisdiction of Provincial Congress Committees in Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa. It demonstrates the different ways in which specific communities in Bihar conceptualised the ordering of the Indian state and discusses the early indications of the potential for broad discomfort in Bihar with regard to linguistic reorganisation.

The second section explores the responses from the Bengali community in Bihar to the passing of the Government of India Act (1935). Bengalis in Bihar continued to express their opposition to what they viewed as discriminatory treatment with regard to employment in government services as well as admission to educational institutions. With the renewed focus on the protection of minorities in the Government of India Act (1935), Bengalis in Bihar made strategic claims to minority status in order to prevent an erosion of their power within the administrative structures of the province.

The third section focuses on the 1936-1937 provincial elections and the formation of the Congress ministries in 1937. It demonstrates the ways in which Bengalis in the province, while still ostensibly supporting the Bihar Congress, were, nevertheless, willing to express opposition to the party, especially with regard to the Congress' attitudes to Muslims. To quite a large extent, this position reflected that of the Hindu Bengali *bhadralok* in Bengal. However, Bengali organisations and publications in Bihar were also quite willing to diverge from the widely held positions of this class of Bengalis in Bengal, including those around the formation of provincial ministries, demonstrating that the politics of Bengalis in Bihar was not merely a reflection of Bengali Hindu politics in Bengal.

The Simon Commission and Territorial Realignment: Claims and counterclaims regarding the linguistic makeup and division of provinces in eastern India (1928-1937)

In 1928, the British government sent the Simon Commission to India to formulate a report on the subject of constitutional reform. However, the lack of Indians on the Commission led to widespread protests. In response to the exclusion of Indians from the Simon Commission, the All-Parties Conference, which included delegates from a variety of Indian political parties (such as the Congress, the Muslim League, and the Hindu Mahasabha), was organised in 1928. The backlash to the Commission and the disunity within this conference (especially after the production of the Nehru report that met with disapproval from the Muslim League) has been discussed within the scholarship,[12] however, how the Simon Commission encouraged the emergence of certain claims has been underexplored. This section will discuss the ways in which Indians (with a focus on groups from Bihar & Orissa) interacted with the Commission. Despite the fact that most nationalist opinion acknowledged that only limited reforms were likely to emerge out of the investigation of the Commission it

[12] Uma Kaura, *Muslims and Indian Nationalism (1928–40): The Emergence of the Demand for India's Partition* (Delhi: Manohar, 1977); Wilson, *India Conquered*.

nevertheless gave various organisations and communities across India the platform to make claims and put forward demands. Bihar was a site of such claims with both Oriya and Adivasi organisations, respectively, demanding separate provinces. British officials gave Oriya demands consideration and Orissa was eventually made a different province in 1936. However, the Adivasi claims were quickly dismissed. The decision to grant a linguistic state and not a state based on a common Adivasi identity appeared to legitimise the notion of linguistic territoriality. However, the movement for Jharkhand did not disappear, and this period saw the consolidation of several Adivasi organisations into the Adivasi Mahasabha. Potential issues regarding the Congress' promise of linguistic states also emerged in Bihar. Congress PCCs from Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa all demanded the Singhbhum DCC (a district in southern Chhotanagpur) be under their respective jurisdictions. This section reveals the early signs of disquiet in the Congress leadership in Bihar with regard to linguistic realignment.

The Simon Commission arrived in Patna in December 1928. A delegation from the Chhotanagpur Unnati Samaj (CUS), an Adivasi organisation, submitted a memorandum with a list of demands to the Commission. The CUS was an Adivasi organisation that Anglican and Lutheran Adivasis dominated. During this period, Protestant Adivasis primarily dominated Adivasi politics. Protestants, while a small proportion of Adivasis overall, were nonetheless more likely to be educated in British education systems than their peers. The CUS petitioned the Simon Commission for better access to jobs and education for Adivasis. Furthermore, they claimed the formation of a separate province for all Adivasis in Bihar was essential for the 'progress' of this community. An article published in February 1929 in *Ghar Bandhu*, a journal produced under the auspices of the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church, strongly supported the creation of a new province. In a divergence from narratives produced by upper-caste Hindus, which presented the ancient past as a glorious golden age of Hindu civilisation, the article claimed that 'during the long reigns of both Hindus and Muslims, those who were poor were forced to live in a state of illiteracy and ignorance'.[13] It presented a much more favourable view of British rule, stating it was possible for the people to 'raise' their status under them, and those 'moralists' who objected to British rule were hypocritical as their knowledge had been 'acquired only through the education provided by the English'.[14]

[13] 'Simon Commission aur Chhotanagpur Unnati Samaj', *Ghar Bandhu*, 53 (1929), 21 (translated from Hindi).
[14] *Ibid*. (translated from Hindi)

However, the article also suggested that little had been done for the betterment of Adivasis by any government, and this was the reason the Commission needed to pay more attention to their claims.[15] It alleged that under the current system of elections within Bihar and Orissa, Adivasis did not receive adequate representation in the Legislative Councils, and the 'iron-willed' zamindars who dominated the body were 'biased' towards those in their class.[16] Therefore, the argument ran that a separate province was necessary for the progress of Adivasis, which included 'the Santhal Parganas, Chhotanagpur, Yashpur, Surguja, and Rajgangapur'.[17] It stated that the population of this province would be greater than England and Wales combined, and it would not be a small, insignificant state (*chhota-mota sthan*). The language used in the article depicted Adivasis, despite their religious and 'tribal' differences, as a united group. Although the article largely presented the British in a favourable light, praising the government for giving Adivasis the opportunity to put forth their case, they nevertheless emphasised the argument that Adivasis had historically been given few opportunities. Therefore, this demand for Jharkhand was based more on histories of oppression at the hands of non-Adivasis than on linguistic homogeneity.

These arguments found little favour with British officials who deemed the region, like others inhabited primarily by Adivasis, 'unsuited' to the 'modern representative system of government' as they were 'backward' and 'primitive'.[18] Instead of making the area a separate province, it was designated a 'partially excluded region' in 1936. The Secretary of State for India at the time claimed that there was little difference between partially excluded territories and territories governed normally, apart from giving the 'Governor' a larger 'degree of personal control' over 'the normal legislative and executive jurisdiction of the Province'.[19]

The response to the demand for Jharkhand can be contrasted with that of Orissa. A delegation from Orissa, led by the Maharaja of Parlakhemundi, petitioned the Simon Commission and demanded the separation of Orissa from the rest of Bihar. In 1930, the British government invited him to be a delegate at the Roundtable Conference in London, where he continued lobbying for a separate state of Orissa. In September 1931, the Government of India appointed a committee to 'examine and report on the administrative, financial, and other consequences of setting up a separate administration for Oriya-speaking

[15] *Ibid*. (translated from Hindi).
[16] *Ibid*., 23 (translated from Hindi).
[17] *Ibid*. (translated from Hindi).
[18] Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order, 1936, *Hansard*, Volume 99, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1936/feb/25/government-of-india-excluded-and (Accessed on
[19] *Ibid*.

peoples and to make recommendations regarding its boundaries in the event of their separation.'[20] The eventual decision made in 1932 was to include the plains regions and Ganjam in the new province. The Oriya delegation that demanded a separate state was not particularly enthused by the exclusion of various Oriya-speaking regions, especially with the fate of Singhbhum. Bihar retained this area despite the report definitively stating that it was largely Oriya-speaking. Nevertheless, British officials appeared to have bowed to the linguistic principle through their redrawing of boundaries.[21] While this granting of Orissa suggests the growing significance of the linguistic principle, the demand for Jharkhand, which was primarily not based on linguistic factors, indicated that communities and political organisations in Bihar would likely contest the narrative that the linguistic principle was paramount (as they undoubtedly did in the postcolonial era). The granting of Orissa and the dismissal of the Jharkhand demand encouraged the consolidation of Adivasi organisations through the 1930s, and their explicit demands to separate the resource-rich Chhotanagpur plateau from Bihar put them at odds with the elite Hindus and the admittedly small number of Muslims who controlled the Congress organisation in the state.

The hiving off of Burma from India, the separation of Bihar and Orissa, the carving out of Sindh from Bombay in 1936, along with the long-held Congress promise to reorganise territories along linguistic lines led to the increased focus on what territories belonged to which linguistic community. However, it was abundantly clear in eastern India that this would not be an uncontested process. In a sign of the issues that would arise around linguistic realignment in independent India, the three PCCs in charge of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa (called the Utkal PCC) began to have disputes regarding their jurisdiction. Issues around DCCs in border regions such as Singhbhum and Dhalbhum, which had large deposits of iron ore and copper, were particularly contentious, with the Bengal, Bihar, and Utkal PCCs all claiming jurisdiction. Additionally, Singhbhum had a large proportion of Adivasis in its population, which further complicated issues. On 22nd April 1937, the President of the Singhbhum DCC, P. Bhattasali, wrote a letter to Nehru complaining about the formation of a rival DCC that was 'authorised' by the Utkal PCC.[22] The initial response from the AICC was to suggest the PCCs resolve the matter internally.[23]

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[20] Samuel O' Donnell, *Report of the Orissa Committee* (Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1932), 1.
[21] *Ibid*., 18-20.
[22] 'From President of Singhbhum District Congress Committee, P. Bhattasali to Jawaharlal Nehru', 22 April 1937, AICC Volume I, Boundaries of Provinces, File no. P-24/1937 in *NMML* page 222 in file 1 in document.
[23] 'From General Secretary of AICC to the President, Singhbhum DCC', 1 May 1937, AICC Volume I, Boundaries of Provinces, File no. P-24/1937 in *NMML* page 220 in file 1 in document

However, after intervention from A.N. Sinha, a senior politician in Bihar and the General Secretary of the Bihar PCC, the Congress High Command quickly issued orders to prevent the creation of a separate DCC in Singhbhum. Sinha claimed that the DCC in Singhbhum had always acted 'under the direction, control, and guidance of our [Bihar PCC] committee'.[24] Although it was widely recognised (including in the Report of the Orissa Committee) that Singhbhum was more linguistically aligned with Orissa, Sinha claimed that any changes in jurisdiction would create 'unnecessary friction and confusion'.[25] The Congress High Command supported Sinha, and a letter was sent from the General Secretary of the ACC to the Secretary of the Utkal PCC that stated that the 'Working Committee had decided that the present arrangements were not to be disturbed' and that 'Dhalbhum' also was a part of the 'Congress Province of Bihar'.[26]

The Congress Working Committee in Calcutta in late October 1937 further exacerbated these issues. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, senior Telugu Congressman, put forth a resolution demanding 'that Congress Ministries in the provinces comprising more than one language to be immediately requested to give their best attention to the question of reorganising the territorial boundaries of their provinces so as to redistribute them on a language basis'.[27] N.N. Ghose, a Congressman from Bengal, added an amendment demanding the inclusion of Bengali-speaking tracts in Singhbhum and Dhalbhum in the Bengal province.[28] Due to the Congress' commitment to linguistic states, the Working Committee passed this resolution with the amendment. However, the Utkal PCC, whose leaders were already upset with the Congress High Command's decisions over the jurisdiction of Singhbhum and Dhalbhum, opposed this amendment. In a letter to the President of the AICC written on 16 November 1937, the President of the Utkal PCC and future Chief Minister of Orissa, Harekrushna Mahtab, complained that the Utkal PCC was not 'given the slightest chance to establish our claim and whatever was decided was done in

[24] 'From A. N. Sinha (Gen sec. of Behar Provincial Congress Committee) to General Secretary of AICC' 15 May 1937, AICC Volume I, Boundaries of Provinces, File no. P-24/1937 in *NMML* page 215 in file 1 in document.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] 'From General Secretary AICC to Secretary Utkal Provincial Congress', 17 May 1937, AICC Volume I, Boundaries of Provinces, File no. P-24/1937 in *NMML* page 218 in file 1 in document.
[27] 'From Pattabhi Sitaramayya to the General Secretary of the AICC' 9 September 1937, AICC Volume I, Private members' resolutions for the Calcutta meeting of the AICC, File no. P-24/1937 in *NMML* page 13 in file 1 in document.
[28] Resolutions from protest meeting against the dead silent of Utkal Provincial Congress Committee members in the AICC session held in Calcutta in the last week of October 1937' 27 November 1937, AICC Volume I, Boundaries of Provinces, File no. P-24/1937 in *NMML* page 13 in file 1 in document.

our absence'.[29] He presented this current claim from the Bengal PCC as a further humiliation and injustice to the Utkal PCC and the province of Orissa.

A series of resolutions were passed in a protest meeting against the amendment held on the 27th of November by the Golmuri Utkal Samaj in Golmuri, Jamshedpur (located in present day Jharkhand). The resolutions claimed that both the 'the British Government as well as AICC overlooked the claim [for Oriya-speaking territories to be included in Orissa], for which this meeting extremely regrets and demands for an early and proper enquiry by AICC and fulfil the rights [of Oriya speakers].'[30] The resolutions also blamed Rajendra Prasad and stated that it was only after he became the president of the AICC that the Singhbhum DCC was put under the control of the Bihar Congress which, according to the Golmuri Utkal Samaj, was 'unjust'.[31] The General Secretary of the AICC responded to Mahtab, suggesting that these resolutions were non-binding as Congress did not currently have the power to change boundaries. Therefore, the resolutions did 'not affect the boundaries in any way'.[32] This was reflective of the Congress's lack of desire to truly engage with the difficulties that could arise from actual changes to internal Indian borders, and it also represented the Congress leadership's inherent caution when dealing with these matters.

This early unease with any change in jurisdiction for PCCs foreshadowed the reluctance of the Congress High Command to redraw borders along linguistic lines in independent India and suggested that, even before the creation of Pakistan, the Congress leadership was uncomfortable with the issues the redrawing of India's internal boundaries would likely cause. However, the attachment to the idea of linguistic states, fostered in part by the fact that PCCs had been reorganised along linguistic lines, encouraged the view of linguistic groups having their 'homelands' and belonging to specific territories. Nevertheless, it is evident that in Bihar, specifically, the linguistic heterogeneity of the province made it easier to conceivably make claims to Bihari belonging without speaking Hindi. The following section will explore the ways in which Bengalis in Bihar made claims to the category of minority, presenting themselves as a Bihari minority (amongst several minorities) and demanding protection on this basis.

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[29] From Harekrushna Mahtab, President Utkal Provincial Congress Committee to the President, All India Congress Committee, 16 November 1937, AICC Volume I, Boundaries of Provinces, File no. P-24/1937 in *NMML* page 19 in file 1 in document

[30] 'Resolutions from protest meeting' page 13 in file, 1 in doc.

[31] *Ibid*., page 14 in file 2 in doc.

[32] 'From General Secretary AICC to the President Utkal PCC', 29 November 1937, AICC Volume I, Boundaries of Provinces, File no. P-24/1937 in NMML page 18 in file 1 in document.

The Government of India Act 1935 and Bengali-Bihari strategic claims to belonging (1935-1937)

In the early 1930s, most political organisations focused on the upcoming constitutional reforms. In August 1935, the British parliament passed the Government of India Act. It removed the system of dyarchy in favour of provincial autonomy with the creation of wholly elected provincial assemblies. The franchise was also extended from seven million people to thirty-five million. Additionally, the Act also included 'protections' for minority groups. This was sketched out in Part XII of the Act, which assured minorities that the governor-general and governors of provinces would intervene if minorities were under threat.[33] However, the definition of minority was not clearly set out in the Act, which resulted in a degree of ambiguity around the term. The Act's enfranchisement of a larger number of people and the creation of provincial assemblies received the largest share of attention during that period, especially due to Congress' ambivalence towards accepting offices under the Act. Nevertheless, some sections of the Indian population viewed the 'minority protection' clause, mainly due to the ambiguity of the definition, as a way to make particular demands. With the Congress' rise and the likelihood of it taking control of government sooner rather than later, however, these groups also had to ensure that the claims appealed to this organisation or, at the very least, did not result in condemnation.

This section examines the ways in which Bengali-Biharis put forth their claim to minority status in Bihar to demand certain rights and protections, especially the removal of domicile certificates and the introduction of open competition to all posts in the Bihar government. This claim of minority status was layered on the previous arguments regarding service to the province, as well as the histories of settlement covered in the first chapter. Additionally, the independence movement and the focus on 'Indian unity' from the Congress meant that the claims had to be placed in broader Congress frameworks of 'anti-provincialism' to not alienate this increasingly influential political party. In April 1937, in an address presented to the Governor of Bihar, Maurice Hallett, the Bengali Settlers Association of Gaya demanded a relaxation in domicile rules. The address stated, 'the rules as to the grant of certificate of domicile in this province have of late become more stringent than absolutely necessary and the procedure extremely harassing and sometimes frustrating the very object for which the certificate is applied'.[34] In an allusion to the widely disseminated histories of

[33] *The Government of India Act, 1935* (UK Office of Public Service Information, 1935), 194.
[34] 'Address to be presented to His Excellency the Governor by the Bengali Settlers Association, Gaya', *Bihar State Archives*, Appointments Department, Proceeding B, File Number 2M/86/37, June 1937, pg. 6.

ancient Bihar that accompanied the formation of the province, they explicitly claimed a connection between Bengalis and Bihar that was rooted in the ancient past, stating, 'The connection of the Bengalies [sic] as a race with the area now constituted as the Province of Bihar dates back from long before the days of the Mohammedan conquest. The stone inscription in some of the temples here, the traditions current and the pages of history bear this fact amply out.'[35] This claim of an ancient connection was at odds with narratives presented by certain sections of the Hindi-speaking elite who presented Bengalis as more recent immigrants to the province. The Association also identified Bengalis as a vulnerable minority and demanded the accompanying protections. They referred to the Government of India Act and stated that as 'the Crown's representative', the Governor had a 'special responsibility' to 'protect minorities.'

The Bengali Settlers Association of Gaya requested that all appointments to government service be made through a competitive process and suggested that, as 'Bengalies [sic] in Bihar depend mostly on service and some of the learned professions only such as law and medicine', the fact that they were not receiving jobs due to their heritage was unfair to the community. They claimed that 'efficiency' should be 'the only passport to service'.[36] They indicated that these policies were representative of 'provincialism and communalism' that was 'more or less in evidence' in the province and 'even the system of recruitment to services under the Government' was 'based in some measure at least upon considerations of one of the other or of both'.[37] The language used with regard to 'provincialism and communalism' reflected nationalist rhetoric, usually utilised by representatives of the Congress Party. This incorporation of Congress rhetoric demonstrated the fact that most Indians (despite the fact they were only given the power to control provincial administrations) were increasingly viewing the Congress as the most significant authority in Indian politics.

Bengali-Biharis presented an understanding of belonging that was uniquely beneficial to their community and, to ensure those in positions of authority did not dismiss this used the frameworks developed by the Congress and British officials to present a strong case for why their demands should be adhered to. The address also claimed that Bengali-Biharis deserved to have particular attention paid to their grievances due to the fact that 'Bengalis of Bihar have considerable stake in the country and have so far done all we can for the amelioration

[35] *Ibid*., 8.
[36] *Ibid*.
[37] *Ibid*.

and development of her people in general'.[38] These arguments included claims based on ancient historical connections, minority rights, as well as rewards due to the Bengali community for their 'efforts' in the development of India.

The Governor was unresponsive to these demands, suggesting to a large extent that the issues lay in the Bengali community's refusal to integrate with the 'Bihari' community. In his reply to this address, Governor Hallett stated, 'I would offer a word of advice which my predecessor gave to the Domiciled Bengali Community on one occasion when he said, "I am inclined to think that the less you insist on the distinctiveness of your community and the more you identify yourself with the native-born Bihari, the better it will be in the long run. In particular I would suggest that you should identify yourselves more linguistically with Bihar. The vernacular of Bihar should be your first not second language."'[39] This advice suggested that while Bengalis were viewed as a distinct community by the colonial state, they were not necessarily seen as requiring protection as a 'minority' and were not considered 'genuine' Biharis. The Governor also stated that he could not make appointments through open competition as he was 'specifically charged' in his '"Instrument of Instructions" to secure a due proportion of appointments in the services to the several communities'. He suggested it was a 'great advantage to have representatives of all communities in the services as well as in the Legislatures' as that would lead 'to greater unity and greater harmony without which there can be no great progress'.[40]

The Patna-based newspaper that catered to Bengalis in Bihar, *The Behar Herald*, supported the position taken by the Gaya Association. An article in the paper claimed they could not 'follow His Excellency's reasoning' as 'the educational superiority of the Bengali community' was 'largely a thing of the past'.[41] They suggested that even 'fixation of definite percentages for the different communities' would be preferable to the relatively ad hoc attempts to ensure that communities had adequate service representation. The article's author described the current situation as 'beset with uncertainty, intrigue and wire-pulling'.[42] The article also stated that despite the necessity of protecting Bihari jobs from outsiders, 'Bengalis who have lived in this province from time immemorial should be treated as natural-born citizens of the province free from all obligations to take out a domicile certificate' and at the very least, if the system had to remain in place, domicile certificates should be 'enjoyed

[38] *Ibid*., 10.
[39] 'Governor's Speech to Bengali Settler's Association of Gaya', *The Behar Herald*, 5 May 1937, 6.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] 'Governor's Reply to Bengali Settler's Association of Gaya', *The Behar Herald,* 8 May 1937, 8.
[42] *Ibid*.

in hereditary succession unless a person expressly forgoes the provincial citizenship or forfeits it by long-continued absence.'[43]

The Behar Herald continued to raise the matter of the governor's 'duties' to ensure proper representation in services under the Instrument of Accession. An article published in June 1937 once again claimed that open competition would not 'enable Bengalees [sic] to swamp other communities' as 'in intellect and talents the Bihari Hindus can more than hold their own against the competition of other communities'.[44] Bitterness also pervaded the language used by the article when describing other 'minority' communities, such as Muslims and Anglo-Indians. While ostensibly praising Bihari Muslims, stating that they were 'justly famous all over India for their success in politics and their professions', the article also claimed that they 'enjoy a double safeguard' as British policy was to give them a 'fixed percentage of the services regardless of their comparative merits and ability.'[45] With regards to Anglo-Indians, the article pointed to the fact that their community had a proportion of posts fixed for their community in services such as the 'customs, post and telegraph services' due to 'the past association of the Anglo-Indian community with the said services.'[46] The article argued that Bengalis in Bihar deserved the same treatment due to the 'past association of the Bengalee community with the services in the province'.[47] Bengali sense of grievance, therefore, appeared to be based on the fact that they did not receive adequate protection from the government as a minority (a claim which they repeatedly raised). In contrast, other minorities accrued significant benefits from their status. Once again, their argument ran that despite long histories of the Bengali community's service in the province, they were not being rewarded but punished.

There were some instances where the colonial government did acknowledge the shortcomings of some of the domicile rules, especially in border regions. In a speech delivered to leading members of the community of Manbhum, Hallett did indicate there were 'peculiar difficulties in a district such as Manbhum which is adjacent to Bengal' and promised to 'discuss the question with' his 'ministers to see whether any better system than that now in force' could 'be devised'.[48] However, he still refused to allow domicile certificates to be granted by private organisations as was suggested by the Manbhum

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[43] *Ibid*.
[44] 'Bengalees in Public Service', *The Behar Herald,* 5 June 1937, 2.
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] *Ibid*.
[47] *Ibid*.
[48] Address to be presented to His Excellency the Governor by the Manbhum Association', Appointments Department, Proceeding B, File Number 2M/192/37, June 1937, in *Bihar State Archives*, 15.

Association on the grounds that they 'could not resist the temptation to give such certificates in doubtful cases'.[49] In a note regarding the complaints of Bengalis in Manbhum, W.B. Brett repeated his suggestions to Bengalis, which he had previously made in 1933. He stated:

> So as far as old established Bengali families are concerned there is in theory no reason why they should be required to produce domicile certificates at all but as they bear Bengali names the question of their domicile is very likely to arise, at any rate when they are candidates for posts in other districts. Consequently, it is advisable for their own protection that they should obtain domicile certificates in the usual manner.[50]

These policies, which essentially treated Bengalis in Bihar as fundamentally different from 'true' Biharis, reinforced divisions between Bengali-Biharis and their Hindi and Urdu-speaking counterparts. The colonial government also dismissed claims of minority status made by Bengalis and recommended they more effectively integrate with Biharis.

In response to this, *The Behar Herald* suggested that the government should exempt Bengalis in Manbhum from having to provide domicile certificates. An article published shortly after the Governor's speech suggested that 'a register be kept of all families of Bengali settlers recognised to be such at the present moment' and that 'members of all such families should be treated in the future as genuine Biharis without question.'[51] The article also stated that 'such persons and their children should be considered as Biharis, i.e., children of the soil despite long absence or loss of landed property just as is the case with Hindi speaking Biharis.' These forceful protestations of belonging, including the claim of being 'sons of the soil', suggest that Bengalis in Bihar realised the material necessity of being recognised as 'natives' of a province. Their focus on equality between Bengalis and Hindi-speaking Biharis and the repeated identification of Bengalis in Bihar as 'Biharis' and 'genuine Biharis' further reiterates this. It is significant that despite the redrawing of the borders of Bihar in the 1930s and concerted campaigns for more changes from Adivasis, Bengalis in Bihar, even those located near Bengal, were not demanding territorial realignment.

Apart from the events happening on the national scale, such as the civil disobedience movement and the various constitutional reforms, the 1930s saw concerted movements for the separation of several territories from Bihar. Additionally, there was growing Bengali

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[49] *Ibid*.
[50] *Ibid*., 4.
[51] 'Current Comments: Bengalis of Manbhum', *The Behar Herald,* 30 June 1937, 9.

dissatisfaction with policies around employment in Bihar. Therefore, in response to these phenomena, various groups in Bihar put forth understandings of Bihari identity. This was done both to support the claims made by the group they identified with and to counter opposing claims from other groups. While British officials in Bihar were the primary recipients of most demands made by a variety of organisations and groups, this would change through the 1930s. Constitutional reforms and the growing expectation of independence meant that the Congress was widely viewed as a government in waiting, particularly after the 1936-37 elections. This is evident given the importance attached to PCC jurisdiction. The following section will explore the 1936-37 election campaign and analyse the responses to the Congress campaign from Bengalis in Bihar.

Provincial Elections in Bihar: Bengali response to the Congress campaign and formation of government in the province (1936-1937)

This section examines the repercussions of the 1936-37 elections in Bihar. It discusses the different ways in which Bengalis in Bihar navigated the first provincial elections and the installation of a Congress ministry. Firstly, it will explore how Bengali-Bihari politics overlapped and diverged from upper-caste Hindu Bengali politics in Bengal. These politics converged in the anti-Muslim sentiment displayed by both groups. However, to some extent, these stemmed from different sources. Bengalis in Bihar, as discussed in the previous section, expressed resentment based on the fact that Muslims, as another 'minority' community, received greater 'protections'. On the other hand, the *bhadralok* in Bengal proper expressed resentment at the supposed advantages given to Muslims under the Communal Award. The supposed 'injustices' done to Hindu Bengalis due to the seat allocations in Bengal also likely encouraged anti-Muslim sentiment in Bengalis in Bihar as, in the post-war era, some of these Bengali-Bihari publications and public figures would criticise the Congress actions in Bengal and describe the party as having 'abandoned' Bengalis. This entrenched anti-Muslim positions within both these communities ensuring that Muslim Biharis (and Hindu Biharis) viewed Bengalis as a whole as broadly anti-Muslim.

Secondly, it will investigate the relationship between sections of the Bengali population in Bihar and the Congress and discuss the ways in which these groups were willing to criticise the Congress while still making attempts to remain within Congress structures. This was representative of the Congress as an 'umbrella party' as it spanned 'cleavages of class, ethnicity (race, caste, religion, language), region, and political

programme (moderate right, moderate left).'[52] This section demonstrates how Bengali-Biharis attempted to strategically make claims upon the Congress Party by using rhetoric that reflected that of the Congress national leadership while critiquing the positions taken by the Congress in Bihar. It will trace the increasingly critical rhetoric towards the Congress from the Bengali-Bihari community and demonstrate the reasons why the Congress deemed it necessary to investigate the issue soon after the elections.

This period of constitutional reform and mass movements saw dramatic changes within the Indian political landscape. The lack of immediate progress towards independence resulted in Gandhi and the Congress launching the Civil Disobedience Movement, which began in March 1930 with the Dandi March against the British salt tax. This led to further repression, and the British arrested Gandhi and several others. With the election of the first Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, in 1929, the British government was more inclined to negotiate with Indian nationalists. The First Roundtable Conference was organised in November 1930 and included Indian delegates. However, the internment of the participants of the Civil Disobedience Movement and the authoritarianism displayed by the colonial government during their suppression of the movement meant that the Congress boycotted the conference. Without the Congress and Gandhi's support, the conference lacked legitimacy. Therefore, Gandhi was released in January 1931 to encourage better outcomes for the next proposed conference. The signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March 1932 paved the way for the Mahatma to attend the Second Roundtable Conference in May 1932. Congressmen were bitterly disappointed with the proceedings and more so after Macdonald (now leading the Conservative-dominated National Government) announced the Communal Award in August 1932, which granted separate electorates, not only to Muslims but to other religions and 'Depressed Classes'.[53]

Gandhi and the Congress High Command deemed this unacceptable and accused the British of attempts to foster divisions in Indian society. Congress leaders raised particular issues with the granting of separate electorates to Dalits and suggested this would result in a divided Hindu society. Gandhi's fast against this eventually led to the signing of the Poona Pact in September 1932, where Congress and Dalit leaders agreed that Dalits would have seats reserved for them within the general electorate. The signing of the Poona Pact largely satisfied the Congress High Command, which adopted a policy of 'non-acceptance and non-

[52] Adnan Farooqi and E Sridharan, 'Can Umbrella Parties Survive? The Decline of the Indian National Congress', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 54.3 (2016).
[53] Muldoon.

rejection' of the Communal Award. However, this agreement to fight elections without the removal of separate electorates for Muslims infuriated the *bhadralok-dominated* Congress in Bengal. This is due to the fact, as Joya Chatterji states, that it 'in effect reduced the Bengali *bhadralok* to an impotent minority in a Legislative Assembly, which they had hoped to dominate in the new era of provincial autonomy.'[54]

The Government of India Act was passed in 1935, and the Congress agreed to fight elections under its provisions. These involved a wider franchise than previous elections, and the formation of provincial assemblies made up of elected members. As Vinita Damodaran suggests, this was particularly beneficial to the Congress in Bihar, whose campaign had lost impetus after the end of the mass movements of the 1930s.[55] Nevertheless, there were debates on whether it was appropriate to accept office under these terms. However, the overwhelming success of Congress in the 1937 elections encouraged the acceptance of offices, and the party decided to form governments in provinces where they had achieved majorities in the assemblies. This did not include Bengal. While the Congress had a plurality of seats in the province, the Muslim League aligned with the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) to form a coalition government. The coalition elected to install Praja Party leader, Fazlul Haq, as Premier of the province.

To demonstrate the ways in which Bengali-Bihari politics diverged from that of their co-linguists across the border it is necessary to discuss the politics of the *bhadralok-dominated* Congress of Bengal. One of the ways in which they differed significantly was in supporting the Congress choice to fight elections and accept office after the 1937 elections. Despite the reluctant acceptance of the Communal Award by the Congress High Command, the Bengal PCC passed several resolutions condemning it. In early 1935, the Bengal Provincial Conference that met in Dinajpur objected to the Congress' acceptance of the 'Communal Decision'.[56] The Bengal Congress continued to flout directions from the Congress High Command and, in April 1936, encouraged the continuation of the 'agitation both in and outside the legislatures for the rejection of the Communal Decision and thereby to pave the way for an agreed solution of the Communal problem on the basis of Joint Electorate and adult franchise or on any other agreed basis and consistent with independence

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[54] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition (1932-1937)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 21.
[55] Vinita Damodaran, *Broken Promises: Popular Protest Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar (1935-1946)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 53.
[56] 'Resolutions passed at Bengal Provincial Conference held at Dinajpur in April 1935', AICC Volume I, Resolutions passed by the Karnataka and Bengal Political Conference, File no. P-30/1935 in *NMML* page 13 in file 1 in document.

and principles of democracy'.[57] Nehru quickly raised objections to this in a letter to the Secretary of the Bengal PCC, stating, 'It seems to me that parts of this resolution are directly opposed to the spirit and letter of the Congress Manifesto as unanimously adopted by the All-India Congress Committee. You will agree with me that this would lead the Bengal PCC to a course of activity which the AICC has stated in the clearest language is undesirable and harmful both in the larger interest as well from the point of view of combating the Communal Decision.'[58] In a speech to a students' association in Bengal, Nehru implored students to 'lay stress on the real problem of India and not allow Bengal to think on communal lines as it has got into the habit of doing.'[59] Bengal had long been a territory beset by communal issues and the dissatisfaction and non-compliance from Bengali Hindus in the provincial Congress organisation encouraged the Congress High Command to view Bengalis as having greater communal animosity than other communities. This narrative of the fundamentally anti-Muslim nature of the Hindu Bengalis would become more entrenched as India moved towards independence.

Unlike their co-linguists in Bengal, Bengali-Biharis expressed full-throated support of the Congress decision to contest elections and accept offices. Upon the release of the Congress manifesto in early September 1936, an article was published in *The Behar Herald* that rejoiced in the 'defeat of the socialists' within the party, evidenced (according to the author) by the choice of the Congress to postpone the decision of whether or not to accept offices.[60] The article claimed that this choice 'really brightens the chances of a Congress Ministry' and that 'those who sincerely want to see Congress leaders become ministers cannot but feel glad therefore over this part of the Congress Manifesto'.[61] It also lauded Rajendra Prasad, stating, 'we in Bihar are proud to see how he is deftly steering the ship of the Congress clear of revolutionary shoals'.[62] The attitude of their co-linguists in Bengal was clearly dramatically different to Bengali-Biharis, as Joya Chatterji states, 'the Bengal Congress would rather have not contested the elections at all'.[63] This identification with

[57] 'Resolution passed at meeting of the Executive Council of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee' 2 September 1936, Communal Award, File no. G-24/1936 in *NMML*, page 107 in file, 1 in doc.
[58] 'From Jawaharlal Nehru to the Secretary of the Bengal PCC,' 5 September 1936, AICC Volume I, Communal Award, File no. G-24/1936 in *NMML*, page 110 in file, 1 in doc.
[59] 'From Sarat Chandra Bose to G.B. Pant on the position of Congress in Bengal', 25 January 1937, AICC Volume I, J. Nehru's important correspondence with Bengal PCC and Congress Council Party, File no. E-5 (pt-2)/1936 in *NMML*, page 185 in file, 1 in doc.
[60] 'Congress and Elections', *The Behar Herald*, 2 September 1936, 2.
[61] *Ibid*.
[62] *Ibid*.
[63] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 95.

Rajendra Prasad and the opposition to the position taken by Bengalis in Bengal is illustrative of the strategies employed by Bengalis in Bihar, which, when discussing the Congress, strongly identified as explicitly Bihari.

An article published a week later further emphasised the importance of the Congress accepting offices and forming governments. The article suggested that the Congress' only option, regardless of whether or not they believed the constitutional reforms would bring fundamental change to the running of government, was to accept offices as either they would be allowed to carry out a 'constructive programme beneficial to the masses', or have the British Government eventually reject the authority of the provincial legislatures and set the Governor up as 'dictator', thereby exposing the 'hollowness of the claims made by Government apologists on behalf of the constitution and completely alienate public opinion against them.'[64] The article's author expressed faith that the provincial governments, even under a constitution with 'obvious defects', could yield 'quite excellent results under Congress guidance.' It suggested that the only way the Congress could effectively carry out a mass movement against the constitution was to 'compel the British Government to wreck it' by forming provincial governments, and if they did not, they risked 'a fresh accession of strength to the reactionary parties' who would agree to form a government under the constitution. [65]

It was the Congress Party's positions towards Muslims that these Bengali-Bihari publications and figures had the most significant issue with. They expressed an unwillingness to align with predominantly Muslim parties that their co-linguists in Bengal initially did not. Regardless of the growing anti-Muslim sentiment within upper-caste Hindu Bengali Congress circles, there were still some within the party willing to ally with the Krishak Praja Party, especially as, as Chatterji states, 'Krishak Praja leaders were usually keen to play down their communal leanings, and, in the campaign for the Assembly elections, purposely chose prominent Muslim zamindars as targets to demonstrate their impartiality.'[66] Despite strongly opposing the Communal Award and, to a certain extent, alienating the Bengal PCC from the rest of the Congress, leaders of the Bengal Congress believed that the KPP was more likely to align with the Congress than the Muslim League. The leader of the Bengal Congress, Sarat Chandra Bose, expressed this faith in (and to a certain extent reliance on) the Praja Party after the election. In a letter to Govind Ballabh Pant, he stated, 'As regards Moslem [sic] seats we

[64] 'Ministry or No Ministry', *The Behar Herald*, 9 September 1936, 2.
[65] *Ibid*.
[66] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 78.

expect the Proja party will be able to capture quite a goodly number. It is difficult however to arrive at a definite figure at present. The Proja party members will generally side with us in the Assembly.'[67] However, after the election and the formation of the coalition between the Praja Party and the League, this significant anti-Muslim sentiment within the *bhadralok* Bengali community in Bengal grew and became largely entrenched.

This differed from the attitudes of Bengalis in Bihar, who opposed any coalition with Muslim parties. *The Behar Herald* began expressing some disquiet with the Congress campaign. In an article on the IMP conference held in Patna in September 1936, *The Behar Herald* warned that even though the party was 'prepared to co-operate with the Congress', as it stood for the 'protection of the interests of the minority Muslim community,' it would 'if necessary, fight the Congress'.[68] *The Behar Herald* used this anti-Muslim rhetoric again in an article written later in the year about the Congress and its relationship with the Bengalis in the province. The article reaffirmed Bengali support for the Congress, claiming that Bengalis were 'almost instinctively Congress-minded' and that there was 'every reason to suppose that the Bengalis will in a body vote for the Congress'.[69] It also stated that the Congress had been very receptive to Bengali complaints and 'assured the Domiciled Bengalis that their rights were quite safe in Congress hands'.[70] However, the article deplored the 'tacit' support given to the IMP by the Congress. It also claimed that the 'bulk of the Muslim population' had their 'vision…clouded by the communal miasma' and that if the Congress did officially align itself with the IMP, 'such an unnatural alliance' would 'create more problems than it' would 'help to solve'.[71] The paper also claimed that all Muslim political figures in the province were attempting to raise the spectre of Hindu domination in order to win seats, regardless of whether or not they truly believed this was the case. The article stated that the leader of the United Muslim Party, Syed Abdul Aziz, despite being a 'decent man in private life' and 'individually inspired with the friendliest feelings towards the Hindus', could not 'open his mouth before the Muslim electorate without raising the bogey of Hindu domination.'[72]

Muslim political organisations in Bihar in the 1930s did not coalesce around the Muslim League (as was the case in several Muslim minority provinces). In addition, histories of Hindu-Muslim cooperation during the movement for Bihar also likely encouraged the

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[67] 'Resolution passed at meeting of the Executive Council of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee' 2 September 1936, Communal Award, File no. G-24/1936 in *NMML*, page 107 in file, 1 in doc.
[68] 'Moslem Independent Party', *The Behar Herald*, 9 September 1936, 1.
[69] 'Bengalis and Congress', *The Behar Herald*, 11 November 1936, 2.
[70] *Ibid*.
[71] *Ibid*.
[72] 'Frightening the Muslim', *The Behar Herald*, 11 November 1936, 2.

Congress leadership in the province (all of whom had wholeheartedly supported Bihar's separation from Bengal) to view Muslim parties with less suspicion. Apart from the Independent Muslim Party, Muslim parties in Bihar included the Dandian Ahrarists, the United Party, the All-India Momin Conference, the Radical Muslim Party, and several others. Politically involved Biharis acknowledged that the Congress tacitly supported the Independent Muslim Party, and negotiations also occurred with other parties in Bihar. The Radical Muslim Party threw their support behind the Congress despite raising issues with Muslims within the Congress organisation, and in particular, Syed Mahmud.[73] This relationship with Muslims was viewed unfavourably by Bengali-Bihari figures and publications because Muslims were presented by these groups as having retained advantages from their minority status that Bengalis were unable to access.

Bengalis in Bihar had additional reasons for dissatisfaction with the Congress. The party fielded the unpopular Krishna Ballabh Sahay in Hazaribagh, which had high proportions of both Adivasis and Bengalis. He was also responsible for the selection of several candidates across the Chhotanagpur Division. Neither Adivasis nor Bengalis seemed particularly inclined to support him, and he was also a relatively controversial choice within the Congress organisation. A complaint sent to Nehru by Dwarika Prasad Akhuri, a pleader from Daltonganj, accused Sahay of practising 'favouritism and cliquishness' and 'not consistently' following 'the rules of the Congress'.[74] The Bengali community in Hazaribagh also appeared to throw their support behind Sahay's opponent in Hazaribagh, Surat Kumar Gupta. The campaign for that seat was contentious, with Bengali support for the opponent of a senior Congressman further engendering mistrust between the Congress and Bengalis in the province.[75]

The Behar Herald and (according to the newspaper) large sections of Bengalis in Bihar continued expressing their support for the Congress; however, it was also made clear that, to a certain extent, this community felt it had little choice but to do so. In an article published after the announcement of the Congress victory in February 1937, the newspaper congratulated the Congress for their success in the province, stating, 'its victories have been

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[73] 'From Mohamad Ali Asghar to Jawaharlal Nehru', 8 November 1936, AICC Volume I, Correspondence with Behar PCC, File no. P5/1936 in *NMML* page 13 in file 1 in document.
'Resolutions passed at meeting of Radical Muslims of Bihar (Patna)', 19 April 1936, AICC Volume I, Correspondence with Behar PCC, File no. P5/1936 in *NMML* page 29 in file 1 in document.
[74] 'From Dwarika Prasad Akhuri (Pleader, Daltonganj) to Jawaharlal Nehru', 15 November 1936, AICC Volume I, Correspondence with Behar PCC, File no. P5/1936 in *NMML* page 2 in file 1 in document.
[75] 'Congress Contemporary on the Warpath', *The Behar Herald*, 10 February 1937, 2.

amazing, its majorities stunning.'[76] The article once again reiterated the newspaper's support for the acceptance of offices. However, it also warned Bengalis in Bihar that, 'no Bengali, however eminent and exalted his position may be, has succeeded in winning victory in opposition to the Congress from a mass constituency', implying that Bengalis in Bihar had little choice but to throw their support behind the Congress.[77] This also emphasises the Bengali community's strategic support of the Congress. The ambivalence of Bengali-Biharis towards the Congress is unsurprising as Vinita Damodaran states, 'about 70 per cent of the [Bihar Congress] committee were upper-caste men, mainly lawyers', who were the most likely to compete with Bengalis for jobs in service.[78]

This ambivalence quickly changed to disillusionment. Shortly after the Congress victory, there was an incident in Hazaribagh where Rajendra Prasad was allegedly 'abused' by some of the inhabitants of the region during his post-election tour. An article in the Congress mouthpiece, *The Searchlight,* suggested a 'score of Bengalee young men' were responsible for this 'abuse' and claimed that if it had not been for the 'protection accorded by Babu Rajendra Prasad, some of these men would have been torn to pieces by the infuriated (pro-Congress) audience.'[79] The article then stated that 'even this loving act of protection far from being appreciated, was abused.'[80] It also accused the Bengali community due to 'their silence' having 'connived at and acquiesced in this unpardonable affront to man like Babu Rajendra Prasad, loved and respected throughout India.'[81] *The Behar Herald* objected to the placing of blame upon Bengalis, suggesting that few Bengalis in the province had even heard the story. The paper published a response to *The Searchlight* article, that claimed that the 'Congress contemporary not only magnified the Hazaribagh incident beyond all reasonable proportions' but also made 'it the occasion for a Fascist sermon to the entire Bengalee Community. Holding an entire community responsible for the misdeeds of a few is the favourite game of militarists and Imperialists'.[82]

The tone of this article was markedly different from previous ones. The equation of *The Searchlight* with a fascist, imperialist power, especially after the party it claimed to represent had successfully competed in the electoral process, echoed that used by the Muslim League after the election when raising the possibility of a 'Hindu Raj'. In the article, the

[76] 'Congress victory in Bihar', *The Behar Herald*, 6 February 1937, 2.
[77] *Ibid*.
[78] Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 54.
[79] 'Congress Contemporary on the Warpath', 2.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] *Ibid*.
[82] *Ibid*.

author focused mainly on the dangers of attributing the actions of a few members of a community to the broader community and claimed that either *The Searchlight* was exaggerating or the Bengalis they were referring to 'were a set of lunatics who hardly need to be taken seriously'.[83] It is evident, primarily because large proportions of the Bengali community in Hazaribagh did not support the Congress candidate (although he was uniquely controversial), that all Bengalis in Bihar were not necessarily as supportive of the Congress as *The Behar Herald* claimed. However, the difference between Muslims across India and Bengali-Biharis was that the former had the Muslim League and other Muslim parties to throw their support behind while several members of the latter community viewed the Congress as its only viable option for political representation in Bihar, especially after its overwhelming victories in 1937.

However, despite protestations of loyalty to Congress, Bengalis in Bihar quickly turned to the British for representation soon after the election, with requests to the governor to nominate Bengalis in the provinces to the Legislative Council, which, unlike the Assembly, had a section of legislators that British officials appointed. These Bengalis included, 'Dr. P.K. Sen, Bar-at-Law…Rai Bahadur Amarnath Chatterjee, Ex-Judge of the Patna High Court and Ex-member of the Public Service Commission, Rai Bahadur Surendra Nath Mukherjee Retired District and Sessions Judge and Mihir Nath Roy, President of the Bengalee Settler's Association'.[84] Although it was not explicitly stated, it does appear that, to a certain extent, Bengalis in Bihar did not believe that the Congress would grant them adequate representation.

In March 1937, the AICC announced that the Congress would form ministries in the provinces. However, the party caveated this announcement by declaring they would only form a cabinet if the Governor issued a statement announcing he would 'not use in regard to the constitutional activities of the Cabinet, his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of the Cabinet'.[85] British officials rejected this demand and then asked various other parties elected to form either minority or coalition governments. In a blow to the Congress in Bengal, the Krishak Praja and the Muslim League formed a coalition government. Unlike several other states where Congress majorities made it impossible for minority parties to create stable governments, it appeared likely that this government would last. Narratives of Muslim 'betrayal' abounded, and while the two groups of Bengalis had not arrived at this

[83] *Ibid*.
[84] 'Bihar Upper Chamber and the Bengalees', *The Behar Herald,* 24 February 1937, 2.
[85] 'Why Talks Failed in Bihar: Congress demand for convention', *Times of India*, 29 March 1937, 7.

position due to the same set of circumstances, both expressed anger at the ways in which Muslim politics was practiced. In a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru regarding the election of a speaker to the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Sarat Chandra Bose expressed his disappointment in the KPP for 'voting along communal lines'.[86] He also painted KPP members as unreliable and unlikely to stick to their promises, stating that 'unfortunately members of the Proja party who had promised their support did not keep their promise'.[87]

This reaction from Bengalis to the installation of an IMP-led minority government under the Premiership of Mohammad Yusuf in Bihar clearly emphasised this anti-Muslim tendency of Bengalis in Bihar. *The Behar Herald* published an article declaring it had been vindicated by the position it had taken regarding the IMP, stating that 'When the Congress in Bihar was flirting with the Independent Muslim Party under the leadership of Maulana Sajjad, we sounded a note of warning which now seems to have been amply justified'.[88] The author of the article further claimed that it was 'apparent therefore that Maulana Sajjad's party' was 'as anti-Congress as the other Muslim Parties'.[89] The newspaper also raised strong objections to rumours that the interim government was going to make Urdu a court language in all courts in the province. The article claimed that while Muslims were entitled to protections as minorities, they demanded 'undue privileges' which were 'as undemocratic' as they were 'antinational'.[90] These, according to the article, included 'separate electorates, reservation of seats and proportional representation in the services' as well as 'Muslim demands for cessation of music before mosques and the use of the Urdu script.' It lambasted the Congress for setting 'its face against one-sided agitation on the part of Hindus against undue concessions granted by the Government'. It claimed that the party could not make 'any positive lead in respect to communalism' due to their 'conciliatory policy of settlement by mutual agreement.'[91] Although the order eventually passed only expanded the regions in Bihar where Urdu was a recognised court script and also supported the use of Bengali in Santhal Parganas and most of the Chhotanagpur Division, Bengalis in Bihar remained distrustful with regard to the motives of the interim government.[92]

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[86] 'From Sarat Chandra Bose to Jawaharlal Nehru', 10 April 1937, AICC Volume I, J. Nehru's important correspondence with Bengal PCC and Congress Council Party, File no. E-5 (pt-1)/1936 in *NMML* page 66 in file 1 in document.
[87] *Ibid*.
[88] 'Congress and Muslims', *The Behar Herald*, 24 April 1937, 2.
[89] *Ibid*.
[90] 'Rights of Minorities', *The Behar Herald*, 26 May 1937, 2.
[91] *Ibid*.
[92] 'Court Languages and Scripts: Government's Notification', *The Behar Herald*, 5 June 1937, 7.

These Bengali-Bihari suspicions regarding the Congress' pandering to Muslims were seemingly confirmed after the resolutions passed in the Congress conference in Darbhanga where the Bihar PCC passed a resolution that would ensure Urdu remained one of the court scripts.[93] The use of script also received support from Abdul Bari, a professor and Congressman who would go on to head the Bihar PCC until his assassination in 1947.[94] *The Behar Herald* had previously thrown its support behind the Congress. However, the policies of the interim government, as well as the seeming backing for these policies given by the Congress, effectively disillusioned the editors of this publication. The paper also continued expressing its hostility towards the *Searchlight*, claiming that the paper had dismissed issues raised by Babu Naresh Chandra Sinha, a pleader from Bhagalpur, regarding the hardship imposed on Bengali-Biharis due to the necessity of acquiring domicile certificates. It stated that the editor of the *Searchlight* had not bothered to review the complaint raised and had dismissed the cases as being from the 'last century'.[95] The attitude of the Congress paper also encouraged some Bengalis in Bihar to take the view that the Congress was not likely to aid them in navigating the issues they raised.

In July 1937, the Bihar Congress agreed to form a ministry in the province. The interim government quickly resigned, and the Congress began filling posts in the cabinet. Despite the two most senior posts going to high-caste Congressman, the cabinet was, as Vinita Damodaran suggests, relatively diverse.[96] Sri Krishna Sinha, a Bhumiar, was made the Premier and Anugrah Narayan Sinha, a Rajput was given the post of both Deputy Premier and Finance Minister. Also included were Syed Mahmud, a Bihari Muslim who was made Minister of Education and Development and Jaglal Choudhury, a Dalit, who was given the position of Minister of Excise and Public Health. One Bengali, Jimut Bahan Sen, was included in the cabinet as a Parliamentary Secretary and he took his oath in Bengali, stating that as it was also 'one of the vernaculars of the province' he had a right to do so.[97] While Bengalis in the province appreciated the installation of Sen in the position, with *The Behar Herald* previously expressing faith that he would 'stop the fight between Biharis and Bengalis of Bihar', there was nevertheless a growing ambivalence towards and willingness to criticise the Congress from members of the Bengali community.[98]

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[93] 'Darbhanga Political Conference: Dr. Syed Mahmud's Speech', *The Behar Herald*, 19 June 1937, 2.
[94] 'Current Comments: The Urdu Script', *The Behar Herald*, 14 July 1937, 9.
[95] 'Discrimination Against Domiciled Bengali', *The Behar Herald*, 29 May 1937, 2.
[96] Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, 64.
[97] 'Members Sworn', *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1937*, http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/159039 (Accessed on 15 June 1937).
[98] 'Bengalee-Bihari Unity', *The Behar Herald*, 24 February 1937, 2.

Conclusion

The 1930s was a period of transition for India, and Bihar was no different, with a multitude of claims from different communities coming to the fore, likely due to the fact that Indian independence appeared closer than it had in previous decades. Adivasi and Oriya organisations lobbied for the division of the province, while Bengalis in Bihar began to feel increasingly alienated by what they perceived as discrimination against them as Biharis. The passing of the 1935 constitutional reforms and the introduction of elections provided Bengalis in Bihar a different lens through which to make their claims of belonging in Bihar, with several Bengali organisations and figures beginning to identify their community as a Bihari minority. They based their claims of belonging on histories of Bengali settlement in the province and suggested that Bengalis were 'sons of the soil' in the same way Biharis were. They also claimed that given their histories of service to the province and to India as a whole, at the very least, they were entitled to no bar on employment for their community. They pointed to other minority communities, such as Anglo-Indians and Muslims, who had greater protections than Bengalis and suggested that this amounted to discrimination against their community. This strategic claim to minority status was an attempt to bolster their demands for the abolition of domicile certificates.

The election of a Muslim-dominated government in Bengal, as well as the installation of an interim Muslim-dominated government in Bihar (whose language policies the Congress supported), also increased fears in some Bengali-Biharis that they were likely to be shut out of governance and would not have political representation. After concerted opposition to the Communal Award from the Bengal Congress, the Congress High Command had also begun to view Hindu Bengalis in politics as dangerously communal. Therefore, they were not as inclined to take the complaints of Bengalis outside Bengal as seriously. The relationship between the Congress and some sections of the Bengali population in Bihar continued to deteriorate over the next few years, leading to the Congress to launch an investigation in 1938 into the various issues raised by Bengalis-Biharis and their Hindi and Urdu-speaking counterparts in the state. This investigation and the response to it will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Bihar under the Congress: Bengali Biharis and their navigation of the first Congress Ministry (1937-1940)

Introduction

Through the 1920s and 1930s, Bengalis in Bihar had continually lobbied those in positions of power to remove the requirement for Bengalis to get domicile certificates to gain access to government employment and admission to educational institutions. These debates appeared to hinge on the extent to which Bengalis truly 'belonged' in Bihar. Certain elite sections of the Hindi and Urdu-speaking Bihari population asserted that Bengalis were essentially 'foreign' while Bengalis in the province claimed belonging on the basis of historical settlement and service to the province. A growing number of complaints from Bihar regarding these issues caused the Congress High Command to intervene. The Congress High Command gave Rajendra Prasad the task of conducting the investigation into the issue in April 1938, and he produced his report in early 1939. This investigation was a significant event in the history of Bengalis in Bihar and will be the subject of this chapter.

An analysis of this investigation provides three contributions to the broader scholarship of South Asia. Firstly, it contributes to the discussions around Indian communities living outside their ostensible homelands and the ways in which they made claims upon those in positions of authority. These usually involved examinations of Indian diasporas that moved beyond the formal borders of India. Darinee Alagirisamy discusses how the Self-Respect Movement encouraged Indian Tamils in Malaya and Singapore to demand 'progress and equality' with other communities.[1] Mobilisation often led to attempts to conceptualise identities that reconciled both the ostensible homeland and the place of settlement. Amarjit Kaur explores these layered conceptions of identity in her analysis of Indians in Malaysia.[2] Internal migration within India and subsequent settlement of populations outside their ostensible homelands meant that these issues were not purely international. Tensions between 'outsiders' and 'insiders' are explored by Karen Leonard in her analysis of the mulki versus non-mulki issue in Hyderabad between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[3]

[1] Darinee Alagirisamy, 'The Self-Respect Movement and Tamil Politics of Belonging in Interwar British Malaya', *Modern Asian Studies*, 50.5 (2016).
[2] Kaur.
[3] Leonard.

This chapter demonstrates that external diasporas were not the only groups that developed layered identities. The ways in which Bengali-Bihari began to conceptualise their identities mirrored the development of composite identities in external diasporic communities. It also provides the perspective of a non-princely state to explore the way the Congress navigated these issues of belonging. It argues that due to the necessity of producing evidence for the investigation narratives of Bengali belonging in Bihar were developed and solidified during this period. As appealing to the Congress was necessary, narratives moved away from discussions of the necessity of protecting Bengalis as a minority and focused more specifically on demands for 'equality' with Biharis on the basis of fundamental Bengali belonging to the province. Bengalis in Bihar often made these demands by mirroring Congress rhetoric (used by Nehru in particular) around the necessity of ending 'provincialism' and 'communalism' for the overall benefit of India. In this period, Bengali-Biharis developed these narratives of belonging primarily to highlight the failures of the Government of Bihar and the seeming lack of willingness of the Congress in Bihar to change policies around domicile. However, in the post-colonial era these same narratives were repurposed by different factions of Bengalis in the province, some who supported the linguistic realignment of states and some who opposed it. It also demonstrates how elite Hindi and Urdu speakers in the province developed narratives of Bengalis as 'outsiders' and 'oppressors' during this period. These would be reiterated (and emphasised) during the period of linguistic reorganisation.

Secondly, this chapter contributes to scholarship on strategies used by Adivasis to demand Jharkhand in the colonial era. Adivasi mobilisational strategies have been explored by several scholars, including Vinita Damodaran, who analyses the impact of the 1937 elections on the creation and consolidation of the Adivasi Mahasabha and how this group constructed 'Jharkhandi' identity through this mobilisation.[4] Archana Prasad explores the different types of Adivasi mobilisation in the early twentieth century and highlights the differences between the Congress attempts at engagement, the communist led efforts and movements led by elite Adivasis.[5] This chapter examines a different aspect of Adivasi political strategies as it discusses the strategic Adivasi use of grievances from other communities in Bihar to bolster their assertions that the Government of Bihar was incapable of effectively governing communities beyond 'traditional' Biharis. While Adivasis did not

[4] Damodaran, 'The Politics of Marginality and the Construction of Indigeneity in Chotanagpur'.
[5] Archana Prasad, 'Unravelling the Forms of Adivasi Organisation and Resistance in Colonial India', *Indian Historical Review*, 33.1 (2006).

necessarily define what exactly made an individual (or a community) 'Bihari', they suggested that Bengalis and Adivasis were not included in this community.

Thirdly, this chapter will discuss debates around what equitable 'representation' entailed in late colonial India. These issues were contentious during the early twentieth century in Bihar and came to the fore during Prasad's investigation. As U Kalpagam notes, these discussions around representation emerged from the 'production of certain kinds of knowledge as a part of technologies of governance.'[6] The most controversial was the introduction of separate electorates; however, how much representation specific communities were due was also discussed. As Rochana Bajpai states the British tended to believe that the 'interests of Indians…could not be individual' and, therefore, rights were granted through 'groups.'[7] This resulted in the elevation of certain prominent individuals to the role of 'spokesmen' for their groups. Although the general principle seemingly followed by the British was that 'legitimate interests should be voiced, and that minority groups should have representation in proportion to the proportion of their population', the varying levels of privilege of these groups meant that these discussions were complicated and debates around equality were not reduced to discussions of proportionality.[8]

This chapter contributes to this scholarship around 'representation' by examining claim-making during this intervening period of provincial rule. Discussions of 'representation' in Bihar primarily involved discussions around who was entitled to what jobs in government service rather than the reservation of seats or spaces in elected assemblies. The basis upon which communities made demands underwent a shift through this period as it became increasingly necessary to appeal to the Congress and not just British officials. Although Bengalis were technically a minority, the cultures of education inculcated within the *bhadralok* community (which were further encouraged by non-landholding Bengalis' reliance on jobs in government service) meant that they were relatively privileged. This, along with the rhetoric used by senior leaders in the Congress around the necessity for a united Indian population, meant that the 'spokesmen' of the Bengalis in Bihar chose to focus on the importance of equality rather than 'protection'. They entirely dropped claims of minority status and concentrated instead on the necessity of treating all Indians as essentially the same regardless of the histories of individual communities.

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[6] U Kalpagam, *Rule by Numbers: Governmentality in Colonial India* (London: Lexington Books, 2014). p. 8.
[7] Rochana Bajpai, *Debating Difference: Group Rights and Liberal Democracy in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.33.
[8] Judith Brown quoted in, *Ibid*, p.33.

To make these arguments, the first section will discuss the claims made during the investigation by various interested parties and focus on how Bengali-Biharis strategically presented their 'identity' as Biharis to achieve their aims. The second section will examine the response to Rajendra Prasad's 1939 report from members of the Bengali community in Bihar. Finally, the third section will analyse how Adivasis and Bengalis used narratives of oppression developed in the other's community to bolster their own assertions around the failures of the Government of Bihar to effectively rule those who those in positions of power (the Congress and British officials) did not consider 'traditionally' Bihari.

Claims made during the investigation of the 'Bengali-Bihari issue' (1937- 1938)

This section will discuss the ways in which Bengalis in Bihar put forth their claims to belonging to bolster their demands to remove the domicile requirement. It argues that this group continually deployed rhetoric that referred to the necessity of a unified India in order to appeal to the Congress, which was increasingly viewed as the government in waiting. Secondly, it demonstrates the ways in which Congress' fears of the Muslim League's political strategies were implicitly referred to and opposed in order to further strengthen the Bengali-Bihari position in the province.

On the 13th of February 1938, Bengalis in the capital of the province founded the Bengali Association of Bihar under the leadership of Bihari-Bengali ex-judge in the Patna High Court, P. R. Das. This organisation would become one of the most prominent organisations claiming to represent Bengali-Biharis in the province. It also developed a close relationship with *The Behar Herald,* which Biharis began to view as the Bengali Association's mouthpiece. The Association, journalists from *The Behar Herald*, and Bengali members of the Legislative Assembly of Bihar continued to raise issues regarding the status of Bengalis in Bihar.

The issues in Bihar between Bengali-Biharis and other Biharis in the province were deemed significant enough that the High Command decided to launch an investigation into the matter at the Congress Working Committee meeting in April 1938 in Calcutta. Given the fact that there was a great deal of migration between provinces as well as populations settled away from their ostensible linguistic 'homelands' the Congress deemed it necessary to intervene, viewing the Bihar case as helpful in setting a precedent as to how to deal with these issues. Figures and organisation on all sides of the debate raised various claims in the period before the report's release. Bengalis in Bihar, represented by Das, contended that the domicile rules were 'ultra vires' under the Government of India Act (1935) and were against

Congress policy. The Congress Ministry and its supporters argued that neither of these precluded the use of domicile certificates and that Bengalis had a far higher proportion of jobs in services than their population in Bihar. Publications such as the *Searchlight,* which was widely recognised as being a Congress mouthpiece, often put forth narratives of Bengali oppression of Biharis. Therefore, the need to present evidence to the Congress High Command had the impact of solidifying narratives on both sides of the debate, with Bengali figures and publications reiterating their claims of historical belonging. In contrast, elite Hindi and Urdu figures and organisations continued to present Bengalis as outsiders and oppressors who had an unfairly large share of the jobs within the services.

The advent of the Congress ministry intensified debates surrounding Bengalis in government service in Bihar in two ways. Firstly, several sections of the Hindi and Urdu-speaking Bihari population continued to raise the issue of the preponderance of Bengalis in service. Congress MLA from Jale (a constituency in the Darbhanga district) and veteran of the independence movement, Jamuna Karjee, claimed in the Legislative Assembly that Bihar was 'the only province in which persons belonging to other provinces are appointed in the services under the Provincial Government'.[9] This was despite the relatively strict rules the Government of Bihar had established regarding domicile certificates. While Premier S. K. Sinha dismissed this claim as entirely inaccurate, this attitude from a senior Congressman indicated continued disquiet from large sections of the Hindi-speaking Bihari population with regard to the number of Bengalis in service. Secondly, the hiring practices of the Government of Bihar with regard to those considered 'local' were queried. Members of the legislative assembly and council asked a series of questions regarding the proportion of jobs given to various communities, and in response government, represented by S.K. Sinha, declared their intention to ensure 'the claims of different communities' were 'taken into consideration'.[10] Bengalis in the Bihar legislatures also continued to raise concerns about the practice of requiring domicile certificates. These debates led members of the government to acknowledge the significant power wielded by district magistrates in ascertaining the 'intention' of the candidate for domicile certificate to remain an inhabitant of Bihar.[11] Bengalis strongly condemned this as owning property outside the province could bar them

[9] 'Appointment of Biharis in Government Service', 11 December 1937, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1937* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/21535 (Accessed on 27 February 2022), p. 2.
[10] 'Proportion of Muslim and other communities for the appointment to public service', 23 December 1937, *Bihar Legislative Council Debates 1937* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/153476 (Accessed on 27 February 2022) p.3.
[11] 'Definition of the word 'domicile'', 15 December 1937, *Bihar Legislative Council Debates 1937* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/154828 (Accessed on 27 February 2022) p.2.

from gaining one. In addition to this, to get a domicile certificate the candidate either had to be in the process of applying for government jobs or for a place in educational institutions.[12] This often meant that if the certificate did not come in time, the job would likely be given to another candidate.

These debates (and the subsequent information requested from the government) led to increased urgency in the Government of Bihar to ensure a more 'equitable' distribution of jobs in the services. A series of memos were circulated in February reiterating the Government of Bihar's commitment to reducing the number of Bengalis in the provincial service. In a memo written on the 18th of February by the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, W.B. Brett, he stated that 'The attention of the Government has been drawn to the high percentage of posts held by Bengalis in the services under the Provincial Government' and that it was the Government's duty when making appointments to 'take into consideration' the 'percentage of posts which the particular community holds in the service to which appointment are being made and the percentage which that community bears to the total population'.[13] Similarly, another memo issued by the Office of the Conservator of Forests and written on the 22nd of February by J. S. Owden stated that 'The proportion of Bihari Hindus (including the Scheduled casts and Aborigines) and Bihari Mohammadens should be raised considerably before any further appointments of domiciled Bengalees are made.'[14] These memos presented Bengalis as not truly Bihari while also homogenising all other residents of Bihar (apart from Muslims) as 'Bihari Hindus'.[15] The memo also stated that 'No one in the departments should take advantage of his position to get any near relation appointed'.[16] This implied that it was not just the relatively high standards of education in Bengali communities that resulted in their gaining large proportions of government jobs but also nepotism. These narratives presented Bengalis as having unfairly taken Bihari jobs while not being true inhabitants of the province.

Nevertheless, the government continued to state that Bengalis with histories of ancestral settlement in the province did not require domicile certificates. The inconsistencies in the position of the government were highlighted in a debate in the Legislative Assembly on

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[12] *Ibid*.
[13] 'Memo No. 67 A: Percentage of members of different communities in Government Service circulated by W.B. Brett', 18 February 1938, Gandhi, M.K. (Pyarelal) XV Instalment, Letters to Mahadev Desai from P. R. Das (President of Bengalee Association, Bihar), File no. 354 in *Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Archive,* page 2 in file 1 in document.
[14] 'Appointment to posts in the Forest Department, memo circulated by J.S. Owden', 22 February 1938, Gandhi, M.K. (Pyarelal) XV Instalment, Letters to Mahadev Desai from P. R. Das (President of Bengalee Association, Bihar), File no. 354 in *Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Archive,* page 2 in file 1 in document.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] *Ibid*.

the 5th of March 1938. Sachchidananda Sinha stated that 'the system of granting domicile certificates in this province has caused (for the last few years, in particular) very grave dissatisfaction to the vast bulk of the educated classes, by reason of such certificates being granted without sufficient justification'.[17] He indicated that this had caused 'hardship' to 'genuine qualified Beharee candidates.'[18] He also quoted the *Searchlight*, which stated there was 'sordid intrigue and nepotism on the part of those in power to advance the cause of some non-Beharee and non-domiciled relation of theirs, sacrificing the interests of children of the soil.'[19] This echoed the implications in Owden's memo and presented Bengalis in the service as nepotistic interlopers. He further suggested in the debate that it was the duty of the Government of Bihar to correct these injustices. The parliamentary secretary, Krishna Ballabh Sahay, responded on behalf of the government, stating that 'the attention of the Departments has been drawn to the comparatively high percentage of posts held by Bengalis'.[20]

However, when the Government was questioned during the same debate by Upendra Nath Mukherjee, a Bengali MLA, regarding the application of the domicile rule to Manbhum (given that large sections of that area had Bengali last names), S.K. Sinha stated that this was necessary as 'Bengalis from outside may settle in a Bengali-speaking district also'.[21] When Mukherjee asked if this meant 'that everybody residing in a Bengali-speaking district has got to produce a certificate of domicile when seeking for a post', Sinha responded 'No'.[22] Mohammad Yunus, the erstwhile Premier of Bihar, supported the government's position, stating, 'I think Bengalis who are natives of the province do not require any certificate'.[23] Nevertheless, no government official or supporter of the government position explicitly stated how the government intended to determine whether a Bengali was a 'native of the province' or not. This lack of specificity, as well as the fact that the magistrate had to determine the 'intention' of applicants to stay in the province, meant that neither Bengalis in Bihar nor Hindi and Urdu-speaking Biharis were particularly pleased with the certificates as it was claimed by both that the process was unfair.

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[17] 'Grant of Domicile Certificates in the Province', 5 March 1938, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1938* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/137403 (Accessed on 27 February 2022) p.2.
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] *Ibid*.
[20] 'Bihar for the Biharees: A Myth', 5 March 1938, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1938* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/137404 (Accessed on 27 February 2022) p.5.
[21] 'Grant of Domicile Certificates in the Province, p.2.
[22] *Ibid*.
[23] *Ibid*.

The confusion around the domicile rules with regards to Bengalis, further increased Bengali-Bihari suspicions that the government was discriminating against Hindu Bengalis in particular while allowing other minorities, regardless of their domicile status, to gain employment without the requirement of the certificate. This was evidenced by the question from Bengali MLA Munindra Nath Mukherji, which asked 'whether Muslims or Anglo-Indians who are not genuine natives of Bihar have got to produce certificates of domicile when they apply for posts in Government services or for admission into Government educational institutions in Bihar'.[24] While the question was only officially put forward in June the information was requested from the government in March, reflecting the growing tension during this period between Bengalis in Bihar and other sections of the Bihari population.[25] Although the Government claimed that there was no difference between the treatment of Bengalis and the treatment of any of the other groups Mukherji had named, it is, nevertheless, evident through the question that Bengalis in Bihar believed the government was specifically targeting them.

Given the increasingly bitter disputes in Bihar's Legislative Assembly and Council and the various claims, counterclaims and demands made of the Government of Bihar, the Indian National Congress deemed it would be wise to intervene. Internal migration in India was widespread, especially with regard to changing locations to pursue education or jobs in government service. This was especially evident in Hyderabad, where tensions between Mulkis and non-Mulkis (those claiming to be historic natives of Hyderabad and those considered to be more recent immigrants from British India) had existed for several decades.[26] Additionally, other communities such as the 'Telugus of Madras' and the 'Beraris in the CP' were also considered likely to cause issues for the Congress in this new period of 'provincial autonomy'.[27] Therefore, the Congress viewed a resolution to the problems in Bihar as important as this would likely set a precedent for how to deal with these same issues in different provinces in the future. In April 1938, the Congress High Command decided that Rajendra Prasad was the most suitable person to lead the investigation into the 'Bengali-Bihari issue'.[28]

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[24] 'Assembly Question by Mr. Munindra Nath Mukherji, MLA, whether Muslims and Anglo-Indias, not natives of Bihar have to produce certificate of domicile when they apply for posts in Govt services,' 24 March 1938, *Bihar State Archives*, Appointments Department, Proceeding B, File Number 2d-75/1938, June 1938, pg. 6.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] Leonard, ' The Mulki-Non-Mulki Conflict'.
[27] 'Ministry Versus Minority: A New Problem Set by Provincial Autonomy' *Times of India*, 3 January 1939.
[28] 'Indian Political Notes: Congress High Command at Work', *Times of India*, 6 April 1938, 10.

P. R. Das, as the leader of the Bengali Association, was invited to give evidence. As mentioned previously, the fact that the British granted community rather than individual rights meant that 'spokesmen' for communities emerged, and Das acted as the leading spokesman for Bengalis in Bihar. He wrote several letters to the Congress High Command, attempting to legitimise his claims by basing his arguments both on the constitutional framework developed for India by the British, as well as the positions of the Congress itself. He employed two main strategies; the first was to provide a series of examples of instances when Bengalis suffered due to either discrimination or difficulties around gaining a domicile certificate. He claimed this was an issue as Bengalis technically were not considered a 'separate' community under the law. Still, according to him, they continued to face significant problems that 'native' Biharis did not. The second was to reiterate narratives around the historic Bengali presence in the area that constituted Bihar. However, unlike previous strategies deployed by the Bengali-Bihari community, he did not reference Bengali-Biharis 'minority' status.

The first strategy is evident in a letter written to J.B. Kripalani, the general secretary of the Congress, where he stated that the Government of India Act (1935) did 'not permit any Provincial Government to make any discrimination whatever as between a Bengali and a Bihari' implying that through their enforcement of domicile certificates, the Government of Bihar was behaving unconstitutionally.[29] He suggested that Section 298 of the Government of India Act prevented discrimination in employment on the grounds of place of birth, which, therefore, meant that any discrimination against Bengalis in Bihar was against the law.[30]

To support this claim, he stated that as Bengalis were not given separate electorates under the Government of India Act (1935), the Government of Bihar could not 'make a distinction between a Bihari and a Bengali' and give preference to Biharis when hiring as under the law they were considered to be a part of the same community.[31] He also stated that 'it seems to me that the paramount consideration which the Indian National Congress has always kept in view is that there is one India, one people and one nation and that no distinction whatever can be made between one person or another solely on provincial ground'.[32] This situated his argument firmly within the Congress mainstream and implicitly condemned the positions taken by the Muslim League. These statements demonstrate how

[29] 'From P.R. Das to J. B Kripalani, General Secretary of the Indian National Congress', 3 April 1938, Gandhi, M.K. (Pyarelal) XV Instalment, Letters to Mahadev Desai from P. R. Das (President of Bengalee Association, Bihar), File no. 354 in *Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Archive,* page 5 in file 1 in document.
[30] *Ibid*.
[31] *Ibid*., 7 in file 3 in doc.
[32] *Ibid*.

some communities navigated this period of transition, where the colonial government still ruled, but the Congress was viewed as the party of government in waiting. By basing his claims on both the Government of India Act (1935) and Congress resolutions, P.R. Das attempted to place Bengali demands in the mainstream of Indian politics and ensure his arguments appealed to those in positions of authority.

Das objected to the necessity of requiring domicile certificates, suggesting that the fact that it was not possible to get a certificate unless a candidate was applying for a specific job or attempting to gain admission into an educational institution meant that these opportunities often disappeared before the certificate came through. He brought up the grievances of Babu Basanta Kumar Banarji, a candidate for a position in government service, who applied for a domicile certificate on the 23rd of April 1936 but did not actually receive the certificate until the 3rd of September, by which time 'the appointment had been made, and the certificate became wholly useless.'[33] He also indicated the exhaustive nature of the questions in the application for a certificate meant that regardless of how efficiently the district officers processed certificates, if any extra enquiry had to be made to determine the 'the truth of each answer,' the 'enquiry itself must take an enormous amount of time'.[34] He claimed that these enquiries prevented the growth of 'good feeling' between 'Bengalis and Biharis'.[35]

He suggested that apart from the lengthy and cumbersome process of applying for a certificate, district officers were inconsistently putting the rules into operation. This, in turn, caused significant issues for Bengali candidates for positions in various institutions. He gave the example of the brother of Babu Shamu Sharan Chowdhury, who was a Bengali-Bihari professor of biology at Prince of Wales Medical College. While his brother had gained admission to the Engineering College in Patna without having to produce a certificate on the basis that there was enough proof of his Bihari status due to his brother's position, when trying to complete his degree and get 'special training,' he was told he had to produce a domicile certificate.[36] Das raised the case of a domiciled Bengali, Nagendra Nath Das, an 'Assistant in the Secretariat', being denied a certificate despite owning property in Bihar and educating his children in the province. Das claimed the district officer had rejected his application because he had a brother who was 'living in a rented house in Calcutta'.[37] Das

[33] *Ibid*., 10 in file 6 in doc.
[34] *Ibid*, 11 in file 7 in doc.
[35] *Ibid*., 14 in file 10 in doc.
[36] *Ibid*., 15 in file 11 in doc.
[37] *Ibid*., 16 in file 12 in doc.

intended to raise these examples to demonstrate how the Bengalis in Bihar were having their lives materially affected by the requirement to produce domicile certificates as well as emphasising the arbitrary ways in which the actual rule was being implemented. This strategy also allowed Bengalis to move beyond territorial understandings of belonging, which was necessary if they were to question the logic of domicile certificates.

Das detailed numerous cases of Bengalis in Bihar losing opportunities for employment due to the fact they were Bengalis, suggesting the procurement of a domicile certificate did not necessarily prevent this. He gave a variety of examples of what he claimed was clear 'injustice' being done to Bengalis 'in the matter of appointments'.[38] He raised the case regarding a candidate for the position of 'Lecturer in Chemistry', Babu Sudhansu Chakravarty, who he stated had not been given the job despite gaining the approval of the 'Selection Committee, by the Governing Body and by the Public Services Commission' as well as being 'domiciled'.[39] He stated the job had instead been given to a Bihari with 'inferior qualifications.'[40] He also claimed the government was overlooking Bengali candidates for promotion through the ranks of service. He referred to the situation in the Engineers Office of the South Bihar Circle where he suggested that a junior Bihari officer was promoted upon the retirement of the Head Assistant as all the senior officers in that department were Bengali.[41]

Apart from individual cases, Das also added that under guidance published by government officials namely John Wardle Houlton, the Secretary to the Government of Bihar in the Revenue Department, 'Bengalee traders' in the province were being discriminated against as the government was encouraged to only do business with 'Bihari firms'.[42] He claimed that private firms in the province occasionally dismissed Bengalis due to the Government of Bihar's guidance to private industry to employ more 'provincials'. He raised the case of the Remington Typewriter Company, which allegedly dismissed some Bengalis from their Patna office.[43] Das built his case relatively methodically, discussing the issues around the requirement of certificates and instances of what he claimed were clear anti-Bengali bias.

Das' second strategy of emphasising the historic presence of Bengalis was evident in a second letter written the day after. He added to his claims of historical Bengali belonging in the province, stating that 'Bengalis living in Chota Nagpur are natives of Chota Nagpur and it

[38] *Ibid*.
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] *Ibid*.
[42] *Ibid*., 17 in file, 13 in doc
[43] *Ibid*.

would be most unjust to call upon them to take out domicile certificates or make any discrimination between Biharis and these Bengalis'.[44] He stated that as 'half the Bengali population of Bihar resides in Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas' therefore, 'the question assumes some importance when these Bengalis who have been residing in Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas for generations are asked to take out domicile certificates to qualify themselves for an appointment in the Government service.'[45] This clear claim of belonging to those regions reiterated previous statements made by other groups regarding the historic presence of Bengalis in the province, further bolstering their demands for 'equality' with Biharis. The use of the word 'native' emphasised this claim to belonging. Therefore, as his argument ran, the requirement for domicile certificates was even more egregious as this group of Bengalis did not have ancestors who had settled anywhere else and were undeniably from a part of what was now Bihar.

To solve this 'Bengali-Bihari issue', the Congress invited representatives from the Bengali population of Bihar, as well as representatives of the Government of Bihar to give evidence to Rajendra Prasad and Gandhi in Wardha in late August 1938. In preparation, P.R. Das produced a memorandum for the meeting on the 5th of August 1938. While his previous letters to Kripalani had focused more broadly on the harm done to Bengalis in Bihar due to the requirement of domicile certificates, this memo mainly discussed whether or not domicile certificates were legal under the Government of India Act (1935). Das stated that the domicile certificates, in effect amounted to 'naturalisation certificates.'[46] He claimed that the 1935 Government of India Act 'confers no power upon the Provincial Governments to issue naturalisation certificates to those who are already British subjects.'[47] As 'the object of granting a domicile certificate under the rules framed by the Bihar Government is to confer the status of a native upon a non-Bihari. This the very object of granting a naturalisation certificate.'[48] Therefore, he suggested that 'The rules as to domicile certificates' were 'wholly ultra vires'.[49]

He warned the Congress that allowing the practice of requiring domicile certificates to continue could potentially lead to more issues later. He stated in the memo that 'the Indian

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[44] 'From P.R. Das to J. B Kripalani, General Secretary of the Indian National Congress', 4 April 1938, Gandhi, M.K. (Pyarelal) XV Instalment, Letters to Mahadev Desai from P. R. Das (President of Bengalee Association, Bihar), File no. 354, in *Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Archive,* page 20 in file 1 in document.
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] 'Memorandum submitted by P.R. Das to Rajendra Prasad relating to the Bengal-Bihar Controversy', 5 August 1938, Gandhi, M.K. (Pyarelal) XV Instalment, Letters from P.R. Das to M.K. Gandhi, File no. 415, in *Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Archive,* page 4 in file 3 in document.
[47] *Ibid*.
[48] *Ibid*.
[49] *Ibid*., 5 in file 4 in doc.

National Congress must make up its mind whether it is prepared to accept a provincial citizenship as distinct from the Indian citizenship.'[50] He suggested that this could have a negative effect on 'on the growth and development of nationalism in India', as it would mean 'discriminating legislation by one province against another province' would be put in place.[51] This, he claimed, would be against the fundamental objective of the Congress, which was to 'bring into existence one people, one nation, and one India'.[52] Das' continual repetition of this statement suggests that he believed this argument regarding Congress values was the one most likely to appeal to senior Congressmen. This also had the benefit of appealing to Congress fears of the strategies employed by the Muslim League.

Das recommended that domicile certificates in the form they currently were in should be abolished, and any candidate for service should state 'that he has resided in Bihar for the necessary number of years' and that 'he must state that he intends to reside in Bihar or to enter or continue in the service of the Crown in Bihar'.[53] This would remove the necessity of producing a physical certificate that a District Officer had signed off on. However, he did indicate that it was important for anyone who was attempting to gain employment in government service in Bihar 'should be able to make himself understood in the language known to the inhabitants and should be in a position to follow the conversation in that language.'[54] Consequently, he suggested a language test be put in place to determine if the candidate was comfortable with the 'Hindusthani' language. He stated the test should not be 'a public examination' and that 'two certificates from two persons qualified to give certificate on the point should be sufficient'.[55] These proposals to reform the basis upon which domicile was defined with a focus on the 'Hindusthani' language that the more secular-leaning Congressmen believed would help India overcome the issues between proponents of Hindi and Urdu demonstrates how Bengalis in Bihar attempted to appeal to the Congress as the government in waiting. By defining belonging as a choice and not something intrinsically related to culture, Das bolstered Congress' positions on anti-provincialism.

On the 20th of August 1938, Rajendra Prasad convened a conference to deal with this issue. This conference took place place in Wardha. P.R. Das, S.N Dutta, the Secretary of the Bengali Association, and Das' fellow ex-High Court judge Amarnath Chatterji represented

[50] *Ibid*., 13 in file 12 in doc.
[51] *Ibid*.
[52] *Ibid*.
[53] *Ibid*., 19 in file 18 in doc.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] *Ibid*.

Bengalis from Bihar.[56] Mohammad Yunus, the erstwhile premier, was invited to give evidence as the leader of the Independent Muslim Party.[57] Mathura Prasad, the Secretary of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, was also in attendance at Wardha.[58] The Government of Bihar sent Krishna Ballabh Sahay to represent its position.[59] However, the Premier S.K. Sinha did not attend. Therefore, Sahay stated that he had no authority to act on behalf of the government and had simply come to Wardha 'to make notes of' Das' 'representation to Srijut Rajendra Prasad'.[60] Sachchidananda Sinha also did not attend. This disappointed Das, who, in a letter to Mahadev Desai, suggested that this was indicative of disrespect not just towards him as the representative of Bengalis in Bihar but also to Prasad.[61]

Das also stated that while he had 'no doubt put' his 'case before Rajendra Prasad', his 'visit to Wardha' had 'led to no result' mainly due to the fact that Sahay stated he could not act on behalf of the government.[62] Das also claimed that neither S.K. Sinha nor Sachchidananda Sinha came to Wardha in part to ensure Prasad would have to go to Patna. Das strongly urged that the 'next sitting' not take place in Patna as he suggested, 'the atmosphere of Wardha is better for the solution of this problem than the atmosphere of Bihar'.[63] He added that the reason for this was not just because bias towards his opponents might creep into a decision made in Patna but also as 'this particular problem is not a Bengali-Behari problem, but an All-India problem' and, therefore, dealing with it in Bihar would imply that it was a provincial issue.[64]

Acceding to Das' request (or possibly because of his ill health), Prasad did not have the next sitting regarding the issue in Patna. The discussions were instead folded into the Congress session in Delhi in September 1938.[65] This led to those on all sides of the debate making several claims regarding Bengali belonging in the provinces throughout September. An editorial in *The Behar Herald* condemned S. K. Sinha for his statements criticising P. R. Das' position on the Chhotanagpur region in a reception organised in part by Das at the Wheeler Senate Hall in Patna.[66] The editorial suggested that as Das was 'one of the

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[56] 'Bengali-Bihari Question', *Times of India*, 19 August 1938, 14.
[57] 'Bengali-Bihari Controversy: Wardha Conference', *Times of India*, 20 August 1938, p.14.
[58] *Ibid*.
[59] *Ibid*.
[60] 'Letter to Mahadev Desai', 25 August 1938, Gandhi, M.K. (Pyarelal) XV Instalment, Letters from P.R. Das to M.K. Gandhi, File no. 416, in *Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Archive,* page 2 in file.
[61] *Ibid.,* page 23 in file.
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] 'The Bengali Bihari Controversy: Domicile Rules', *Times of India*, 23 September 1938, 13.
[66] 'The Premier's Speech at Senate Hall', *The Behar Herald*, 3 September 1938, 4.

convenors of the meeting' and had 'attended it personally', the 'Premier should have refrained from criticising Mr Das on this occasion'.[67] The editorial also took aim at the vaunted 'stability' in the Government of Bihar, suggesting that Sinha could not take credit for the stability of the government as this was 'determined by the religious and linguistic composition of the population and the Communal Award' not the actual way in which the government functioned.[68]

The sniping between figures on different sides of the debate continued with Sachchidananda Sinha's systematic repudiation of Das' claims in his note submitted to Rajendra Prasad before the talks in September. He agreed with Das' statement that the Bengali-Bihari issue was not a provincial issue but 'an all-India problem, affecting alike British States and also the Indian States'. However, he dismissed the idea that section 298 of the Government of India Act (1935) created an 'Indian citizenship as opposed to provincial citizenship' and that 'there was no provision in the Government of India Act at all dealing with any such questions of Indian citizenship'. He also stated (with considerably more vagueness) that despite Das' arguments regarding Congress positions on 'one Indian people', nothing in Congress resolutions could 'mean any such thing as is contended by the opponents of the Government of Bihar'.[69] After making these two claims, he then dismissed the legalistic basis of Das' arguments, stating the issue was 'not so much a matter of law as of administrative policy and statesmanship.'.[70] The Government of Bihar also produced a note which supported Sinha's positions and added that there was 'no analogy between domicile certificates and naturalisation' as the 'latter conferred rights of naturalisation' while the 'former existed as evidence before Government proclaims appointment to services'.[71] These statements dismissed the legal grounds upon which Das was attempting to make his claim while also arguing that the issue was not a legal matter at all.

Despite the continual assertion of grievance at the necessity of producing domicile certificates in Bihar (and allegations of mistreatment at the hands of Bihari district-level officials when they attempted to gain them), several sections of Bengalis in Bihar continued to dismiss any idea of linguistic reorganisation, claiming that this would only lead to more ill-feeling between provinces. This dismissal of linguistic reorganisation was a reiteration of the strategies used by Das, which involved emphasising the importance of a 'united' India as,

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[67] *Ibid*.
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] 'The Bengali Bihari Controversy: Domicile Rules', p.13.
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Ibid.*

despite Congress support for the idea, there were some fears that it could lead to a further fragmenting of the broader Indian nation. An article in *The Behar Herald,* published on the 21st of September 1938, strongly condemned the Congress commitment to the redistribution of territories made through the 1920s and 30s, stating 'with great respect to the supporters of the idea it seems to us that the proposal to send the Bihar-Bengalis back to Bengal sounds very much like the following: No, your claim to be governed by a council including among others a few representatives of your own race is separatist. So, you must go back to Bengal and be governed exclusively by people of your own race'.[72] The article went on to claim that 'autonomous, monolinguistic states (we might say monochromatic) must necessarily involve the shutting of the humanising influence possible through people of different nationalities and cultures living together under the same aegis and sooner or later lead to the provinces banging their doors against one another'.[73] These statements reiterated Das' claims that heterogenous provinces were necessary to ensure India became 'one nation'. Unlike the mainstream views expressed within the Congress at the time, which largely favoured linguistic states, they claimed that this would make India less united. *The Behar Herald* was also published in Patna, which meant it catered to Bengalis who were likely to remain in Bihar regardless of whether linguistic reorganisation occurred or not and, therefore, had a stake in maintaining Bihar's multicultural nature.

In contrast to this framing of the issue as one of fundamental rights by Bengali-Bihari organisations and figures, some politicians in Bihar conceptualised the matter as one of inequality. Jaglal Choudhury, the prominent Bihari Dalit leader, suggested that a new formula needed to be devised in Bihar with regard to employment in government service. While deprecating the fact that debates around proportionality in services arose as people in India sought 'appointments under the Government not with a view to serve people or the state but with a view to earn money', he stated that the Congress had to 'look at things as they are' and 'decide the principle on the basis of which the formula [to ensure equality] should evolve'.[74] Choudhury suggested that in order to improve the position of 'less advanced communities, ' these communities should receive a higher weightage in the formula than their population required. In his ranking of various Bihari communities and their levels of advancement, he placed Bengali-Biharis at the top of the list and stated that under his formula, 'Bengalees

[72] 'Provinicialism and Linguistic Provinces', *The Behar Herald*, 21 September, 2
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] 'Suggestions made by J. Choudhury in regard to the distribution of appointments among various communities in Bihar', 24 September 1938, in *Dr Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Select Documents, Volume 2*, ed. Valmiki Choudhury (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1984), 287.

domiciled in Bihar' would 'get a few less posts than their population demanded'.[75] This position, rather than discussing the nature of Bengali belonging, undercut their claims on the basis of privilege.

However, some senior Congress politicians accepted, to quite a large extent, the argument that referred to historical Bengali belonging in Bihari. Jawaharlal Nehru appeared particularly sympathetic to Bengalis in Bihar. When intervening in the debate, Nehru stated that 'the Biharis have to remember that a large number of Bengalees who have long settled in Bihar are as much of Bihar as any Behari can be'.[76] He also stated 'Bihar should be very careful about not doing any injustice to the Bengalee element who have contributed so much to the province.'[77] Nehru's echo of the language used by various leaders was indicative that the strategy used by leading Bengali figures in Bihar, which involved framing the issue as one that involved issues of 'provincialism' rather than issues of 'equality' and 'proportionality', was quite successful. His advice to Bengalis in Bihar which was essentially to be 'tolerant' of policy and rhetoric used within Bihar as it was 'veritably a new province in some ways not so developed as Bengal' and was 'seeking self-realisation and opportunities for self-development', also demonstrated greater sympathy for the Bengali position that the position held by the Congress Ministry in the province.[78] Nevertheless, Nehru's views, while ostensibly the position of the Congress as a whole, was not entirely representative of the opinions of senior Congress leadership. This was especially true for regional leaders who were quite willing to rely on these forces of 'provincialism' and 'communalism' to bolster their preeminent positions in the state.

Prasad, who was leading the investigation, was widely recognised as being on a different wing of the party. In a letter to Syed Sultan Ahmed, an eminent Bihari member of the Legislative Council, Prasad explicitly identified Bengalis, along with Kisan Sabhaites and members of the Muslim League as groups that created 'much propaganda against the Congress Ministry'.[79] He suggested that a part of the reason for their dissatisfaction was due to the fact that communities who were 'backward in education' were now attempting to 'claim a share in the appointments' and the 'so-called advanced communities' could 'not continue to enjoy the monopoly they had enjoyed so long'.[80] Prasad's views of Bengalis more

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[75] *Ibid.*
[76] 'Bengalees in Bihar: Pandit Nehru's Statement', *The Behar Herald*, 21 September 1938, 13.
[77] *Ibid.*
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] 'From Rajendra Prasad to Sir Sultan Ahmed', 21 November 1938, in *Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence, Vol 2,* 143.
[80] *Ibid*.

closely mirrored those presented by Choudhury, who depicted Bengalis as an 'advanced' community that needed to acknowledge the rights of other communities to have a share in government appointments. Therefore, Bengalis in Bihar were unlikely to have expected him to view their demands with the same levels of sympathy as Nehru, who viewed the issue as one that had the regrettable effect of encouraging 'provincialism'.

Additionally, *The Searchlight* vehemently denied the claim of historic Bengali belonging. In a series of articles, the paper asserted that Bengalis were outsiders who had settled in these border regions and had imposed their language on the Bihari inhabitants of the province. Controversy arose around the medium of education in Jharia (a town in the Dhanbad district), with declarations that Bengalis were attempting to 'Bengalicise an admittedly Hindusthani area'.[81] Similarly, the paper published accusations that Bengalis 'hated…to the utmost' Kurmis in the Manbhum district (a border area that was part of the Purulia subdivision and considered to be mainly Bengali-speaking) and had given them 'no facility for education'.[82] The article, by continually referring to Bengalis in that area as 'settlers', heavily implied that they were oppressing the actual inhabitants of the region. Interestingly, considering the increasing tensions between Urdu and Hindi speakers across the country, the author of the article stated that Bengalis had 'proclaimed their war on Hindi and Urdu, the lingua franca of India, recognised as such by the Indian National Congress'. Mainstream organisations in Bihar (unlike other regions in the 'Hindi-belt') appear to have folded Muslims into their political coalition, clearly demarcating these upper-caste Bengalis as outsiders despite elite Hindus who controlled these organisations, sharing the same religion. This had the benefit of echoing Congress rhetoric and presenting Bihar as a uniquely non-communal state.

The debates during the investigation into the 'Bengali-Bihari issues', led to a cementing of narratives regarding the position of Bengalis within Bihari social structures. Bengalis claimed historical belonging in the province and developed their rhetoric to explicitly appeal to the Congress High Command. The actual Congress Ministry, along with its supporters, presented the issue as one of proper representation. Provincial Congress-supporting publications also began emphasising narratives surrounding Bengali oppression of Biharis to further undercut their claims in the province. Therefore, Prasad's report had the rather large task of reconciling a host of demands.

[81] 'Bengalee Offensive I', *The Searchlight*, 8 December 1938, 6.
[82] 'Manbhum Kurmis Demand Hindi', *The Searchlight*, 21 December 1938, 3.

Release of Prasad's Report and Response in Bihar

This section discusses the content of Rajendra Prasad's report on the 'Bengali-Bihari' issue and argues that its findings foreshadowed the ways in which the Congress tackled the matter of group versus individual rights in the post-colonial era. This would involve 'containing' group rights to a certain extent while still recognising histories of privilege and histories of discrimination within specific communities. It demonstrates the difficulties faced by the Congress when attempting to navigate linguistic minority issues. After almost a full year of sniping from various figures, organisations, and publications in Bihar, Prasad's report was released on the 13th of January 1939. It did define the Bengali community as a separate one and recommended that more attention should be paid to ensuring all communities were equally represented in the services. But it, nonetheless, accepted that Bengalis who had histories of settlement in the province should not be required to produce domicile certificates. Several sections of the Bengali community, including Das, welcomed the conclusions of the report. However, the recommendations of the report were not implemented after its release, and by the end of the year, the Congress governments had, by and large, resigned. Therefore, several sections of the Bengali population in Bihar continued to fulminate against government policy. While the advent of the war and the Quit India movement meant that the issues were shelved to quite a large extent, they did not disappear, and the matter of 'ill-treatment' of Bengalis in Bihar would take on new dimensions in the post-colonial context.

Although it was only released in early 1939, Prasad's report was largely completed by early October 1938 and sent to the Congress Working Committee for approval.[83] The report systematically dealt with the various issues raised by Das (as a representative for Bengalis in Bihar) and representatives of the Congress ministry. He divided the Bengali community in the province up into four groups, with the first three groups being Bengalis for whom Bihar was their permanent home, either due to the fact their families had long inhabited the regions within Bihar's current boundaries or due to their permanent settlement in Bihar.[84] He

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[83] 'Draft Report on the Bengali-Bihari issue', 2 October 1938, All India Congress Committee, 1st Instalment, Rajendra Prasad's account on Bengal-Bihar Controversy relating to questions of Domicile etc., File no. G-60 KW1/1938-39 in *NMML*, 8 in file.

[84] *Ibid*., 10 in file, 2 in doc.

The four groups of Bengalis discussed by Prasad were listed as follows:

1) Residents of areas bordering on Bengal where Bengali is spoken. They are Bengalis by language but are residents of the province of Bihar like any other residents living in what is called Bihar proper.

2) A number of Bengali families called Rarhis who came to Bhagalpur district and settled there centuries ago and have become absorbed in the local population and speak local dialect. They are for all purposes Biharis except that being Hindus they have sometimes to go to Bengal for marriage relations with the people of their own castes.

3) Bengalis who have come for service or profession or business and have made Bihar their permanent home and have thus become domiciled.

described the last group as Bengalis who had come to Bihar for work but had not permanently settled in the province. Prasad stated that it was the Government's policy to 'make no distinction between Biharis properly so-called and Bengalis of classes 1, 2 and 3… who may be called Bengali-speaking Biharis.'[85] However, despite this policy, Prasad acknowledged that there were still significant issues raised by Bengalis in Bihar.

As the main issue revolved around domicile certificates, the bulk of Prasad's report dealt with the decision of whether or not to abolish them. He stated that the certificates themselves were not *ultra vires,* as Das had contended. Prasad defended the right of the government to give 'preference to Provincials', as well as reserve 'posts for members of particular communities or for Provincials', stating that doing so was not against clause 298 of the Government of India Act (1935).[86] Similarly, when dealing with Das' other argument relating to ideals espoused by the Congress, Prasad claimed that 'while the Congress' stood 'for an Indian nationality', it recognised 'linguistic and cultural distinctions among the residents in different parts of the country'.[87] He further stated, 'the desire of provincials to seek employment in their own locality is natural and not reprehensible and rules providing for such employment to them are not inconsistent with the high ideals of the Congress, particularly when they exist in all provinces'.[88] These conclusions were all essentially the same as the arguments made by the Congress Ministry and other eminent Biharis such as Sachchidananda Sinha.

However, Prasad's report also considered the issues Das raised with the bureaucracy involved in the actual procurement of domicile certificates. He acknowledged Das' claims that the fact that the certificates could only be obtained if the candidate was in the process of applying for a job or seeking admission into services was a significant hindrance.[89] Prasad accepted that the issue of the length of time between the application and the grant of a domicile certificate did materially disadvantage Bengalis in the province.[90] Above all, the requirement for all Bengalis to provide a domicile certificate, regardless of whether or not their families had long histories of settlement in the province, was regarded as a major problem in Prasad's report.[91] Therefore, Prasad recommended the abolition of domicile certificates as this would ensure there was 'no distinction between Biharis properly so called

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4) Bengalis who have not made Bihar their home but have come for service profession or business.
[85] *Ibid*., 10 in file, 2 in doc.
[86] *Ibid.,* 26 in file, 18 in doc.
[87] *Ibid.*
[88] *Ibid.*
[89] *Ibid.,* 12 in file, 4 in doc.
[90] *Ibid.*
[91] *Ibid*.

and Bengali speaking residents of the Province, whether natural born or domiciled.'[92] Although this had not been explicitly alluded to by P.R. Das, who preferred to make his arguments on the basis of legality and Congress policy, Prasad's report also laid out the right of Bengalis in Bihar to received education in their mother-tongue. He stated, 'In the areas where Bengali is the spoken language the medium of instruction in primary schools ought to be Bengali'.[93] He added that even in areas where Bengali was not the predominant language, 'if there are a reasonable number of students speaking Bengali they should be taught Bengali.'[94] This acceptance of these arguments made by Bengalis in Bihar suggested that while Prasad himself might have misgivings regarding the Bengali community in the province, Bengalis in Bihar were largely successful at framing the issue as one that had the potential to encourage 'provincialism'.

Nevertheless, Prasad reiterated the issues with the number of Bengalis in service, stating that 'the case of Biharis and the Government is that Bengalis are overrepresented in the services whereas Biharis have not received their due share in them'.[95] He denied Das' claim that the Government of Bihar was not allowed to 'make a distinction between Bengalis and Biharis' due to the fact Bengalis were not given separate electorates, stating, 'I do not think the provision for separate electorates has anything to do with appointments and these have to be fairly distributed irrespective of separate electorates'.[96] He marked Bengalis as a distinct community in Bihar, suggesting that this was undoubtedly the case as 'Bengalis in Bihar speak a different language and insist on having Bengali schools.'[97] The use of 'insist' implied to quite a large extent that Bengalis in the province were purposefully refusing to integrate with the 'true' inhabitants of the province who had Hindi as their medium of education.

While he did concede that in some cases the pressure put by the government on private firms to employ Biharis had led to even domiciled Bengalis being removed from their positions or denied promotions, he recommended that it should 'be open to the Government to suggest to firms and factories carrying out business in Bihar to give appointments to residents of the province and to give preference to firms and factories agreeing to employ provincials'.[98] He also stated that while the rules regarding what entailed 'domicile' should

[92] *Ibid.,* 26 in file, 18 in doc.
[93] *Ibid.*
[94] *Ibid.*
[95] *Ibid.,* 18 in file, 10 in doc.
[96] *Ibid.,* 22 in file, 14 in doc.
[97] *Ibid.*
[98] *Ibid.,* 23 in file 15 in doc.

be made clearer,[99] he did not remove the need to prove domicile, stating, that the abolition of certificates did not mean 'the scrutiny of a claim for domicile should be perfunctory'.[100] He claimed that 'any perfunctoriness will inevitably work as a hardship against the residents of the province.'[101] This meant that Bengalis in the province would still have to prove their domicile in ways that other Biharis did not. Therefore, while accepting Bengali-Bihari claims that the domicile certificates caused significant hardship, Prasad's recommendations emphasised the narratives propounded by many government officials and elite Hindi-speaking Biharis in the province (both within the Congress Ministry and outside it) that presented Bengalis as 'overrepresented' in government service and likely to come to Bihar in search of jobs (which should by rights be given to Biharis). This report foreshadowed the debates around individual versus group rights and minority rights that would emerge after independence. As stated by Bajpai, despite attempts to make the individual the bearer of rights in independent India, there was a 'containment' of group rights rather than a 'retrenchment'.[102] This episode in Bihari history foreshadowed the uneasy compromise between the two that the Congress would make in independent India.

Prasad sent his draft report to the Congress Working Committee, which then produced its own report on the basis of Prasad's findings during the Tripuri session in early December 1938.[103] An article published in the *Times of India* suggested that as the 'during the year-long controversy certain broad issues of the constitution, law, moral propriety, and expediency which bore on inter-provincial relationships were raised', the matter was 'raised to the level of all-India importance.'[104] This demonstrates how pressing these issues were to the Congress as they were essentially a national government in waiting. In a letter written to Prasad in December 1938, J.B. Kripalani stated that the Working Committee largely adopted Prasad's conclusions in their own report but recommended a few changes. The main change had to do with the issue of private industry in the province. Kripalani indicated that the 'Committee felt it would be better for a government not to suggest to firms and factories to make a specific kind of appointment' as this 'would amount to considerable pressure and injustices might

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[99] *Ibid.*
He put forth a variety of criteria stating the 'length of residence, possession of house and other property and other relevant matters should be taken into consideration and conclusion arrived at on the totality of the evidence available. In my opinion ten years' continuous residence should prima facie be regarded as evidence of domicile.'
[100] *Ibid.,* 18 in file, 10 in doc.
[101] *Ibid.*
[102] Bajpai, *Debating Difference*, p. 57.
[103] 'Treatment of Bengalis in Bihar: "No Discrimination"', *Times of India*, 13 December 1938, 9.
[104] *Ibid.*

result'.[105] Prasad strongly contested this, stating that as this was a policy put in place by other states, Bihar also had the right to aid their 'provincials' in their search of jobs. He gave examples of other provinces, such as Orissa and the Central Provinces, which did have specific rules regarding the hiring practices of private firms and factories. Prasad claimed it would not be untoward if the Government of Bihar also put forth their preference for 'provincials' rather than people who were not 'native' to the province.[106] He emphasised that in several industries in Bihar, in particular the 'coalmines' and 'sugar mills' and the 'mica and steel' industries, there were 'large numbers' of provincials 'employed in the lowest paid grades as unskilled labourers…but hardly any native of the province in the higher paid grades'. He stated that this 'naturally creates discontent'. Nonetheless, due to his desire to ensure there was no 'further delay', he agreed to make that minor change.[107]

The party discussed the final report at the Congress Working Committee session in Bardoli on the 13th of January 1939. The bulk of Prasad's recommendations were included in the final report. While, as per the suggestion of the Working Committee, the report indicated that the Government of Bihar should not make suggestions to private companies, Prasad still reiterated his point that there was 'nothing wrong in Government suggesting to firms and factories in the province to give employment to the provincials'.[108] Nonetheless, due to the possibility of firms misinterpreting this guidance and dismissing domiciled Bengalis (regarded as provincials according to the Government of Bihar), Prasad conceded that the government should avoid giving guidance.[109] Nevertheless, the rest of the report remained largely unchanged from Prasad's initial draft. This meant a recommendation that domicile certificates be abolished as it was acknowledged that the process to gain one was cumbersome, which was one of the main demands made by P. R. Das. However, the report also emphasised the fact that Bengalis in Bihar were a distinct community, which meant in order to achieve equal representation for all communities in Bihar it was acceptable for the government to reduce the number of appointments given to them.

The report produced mixed reactions from various organisations and figures across Bihar and Bengal. The Bengal PCC praised Das for his defence of the 'rights' of 'Bengalis in

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[105] 'From J.B. Kripalani to Rajendra Prasad', 11 December 1938, in *Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence, Vol 2*, 172.
[106] 'From Rajendra Prasad to J.B. Kripalani,' 31 December 1938, *Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence, Vol 2*, 179.
[107] *Ibid.*
[108] 'The Position of Bengalis in Bihar: Babu Rajendra Prasad's Conclusions', *Times of India*, 18 January 1939, 13.
[109] *Ibid.*

Bihar' against 'narrow provincialism. [110] While to some extent accepting the conclusions of the report, the resolutions passed at the meeting largely focused on the damage that would be done to 'national unity' if the Bihar Congress did not 'protect the rights' of Bengalis in Bihar and requested the Congress in that province to look at the 'issues of the Bengali population with sympathy'.[111] Members of the Bengal PCC had, however, already begun raising and supporting resolutions regarding the reorganisation of provinces along linguistic lines. Therefore, reiterating claims of mistreatment of Bengalis in Bihar would strengthen their case with regard to the redistribution of territories.

In contrast to the response from Bengali organisations in Bengal, Bengalis in Bihar broadly expressed satisfaction with the report, and even the border districts appeared to accept its conclusions. P.R. Das released a statement that described the conclusions drawn by the report as 'entirely satisfactory' and added that he had 'every reason to think…the Bengali-Bihari controversy will be a thing of the past'.[112] The Bengali Association later officially ratified his position by passing resolutions demanding its immediate implementation during a meeting of their Executive Committee in October 1939.[113] The Congress swept elections for the Manbhum District Board held in March 1939 and received the strong support of *Mukti*, the leading Bengali journal published in Purulia, which stated that the Congress Committee in Manbhum was made up of people from the area and would, therefore, be good representatives.[114] This indicates that large portions of the Bengali population in Bihar accepted the report's conclusions, namely that despite being a distinct community within Bihar, Bengalis in the province were undoubtedly 'Bihari'.

However, the Government of Bihar dragged their feet on actually implementing the recommendations of the report. Jimutbahan Sen, the sole Bengali member of the cabinet, was particularly unhappy with the government. In a letter to Rajendra Prasad written on the 9th of May 1939, Sen claimed that due to the anti-Bengali feeling within the government, he was being side-lined and forced into a 'life of inaction'. [115] He urged Prasad to encourage the Congress Ministry to quickly implement the policies laid out in the report, suggesting that despite their recent success in the election of the Congress in the Manbhum municipal

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[110] '*Bangali-Bihari somasyar somadhane Congress jatiyatabadi mol'*, *Jugantar*, 17th Jan 1939, 7 (translated from Bengali).
[111] *Ibid.* (translated from Bengali).
[112] 'Entirely Satisfactory: Mr P.R. Das's Statement', *The Searchlight*, 15 January 1939, 5.
[113] 'A report of the proceedings of a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Bengali Association, Bihar', *The Behar Herald*, 10 October 1939, 14.
[114] '*Jila-Board Nirbaachon*' *Mukti*, 21 February 1939, 4 (translated from Bengali).
[115] 'From Jimutbahan Sen to Rajendra Prasad,' 9 May 1939,' in *Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Selected Documents, Vol. 3*, 63.

elections, it would be 'reduced to a false position if the Congress Government' did 'not give effect to the award given by the Congress on the Bengali-Bihari issue'. He also indicated that he believed it was individual Bengali-Biharis within the Congress organisation and their vigorous campaigning that had led to Congress victories, rather than Congress policies themselves being particularly popular amongst Bengalis in Bihar.[116] This suggested that despite Prasad's report being welcomed by sections of the Bengali population in Bihar, some Bengali-Biharis were still unhappy with the situation in Bihar.

Additionally, there were suggestions that the Government of Bihar was making attempts to replace Bengali with Hindi in the Manbhum Sadr. *Mukti*, although it was widely regarded as a Congress-supporting journal, published several letters to the editor which strongly objected to the actions of a newly appointed Subdivisional Officer who the writers claimed was making 'a futile attempt to oust the Bengali language indirectly by accepting the Hindi language as a compulsory mass language' in several meetings across the Manbhum district.[117] There were allegations raised that the Subdivisional Officer promised more funding to Hindi educational institutions and also suggested that it would be easier for students trained in Hindi at a primary school level to eventually gain jobs in services. While both the letter writers published in *Mukti* reiterated the importance of all Indians learning Hindustani as the Congress had designated it the lingua franca of the country, they nevertheless opposed any attempts to replace their 'mother tongue' of Bengali with Hindi at primary levels of education.[118] This story was picked up by *The Behar Herald*, which added its objections to those of the letter writers.[119] *The Behar Herald's* correspondent in Purulia, like the letter writers in *Mukti*, stated the importance of attempts to 'popularise Hindi among members of any community' but suggested that 'the sort of propaganda' being carried out in Manbhum such as bribing people with government jobs so they would learn the language would not 'ever serve Hindi well'.[120] He also alleged that these meetings were 'semi-officially inspired', implying that this was one of the aims of the Government of Bihar.[121]

Therefore, although several sections of Bengalis across the province had expressed their approval of the conclusions of Prasad's report, there were still significant tensions within the province. These are largely related to the fact that the Congress Ministry appeared unwilling to implement the recommendations made by the report. The allegations of 'semi-

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[116] *Ibid.*
[117] '*Prerito Potro'*, *Mukti*, 6 November 1939, 16 (translated from Bengali).
[118] Ibid., 15-17 (translated from Bengali).
[119] 'Notes and Comments: Hindi Propaganda in Manbhum', *The Behar Herald*, 7 November 1939, 5.
[120] 'Warning from Mr X', *The Behar Herald*, 7 November 1939, 14.
[121] *Ibid.*

official' attempts to replace Bengali with Hindi in the Bengali speaking areas of Bihar further alienated the Bengali population of the province, regardless of where they were based. This hostility was also exacerbated by the increasing consolidation of Adivasi organisations in the Chhotanagpur Plateau and their demand for the creation of a new province of Jharkhand. As Bengalis and Adivasis were viewed as being somewhat sympathetic to each other's various causes, some figures in the Congress viewed Bengalis with increased suspicion. The next section will analyse the complex, overlapping politics of Bengalis, Adivasis, and the Bihar Congress organisation.

Development of alliances between Bengalis and Adivasis in Bihar

This section discusses the development of strategic alliances between Bengalis and Adivasis in Bihar with both communities using narratives of the other to implicitly demand rights that they believed were due to their own community. This allowed representatives of both communities to oppose Congress positions and demonstrate that there was a wide section of society not well served by the Congress. Through 1938, Adivasi organisations in the province, such as the Chhotanagpur Unnati Samaj, the Catholic Sabha, and the Kisan Sabha, worked towards uniting under a common banner to demand an improvement in the condition of Adivasis which they claimed would be achieved by the formation of a separate province of Jharkhand.[122] Since both groups considered they were being discriminated against by the Government of Bihar, Bengali and Adivasi organisations often expressed support for each other's demands. Nevertheless, in an illustration of the paternalistic attitude of many senior upper-caste Hindi Bihari politicians towards Adivasis, they viewed the movement as having been encouraged and led by Bengalis rather than Adivasis themselves. Adivasi and Bengali leaders did often find it pragmatic to express support for each other's causes with claims of kinship based on the fact that both these groups were not adequately represented (or well treated) by mainstream, upper-caste, Hindi-speaking politicians. Still, the impetus of the movement was from Adivasis themselves and not from Bengalis, who were far more concerned with issues around domicile certificates during this period.

Although the focus during 1938 was largely on the Bengali-Bihari issue, the elections of 1937 and the lack of success of Adivasi organisations encouraged Adivasi groups to consolidate under a single banner. On the 10th of January 1938, at a meeting in St. Albert's Seminary in Ranchi, a group of sixty delegates from the Chota Nagpur Unnati Samaj, the

[122] Vinita Damodaran, 'Environment, Ethnicity and History in Chotanagpur, India, 1850–1970', *Environment and History*, 3 (1993); Corbridge; Tillin.

Catholic Sabha, and the Kisan Sabha met to discuss how to 'form a common front of all the aborigines in Chota Nagpur'.[123] However, the difficulties of creating a single representative body for the diverse population of Chhotanagpur was a significant issue. Disputes occurred between Adivasis from various Christian denominations and between Christian and non-Christian Adivasis. As C. Vanhoutte, a Catholic missionary in Chhotanagpur, suggested in his report on the attempts of Adivasi organisations to form a single front, the best way to do so was strongly contested.[124] Different organisations put forth various suggestions, including that a new organisation be formed while the individual groups continued to serve the needs of their members; the organisations amalgamate with the Unnati Samaj, which technically allowed all Adivasis to join although Lutherans dominated the organisation; or the organisations form a federation which would then take a common stand with regards to interactions within the political sphere. By May 1938, the three organisations decided that amalgamation was the best option and formed the Adivasi Mahasabha. The primary demand from this organisation was the creation of a separate province of Jharkhand out of the regions of Bihar where Adivasis tended to predominate (primarily Chhotanagpur, Kolhan, Palamau, and the Santhal Parganas).[125]

These demands and the consolidation of Adivasi organisations did not go unnoticed by the Congress Ministry and senior political figures in Bihar. On the 24th of June 1938, Sachchidananda Sinha asked the Ministry to clarify its position on the demands made by the Mahasabha in the Legislative Assembly. The Congress Ministry, represented by K.B. Sahay, firmly dismissed the demand and claimed that there was no basis upon which the demand was valid. Sahay stated that although Chhotanagpur had 'vast potentialities', it was currently 'educationally and industrially undeveloped' and, therefore, could not financially sustain itself.[126] He added that this lack of funds meant that it also could not develop its own administrative structures, suggesting that 'as a part of the old established and old organised administration of Bihar this area is more likely to advance educationally and industrially than if formed into a separate province.'[127] Sahay also presented historical narratives linking Bihar and Chhotanagpur, stating 'in the time of Emperor Akbar Kokrah or Jharkhand, as Chota Nagpur was then called, formed a part of the Bihar Subah, and when in 1765 the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa was granted by Shah Alam to the East India Company, Chota

[123] C. Vanhoutte, 'The Chota Nagpur Common Front', *Our Field*, 14th Year, No. 5 (1938), 155.
[124] *Ibid.*
[125] Damodaran, 'Environment, Ethnicity and History in Chotanagpur, India, 1850–1970'.
[126] 'Constitution of a Separate Province of Chota Nagpur', 24 June 1938, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1938* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/180928, (Accessed on 20 March 2022).
[127] *Ibid*.

Nagpur came under British influence as an integral part of Bihar.'[128] These narratives presented the demand for Jharkhand as fundamentally illegitimate as it was not only invalid for practical reasons of administration and economic viability but also because, historically these regions had always been a part of Bihar.

The Adivasi Mahasabha contested this and continued to demand separation on the basis that Biharis had historically oppressed Adivasis. This demand often received support from Bengali figures, organisations, and publications in Bihar. P.R. Das, when discussing the Bengali-Bihar issue with Kripalani, asserted that this claim that Chhotanagpur had historically always been a part of Bihar was erroneous, stating that apart from Manbhum, no part of Chhotanagpur had been a part of either Bihar or Bengal before British rule as 'it never came under the control of the Moghul rulers.'[129] A letter to the editor written by Obed Minz from Raghunathpur regarding the formation of a separate province of Jharkhand was published in *The Behar Herald* on the 10th of September 1938. The letter reiterated the narrative presented by Das and suggested that apart from the rulers of Chhotanagpur paying tribute during Jahangir's reign, they ruled 'without any interference' and, therefore, this area 'in no sense' could 'be called historically a part of Bihar'.[130] He referred to Das' views on the history of Chhotanagpur, stating, 'P.R. Das has thoroughly exploded the opposition theory of Chota Nagpur [sic] ever being a part of the Bihar Suba.'[131] Minz, the letter writer, also indicated that he believed that 'racially and culturally' the residents of Chhotanagpur had 'absolutely no affinity with the Biharis of Bihar proper'.[132] When discussing the matter of administrative and economic difficulties that a new province could face, Minz suggested that financial issues could not be the basis upon which this decision was made, stating 'we might pertinently ask how Bihar and Orissa was separated from Bengal' if this was the case.[133] While the letter writer himself was not Bengali, the fact that the paper that catered to Bengalis was willing to publish his letter, as well as the fact that it referred to Das, whose arguments had mainly been made to support his own claim that domicile certificates were unnecessary for Bengalis settled in those areas, demonstrates how both communities used narratives propagated by the other to bolster their own claims.

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[128] *Ibid.*
[129] 'From P.R. Das to J. B Kripalani, General Secretary of the Indian National Congress', 4 April 1938, 21 in file, 2 in doc.
[130] 'Correspondence: Chhotanagpur as a Province', *The Behar Herald*, 20 September 1938, 7.
[131] *Ibid.*
[132] *Ibid.*
[133] *Ibid.*

Bengalis and Adivasis had, on occasion, made similar claims with regard to the attempt of administrators to impose Hindi on non-Hindi-speaking regions, with representatives of both groups suggesting this would have a negative impact on the inhabitants of those areas. On the 2nd of July 1938, a resolution was passed in the Santhal Pargana District Committee meeting recommending to the government that Hindi be made the language of instruction in all primary schools in Santhal and Paharia regions. In a letter to the Secretary of the Governor of Bihar, Kesav Hazari, a member of the Santhal Pargana District Committee and its Education Sub-Committee, expressed his opposition to this resolution on the basis that it negatively impacted Adivasi education in the Santhal Parganas.[134] In an impassioned plea to the Governor of Bihar, he forcefully objected to the change, stating that the previous attempts to replace Bengali with Hindi in 1914 had resulted in the 'manifest setback of aboriginal education' and the language of education had had to be changed back to Bengali in 1931 as it was deemed untenable to continue with Hindi.[135] This, he claimed, was due to the fact that Hindi was a 'foreign tongue' while Bengali was 'their second mother tongue', which meant that the 'unfortunate Santhal children of Bengali areas who attended school from 1921 to 1930 had to do uphill work in receiving their education in a foreign tongue.'[136] This, in turn, led to 'less and less Santhal parents willing to send their children to school' as learning Hindi was of little purpose in a region that did not speak it.[137] He also begged that the education of 'innocent Santhals' should not be made an issue in the 'raging Bengali-Bihari scramble'.[138] Therefore, despite not necessarily identifying as a part of the same community, the Bengali language remained important to some sections of the Adivasi community. This common goal of ensuring Bengali was not replaced by Hindi further encouraged members of both communities to view the demands of the other with sympathy.

This period was important in Adivasi politics as Jaipal Singh, the Munda leader, emerged as a significant force in Adivasi politics in the late 1930s. Despite technically being an Anglican, Singh was viewed as a widely acceptable and relatively non-controversial figure within the Adivasi community. Educated at Oxford, his credentials were burnished by his captaincy of the Indian hockey team in the 1928 Olympics (although he did not play with the victorious Indian team in the final, having gotten into a dispute with the English manager).

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[134] 'From Kesav Hazari to the Secretary of the Governor of Bihar,' 17 October 1938', in *Dr Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence,* 202.
[135] *Ibid.*
[136] *Ibid.,* 206.
[137] *Ibid.*
[138] *Ibid.,* 205.

Upon his return in late 1938, he wrote to Rajendra Prasad, expressing his disappointment at the 'hopeless condition of the Chhotanagpuris', stating that 'he could no longer remain outside the crying distress of my people'.[139] He immediately involved himself in the Adivasi Mahasabha and was elected president during the session held in January.[140]

He also strongly objected to the rhetoric used by several politicians and publications in Bihar when discussing the Bengali-Bihari issue, claiming that this had 'exposed how the Biharis do not think of the people of Chhotanagpur, the Santhal Parganas and non-Biharis who have settled permanently in the Province of Bihar as Biharis'.[141] He asked, 'If the Bengalis who are much more advanced can be treated so shamelessly and heartlessly, have the poor and backward Adibasis anything to hope from a Bihari Ministry which has been determined as its acts show to ignore everybody else at the expense of Congress principles and help only the Biharis?'[142] He claimed it 'was truer to say the Ministry is Bihari rather than Bihar'.[143] This rhetoric not only demonstrates the sympathy expressed by Adivasi figures towards issues raised by Bengali-Biharis but also how some Adivasi figures used these issues to further their own aims of forming a separate state. While Bengalis in Bihar rarely expressed their support for the reorganisation of provinces (and, in fact, often opposed it), organisations like the Adivasi Mahasabha that did want separation found narratives of Bengali mistreatment in Bihar useful when arguing their case.

However, senior Congress Bihari figures used this seeming closeness between Bengalis and Adivasis to delegitimise the arguments made by Adivasi organisations regarding the creation of a separate state of Jharkhand. As Stewart Corbridge has established, political leaders and administrators had an inherently paternalistic attitude towards Adivasis, and they often suggested that Adivasis were likely to be exploited by communities 'better versed in the law or the use of money'.[144] In Bihar, which heavily relied on the natural resources found in these border regions, Adivasi exploitation by the more 'developed' Bengalis was, therefore, a narrative perpetuated by the Bihar government and Bihari Congress politicians. In a letter to the Lord Bishop of Calcutta and Metropolitan India, Burma and Ceylon, Foss Wescott, in early February 1939, Rajendra Prasad expressed his

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[139] 'From Jaipal Singh to Rajendra Prasad', 22 December 1938, in in *Dr Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence, Vol. 2,* 177.
[140] Rana.
[141] 'From Jaipal Singh to Rajendra Prasad,' 1 February 1939', in *Dr Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Select Documents, Volume 3*, ed. Valmiki Choudhury (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1984), 9.
[142] *Ibid*.
[143] *Ibid.*
[144] Stewart Corbridge, 'The Continuing Struggle for India's Jharkhand: Democracy, Decentralisation and the Politics of Names and Numbers', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 40 (2002), 61.

annoyance at the rumblings of discontent in Chhotanagpur, stating 'there is a concerted, it appears, under the leadership of some of our Bengali friends to agitate for the separation of Chhotanagpur from Bihar.'[145] Westcott's past employment as the Bishop of Chhotanagpur in 1905 (officially called Chota Nagpore at the time) made him concerned with the activities in the province, and Prasad found it necessary to reassure him that the Adivasi movements were not significant and not driven by Adivasis themselves. If it was Bengalis and not Adivasis themselves who were encouraging separatism, it was easier to dismiss these movements as a blatant power grab by Bengalis, unhappy with their decreasing importance in the state.

Jimutbahan Sen, the sole Bengali member of the provincial cabinet, immediately rebutted these claims of Bengali leadership of Adivasi movements. He stated that 'the government is being misled to think the originators of the movement are the Christian missionaries and the Bengalis' when in truth 'they joined or rather made common cause for the separation of Chhotanagpur in the already existing movement'.[146] He suggested that the 'unsympathetic attitude of the Congress Government towards the aborigines' had resulted in the agitations for the separation of Bihar. He indicated that this lack of sympathy was exemplified by the opposition to a 'degree college at Ranchi' by the 'Congress Party in the Legislature'.[147] Implicit in these criticisms was the view that the Congress Ministry in Bihar had been unsuccessful at reconciling the demands of those they considered true Biharis and those like Bengalis and Adivasis who were not considered Biharis in the same sense. The growing alignment between Bengalis and Adivasis in Bihar was exemplified by the claims made by the Catholic missionary C. Vanhoutte with regard to a meeting of the Adivasi Mahasabha in Ranchi in April 1939. He suggested that the eloquence of Adivasi leaders during this meeting and the sheer numbers that arrived in the city to support the Mahasabha had 'elicited the sympathy of many Hindus, especially Bengalis' and that it had 'been heard said by several of them that these aborigines are quite within their right to express their grievances and to fight for the independence of their country.'[148]

These claims of Bengali support appeared justified, given the opinions presented in *The Behar Herald* regarding Adivasis and Chhotanagpur. In 1939, the newspaper started publishing a column called the 'Problem of Chota-Nagpur: Facts Against Fibs', which often expressed strong support for the formation of a separate province of Jharkhand and also

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[145] 'To the Lord Bishop of Calcutta and Metropolitan India, Burma and Ceylon (Calcutta) from Rajendra Prasad, 11 February 1939', *Dr Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence, Vol. 3*, 24.
[146] 'From Jimutbahan Sen to Rajendra Prasad,' 9 May 1939, *Dr Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence, Vol. 3,* 63.
[147] *Ibid*.
[148] C. Vanhoutte, 'Adibasi Sabha and the Chota Nagpur Separation League', *Our Field*, 15th Year, No. 3 (1939), 63.

emphasised the connections between Bengalis and the different groups of Adivasis. In an article on the Santhals, the author (identified only as a Chotanagpuri) claimed that due to long histories of rule from Bengal, the Santhals were Bengali in the same way 'Bhils' were 'Guzerati', 'Chuhras' were 'Punjabi', and the 'Gonds and Viduras' were 'people of the Central Provinces'.[149] In the same vein, the author of the column claimed that several other Adivasi communities, including 'Bhumij', 'Kudmis' (Kurmis), 'Tanties', and several others, had 'no ethnical and linguistic relations with the people of Bihar' and were more closely related in these senses to Bengalis.[150] Nevertheless, despite the emphasis on these claims of closeness between Bengalis and Adivasis, the commentator expressed his support for the 'legitimate demands of the people of Chota Nagpur' rather than demanding that these regions be amalgamated with Bengal. The writer suggested that the Congress Ministry and S.K. Sinha, in particular, had an imperialist attitude towards Chhotanagpur, stating that 'It is apparent that he tries to impress the idea that Biharees are the natural guardians of the Chota-Nagpuris and it is their benign duty to govern over and civilise the Chota-Nagpuris.'[151] The author continually reiterated that the land belonged to 'aborigines' who were not being adequately represented by the Congress Ministry and, therefore deserved to have a separate province.[152]

The interactions between Adivasi and Bengali figures, organisations, and publications demonstrate the complex relationship that developed in the late 1930s between these communities. While their aims were not necessarily aligned, with Bengalis demanding to be treated as 'true' Biharis who did not have to prove their domicile and Adivasis calling for the creation of a separate Adivasi province, both groups found it useful to express sympathy for each other's claims in part to bolster their own. The support for the other group's demands also allowed the airing of grievances without appearing to only have narrow, 'provincial' concerns. Therefore, this alignment was partly due to the fact that there were some issues that concerned both groups, such as the language of education, but also due to the fact these two communities found it beneficial to their own causes to refer to the grievances of the other community to emphasise the lack of good governance on the part of the government of Bihar.

Conclusion

[149] 'The Problem of Chota-Nagpur: The Santhals', *The Behar Herald*, 3 October 1939, 13.
[150] 'The Problem of Chota-Nagpur: The Bhumij Caste', *The Behar Herald*, 31 October 1939, 16.
[151] 'The Problem of Chota-Nagpur: Chota-Nagpur with the Santhal Parganas- whether a land of aborigines' *The Behar Herald*, 7 November 1939, 9.
[152] *Ibid*.

Despite approving of the conclusions of Prasad's report, Bengalis in the province remained dissatisfied at the lack of progress made by the Congress administration in the implementation of the recommendations of the report. However, the advent of the war transformed this situation, to a certain extent. The problems around the 'educated unemployed', a group that Bengalis in various provinces did, on occasion, find themselves in, were alleviated due to the rapid expansion of the Indian Civil Service to deal with the pressures of the war.[153] Additionally, due to the outbreak of the war and the Quit India Movement, these issues were largely shelved until 1945, when it became increasingly clear that independence (and, therefore, a political reordering) was imminent.

Indian politics elsewhere was anything but settled and these larger changes would have a profound impact on the way Bengalis in Bihar enacted politics. The fragmentation of Bengali-Bihari politics in the post-war era can be directly linked to the transformations occurring in the debates around minority rights and separatism. In March 1940 the Muslim League passed the Lahore Resolution during its general session. Scholars of Indian history (and some contemporary observers) have regarded this as the beginning of the demand for a separate territorial homeland for South Asian Muslims. Despite the vagueness of the demand for this separate state, narratives of Muslims harbouring separatist tendencies began to emerge during this period. Therefore, mainstream Congress politicians began to view demands based on rights due to minorities as inherently suspicious due to the close association of Muslim politics with 'minority' politics. This suspicion encouraged Bengali-Biharis, especially those in non-Bengali-speaking regions of the state, to make their demands through appeals to Indian unity rather than focus on the distinctiveness of their community.

In 1942, the Congress launched the Quit India Movement, which resulted in the mass arrests of Congress leaders, including Nehru and Gandhi. The war years in Bihar were marked by significant participation in the Quit India Movement. Although it is widely recognised that the arrests of senior Congress figures reduced its effectiveness, as Vinita Damodaran states, in Bihar, 'the arrests meant to pre-empt a struggle, triggered off a mass movement of such dimensions that, for a few weeks it completely destroyed the authority of the colonial state in large parts of Bihar'. Despite the attempts at repression, the movement continued into 1944, albeit as a disparate underground movement' that often descended 'into violence.'[154] The instability in Bihar, coupled with the repression meted out by the colonial

[153] Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: India (1939-45)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 61 (2000).
[154] Vinita Damodaran, *Broken Promises: Popular Protest Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar (1935-1946)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 200.

state meant that there was little opportunity for Bengalis to voice any issues they had with governance and administration in the province during the war years.

After the end of the war, it became evident that India would gain independence sooner rather than later. The colonial government released Congress leaders, and negotiations began. Given the Congress' overwhelming popularity and their success in the 1936-37 elections, Indians and British alike believed it was highly likely that they would take the reins of power after the departure of the colonial power. However, a resurgent Muslim League under Mohammad Ali Jinnah had begun making demands for a separate homeland for South Asian Muslims. British support of the League during the war years to lend credence to their claims that Indians were supportive of the British during the war led to Jinnah becoming increasingly influential in Muslim politics across the subcontinent. The exact reasoning behind Jinnah's demands for Pakistan have been debated, with some historians suggesting that he used this demand as a bargaining chip for greater Muslim autonomy within a larger Indian state.[155] Nevertheless, after the Muslim League won overwhelming victories in the 1946 elections in Muslim constituencies across the country on the basis of the demand for Pakistan, the creation of a separate state became increasingly likely. Jinnah's manoeuvres were viewed with suspicion by Congress leadership, who continually railed against his tactics, claiming they encouraged 'fissiparous' tendencies in India which could potentially lead to the dissolution of the country.

Despite this brief period during which tensions between Bengalis in Bihar and their Hindi and Urdu-speaking counterparts were somewhat calmed, the lack of actual resolution and the reconfiguration of minority politics more broadly meant that these issues would re-emerge in the post-colonial era, albeit in different forms. These issues became more evident as the expectation of linguistic realignment also accompanied independence. Narratives developed during this era were often deployed during the early independent era, although not necessarily for the same aims. These transformations will be explored in the next three chapters.

[155] Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Chapter 4: A Period of Transition: Bengali-Bihar navigation of early claims regarding language in Eastern India (1945-1949)

Introduction

The previous chapter examined how Bengalis in Bihar navigated the first period of provincial governance under the Congress. It demonstrated the ways in which claims were made by this group in order to appeal to the party. It discussed the alignments created between Adivasi and Bengali groups, who used narratives of oppression developed by the other community to emphasise the inadequacies of the Government of Bihar. This chapter examines the aftermath of the war, independence, and partition and demonstrates that it was a period of transition where Bengali-Bihari politics fragmented. This was a change from the pre-independence period when Bengali organisations and figures across the province had made similar demands regarding removing domicile certificates and funding Bengali educational institutions. This chapter will explore this fragmentation. The first section demonstrates the variety of Bengali political positions held in the post-war, pre-independence period. The second discusses the impact demands for the reorganisation of states had on Bengali politics in Bihar, particularly Bengali attitudes toward the formation of the state of Jharkhand and West Bengal's demands for Bihari territory. The third section deals with the Bengali-Bihari response to debates around the official language of both the state and the nation.

Across these sections, the chapter makes three contributions to the historiography. Firstly, it argues that partition transformed Bengali-Bihari politics as location became increasingly crucial to the practice of these politics. As Ayesha Jalal and David Gilmartin indicate, the movement for Pakistan was 'non-territorially defined'.[1] However, the experience of partition and the bloodshed and brutality it encouraged made these groups more insecure. This is partly why this period witnessed the beginnings of the divergence in the way in which Bengalis enacted politics on the border in districts and subdivisions where Bengali was the predominant language spoken on the one hand, and Bengalis from districts where they were a 'minority', on the other hand.

[1] Ayesha Jalal, 'Exploding Communalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia', in *Nationalism, Democracy, and Development : State and Politics in India*, ed. by Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Gilmartin, 'Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 57.4 (1998).

Bengalis in border areas became increasingly alienated from Congress leadership in the state, and they were willing to castigate the Congress for what they viewed as discriminatory and oppressive policies. During partition, millions of people crossed borders in order to avoid the communal violence. A significant influx of refugees particularly impacted West Bengal, and the state government struggled to resettle them. Here, ideas of linguistic reorganisation that had emerged in the early part of the twentieth century came to the fore, as West Bengal (as the part of Bengal that remained in India was called) demanded the central government redistribute territory along linguistic lines as a matter of urgency. This was not just because the Congress had continually promised to do so over the last few decades, but also due to the fact that West Bengal required more territory for the resettlement of refugees. However, the Indian government and senior Congress members, fearful of encouraging further separatism, suggested that it was not the right time to consider a redrawing of borders within India. This impacted Bengali-Biharis settled on the border of Bihar and Bengal as the Government of Bihar, wary they would have to cede territory to Bengal, began to encourage Hindi education in regions that various government officials and colonial surveyors had previously marked as predominantly Bengali-speaking. Members of the Government of Bihar and politicians supportive of the government deployed narratives of Bengali colonialism that elite Hindi and Urdu speakers had put forth during Rajendra Prasad's investigation to justify these policies. Bengalis in these areas, therefore, became increasingly alienated from the Congress administration and, given the traumas associated with partition, obliquely began referring to the dangers of 'mistreating' minorities.

Secondly, this chapter argues that partition made 'minorities', even those who were not religious minorities, more insecure and, therefore, more likely to throw their support behind 'mainstream' priorities. Scholars such as Taylor Sherman have demonstrated these transformations within religious populations. She argues that Muslims involved in politics in Hyderabad, for instance, moved away from any organisation that could be regarded as 'communal' and aligned their priorities with the Congress government that was in power in order to ensure their security in the province.[2] Similarly, as Mushirul Hasan states in his discussion of Muslim politics after partition, 'Political mobilisation along communitarian lines carried serious risks because it hardened communal attitudes among majority segments and deepened the sense of insecurity amongst the minorities'. He states this is likely the

[2] Sherman.

reason for the overwhelming success of Congress Muslim candidates in elections, while explicitly Muslim parties failed to make breakthroughs.[3]

This chapter will contribute to the scholarship on minority political engagement in postcolonial India and demonstrate that partition impacted minority politics regardless of what made that community a minority. It argues that partition fundamentally transformed the pattern of politics of most minority communities as the brutality and bloodshed encouraged minority communities to align themselves with those in positions of power to ensure their security (be it access to jobs, education, and political representation). The likelihood of the Congress' ascent to power meant that Bengali-Bihari figures and publications from non-border regions began to move away from overt criticism of the Congress and towards conditional support. P.R. Das, who had been willing to criticise the Congress during the colonial era, threw his support behind the party, castigating Bengali organisations and publications in the province that did not support them. While there was not yet a definitive split between Bengali-Biharis settled in areas that bordered Bengal in Bihar (primarily Manbhum) and Bengalis settled in other parts of Bihar during the early years of independence, specific patterns did begin to emerge. Bengali MLAs from non-border regions, while still supporting the demands of Bengalis from the border as they had in previous years, began to express support for some priorities of the Government of Bihar, such as the elevation of Hindi to the national language.

As independence in August 1947 was accompanied by a brutal bloodletting that left millions displaced and dead, 'minority' politics became associated not just with separatism but with widespread destruction. Therefore, to achieve the aim of abolishing domicile certificates in the province, the spokesman for Bengalis in the province, P.R. Das, essentially attempted to appeal to the ostensible commitments the Congress had to the unity of all Indians and anti-provincialism. As Rochana Bajpai establishes, minority identities were consolidated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with British practices of enumeration strongly influencing this solidification of identity. She demonstrates how constitution-making in the postcolonial era in India was primarily marked by a 'retrenchment' with regard to minority group rights.[4] While the constitution did continue to ostensibly protect the right of linguistic minorities to 'conserve' their 'language, script, and

[3] Mushirul Hasan, 'Adjustment and Accommodation: Indian Muslims after Partition', *Social Scientist*, 18.8 (1990), p. 58.
[4] Rochana Bajpai, *Debating Difference: Group Rights and Liberal Democracy in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 50.

culture', the experiences of partition, and consequently, the negative association with minority demands, led to difficulties in making claims based on minority rights.[5] Therefore, Bengalis in Bihar, especially those situated in non-border regions, began to slowly distance themselves from the term.

Thirdly, this chapter explores the impact of debates around the national language on the Bengali-Bihari practice of politics. The constituent assembly debates covered the matter of the national language of India, which again was hotly contested, as representatives from non-Hindi-states raised objections to the idea that Hindi would entirely replace English for official Indian government business. Some organisations, particularly those from West Bengal, suggested that Hindi did not have a rich enough history or literature to be the national language. They claimed that Bengali should be the national language as it was more developed. Senior Congress politicians viewed this as a somewhat ridiculous suggestion and developed narratives of Bengali obduracy. Bengalis in Bihar found they had a far more treacherous terrain to navigate. Unable to make claims on the basis of being minorities, viewed with increased suspicion in Bihar due to West Bengal's demands on Bihari territory, and unable to appeal to national politicians who viewed Bengalis as increasingly inclined to 'provincialism' in the five years after the war Bengalis in Bihar had to walk something of a tightrope in order to ensure their rights in the state, including their right to work remained protected.

Bengali-Bihari navigation of post-war politics (1945-1947)

This section discusses the uneasy relationship between Bengali-Bihari organisations, publications, and figures and the Congress in the immediate aftermath of the war. Bengali politics became increasingly fragmented as some Bengali publications strongly criticised the Congress, while other Bengali figures urged their fellow Bengalis to vote for the Congress and attempt to further their aims from within. During this period, unlike the pre-war era, when there was broad opposition to domicile certificates and a willingness to condemn the Congress almost across the board, some Bengali-Bihari organisations and figures began to chastise other parts of their community for being too 'anti-Congress'. This section will analyse the rhetoric used by the newspaper *The Behar Herald* towards Muslims, the Congress' seeming 'abandonment' of Bengalis in Bengal proper, Congress campaigning practices, and finally, the lack of action taken on the matter of domicile certificates. It

[5] *Ibid*., 58.

demonstrates the diversity within the practice of Bengali politics in Bihar in the post-war and pre-partition era.

Bengalis in Bihar were particularly critical of the Muslim League and Muslim politics in general. As discussed in previous chapters, in the 1930s, upper-caste Hindu Bengalis in Bengal and in Bihar began expressing increasingly anti-Muslim sentiment. This is evidenced by the language used by *The Behar Herald* in the 1940s. Firstly, an article in the paper expressed its support for the Hindu Mahasabha, stating, 'we would welcome the Hindu Mahasabha representation in all Legislatures, Central as well as Provincial' as this would provide a 'counter-weight' to the League. The article heavily implied that the Congress was an ineffective spokesman for Hindu interests, which was why it was necessary to elect members of the Hindu Mahasabha to legislatures.[6] Secondly, apart from expressing tentative support for the Hindu Mahasabha, some sections of the Bengali population criticised the League's record of government in Bengal. An article written in December 1945 stated, 'As for the Bengal League, it can definitely be said that its leaders are far below the standard even of the armchair politicians of the nineteenth century' and accused the party of standing candidates involved with 'hoarding' and 'profiteering' during the Bengal Famine.[7] Thirdly, another article written in the same month suggested that the Congress had left Bengal to the mercies of the 'Herbert-Nazimuddin regime' and given 'no aid' to Bengalis.[8]

Despite the significant tensions that arose during partition, which often culminated in bloody communal riots in the state, Muslims in Bihar retained marginally more political power than their counterparts in the United Provinces/Uttar Pradesh. As in other parts of the country with significant Muslim minority populations, the idea of Pakistan received considerable support. There was mass migration of Muslims from the province, with some moving to the western flank of Pakistan and almost a million moving to the eastern flank.[9] Nevertheless, the demand for a separate Muslim homeland did not particularly appeal to the leaders of the Independent Muslim Party (IMP).[10] Bihar was a Muslim minority province where the League performed particularly poorly in the Muslim electorates in 1937, failing to win any seats. Therefore, the Muslim League had a considerable mountain to climb to win over Muslims in the province. However, due to national political trends, in the 1946 elections, the Muslim League won almost all the Muslim seats in the province. S.K. Sinha

[6] 'Congress Vs. Mahasabha', *The Behar Herald*, 20 November 1945, 3.
[7] 'The Election Fever', *The Behar Herald*, 11 December 1945, 2.
[8] 'Calcutta in the Grip of the Congress', *The Behar Herald,* 18 December 1945, 1.
[9] Ennals.
[10] Sajjad, *Muslim Politics in Bihar: Changing Contours*.

attributed the League's victory in 1946 to the violent electioneering of the League and claimed even those not supportive of Pakistan were cowed into voting for the League.[11]

Mohammad Sajjad, on the other hand, suggests that the increasing communalisation of the Congress in the province (evidenced by the growing anti-Muslim rhetoric in *The Searchlight)* and the relative lack of funds available to anti-partition Muslims in the province as compared to the League, led to a Muslim League victory in the Muslim electorates.[12] Nevertheless, the bulk of Muslim leadership in the province did not support partition and, consequently, unlike large numbers of middle-class civil servants and other administrative officials, did not leave. This, as Sajjad suggests, allowed Muslims to remain a political force even after independence, as (unlike UP) migration did not decimate Muslim political structures in the province. Therefore, despite deepening tensions between the Hindu and Muslim populations in Bihar and outbreaks of violence, the campaign for Pakistan in Bihar did not fundamentally realign politics along religious lines. Unlike in other provinces such as the United Provinces and Bengal, where Muslim leadership was viewed with suspicion by the Congress, in Bihar, the Congress was more willing to negotiate with erstwhile members of the IMP in the postcolonial period and welcome them into the Congress party. Ensuring Muslims in Bihar felt 'Bihari' was crucial to the Congress leadership as some regions that bordered Bengal housed large populations of Muslims. As members of the West Bengal Congress had long made claim to these border regions, the Congress leadership in the province believed it was necessary for these Muslims to identify with Bihar so territories would not be transferred. The fact that Congress leaders viewed it as essential to identify Muslims in Bihari as explicitly Bihari meant that the anti-Muslim sentiment expressed by Bengalis in the province alienated the upper-caste Hindus of the Congress as well.

The lack of uniformity in Bengali-Bihari political positions concerning the Congress is evident in the articles in *The Behar Herald*. Some Bengali individuals and organisations were seemingly overtly 'anti-Congress', while others cautioned against alienating the Congress. The editors of the paper appeared to be on the side that was generally more critical of the Congress. An article published in October 1945 in the paper alleged that the Congress, while preaching non-violence were encouraging attacks on their political opponents from its followers. The article stated that the 'non-violence of the Congress' was 'only against the powerful and mighty', while used 'lathis' against the 'Communists, Radical Democrats,

[11] *Ibid*., 227.
[12] *Ibid*.

Hindu Mahasabhaites, and Ambedkarites' who were 'numerically insignificant'.[13] A letter from a correspondent, Amulya Ranjan Ghosh (published quite unusually on the front page of the paper although the author was seemingly an ordinary inhabitant of the province), criticised the previous Congress administration in the province, stating 'the domicile question, which for its solution was entrusted to the Bihar leader by the Indian National Congress, dragged on inconclusively and finally got buried, perhaps in the dovecotes of the Secretariat'.[14]

Some Bengalis moderated their criticism while still emphasising that the Congress had to earn the support of Bengalis by solving the issues faced by the community in the province. In a missive to the Bengali Association of Patna, a leading Bengali advocate in Patna, Basanta Chandra Ghose, stated, 'The Association should…formulate in clear terms its demands [to the Congress] on behalf of the Bengalees to live and earn their livelihood as free citizens in Bihar without Provincial prejudice and obtain for the Bengalee residents of Bihar the same treatment as is meted out to every other people in Bihar'. If the Congress did so, Ghose stated that the Association should 'offer' its 'wholehearted support' to the party in the upcoming election.[15] P.R. Das was much more explicit in his disapproval of the language around the Congress used by *The Behar Herald*, writing in a letter to the editor that while he had his 'own quarrels with the Bihar Congress party', these would 'not stand in' the 'way of giving wholehearted support to the Congress at the coming elections'.[16] These discussions of the Congress and its policies in Bihar in the Bengali community in the province indicated that Bengali politics in Bihar were complex and opinions were not homogenous. This was a significant change from the way in which Bengalis in Bihar practised politics before the mid-1940s. Despite the Bengali Association (and Das, in particular) ostensibly being the main representative of Bengalis in Bihar, even in Patna, where the organisation was based, there was no clear consensus around the strategies that should be employed to improve Bengali lives in the province. *The Behar Herald* published several articles to emphasise the deficiencies of the Congress. Ghose, the advocate, suggested conditional support for the Congress, while Das threw his whole weight behind the Congress, evidently of the belief that as the Congress would inevitably gain power in the province, Bengalis had little option to support the party.

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[13] 'The Philosophy of the Bully', *The Behar Herald*, 23 October 1945, 34.
[14] 'Sir Jagadish's Gift: A Correspondent's Letter', *The Behar Herald*, 20 November 1945, 1.
[15] 'Bengalees in Bihar', *The Behar Herald,* 13 November 1945, 20.
[16] 'A Letter from Mr. P.R. Das', *The Behar Herald*, 18 December 1945, 164.

Nevertheless, Das continued to object to the lack of progress made in implementing the recommendations of Rajendra Prasad's 1939 report. However, rather than publishing his disapproval in public newspapers, he tended to appeal directly to the AICC and the Chief Minister of Bihar. In June 1947, in a letter to the Premier of Bihar, he opposed the idea that the Bengali community in Bihar should be considered a distinct entity apart from the Hindi-speaking residents of the province' and that the community 'raised its voices of strong protest against the irksome and vexatious rules of domicile prevalent in this province.'[17] The letter further claimed that although the government had ostensibly abolished domicile certificates, a memo circulated in March 1947 proved that some government institutions continued to demand proof of domicile in the form of the certificate. This controversial memo stated that 'although 'No one' would 'henceforth be required to file a domicile certificate with his application for appointment or for admission in Government institutions' nevertheless 'the appointing authority may at his discretion make an enquiry in such cases and anyone who wishes to avoid this enquiry should obtain a certificate of domicile beforehand'.[18] His language suggests that although he viewed the Congress as the sole option for representation, his underpinning his support was the idea that there was the possibility of encouraging the party towards specific policies.

Demands for the redrawing of state boundaries and the aftermath of partition (1945-1950)

On the 15th of August 1947, several decades after the movement for India's freedom began, the country gained independence. Jawaharlal Nehru, the leader of the Congress and vice president of the interim government, became the first Prime Minister of independent India. However, the new Indian government was immediately faced with a series of crises, first and foremost the refugee crisis that accompanied the partition of India. Several organisations in West Bengal began demanding the amalgamation of Bengali-speaking territories in other provinces with their province. These organisations argued that this was necessary, not only due to the fact that the Congress had long been committed to creating linguistic states but also to resettle refugees flooding into the province. Although there were a few limited calls from Bengali-Biharis for the amalgamation of Bengali-speaking areas in Bihar with West

[17] 'Letter From P.R. Das Esqr., President of Bengali Association, Bihar to the Hon'ble, Prime Minister, Government of Bihar', June 1947 in AICC 2nd Instalment, Parliamentary Board (PB) No. 4-Bihar, Serial no. 1787 in *NMML* page 47-48 in file 1-2 in document.
[18] 'Extracts from Memo no.1619 of the 13th of March 1947,' page no. 54 in file.

Bengal, Bengali publications preferred to focus on supporting the demand for Jharkhand. However, the consistent demands from West Bengal on Bihari territory, as well as implicit support for Jharkhand from Bengali-Bihar publications, made pro-Hindi and Urdu Biharis, who were already relatively suspicious of Bengali-Biharis due to the previous decades of tension, more distrustful of the community. Nevertheless, after the experiences of partition, the central government, and Nehru in particular, were unwilling to risk fundamentally restructuring India in ways that could potentially encourage separatism.

Bengali-Bihari publications and senior Adivasi politicians continued to align, demonstrating that the strategic alliance between the two groups had not broken down during the war years or after. This would change when linguistic realignment became a reality in the 1950s and will be explored in depth in chapters 5 and 6. While the war had somewhat halted activity around the Jharkhand project, Jaipal Singh, the leader of the Adivasi Mahasabha, quickly resumed his campaign after the close of hostilities. In a speech that inaugurated the campaign of the newly established Jharkhand Provincial Party on the 4th of November 1945, he once again set out the demand for a separate Adivasi province, stating 'the demand for separation [coming from the Adivasi areas] from Bihar proper is… stronger than before and is irrevocable.'[19] He further claimed that 'Biharis refuse to concede us the same rights that they advanced for the separation from Bengal' and took particular issue with Rajendra Prasad's claim that Adivasis and Biharis had intermingled for long enough that there was little possibility of distinguishing between the populations.[20] He published a series of articles in *The Behar Herald*, with the paper willing (as other mainstream publications such as the *Searchlight* were not) to give him a platform for his views. In an article on the political alignments in the upcoming election of 1946, he appealed to Bengalis in Bihar to support Adivasi claims to Jharkhand, suggesting that Bengalis had historically been sympathetic to the demand. He stated, 'Manbhum and other Bengalis have, in the past, rebelled against Congress fanaticism. Will these Bengalis come out in the open and stand as Jharkhand nationalists?'[21] Additionally, the coverage given to Singh in *The Behar Herald* was broadly sympathetic, with one laudatory article published in November 1945 praising his multilingualism and stating that he had 'raised the ambitions of the Adibasis to the all-India nationalist level'.[22] The rhetoric used by Singh and journalists of *The Behar Herald* indicated

[19] 'The Jharkhand Issue', *The Behar Herald*, 13 November 1945, 96.
[20] *Ibid*.
[21] Jaipal Singh, 'Transitional Alignments', *The Behar Herald*, 9 October 1945, 1.
[22] 'A Primitive Nationalist', *The Behar Herald*, 4 November 1945, 147.

that the narratives created in the 1930s around the 'injustices' done to both Adivasis and Bengalis continued to be an essential aspect of the way both groups made claims of the state.

Demands on Bihari territory from West Bengal came thick and fast in the closing months of 1947. In December 1947, the Asansol Bar Association sent a memorandum to the central government that stated, 'for the protection of the culture and language of the Bengalee speaking people of the districts of Manbhum, Singhbhum, Purulia, Bhagalpur and the Shantalparganas linguistic redistribution is necessary' and 'those districts' would 'form part of and be united with the Province of Bengal.'[23] Some members of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee (WBPCC) expressed their displeasure at the lack of movement on the redistribution of territories, with the secretary of the WBPCC, P.K. Roy, writing to the President of the AICC in March 1948, accusatorily stating that 'Our leaders are not in the mood to accept the ideas and claim of Bengal so far as the Bengali-speaking areas of Assam, Bihar, Orissa and Chotanagpur [sic] and other adjoining States are concerned till the Hindi Sahitya Prochar Samity [sic] can definitely make the same as a Hindi-speaking area.'[24] Roy implied that the Government of Bihar, through the Hindi Prachar Samiti (an organisation committed to developing Hindi and encouraging the use of the language), was carrying out a Hindi-ising policy in the predominantly Bengali-speaking areas of Bihar to pre-empt any Bengali claims to territory. Roy added, 'Moreover, West Bengal may claim those areas for the solution of the East Bengal Refugee Relief and Resettlement Problem.'[25] There was a clear sense of grievance in these letters and memos, with the writers and organisations expressing that they believed the government was discriminating against them because they were Bengali.

Apart from the Congress, demands came from other eminent Bengali politicians such as Sarat Chandra Bose. Involved in the unsuccessful Sarat-Suhrawardy scheme to create an undivided sovereign Bengal, after independence, Bose turned his attention to the amalgamation of Indian Bengali-speaking territories with West Bengal. During his chairmanship of the Asansol West Bengal Provincial Committee, the organisation passed resolutions primarily relating to the transfer of territories of West Bengal. This resolution stated:

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[23] 'Resolutions passed by the members of the Bar Association, Asansol', in AICC Vol. I, Rival claims of Provincial Congress Committees regarding jurisdiction and adjustment of political boundaries, File no. G-27/1945-46, *NMML*, page no. 170 in file.
[24] 'Memo from P.K. Roy to the President of the All-India Congress Committee', 19 March 1948, page no. 10 in file.
[25] *Ibid*.

> This conference…calls upon the Govt of India to give effect to the principle and policy of creating provinces on the linguistic basis as declared by the Indian National Congress in the year 1911 and reiterated in successive sessions of the Congress upto the year 1945 and to redraw the boundaries of West Bengal and Bihar on that basis by including in West Bengal- the district of Manbhum and the Dhalbhum subdivision of the district of Singhbhum, the Bengali speaking areas of the Santal Parganas and the portion of Purnea lying to the east of Mahananda and Kalindi rivers.[26]

The Committee stated that 'this conference is of the opinion that the Indian states of Seraikella and Kharsawan legitimately belong to West Bengal on the principle of linguistic basis.' Bose made several speeches demanding the transfer of all Bengali-speaking areas to West Bengal, claiming the state had 'unassailable' claims to them on 'linguistic, economic,' and 'administrative' bases.[27] Bose made a series of appeals for the linguistic realignment of borders, even including it in his seventeen points that he delivered during a conference of the United Socialist Congress in 1949.[28] This language put further pressure on the Government of Bihar regarding the border regions as it was evident that West Bengal would make claims to them in the event of linguistic reorganisation.

Despite a lack of support from some senior politicians like Nehru and Patel for the redrawing of boundaries, the Linguistic Provinces Commission led by S. K. Dhar was set up in 1948 to investigate the desirability of the reorganisation of states. The Commission gave the findings to the JVP Committee (Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya), who then made a series of recommendations. This report, while indicating that there was 'some advantage in imparting education, in working the Legislature, and in administration if a large majority speak the same language' was unwilling to recommend reorganisation as it would 'bring into existence provinces with a sub-national bias at a time when nationalism' was 'yet in its infancy' and was 'not in a position to bear any strain'.[29] It did not entirely dismiss the idea of linguistic provinces, stating that 'As soon as the Indian states have been integrated and the country has stabilised itself and other conditions are favourable they may be re-formed and convenient administrative provinces set up', however,

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[26] 'Resolutions passed at West Bengal Provincial Committee Asansol Chaired by Sarat Chandra Bose on 22nd, 23rd May 1948', in AICC Vol I, Letters, resolutions etc. regarding West Bengal's claim to Bengali-speaking areas, G-30/1947, 1.
[27] 'Bihar's Bengali Area: Mr. Sarat Bose's Demands', *Times of India,* 6 June 1948, 12.
[28] 'Mr. Sarat Bose's Seventeen Points', *Times of India*, 3 November 1949, 6.
[29] *Report of Linguistic Provinces Commission 1948* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1948), 29-28.

it was clear state-lines were unlikely to change quickly.[30] Patel and Nehru both railed against the evils of 'provincialism', often specifically identifying Bengali behaviour as an issue. At a Bengali Literary Conference in March 1949, Patel warned, 'Though the country has been partitioned, culturally and linguistically India remains one and there is none who could partition it on those spheres. I will advise the youth of Bengal that they should not do anything which would harm the cause of Bengal, in particular, and the country in general.'[31]

Nevertheless, despite these statements of opposition, the demand for linguistic states grew. In October 1949, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, B. C. Roy, continued to make forceful assertions regarding Bengal's right to territory, stating in a memo to Pattabhi Sitaramayya:

> With regards to living space, it is also well-known that the density of the population in West Bengal is the highest in India, if not the whole world. The people of Bengal have been shouting for some increase in space and they have pointed out Cooch Behar, Manbhum and Singhbhum areas which could very reasonably be brought into Bengal, not on the basis of linguistic consideration but on the basis that there is not enough living space for the 25 million people of West Bengal. In all these matters, West Bengal people are very definitely against the Centre.[32]

The use of the phrase 'living space' was particularly striking given the fact 'lebensraum' was a significant aspect of Nazi ideology. This, along with the oblique and vaguely threatening references to partition made by Bengalis in the Bihar Legislative Assembly (that will be explored later in the chapter), suggests that those involved in politics were quite willing to deploy concepts and events that were widely viewed as negative to achieve their aims.

This echoed demands from other governing bodies in Bengal, including various Municipal bodies. Both the Berhampore Municipal Commissioners and the Krishnagar Municipal Commissioners passed resolutions demanding the inclusion of Bihari territory in West Bengal. The resolution passed on the 30th of August, the Krishnagar meeting of Municipal Commissioners stated that the 'Government' should 'take the necessary steps for the inclusion of Bengali-speaking and cultural area like Manbhum in West Bengal in consistence with the long-cherished views of the Indian National Congress in the matter of

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[30] *Ibid*., 34.
[31] 'National Language Must Be One of Masses', *The Times of India*, 15 March 1949, 1.
[32] 'Memo sent to Pattabhi Sitaramayya on 12 October 1949 from B. C. Roy regarding main points urged before the Working Committee and its meeting on 4 October 1949', 12 October 1949, in AICC Volume II, Parliamentary Board (PB) No. 3-Bengal, Serial no. 1809 pt. I in NMML, page 47-48 in file 1 in doc.

formation of provinces on Linguistic basis.'[33] Similarly, the resolution passed on the 23rd of September 1949 at the Berhampore meeting of Municipal Commissioners derided the 'apathetic attitude of the central government' towards the issue of a Bengali linguistic state and demanded the transfer of territories as Bengal had 'diminished to a considerable extent in area and resources and 'not in a position to feed the existing population which has further increased considerably by immigration of several lakhs of refugee population of East Bengal'.[34]

However, as in previous years, Bengalis in Bihar, regardless of where they were located, lobbied against the creation of linguistic states. The local Congress organisation in Manbhum urged against hasty action taken on the redrawing of boundaries along linguistic lines. In May 1948, taking their cue from the national Congress organisation, which was leaning away from the reorganisation of states, the Manbhum District Congress Committee (DCC) stated the only reason for linguistic reorganisation was 'administrative convenience', and that it was 'not proper to pursue it on class consideration.'[35] The Committee stated that all citizens of India 'have to follow any direction given by the Congress and the Constituent Assembly, which deals with higher matters of policies', essentially dismissing the demands made by West Bengal.[36]

Ostensibly, Bengali-Biharis were not actively demanding a Jharkhand State or lobbying for Bihari territories with predominantly Bengali speakers to be amalgamated with West Bengal. During the latter half of the '40s, regardless of whether they were settled in border or non-border areas, Bengali-Biharis did not demand changes to Bihar's borders. Nevertheless, it was quite likely that the claims made by both Adivasis for Jharkhand and West Bengal on Bihari territory would materially impact the lives of Bengalis living in Bihar. Given the fact that Indians (and especially Indian politicians) widely expected that, eventually, the central government would redraw state borders, the Government of Bihar and other Bihari politicians opposed to the ceding of Bihar's territory found it critical to prove that the areas Bengal demanded were not actually Bengali but Hindi speaking. Therefore, the Government of Bihar attempted to encourage Hindi education in Bengali-speaking regions of Bihar. Elite Hindi and Urdu-speaking politicians also continued to develop and present

[33] 'Extract from minutes of the proceedings of the monthly general meeting of the Municipal Commissioners of the Krishnagar Municipality', 30 August 1949, page 64 in file.
[34] 'Extract from the proceedings of the General meeting of the Municipal Commissioners, Berhampore (West Bengal), 23 September 1949, page 64 in file.
[35] 'Memo from the Manbhum District Committee', 30 May 1948, in AICC Volume I, Letters, resolutions etc. regarding West Bengal's claim to Bengali-speaking areas, G-30/1947 in NMML, page 38 in file.
[36] *Ibid*.

narratives of the historical imposition of the Bengali language on the areas to undercut Bengal's claims. These strategies were opposed by Bengali figures in Bihar, especially those settled in predominantly Bengali-speaking border areas. However, navigating these issues became increasingly complex as debates around Bengali and Hindi occurred within the context of broader discussions around the national language and minority rights.

Bengali-Bihari's navigation of 'minority' politics, official language debates, and the right to employment during the writing of the Indian constitution (1947-1950)

Apart from these issues around refugees and demands for linguistic realignment, the Constituent Assembly of India was in the midst of developing India's constitution. Although the 389-member Constituent Assembly had been assembled at the end of 1946, it was only after independence, on the 29th of August 1947, that the Drafting Committee was appointed, and constitution-making began in earnest. The items on the agenda that were of particular concern to Bengalis in Bihar were the debates around minority issues and, as ever, the rights around employment. This section will first discuss the rhetoric used by Bengali-Biharis to make claims in this turbulent era and argue that it slowly moved away from petitions for 'protection' due to the fact the community was a linguistic minority and emphasised that 'equality' was not being granted to the community when making any demands. Secondly, it explores Bengali-Bihari attempts to align their politics with the priorities of the Government of Bihar, particularly with regard to support for the Hindi language. However, during this period, Bengalis across Bihar (and not just in the border regions) were still willing to critique the Government. This would fundamentally change after the realities of linguistic alignment emerged in the mid-fifties as Bengalis not settled on the border refused to criticise the Government of Bihar. Thirdly, it analyses the solidification of narratives around Bengalis as 'colonisers' developed during the Rajendra Prasad investigation of 1938-39 that elite Hindu Hindi-speaking Biharis reproduced to counter any claims from West Bengal for linguistic realignment. Finally, it examines the slow mending of relations between Hindi-speaking Bihari upper-caste Hindus and elite Muslim Biharis in the province.

Due to the changing narratives around minorities and minority rights, Bengali-Biharis began framing their claims, especially their demands for employment, through a more nationalistic lens by presenting these rights as essential for the betterment of the Indian nation. A resolution passed by the Bengali Association of Bihar on the 8th of June 1947 against the continued requirement for domicile certificates stated:

> On the eve of tremendous happenings, with India at the threshold of her freedom, we, and our leaders envisage a ONE and UNITED INDIA where brotherhood of man will transcend narrow provincialism and vicious communalism. With that avowed object in view we are making our humble suggestion with the hope that the barrier between the Hindi-speaking (Biharis) and Bengali-speaking Biharis may be reduced to a minimum and both may together form a compact homogenous society and contribute equally to the social, political, and economic life of the province and jointly help to make Bihar a model State within the United Indian Republic.[37]

The rhetoric in the resolution demonstrates the slow shift in Bengali-Bihari strategies from emphasising the protections necessary for the community due to its minority status to demands around equality. This had begun in the pre-independence era with Das in particular emphasising the 'Bihari-ness' of Bengalis. In this statement the Bengali Association in Patna explicitly presented their Bihari identity as central. Minority politics became increasingly conflated with the demand for Pakistan, and the ostensible aim of the Congress was primarily to create a united nation that did not have 'fissiparous' tendencies. Therefore, rather than suggesting the government should provide Bengalis in Bihar with protection due to their minority status, the resolution focused on how Bengalis and Bihar must be treated equally to contribute to the betterment of India. This presented the Bengali-Bihari issue, which the Congress High Command tended to treat as a provincial matter, through a national lens. Although this matter related to linguistic minorities, the Association made attempts to comply with how the Congress policed minority demands. This mirrored how Dalit politics in West Bengal was discussed, as the upper-caste members of the Congress there, through their opposition to reservation on the grounds that it worked to divide the country. Instead, they emphasised the need to grant the benefits of reservation to those 'really on the lower rungs of society'.[38] This rhetoric served to frame these seemingly provincial matters as all-India issues.

The debate around Hindi was one that Bengalis in Bihar had to navigate with some caution. Although the matter had not yet been decided conclusively in the Constituent Assembly, it was widely expected that Hindi would be made the official language of the country. Therefore, opposition to the language could be framed as disloyalty to India. It was the predominant language spoken in Bihar in the 1940s, and there were concerted attempts by

[37] 'Resolutions from Provincial Bengali Association Meeting', page no. 48 in file 2 in doc.
[38] Dwaipayan Sen, *The Decline of the Caste Question: Jogendranath Mandal and the Defeat of Dalit Politics in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 194.

certain members of Congress in Bihar to present Hindi as inherently related to being Bihari. On the 5th of March 1948, a Congress MLA, Hari Nath Mishra, put forth a resolution to make Hindi the province's official language. While most of the members of the Assembly supported this, there was nevertheless some opposition. The most vehement opposition came from Srish Chandra Banerjee, a Bengali Congress MLA. Banerjee's constituency was Central Manbhum, which, like the rest of the district, had a high proportion of Bengali speakers. Banerjee stated that while he understood the 'necessity of learning Hindi as in this time it must be the State language of the whole country' the Congress had also 'pledged to protect the language, culture and religion of minority communities.'[39] This referenced the 'minority' status claimed by Bengalis, but the demand was placed squarely within the constitutional framework.

Therefore, he demanded that 'Bengali should be accepted as an alternative court language in such areas where Bengalis are predominantly living.'[40] He also indicated that the timeline given (all officials must learn Hindi by August 1948) to non-Hindi speaking officials to learn Hindi was insufficient and asked that this be extended to 'five years'.[41] He also claimed that the administration in his district had 'collapsed' as the 'District Officer in order to make up his deficiency in administration' had 'been trying to force the Hindi language upon the people'.[42] The Speaker of the House was largely unsupportive of his statements, suggesting that he was not 'clear' and that the member had to prove that the 'court language' and 'state language' were the same. He also chided him for referring to the matter of administration, asking him 'What has the administration to do with the introduction of Hindi as a State language?'[43] Interestingly, unlike the rest of the debate, this exchange was carried out entirely in English. This would suggest, despite the vehement declaration made by Banerjee of his commitment to Hindi as the national language, he was not wholly supportive of the shift to the language.

This resolution was, however, not universally derided by all Bengali members in the Assembly. Unlike Banerjee, who gave his statements entirely in English, Bengali MLA Lambodar Mukherjee spoke in Hindi and appeared to be far more supportive of the resolution. He claimed that 'Hindi becoming the official language was not just a matter of necessity but a matter of *dharm*'.[44] *Dharm* loosely translates to duty, implying that this matter was a priority.

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[39] 'Introduction of Hindi as the State Language', 5 March 1948, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates, Volume IV, No. 12*, (Patna: Superintendent Printing, 1949), 31.
[40] *Ibid*., 33.
[41] *Ibid.,* 35.
[42] *Ibid.,* 36.
[43] *Ibid.,* 33-36.
[44] *Ibid.,* 51 (translated from Hindi).

He suggested that to properly eradicate British influences, India had to accept Hindi as the official language. He also attempted to qualify Banerjee's statements, claiming that the representative from Baghmundi was not opposed to Hindi being the state language but was merely raising issues around practical matters of administration. Nevertheless, he did warn the Bihar government against changing the court language in regions where Bengali was the primary language spoken, stating, 'I also know that in… Arrah court the judgments could not be given in Bengali, but judgments would have to be given in Hindi. If we did not do this, then no one would listen to our judgments. Similarly, in the Jamtara court, we must give our judgments in Bengali, and the government must understand this. If the government doesn't listen to this, then they are not worthy of ruling.'[45]

Mukherjee did, however, use highly anti-Urdu and anti-Muslim rhetoric to state that no matter what occurred, Urdu should not be made an official language of the province. Mukherjee explicitly condemned Muslims for demanding Pakistan. He said 'Urdu' was 'not the language of India' and that no 'compact area' in India had Urdu as its language nor any 'district in Bihar'.[46] He denounced the idea of Pakistan, asserting that if Muslims had not 'made this mistake, then India would have been one of the great countries in the world'.[47] He went on to say that Muslims should 'be careful' and that 'now' they 'understand the mistake' they've 'made'. He also stated that they should 'take their arguments about India's voice back and stop thinking' of themselves as 'Hindus or Muslims, but simply Bihari'.[48] This anti-Muslim rhetoric echoed the language used by *The Behar Herald* and the rhetoric that emerged from upper-caste Hindu groups in Bengal during and after the period of provincial governance.

The rhetoric from Banerjee and Mukherjee around the Government of Bihar's language policies was, to quite a large extent, mirrored by the language used by the Manbhum DCC. While rejecting demands for the realignment of borders on the grounds that the constituent Assembly and Congress leadership believed it was unwise, the DCC strongly objected to what they viewed as the imposition of Hindi in the region. Nevertheless, the DCC still supported Hindi as the national language. In the report of the meeting on the 30th of May in 1948 sent to the AICC, the Manbhum DCC was complimentary and supportive of the

[45] *Ibid*., 52 (translated from Hindi).
[46] *Ibid.,* 52 (translated from Hindi)
[47] *Ibid.,* 53(translated from Hindi).
[48] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).

Hindi language, stating that 'Above all our Rashtrabhasha is our pride'.[49] However, the committee also stated:

> That is why we have to say today with great regret that the atmosphere of Manbhum is being vitiated on the plea of propagating the Hindi language which is the unifying link of us all. Hindi is the basis of our Rashtrabhasha Hindustani. Hindi, which will be the ornament of our state is not coming in the case of Manbhum, illuminated in all glory. It appears as a calamity in the life of the people of Manbhum, carried like a disease and a terror on the wings of iniquities of its aggressive votaries, entering through the backdoor for depriving people of their just rights.[50]

The rhetoric used by both the Congress organisation in Manbhum as well as the language used by Bengali MLAs presents a clear pattern of political engagement. In order to buttress their patriotic and Bihari credentials, support for the Hindi language was seen as necessary. It was only after a declaration of commitment to the necessity of the elevation of Hindi that they could express demands around the preservation of the Bengali language.

It was becoming evident that the Congress in Manbhum was becoming increasingly discontented with both the state and the national organisations due to politics surrounding language. The secretary of the District Congress Committee in Purulia, Bibhuti Bhushan Das, demonstrated his increasing alienation from the Congress in a letter sent in June 1948 to Shankarrao Deo, the general secretary of the Congress. While he did allude to the principle of linguistic states, he focused mainly on the 'objectionable' and 'abhorrent' attempts made by the Government of Bihar to replace Bengali with Hindi in the region and attached the Joint Education Committee (JEC) of Manbhum's programme to prove his claims. The JEC's memorandum appeared to be highly anti-Bengali. It called for 'The work of [teacher] training be entrusted to Beharees only and not to Bengalees or persons opposing the actual work as from experience it has been found that at several centres Bengali teachers were given charge of training of teachers in Hindi and the result has become far from pleasing.'[51] It also stated that the 'The activities of the Mass Literacy campaign should be confined to Hindi only' and the 'new syllabus' produced by the committee, 'under which the teaching of Hindi' was 'compulsory', needed to be 'enforced' and if not the Board should be 'reported to the Government'.[52] While the Constituent Assembly had not yet decided on the matter of the

[49] ''Memo from the Manbhum District Committee', 37.
[50] *Ibid.,* 41.
[51] Letter from Bibhuti Bhushan Das Gupta, Secretary, District Congress Committee Purulia, (Manbhum) Bihar to Shankar Rao Deo', 15 June 1948, Rival claims of Provincial Congress Committees regarding jurisdiction and adjustment of political boundaries, File no. G-27/1945-46, page 70 in file.
[52] *Ibid*., page 72 in file.

official and national language, these positions were directly against Congress' educational principles (as put forth under the Wardha Scheme), which promised education in the mother tongue, especially at a basic level. Although Bengalis in the border regions, like Bibhuti Bhushan Das, remained within the Congress organisation, it is clear that the actions of the Bihar government (at various levels) were slowly alienating some sections of the Bengali population.

This was reflected in satyagraha organised by the Lok Sevak Sangh (LSS), an organisation of Bengalis in the border regions who largely belonged to the Congress Party. The resolution passed at a two-day LSS conference in Manbhum in April stated that the aim of the *satyagraha* was not to 'struggle against a language or against a people speaking a certain language' but for 'self-purification.' The resolution also clearly underlined that 'Every language in our country is sacred to us and, everyone, whatever may be his language is of our people'.[53] Despite their protests against the Congress government, the members of the LSS chose to remain members of the Congress as well. The lack of reference to linguistic states suggests that the LSS and the *satyagrahas* were less concerned with the transfer of territories and more so with the 'protection of rights' in the state they already belonged to.[54]

Over a year after the Bengali Association's exhortations and nine months after the spirited debate on the state language in Bihar's Legislative Assembly, the Constituent Assembly of India debated the matter of employment rights and minority rights. The discussion on Draft Article 10 (put into the Constitution as Article 16), which dealt with this issue, took place on the 30th of November 1948, with the article in discussion ostensibly protecting the rights of all Indians to work across the country. The text of the article included clauses:

> 1. There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters of employment under the State.
> 2. No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth or any of them, be ineligible for any office under the State.[55]

The first two clauses in this article ostensibly protected Bengali rights to employment in Bihar. However, clause 3 of the article also gave parliament the right to frame laws around the 'requirement as to residence within that State prior to such employment or appointment', which, in essence, allowed the Government of Bihar to continue demanding proof of

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[53] 'Aim of Manbhum Satyagraha', *The Times of India*, 22 April, 1949, 7.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] 'Draft Article 10/Article 16' *Constitution of India*. https://www.constitutionofindia.net/articles/article-16-equality-of-opportunity-in-matters-of-public-employment/ (Accessed on 30 May 2022).

domicile.[56] When discussing this matter, B.R. Ambedkar, the influential Dalit leader and the first Minister of Law and Justice, stated that this article had been put in place as 'irrespective of the local jurisdiction of the provinces and the Indian States, it is only a concomitant thing that residence should not be required for holding a particular post in a particular State because, in so far as you make residence a qualification, you are really subtracting from the value of a common citizenship.'[57]

This statement, in essence, echoed the rhetoric used in the resolution that was passed by the Bengali Association of Bihar a little over a year ago. However, in his defence of the third clause of the article, Ambedkar, the chair of the drafting committee, added, 'it must be realised that you cannot allow people who are flying from one province to another, from one State to another, as mere birds of passage without any roots, without any connection with that particular province, just to come, apply for posts and, so to say, take the plums and walk away.'[58] While Ambedkar suggested that the third clause would allow parliament to lay down uniform laws as to the length of the period after which a person would be considered a resident in a specific state, it was not established precisely how domicile or residence was to be determined. As the Government of Bihar maintained domicile certificates were only a requirement to ensure non-residents of the province did not take jobs from residents of the province, this clause did little to support the position of Bengalis in Bihar, who were firmly against the practice.

Despite the negative narratives around the demand for minority rights (especially religious minorities) and the abolition of separate electorates, the Assembly did discuss provisions for minorities. The Assembly included these in Articles 23 and 23A of the draft constitution. Article 23 (included in the final constitution as Article 29) stated that 'Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.'[59] Article 23A (included in the constitution as Article 30) gave minorities the 'right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.'[60] Bengalis in Bihar, therefore, rather than continuing to demand the removal of domicile certificates on the basis that this would ensure

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[56] *Ibid*.
[57] 'Article 10,' 30 November 1948, *Constituent Assembly Debates: Official Report*, Volume VII (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2014), 700.
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] 'Draft Article 23/Article 29', *Constitution of India*, https://www.constitutionofindia.net/articles/article-29-protection-of-interests-of-minorities/ (Accessed on 20 May 2022).
[60] 'Draft Article 23A/Article 30', Constitution of India, https://www.constitutionofindia.net/articles/article-30-right-of-minorities-to-establish-and-administer-educational-institutions/ (Accessed on 20 May 2022).

a more united India, began to focus on demands around education and the preservation of the Bengali language in Bihar.

However, as West Bengal continued demanding territory, these claims from Bengalis in Bihar were viewed by pro-Hindi politicians with suspicion as officially admitting that certain regions were predominantly Bengali-speaking could later be used by West Bengal to demand the areas. As the Constituent Assembly had marked out the preservation of language as a right for minorities Bengalis in Bihar began using that clause in order to demand rights around language. In Bihar's Legislative Assembly in March 1949, Srish Chandra Banerjee, the Bengali Congress MLA from Baghmundi, put forth a cut-motion during the debate on the education budget on the grounds that Hindi was being imposed on Manbhum and that this was adversely affecting education in the region as 80% of the residents there spoke Bengali. He stated that out of the '9,595 students' in primary schools in this area '7,863' were 'Bengali speakers.'[61] As a result, according to Banerjee, there were 'few admissions this year' as they were being forced to study in Hindi.[62]

He also asserted that the Bengali language had been used 'ever since education began' in the area, and it was not the case that 'everyone had been Hindi speakers before'.[63] He objected to the allegation that the Bengali language had been 'forcibly taught'.[64] He stated Bengalis had 'given' their 'blood to elevate Manbhum and Singhbhum' and the 'way the Deputy District Commissioner' was 'governing' was 'destroying' the region.[65] This statement of Bengali connection to the land appears to be an attempt to situate Bengalis within the history of Bihar, not as exploiters but as creators of civilisation. He also suggested that this issue was 'making enemies' of those who had 'fought for independence shoulder to shoulder'.[66] There was undoubtedly the implication that having had significant numbers of Bengalis in the administration of these regions as well as having supported the Congress and independence for India, Bengalis deserved to be treated with more respect by the Government of Bihar.

MLA Sagar Mahato gave his opinion on the matter in the same debate in 1949. He was likely not considered a 'Bengali' in the same sense as Mukherjee and Banerjee as

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[61] 'Sarkar ki Shiksha Neeti', *Bihar Legislative Assembly*, 24 August 1949, http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/133899 (Accessed on 15th May 2021) (translated from Hindi), p. 2-3.
[62] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi), 3.
[63] *Ibid*., (translated from Hindi).
[64] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).
[65] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi), p. 4.
[66] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi), p. 5.

Mahato was a last name in tribes and castes classified as 'backward', and he stated that he was speaking on behalf of the 'people from the countryside' who had Bengali as their 'mother-tongue' which his 'Bihari brothers' wanted to remove'.[67] He agreed with Mukherjee, adding that some Bengali-speaking students in Purulia had 'left school' and were 'now attending coaching classes' when they were 'told to study in Hindi', increasing their expenses and severely impacting their ability to continue their education.[68]

Banerjee's cut-motion produced a furious reaction from a large proportion of MLAs in the Assembly. Murli Manohar Prasad, editor of *The Searchlight*, the Bihar Congress paper, declared that the matter of language in Manbhum was a 'serious question' related to both 'matters of the Indian Union' and Bihar's 'autonomy'.[69] He went on to imply that Bengalis had imposed the language on the region, stating that when 'Bengal and Bihar were one' residents of Manbhum 'were compelled to speak Bengali' as Bengalis 'left no possible path' for them to learn Hindi.[70] He proclaimed that by 'referring to the 80% of people who speak Bengali' Banerjee 'rubbed salt in the wound'.[71] He asserted that 'to keep Bihar united, ' it was 'necessary to learn Hindi in every district.' He ended his speech rather threateningly by suggesting if it had been 'any other government', they would have 'shot these agitators' who were working against the Hindi language.[72]

Rashbihari Lal, the Congress MLA from Sultanganj, enthusiastically responded to his speech and reiterated the claims regarding the 'limited Hindi education' provided in Manbhum during the period when Bengal and Bihar were a single province. He reinforced the narrative set by colonial administrators and senior Congress figures like Rajendra Prasad of Bengali overrepresentation in services, stating, 'At that time, all the officers were Bengali. The chairmen of district boards, etc, were all Bengali.' He also made further accusations against the Bengali community, explicitly relating their actions to those of colonisers by maintaining they 'saw the English rule and propagate English [language]' and as 'Bengalis are good at imitating' they 'imitated the English disseminated their propaganda' and 'compelled Biharis to learn Bengali'.[73] This was a clear condemnation of the entire Bengali community as it equated them with the British and subtly suggested they had been pawns of

[67] *Ibid.,* 6, (translated from Hindi)
[68] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).
[69] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).
[70] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi)
[71] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).
[72] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi), p. 6.
[73] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).

the British, implicitly rebutting Banerjee's claims of having stood together during the independence movement.

This narrative had the benefit of refuting any claims Bengali speakers had with regards to territories like Manbhum, as it implied that even if Bengalis-speakers were in the majority there, they had essentially forced themselves upon the population, and Hindi-speakers could now act as liberators. The debate continued the next day, and some Bengali MLAs were highly affronted by the accusations levelled by their fellow Bihari MLAs. Banerjee responded that he would have 'no problem being shot' and that 'there was pressure being put on Manbhum from all sides.'[74] He also accused the District Commissioner of 'removing all the Bengali officers' and setting themselves up as a 'ruling race'.[75] Lambodar Mukherjee, who had previously been relatively supportive of the government with regards to Hindi, also reacted furiously, asserting that 'studying in Bengali' did 'not mean' Bengalis wanted 'to leave Bihar'. He stated, 'Bihar is our birthplace. We have served Bihar. Bihar has given us respect.' However, if Hindi speakers continued 'this fight' in the name of preventing 'separation', there would undoubtedly 'be separation'. He also alluded to partition, suggesting that 'Pakistan was formed after the Bihar riots' and that now the government and anti-Bengali politicians were 'making the same mistakes again.'[76]

Badrinath Varma, another Congress MLA, made a particularly lengthy case for why Bengali should not be considered the language of those regions. He quoted a great deal from British civil servants and judges to bolster his argument. He focused on claims from a Deputy Commissioner of Manbhum in the early 1910s, D. Milne, who stated, 'Census figures I am certain are largely fudged in the direction of putting down aboriginals as Bengali-speaking. They are no more correct than the report of German-speaking Alsace-Lorrainers, for there is not a genuine Bengali in the district outside the ministerial and professional classes.'[77] He then went on to quote a high court judge who served for 15 years between 1921 and 1936, Judge T.S Macpherson. According to Varma, Macpherson stated, 'No doubt the late census shows Bengali as the language of two-thirds of the inhabitants [of Manbhum], but the result was obtained by including many persons who speak Kurmali…Kurmali, the tribal language of the aboriginal Kurmis, is a form of the Bihari language and classified as Hindi in the census…But as it is looked at through Bengali spectacles, the language was probably, under a

[74] 'Sarkar ki Shiksha Neeti cont.', 25 August 1949, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates,1949, Volume VI, No. 25*, (Patna: Superintendent Printing, 1950), 24 (translated from Hindi).
[75] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).
[76] *Ibid.,* 4, (translated from Hindi).
[77] *Ibid.,* 12.

misconception, often entered by enumerators as Bengali'.[78] By using these sources, Varma perpetuated the narrative of 'colonialist Bengalis'. He was supported in this by Congress MLA Guptanath Sinha, who claimed that 'old documents' would prove that 'a short while ago those people worked in Hindi' and that he could 'say with confidence that the dialect is not Bengali but Kurmali' a 'form of Magahi'.[79] He dismissed the possibility of Kurmali or Magahi being the language of education as being too 'heavy' a burden on the government given the vast number of 'mother tongues'.[80]

Varma was not content to only build historical narratives but attempted to prove that Bengalis in the present day were attempting to 'colonise' territory that was not theirs. Given the vast number of claims to Bihari territory coming from West Bengal during this period, it appeared as though his arguments had validity. He quoted from a speech given by Sarat Chandra Bose at Calcutta University on the 23rd of May 1948, where he claimed that Bose stated, 'let us revolve [resolve] in the name of Protapaditya to create a new state in the independent Bangal…He broke the chains of Delhi. We are today enchained by New Delhi. Like Protapaditya who formed an independent state, our ideal and aim would be the same. With the Bengali-speaking areas of Bihar and Orissa added to West Bangal we can form an independent sovereign state in Bangal.'[81] Varma proceeded to state that he did not want to 'go into this controversy' but added that since many of these 'perfidious' meetings were occurring in schools in Purulia, the Deputy Commissioner there had to do some work to 'maintain order' there and that was why certain members of the Assembly had 'begun making complaints against him'.[82] He suggested that Bengalis were encouraging people to 'leave their mother tongues' behind and so they would 'get lost in dreams of Greater Bengal.'[83] This had the effect of painting Bengalis as not only colonialists but as traitors to India. Therefore, their demands appeared even more unreasonable and essentially treasonous as it was not education in Bengali they were advocating for but, in effect, another partition of India.

Hari Nath Mishra, the MLA who moved the resolution in 1948 to make Hindi the national language, appeared to be opposed to the introduction of other official languages. Although he conceded in the debate around the resolution that the province was multilingual,

[78] *Ibid.,* 13.
[79] *Ibid.,* 7, (translated from Hindi).
[80] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi).
[81] *Ibid.,* 15.
[82] *Ibid.,* 17 (translated from Hindi)
[83] *Ibid.,* 19, (translated from Hindi).

he claimed that 'all the people of Bihar' could 'understand and speak Hindi without trouble' and that 'Hindi is one such language which brings together the dissimilar parts of the province in an organised manner.'[84] Therefore, he suggested that all civil servants, both national and provincial, learn Hindi by the 15th of August 1948. He also made claims regarding the histories of Bihar, stating that an examination of 'old records' would prove that no matter who ruled, 'Hindus or…Muslims, Bengalis or, Santhali or, Maithili or Bhojpuri speakers' the 'Hindi language written in the Nagari script' was found.[85] As Mishra's argument ran, being Bihari and knowing Hindi were intimately linked. Although even the strongest advocates for Hindi often conceded that it was a relatively new language, in his speech, he built a narrative of Hindi's long lineage in the state.

Before other members expressed opposition to his resolution, Mishra made several statements regarding the unfeasibility of Urdu as a state language, suggesting that as only 'literate' Muslims in large cities who had 'gone to universities speak and write Urdu' it could not be the 'official language or official script in any way'.[86] He also questioned the idea of Urdu as the language of Islam, stating:

> In the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, when Bengalis from East Bengal asked to use Bengali as their official language, Mr Liaquat Ali Khan said that Pakistan is a single Islamic country and Urdu is an Islamic language. Can you explain to me if that means that all countries that follow Islam need to speak this language? Apart from Hindustan, there are many countries that follow Islam, like Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, etcetera, etcetera, but apart from Hindustan and Pakistan, no other countries speak Urdu. Islam has been a religion for thirteen hundred years while Urdu is only 450 to 500 years old.[87]

Mishra's references to Pakistan appear to be rather inflammatory, possibly suggesting that if Bihari Muslims continued to demand Urdu as a state language, they were, in effect, similar to 'Pakistanis' who, given the context of the brutal partition and the recent war, were India's enemies.

However, this argument was greeted with caution by the Speaker of the House, Bindeshwari Prasad Verma, who stated that he 'did not know to what extent' it was 'reasonable' to put forth his argument and then provide answers to questions that had not yet

[84] 'Introduction of Hindi as the State Language', 5 March 1948, 16 (translated from Hindi).
[85] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).
[86] *Ibid.,* 17 (translated from Hindi).
[87] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi).

arisen.[88] This suggests that some Hindi politicians in Bihar (especially those in positions of authority, as the speaker undoubtedly was) were, at the very least, a little sensitive to the possibility of increasing communal tensions and did not particularly want to alienate the Muslim community in the state. Similarly, the Chief Minister of the state, Sri Krishna Sinha, struck a more conciliatory tone when discussing the demands for Urdu in the state. He said, 'I am a representative of the public; therefore, I have to speak in a language that is commonly used which is called Hindi. But I cannot remove Urdu words from it. So, I use Urdu phrases and I enjoy using them because there is sweetness in them.'[89] Additionally, instead of using '*shabd',* the more commonly used term for 'word', he used the word '*lafz*', which has its roots in Persian rather than Sanskrit, explicitly furthering his point that Urdu and Hindi were closely tied to each other. Sinha's rhetoric contrasts with the desire for the sanskritisation of the language expressed by UP Hindi-speaking politicians.[90]

Mishra's resolution received support from Hindi-speaking MLAs in the Assembly. Buddhinath Jha suggested that 'there could be no language apart from Hindi' and it could not be written in 'both Devanagari and Urdu scripts' as 'it would increase difficulties in administration.'[91] Aware that the argument often used against Hindi was its incapability of use in a scientific capacity, he stated that it was not 'as though there are any languages in the country that' were 'more scientific' and that 'No one' could 'solve this issue.'[92] He unfavourably compared the Bengali and Persian scripts and languages to the Hindi and Devanagari ones indicating that 'all scripts' were not suited for the writing of scientific methods' and that 'Only the Nagari script' could be used in science' as 'in Bengali' if one wanted to 'write Lakshmi' it was 'written as Lokhhi' and 'in Persian' if one wanted to 'write Khuda' it was 'written as Khada,' so 'errors' would 'undoubtedly' be made in 'these languages'.[93] The arguments for Hindi were not only developed by building narratives of its past but also by making claims of its potential benefits for the future. It was presented as being in competition with languages that perhaps had longer histories of official use.

Narratives of Bengali intransigence were commonplace during this period. Debates over the national language further compounded this. There has been a focus on the role played by South Indians, and in particular Tamils, in opposing Hindi as the official language

[88] *Ibid*., 18 (translated from Hindi).
[89] *Ibid.,* 59 (translated from Hindi).
[90] Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*.
[91] 'Introduction of Hindi as the State Language', 30 (translated from Hindi).
[92] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi).
[93] *Ibid.,* 31 (translated from Hindi)

of the Indian Union. However, during this period Bengali claims around the national language were viewed by pro-Hindi politicians as faintly ridiculous. Even before independence Bengali organisations demanded that Bengali be made the national language of India. In a memorandum to the Constituent Assembly in June 1947, the *Nikhil Bharat Bangabhasa Prosar Samiti*, stated that the Bengali language was the only competent language which can serve the purpose of Indian national language' as it had 'innate…vast wealth and wide richness for serving the various and peculiar purposes of a nation.'[94] In another memo to the Assembly from the *Bangala Rashtra Bhasha Prochar Bhibag*, this Bengali organisation once again reiterated the demand the make Bengali 'the state language' (with state in this case referring to the country), as 'the superiority of Bengali to any other Indian language' had 'been accepted by all'.[95] The organisation argued that 'the claim that majority of people do speak Hindi is not tenable in view of the fact that Hindi of one area differs from that of another.'[96] Finally, this demand was made by Satish Chandra Samanta, the Bengali representative from Tamluk, during the debate over the national language in September 1949. Samanta claimed that Bengali was the only language 'rich' enough to be the national language and suggested that as Rabindranath Tagore's work was studied globally, it was the only language with the requisite 'international connections.'[97] These claims were quickly dismissed by pro-Hindi members in the Constituent Assembly, with Algu Rai Shastri from the United Provinces suggesting that this was impossible as Bengali was not spoken in as many states as Hindi.[98] The demands for Bengali to be made the national language, to some extent, undercut the claims made by West Bengal around territory. These demands were viewed as unreasonable, which in turn led any demands made by Bengalis to be viewed as unreasonable.

Conclusion

This period of transition was significant as the writing of the constitution as political figures believed that this document would define how the Indian state would be ordered and would

[94] 'Resolutions passed in the Nikhil Bharat Bangabhasa Prosar Samiti', 12 June 1947, in National Archives of India (NAI), *Office of the Constituent Assembly of India*, Demand for formation of a separate province by combining Western Bengal and the Eastern Part of Bihar, File no. CA/22/Com/47, 980.
[95] "Bangala Rashtra Bhasha Prochar Bhibag mass meeting on 28 April 1948', 14 May 1948, NAI, *Office of the Constituent Assembly of India*, Redistribution of Provinces on Linguistic Basis (Representations re. the formation of a separate Karnatak Province), File no. CA/23/LPC/48, 101.
[96] *Ibid.*
[97]'Language', 13 September 1949, *Constituent Assembly Debates: Official Report,* Vol. IX (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2014), 1377.
[98] *Ibid*.

function. This meant that thousands of demands from multiple communities were put forth. This chapter has demonstrated the impact of these broader debates around language and identity on communities in Bihar. Firstly, West Bengal's claims to territory, despite the JVP report, which cautioned against it, and Bengali claims around the national language led to accusations of Bengalis engaging in provincialism. Secondly, Bengalis in Bengal proper were, in turn, disappointed with senior Congressmen and national political leaders as demands to redistribute territory were summarily dismissed. Bengalis in Bihar, and in particular the border regions, were unhappy with the Congress as they viewed the policies carried out by the Congress-led government as encouraging the imposition of Hindi. Although the pre-independent political alignments had not broken down in Bihar, with influential Bengali-Bihari politicians remaining within the Congress organisation, their displeasure at the state of affairs was evident. Thirdly, narratives of colonialist Bengalis presented by pro-Hindi Bihari politicians were developed and refined during this period. Strategies relating to the ways in which Bengalis demanded rights underwent a transformation with more focus placed on education and administration in Bengali than on Bengali rights to jobs, which were central in the pre-independent period. The passing of the constitution and the decision to conduct elections under universal franchise further impacted Bengali politics in the province, as did the growing demands for linguistic states. The next chapter will examine the various responses in Bihar both to the first general election (1952) and to the central government's decision to redraw state boundaries along linguistic lines.

Chapter 5: 'Hindi Imperialism' Versus 'Bengali Colonialism': Transformations in Bihari politics due to impending linguistic reorganisation (1950-54)

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the period shortly after independence when various groups and communities were putting forth different visions of India. This transitory era was marked by a general lack of cohesion in Bengali politics in Bihar, with numerous different conceptions of their community's position within Bihar and broader Indian society discussed. Different figures used these conceptions of belonging to achieve their aims without settling on singular strategies. Clearer alignments would come into focus in the era after the passing of the Constitution of India, which came into effect on the 26th of January 1950. It was decided that elections would be held on the basis of universal franchise the following year, and an officially elected government would form in 1952. While through the late 1940s, the Congress held firm against the redistribution of territories on the basis of language, after the growth of concerted language movements, it became increasingly difficult to deny the population linguistic states. The growing likelihood of linguistic reorganisation led to further fears in Bihar regarding the fate of Manbhum and other parts of the Chhotanagpur plateau, which further encouraged the state's government to continue their project of 'Hindi-isation' in those regions. This, in turn, resulted in the departure of several senior Bengali-Bihari politicians from the Congress in the Manbhum area. These politicians, who organised as the Lok Sevak Sangh (LSS) within the Manbhum Congress, now formed a separate party to contest elections.

In 1952, after acceding to the demands of those who called for the formation of a Telugu-speaking Andhra State in southern India, the Government of India made the decision to redraw state borders along linguistic lines. This resulted in the creation of further distance between Bengalis settled on the border (primarily represented by the LSS in the Assembly) and Bengali politicians and publications from areas unlikely to be granted to West Bengal. The former doubled down on its anti-Congress and pro-linguistic realignment stance, while the latter were vehement in their support for the position of the government of Bihar. It was a period of political realignment within Bihar as strategic alliances that had developed in the multilingual and multicultural state became strained with its likely move towards greater linguistic homogeneity. Some alliances that had seemingly significantly deteriorated due to partition were unexpectedly revived in the face of linguistic realignment.

Firstly, Bengalis inhabiting non-border regions in Bihar, such as Patna, Monghyr, and Gaya, opposed the transfer of any territories to West Bengal. This mirrored the Government of Bihar's position. Although these Bengalis had always walked something more of a tightrope, expressing support for education and administration in the Bengali language in areas where Bengali was predominant while also voicing their support of Hindi more generally, the impending reorganisation of states led them to disassociate from any demands made by their co-linguists on the border. While other Bihari politicians such as Murali Manohar Prasad continued to present Bengalis in the borders as interlopers and colonisers, non-border Bengalis began repurposing narratives of Bengali belonging in the region, which Bengali-Biharis had previously deployed to oppose government policies, to support the continued inclusion of the Manbhum region in Bihar. As the argument made by these groups ran, as Bengalis had always been a part of the fabric of Bihari society and had contributed to Bihar's culture, being Bihari and being Bengali were not mutually exclusive. Therefore, transferring Bengali-speaking territory out of Bihar was not required.

A discussion of these political realignments in Bihar contributes to broader debates around minority engagement in India. The politics of non-border Bengali-Biharis mirrored political engagement from minorities across India. Leading Muslims in Bombay, including Syed Abdullah Brelvi, M.Y. Nurie, K.A. Hameid, and Moinuddin Harris, encouraged Muslims to discard organisations centred around religious identity and join the Congress. They made laudatory statements about the party such as 'it is, as it has always been, the one political party that can establish a stable, truly democratic government and ensure the prosperity and progress of all citizens without any distinction of caste or creed'.[1] While Mushirul Hasan emphasises the lack of unity in terms of political engagement in the Indian Muslim population in the postcolonial era, he states, 'As a result of the pervasive insecurity and fear', many Muslims in government service 'found it necessary to affirm their loyalty to the Indian Union.'[2] This was also true in Hyderabad, as Taylor Sherman argues, with some Muslims in the state aligning with the 'Congress' as this 'was the best strategy to adopt' largely because the party controlled the levers of power.[3] This chapter discusses the stances taken by minorities beyond religious ones and demonstrates the impact independence and partition had on minority communities across India. While Bengalis were not tarred by the

[1] Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence* (London: C. Hurst, 1996), p.189.
[2] *Ibid.,* 190.
[3] Sherman, '*Muslim Belonging in Secular India'*.

same ‘communal’ brush as Muslims, those who were not settled on the border and whose territories would not be moved attempted to buttress their ‘Bihari’ credentials by opposing the transfer of territory and expressing support for the Hindi language.

These Bengalis supported the positions held by the Government of Bihar in order to prove they were loyal to the state they inhabited rather than their ostensible linguistic homeland. They also feared a more culturally homogenous state (without the populations of Bengalis at the border) could lead to majoritarianism and oppression of the Bengali community that remained in the state. Although the expression of this fear of the ‘cultural nationalism’ of the majority was only to come to the fore later, the strong opposition from Bengalis not on the border to the ceding of any Bengali-speaking regions to West Bengal indicated that these linguistic minorities preferred the security of a culturally heterogenous state.

Secondly, due to the impending linguistic reorganisation, elite Hindu Biharis (not including Bengali-Biharis) began presenting Muslims in the state as a fundamental part of the Bihari community. This was primarily because Kishanganj, a border region with a significant Muslim population, could possibly be transferred to West Bengal. Therefore, it was in the interests of the government and Bihari politicians who did not want to see the region removed from Bihar to reaffirm Muslim belonging in the state while presenting Bengalis as inherently hostile to Muslims. This was not particularly difficult given the history of communal relations in Bengal and the rhetoric used by Bengalis in Bihar with regard to Muslims. This trend, which began during this period, would become more apparent as debates around linguistic reorganisation developed over the next few years. This discussion contributes to scholarship on the broader Hindi language movements in India as most historians, such as Sudha Pai, frame the postcolonial Hindi language movements as fundamentally anti-Urdu.[4] Hasan similarly suggests that in UP, senior politicians actively ‘othered’ the Indian Muslim population. The Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel also ‘relapsed into his old attitude of suspecting Muslim loyalty’ and ‘removed Muslim officials who had opted to stay in India.’[5] However, an analysis of politics in Bihar reveals that not all proponents of Hindi were fundamentally opposed to Urdu (or to Muslims). The Government of Bihar viewed presenting Muslims as a part of the Bihari community as an essential part of their attempts to retain territory in the state and, therefore, did not attempt to other the community.

[4] Sudha Pai, ‘Politics of Language: Decline of Urdu in Uttar Pradesh’, *Economics and Political Weekly*, 37.27 (2002).
[5] Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation*, 147.

The third historiographical intervention this chapter makes involves the practice of Adivasi politics in Bihar. Border Bengali support for the transfer of territories in Chhotanagpur was opposed by Adivasi organisations and figures (who had previously expressed sympathy for many demands that emerged from the Bengali community) as any division of the plateau would entail a split in Adivasi lands. Adivasi organisations, therefore, continued to demand a separate state of Jharkhand and opposed the ceding of any Bihari territory to West Bengal. Although the politics of Adivasis in postcolonial Bihar has been examined in detail by Louise Tillin, this discussion contributes to the scholarship around Adivasi strategies by discussing the shifting temporary alliances made by the group in order to achieve their aims of a separate state.[6]

This chapter will explore the debates around the Hindi language and the growing divergence in how Bengalis on the border and Bengalis in non-border regions practised politics. It demonstrates that both non-border Bengalis and Muslims in Bihar supported Congress priorities, mirroring patterns of minority engagement across the country in the postcolonial era.

The passing of the Bihar Official Language Bill (1950) and the split in the Congress in Manbhum (1950-1951)

The demands for territory, mainly from West Bengal, abated somewhat in the first two years after India was declared a republic. Nevertheless, while there were no large-scale movements for linguistic states, issues around language continued to simmer. In Bihar, the relationships between senior Congress politicians in the state and Bengalis on the border (who, until this time, had remained members of the Congress organisation) slowly began to deteriorate. The actions of the Congress-led government in the previous years, coupled with a food crisis exacerbated by a paddy levy in Manbhum, entirely alienated the members of the Lok Sevak Sangh (LSS), which split from the Congress. Adding to the tensions were some pro-Hindi Bihari politicians, who continued to express the belief that Bengalis were taking the bulk of jobs in various branches of the service through networks within their community.

While it was widely accepted that Hindi would be the official language, the Indian Constitution had put in place a proviso that required state legislatures to declare a specific language official if they no longer wanted to use English. The Bihar Official Language Bill was put to the Bihar Legislative Assembly between the 3rd and 4th of October 1950 by Krishna

[6] Tillin, *Remapping India*.

Ballabh Sahay, the controversial Revenue Minister. The bill had little trouble passing in the Congress majority house. However, some members of the House suggested amendments and MLAs from predominantly Bengali-speaking regions were particularly vocal during the debate. The MLA from Manbhum elected to the Muslim seat in 1946, Saiyid Amin Ahmad, put forth two amendments during the debate, one to request the wide circulation of the bill in order to assess public opinion and expand the number of officially recognised languages in Bihar. The second proposal stated:

> 1. Subject to the provisions of article 346, 347, and 348 of the Constitution of India, the languages to be used for the official purposes of the state shall be: -
>   1) Hindi in the Devanagari, Roman or Kaithi script.
>   2) Urdu in the Devanagari, Roman, Kaithi or Persian script.
>   3) Bengali in Bangala or Roman script.
>   4) Ho, Oraon, Mundari and Santhali in the Deonagari [sic]or Roman script.
> 2. Notwithstanding anything in clause (1) for a period of 15 years starting on the 26th of January 1950, the English language shall continue to be used for all official purposes [7]

Ahmad was elected on a Muslim League ticket; nevertheless, like many other League MLAs from Bihar, he chose not to move to Pakistan after partition.

Ahmad made it clear that he was more interested in the preservation of spoken languages. He stated that the government should 'keep any script they wished to keep but allow Urdu to remain [one of the official languages].'[8] He suggested that even Urdu written in the Devanagari script was acceptable. He defended the necessity of keeping English as an official language, pointing out that while it was possible to communicate in Hindi with other states, such as UP, who had made Hindi their official language, it would be challenging to communicate with both the central government which had kept English as an official language and other non-Hindi-speaking states. [9] He added that Hindi was not a scientific enough language and that India was likely to need aid from foreign experts, so English could not be replaced entirely by Hindi (especially at universities).[10]

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[7] 'Bihar Official Language Bill', 4 October 1950, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates* 1950, http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/28977, p. 3.
[8] *Ibid*. (translated from Hindi), p. 16.
[9] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi), p. 8.
[10] *Ibid.,* p. 10.

These arguments were opposed by several sections of the house, even by MLAs who were ostensibly speakers of the languages Ahmad aimed to 'protect' with his amendment. Government representatives did not approve, and Sahay, the mover of the original proposal, claimed that Ahmad was merely attempting to win over Bengalis and Adivasis and did not truly 'love' Urdu, Bengali, Santhali, and Oraon. Sahay alleged that Ahmad still 'loved' those he had 'been in service to' [the English], which was why he remained supportive of the English language. He added that Ahmad's true aim was to promote English in order to exclude those who did not speak the language from power.[11] He stated that the passing of the bill would not mean that all official business would immediately be conducted in Hindi but that the bill allowed people to begin to 'prepare' for the change.[12]

Nevertheless, some of the Adivasi contingent in the Assembly supported Amin. Sidui Hembrom, a representative of the Adivasi Mahasabha from Singhbhum, stated that he approved of the amendment as Adivasis had historically been 'taught in languages' that were not their own, and with independence, they too expected to receive education in their mother tongue.[13] Hembrom accused the Congress of causing hardship to Santhalis, asserting that before 1948, Santhalis were able to file court documents using the Santhali language in the Roman script. However, as the government made Hindi the official language, this practice was discontinued. Hembrom suggested that at the very least courts in the Santhal Parganas should allow the use of Santhali in the Devanagari script.[14] Binodanand Jha, the Congress MLA from Deogarh-cum-Jamtara, dismissed this and claimed this was only the practice in one district (Dumka) as an experiment carried out by British officials and not standard across the state.[15] Although Hembrom attempted to point to the plight of Adivasis who were forced to learn many more languages other than their mother tongue, this line of argument was quickly dismissed by the speaker, who claimed the discussion had moved off-topic as Hembrom focused more on the language of education rather than the matter of the official language of the state.[16]

Given the nature of Ahmad's amendment, it would stand to reason that other linguistic minorities, especially ex-Muslim Leaguers like himself, would be equally supportive.

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[11] *Ibid*. (translated from Hindi), p. 16.
[12] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi), p. 18.
[13] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi), p. 22.
[14] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi).
[15] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi), p. 22-23.
[16] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi), p. 23.

Nevertheless, Muhammad Tahir, the MLA from Amour in Purnea, did not entirely approve of the resolution. Although the two MLAs fought the 1946 election under the same banner, their respective political statures within the state were different. Ahmad's political career quickly fizzled out after his election to Bihar's upper house was declared void in 1953.[17] On the other hand, Tahir was considered a reasonably influential Bihari politician, running unopposed in all three of his election campaigns for the Bihar Legislative Assembly. Tahir's party allegiance shifted from the IMP in 1937 to the League in 1946 and finally to the Congress after independence while remaining unbeatable in his constituency.[18] He finally became the MP for Kishanganj in 1957, serving for two terms.[19] Therefore, Tahir had some amount of leverage over the Congress (as he had an iron grip on his constituency) but needed to work within Congress structures to ensure the progression of his political career. He stated he did not approve of three latter parts of the amendment, which would give Urdu, Bengal, Santhali, and Mundari official status, but requested that 'Hindi in the Devanagari script' be replaced with 'Hindustani in the Devanagari script'.[20] In defence of his position, he referred to the long histories of Hindi and Urdu both existing in the state and the consequent importance of Urdu as a language to Bihar. When the speaker pointed out that his original demand centred around 'Hindustani', Tahir responded that 'Hindustani and Urdu were one thing'.[21] While Tahir attempted to make the case for Urdu, he aligned himself more closely with the ruling party and the government's priorities, demonstrating how some Muslims in Bihar (especially those who were a part of the power structures of the Congress) advanced their agenda. This identification with Bihar and with Bihar's government meant that when linguistic realignment came later in the decade, areas that were Muslim majority, or represented by Muslims, demanded to remain a part of Bihar.

Ahmad had designed his amendment to appeal to a variety of linguistic minorities in Bihar; however, long histories of Bengali-Bihari antipathy towards Muslims within the state meant that Srish Chandra Banerjee, the Bengali Congress MLA from Central Manbhum, was reluctant to support Ahmad's amendment. He continually expressed his lack of faith that Ahmad's amendment would be successful and objected to the clause that allowed for Bengali

[17] 'Election in Bihar Declared Void: Issue of nomination', The Times of India, 18 February 1953, 7.
[18] 'Members Absence During Voting: Congress Warning', The Times of India, 3 August 1938, 5. 'Bihar Assembly Election: Results and Analysis', The Times of India, 3 April 1946, 8. *Bihar Assembly Election Results in 1951* https://www.elections.in/bihar/assembly-constituencies/1951-election-results.html
[19] Bihar Parliamentary Elections, Kishanganj, https://www.elections.in/bihar/parliamentary-constituencies/kishanganj.html?utm_source=from_pctrack. (Accessed on 4 March 2022).
[20] 'Bihar Official Language Bill', (translated from Hindi), p. 35.
[21] *Ibid*. (translated from Hindi), p. 37.

to be written in the Roman script, stating, 'I do not know with whose consent he has written this'.[22] Banerjee went on to add his own amendment to the proposal, which would give Bengali the status of an official language 'in addition to Hindi in the districts of Manbhum, Singhbhum, Purnea and Santhal Parganas'.[23] He stated this was because if Hindi were introduced 'as the state language throughout the Province, these Bengali speaking people [in the four districts]' would 'be severely handicapped.[24] He claimed that in Manbhum, the 'administration… is on the verge of collapse' as 'Government officers' were 'acting according to their own sweet will and choice' and that any attempts to impose Hindi on the region would be costly and ineffective.[25] Although Ahmad was attempting to unite distinct linguistic minority groups behind his amendment, Banerjee expressed his opposition to Urdu as a state language, stating that it would be 'difficult to introduce Urdu as an additional state language' as, unlike Bengalis, Muslims did not live in a 'compact area' in the state.[26] The response from Banerjee to Ahmad's resolution further emphasised the narratives around the anti-Muslim sentiment present in Bengali communities.

K.B. Sahay immediately dismissed Banerjee's amendment on the grounds that the Bengali census enumerators had included Kurmali as Bengali, a claim which he stated was supported by the research done by Hugh Macpherson, a British official who was briefly appointed the Acting Governor of Bihar and Orissa in 1924.[27] Sahay suggested that Kurmali was actually a dialect of Hindi, which meant that Hindi education would be more valuable in areas like Manbhum with large numbers of Kurmis. He claimed that inhabitants of the border regions were given no opportunity to study Hindi, stating that there were some claims made that Bengali was forcibly 'imposed' on the region.[28] These narratives had been perpetuated at least since the late 1930s (during the height of the 'Bengali-Bihari issue') and systematically denied that the Bengali language and Bengalis themselves were Biharis.

None of the amendments were approved, and the house passed the Bihar Official Language Bill with a large majority. This episode demonstrated the growing distance between the Congress and their Bengali MLAs on the border. Food shortages in Manbhum exacerbated this, as did the apparent lack of solution provided by the Government of Bihar. Manbhum had been declared a grain surplus region in 1948, although its inhabitants protested that

[22] *Ibid*., p. 30
[23] *Ibid.,* p. 31.
[24] *Ibid*.
[25] *Ibid.,* 32.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi), p. 45.
[28] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi).

designation. In October 1950, the situation was particularly dire and the LSS organisation within the Congress came out in protest against the government's actions. In a statement, the LSS's spokesperson, Arunchandra Ghosh, bemoaned the 'desperate' shortages of 'rice and other food grains in the Purulia market'. He railed against the 'government systems' that had created the situation and claimed that Manbhum was in the grip of famine.[29] Although language remained a significant part of the grievances expressed by Bengalis in the border regions, narratives were being developed around the neglect of the region by the government that currently controlled it. This demonstrated that linguistic issues were not viewed in isolation but connected to broader debates occurring in independent India. As Benjamin Siegel has shown, the nationalist promises around food scarcity had been quickly broken due to the realities of the food situation in independent India. Bihar in the late 1940s and early 1950s was particularly affected by food shortages.[30] These two issues, therefore, exacerbated the alienation of sections of the Manbhum population from the Government of Bihar.

This situation meant that members of the LSS found they could no longer work within the Congress party to achieve their aims. On the 26th of January 1951, a year after the inauguration of the Constitution, at the LSS district conference held in Kumir, the LSS adopted a resolution to 'sever' their 'organisational connection with the Congress organisation' as 'the congress organisation now adays' was 'beyond any hope of rectification and unsuitable for the declared ideas it avowed'.[31] The resolution further stated, 'the Congress through its incompetency and its support, having been filled with the corruption and disgracefully bad administration have rendered popular life miserable in every sphere, and have far retarded the Congress aim of administration'.[32] The language used was particularly strong, which suggested that the organisation had come to believe that attempts to achieve their aims within the Congress structures had definitively failed, and it was better to attempt to pressure the Congress from outside the organisation. Srish Chandra Banerjee personally tendered his resignation from both the Congress and the Assembly, stating that his 'efforts' to solve the 'problems' of his district, which was 'mainly a Bengali-speaking area' did not get 'a favourable attitude and desirable sympathy from our Assembly as a whole'.[33] He made

[29] '*Purulia Bajar o Sarkari Karyakalaap'*, *Mukti*, 16 October 1950, 6. (translated from Bengali).
[30] Benjamin Robert Siegel, *Hungry Nation: Food, Famine, and the Making of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 87.
[31] 'Letter from Srish Chandra Banerjee, Member of Bihar Legislative Assembly to President of Central Parliamentary Board, All-India Congress Committee,' 3 March, 1951 in AICC Volume II, PB No. 4-Bihar, Serial no. 1860 in *NMML,* page 24 in file 1 in doc.
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.,* page 25 in file 2 in doc.

reference to the 'majority view', which was at 'variance' with 'the ideals and works' of the LSS.[34] The withdrawal of members of the Lok Sevak Sangh from the Congress caused significant issues for the Congress in terms of their electoral prospects in the area as these figures were well known, with long histories in the district.

In 1951, the Government of Bihar further incensed residents of Manbhum by introducing a paddy levy. Farming in Manbhum was seasonal, and its small agriculturalists usually relied on the forests for subsistence during the off-season. The Government of Bihar's Forest Acts to ensure the preservation of these areas put further pressure on them.[35] 1951 was a year of drought, which exacerbated food shortages in Manbhum. The Bihar government's apparent lack of concern for this area frustrated inhabitants, and in March 1951, the LSS, with widespread support in the region, launched a *satyagraha* against the 'government's food policy'.[36] The government eventually had to abandon its plans for the paddy levy, which demonstrated the relative strength of the LSS and the popularity of their positions in the area. It revealed a certain security in the position of the LSS in the region, especially given the fact that national elections were shortly scheduled to take place. The decision to remove themselves from the Congress party and actively oppose it through direct action suggests that the members of this organisation were quite confident in the support they would receive.

Election results and growing demands for linguistic realignment (1952)

This section will examine the results of the election in Manbhum and discuss how narratives developed during the colonial era of Bengali 'colonialism' were redeployed in the period just after independence to justify electoral losses. It argues that the Congress had alienated large sections of the population of Manbhum due to the state government's encouragement (and in some cases imposition) of Hindi. While there were some attempts to suggest that the LSS did not truly represent the opinions of the inhabitants of Manbhum, their victories indicate that the Congress government in the state was not particularly popular in this region. The first past the post system did, to a certain extent, obscure the scale of opposition to the Congress as it tended to be fragmented, and Congress candidates often won pluralities rather than majorities. This fact made the party's difficulties in regions where demands for linguistic reorganisation flourished starker as Congress candidates frequently found themselves decisively outvoted. In

[34] *Ibid.,* page 27 in file 3 in doc.
[35] 'Lands Not Cultivated For Lack of Paddy Seed: thousands of peasants are starving in Manbhum', *The Times of India*, 3 July 1953, 7.
[36] 'Bihar Satyagraha Threat', *The Times of India*, 9 March 1951, 5.

Rajni Kothari's analysis of the 'Congress System' in India, he argues that the non-Congress parties acted as 'parties of pressure' which functioned on the 'margin' and whose job was not to provide viable alternatives for parties of governance but to be a 'latent threat' to ensure the 'party of dominance' does not stray too far from public opinion.[37] The LSS acted as this 'party of pressure', and its opposition to the Hindi-isation of the Manbhum region was acknowledged as valid.

The Congress fared particularly poorly in areas where language issues simmered. This was evident in the region of Madras, which demanded a separate Telugu-speaking state.[38] It was apparent in Bihar where the Congress won large majorities but suffered reverses in Chhotanagpur. The Jharkhand Party, which supported the formation of a separate Adivasi state, won 32 of the 53 seats they contested.[39] In Manbhum, the LSS won seven out of twelve seats contested by them, and the President of the Manbhum DCC had to forfeit his security deposit as he did not receive enough votes. Jimutbahan Sen, the only Bengali member of cabinet in the 1937 election, was defeated by a considerable margin.[40] Srish Chandra Banerjee, who had resigned from the Congress the previous year was returned to the Assembly, getting almost double the votes of his Congress competitor.[41]

H.P. Singh, the Secretary of the Manbhum Zilla Congress Committee, prepared a long election report to explain the losses in the area. The report largely blamed the ex-Congressmen who formed the LSS, claiming they were 'rebels and political renegades who made a capital out of their former position' and had 'imposed upon unsophisticated electorates that they were the congress candidates and to vote for them meant a vote for the congress.'[42] The report further went on to state that in 'urban areas', the LSS had 'inflamed provincial bias' and 'raised the cry that Bengali Nation and culture was in Jeopardy and a vote for them would mean the saving of Bengali speaking population from annihilation'.[43] This report implies that the loss was not due to innate issues with the Congress but because the LSS (and other Bengalis) had behaved in a way that encouraged 'provincialism'. Firstly, these accusations of 'provincialism' were effective ways to undercut the success of the LSS due to the fact, as Emma Mawdsley states, senior politicians such as Nehru believed that the process

[37] Rajni Kothari, 'The Congress "System" in India', *Asian Survey*, 4.12 (1964), p. 1162.
[38] Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 186.
[39] 'Congress Majority in Bihar Assembly: Review of Party Position', *The Times of India*, 15 Feb 1952, 6.
[40] 'Election report', 7 April 1952 in AICC Volume II, Parliamentary Election Committee (PEC) No. 3-Bihar, Serial no. 2309 in *NMML,* page 95 in file 2 in doc
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] *Ibid.,* page 98 in file 1 in doc.
[43] *Ibid.,* page 98-99 in file, 1-2 in doc.

of nation-building, begun by the passing of the Constitution and the institutionalisation of democratic elections would be hindered by the 'reactionary forces of ethnicity, language, religion and regional culture'.[44] Therefore, these claims diluted the responsibility of the DCC to which Singh belonged. Secondly, the framing of the Manbhum electorate as 'unsophisticated' reiterated narratives put forth by elite 'native' Biharis regarding the imposition of Bengali on the 'backward' population of the Manbhum regions.

Nevertheless, although the report attempted to place blame for Congress losses mostly on the LSS, Singh admitted that the Congress in the district had been 'dubbed as the Hindi Congress' and government policies of Hindi-isation of the region had effectively turned a large section of the population against the party. He stated that the reasons for the loss in the region were 'unnecessary haste in foisting Hindi upon a population by unscrupulous officers', as well as the 'step-motherly attitude towards infant college and proposed Bengali high school' while the District Commissioner spent large sums of money on a Hindi-medium girls' high school.[45] Evidently, despite the vociferous claims made by pro-Hindi Bihari public figures of Bengali colonialism in the area, the inhabitants of Manbhum were largely supportive of the demands made by the LSS on behalf of the Bengali community. Despite a distinct lack of sympathy expressed by Singh for Bengali demands and his emphasis on the supposedly underhanded methods used by the LSS to emerge victorious in Manbhum, Singh did partly place the blame on the Hindi policies of the government, suggesting that it was impossible to ignore these issues in Manbhum. This was regardless of the narratives that some members of the ruling party and parts of the government propagated with respect to Bengalis as having imposed their language on the region.

The LSS succeeded in winning several seats, which backed their claim of being representatives for their region, and some of their MLAs in the Assembly continued to express their discontent with the situation in Manbhum. Despite the long report warning against Hindi policies in the region, pro-Hindi MLAs in the Assembly continued to demand it, presenting historical narratives about the area to support their claims. In May 1952, the Governor of Bihar, M.S. Aney, gave an address that dealt with a variety of challenges facing Bihar, including the food shortages.[46] During the response to the address in the Legislative Assembly, Srish Chandra Banerjee demanded that the lines, 'the failure to protect adequately

[44] Emma Mawdsley, 'Redrawing the Body Politic: Federalism, Regionalism and the Creation of New States in India', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 40.3 (2002), 38.
[45] *Ibid*., page 102-103 in file, 5-6 in doc.
[46] 'Dr Aney's Call to Bihar Legislators', *The Times of India*, 17 May 1952, p. 7.

the language, culture, life, property, and civil liberties of the non-Hindi speaking people of the State is regretted', be added as an amendment to the speech.[47] This amendment was greeted with disdain by pro-Hindi MLAs in the Assembly, with Badrinath Varma angrily dismissing the idea that Bengali claims had any basis. Varma was a fairly senior Congressman in the province and was made a member of the cabinet after the 1952 elections, suggesting his opinions were not particularly niche. He once again implied that Bengalis were essentially colonisers, stating that although Indians had 'chased the English away', however 'the people who worked in government offices' had 'unfortunately remained'.[48] He strongly objected to the idea that the government was carrying out the process of Hindi-isation against the wishes of the people of Manbhum. He stated that the 'police were not catching children and forcibly putting them in school' but that they were 'free' and going to whichever school was the most 'convenient.'[49] He further went on to claim that the only reason anyone was upset was because of 'vested interests' in the region that opposed the 'abolition of the zamindari', with the implication that high-caste Bengalis in the area feared a literate Hindi population over whom they might have less control.[50] The presentation of Bengali speakers as upper-caste exploiters suggests a specific framing by some pro-Hindi MLAs of the Bengali position in Bihar of Bengalis as colonisers and exploiters.

Varma claimed that the issue of 'non-recognition' of Bengali schools was not a valid grievance, stating that if the requirements for schools, such as 'land, money, etc. etc.', were not met, then it was not possible to receive recognition. He implied that Bengalis had little to complain about regarding a lack of schools in their language, stating 'when Bengal and Bihar were one' there was 'not a single Bihari in the Secretariat in Bengal' and 'all the schools that were opened were opened in that [Bengali] language only'.[51] Although this point was hardly relevant in terms of the demand for the recognition of more Bengali schools, the references to histories of 'injustices' against Hindi-speaking Biharis at the hands of Bengalis was an important part of the narrative that pro-Hindi figures propagated in order to justify their policies in the border regions. Banerjee's amendment, somewhat predictably, failed to pass, which further suggested to some members of the Bengali community that Bihar was likely to

[47] 'Discussion on the Address of H.E. the Governor', 22 May 1952, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates, 1952, Vol. 1, No. 9* (Patna: Superintendent Press, 1953), 43.
[48] *Ibid.,* 24 (translated from Hindi).
[49] *Ibid.* 25 (translated from Hindi).
[50] *Ibid.,* 26 (translated from Hindi).
[51] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).

be inhospitable towards them. Despite the mandate the LSS won in Manbhum, it was evident they had little opportunity to influence policy.

States' response to linguistic realignment

The Government of West Bengal, where the Congress had recently won, continued its demands on territory in Bihar and provided the LSS with support. On the 7th of August 1952, the West Bengal Assembly passed a resolution demanding an increase in territory for West Bengal and a reduction in territory for Bihar to solve the refugee problem.[52] The West Bengal government demanded 16,000 square kilometres of territory from Bihar, which, as the reorganisation of states had been deemed inadvisable, the government of Bihar ignored. However, the events of the next few months brought the matter of linguistic reorganisation back into prominence as discontent continued to bubble in the Andhra regions of Madras. On the 19th of October 1952, an old Congressman, Potti Sriramulu, emulating his guru Gandhi, began a fast to pressure the government into granting an Andhra state. The fast lasted almost two months but the government refused to entertain his demands. In a letter to the Governor of Madras, Sri Prakasa, Nehru stated, 'It is impossible for a Government to function under threats of hunger strikes and the like'.[53] However, on the 15th of December, Sriramalu died, and there was widespread chaos in the areas of Madras that demanded a Telugu-speaking state. Acting quickly, on the 19th of December, Nehru announced that the state of Andhra would be formed shortly. The government had little choice but to redraw all boundaries along linguistic lines. Aware that the Bengal-Bihar border was a particular point of contention and that his speech in the Assembly was likely to encourage the linguistic claims from West Bengal, the day before his announcement, Nehru wrote a letter to BC. Roy, asking his 'people in Bengal' not to 'start off again' but to 'deal with this matter in as friendly a manner as possible' by talking to 'Sri Babu [S. K. Sinha] and other Bihar people.'[54] Both Bihar and West Bengal largely ignored this plea from Nehru. A year later, in December 1953, the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) was set up to research how to divide the country linguistically. The Commission provided a space for state governments and other interested parties to make claims regarding the territory their state was entitled to. This led to the

[52] 'Embarrassed by the arrival of refugees, West Bengal demands an increase in size', *Jugantar*, 8 August 1952, 1 (translated from Bengali).
[53] Jawaharlal Nehru, 'To Sri Prakasa', 7 December 1952, *SWJN, Series 2,* Vol. 20, 236.
[54] Jawaharlal Nehru, 'To B. C. Roy', 18 December 1952, *SJWN*, Series 2, Vol. 20, 268.

production and propagation of a host of narratives surrounding languages and communities to encourage the SRC to accede to their demands.

Once the central government accepted that linguistic states would have to be created, West Bengal's demands for territories in Bihar became even more vociferous. This, in turn, led to a further emphasis by Hindi Bihari politicians on narratives of Bengali 'colonisation' of and imposition of their language on the border regions. While the linguistic principle had been accepted, fears around the dangers of 'provincialism' to India's unity still continued to thrive. Therefore, Bengalis on the border (with the LSS leading the charge) continued to highlight the oppression faced by Bengalis at the hands of the Government of Bihar to justify their demands for transfers of territory. On the other hand, Bengalis not settled on the border strongly supported the priorities of the state's government in order to ensure they were not tarred with the same brush as their co-linguists on the border. They strategically deployed the same narratives of belonging developed and refined during the Rajendra Prasad investigation in the late 1930s but instead used these to bolster the positions taken by Hindi politicians regarding Bihar's territory.

On the 30th of April 1953, Bengali-speaking MLAs in the Bihar Assembly led by Srish Chandra Banerjee and including Bhim Chandra Mahto, an Adivasi MLA, wrote to the President of India, requesting the official recognition of Bengali as a state language in Bihar. The letter emphasised the fact that 'some members of the Bihar Legislative Assembly' could not 'adequately express themselves in any language except Bengali' and suggested that in order to access their right to representation, it was necessary to give official recognition to Bengali.[55] This demand received a cool response from the central government. B. N. Lokur, Special Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Law, suggested that a response should be sent stating the 'President is not satisfied' that a 'substantial proportion of the population of the State of Bihar desire the use of the Bengali language to be recognised by that State'.[56] Although the central government dismissed this, the letter indicated that some Bengalis in Bihar did not view the state as having given them adequate representation as they were not allowed to communicate in their 'mother tongue', which put them at a disadvantage.

Meanwhile, West Bengal continued to lay claim to Bengali-speaking border territories of Bihar. On the 4th of May 1953, the Bengal Assembly passed a resolution demanding both

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[55] 'Letter to President of India from Members of the Bihar', 30 April, 1953, Papers of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Proposal for the recognition of Bengali languages by the State of Bihar, File no. 182/53-Public I*, NAI,* Page 13 in file.
[56] 'Note from B.N. Lokur', 9 June 1953, page 3 in file.

the transfer of territory to West Bengal as well as the recognition of Bengali as a state language in Bihar. The Congress Chief Minister B.C. Roy stated that 'There was a great deal of excitement sometime back in some parts of Bihar when its Government prescribed that in the schools Bengali could not be taught above a certain standard, in fact, it was thought that they would insist upon every Bengalee learning Hindi as the only language to be learnt.' He claimed that 'this was entirely against the spirit of the Constitution, and you cannot deprive a particular group of people from speaking the language of the community to which it belongs.'[57]

Roy found support across the political spectrum for the resolution. The Communist MLA, Ranendra Nath Sen, further emphasised the importance of language on the political stage, stating, 'Many among the leaders of our agitation were writers and linguists. The language, therefore, has a very important place in our national agitation.'[58] The Hindu Mahasabha MLA, Tarapada Bandhopadhyay, suggested the 'dangerous situation' in Bihar was 'analogous to that in Pakistan due to the foisting of Urdu upon that state'.[59] The Forward Bloc MLA, Atindra Nath Bose, indicated he believed the Congress had 'set their face against anything that stands for Bengali language and culture', especially since the central government refused to implement the 'longstanding Congress promise of redistribution of boundaries on linguistic basis'.[60] These MLAs provided a variety of reasons for why West Bengal should both receive the territory and for why Bihar should make Bengali a state language. Additionally, state legislatures could not pass resolutions on behalf of neighbouring state governments.

Nevertheless, given the changing national context with regard to states reorganisation, these resolutions put increasing pressure on the Government in Bihar, which, unlike the previous year, immediately opened a debate on the 12th of May regarding the West Bengal government's demands. Apart from Srish Chandra Banerjee and his fellow LSS members, the entire house came out against the resolution passed by the West Bengal Legislative Assembly. In an instance of how political allegiances could shift dramatically during the period of linguistic reorganisation, both non-border Bengalis and Adivasis, who had previously expressed some sympathy for the issues faced by Bengalis at the border, expressed their strong support for the government's position. Chief Minister S. K. Sinha began by indicating

[57] 'West Bengal Legislative Assembly Debate', 4 May 1953, page 20 in file, 4 in doc.
[58] *Ibid.,* page 24 in file 8 in doc.
[59] *Ibid.,* page 22 in file, 6 in doc.
[60] *Ibid.,* page 27 in file, 11 in doc.

that he knew the topic was controversial and cautioned his members to 'do their work coolly' and not become 'agitated'.[61] He added that given the high tensions around the question, it would 'have been better' if it 'had not been raised at this time'.[62] The Congress MLA and future speaker of the Assembly, Lakshmi Narayan Sudhanshu, quickly put forth a resolution declining to accede to West Bengal's claims, which received widespread support in the Bihar Assembly. He stated that Bengal's claims on the land were based on more recent histories of the 'British era and the Mughal reign', but if one were to examine histories before that they would find that 'Bengal's map was not in this form'.[63] He suggested that the histories of empires that ruled from Pataliputra, while Bengal was made up of 'small-small kingdoms' situated 'mostly around Dhaka', undercut any Bengali claims to the region, as their ascendency was a recent phenomenon, while Bihar had historical roots.[64] This directly refuted the argument from West Bengal that Bihar had only been created out of Bengal by the British, who maliciously intended to reduce Bengali influence. Sudhanshu added that the 'Bengali language was derived from the Bihari language Magahi'.[65] His statement about language challenged the transfer of territories on linguistic grounds, suggesting that long histories of intermingling and governance from Bihar meant that West Bengal had no grounds for its claim.

Murali Manohar Prasad was, unsurprisingly, against any possible amalgamation of Bengali-speaking Bihar with West Bengal. He made a series of claims regarding Bengalis in Bihar, stating that they had 'occupied the highest positions in the State of Bihar' and, therefore, could not claim to be victims of discrimination.[66] He stated that if a proper 'investigation' were made of West Bengal's claims, it would 'throw light on a chapter of Indian history' that would 'not redound to the credit of Bengal'. He further stated, 'it can be proved to the hilt that not merely in Manbhum and the Santhal Parganas but in adjoining areas Bengali officials, supported by the full weight of the then Bengal Government, imposed Bengali deliberately on the then Hindi-speaking people of that area.'[67] Echoing Rajendra Prasad's words from 1939, he suggested that Bengalis had 'sponsored the idea of Chota Nagpur [sic] as a separate province', which would result in the 'industrial areas' being 'carved

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[61] 'Bengal Bihar Boundary Issues', 12 May 1953, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1953,* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/169574 (accessed on 25th June 2021) (translated from Hindi), p. 2.
[62] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi), p. 5.
[63] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).
[64] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).
[65] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).
[66] *Ibid.,* p. 14.
[67] *Ibid.,* p. 19.

out of Bihar and amalgamated into a separate centrally administered state.[68] He indicated this was because his 'Bengali friends' had 'always cast long lingering looks on the mineral belt of Bihar'.[69] He further stated that linguistic commonality was not necessary for smooth administration. Like Sudhanshu and other pro-Hindi MLAs, Prasad used specific historical narratives to support Bihar's right to the territories in question and emphasised the idea that Bengalis settled in the border regions were essentially exploitative colonisers who had no rights over the area. His references to Chhotanagpur and the mineral belt further emphasised his portrayal of Bengalis in Bihar as disloyal to the state that housed them in order to undercut their claims of discrimination. This also served to undermine Adivasi demands for Jharkhand as Prasad presented the movement as one developed by Bengalis to harm Bihar.

While Prasad indicated that he did not approve of raising the question of border realignment, he did suggest that if 'the boundary problem has to be opened then those parts of which Bihar has been unjustly deprived and which should belong to Bihar must revert to Bihar'.[70] He added an amendment to Sudhanshu's resolution where Bihar claimed 'The whole of Darjeeling, the whole of Jalpaiguri, parts of Malda, Birbhum, Dinajpur and Midnapur'.[71] He stated that as the region was primarily 'Hindi speaking and Nepali speaking' and 'Nepali' was 'a kind of Hindi', it should be a part of Bihar. He suggested that Bengal had little claim to the area as 'Bengali' was 'spoken by a small percentage of people' and that as the current borders separated 'Santhal from Santhal, Munda from Munda and Bhumij from Bhumij', it should be incorporated into Bihar.[72] His frequent references to Adivasis when making arguments regarding territory while simultaneously ignoring the Jharkhand movement (or implying that it was encouraged by Bengalis) exemplify the attitudes of the proponents of the Hindi language movement in Bihar and illuminate their conceptions of the state. Evidently, his definition of 'Bihari' encompassed more than just Hindi speakers (although these languages were presented as Hindi adjacent).

Srish Chandra Banerjee, as always, was highly vocal in the debate that, on occasion, turned hostile. He was heckled throughout his speech, with several members demanding he speak Hindi and suggesting that his speech had been 'prepared by the West Bengal people'.[73] The speaker had to intervene often, asking members of the house to allow Banerjee to speak.

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[68] *Ibid.,* p. 14.
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] *Ibid.,* p. 19.
[73] *Ibid.,* p 34.

While Banerjee's amendment was not particularly controversial as it suggested the establishment of a commission to research the matter of linguistic states (which was something the central government was already doing), the house, nevertheless, greeted it with a great deal of antagonism and his use of English rather than Hindi appeared to inflame the other MLAs further. Prasad accused him of producing forged documents supporting the claims of Bengal and suggested that he was ungrateful for the 'hospitality' shown to him by Bihar.[74] His use of the word 'hospitality' also served to undercut Banerjee's claims of belonging to the region he inhabited, presenting him as an outsider.

Banerjee continued speaking on the second day of the debate, but now in Hindi. He stated his support for amalgamating the Bengali-speaking regions into West Bengal; however, he also claimed that this was never the true aim of the LSS. He asserted that it was the behaviour of the Congress that drove the LSS and other members of the Bengali community away through their Hindi-isation schemes. He suggested that the LSS did not mind the 'indefinite suspension of the question of redistribution by the Government of India'; however, he objected to the 'atrocities' being carried out in the Bengali-speaking regions, such as the supposed 'imposition' of Hindi on the region by the Government of Bihar. [75] He implored the Assembly to 'free' Bengalis in Bihar 'from the hand of Hindi imperialism'.[76] The rhetoric from the debate was not received well by the *Mukti*. In an article published shortly after the debate, the author repeated Banerjee's claim regarding the 'Hindi imperialism' of Bihar and stated that 'Apart from the Congress' even opposition parties including the 'Janata, Jharkhand, Praja, Forward Bloc' competed 'with each other as to who' could 'insult and humiliate Bengal and Bengalis more'.[77] The article defended the proposal by West Bengal, indicating that, as the Congress leadership and the national government had agreed to linguistic reorganisation, the Government of Bihar should have no issues with the claims. The article also defended Srish Chandra Banerjee, suggesting that the speaker unfairly discarded his amendment and alleging that the intimidatory attitude of the Bihar Legislative Assembly towards Bengalis was echoed in the 'Bihar administration' and the 'civil service'.[78]

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[74] *Ibid.*
[75] 'Bengal Bihar Boundary Issues cont.', 13 May 1953, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1953,* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/169592 (accessed on 26 June 2021) (translated from Hindi), p. 5 (translated from Hindi).
[76] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).
[77] *'Bihar Vidhan Sabhar Aacharan', Mukti*, 18 May 1953, p. 3.
[78] 'Bengal Bihar Boundary Issues cont. 13 May 1953., p. 7

Pro-Hindi MLAs in the Assembly strongly objected to the use of the term 'Hindi imperialism'. Prasad suggested this 'hurt the feelings of ninety-nine per cent members'.[79] Devendra Nath Mahata, the Congress MLA from Jhalda, asserted that the 'agitators' of the LSS had 'no hearth and homes in Bihar'. He further stated that Bengalis who had 'settled in Bihar for the last several generations' and who lived 'quite happily with his Bihari neighbour' did not want any transfers of territory.[80] His constituency also had large proportions of Bengali speakers, was quite near the border, and would likely be transferred to West Bengal in the event of reorganisation. However, it also housed Santhalis and Kurmis, so it was quite diverse. His main opponent during the 1952 elections had been a member of the LSS, which was likely why he attempted to present a narrative that specifically denied members of the LSS belonging in territory in Bihar. He made a series of allegations about Srish Chandra Banerjee, stating Banerjee was 'reported to have hailed from East Pakistan and later came to Midnapur and then in 1923 migrated to Manbhum, where he will migrate in future, God knows.[81] This denial of belonging to those who demanded separation was also accompanied by the emphasising the fact that the *bhadralok* had largely supported partition and, therefore, could not now make claims based on cultural and linguistic belonging as they were willing to give up East Bengal to ensure their state would remain a Hindu majority. Rash Bihari Lal, the Congress MLA from Sultanganj, objected to the transfers on the grounds that Hindu Bengalis did not 'have the courage to accept a government run by a Muslim majority for the whole of Bengal' but 'having then deliberately discarded the cultural and linguistic theory to suit their purposes' were 'now trotting it out again to with a view to acquire no less than 8000 square-miles of Bihar including its richest mineral areas'.[82] Lal's statements also implied that Hindu Bengalis were inherently hostile to Muslims, a narrative that was useful in preventing regions of Bihar in Kishanganj with large Muslim populations from being transferred.

Muhammad Tahir, who was now officially a Congress MLA, having run in the last election on the party's ticket, supported Mahata. He claimed the position of his constituency which bordered Pakistan, Nepal and West Bengal, gave him unique insight into the matter at hand.[83] He raised particular issue with the claim that West Bengal would need a part of Kishanganj in order to connect the two parts of the state as well as ensure that a single state

[79] *Ibid*., p. 24.
[80] *Ibid.*
[81] *Ibid.*
[82] 'Bengal Bihar Boundary Issues cont.', 14 May 1953, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1953,* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/171030 (accessed on 26 June 2021), p. 49.
[83] 'Bengal Bihar Boundary Issues cont.', 13 May 1953, p. 19 (translated from Hindi).

would share a border with Pakistan. He maintained that the regions in Kishanganj had few Bengali speakers and that if West Bengal truly needed a 'corridor', they should ask Pakistan rather than request territory from their neighbouring state. He also suggested that it was more than simply a matter of West Bengal needing a corridor but an attempt to increase their economic productivity at the expense of Bihar. He claimed the fact that West Bengal had mainly demanded parts of the Purnea district that were 'paddy growing areas' which fed other parts of Bihar proved this point.[84] He also indicated that he believed the Bengali demands amounted to an attempt to create a 'communal state', which he stated 'Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had said should not exist'. He ended his speech by declaring that 'not an inch of Bihar should be given to Bengal'.[85] The narratives around Bengali anti-Muslim sentiment continued to be developed through the debates over the next few years. Muslims in Bihar had, nevertheless, always, to some extent, had a contentious relationship with the Bengali community, with Bengali-Bihari figures, organisations, and publications often decrying the actions of Muslim leadership in Bengal and Bihar. Most Muslim MLAs (especially those in the Congress) also voiced their support for government actions that could be perceived as anti-Bengali.

However, Adivasis, particularly Adivasi organisations under the leadership of Jaipal Singh, had historically been sympathetic towards Bengali demands and had ties to Bengali organisations on the border. The proposed changes to the border fundamentally altered this relationship, with MLAs from the Jharkhand Party voicing their opposition to the amalgamation of any territory in Chhotanagpur and the Santhal Parganas with West Bengal. Mukund Ram Tanti, the Jharkhand Party MLA from Ghatsila-cum-Baharagora, put forth an amendment against the claims made by the West Bengal Assembly on the basis that it would result in

> …the likely dislocations and disruptions of the economic, geographical, cultural, and administrative structure of the region and because of the likely disturbances and failures in protection and safeguards of the tribes and other backward people who are being administered under special tenancy laws and special provisions of the Constitution thereby creating blockades and handicaps on their progress within the prescribed time.[86]

[84] *Ibid.,* p. 20.
[85] *Ibid.,* p. 21.
[86] Bengal Bihar Boundary Issues', 12 May 1953, p. 21.

He particularly took issue with the fact that West Bengal intended to use the territory they demanded to supposedly settle refugees, claiming that those regions did not have enough resources to accommodate additional people. He also suggested that Chhotanagpur's merger with Bengal would result in the oppression of tribals at the hands of more 'advanced' Bengalis.[87]

Chunka Hembrom, the Jharkhand Party MLA from Paraiyahat-cum-Jarmundih in the Santhal Parganas, also expressed opposition. Hembrom stated that the Santhal Parganas were neither 'Hindi' nor 'Bengali' speaking but Santhali speaking and that Manbhum's inhabitants were at least sixty per cent Adivasi. He reiterated Tanti's point, stating that the Santhal Parganas were 'hilly' and unsuitable for the accommodation of refugees. He also claimed that while there were Adivasis in Bengal in 'Darjeeling, Dinajpur, Bankura, Midnapur, and Burdwan, they were treated 'like animals in the jungle' by the state. He also turned his fire on the Government of Bihar, suggesting that they had, like the Government of West Bengal, attempted to oppress Adivasis, in particular accusing it of refusing educational opportunities in their mother tongue and forcing the children to 'pray in Hindi' in one school in Jamtara.[88] Although the Jharkhand Party continued to express its opposition to policies implemented by the Government of Bihar, they were even more vehemently opposed to the transfer of any territories from Bihar to West Bengal.

This antagonism towards Bengalis on the border and Bengali views was an almost universal reaction from the House. Bengalis not situated on the border (from regions such as Patna, Gaya, and Monghyr) had previously greeted this rhetoric with opposition. In past decades they had often defended the rights of Bengalis in Bihar to be educated and receive court judgments in their own language. With the imminent reorganisation of boundaries, this changed dramatically. Nirapada Mukherji, the Bengali Congress MLA from Monghyr, objected to the demands from the Bengali government, suggesting their demand was 'the outcome of their expansionist policy to improve their own condition at the cost of others'.[89] He stated that 'no protection was needed from West Bengal' and that Bengalis in Bihar had long been productive members of the state. He referred to 'eminent Bengali writers' from Bihar, such as 'Sarat Chandra Chatterjee reared up in Bhagalpur, Sri Balachandra Mukherjee, better known as 'Banafool', of the same city, Saradindu Banerjee of Monghyr' who 'did not

[87] *Ibid.,* p. 22 (translated from Hindi).
[88] *Ibid.,* p. 36-38 (translated from Hindi).
[89] 'Bengal Bihar Boundary Issues cont.', 14 May 1953, p. 4

require protection from Bengal'.[90] Mukherji's views suggest that some Bengalis in Bihar continued to identify with the state despite the demands for the transfer of territories. While Monghyr did have a sizeable Bengali population and was relatively close to the border of West Bengal, it was not likely to go to the state. His language was symptomatic of the fear of some Bengalis that the amalgamation movement might cause further backlash against members of their community regardless of whether they supported it. It also mirrors the ways in which Muslim organisations and political figures engaged with politics in the post-partition era.

Jyotirmoyee Devi, the Congress MLA from Pakur, a region that West Bengal had claimed, used similar language to object to any redistribution of territory. She pointed to her histories with both of the states (as she had been raised in Bengal but married into a family in Bihar) to strengthen her appeal, as she claimed that dividing up India solely on a linguistic basis was 'unpracticable' and would also 'weaken the solidarity of the nation'.[91] While Pakur was on the border and did have Bengali speakers, Jyotirmoyee Devi also represented large Adivasi populations, who, as evidenced by the opposition from the Jharkhand Party, were not pro-amalgamation of any of Bihar's territory with West Bengal. Jyotirmoyee Devi's rhetoric about the importance of heterogenous states would be repeated later, especially by Bengalis and Bengali publications not located in border regions. The narratives of Bengali belonging in Bihar and the importance of linguistic heterogeneity developed during the Prasad investigation to emphasise the failures of the Government of Bihar were repurposed in the independent era by Bengalis in the state to buttress the government's position.

MLAs in Bihar were also quick to dismiss claims that Bengal required territory on the grounds of refugee rehabilitation. Sundari Devi, the Congress MLA from Bhaktiarpur, suggested that the West Bengal government was using refugees to increase the number of Bengali speakers in border regions and force a transfer of territories in Purnea, where the Government of Bihar settled refugees. This argument was similar to Devendra Nath Mahato's as it essentially accused those who demanded secession of not being actual 'Biharis' but immigrants. However, she suggested that despite the provocation from West Bengal, 'political considerations' had 'not stood in the way of the Government of Bihar, and everything' had 'been done to rehabilitate the displaced persons of West Bengal in this area'.[92] The debate concluded the next day, with Sudhanshu's motion and Prasad's amendment passing while the

[90] *Ibid.,* p. 5
[91] *Ibid.,* p. 13-15.
[92] *Ibid.,* p. 2-4.

speaker declared Banerjee's had accidentally been allowed to be put forth and was, in truth, 'out of office'. These exchanges, which occurred before the SRC had even been established, did not contribute to smooth negotiations between the states and the central government.

The SRC spent two years examining various claims from different states. Given the controversy around any decision regarding borders, this was a contentious period. Various organisations were allowed to submit evidence and memoranda related to the reorganisation of states, and the Committee received several from Bihar and Bengal. The Bengal Congress Pradesh Committee submitted a memorandum to the SRC in 1954, demanding (as they had previously) 21,352 sq. miles of territory from neighbouring states and the inclusion of more than 8 million people in Bengal. The West Bengal State Government's suggestion was slightly more realistic. In a memorandum written to the SRC, they claimed 11,840 sq. miles for Bengal, with a population of 5.7 million. These areas included the mineral-rich and industrial areas such as the Santhal Parganas, Rajmahal, Manbhum and Singhbhum, parts of which were also claimed by Orissa and Adivasis for a Jharkhand state. They also demanded Kishanganj to facilitate transport between the two parts of West Bengal, which, after partition, were no longer contiguous.[93] Bihar immediately made counterclaims to various parts of West Bengal, including Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri.[94]

In a Congress Working Committee (CWC) Meeting on the 4th and 5th of April 1954, the organisation passed a resolution requesting its Pradesh Congress Committees to reduce the levels of infighting. The CWC noted with 'regretful surprise that there was occasional tendency of a State Legislature or a Pradesh Congress Committee to act in a manner which was hostile to other States and PCCs'.[95] It also stated that it was 'expected that Congress Committees and Congressmen' would 'not participate or carry on agitation on this matter, nor' would 'they associate with other parties in making joint representations to the Commission.'[96] The debates between delegates from Bengal and Bihar were especially contentious and time-consuming, with Nehru complaining at a plenary session of the Congress in January 1955 that 'one got the impression from these speeches that the reorganisation of States was a problem between Bengal and Bihar'. Bihar delegates continually requested the postponement of any decision by a minimum of five years.

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[93] Marcus Franda, *West Bengal and the Federalising Process in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 19-21.
[94] *Ibid.,* 22.
[95] 'Proceedings of the Working Committee Meeting Dated 4th&5th April 1954', AICC Volume II, Legal Aid Committee, Serial no. 4785 in *NMML* page 79 in file 3 in document.
[96] *Ibid.,* page 80 in file 3 in doc.

However, Nehru, after defending the right of a Bengali delegate, Pratap Guha Roy, to speak in Bengali over objections from Bihari delegates, stated that opposition to linguistic realignment was 'unrealistic'.[97]

The SRC travelled to various parts of the country in the process of writing their report, and their visits encouraged demonstrations by multiple parties and, in some cases, violence. Given the large amounts of territory demanded by West Bengal, tensions were high in the border regions of its neighbouring states. There were issues in Manbhum in January 1955 with the LSS launching a satyagraha to persuade the Commission to accede to its claims regarding the redistribution of territory, which largely aligned with those made by the Government of West Bengal.[98] They marched the 480 kilometres from Manbhum to Calcutta and the procession was only broken up when it reached the West Bengal Government's headquarters.[99]

In April 1955, anti-Bengali riots broke out in Goalpara, a district in Assam, and they were serious enough to request assistance from the army. Refugee colonies in the district (which mostly housed East Bengali refugees) were burnt, and several thousand refugees flooded into West Bengal in the aftermath. The Assam Government downplayed the issue, with Assam Cabinet Minister M. M. Chowdhury alleging that newspapers had exaggerated 'minor incidents'.[100] The West Bengal Government, in turn, claimed that the Assam Government had purposefully ignored growing tensions in the area and suggested that some Congressmen might be involved.[101]

Conclusion

It was in this state of heightened tensions that the States Reorganisation report was delivered at the end of September 1955. The period preceding the report had been a vital one in the histories of Bihari-Bengalis as it represented a turning point for Bengalis living on the border whose representatives began to demand the amalgamation of their region with West Bengal rather than a recognition of rights as they had previously. This divergence from the Congress and the government was emphasised by Srish Chandra Banerjee's increasingly vocal opposition to government language policies and, finally, the departure of several Bengali

[97] 'States Reorganisation Approved: Quarrelling Delegates Rebuked by Mr Nehru', 25 January 1955, *The Times of India*, 5.
[98] 'Psychosis on Bihar Border', 9 February 1955, *The Times of India*, 6.
[99] Franda, *Federalising Process in West Bengal*.
[100] 'Refugee Colonies Burnt by Armed Hooligans', 12 April 1955, *The Times of India*, 7.
[101] 'Goalpara Disturbances Were Serious', 23 April 1955, *The Times of India*, 6.

politicians in Manbhum from the Congress. Unlike previous decades, when Bengalis and Adivasis created tentative alliances, Adivasis, represented by the Jharkhand Party, came out strongly against demands made by the LSS. While linguistic rights had previously been something both Bengalis and Adivasis agreed on to some extent (with both communities demanding the Government of Bihar expand the use of their languages), Adivasi organisations opposed the division of the Santhal Parganas and Chhotanagpur Plateau that border Bengalis demanded. This was accompanied by the development of narratives of Bengali oppression of Adivasis both in West Bengal and in Bihar. This political isolation would further encourage Bengalis in the border regions of Bihar to support reorganisation over any other plan.

However, Bengalis, who did not represent border areas or areas with significant Adivasi populations, began to shy away from demands around their 'mother tongue'. While in previous years, these representatives in the Legislative Assembly had often supported claims of oppression made by their co-linguists on the border, as pro-Hindi Biharis regarded any support for Bengali claims as 'disloyal' to the state, this support rapidly dried up. Accusations of 'provincialism' were centred, implicitly presenting those Bengalis who did make demands around language as willing to sacrifice the unity of India in order to garner advantages for themselves and their community. Apart from not extending their support, this group also actively began to align themselves with the Government of Bihar, using their claims of 'Bengali-ness' and 'Bihari-ness' to buttress the position taken by the state and the ruling party. This is an interesting inversion of the previous reasons for which Bengalis claimed belonging in Bihar, as in the 1930s and 40s, these same arguments were used to object to the government's position on domicile certificates and demand equality with other Biharis. In the 1950s, however, these arguments were used instead to demonstrate that Bengalis belonged in Bihar and, therefore, the amalgamation of Bengali-speaking areas in Bihar with West Bengal was unnecessary.

Chapter 6: 'A Positive Approach to the Problem of Indian Unity'?[1] The Development of Alternatives to Linguistic Territorialism in Bihar (1954-1957)

Introduction

The previous chapter examined how Bihar's political class responded to the impending reorganisation of states. This chapter discusses the response to the publication of the report and argues that Bihar's multiculturalism encouraged its politicians to seek alternatives to linguistic realignment in the form of a merger between Bihar and Bengal. The plan for the merger was based on histories of the first Congress agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905. The Chief Ministers presented this plan as reversing the wrongs done to India due to the British policy of 'divide and rule', and it certainly appealed to senior Congress politicians such as Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. However, other historical narratives had also developed alongside the 'nationalist' ones that were centred around the Congress, which effectively prevented the merger. These included narratives of the historical distinctiveness of Bihar from Bengal, which emphasised Bihar's ancient history as the seat of various empires. Elite Hindi and Urdu-speaking Biharis had, over the past several decades, presented centuries of rule from Bengal as the reason for Bihar's relative 'backwardness'. Similarly, both Hindu and Muslim Bihari politicians argued against the transfer of regions with large Muslim populations to West Bengal by utilising the anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies pursued by the Bengali *bhadralok* in pre-partition Bengal. This meant those who identified as Bihari found it challenging to reconcile the conflicting narratives of the historical correction that the merger would be and historical animosity towards Bengal and Bengalis. The Bengal-Bihar merger plan was representative of the Nehruvian 'pluralistic' model; however, the ways in which the states had previously made claims and the rhetoric used to mobilise populations meant that there was almost no chance of this plan coming to fruition.

The Centre and even Chief Ministers of the states themselves could attempt to promote a solution to the issue that had roots in one of the first mass agitations carried out by the Congress, but the pattern of politics that emerged in post-colonial Bihar and Bengal meant that there was little room for negotiation. The accusations of 'cultural imperialism' and the subsequent narratives built around these ideas created more rigid boundaries around identity and polarised populations within the two states. An analysis of this episode in Indian

[1] 'Joint Statement of the Chief Ministers of West Bengal and Bihar', 23 January 1956, AICC Volume II, File no. P-4, Serial no. 3110 (c), in *NMML,* page 16 in file 1 in doc.

history demonstrates how politicians deployed historical narratives to bolster their demands and buttress their schemes, reveals a diverging strain of the Hindi language movement in India, and sheds light on how linguistic minorities navigated linguistic reorganisation. This contributes to the scholarship around understandings of belonging and identity in India and allows us to reconceptualise the ideological underpinnings of the Hindi language movement.

Firstly, this chapter demonstrates that the debates around linguistic reorganisation revealed various ways in which 'minorities' conceptualised the ordering of the newly independent Indian nation and their place within it. It argues that minorities felt uniquely threatened by reorganisation as they feared linguistically homogenous states would lead to 'cultural nationalism', and this would result in marginalisation of those not considered a part of the 'majority'. The scholarship has presented the work of the States Reorganisation Commission of India, created in 1953, and the subsequent Act passed by the Lok Sabha as having effectively ironed out some of the more significant internal conflicts in India. While the government and parliament did not accept all the Commission's suggestions, large sections of the Act were based on its recommendations. Bethany Lacina argues that the reorganisation of states in India reduced the chances of civil war in independent India as the Congress demonstrated its ability to accommodate 'important' regional partners.[2] Scholars view the solutions provided in the act as having not been universally popular, but acceptable enough to the bulk of the Indian population.[3] However, this can obscure some of the intense negotiations that accompanied the publication of the report. The publication of the SRC report in 1955 did cause some controversy in both Bihar and West Bengal. There was dissatisfaction in West Bengal as the report recommended it receive around an eighth of the territory its government had demanded. In Bihar too, there was discontent as the report suggested the transfer of some parts of Manbhum and other areas to West Bengal. After the release of the report, several states attempted to improve their positions by suggesting alternatives. These alternatives would need to find favour with the Central Government to be considered. Endeavouring to arrive at a compromise, B. C. Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, and S. K. Sinha, the Chief Minister of Bihar, put forth a plan for the amalgamation of West Bengal and Bihar in early 1956. The plan heavily emphasised that the merger would improve the prospects of 'Indian unity'. Given the fact that one of the first significant

[2] Bethany Lacina, in her work 'How Governments Shape the Risk of Civil Violence: India's Federal Reorganization, 1950–56', *American Journal of Political Science*, 58.3 (2014)
[3] Marcus Franda, *West Bengal and the Federalising Process in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 57-61.

Congress agitations was against the partition of Bengal, this plan also had the advantage of appealing to the sentiment associated with the independence movement.

Secondly, this chapter argues that the territorial ambitions of West Bengal encouraged the improvement of the relationship between elite Bihari Hindi and Urdu speakers. Senior Hindi-speaking Bihari politicians reiterated notions of Muslim belonging in the state in order to oppose Bengali claims to the transfer of parts of Kishanganj, which had significant Muslim populations. This (accompanied by the fact that, as mentioned earlier, many Muslim politicians remained in Bihar post-partition) allowed space for Muslim politics around language to flourish in ways that it could not in other parts of the country. As Sudha Pai discusses in her exploration of Urdu in UP in independent India, there were some half-hearted attempts to make Urdu a second language of the state, but these were consistently stymied by forces such as the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan.[4] However, Muslim politicians and cultural organisations in Bihar were able to make the case for Urdu and present it as an effective vote-getter through the 1960s and 70s, resulting in the Congress government of 1980 making it an official language of the state.[5]

Thirdly, this chapter discusses the impact the development of specific historical narratives can have on political decision-making. It argues that narratives developed around the distinctiveness of linguistic communities appealed to these communities more than broad ones designed around the 'Indian nation'. As Sumit Sarkar suggests, the first partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi Movement occupied and continues to occupy 'a very notable place in the historiography of nationalism'.[6] He indicates that this was a significant era as it saw 'the anti-partition movement', which was 'first conducted on quite conventional lines by established politicians worried mainly over an alleged threat to elite privileges, rapidly broaden after 1905 into an awareness of irreconcilable differences between British and Indian interests which only swaraj could resolve.'[7] This, in turn, led to 'the first major effort of the nationalist bhadralok to attain identity with the masses and mobilise them around a programme of passive resistance.'[8] Manu Goswami also emphasises the importance of this historical event in the development of mass (with some caveats) based politics, stating that it 'represented the first systematic campaign to incorporate and mobilise the 'masses' within

[4] Pai, 'Politics of Language'.
[5] Sajjad, 'Language as a Tool of Minority Politics: Urdu, in Bihar, India, 1951–1989'.
[6] Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1903-1908)* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973), 1.
[7] *Ibid.,* 3.
[8] *Ibid.*

the elite structure of institutional nationalism.'[9] Given the history of Congress participation, Congress politicians at the time viewed the 1905 anti-partition campaign as one of the first steps towards the Gandhian mass movements of the later decades. These Congress politicians also viewed the Swadeshi Movement, more generally, as a significant 'national' event in the history of India. Scholars such as Andrew Sartori agree, suggesting that the movement 'entered the historiography of South Asia as the first major attempt in the history of Indian nationalism at popular mobilisation.'[10] Similarly, David Ludden describes the era as highly significant, stating that 'it established a permanent spatial frame for Indian national thought.'[11] Therefore, it was probable that, unlike a reiteration of demands that the SRC had already dismissed, the Chief Ministers' plan would find favour with many leaders in the Centre and would encourage the Central Government to negotiate.

However, as demonstrated in the first chapter, the Swadeshi movement was not as popular in Bihar as it was in Bengal. The development of narratives of the historical distinctiveness of Bihar meant that there was little room to compromise with regard to issues such as which city might become the capital of the enlarged state. While the plan did meet the approval of the Prime Minister, the difficulties of actually implementing it meant that it was quickly abandoned. The two states continued to raise objections to the proposals in the report; however, with no alternatives, they had no choice but to accept the recommendations of the SRC. On the 1st of September 1956, Parliament passed the bill transferring territories from Bihar to West Bengal, and neither state could significantly alter the decisions of the SRC.

This chapter analyses responses to the publication of the SRC report. It begins with an examination of the initial reactions to the report from the two states and how they chose to negotiate with each other and the Central Government in 1955. The second section discusses the Chief Ministers' plan for the amalgamation of West Bengal and Bihar and the ideas underpinning it. The last section explores the reasons for its failure and the eventual transfer of territories in 1957.

Publication of the SRC Report (1954-55)

[9] Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 242.
[10] Andrew Sartori, 'The Categorical Logic of a Colonial Nationalism: Swadeshi, (1904-1908)', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 23 (2003), 271.
[11] David Ludden, 'Spatial Inequity and National Territory: Remapping 1905 in Bengal and Assam', *Modern Asian Studies*, 46 (2012), 483.

The nervousness around the proposed changes to the border was evident within the non-border Bengali community in Bihar. In an article published in *The Behar Herald* on the eve of the release of the SRC report, the author stated, 'neither considerations of party discipline nor of Governmental responsibility can keep linguistic rivalry and fury under check'.[12] The article went on to claim that this threatened the 'hard won unity of the country' and supported the idea that the report should be 'scrapped altogether'.[13] It indicated a belief that 'a strong agitation punctuated with violence' was likely to make the Government of India 'drop the report of the States Reorganisation Commission like a hot potato'.[14] This reflected the unease within non-border sections of the Bengali population with regard to linguistic realignment and fears that clashes like those in Goalpara would occur.

While the Goalpara incident was considered particularly egregious, it was evident that linguistic reorganisation was a controversial subject. Therefore, the Central Government suggested that states reorganisation would not be revisited after the production of the report (although changes would later be made). It was published (after a slight delay) on the 30th of September 1955, and sent to the Lok Sabha and various state Assemblies for debate. Firstly, the report did not recommend the formation of a Jharkhand state but did suggest a Tribal Advisory Council should be constituted to improve conditions in those regions.[15] Secondly, it rejected the suggestion that the Seraikella Subdivision move to Orissa on linguistic grounds.[16] Thirdly, claims from West Bengal were deemed largely unrealistic, with the Commission stating that the linguistic makeup of large parts of the regions they demanded was not sufficiently Bengali-speaking for transfer. Bihar retained most of the industrial and mineral-rich areas, including Rajmahal, Dhalbhum and Singhbhum.[17] However, the news was not all good for the Government of Bihar. The SRC rejected their claims to Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Malda, West Dinajpur, Sundargarh, Keonjhar, and Mayurbhanj in West Bengal. Fourthly, while it was considerably less than had been demanded by the West Bengal Government, around 3812 sq. miles, which held a population of 1.7 million, was recommended for transfer to West Bengal. Bihar was to lose most of the mineral-rich subdistrict of Manbhum. Dhanbad and its coal would remain in the state, but this was, nevertheless, a blow to Bihar. Fifthly, to facilitate more efficient administration of West Bengal, some of the predominantly Muslim,

[12] 'Shape of Things to Come', 1 October 1955, *The Behar Herald,* 1.
[13] *Ibid.,* p. 2.
[14] *Ibid*.
[15] *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission*, (Delhi: Government of India Press, 1955) 169.
[16] *Ibid.,* 170.
[17] *Ibid.,* 180.

Urdu-speaking region east of the Mahananda River in Purnea (a part of Kishanganj), was to be transferred out of Bihar. This would unite the two non-contiguous sections of West Bengal and ensure only a single state would share a border with Pakistan.

These decisions were instantly controversial in Bihar. Although the SRC had marked large sections of Manbhum for transfer to West Bengal, the Lok Sevak Sangh objected to the dividing of the district. In an article published in the *Mukti*, the Bengali language newspaper widely recognised now as the mouthpiece of the LSS, the author claimed that the SRC had not just given a 'wrong judgment' but committed a 'grave injustice'.[18] The article alleged that the Commission had not examined the facts and arrived in Bihar with their judgement 'previously decided'.[19] It deemed the recommendations of the Commission illogical as it suggested they had not followed any specific criteria when making their decisions.[20] The article indicated that Bihar benefitted unduly by focusing on economic arguments against transfer and that more territory was West Bengal's under the linguistic principle. This rhetoric of injustice further emphasised the oppression meted out to Bengalis by the government and government-adjacent organisations. It solidified the idea that Manbhum Bengalis, in particular, could not receive fair treatment at the hands of the Congress.

On the other hand, articles in *The Behar Herald*, presenting the view of non-border Bengalis, continued to emphasise the importance of retaining linguistic heterogeneity within India. In an article on opinions regarding the SRC report that highlighted the issues several political figures across India had with the Commission's report and included quotes from the President of the Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee, S.K. Patil, where he hailed the SRC's decision to keep Bombay State intact. Patil suggested that it was Bombay's 'cosmopolitan and multilingual character' that allowed 'Bombay State to be one of the most progressive' states 'not only in administration but in other reforms as well.'[21] *The Behar Herald* published articles supportive of the propagation of the Hindi language, which, given that Hindi had been declared the official language of Bihar, reaffirmed the support of parts of the Bengali community for the government's priorities. When critiquing the views held by Palahalli Sitaramiah, a member of the Mysore Legislative Council, who suggested that north and south Indians should intermarry to increase the use of Hindi in the south, an article in *The Behar Herald* stated that 'Without going into all these dubious devices why not tell Southerners that

[18] '*Sima Komishoner Suparish'* 17 October 1955, *Mukti, Vol. 16*, 3, (translated from Bengali).
[19] *Ibid.* (translated from Bengali).
[20] *Ibid.* (translated from Bengali).
[21] 'Opinions Re: SRC Report', 15 October 1955, *The Behar Herald,* 1.

anyone who is ignorant of the national language cannot be regarded as an Indian national after 1965.'[22] These articles were representative of the insecurity felt by non-border Bengalis in Bihar who attempted to strategically reaffirm their credentials as Biharis by supporting positions taken by Bihar's government and other senior Bihari politicians, as well as oppose linguistic reorganisation.

After examining the plan, both the governments of West Bengal and Bihar quickly asserted that the report had discriminated against their states. After allowing for two months to examine the report, the Bihar Legislative Assembly met to pass a motion expressing its views on the report on the 25th of November 1955. The debate lasted four days, and MLAs across the political spectrum and from various communities articulated their displeasure at the recommendations of the SRC. Amiyo Kumar Ghosh, the Bengali Congress MLA from Daltonganj, was fervently opposed to the transfer of territories. His constituency was located in Chhotanagpur and was multilingual but did not border West Bengal. He acted as one of the leading spokesmen against the transfer of territories, which suggests that the Congress and other anti-transfer supporters were aware of the impact of having a Bengali represent their point of view. Ghosh moved an amendment to 'reject the recommendations of the Commission for the transfer of parts of Manbhum Sadr Subdivision and parts of the Purnea district from Bihar to West Bengal, and to declare that no part of Bihar shall be transferred to it from any other state'.[23] He indicated that he believed the Commission had not adequately investigated the desires of the people of the regions that were to be transferred and stated that in 'the parts that will be given to Bengal in both Purnea and Manbhum, all' the inhabitants' 'kinship' was 'with Bihar' regardless of whether they were Bengali speakers or not.[24] His statements on the 'kinship' (using the term '*sambandh*') rather than linguistic affinities of people demonstrate that there was a section of Bengalis in Bihar who had developed a nested understanding of identity, where being Bengali and being Bihari were not mutually exclusive.

Ghosh also stated that the Commission had failed to thoroughly examine the case in Bihar, suggesting that the '55 per cent of Bengali-speakers in the Manbhum Sadr' were 'not Bengali but Bihari Adivasis'. He added that 'since these people live on the border, the language of the other side becomes predominant for a variety of reasons.'[25] The

[22] Remedy Worse Than Disease', 12 November 1955, *The Behar Herald,* 2.
[23] 'Discussions on the Report of the States Reorganisation Commission', 25 November 1955, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1955,* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/107436 (Accessed on 10 October 2021)., p. 6-8.
[24] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).
[25] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi).

Commission's report, which did not recommend the creation of a new Adivasi state, bolstered this claim of Bihar being the home of the Adivasis of Chhotanagpur. It was a way to argue against the transfer of territories to West Bengal, as this would mean removing some of Adivasi territory from Chhotanagpur.

Jharkhand Party opposed the transfer of territories as they claimed Manbhum as a part of Adivasi lands and stated that it should not be divided. At the next session on the 30th of November 1955, S. K. Bage, the Jharkhand Party MLA from Kolebira, stated forcefully that 'we, the people of the Jharkhand area, shall not allow an inch of land to go away from Manbhum for the sake of the formation of Jharkhand' and that 'For the present the Purulia subdistrict of Manbhum' was 'of common interest both for Bihar as well as for Jharkhand'.[26] This denouncement of the transfer of territories by a Jharkhand Party MLA demonstrates the independence of the Adivasi movement for a separate state. This movement was not influenced by demands from West Bengal or Bengalis within Bihar. It further emphasises the inherently strategic nature of the alliance between Bengali-Bihari and Adivasi organisations and figures. When it was inconvenient to form a common front, both groups quickly discarded the alliance.

Murali Manohar Prasad strongly approved of Ghosh's amendment, stating, 'In Manbhum Sadr there is horror abroad over the proposed transfer, and even genuine Bengalis have no relish for being transferred to Bengal for the simple reason that they fear they would be swamped by more advanced Bengalis from across the border'.[27] He once again asserted that it could 'be proved chapter and verse that Bengali was imposed on the people of these areas' who had 'no choice' and 'no option but to read and write in Bengali because there was no provision for teaching of Hindi in those areas at the time.'[28] Therefore, as his argument ran, the increase in the Hindi-speaking population in the border regions was not due to a policy of Hindi-isation but because the inhabitants of those regions were choosing to study in the original language of the area. This undercut both West Bengal's argument of linguistic affinity and claims of imposition of Hindi by Bengali speakers in the region.

He added to Ghosh's amendment, repeating the demand for 'Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Malda, and a part of Dinajpur to be amalgamated with Bihar'.[29] Prasad explicitly stated in his

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[26] Discussions on the Report of the States Reorganisation Commission', 30 November 1955, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1955,* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/143940 (Accessed on 10 October 2021), p. 3.
[27] *Ibid.,* p. 21.
[28] *Ibid.,* p. 23.
[29] 'Discussions on the Report of the States Reorganisation Commission', 25 November 1955, p. 4.

amendment that 'This amalgamation will put a stop to these separatist tendencies in the area which the Commission deplore'.[30] He suggested that his demands were not because these regions were Hindi-speaking but because the Government of West Bengal did not provide adequate facilities for the teaching of Hindi.

Apart from alluding to the possible issues for Urdu speakers in a state that did not have adequate non-Bengali services, Prasad also claimed that Muslims in Kishanganj were opposed to its transfer due to histories of oppression at the hands of Hindu Bengalis. He referenced the 1916 session of the Congress where the Congress and the Muslim League signed the Lucknow Pact, stating, 'the then Hindu Congress leader of Bengal, whose memory I respect, thundered that Bengali Muslims could not have representation according to their population in the Legislature because the Hindus had made Bengal what it was' and that as a result of this Bengali 'Muslim representation was reduced to 40 per cent, far less than their population.' He suggested that Bihari Muslims had emerged in a stronger position after the pact as opposed to Bengali Muslims as 'in order to compensate the Muslims of Bengal for the loss they thus suffered we in Bihar were called upon to agree to the principle of weightage, giving the Muslims of Bihar 25 per cent representation'.[31] Prasad's narrative had the effect of presenting West Bengal as an inherently inhospitable environment for Muslims while depicting Bihar as more tolerant. He contrasted this with histories of Bihari Hindu-Muslim unity in the face of British colonialism, referring to Babu Kunwar Singh Behar and Nawabzada Syed Mohammad Mehdi, who he claimed had led the 1857 revolt in Patna. This further demonstrates the fact that proponents of the Hindi language in Bihar had fundamentally different aims than those in UP. Prasad identified the behaviour of Bengali 'Hindu' leaders as an issue while making appeals on behalf of Muslim Urdu speakers in Kishanganj, suggesting that broader Hindu unity (and the creation of a unified Hindu India) was not his primary goal.

Mohammad Tahir, the now Congress MLA from Amour (having previously been a member of both the IMP and Muslim League), supported him and urged the Assembly to 'reject' the 'recommendation' of the Commission after 'the amendment Murali Babu' was 'passed'.[32] While the SRC's report had not marked his constituency for transfer to West Bengal, it did neighbour constituencies recommended for transfer to West Bengal. Speaking

[30] *Ibid*., p. 7-8.
[31] Discussions on the Report of the States Reorganisation Commission', 30 November 1955, 17-18.
[32] Discussions on the Report of the States Reorganisation Commission', 1 December 1955, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1955,* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/170177 (Accessed on 10 October 2021), p. 8, (translated from Hindi).

on the 1st of December, the third day of the debate, Tahir also expressed his belief that Muslims would not receive fair treatment in West Bengal. He claimed that 'Bengali leaders' had 'ruined Muslims in the state' and had caused 'devastation' in numerous ways 'since 1913.'[33] Tahir's support of the Bihar Government's position and his references to the historical oppression of Bengali Muslims indicate that the strategy of Bihari proponents of Hindi to encourage rather than discourage Muslim inclusion in the wider Bihari community was largely successful. Bihar was presented as having far lower levels of communal tension than West Bengal.

Srish Chandra Banerjee and the LSS expressed their full support for the transfer of territories and disappointment that SRC's recommendations had not included more territory for West Bengal. Banerjee moved an amendment on the first day of the debate demanding the 'whole of Manbhum District, the Dhalbhum subdivision of Singhbhum district, the Bengali-speaking areas of the Santhal Parganas, Pakur and Jamtara subdivisions and the adjoining areas of Rajmahal, Dumka, and Deogarh and Purnea district should be integrated with West Bengal.'[34] While he did advance linguistic arguments, ultimately, his claim for the transfer once again lay in the inability of the Government of Bihar to adequately serve the Bengali-speaking population. Alluding to previous controversy, he stated, 'The Government of Bihar should profit by the loss of money to the extent of millions in their futile effort to Hindise those Bengali speaking areas and should rise to the occasion conceding the claimed areas. To do justice to bordering Bengali-speaking people the Government shall have to train additional staff to serve those Bengali-speaking people in their own mother tongue as the Government by no means can be popular as has been the case today if they fail to train their officers to deal with the people in their mother tongue.'[35] The core of the LSS argument remained the necessity to escape from a government that marginalised minority communities, which continued to fit into the broader ways in which minority claims were 'allowed' to be made by the Congress regime. Claims had to centre around 'backwardness' and/or marginalisation to be acceptable.

To end the debate, S. K. Sinha presented the government's position and asked for a vote to be called on the amendments. He was against the transfer of territories and referred to the 'acute distress caused' to the people of Bihar by the 'Commission's recommendations for

[33] *Ibid*., (translated from Hindi).
[34] 'Discussions on the Report of the States Reorganisation Commission', 25 November 1955, p. 3.
[35] *Ibid.,* p. 22-23.

the transfer of certain areas to West Bengal'.[36] He made two main arguments against the transfer, applying them to Manbhum and Kishanganj, respectively. With regards to the Manbhum areas, he focused on the economic damage that the transfer would cause Bihar, stating:

> 'Bihar's excessive dependence on agriculture has already made its economy unbalanced and unstable, and if any parts of Manbhum or Singbhum, where its industries are concentrated and where the bulk of its mineral resources lie, are taken away, its dependence on agriculture would increase further, and its potentialities for future industrial development appreciably reduced.[37]

He reiterated narratives of Bengali oppression of Hindi speakers on the border to support his argument, alluding to the 'systematic oppression of Bihari and Tribal languages over some decades.'[38] He implied that this transfer was the result of the Commission being influenced by West Bengal's 'psychological problems' due to its steadily decreasing territory over the past century and not based on proper evidence.[39]

Although the SRC had recommended the transfer of parts of Kishanganj to West Bengal due to administrative rather than linguistic reasons, Sinha argued that the linguistic principle needed to be paramount in this area and suggested that ignoring this would result in larger issues for both the states of Bengal and Bihar as well as the central government. He disagreed with the Commission's assertion that the linguistic arguments 'advanced by Bihar or by Bengal' were 'far from conclusive'.[40] He stated that

> 'The local dialect has admittedly, always been written in the Kaithi script, which is allied to Hindi, and has been in use all over Bihar; Hindi was the sole court language of the district even before Bihar was separated from Bengal; the record of rights has always been maintained in Hindi; and the local population has never asked for education in or through the medium of Bengali.'[41]

He also objected to the idea that Bihar had encouraged Muslims in Kishanganj to protest against the transfer to West Bengal and stated, 'they are free to assess the value of

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[36] Discussions on the Report of the States Reorganisation Commission', 1 December 1955, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1955,* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/170979 (Accessed on 10 October)., p. 36.
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.,* p. 31.
[40] *Ibid.,* p. 37.
[41] *Ibid.,* p. 37-38.

their social, political, cultural and linguistic bonds with Bihar- in short they are free to entertain and to express their natural feelings as Biharis and as Bihari Muslims.'[42]

Sinha's rhetoric further emphasises the distinctive strain of the Hindi language movement in Bihar. These narratives identify Bihari Muslims in Kishanganj as a fundamental part of the Bihari community. Sinha went on to suggest that it was 'the height of unwisdom to have on India's borders, a disgruntled population suffering from a sense of wrong.'[43] This argument effectively undercut the administrative argument made by the SRC report and West Bengal. It also implied that Bihar was the only state that could effectively ensure Muslims in Kishanganj remained loyal to India as they identified primarily as Bihari rather than Indian. Shortly after his statement, the Assembly voted on the resolution and the various amendments put forward. Ghosh's resolution with Prasad's amendment passed overwhelmingly, with only the LSS and a few other members voting against it.[44] All the amendments demanding territory be removed from Bihar failed, resulting in the Bihar Assembly officially expressing displeasure at the Report's recommendations.

The West Bengal Assembly was quick to respond, holding a discussion on the report on the 5th of December. While most members of the Assembly approved of the transfer of the few territories to West Bengal, they objected to the fact that the SRC had not recommended giving West more territory. B. C. Roy, the Chief Minister, also protested against the recommendations of the Commission. He referenced histories of wrongs committed against Bengal and, by extension, Bengalis. The rhetoric used by both the CM and Assembly members from various parties expressed the idea Bengal had been disadvantaged by the British Government's imposition of a 'Muslim majority' on the province after its reunification in 1912 with the implication that it was Hindu Bengalis that truly represented Bengal. Therefore, due to this supposed historical injustice done to Bengal, it deserved territories from the states bordering it, as the argument ran that the only reason they were no longer a part of Bengal was due to British attempts to work against the province.[45] His government faced accusations of failing to properly put forth Bengal's claims. Opposition politicians presented the Congress itself as an inherently Hindi imperialist organisation, run primarily by Hindi politicians, and determined to act against the interests of 'non-Hindi

[42] *Ibid.,* p. 40.
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] 'Government Resolution on the Report of the States Reorganisation Commission', 5 December 1955, *Official Report of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly: Thirteenth Session, December 1955*, (Alipore: Superintendent Government Printing, 1956), 28, 39.

speaking areas' which those Hindi politicians wished to 'dominate'.[46] Like the Bihar Assembly, the West Bengal Assembly expressed its displeasure at the report of the SRC and delivered the report of the proceedings of the debate to the Central Government.

The Lok Sabha Debate took place after both the Assembly debates, between the 14th and the 21st of December 1955. Delegates from both Bengal and Bihar argued their case in Parliament. N.C. Chatterjee, the Hindu Mahasabha MP from Hooghly, spoke in Parliament on behalf of West Bengal and once again put forth the demands raised by the West Bengal government for various territories in bordering states. He objected to the recommendations of the SRC and, echoing the rhetoric of the West Bengal State Assembly, argued various Indian governments (including governments of British India) had persecuted Bengal and Bengalis. He stated that 'The deliberate policy of the British Imperialists was to cripple the Bengali race, and that is why they inflicted the curse of partition upon us.' He went on to claim that the 'crime' committed by Bengalis that resulted in this punishment was to 'produce Surrendra Nath, Bepin Chandra, Aswini Kumar, Abdul Rasul, great fighters for India's freedom'.[47] He suggested that the Bihar Government had misled the SRC and incited communal tensions in Kishanganj to prevent its transfer.[48] Like pro-Hindi MLAs in the Bihar Legislative Assembly, M.P.s from Bihar objected to the recommendations of the report with regard to transfers of territory out of Bihar, using similar arguments. The MP from Muzzafarpur, Syamanandan Sahaya, reiterated narratives of Bengali imposition of their language on the border regions as well as mistreatment of Muslims in West Bengal. He suggested, as S. K Sinha had, that the industrial capabilities of Bihar would be severely depleted if any part of the Chhotanagpur region was transferred out of the state.[49]

Nevertheless, the Central Government brushed these claims aside. Despite a long and furious debate, the Central Government indicated that the recommendations of the Commission would be largely (if not wholly) adhered to with regard to territories in West Bengal and Bihar. The Central Government put in place a timetable for the eventual enaction of the SRC's recommendations, and these details were sent to various state governments. Although leaders and representatives from both Bihar and Bengal objected to the findings of the report, their arguments did not appear to sway the Central Government, which ultimately was responsible for the transfer of territories. It was evident that if either Bihar or West

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[46] *Ibid.,* 42.
[47] 'Motion re Report of the States Reorganisation Commission', 15 December 1955, *Lok Sabha Debates 1955*, Vol. 10, No. 20, (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1955), 2740.
[48] *Ibid.,* 2746, 2748.
[49] *Ibid.,* 2776.

Bengal wanted to negotiate better terms for their respective states, they would have to alight on a scheme that particularly appealed to figures in the Centre.

B. C. Roy and S. K. Sinha's Scheme for the Merger of Bengal and Bihar (1956)

On the 23rd of January 1956, a month after the Lok Sabha Debate on the findings of the SRC, in an unexpected turn of events, given the heightened tensions between the states, the CMs of Bihar and Bengal released a joint statement in Delhi, calling for the merger of their states. In the months before this plan was released it appeared as though linguistic reorganisation and the recommendations put forward by the SRC and the Union Government were likely to lead to increased tensions, if not outright violence in India. This was a particular issue in Bombay State, where (against the SRC's recommendations to reconstitute it as a bilingual Marathi and Gujarati state) the Union government had 'proposed the formation of three administrative units: Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Bombay city.' This immediately led to protests from Marathi leaders and in November 1955, demonstrators clashed with police. A week before the announcement of the proposed Bengal-Bihar merger the Union Government again reiterated the plan to create three units from Bombay. This led to 'large-scale disturbances' in Bombay City and where Gujarati businesses and residences were attacked.[50]

Within this context of heightened language related violence, the plan put forth by the two Chief Ministers appeared to have the benefit of encouraging Indian unity. It appealed to senior politicians such as Nehru who, while granting linguistic states, had continually reiterated the benefits of more linguistically and culturally heterogenous units. Additionally, as the occasionally acerbic J.P. Narayan suggested, the merger could allow the two Chief Ministers to 'escape from a difficult situation'.[51] A great deal of passionate rhetoric had been used during the debates around border territories by both the Chief Ministers, and the merger allowed them to avoid humiliating climbdowns on their respective demands. Instead, difficult questions around the linguistic makeup of border areas could potentially be deferred if not entirely avoided.

The statement made by the two Chief Ministers on the merger began by alluding to the violence that had emerged seemingly as a part of the process of states reorganisation. They stated, 'Recent developments in parts of India in regard to the proposals for the

[50] Isaka, ' Language Identity and Power in Modern India', 146-147.
[51] J.P. Narayan, *Nation Building in India*,ed. Brahmanand (Varanasi: Navachetna Prakashan), 1980, p. 219.

reorganisation of the States have caused us and many others profound dismay. Provincial and linguistic feels [sic] have been roused to such a pitch that separatist tendencies are imperilling the unity of India.'[52] They suggested that the best solution for their two states was a merger as 'neither the Report nor the Government of India's decision' had 'given satisfaction to the people either of West Bengal or Bihar'.[53] They stressed that as bordering states, there had 'to be close cooperation between the two for their mutual advantage' and claimed that there would be little disruption as 'It was not very long ago that Bengal and Bihar were parts of one State'.[54]

The Chief Ministers intended for their respective Assemblies to debate the plan over the next few months. Given that it involved the reunification of what was previously Bengal, it appeared that the Chief Ministers designed the plan to invoke histories of the Swadeshi Movement (1905), which, as has previously been discussed, began in response to the partition of Bengal and was one of the first Congress movements. The statement released by B. C. Roy after the plan was announced appealed to that pivotal period in Indian nationalist history as he suggested it was a 'reunion' rather than a 'merger'.[55] He and S. K. Sinha had to immediately defend their positions in the Assembly, with both suggesting that it would be fundamentally beneficial to Indian unity. On the 6th of February 1956, in a discussion on the Governor's Address, Sinha argued that Bengal and Bihar had been separated solely for the 'administrative and political convenience' of the British government. He described the merger as a potentially 'historic event, and an auspicious one'. [56] There were some objections to the plan from opposition parties. The Socialist Party MLA Mundrika Singh representing Goh objected to the merger, claiming that the Chief Minister had 'no right' to make a 'commitment' without getting the approval of the Legislative Assembly or even the Congress organisation in Bihar.[57]

However, Congress MLAs largely dismissed these sentiments. Niteshwar Prasad Sinha, the Congress MLA from Katra South, hailed the merger as having the potential to eradicate the 'atmosphere of bitterness' in the country and replace it with an 'atmosphere of

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[52] 'Joint Statement of the Chief Ministers of West Bengal and Bihar', 23 January 1956, AICC Volume II, File no. P-4, Serial no. 3110 (c), in *NMML,* page 16 in file 1 in doc.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] 'Dr Roy Terms Plan as 'Reunion'', 1 February 1956, *The Times of India*, 1.
[56] 'Response to the Governor's Address', 6 February 1956, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1956* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/161507 (Accessed on 20 October 2021) p. 31-34.
[57] 'Response to the Governor's Address', 2 February 1956, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1956* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/189904 (Accessed on 20 October 2021) (translated from Hindi) p. 4.

peace'.[58] He specifically raised the issues faced by the 'people of other provinces who settled in Bihar' due to the tensions brought by linguistic realignment and claimed that this merger would settle them.[59] Yogeshwar Ghosh, a Bengali Congress MLA representing Laukaha in North Bihar, strongly supported the merger. He rejected the idea that Biharis would be disadvantaged in the state due to West Bengal's relative superiority when it came to education and development.[60] He stated that this was no longer '1911' and that it was important to create a strong eastern province in India.[61] Similarly, despite not being a member of the Congress and representing a region that was likely to go to West Bengal under the SRC plan (Kashipur/Raghunathpur), Annanda Prasad Chakraborty claimed the union would 'benefit the whole country'. The independent MLA went further, claiming that in order to properly ensure Indian unity, linguistic provinces should be abolished and India should be divided into five zones 'Purv Pradesh, Paschim Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Dakshin Pradesh, and Madhya Bharat.'[62] Although the whole Congress organisation in the state expressed broad support for the merger, Bengalis in Bihar (even some of those who were not likely to stay in Bihar under the SRC proposals) were some of those pressing the hardest to ensure the plan came to fruition.

B. C. Roy echoed Sinha's rhetoric later that month, claiming that the British had 'brought about partition' to 'pursue the ideal of divide and rule' and 'not because there was a clamour or agitation on the part of the people'.[63] Through the references made to the self-interested British policies of the past, Sinha and Roy presented the merger as a correction to a historic injustice done to India as a whole. The two legislative assemblies, somewhat surprisingly and perhaps in a testament to the control exercised by the respective Chief Ministers in the state, recorded their approval of the measure. During discussions on the Governor of West Bengal's speech, the West Bengal Legislative Assembly voted down an amendment put forth by Subodh Banerjee, the Socialist Unity Centre of India MLA, to prevent the merger.[64] In a debate held between the 24th and 25th of February in the Bihar Legislative Assembly on the merger of the two states, the House recorded its approval of the

[58] *Ibid*., (translated from Hindi) p. 2.
[59] *Ibid*., (translated from Hindi) p. 3.
[60] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi)
[61] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi), p. 14-16.
[62] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi) p.13-14.
[63] 'Amendments in Reply to Governor's Speech', 20 February 1956, *West Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates*, (Alipore: Superintendent Government Printing, 1957), p. 406.
[64] 'Amendments in Reply to Governor's Speech', 23 February 1956, *West Bengal Legislative Assembly*.

plan, with most Congress MLAs voting for it.[65] It received conditional support from the Jharkhand Part, with S. K. Bage suggesting that while it was a good idea, 'undue haste should be avoided'. He alluded to the benefits of uniting the '60 lakh Adivasis of Bihar with the 20 lakh Adivasis of Bengal' as well as uniting the 'forests' of the two states.[66]

Within the two states the section of the population this plan was most popular with was undoubtedly Bengalis in the non-border regions of Bihar. Reflecting the support for the merger by Bengalis in the Bihar Legislative Assembly, *The Behar Herald* reiterated its opposition to linguistically homogenous states in an article stating that these trends of 'cultural nationalism' would lead to states 'emerging ultimately as independent units'.[67] Another article praised Sinha and Roy for thinking 'of the good of India rather than their own States'.[68] Another article berated those who criticised the merger on the basis that Bengalis were 'intellectually superior to Biharees', stating that while this was the case in the early twentieth century, Biharis and Bengalis now had equal access to education and that as they were 'racially the same people', there was no question of the two populations having different intellectual capabilities.[69] Although the newspaper rarely directly referred to the potential plight of linguistic minorities in largely linguistically homogenous states, the constant references to 'cultural nationalism' ensured a focus remained on the issues of majoritarianism, and it was implied that these trends would be harmful to minorities.

Advocates of this proposal presented it as one for the betterment of the nation and designed to appeal to figures like the Prime Minister in the Centre. In that regard, it was highly successful. The topic of linguistic states had been complicated and oftentimes hostile, and several leading politicians across the country had previously expressed their fears that this would lead to a divided Indian population and possible separatism. Consequently, some influential figures greeted Sinha and Roy's plan with strong approval. Nehru wholeheartedly endorsed the merger, writing to B. C. Roy on the 27th of February to express his support. He stated that he 'thought the proposal was a good one' that would be 'beneficial to both states as well as to India' [70] He lauded their plan at a conference for governors in early March and

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[65] 'Discussion on the Resolution Regarding the Union of the States of Bihar and West Bengal', 25 February 1956, Bihar Legislative Assembly, http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/54215 (Accessed on 21 October 2021.).
[66] *Ibid.* (translated from Hindi), p. 15.
[67] 'Culture Nationalism', 28 January 1956, *The Behar Herald*, 7.
[68] 'Too Good to Come True', 28 January 1956, *The Behar Herald*, 1.
[69] 'Inferiority Complex', 11 February 1956, *The Behar Herald*, 217.
[70] Jawaharlal Nehru, 'To B. C. Roy', *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Second Series, Volume 32*, Eds. H.Y. Sharada Prasad and A. K. Damodaran, (New Delhi: Teen Murti House, 2003), 191.

encouraged other leaders to follow the example set by Sinha and Roy.[71] The merger received a similar reaction from H. N. Kunzru, a member of the SRC, who hailed the plan as 'epoch-making' and suggested it would 'would strengthen the country's unity and integrate the people as perhaps nothing else could have done.[72] Southern Congress leaders from Madras, who had seen their own share of issues around language in the previous years, similarly approved of the plan. Alluding to the role played by Bengali leaders in the freedom movement, C. Rajagopalachari (who had briefly served as the Governor of West Bengal) stated, 'Bengal has led Bharat again, as in the old days. Your gesture has ensured peace and progress to India'.[73] K. Kamaraj, the Chief Minister of Madras, suggested that the merger 'was a positive contribution to the country's larger integration'.[74]

While this plan was viewed highly positively by many Indian leaders, with several suggesting that the Bengal-Bihar merger would result in a more unified India, it became increasingly clear that it did not have widespread support in either of the states, with many Congress members voicing their qualms. Although it had received approval from both Bihar and Bengal's legislative assemblies, the debates around the plan indicated the challenges that would accompany the implementation of the plan. As it was in the movement for Pakistan, the rhetoric surrounding demands on various sides of the debate made negotiating the details of the merger complicated. The language of cultural imperialism and persistent claims of oppression at the others' hands meant that separation became seen as increasingly likely.

Failure of the West Bengal-Bihar Merger Scheme and the Transfer of Territories (1956-1957)

Given its laudatory reception by several national leaders and the seeming approval given to the plan by both Assemblies, the likelihood of the merger happening appeared to be high in the first few months of 1956. However, there were early signs of dissent. Firstly, in the debate on the merger in Bihar in late February, even some members of the Congress expressed their concerns. Secondly, it was difficult to ignore the outright condemnation that this proposal received from the LSS, and the administration of Manbhum had been a particular point of contention during the debates on the linguistic realignment of states. Thirdly, the Chief Ministers did not release specific details of the plan either before

[71] 'Proposed Merger of West Bengal and Bihar Hailed by Mr Nehru', 4 March 1956, *The Times of India*, 1.
[72] 'Bengal-Bihar Merger "Epoch-Making" Event', 24 January 1956, *The Times of India,* 7.
[73] 'Proposal to Merge Bihar and Bengal Hailed', 25 January 1956, *The Times of India*, 5.
[74] *Ibid.*

announcing it or before the Assembly Debates. While there were some loose plans regarding zonal councils and state languages, neither Chief Minister clearly laid out the intricacies of administration, and state-level politicians in both Bihar and Bengal deemed B.C. Roy's tentative plans to be too complicated. Fourthly, the issues that the states had faced had not disappeared. West Bengal was still struggling with a refugee crisis, and there were fears in Bihar that refugees from East Pakistan would flood into Bihar in the event of a merger. Fifthly, there was no solution in the plan for the grievances around administration and services raised in multilingual border regions. The two Chief Ministers did not raise the issue of the language in which those regions would actually be administered in in the various announcements and statements they made. Given the heightened tensions, there was limited room for negotiation as neither Chief Minister could make the compromises required for the plan to come to fruition. By May 1956, most political figures accepted the merger was unlikely, and on the 1st of September 1956, the Lok Sabha passed the Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Act. Despite attempts to appeal to 'nationalist' histories, the inflammatory rhetoric and accusations of cultural imperialism that permeated the debate resulted in the majority of political figures and organisations in Bihar and Bengal viewing separation as the more favourable option.

Although the merger scheme seemed popular and an easy way to fix issues on the border, a certain section of the Bengali population was highly opposed to it as there was significant uncertainty as to whether Bengali-speaking territories would actually be placed in the hands of Bengali administrators or whether, in practice, it would continue to be governed by Biharis. In their joint statement, the Chief Ministers did not mention the issues raised by Bengalis on the border. A passionate editorial in the *Mukti* reflected the dissatisfaction with this, and it objected to the merger and the rhetoric used by various leaders regarding the possible merger. It suggested that there was 'huge unrest' due to the possibility of the merger. It also accused 'big states' of attempting to influence Nehru by suggesting that 'merging states' was the 'only way to get rid of language chauvinism', 'blind regionalism', and 'communalism'.[75] This, they claimed, had the opposite effect on the language movements in states as the Central Government's dismissal of just demands as 'conspiracies' made 'locals' of the provinces 'angry, which is why they have become violent.'[76] Although the article did condemn their violence, it also suggested that under 'rights of citizenship' granted to Indians,

[75] '*Bhashar Dabi Banam Andho Prodeshikta'*, 6 February 1956, *Mukti, Vol. 17*, 3 (translated from Bengali).
[76] *Ibid.* (translated from Bengali).

they had the right to use and defend 'their mother tongue'.[77] This rhetoric had been used previously by the LSS, but it was increasingly evident that they were largely disillusioned with the way in which the Government of Bihar and, to a certain extent, the Government of India protected their 'rights'.

While the Bihar Legislative Assembly did approve of the union of the states, the slew of amendments proposed by (largely Congress) MLAs suggested that the party machinery in the state had a more ambivalent view of the plan than the Chief Minister. In his amendment, Ramjanam Mahato, the Congress MLA from Colgong, demanded that the 'present boundaries of the state' should 'not be touched'.[78] He suggested that there was a great deal of confusion around the plan, with it being dubbed a 'merger', then a 'reunion', and then a 'union' with the 'matter of secession' also being 'raised', therefore, he claimed that both this 'situation' and the fact that Bihar had given the 'States Reorganisation Commission a befitting reply' to its plans for territorial transfer out of Bihar meant that the 'boundary should remain the same.'[79] His language suggests that he disapproved of the merger idea and that he was unlikely to support the merger if it involved any concession to demands made by West Bengal.

Other amendments put forward also indicated that there were likely to be issues with the merger. Ramrup Prasad Rai, the Congress MLA from Mohiuddinnagar, suggested as a condition of the merger, Patna ought to be made the first capital of the new state, with Calcutta acting as the second capital. He argued that as Patna had been the capital in 'ancient times' and since the 'whole of India' was 'adorned by Ashoka's *rajchakra* on their breast' it should 'at the very least be the capital of *Purv Pradesh* (Eastern Province).'[80] While the Speaker admonished him for straying off the topic, Rai quickly presented several narratives regarding the history of Bihar. He heavily implied that the state was inherently more deserving of housing the capital as it had produced figures such as Buddha and Ashoka and had been the site of movements during the freedom struggle, such as the Champaran movement.[81] These claims suggest that some Biharis had produced histories and narratives that contributed to a specific Bihari identity. Despite having been a part of the same province for centuries, Bengal was not given prominence in these narratives. There were also no

[77] *Ibid.* (translated from Bengali).
[78] 'Discussion on the Resolution Regarding the Union of the States of Bihar and West Bengal', 24 February 1956, p. 13.
[79] *Ibid.,* p. 13-14, (translated from Hindi).
[80] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi), p. 18-19.
[81] *Ibid.,* (translated from Hindi), p. 18-20.

indications that West Bengal would agree to the capital being Patna. Shortly after the debate, in a broadcast from All-India Radio Calcutta on the 4th of March, B. C. Roy stated, 'As far as I can gather, Calcutta has to remain as the capital of the combined State, although Patna may be the second capital.'[82] Therefore, it was very likely that this would be an insurmountable issue faced by the two states.

Additionally, there was opposition from some sections of the Bengali community, with the Lok Sevak Sangh, in particular, claiming that Bihar and Bengal could not function as a single state. In a possible attempt to encourage wavering Congressmen, Srish Chandra Banerjee claimed that the merger would 'liquidate Bihar'. He stated that the proposal 'was not made in a private room but on the floor of the West Bengal Assembly', implying that the plan was an attempt by Bengal to gain control of Bihar. He also made allusions to the *Mahabharat*, citing a significant part at the crux of the *Bhagvad Gita* after Krishna has expounded on various topics and finally tells Arjun to surrender to him to free himself from any sin he might feel having to fight his relatives and teachers. Krishna, in turn, promises protection. Banerjee stated, 'the Chief Minister's message may be compared to the message of Arjun when he completely surrendered to Lord Krishna. Similarly, the Chief Minister has completely surrendered to the Krishna of Bengal'.[83] By comparing Sinha to Arjun and Roy to Krishna, Banerjee further emphasised that Sinha was simply being led by Roy to promote the interests of West Bengal over Bihar. Banerjee was highly opposed to the merger plan. His rhetoric and focus on the claim that the merger would be detrimental to Bihar also suggests that despite the seeming support of large sections of the Assembly, there was some uneasiness regarding the merger that he believed could be appealed to.

In West Bengal, there were also qualms, with many of their demands running counter to those expressed in the Bihar Assembly. The West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee endorsed the plan in their meeting on the 17th of March; however, they also added that a secession proviso ought to be included and demanded the reorganisation of territories still be implemented with Bengali-speaking areas in Bihar brought under Bengali administration.[84] Neither of these demands was acceptable to S. K. Sinha, and plans for the merger quickly fell apart. Talks were held in March with B. C. Roy, Nehru, Govind Ballabh Pant (Home Minister) and Abdul Kalam Azad (Minister of Education), which were discouraging. B. C.

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[82] 'The full text of the broadcast on the "Union of Bengal and Bihar" by Dr B.C. Roy, Chief Minister from AIR Calcutta' AICC Volume II, P.B -21: West Bengal, Serial no. 2048 in NMML, page 263 in file 6 in doc.
[83] 'Discussion on the Resolution Regarding the Union of the States of Bihar and West Bengal', 25 February 1956, p. 22.
[84] 'Merger With Bihar Favoured', 18 March 1956, *The Times of India,* 1.

Roy claimed that both the option of secession and the transfer of territories were essential for the merger to proceed. Faced with a local Congress Party that was not entirely supportive of the merger and an anti-merger opposition party, Roy was unable to shift his position.

The tone struck by national leaders such as Nehru also quickly shifted. Unlike previous occasions, when the Prime Minister had expressed his wholehearted support for the merger, he suggested on the 2nd of April (shortly after the talks with Roy) that it was not an issue over which people should get 'vastly excited.'[85] He also emphasised that it was a decision that had to be made by the two states and not the Central Government.[86] Talks continued through April but did not make headway. Public opinion against the merger mounted in both states with an anti-merger candidate declaring his intention to run in a parliamentary by-election in North-West Calcutta later in the month. The candidate, M.K. Moitra, was a member of the West Bengal Linguistic States Reorganisation Committee, a political party specifically created to oppose the merger. On the 29th of February, Moitra defeated the Congress candidate Ashok Sen. Although this seat had not previously been held by the Congress, in a statement to the press on the 3rd of May, Roy declared he was withdrawing the proposal for a merger. He defended the initial idea as potentially leading 'to the promotion of Indian unity' but also stated that he 'had to bow to the opinion of the people as expressed in the last Parliamentary by-election' and 'withdraw this proposal now before the public'.[87] Although the election was likely not the sole factor, since Roy and Sinha could not reach a consensus on several important issues, it provided Roy with a useful reason to withdraw the proposal.

While continuing to assert that the merger would have been ideal, Bengali-Biharis returned to opposing the transfer of any territories to Bengal. *The Behar Herald* placed the blame squarely on West Bengal for abandoning the merger plan. An article published in May 1956 suggested that this could lead to 'a rising wave of crime and satyagrahas' and, therefore, demanded the 'ceding of Darjeeling and Kuch Bihar' as 'compensation'.[88] This rhetoric firmly placed Bengali-Biharis on the side of the Government of Bihar and demonstrated the ways in which this group attempted to ensure its security.

While the prospect of a merger had briefly delayed the production of a transfer of territories bill, by the 13th of June, the Government of India had prepared a draft bill to be

[85] 'No Decision Yet', 3 April 1956, *The Times of India*, 8.
[86] *Ibid.*
[87] 'Bengal-Bihar Union Plan to Be Withdrawn', 4 May 1956, *The Times of India*, 7.
[88] 'Our Reactions to Non-Union', *The Behar Herald*, 12 May 1956, 372.

circulated to the State Assemblies and debated in the Lok Sabha. The bill put forth largely followed the recommendations of the SRC, which, after the merger plan, was viewed as the only option.[89] Both the State Assemblies discussed the bill in early July, and both expressed their displeasure at the recommendations in the Bill. The contents of the debates were then circulated to members of the Lok Sabha so they could understand the context of the questions raised. The debate in the West Bengal Assembly held between the 4th and 6th of July, was a lively one, with opposition politicians, such as the Communist leader Jyoti Basu, accusing Roy and the Congress-led Central Government of purposefully causing issues on the border by not giving West Bengal its due to cause 'bitterness between the peoples and State Governments'.[90] Basu recommended the creation of another boundary commission but suggested that as these disputes distracted the population of West Bengal from other more pressing issues, such as the refugee crisis, both the state and central governments did 'not wish to settle the affair once and for all'.[91] Roy responded with some amount of caution. Unlike previous debates, where he had vehemently expressed his opinion on Bengal's territorial rights, often sponsoring motions in the Assembly to support the transfer of large swathes of land, in this debate, he indicated that he believed that the government could not revisit the recommendations of the SRC. He suggested that to do so would open Bengal up to potential claims on its territory, stating 'The moment we start on that basis, namely "Give it to me because it is a Bengali-speaking area" they will make similar claims. I believe somebody made a claim about portions of Malda, portions of Jalpaiguri and portions of Darjeeling and other portions. You cannot deny to the other party the same privileges you are claiming for yourself.'[92] Therefore, the West Bengal Government, while dutifully objecting once again to recommendations in the bill, expressed less opposition than they previously had to the suggested transfer of territories.

The debate on the bill began in Bihar a day later, on the 5th of July. The arguments made in the debate were along familiar lines, with figures like Murali Manohar Prasad claiming that Bengal had no right to any of the territories likely to be transferred as they had imposed the Bengali language and oppressed Hindi speakers in those and other regions. Muhammad Tahir once again supported him and voiced his own fears for the large Muslim community that was to come under the administration of the West Bengal Government in

[89] '2,900 Sq. Miles of Bihar Areas for West Bengal', 14 June 1956, *The Times of India*, 7.
[90] 'Resolution on the Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Bill, 1956', 4 July 1956, *Official Report of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly: Volume 15,* (Alipore: Superintendent Government Printing, 1957), 127.
[91] *Ibid.*
[92] *Ibid.,* 131.

Kishanganj. A significant section of the Assembly also supported a plebiscite to determine the true feelings of those living on the border, with several Congress MLAs, including Sarayu Prasad, Bholanath Bhagat and Mohammad Tahir, all putting forth amendments demanding the will of the people be considered.[93] Srish Chandra Banerjee opposed these demands. He claimed there was no 'neutral body' to oversee a plebiscite as the Congress controlled all levers of government. He stated that 'our experience of the last eight years has shown us that this Government is quite unfit for holding the reins of Government and is quite unfit to give justice to the people here'. When asked by the Speaker if he would prefer if West Bengal oversaw the plebiscite, he responded 'No. Sir. The same Congress regime is there'.[94] The anti-Congress rhetoric used by Banerjee, despite the fact the goals of the LSS largely aligned with those of the West Bengal Congress by 1956, suggests some Bengalis in Bihar were disillusioned with the larger Congress project and the way in which India was functioning. While the LSS undoubtedly supported the transfer of territories to Bengal, they nevertheless remained dissatisfied by what they viewed as the failure of the Congress government to protect their rights to the 'preservation' of their mother tongue. Unlike the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, the Bihar Legislative Assembly did not record its approval of the recommendations in the bill. After a series of compromises that involved the retention of a larger section of Kishanganj in Bihar and the transfer of more territory in Manbhum to West Bengal, the bill was deemed acceptable to Bihar.[95]

The States' Reorganisation Bill and the State Assemblies' response were sent to the Lok Sabha for debate, which took place on the 17th of August. M.P.s West Bengal and Bihar once again voiced their reservations regarding the bill, proposing a host of amendments; however, these were all voted down. Despite the plan's failure, there was still some support for the merger, with Jaipal Singh tabling an amendment to create a 'strong frontier province' of 'Purva Pradesh'. While he viewed the creation of a separate state of Jharkhand as preferable, the merger would unite the Adivasi populations in the two states.[96] Sushama Sen, a Congress MP from Bhagalpur South, also expressed support for the merger, bemoaning the hostility between representatives of Bihar and Bengal. She stated, 'Coming from Bengal as I do, having been born and bred in Bengal and then having stayed in Bihar for forty years-and

[93] 'Views of the Bihar Legislative Assembly on the Bihar and Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Bill, 1956', 5 July 1956, *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates 1956,* http://archives.biharvidhanmandal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/35539 (Accessed on 12 November 2021).
[94] *Ibid.,* p. 36.
[95] Franda, 'West Bengal and the Federalising Process,' 57.
[96] 'Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories Bill) 1956', 17 August 1956, *Lok Sabha Debates 1956*, Vol. 7, No. 24, (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1956), 3635.

all my work lies in that area- I find it is very painful indeed for me to hear the charges which are levelled against Bihar and Bengal'.[97] Although she did state that the 'best solution would have been the merger', she also objected to the transfer of some territories from Bihar to Bengal in the event that it did not occur. Sen's references to her identity as a Bengali in Bihar and her subsequent opposition to the transfer of territories indicate that, despite the heightened tensions, some Bengalis in Bihar (while not giving up their identity as Bengali) nevertheless identified more with the goals of Bihar. However, there was not enough support in the Assembly for a merger and the amendments demanding one were all negatived. The Bill passed with few amendments that were largely logistical, and territories were officially transferred by September 1956.

Conclusion

The transfer of territories saw a definite decrease in hostilities between the two states. The Lok Sevak Sangh remained a significant political presence in the regions that had transferred to West Bengal. Unlike in Andhra, where voters rewarded Congress for granting the state, in West Bengal, the LSS continued to be the choice of a fair majority in Manbhum, suggesting that the language issues coupled with food shortages had alienated the inhabitants of Manbhum from the Congress. Although some constituencies on the border were not demarcated in time for the 1957 elections, the LSS nevertheless once again managed to win the majority of the seats they stood for. In 1967, the LSS became a part of the United Front, which went on to win the state elections in West Bengal, and some of its members joined the cabinet.

Although the two states were unable to reach an agreement on the merger, the responses from the various communities in Bihar are nonetheless illuminative. These conceptualisations of the Indian nation and identity did not disappear. Debates around these understandings invariably involve discussions of how 'belonging' manifests, especially in some communities that have lived outside their linguistic homeland for several centuries.

As Bengalis not settled on the border were unlikely to migrate to Bengal and be ruled by a Bengali government, this section of the population viewed it as essential to reaffirm their 'Bihari-ness' and their support for positions taken by Bihar's government. Apart from simply reiterating their loyalty to Bihar, spokesmen and women from the non-border Bengali community also indicated that they believed a less linguistically heterogeneous state would

[97] *Ibid*., 3639.

likely result in greater hardship for linguistic minorities that had no choice but to remain in the state. Consequently, the suggestion to merge Bihar and West Bengal was greeted with enthusiasm in these quarters. While this plan did not come to fruition, it does, nevertheless, demonstrate that while linguistic reorganisation was seen as one of the best solutions to India's issues that sprang from its multicultural population, there were some Indians who believed the state should be ordered in different ways to better protect vulnerable populations.

This chapter has demonstrated that the differences in the aims of the Hindi language movement in Bihar from the one in UP are emphasised by the language of inclusion towards Urdu used in Bihar during this period. The attempts to include Bihari Muslims within a larger Bihari community appear to have been successful, given the opposition in parts of Kishanganj to its transfer to West Bengal. Both pro-Hindi Hindu MLAs and Muslim MLAs in the Assembly agreed that Bihar was essentially the homeland of these Muslims. The issue of Pakistan was raised, with some significant figures such as S. K. Sinha suggesting that Muslims in the state felt more kinship with Bihar than India and that it would be unwise to transfer the administration of these areas out of Bihari hands. This Bihari community (that explicitly included Bihari Muslims) was defined along linguistic rather than religious lines, with Bengali Biharis being excluded. An analysis of this episode in Indian history, therefore, contributes to understandings of how minorities beyond religious ones navigated politics in newly independent India and reconceptualises the Hindi language movement in the context of linguistic territorialism.

Conclusion

This dissertation has focused on a relatively small community within Bihar; nonetheless, the debates that occurred around Bengalis in Bihar, including discussions of who truly 'belonged' in the state, provide us with insight into how various groups strategically used the identities they could conceivably make claims to in order to navigate a shifting political landscape. The first chapter examined the different ways in which Bengalis in Bihar navigated the 1912 division of Bihar and Bengal and how the increasingly strict domicile requirements to access tertiary education and apply for government jobs developed between the 1910s and the 1930s. The second chapter investigated the impact of the passing of the Government of India Act (1935) and the ways in which Bengalis strategically used the category of minority to make their claims. It also explored the growing demands for linguistic states and the difficulties faced by the Congress leadership in Bihar due to issues around jurisdictions of linguistically based PCCs. The third chapter analysed the 'Bengali-Bihari' investigation ordered by the Congress and uncovered how narratives of Bengali belonging (or non-belonging) in Bihar were developed and refined during this period. The fourth chapter traced the Bengali-Bihari navigation of independence and partition and the divergence between border and non-border Bengali politics in Bihar. The fifth chapter discussed Bihar's response to the impending linguistic realignment and the use of rhetoric around Bengali-Bihari belonging to justify opposition to linguistic realignment. The final chapter explored the response in Bihar to the publication of the SRC report and the ultimately unsuccessful plan to merge Bengal and Bihar.

Firstly, this thesis explores the impact of the transition to independence on linguistic minorities. The historical scholarship tends to focus more on religious and caste minorities, with scholars such as Niraja Jayal and Rochana Bajpai discussing these transformations within both these groups during the transition from colonial rule to independence.[1] Mushirul Hasan explores Muslim politics in postcolonial North India and highlights the impact of partition on the practice of these politics, suggesting that Muslims in India largely had to align with those in positions of power (primarily the Congress) to ensure their security and political success.[2] Similarly, Taylor Sherman discusses how Muslim politics transformed in

[1] Bajpai; Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Citizenship and Its Discontents: An Indian History* (Harvard University Press, 2013).
[2] Hasan, 'Adjustment and Accommodation: Indian Muslims after Partition'.

Hyderabad after the partition and analyses the reasons behind the alignment of several Muslim organisations with the Congress.[3] This thesis, on the other hand, uncovers the ways in which the category of minority was used strategically by those who claimed the status on the basis of language rather than religion or caste. With the emphasis placed on the protection of minorities in the 1935 Government of India Act, Bengalis across Bihar were quick to make claims to the category of minority in order to protest against the hated domicile certificate requirement. In order to bolster their case against domicile certificates Bengalis also developed narratives of historical Bengali belonging to the province, presenting Bengalis as a Bihari minority and not 'outsiders'. These narratives did not disappear after the colonial era, even though the demands made by Bengalis in the state changed.

Secondly, this thesis argues that partition significantly impacted minority politics, with minority communities tending to express support for the priorities of and align themselves with those in positions of power. As evidenced by the split within the Bengali community in Bihar, partition had made the geographical space inhabited by communities more significant. The demand for Pakistan and the framing of the movement as a 'nonterritorially defined' one (especially in its early stages) has resulted in scholarship on Indian minority politics somewhat overlooking the spatial aspects of community mobilisation.[4] Partition most likely resulted in the dangers of non-territorial forms of politics for minorities being emphasised due to the brutality inflicted on those caught on the 'wrong side of the border'. Bengalis in parts of Bihar whose continued ability to thrive (or even continue to live) in the state relied, to a certain extent, on the goodwill of other non-Bengali communities tended to align themselves with the politics of the dominant community. However, Bengalis in regions of Bihar where they were the predominant community explicitly used partition as a threat (before the decision to reorganise India linguistically) and then a model to demand their rights and then demand the regions they inhabited be removed from Bihar and amalgamated with West Bengal.

Thirdly, this thesis makes interventions in the broader scholarship around the connection between territorial and linguistic belonging. It examines a state that developed a broad coalition against linguistic realignment, demonstrating that linguistic territorialism was not universally popular. In this respect, the scholarship has largely focused on the various ways in which language and territory became increasingly linked, as well as the demands

[3] Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India*.
[4] Ayesha Jalal, 'Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imagining', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27.1 (1995), p. 74.

associated with creating states with more linguistic homogeneity.[5] Sumathi Ramaswamy explores the development of a 'Tamil' identity that was closely connected to the development of the Tamil language.[6] Scholars such as Oliver Godsmark, Riho Isaka, and Lisa Mitchell discuss the ways in which various communities of Marathi, Gujarati and Telugu speakers used language as a basis to demand the creation of units within the Indian nation, wherein their language would be the one spoken by the majority.[7] Understandably, the scholarship tends to place focus on movements that claimed to represent linguistic majorities in circumscribed areas, as these are viewed as having eventually led to a substantial reorganisation of the Indian nation. Nevertheless, there were large populations living outside their ostensible linguistic homeland who were against the idea of redrawing Indian state lines. Sindhis in Bombay, for instance, argued against the constitution of separate Marathi and Gujarati-speaking states and claimed Bombay's heterogeneity provided a degree of protection to linguistic minorities.[8]

Therefore, an analysis of the politics of language groups in Bihar provides insight into the more strategic aspects of claims around language and linguistic belonging. This thesis argues that linguistic minorities generally opposed the creation of linguistic states as they feared 'cultural nationalism' would marginalise those not considered a part of the linguistic 'majority'. Although most scholars of language movements acknowledge that these movements are not preordained and that communities construct devotion to language through a variety of processes over a significant period of time, there is a tendency to associate language with more emotive aspects of political mobilisation. This is evident in the titles of books analysing language movements, such as Sumathi Ramaswamy's *Passions of the Tongue* and Lisa Mitchell's *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India*. On the other hand, this dissertation focuses less on the interiority of these linguistic communities and more on how they strategically used the identities they could conceivably make claim to in order to bolster their demands. It demonstrates both that the Indian population did not uniformly

[5] See *Interrogating Reorganisation of States* ed. by Sarangi and Pai for an examination of the different contexts in India that led to the emergence of demands for linguistic reorganisation. See Robert D. King's *Nehru and the Language Politics of India* for Nehru's responses to demands for linguistic reorganisation. In Jyotirindra Das Gupta, *Language Conflict and National Development: Group Politics and National Language Policy in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) he develops the argument that the linguistic cleavages and the ways in which linguistic movements were organised in India ameliorated other cleavages within Indian society.
[6] Ramaswamy.
[7] Mitchell; Godsmark; Isaka.
[8] See Uttara Shahani, 'Language Without a Land: Partition, Sindhi Refugees and the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution', *Asian Affairs* 53, no. 2 (2010) for more detail on Sindhi navigation of the post-colonial era in Bombay state.

accept the principle of linguistic territorialism and that communities conceived alternative ways of 'ordering' the nation. These alternatives were based on retaining linguistic diversity within states so that individual units of India were more representative of the country's broader diversity. The proponents of these alternatives argue that this would encourage the development of relationships between people of different communities and, therefore, inspire greater unity within India.

The interactions between the Bengalis in Bihar and other communities in the state can shed light on the broader picture of strategic claim-making in India. This adds nuance to discussions of Adivasi politics covered by Vinita Damodaran, Stuart Corbridge, and Louise Tillin.[9] This research has revealed that Jaipal Singh used the alleged mistreatment of Bengalis and the continual insistence from several mainstream Bihari politicians that Bengalis were essentially outsiders and colonisers to demand a separate Adivasi state on the grounds that 'native' Biharis had made the definition of Bihari too exclusive, leaving large sections of the population (including Adivasis) out of this community. Similarly, Bengalis in Bihar were willing to support Adivasi demands for a separate state as the narratives of Adivasi oppression at the hands of these same Biharis bolstered the narrative that 'native' Biharis were discriminatory towards those that did not fit the mainstream definition of Bihari. However, upon independence, it quickly became apparent that adherence to the linguistic principle would result in the amalgamation of parts of the Chhotanagpur Plateau with West Bengal. As a result, Adivasi members of the Jharkhand Party came out in strong opposition to this, reiterating 'native' Bihari narratives of Bengalis as oppressors. On the other hand, the consistently anti-Muslim rhetoric used by Bengalis in Bihar cemented the impression that West Bengal would be inhospitable to Muslims. This gave greater credence to Muslim (and elite Bihari Hindi-speaking Hindu) demands that areas with large Muslim populations ought not to be transferred to the neighbouring state.

Fourthly, this dissertation contributes to discussions around the Hindi language movement and argues that the movement developed in Bihar was less concerned with the exclusion of Muslims and more concerned with the retention of territory within the state. The connection of Hindi to the development of an Indian identity that explicitly excluded Muslims has been explored thoroughly in the scholarship. Christopher King examines the development of the Hindi language movement in UP in the nineteenth century, with

[9] Damodaran, 'The Politics of Marginality and the Construction of Indigeneity in Chotanagpur'; Corbridge; Tillin.

particular focus on the reasons why the movement became so explicitly anti-Muslim.[10] Similarly, William Gould and Francesca Orsini emphasise the anti-Muslim bent of the Hindi language movement in the early twentieth century.[11] Sudha Pai explores the anti-Urdu policies pursued by Congress leadership in UP in independent India.[12] Given the host of senior Indian and Pakistani politicians that emerged from the state, UP narratives have tended to be 'nationalised', and other debates around the Hindi language have been marginalised.

This dissertation has, therefore, provided an intervention in the scholarship with regard to the ideological underpinnings of the Hindi language movement in North India. Unlike the movement in the United Provinces/Uttar Pradesh (UP), which attempted to build a unified Hindu community, this thesis has demonstrated that the process of 'Hindi-isation' in Bihar was mainly implemented to ensure that Bihar would retain territories in the event of linguistic reorganisation. Due to this desire to retain territory, there was little attempt to 'other' Muslims as there was a possibility that the border regions of Kishanganj could be transferred to West Bengal. These proponents of Hindi were largely successful in preventing the alienation of Muslims in the state (despite the violence that Hindu communities perpetrated against the Muslims in Bihar), as Muslim MLAs from parts of Kishanganj were some of the most vehement opponents of any transfer of territories. Similarly, in contrast to their pro-Hindi counterparts in UP, there was little attempt to sanskritise the language in Bihar, with senior politicians, such as Rajendra Prasad, actively arguing against this process. The desire to retain territory, while undoubtedly the most significant reason for how the Hindi language movement developed in Bihar, was not the only reason there were relatively higher levels of cooperation between the 'native' Bihari Hindu and Muslim communities. Histories of elite Hindus and Muslims aligning to demand the separation of Bihar from Bengal also allowed these two communities to overcome the tensions that the demand for Pakistan had created.

All these arguments open up new possibilities for the exploration of the politics of language after the period examined by this thesis. The failure of Bihar and West Bengal to effect a merger and the continuing creation of linguistic states into the 1960s appeared to

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[10] In Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994) he argues that the 'contradictions in government policy' which retained Urdu as the language of governance, while educating the vast majority of (Hindu) students (for the purpose of governance) in Hindi led to 'perceptions' of 'uneven rates of social change' and therefore animosity against Urdu (and by extension Muslims).
[11] William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Orsini.
[12] Pai, 'Politics of Language'.

fundamentally shut down discussions of non-linguistic ways to order the Indian nation. The violent backlash in 1965 in Madras to the proposed introduction of Hindi as the sole official language of the Indian Union and the subsequent decisions to pursue policies that elevated the Tamil language made by the non-Congress, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam state government (brought to power to some extent on the back of the anti-Hindi agitations) also encouraged the belief that the language principle would remain the most important factor when ordering and reordering the Indian nation.[13]

This consolidation around regional languages was not a principle solely endorsed by state governments with the reluctant acquiescence of the centre. In July 1967, the Union Government, during the passing of a bill to ensure the use of the mother tongue at all levels of education, stated the 'Government of India has accepted in principle that Indian languages should now be adopted as media of education at all stages' as the current system of primarily English language tertiary education resulted in 'the creative energies of the people' not being 'released' and the 'gulf between the intelligentsia and the masses' not being 'bridged'.[14] Various communities, state governments, and organisations continued to raise demands around language, with issues along the Maharashtra-Karnataka border arising in the 1960s and '70s. The government in Bombay put forth vehement arguments, claiming that regions such as Belgaum were not fully Kannada-speaking and had large populations of Marathi speakers and should, therefore, be transferred to Maharashtra.

Nevertheless, despite these seeming shifts towards adherence to the principle of linguistic territorialism, it became more apparent in the 1970s and 1980s that the Union Government no longer regarded the linguistic principle as the main basis for the creation of new states. Demands from states for territories in other states based on the linguistic principle were summarily dismissed. It had already been evident in the 1950s that the creation of linguistic states was quite likely to exacerbate issues around the treatment of linguistic minorities. In acknowledgement of this, the position of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities was created through the States Reorganisation Act in 1957 to try to ensure these groups would not suffer.

As the years passed, it became increasingly evident that linguistic reorganisation had not solved all the issues around borders, belonging, and rights in the country. Influential politicians who had supported linguistic reorganisation in the past, including Jayaprakash

[13] Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue*.
[14] 'Sen Announces a Historic Decision', *Times of India*, 20 July 1967, p.1.

Narayan and Siddavanahalli Nijalingappa, announced their opposition to the principle, with Nijalingappa even suggesting that India should be reorganised once again, but this time to ensure the units were as economically efficient as possible.[15] The demands for the transfers of territory based on language did not gain traction, while demands centred around other identities, such as Adivasi identities, did. A part of this is undoubtedly, as Marcus Franda argued, due to the fact that the linguistic reorganisation that took place over the 1950s and '60s was broadly acceptable to the majority of the Indian public. Additionally, the fact that states were more linguistically homogenous allowed state governments to pursue policies around the language of education and administration that would not have been acceptable in more multilingual states. This most likely satisfied speakers of the majority language and allowed linguistic passions to dissipate somewhat.

However, this does not fully explain why transfers of territories between states on a linguistic basis almost entirely ceased. For instance, the demands made by the government in Bombay for the transfer of border territories from Mysore/Karnataka to Maharashtra were unsuccessful, with the Government of Karnataka refusing to countenance any changes to the border.[16] Similarly, despite having a distinct language, the demand for a separate Mithila state carved out of Bihar also did not gain the approval of the Union Government.[17]

Nevertheless, this did not mean new states were not created in India. Several states were created from the sizeable northeastern state of Assam in the 1960s and 1970s. However, although language is acknowledged as an important aspect of identity in these regions, none of the movements for separation specifically used language as the basis for their demands. Similarly, language was not the central principle behind the demand for Jharkhand, which the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha reignited in the 1970s and was finally successful in 2000. Accompanying the creation of Jharkhand was the separation of Chhattisgarh and Uttaranchal, which were carved out of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, respectively. Neither of these two states was created on the basis of language either.[18] As recently as 2014, the Telangana region in Andhra Pradesh was awarded statehood despite the area being broadly linguistically

[15] 'A Wrong Step Says Narayan' *Times of India*, 1 September 1962, p.5; 'Linguistic States Will Not Lead to Integration Reaffirms Nijalingappa', Times of India, 28 April 1969, p.1.
[16] 'The Dispute Over Belgaum: Centre in a Fix', *Times of India*, 21 May 1971, 10.
[17] Marcus Franda, *West Bengal and the Federalising Process in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).
[18] Emma Mawdsley, 'Regionalism, Decentralisation, and Politics: State Reorganisation in Contemporary India', in *South Asia in a Globalising World: A Reconstructed Regional Geography*, ed. by Glynn Williams and Bob Bradnock, DARG Regional Development, 3 (Routledge, 2014).

homogenous.[19] This is especially significant as Andhra was the site of the most vehement demand for linguistic reorganisation and was also the first territory granted linguistic statehood. An examination of the politics of a state that built a reasonably broad coalition against linguistic realignment specifically (not against the redistribution of territory) can shed some light on why this form of sorting the Indian population was deemed unsustainable after 1966.

[19] Kham Khan Suan Hausing, 'Telangana and the Politics of State Formation in India: Recognition and Accommodation in a Multinational Federation', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 28.4 (2018).

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