

Muslim League Leader Khwaja Nazim Uddin and 1937 Election Tragedy in the Bengal Province of British India

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ABSTRACT— *The paper focuses on the muslim political leaders' activities, nature, ideology and legitimacy in the period of 1935 to 1937 and 1937 election in the Bengal province of British India. Khwaza Nazim Uddin and other Political Leader played significant roles in the socio-economic and political development of Bengal. However, Muslim Political leaders were competing with one another to obtain more power in Bengal politics. In particular, Khwaja Nazim Uddin was a popular leader in Bengal but defeated in the election in 1937. Thus, this paper explores Khwaja Nazim Uddin's political career, ideology and the reasons of his defeat in 1937 election. To investigate, it utilizes historical and exploratory descriptive methods. Instrument used to collect data is review of relevant literature, books on autobiography, media reports and archival data. The archival data are historical records and British government document during the colonial rule in Bengal. The finding of the study suggests that the question of Muslim unity always a moving factor in Bengal politics in a situations of tense relations between Hindus and Muslims but Khwaja Nazim Uddin failed to remain united to fulfill the rights of Bengal people due to the lack of his ability in leadership.*

Keywords— Muslim Political Leader, Khwaja Nazim Uddin, Bengal Politics, 1937 election and Hindu and Muslim relation

1. INTRODUCTION

A political leadership can show the right path to the people or their leadership can make the people go astray. In the modern times, a leadership can have a significant contribution in raising the consciousness of a nation. Even a leader with a sophisticated political plan can make the people reach their desired destination. It is observed in regard to our above discussion that only the Bengal Muslim leaders played significant roles in the economical and political development of the province. It was observed Bengal politics in 1937 and 1937 election of undivided Bengal. Though at first, Hindu and Muslim communal conflict (better education, high profile job, and certain political right)¹ were the major issues in undivided Bengal politics but later Muslim leaders overcame this situation through the help of the British Government. Since British Government always believes in Divide and Rule, they never wanted Hindu and Muslim unity². The situation of the country at that time was the Hindus would always reject what the Muslims accepted. The British Government was also silent under these situations. For this reason, in 1926 and 1946 a communal riot occurred in undivided Bengal³. Before 1935, majority of the Muslim leaders in undivided Bengal became alert in preserving the rights of their own community, but after 1935 according to legal policies their attitude changed, and then Muslims wanted to achieve leadership in every sector. At that time they were divided into various groups. And they were not only content by following their own policy but also began to proclaim wrong ideas against the activities to each other.

However, this is an interesting area of academic enquiry but the area is under exploration. There is paucity of scholarly works on the area. The paper explores the Muslim political leaders' roles, ideology and legitimacy in the period of 1935 to 1937 and 1937 election in the Bengal province of British India. In particular, it finds out Khwaja Nazim Uddin's political career, ideology and the reasons of his defeat in 1937 election. The study is very significant as it gives some insight about Bengal Muslim leadership, politics and political development. It will add new knowledge of the area to academia.

2. BACKGROUND

In the beginning of 1929, the majority of the Muslim of Bengal realized that they were not ready to relinquish their own constitution. Although all Muslim leaders expressed the same views about their own politics and constitution, they could not amalgamate themselves in to a single organization. By this time, a part of the Muslim leaders took the initiative to unite the peasants and rebels (most of whom were Muslims) of Bengal. It must be stated that the candidates of the

election of 1929 were aware of the fact that the votes cast by the peasants are extremely important (a large number of whom had attained the right to vote under the new constitution)^{4, 5}. As according to the law of 1929, the number of votes cast by the pastoral people increased to 4, 44,382. Bearing this in mind, a section led by the Muslim leaders like Khwaja Nazim Uddin, Sir Abdur Rahim, Nawab Nabab Ali Chowdhury and even the leaders who were not associated with the rural areas also came ahead to protect the peasants interest and some of them even arranged conferences in different areas of Bengal⁶. In the meantime, election of the Bengal legislative Council took place in June 1929. A notable incident in the Muslim politics of Bengal that occurred after this election was the formation of an organization named *Tenant Party* that primarily constituted of 18 legislative council members⁷. It is also true that even though there some existed important self centric sub parties, the politics of the Muslims of Bengal paved in two significant directions. One of it was the *Muslim League* which was run by Khwaja Nazim Uddin and Sohrawardy and another by A.K Fazlul Haque, who gained popularity by leading the peasants and the subjects. Later in 1st July of 1929, a conference arranged in the presence of 27 members of the Legislative council it was agreed in a conference to form a party called *Bengal Proja Party*^{8, 9}. Several Muslim leaders with different opinion were part of the conference such as the British supporters Khwaja Nazim Uddin, Nawab Musharraf Hossain, Ghajnabi an antagonist of the British Abdul Karim, Shamsuddin Ahmed, Azizul Haque and Abdur Rahim who was devoted towards the Muslim constitution, Fazlul Haque and H.S. Sohrawardy. Under the 2nd and 3rd legislature of Stanford-Chamsford Reformation, during the discussion of the Bengal Tenancy Act Amendment Bill the leaders unwaveringly stood by the landlord. Consequently, as they lost the trust of the Muslim members, they proposed to preserve the rights of the Bengal peasants and subjects (majority of who were Muslims) in the Legislative council. However, some of the members led by A.K. Fazlul Haque opposed against the Khwaja Nazim Uddin, Ghaznabi in the meeting¹⁰. However the aims and objects of the Bengal Muslim Council Association were defined as to work the constotuation and advance the cause of the community in the legislature. Later A K Fazlul Haque established the *Bengal Proja Party* (Non communal organisation)¹¹.

3. KHWAJA NAZIM UDDINS POLITICAL CREED

Khwaja Nazim Uddin played a supreme role as a leader in the Muslim politics of Bengal¹². The third legislative council led by a governor ended in April 1929 even though there was a little apprehension regarding the agility of the committee assigning three members to it. The members were Khwaja Nazim Uddin, Kumar Shib Shekhrasho Ray, Khan Bahadur, Kazi Golam Mohiuddin Faruqi, Nazim Uddin was given the responsibility of the ministry of education¹³. It must be stated that Fazlul Haque was an antagonist of this group because a group of members of the tenant party led by him was devoted in preserving the rights of the peasants¹⁴. On the other hand, Kumar Shib of the Shorajjo Party opposed the appointment of Shekhrasho Ray because he was committed in not supporting any cabinet during the legislative election. This committee received great approbation from the British¹⁵. None of these leaders could come into power if the British were moved away from their side. That is why later many high- profile leaders like Khwaja Nazim Uddin did not hesitate to sacrifice their own ideology. By this time the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal were at loggerheads regarding various issues in the meeting of the committee of law¹⁶. The subjects and the Bengal pastoral primary education are some of the noteworthy issue but the issue about the rural primary education was strongly opposed by the congress and the party in the 4th assembly of Bengal law and this inflamed the division of the Hindus and the Muslims. Although the primary education bill was upheld in the 3rd assembly, a select committee was formed for its discretion due to the demands of the Shorajjo Party. Then by the select committee's recommendation, the 4th legislative was raised in the first session. Due to the select committee's approval, it was announced again in the fourth law assembly. Khwaja Nazim Uddin and his allies wanted to have the approval of the bill. Most of the Muslim members agreed to the terms of the bill but it inhibited violent opposition from the members of the Shorajjo party. The leaders of the Shorajjo party J. Sen. Gupta criticized the contents of the bill and applied to reject it immediately. He thought that it was impossible to have its approbation in the meeting and he demanded to include the education of all area including the rural area. He even demanded that the representatives of the public are allowed to regulate the principle of the bill. But the Muslim leaders were against this bill. Later Nalini Ranjan a member of the Sorajjo party proposed that votes should be cast whether the bill should be taken into account by the select committee. But this Khwaja Nazim Uddin and his Muslim allies voted against submitting the bill to take select committee whereas the Hindu members voted for submitting it to the select committee. They got 74 votes and Muslim allies got 38 votes^{17, 18}. Again the proposed amendment of the education bill was presented by the select committee on 31st March. But the minister of education, Khwaja Nazim Uddin denied it. He said...

*"The amendment bill of the select committee would mostly result in wastage of the funds provided by the government and it would create turmoil"*¹⁹.

The majority of the Hindu members protested strongly against the rejection proposal of Khwaja Nazim Uddin. On the other hand, the Muslim members supported his proposal in order for him to raise a new bill. At that time Khwaja Nazim Uddin promised that he would present a new bill which would provide a proper scheme regarding rural primary education and if it is established it would be possible to make primary education free for the students and obligatory for at least 7 years²⁰.

Although Khwaja Nazim Uddin was greeted with much honor for his bill, he was rejected by the European Muslim members. The local minister of the government, Shib Shekhrasho Ray and Khwaja Nazim Uddin (13th August) became hostile with the contents of the bill and consequently Kumar Shib resigned from his designation²¹. He annotated about Khwaja Nazim Uddin.....

“The minister of education (Khwaja Nazim Uddin) is biased as he only considered the support of the Muslims and other European members and he intended to receive approval of the bill despite the disagreement of the Hindu members”.

This would conspicuously resulted in clashes between the Muslims and the Hindus and it reflects the prejudicial mentality of Khwaja Nazim Uddin²². A.K. Fazlul Haque and his party were absolutely against the idea of passing the bill regarding primary education to the select committee²³. He was in favor of the bill and said...

“Although he is not an ally of the ministers, he must admit that the Hindu members have committed a crime by opposing the contents of the bill”.

This clearly signifies that although the Muslim leaders are themselves involved in conspiracy but when it arrives at an issue between the Muslims and Hindus the Muslims would always support the issues of their own clan²⁴.

4. METHODOLOGY

In the study, historical and exploratory descriptive methods are utilized. The empirical data is collected from secondary and primary sources. The secondary data is collected from relevant literature, books on autobiography and media reports. Primary data is collected from archival data. The archival data are historical records and British government document during the colonial rule in Bengal. This data is collected from different libraries such as National Library of Calcutta and Dhaka. It investigates online sources of archival data.

The study reviews the relevant literature, government documents and media reports. It re-checks the theme of historical records and media reports compared with those in other records and newspapers. Therefore, it investigates the research questions by analyzing the data collected from archive. Following each of records, cross-case analysis is done. This means grouping of answers to common questions.

5. POLITICAL ASCENDANCY

According to the Indian Law Act of 1935, the election that took place in 1937 created a new turmoil among the Muslim political leaders. Prior to the election in 1937 the Muslim political leaders established various organizations to obtain more power. By 1936 along with A.K. Fazlul Haque's *Krishok Proja Party* influenced Muslim leaders like Khwaja Habibullah, H.S .Sohrawardy, Khwaja Nazim Uddin formed *United Muslim Party* and new *Majlish party*. Even the provincial *Muslim League* had an important position. That time Muhammad Ali Jinnah being the leader of *Muslim League* was devoted to take the initiative of uniting all the Muslim organizations under the *Muslim League* and later he became prosperous in doing it. But *Krishok Proja Party* was in a diminishing position compared to *United Muslim Party* and there were conflicts apparent between Khwaja Nazim Uddin's *United Muslim Party* and A.K. Fazlul Haque's *Krishok Proja Party* about the impending elections of 1937²⁵. A significant part of this election is that, the leaders of the *Krishok Proja Party* always wanted to prove their neutrality towards their clan. To prove this, they deliberately used the powerful Muslim landholders as their bait. In August 1936 in an assembly arranged at the district of Tipura in Comilla, A.K. Fazlul Haque delivered his speech to 4000 Muslim members. He spoke about the Muslim landholders, specifically about Sir Nazim Uddin and Sir K. G.M. Faruqi. He accused of misusing the funds provided by the government and neglecting the right of those living in hardship. It must be noted that at this time Khwaja Nazim Uddin was a member of the legislative council of the government²⁶. *Muslim League* had successfully reached their destination because of his work and utmost dedication. On the other hand, Khwaja Nazim Uddin on behalf of the *United Muslim Party* declared that *Proja Party* should not be regarded as organizations of the Muslims. Although Khwaja Nazim Uddin appeared to be diligent to work for the rights of the Hindus, his speech was later proved to be futile. Later Khwaja Nazim Uddin and the other significant leaders of the *United Muslim Party* apprehended that they would fail to unite all the Muslims of India as they decided to amalgamate with the *Proja Party*. But there was a dispute about who would be the ultimate leader of this front as *Krishok Proja Party* demanded A.K. Fazlul Haque's leadership. But Khwaja Nazim Uddin and other wealthy leaders were unable to accept that fact.

6. CHALLENGED ACCEPTED BY KHWAJA NAZIM UDDIN AND PARTICIPATE THE 1937 ELECTION

However there was a disagreement about the formation of a parliamentary board between the two parties All India Muslim League (AIML) and Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML). At the all India level, Jinnah was undertaking arrangements in order to enable the moribund League to contest the forthcoming general election. The Bombay session of the AIML Jinnah (April 1936), which preceded the 1937 Assembly elections and at which the League resolved to field candidates on its own²⁷. A.K. Fazlul Haque declared that he would independently participate in the election to preserve the rights of the Proja Party. Under these conditions, the election dates are declared and took place on January, 1937²⁸. However, a noteworthy thing about the 1937 election was that Dr .R Ahmed challenged Khwaja Nazim Uddin to compete with A.K. Fazlul Haque in any areas of Bengal. Khwaja Nazim Uddin thought that after the tribal riots in that area Patuakhali that occurred in 1927, Patuakhali was considered the safest constituency for Khwaja Nazim Uddin as the area fell within his Zamindari. His activity would achieved much more popularity than A.K. Fazlul Haque and it would intensely attract the voters towards him as this area is part of the personal estate belong to the Nawabs of Dhaka. Khwaja Nazim Uddin utilized all the power and facilities of Ahsan Manjil (the family Headquarters of the Dhaka Nawabs) for the election. He even made the famous sage of Furfura Shah Sufi Moulana promised that the sage costs his vote for Khwaja Nazim Uddin for the sake of Islam. He invited the Muslim students from Punjab and Uttar Pradesh and other states to assist him in campaigning for the election. Even the governor Sir John Anderson declared that people should vote for Khwaja Nazim Uddin after his trip to Patuakhali to set a flaming example of justice. A.K. Fazlul Haque stated to the voters that this battle was between the landlords and the peasants and he promised that he would abolish the policy of landlords if he was elected by the grace of Allah."I would abrogate the policy of landlords if I was elected by Allah's grace"²⁹. A.K. Fazlul Haque also persuaded some other religious leaders to speak in support of him. Though it was a critical fight and on the eve of election, in an appeal to the voters of Bengal³⁰.

7. ELECTION RESULT

The 1937 election was very much important in undivided Bengal because the 1937 was the first election that masses of Indians were eligible to participate³¹. In the election, *Muslim League* received more seats than *Krishok Proja Party*. *Muslim League* received 39 seats and *Krishok Proja Party* received 36 seats³². However, in the Potuakhali election region, Muslim league's leader Khwaja Nazim Uddin faced huge defeated against A.K. Fazlul Haque. This victory increased A.K. Fazlul Haque's reputation in one side and on the other side kept him hesitant to take initiative regarding the *Muslim League* and forming the government³³. In this election Khwaja Nazim Uddin received 6308 votes which was even less than half of the votes received by A.K. Fazlul Haque who received 13782 votes. This victory in Patuakhali made the *Krishok Proja Party* even more determined. On the other hand, Khwaja Nazim Uddin lost his own dignity. He could never make up the losses after this defeat but on these days of trouble, H.S. Sohrawardy who was victorious in two separate areas in the election in Kolkata. Khwaja Nazim Uddin was elected from the Calcutta North Muslim (urban) constituency in a by election held as a result of resignation by H S Sohrawardy. H S Sohrawardy decided to vacate his Calcutta seat, not the other, for Khwaja Nazim Uddin. Because of everything H S Sohrawardy ensured Khwaja Nazim Uddin's safe return in the politics³⁴. This must be noted that Khwaja Nazim Uddin was involved in a conspiracy to throw H.S. Sohrawardy out of politics. After his loss in 1937, Khwaja Nazim Uddin did not have the courage to compete in any other elections where his victory is uncertain. Whatever is the case, Khwaja Nazim Uddin's relationship with the government brought him to the top. While scrutinizing the results of the election, it can be concluded that none of the political parties achieved a victory. Although *Muslim League* received more votes than the *Proja party*, the defeat encountered by Khwaja Nazim Uddin in Potuakhali was a remarkable moment A.K. Fazlul Haque's victory brought him more power. On the other hand, *Muslim League* was not inclined to form the government body. That time A.K. Fazlul Haque was assigned with the constitutional duties. Without any doubt, he was interested to take that kind of responsibility. Before that he requested the party chiefs who were elected to present themselves with the numbers of supporters in front of Bengals governor Anderson.³⁵ The *Muslim League* had a long discussion with many component parties of the coalition for two weeks and later on 24th March they desired to form the committee of ministers and proposed it to the government. There were five Muslim Leaders and five Hindu members under A.K. Fazlul Haque's leadership. In the ministry, Khwaja Nazim Uddin was given the responsibility as the education minister³⁶.

8. DISCUSSION

Khwaja Nazim Uddin had lost the election terribly on A. K Fazlul Haque's vigilance and intelligence³⁷. By considering the election of 1936-37, A.K. Fazlul Haque attended many conferences and mentioned that Hindus and Muslims belong to one nation and they are all Bengalis. Although A.K. Fazlul Haque's communal attitude was revealed several times^{38, 39}. A.K. Fazlul Haque was an independent Talukdar (i.e., he was not under the Zamindars) and later he decided to leave *Proja Party* because he wanted to lead *Krishok Proja Party* in the legislative council election. Most of the members of

the *Proja Party* mentioned the policy of abrogating Zamindari (The term Zamindari means land owner). The position and influence which the aristocratic Muslims continued to exercise in every where was a relic of the past which was linked with and Muslim political power⁴⁰. In the manifesto of the election but later A.K. Fazlul Haque opposed it and proclaimed the only mission of the election to be the Dal Bhat activity. It should be stated that according to the law of Indian Legislative, there is an increment in the number of peasants or the pastoral voters that was why A.K. Fazlul Haque realized that it was impossible to win the election without the approval of the peasants. That was why A.K. Fazlul Haque became more alert about the rural side than the urban. Consequently his 'Dal Bhat' activity gained more popularity and A.K. Fazlul Haque apart from the other leaders gave more importance to the emotions of the villagers and he was able to socialize with them⁴¹. On the other side, Khwaja Nazim Uddin utilized all the power and facilities of Ahsan Manjil and the power of the British government in the election. Whatever is the case, Khwaja Nazim Uddin relationship with the government brought him to the top while scrutinizing the results of the election⁴². Moreover a leader like Khwaja Nazim Uddin did not be reluctant to misuse his power to gain more popularity. This was proven when he went to book for a place for Mohamed an Sputnik club in Kolkata. This club was an outstanding medium in which Bengal *Muslim League* achieved fame. Khwaja Nazim Uddin booked a place for the club in Kolkata at an extremely cheap price and was apathetic about the rules and regulations. Although the Muslims were satisfied Hindus were not, the Hindus began to perceive the Legislative council as the communal council. It must be noted that Khwaja Nazim Uddin misused his powers to get involved in such corrupting activities only to impress Jinnah. He knew that he could not stay at his position by going against Jinnah. He remained in power by applying this ever loyal policy for at least ten years⁴³.

9. CONCLUSION

The above discussion reflects that, the *Muslim League* leader Khwaja Nazim Uddin played significant roles in the economic and political development of the Bengal province. Khwaja Nazim uddin was famous for his loyal adherent of British attitude and obedient to M.A. Jinnah. Khwaja Nazim Uddin always misused his power to get involved in such corrupting activities only to impress Jinnah. Because Khwaja Nazim Uddin knew that he could not stay at his position by going against Jinnah⁴⁴. The major issues of 1937 election presented by both *Muslim League* leader Khwaja Nazim Uddin and *Krishok Proja Party* leader A.K. Fazlul Haque reflected the features of their leadership in undivided Bengal. Sometimes politician was busy with his own interests and to satisfy his desire of power, sometimes he failed to remain united to fulfill the rights of Bengal people due to the lack of his ability in leadership. Indeed we can say that, there was importance of the Muslim leadership in Bengal in the incidents that occurred from 1937 and 1937 election. Later, Khwaja Nazim Uddin shrewdly utilized this communal mentality and entered in the central and later in the provincial parliament. This was a great triumph for the supporters of Khwaja Nizim Uddin⁴⁵.

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