

Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy: Glimpses of his political struggle

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TODAY is the forty-third death anniversary of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. Born in Medinipore in the then Bengal (now part of West Bengal state in India) on September 8, 1892, he breathed his last on December 5, 1963 in a lonely hotel room in Beirut under mysterious circumstances. He was buried in Dhaka on December 8, 1963 beside Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq's grave, adjacent to the then Race Course Maidan.

H.S. Suhrawardy had a long political career, spanning a period 43 years, if 1920 is taken as the starting point when he joined the Khilafat movement. Between 1920 and his death in 1963 he had a chequered political career, which was essentially characterised by many momentous events, historic vicissitudes, spectacular successes, endless controversies, dismal failures, and personal tragedies. It is, therefore, problematic to attempt an exhaustive description or analysis of all the phases of his long political career in a single article. Rather, the chief intent of this commentary is to provide glimpses of his political struggle.

H.S. Suhrawardy was born in Medinipore on September 8, 1892 in one of the most distinguished Muslim families of the then Bengal. He completed his elementary education under the guidance of his scholarly parents and his meritorious maternal uncle Abdullah Al-Mamun. From the beginning, he was a meritorious student.

After finishing his education at Calcutta Alia Madrasa he attended St. Xaviers' College, wherefrom he received a Bachelor of Science degree with Honours in Sciences. In spite of his specialisation in science subjects, he was versatile in his quest for knowledge, and he had a knack for language, literature, and humanities. To fulfil his mother's earnest request, he also completed an M.A. degree in Arabic Language and Literature from Calcutta University before his departure for England in 1913.

He studied Sciences at Oxford University and received a Bachelor degree with Honours in Science. He also studied Law and Jurisprudence at Oxford University and received the coveted B.C.L. degree and, at the age of 26, he completed his Bar-at-Law from Gray's Inn in 1918. On his return from abroad in 1918, he started his law practice at Calcutta High Court.

Although H.S. Suhrawardy was born in a family of eminent personalities of exceptional merit, remarkable scholarship and profound accomplishments, he made a conscious decision to serve the people by joining politics. He started his political career as an avowed Khilafatist in 1920, and soon thereafter he emerged as one of the most ardent defenders of Muslim interests in Bengal.

During his formative years in politics, H.S. Suhrawardy preferred to call himself an "independent" or a "nationalist." The Swaraj Party of Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das (1870-1925) provided a political platform for him. He quickly realised that C.R. Das was the most prominent and charismatic Bengali nationalist leader of his era. He was one of the proponents of the Bengal Pact. He found C.R. Das to be a distinguished leader of extraordinary merit and integrity whose political philosophy and leadership style could be emulated. Like C.R. Das, he also believed that the independence movement of India would not succeed in the absence of Hindu-Muslim unity.

H.S. Suhrawardy was elected in 1924 to be the Deputy Mayor of Calcutta Municipal Corporation (along with C.R. Das as the Mayor), and he held that position till he resigned in 1927. He worked tirelessly during the late spring and early summer months of 1926 to put an end to Hindu-Muslim riots in Calcutta. However, the leaders and newspapermen of the Hindu community in Calcutta made him a target of their hate campaign for his defense in the Courts of law for the falsely accused Muslim rioters.

He was markedly vocal about the urgent need for ventilating and redressing the genuine grievances of the Muslim population in Bengal. Throughout the 1920s, he emphasised the

The passing away of this political doyen at that critical moment created a void in the core leadership of the resistance movement against the autocratic dictatorship in Pakistan. He was the most articulate voice for introduction of adult franchise and restoration of parliamentary democracy in Pakistan in an era when a military dictator was in the process of consolidating his grip over the political process through the introduction of the so-called basic democracy.



paramount importance of Hindu-Muslim unity for wresting freedom from the British colonial rule. He did not believe that the Congress party could ever be the fair arbiter of the conflict between Hindus and Muslims.

By the year 1927, he emerged as the most vocal and articulate defender of Muslim rights in the city of Calcutta; he organised numerous associations, labour unions, and trade unions in Calcutta. He was also instrumental in organising the All-India Khilafat Conference and All-Bengal Muslim Conference in 1928. As one of the emerging Muslim leaders of India, H.S. Suhrawardy was very critical about the lopsided recommendations of the Simon Commission Report. He was also an ardent critic of the Nehru (Motilal) Commission Report. During 1931-32, he was actively involved in holding of the Conferences of the All-India Muslim Volunteers.

Although H.S. Suhrawardy was emerging as

one of the most respected Muslim leaders of Bengal, he was not willing to be associated with the Muslim League till the end of 1936. Along with some of the most prominent Muslim leaders of Bengal, he had formed the Independent Muslim Party (IMP) in early 1936, and he was selected to be the general secretary of this newly formed political party. However, due to the insistence of the provincial and All-India Muslim League leaders, the short-lived Independent Muslim Party (IMP) got merged in the later part of 1936 with the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML).

As a compromise, H.S. Suhrawardy was selected to be the general secretary of the BPML from the end of 1936 through the end of 1943, he performed a yeoman's task in the process of

popularising the moribund Muslim League party and the concept of Pakistan among the Muslim masses throughout the nooks and corners of the then Bengal. He was recognised as the most dynamic leader of the BPML, and his leadership role was crucial in the process of recruiting a group of dedicated and capable party workers. He was also personally instrumental in the formation of the Muslim National Guards under the sponsorship of the BPML.

He was elected to the Bengal Legislative Council in 1921, and returned to the Council in all of the following consecutive terms. He was also a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly from 1937 through 1947. He was a seasoned parliamentarian in the truest sense of the term, and his speeches in the legislative assemblies both before and after the partition may be considered as classics in legislative debates.

Doubtless, his relentless fight throughout his post-partition political life for establishing a federally anchored parliamentary form of government in Pakistan owed much to the robust legislative training and experience that he had gained during his pre-partition political years from 1921 to 1947 in the Bengal Legislative Council and the Bengal Legislative Assembly.

After the formation of the Muslim League and Praja Party coalition ministry in Bengal under the leadership A.K. Fazlul Huq, H.S. Suhrawardy was made the minister in charge of labour. He also held other important portfolios in Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq's cabinet. He was also one of the staunchest opponents of the second coalition ministry of A.K. Fazlul Huq, which was often derided as the Shyma-Huq

ministry. He was the most active member in Khwaja Nazimuddin's cabinet, which was formed after the collapse of the so-called Shyma-Huq cabinet in 1943.

H.S. Suhrawardy personally enlisted the support of industrial workers of Bengal in favour of the Pakistan movement. His popularity among the students and younger generation had motivated many to be the most vocal supporters of the Pakistan movement. Both H.S. Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim had been credited with a landslide victory of the Muslim League. H.S. Suhrawardy was literally banished from the political scene of Pakistan by the Jinnah loyalists, both at the center in Karachi and in the province of East Bengal.

As the Chief Minister of Bengal in 1946, H.S. Suhrawardy shouldered the responsibility of lending logistic support to the Pakistan Movement. Being essentially goaded by M.A. Jinnah, he also moved the controversial Amendment to the original version of the historic 1940 Lahore Resolution at the Delhi Convention of the Muslim League Legislators in 1946.

H.S. Suhrawardy's proposal for "Sovereign Bengal" did not gain much ground because of the fact that his reputation as a staunch defender of the Muslim rights in Bengal and his controversial role before, during, and after the 1946 riots in Calcutta had seriously eroded his credibility among the leaders and masses of the Hindu community.

With the exception of Saratchandra Bose, his idea of "Sovereign United Bengal" as a last minute effort to stop the partition of Bengal in 1947 was not well received by the religiously imbued Congress leaders. By that time, the Hindu Mahashabha leaders and the Congress leadership in Bengal were already committed to the division of Bengal on communal lines. Therefore, there is little wonder that the Congress-led champions of "Akhand Bharat" and Hindu Mahashabha-led exponents of the "divided" Bengal were not at all willing to lend any support to his proposal for sovereign Bengal.

As subsequent events proved, the concept of a separate sovereign Bengal was one of the riskiest political maneuvers of his entire political life. In fact, after independence was granted in August 1947 to the Dominions of India and Pakistan, the leadership of both India and Pakistan deliberately shunned him. With the exception of Mahatma Gandhi, the central leaders in India had no empathy for him.

On the other hand, H.S. Suhrawardy had no immediate prospect of playing any meaningful leadership role in Pakistan. Instead of recognising his popularity, political stature, commitment, and organisational skills; and his contribution to the Pakistan movement at a critical juncture, M.A. Jinnah consciously patronised Khwaja Nazimuddin's bid to become the parliamentary leader of the Muslim League legislators in Bengal on August 5, 1947 (only 9 days before Pakistan was born!).

With the selection of a reactionary, conservative and discredited leader of the BPML for

Bengal.

Once Pakistan was a reality on August 14, 1947, the goal of Khwaja Nazimuddin and his coterie in the provincial Muslim League was to keep the doors of the party closed to the most progressive and dynamic members of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. The followers of both H.S. Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim were specifically singled out to be excluded even from the primary membership of the Muslim League. H.S. Suhrawardy was literally banished from the political scene of Pakistan by the Jinnah loyalists, both at the center in Karachi and in the province of East Bengal.

As the Chief Minister of East Bengal, Khwaja Nazimuddin lost no time in characterising him as an "Indian agent" and an "enemy of Pakistan." He was quickly removed from the membership of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. The East Bengal Government had also prohibited him from entering or addressing public meetings in any place of East Bengal.

Despite persistent attacks from the reactionary forces of the ruling Muslim League, H.S. Suhrawardy re-emerged in Pakistan's political scene as a champion of liberal democracy. He was one of the builders of opposition politics in the early years of Pakistan. Many of his followers took an active role in the formation of both the East Pakistan Student League (EPSL) in early 1948 and East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (EPAL) in June mid-1949.

These pro-democracy organisations were in the vanguard of all the phases (1948-52) of the Bengali Language Movement. In 1953, H.S. Suhrawardy, in collaboration with A.K. Fazlul Huq and Maulana Bhasani, was responsible for forming Jukta Front (United Front). His organisational skills and personal charisma significantly contributed to the landslide victory of the United Front over the ruling Muslim League in the 1954 general election in East Bengal.

H.S. Suhrawardy emerged as the most credible voice in support of framing a Constitution with the provisions for civil liberties and a full-blown parliamentary model of liberal democracy in Pakistan. Aimed at establishing a foothold in the Punjabi and Mohajir dominated decision-making process of the central government, he became the Law Minister in Mohammad Ali Bogra's Cabinet, and he held that position from December 20, 1954, through August, 1955.

He was the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly of Pakistan from August 11, 1955 through September 1, 1956. His contribution to the making of the 1956 Constitution of Pakistan was substantial. He was also the prime minister of Pakistan from September 12, 1956 through October 11, 1957.

The 1956 Constitution of Pakistan was suspended and Martial Law was promulgated by President Iskander Mirza (a descendant of Mir Jaffar Ali Khan) on October 7, 1958. The appearance of Ayub Khan as the president and chief martial law administrator on October 27, 1958



assuming the role of the Chief Minister of East Bengal (East Pakistan) over a progressive and dynamic leader of H.S. Suhrawardy's caliber and stature, the founding father of the new nation of Pakistan had tacitly sealed the political fate of the last prime minister of undivided

was undoubtedly a nail in the coffin of the semblance of a moribund democracy in Pakistan.

The newly installed dictator of Pakistan knew well that H.S. Suhrawardy was a stumbling block in the design and implementation

of his tailor-made Constitution. Therefore, Ayub Khan, the self-declared dictator of Pakistan, quietly approached him to cooperate with the Constitution making process of the military regime. Although the constitution making and democracy building were his chief concerns during his political career in Pakistan, he bluntly refused to lend any stamp of legitimacy to the illegitimate dictatorial regime of Ayub Khan. As a dedicated champion of genuine parliamentary democracy in Pakistan, he refused to endorse Ayub Khan's illegal seizure of state power.

H.S. Suhrawardy was one of the top political leaders in Pakistan who were banned from politics through the imposition of the infamous Elective Bodies Disqualification Order (EBDO) on August 7, 1959. He was also falsely accused of the violation of the EBDO in July 1960, and he was disqualified to be engaged in country's political process. As if EBDO sanction was not enough of a tool to impede his dauntless dissenting voice, he was arrested on flimsy charge on January 30, 1962. He was put in a solitary confinement in the Central jail of Karachi without any trial on concocted charges of "anti-state activities" under the 1952 Security of Pakistan Act.

Instead of bowing down to Ayub Khan's smearing and torturing tactics, he decided to challenge the legality of the patently false and baseless allegations.

Ayub Khan, the self-declared President of Pakistan, "promulgated" his Constitution of Pakistan on March 1, 1962, and pursuant to that tailor-made Constitution, the "indirect elections" to the National Assembly of Pakistan and the Provincial Assemblies were held on April 28, 1962 and May 6, 1962 respectively. The self-declared President of Pakistan lost no time in inaugurating the impotent legislatures both at the Center (National Assembly of Pakistan) and the Provinces.

Once the first phase of Ayub Khan's consolidation of state power through the implementation of the so-called Basic Democracy was complete, H.S. Suhrawardy was released from jail on August 19, 1962.

After his release from jail, he had launched an anti-Ayub movement in both wings of Pakistan for the restoration of democracy. To him, Ayub Khan's Basic Democracy was nothing but a mockery in the name of democracy. Instead of becoming a collaborator of a military dictator, he decided to be the most authentic dissenting voice against the then diabolical regime.

He had successfully enlisted support from all pro-democratic forces of Pakistan, and he formed the National Democratic Front (NDF) in October 1962 to dislodge the undemocratic regime of a military dictator. His immediate goal was to re-establish parliamentary democracy and democratic institutions in Pakistan through the restoration of the 1956 Constitution. He was not in good health in those days. Yet he kept on fighting against the autocracy till he went abroad for treatment. Unfortunately, he died on December 5, 1963 under unusually mysterious circumstances.

Although H.S. Suhrawardy was more than 71 years old when he breathed his last, and the news of his sudden demise spread a shock wave throughout Pakistan. He died at a time when the dissenting political forces in Pakistan were gaining ground toward building up an effective opposition against the military dictatorship of Ayub Khan. The passing away of this political doyen at that critical moment created a void in the core leadership of the resistance movement against the autocratic dictatorship in Pakistan.

He was the most articulate voice for introduction of adult franchise and restoration of parliamentary democracy in Pakistan in an era when a military dictator was in the process of consolidating his grip over the political process through the introduction of the so-called basic democracy.

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N-deal has nothing to do with power generation

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THE Communist Party of India (Marxist) is not the major issue vis-a-vis the nuclear deal. It is essential to understand the actual issue rather than abide by the wishes of the US government, which may or may not be interested in India's gains or losses.

Although the Indian media and the government want to promote the deal in terms of power generation, the deal has very little to do with the matter. Nuclear power contributes about 2 percent of the current electricity generation in the country. At present, India is producing 3,300 MW, which will be 7,000 MW in 2020. According to the Planning Commission and the prime minister, the capacity of nuclear power would be 20,000 MW in the year 2020. In order to get there, India will buy second-hand reactors from the USA to produce 13,000 MW of nuclear power, spending about Rs 2 crore

for the reactors and another Rs 8 crore to set them up with fuel facilities to achieve that goal. The budget provides for only Rs 6.5 crore per year. Thus, the country will spend twice the budget outlay to set up these vintage reactors. The cost of power will jump to Rs 7 a unit, which is double the present cost. Even if the country were to achieve a 50 percent increase in nuclear power generation, such a step would only increase the overall electricity output by one percent at the most, and would increase India's overall energy output by only a fraction of one percent.

Two questions should be raised. Why does the USA want India to accept the deal? Why did America prevent India from developing nuclear energy for the last 33 years? The answer is that the Indo-US nuclear deal has nothing to do with power generation. It has everything to do with nuclear non-proliferation. India, so far as refused to sign the NPT.

which will not allow her to develop or keep nuclear weapons. However, it will allow the country to import civilian nuclear reactors, which would be under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA). Its chairman, an Egyptian lawyer, visited India recently to prepare the legal treaty to turn the country into another Ukraine.

In 1974, the USA had imposed sanctions so that India wouldn't be able to get any nuclear-related materials or technology. After 1998, the USA tightened the sanctions to ensure that India was deprived of defence-related technology or materials. However, even after 1974, India received nuclear technology and materials, including conventional nuclear power plants, fast-breeder reactors, reprocessing and enrichment plants and heavy-water plants from the former Soviet Union and Russia without any restrictions. The

country is almost self-sufficient

in nuclear technology and can produce nuclear weapons despite all the efforts of the United States to stop it.

Only for the last two years, because of its membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), Russia wants to supply nuclear power plants with added safeguards, specifically that the plants cannot be used to produce nuclear weapons. However, it has offered offshore nuclear plants to India without any restrictions. India can have both or either of the on-shore or offshore nuclear power plants from Russia and, as a result of the projected development of power generation, it does not need US support at all. It really does not matter if India refuses to sign the Indo-US treaty on nuclear energy. Even if India needs nuclear power plants to supplement its energy requirement, it can do without plants from the USA. Russia can still supply whatever India needs at a

much lower price. The US Senate has added a new clause to the Hyde Act, stating that in future national security organisations of the USA, which means the CIA and the FBI, will collaborate with India in the matter of nuclear non-proliferation. This, in effect, implies that US organisations will make sure that India will not be able to use its nuclear facilities to produce nuclear weapons. India will not be able to import technology or materials from any of the countries of the NSG, including Russia. Its nuclear weapons program will, thus, be terminated. This is the real objective of the Indo-US treaty.

Section 104(d)(2) stipulates that transfers to India cannot begin without suitable changes in NSG guidelines. Concern has been expressed over the supply of nuclear fuel, which could be used to produce nuclear weapons, by using the end-use monitoring of spent fuel by the International Atomic Energy Commission and the US organisations. The legislation also provides for a cap on fissile material production. All this is geared to end India's nuclear weapons program.

Dr Homi Sethna, former chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and one of the founding-fathers of India's nuclear program, said that what Dr Manmohan Singh was about to sign was worse than joining the NPT regime. Dr A. Gopalakrishnan, former chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, has outlined

how precisely commitments made by Dr Singh to Parliament have been blatantly undermined.

He has cautioned that if the deal went through in its present form, it would "compromise the sovereignty of this country for decades to come." He has exposed the very enormous financial price that India will have to pay as well, between Rs 300,000 and Rs 400,000 crore in nuclear reactors that will be totally dependent for their existence on a yearly audit of our policies by the US Congress. Dr PK Iyengar, another former chairman of the AEC, has said that the deal amounts to "giving up sovereignty." These scientists do not have a political or personal agenda.

The USA will not give India the right to reprocess spent fuel. Reprocessing is needed to separate Plutonium 239, a byproduct from the first stage, and use it with thorium to fuel the fast-breeder reactors (FBR), which is

the second stage. The FBRs breed more fuel than they consume. In the third stage, the Uranium