

A TALE OF TWO LEADERS: JINNAH-SUHRAWARDY RELATIONS DURING FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Farooq Ahmad Dar*

Abstract

Suhrawardy is considered to be one of the most competent politicians Pakistan has ever produced. He was blessed with God-gifted talent, was well-versed in the art of politics and right from the beginning of his career he proved to be a popular leader amongst his support base. He had strange relations with Jinnah. On one hand he kept supporting Jinnah ever since the latter started trying to re-organize the Muslim League, after his return from self-exile, but on the other hand history has witnessed a number of ebb and flow in the relationship of the two. Though the main reason for it was the difference in the ultimate agenda, i.e. Jinnah was concerned about Muslims living all over India while Suhrawardy's major focus was the people of Bengal; yet there were many other factors which did not allow the two leaders to consistently remain on the same page on the issue of few important political matters. This paper investigates that why Suhrawardy did not become Jinnah's number one choice in Bengal and why he kept relying more on people like Ispahani and Nazimuddin? It also explores that why in spite of all the differences, the two spearheads never publically opposed each other?

Keywords

Jinnah, Suhrawadhy, Bengal, Muslim League, Elections of 1937, Elections of 1946, Delhi Muslim Legislator's Convention

Unlike Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who was totally a self-made man, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy's lineage and brought up played an important role in his achievements, especially at the

* Associate Professor Department of History Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad

entry point of his career. Suhrawardy was born in a distinguished family, with a history of a long list of achievements, on September 8, 1892 in Madnapore, a town in West Bengal. His father, Zahid Suhrawardy, was an eminent jurist and “a person of great scholarship and distinction”. His maternal grandfather, Ubaidullah Suhrawardy, was a creative Urdu writer and his mother, Khujesta Akhtar Banu Suhrawaria Begum, was one of the very few women of her era “who had achieved a high standard of scholarship, not only in Urdu and Persian but in English as well” (Ikramullah, 2007: 3). He himself was educated at the prestigious educational institutions of Calcutta like Calcutta Madrassa and St. Xavier’s College before he won a scholarship to study at Oxford. He did his Masters in Political Science from the St. Catherine’s College and then earned Bachelors in Civil Law in 1920. He got himself enrolled with Gray’s Inn for his bar-at-Law. In 1920, he was married to Niaz Fatima, a lady belonging to one of the most respectable families of Bengal. His father in Law, Abdur Rahim, remained Home Minister of Bengal during the British Raj (Rashid, 1987: 24). Back from England, Suhrawardy directly walked into the field of politics. He first got associated himself with Khilafat Movement and was straight away made secretary of Calcutta Khilafat Committee by Ali Brothers. Simultaneously he was awarded Muslim League’s ticket to the elections of Bengal Legislative Assembly from the Khidirpur industrial area in 1921. His family background helped him in winning the election quite comfortably.

There were, however, a number of things which were common among both Jinnah and his sixteen years younger colleague, Suhrawardy. Two of them, as young men, were hard-working with a devotion and determination to excel. They both had openly expressed anti-imperial sentiments bluntly and without any hesitation. If Jinnah could publicly developed differences with 1st Marquess of Wallingdon in 1918, Suhrawardy while opposing Whipping Bill in the Bengal

Assembly candidly declared that British should not consider Indians as “animals” as “history would testify that in the past” Indians “were superior” than “their white masters” in accordance with “the standards of civilization” (Talukdar, 2009: 9). Likewise, both of them emerged as advocates of cooperation and harmony with Hindus. If Jinnah came forward as the architect of Lucknow Pact, Suhrawardy along with Chittaranjan Das was behind the signing of the Bengal Pact,¹ which embarked upon the need of Hindu Muslim Unity for the strengthening of the concept of Bengali nationalism as well as for the freedom from the foreign yoke. Two of them were so close to each other that after the elections of Calcutta Corporation in March 1924 Das was elected as Mayor and Suhrawardy his deputy (Chattopadhyay, 1984: 82). Even when communal riots broke out in Bengal, a year after the death of Das in 1926, Suhrawardy alongside Subash Chandra Bose kept pleading for Hindu-Muslim unity and attempted to renew Bengal Pact (Talukdar, 2009: 10).

Bengal riots of 1920s left a big impact on Suhrawardy’s thinking. He for the first time started feeling more like a Muslim than a Bengali or an Indian. Being the only prominent Muslim office holder at that time, as Deputy Mayor of Calcutta, he tried to give as much protection to his community as possible. When

¹ According to the Pact, which was signed on December 16, 1923, Muslim members promised to support the Swaraj Party in the Bengal Council. In lieu of it, Bengali Muslims got substantial concessions: i) Muslim representation in the Bengal legislature should be on the basis of population and by separate electorates; ii) Muslim-Hindu ratio in the local self-government should be 60:40 in Muslim majority districts and 40:60 in Hindu majority districts; iii) Muslim share in jobs should be 55% and they be given 80% share in new appointments till the promised ratio was reached; iv) No music before mosques; v) Muslim would have the right to sacrifice cow. For details see (Page, 1987: 42-44).

the things went beyond his control he resigned from his position in 1927. He launched Independent Muslim Party in Bengal to look after the political, economic and social interests of the Muslims of Bengal. But this was the time when he also started actively participating in all-India Muslim politics and thus got more opportunities to interact with Jinnah. Since both of them were recently betrayed by the Hindus, whom they had blindly trusted, they were almost on the same page on the issue of communal problems of India, when it was discussed at a peace conference organized at Simla under the presidentship of the Maharajah of Alwar in 1927. It is reported that both exchanged their notes on the occasion. If for Jinnah Hindus were becoming “extremely unreasonable”, Suhrawardy believed that “the talk of Hindu-Muslim unity was a myth”, that “the Hindus wanted nothing but complete surrender from the Muslims as the price of unity” (Talukdar, 2009: 103). However, Suhrawardy, who was present at the session of All-India Muslim League, where Jinnah presented Delhi Muslim Proposals, was one of those who opposed the scheme as he considered it against the rights of the Bengali Muslims (Ahmad, 1992: 524). In the Calcutta session of the League held on December 26-30, Suhrawardy opposed Jinnah and supported Falzul Huq and others who wanted to participate in All-parties Muslim Conference organized at Delhi by Muhammad Shafi (Pirzada, 2007: 125).

Interaction between Jinnah and Suhrawardy increased when Jinnah came back from his self-exile and started working on building a team all across India. For Jinnah, Bengal, being a Muslim-majority province, was very important and by that time Suhrawardy was an established name in the politics of the province. He was considered as a dynamic leader, who had support-base both in Calcutta as well as in the semi-urban and rural areas of Bengal. His alliance with the Nawabs of Dhaka and

formation of United Muslim Party² had made him even stronger. When Jinnah tried his luck in Bengal he found Huq, the most important of the Bengali Muslim leaders, wavered and not ready to openly announce his support for the League. On this, Ispahani and others convinced him that the best opportunity for Jinnah to make inroads in province's politics was by winning over Suhrawardy. Jinnah assigned task of persuading Suhrawardy to become part of his struggle to Nazimuddin, Khwaja Khairuddin, Ispahani and Abdur Rahman Siddique. This was the time when Agha Khan was also approaching Suhrawardy to lead his Muslim Conference in Bengal but after thinking for a while he decided to join Muslim League. He even advised Agha Khan to cooperate with Jinnah and to merge his organization with Muslim League as the party was more organized and was spread all over the country (Ikramullah, 2007: 37). He was immediately made General Secretary of the Bengal chapter of the party and was given the task to run the election campaign.

In the elections of 1936 the contest on the Muslim seats in Bengal was primarily between Krishak Praja Party and the League and the general perception was that Huq's party with its appeal for the down-trodden people would easily sweep the polls. However, Suhrawardy's personal influence, his untiring efforts, his slogan to vote for the Muslim solidarity (Sen, 1986: 42) and his campaign of allegations against the Krishak Praja Party by branding them as agents of Hindu Congress (Chattopadyay, 1984: 153) enabled Jinnah's party to perform well in at least one of the Muslim majority provinces. League, with sixty seats, after Congress, emerged as the second largest party in the Bengal Assembly and thus become an important player in the government making. Suhrawardy, himself was elected from two constituencies of Calcutta. Later, on Jinnah's directives, he gave

² Suhrawardy founded United Muslim Party on May 25, 1936. He became its General Secretary while Khawaja Habibullah became its President. See (*Star of India*, July 15, 1936).

one of them to Nazimuddin in the by-elections, who was earlier defeated by Huq from his own constituency in the general elections. When a collation government of Krishak Praja and League was formed in Bengal, Suhrawardy was one of the four Leaguers to be included in the cabinet and was given the charge of the Ministry of Commerce and Labour (Mitra, 1990: 92-93).

In spite of the fact that the League performed well in the province during the 1936 elections, internal rifts in the party still existed. Suhrawardy, planned to reorganize Bengal Muslim League by establishing a broad based party organization with branches all over the province. For this he wanted Jinnah to give the province “liberty to frame its own rules” so that he could “adapt the rules and regulations according to provincial conditions” (H.S. Suhrawardy to M.A. Jinnah, June 23, 1937). The idea was not liked by the other provincial leaders as they thought this would create Suhrawardy's hegemony in the provincial chapter of the party. When Jinnah was asked to resolve the matter, he knowing the gravity of the issue initially adopted delaying tactics. This annoyed Suhrawardy and he went to the extent that he directly wrote to Jinnah that if he was interested in running the League in Bengal, Suhrawardy was “prepared to assist” him but if he was “really lukewarm about it” then the latter would start his “own separate organization” (H.S. Suhrawardy to M.A. Jinnah, July 5, 1937). He suggested that if Jinnah would adopt a go slow policy, the hold of League in the province would “degenerate” but if he manage to discipline the Bengal League it would not only help him control Bengal but would also “give strength to the origination in other provinces” (H.S. Suhrawardy to M.A. Jinnah, July 23, 1937). This made Jinnah change his approach. In order to smooth out the affairs of the Bengal Muslim League Jinnah went to the extent of exploring the option of changing the venue of the all-important twenty-fifth session of the party from Lucknow to Calcutta. (M.A. Jinnah to Suhrawardy, July 3, 1937, and H.S. Suhraward to M.A. Jinnah,

July 23, 1937). This could, however, not materialize because of the protest from the leadership of United Provinces, who had already built-up an atmosphere for the gathering in their province.

Due to Jinnah's engagement in the Bengal affairs, gulf between the provincial leaders was apparently bridged. In November 1937 a Sub-Committee of Organizing Committee of Bengal Muslim League was constituted with the aim to frame party's constitution. Though Akram Khan, Ispahani, Khawaja Shahabuddin, Hamidul Haq Chowdhury and Habibullah Babar were the members of the Sub-Committee, but the real power to frame the constitution of the Bengal Muslim League was actually given to Suhrawardy (H.S. Suhrawardy to M.A. Jinnah, November 19, 1937). He was also appointed as the member of the Fund Committee of All India Muslim League (All-India Muslim League's Working Committee Meeting, July 30-31, 1938, Resolution 3). This made him happy and one could see a massive improvement in his relationship with Jinnah during this period. When Jinnah visited Bengal in December 1937 – January 1938, Suhrawardy accompanied him in most of the gatherings especially when he was interacting with youth and students (Ahmad, 1992: 202-14). However, Suhrawardy was yet not ready to completely surrender before the instructions of Jinnah and continued to challenge and criticize him. When Jinnah in March 1938 gave him the responsibility to reorganized provincial League and to constitute District and Sub-Divisional Committees on urgent basis, Suhrawardy within two days replied that "it was a great pity" that the committees were not organized "earlier" and thus he had to "work hurriedly" and had to "work very hard" (H.S. Suhrawardy to M.A. Jinnah, March 26, 1938). This attitude confirmed Jinnah that Suhrawardy was not the type of a person who could be expected to remain obedient to the party's leadership (Rashid, 1987: 102). Probably this was the reason that

Suhrawardy was never nominated as the member of the Working Committee of the League.

In spite of all this, Suhrawardy's grip on the provincial chapter of the League was tight and he was taking radical measures³, which were making him more popular amongst Bengali masses. Jinnah, being a sharp mind, realized it and thus kept relying on him to organize League in the province. In the Patna Session of the party held in December 1938, Jinnah convinced Akram Khan and his colleagues to remove their differences with Suhrawardy and to work with him (Statement issued by Fazlul Huq and Akram Khan from Patna, December 28, 1938) Jinnah helped Suhrawardy becoming Secretary of the Bengal Muslim League at the representative conference of the party held on April 8-9, 1939 at Calcutta (Afzal, 2013: 426). If Jinnah wanted to send any message to the people of Bengal he knew that the best channel was via Suhrawardy. He indirectly asked Suhrawardy to convince the people of the province that if "the Muslims wish to have an honorable place in the sun of India", the only option for them was "to establish one flag, one platform, and one voice" and "by supporting wholeheartedly the All India Muslim League" (*Star of India*, November 20, 1939). Jinnah's strategy paid off as Bengal by and large became "League-minded" (H.S. Suhrawardy's speech at the General Committee meeting of the BPML held on October 28, 1939). Suhrawardy further wanted the party organs to interact with the Muslim masses and to communicate to them the message that "for the greater interest of the community every Muslim should

³ Suhrawardy introduced drastic reforms in new constitution of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, e.g. i) it provided opportunity to all male and female adult Muslims of the province to become member of the party; ii) membership fee was reduced to two annas; iii) pyramidal structure of the party comprising of Primary Leagues, Sub-divisional Leagues, District Leagues and Provincial Leagues. He also practically started League's branches in all districts and sub-divisions of the province.

assemble under the banner of the Muslim League” (H.S. Suhrawardy’s speech at Mollar Hut on January 15, 1938). He attended the League’s Lahore Session of 1940 as the representative of the Bengal delegation and in support of Jinnah openly spoke against the idea of federation as embodied in the Government of India Act 1935 and as advocated by the Congress (Talukdar, 2009: 17).

By 1941 Jinnah was not happy with Huq and thus wanted to topple his government and to have his own nominee as the chief executive of Bengal. To achieve this, his biggest hope was Suhrawardy. Responding to Jinnah’s wish, or probably because of his own desire to sit in the driving seat, Suhrawardy encouraged students and workers to come out in the streets and protest against Huq. This ultimately led to the resignation of League’s Ministers on December 1, resulting in the expulsion of Huq from the League and fall of his ministry (Jalal, 2010: 68-69).⁴ Still Suhrawardy was not given the reward he deserved. Though he, being a popular leader was the most appropriate and perhaps the most deserving person to replace Huq in the League’s Central Working Committee, Jinnah nominated Ispahani for the position. Bengali leaguers opposed this decision on the ground that Ispahani being a “non-Bengali” couldn’t be a true representative as though he “knew Calcutta” but he understood very “little of Bengal” (Raghib Ahsan to M.A. Jinnah, June 3 1941). Even Nazimuddin openly declared that Suhrawardy had “a prior claim” on this position than “anyone” else (Khawaja Nazimuddin to M.A. Jinnah, December 14, 1941) and requested Jinnah to revisit his decision and asked him at least to “increase the province’s quota by one” to accommodate Suhrawardy as he was “the chief organizer of the Muslim League in Bengal”, and was “taking a great deal of interest” in the local politics as “a

⁴ Four days later Huq reassumed the charge as province’s premier with the backing of Progressive Coalition Party.

hundred percent Leaguer” (Khawaja Nazimuddin to M.A. Jinnah, June 10, 1941). Jinnah did not change his decision.

Suhrawardy, who knew the importance of an all-India organization and realized that with the increase of League’s popularity in the province his own personal power base in Bengal would also enhance, did not challenge Jinnah and continued to work for the solidification of the League at grass-root level, as the provincial Secretary of the party. In April 1942 he led the provincial League to observe “Anti-Repression Day” against Dhaka University’s decision to suspend the student’s union (Herbert to Linlithgow, February 11, 1942) and informed Jinnah that the Bengali Muslims had realized that “Pakistan means everything to them and they are not prepared to support anyone whose activities may cause it damage” (H.S. Suhrawardy to M.A. Jinnah, April 25, 1942). He also organized a “League Fortnight” with the aim to increase the membership of the party as well as that of the Muslim League National Guards (*Dawn*, May 31, 1942). He exploited the fact that Huq would only stay in office “as long as Hindu parties think that they can use him as a puppet” (Proceedings of Bengal Legislative Assembly, March 27, 1943). It would not be wrong if one gives the credit of de-popularizing Huq’s ministry and ultimately his resignation on March 29, 1943 to the efforts of Suhrawardy. Even Jinnah’s confidants were reporting him that besides Suhrawardy there was “no other public man who exercises such influence in the Districts of Bengal” and that “the popularity of the League in Bengal” was “due to the untiring and selfless efforts of the student community” which was directly under Suhrawardy’s influence (Tour Report of Nawab Ismail, July 5, 1943).

In spite of all the efforts and contributions of Suhrawardy, when in April 1943 the Muslim League was in a position to ultimately form government in Bengal, the “old guards” managed to appoint Nazimuddin as the provincial Premier. Jinnah was asked to intervene and give justice to Suhrawardy but he

completely ignored the appeal (Ispahani to M.A. Jinnah, April 15, 1943). Though Suhrawardy also wanted to become member of the League's Planning Committee (Hamidul Huq Chowdhury to Jinnah, January 27, 1944),⁵ and some of his friends pleaded his case before Jinnah but the latter along with Liaquat disapproved the idea (Liaquat to M.A. Jinnah, January 12, 1944, and M.A. Jinnah to Liaquat, January 3, 1944). Suhrawardy was still ready to work as a minister in Nazimuddin's cabinet but even then the high command of the League wanted to further sidelined him. Few months later, a notification suggesting that no individual could hold party position and government office at a time, was issued. Apparently it was a good decision as it was a difficult task for any person to perform both organizational and ministerial duties simultaneously, yet many believe that the main intention behind the decision was to put Suhrawardy in an awkward position (Sen, 1982: 108). He had to make a choice between leaving parliamentary leadership completely in the hands of Khawaja group or to leave the League's leadership, which was the main basis of his political power. He intelligently dealt with the situation and resigned as the Secretary of the Bengal League. However, in party elections held in Calcutta on November 6-7, 1943, he not only got his trusted nominee Abul Hashim elected as Secretary but was also able to defeat Nazimuddin's candidates for other important positions in the party (Jalal, 2010: 103). On the other hand he as minister for Civil Supplies defended his government during the famine and put blame on bad management and wrong planning of the British Government. Besides this, he worked day and night and managed to provide food to three hundred thousand people (Afzal, 2013: 430). All this further

⁵ The members of the planning committee were selected by Jinnah and Liaquat. Its main function was to explore the economic conditions of the areas to be included in Pakistan and to plan for their commercial, agricultural and industrial development.

strengthened his popularity amongst masses and hold over the Bengal League.

Knowing the importance of the unity of League in Bengal for the future electoral politics, Suhrawardy and his associates continued trying to bridge their gulf with Jinnah. Abul Hashim persistently used to share his progress report with Jinnah and seek his guidance on regular basis (Afzal, 2013: 429). Suhrawardy, himself was the chief architect of the resolution passed by the Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League suggesting that “Jinnah’s stand” was “reasonable and just, patriotic and statesmanlike” and that the Committee “wholeheartedly supports the stand taken by him in his negotiations with Mr. Gandhi” (Resolution by the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, November 1, 1944). But in a meeting of the Council of Bengal Muslim League held on September 29, 1945 “disgraceful senses were witnessed” and the “game of pull devil, pull baker” was played between “Nazimuddin and his henchmen” and “Suhrawardy and his lieutenants” (M.A.H. Ispahani to M.A. Jinnah, October 1, 1945). Khawaja group wanted Jinnah to take some action against Suhrawardy group, but Jinnah, may be because of the positive behavior of this faction towards him or may be because of the strong organizational footings of the group in the provincial politics, avoided any such move (Rashid, 1987: 203). Still because of some actions of Jinnah one could easily see his tilt towards the opposite camp. Though he was patronizing Akram Khan’s daily newspaper “Azad”, but when Abu Hashim requested him to give his “blessings” for his weekly “Millat”, Jinnah flatly refused and asked him not to publish it in the name of the League (Hashim, 1974: 99).

Suhrawardy realized the importance of finances for his election campaign and knew that his chief sponsors in the province could only be either *nawabs* or the non-Bengali Muslim businessmen of Calcutta. For this he even agreed to form

Provincial Parliamentary Board in the province by consensus. He himself proposed Nazimuddin's name as chairman of the elections fund committee (Raghib Ahsan to Liaquat, October 12, 1945). He also asked for the financial help from the central Muslim League. He requested the high command of the party to realize that the people of Bengal had bypassed the province and had made heavy contributions in the Central Fund of the party. He added that in order to counter Congress, who would "mobilize its full strength and spend money lavishly to capture Muslim seats", Jinnah should at least give fifty thousand rupees from Central Fund to meet the expenditures of the election to the Central Assembly from Bengal (H.S. Suhrawardy to Liaquat, October 9, 1945). In response to this, Jinnah reminded him of the famous proverb, "God helps those who help themselves". He added that the "election to the Indian Central Legislative Assembly" was the responsibility of "your province" and he would be "unable to" provide any "support from the Central Fund". Jinnah further made it clear that "barring some poor people and middle class people, who have sent me very small sums... there has been no real support to the Central Fund from Bengal" (M.A. Jinnah to Suhrawardy, October 30, 1945). Though Jinnah eventually awarded some amount from the Central Fund to Bengal, few days before the elections, but instead of giving it to Suhrawardy or Provincial Parliamentary Board, he handed over the amount to a special Committee consisting of Ispahani, A.W. Razzak and Moazzemuddin Hussain (Report of the Working Committee of AIML, April 1946).

Suhrawardy and other Bengali leaders wanted Jinnah to visit the province during election campaign but the latter wanted the "provincial leaders to manage things in their own provinces". He was of the view that he, in the previous "seven years", had "worked and put out people on a clear road" and now he was expecting that those who were "in charge of the provincial organizations and those who desire to lead... should work as a

team in an organized manner and systematically carry on their work” (M.A. Jinnah to Akram Khan, August 27, 1945). He, moreover, was not enjoying good health and was not in a position to bare physical strain of extensive tours during the election campaign. In a letter to Suhrawardy, he admitted that when people found him amongst them, because of “regard and affection” for him, “dangerously mobbed” him and that he could not afford because of his fragile condition (M.A. Jinnah to H.S. Suhrawardy, February 7, 1946). Suhrawardy still wanted at least his ceremonial presence. He knew that it would be enough to get popular support for the party’s candidates. In a letter he asked Jinnah that he must tour Bengal as it would “give the people a chance to see” him, which they were “most anxious to do” and that would definitely help the League performing well in the province (H.S. Suhrawardy to M.A. Jinnah, January 31, 1946). Knowing the importance of Bengal for future Pakistan, Jinnah toured the province in February – March 1946 as a part of his otherwise very limited electioneering program.

Before elections, tussle started between Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy for post-election leadership of the province. Though there was no open conflict but the divide could be observed in composition of the provincial parliamentary board and selection of candidates for different constituencies. Khaliquzzam, on Jinnah’s advice, visited Bengal and managed to apparently patch-up their differences (Liaquat to M.A. Jinnah, June 5, 1945). This helped Bengal League to go to polls as the largest and best organized provincial chapter of the party. Yet the divide in the method of campaign was quite visible. Suhrawardhy group was targeting middle-class while the opponents were mainly focusing on rural elite. Defeat of Nazimuddin from his own constituency, however, made things easier for Suhrawardy. On April 3, Frederick Burrows, the Governor of Bengal, invited him to form ministry in the province. Jinnah put his weight behind Suhrawardhy, when he himself received him at the station and

then asked him to present the most important resolution at the Delhi Muslim Legislator's Convention on April 9, 1946. This resolution once for ever made it clear that "the Zones comprising of Bengal and Assam in the North-East and the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the North-West of India" would constitute "a sovereign independent state" and that the Muslims would "never submit to any constitution for a united India" and would "never participate in any single constitution-making machinery" (Delhi Resolution, April 8, 1946). Speaking on the occasion, Suhrawardy made it clear that "there was no room for Muslims outside the League" and that "Muslims would accept nothing less than a sovereign State" for them. He categorically told Jinnah that the "Muslims of Bengal" were prepared to make every sacrifice for the great glory of Pakistan" (H.S. Suhrawardy's Speech, April 8, 1946).

Another issue that emerged was that Suhrawardy showed his willingness to cooperate with cross-communal Bengali leadership as he, alongside local Congress, Khaksar and Communist Party's heads, protested against the anti-students' police lathi-charge on February 12 at Wellington Square and raised slogans, "Hindus and Muslims unite" and "Down with British Imperialism" (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, February 13, 1946). Though Abul Kalam Azad declared elections in the province as "a sordid story of corruption and official interferences of the worst type" (*Statesman*, April 3, 1946), and Suhrawardy in his rebuttal claimed that if there was "any official interference" it was "on behalf of the Congress" (Mitra, 1990: 48), yet the latter was interested in forming a collation government with Congress. He met Azad and Kiran Sankar Roy, between April 11 and 14 and tried to find out a compromising formula. The talks, however, failed as there was a deadlock mainly on the issue of the distribution of portfolios (*Statesman*, April 22, 1946). Because of his tilt towards Congress, a group of Leaguers started complaining Jinnah about him. They termed his as "the epitome

of power politics”, questioned his “sincerity and honesty” and assumed that he “being in power” would “harm their interests” and “deny them favour” (Saudur Rahman to M.A. Jinnah, February 12, 1946). Jinnah, did not listen to these complaints and on the advice of Ispahani ignored the voices which were “hostile to Suhrawardy” (M.A.H. Ispahani to M.A. Jinnah, March 6, 1946).

Cabinet which assumed charge of Bengal administration on April 24, 1946 had a couple of Khan Bahadurs, yet, by and large, it represented the Bengali middle class as it was dominated by Suhrawardy’s group within the League. It was the first ministry in the history of the province which did not have any member from the nawab family of Dacca (Burrows to Wavell, April 25, 1946). As Chief Minister, Suhrawardhy kept taking advice from Jinnah on different matters (H.S. Suhrawardhy to M.A. Jinnah, June 15, 1946). He also gave his input in formulation of the party’s policies at the central level. When Congress demanded at the time of Simla Conference that the League should not be allowed “to nominate full Muslim quota” because there were “Muslims outside the League”, Suhrawardy suggested Jinnah to call “a convention of all the Muslim members of the Central and Provincial Legislatures”, as the representatives of the Muslims “alone” had the “right to make the final... decision” (H.S. Suhrawardhy to M.A. Jinnah, July 2 1945). Suhrawardhy also brought Jaipal Singh and his other Christian colleagues of the Adibasi Mahasabha close to Jinnah and made them “supporters” and “friends” of the Muslim League “by honest conviction” (H.S. Suhrawardhy to M.A. Jinnah, April 27, 1946). Yet, in the elections for the mayor of Calcutta Corporation, Suhrawardy opposed Jinnah’s trusted friend, Ispahani and got his own nominee Mohammad Usman elected for the post (Burrows to Wavell, June 3, 1946). Jinnah also received complaints against Suhrawardy from common Leaguers, who blamed him of not doing anything for “the poor Muslims of

Bengal” (A. Rahim to M.A. Jinnah, May 30, 1946) and thus did not include him in the Working Committee of the League.

On July 29, the All-India Muslim League Council rejected the Cabinet Mission Plan and declared that the “Muslim nation” should “resort to Direct Action to achieve Pakistan” (Pirzada, 2007: 558). Jinnah appealed before the Muslims all around India to show solidarity by observing Direct Action Day “in a peaceful manner” on August 16 (Ahmed, 1964: 323). Suhrawardy, as Chief Minister of Bengal, decided to completely support Jinnah on this. The provincial chapter of the League in a meeting on August 5 while chalking down the program asked the people of the province to observe “general strike”; to pray for “the freedom of Muslim India” after Jumma prayers; to hold “peaceful processions and demonstrations”; to “reiterate full support for the League Council Resolution” etc. (*Star of India*, August 6, 1946). While making these directions public, Suhrawardy reiterated that “all demonstrations, procession, meetings, protests, closing of shops, observance of Hartals, etc. should be absolutely peaceful”. He added that since it was party’s “first step” in pursuance of its “new policy” and thus they should be “absolutely disciplined” so that they could show to “the world” that they were trained to follow “the orders issued by the high command of the Muslim League” (*Amrit Bazar Partika*, August 10, 1946). But, in spite of these words of caution by both Jinnah and Suhrawardy, August 16 proved to be a fatal day as rioting and violence broke out. In the “Great Calcutta Killing” around four thousand five hundred people lost their lives and another sixteen thousand were injured.

In order to bring things in Bengal back to normal and to earn harmony between Hindus and Muslims of the province, Suhrawardy once again tried to rope the Congress in, and form a coalition Ministry. Nevertheless, Nazimuddin group, who actually wanted to get rid of Suhrawardy’s government, opposed the idea (SR, 1st half, November 1946). Suhrawardy, in order to

convince Jinnah to support his plan, visited Bombay on September 5 and 6. Since, Jinnah was not only concerned about the future of Bengal, and his priority was to look after the interest of whole Muslim community in India, so he was not convinced by the arguments of Suhrawardy. He flatly “refused to allow” Suhrawardy “to establish a coalition ministry in Bengal, unless there was a satisfactory coalition at the center” (Moon, 1974: 348). Suhrawardy surrendered before Jinnah’s decision and made it clear before the Bengal Assembly that “his government” would “not participate in any conference” with the “Congress Interim Government” at the center. Yet, he tried to act as an “emissary” between Jinnah and Wavell in order to “resume talks” between the two on the issue of the inclusion of League in the interim government (Burrow to Wavell, October 5, 1946).

Suhrawardy, being a Bengali nationalist, never wanted the episode of the Partition of Bengal to be repeated again in 1947. To begin with, in order to make whole of Bengal part of Pakistan, he called Jharkand-Pakistan Conference with the aim to win over the scheduled cast people of the province for the cause of Pakistan (*Star of India*, February 25, 1946). Nevertheless, when it became evident that Bengal would be divided alongside the partition of India, he started working for retaining the unity of the province at any cost. He tried to convince Burrow that the province should be allowed to have its “own constitution” and to work for its “own Provincial Plans” (H.S. Suhrawardy to Burrows, February 24, 1947). He along with Sarat Chandra Bose started working on a plan that would claim on the inclusion of all Bengali-speaking people, both Hindus and Muslims, in one “Sovereign Zone” (H.S. Suhrawardy’s interview with the Associated Press of America, April 6, 1946). On April 27, 1947, in a press conference at New Delhi he eventually openly announced that he had “visualized ... Bengal as an independent state and not part of any Union of India” (H.S. Suhrawardy’s statement of April 27, 1947). In his opinion, the demand for the

creation of “three fully independent and sovereign states” was in alignment with the Lahore Resolution of 1940 (Rahman, n.d: 86). Nazimuddin group strongly opposed the idea of United Independent Bengal, which they consider was co-authored by Burrow (Mansergh, 1981: 832-33). A large group of the League’s members of the Bengal Assembly presented a memorandum before authorities of the party at center claiming that Suhrawardy was working against the “interests of the party, community and the country”, and thus there was a need for the change of regime in the province (Memorandum presented to central league, March 20, 1947). Jinnah discouraged them and directed them to maintain unity in the party “at this critical movement” (M.A. Jinnah to Habibullah Babar, April 1, 1947). In fact, Suhrawardy kept Jinnah posted about all the developments related to his scheme through Liaquat (Liaquat to M.A. Jinnah May 24, 1947, NAP, QAP, F. 335/285). Jinnah never disapproved the scheme for United Bengal and actually considered it as “a sort of subsidiary Pakistan” (25th Meeting of India and Burma Committee of the Cabinet, May 19, 1947). Yet, he did never openly endorse the idea as he first wanted Congress leadership to give their verdict. The idea died down as Congress declared United Bengal as “virtual Pakistan” and demanded that if India would “be divided on communal considerations”, partition of Bengal would also become “an immediate necessity” (Mookerjee to Mountbatten, May 2, 1947).

As partition of Bengal left Suhrawardy’s support base in West-Bengal with India, Nazimuddin managed to defeat him by seventy-five to thirty-nine votes and become the first Chief Minister of Pakistani province of East Bengal (Afzal, 1998: 124). Jinnah still wanted Suhrawardy to play an important role in Pakistan’s administration. He wanted to appoint him as “Roving Ambassador” of Pakistan and to act as “his personal representative to acquaint the governments all over the world” (Talukdar, 2009: 106). Jinnah also gave him the offer to join the

federal cabinet in the capacity of either defence or refugee minister, or to serve as the permanent representative of Pakistan in the United Nations or to become Ambassador of Pakistan in any of the Middle Eastern countries, but Suhrawardy opted to stay back in Calcutta and to fight against communal riots. Suhrawardy devised a twelve-point charter of minority rights for Pakistan and India, but he failed to get the document endorsed by Jinnah (Talukdar, 2009: 109).⁶ However, when Suhrawardy along with Mian Iftikharuddin proposed to open the doors of Pakistan Muslim League for the non-Muslim citizens of the state, Jinnah unlike Liaquat did not oppose the idea and promised that the party would consider the recommendation (Khan, 1977: 361). Likewise when, Liaquat's government tried to get rid of Suhrawardy because of his open criticism against them (Suhrawardy's speech in the CAP, March 6, 1948), and on May 18, 1948 passed an amendment to the rules of the Constituent Assembly, seeking to restrict membership of the Assembly only to the permanent residents of Pakistan (Amendment passed by CAP on May 18, 1948); his membership was not terminated till the time Jinnah was alive and was officially the president of the Assembly.⁷

Conclusion

One can say that the relationship between the two leaders were like a roller-coaster ride with a lot of turns and twists. It is true that Jinnah never allowed Suhrawardy to enter his inner circle and relied mainly on the likes of Ispahani and Nazimuddin when it comes to Bengal politics, but it is also a reality that he

⁶ Liaquat-Nehru Pact signed on April 8, 1950 was primarily inspired by the same Suhrawardy's formula of communal harmony.

⁷ It was after the death of Jinnah that his successor as President of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, Maulvi Tamizuddin Khan, terminated Suhrawardy's membership of the house on February 26, 1949. He was also banned to entry into East Pakistan. Under the circumstances Suhrawardy migrated to Karachi on March 5 and stayed in his son-in-law's house.

constantly kept him in the loop and never let him go. In crucial movements he always fell back on Suhrawardy's services in order to keep Bengal under Muslim League's influence. On the other hand Suhrawardy, in spite of being consistently ignored by Jinnah, always responded to the call of the latter, whenever his services were required. It is also a matter of fact that one could hardly find him criticizing Jinnah in public. Even in his memoirs, Suhrawardy though openly condemned Liaquat but he has not written a single word against Jinnah. The reason for all this was that both of them respected the integrity, statesmanship, intelligence and political acumen of each other and realized that they had differences only because they looked at the Indian politics from diverse perspectives. If Jinnah was concerned about safeguarding the interests of Muslims living all over India, Suhrawardy was primarily interested in looking after the rights of Bengalis in general and the Muslims of Bengal in particular. The cooperation between the two, based on pragmatic politics, helped Jinnah in winning over Muslim-majority province of Bengal and Suhrawardy to have someone at the national level who could raise his voice for him.

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