

Elite Politics in the States: A Study of Bahawalpur Muslim League (1925-1947)

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Although sufficient research has been carried out on different segments and aspects of the Bahawalpur State, the role of the elite⁽¹⁾ in the politics of the Bahawalpur State has yet to be discussed in detail. The present research paper deals with the elite politicians of the Ex-Bahawalpur State. An attempt has been initiated to highlight the role of the elite from 1925 to 1947, with an emphasis that how they supported the cause of the All India Muslim League (AIML)

During British India rule in the Subcontinent there were almost 562 princely states instead of any central or provincial administration.⁽²⁾ The States comprised roughly one third of the total area of the subcontinent and one quarter of its population. The supreme authority of the State lay with the British crown. In internal affairs, the rulers of the State were free to decide, abiding by the limits as mentioned in the treaties and agreements signed with the British rulers.⁽³⁾

The Bahawalpur State was considered to be an important sovereign state in Punjab. The Bahawalpur State had a special privilege as it was larger than some states of the present time like Lebanon, Kuwait, Israel and Denmark in respect of area. Its population was two times more than the total population of United Arab Emirates.⁽⁴⁾ Its rulers also enjoyed special protocol and titles conferred by the British since 1866 as they were accorded 17 canons salute and had special access to the Viceroy of British India⁵⁾ Bahawalpur state also had a separate mint to cast coins for its public and the facility remained intact until 1940.⁽⁶⁾

The widow of Nawab Muhammad Bahawal Khan IV (1859-1866) invited the British to run the State administration and to provide the safety of the sovereignty to her minor son in 1866; the decision to invite the British in this state marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the State administration. So, after the sudden demise of Nawab Muhammad Bahawal Khan (V) (1903-1907), his son Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan (V) inherited the throne of the state in 1907, at the minor age of just three years. The British Government established a Regency Council under the supervision of

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Maulvi Sir Rahim Bakhsh (1907-1923) until the minor Nawab grew up as a young man. This Council was responsible for state administration. Special attention was paid to the education and upbringing of Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan (V). He started his education from Atchison College, Lahore and completed in England. He had an aptitude for military affairs and achieved several military titles, conferred on him by the British Empire. The Viceroy of India, Lord Reading (1921-1926) awarded total authority of the state administration to Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan (V) on March 8, 1924.⁽⁷⁾

At that time, a political awakening started in the princely states of British India, coinciding with the freedom movement, which had already erupted all over the sub-continent. But the people of Bahawalpur State could not enjoy the political atmosphere in the British governed State, because they were subjected to a dual system of government overwhelmed by the British. They dominated the people of the princely states through Nawabs and Rajas indirectly. The people were forced to abide by the personal rule there. They could not discuss or say anything against the British Government policies and decisions, so the people of Bahawalpur state had to some extent be silent and peaceful, in spite of the political awakening in the Sub-Continent. Nevertheless the state enforced a ban on political activities in view of external affairs. In this condition, a law was imposed in the state on May 14, 1924:

In the state premises, for any public meeting it will be incumbent upon the people to take a written permission for the same, 48 hours before the meeting, from the District Magistrate in view of the administrative affairs and on condition that the holders of the meeting will have nothing to do with political movements and campaigns, relating to the British Government and the state of Bahawalpur, which may lead to disturbance in law and order, or which may harm the feelings of any community and religion. The meeting holders will be answerable to legal proceedings, even after these conditions, if they break out a law and order situation.⁽⁸⁾

In spite of all this, the people of the state could not keep themselves away from being influenced by the wave of political awakening in the sub-continent. Like the movement for silken handkerchief, the Khilafat movement, the effects of Shahid Ganj Masjid at Lahore. The positive effects were also obvious in the political scenario of Bahawalpur. Especially the two elite personalities who showed courage and resigned from their jobs as Maulvi Abdul Aziz, Zila Dar and Ghulam Qadir, Overseer took initiative to show their powerful motives.⁽⁹⁾ Other illustrious names of this series were Taj Muhammad Khan Durrani who supported the cause of Muslim League and showed their strong political vision. He was educated at Aligarh. They also

graciously offered the net cash and food to the refugees for Afghanistan as their train stopped at the Bahawalpur Railway Station. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Master Abdul Hameed was also an enthusiastic worker and supporter of the noble cause as he wore clothes made of raw cotton, khaddar, and rejected the foreign precious clothes. ⁽¹¹⁾ In Bahawalpur State the first ever public movement was launched by the Hindu community in the rule of British Regency Council, when Sir Maulvi Rahim Bakhsh was its president. When the income tax laws were imposed, the Hindus openly opposed and displayed their power and unity. The leader of this power display was a Hindu dignitary Mukhi Darya Bakhsh. In order to encounter the Hindu power display, the Muslim government officers also formed a reformist party *Moid-ul-Islam*, with a premier objective to launch development activities for the Muslims in addition to issuing a sound reply to the Hindus. The *Jamiat-ul-Muslimeen*, was inaugurated in 1925. Then in 1929, the Muslims launched two reforming movements on a smaller scale namely *Islah-e- Iteffal* and *Islah-e-Rusoom*, so, various political movements began to nurture under ground under the shadow of reforms movements in Bahawalpur State.

According to the prevailing law of the state no branch of any political movement or party of British India was allowed in Bahawalpur State. As a result some religious parties after 1930 A.D. by the Muslims of the state under the banners of *Anjuman Khuddam-ud-Din* (with the merger of the joint reform movements of *Islah-e-Iteffal* and *Islah-e-Rusoom*) in 1932, (which later on was converted into “*Hezbollah*”), *Hindu Sabha* by the local Hindu community and “*Anis-al-Ghuraba*”, “*Anjuman Nau Abad Karan*” and “*Anjuman Isha’at-e- Seerat-un-Nabi* (PBUH)” are worth mentioning.

In 1933 there was an incident involving the slaughtering of a cow and the Hindus arrested a Muslim as a result, which created an inter faith dispute among Hindus and the Muslims in Ahmed Pur East. Both the religious groups accelerated their political activities to raise their voice about their point of view and a grim situation was created among them. The Hindus were led by their frontline leaders Mukhi Darya Bakhsh, Bhagat Kanwal Nain, Lala Anand Verma, Khushi Ram, Girdhari Lal. Kewal Ram, Nemat Rai, Sobhraj and Murlidhar. Similarly, the Muslims had their prominent personalities leading them at this crucial juncture, including Maulvi Abdul Aziz, Maulana Muhammad Dawood, Taj Muhammad Durrani, Allama Arshad, Munshi Abdul Majeed, Hafiz Ahmed Yar, Maulvi Abdul Rehman, Abdul Hameed Rizwani, Faiz Muhammad Choorigar, Abdul Majeed Rehmani, Abdul Rehman, Chaudhary Rehmatullah, Master Abdul Rehman Ghazi, Munshi Muhammad Hassan Chughtai, Allah Diwaya, Haji Mehmood Hajjam and Malang Khan Darzi proved to be the motivational factor at this crucial point. Their sentiments, fervour, enthusiasm and consistency created awareness

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among the Muslims of the state and they started to raise their voice through the support of the political parties.

After 1933, two other religious groups of *Hezbollah* (earlier known as *Anjuman-e-Khuddam-ud-Din* as mentioned above) and *Khuddam-ul-Muslimeen* emerged and started functioning in their religious jurisdiction.

An attempt was made to establish “*Majlis-e-Ahrar*” in violation of the state laws. An application for its registration was put under suspension by the government. At last, under the pressure of public demands, the Government established a Reforms Committee in 1939. This committee was assigned the duty of bringing about recommendations for reforms in the state. After 1940 the influences divided the people into two clear cut groups, *Jamiat-ul-Muslimeen* was launched as a representative of the Muslim League on one side, excluding the Nationalists and *Ahrari Ulema*. The supporters of Hindu Congress established a separate association by the name of “*Khuddam-i-Watan*”. The state administration had a soft corner for the Muslim League, once the workers of *Jamiat* made an addition of Muslim League in brackets with their *Jamiat-al-Muslimeen*. It was strictly prohibited in the state to name their parties after the major political parties of the sub-continent in those days, but the workers of the *Jamiat* submitted an explanation asserting that the Muslim League was an English translation of *Jamiat-al-Muslimeen*. The government conceded to this argument.⁽¹²⁾ At that time “Bahawalpur State Muslim Board” was established, under the presidentship of Pirzada Salim Aslam, Advocate (1910-1967) and Sultan Abdul Hamid (1908-1951) was appointed its General Secretary. This association gained much popularity among the common public as well as the notables and dignified. It began to set up its branches in the state because sincere people like Mir Zahid Hussain, Hayat Tarin and Noor Muhammad Nutkani joined the board. The “NAWA-I-MUSLIM” of Pirzada Salim Aslam and the “INSAF” of Mr. Hayat Tareen helped the Muslim League to increase its impact on the people of Bahawalpur State.

With the approval of the Pakistan resolution on 23 March, 1940, a fresh wave of enthusiasm and excitement ran through the Muslims of the Sub-Continent and Bahawalpur was also affected with the flood of Pakistan’s ideology. The practical reflection of Pakistan’s dream was brought to Bahawalpur State by the students who were studying in Aligarh and Lahore.

According to the constitution of the All India Muslim League, the party had been organized in British India only. It was not considered necessary to launch it in the Indian princely states. Contrary to this, the Congress did not comply with the rules and it continued to patronize the Hindus of the states through its tributary party, “The State Peoples Conference”. Front line leaders like Sita

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Ram and Jawahar Lal Nehru (1889-1964) used to preside over the meetings of this party. ⁽¹³⁾ Under the circumstances, Nawab Bahadur Yar Jang (1905-1944) established the States Muslim League after consultation with the Quaid-i-Azam. Its first meeting was held in Lahore in 1940. ⁽¹⁴⁾

The representatives of states attended this conference; Nawab Bahadur Yar Jang was elected the president of this organization. The central office of this organization was established at Nagpur. ⁽¹⁵⁾ This organization also decided that the conference of the state Muslim League, in the future, would be held in the city in which the annual session of the Muslim League was to be held. A great advantage of this resolution was that both the Muslim Leagues though apparently separate, became a single entity, in this way, the Muslims of Indian states and British India got one platform of the Muslim League. Accordingly, the Muslims of the state performed a remarkable role in the struggle for the creation of Pakistan under the dynamic leadership of the Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Within no time the All India States Muslim League established through the good offices of Quaid-i-Azam turned into the voice of the Muslims of the princely states of India. The other associations of the Muslims States started to join it. In this connection the Bahawalpur State did not lag behind. When the delegates of all the States joined the Muslim League, the State represented itself through Abdul Majeed Khakwani, as its first delegate. Similarly, Anwar-al-Rab Gulzar Karimi was also nominated to represent Bahawalpur in the working session of All India State Muslim League (AISML) in 1942. ⁽¹⁶⁾

Hence a race started as a trend among the Muslim princely states to join the AISML after the state of Bahawalpur joined the party. In this connection, Mr. Hayat Tareen wrote a letter to Nawab Bahadur Yar Jang to allow him to open a branch of the Muslim League, or get it affiliated with All India States Muslim League. He received a reply from Nawab Bahadur Yar Jang on 6 Rabi-ul-Sani 1361 A.H. In this letter he asked him if there existed any other Muslim association which might cause a division in the unity of the Muslims of the State. He also advised him to get his party affiliated with States Muslim League, and contact Maulvi Mahmood-ul-Hassan Siddique, Secretary AISML, and get the details of it from him. ⁽¹⁷⁾ Likewise the *Jamiat-al-Muslimeen* attempted to get itself affiliated with AISML through Anwar-ul-Rab. He got a reply from Bahadur Yar Jang on June 4, 1942. In this letter he asked him to contact the Secretary, AISML, Bhopal, ⁽¹⁸⁾ but he did not succeed in his attempt. In the same way Sheikh Abdul Rashid Abdul Quddus Siddiqui from Bahawal Nagar wrote a letter to Nawab Bahadur Yar Jang on May 16, 1944 for assistance of the State Muslims through the platform of the States Muslim League. He received a reply from him on June 25, 1944, "with an exhortation to consolidate the internal unity of his organization". ⁽¹⁹⁾

During this period, the Bahawalpur State administration issued a Royal command to control the public unrest under Public Societies Act on April 25, 1942. "Accordingly, even any Society could not be established without the permission of the Provincial Government. Even the already established societies would cease to exist from the issue of this act. For the permission of their continuance, a renewal would have to be submitted within 30 days of the Act".⁽²⁰⁾

The Bahawalpur State Muslim Board had become a popular organization since its inception. Its founder, Pirzada Salim Aslam applied to the State administration for the establishment of the Muslim League. This application was rejected due to the newly imposed Societies Act. Another problem for the State was that if the inception of this party was permitted, the Congress could also not be prevented from organizing and establishing its party. It would add to the political unrest in the State. Under these circumstances, the Secretary Muslim Board, Sultan Abdul Hamid wrote a bearing envelope to Quaid-i-Azam on Nov. 12, 1946. The letter ran with the Statement:

The Muslims of the State had framed a political party with the name of Bahawalpur State Muslim Board. It has acted purely as a political party by the name of Bahawalpur Muslim League; and its untiring efforts had enabled it to open its branches in the nooks and corners of the State. We in honour of the State Act requested the State Government to allow them to change the name of the Board as Bahawalpur State Muslim League. But the said permission is being still awaited. It was demand of time that the matter should not be delayed, it is decided by most of the people that without waiting for the Govt. permission, the nomenclature of the Board be changed at once. But as the Muslim League high command do not permit violation of law, it is in the benefit of the Muslims of the State to take no unlawful step. So yours instructions are urgently needed and all the Muslims are waiting for your guidance in this matter.⁽²¹⁾

This letter was received by the Quaid-i-Azam when the freedom movement was in its last stage in 1946. By that time Quaid-i-Azam considered geographical position along with the importance of the State. In view of these conditions Quaid-i-Azam's reply was: "Secretary Muslim Board Bahawalpur, Your letter dated 12 November, 1946. Discuss in a friendly spirit with Bahawalpur Government. Wish you all success".⁽²²⁾

This was the first contact of Quaid-i-Azam with the people of Bahawalpur State.

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On account of its geographical significance, the State had to become a cause of dispute between India and Pakistan on the problem of affiliation. According to the independence Act of 1947, the Indian States were free to decide for their future. Quaid-i-Azam had a cordial relationship with the Amir of Bahawalpur, Nawab Sir Sadiq Muhammad Khan V and the people of the State. On the other hand, the Congress leaders had a keen desire to get the State affiliated with India through temptation and threats even before the partition of the Sub-Continent.

As a last resort, the Congress leadership tried to use the public of the Bahawalpur State for its accession with India. The local newspapers like “*Kainat*” and “*Sutlej*” were at its back. With the support of Congress, the leaders of *Khuddam-e- Watan* Party, Mian Faiz Muhammad Choorigar issued a statement for the accession of state.

It is not good to announce the accession of the state with a blind emotionalism. The decision must have this consideration in mind as to what effect it may have on the future life of the people of the state. The rulers of the state should see to it as to which dominion will be useful for our future prosperity. We should see to it, how much canal water we shall have in addition to our present availability. Shall we have supply of water from Bhakra Dam; or shall we have our share of income in the railways and post-offices? How much facility shall we have in obtaining the essential commodities like cloth and sugar? We should accede to the Dominion which admits our demands. Whether it be Pakistan or India.⁽²³⁾

The majority of the people of the state and particularly the leaders of the Muslim League of the State expressed an intense reaction against the intriguing elements. As a result, the *Jamiat-ul-Muslimeen* and the Muslim board were integrated. Both the organizations worked to uproot the propaganda of “*Khuddam-e- Watan*”. They launched a campaign for the annexation of the state with Pakistan. They unveiled the conspiracies of the Congress through meetings, advertisements and posters. The local newspapers “*Nawa-e-Muslim*” and “*Insaf*” played a very effective role in this connection. It was on account of their efforts that the 14 August 1947 became a gala day for the people of the state. They arranged processions and meetings from place to place. Pakistani flags were unfurled on buildings from Fort Abbas to Sadiqabad. In the meeting and procession of big cities, the leaders paid tributes to Quaid-i-Azam, and a demand was placed before the Amir of Bahawalpur to get the state to accede with Pakistan without further delay.

There were some misgivings at the time of the inception of Pakistan because the Amir of Bahawalpur Nawab Sir Sadiq Muhammad Khan V was not

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present in the State at that time. He came to Bahawalpur in October 1947. The accession pact between the State of the Bahawalpur and the Dominion of Pakistan took place with the signature of the Nawab of Bahawalpur on Oct 3, 1947. It materialized with the signatures of the Quaid-i-Azam on Oct 5, 1947. According to the provision 'eight' of this pact, the Quaid-i-Azam accepted the internal autonomy of the Amir of Bahawalpur. ⁽²⁴⁾

Setup of Muslim League After 1949 Reforms

On 8th March 1949, His Highness Amir of Bahawalpuri, Nawab Sir Sadiq Muhammad Khan (V) announced new reforms, and according to these reforms, a state council comprising of 25 members, out of which 16 would be elected by the had to be elected by the local bodies, while the rest would be nominated by His Highness.⁽²⁵⁾

Two ministers would be elected by the council, while the rest of the cabinet would be nominated by His Highness, and the Prime Minister would be nominated by the Pakistan Government with the approval of Amir of Bahawalpur.

These elections were the first real test of the Pakistan Muslim League in Bahawalpur State, and it convincingly overwhelmed State League with a big margin and won 90 out of 118 seats in the Local Bodies and 44 out of 48 seats in the District Board elections. After these elections, the next phase to elect 16 member State Council. The Pakistan Muslim League once again won 15 out of 16 seats and displayed its superiority in the state politics. The Pakistan Muslim League celebrated this victory with great fervor and arranged a big rally under the leadership of first elected Prime Minister of Bahawalpur State, Makhdoom Hassan Mehmood.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned discussion leads us to conclude that despite the ban on political parties, the educated elite class continued their political activities within the jurisdiction of the law. This elite group of the Bahawalpur State continued their efforts to awaken the people of State. They were successful to force the State authorities to introduce more and more reforms. They launched propaganda for the All India Muslim League and persuaded the public to join those parties supported by the All India Muslim League (AIML). It was due to their day and night efforts that Bahawalpur State ultimately acceded with Pakistan.

References

1. Here elite refers to a small group of privileged people dominant at that time in Bahawalpur State, who had recently acquired modern education from English oriented institutions and conscious of their role.
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