Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan: A Traditional Rightist Democrat and Alliance Maker

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ABSTRACT

In a democracy, the opposition always has a pivotal role in uplifting the quality of democracy. Further, it keeps a strict eye on the legislative business and policies of the government. The present study is about Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, one of the most prominent opposition leaders in the political history of Pakistan. The article examines the political journey of Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, which expanded over six decades. Khan is significant in Pakistan's political history because he also set a notable trend: the politics of opposition. He always preferred to be a part of the opposition in his political life. Primarily, the article focuses on Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan's role in forming opposition alliances in 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s lastly, formation of ARD (Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy). During his entire political career, Khan always stood for democracy and was firmly against the country's military rule. On the contrary, he had strongly criticized the civilian government. In Pakistan's political arena, Khan was considered as one of the key figures of the oppositional alliances. The political history of Pakistan is incomplete without discussing Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan.

Keywords: Opposition, Alliance, Democracy, Politics.

Introduction

Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan was one of the shining stars in the sky of Pakistani politics. He was also considered as one of the most dignified and towering personalities in the politics of Pakistan. Khan was also known as a symbol of democracy in Pakistan, known as Baba-e-Jamhoriat. On 13th November 1916, he was born in Khangarh, district Muzaffargarh. He belonged to a traditional, conservative aristocratic family. Historically, Khangarh was the headquarter, and it was the year 1850 when headquarters was shifted to Muzaffargarh. (Pakistan, 1961) In the 18th century, his great grandfather Abdul Samad Khan migrated from Afghanistan and initially settled in Multan but later moved to Khangarh. He remained the ruler of Multan with the support of relative Nawab Muzaffar. (Jafri, 1993) Allah Dad Khan, the grandfather of Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, was a prominent and influential figure in Muzaffargarh and responsible of establishing political power in the town. Sikhs were ruling Punjab, and Alla Dad Khan was politically shrewd enough to assess the situation and supported the British. As a result, he gained more political power and supported the British in countering Sikhs. (Anjum, 1992)
The Khans of Muzaffargarh supported the British because the Sikh rule was a significant threat to their political power and further, there were Muslim-Sikh tensions in Punjab. Further, by 1818 Nawab Muzaffar Khan, the governor of Multan and the close relative of Allah Dad Khan, was dethroned in the Sikh rule. So, it was more likely to become a family hazard, and supporting the British was the best way out. (Jafri, 1993) Thus, on one side, it served the British interest, on the other Khan's political power was strengthened. In the 1857 war, like the other landed aristocrats in Punjab, Khan's family also reinforced the British. In return, the British gave the title of “Khan Sahib” to Allah Dad Khan, and the status of an honorary judge was awarded. Allah Dad Khan passed away in 1885, and his son Saif Ullah Khan became his successor. Saif Ullah Khan continued his father's legacy by remaining loyal to the British. The British Raj continued the annual prize of 175 rupees for a lifetime. He was awarded the title Nawab in 1910 by the British. (Jafri, 1993)

Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan’s Take off in Politics

Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan was the fifth son of Saif Ullah Khan from his youngest wife. (Khakwani, 2004.) He got his education from Aitchison College, Lahore, 1928-1933, and did Senior Cambridge. (Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan: A true democrat, 2015) It was 1927 when Unionist Party appeared on the political map of Punjab. Unionist Party was loyal to the British and dominated by the landed aristocracy of Punjab. Khan’s ancestors were not an exception. They were part of the Unionist Party and remained active in party activities. Nasrullah Khan was not attracted to the politics of the Unionist Party and he was brave enough to take such a bold decision. Therefore, in 1933 he began his political career as a student. Instead of joining the Unionist party, he preferred to join Majlis-I-Ihhrar Islam, which was a Muslim revolutionary party that Syed Ata Ullah Shah Bukhari headed. (Azad, 2003) Majlis-I-Ihhrar Islam was the party of common Muslims, based on the ideology of Muslim Nationalism, focusing on the religo-social issues of Muslims. Furthermore, Majlis-I-Ihhrar Islam has a firm stance against the British Raj. Due to his clarity and commitment to Majlis-I-Ihhrar Islam, Nasrullah Khan became the general secretary of the party in 1946. (Awan, 2010) The question arises opposition with whom? Basically, he raised his voice against the British and the status quo.

Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan’s Post Partition Politics

On 14th August 1947, a new state emerged on the map of the earth. After the death of the founding father (Jinnah) of Pakistan, there was a massive leadership crisis. Although the country was free, the system was stuck under the legacy of British imperialism. After the creation of Pakistan, the politics of Majlis-I-Ihhrar Islam had ended because they opposed the stance of the Muslim League. Moreover, nothing was left for Majlis-I-Ihhrar Islam in real politics. So, according to the circumstances, they reformulated their strategy and began to work as a religious party. Nasrullah Khan began his political activities at the forum of the Muslim League. (Punjab, 2022) In 1951, provincial elections were held, and he successfully won from the constituency of Khangarh. (Punjab, 2022) Later on, Muslim League imposed restrictions on civil liberties. Consequently, he criticized this policy and resigned from Muslim League. (Dailytimes, 2003.) Islam and democracy were the essence of Khan’s political ideology. When Mumtaz Dultana announced agricultural reforms in 1951, he opposed these reforms (Waseem, 1987) and joined hands with Pir Nau Baahar Shah and formed Anjuman-e-Tahafaz Haqkuk Zamidarian. (Gohar, 2010)
In 1953, Tehreek-e-Khatme Nabuwwat was at its peak. Khan, as a worker, fully participated in this movement. (Gohar, 2010) When the first constituent assembly was dissolved, he raised his voice to protect the constitution for the sake of democracy. Although, he was not a member of the constituent assembly.

General Ayub’s Regime and Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan’s Role in Opposition

i) Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan and National Democratic Front (NDF)

In 1958 first Martial law was imposed. To some extent, it is right that the political government had failed to deliver. Consequently, civil and military bureaucracy filled that political space. The majority of the masses welcomed martial law, and the political parties were banned. In 1962, Political parties act was introduced. At that time, almost all the political parties of that time opposed the political apparatus given by Ayub Khan. (Muhammad Rafique Afzal, 2000) At the initial stage, there was a difference of opinion between the parties, whether to reject or partially accept the political apparatus. Later, the opposition agreed that substantial amendments to the new political apparatus would be acceptable.

It was the beginning of a new phase in the political life of Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan. At that time, he was a member of the Awami League (AL), headed by Hussain Shaheed Suharwardy. In May 1962, elections were held, and Khan won the seat in the national assembly. (Gohar, 2010) Later on, on June 6th, martial law was lifted. After that, political parties started working on organizing and mobilizing the masses. On August 19th, Suharwardy was released from jail. (Muhammad Rafique Afzal, 2000) The politicians from East and West Pakistan were not on the same page. Suharwardy started his efforts to bridge the gulf between the political leaders. Suharwardy and Nawabzada’s efforts proved fruitful; thirty-five leaders, including nineteen from East Pakistan, were gathered in Lahore in September. This meeting was held at the residences of Molana Maudadi and Mahmod Ali Qasuri.

Basically, two major issues were discussed. First was the amendments in the existing Constitution, and the second was, whether the national front should be comprised of individual politicians or it must be an alliance of political parties. (Muhammad Rafique Afzal, 2000) On the first point, a consensus was made. The single-point agenda was the democratization of the Constitution. On 4th October, the announcement was made regarding the formation of NDF and fifty-five supporters. Khan had played a vital role in the formation of this alliance. (Muhammad Rafique Afzal, 2000) The primary cause of the failure of NDF was internal disunity, especially, among parties from West Pakistan. Some top leaders including Syed Maudadi, Mian Tufail Muhammad, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, Mujeeb-ur-Rehman, Mahmud Ali, Khair Bakhsh Marri, Mumtaz Dultana, Col. Abid Hussain, and Syed Aziz ul Haq badly affected the working of NDF. The other important reason was that a segment from NDF had contacts with Ayub. Later on, one segment of NDF joined the alliance of opposition parties, and the other became a separate party after the death of Suharwardy. Suharwardy left the country on 19th March 1963.

ii) Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan and formation of Combine Opposition Parties (COP)

Suharwardy died on December 5th, 1963. Rapid changes occurred in Awami League (AL), and factions were emerging in AL. Later, in March 1964, Nawabzada
Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan was elected as the party’s president. (Muhammad Rafique Afzal, 2000) Meanwhile, the presidential election was held in 1965. Nawabzada fully supported Fatima Jinnah as a presidential candidate. He was a significant figure in the formation of COP. Although Fatima Jinnah had lost the elections, Nawabzada and COP did their best for Fatima Jinnah's success.

iii) Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan and formation of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)

In 1965, India-Pakistan war occurred. After the Tashkent Declaration, Mujeeb-ur-Rehman presented his six points. Nawabzada disagreed with the six points. Moreover, the ideology of Bengali Nationalism was dominating the party. It ended up with Nawabzada’s political isolation from the party. These experiences and circumstances evolved his political approach, which led to flexibility and reconciliation. There, he focused on like-minded and formed a new faction in Awami League which included Nur-ul-Amin, Hussain Shaheed Suharwardhy and Choudhry Mohammad Ali. (Waseem, 1987) On the other side, the movement against the dictator was going on but at a low pace. Besides all the differences with Mujeeb-ur-Rehman, he joined him in PDM formation. Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan was elected as president of PDM. (Muhammad Rafique Afzal, 2000) PDM presented their eight-point agenda under the leadership of Nawabzada. In 1968, PDM began to gain some momentum in public, but under the maintenance of the public order ordinance, the movement was sabotaged. (Muhammad Rafique Afzal, 2000) Consequently, PAD was dissolved.

iv) Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan and formation of Direct-Action Committee (DAC)

Basically, PAD was transformed into eight party alliances DAC. Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan became the convenor of DAC. (Afzal, 2002) DAC presented their eight-point agenda. DAC decided to boycott the upcoming elections until their demands were fulfilled. Student Action Committee (SAC) was a radical organization. Both DAC and SAC announced a country-wide strike on 24th January. (Afzal, 2002) The political temperature of the country was rising day by day. Some violent activities occurred during the strike and a curfew was imposed. Now the situation was slipping out of the hands of the government. So, on February 6th, General Ayub invited Nawabzada Nasrullah to Round Table Conference (RTC), which was to be held on February 17th. Ayub gave him a full mandate to invite all the stakeholders. DAC observed the strike on February 14th and demonstrated it as the “people solidarity in support of democracy”. (Afzal, 2002) After that, DAC accepted the invitation of RTC. At last, the delayed RTC was held on 26th February, and Nawabzada presented two points. First, a federal parliamentary form of government, and the second was direct elections. (Afzal, 2002) Other leaders raised their point of view. Unfortunately, a deadlock was created; the consensus was not built among the political leadership. After all the mussiness, Nawabzada announced the dissolution of DAC. (Afzal, 2002)

Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP)

Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP) was established in June 1969. Basically, PDP was a merger of four political parties: Awami League (AL Nasrullah group), National Democratic Front (NDF), Nizam-I Islam Party (NIP) and The Justice Party.
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(Mushtaq, 2015) The prominent political leaders were Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan (AL), Nur-ul-Ameen (NDF), Chaudhry Muhammad Ali (NIP) and Air Marshal (Rtd.) Asghar Khan. The presence of significant political figures in the party became one of the important factors that led to internal rifts and rivalries within the party. It has ultimately damaged the party. Later on, it was also reflected in the performance of the party. PDP could not perform well in the elections and failed to become a mainstream political party. Besides all that, Nawabzada remained in this party till his death. Nawabzada participated in the elections of 1970 but could not win even a single seat. The Pakistan Peoples Party’s (PPP) Ghulam Mustafa Khar defeated him on one seat. When Zia ul Haq imposed martial law, PDP initially became part of Zia’s cabinet but soon left it and became part of MRD.

Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan’s Politics during 1970s and 1980s

Formation of Pakistan National Alliance (PNA)

In Bhutto’s government, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan remained a strong critic of his policies. So, he naturally tilted towards anti-Bhutto politics. In politics, timing is crucial therefore, under the leadership of Pir Pagara, Nawabzada was able to form PNA to challenge Bhutto’s Government. (Azad, 2003) PNA became a popular movement. The agitation began throughout the country. Political chaos and lawlessness were at their peak. Ultimately, all these incidents paved the way for military rule, so General Zia-ul-Haq imposed martial law.

Formation of Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD)

During the initial phase of Zia’s regime, Nawabzada’s PDP joined him, but he soon realized the situation and distanced himself from the government. Nawabzada initiated dialogue with PPP leadership. He was quite successful at it. In 1980, he began to mobilize and organize all the democratic forces to join hands against the tyrannical dictator. Now that the first step of success had been achieved, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) was finally launched. The year 1983 was the turning point in this movement. MRD announced the civil disobedience movement to challenge the military rule. (Azad, 2003) The government dealt with an iron hand to counter this movement. During the agitation and protests by MRD Nawabzada got arrested and got imprisonment. (Mushtaq, 2015) Now it was the beginning of a new wave of state terrorism in which homicides and imprisonments were becoming the norm of the time. Many leaders, including Nawabzada, were also house arrested for a long time. In short, it was a reign of terror for the opposition. General Zia ul Haq died in a plane crash. As a result, the elections were announced, and PPP decided to contest the election without discussing it with allies. In 1988 elections, Nawabzada was elected as a member of the National assembly. (Azad, 2003)

Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan’s Politics during 1990s

i) Combined Opposition (CP)

PPP came into power and Benazir Bhutto became Prime Minister of Pakistan. Nawabzada was still an influential figure in the opposition. He successfully formed an opposition alliance known as the Combined Opposition (CP). Fundamentally, CP was a parliamentary alliance whose purpose was to give tough times to the PPP government. Later on, a vote of no-confidence motion was moved against Benazir
Bhutto by the opponents to sabotage Benazir’s government (Yousafzai, 1989) but it was unsuccessful. Now it was the establishment’s turn; President Ghulam Ishaq Khan dismissed the PPP government on corruption charges.

ii) Islami Jamhori Itihad (IJI)

Later on, Elections were announced. In order to curtail PPP, Islami Jamhori Itihad (IJI) was formed. IJI was an opposition cum electoral alliance. IJI was the brainchild of military authority. The establishment provided massive funds and resources to IJI leadership. It was the only opposition alliance in Pakistan's political history that Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan did not join. Nawabzada was a dignified politician and always remained away from military-funded alliances.

In 1990s elections were held, and Nawaz Sharif came into power. Once again, Nawabzada chose the side of the opposition. He, with PPP, formed APC against the Nawaz' government. In the second term of Benazir Bhutto, he became the chairman of the National Kashmir Committee. (Pakistan G. o., 2022) It was the only time in his political career that he became a part of the government. Later on, President Farooq Leghari dismissed the government. The next elections were held, and the second term of Nawaz Sharif started. Nawabzada still chose to remain in opposition.

Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD)

On October 12th, 1999, Pervez Musharraf declared martial law in the country. The most prominent person to challenge Musharraf's dictatorial rule was Nawabzada Nasrullah. He again became very active in forming an alliance to challenge the military rule. The formation of the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD) was the last and most significant achievement of Khan. (Azad, 2003) This political alliance's two main political parties were PPP and PML N. ARD was purely an anti-martial law alliance. (Lust for Power, 2001) In 2002, General Musharraf introduced LFO (Legal Framework Order) 2002. ARD was against it because it would give legal cover to General Musharraf to become President. (Mushtaq, 2015)

The health of Khan was deteriorating but he often used to visit Saudi Arabia and London (Dailytimes, 2003.) to meet Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto. Nawabzada gave his last interview before his death and he said: "It's like a painting dictatorship as democracy. If a cock crows at midnight it does not mean it is morning". (Azad, 2003) Nawabzada carried his mission till his death bed. On September 27, 2003 he passed away at the age of 85.
Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan’s participation in Electoral Politics:

Table: 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elections</th>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Win/Lose</th>
<th>Party Affiliation</th>
<th>Votes secured</th>
<th>Total Polled Votes</th>
<th>Votes secured by Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Punjab Assembly (Muzaffargarh-VI)</td>
<td>Win</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>NW-58 (Muzaffargarh-I)</td>
<td>Win</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>NW-91 Muzaffargarh-II</td>
<td>Lose</td>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>32,819</td>
<td>149,309</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>NW-92 Muzaffargarh-III</td>
<td>Lose</td>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>46,407</td>
<td>160,613</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>NA-128 Muzaffargarh-II</td>
<td>Win</td>
<td>PNA</td>
<td>74006</td>
<td>121933</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Boycotted the elections</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>NA-136 Muzaffargarh-II</td>
<td>Win</td>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>49245</td>
<td>93572</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>NA-136 Muzaffargarh-II</td>
<td>Lose</td>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>46638</td>
<td>109528</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>NA-137 Muzaffargarh-III</td>
<td>Lose</td>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>4100</td>
<td>100349</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>NA-136 Muzaffargarh-II</td>
<td>Win</td>
<td>NDA</td>
<td>62264</td>
<td>112,404</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>NA-136 Muzaffargarh-II</td>
<td>Lose</td>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>46096</td>
<td>109016</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Analysis of Nawabzada’s Electoral Performance

Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan in his entire political career remained active in electoral politics. He became a member of Punjab Assembly in 1951. In 1960s he started contesting elections at national assembly level from his home town Muzaffargarh. In electoral Politics of National Assembly, he took part in 7 general elections (1962, 1970, 1977, 1988, 1990, 1993, 1997). Out of 7 general elections he won 4 times (1962, 1977, 1988 and 1993). He contested two elections in political alliance. In 1977, he contested on the ticket of PNA (Pakistan National Alliance) and in 1993, he fought on the ticket of NDA (National Democratic Alliance) and in rest of the elections he contested from his own party (PDP). Due to his active participation in National politics his electoral politics had been affected. The nature of tactics and dynamics of an electoral constituency were very complex and because of his enormous commitment at National level politics he was unable to give ample time to his constituency. It was one of the important causes behind his defeat in 3 general elections.
Response of different Political leaders on the demise of Nawabzada Nasurallah Khan

Benazir Bhutto said: “The sincerity of purpose, conviction in his cause and the tenacity with which he fought for it through several decades right until he breathed his last has inspired many and earned him the gratitude of the nation”. (Nawabzada death termed as loss to democratic forces, 2003)

“The best tribute we can pay to the memory of the late Nawab Sahib is to pursue his mission of democracy to which he had dedicated his life”. (Nawabzada death termed as loss to democratic forces, 2003)


Nawaz Sharif said: "He was a man of principle. Even his opponents respected him and his adherence to principle”. (Khangarh mourns for Nasrullah, 2003)

Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri said: "The vacuum created due to his death cannot be filled as he was the only politician who always tried to unite the opposition parties at one platform. He always provided guidelines to the ruling party”. (Khangarh mourns for Nasrullah, 2003)

Conclusion

In the parliamentary form of government, the opposition plays an essential role in the functioning of government and protecting public interest. An effective opposition keeps a strict check and balance on the government's policies for the better quality of democracy and the presence of Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan in opposition was an excellent example of it. Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan was a multi-dimensional personality. Nawabzada was a well-learned and literary person. He was a unique amalgamation of traditionalism and modernism, A Traditionalist in his outlook; cap, achkan, hokka and politics. A modernist through his education (Awan, 2010) and believed in democracy and always struggled for it. The less known side of Nawabzada was that he was a poet and he wrote two volumes of poetry books as well. (Punjab, 2022) He used to gift mangoes to his friends, politicians and journalists. Nawabzada set the trend of a unique kind of opposition's politics. Nawabzada's political career was expanded over a half-century, but he was a very simple and down-to-earth person in his personal life. He used to live in a one-room flat on the railway road in Lahore till the time of his death. Political workers considered this one-room flat as an institute to learn the art of politics. The demise of Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan was a great setback for democracy and democratic forces. He did not focus on his political party, PDP, during his entire political career. In a nutshell, his negotiation skills, blended with patience and diligence, were his strength, and he headed many opposition alliances. Further, the quality to convince the ideologically different political parties on the same political agenda in the form of an alliance makes him unique. He is remembered as the father of democracy in Pakistan. Besides all these things, critics thought that in martial law government, Nawabzada struggled for democratic government and during democratic government, he struggled for martial law.
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References


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