

## 1937 ELECTIONS: ASSESSING THE ROLE OF QAYYUM KHAN MINISTRY IN NWFP

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### ABSTRACT

*This research paper is an attempt to know about the political history of NWFP with special reference to 1937 elections. The NWFP now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa separated from Punjab province in 1901 by George Nathaniel Curzon. NWFP was kept deprived of constitutional reforms till 1932 and was known as Sarzamen-e- Bay Ayin (the land without constitution) for a long time. This research paper will determine the Muslim League pathetic performance in 1937 elections. Muslim League was deliberately ignored by the congress while making the coalition ministry after 1937 elections. Abdul Qayyum khan contributed a lot for NWFP and its people as minister of central legislative council and chief minister of NWFP.*

**Key Words:** North West Frontier Province, Elections, Congress, Muslim League.

### The Political history of NWFP

The North West Frontier Province was formed by lord Curzon in 1901 when it was separated from Punjab province (Ahmad,1992, p.1). In 1901, it was a Chief Commissioner Province but later on in 1932 its status was raised and was made a Governor Province (Ahmad,2011, p.119). In 1849, the British taken NWFP from Sikh after winning the Anglo- Sikh war and worked under the Punjab administration (Ahmad,1992, p.3). The British occupied the plain areas of NWFP as British feared of France attack via Afghanistan (Ahmad,2011, p.118). When the NWFP was established, due to its strategic location and internal insecurity it was not benefitted by the British representative institutions (Barton,1932, p.17).

Local government elections were held in India in 1884. In 1892 these members to elect the provincial legislative members, who in turn elected the central legislative members. The elected representatives were increased in government of India act 1909 and 1919. The NWFP status was raised to Governor's province by Ramsay MacDonald in 1932 (Ahmad,2007, p.32). The British Indian government wanted to setup a rigid military regime in NWFP after its creation. Previously NWFP was called powder magazine and the installation of reforms in NWFP will definitely explode the province (Qayyum,1945, p.26).

Sir Ralph Griffith was made the first governor of NWFP in 1932. Forty (40) members legislative council was made. Public attitude was changed with the introduction of political reforms in NWFP (Ahmad, 2011, p.120-121).

### The Legislative Council Elections in 1932

The red shirts who got their selves affiliated with congress in august 1931 and the conservative Abdul Qayum was appointed the first Muslim minister of the transferred department (Qayyum, p.26).

In 1932 legislative election the voting rate was very high due to the insertion of reforms in NWFP (Report of legislative council elections in the NWFP,1932, p.2-4). The minority voters were best clarified by the race in Peshawar, the Provincial Hindu Sabha Leader, Rai Sahib Mehr Chand Khanna received majority over C.C Gosh, the PCC President (Lahore Tribune, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1932). After meeting, the council members divided into 4 groups, Azad Party represented nationalist opinion by Malik Khuda Bakhsh, liberal party headed by 09 Khans and the progressive party was formed by the combination of 9 professionals and khans. The minority party is formed by 7 Hindus n Sikhs groups together. These parties had no ideology (Administration Report of the NWFP,1932-33. p.19). The Provincial Congress contested in the 1937 election. Bacha khan was banned in NWFP. the government

was not in favour of congress. According to the results the Congress was the biggest party in the assembly but the Governor welcomed Abdul Qayyum for ministry (Bukhari, 1991, p.121).

#### **The 1937 election and the formation of ministry in NWFP.**

Under the government of India act 1935 the provincial elections were schedule in February 1937. The contesters were the Congress Party, Hindu-Sikh Nationalist Party and the Independents. The total electorate were 179,529 people or 72.8%. (Shah,1992, p.28).

The NWFP assembly consisted of 50 seats. Muslims reserved seats were 36. Amongst these 36 seats Congress challenged 29, but won 15 seats., Congress contested 8 out of 9 general seats, but won 4 seats. Congress was more formulated and famous but the League was not. The league was not in a position to sponsor any candidate. The independent Muslims got the majority Muslims vote.

The party wise position in 1937 elections was as

Congress = Nineteen Seats.

Hindu- Sikh Nationalist = Seven Seats.

Muslim Independent Party = Two Seats.

Independent Muslims = Twenty-One Seats.

Independent Hindus= One Seat.

Congress won nineteen seats (fifteen Muslim seats + four Non-Muslim seats), but failed to had majority in the assembly (Sultana,2014, p.190-191).

#### **Distribution of Muslim rural seats.**

Congress won seven seats in Peshawar, three seats in Mardan, two seats in Hazara, one seat in Kohat, one seat in D.I.Khan and one in Bannu. Independent got two seats in Mardan, seven seats in Hazara, three seats in Kohat, three seats in D.I.Khan, three seats in Bannu and no seat in Peshawar.

Congress played very badly in the Hazara District, won only 2 Muslim urban seats out of nine. The Congress and the Hindu-Sikh Nationalist Party evenly divided the general seats. The Hindu-Sikh nationalists won all Sikh seats. So, Congress being the largest party in NWFP, did not get majority seats (Shah,1992, pp.28-29).

Congress won 4 out of 14 seats of Non-Muslims. 07 members were from the Hindu Sikh Nationalists. 01 Hindu elected as an independent candidate. Among 36 seats reserved for the Muslims, 23 members who got elected were not the congress man. The reason was that majority Muslims in NWFP have changed their mind and contested as independents. (Sultana,2014, p.191). Four Non- Muslims and all the Muslim members supported Abdul Qayyum Khan so with help of twenty seven Qayyum established united Muslim Nationalist Party (Talbot,1990,p.10). April 15<sup>th</sup> 1937, the NWFP Governor commence the assembly. The governor obliged the discipline maintained during election and political awareness of the NWFP people. All the members along with speaker Malik Khuda Bakhsh of the first NWFP assembly were welcomed. A coalition ministry was installed in NWFP with Abdul Qayyum Khan having no majority in the assembly. The Congress wanted to institute his government in NWFP and played their card with help of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Dr. Rajinder Prasad who got the backing of six Congress dissolve the Qayyum ministry by 27 votes to 22, on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1937 (Sabir, p.944).

The man who served the province as first political agent, provincial minister and Chief Minister in 1937 (Islam,2010, p.1). In 1922 the first chosen member of central legislative assembly from NWFP. He along with Jinnah described the position of NWFP in the Round Table Conference in London 1930-32 and after the extension of constitutional reform to NWFP he was made the Transferred Subjects minister (Ahmad,2011, p.205). The legislative council under Qayyum did productive work, in 11 sessions 36 resolution were carried (Islam,2010, p.1). All the ordinances issued by the government were unified into a bill called Public Tranquility Bill and was passed on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1932 (*NWFP Legislative Assembly Debates, March 1924, Vol.IV, part III, pp.1847-1752*). United Muslim Nationalist Party act as a plate form for Sahibzada. In the assembly the party position emerged as United Muslim Nationalist 21 seats, congress 19 seats, Hindu-Sikh Nationalist Party 7 seats, Independent Party 2 seats and Independent Hindus 1 (*Legislative Assembly Debates,1926, VOI. VIII. p.641*).

Sir Sahibzada ministry dissolved soon. Dr. Khan Sahib passed a vote of no confidence against him in the NWFP assembly on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1937. Sahibzada services in the education sector cannot be

ignored and got the title of "Sir Sayed of NWFP". He along with Rose Keppel establishment Islamia College Peshawar (Shakeel, p.206).

Sir Sahibzada ministry was installed in NWFP because firstly congress did not get majority members in the assembly, secondly congress demanded for the transfer of power in the whole of India, thirdly till 1937 Muslim league was not that much active to win the elections (Riaz,2008, p.56).

In the Red-Letter Day celebrated by the Congress, the congress flag was upraised at all the meetings. Against the new constitution of government of India act 1935 the country wise "Hartal" was observed (Indian Annual Register,1937, Vol.I. p.168).

Quaid-e- Azam challenged Nehru in a press statement published in the newspaper on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1937. Jinnah actually wanted to safe guard the rights of minorities. He appealed to "*better minded Hindus please think before it is too late*". (The Times of India,30<sup>th</sup> April,1937).

#### **Functioning of Qayyum's Ministry in NWFP**

Muslim league tried its best to form provincial election boards. Conflicts arose among the local Muslim provincial leaders. Muslim league failed to do so, instead Muslims divided into local groups. Which greatly affected the league popularity. Abdul Qayyum tried his best to strengthen the Muslims of NWFP under the umbrella of Muslim League. The Muslim candidates of NWFP contested elections independently in distinct local Muslim groups. The 23 elected Independents Muslim members formed three parties.

1. Progressive Party.
2. Hazara Democratic Party.
3. Azad Party.

These parties formed coalition government in NWFP under Abdul Qayyum khan (Kishwar, 2014, p.192).

An agreement was signed by the coalition ministry had the following points.

1. Hindi Gurmukhi Circular to be withdraw.
2. A member of the Hindu Sikh Nationalist Party be included in the ministry.
3. A member of the Hindu Sikh nationalist party to be appointed as parliamentary secretary.
4. No changes in the donations of educational institutions.
5. 25% scholarships and 25% of admission to schools /colleges should be reserved for Hindus and Sikhs in and outside the province.
6. 25% jobs for Hindus and Sikhs in Public services.
7. No legislation should be introduced in the legislature without the approval of the  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the members representing that community which adversely affect any community (fakhrul, 2010, p.3).
8. 3 members Ministry was installed in NWFP on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1937 with Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum Khan as Chief Minister, Sadullah Khan and Rai bahadur mehr chand khanna as Ministers (Indian Annual Register 1937, Vol. I, p.166).

On 14 April 1937, the NWFP Assembly held its first meeting, addressed by George Cunningham. The congress members were absent. Out of the total 50 members 16 were from UMN Party. 03 independents and 4 from democratic party. The nineteen members opposition is drive by Khan Sahib (Indian Annual Register 1937, Vol.I, p.167).

April and May 1937 was such a disturbed period in tribal areas of NWFP (Times of India,8<sup>th</sup> May,1937). June July was also reported as worse situation in Waziristan (Times of India, 7<sup>th</sup>, July 1937). Ghaffar Khan when released from jail in August 1937 and was trying to dissolve Qayyum government and install Congress ministry in NWFP (Times of India, 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1937). Finally, in September 1937 congress got the support to install their ministry in NWFP (Waqar,1992, p.29).

The Qayyum's government took some important steps like fund of Rs/- 24 lac was proved by Qayyum Ministry to the Malakand Thermal Power Project. Specially for Islamia College Peshawar the educational facilities were increased. Government training school and A Thermal Power School in Peshawar and Mardan were established to provide jobs for the common man and some societies were established in the rural and urban areas for the promotion of industries and agriculture (Sultana,

p.195). Ban on political activities and political prisoners in the province specially Bacha Khan was removed in the Qayyum ministry (Indian Annual Register, 1937, vol-II, p.187).

#### **No- Confidence motion against the Qayyum Ministry.**

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad a congress member, bribed the Hazara Party and Azad Party member to switchover to Dr. Khan Sahib (Sultana, p.195). Khan Sahib moved no-confidence motion by 27 to 22 votes against Abdul Qayyum Khan on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1937 (NWFP Legislative Assembly Debates, 1938, p.98).

As a result, Abdul Qayyum's Ministry resigned. Assembly session was adjourned to September 17<sup>th</sup>. The Governor invited Dr. Khan Sahib to form the Ministry in NWFP. The position of both the leaders are changed Khan Sahib the Chief Minister and Abdul Qayyum the Opposition leader (Indian Annual Register, 1937, pp.277-278). Sir Qayyum felt it too much and fell ill. He departed to his home town for rest. He became seriously ill and could not recover, finally died on 4 December 1937 (Sultana, p.196).

#### **Services of Abdul Qayyum Khan**

Abdul Qayyum Khan contributed a lot for the development of NWFP. He raised NWFP to the status of a province and also worked for the awareness of the Muslims of NWFP. It was he who cooperated Sir Mortimer Durand while demarcating the boundary between India and Afghanistan in 1893 (Samad, p.32).

Islamia College, Peshawar was established by Abdul Qayyum and the foundation stone was laid by Haji Sahib Turangzai on 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1913. Sahibzada introduced reforms in NWFP in the Round Table conferences in London 1930- 31. He was made the Senior Minister of the Governor's first cabinet of NWFP and remained there till 1937 when he was elected as NWFP Legislative Assembly member and then became the Chief Minister of NWFP (Kishwar, p.197).

#### **University in NWFP**

On 1<sup>st</sup> March 1936, in the frontier legislative council a non-official resolution was passed in which a University was demanded for NWFP which benefitted both Frontier and FATA. The number of educated Muslims were increased with the establishment of Islamia College (Shafi, p.937).

#### **Malakand Hydro Electric Scheme**

Abdul Qayyum Khan started the Malakand Hydro Electric Project, completed in Dr. Khan Sahib's period. It was inaugurated by viceroy Lord Linlithgow in 1938 (Shafi, p.945).

#### **Shariat Act**

The NWFP first assembly passed the Shariat Act. It was Sir Sahibzada who raised the Shariat act in the assembly but it was passed during Dr. Khan Sahib's ministry. The act gave right of hereditary, women's right over hereditary land, will, Hiba issues related to engagement, marriage, and divorce. Shariat Act will be considered if the other party is Muslim (Shafi, p.946).

In the health department he started a dispensary in Thall. Importance was given to the agriculture sector and talked about the importance of dairy and farming and in this regard, trainings were started at Islamia College. He debated the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat Application Bill) in the council. He served for a very short time that is six months as a chief minister which was not such a long time to make some legislation (Hassan, personal communication, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016).

Sir Qayyum was a seasoned politician and highly honored in the NWFP. He did a lot for NWFP. One of the founders of the Islamia College, Peshawar. As a cabinet minister from 1932-1936 he took steps for the growth of the Islamia College, Peshawar, and that's why he came to be known as Sir Sayed of Sarhad (Khan, 1980, p.52).

### **CONCLUSION**

This research paper is important as it represented a clear image of the 1937 election and the legislation in Abdul Qayyum's era. In modern democratic states, law making is the work of legislative bodies. The representatives make laws for the betterment of the people. The legislative work is mostly done by the government. To conclude this paper, we can say that Qayyum in NWFP did achieve a number of things to his credit but got very little time to do legislation. The opposition gave very tough time to Sahibzada which led to the dissolution of his ministry in NWFP.

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