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The Legacy of Liaquat Ali Khan: Balancing National and Foreign Affairs

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Abstract

Liaquat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan, encountered significant obstacles in establishing the groundwork for a new nation. His political trajectory was characterized by ethnic strife, language disputes, economic volatility, Constitutional obstacles and foreign policy issues while maneuvering through political intrigues intended to oust him. This article analyzes Khan's attitude towards these difficulties, focusing on his leadership tactics and their effects on these formative years. The article elucidates his legacy as a statesman by examining the difficulties, highlighting his efforts to stabilize a precarious state under significant pressures. This study attempts to answer, in what manner did Liaquat Ali Khan confront the issues of ethnicity, language conflicts, economic instability, constitutional advancement, and foreign relations while navigating political intrigues, and what insights can be gleaned from his leadership for contemporary governance? A qualitative research methodology is used in this article using both primary and secondary sources. The historical documents and official correspondence furnish primary insights, whereas scholarly papers and books present critical analyses of his policies. Liaquat Ali Khan's administration illustrated the intricacies of governance in an emerging nation despite constrained resources and increasing opposition. He implemented programs focused on national integration, economic stabilization, and diplomatic engagement, while his endeavors for constitutional development demonstrated his dedication to institutionalized democracy. Nevertheless, political instability and his premature assassination impeded the complete actualization of his ideal. The study indicated that Khan's leadership provided significant insights into managing conflicting goals and addressing crises, highlighting the lasting importance for Pakistan.

Keywords: Liaquat Ali Khan, Political Instability, Ethnicity, Linguist Issues, Economic Instability, Constitutional Development, Foreign Affairs

Introduction

Politics in Pakistan experienced fragmentation and policies of the country were characterized with fluidity during the period from the death of Jinnah to the killing of Liaquat Ali Khan. Jinnah passed away due to tuberculosis and lung cancer as well as a result of negligence from his subordinates (Kapur, 1991). Liaquat Ali Khan was Prime Minister and he did not ascend to the position of Governor-General so Khawaja Nazim-ud-Din, hailing from East Pakistan, assumed the position of Governor-General.

Nazim-ud-Din's appointment as successor of Jinnah spawned the struggle between the center and the provinces, and between the provinces of Western Pakistan and East Bengal. He was the total reverse of Jinnah, in temperament, in bearing, in experience, in oratory, in all categories where by personalities, notably leaders, are judged (Ziring, 1999). The political leadership lacked the administrative experience and dependent upon the bureaucracy to run the affairs of the state. The political role of bureaucracy became wider due to the flaws of political leadership.

Jinnah's three prominent roles; Governor-General, President of the Muslim League, and President of the Constituent Assembly (Nyrop, 1984) were divided into three categories, i.e. Nazim-ud-Din became Governor-General, Chaudhary Khaliq-uz-Zaman assumed the presidency of the Muslim League while Molvi Tamiz-ud-Din became President of the Constituent Assembly. Liaquat Ali Khan was similar to Jinnah in possession of legal background but he did not possess the same level of political influence as Jinnah. During this period, political authority in Pakistan became fragmented due to personal ambition, intrigue, and significant disagreements regarding policy objectives and methods that hindered the progress of democracy in Pakistan.

Pakistan faced significant challenges due to political instability and its primary cause was regionalism, which had impacted the formation of Governments. The initial decade of Pakistan was crucial for examining the origins, entrenched nature, and detrimental impact of the said problem on political stability. Pakistan adopted the British Parliamentary

system, but the presence of inherent faults and colonial traditions prevented the system from thriving well in the country.

In the years 1948-1951, when single party, Muslim League, was in power, East Pakistanis consistently expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that they were not given adequate representation. The Cabinet of Liaquat Ali Khan was chosen by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, consisting of Fazlur Rehman, I.I. Chundrigar, and Jogandar Nath Mandal from Bengal, Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Malik Ghulam Muhammad, Zafar Ullah Khan, and Feroz Khan Noon from Punjab, Abdul Sattar Pirzada from Sindh, and Sardar Abdul Rab Nishtar from NWFP (Afzal, 2001). Jinnah framed a Cabinet carefully, consisting of various regional interests and, under strong leadership, was able to function effectively as a cohesive unit (Callard, 1956). Subsequently, some new members were added, such as Khawaja Shahbuddin and A.M. Malik from East Bengal, Mushtaq Ahmad Gurmani and Chaudhry Nazir Ahmad from Punjab, and Sardar Bahadur Khan from NWFP (Kiran, 2020).

The cabinet of Liaquat Ali Khan was distinctly spelt into two factions, one led by Minister of Industries Fazlur Rahman and other led by Malik Ghulam Muhammad, who held the position of Finance Minister. Fazlur Rahman headed Bengali faction whereas Ghulam Muhammad led the Punjabi faction and both held divergent views (Afzal, 2001). These two leaders settled their issues and presented a negotiated settlement for formal approval (McGrath, 1996) but did not have agreement on devaluation of currency, and it became evident that there was a conflict between these two individuals (Kiran, 2020). Fazlur Rehman stressed in his letters to Prime Minister, to promptly make a decision on devaluation without unnecessary delay. He expressed that the prolonged uncertainty poses a significant threat to the achievement of our non-devaluation policy (NDC, 1949). He emphasized the importance of prioritizing the decision-making about Ghulam Muhammad and this decision ultimately favored Fazlur Rehman, which led an escalation of animosity between the two ministers (McGrath, 1960).

Ghulam Muhammad occasionally intervened in the affairs of other ministries even Shahab-ud-Din, a member of Fazlur Rehman's group, opposed Ghulam Muhammad's action. Shahab ud din expressed his view to Prime Minister that Ghulam Muhammad should be prohibited from meddling in the business of the Interior Ministry. He added that the management of Karachi was under the authority of the Interior Ministry, and the

Finance Minister should not involve in it (NDC, From Interior Minister Khawaja Shahab ud din to Prime Minister, 1949).

Liaquat Ali Khan's relationship with Cabinet members underwent a transformation following Quaid's demise. Jinnah and Liaquat's authority was consistently willing to heed Quaid's recommendations. However, after Jinnah's death, Malik Ghulam Muhammad and Zafar Ali Khan believed themselves to be more intelligent than Liaquat, were unwilling to comply with his directives. Liaquat established the concept of voting to resolve unresolved matters. However, this behavior demonstrated his inadequate command over the Cabinet so ministers began forming their own factions within the Assembly (Ahmed, 1963).

Rise of Ethnicity

Liaquat Ali Khan already in office as Prime Minister assumed power through an established constitutional process. This was perhaps the only occasion in the history of Pakistan when succession in leadership was conducted under recognized norms (Marker, 2021). In Liaquat Ali Khan's cabinet, there were two prominent groups; Bengali school of thought and Punjabi group. There was a basic clash among both groups over the pro American foreign policy. Liaquat Ali Khan did not possess any electoral boundary in the new country. He was a migrant. He strengthened the central government to control the provincial affairs (Nizami, 2006) that made the provinces weaker. Punjabi-Mahajir conflict also erupted vigorously. Liaquat Ali Khan, long in the shadow of Quaid-e-Azam, was eager to assert his leadership and he did not want a head of the state that could interfere with his style of management (Nizami, 2006). Even he did not welcomed criticism from opposition upon the policies of Muslim League. Prime minister once stated that "do not oppose the league... if u destroy the league, you will destroy Pakistan" (Callard, 2011). Being a Prime Minister and President of Muslim League, he encouraged the league to be seen as nothing more than a hand maiden of the government (McGrath, 1996).

The resistance faced by government was due to the ethnic makeup of the military-bureaucratic aristocracy as it did not accurately represent several ethnicities. The centralization process was marginalized with those who were not fully represented in its

hierarchy. The Punjabis and *Muhajirs* (Migrants) were the major groups that were most influential, both ethnically and politically, in Liaquat's administration. The government felt an urgent need for centralization because a number of competitors of Muslim League were increased at the national level. This increase was a threat to Muslim League and their government as it undermined the credibility of party by promoting populist alternatives.

The Communist Party administered from Calcutta was predominantly controlled by Hindus and its primary influence was observed among the tribal communities residing along the borders of Assam, the scheduled castes of Khulna, and among organized laborers and students in Dacca and Chittagong. The Party had significant success when they had chosen to collaborate with the Awami Muslim League about the language matter. This tactic led the establishment of front organizations such as the Democratic Youth League, the Progressive Writers' Association, the East Pakistan Students Federation, and the Peace Committee. The Youth League, under the leadership of Mahmud Ali and Oli Ahad, was most active with strong presence among the students and instructors of Dacca University, who were at the forefront of the language and anti-BPC campaign (National Archives, 1950).

Language Based Politics

There was need to develop a curriculum for each topic based on 'Islamic philosophy' and Urdu writers authored books for uniformity across Pakistan. There was also need of creating a comprehensive national history as a compendium based on Islamic history and civilization and the significant contributions made by Muslims to the sub-continent (Ankit, 2023). He thought that the responsibility to cultivate 'patriotic individuals unaffected by narrow regionalism or Hindu influence in East Bengal' (National Documentation Wing, 1949). The post-partition language tensions in Bangladesh were clearly demonstrated by the All-Bengal Urdu Association and East Pakistan Renaissance Society who shed light on the fate of the 'Pak-Bangla' culture (Haroon-or-Rashid, 2003). Rahman made necessary for all employees of Government to possess proficiency in Urdu, and asked to establish a translation bureau dedicated to technical and scientific terminology as the Hindus were strongly attached to the Bengali language and Sanskrit, which were the main source of resistance (Ankit, 2023).

Interior Minister Khwaja Shahabuddin also emphasized the significance of the language movement to the Prime Minister that was in reality was due to lack of coverage given to him in Dhaka's major newspapers even *Dawn* newspaper only added six lines about first meeting of the Legislative Assembly in Dacca (National Documentation Wing, PMS, File No. 3 (5)-PMS/48, Shahabuddin to Khan, 1948). Rahman observed that the establishment of a grants committee was necessary while Finance Ministry was so conservative in this term. He intended to establish historical committee, adult education centers in East Bengal with committees focused on curriculum, writing systems, and technical education. He determined that central government would provide free elementary education, designating Urdu as the official language and establishing centers for translation and teacher training (Ankit, 2023).

Attempt to Raise Economic Unrest

In the fiscal year of 1949-50, he requested to Prime Minister to establish teacher training institutions, a university science college, a polytechnic, and a high school in Karachi and asked for grants for different universities. He played a significant role to refrain government from devaluing the currency and he crucially contributed as the Commerce Minister and affected on Liaquat Ali Khan's decisions. Despite facing difficulties, jute production, cotton market, wool market effectively worked and exported material significantly.

Fazal-ur-Rahman believed that separation of the currency was necessary between India and Pakistan to acquire full and formal exchange control. He added that Government of Pakistan should postpone the IMF membership application until the issue with India is resolved (National Documentation Wing, PMS, File No. 3 (3)-PMS/49, Rahman to Khan, 1949). These events were occurred during 1950-51 and he was unwavering in his support for not devaluing the currency, suggested development projects to mitigate the negative impact on Pakistan's shrinking economy but the Finance Ministry was reluctant. He advocated for a deficit budget to demonstrate confidence in the future and argued that the value of the Pakistani rupee should be determined by the terms of trade.

In September 1950, the rupee took different path when IMF finally accepted the Pakistani Government's latter due to achievement of a favorable trade balance in the first six

months of 1950 (Oldenburg, 2010). Fazal-ur-Rahman felt validated by this and expressed his joy, stating that exports had increased by about 15% and there was no significant pressure on imports or on overall trade balance (National Documentation Wing, PMS, File No. 3 (4)-PMS/50, Rahman to Khan, 1950). Foreign trade of the country was effectively handled by the Fazal-ur-Rehman, but the issues raised due to language were still unaddressed.

Influencing the Foreign Policy

In case of Foreign policy, Liaquat Ali Khan was becoming an orphan due to the actions of Western powers, adopted a neutral, pan-Islamic, and anti-colonial foreign policy. His aim was to garner support from Arab States as the Foreign Minister, Zafar Ullah Khan emphasized that aligning with Muslim countries was the fundamental principle of Pakistan's policy. Liaquat Ali Khan had not made any sincere effort to establish the Pakistan's credentials as a neutral power. Nazim-ud-Din ardently upheld the pan-Islamic policy of Prime Minister but no significant outcomes resulted from this change (Samad, 1991).

The Government observed a significant increase in public sentiment, especially in the Punjab region, in support of Pakistan's decision to exit from the Commonwealth. Maulana Shabbir Usmani, President of JUI launched a forceful campaign against Liaquat Ali Khan and the British to withdraw from the Commonwealth due to the belief that Islamic state may only bestow sovereignty upon Allah, rather than the King (*Sindh Observer*, 1949). Liaquat Ali Khan was perceived by the press as a subservient of the Anglo-American alliance that weakened his standing in the Punjab especially in elections 1951 (National Archives, RG 59, Box 4145, 790D.001-451, Preston to Secretary of State, 1951). Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din, Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Anis Hashmi were unwavering critics of government policy especially in international affairs. The negative views towards the West influenced by both religious and left-wing opposition were the obstacles that needed to be addressed before persuasion of any form of cooperation with Western countries.

The government's endeavor to break the deadlock with religious parties faced criticism and resulted in the fragmentation of Pakistani nationalism. The two significant issues in newly established state were still remained unresolved, i.e. the role of Islam and the

presence of regionalism. The draft of constitution faced opposition from the Ulema due to state's secular nature, and from regional factions who rejected its unitary characteristics (National Archives, Microfilm Roll 1, 845F.00/7-2648, Lewis to the Secretary of State, 1948).

Constitutional Attempts and Religio-Political Parties

Liaquat Ali Khan leveraged Islam to expand ruling and attempted to establish Pakistan as a state that would be based on Islamic ideas (*Pakistan News*, 1948). This statement was not contradictory to Jinnah's dedication to secularism as Liaquat Ali Khan concurred with the secular approach, employing the term Islam and Islamic Socialism metaphorically to characterize a society (*Weekly Pakistan News*, 1949). However, this stance garnered only a limited level of backing from the common people but the increasing expectations of the religious groups counteracted this effect.

The religious parties who had endorsed AIML for the sake of Pakistan asked to implement sharia laws. It included JUI, JUP, Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Pakistan, the Khaksars (later on known as Islam League), and JI advocated for the establishment of an Islamic State. Prime Minister's response to religious opposition had resulted in the Objective Resolution 1949, as a manifestation of Islamic principles (Government of Pakistan, 1954). However, it was simply a sham and its rules, especially those pertaining to fundamental rights, were in direct contradiction to Islamic State's ideas and the release of the Interim Report incited an enraged reaction from the Ulema. Khwaja Shahab-ud-Din and Khawajas of Ahsan Manzil supported the *Ulema's* critique that the constitution should follow the principles of Quran-o-Sunnah (Samad, 1991). Yet, the Premier was not ready to face Maulana Nadvi of Nadwat-ul-Ulema as he previously successfully reconciled the two opposing factions, headed by Mufti Shafi and Ihtisham-ul-Huq. Constituent Assembly's President Tamiz-ud-Din's unwillingness to provide a copy of report of the Board of Talimat allowed Maududi to exert control over the proceedings so he extensively written about the fundamentals of an Islamic constitution that was backed by Nadvi and others. The Prime Minister's anticipation that the *Ulema* were incapable of achieving any agreement was contradicted when twenty-two principles of Ulema came into light. They seemed to agree on Islamic State while the Constitution Sub-committee refused to include these suggestions. Liaquat was compelled to delay the Assembly's

proceedings to prevent a conflict but unfortunately he was assassinated before he could take any action (Binder, 1961).

Constitutional plans of Liaquat Ali Khan faced significant criticism from regional forces. At one hand, the Interim Report proposed the implementation of a bicameral system to give equal rights to federating units in Upper House while on the other hand failed to address several unresolved issues, including the dimensions and makeup of the Lower House due to the absence of proposals from the Franchise and Judiciary Sub-committee of the BPC. Two distinct grievances were raised, i.e. the excessive concentration of power in the central government and in the Upper Chamber, East Bengal would be marginalized and became a minority (Public Record Office London, FO371/84204, 1950).

Central Government was perplexed by the uncertain agitations and crisis caused due to the Interim Report. Liaquat Ali Khan traveled to the province to appease the overwhelming opposition to the proposed constitution but when this endeavor proved unsuccessful, he decided to defer the discussion on the BPC Report. His retreat was purely strategic instead of willingness to meet the demands of opposition. Abdul Sattar Pirzada cautioned Bengalis that the request for a majority in both chambers would encounter opposition from other regions (Samad, 1991). To avoid the controversy, the Premier advised to implement the principle of equal representation between both wings of Pakistan (Talukdar, 1987).

Maneuvers for Disposition of Liaquat

Shahab-ud-Din's followers employed Islamic and anti-Commonwealth diction in May 1949 in their endeavor to remove the Prime Minister from office when Liaquat Ali Khan was present at the Commonwealth Prime Minister Conference in London. The campaign against him was limited to a sequence of personal attacks on him and his spouse in the Urdu press of Punjab. The opposition intensified the campaign by denouncing him as pro-Commonwealth and pro-British. *Dawn* consistently published article regarding the Anglo-American alliance and hinted of seeking assistance from alternative sources (*Dawn*, 1949).

The ultimate objective was to depose Liaquat Ali Khan, which required effectively neutralizing the pro-British lobby and for the said purpose the target was to oust Sir Francis Mudie, the Governor of Punjab, and to shut down the Civil and Military Gazette. The Gazette was owned by Seth Dalmia, a Hindu tycoon, who held the distinction of being the largest English language newspaper in Lahore that staunchly supported Liaquat's pro-Commonwealth policies, as well as Mudie. Altaf Hussain, the chief editor of *Dawn* newspaper orchestrated the suspension of aforementioned newspaper with the intention of silencing it. The Cabinet ultimately resolved the dispute with Khwaja Shahab-ud-Din with the support of acting premier Ghulam Muhammed (Samad, 1991).

Without Civil and Military Gazette, Governor Mudie lacked a protective barrier to ward off his critics as the campaign was initiated by the Punjab Muslim League Working Committee and backed by *Nawa-i-Waqt*. The campaign was funded by the Nawab of Mamdot (Samad, 1991) due to Governor's refusal to collaborate with the Muslim League and he desired the reinstatement of Khizar Hayat and his Unionist supporters. The motives behind these accusations were fear and greed.

Liaquat Ali Khan was informed about this conspiracy as Altaf Hussain openly declared in front of Hugh Stephenson, Deputy High Commissioner UK, A.E. Smith, Information Officer UK, and Firoz Khan Noon that he was determined to eliminate Premier. The London Times reported more openly to expose the cabal (*London Times*, 1949). Firoz Khan Noon hastily travelled to Karachi on arrival of Liaquat Ali Khan from London and apprised him of the clandestine plot and Altaf Hussain vowed allegiance to Liaquat Ali Khan.

Political Crisis and Liaquat Ali Khan

Liaquat Ali Khan made a significant effort for the establishment of a parliamentary system in Pakistan but he faced a lot of differences. Serving as Prime Minister, the Constituent Assembly passed Objectives Resolution to frame constitution in accordance with the principles of Islam, democracy, and federalism. However, due to disagreements regarding the approach and methods, these objectives were not attained. The internal divergence revolved around the erosion of the Muslim League's influence and the organization structure of party was deficient. Its activities exposed a significant

prevalence of internal divisions and a lack of dedication to the advancement of social and economic initiatives that unveiled the ambiguous ideology of faction (Kapur, 1991).

The conflicts between Liaquat Ali Khan, Nawab Iftikhar Hussain Mamdot and Mumtaz Doltana in the initial years of the country resulted in destabilizing the democracy. Liaquat Ali Khan commented about Hussein Shaheed Suharwardi and Maulana Abdul Hameed Khan Bhashani for “Dogs let loose by the enemies of Pakistan” (Talbot, 2022). Liaquat’s low estimation about the politicians was revealed in the introduction of PRODA (Public and Representative Office Disqualification Act) that could initiate a penalty against the public office bearers in such crimes like nepotism, bribery and corruption etc. PRODA did not apply to the bureaucrats that mean the civil servants had supremacy on the politicians from initial years of the country. Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated at Rawalpindi on 16th of October 1951. His sudden absence caused a great vacuum in the political landscape of the country but the people of Pakistan, in their usual resilient manner, went on with their lives (Marker, 2021).

Decline of democracy started from the Liaquat Ali Khan’s era. Governor Raj was imposed in Punjab for seven months (Mazari, 1999). Bureaucracy was a skilled and an organized institution comprising officers of Indian civil, police and accounts services. When the popularity and significance of Pakistan Muslim League (PML) declined, bureaucracy emerged as an important institution and played a significant role in the political affairs of the country. Later on, military bureaucracy also joined hands with civil bureaucracy and paved the way for getting direct share of the bureaucracy in the politics of Pakistan. That is why Ghulam Muhammad, a former bureaucrat, came into power with the consent and support of General Ayub Khan (Bashir, 2015).

However, this period was significant due to two factors: firstly, it signified a shift away from the dedication to establish a constitutional and parliamentary system in Pakistan, and a shift towards the establishment of a civil service and a political power structure dominated by the military in Pakistan. Besides this, commencing in August 1949, the US government made a deliberate shift in favor of Pakistan and this event marked as a pivotal moment in American diplomacy and military strategy. The impact of this event had become evident in the realm of Pakistani politics during Liaquat Ali Khan’s period (Selig, 1978).

Conclusion

Liaquat Ali Khan, as a Prime Minister, handled a complicated political terrain. He handled severe hurdles including the challenges of ethnicity and linguistic disparities that endangered the fragile unity of a newly independent state. He took initiatives to mediate between the many ethnic and linguistic groups, seeking for a cohesive national identity. Economic turmoil also aggravated tensions since the partition so he tried to mitigate economic volatility, represented attempts to stabilize the nascent economy, although their efficacy was constrained by systemic obstacles and political resistance.

Liaquat Ali Khan also confronted the formidable challenge of establishing a foreign policy that equilibrated relations with significant nations such as US and USSR. He also faced issues due to anti-Ahmadi dilemma of first Foreign Minister, Sir Zafar Ullah Khan. His realistic approach during the 1950 U.S. visit demonstrated a strategic endeavor to obtain economic assistance and enhance country's worldwide standing.

The evolution of the constitution was another crucial element of Liaquat's administration. In the face of opposition, he established the foundation for a democratic framework through Objectives Resolution, which aimed to harmonize government with Islamic principles while honoring democratic aspirations. Nonetheless, these efforts frequently became entangled in political conflicts by religio-political and machinations by rival factions, which ultimately undermined his administration.

The strategies for Liaquat's removal from office highlighted the power conflicts inside Pakistan's political framework. Notwithstanding these problems, his leadership was crucial in guiding the country through its early years, demonstrating resilience and a vision for Pakistan's future. The killing of Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951 rendered many of his initiatives unfinished, exacerbating the political instability he aimed to mitigate. His legacy, however, exemplified the intricacies of managing a heterogeneous and fragmented society.

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