

Allamah Raghīb Ahsan and Pakistan Movement: An Assessment

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ABSTRACT

This study is not a conventional one rather the subaltern pattern has been taken as a model to understand the contribution of a leader who played a very significant role in the Pakistan Movement for a long span of time for the sake of the nation without focusing his personal interests. That is why, despite very valuable contribution of Allamah Raghīb Ahsan, his name has so far been in the dormant for the common readers of the discipline of history. But it is generally understood that without proper understanding of the contribution of the leaders who stood in the second or third stages of leadership who prepared proper ground for the implementation of the idea of Pakistan. To understand the role of Allamah Raghīb Ahsan in the Pakistan movement it seems to be important to quote here a portion of famous historian Toynbee's statement – "... I find that in a general way the growth of a society can be measured in terms of the increasing power of self-determination won by society's leaders; and I believe that the future fate of civilization lies in the hands of the this minority of creative persons (Arnold Toynbee)."

Key Words Allamah Raghīb Ahsan, Pakistan Movement, All-India Muslim League, Bengal

Introduction

It is a common understanding that any freedom struggle needs firm footing, basic idea, sincerity and philosophical foundation chalked out by its charismatic leadership and determination of the leadership as well as the general masses to transform the freedom struggle into independence. Liberation movements are crucial and challenging moments in the history of nations, which represent a matching response on the part of enslaved people against the challenges of imperial and colonial domination. In this context, epoch making sages and personages appeared on the Indian political scene at the turn of the twentieth century who not only enjoyed great influence in the heart and mind of the people, but also exercised decisive command on the movement and direction of history. Allamah Raghīb Ahsan was one of those personalities who played his due role in the freedom struggle for the Muslim of the subcontinent. He not only played a significant role in the Muslim politics of Bengal and Bihar but also kept himself continuously aware about the overall politics of the entire subcontinent and beyond. Hence, this research paper, however, pinpoints the role of Allamah Raghīb Ahsan in the Muslim freedom struggle of the subcontinent in the light of empirical data and primary and secondary sources. This piece of writing is an

effort to fill the gaps in the understanding of the history of the Freedom Movement which has so far been dealt without proper consultation of the correspondence between the Quaid and Allamah Raghbir Ahsan, as those mostly hand written letters remained generally unexplored.

Historically speaking the Pakistan movement needed seasoned political thinkers/practical politicians like Allamah Raghbir Ahsan who could provide befitting road maps in the light of time, space and subject concerned encompassing all the related aspects not only of the subcontinent but also related with the entire world political moves and motives of the contemporary world powers and power seekers. Another very significant factor related with the personality of Raghbir Ahsan was his profound knowledge of historical and political background of the Muslims of South Asia especially and that of other concerned communities generally. Hence, Raghbir Ahsan mainly focused on the political developments of the Muslims of Bengal as it was the geographical entity where the idea of 'double independence' (Hayat, 2010) could be firmly enrooted to the extent that it could play a beckoning role to be followed by others as role model especially the Muslim majority areas of the subcontinent comprising which new state for the Muslims of the subcontinent namely Pakistan. Nevertheless, the founder of Pakistan Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah keeping in view the aforementioned modalities/political dimensions expected from the Muslims of Bengal a lead that could be a role model to be followed by other Muslim majority areas of the South Asian subcontinent in the struggle for the rights of the Muslims of India that finally resulted into the idea and establishment of Pakistan in August 1947 (M.A. Jinnah to Shaukat Ali, 21 September 1937).

It seems to be most relevant to mention here also that the political awareness and consequent revolutions in the political thinking of the Muslims of Bengal was based on another significant dimension which was resulted from the experiences of that community under the repression based policies and actions of firstly on behalf of the East India Company's rulers and secondly the support they got from the Hindu influential people under the patronage of the company and its resultant tyrannical oppressive measures undertaken by the new beneficiaries of the East India Company and subsequent British rule. Allama Raghbir Ahsan kept this factor also in his mind while suggesting political maneuvers to the high commands especially Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah of All India Muslim League. As a matter of fact Muslims of Bengal's sufferings in terms of administrative, financial, religious, social and political domains especially by the dual repression of the British cum Hindu leadership extended over more than double span of time as compared to that in other parts of India. Because Muslim Bengal's sufferings started in 1757 and continued till 1947, whereas the British power was extended mostly beyond the year of 1857's uprising which has been termed as war of independence by the Indians and mutiny by the Britishers. With the result that, the idea of double independence was unshakably enrooted in the minds of Muslim Bengal which was exemplified not only in the elections of 1945 and 1946 fought in the name of Pakistan by the Muslims; but also in the elections of 1937 in Bengal

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as a result of which Sher-i-Bengal, A.K. Fazlul Haq became the first Muslim Chief Minister of Bengal by dint of the results of the elections of 1937 in which the Muslim League bagged 37 seats when only 2 candidates of the Muslim League won the elections in the Punjab. Basing on this ground realities Allamah Raghīb Ahsan extended his suggestions to the high commands of the All-India Muslim League.

The aforementioned realities does not mean that Raghīb Ahsan kept in his mind only the situation of Bengal, rather he kept himself enlightened with the political ups and downs all over the subcontinent and even beyond. This factor has been proved in his writings and letters to many politicians of influence especially Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah ((Hayat, 2010). Allamah Raghīb Ahsan played a very crucial role as a key advisor to M.A. Jinnah with especial emphasis on political goals by defining the ways and means to achieve those targets. That is why, the Quaid through his letters acknowledged the befittingness of the advices of Allamah Raghīb Ahsan.

Early Life and Education

Abu Muhammad Raghīb Ahsan was born in a middle class family in 1905 at the village of Neodhi in the province of Bihar. His father Munshi Riazuddin was an employee of the Postal department. Raghīb Ahsan's grandfather Ramzan Ali along with his brother Nur Ali was engaged in the trade of horses. Ramzan Ali was illiterate whereas Nur Ali was well educated. Nur Ali performed *Biyyat* at the hands of Syed Ahmad Shaheed and he played a key role in the *Jihad* Movement by donating four horses. Consequently, the British government sanctioned death punishment to for him but he went at large. After that he could not be traced. Then the British government after arresting Ramzan Ali sent him to *Kalapani* and confiscated all of his assets.

During the *kalapani* punishment Ramzan Ali was taken as a Cook of a British officer namely Mr. Brown. When Mr. Brown was coming back from *kalapani* he took Ramzan Ali with him on the condition that he would not go to Bihar for ever and would be settling himself permanently in Calcutta. Mr. Brown, after reaching Calcutta, called there the family of Ramzan Ali and appointed Riazuddin in the postal department of Calcutta. Thus the family of Raghīb Ahsan settled permanently in Calcutta.

Allamah Raghīb Ahsan received early education from his home and then his father admitted him in Jubilee High School from where he passed the matriculation examination in first division. Then he passed in first division both the examinations of intermediate and B.A. from the Calcutta University College. From the same college he got the M.A. degrees with first divisions in Economics, Sociology and English and Political Science. Allamah Raghīb Ahsan, right from his boyhood, was anti-colonialism and was not willing to serve under the foreign rule. But under the pressure of his father, he, however, passed the written

examination of the Indian Civil Service but he did not go for the interview (Interview with Zafeer Ahmad, 1 September 1995).

He was very fond of reading and that is why he spent most of his time in different libraries of Calcutta. At the same time a short period he took interest in drama writing to achieve that goal he used to go to Agha Hashar Kashmiri who lived in his locality (Hayat Khan Lane) in Calcutta. He used to say that had he not entered into politics he would have been either drama writer or novelist. He was also in contact with famous Urdu writers like Raza Ali Wahshat Calcuttavi, Agha Hashar Kashmiri and Natiq Lakhnawi (Ibid).

Pakistan Movement and Allamah Raghیب Ahsan

Allamah Raghیب Ahsan started taking part in active politics when he was a matric student. During the period the Khilafat Movement in India was at its peak under the leadership of Maulana Muhammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali. Raghیب Ahsan was impressed with the leadership of Maulana Muhammad Ali and thus he started eagerly taking part in the Khilafat Movement. Thus in 1918 he was selected as a member of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee at his tender age.

Allamah Raghیب Ahsan launched All-India Muslim Youth League in 1931 (Huq, 1983, p. 8). To preside over the first meeting of the league he invited Allamah Muhammad Iqbal who could not turn up due to indisposition. Hence, Sir Shafaat Ahmad Khan of Allahabad was invited to preside over the meeting. After the meeting Sir Shafaat Ahmad Khan took Allamah Raghیب Ahsan with him to Allahabad and offered the editorship of the weekly *Star*. He also remained the editor of the Calcutta based weekly the *Star of India*.

He used to extend necessary suggestions on various points regarding politics as well as the organisational matters to the All-India Muslim League especially to its President Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Allamah Raghیب Ahsan wrote to the Quaid hundreds of letters most of them are still preserved in the Quaid-i-Azam Papers. Most of these hand-written letters are very lengthy and spread over dozens of pages with necessary and appropriate suggestions regarding provincial and All-India policies. Those suggestions were so relevant and timely that the Quaid not only asked Allamah Raghیب Ahsan to continue the process but also marked as “important suggestions” the file No. 204 which was especially maintained to preserve the letters sent by Allamah Raghیب Ahsan (Quaid-i-Azam Papers, File 204).

Besides mailing suggestions to the Quaid, Allamah Raghیب Ahsan used to write articles in different newspapers of the subcontinent. Those articles not only responded the issues raised by the opponents of the Pakistan movement but also carried thought-provoking ideas for the Muslim League leadership including the Quaid.

Moreover, Allamah Raghیب Ahsan mostly kept himself engaged in the thinking as to how the idea of Pakistan could be penetrated in the hearts of the Muslim of India. As a result of his intellectual capability – as well as prolonged

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physical efforts the Jamiat ul Ulama-i Islam came into being in October 1945 i.e, at the crucial juncture of the Pakistan movement. Thus this brainchild of the Allamah played a very significant role in moulding Muslim public opinion in favour of the idea of Pakistan.

Allamah Raghīb Ahsan, as he been mentioned earlier, continuously remained acquainted with latest thought process of the scholarly world. Thus his articles published in different newspapers of India used to be thought provoking. Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar was impressed by his thought provoking writings and other scholarly capabilities. Consequently, he engaged Allamah Raghīb Ahsan in the editorial work of the *Comrade* and the *Hamdard* magazines. Allamah Raghīb Ahsan played a very important role in laying the foundation of the Calcutta Muslim League in 1936 (Huq, 1983, p. 8). He was made a member of the All-India Muslim League Council in 1937. He also became the member of Bengal Provincial Muslim League as well as Muslim League Parliamentary Board.

One of the most significant roles of the Allamah in the Pakistan Movement was the efforts to create Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam. In Bengal, particularly in Calcutta, the Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Hind especially its leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, enjoyed very wide ranging popular support. Hence, to counter their strong hold Allamah Raghīb Ahsan played a pivotal role in the creation of Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam. As a matter of fact this organization was the brain-child of Allamah Raghīb Ahsan. He made the plan and made tremendous efforts in its establishment.

The Allamah was elected as the member of the Indian Constituent Assembly from Calcutta. That is why he remained in Delhi even after the creation of Pakistan in 1947. From there, later on, he came back to Calcutta where there was an attempt to arrest him but he escaped and migrated to Dhaka, East Pakistan. Allamah Raghīb Ahsan after reaching Dhaka remained aloof from active politics. During those days he remained patron of different religious *madrasas* of East Pakistan.

Before 1970 elections he joined the Pakistan Democratic Party led by Nurul Amin. After the creation of Bangladesh, he remained in Dhaka till 1974. In 1974 when the Islamic Summit Conference was being organized by Pakistan, the Allamah migrated to Karachi through the first flight from Dhaka to Karachi, after the creation of Bangladesh. He then settled him at North Nazimabad in Karachi.

He died on Friday the 28th November 1975 when he was entering a mosque for the Jumm'a prayers. He fell down at the entrance of the mosque and died then and there. He was buried at the Sakhi Hassan graveyard of Karachi. He left a widow, two sons and three daughters.

Allamah Raghīb Ahsan maintained very close relations with Allamah Muhammad Iqbal whose thought inspired him to a great deal. This view can be testified through their correspondence which, according to the available sources, began in 1929. Through the letters written by Allamah Iqbal to Raghīb Ahsan it can be ascertained that the former adored much the later for his abilities particularly his noble thoughts (Iqbal to Raghīb, 21 December 1929). Thus their

correspondence continued till the death of Allamah Iqbal in 1938 (Huq, 1983, pp. 1-152).

The Correspondence, as per available information, between Raghieb Ahsan and the Quaid began in May 1936 after his first meeting with him in New Delhi in winter, 1935 when he met the later for the first time (Raghieb to M.A. Jinnah, 31 May 1936). Then on ward the correspondence between them continued till the death of the Quaid (Quaid-i-Azam Papers, File 204). Like Allamah Muhammad Iqbal the Quaid used to give much importance to the thoughts and views of Allamah Raghieb Ahsan and that can be derived from the inscription, most probably with the pen of the Quaid, on the most concerned file to preserve the correspondence. On the cover of the file it has been marked as "LETTERS OF MR. RAGHIB AHSAN WITH USEFUL SUGGESTIONS" (Quaid-i-Azam Papers, File 204, p.1). It clearly indicates the importance that enjoyed the opinions of the Allamah in the mind of the Quaid. To depict that point more clearly, a citation from a latter written by the Quaid to the Allamah seems to be befitting. He writes on 1 August 1937, "I shall always welcome any information that you can give me or any assistance you can render. There is no need for introduction at all" (M. A. Jinnah to Raghieb, 1 August 1937). From this letter another point becomes clear that the Quaid was well informed about the capabilities of the Allamah and that is why he pointed out in his aforementioned letter to the Allamah that, "There is no need for introduction at all".

Allamah Raghieb Ahsan performed the duties of a think tank for the Quaid by providing him with necessary suggestions regarding local, regional and international affairs as well as the organizational matters of the All-India Muslim League. The Allamah always remained very conscious about the issues and developments those had impacts on the interests of the Muslims particularly of Bengal. One such instance can be mentioned here when he informed the Quaid about the move of the Indian National Congress for a Hindu-Muslim pact in Bengal. By doing so the Allamah forwarded a detailed picture of the political situation in Bengal seeking necessary steps on the part of the All-India Muslim League especially by its president (Raghieb Ahsan to M. A. Jinnah, 9 January 1938). The Quaid appreciating the situation responded immediately and wrote to the Allamah, " Many thanks for your letter of the 9th. Yes, I have received the telegram and the cutting from the Star. I have already issued my statement which by the time you receive this letter you must have seen in the press. Please let me know what is the reaction to it in your province, and keep me informed." (M. A. Jinnah to Raghieb, 12 January 1938) This is undoubtedly another prove of the tremendous intellectual contribution of Allamah Raghieb Ahsan in the Muslim struggle for freedom in the subcontinent. The Allamah by doing the duties of real camp follower of the Quaid wrote on 17 January 1938 that, " The reaction to your statement in Bengal and Bihar is on the whole favourable. All the papers featured it with double columns headlines. The Muslims without exception received it with joy and satisfaction. The Hindus also although mildly criticizing it here and there have generally received it in a better and chastened spirit" (Raghieb to M. A.

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Jinnah, 17 January 1938). Thus the Allamah used to write letters mostly very lengthy (Hayat, 2010) covering in-depth evaluation of the situation. These are why the Quaid regarded the letters of the Allamah as very useful and important. The Quaid used to consult with special impotence the suggestions of Allamah Raghīb Ahsan in making his policies as well as those of the All-India Muslim League. As another proof of the fact a portion of the Quaid's letter can be quoted here, "With regard to your suggestion (Ibid) that the next meeting of the Working Committee should be in Calcutta I wish to inform you that I shall bear it in mind, and also your other suggestions as they are very valuable in deed and of great help to me" (M. A. Jinnah to Raghīb, 19 July 1940).

As a matter of fact the over-all role of the Quaid as well as the all-India Muslim League cannot be properly understood without having light from the correspondence between Allamah Raghīb Ahsan and Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The correspondence is more impotent for those who want to understand the politics particularly the Muslim politics in Bengal and Bihar as it contains day to day reporting concerning the provinces. As Allamah Raghīb Ahsan had played very special role in the reorganization of the Bengal Muslim League hence he had to play a significant role in removing the hold of the Indian National Congress over the Muslims of Bengal. He used to inform about the developments in that respect. In a letter to the Quaid he writes, "I hope you must have seen the latest move of the Wardha in banning the Muslim League as a communal body. The reaction of Calcutta and Bengal is that this an affront to the Muslim India and Muslims should not now enter into any negotiations with the Congress" (Raghīb to M. A. Jinnah). In such a situation under the auspices of the Bengal Muslim League, Allamah Raghīb Ahsan launched a campaign to remove the influence of the Indian National Congress generally in Bengal and particularly in Calcutta. Hence, he writes to the Quaid on 16 December 1938 that, "You must have read in papers regarding our war on the "Imamat" of M. Abul Kalam Azad and our monster meetings, processions, demonstrations and press propaganda in this connection. This was done solely because Abul Kalam Azad has taken the position of the holder of the portfolio of Islam in the Congress and the Muslim League refuses to accept any one except Mr. Jinnah (Raghīb to M. A. Jinnah, 16 December 1938). While such a vigorous campaign was on against the Congress particularly Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Nawab Ismail Khan met the Maulana at Anand Bhawan. The matter was taken very seriously by the Muslims of Bengal especially by Allamah Raghīb Ahsan . He, therefore wrote to the Quaid that "It is very strange, however to see that Nawab Ismail Khan recently went out of his way to pay a visit to Anand Bhawan and meet Mr. Azad. What is th9is ? The Muslims strongly resent this move. Will you kindly explain, whether this interview was authorized by you or not? (Ibid) He further said "We in Calcutta believe that our work in connection with the Revolution in Calcutta Maidan Imamat has been undone by Nawab Ismail. This has given us very great pain. Please write to us regarding this matter and oblige" (Ibid). The Quaid giving a very quick response

wrote on 21 December 1938, “Many thanks for your letter of 16th December 1938. I have already issued my statement with regard to the matter referred to by you in your letter” (M. A. Jinnah to Raghīb, 21 December 1938). Thus the Quaid very keenly helped the Bengal Muslim League in its reorganization and at the same time removed the confusion that emerged at that time. Besides that, the Quaid expressed his full support to the campaigns of the Calcutta Muslim League. He wrote “I wish you every success in reorganizing the Muslim League in Calcutta” (Ibid).

It requires to be mentioned here that as a result of the campaign of the Calcutta Muslim League against the *imamat* of the *Eid* congregations at the Calcutta Maidan Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was ousted (Raghīb to M. A. Jinnah, 14 August 1940). This episode had a considerable impact on the overall politics of India. Consequently, it was established that Maulana Azad was not the representative of the Muslims of India though the Indian National Congress was trying to use the card of the Maulana to attract the Muslims of India towards its policies vis a vis the All-India Muslim League. In August 1940 Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah categorically expressed that “Azad represents neither Hindus nor Muslims” (Ibid). Commenting on this assertion Allamah Raghīb Ahsan writes:

“Thousands and millions of congratulations on your master-stroke against the Muslim “show-boy” of the Congress. By deposing him from the *Imamate* of the Calcutta Maidan the Calcutta Muslims demonstrated the fact long ago that Mr. Abul Kalam Azad is an outcaste in Muslim society. But the exquisite manner you have ruthlessly exposed arch-traitor is being loudly and widely applauded in Bengal. Naturally the Congress press has lost its balance. But it is noteworthy that not a single Congress paper or publicist has dared to advance a single argument against your assertion that ‘Azad’ represents neither Hindus nor Muslims. This ‘kick’ in reality represents the abysmal degradation and humiliation of this ‘Ghaddar’. Azad must be experiencing the agony of his life.” (Ibid)

Not only the Bengal and Bihar Muslim Leagues were being benefited in their organizational and policy matters by the thoughts of Allamah Raghīb Ahsan but the All-India Muslim League owe too much to him for his contributions in those spheres. As a matter of fact the Allamah used to observe very keenly the over-all organizational policies and matters of the All-India Muslim League to avoid any sort of flaws. For example in June 1940 he writes to the Quaid:

“The enclosed *Meesaque*-‘pledge’ was adopted by the Calcutta League and the Bengal League for National Guards. This has been also adopted by the Gaya National Guards who are one of the best trained Guards in India. The one defect in the draft pledge

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recently published by the League from Bombay is that the Pledge does not anywhere mention the name of the Muslim League and omits the essential, fundamental and vital matter of taking a solemn undertaking from every volunteer that he will be loyal to the League and always work as a soldier under the command of the League. This is of primary and basic importance". (Raghīb Ahsan to M. A. Jinnah, 25 June 1940)

This way Allamah Raghīb Ahsan continuously provided the All India Muslim League with the timely suggestions. Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah always gave befitting importance to those suggestions. As a matter of fact, after the adoption of the Pakistan Resolution, the suggestions and other contributions of the Allamah played a decisive role in its fulfillment. Allamah Raghīb Ahsan was in favour of a vigorous movement under the All-India Muslim League and the able leadership of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. In that direction Allamah Raghīb Ahsan put forward numerous ideas and suggestions.

Conclusion

As has been already mentioned in the introduction that the Pakistan movement was practically a dual independence – on the one hand from the British colonial power and the Muslim majority community's probable domination by the majority community of India's rule over the Muslims on the other. In that respect Allamah Raghīb Ahsan role both as a political leader more especially as an advisor to the All-India Muslim League more specifically to its president Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah was based on ground realities of India generally and that of Bengal particularly. That is why, M.A. Jinnah himself acknowledged the significance suggestions/explanations extended by Allamah Raghīb Ahsan.

Though Allamah Raghīb Ahsan was a camp follower of the All-India Muslim League and its leader Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, even then, he dared to express his (Raghīb Ahsan) disagreement on many aspects of their policies and actions. Even then, Raghīb Ahsan never dissociated himself from the fold of the Muslim League. From this point it can be ascertained that the support and differences of Allamah Raghīb Ahsan were not based on his personal gains rather those were directed towards the greater interests of the Muslim community of India.

In another domain Allamah Raghīb Ahsan's role seems to be worth-mentioning in the policy orientation of the All-India Muslim League. Documents reveal that the idea of Day of Deliverance which was observed by the Muslims of India under the directions of the All-India Muslim League in 1939 when the congress ministries resigned from power in six provinces of British India was the brain child of Allamah Raghīb Ahsan. Similarly, another product of his thinking brain was the creation of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam to counter the influence of the

Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind which was supporting the Indian National Congress and opposing the idea of Pakistan. For this purpose Allamah Raghیب Ahsan started his communication with the Ulema of the entire subcontinent much before the creation of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam which played a pivotal role in popularizing the idea of 'double independence' in the Muslim masses throughout India. Another practical example of such efforts of Allamah Raghیب Ahsan was found in Kolkata (previously Calcutta) where the most significant leader of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had been leading the Eid prayers at the Kolkata maidan for many years but his *imamat* came to an end as a result of vigorous campaign of the Kolkata Muslim League under the guidance of Allamah Raghیب Ahsan. Consequently, the Indian National Congress which had no support in Muslim Bengal lost the indirect influence over Muslim Bengal.

After a critical study of the life and times of Allamah Raghیب Ahsan it can be safely concluded that he was not power hungry as despite being a leading personality of Muslim Bengal as well as all over India, he never attained a single high post in governance. At the same time his concerns for the Muslims all over the world especially the Palestinian Muslims showed that he was basically desirous to improve the critical situation of the Muslims of India specially and the Muslim community in the world generally.

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in company with Allamah Muhammad Iqbal and Sir Salahuddin Saljuti, the Consul General of Afghanistan at the Afghan Consulate, Haley Road.

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