

Presidential Elections: Altaf Gauhar's Version*

[In Pakistan first Presidential elections were held on 2 January 1965. Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan, President of Pakistan, went for seeking consent of the 80,000 BDs. But he was challenged by Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, sister of Quaid-i-Azam M.A. Jinnah. Immediately after the announcement of her candidature for Presidential election on 17 September 1964, as COP's candidate, the electoral time campaign started. As Information Secretary, Altaf Gauhar was supervising Ayub Khan's propaganda campaign. This account was written by him much later in the book entitled: *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*. His accounts, though interesting, differ from that of Sirdar Shaukat Hyat Khan. For the benefit of the readers, it is reproduced -- Eds].

While Ayub's image was beginning to glisten in the region as a result of Pakistan's blossoming friendship with the People's Republic of China, his domestic outlook was looking quite murky. His Constitution had disappointed the people and his political party had no support among the masses. Through indirect elections the party had secured a majority in the national and provincial legislatures in 1962 but there were powerful opposition elements that not only questioned the democratic character of the Constitution but also Ayub's right to promulgate a Constitution at all. The Press which had remained subservient and aphonic under

* Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1993), pp.273-288.

Martial Law suddenly recovered its freedom and started to voice strong nationalistic demands.

The presidential election was certainly not on top of Ayub's agenda in the first half of 1964. It was not difficult to forecast that the election would be strongly contested and candidates would have to go to the masses from the start though under the constitution candidates were required only to appear before the members of the electoral college to put across their programme and to answer any questions that members might ask. Having elected the basic democrats, the people were not required to take any part in the presidential election. Ayub's associates believed that the opposition would be too divided to put up any candidate on a unanimous basis and there would be no contest. They assured him that given his achievements and his prominent international status there really was no one in the country who could pose a challenge to him. Ayub and his ministers were, therefore, taken by surprise when on 18 September the Combined Opposition Parties (COP) announced that Miss Fatima Jinnah had "graciously accepted their request for nomination as a candidate for the Presidential elections." Miss Jinnah, sister of the Quaid-e-Azam, was a venerable lady, deeply respected throughout the country. No one could quite fathom how the opposition parties had managed to sink their differences and agree on a single candidate. The Law Minister, Sheikh Khurshid Ahmed, who had been baiting the opposition in the National Assembly to come out with the name of their candidate, was quite crestfallen. The two provincial governors, who had maintained law and order with an iron hand and snuffed out all dissent, were bewildered by the ecstatic manner in which the people celebrated Miss Jinnah's decision to fight their hero the soldier-statesman Ayub. She had no experience of government, no knowledge of administration and no contact with world leaders. Nevertheless, she was the idol of the people and wherever she appeared hundreds of thousands of people would gather only to catch a glimpse of her. She was frail and elderly and could hardly speak any of the national languages but her charisma was irresistible. She was seen by the crowds as the only person who could bring down Ayub's authoritarian rule and restore the democratic rights of the people.

The ruling political party was in complete disarray. It had no cadres and no organisation, only a clutch of paid employees. The Secretary-General of the party, Abdul Waheed Khan, a pusillanimous character, was almost paralysed by the appearance of Miss Jinnah on the political scene. He continued to insist that presidential candidates must not be allowed to hold public meetings; they must wait for the emergence of the electoral college to put their case before the BDs. The Constitution did not envisage any electoral campaign at the popular level but it did not forbid a presidential candidate from going to the people directly and organising public rallies to acquaint the masses with various political issues. The possibility of promulgating an Ordinance forbidding the candidates from addressing public meetings was considered, but it was realised that the size of the crowds Miss Jinnah was attracting would make it impossible for the administration to enforce such a measure.

The Campaign Trail

The first phase of the campaign started on 18 September 1964 and continued until the end of October when Miss Jinnah finished her tour of major cities of West Pakistan. The halo around her brightened with each public appearance. The ruling political party maintained a discrete silence during this period because no one in the government had the courage to utter a word of criticism against Miss Jinnah. Ayub was fuming because he could not understand how a campaign could be conducted when not a word of criticism could be uttered against his rival. He repeatedly urged his associates to expose Miss Jinnah's political record, and draw the attention of the people to her lack of experience and her old age. All that Ayub's associates could manage was to criticise the political advisors around Miss Jinnah and attack their bona fides.

Ayub finally decided to take up the challenge himself and started addressing public meetings. He addressed his first public meeting in Peshawar on 13 October. The local administration had lassoed a large crowd into the meeting ground but Ayub did not have Miss Jinnah's charisma and he had no experience of public speaking. His knowledge of Urdu, which was the only common language the crowds in West Pakistan understood, was limited. But

he learnt quickly and after the first three or four public meetings, started speaking with greater confidence. He was handicapped by the fact that he could not criticise Miss Jinnah because attacking an old lady would be considered unbecoming of a gentleman. While his own party was getting more and more demoralised and succumbing to internal differences, the five feuding opposition parties had succeeded in forging a powerful combination. The real problem of Ayub's associates was that they were all convinced that he would never allow the situation to reach a point where he might lose the election. They were certain that if things went too far he would call upon the army to put an end to popular hysteria. Only Ayub knew that he had no choice but to go through the process he had himself initiated. If he were to become the victim of the process the armed forces would not come to his rescue, since they too could see the crowds that daily paraded the streets denouncing Ayub and his Constitution.

After finishing one round of public meetings in West Pakistan, Miss Jinnah proceeded to East Pakistan where the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman, was carrying on a crusade against the Ayub regime. The people in East Pakistan felt that they had been deprived of all their rights and that the province was no better than a colony of Islamabad. Miss Jinnah was seen as the only hope of changing an unjust and oppressive system. The crowds that greeted her in East Pakistan were even larger than those in West Pakistan.

In her speeches Miss Jinnah attacked Ayub mercilessly, portraying him as an interloper and a dictator, and alleging that his ministers and governors were his lackeys who had no real power. She attacked Ayub and his family for corruption. One minister whom she singled out for personal condemnation was Bhutto. She called him an "inebriate and a philanderer" in a speech in Hyderabad. Ayub could take it no more and, at a press conference in Lahore, he said that Miss Jinnah had been leading an "unnatural" life, a reference to her spinsterhood, and was surrounded by "perverts." Everyone in the Government was totally stunned, but somehow Ayub survived, mainly because the campaign rhetoric had already sunk to a low level and rival parties were freely exchanging invective and abuse.

The campaign raised serious questions about Ayub's style of government. Allegations of corruption against Ayub's family, particularly his son Gohar Ayub, were openly levelled and widely believed. Gohar, a retired Captain from the army, had acquired an assembly plant from General Motors (to which he gave the name Gandhara Motors) through the influence of his father. Throughout the campaign 'Gandhara' was used as the ultimate proof of nepotism against Ayub. The opposition adopted 'Gandhara' as a slogan, which they used with devastating effect, and people from Peshawar to Chittagong came to treat it as the ultimate symbol of corruption in Ayub's government and in his own family. Nothing destroyed Ayub's prestige and credibility more than 'Gandhara'. Even his reforms came in for a lot of criticism. His land reforms were seen as an elaborate design to consolidate the power of landlords and bureaucrats and his Islamic reforms, especially the family laws, were criticised as a deviation from the Sunnah.

Ayub was persuaded by his party to use the religious card against Miss Jinnah. A 'fatwa' (religious decree) was obtained from some ulema to the effect that a woman could not become the head of a Muslim State. The opposition organised an even larger set of ulema to produce an equally authoritative 'fatwa' in support of Miss Jinnah. They discovered from the writings of various Muslim jurists that a woman could become the ruler under exceptional circumstances. And who could deny, asked the opposition, that Pakistan was going through exceptional circumstances? The weapon of religious decrees worked against Ayub throughout the campaign.

But the most damaging effect of the campaign for Ayub was that it affected the ability of his administration to influence the basic democrats. The assumption all along had been that BD elections would be completed in the first phase and the presidential campaign would then begin as a separate exercise. As it turned out the presidential campaign swept the country well before the BD elections. The ruling party had first decided that it would nominate its candidates for BD elections and issue them with party tickets. As the campaign progressed, the ruling party lost confidence in its ability to get a majority of its candidates elected. It was, therefore, decided that there should be no officially nominated party

candidate, and each candidate should fight the election as an independent. The Combined Opposition Parties (COP) also decided not to issue party tickets. This reopened the possibility that the administration might be able to persuade or pressurise elected candidates into giving support to Ayub. Had COP put up candidates throughout the country there would have been a distinct possibility that it could have won a majority of seats in the electoral college. The real reason why COP could not follow such a strategy was that while its leadership had been able to agree on a single presidential candidate, it could not agree on 80,000 candidates for the electoral college. Each one of the opposition parties demanded a large share in the electoral college and contending claims proved irreconcilable.

The elections of basic democrats ended on 19 November 1964 with both sides claiming an overwhelming victory. The Muslim League declared that 80 per cent of the elected members were Ayub supporters and COP claimed that 90 per cent of the members were pledged to vote for Miss Jinnah. The administration did its own research, compiling and analysing the antecedents of each one of the elected members. The Intelligence Bureau gave Ayub the cheerful message that 75 per cent of the members would support him. The governors now proceeded to obtain a formal oath of allegiance from the elected members. Divisional commissioners and district magistrates were then assigned the task of ensuring that the elected members did not deviate from their oath. Followed a competition among district magistrates, each trying to bring the largest number of BDs to Ayub's side, knowing that high-scorers would earn special recognition for initiative and dedication to duty. The whole election was now reduced to an administrative exercise to ensure Ayub's victory.

Ayub Gets Re-elected

Ayub still had to fix a date for the election of the President. His term was expiring on 23 March 1965 and under the Constitution the election to the office of the President had to be completed at least 20 days before that. Ayub was advised by his governors and many of his ministers that he should fix the date as close to 23 March as possible. But he had seen how ineffectual his

party had been and instinctively knew that time was on Miss Jinnah's side. If she were to undertake another round of public meetings, gruelling though such an exercise would be for her, COP might manage to frighten the members of the electoral college into submission. The opposition would certainly use all means of winning over the members. Already pressures were building even in the countryside, and elected members were complaining to district officers that if they did not vote for Miss Jinnah COP activists would burn down their houses and destroy their property and crops. The district officers were themselves under so much pressure that they wanted the election to be wrapped up as soon as possible. Ayub finally decided that the election should be held on 2 January 1965.

The decision took COP by surprise. The first round of the campaign had clearly gone in favour of Miss Jinnah. She had demolished the ruling party, leaving Ayub to fight a lonely battle against her. She now undertook a second round of public meetings in West Pakistan during which she started to question Ayub's performance as President. She claimed that he had bartered away Pakistan's waters by signing the Indus Basin Waters Treaty with India. She revived the controversy about the offer Ayub made to Nehru in 1959 to enter into a joint defence pact with India against China. She referred to a meeting that Ayub had with the Agha Khan in Nice in 1951, soon after the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan, during the course of which the Agha Khan said to him: "You have got Pakistan after great sacrifices. You do not want to lose it. But if parliamentary system is the one you are going to follow then you will lose Pakistan. I have called you here to tell you that you will lose it this way, and that you are the one person who can save it." She used this incident to show that he was planning to overthrow the civilian government long before the coup d'etat in 1958. Much as the ruling party tried to defend Ayub, Miss Jinnah succeeded in creating serious doubts in the public mind about Ayub's reforms and his achievements in the field of international affairs. The only mistake she made was to refer to the United States in one of her speeches as Pakistan's "only friend", which upset many of her left-leaning associates, but she soon retracted that statement.

While Miss Jinnah's charisma continued to captivate the masses, COP, seeing success within reach, started quarrelling about political issues on which they had conflicting, even contradictory, positions. The leaders of the opposition parties also began to resent the way Miss Jinnah treated them. She had adopted the aloof and domineering style of her brother, and would not allow any of the political veterans around her to say anything. Nor would she follow their advice on the election strategy. The opposition had carefully analyzed the results of the election of basic democrats and had noticed that 37 per cent of old members had been returned in West Pakistan, and 45 per cent in East Pakistan. Of the old chairmen of the councils of basic democrats nearly 70 per cent had been returned in East Pakistan and 60 per cent in West Pakistan. Few of the members had any education or an assured source of income. Fewer still had any political experience. Their influence was primarily local and they were not accountable to any political party. Once the BDs were elected, the vulnerability of the electoral system to administrative pressures and counter-pressures began to be exposed. The government set out to buy as many of the elected members as possible, while blaming the opposition for disturbing the peace.

The final phase of the campaign was marked by a series of confrontation meetings. Presidential candidates would appear before the members of the electoral college in principal towns and, after making an opening statement, answer the questions put to them by members of the electoral college. These meetings were presided over by judges of different High Courts and questions were all deposited in a box. The presiding officer would draw out a question and read it aloud and then ask the candidate to answer the question. The ruling party managed to put a very large number of questions into the box so that when the presiding officer put his hand in the box the likelihood was that he would draw out a question of the ruling party's preference. Some of the presiding judges were amenable to government pressure, others were more than willing to show their loyalty to Ayub Khan: they rejected questions they thought would be considered offensive by Ayub. An Ordinance was issued debarring the public from attending these meetings and the election commission decided to keep the two

candidates apart; Ayub would appear before the members in the morning and Miss Jinnah in the afternoon or vice versa.

Miss Jinnah was on her own in these confrontation meetings and her lack of political experience and irascible temperament started to show. The first meeting was in Rawalpindi and she was led to believe by some of her workers that the government had decided, in collusion with the election commission, to keep all the elected members away from the meeting. The night before the meeting she wrote a letter to the commission alleging collusion and demanding a change in the time of the meeting. The commission declined to make any change, and the members of the electoral college started gathering at the venue of the meeting early in the morning. By nine o'clock in the morning the place was packed to capacity. The ruling party had indeed tried to prevent the members from coming to the meeting but had completely failed. Miss Jinnah turned up at the appointed time and in a brief speech attacked the commission for its failure to bring the members of the electoral college to the meeting. The members who were all present, perplexed by Miss Jinnah's speech. The judge who was presiding over the meeting had only to point out that all the members invited to the meeting were sitting there to show that Miss Jinnah's charge was baseless. She lost many of her supporters that day. By comparison, when Ayub appeared before the members in the afternoon he was enthusiastically greeted and his speech was quite warmly applauded.

The question-answer sessions which were broadcast by Radio Pakistan, after careful editing to ensure that nothing damaging to Ayub was put on the air, also went badly for Miss Jinnah. There was hardly a question to which she could give a clear and coherent answer. Some questions she did not even understand. Others she understood, but she avoided taking a clear position lest she should alienate any of the constituent parties of the COP. By avoiding all difficult and crucial issues she did manage to keep COP united, but her constant hedging cost her the support of many members of the electoral college. As the confrontation meetings proceeded, the war of pamphlets, posters, and advertisements also reached its peak. In this COP had an edge over the ruling party because it could manufacture a variety of rumours and slanders against Ayub. It

also started issuing threats to businessmen and bureaucrats to maintain pressure on the members. Toward the end of the campaign COP started a wild rumour that Ayub was planning to pack his bags and leave the country before the polling day. The rumour hit East Pakistan with particular force because there was greater willingness among the Bengalis to believe that Ayub had lost his nerve and would soon quit the field. On 25 December, Ayub issued a statement denying the rumour and told the pressmen at the Dacca airport that “a section of the press has said that I am packing up and leaving. Let me tell them through you that I will fight these enemies of the country to the last.” Ayub was beginning to wonder whether the opposition had really come to believe that they would win the election.

The polling took place on 2 January 1965, in a peaceful environment. The COP strategy of harassing the members was effectively neutralised by the measures taken by the government to maintain a calm atmosphere at the polling stations. The opposition wanted the results of the election to be determined at street corners and not at polling stations which they knew were under the control of the government. The government moved in the army in aid of civil authorities thus frustrating the COP strategy of attacking the voters. A few days before the polling, the COP steering committee issued a statement in which it threatened to launch a countrywide disobedience movement if the results did not go in favour of Miss Jinnah. Ayub ignored the hysteria of the opposition and waited for the election day and did not yield to the pressure from his party to adopt such desperate measures as imposing pre-censorship on newspaper.

On the day of polling both sides appeared equally confident although the opposition was much more demonstrative than the ruling party. Heavy polling was reported in the morning and results started coming in after 1 p.m. Arrangements had been made that the results should be announced by Radio Pakistan as they were issued by the presiding officers at the polling stations. This was to ensure that the opposition did not level any charges of administrative tampering with the ballot boxes.

The first results came from Dacca and looked bad for Ayub. Next came Karachi and that too went against Ayub. Lahore provided considerable relief because it was generally believed that Lahore always went with the opposition. Throughout the country people were glued to their radio sets. In Dacca, the opposition started celebrating its victory after hearing the local results. By the evening, however, COP had collapsed. Miss Jinnah could not be reached and the gates of her Karachi residence, Flagstaff House, were bolted and barred. The Chief Commissioner announced the results, which gave a clear majority to Ayub.

Ayub was to go on the air at 10 p.m. But by 7 p.m. Ayub, who had been a lonely figure for some weeks, was once again surrounded by a host of sycophants and admirers who were all submitting suggestions about what he should say in his 'victory' speech. The speech had already been drafted by the Information Secretary and Ayub, still in a dazed state, read it out into the microphone without any feeling. The dazed look did not leave Ayub's face for several hours. What had shaken him completely was the knowledge that he had come so close to defeat and his Constitution and his reforms had been so comprehensively rejected by the people. Out of 80,000 members of the electoral college, 49,951 voted for Ayub, and 38,691 for Miss Jinnah. But in East Pakistan the gap was much narrower — Miss Jinnah had 18,434 votes against Ayub's 21,012, giving him a winning margin of only 2,578 votes. In West Pakistan, Ayub won all the divisions and districts except Karachi, but in East Pakistan he won in only in two divisions, Rajshahi and Khulna, and lost in Dacca and Chittagong. Out of 17 districts in East Pakistan he lost in four: Dacca, Noakhali, Sylhet, and Comilla. The loss of Karachi caused consternation. It demonstrated the strong support Miss Jinnah enjoyed among the refugees. In many other towns of Sindh also, the refugee vote went against Ayub.

No Lessons Learnt

Ayub asked the Information Secretary, who had accompanied him during the campaign, to carry out a detailed analysis of the election campaign and its results. The analysis showed that the demand for democracy had been Miss Jinnah's main source of

popularity, and had won her the support of the intelligentsia. The government had suffered because of allegations of corruption, and it was widely known that the administrative machinery had been used to swing the members of the electoral college in Ayub's favour. COP suffered because of internal conflicts and the poor performance of Miss Jinnah in the projection meetings. While her magic worked in public rallies and processions, in the orderly atmosphere of meetings organised by the election commission her appeal plummeted.

The analysis brought out the deep feelings of alienation among the people who had been denied any meaningful participation in the affairs of the state since Independence. The BD system had further increased the isolation of the people. The ruling party was seen as a haven for opportunists and time-servers dominated by Ayub's minions and stooges. It was true that the crowds had gone to see Miss Jinnah out of curiosity but they had also decisively registered their protest against the government and its policies.

It would be unfortunate, the analysis suggested, if the strength and intensity of the protest was doubted or attributed to the machinations of politicians or enemy agents. What people needed most was a sense of belonging and participation. This was completely lacking, and if remedial measures were not adopted popular resentment would explode whenever an opportunity offered itself.

The President, the governors, and ministers should all declare their assets before the commencement of the next term. All allegations of corruption should be thoroughly investigated and dealt with. But above all the system of basic democracies must be made acceptable to the people. If the demand for direct elections was not acceptable to the government then the size of the electoral college must be sufficiently enlarged to put it beyond the reach of the administration.

This analysis was put on the agenda of the governors' conference a few weeks later. By then the ruling party had convinced Ayub that he had scored a convincing victory and the opposition had been thoroughly trounced. Instead of taking any decision on the points made out in the analysis, the Governors'

Conference decided to set up a 'patronage committee' to reward all those lawyers and teachers who had worked for Ayub during the campaign. The ruling party had obviously learnt no lesson from the opposition campaign or from the results of the election. Ayub briefly considered the possibility of enlarging the size of the electoral college but decided not to tinker with the system.

It did not take Ayub long to get back into the warm waters of international affairs leaving his feuding opponents bogged in the quagmire of domestic bitterness.