

Abstract

Over the last few decades, a good number of scholars and intellectuals have been paying much attention to the study of Bengal and contemporary politics from various perspectives. This trend of studying Bengal politics has not only enriched our knowledge of this region but also highlighted many sides of Indian history so far untouched. Some remarkable research works were undertaken on great political personalities of undivided Bengal like Surendra Nath Banerjee, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bipin Chandra Pal, Chitta Ranjan Das, Subhas Chandra Bose, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Khwaja Nazimuddin and so on and so forth. But it is a great tragedy of history that Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq (1873-1962), popularly known as *Sher-e-Bangla* (Tiger of Bengal) or ‘Hak Saheb’ who was one of the doyens of Bengal, who by his own capacity, controlled, dominated, moulded and shaped Bengal politics for almost three decades and successfully gave a new dimension to provincial politics by mobilizing the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajas* (tenants), by leading the praja movement and forming a political party exclusively for them called the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) and raising the slogan *Dal-Bhat* (rice and pulse) for the masses (which gave him dividends in the Bengal Legislative Assembly Elections of 1937), who was never defeated in any election in between 1913 and 1954 (which was an exceptional record in the history of South-East Asia), who became the first democratically elected Premier of Bengal in 1937 and led two successive Coalition Ministries (1937-1943), has to a great extent failed to attract the attention of the intellectual world. Although very few researches in this part of Bengal (i.e. West Bengal) vis-a-vis India were executed on him and his political career, all these works almost failed to represent and analyze the man and his shifting political activities (from provincial to national politics and vice-versa), his fight and compromise with the League leadership, particularly with Jinnah, his contrasts, ambiguities, his volatile temperament, his vacillating political stance and the inherent political currents and cross-currents operating in Bengal vis-a-vis India and within the Muslim League – the currents which helped Fazlul Huq to become the Premier of Bengal in 1937 and to move the Lahore Resolution (commonly known as the Pakistan Resolution) in 1940 and the cross-currents which paved the way for his expulsion from the Muslim League in December 1941, forced him to resign from the

post of the Premier in March 1943 and ultimately turned him into a 'tragic hero' before the second partition of Bengal (1947).

Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq who was born in a landed aristocratic family in Barisal (Eastern Bengal), was a very fascinating, charismatic, popular and at the same time, an enigmatic and controversial character in the first half of the twentieth century. He was a successful lawyer cum politician, a solid *bhumiputra* (son of the soil) who was proud to be a Bengali as well as a Muslim. He supported the partition of Bengal (1905) and was one of the founder- members of the All-India Muslim League (1906). He expressed his resentment at the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911 and came into close contact with Nawab Salimullah of Dacca and his communal politics. Having denied of a higher Government service, Fazlul Huq actively joined politics in 1912 and soon ascended the political ladder. He got himself elected in the by-election of the Dacca Division seat (where majority of the voters were Hindus) in the Bengal Legislative Council by defeating Roy Bahadur Kumar Mahendra Nath Mitra and was almost uninterruptedly associated with the Bengal Legislature till 1947, except for two years (1934-1936) when he was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly. Being elected in the Bengal Legislative Council, Fazlul Huq delivered firing speeches giving emphasis on the spread of education particularly for the Muslims and establishment of educational institutions exclusively for them. Soon he came out of his narrow, communal outlook, stood for the Hindu-Muslim unity and was instrumental in drafting the historic Lucknow Pact (1916) which was Huq's a stepping stone to all- India politics. Fazlul Huq not only became the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and the Joint Secretary of the Muslim League (1913-1916) and became the President of the League (1916-1921) but also he joined the Congress in 1917, became its Joint –Secretary and a year later, he served this organization as General Secretary. As he was a diehard anti- imperialist, Huq protested against the Rowlatt Bill and came forward to support the Khilafat- Non-Cooperation Movement. But when Gandhiji adopted the boycott programme, Fazlul Huq strongly opposed to it on the questions of education of the Muslim youth and of participation in the Council elections. As he contested in the December 1920 – January 1921 Council elections, he was formally expelled from the Muslim League. He also resigned from the Congress and joined the Congress-Khilafat-Swarajya Party and as its candidate, contested in the Council elections (which was held in November 1923)

and got himself elected. When C.R. Das refused to form the ministry, Fazlul Huq along with his eight Muslim followers left the Swarajya Party, joined the 'Ministerial Party' and accepted the office of the Minister of Education but had to resign within six months. Thereafter he decided to take up the cause of the toiling masses, he mixed with them freely, spoke with them in their common language (which they can easily understand) and raised his voice against the oppressive zamindars. For safeguarding the interests of the *krishaks* and *prajas*, Fazlul Huq formed the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) and contested the elections of the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1937 and got an unbelievable success. He was successful in getting the support of the Muslim League and became the first Premier (under the Government of India Act, 1935) of Bengal and formed the Praja- League Coalition Ministry which continued upto December 1941. Thereafter he formed the Progressive Coalition Ministry comprising heterogeneous groups like the KPP, Forward Bloc Congress, Hindu Mahasabha, Independent Scheduled Caste etc. and headed the Ministry till March 1943. When Fazlul Huq was in power, he took different initiatives, passed different Acts to ameliorate the condition of the weaker section of the society, formed the Debt Reconciliation Boards to enable the debtors to get back their lands from the exploitive usurers and laid the foundation of different schools and colleges particularly for the Muslim girls. But he did not confine himself within the boundaries of Bengal and often shifted from provincial to national politics. Meanwhile he rejoined the Muslim League in September 1937 and his religious identity guided him to move the Lahore Resolution in 1940. On the question of joining in the Defence Council, Fazlul Huq entered into a clash with Jinnah who took disciplinary action against him and expelled him from the League in December 1941 which lasted for almost five years. He had to face the initial phase of the great Bengal Famine of 1943 and was forced to resign from the Premiership in March 1943. His dilemma, his ambivalence and his vacillating political stances created confusion within the KPP and his followers who gradually left him and rallied behind Jinnah and his Pakistan movement. Though he was elected from two seats in the Assembly Elections of 1946, his KPP got a tremendous setback, won only four seats and turned almost into a 'microscopic minority'. In search of fortune, Fazlul Huq again joined the League but failed to win the confidence of the League Supremo and turned into a frustrated man. Though at the fag end of his political career in undivided Bengal he opposed to the partition of India and tried to protect Hindu- Muslim unity in Barisal, he did not spontaneously raise his

voice and whole-heartedly make campaign in favour of United Independent Bengal and finally left from Calcutta not towards Karachi but towards Dacca where he started a new political struggle.

Against this backdrop, an earnest attempt has been made to make an in-depth study on A.K. Fazlul Huq and undergo a research work on him entitled “A.K. Fazlul Huq and Bengal Politics Between the two Partitions (1905-1947): Currents and Cross-Currents” to highlight in proper historical and political perspectives, the role of Fazlul Huq in the political dynamics of Bengal. The proposed study endeavours to disclose many facets of his political life so far untouched, to investigate some of the perennial problems and questions that figured prominently in the life and activities of Fazlul Huq for example, the land question, peasant politics, indebted peasantry of Bengal etc., to put forward his ambiguities and contrasts, to highlight different shades and volatile stances of his colourful political career, to interpret and reassess Huq’s political activities against the backdrop of contemporary Bengal and national politics and the various political forces, currents and cross- currents operating there and above all, to make an impartial judgement on his life and activities.