

Tributes

Farewell Comrade — Obituary: Rasheed Hasan Khan

I was introduced to Rasheed Hasan Khan by the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. This was in October 1967. Mr. Bhutto, I had learnt, was staying at the newly built Dacca Intercontinental. I had his room number, I called and was asked to come up. At that time Mr. Bhutto was discussing the name of the party ready for launch, and he assured a local politician Mr. M. R. Khan that it would not be denominational. On that they shook hands, Mr. M.R. Khan left and Mr. Bhutto suggested that all of us assembled in his room go down to the coffee bar.

There arrived Mr Mairaj Muhammad Khan and Mr. Rasheed Hasan Khan, who were staying at the older, but still very prestigious Shahbagh Hotel. Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did the honors. I was doing my B.A. (Hons.) final year at the University of Dacca. My subject was Islamic History and Culture. This did not cause him any curiosity because the majority of the East Pakistani politicians who joined the Pakistan People's Party were ulama led by Maulana Nur-uz-Zaman. This I discovered later was of some concern to Rasheed Hasan Khan.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (still a devotee, I find it difficult to over-orientalize his name) had introduced me upstairs to Mr. J.A. Rahim, and Mr. Suleman who was later reported as having seen an U.F.O. among others who were too many to remember. In 1965 Mairaj Muhammad Khan had been elected President of the National Students Federation; by 1967, Rasheed Hasan Khan had taken over. It was then that a Sino-Soviet split took place within the N.S.F. also. Rasheed Hasan Khan headed the pro-China faction and the pro-Russian faction headed by my father's first cousin, Amir Hyder Kazimi.

I was a student activist, and I tried to get Mairaj and Rasheed to address some students of the pro-Bhashani East Pakistan Students Union (E.P.S.U.) I contacted a middle ranking but highly regarded student leader Nizam Ahmad to make the arrangements. I myself did not attend for the fear that the venture would be a non-starter. It was reported back to me that Rasheed Hasan Khan had stressed the ideological note rather strongly and had stated candidly that in the next phase of the revolution

Mr. Z.A. Bhutto, Mr. J.A. Rahim and other leaders unwilling to de-class themselves, would be eliminated. I never questioned Raheed Hasan Khan or Mairaj Muhammad Khan about their speeches.

For my M.A, I transferred to Karachi University in 1968, there I was accosted in the Arts lobby by Rasheed Hasan Khan. This led to my being inducted as a Councillor of the N.S.F. At that time Amir Hyder Chacha went around with Wali Khan, but my choice was taken gracefully by him. So for the one year I was doing my M.A. and thereafter while waiting for the results, I remained in close contact with Rasheed Hasan Khan. Once when we were at his digs at the Dow Medical College Hostel, I crushed my cigarette at the sound of the *azaan*. Rasheed Hasan Khan remained placid, but Mehekri was fazed.

Rasheed Hasan Khan knew my type. Mehekri, though he tried to hide his expression clearly considered me a weirdo. Here, I need to add, that my being a student of Islamic History had taught me that the term 'Islamic Socialism' was coined neither by the Quaid-i-Azam, nor Liaquat Ali Khan who had proclaimed Islamic Socialism the state ideology, or by the Raja of Mahmudabad, or the other leaders of the Pakistan Movement, but by Syed Qutb Shaheed of Egypt and Mustafa al-Sibayee of Syria.

They argued that Islamic socialism was free of the atheism of communism and the exploitation of capitalism. My earnestness must have caused amusement to my N.S.F. compatriots. On the other side, my Marxism had a dash of Groucho Marx thrown in. While I was firmly with Mr.Bhutto and the P.P.P.; I had cut my writing teeth on P. G. Wodehouse so, our addressing each other as comrade (*saathi* in Urdu) conjured up before my eyes the figure of R. Psmith.

The succeeding years wiped out all traces of humor however and 1969-1971 were the years of the deepest anxiety and crisis. On these I have written separately. On 20 December 1971 Radio Pakistan announced in its Bengali language news bulletin that Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had been transferred the office of Chief Martial Law Administrator and President. For me this was a ray of hope.

On 21 December 1971 Rasheed Hasan Khan held a press conference and disassociated the N.S.F. from the P.P.P. He did not agree with a reporter that the one day old P.P.P.government needed more time before judgment was passed on it. Mr Mairaj Muhammad Khan was later jailed by Mr. Bhutto, but to his credit, in an ARY September 2007 interview he viewed his years in jail in rather impersonal terms, still retaining sentiments for ZAB.

Rasheed Hasan Khan told me that once he and Mairaj Muhammad Khan were met in jail by Masood Nabi Noor (then West Pakistan Home

Secretary, I think). He asked what was the necessity of students getting involved in national politics? If they confined their interest to purely students interests, the government would pay regard to them. Rasheed Hasan Khan replied by portraying the plight of a Pakistani student in America, who when he said that he cannot eat pig, was served mutton off the same platter.

The Sino-Soviet split cost the N.S.F. many an election in the Karachi University Students Union. I was approached by Rasheed Rizvi (later Sindh High Court Judge) to bring about a re-union. ‘You are close to Rasheed Hasan Khan and the nephew of Amir Hyder Kazimi’. I asked ‘Rasheed on what basis am I to proceed?’ Years later after Rasheed Rizvi had stepped down from the bench, I recounted this conversation to both Amir Hyder Chacha and Rasheed Hasan Khan; separately off course, and they both made an identical comment: “well said!”

When my book *A Concise History of Pakistan* came out (2009) I sought out after many years, through Shabbar Azmi, Dr. Rasheed Hasan Khan. He did not recognize me but he was gracious, and went down memory lane with me. He like me was a diabetic but led a more hectic life. I asked him: ‘Did you ever meet Mairaj Muhammad Khan after 20 December 1971?’ ‘No’ he replied ‘Mairaj Sahib wanted Bhutto, he also wanted Revolution, and both were not possible’. I had stopped following Rasheed Hasan Khan. I also left the P.P.P. in November 1970, only because I had been appointed a college lecturer, a post demanding political impartiality. Yet Rasheed Hasan Khan will be remembered as a man of integrity. For this reason, the past will not bury its dead.

Visiting Faculty, Area Study Centre for Europe
University of Karachi

Reza Kazimi