

**Political Oppression, Resistance and Leadership Change: The Rise of
Nasim Wali Khan as a Leader**

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Abstract

Turbulent political situations have often facilitated the rise of women leaders in South Asia. Such leaders courageously confronted the testing times and expressed their agency through efficient political manoeuvring; consequently, prolonging their stay in politics. This is particularly the case with a Pakhtun woman leader, Nasim Wali Khan. In this paper, we explore how Nasim Wali Khan emerged as a leader in face of ferocious political suppression such as imprisonment and torcher, perpetrated by the regime of Z.A. Bhutto and how she retained her position through political manoeuvring. The arguments in this paper are based on data collected through secondary and primary sources. Interviews are conducted with the various political workers, academicians, journalists and the family members of Nasim Wali Khan to gain valuable insights. The paper finds out that despite patriarchal social structures and politically menacing regime, Nasim Wali Khan undertook the leadership responsibilities and struggled to occupy and retain a crucial dissenting political space during 1970s.

Keywords: Political Leadership, Oppressive Regime, Resistance, Nasim Wali Khan, Pakistan.

Introduction

The general elections of 1970 provided a unique opportunity to Pakistan i.e., democratic transition based in popular politics. However, the succeeding regime of Z.A. Bhutto dented it through his authoritarian style of governance. Z. A. Bhutto was a highly educated, charismatic and popular leader from Sindh, who ruled Pakistan from 1971 till 1977 (cf. Wolpert, 1993). Z.A. Bhutto after occupying the helms of affairs used coercive measures against those who challenged his authority and question his abusive acts. Intimidation, police harassment, imprisonment and torcher were various tools used by Bhutto to deal with his opponents. Bhutto's oppressive measures were not only limited to political figures but included journalists, lawyers and all those who publically opposed Z. A. Bhutto. During his tenure, political violence was rampant; 'political murders and assassinations became routine' and 'official use of terror and violence' became 'widespread' (Ziring, 1997, p. 381-383). In

such acrimonious situation, Nasim Wali Khan was chosen to lead an opposition party and resist the repressive measures of Bhutto regime.

Nasim Wali Khan is from a progressive political family of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Her father had close association with the Khudai Khidmatgar (KK) movement of India, which was a reformist and anti-imperialist movement led by Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Likewise, her maternal uncle was also a prominent political leader of the time. Later, she became the daughter-in-law of the founder of KK movement, i.e., Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Bacha Khan) through marriage to his son and successor Abdul Wali Khan. In South Asia, Bacha Khan is still remembered as a political stalwart who resisted British imperialism in India. Being raised under Bacha Khan's patronage, Nasim Wali's political acumen developed considerably and this helped her take the ardent task of party leadership in crises (Yousafzai, interview, 2017).

The primary question under investigation in this paper is *how Nasim Wali Khan as a Pakhtun woman leader rose up and confronted the oppressive regime of Z. A. Bhutto?* Qualitative research method is used in the collection of data. In order to answer the question, we have collected data from the primary and secondary sources. For in-depth analysis, we conducted semi-structured interviews from 26 respondents including 1 journalist, 2 academicians, 4 provincial ministers, 3 professionals (lawyers from the Mardan Session Court and 1 from Supreme Court) and the rest from her close associates and political workers acquainted with Nasim Wali Khan. We also have conducted numerous sessions of semi-structured interviews with Nasim Wali Khan in her house. We also used secondary sources in form of published materials to get information regarding Bhutto regime. Secondary data was collected from the books, journals, internet, Nasim Wali Khan online interviews and from different newspapers articles. Different reports and documents referred to women political leadership in Pakhtun society was employed to get meticulous data and enhance the quality of a research paper.

The first part of this paper sets the context for this study by briefly discussing the crisis during Bhutto's era and most specifically the oppressive measures used by Z. A. Bhutto government against its political adversaries. The second section is about the emergence of Nasim Wali Khan within her conservative Pakhtun society and the courageous confrontation she posed to the oppressive regime. It also elaborates on her resistance strategies against the oppression. Finally, the paper concludes its findings within the broader analytical framework focused on Pakistani politics and leadership change.

Setting the Context: Political Conflicts, Opposition and Suppressive Regime of Z. A. Bhutto

In the general elections of 1970, the then National Awami Party (a nationalist political party) won a significant number of seats i-e 13 as compared to Muslim League Qayyum who won 10 seats, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam secured 4, 3 by Pakistan Peoples Party, Council Muslim League 2, Conventional Muslim League and Jamaat-i-Islami secured 1,1 seat while independent won 6 seats out of 40 constituencies in the province of NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Similarly in Baluchistan, National Awami Party secured 8 seats, Muslim League (Qayyum) 3, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam won 2 seats and independent secured 5 seats out of 20 constituencies (Rizwan,2014). NAP was able to form its (coalition) government in both the provinces. Baluchistan provided electoral support base for NAP because of the rising ethno-nationalist sentiments in the province and the ethno-nationalistic credentials of NAP. The PPP government led by Z. A. Bhutto instigated the local resistance in Baluchistan with the support of the Balochi sardars (tribal leaders) against the NAP government. NAP had limited success in East Pakistan by winning only 1 seat in the provincial assembly of East Pakistan (Tasneem,2013,p.197). Abdul Wali Khan, the leader of NAP from the west wing of Pakistan, won both the National and Provincial assembly seats from his home town Charsadda. That was a time, when Sheikh Mujeeb ur Rehman was perceived to be the future Prime Minister of Pakistan. Z. A. Bhutto considered him a threat to his political career, so after the announcement of general election results, he visited Charsadda in 1971 to meet Abdul Wali Khan, to make a united front against the leader of Awami League of East Pakistan, Sheikh Mujeeb. However, the offer was turned down by Abdul Wali Khan. Consequently, Z. A. Bhutto threatened him for the serious outcome (Shah, 2015).

On March 23rd, 1971, Abdul Wali Khan among other well-known political figures offered their full support to Sheikh Mujeeb in the formation of government. However, in the meanwhile General Yahya Khan banned Sheikh Mujeeb in a vindictive act. NAP condemned such actions against the East Pakistan and pressurised the government to solve issues through dialogue (Chandio et al, 2011). The support offered by NAP to Sheikh Mujeeb was not acceptable to the government of West Pakistan, as a result on November 26th, 1971, Yahya Khan also banned NAP. But when Z.A. Bhutto formed the government on December 21st, 1971 he removed the ban against the NAP. This fair action was welcomed by the NAP leaders and provided

unconditional support to PPP. However, NAP's friendship with Bhutto proved to be short lived.

In 1972, NAP was in coalition with the BNP (Baluchistan National Party) in Baluchistan and JUI (Jamait Ulema- e-Islam) in NWFP. After the formation of NAP's government in Baluchistan, they faced greater resistance from the federal government's sponsored Sardars. Consequently, they hardly stayed in power for ten months. NAP government was dismissed by Z. A. Bhutto on the allegation that they are struggling for their independent state from Pakistan through a civil war and are thus sabotaging the peace and security of the country (Siddiqi, 2012).

Z. A. Bhutto took severe action against the NAP after the 1971 war. On March 23rd, 1973 Bhutto ordered FSF (Federal Security Force) to assault the opposition rally in Liaquat Bagh Rawalpindi. As a result of this assault, many people got killed and the NAP leaders, including Ajmal Khattak had to flee to Kabul for the safety of their lives. Later in February 1973, Bhutto dissolved the coalition government of NAP and JUI in Baluchistan and bypassed NAP in appointing Arbab Sikandar Khan as the Governor of NWFP and Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo as Governor of Baluchistan (Shah,2015).Almost four attempts were made to assassinate Wali Khan till 1973, in which he narrowly escaped(Wolpert,1993,p.223).

Z.A. Bhutto government took severe actions against the opponents by arresting the leaders and torturing them in cells (Amin,2007,p.37-38). In 1974, Z. A. Bhutto adopted different policies to handle the opposing factors, some through fulfilling the demands and others through tough stances. He was confident enough to have military backing after the initiation of military operation against the Baloch separatist factions (Hussain, 2008,p.77).

Abdul Wali Khan was blamed to be involved in anti- state activities(Amir.2006). Subsequently, Nawab Akbar Khan Bhugti also blamed NAP and its leadership for separatist activities. Abdul Wali Khan was again arrested on February 8th, 1975 when he was at the funeral of PPP leader Hayat Sherpao (Lyon,2008).Bhutto regime arrested Abdul Wali Khan along with 52 other NAP leadership, including Arbab Sikandar Khan, Afzal Khan, Haji Bilour (NWFP), Ghous Bakhsh Bazenjo, Attaullah Mangal (Baluchistan), Amirzada Khan (Mardan) and sent them to Hyderabad jail. Z. A. Bhutto even arrested the governors of NWFP and Baluchistan. He then committed revengeful acts and banned NAP on February10th, 1975(Noman,2009). NAP

offices were closed down, party funds were seized and party records were wrecked.

The federal government led by Bhutto took different measures to defame the leadership of NAP through press and government controlled electronic media. Abdul Wali Khan was declared a traitor, an enemy of Islam and also the agent of India, Afghanistan, Russia and Iraq. Bhutto imposed censorship with regards to publications of Bacha Khan and Abdul Wali Khan name's (Tofan, interview, 2016). A strategy to officially ban NAP through the apex court was also shaped, as a consequence in June 1975, the reference against NAP was sent to Supreme Court. The court banned NAP by declaring her anti-state party which was involved in activities detrimental to the development of Pakistan (Afridi, interview, 2017).

Z.A. Bhutto even armed the PPP members and supporters throughout Pakistan for the purpose to counter the PNA agitations in the aftermath of 1977 elections (Mazari, 1999, p.467). Bhutto was a person who would have done anything for the possession of power in his hand. He took stern actions to suppress the opponents. He even planned to assassinate Kausar Niazi and Ghulam Mustafa Khar, leaders of the PPP. With the sacrifice of these two leaders, in retaliation, an infuriated and uncontrolled PPP mob would attack and kill the PNA leaders, including Shah Ahmed Noorani, Asghar Khan and Sherbaz Khan Mazari (Mazari, 1999, p.467).

So, the oppressive measures were not only restricted to the opponents, but towards his party associates as well. Anyone in the party arguing or resisting the acts of Z. A. Bhutto would face the wrath. They were expelled from the party. Ziring argues that Z. A. Bhutto ordered for the resignation of more than 30 MNA'S of PPP. But when they obstructed the order, they became the victims of cruel assassination by the FSF (Ziring, 1997, p.383). Similar actions were taken against the editors of the magazines and the lawyers as well. Ziring stated that use of arms was the routine matter in Bhutto era. Instead of denunciation, Z.A. Bhutto acknowledged the use of violence for the purpose to control the uncontrolled situation. Thus, he officially used terror and coercion (ibid, 1997, p.383).

During Z. A. Bhutto era, fundamental rights of the citizens were suspended under the Defence of Pakistan Regulation (DRP). The democratic government still continued these regulations which were proliferated by the darkest military rule. But Bhutto argues that it was just for the preservation of security and territorial integrity of the country and to suppress the

combatants. Once the government evaluated the changes in the conflicting situations, the state of emergency would be terminated (Wolpert, 1993, p.231).

Fighting a Political Battle: Nasim Wali Khan's leadership and Resistance Strategies

Since the NAP faced full outrage of the Bhutto on account of its relentless opposition to his government, a political crisis engulfed NAP itself. It was the crisis of leadership. Besides banning NAP, Bhutto imprisoned the entire party leadership cadre including Abdul Wali Khan in 1975. This left a political vacuum within NAP. Nasim Wali Khan being the wife of Wali Khan came forth and courageously occupied the leadership role at the time of distress. She not only struggled against the political imprisonment of NAP leadership but also tried to protect the party from disintegration (Mayaar, interview, 2017). Furthermore, she strived to play a befitting role of an opposition leader in challenging times.

The literature on political leadership argues that such conflicting situations, enables appropriate leaders to emerge on the political scene and occupy the top leadership positions (Bass & Stogdill, 1990, p.38) and to handle the predicament through commendable measures. Nasim Wali Khan followed the same path. She revealed in one of her interview that she had never thought of joining the active politics. But acrimonious situation, created by Bhutto through targeting political opponents most specifically her husband, party associates, compelled her to leave the comforts of her home and adopt active political life (Wali, interview, 2014). However, it is crucial to note that Nasim Wali Khan belonged to Pakhtun society which generally shuns the doors of active public life on women. Her struggle is significant because she not only resisted the oppressive regime of Bhutto but overcome the patriarchal structures erected by her own culture and society. In order to explore how she did so, we have to analyse various strategies adopted by Nasim Wali Khan and the extent of their success.

Conflicting situations tend to be motivational factors for the leader's concerns and actions (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). The acts and concerns of Nasim Wali Khan were also specified by the testing situations which she confronted in her political career. Nasim Wali Khan declared that she still remembers the intentions and words of Z. A. Bhutto, who wished to end the political career of Ghaffar Khan and his family. Such statements and policies on the part of opponents and the incumbent government further motivated and provoked

her to join politics. She vigorously confronted the injustices made by Z. A. Bhutto against the party and family (Wali, interview, 2014).

Wives of politicians are fully acquainted with political life, therefore they occupy the political space on behalf of their husbands (Jensen, 2008). These elite women have different life experiences as compared to women of the general masses (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005). The active political role of their families is a kind of awareness and preparation for the successors (both male and female) in the future. Thus, women political leaders, through their political family connections, reach to top public offices and easily gain attention, support and sympathies of the general public and direct their political parties effectively (Iwanaga, 2008, p.283). Hussain revealed that in Central Asia and South Asia 'entitlement' matters a lot. It becomes an extra characteristic for the political successors. But, in Pakhtun society entitlement is related to sacrifices of the elders and not to the caste or wealth. Similarly, in case of Nasim Wali Khan, presence of the specific family entitlement is just because of her predecessor's sacrifices who suffered considerably in the whole nationalist movement (Hussain, interview, 2017). Such sacrifices encouraged her to start an unarmed civilian struggle against atrocities of the government.

Nasim Wali Khan had a good understanding of politics because of the day to day political discussions and visits of the political personalities to her home. This gave her courage to express her knowledge of politics. It is also evident from the fact that Abdul Wali Khan discussed different political matters with her and engaged her in his crucial negotiations with his political counterparts. Moreover, the legacy of her father-in-law was much bigger to be protected at all costs even out of the cost of her own comfort (Yousafzai, interview, 2016). Moreover, the opportunity available to her was efficiently manoeuvred by Nasim Wali Khan. Additionally, her own abilities, demonstrated over a period of time, were also noticeable. Afridi appreciates her courage, wisdom and confidence in confronting the odds (Afridi, interview, 2017). Probably these qualities were achieved through her political grooming.

So family political affiliation, political grooming and public regards encouraged Nasim Wali Khan in her struggle against the opponents. She took hard steps to achieve the triumph. Nasim Wali Khan was accompanied by Haji Bilour and Amir Zada Khan (Mardan based advocate) to meet Abdul Wali Khan in jail and make him aware of the political conditions and the

deteriorating status of the party. He gave carte blanche to Nasim Wali Khan and the party colleagues to reform the party (Wali, Interview, 2017). It was important to have a platform through which they were able to resist the suppressive acts of government.

Saint-Germain considered women to be more suitable to occupy the political power after any of the mishaps with their male members because they are the true unifier of the family and having the potential to serve the countries in turbulent situations (Saint-Germain, 1993). Thus, Nasim Wali's struggle started when she tried to congregate old party colleagues and workers and reformed old NAP with the new name National Democratic Party (NDP). This platform would enable her to struggle hard for the release of party colleagues and workers including her husband who were imprisoned in Hyderabad jail as well as demand for fresh elections. She united the defunct party and its supporters. Sardar Sherbaz Mazari became the president and Nasim Wali Khan occupied the position of the vice president of the new party. Sherbaz Mazari was a dissenter of Z. A. Bhutto and virulent critic of his oppressive actions in Baluchistan (Ahmad, 2000). It was through the platform of NDP that Nasim Wali Khan demonstrated her presence on the national political scene. After the NDP formation, she moved towards the public to gain their support in her struggle against the suppression.

Followers play an important role in the career path of a leader by accepting, supporting and empowering a suitable leader in conflicting times. Adoption of an appropriate leadership style enable leaders to gain support and acceptance of public in general. Nasim Wali Khan earned the support of the general public in her struggle against the oppressive forces. Nasim Wali Khan proved herself a suitable candidate for the leadership of the time. She in her very first political speech at Chowk Yadgar, in the presence of a large gathering of supporters and party adversaries, impressed and exhibited her leadership skills. She took over the emotions of the public with these words,

"I am passing from such a situation that there is no male member in the family. They are behind the bars. There is no one (in family) to come forward and take political responsibilities and to carry out the movement forward. Conflicting situations compelled me to come into the open, and took the responsibility of my people in these hard times and together we will fight against the atrocities of Bhutto's government (Wali, interview: 2014).

Loyalties and antagonism among Pakhtuns are very intricate. Even perennial rivals get united against the outside rivals (Ganas, 2008,p.62). Nasim Wali Khan appealed to such characteristics of Pakhtuns in her speeches. Nasim Wali Khan speeches had galvanizing effect on the public who became emotional after listening to her. She had the ability to allure large crowd through good oratory skills and public from the far flung areas attended gatherings enthusiastically. Her speeches enhanced morale of the public (Tofan, interview, 2017).

Nasim Wali Khan courageously showed her presence along with old comrades in different demonstrations from Swabi, Charsadda and Mardan. She expressed her emotions in these words, *"I wore this black shawl which was a sign of my grief. I only started wearing white shawl when you people stood by me in my efforts to break the Hyderabad tribunal and set free our leaders. Would you people agree to put shawl on my head, then I will come to the forefront to start a struggle with you. I have no option left but to join the political field actively and fought against atrocities of the government"*.

Her emotional speeches motivated public specifically Pakhtuns who considered it as the matter of identity i.e., *Pakhtu*(Tofan,interview,2017). Masses recognized sacrifices and struggle of the Bacha Khan for Pakhtuns. He faced difficulties but resisted the opponents for the rights and interest of the public in general(Yousafzai,interview,2016).As public pay regards to the sacrifices made by the males of these families. (Wijekoon,2005,p.67).Nasim Wali Khan also served as a connection between her husband and the party supporters. She continued her struggle for three years (Khan, interview, 2017).

She bravely confronted the oppressive measures taken by the government. She arranged public gatherings, rallies and was in the forefront against any act of the government who infringed the public rights. She availed the opportunities intelligently and never compromised on her political principles. She spoke confidently and discussed the problems with the general public in her public gatherings in an impressive way (Yousafzai, interview,2016).

Nasim Wali Khan exploited the cultural aspect in her favour and struggled against atrocities of the government through popular support. This cultural aspect accumulates' the sympathy vote' for the elite class women who are confronting the hard situation (Wijekoon,2005,p.64). Such support was evident in the general elections of 1977, in which Nasim Wali Khan was

succeeded from two constituencies of Swabi and Charsadda. By winning these general seats, she became the first woman parliamentarian to be elected on general seats (Roy,2014,p.179).

Nasim Wali Khan won the election (1977) from the platform of a political alliance of Anti-Bhutto parties called PNA (Pakistan National Alliance). But election results favoured Z. A. Bhutto, who secured 155 out of total 200 seats in central parliament. PNA blamed government for massive and organized rigging in these elections. Consequently, they boycotted the scheduled provincial elections and started agitations against Bhutto regime. Government took severe measures to crush his opponents, which further aggravated situation of the country (Idrees et al.2015,p.09).

Nasim Wali Khan was an honorary member of the PNA committee and had a strong stand in PNA while Sardar Mazari was the official representative of NDP in such conflicting circumstances. Z. A. Bhutto initially took coercive actions against the PNA agitation, but later, he realized that the situation went from bad to worse (Amin,2007,p.38). He offered dialogue with the PNA and agreed to hold new elections. Being a successful leader enjoying great mass support, it was not easy for the government to ignore Nasim Wali Khan. Z. A. Bhutto tried to meet her and discussed the issues during PNA agitation, but she refused. Nasim Wali Khan was strongly against the agreement on the point that how could it be possible to have fair and free elections in the presence of such turbulent situation and illegitimate government? (Nasr,1994).

Nationwide strikes started against the Bhutto rule. Leading members of PNA including Sher Baz Mazari, Nasim Wali Khan, Mufti Mahmood, Mulana Shah Ahmad Noorani and dozens of other leaders were arrested on March 25, 1977. During the months ahead, processions, arrests, tear gas and baton charging became routine. Situation became further aggravated when Bhutto regime used FSF (Federal Security Force) and army against the agitators. Due to arrests of the leaders, reins of the movement directly came under the control of general public which was impossible for the government to counter (Hussain,2008).

NDP wanted the army to take over and then hold fresh elections within 90 days. Nasim Wali Khan adopted tough stance without surrendering in front of her opponents. She pressurized the illegal government of Bhutto to leave office and hold fresh elections along with the release of all political leaders

and workers (Amin,2007). Nasim Wali Khan started campaigns by touring the whole country. She held public meetings and processions across the country. When General Zia imposed Martial Law and removed Z.A. Bhutto from his office on 5th July 1977, PNA leaders welcomed this act of removing Bhutto (Hussain.2008). However, they termed the martial law as “unwanted but unavoidable” act (Khuhro et al,2013).

After the imposition of Martial law, Gen. Zia ul Haq revoked Hyderabad Conspiracy Case against the former NAP leaders and workers. Gen. Zia released Abdul Wali Khan from the jail in December 1977 and also returned their forfeited properties. General Zia declared Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Abdul Wali Khan as great patriots. Nasim Wali Khan thus led an unarmed, organized civilian movement to oust the autocratic government of Bhutto (Yousafzai, interview, 2016).

Conclusion

Nasim Wali Khan was swept into the political leadership position by a political crisis embedded in the oppressive actions of Z.A. Bhutto. She was intimidated like many other opposition leaders of the time, by the regime, but she refused to succumb to such pressures. She courageously confronted the oppressive measures taken by Bhutto regime through relentless public mobilization. She adroitly exploited the political family affiliation, cultural and emotional sentiments and galvanized public support despite serious challenges to her leadership. Her long struggle not only won her limited success but also exposed her to be a leader in her own right. She got wider recognition among her followers and opponents.

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