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### Oral history interview with Badruddin Umar

Umar, Badruddin  
Iqbal, Iftekhhar  
2009-11-25

[0:00](#)

This is 25th of October, 2009. I am sitting with Mr. Badruddin Umar at his residence in Mirpur, in Dacca. Mr. Umar, if I am correct, you were born in 1931 in Bardhaman. I was wondering if you would kindly let us know about your time when you were brought up and your family, because I am particularly tempted to ask you at a later point about your father, Abu Hasim, but at the start can you please begin with your early childhood?

I was born in a house in Burdwan town, which was quite old. This house actually was very important for our whole family...a kind of extended family, you can say, and the room in which I was born is called in Bangla "Aatur Ghor". In that "aatur ghor" dozens of our cousins

[1:49](#)

They would come there...

and many senior cousins they were born in that room. In those days there were no hospitals like now, present day, where children are born. So, in those days, they used to be born in their own houses. All the first children used to be born in their maternal in-laws', maternal grandparents' house.

Yeah, that was the tradition.

[2:33](#)

But now in our time, that house, all my sisters and brothers, they were born...my cousins, and the house was...the house belonged to a great aunt of mine, and it was bought in late 19th century by her father for her and it was historically an important house in the sense that the famous Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar when he was in Burdwan, he established a hospital, malaria hospital, in Burdwan, and that hospital was housed in this room, in this building, which was owned at that time by a Zamindar, a Punjabi Zamindar called Banso Sodhan Khetri, and Khetri actually bought this house from some English traders who build the house for his own business purposes.

It must have be very historical.

[4:17](#)

Yes, and this house was visited. Actually, it was a centre of political activity in the 30s, the decade in which I was born

Yes, and that was also the decade when Budhi Mukti Andolan was at its peak.

..and in the 40's so many distinguished people came.

Which school you went to?

[4:47](#)

I went to a school called Burdwan Town School.

Okay, and then your college was...?

This was...this was not a Government School but it received a highest government aid in Bengal, because Bengal...Burdwan had no Zila School, Government School

like in Jessore or...

[5:10](#)

like many other districts.

Barisal

and I, after matriculation, I studied ISC, Intermediate Science in Burdwan Raj College, which was also a good college.

So by the time you were growing up, and at college level, your father was very active, politically.

[5:41](#)

He was actually...I passed my matriculation examination in 1948, and he became general secretary in the Muslim League in 1943. So when I joined the College, I started studying in the College, he actually became a politically comparatively important person, because his political career, real political career was really ended with the Partition.

Partition, but you...because of his political activism, your fathers' colleagues must have visited your house in those times, and you remember some of them?

Yes, yes, it was actually before my father, my grandfather used to be there. It was not his house, because he had no house of his own.

[6:54](#)

So he was a cousin of mine, grand uncle about whom I spoke earlier, though he used to live in that building - Number 2 Parkus Road in Burdwan - and there people used to come to visit him, and Sorojini Naidu for instance was a friend of my grandfather. She visited the house later on, and many others I don't remember...Abul Hasan, but during my father's time...Liaquat Ali Khan and Saruddin, Nazimuddin and Midul Amin. They all came to that house, visited the house.

...and Saurafdi was probably your...?

Saurafdi was the first cousin of my mother.

[8:00](#)

Okay. So he also came not only because of politics, but also having the relation...

No, no, he came for political purposes, but other occasions he came to our house in Dhaka, but in Burdwan, you see, that was a political visit.

So that was quite interesting. Interesting people, interesting time, and in the 30's, as you were growing up, you must have felt the heat of...

[8:32](#)

No, in the 30's I was a mere boy, you see, I mean...

...when you were in college...

Yes, when I was in college, again, I was a young man of sixteen.

How was the relationship between Sourafddin and your father, as far as you recall it?

[8:48](#)

No, it was quite good and cordial.

Political friendship, I mean.

It was good and cordial between them, because my father, when he sought election in 1943 for General Secretaryship of the Muslim League, he was supported by Sourafddin, and that support was quite substantial, but later on...and actually he, Sourafddin, could not become the Prime Minister of Bengal without my father's support.

[9:27](#)

Yeah, so there was mutual...

Because he was the man who organized the Muslim League at the grassroots. Previously, it was the prisoner in the house of Nawabs, for instance Rattan Nawab. So it was taken out of that prison, and Bengal Muslim League became an organization of the middle class Muslims, basically, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, you know, he wrote in his Modern Islam in India, that only after nearly two years of his secretaryship, Bengal Muslim League had a member of half a million people.

Yeah, that was quite an achievement.

[10:15](#)

That was a tremendous achievement, and so he became the most influential organization man in the Muslim League, and in that capacity he used to make considerable powers. He himself had no ministerial or any other ambition because he could have easily become a minister after the 1946 election, but he didn't want that. He wanted to keep the government of the ministry under

the control of the organization that was his. So there was a certain struggle. As you know, it happens very often. In this country it is unknown, but in other places...

Like in England...

[11:08](#)

The control between the party leaders and the government leaders.

That's crucial that is not happening yet. Isn't it surprising that after the partition, your Sourafddin had much more...but...I mean, much more success than your father. Your....There was a kind of decline. What is your feeling about this? What happened, really? Was it center-most politics in the sense high..higher ups of the Muslim League?

Actually my father, as I said he was not interested in the ministerial post or anything. You can say that one of his weaknesses was that he had some ideological commitments.

[12:04](#)

Good, bad, or indifferent, he had some ideological commitment, but Sourafddin had none, you see. He had no school, you see.

He was more after power you think?

He was an opportunist and a demon at the same time. I must say that he was not communal, though he was in the Muslim League, but lot of blame is put on him when you come to Calcutta Riot and all that, but my father was very much convinced, and I am also convinced as far as I know. Actually, the whole developments during that time - the Calcutta Riot - but Sourafddin actually was not involved in this riot.

[12:50](#)

On the other hand, he as prime minister wanted to help the people who are victims, and this was those who were actually engaged in that riot. No, going back to the other question, the struggle between the organization and government, it was there, but it did not take any serious, you see, I mean, turn during this period. But, Sourafddin, as my father's popularity grew, he became. So he was, I mean, naturally very jealous after that, because organizationally and otherwise, though he was the prime minister, he was not the number one. But since he was the prime minister, his name is publicized very much now, but at that time, he was actually less powerful in the organization. So the first conflict between them, it arose, you see, at the time when in 1947...probably '47 I suppose, Maulana Akram Khan, who was the president of the Muslim League provincial, resigned. He used to resign quite often.

[14:42](#)

He would resign, and then after sometime he created a situation in which he would be requested to withdraw his resignation, and then he would say, yes, and remain installed in the same position. So, in 1947 he resigned, and then my father was the general secretary. He actually started notice for an election, and the date was fixed, but at that time Nazimuddin, Maulana

Akram Khan, and these people, they actually hatched a conspiracy, you can say, to...not...to see that my father was not elected president. So, they approached Faizul Haq, and sometime before that, Mr. Jinnah, he withdrew the ban, you see, imposed on Faizul Haq. Actually, Faizul Haq was expelled from the Muslim League, and that expulsion order was withdrawn, and so Faizul Haq became a member of the Muslim League, and these people, they approached Faizul Haq and promised support to him in this election. Very surprisingly, Sourafddin, he was so close to my father, he actually surprisingly sided with...

[16:44](#)

Khan saab.

And he also didn't want him to be the president of the provincial Muslim League. So, it is not necessary to go into details, but actually that created a situation in which there were a lot of disturbances in the council. The counselors, they were in favor of my father. There were others who were in favor of Faizul Haq, because...not because he was a nominee of the Nazimuddin's, but probably he himself had a popular stretch than he has popularity of his own. So, a situation was created in the council meeting.

Had it been not...been the case, probably, the case that was put forward by your father with the United Bengal maybe that...

[17:49](#)

No, no that was...and at that meeting there was so much disturbances that ultimately, it was actually found that neither side could really have a decisive victory, but there was a possibility of some bloodshed et cetera. Then, suddenly, Nazimuddin group actually requested Akram Khan, as he was requested earlier...as he was requested earlier in different circumstances. So here they again requested Akram Khan to withdraw his resignation, and so withdraw his resignation, and then both my father and Faizul Haq, actually, they are out because there was no election, because Akram Khan's resignation was not accepted, you see. That was also one of the items in the Council. So when Akram Khan withdrew his resignation, and Nazimuddin group supported, you know, supported him. Then, as a compromise solution because it was...majority of the group, in order to avoid the confrontation, they supported that. So then Akram Khan withdrew. But that, Faizul Haq was extremely angry, and he demanded an election.

[19:51](#)

He demanded not an election but a, I mean, opinion whole inside the Council in favor of against Akram Khan's resignation. But, Faizul Haq was actually badly defeated there, but this actually made the relation between my father and Sourafddin. Sourafddin actually made some maneuvers which actually did create difficulties for my father..., and this became quite, you know. So, after that you see, naturally, the relation did not remain at that way.

Is this a background against which your father's Khilafat-e-Rabbani Party was...

No, no, it was later.

[20:43](#)

It was later, but still he was not feeling at home with the Muslim League after the partition in the 50's. Your father established this "Khilafat-e-Rabbani Party."

No, no it was much later. Much later.

'53, '54.

Much later.

[20:58](#)

After Partition, of course. Yeah, yeah.

It was '53, '54.

We will come back to it later. Coming back to yourself, again. Just before Partition, I mean, when did the Marxist-Leninist idea were cultivating in you? Were you given to read the Marxist text at that point or...?

[21:28](#)

No, actually I never, you see, was a member of any student organization, and I had no particular inclination towards any political party in the Muslim League, but I used to do at that time listen to my father, you see, because he would often engage in serious discussions.

You are talking about just before the Partition or after?

No, no much before Partition.

[22:01](#)

Partition, okay.

And I also used attend the political classes of the...which the Communist Party organized in their office. So I used to go there not very often but sometimes and listen to what they would say.

Do you remember any some of those who were instructing?

[22:29](#)

Yes, Hari Krishna Kumar, Bina Chowdhury, but I was generally speaking under the Islamic influence because of my father's, but that was...I did not study in the Islamic literature or anything. It was just, as far as I could, I mean, gather, from what we used to discuss. And then Partition, actually happened. My father became the political...I used to read lot of, I mean, novels and travels even detective novels at that time. We used to read newspapers everyday that was in Cultural Bhavan.

Where were you during the Calcutta Riot? You were in Bardhaman?

[24:17](#)

No, during the Calcutta Riot, I was in Calcutta, because it so happened that the Muslim League, they called a meeting at the Maidan in Calcutta, and it was expected that the meeting would be a very... Iftequar: Violent.

Not violent. Not at all. It would be a very big event.

Big gathering.

Big gathering. So my father took me and my younger brother who was six and a half years.

[24:58](#)

What was his name?

His name is Sahabuddin. So he took us to Calcutta.

Okay. So he was giving any lecture? No...

So at that time, we were in Calcutta, but we used to live in Burdwan. My father used to live in Calcutta where he rented a house in which also the weekly paper Birla was also...used to be composed.

[25:32](#)

...printed from there. So, did you have any experiences from that particular day of direct action?

Actually, since the early morning, people started coming that the Raja Bazaar and other areas. Riots broke out, and people were getting very excited, I remember, but in spite of that, the meeting which was called at 4'o clock some time in the afternoon.

Who attended the meeting among the major leaders?

[26:16](#)

No, there...the Bengal Muslim League leaders, they were all there. My father was there, Sourafddin, Nazimuddin, others,...elected, and there was a ladder they had to go up.

Your father spoke or on that day?

Yes, he spoke and Sourafddin, Nazimuddin and actually Raja Gaznafar Ali Khan of Punjab was also there at that time. No I don't think he spoke or maybe two, three minutes, four minutes. It was a very short note, because by that time riot broke out in Bhawanipur, in Raja Bazaar and other places.

[26:59](#)

So...and excited people were trying to excite the audience by saying that many Muslims had been killed, so we must go for vengeance, and the meeting actually...There are many details, you see. I need not go, but actually the meeting did not last for more than thirty, forty minutes, because the situation was getting very tense, you see. People were...they were wanting to go back to their home areas, you see. So, we went there by car, but the car couldn't reach up to the lost traffic

facility. Big crowd, you see. We had to get down and walk, and people lost track. So after the meeting, we walked to our house, you see. It was situated in Recon Street. All the way we had to walk. There was no transport.

Did you feel secure anymore there?

[28:09](#)

No, there was no insecurity 'till that time, you see. The meeting broke, and thousands and thousands of people were going, back. They were going to their areas, and then after that, you see, after that on the sixteenth night, there was...the killing started, and from our house, we used to...there was a narrow lane, you see. It used to connect at the, this, our house, the main Recon, and street so the road was actually at a distance, we were not right at the road. So, we used to hear shouts and loud voices et cetera, chasing people, you see, and killing, assaults...

Later on, in the 60's, you have written three books, particularly, that related more or less to communal issues, and I wonder if that also developed from your experience of the bloodshed and all this communal violence of that time, or you had other take? Other academic, or...?

[29:35](#)

No, I wouldn't say that my experience of Calcutta Riot, you see, actually led me to write those things. Naturally, we were against communalism. We were against killings, actually. We never supported that kind of thing, but what I wrote in the 60's that was because...

Contemporary situation...

...of what was going on.

[29:59](#)

...at that time.

Yes, at that time.

Yeah.

And, I am a man who grew up very slowly. Changes took place. Very great changes within this place, but it took place very slowly.

[30:17](#)

When was it in the 50's?

50's, 60's.

What kind of change? Can you tell us?

No, as I said, I was an Islamic-minded people, you see, who were inclined towards Islam. So even when he came to Dhaka in 1950.

[30:41](#)

So, there was a lingering influence, and it took another 3, 4, 5 years for me to overcome that, you see, but that happened because I began to study philosophy, you see. My father wanted me to be a physician, but then he lost his sight, you see, because he had a disease in the eye called retinitis.

Yes, yes gradually.

Gradually...

[31:19](#)

Thank God that developed much later.

Actually, at the time of partition, he became a blind man. In 1948 - 49 I used to...he is my grandfather.

Yeah, I was just wandering whether...fit my imagination.

No, so I used to read a lot of philosophical books, Indian philosophy and Western philosophy. So, while I was reading that...

[31:52](#)

In the 50's, perhaps.

In the 50's, no not in the 50's in 1948-49.

Ok, where were you in '48?

In Burdwan.

[32:02](#)

In Burdwan, Okay.

So, in these 2 years, you see, I became acquainted with some of the thoughts of the European philosophers and Indian philosophers and the six schools of philosophy, Max Müller, see. That was one of the books which I read out...So, I became interested in that kind of thing, but my father wanted me to be a physician, when I came to Dhaka I...

When did you...when did your family decided to come to Dhaka?

[32:45](#)

After the riot, February riot in 1950's.

Okay, 1950. What was the nature of the riot? Was it like...?

It was not a riot actually.

Localized...

[32:55](#)

Burdwan was a very peaceful area. Before that, there was no communal riot in Burdwan. At that time also, what happened was not a full scale riot or anything, but tension it was, and some people - this was the experience - they actually set fire to our house. When tension arose, my father was not in Burdwan. He was in Calcutta, but...

You were in there.

...we shifted from that house, because that was an isolated house, isolated place. So, we shifted from there to our other relations house.

[33:38](#)

Your mother were other...

in the middle of the town, and the house was set on fire, you see. My father was very much disturbed by that because he never thought that his house would be, I mean, attacked by anyone like that, because among his friends, mostly, they were Hindus. One or two were Muslims, but most of the others were Hindus.

That was quite unexpected, particularly in '52.

[34:17](#)

...and some later, but after this situation some of his friends' attitude and behavior was not quite...

...as before.

...as before. So that also hurt him . So after our house was burned, we went back to our village home, and during the rest of the period between the riot and our...

...departure.

[34:53](#)

...our departure from the, this period we stayed in our village, you see.

So when you arrived, your family and yourself arrived in Dhaka in February 1952?

I came in '50, it was '50.

Okay.

[35:09](#)

because the riot took place in '50. So I came here earlier because I had to appear in the intermediate examination.

You said you did it in Dhaka.

Both the government said in India

East Pakistan.

[35:28](#)

This Calcutta and Dhaka University running the examinations, you see, for the migrants.

Okay, repatriation.

So, I came here on the 12th of April, and the examination started a few days later. I appeared as a refugee candidate.

Ok, you were in Dhaka College?

[35:51](#)

No, the examination, I was studying in Dhaka.

No, I mean your examination took place...

Examination took place in the Curzon Hall area. There is a hall called Litten Hall, in that little hall.

So you appeared in 1950?

[36:06](#)

In 1950.

And then after your exam, you went to do your honors?

In Philosophy.

You went to Oxford directly?

[36:17](#)

No, No.

You went to Oxford later?

Oxford was much later, in 1959. So I studied philosophy in Dhaka University.

Okay, and you were a student during when the Language Movement was going on?

[36:33](#)

Ah, yes.

In Dhaka University. So you also participated in...?

No, I participated as...

What were the active political...?

[36:45](#)

Hundreds of others participated. I was neither a leader or my class friends...some of the class friends were leading workers, you see.

But, your book happens to be one of the first and most acute observations about those, and also that goes against the main history, the main interpretations of this. How did you...?

This is because I had an added advantage, because I was a participant of that, because as there was, as I said, hundreds of others participated. They joined the demonstrations, and they witnessed many developments, acts, you see.

[37:29](#)

Police actions, et cetera, and how the leaders behaved, you see, and who did what. So, it was under my eyes, you see. So, that helped me to get the, as they say, the hang of the things. So, that was an advantage. When I wrote, actually, I did not decide to write anything in 1952, or I was not a writer at all. So, but when I decided to write, I started writing. Actually, I started work not on the Language Movement, but I wanted to, when I was in Rajshrajsahahi University. I joined Rajshahi University in November 1957, but in the early 60's, then I thought that it would be worthwhile if I study the developments, political and other developments, in East Bengal since 1947. I didn't know anything about this country because...

You joined Department of Political Science in Rajshahi?

[38:52](#)

Yes, that was later you see. Yes, that was not later, I started work on this, you see, in 1963 actually. Before that, I joined Rajshahi University in Philosophy, not in Political science. I joined Political Science Department after coming back from Oxford, you see, because in Oxford I took...

And go back to the issues related to your Oxford days? But before that you were talking about the Language Movement. You were...as you were preparing yourself to write...

[39:34](#)

No, the only thing I did that my father was approached by the some of the leaders of the committee, action committee, to write on that the legitimacy of the language, the...

Action Committee of the Language.

Yeah, there was a member of that, and he actually presided over the 20th February meeting which decided whether to take part in the...

[40:07](#)

In the procession, whether to break the section.

whether to break the 1944 section.

Was your father against or...?

No, he was not in favor of..

[40:19](#)

Violating, violating the, yeah.

Violating, most of them were not, because the communists also were not in favor of that.

But some were in favor. Some were..

Their number was very few, because the communist party also thought that they already had an experience of this kind of a...'48 '49 '50's...

[40:41](#)

So they thought that they went again for this kind of...and that will be another adventure sort of thing, and the government actually announced an election. So they thought that if a disturbance like that took place, then the government will decide to delay the election. So they wanted the early election. That sort of considerations were there, but the action who were in the field, they were feeling the pulse of the students, the temper of the students, and they wanted to actually violate it. Most of the young people, they wanted to violate, you see.

Okay, so then, after about five, six years you decided to write about the history of the Language Movement.

[41:33](#)

Not five, six years. This was 1952, and I started...I did not write any, I mean, start work on the Language Movement, as I said. In 1963, I thought that I better write on the developments, you see, which took place since 1947, and I didn't know anything, as I said. We were not here. We didn't know anything. I didn't know anything. So then I started thinking on the methodology of this work. I knew the people who were active in politics at that time, before 1947 and after that. So, there was Mr. Kamruddin Ahmad, who was a very active worker associated with my father's...

Ambassador? Who later became Ambassador, and wrote a social history of Bengal?

[42:37](#)

Yes. So, I first met him and told him that I would like to know about...I decided to work on this, and I would like to know what actually happened since 1947, politically. So, I had number of sittings with him, and in those days there were no these...

Computers.

...recording devices.

Recordings, yeah..., so you took some oral evidence without recording.

[43:15](#)

Yes, without recording.

Technically recording.

I used to take notes, you see.

Shorthand or something like that.

[43:21](#)

Not shorthand. In long hand, but I used to take notes, and then in the evening whenever I interviewed any person, in the evening, I used to write it down.

Okay, from your memory.

On the basis of notes, and on the basis of the fresh memory, which I had during the days.

That was great, yeah.

[43:45](#)

I never felt any difficulty in actually writing what they said, you see.

And you gave the summary and also the...

Yes, so by interviewing Mr. Kamruddin Ahmad, I came to know, in broad outline, the history of East Bengal since 1947 up to 1964, '65. I continued this, with him I continued this, and then I also interviewed lots of other people, and totally, I actually interviewed more than a hundred people. Of these, fifty-nine interviews have been printed in Bengali Academy.

[44:36](#)

In Bangla Academy.

Bangla Academy.

You probably took up that issue, but there is debate that Awami League was the mainstream in the Language Movement, and probably you don't, I mean, you probably differ to that.

[44:55](#)

No, it is not the question of differing, you see. It was absolutely serious, and it would be nonsensical to say that Awami League had a leading role in the Student League. Actually, it was an important organization in 1952, but so far as the Language Movement is concerned, it had very little, I mean, very little, you can say, influence on the Language Movement, because they were in...they didn't want to break the...they didn't want to...they were against breaking the 144. The convener of the All Party Committee was the Student League leader, that's true, but in spite of that, you see, the real organizational force at that time was the Juba League. East Pakistan Juba League. The young men speak.

They call it Youth League

[46:30](#)

Youth League, Youth League.

Awami Youth League.

No, No. Awami had nothing to do with it!

Oh, that was a different..., now they have a kind of Youth League but that is a different one.

[46:40](#)

That Youth League was organized by...

All Party...

Not All Party. Mainly by the Communist Party at that time. Those who were related in one way or other with the Communist Party, they actually formed this Youth League. There were some others also, but this other group, they, those who were related to the Communist Party, they were the main force. No organization can say that it is their movement. Tamaddun Majlish actually had a role in 1948, the early period, but in 1952, it was very much, you know, but they still claimed that they are actually the leaders and they are the...

[47:32](#)

By, in 1952, when these events were taking place, you were still kind of Islamically oriented, and from that point of view, what I mean, from that perspective, what did you feel? Do you...? Were you thinking that this movement was going against Islam, or it was a kind of secular...?

No, up to that period, I had some influence - Islamic influence on me, but I never, as I said, that I did not join any student organization, Islamic or otherwise.

No, but in other terms of your thinking...

[48:09](#)

Thinking, no. I never thought that Islam was...

Islam was not against...in your bar against...

No, no, Islam was not in my mind at all, so far as the movement was concerned. I was a member of the Islamic cultural organization called Tamaddun Majlish, which I said...

That was in favor of...

[48:30](#)

Yes, but they were not very aggressive, you see. As you find, the aggressive Islamic organization. They were not aggressive. Later on, they changed, you see. Later on, it degenerated, I can say.

But did you see any conflict between Bangla and Islam?

No, no, not only that they did not see any conflict, but actually these were the people who...  
Initiated.

[49:02](#)

...were initiators of this, and those who opposed Bengali, you see, in the 19th century and later, you see, they were not the grassroots.

They were the elite and...

They were the elite class. Even so far as the newspapers are concerned, if you go to the 19th century, you will find that in the 90's and later, you see, those who were preaching Islam, you see, they were doing it in Bengali.

[49:35](#)

There was no other, I mean, scope, because if you are going to address the page and send it to people who were less educated or were richly educated, you had to, I mean, speak to them in Bengali. Urdu was a silly idea and so was English, and they were bringing out newspapers and journals in Bengali. So if you go back to the history of Bengali newspapers, edited by Musalmans, you will find that they were related to Islamic, this, missionary activities.

Yeah, yeah, so that started solely from the Farazi Movement and all this, the...

You can say that Tamaddun Majlish, these people were in a way, they belonged to that tradition. Not very consciously, but, I mean...

[50:32](#)

I mean, by circumstances they are...

By circumstances.

Yeah. When did you decide to go to Oxford, in...? When did you go to Oxford?

I told...the question of deciding.

[50:42](#)

Yeah, what circumstances led you to...?

I..No, there was no circumstances. I got a scholarship.

Okay, yeah that was the circumstances.

From the, it was a central government scholarship. So, I went to Oxford in October...late September.

[51:04](#)

In the year?

1959.

Okay. 1959, and you took up this PPE.

PPE, yeah.

[51:14](#)

Philosophy, Political Science and Economics.

Philosophy, Political Science and Economics was honors, less in Politics and Economics.

Yeah. So how were your days in Oxford? Did you make lot of friends and did you make...?

Yes, I have given detailed, you see, descriptions of my Oxford life in the volume 2 of my autobiography.

[51:36](#)

Autobiography, yeah. Oh, you have already published the Volume 2?

Volume 3.

Okay, so I only knew about the volume that describes your life from 1931 to 1950. So you have already published the Volume 2.

[51:51](#)

Second volume from 1950 to 1968, from our coming over to Dhaka and to my resignation from the Rajshahi post. And the volume 3 is from '69 to March 1971.

So you, when did you return from Oxford?

'61 August.

It was a two...

[52:19](#)

Two year.

Two year course.

One year exemption was there because we were old people and we already passed whatever examinations there were...

Okay. Were there any South Asian friends?

[52:30](#)

Yes, yes! there were many.

Do you remember any names?

Yes, South Asian mainly.

I mean Indian, or the historian, or...

[52:39](#)

There were others...So far as Indians, Ravindra Dayal was there. Later, he became the chief of the Oxford University Press in Delhi, and still later, founded the publication of his own called Ravindra Dayal.

So you got in...

He died two, three years ago, and there was another friend who became, I just forget his name, he was quite close. He joined the Indian Foreign Service and later became ambassadors for Cuba and Malaysia and...

[53:23](#)

Okay. So when you got active in politics after coming from...after coming back from Oxford?

No, no, I didn't. I joined politics in 1969.

During the student...

...after resigning my job in Rajshahi.

[53:42](#)

Okay, can you tell us little bit about the reasons you resigned? Was it because of politics or were any other considerations?

No, I actually decided to give up my university job and join politics as early as my Oxford days, you see, but then, as I said, I didn't do anything hurriedly. I took my time. Actually, in London, I met Nepal Nag, who was one of the leading Communist Party leaders in East Bengal at that time, and he...

You mean Communist Party of Pakistan?

[54:32](#)

Yes. He wanted me to join the party, and he actually sent his recommendations here, you see, but then at that point, you see, in 1961, I didn't want to become a member of the party because being a member...because I was a serious man, you see. I have always done whatever I have done quite honestly. So, I thought that if I had joined the party at that time, I would have some definite obligations and some responsibilities which I was not...Otherwise, family considerations and otherwise were there. So I took my time, you see, but I resigned from the Rajshahi University because I started writing on the cultural situation in East Pakistan at that time. Pakistan, you know...I first started writing in a journal which used to be published in a Rajshahi...

[55:44](#)

Ganashakti or...?

No, no Ganashakti was 1971, '70. Ganashakti was a party paper, after I joined...

After you joined the party.

But that was a paper which used to be edited by Mustafa Nooral Islam and Naziriul Rohman Siddiqui.

[56:02](#)

That was called Sonskriti.

No, no, that was called Purbo Megh.

Purbo Megh, oh!

Sonskriti was a paper later in 1974. I used to edit it. Still, I edit that paper.

[56:12](#)

Then I wrote that article on Communalism called Somprodikota, and that created a lot of commotion in the government circle and also among the people, middle class people here, who were gradually shedding off their communal thinking and were inclined towards liberal thinking or socialist thinking. So, I continued with the book called Somprodikota. It consisted of several articles which were published in 1966 first. Then another, Sonskriti Sokot, Crisis in Culture. That was in '67. And then the other book was ready, called Cultural Communalism, but that was published after I left Rajshahi University. Actually, the printing started while I was there, but the actual publication...

The three books came in...

[57:21](#)

In Rajshahi, while I was in Rajshahi University. So that created lot of, I mean, hostility against me.

From the establishment.

From the, actually the Governor Munim Khan who was absolutely set against me, you see; he wanted the vice chancellor to dismiss me. The vice chancellor, I mean, refused to do

Who was the vice chancellor then?

[57:46](#)

Mohammad Samsul Haq.

Who became the Speaker?

No, no, he became a minister in Area's cabinet. So, actually the governor in October, early October, or late September, the governor actually convened the conference, you see. He called the vice chancellor, and there was a, as I was told by the vice chancellor when he came back

from Dhaka to Raj Sahi, that there was a two and half hour's meeting, and in that meeting, the vice chancellor was there, the IG Police was there, there was no home secretary at that time.

[58:40](#)

The joint secretary home, Obaidullah, who was a friend of mine, a class friend of mine, he was there. I also heard from him, you see, some other things that took place in the meeting. Then there was the education secretary. I mean, it was a very high power meeting, and in that meeting, Munim Khan wanted the governor, wanted the vice chancellor to dismiss me, and the vice chancellor said that it was not possible for him to do that. First, because there was no rule in the university...

Somebody will be sacked because of his writing.

[59:22](#)

Sacked because of writing, you see. He said if you think that he is security problem, You have security laws. You can pick him up security, as a security, as a security problem...

Threat, a security...

...but I cannot dismiss him. Secondly, if I dismiss him, it will not be possible for me to run the university at this moment, because at that time, I was quite popular, and I had friends in the university. Students were also inclined towards what we were doing

[59:55](#)

A very good following of you.

So, there would have been a big disturbance in the University. So you can say that it would not be possible for that. Then the vice chancellor came back to Rajshahi, and he called me and told me that this is the position, and it is becoming very difficult for him to protect me. So, I told him that there is no need for it. I also said that earlier to him. He wanted me to help him. I said, I can...how can I help you? Once, he said, Could you write anything up against India? So, now we can write against India, but at that time, why should I write against India about this. And, I was actually working in a completely different field.

[60:50](#)

So when he came back from that meeting in Dhaka, so, and reported that to me, I decided. You see, I already wanted to leave this, yeah. I was thinking that I want to go for politics, but I am getting older and older. If I go on like this, I would finally burn out there, you see, and it wouldn't be possible for me to get out. So, that was an occasion ...a situation which led me to resign.

And, also there is the other cooling factor like politics.

So, after two, three days, I went to the vice chancellor and submitted my resignation.

[61:34](#)

Okay, and then you...then for...after that, you joined East Pakistan Communist Party.

Yes, East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist).

Yeah, then, I am not sure if I am correct, but you resigned the party in 1971?

In 1971.

[61:53](#)

December?

December.

Why?

Because I, one day, actually, we were doing in 1971 or not doing, you see.

[62:03](#)

They were not good enough, active enough?

No, no, they actually, they were...there was complete wrong understanding of the whole situation, and I have written in detail about this in my volume three.

Yeah, but just for our audience, so...

Ah. But there, you see, they thought that at the beginning, when the 19...the 25 March that genocide started.

[62:36](#)

There was a natural reaction among our party leaders also that we will have to really resist it, and resist it unitedly with others, even unitedly with the Awami League. That was a decision which we had up to 20, 27th of March...on the 30th March, you can say. That was the position, and then I had a meeting with some of the leaders, Sukhendu Dastidar, and Toha, and Abdul Haq, that sort of leaders. They were the three most important leaders. So I had a meeting with them on the 30th, and even in that meeting, it was so decided, and then we left Dhaka. We were...actually, when we were leaving Dhaka, Toha and myself, and two other young chaps with us, so we were arrested in Rajarbagh, you see. You know, the Sahid Kumar case, that...

By Pak Army?

[64:06](#)

No, by the Awami League of ICSE.

What was the date?

That was 27th of...

Of '71.

[64:13](#)

27th of March.

December, or...Oh, March!

27th of March, and they actually wanted to kill us. Somehow, we escaped you see, and that is it.

Why would at that time Awami League would do that, because they wanted, they must have wanted a broader platform?

[64:27](#)

No, they didn't want any broader platform. They wanted their own main leadership, and since we were known as the pro-Chinese, you see, communists, you see, they were deadly against us, and Tajuddin didn't want that, but there were other criminals in the Awami League, others, the diehards, you see, who did want it, and actually, they actually kept us, you see, in a union council office, and we were not allowed to go out, not even, I mean, any food, or water, or anything, you see, but somehow with the help...

But the war has already started.

[65:08](#)

Yes, that was 27th, after the...

Yeah.

So we stood all the way. I met a student who was in Rajshahi University. He actually organized this, our escape, everything.

So that was quite a...lucky that you got away.

[65:28](#)

Yes, it was very lucky that I met that student.

So it was not the Pak Army, but Awami League that...

The Awami League, yes, the Awami League.

In 1971, they were the...

[65:37](#)

And some of the Awami League, these mafias visited us, in that, while we were detained there, and they took from us the ammunitions which we were carrying, you see. They took all the ammunitions. We had three revolvers...two revolvers with us.

Did you have any communication with Bhasani?

No, no, we had no communication with Bhasani.

He was also pro-Chinese?

[66:06](#)

He was pro-Chinese, yes, but he went to India, and he was practically kept in a confinement, you see.

So he was rather, he was neutralized.

He was neutralized, and then we escaped, and...escaped from there, and later, when I was in a village in Jessore, on the 14th of April, in the evening, there was a radio broadcast that Zhou Enlai, you see, the Chinese Prime Minister, has sent a verbal message to Ayub Khan saying that the prosperity of the people of East Pakistan lies in the unity of Pakistan and secondly, that only a handful of people are trying to separate East Pakistan from West Pakistan..

[67:13](#)

So both these were wrong, politically wrong, and we had no reason to, I mean...

Subscribe to that, to that view.

To subscribe to that view. So, immediately, lot in shaping the minds of the middle class Bangladeshis. Bangladeshis, I mean, East Pakistanis or Pakistani Bengalis.

Like Abul Mansoor Ahmad's view was a kind of foreshadowing, this kind of Bangladeshi, kind of nationalist...

[67:55](#)

Actually, Abul Mansoor Ahmad, he...I had a good personal relation with him. He was the senior leader, year older than my father, and his son was a friend of mine. He was a class friend, Mahboob..

Not Mahboob...Maboob. Senior to him, yeah.

Actually Abul Mansoor Ahmad wrote a long criticism of my Somprokidota. I have lost it. It was published by Ahmad Publications.

[68:32](#)

What was his take?

His attitude was not hostile like many others like Ali Hasan or Liaquat Hussain, but he, in his own way, criticized because ,you know, he was one of the Bengali writers who wanted to Islamize Bengali like poet Ghulam Mustafa and Tatin Bhonsale and others. So he criticized me for my ideas, you see, and naturally he wanted to say that whatever happened actually Hindu middle class people contribute to the lot which was in a way true because Hindu middle class was very...

Religious...

[69:35](#)

Communal. A large section of them, not all of them, a large section of them. Actually, when people talk of communalism in general they mean Muslim communalism, you see, which is absolutely wrong because communalism among the Muslims, you can say, was a kind of reaction to the big brotherly attitude of the Hindus who were really highly cultured, educated, better placed, and so they used to look down upon the Muslims, and there was a caste hatred-like attitude towards the Muslims. It was there. So as the caste Hindus never thought of being dominated by the lower caste Hindus. If they were told that the lower caste people were going to run the government and the affairs of the country, so they would not certainly submit to that. It happened like that, you see, regarding the Muslims, but the lower class Hindus couldn't make it, but the Muslims made it. So that was a fact which influenced the course of developments here.

[71:03](#)

So Abdul Mansoor Ahmad probably took, I mean, departed from that perspective.

No, he was, as I said, he belonged to...he was in favor of Muslimizing the...not only in East Pakistan, but that was his position earlier, you see, in the 40's, in the 30's, you see. He belonged to that school.

How, I mean, what difference...?

He belonged to that school, but he was not a supporter of Urdu or anything.

[71:34](#)

Yeah. Was there any difference between him and the Buddhir Mukti Andolan era?

Yes, Buddhir Mukti Andolan was a liberal movement, you see. I mean, it was a liberal movement.

But that didn't last long.

No, it didn't last long, and sorry, it was led by weak people, for instance, I would say.

[71:54](#)

Weak, you mean intellectually weak or...?

Yeah, intellectually weak, and they are, I mean...

Politically not connected.

They could not produce any remarkable work, you see, which influences the writing which would influence the...

[72:09](#)

Mass people.

For instance, there was Abul Hussain, and Kazi Abdul was the most influential of them, was the most influential among them, but there were others, you see, for instance...

Abul Hussain.

Abul Hussain was there. He died very early.

[72:35](#)

Kazi Muhtar Hussain.

Kazi Muhtar Hussain, and the worst of them was Abul Fazal of Chittagong, you see. He was an opportunist. Later, he turned out to be a downright opportunist and...