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## The History of Transformation from the Ideology of Pan-Islamism to Formal Leftism in Undivided India



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**Abstract:** *This research paper explores the history of the evolution of formal leftism in undivided India, with special focus on the NWFP (present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) of Pakistan. Communist Party of India (CPI) was the first socialist political party of undivided India, which was originally founded in Soviet Tashkent in 1920 and was activated in undivided India in 1925. The history of the formation of CPI and formal leftism in undivided India tells us about a long process of transformation which underwent a great shift during the politically charged scenario of Khilafat-cum-Hijrat Movement. The early anti-colonial revolutionaries and the reformist leaders upholding Pan-Islamist ideology fused for a common fight against British imperialism in undivided India, which ended in widespread migration (Hijra) into Afghanistan and up and beyond Soviet Tashkent. A military school was founded in Tashkent for the training of Indian Muhajirin, and it was at this juncture that Muhajirin turned into socialist revolutionary, and who later founded formal leftism in India and Pakistan.*

**Key Words:** Communism, Pan-Islamism, Mujahidin, Hijra, Bolshevik, Socialism

### Introduction

The history of formal leftism in undivided India can be traced to anti-colonial indigenous struggle of earlier *Mujahideen* movement, which contested the British power after the defeat of Sikh Army in the second war of Anglo-Sikh in 1849. The *Mujahideen* gave a tough time to British Army by establishing military headquarters at the borderland tribal areas. Chamarkand was one of such Headquarters, which was frequently use by expatriates' anti-colonial revolutionaries for traveling to and from Afghanistan and beyond. It was through Chamarkand Markaz, that many *Muhajirin* and some of the Pan-Islamist turned Bolsheviks

espionage between undivided British India and Soviet Tashkent (Ayaz & Islam, [2022](#)).

Thus, the Socialist, or more broadly, leftist politics in India and Pakistan was the product of a long process of transformation, which culminated into the formation of émigré Communist Party of India, (CPI). The CPI was founded on October 17, 1920 in Soviet Tashkent, by Manabendra Nath Roy (1887-1954), with the support of émigré Indian revolutionaries and a section of educated *Muhajirin* who were attending their political and military training at Tashkent in *Induski Kurs* (Indian Military School) (Raza, [2011](#)).

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Among those émigré revolutionaries, many first imbibed anti-imperialist revolutionary sentiments and were inspired by Pan-Islamist ideology. The Khilafat leaders, in 1920, declared India to no longer be a peaceful place for Muslim believers to live in – a *Dar ul-Harb* -- and called for leaving it by migrating (*hijra*) to Afghanistan and other Islamic countries. For them, migration (*hijra*) meant leaving the motherland (a known place) and travelling to another abode (an unknown place), in the tradition of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). They saw this as a crucial tactic for the liberation of their motherland (Rauf, 2005).

Obaidullah Sindhi (1872-1944), Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali (1854-1927), Abdul Rab Peshawari, Mahendra Singh Pratap (1886-1979), and many others left India during and after the First World War, on order to carry out anti-imperialist work in the tribal lands of the Indo-Afghanistan border, in Central and East Asia, Europe, America and eventually in the post-revolutionary USSR (Saikia, 2016). At the closing of the First World War, with the uncertain position of the Muslim Ottoman Empire, the Khilafat leaders in India fueled agitation which caught some momentum, and which politically mobilized a sizable number of Indian Muslims to participate in wide scale migration (*hijra*) to Afghanistan and Tashkent. This *hijra* episode was also reinforced by King Amanullah Khan who issued statements of welcome in speeches of 1920. Lenin and Roy had also approved a similar plan at that time for the training and education of the expected *Muhajirin* (Saikia, 2017).

It may seem a little unexpected at first that so many of these emigrant revolutionaries (*Muhajirin*), who embraced a deep-rooted Pan-Islamist ideology earlier, ended up finally embracing socialist thought. Some of them, for example Rab, actually delivered the proposal to Roy for establishing an émigré Communist Party of India in Tashkent (Ansari, 2015a). Did they give up their faith to profess the socialist ideology of Marxism-Leninism, which negates any transcendent order and makes humanity itself the sole master of its own social and cultural life? Or did they simply find commonalities in Socialist and Pan-Islamist

programs to achieve their goal: *Azadi* (liberation of India from the British colonialism)? The shift to Communism as a primary strategy did not occur abruptly. Rather it underwent in a slow process of transformation, the beginnings of which lay even prior to the inception of leftism, in the formal sense outlined above. It was indigenous trends which laid the foundations for leftism to be adopted formally much later. This history has been developing since Muslim power in India was replaced by British colonial government around the closing of the eighteenth century.

Ultimately, Communism and earlier Islamic activism were compatible because they contained a similar ethos in a variety of areas: principal among them were anti-imperialism and social reform. This point requires attention to historical specificity, however. Therefore, this chapter seeks to explore this process of transformation from a position of Pan-Islamist modes of activism, toward fusions of grassroots Islamic activism and actors with the socialist ideology of Marxist-Leninism. This process of fusion involved two stages. First was the formative phase of colonialization of Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, when sizable portions of the Muslim community at large first imbibed a strong feeling of anti-imperialism followed by a militant struggle (*jihād*), as among, for instance, the well-known *Mujahideen* Movement (Haroon, 2008). This movement arose right after the annexation of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP: the present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province) in 1849, by the British, explained in Marsden and Hopkins, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier* (Marsden & Hopkins, 2012). Second was the Pan-Islamist, Khilafat and *Hijrat* phase of the interwar period, when mass politics was beginning to take hold with the rise of the Indian National Congress's 1919 mobilization campaigns for non-cooperation. Connected to this general mood, Muslims were mobilized to agitate against the abolition of the Caliphate in the Ottoman empire as well as to migrate to Afghanistan. It was this period that saw a transformation of Pan-Islamism to formal socialist ideology, at least among some portions of the population.

In the following pages this chapter first discusses the *Mujahidin* movement and its *jihadi* networks and explores how far it was interconnected with transborder émigré revolutionaries, nationalist organizations, and the reformist seminary Darul Uloom Deoband.

### The Mujahideen movement as a foundational base for anti-colonial activities

*Mujahideen* (sing, *Mujahid*) is an Islamic term which signifies those who strive in the cause of God. This striving can assume various forms, including taking up arms and waging militant struggle against those who pose a threat to the lives, property, and religious faith of Muslims (Rauf, 2005). However, the more specific usage of ‘*Mujahideen*’ here refers to the followers of Syed Ahmad b. Mohammad Irfan (d. 1831), commonly known as Syed Ahmad Shaheed Barailvi, and his successors who fought against the Sikhs and then later against the British. Inspired by the philosophy and vision of Shah Abdul Aziz (d. 1824), the son of and successor to Hazrat Shah Wali Ullah (d. 1762), Syed Ahmad Barailvi started his *jihad* movement in 1823 – initially against Sikh rule – from the India-Afghanistan borderland region (present day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa).

It was at the same time a movement aimed at complete social, economic, as well as spiritual reform of the countryside, as Communism was later, even if in a different mode: after the conquest of Peshawar in 1829, for a brief period Syed Ahmad established an Islamic government and set the stage for reformation of society by purging un-Islamic customs and tradition. Withdrawing from Peshawar, with an aim to crush the forces of Sikh Empire, he marched toward Balakot with 600 followers in 1831, for a final battle with the non-believers. After his tragic death in the contest, his successors and followers did not give up and continued to carry their *jihad* with the same zeal and momentum in other parts of the borderland until the British replaced the Sikh rule in 1849 (Ahmad & Khan, 2019).

The defeat of Sikh Empire and subsequent occupation of N.W.F.P, (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)

by the British in 1849 set the stage for the Anglo-*Mujahideen* contestation, in the borderland region throughout the nineteenth century (Qadir & Atlas, 2014). The *Mujahideen* were re-organizing at Sathana in Hazara and other adjacent areas of the borderland and gave tough resistance to the British forces. The collaboration of the Sathana *Mujahideen* with others from Swat, amidst the 1857 uprising, worked out when the soldiers of Native Infantry 55 revolted against the command of the British military and absconded with ammunition, rifles, and what other treasure they could seize (Rauf, 2005).

The plan was to liberate the borderland amidst the British’s endeavors to save their Indian Empire during the mutiny, but it could not fully succeed due to the sudden death of Syed Akbar Shah, the ruler of Swat, just one day before the uprising. The *Mujahideen* retreated to Buner and Hazara valleys and re-organized massive support at Ambila to harass and destroy the British forces. The battle of Ambila (Buner) was fought between the British forces and the *Mujahideen* in 1862 with heavy losses on both sides. The role of Maulana Najam-ud-Din, otherwise known as Hadda Mullah, was instrumental in these militant activities (Caron, 2016).

According to Professor Fakhru Islam’s ‘Political History of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, (Islam, 2015) around one hundred Anglo-*Mujahideen* wars and skirmishes have been recorded. Amongst all, the 1897 siege of Malakand (Chakdarra) by *Mujahideen*, which is also called the Great War of Malakand in history, is one of the more significant, with the so-called ‘Mad Mullah’ playing a key role in the uprising (Edwards, 2009). Winston Churchill and General Blood, who was commanding the British forces, have given details about their losses in this war, but one can imagine it from folklore such as these *tappas*:

د مالا کنڊ گيدر څاربه دي خوراک ني څه دے د گوراؤ لرمونونه  
د مالا کنڊ گيدر څاربه دي د امبيلے گيدر کيلے ورته کوبنه

#### Translation:

*Malakand’s jackals are plump; Because they eat intestines of Englishmen*

*Malakand’s jackals are fat; Ambala’s jackals are complaining hard (Dinakhel, 2015)*

By 1897, the *Mujahideen* established a network in small but strategic pockets, throughout the mountainous and hilly terrain of borderland with its military headquarters located in Astamas, Buner, and later in Chamarkand *Markaz*, which is located near the Mohmand-Bajaur border. Chamarkand *Markaz*, was established during the outbreak of World War I, in this strategic location on the Anglo-Afghan border. A military School was also established in Chamarkand Markaz for the arrangement of military training and drill courses (Saikia, 2017). The school library was enriched with newspapers, pamphlets and books related to politics, medicine, science, history, philosophy, industry, religion, Urdu, Pashto, Arabic, Persian, and English Literature.

Arms and ammunition manufacturing were also set up in the Markaz; however, the main supply of weapons was from other sources. A lithographic press and printing machine were installed in Chamarkand and published the weekly periodical *Al-Intiqam* ('Retaliation'). The objectives of this newspaper were to apprise foreign governments about the movement in India as well as to create feelings of patriotism among the troops of the motherland with a view to prepare them for war against the enemies. It was replaced with the bi-monthly magazine *Al-Mujahid* in 1920, which continued to publish until 1940s. The news, and editorial sections, would usually print in the *Pashto* language while articles were printed in Persian and Urdu. The paper had a small but global readership, with its copies been circulated in borderland and settled areas as well as being exported to foreign countries like Afghanistan, USSR, China, Italy, USA, and other countries (Rauf, 2011).

This well-established network of *Mujahideen* also provided logistic and intelligence support for the passage of anti-colonial revolutionaries, Pan-Islamist activists and leaders and, up to the 1920s, for the *Hijrat* Movement, as some of the *Muhajirin* opted to travel via the Mujahideen colony at Chamarkand on their way to Afghanistan and Soviet Tashkent (Chattopadhyay, 2019).

It is generally believed that it was here that the two different ideologies – Islam and

socialism, came close together and evolved a working relationship deepening beyond the more basic overlaps of anti-imperialism and egalitarianism, because the emissaries of the Bolsheviks used this channel for the espionage via early Muslim socialists in British India. This was especially the case when the Pan-Islamist Khilafat agitation morphed into the *Hijrat* movement, and there grew a widespread trend of migration to Afghanistan, Soviet Turkistan, and Turkey.

Thus, *Muhajirin* came into direct contact with Bolsheviks. More details of this account are preserved in the Travelogue of Abdul Akbar Shah (1899-1947, *Safar Nama-i Roosi Turkistan Au Afghanistan* (Travel Account of Russian Turkistan & Afghanistan), who himself accompanied Abdul Ghafar Khan in Hijra trek (Marwat & Hussam, 2009). Several informers were also planted among *Muhajirin* who turned spies on their return and subsequent arrest, have also mentioned about their early experiences with Communism. (Bentivoglio, 2020).

According to (Ansari, 2015b), while some of *Muhajir* developed socialist convictions over the course of their training and founded the émigré CPI at Tashkent on October 17, 1917. It is therefore necessary to highlight the *Muhajirin* travelling from India as part of the Pan-Islamist Khilafat Movement in greater depth.

### **The Pan-Islamist-Muhajirin (Expatriate Anti-colonial Revolutionaries)**

The ideology of Pan-Islamism, with its wide range of followers and eminent theologians (*ulama*) supporting it in British India, played a commendable role in the liberation struggle. Pan-Islamists revolutionaries had already developed from close, if piecemeal, relationships between the borderland *Mujahidin*; secret societies like the Reshmi Rimal Tehreek (Silk Handkerchief Movement, 1914-15) led by Maulana Mahmood-ul-Hasan of the social- and religious-reformist Dar-ul-Uloom-i-Deoband; the Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband itself, which was founded by an earlier generation of anti-imperialist Islamic activists; the journalism of Maulana Azad which popularized Pan-Islamism in the period leading

up to the First World War; and the India Revolutionary Association (IRA).

Pan-Islamic activists set the stage for liberating India from abroad, by carrying out their anti-colonial activities as émigré revolutionaries (Bayat, 2008), beyond the borders of British India in areas like the Tribal borderland, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Turkey, Russia, Europe, and America. Prominent among these émigrés were leaders like Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali (b. 1854) Raja Mahendra Pratap (b. 1886), Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi (b.1888), Mohammad Iqbal Shedai (1888), M. N. Roy (1887), Abdur Rab Peshawari, and several others .

To destabilize the British Indian government, and to work toward a parallel administration, in 1915 in Kabul the above activists formed a Provisional Government of India in Exile, with Barkatullah as Prime Minister, Raja Mahendra Pratap as President, Maulana Obaidullah as Home Minister, and Mohammad Iqbal Shedai as representative of the Mujahidin and the Ghadar Party. Due to the composite religious nature of this group and to the fusion of anti-imperialism with leftist tendencies in groups like the Ghadar Party, this political experience abroad found a shared commitment to some convictions of leftism as a common ground (Roy, 2005). It aimed to establish not only an independent India, but an Indian socialist republic in exile. Meanwhile a German-Turkish mission, which also included two Indian revolutionaries, had arrived at Kabul around the same time to win over Afghanistan's court for support in organizing a *lashkar* (liberation army) to attack British forces and installations. However, this plan came to naught at the end, due to a variety of numerous strategic and political considerations.

As of 1919, they began devising another plan to persuade Afghanistan's new anti-imperialist king, Amanullah Khan, that offering support to the idea of migration (*Hijratt*) from India to Afghanistan would result in an influx of a skilled and educated working class, who could be helpful in strengthening Afghanistan's military power and the development of its agriculture, health, education, and business

sectors. The Amir was informed further that the brain-drain effect of *Hijratt* would also weaken the British government and keep them under pressure. On the other hand, the Pan-Islamist revolutionaries presumed that it would put the liberation of India on the global agenda. Barkatullah and Rab played an influential role to convince the Amir of Afghanistan to finally approve the plan (Ansari, 2015b).

Across the border at the same time, the Muslim community had itself been confronting increasing anti-Muslim behavior under British colonial rule worldwide, since the aftermath of 1857, which resulted in the formation of the self-conscious category of 'Muslim community' in the first place. This was above all the case in India, as Cemil Aydin (Aydin, 2017) writes in *The Idea of the Muslim World*. As of 1919, India's Muslim community, having been constituted as a coherent self-image in the first place, were now deeply perturbed first by the loss of Ottoman territories in the Balkan Wars and then by the insulting treatment given to the Ottoman Empire at the hands of allied powers at the closing of WWI.

Being unable to gain the lost glory of Muslim empire in India, the Muslim community, under the influence especially of Maulana Azad's Urdu-language journalism, had come to view the Ottoman Empire as a hope and symbol: the last independent Islamic world power. They had always been anxious about its territorial integrity and protection. Therefore, the emotional attachments of Indian Muslims to save the holy places mobilized them to participate in the Khilafat agitation and later in the *Hijratt* movement (Baha, 1979).

Well-informed as to the threatening situation in India and across the border in Afghanistan, and with pressure also from Gandhi's non-cooperation movement with which *Khilafat* was allied, the British government tried to pacify the public anger by issuing official promises that they would fully protect and preserve the Muslim holy places. In order to curtail further the influence of Pan-Islamists, a few *ulama* also issued a verdict to the advantage of the British government that the tension between Turkey and Britain was political, not

Islamic. However, when it was disclosed to the leaders of Central Khilafat Committee in Bombay, and its subordinate committees at the Provincial, Regional, District and Tehsil levels, that the British government had no regards for the holy places, they mobilized the public against the injustices of British government.

The *Khilafat* agitation gained further momentum when Greece attacked Istanbul with the support of the British in 1919. The Muslim community at large were increasingly turning anti-British, as Pan-Islamic Urdu vernaculars like *Zamindar*, *Comrade*, *al-Hilal*, and other revolutionary newspapers continued to keep them informed about the war activities (Sökefeld, 2002). In April 1919, Shaukat Ali (1873-1938) and Mohammad Ali (1878-1931) conveyed the following message to Lord Chelmsfield (1868-1933), the viceroy of India;

“When a land is not safe for Islam a Muslim has only two alternatives: *Jihad* or *Hijrat*. That is to say, he must either make use of every force God has given him for the liberation of the land and the ensurement of perfect freedom for the practice and preaching of Islam, or he must migrate to some other, freer land with a view to return to it when it is once again safe for Islam...In view of our present weak condition, migration is the only alternative for us...This step, which we shall now have to consider with all the seriousness that its very nature demands, will be perhaps the most decisive in the history of our community since the *Hijrat* of our Holy Prophet.” (Qureshi, 2011)

This in effect classified India as a *Dar-ul-Harb*, a place where Islam could not be practiced according to conscience, due to political repression. Other Khilafatists, like Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, upheld similar views regarding the *Hijrat* and considered it as an important constituent of the five pillars of Islam (Qureshi, 2011). The head of the Farangi Mahall (Nizamiyya) seminary of Lucknow, Maulana Abd al-Bari (1879-1926), had also issued a verdict (*fatwa*) to validate the *Hijrat* as in accordance with Islam (Robinson, 2002).

The Muslim paper *Hamdam*, on August 3, 1920, reprinted Azad’s and Bari’s *fatwas* together, under the heading ‘Religious

Injunctions Regarding Migration (*Hijrat*). However, Bari’s views were different from the above, regarding a declaration of India as *Dar-ul-Harb*, and he did not make it obligatory for everyone to proceed on *Hijrat*. Nonetheless the public heard something different: the Afghan paper *Ittehad-i-Mashraqi*, in issue No. 20 published on May 12, 1920 gives an explanations of Bari’s *fatwa* as saying that:

All those who find that while living in India they cannot freely perform their religious duties, can emigrate to such places where they think that they will not find any hindrances (Reetz, 1995).

According to Lal Baha’s account of the *Hijrat* movement, Azad’s and Bari’s *fatwas* made *Hijrat* into a sacred duty which provided the Khilafat leaders an impetus to mobilize the public. Thus, the Khilafat agitation, in a rapidly changed geo-political scenario, started to evolve into the *Hijrat* Movement. In May-June of 1920, thousands of people, most of them belonging to the tribal areas and parts of present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, decided to leave India for Afghanistan. They sold their valuables and property at cheap rates, with some even simply abandoning all their property, and set out on *Hijrat*. The *Zamindar* published a feature on May 7, 1920, about the first batch of *Muhajirin*, numbering 1338, that were ready to leave for Afghanistan. The number corresponded to the year in the Muslim *Hijri* calendar, which produced an additionally thrilling emotional connection with the actual *Hijrat* of Prophet Mohammad and his companions (Reetz, 1995).

In order to provide border crossing and travel services to the *Muhajirin*, the Khilafat Committee set up several offices in the country, with its head office in Peshawar. Haji Jan Mohammad, the secretary of the *Hijrat* and *Khilafat* committees, hired may inns (*seraye*) in Namak Mandi, Peshawar, for the accommodation of *Muhajirin*. Soon after, *Muhajirin* from Sind, Punjab and remote areas started their travel to Peshawar in May-June of 1920 via trains, buses, and caravans. Peshawar became the hub of activities for all *Muhajirin*. At several places clashes with security forces were reported, but to a considerable extent it appears that the British government did not attempt to

obstruct them or to try and force anyone to change their decision of migration (Ayaz et al., 2023).

The *Muhajirin* were advised in Peshawar to leave for Afghanistan in *qafilas* (caravans) consisting of small numbers, to avoid congesting the road at the Torkham border. Of course some *Muhajirin* had already decided to use the Mohmand-Bajawar route, via Chamarkand, to enter Afghanistan, but if there was any record of their exact number it is not currently known. Nonetheless, by July 1920, approximately 50,000 *Muhajirin* had crossed the Indo-Afghanistan border, and around 30,000 more were waiting for their travel documents and were prepared to start their journey (Sultan-I-Rome, 2004).

It was reported that the sudden influx of *Muhajirin* was met with severe logistical mismanagement and overburdened state capacity once in Afghanistan, and some even received harsh treatment. It had become so difficult to accommodate further *Muhajirin* that the committee advised the King to issue a timely *farman* (proclamation) to stop further migration immediately until the government could make suitable arrangements for them. This created a panic among the Khilafat leadership, and in the *Muhajirin* camps. The growing numbers of *qafilas* (groups) of *Muhajirin*, waiting at Torkham border to enter Jalalabad, were asked to return. It was becoming much more difficult to stop those hundreds of thousands of people who were waiting in their inns, or who had sold their property and were on their way to the Khyber Pass (Ansari, 1986).

The early batches of *Muhajirin* were accommodated by the Afghan government in various sectors and institutions, after a short training and assessment period. Some of the *Muhajirin* were not happy during their stay at Jabal-us-Siraj, the designated place for their settlement at Afghanistan. Khan Abdul Akbar Khan, in his biography, narrated that he and his comrades organized paths for those *Muhajirin* who were unhappy to travel further to Soviet Tashkent, Anatolia, and beyond (Marwat & Hussam, 2009).

One obvious reason for some of these *Muhajirin* to leave Afghanistan had been what they saw as the inappropriate treatment they received from their Muslim Pakhtun brothers during their travelling and stay. This shattered the glory that they had imagined in their Pan-Islamist ideology and their struggle for saving the Khilafat. Secondly, the miserable conditions under which they were hosted, and the way in which they experienced a range of material deprivations with little hope of improvement in the near future, transformed their thinking. They realized that even their ethno-linguistic and religious brethren in Afghanistan did not have any regard to their Pan-Islamist ideology.

In other words, their Pakhtun brothers in Afghanistan were not ready to buy into their anti-nationalist Pan-Islamic product. Thus, national identity (Afghan) superseded both ethnic and religious identity in this case. Therefore, an emotional attachment with Muslim Ottoman Empire, and ideology of Pan-Islamism, gradually lost its essence as these particular *Muhajirin* thinking changed to focus on the liberation of India as their final objective (Qureshi, 1924). In the achievement of this objective, they came into direct contact with Bolsheviks and Marxists intellectuals, who gave new meaning to their thoughts and experiences.

### **The Training of Muhajirin at Tashkent and Moscow**

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A few hundred *Muhajirin* decided to travel beyond Afghanistan from Jabal-us-Siraj through Afghanistan's Turkic territories to Tashkent, in the USSR. (Ansari, 2015b). Two batches of *Muhajirin* numbering around 200, arrived in Tashkent in July. It was a challenging journey, as they were arrested and imprisoned by Turkomans belonging to the anti-Soviet counter-revolutionary army, supported by the British government. They were beaten harshly and tied to trees. When they tried to point out the fact that they were Muslim people, migrating from India due to the cruelties of the British government, it did not change the attitude of the Turkomans. Rather they cursed the *Muhajirin* and criticized their method and style of performing their prayers. The *Muhajirin*, as recalled by Akbar

Shah, joined the ranks of the Red Army at this point, and helped in raids on the Turkomans. They defeated the Turkomans, and together with the Red Army proceeded onward to Tashkent, where they were received with a warm welcome amidst chants of jubilation.

After their arrival in Tashkent, these *Muhajirin* were admitted to the Induski Kurs, (Indian Military School), which was established by M.N. Roy for the purpose of giving Indian expatriates military and political training. The school had a spacious building with many services and facilities for émigré students, and therefore it seems clear that Roy and Lenin were expecting many *Muhajirin* to be admitted in the school. It was presumed that after their political and military trainings they would be sent back with modern weaponry to attack the British government in the tribal areas and the present-day Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa region, followed by the establishment of a socialist state and society. The actual numbers did not support this.

However, training even for these limited numbers of *Muhajirin* started at the school by August 1920 (Adhikari, 1925). They were provided accommodation, food, and other facilities at their residency. As memoirs like Akbar's describe, they also had the opportunity to observe a variety of different conditions and political environments under the socialist government of V. Lenin, during their stay at Soviet Tashkent.

After eight months of training, however, the military school at Tashkent was closed, as the Afghan Amir began showing reluctance to allow espionage by these émigré revolutionaries across the Indo-Afghan border. Therefore, these *Muhajirin* were given an offer to proceed to Moscow to enroll in the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, which was a special institution established by the Soviet government in April 1921 for the education of youth from colonial and semi-colonial countries (Ansari, 2015b). Some of them, who had been unimpressed with their ideological training, declined the offer with an argument that they already knew that they and their hosts were anti-imperialists, so what more was there for them to learn?

What they had been interested in was military training and support, to attack and destroy British imperial power. From the semi-colonialist Soviet point of view, though, this argument did not sound encouraging: it was easy enough to teach them all how to shoot guns, but the question was what would they do with their guns, and whom they would fight, and for what ideal, in the end (Ansari, 1986)? Therefore, political and ideological training were considered essential before these émigrés could be armed. The idea was not even to convert them to communism, but to make them politically conscious enough to understand the necessary pre-requisites of a revolution and how it could be brought about in India. Despite this explanation, many of the *Muhajirin* ignored the Soviet invitation and returned to India, with minimum assistance from the Soviet government.

However, some of the Tashkent *Muhajirin* accepted the offer by the Soviet government to further study at Moscow, once they had been convinced that they had to learn political skills before they could use the military training. They were told by M. N. Roy that the Indian bourgeoisie class—Hindu capitalist, merchants, and moneylenders, under the auspices of the AINC—were likely to compromise with British capitalism even after independence in the profitable business of exploiting labor under pre-capitalist social condition. Thus, driving out the British, for them would not change the fate of poor Indians, because it would only mean the substitution of foreign exploitation by native exploitation (Ansari, 2015b).

They were convinced that the lot of the working people would be improved only by a revolution under the leadership of the proletariat, not by the success of the bourgeois nationalist movement in India. According to Roy's understanding, since they were inclined to be non-compromising idealists already, the *Muhajirin* of Tashkent were easily and quickly persuaded to the conclusion that the Communist revolution alone can liberate Indian people from British tyranny. Therefore, these *Muhajirin*, according to Roy, reached their conclusion not by a rational grasp of socialist theory but by emotional transfer of loyalty from one set of ideas to another (Ansari, 2015b), even if both



also included pre-existing commonalities like a need to remake society (as present in *Deobandism*), and egalitarianism and anti-imperialism.

By the time the Tashkent school closed in May 1921, there were two groups of *Muhajirin*, one led by Rab and the other by Roy, who went on to continue their political training in Moscow. These were the *Muhajirin* who had shown interest in their training and education at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. Students studying at this university were taught courses in fundamental Marxian methods of understanding the history of socio-economic and politics developments. Other courses included: Marxism, Theory of Historical Materialism, Histories of Class Struggle, Western Labor Movement, and Political Economy. Great importance was given to the Russian language, the history of India, and issues of nationalism.

Thus, the *Muhajirin* found themselves in a materialist world that had little time for religious awareness or practices, as the scientific Marxism of that era had no use for the laws of Islam or any religion in general. In addition to this, any display of nationalist feeling was disapproved, and the students were taught to fight imperialism by appealing not to racial and prejudicial sentiment; rather this fight had to be carried out in the name of International Communism.

The *Muhajirin* soon discovered that these ideas were not simply presented as theory, but were put into practice in the daily activities of the university. Religious tolerance, equality, and companionship were promoted as highly desirable values. The students learned democratic process by electing different committees to look after the academic, administrative, and other matters, related to their residency at the university. This ideological indoctrination of the *Muhajirin*, accompanied by the whole social experience as well, created them as an ideal leadership for the Communist movement in India, when they left Tashkent in the subsequent years. However, upon their return to India, they were arrested and charged under the Peshawar, Kanpur, and Meerut conspiracy cases, and hardly any of them were able to take part in Communist politics as a result.

## Transformation from Pan-Islamism to Socialism

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During their long travel (*Hijrat*) from India to Afghanistan and to Soviet Tashkent and beyond, these *Muhajirin* faced numerous hardships and experienced some hard realities that shaped their thinking and understanding about the liberation of India. They first imbibed strong anti-colonial feeling in India, and started their journey as Pan-Islamists to defend the Ottoman Muslim empire. Upon their migration to Afghanistan, they confronted a changed socio-political and economic condition, where they were treated inappropriately by the local administration.

They realized very soon that their Pan-Islamist thinking did not have anything in common with Afghan nationalism. Their Pan-Islamist ideology also lost its vigor when they were informed that Mustafa Kemal himself abolished the institution of Khilafat in Turkey. This secular technique, applied for the independence of a strong republican Turkey and exercised by Bolsheviks in their country's liberation from the Tsar, gave a new window of ideological orientation for the *Muhajirin*.

The thinking of *Muhajirin* underwent another shocking experience, when the boat carrying *Muhajirin* via Kirkee to Tashkent was stopped by the Turkoman forces in Turkestan. They were treated very harshly, as Mohammad Shafiq, a *Muhajir* from Peshawar narrated. They tried to convince these Muslim Turkomans that they were the victims of British imperialism but the Turkomans, being counterrevolutionaries paid by the British government against the Red Army, did not accept their pleading. Rather their way of performing prayers and recitation of Holy Quran were criticized as incorrect. This incident had a dynamic effect on the thinking and experiences of the *Muhajirin* which finally motivated them, along with all the above experiences, to resort to the secular ideology of communism for the liberation of India (Ansari, 2015b).

Lastly, the eight-month training at the military school at Tashkent helped the *Muhajirin* to learn about the possibilities of Communist revolution to get rid of the British imperialism. And finally, the ideological training at the

Communist University of the Toilers of the East provided the *Muhajirin* with a lived, embodied experience of the communist ideology. All this served to transform their thinking from a Pan-Islamic standpoint to a secular Communist ideology for the liberation of India.

### Formation of Socialist Party for Undivided India

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The training at the Indian Military School at Tashkent had a resourceful impact on the outlook and political consciousness of the *Muhajirin*, as many of them wanted to join the Communist Party at Turkistan and some of them enquired why they should not establish the Communist Party of India there and then. They were supported by Rab, who had arrived from Kabul on the invitation of the Soviet government to make the IRA functional at Tashkent. When they approached Roy with this proposal, he initially discarded it with argument that this matter should not be decided in haste. They should wait, Roy implied, until they returned to India because it made no sense that a mere few émigré individuals could call themselves the Communist Party, representing the working classes of the country at large.

A severe rift emerged between the groups of Rab and Roy. The prime cause of their differences were questions about the leadership of the *Muhajirin*, and the appropriate methodology of building a socialist revolution. Rab was of the opinion that the Muslims of India were not ready to accept communism and that only national revolution, and the resulting overthrow of British rule in India, would pave the way for the improvement of the living and working conditions of its poor (Ansari, 1986). In the face of Roy's reluctance to the proposal, the support of Rab grew among the majority of the *Muhajirin*. Some of the supporters of Rab chanted slogans of the new party openly and passed disparaging remarks about their fanatical past, which degenerated into altercations and even exchanges of blows. The tense situation in India House, where the *Muhajirin* were residing, forced Roy to agree with the proposal of forming Communist Party of their own on October 17, 1920.

However, Roy tried to keep Rab excluded from it. The minutes of the meeting, at which the party came into existence, indicates that the documents were signed by Roy and the same was communicated to Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkistan (Adhikari, 1925).

The CPI remained a very small organization in Tashkent, with only ten members, which included Mohammad Shafiq, Roy, and his American wife Evelyn Trent Roy, Abani Mukerji and his Russian wife Rosa Fitingov, Mohammad Ali, and M. Prativadi Bhayankar Acharya. Rafiq Ahmad, in his autobiography *Regrettable Journey*, described that Shaukat Usmani, Gaus Rahaman, Ferozuddin Mansoor, Fazal Illahi Qurban, Rehmat Ali Zakariya and Habib Ahmad also joined the party when they reached to Tashkent (Adhikari, 1925).

Soon after the formation of CPI, it adopted the principles proclaimed by the Third Communist International, and the party decided to work out a policy suited to the conditions of India. One of the main objectives of the formation of the party was to prepare the grounds for a socialist revolution in India which would pave the way to throw out the British imperial government. Second, although it was a small party, it managed to arrange public talks and debates to be delivered by politically more advanced members of the *Muhajirin*, like Shaukat Usmani, Mohammad Shafiq, and Abdullah Safdar. Third, the party organized itself with an objective to carry out its activities in a relatively systematic and disciplined manner.

### Connections of CPI with the Communist Party of the USSR (CPSU)

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The newly formed CPI and its leadership had a very close relationship with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), as the latter had sponsored the whole project of spreading communist thoughts among the Indian revolutionaries. The CPSU, and especially Lenin, had given keen attention to the problems of India and its liberation from the British imperialism. It was on the directives of the CPSU that delegates and leadership of the CPI were invited by Lenin to present their supplementary thesis in the Third Communist International (Swain, 2010).

In 1921, practical measures were adopted by the Soviet government to allocate further funds to promoting the organization of Communist groups in India, and enabling them to intervene effectively in the revolutionary struggle. An extensive network of channels and contacts were built by Roy so that these funds could be sent to India. Ghulam Hussain received a substantial amount of money for the purpose of publishing a revolutionary Urdu paper, *Inqilab*. Shaukat Usmani was provided with sufficient money to organize workers and progressive groups for the socialist awakening. Similarly, Muzaffar Ahmad received a small sum of money regularly for his personal expenses as well as for political work and travelling. Besides these funding sources, Roy had also issued instructions to the Indian revolutionaries to receive copies of Comintern magazines like *Inprecor* and *The Vanguard*, and made arrangements for the publication of articles such as 'India in Transition', 'What do we Want?', and 'One Year of Non-Cooperation'. With the help of these efforts, small Communist groups had begun to emerge in Lahore, Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, and the United Provinces (Jan, 2018).

The CPI leadership at Tashkent had been in touch with the more left-inclined leaders in AINC and other progressive circles of India. It was believed that the party would be made functional in India once its leadership returned from Tashkent. Due to state repressive policies and subsequent arrests of its leadership in the Peshawar, Kanpur and Meerut Conspiracy cases, though, the party took long time to establish itself. An attempt to hold the first CPI conference at Kanpur in 1922, was made to hold the first CPI conference at Kanpur in 1922, but due to the raids and arrests by the government, the program was postponed.

Finally, the CPI succeeded in holding its first party conference on December 26, 1925 at Kanpur, which was attended by delegates from various communist groups located in Bengal, Calcutta, Bombay, Punjab, and the United Provinces (Raza, 2011). The central executive committee was formed with S.V. Ghat (1896-1970) as Secretary General of the Party. From there, it slowly and gradually started to expand

its outreach and gave birth to many class organizations, which shall be discussed in next chapter. For now, this chapter has shown that not only were Indian Muslims and the Indo-Afghan borderland included in the rise of communism in the Indian subcontinent from the beginning, they and their specific experiences were absolutely formative in that history to the point that we can say that communism and political Islam were, by this stage, distinct but intertwined political positions.

## **Conclusion**

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It is concluded from the history presented above, that the CPI and after its split on the eve of independence, the Communist Party of Pakistan, (CPP) both political parties owe its existence due to a long process of transformation. Starting with earlier *Mujahideen* movement, the Muslim of India in a politically charged scenario of *Khilafat-cum-Hijra* decided to leave India. This movement was originally motivated by a Pan-Islamist thoughts and was of the view to put the liberation of India on international agenda, and therefore adopted *Hijra* (Travel) as a tool for independence.

Although CPP is the first formal leftist political party of Pakistan, however, its pioneer leaders and members had earlier developed a deep rooted anti-colonial sentiment against British government. The fusion of Pan-Islamist ideology with Bolsheviks in their fighting against British imperialism, had produced an Indian socialism, which is quite unique in its nature.

After exploring the history of formal leftism in undivided India and later on in Pakistan, it can be established that former NWFP and FATA (present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) had played a great role in the espionage of international ideologies. In particularly, the borderland on the Pakistan-Afghanistan geographies, had provided space for émigré revolutionaries and later to the espionage of socialist ideologies in South Asia. This research concludes with a recommendation for carrying out future research on the borderland history and ethnography for understanding ideological transformation in South Asia (Ayaz, 2022).

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