



The Governor General and Provincial Politics: Jinnah's NWFP Politics (1947-1948)

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Abstract: The politics of North-West Frontier Province was a tough task for Jinnah due to well-established rival political parties like Khudai Khidmatgars and Indian National Congress. He revived the dormant Provincial Muslim League in the post-1936 election period. But the situation did not change significantly. After the 3rd June plan, Jinnah wanted dismissal of the Congress ministry, which happened after partition as Jinnah dismissed the Congress-led ministry to install his handpicked Qaiyum Khan ministry. Rumours, doubts, and trust deficit prevailed between both sides. Jinnah guided and favoured Qaiyum in every possible way through Governor General's office. Jinnah monitored the politics before and after his last visit to the province till his severe illness.

Introduction

North West Frontier Province was created in 1901 by grouping settled Northern Districts of the previous Punjab zone along with a buffer zone, FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas). This was a Muslim majority province, but it was not allowed to receive political reforms due to certain strategic interests of the imperial authority. The Indian reform acts did not provide any constitutional relief to the masses. Rather, administrative machinery remained primitive colonial in nature in the province. The major political parties of India (Indian National Congress and All India Muslim League) advocated the introduction of political reforms in the province in their respective constitutional reform proposals. The only surviving social cum political movement with the grassroots organisation was Khudai Khidmatgars which went through troubled waters due to its advocacy of the Pashtun rights and reforms. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Bacha Khan) sought his political linkage with Congress before the introduction of political reforms in the province. The Muslim representative party, AIML,

was not much popular and organised in the province till the introduction of the 1935 Act and upcoming Elections under the new reforms package.

Jinnah visited the province during his campaign for the formation of Muslim League Parliamentary Boards in 1936. The response from the public was poor. And League had no tangible base in the province, and its political rivals Congress and Khudai Khidmatgars were more popular with a strong following in the province. Jinnah's visit was the first step from the central League's organisation in the province. But the first election results were not favourable for Jinnah and his League. Jinnah reorganised League in the province and paid diligent attention to the provincial League affairs. The Central Committee of Action and other monitoring bodies redirected League organisations in the province from time to time after 1940. But, despite all efforts, League could not become a single popular party in the province due to well-established rival parties. However, Jinnah's second visit to the province was successful enough to boost the popularity of the League, which was testified after provincial

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elections. While Nehru visited the province in October 1946, which became an embarrassment for him as he was greeted with black flags and slogans of "Go back" at Peshawar (Koreju 1994). This showed that the people of Frontier did not support the policy and programme of the Central Congress; rather, their support to INC in the province was because of Khudai Khidmatgars.

Politics after Elections

The election results were not a formidable tilt in favour of the League, but people started realising League and Congress politics for a United and divided India. League launched civil disobedience movement against Congress-led ministry with demand for fresh elections to form people's representative government in the province. The demand for fresh elections was inconceivable for Congress as it could change the political scenario of the province, which was previously against the demand for Pakistan. Congress government responded that any sort of fresh elections or referendum would harm political balance in the province (Cambell-Johnson 1985). The Congress ministry issued directives to curtail civil rights in the province and also arrested prominent provincial League leaders (Cambell-Johnson 1985).

The British realised League's following in the province could possibly result in fresh elections or referendums to avoid the culmination of political sensitivities into violence. Sir Olaf Caroe, the newly appointed Governor, proposed fresh elections in April 1947 to break the deadlock (Cambell-Johnson 1985). Lord Mountbatten, Governor General, also visited the province to assess the situation in the Frontier region. Crowds of the pro-Pakistan Leaguers greeted him at Peshawar with huge demonstrations in favour of the next solution (Jasson 1981). The situation forced him to think about fresh elections as the only way out from that deadlock, but due to uncertain reasons, the referendum option was decided to know public opinion about the future of the province (Jasson 1981). It was endorsed in the partition plan of 3rd June 1947.

Referendum and Independence

The Khudai Khidmatgars leadership was expecting such a decision. Therefore they demanded another

option for Pakhtunistan, which was contrary to the 3rd June plan. Nehru himself wrote to Mountbatten against the option of the referendum and supported demand for Pakhtunistan (Jasson 1981). Jinnah invited Abdul Ghaffar Khan for a meeting and asked him to join Pakistan and settle issues through the constituent assembly, which was turned down by the latter (Pyarelal 1966). Khudai Khidmatgars opted for the boycott of the referendum and passed a resolution on 21st June 1947. The resolution declared the formation of a Pashtun state as objective and framing of a constitution based on Islamic principles along with democracy, equality, and social justice. On 24th June, Ghaffar Khan stated in public that the struggle of his party was for the freedom of India, and they would not accept any solution other than freedom for Pashtuns (S. W. Shah, Abdul Ghaffar Khan 2007).

Jinnah called the "boycott" of the referendum a "new stunt" from Khudai Khidmatgars and a violation of the 3rd June plan. Moreover, he appealed to the Frontier Muslims to vote for Pakistan as they were Muslims first and Pashtuns later. Jinnah was sure that the people would definitely vote for Pakistan and join the constituent assembly of Pakistan (Saeed 1983). The other Muslim leaders also endeavoured to convince the public that their province would only prosper if it joined Pakistan as the new state would be a fort of Islam for the Indian Muslims (S. W. Shah, Muslim League in NWFP 1992). Despite the boycott and the Congress government's anti-referendum measures, the process took place from 6th to 17th July 1947. The results were announced on 20th July, which showed that 292,118 people polled their votes out and 288,244 people polled their votes in favour of Pakistan while only 2874 votes were against Pakistan (Mansergh 1983). The turn-out was 50.48% out of the total registered voters, 572,980, which was clear in its verdict in support of Pakistan.

Jinnah assured the people of Frontier that they would have complete freedom to develop their social, cultural, and political institutions along with the same type of self-government as in any part or province of Pakistan (Saeed 1983). But another issue was the Congress ministry in power which was a bit unpopular and unreliable during that situation. Leaguers were emphasising dismissing the ministry as it could pose a potential

threat to the League's interests. Khan Sahib ministry could declare independent Pashtonistan on the eve of 15th August. Liaqat Ali Khan conveyed his fears to Mountbatten and asked for the imposition of the Governor's rule in the province to avoid any mishap_(Mansergh 1983). On the other side, Dr Khan Sahib refused to accept the referendum results as it was "not honest, free and fair". He also refuted his earlier statement about polls that if 31% of people polled in favour of Pakistan, he would resign from ministry_(Dar 2022). After refusal to resign from office, Dr Khan Sahib made some demands from Jinnah, mainly focused on provincial autonomy, the right of secession from Pakistan, and the incorporation of contiguous Pashtun areas in the province. But Jinnah again refused to grant anything personally as, for him, the right forum for such demands and debates was the future constituent assembly of Pakistan_(Dar 2022).

The issue was discussed by the provisional cabinet of Pakistan on 1st August and communicated to Mountbatten for dismissal from the ministry. He discussed the demand with Patel and Nehru, and some other members but refrained from taking any measure for dismissal which could retard his image. After some verbal assurances and lip service, League leadership was informed that the Congress ministry could not be dismissed before partition. In other words, they left this matter to Jinnah and his handpicked next Governor of Frontier, Cunningham_(Gazette 1947). Cunningham met Jinnah in Karachi and discussed the prevailing situation in the province. He found Jinnah firm and steadfast in his decision about Dr Khan Sahib, but he was able to persuade Jinnah to give him time to assess the situation and not to take any further action_(Mansergh 1983).

Cunningham met Dr Khan Sahib on 13th August and warned him that his government would be dismissed in case of non-cooperation with the government of Pakistan. Dr Khan assured the Governor that he had no intentions to declare independence from Pashtunistan and also showed his willingness to pull down the Congress flag from his residence after the declaration of independence. He also assured resignations from him and his cabinet members in case of no confidence, and even if Jinnah dismissed their ministry, they would accept the decision (Mansergh 1983).

Governor General and Politics of NWFP

Jinnah assumed the office as the first governor general of the newly created state of Pakistan on 15th August 1947. The NWFP government remained in office after independence, but some circles rumoured about its intentions. The course of politics remained heavily dominated by the past politics and statements of the leaders from both sides. For the first 17 days, Khudai Khidmatgars gave no such impression about the change of their political attitude or recognition of Pakistan. Perhaps, this was the time when most political circles gossiped about their political intentions. The League circles believed that things had not changed, and Dr Khan was still a dubious political entity whose oath of loyalty to Pakistan was unconfirmed (Civil and Military Gazette, 1947). Perhaps their linkage with India and Afghanistan showed that Dr Khan Sahib had great ideological differences with Muslim League. Dr Khan took a bit longer period to express his loyalty to the state of Pakistan in a meeting at Sardaryab seventeen days after the partition. The said boycott of official functions and ceremonies in various towns and cities further exacerbated the situation. Dr Khan and his cabinet members did not attend the flag hoisting ceremony at Peshawar, which aroused serious concerns from some segments. Cunningham informed Jinnah that they did not attend as to the presence of Muslim League National Guards, which were charged enough at that time. Moreover, it was League's flag and party ceremony, and how could they salute a party flag? (G. Cunningham 1947). There are two points of view about this situation. One segment agrees with Cunningham's letter to Jinnah that an emotionally charged crowd could be harmful to Dr Khan and his colleagues. While the other argues that it was the state flag, not the party flag and refusal to salute meant it was disloyal to the state of Pakistan_(S. W. Shah 1999).

The federal cabinet took this incident seriously and discussed the matter from pre-partition to till date. Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, presided over a meeting of the cabinet on 21st August and decided to dismiss the provincial ministry_(Files 1947). Jinnah instructed the Governor, Cunningham, for dismissal and compliance was made on the same day. It generated a debate over the governor general's powers and the decision to dismiss the

provincial ministry at that time. The provisional constitution of Pakistan, amended 1935 Act, clause 5 of clause 51 entitled the governor general to instruct the provincial governors for "choosing and summoning and the dismissal" of provincial governments. [\(The Government of India Act 1935 1935\)](#). Moreover, the same rule was practised by Mountbatten also when he wrote on 1st August that he had the legal authority to direct the provincial governors for dismissal of any ministry which was unchallengeable in any court of law [\(Mountbatten 1947\)](#).

Jinnah used the same prerogative of the constitution, sub-clause 5 of clause 51, and directed Cunningham to invite Abdul Qayyum Khan, leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party, to form the new government. Cunningham acted upon the advice on the same day and invited Qayyum to form the government. But Muslim League had the support of 15 members in the assembly, while 20 members were supporters of Congress. Qayyum was provided assurance that the assembly would not be summoned until March 1948 till the end of the fiscal year. [\(N. Mitchell 1968\)](#). Subsequently, NWFP's next ministry was sworn in on 22nd August 1947, comprised of Qayyum and Abbas Khan. The ministry had to deal with a bunch of administrative and political problems, mainly the Khudai Khidmatgars. [\(Samad 1995\)](#). Qayyum was less interested in the affairs of his ministry. Rather, he preferred to spend most of his time in his village. This led to over-reliance on the civil servants to run administration and to take key decisions in the province. [\(Samad 1995\)](#). Qayyum had only one advantage. He got the fullest support from the central government, particularly Jinnah was at his back. [\(W. A. Shah 1990\)](#).

Jinnah used to get regular reports about the working of Qayyum and the Ministry and other political developments from Governor Cunningham. He felt satiated with the working of the Qayyum and with the overall political situation of the province. One of the reports mentioned that the popularity graph of the League was increasing in the province, and people were turning their opinions in support of the League and Jinnah. [\(G. Cunningham 1947\)](#). Even Cunningham timely informed Jinnah about possible food shortage in the province, which could generate anti-Qayyum sentiments among the public. On Jinnah's directives, the central government arranged early

food supply measures to avoid damage to the rapport of the Qayyum ministry. [\(Times 1947\)](#).

The rivals of the ministry, Khudai Khidmatgars, were trying to revive their politics with the issue of Pashtonistan. Some of the reports mentioned that Abdul Ghafar Khan, along with his supporters, held a meeting and hoisted their proposed Pashtonistan flag with anti-Pakistan remarks [\(The Pakistan Times, 1947\)](#). Moreover, the report cited that they were getting monetary support from other anti-state and anti-Pakistan elements to fund their campaign. These reports infuriated Qayyum, who wanted stern actions against Khudai Khidmatgars, but the Governor, Cunningham, had a different opinion about this issue. As per him, Khudai Khidmatgars' politics was already losing ground, and there was no specific need to pay attention or take any punitive measures which could relaunch them [\(Cunningham 1947\)](#).

Jinnah liked Cunningham's opinion and advised Qayyum not to indulge in punitive measures or political victimisation of the Khudai Khidmatgars without any "good reason" [\(Cunningham to Jinnah 1947\)](#). The lenient and sane political gestures produced positive vibes from the other side too. Abdul Ghaffar Khan came with a changed approach towards politics and publicly declared that his party had no plans to disrupt the government and Pakistan, and its statutes were acceptable to them. [\(Cunningham 1947\)](#). Some elements exaggerated this statement with rumours of possible rapprochement between the League and Congress in NWFP. [\(Cunningham to Jinnah 1947\)](#). But Qayyum's approach was in contrast to Jinnah's amicable policy towards his political opponents. Indian National Congress invited the Khan brothers to attend Indian Muslim Conference at Lucknow. This was purely an honorary political invitation to pay gratitude to Congress's staunch allies in the former political scene. But Qayyum termed it as treachery and branded Khans as "Indian Agents" who were not loyal to Pakistan. He declared that he would not allow any political party to exist which would not show allegiance to Pakistan. [\(Qayyum Khan to Jinnah 1947\)](#).

In 1948, the budget session was approaching, and Qayyum was in real trouble over the issue of the majority in the house. Qayyum requested Jinnah to dissolve the assembly, which was also

seconded by Cunningham as a better option to save the ministry. (N. Mitchell 1968). Jinnah did not want to take any decision in haste. Rather, he directed Liaqat Ali Khan to visit the province and meet Qaiyum and Cunningham for a possible way out of the situation. (Jinnah to Qaiyum 1948). The discussions ended in the solution that in case Qaiyum failed to get the vote of confidence in the budget session, he would resign and subsequently, the Governor would dissolve the assembly to conduct fresh elections under a caretaker set up to meet constitutional requirements. (N. Mitchell 1968). But things turned better as Qaiyum was able to muster a majority vote in the budget session after getting support from the members of the opposition in the house. (N. Mitchell 1968).

The Khudai Khidmatgars had lost their hold over provincial politics by February 1948. It was time to rethink their political strategy and devise a new way forward to keep their politics alive. (Samad 1995, 147). In their new political approach, they declared their loyalty to the state of Pakistan and focused on the socio-economic development program to uplift the community. (Dawn 1948). Within a couple of days, there were reports that Abdul Ghaffar Khan wanted to attend the session of the constituent assembly to take the oath of allegiance. (Samad 1995). Ghaffar spoke on the floor of the house and admitted his opposition to the idea of Pakistan, but at that moment, he accepted the partition of India. Moreover, he added that he and his party never intended an autonomous Pashtonistan within Pakistan's federation and labelled all such reports as a pernicious piece of propaganda against him. Ghaffar further clarified his statements that he wanted ethnic recognition of the areas where Pahtoons were residing like other regions of Pakistan such as Punjabis, Sindhi, and Bengalis. (Jansson 1981). Jinnah and Ghaffar met in Karachi to discuss some initial issues, which made friendly newspaper headlines in nationwide newspapers.

Jinnah decided to take a tour of NWFP and FATA in April 1948 to further solidify his political footprint among the people and to aid the Qaiyum ministry to keep it consolidated through his presence in the province. During that visit, Jinnah attended many public gatherings and guest meetings from all segments of the polity. (Sultan-I-Rome 2013). Aside from that busy schedule, Jinnah and Ghaffar held private talks at the

Governor's house. Jinnah tried to convince Ghaffar to merge Khadai Khidmatgars into Muslim League but got no positive response from the other side. (Sultan-I-Rome 2013). In the past, Jinnah successfully manipulated regional parties of Punjab, Sindh and Bengal through negotiations and achieved mergers and amalgamations into League. But this time, Jinnah failed to convince a party head in either way to be part of the League. Though the talks failed to produce desired results for Jinnah yet, they generated a positive outcome in shaping the changed mindset and approach of Ghaffar Khan vis-à-vis Jinnah, Pakistan, and Muslim League politics. Ghaffar and Jinnah built a constructive relationship after those talks. Ghaffar changed his tone and approach towards Jinnah while Jinnah also reciprocated in the same way. In one of his letters to Jinnah, Ghaffar started with "My dear Quaid-i-Azam" and expressed his willingness to work for "strengthening and safeguarding the interests of Pakistan", and for Pakistan, he was ready to "make every sacrifice for this cause". Ghaffar added that his party would not launch any move which might "tend to obstruct the work of the Government". (Abdul Ghaffar Khan to Jinnah 1948).

Jinnah had realised the consequences of post-partition politics and propaganda against each other from both political parties. Therefore, he availed that opportunity and tried to further elaborate on political issues and objectives of the government for the uplift of the province. Jinnah still enjoyed huge populist support from the masses filled with the veneration due to his prevailing charismatic impression. That's why Jinnah visited educational institutions, defence organisations, public gatherings and ceremonies, which further expanded his aura in the hearts and minds of the people. Jinnah appealed to the masses to "support the government" and "give the government" some "reasonable time" to improve the issues of governance. (Dawn, Jinnah's Address to a Public Meeting at Peshawar 14th April 1948). The details of Jinnah's third and last visit to the province show that Jinnah got an unprecedented response from the masses and local leadership. He was received jubilantly and was given traditional hospitality with immense honour and respect during the visit. (Dawn 1948). Qaiyum availed that opportunity and made a request to expand his ministry by adding two more ministers,

which was accepted and endorsed_(Sultan-I-Rome 2013).

Jinnah Ghaffar's talks were not that much fruitful for provincial politics in the long run. There was the emergence of another political challenger to Jinnah and League, which was not the NWFP limited party. Rather, it was another attempt to unite all national groups into a single Pakistan People's Party. Ghaffar and G.M. Syed wanted full autonomy for all linguistic groups and to turn Pakistan into a union of the social republic with cultural relations with neighbours India and Afghanistan. Moreover, their agenda was to replace Muslim League with another political force as the League had "outlived its usefulness" (Fakhar-ul-Islam 2014). At that moment, Ghaffar's statement further added fuel to the fire, which termed the Government of Pakistan similar to the British Administrators due to the fact that except for three governors, all of the administrative staff was of British origin_(Fakhar-ul-Islam 2014). The initial expansion activities of the newly formed Pakistan People's Party rang alarm bells for Jinnah and the provincial administration.

Ghaffar Khan toured the province to an established network of this party and blazed sentiments of linguistic nationalism among the masses. Qaiyum had neither political capacity to thwart that type of fundamentalist politics nor possessed the ability to counter it through political negotiations. His over-reliance on the civil administration could only muster support through legal action against the key leaders of the People's Party. The administration decided to arrest key leaders, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Abdul Wali Khan, Qazi Ataullah and Abdus Samad Khan Achakzai, to decrease the momentum of the obstructive politics. The charges against them ranged from anti-state activities to collaboration with agents of the Faqir of Ipi to cause further problems in FATA and to jeopardise Muslim resistance in Kashmir by aiding and collaborating with Indian forces. The case hearing took place in the court of the district magistrate of Kohat, who found Ghaffar guilty of all these charges and convicted him of three of rigorous imprisonment_(N. Mitchell 1968). The arrests and trials were legalised under Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), which is questionable in its validity for settled districts of NWFP.

But after the trials, the government promulgated North-West Frontier Province Public

Safety Ordinance through the office of the provincial Governor. The new ordinance empowered the officials to arrest any person without warrants and imprison him without a judicial trial. It was up to the government to deem someone's involvement or intention to commit prejudicial activities against it¹⁶⁴. More than two hundred Khudai Khidmatgars were arrested under the newly promulgated ordinance and put on trial for subversive activities_(Rashiduzzaman 1967). There is no evidence that Jinnah was informed about the promulgation of this ordinance or authorisation from Jinnah to use such tactics against Khudai Khidmatgars. In June 1948, Jinnah was in dilapidated health. His official work routine was less active than in the previous months. Qaiyum heavily relied on the civil bureaucracy and administration to maintain his authority over provincial affairs. This was his idea which was implemented by Governor Cunningham to counter an emerging political power against him. Jinnah did not interfere much in provincial affairs during the last days of their life. The months of July and August witnessed his worsening health condition and his reliance on the cabinet and Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan for official matters. Qaiyum Khan enjoyed Jinnah's support for his ministry and remained in office even after the demise of Jinnah.

Conclusion

The politics of North-West Frontier Province posed an actual challenge to Jinnah's political foresightedness due to the existence of a more popular political party which was affiliated with the Indian National Congress. Jinnah's early quest for popularity and election victory proved merely an endeavour to get a basic structure for his political party in the province. The post-1937 phase witnessed situational benefits to the League that also strengthened the political base of the League in the province. The politics of the 1946 elections were the most important issue for Jinnah and the League as it was contested on the basis of United India or Pakistan. League contested elections in an average state of the political organisation, while Jinnah paid more heed to this province due to its position as a Pakistan zone province.

Jinnah wanted to dismiss the then Congress-led ministry, which ushered in a new phase of politics in the province. League could not muster a

majority in the provincial assembly, but Jinnah wanted the Congress-led ministry to be ousted even before partition. The British administration left this task to the central executive of Pakistan. Jinnah's first step for NWFP was to dismiss the ministry and create a League ministry in its place. This political cum executive move proved a trendsetter of central interference in provincial politics. Lack of trust, doubts and rumours jeopardise Jinnah and Khudai Khidmatgar's relationship, while Qaiyum's over-reliance on civil bureaucracy to run affairs of the province also contributed to the exacerbation of the political environment. Adul Ghaffar Khan tried to mend

relations with Jinnah through assurances, but Jinnah's demand for a merger of his party was not acceptable to him. Moreover, the creation Pakistan People's Party with other nationalist leaders of Pakistan added fuel to the fire of an already existing environment of dubious perceptions regarding each other.

During Jinnah's governor generalship, Qaiyum enjoyed massive support from him in all terms. Jinnah arranged all administrative support for him, but it could not improve his performance. But the political trends of this period shadowed the future politics of Pakistan.

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