

Role of Bacha Khan in Educating the Pakhtoon Society



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Abstract: History has rarely recorded such leaders who raised their nation from the darkness of ignorance to the light of glory. Bacha Khan (Abdul Ghaffar Khan) was one of them. When the society was under the powers of lords, he gave the lesson of equality, blowing new life in the dead society. It was his struggle, his tiresome efforts, his tolerance, the devotion that he uplifted his people from serving their lords to become a respectable, educated nation. He dedicated his entire life to the service of the Pashtun nation and strongly believed that if any change had to come, it would come only through education. For this purpose, he established in various parts of the province where teachers used to teach on voluntary bases. This study highlights the hardships faced by Bacha Khan in promoting education among the pakhtoons and his struggle for the awakening of pakhtoon society.

Key Words: Pakhtoon's, Bacha Khan, Madrassa, Struggle, Education, Charsadda

Introduction

Every movement is launched, keeping in view certain factors, and there are always some concealed circumstances compelling intellectuals to start a campaign. On the fertile soil of the Pakhtoon, certain factors compelled Bacha Khan to initiate. In mission school, Bacha Khan was highly influenced from his headmaster, Vigrum, and his brother Dr Vigrum. Both the brothers were very faithful, devoted, and loveful. They had to give scholarships to the indigent Pakhtoon students out of their salaries. Bacha Khan was amazed at their behavior and learned the very determination of nationalism, human service, fraternity, patriotism, etc. From his Teacher Vigrum. Bacha Khan thought that these people are to share their earnings with our kids, and we ourselves are dumb spectators (Tendulkar, 1967).

At that time, the Pakhtoon had to lead a tough life. Their life was very weak, and the society was full of social evils. There was short of earning and educational facilities. Bacha Khan observed that people of his community were passing through much deteriorated conditions because of their ignorance. Neither government was eager to educate people, to spread knowledge. There was no arrangement of

education. Bacha Khan tried his best to change the destroyed conditions and wanted to introduce reforms (A. G. Khan & Narang, 1969). When he went to Afghanistan in the Hijrat movement, he consulted the responsible people there, and when he observed the miserable condition of the people of Afghanistan and tribal area and worked for fifteen years in Afghanistan, Bacha Khan concluded that revolution is not possible in a hurry. It requires patience, knowledge, intellectuals, personalities, and learned people. Bacha Khan decided to open educational institutions for educating and training the volunteers (K. A. W. Khan, 1987).

British authorities had to give education in local languages, but in NWFP, the case was different. Here education media was not Pashto. Bacha Khan observed that in the rest of India, primary education had to be given in their own languages, but unfortunately, Pakhtoon had to be given basic education in other languages. So Bacha Khan decided to open educational institutions in their own media, In the language of the great Khushal Khan and Rahman Baba. Bacha Khan had a spiritual attachment with the prominent Ulema and was highly influenced by their personalities, cause,

knowledge and educational motives. The most important among those Ulema were Maulana Mahmood-ul-Hassan of Deoband, Hazrat Ubaid-Ullah sindhy, Maulvi Fazal Mehmood Makhfi, and Haji Sahib Turangzai, etc. He had to visit the institution of Dewband and the institution of Ubaid-Ullah Sindy. He had to chat with that Ulema and their pupils, who inspired Bacha Khan and compelled him to open educational institutions ([Nichols, 2003](#)).

British educational system was based on imperial designs to achieve their imperial target, while religious Madrassas were not working on sound foundations. So he wanted to establish educational institutions based on maternal language with a neutral approach between the British styled and orthodox religious institutions. His movement was a unique and first one in the available history of the Pakhtoon section of the then NWFP, for that was a universal movement based on the amalgamation of modern and religious education. Keeping in view certain objectives, Bacha Khan started to establish educational institutions in the nuke and corner of the Pakhtoon dominated portion of the province ([K. A. W. Khan, 1987](#)).

Bacha Khan, his Life, and Struggle

Bacha Khan started his mission as a social reformer by launching Anjuman-e-islahul-afaghina and subsequently the khudai khidmatgar movement; from the platform of these organizations, he rendered valuable services to the pukhtoos. The object of this movement was the social reformation and universalization of education among the pukhtoon. For this purpose he established madras as different parts of N.W.F.P, which brought positive results. People got educated, and as a result of this, much political awakening took place. Later on, the khudai khidmatgar movement was turned into a political movement that heroically struggled for the liberation of the pukhtoos, homeland from foreign rulers. Bacha Khan, accompanied by his followers, visited every nook and corner by N.W.F.P and held meetings to propagate his message (i) (Bukhari 1957).

He stressed acquiring of education as the need of the hour and a pre-requisite for freedom. The pakhtoos were very backward people and were against receiving education. Bacha Khan was deeply impressed by Haji sahib of Turangzai. He wanted to spread education with the help of Haji sahib because he was no his close associate, but suddenly a struck the Khan's dreams when the Haji Sahib fled one night to

the Mohmand Agency and he never returned. Now Bacha Khan was alone. He decided to visit Bajaur, and Malakand agencies. Bacha Khan thought that "Zagi" a small village of Mohmand territory (in Bajaur) would be a good place to start his work. He wanted to start work as a social reformer there. In the Frontier, the Khan worked with a new zeal. He visited the pakhtoon villages for reopening schools, starting new ones, and arguing with the villagers to improve their lot. At every turn, he faced opposition but did not lose heart and tried his best at reforming and educating the pakhtoos. (Narang, 1969)

In the case of female education, the situation was very worst. They would not allow their daughters to be educated in school. The credit goes to bacha Khan who encouraged the pakhtoos to get their daughters to educated, and for this purpose, he first sent his daughter to school. His family and in-laws were against this move, but he did not care for their opposition. His daughter went to graduate herself from Ala Abad University. She was one of the first women from the frontier region to receive higher education. And nowadays, if not all, a large section of the population is educated, including women. Universalizing education was not only meant to improve the standard of life of the native people but was also the road to freedom too. (Khan,1983).

Bacha Khan launched 'The Pakhtoon' magazine, which played a very important role in the awakening of pakhoos. It carried the message of bacha Khan to the readers in N.W.F.P and Afghanistan. The issues of this magazine were full of strong and convincing arguments manly to rouse the people to fight for freedom. He writes, "O, my brothers, ours is a miserable plight today the Britishers are bossing over us due to our disunity and weakness, Rise, and get united to fight for your freedom like the Arabs."(Tendulkar. 1967)

The journal also greatly projected his personality. He was a great freedom fighter who had dedicated all his life to the liberation of his homeland from the British, besides striving hard for the social reformation of the pakhtoon society. His struggle for independence will always be remembered in the annals of our history. under the auspices of the khuudei khidmatghar movement, Pashto dramas were staged in some village with the object of educating the masses and inculcating in them the love of freedom, such programs created a strong mental awakening among the people. (Tendulkar. 1967)

'The Pakhtoon' magazine played a very important role in reforming the pakhtoon society. It published many reformative essays, articles, and poems which were very informative about the pakhtoon culture. One of his important articles, entitled "Da Ghulamai Yava Nakha Mall Abas Kaul Di" (wastage of money is a symbol of slavery) has been published to educate the pakhtoon masses against extravagance. The writer severely criticizes the wasteful rituals on the occasions of deaths and also the festivities of celebrations at births. In these celebrations they would spend money ruthlessly even if they had no ready money to spend. They would sell or mortgage their farms or borrow money on interest. Such ceremonies as suicidal for an individual and society on the whole. Pakhtoon magazine played a very crucial role in removing all these evils from pakhtoon society. (Javed. 1981)

The hardship which bacha khan bore during the freedom struggle is a glorious chapter of his life story. The incident of merwas Dheri (Mardan) is a memorable one. In this, two of his ribs were fractured by the severe beating of the police. He was stopped at merwas Dheri and was not allowed to proceed to Mardan. He was asked to go back, but he replied, "My steps never go back".

The goal of the struggle launched by Bacha khan was the freedom of his motherland. In his speech, he called upon his people to get prepared to free the situation with courage and determination. Toward the end of his struggle, he is called upon even the pakhtoon women. Talk to join the liberation struggle. He always told people that the word "Pakhtoon" was synonymous with freedom. He said, "The Pakhtoons have their own traditions, history, and culture, which could not be preserved unless they had full freedom to maintain and develop their own traditions" (azad 1959)

Bacha khan greatest wish in life was to see his people share each other sorrows and joys old to see them work together as actual partners in life, and to win their rightful place among the nations of the world by virtues of services place by God and humanity. We know that in their endeavors for political awakening in the Frontier, both bacha khan's and Haji sahib of Turangzai played a very important role because both of them were dedicated social reforms and rendered valuable services for the realization of their mission. They raised their voice against the British Raj at a time when it was in full power. They fought again the

British rule because they believed that freedom was the birthright of every people. They fought for a long time and proved themselves worthy for their task. (Narang 1969).

The best effect of Khudai Khidmatgar (movement of Bacha Khan) was very important because they neither cared for their lives nor for their belongings. They sacrificed everything for the sake of this movement. Their houses were searched, their families were harassed, and their crops were set on fire. They were beaten inhumanely, crushed, stripped, maltreated, and kept hungry and thirsty. Their mothers, wives, and sisters were disgraced in their presence. Their innocent children were punished mercilessly in front of them, but they stood firm like rocks and bore all the hardships with courage and determination. Despite the inhuman violence and cruelty against the pakhtoons, the Khudai Khidmatgars remained as stand fast and courageous as ever before. The Khudai Khidmatgars were religious people and to defame this movement was like a sin for them. They tried to carry on their movement side by side with religion, and that's why their movement grew in strength and popularity in the whole region within a very short span of time. The Khudai Khidmatgar was a non-violent movement and prohibited the carrying of weapons by its followers. Perhaps the best effect that this movement was that it removed from the people's hearts that fear of the British government and inspired them with new hope and courage. (Narang 1969)

Bacha Khan was the greatest of the pakhtoon leader of all times. Death has removed him physically, but he lives in the hearts of those who loved and respected him, who shared their joys and sorrows with him, and those who stood by him through the thick and thin of his crusades against the alien rulers and against the forces of tyranny, injustice, oppression, and exploitation. His lifelong struggle for his people and the motherland constitutes a glorious chapter of our history which will guide and inspire the leaders and common men of the future generation. (Narang, 1969)

In December 1937, when doctor khan sahib (the elder brother of Bacha khan) formed his government in N.W.F.P. he also rendered great service for the pakhtoon. However, all the powers were in the hands of the British governor, but in spite of that dr. Khan Sahib, during his short tenure in office did considerable work for the uplift of the pakhtoons. Introduce Pashto

language in the curriculum of schools in the province. His (Bacha Khan) movement during his short term of doctor Khan Sahib government was for the uplift of backward Pakhtoons. Their short term in government created so much confidence in the Pakhtoons that one's when doctor Khan Sahib was going through the Qissa Khwani Bazaar a person pulled his collar and asked; "what have you done for us?" doctor Khan Sahib smiled and replied, we have done a lot for you, that's why you can ask me a question in such a manner. (Saqi, 1979)

This shows to us how much self confidence was created by Bacha Khan's movement among the Pakhtoons. So we can say that Bacha Khan's contribution in the politics of the sub-continent was as great as that of his contemporaries. Delegacy which Bacha Khan left behind is enshrined in the memories of his devotion to social service, his message of love and peace, his capacity for sacrifices given for a cause, his cherished goal and his mission to bring genuine friendship between the communities and masses of the sub-continent. Bacha Khan is reported to have said, "The prophet faced many handicaps, but he never gave up hope, and finally he triumphed". He has left that lesson behind, and if we face our difficulties in the same spirit, I do not see any reason why we should ever fail. The cause of freedom is always just in the fight against slavery is always noble. (Easwaran, 1984)

Abdul Ghaffar Khan thought that the real enemies of the Muslims were not the Hindus but the Britishers. In his opinion when the Britishers would leave India the Muslims and Hindus could continue living together in a united India as they had done for many centuries. He asked the All India Muslim League to join hand with the All India Congress in its struggle against the British role, but the League rejected the offer and begins to call Bacha Khan an agent of the Hindus. Although the Muslim League called him an agent of the Hindus, yet the fact remains that he was neither the agent of the Hindus nor of the communists and socialists. He was only a true Khudai Khidmatgar and a Pakhtoon nationalist whose aim was the uplift of the Pakhtoons and to get freedom. But some people are unable to judge him properly because of their own smallness of vision and mind. They charged him with one thing or another, but today whose all believe on freedom, knowledge, and love of fellow human beings not only in Pakistan but throughout the world will recognize him as a great freedom fighter. (Younas 1947)

He lived a very simple life according to Islamic principle. He lived in the principle of universal Islamic brotherhood; submission to Allah's will and serving Allah through the service of human beings, irrespective of caste, color, race or religion. To achieve his mission Bacha Khan suffered the hardship of imprisonment and confiscation of his property. The Pakhtoons rallied around him and rendered more sacrifice than any other community in the struggle for independence. The great impact of his personality on society was that most of the social evil, e.g feudalism, family feuds, bloodshed and "para Jamba" were rooted out from the Pakhtoons society. For the eradication of social evils, he and his colleagues used to address large public meetings at different places and arranged to have didactic dramas staged mostly in rural areas of the frontier province. He was a true Pakhtoon and perhaps it will be a long time before another Pakhtoon like Bacha Khan will be born in Pakhtoon society. (Khan 1947)

Bacha Khan had discovered by practical experience that love can create more in a second than an atom bomb can destroy. He always thought to the Pakhtoons the spirit of kindness, courage and many other good values. In those days trade and commerce were considered as an inferior profession. If any Pakhtoon setup business, he was ridiculed and they asked him "Are you Hindu"? To remedy this false notion, he himself set an example; first, he started the business of gur, tobacco, and cotton, and encouraged the people to do the same. Now days it is because of Bacha Khan encouragement that the Pakhtoon people are more interested in business than any other calling. He was dead set against the use of narcotics and also advised others to such things. He urged the people that they should produce cotton cloths at home and leave the factories to produce arms. For this purpose he went to down country and brought many hand looms for the manufacturing of cotton fabrics. (Khan, 1983).

Madrasa at Utmanzai (Charsadda)

In 1910 Bacha Khan in collaboration with Moulvi Abdul Aziz established an institution at Utmanzai (Charsadda). They visited the adjacent areas and tried to focus people attention on education. Bacha Khan awakened the Pakhtoon Senses regarding the importance of education in their hearts. The mullahs opposed the educational plan of Bacha Khan. They spread propaganda that Pashto is the language of hell.

They used to say that people who study in schools would be sent to hell. They had to say that studying in school is to get paisa and such people have no place in the paradise and will be sent to hell ([Bangash & Jan, 2015](#)).

Khaluna Madrassa at Dir

Bacha Khan and his colleagues had gone to Afghanistan in Hijrat Movement and to see responsible people to consult them regarding his idea of establishing institutions. Their response was positive and Bacha Khan along with his friends visited tribal areas. They reached Dir where they stayed at Khaluna village. People of that village were Akhunzadas and Paracas who were very faithful and progressive people. They were wealthy and they accepted his request with enthusiasm and a madrassa was established there ([K. A. W. Khan, 1987](#)).

Response of the people was very encouraging and the institution developed very soon. Strength of the students reached to four hundred. Later on government closed that Madrassa.

Azad School at Utmanzai (Charsadda)

Bacha Khan established azad School in 1921 at Utmanzai (Charsadda) in collaboration with other friends. They were QaziAttuallah, Taj Muhammad, Mian Ahmad Shah, Muhammad Abbas Khan, Abdul Akbar Khan Akbar, Muhammad Akbar Khan Khadim, and Abdullah Shah. Bacha Khan aim was to educate the Pakhtoon and to produce the sense of nationalism and mutual cooperation and love ([A. G. Khan & Narang, 1969](#)).

He himself used to teach in the school because of the shortage of teachers. His own sons were the students of his school. The idea of this Azad School proved to be the best in the favor of the Muslims but again the British found it ill in their own concern, as it was a kind of threat to them from the Puktoons and so they started to engage Bacha Khan in one matter or the other in order to divert his attention from all the branches of Azad school situated in Charsadda, Mardan, Sawabi etc. This School system was affiliated with Jamia Millia Delhi on December 1st, 1923. The final examination, i.e., the matriculation examinations were conducted by Jamia Millia and the passed students were entertained to get admission for further studies in Jamia Millia. The syllabus was designed by the scholars of Jamia Millia with the permission of a

little bit modification according to the conditions and situations. The curriculum also included the teaching of the Holy Quran, Hadith, Fiqah, Arabic language and Islamic history to give religious education to the Puktoons ([K. A. W. Khan, 1987](#)).

Yousafzai Madrassas

Through the Anjuman Islah-I-Afaghina, Bacha Khan succeeded to establish educational institutions at scattered places of Yousafzais' land. Sahib Zada Khurshid Khan and Nasrullah Jan of Adina Openly supported him in establishing institutions in District Mardan. He says that schools on the soil of Yousafzai were flourishing and were in good conditions. Muhammad Akbar Khadim had to conduct examinations and Bacha Khan used to produce awareness. Main schools were situated at Balagarhi, Sawaldher, Rustam, Sudham, Ghlyara, Nawankilli and Ismaila etc ([Shah, 2007](#)).

Madrassas at Peshawar and Southern Districts

Bacha Khan established school in Peshawar. Various institutions were created at Kohat. There were two main schools at Kohat working in an encouraging manner. A school was established at Hangu managed by Sahib Ali Badsha. There was Sunni-Shia tussle obstructing educational uplift. Bacha Khan addressed a huge gathering at Hangu where he delivered an impressive speech on the Shia-Sunni issue. A very important school was created at Tall where people had to offer exemplary sacrifices. Bacha Khan visited Bannu and established schools in collaboration with Amir Mukhtar Sahib ([K. A. W. Khan, 1987](#)).

Hurdles faced by Bacha Khan

British Rulers

The most significant obstruction was from the government side. British rulers sensed a threat from the encouraging trend, enthusiasm and tendencies of the people towards Bacha Khan's movement, a constant source of anxiety for ruling authorities. They applied various tactics to resist. A few instances of the government reaction are:

1. When a school was opened at Khaluna (Dir) and its strength reached at about four hundred students, it was a source of severe inconvenience for the Political Agent of

- Malakand and directed the Nawab of Dir to close the school. Nawab closed rather burnt the school.
2. British rulers focused their attention on the annexation of Buner. They closed all the national Islamic Madrassas. These Madrassas was considered serious obstructions in their way. Teachers and supporters of those institutions were arrested. Bacha Khan had given the charge of those schools to Haji Sahib Turangzai in order to reduce opposition from the religious circles, but his confrontation with the British rulers caused the destruction of national Madrassas ([Banerjee, 2000](#)). Government oppressed the teachers and they were sent to D-I-Khan jail. Heavy chains were put in their legs and hands; they had to run hand-grinders; manual oil extractors and Persian wheels had to be run just like animal. Their beards had to be shaved. They had to be given insulting and humiliating dress and food. On Yousafzai soil, one of his supporters, Nasarullah Khan was compelled by the government to go abroad to get higher education.
 3. British ruler had to produce fear and terror among the teachers. They had to give threats and when they failed, they would offer greater salaries. Maqsood Jan from Bannu was a teacher at Azad Madrassa Utmanzai, who was teased badly.
 4. Sir, Hamilton Grant was a Chief Commissioner (CC) of the then NWFP, who invited Ghaffar Khan's father to restrain his son from his activities. His Secretary, Saad Ullah Khan Umerzai convinced his father to detach his son from the social activities. His father advised him to abandon his activities but he responded that it was his sacred religious obligation to serve humanity. His father openly denied government's desire ([Taizi, 2002](#)).
 5. Once, Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qayum Khan invited Bacha Khan and his students of Azad School Utmanzai to Islamia College, Peshawar to attend the function. In the gathering, students of Azad Madrassa presented a poem, which brought tears to the eyes of listeners. British listeners became angry and asked, "Who are these boys"? They were told that

they were the students of Utmanzai. The response was very dangerous and a source of irritation for the British rulers. British authorities were very anxious of the progress and spreading of these institutions. Any type of awareness was a source of constant threat to their rule in the region. So, they left no stone unturned to turn the National Islamic School in ruins ([Daulatzai, 2004](#)).

Role of Religious Circles

British authorities had to use Mullas against the educational institution in NWFP they were assigned the duty to resist educational progress. They spread propaganda that Pashto is the language of hell. They used to say that the people who study in schools would be sent to hell. They had to say that studying in school is to get paisa and such people will have no place in the Paradise and will be sent to Hell. Mullahs had to resist school education but they themselves had no any solid program to educate the people. The Pakhtoon remained very backward because of the negative attitude of the Mullahs ([Aziz, 2012](#)). Bacha Khan says "Once when I was at Mufti Abad to establish a Madrassa, A Mullah named Chitrali Mullah came there having a rifle in his one hand and a few books in his other hand. I was busy in conversation that Mullah stood up and declared that he did not accept the education advocated by Bacha Khan khan. He demonstrates a book and recited a line 'a dog barks 'and a 'big pig', is knowledge? Then he challenged me to decide either through the rifle or through the books" The Pakhtoon can be controlled through religious circle and they used this weapon very successfully.

Despite many problems, Bacha Khan was successful to produce awareness among the Pakhtoon to educate their kids and he broke the stronghold of Mullahs ([Aziz, 2012](#)).

Conclusion

Bacha Khan Khan and his colleagues offered heavy sacrifices to establish and develop these educational institutions. They accepted all challenges i-e threat from the government, financial weaknesses, obstruction by Khans and Mullas and sometimes discouraging attitude of his colleagues. His efforts reveal that he eagerly tried to develop literary spirit and improve the standard of education among the

warrior and wild Pakhtun tribes. On one side, he had to establish institutions, while on the other hand; he had to produce awareness through meetings and public gatherings. He had to motivate people to get education. It proves a great victory against negative Pukhtoos image as a violent nation. Bacha Khan Khan launched an educational campaign to educate the wild

and savage Pakhtoon, for he wanted to bring a mental evolution, which was necessary for social reformation. But Bacha Khan faced various problems in the way of educational campaign. Keeping in view his pains, role of Bacha Khan in educational development cannot be ignored.

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