The Khaksar Movement

L. JISKANI

The specific aim of the Khaksar Movement was to convert Muslims into a militant nation. During 1930s the masses of the subcontinent were in confusion and the movement emerged out of discontentment and dejection. The working class and petty bourgeoisie of urban and rural areas joined this movement. People were attracted by its progressive methods and therefore, it emerged as a successful, organized, dominant and powerful movement.

Khaksars being para-military organization, the main object was discipline, militarist training and social service. A Khaksar was dressed in brown uniform, carried spade (Belchah, the symbol of the movement) on his shoulder and underwent for more than an hour military drill and parade. It was distinctly a religious movement, emphasizing religious discipline within the organization and in daily life. The Khaksars opposed the degrading religion of the Mullas. The movement had vague socialist ideas. The spade was symbol of dignity of honest labour and the weapon of the poor labour. Non-Muslims were permitted to join it if they acknowledged *tawhid* and *alakhirah* but appeal was made to Muslims and virtually only Muslims had joined it. But sometimes the movement proclaimed rather "Hindus and Sikhs must know that we are not against them. If we get power, we will work for them too."[1]

Keeping in view the glorious past of Islam, its early conquests were particularly stressed as an ideal of the new Muslimized world. Khaksars were encouraged to believe that they were devoted to create a well-ordered, decidedly progressive and flourishing future society in the subcontinent. Karl Marx said that "you cannot make Revolution without revolutionaries."[2] Allama Mashriqi wanted to produce revolutionaries in order to make revolution for the betterment of tomorrow.

We can say that to some extent the movement was based on scientific patterns. They were working for an ideal society, "Our aim is peace, love, equality and justice for all."[3] But they could not give any economic programme and that is why they faced a terrible blow and it was considered an aimless movement. A Khaksar was not concerned with the ultimate goal. If questioned, he said "Ask the leader," and again he explicitly stated "Our khaksar does not know exactly what he stands for. He has but to do and die as he is ordered."[4] The movement had been strongest in the Punjab and the United Provinces, with some considerable influence in Sind and N.W.F.P. The upper class occupied high rank leadership of the movement rather than the ordinary members except few mostly idealistic intellectuals. But none of the peasantry class or true urban proletariat was taken in the important leaders of the movement. An official estimate from Simla made in 1941 was reported to set the figure at thirty thousand.[5] The membership of the movement according to its own claims was numbered at about forty thousand.[6] According to W.C. Smith "Probably the actual number has been very considerably over fifty thousand."[7] The supreme head of the movement was Amir Allamah Inayatullah Mashriqi with a bourgeois family background who took a brilliant triple degree from Cambridge in Mathematics, Physics and Oriental Languages being a "Senior Wrangler". He returned to India and entered the Government service in Education Department.

India was not interested in the Khilafat Conference which was held at Cairo in the year 1926. Jamiat-ul-Ulama, the All India Khilafat Committee and the Muslim League declined to send delegates. Allama Mashriqi attended the conference privately and was the sole Indian there. He then went to Europe, met Hitler and discussed affairs with him. In 1931, he returned to India and organized the Khaksar movement. He foresaw a period of chaos in India and proceeded to gather under him an armed force to seize power. It was his long awaited dream which he wanted to bring into reality.

Khaksars fulfilled for a time the religious needs of the people concerned. The members in the organization had moved from a feudal village economy to the lower ranges of a new industrial economy. The old feudal religion, the Islam of the Mullas was outright rejected. People were not advanced and intellectual enough to adapt to the

sophisticated bourgeois Islam of liberals and progressive thinkers. They wanted to be led. They knew that individually they were superior to the Mullas. Mashriqi wrote of these traditional religionists: "Their poverty, ignorance, vileness, destitution, helplessness, dumbness, filthiness and their tatters, all these clearly indicate that, whatever they be, they can never be the leaders of this nation"[8]

The *Khaksar* movement gave them two gifts of religion: "the sense of being useful and significant, and the promise of salvation or reward."[9] In brief the one aim of the Khaksar movement is "to raise, once again after the lapse of thirteen centuries, Soldiers for God and Islam ..... our aim is to be once again kings, rulers, world conquerors and supreme masters on earth. This is our religion, our Islam, our creed and our faith."[10] They laid stress on neatness, discipline, punctuality which made them able to be fit in new industrialized society. They rendered social services in orderly way, acting as ushers in Mosques and at every other feasible gathering, giving assistance after earthquakes and digging wells etc. Khaksar propaganda had to fight against long traditions and superstitions prevailing in illiterate and helpless society and they succeeded in it to some extent.

Khaksars claimed that their programme included communism.[11] We can say it was hotch potch of religion, spiritualism and communism. They were aiming at "Muslim communism" and not the "present corrupted form of the communism prevalent in Europe."[12] They led their movement neither to religion nor to communism. It was a movement without purpose or destination and they stood no where. The movement was purely mystic idealism and based on religious emotion.

The attention of the people was diverted when the movement attacked Maulvies and then began an open collision. The orthodox class denounced Allama Mashriqi and his movement as heretical and kafir.[12] This was the time when the movement was growing in size and strength.

Allama Mashriqi announced that Khaksar movement would keep order among Muslims when in 1939 a Sunni-Shia conflict flared up in Lucknow.[13] After receiving orders, belchah armed khaksars

from Punjab marched on this city but the United Provinces police refused them entry. The result was that the first Khaksar clash with Government forces was with a Congress government and they were first fired upon by Congress police.

Allama Mashriqi demanded from the Unionist Government permission to use the official Radio Station, or permission to have a private one from an official Bayt-al-Mal under Khaksar control. The Government did not accept the request and decided that the oganization was getting too dangerous. They declared one of its publications objectionable. In 1940 the Government imposed a ban on all non-official military parading. Khaksars were ordered to assemble in Lahore on 19th March, 1940 to defy the orders. The police opened fire killing about 50[14] Khaksars. Soon afterwards, Allama Mashriqi was arrested and put into Lahore prison, and was kept confined for almost three years. The movement was declared an unlawful organization in the Punjab and Delhi. The Khaksars were arrested in Lahore, out of which nineteen were awarded life imprisonment.

In the end of 1940 the ban imposed on Khaksar organization was lifted but the general ban on military parade remained in force. More than 1650 detainees were released and only 50 were kept imprisoned.[15] The petitions made for the release of Allama Mashriqi were repeatedly rejected. Finally he saw no way to win tussle with the Government. On January 16, 1942, he issued a proclamation ordering "the Khaksars to discontinue altogether for the duration of the war the display of uniforms or badges, the carrying of belchas or any other weapons, and marches or drilling of any description."[16] Soon afterwards he was released on the condition to remain within Madras province.

British Government took repressive measures in order to curb Congress activities which resulted in the upsurge of a nationalist and anti-British struggle. Allama Mashriqi ordered his khaksars not to participate in that "Suicidal"[17] struggle. They were further warned that they should not take part in any anti-war activities or any propaganda against British Government.

In the beginning of 1943 after much discussions in assemblies and in public, further guarantees were given that for the duration of war the movement will confine itself to social services only and will not pursue illegal activities. After such undertakings given by Allama Mashriqi, Khaksar party was once more declared a legal organization.

People do not rely on slogans only. They also consider the political future of a party. Muslim League was the only party which was much popular among the Muslims of India. It was a big question and concern of every Muslim that if India wins freedom, what will be the future status of Muslims in India? The Muslim League was fighting on both fronts with the British Government as well as the Congress. The educated class of Muslims supported Muslim League considering it to be a genuine party to meet the needs of Muslims for their separate home land. Thus great popularity was gained by Muslim League which fought courageously with the British Government and the Congress simultaneously for the just cause of the Muslims. Allama Mashriqi and Khaksars disliked the popularity of Muslim League and it annoyed them. The beginning of such feeling was the end of the movement.

At the time of the Lahore incident Sir Sikander Hayat was the chief minister of Punjab who belonged to Unionist party. Sir Sikander Hayat had a soft corner for Muslim League. He tried to root out Khaksar movement in the Punjab province.

The brutal action taken by the Unionist party against Khaksars in the Punjab was condemned by the people in the nook and corner of the country and Punjab Government was made responsible for the incident. Muslim League sympathised with Khaksars and did not involve Sikander Hayat and his party in the Lahore incident.[18]

On the night of March 21, 1940, a meeting of Muslim League's Subject Committee was held at Lahore in which representatives from different provinces participated. Late Choudhry Barkat Ali and his supporters wanted to slate Sir Sikander Hayat so that he should be expelled or be compelled to leave the party immediately, Most of the members spoke against Sikander Hayat and the atrocities committed on Khaksars. Finally, Sikander Hayat while speaking, wept

and defended himself and his Government. After much discussion a resolution was passed in which Punjab Government was absolved of the responsibility for the Lahore incident and an assurance was given that the ban imposed on Khaksars will be removed as soon as situation was normalized. This was somewhat big success of Sir Sikander Hayat.[19]

Khaksars thought that lip-sympathy of the Muslim League was a betrayal and consequently out of confusion a Khaksar attacked Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah which gave a further terrible blow to the movement and its popularity.

When Allama Mashriqi observed that the future of the movement was at stake, he made final desperate efforts to save the movement from disaster, and announced that "on June 30, 1947, three lakh Khaksars of this country should converge at Jamia Masjid and Red Fort, Delhi and wait for further orders." He further continued, if they converged, further programme of the movement will be chalked out, if not, movement will come to an end."[20]

These efforts failed however and finally, Allama Mashriqi announced the end of the movement in the following poignant proclamation:

"Through the Khaksar movement I wanted to galvanise the revolutionary forces of my nation but could not succeed during last seventeen years. I found the major characteristic of our nation that they want to achieve every object but without labour. They lack revolutionary qualities. They are intoxicated with the idea of Pakistan and are not interested in any thing except that. Three months ago I ordered the Khaksars to converge at Delhi but they did not. I spent best of my life's portion as well as wealth and served sincerely for the uplift of the Muslim nation but I could not succeed in making the Muslims of India dominant. I do hereby voluntarily retire from the leadership of Khaksar movement hereafter."[21]

Footnotes

1. W. C. Smith, Modern Islam in India, A Social Analysis, Ripon Printing Press, Bull Road, Lahore, 1943, p. 285.

2. A. Spirkin O. Yakhot, The basic Principles of Dialectical and Historical Materialism, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1971, p. 158.
3. Mashriqi, The Khaksar Movement, The Light, Lahore, 24-12-36.
4. Mashriqi, قول فیصل quoted in translation in Subhan, The Khaksar Movement, Bulletin of the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies, series xxix, July-August, 1941, p. 12.
5. W.C. Smith, op. cit., p. 286.
6. Ibid, p. 286.
7. Ibid, p. 286.
8. Mashriqi, قول فیصل in Subhan, op. cit., p. 13.
9. W. C. Smith, op. cit., p. 291.
10. Mashriqi, قول فیصل in Subhan, op. cit., p. 12.
11. W. C. Smith, op. cit., p. 292.
12. Ibid, p. 292.
13. Ibid, p. 293.
14. Abdullah Malik, پنجاب کی سیاسی تحریکیں, Kausar Publisher, Lahore, 1973, p. 300.
15. W. C. Smith, op. cit., p. 294.
16. Statement by Allama Mashriqi, made public in a Government Press on 16-1-1942 as reported in the Tribune, Lahore, 17-1-1942.
17. W. C. Smith, op. cit., p. 295.
18. Abdullah Malik, پنجاب کی سیاسی تحریکیں, op. cit., p. 305.
19. Ibid, pp. 304-305.
20. Ibid, p. 347.
21. Ibid, p. 347. The quotation from Allama Mashriqi is free translation by the present writer from A. Malik's book.