FRONTIER TRAGEDY - 1930

AHMAD SALIM

The Qissa Khani Bazar firing in Peshawar on 30 April,1930 was the natural result of movements against the oppressive rule of the British Power in the Indo - Pak Sub - continent, Among these movements some were of 'national' character which influenced the politics of the 'Indian' Empire's frontier area, Some events and movements however, were due to internal causes and were the outcome of social, economic and political problems confined to the area. Among the 'national' movements, Ghadar Party, resistence to recruitment during the Firstworld War, movementagainst the Rowllat Act, massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh; the boycott of Prince of Wales's visit Hijrat movement, Khilafat movement, formation of Naujawan Bharat Sabha. and movement against Simon Commission deserve special mention. Among the local movements, the individual terrorist activities of Muttan Khan and Ajab Khan against the English, opposition to Engilsh eduction, the overthrow of the liberal and anti-imperialist government of Amanullah Khan in Afghanistan and the rise of Khudai Khidmatgar movement are of hasic importance. In order to understand how these events and movements gained momentum and turned into the tragedy of 30 April 1930, it is necessary to go into some details regarding the origin, trend and the effects of the people's reaction in the Frontiv to the reprassive measures of the British.

In 1901, Lord Curzon separated the Peshawar districts (includtng Mardan), Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan and Hazara from the Punjab and gave them the form of the North Western Frontier Province. Both the Muslims and the Hindus opposed this new province, For full one hundred years this area was regarded as "the best training school for the British Officers." According to an English historian, Andrews, "For the English army there cannot be a better

training ground than the Punjab Frontier Force," In order to train their army, the English from time to time fought separately with each one of the different tribes in the Frontier. Like other areas the people of this area also took part in the War of Independence in 1857, and afterwards fell victim to the oppression of the occupying army. To destroy the Pathans military measures were taken against them on the one hand and on the other hand their morale was sought to be undermined on a large scale. False stories against them became so common that an Englishman had to say in protest.

> "The character of the unfortunate Pathan has been torn to pieces by authors Since the last half-century; and they were stigmetized as traitors, blood thirsty and cruel until it became a fashion to call the Pathan ferocious of worst the type."

From 1849 to 1901, sity military operations were conpucted against the Waziries, the Afridis, the Mohmands, the Masuds, the Yousif zais, the Hasan zais, the Orakzais, the Isazris, and other frontier tribes. In these military operations the English tried to crush movenents in Swat, Kohat, Khyber, Bajaur, Bonir and the areas in Waziristan but in most of them the activists were able to escape with their life.

While retaining and cruelly enforcing the Chazi Act (Murderous outrage Act) of 1877, new oppressive rules were imposed on the new province. Among these the Frontier Crime Regulation and the new Jirga System were the worst. On the mere doubt that any tribesman intended to kill an Englishman he was hanged under the Ghazi Act. It was enough for a tribesman to be found walking with a weapon in the Cantonemnet area after sunset to be branded as a political murderer and hence liable to be hanged. Despite such a grave indictment the 'culprit' was not allowed the facility of any legal counsel.3 It was not necessary to take the culprit anywhere in particular to hang him; the decision as to the place of hanging completely rested with the man - in- charge at the time. He could hang him on a tree, on a wall, in an enclosed place or in a 'maidan'. To raise a finger on a White man amounted to an intention to kill him. To the new province Maulana Mohammed Ali Jauhar gave the befitting name of "land without rules." Driticiring these

oppressive rules Qaid-i Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah once said in the Central Legislative Assembly.

> "The principle of the government of the dark ages is being repeated: Official oppression and the oppressive policy for which the Frontier government has been criticised several times." 4

These oppressive rules produced bitter reactions. In 1908 Multan Khan Zagha Khail Afridi made an attack on the Peshawar city and looted Sarrafa Bazar but afterwards through the treachery of a companion he was killed fighting with the army. The following lines from a Pushto folk song refer to this event:-

> Multan was way laid through deciet;
> Who will now commit robbery!

The attack by Multan Khan did much to destory the prestige of the rulers. They now began to create religious dissensions among the people and succeeded in stirring up Hindu-Muslim riots on a large scale in 1910. They made succcessful use of the Holy and Muharram festivals which that year fell on the same date. They favoured the riots and themselves started crushing the two communitiec, as keepers of law and order. But these riots could not last long. The events in Tripoli and Balkans created political urge among the people to unite and face the common enemy. The Great War of 1914-18 removed all misunderstandings as mutual conflict and animosity among the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Different Pathan tribes resisted recruitment in the army and refused to subscribe to the war fund. The resistance started from the hilly area of Hazara. In Bajaur some tribes made an attack on the British post at Shabqadar and caused much trouble to the enemy. The Mahsud tribe murdered their political agent alongwith two English officers. The people resisted the payment of war loans. During the entire period of the war only 1, 38, 451 rupees could be collected in the Frontier Province and the number of recruited persons could not come to more than 32454. Those in the Pathan platoon who refused to fight with the Turks in this war were shot dead in hundreds under Court Martial; and the rest were deported by sea to an unknown destination and were drowned on the way near Burma.

After the war the Indians were offered Rowlatt Act as reward for participation in the war. As a result, powerful reaction arose against the Act throughout the country. The Frontier people also joined the movement and were arrested in large numbers. Among the many who suffered deportation and were sent to the Andamans, Hakim Abdul Jalil Nadvi, Mohd Ashiq, Fruit Merchant, Dr. Charu Chandar Ghose, Agha Syed Abdullah Shah and Pandit Amir Chand Bimwal were the more well known, Against the Rowlatt Act Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan held a meeting in Otmanzai which was attended by 100,000 people.5 This was Ghaffar Khan's first meeting and the first political meeting in the history of Otmanzai. As a result Ghaffar Khan himself and one hundred and fifty of his chief workers were arrested and detained under abominable conditions for six months. 6

In 1920. Maulana Abdul Bari declared in his 'fatwas' at Lucknow that India was Darul Harb (place of war), and the Muslims should therefore migrate from it to some Islamic country. The people of the Punjab Frontier and Sind responded first to this sentimental fatwa, Migration gained speed and the people in hundreds of thousands came ant leaving their houses. parental properties and crops behind. Harsh and cruel measures taken by the English against the Khilafat created unrest among the people. This highly sentimentelised yet very haphazardly organized movement almost put the structure of common life on the country into disarray. Families were destroyed. Children left their parents and wives separated from their husband. The betrothed males considered it a shame to leave behind their fiancees unclaimed, so they were married hurriedly while on their way to 'Hijrat'. Ready crops were mere sold for nothing. This vast migration ruined the economy of Atghanistan. The Hijrat (migration) Committee tried to stop the 'muhajireen' from going ahead but nobody could keep Sane. The people kept on coming from the Punjab and Sind until there was no room left for the muhajireen in Afghanistan, whose rulers refused to accept this flood of people. The unprecedented crowds of the muhajireen, lying in fields under the open sky, began to die of starvation and thirst. Children, women and the young were forced to mortgage themselvs for a glass of water and a piece of bread. 7 In this way the tragedy af 'Hijrat' Come to an

end and those who survived returned to their houses. Ghaffar Khan and the members of his family were also among those who went on 'Hijrat' for the sale of 'Khilafat' in Islam. Instead of proving helpful in the struggle for independence this negative movement, retarded its progress. Besides the great loss of life and property it discouraged by example the struggle for freedom. The 'hijrat' movement, however, had a positive side, too, in as much as those who instead of returning home crossed to Russia had the opportunity of witnessing the socialist revolution and they came back deeply impressed by socialist thinking.

After the Hijrat fiasco, Khilafat movement as a whole left the people angry and sad. As a reaction, the movement against the Rowlatt Act again became active. Slogans in favour of non-co-operation began to be raised. Students started leaving educational institutions. 'British' Courts were boycotted. As a counter-balance to the government educational institutions, peoples' institutions such as Jamia Millia Islamia and such other national colleges were established. Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Syed Fazal Hamdani established national educational institutions in Otmanzai and Pashawar. A Hindu-Muslim conference was held in June 1920 in Allahbad to decide on the next course of action in the national struggle for freedom. The Hindu-Muslim unity attained through this Conference particularly in its impact on the Frontier Province can be gauged by the fact that Sardar Gur Bukhsh Sing was the general Secretary of Khilafat Committee in Sarhad and Amir Chand Biswal from the area was again the first worker of the committee to be arrested and sentenced for non-cooperation. The movement effected most severely the working of the administrative machinery in the province.

> Admitting this, Sir George Mc Munn wrote "In the occupied district in these dangerous days when the movements of Hijrat and Rhilafat had created an atmosphere of no-Confidence it spread from Peshawar to the southern areas als"

Mr, Ewart admitted that throughout the length and breadth of the province, especially in Bannu, this movement gained the same momentum as was seen in Peshawar during the first Afghan war in 1919 and again on the occasion of the arrival of Crown

Prince of Great Britain in India. Mansera, the tehsil of Hazara, refused to admit the existence of the British government, and the villagers, specially in Dhodeyal and Shahi Keyari, appointed their own officers and Tehsildars. They themselves started to perform for keeping law and order in that area, and on two or three occasions they publicly tried British government officials and awarded them summary punishments. Thus the danger to the safety and stablity of British rule lurked ominously in Kohat and Bannu. A report on conditions then prevalent, by Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari was published in "Venture", London, in May, 1921 according to which during the days of the Tehrik (movement) nearly 25,000 to 26,000 titles and awards bestowed by the British govnment, were surrendered, and no order for the import of English cloth was placeh with British manufacturers in England between January 1921 and May 1921.

The Khilafat movement continued gathering momentum in Sarhad. A move to close all places of prostitution was started and folk songs in Pushto and Hindko languages on this subject were sung in every house. Perturbed, the government raided the offices of the Khilafat Committee. All records were confiscated and meetings and processions were banned. This ban was firmly opposed and defied. Arrests were courted en masse. In 1922 Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Dr. Saifuddin Kichlew and Ghazi Abdur Rehman Ludhyanavi toured the province. Police arrested them and sent them back beyond Attock. While these disturbances were on, the arrival of the Prince of Wales was announced. May 6 was fixed for the reception of the Prince in Sarhad. By that time all notable leaders were put into jail. The remaining members of the Khilafat Commlttee arranged a programme of Hartal under the leadership of Mr. Allah Bukhsh Yusufi on the day of arrival of the Prince. Leaflets and hand bills bearing titles, such as "Accept me or not, I am your guest" were distributed in the city. For the folly of an officer the hartal was observed even one day before the schedule. On 6th May, the day of the Princes arrival the whole city observed hartal. The Khilafat workers infiltrated into the official reception procession meant for the Prince and on hisarrival raised the slogan of 'Shame, Shame. In Chowk Yadgar, Rai Bahadur Meherchand Khanna had just started to read his reception address in honour or the Prince when the crowd started

raising the slogans of their national leaders. The crowd went out of control and began to destroy every thing. In a few minutes, all decorations were ruined. The Prince was escorted with great difficulty to the Government House. 8 The gentry in the forefront of the reception arrangements for the Prince were taken to task by the British. Titles of some titleholders were withdrawn, and they lose face miserably before their overlords. 9

After the return of the Prince all political parties in the provinee were declared illegal and political workers were arrested enmasse and put behind bars for indefinite periods.

In 1923 the famous freedom fighter Ajab Khan appeared on the scene. At that time individual terrorism was beginning to catch imagination of the bold and self-sacrifcing youth in the conntry. In November 1920 two English officers were murdered in Kohat. In1921 a big robbery was committed in Kohat Cantonment. On 10th April 1923 two military officers were killed in the Khyber Pass and on 13th April Ajab Khan carried away an English woman Miss Ellis. This abduction was committed mistakenly. The British army had earlier raided the house of Ajab Khan, accusing him of the Kohat robbery. In his absence the women of his household were ill-treated. On coming to know about this Ajab Khan decided to kill Major Ellis, the man responsible for the raid on his house. On that night. however, the Major too was not present in his house. Mistakenly his wife was murdered in his place. Again, mistakenly his daughter was kidnapped in place of his wife. Ajab Khan and his companions took the girl away with them. Afterwards when he came to know the facts Ajab Khan was very sorry and he kept the girl fully protected. This incident shook the whole edifice of the Indian government. Tribal jirgas were convened everywhere. Enticments, political pressures and other methods were brought to bear for the return of the girl. The Afridis of the Khyber Pass held consultations among themselves and asked Ajab Khan to return the girl. Ajab Khan returned the girl unconditionally and himself crossed to Afghanistan. This situation was unbearable for the English To avenge this they provoked Hindu-Muslim riot in Kohat in 1924. When

it subsided, both the communities soon reconciled and started jointly demanding political rights for Sarhad. The Simon Commission was vehemently opposed and was everywhere boycotted by the people in 1927. As a result of an English intrigue that year, Afghanistan suffered unrest. The liberal and anti-imperialish stand of the King of Afghanistan was too much for the English to bear. Afghanistan was also providing protection and shelter to rebels from the British Province of N. W. F. P. in India. Then conspiracy and propaganda by their paid Mullas stirred rebellion in its army. To prove that Amanullah Khan and his wife had defied Islamic tenets and had turned heretics, untrue and made up pictures and photos of the royal couple showing them in western attire were given wide publicity. The notorious English intelligene officer Col. T.E. Lawerence, assuming the role of a well-versed man in religion, obtained the fatwa of 'Kufr' against Amanullah Khan and united the whole of Afghan populace against him. 10 Amanullah Khan had to fly and take shelter in Qandhar and Habibullah Khan alias Bacha Saqqa usurped the throne. The downfall of Amanullah Khan cleared the way for the English in Sarhad. It is therefore not wrong to say that the English were later emboldened to suppress through blood and by use of truncheon the unarmed people in the Frontier area, due to the fact of the neighbouring country becoming weak through internal disorder.

In 1929, "Naujawan Bharat Sabha" came into being in the Frontier Province. Sanober Hussain Mohmand, Abdur Rahman Kiya, Abdul Aziz Khush Bash and Abdullah Pakhkh:gar were its main figures. The flag of the party was red with the sign of hammar and sickle on it. Very soon its branches were opened in Hazara and Bannu. In 1929 Abdul Ghaffar Khan participated in the Lahore Session of the Congress and moved a resolution to the effect that the people of the Frontier province should be given the same rights as were enjoyed by the people of other provinces of India. He also supported the resolution presented by Hakim Abdul Jalil that the Frontier Crime Regulation should be immediately ended.

In 1929, when Abdul Ghaffar Khan emerged as the unrivalled political leader of the Pathans, the Frontier Province at that time was a victim of English oppression in its grossest form, leading to

unethical practices in society and corrupting and vitiating it tragically. Y.B. Mathur has summed up the situation in the following words:-

> "Under the British, the Frontier became an asylum of immoralities where sodomy, prostitution, use of knives, playing with quails, and other evil habits had become the necessary occupations of life. Khans or tribal Sardars took pride in keeping lads for committing sodomy; daughters were sold in the maket and deprived of legacy rights. Cousins regarded themselves as enemies. Seeking revenge was un-paralleled."12

According to the issue of 95 March 1230 of the "Naujawan Sarfarosh" tha condition of justice and courts was something like this:-

> "Government framed many rules for caging and uncaging people. Justice was auctioned in the courts. Magistrates were ignorant; Munsiffs were untrimmed logs, Vakeels were selfish and shirked work." 13

The farmers were the most hard hit. They could be bought and sold with the plots of land they tilled. They were the chattel of the Khans. There was no adequate arrangement for the education of their children. To keep the Pathans illiterate appeared to be the aim of the government. The area, alongwith the rest of the Indian subcontinent, once considered the pride of the East turned into a field for western exploitation. The ferocious machines of Manchester and Lancashire were sucking its blood. The traders of Europe espeually England, had usurped all its wealth and resources and estabbshed theis own monopoly. They had full controi of all its industry and manufacture. The laboures and farmers were subjected to all types of exaction prohibitions and tyrannies. 14

In this social and political situation Abdul Ghaffar Khan started his Khudai Khidmatgar movement. In January 1930 volunteers began to be enrolled. Brown colour uniforms were approved for them which led the government to call them 'Surkh Posh' and to link them with the Bolsheviks, and in this way a false plea was found for their oppression. Bacha Khan several times denied the organizat-

ions counection with the Bolsheviks on the clearest of terms. On one occasion he said:-

> "At first this uniform was of white Khadder but it used to get soon dirty. Hence tt was suggested that it should be brown. To call It red is totally wrong. It has nothing to do with the red colour of Soviet Russia."

During this time the Jamait-e-Khilafat declared that it would arrange picketing all places of prostitution. Soon enough the picketings started on wine-shops. Talks about noncooperation became common. Rumours began to spread that Abdul Ghaffar Khan wantec to start movement against payment of taxes. On 16 April he held a Kisan Confeence in Otmanzai. Besides thousands of people, the workers of the Congress Committee. Naujawan Bharat Sabha and Khilafat Committee attended it. In connection with the payment of taxes Ghaffar Khan in the meeting contradicted the rumours and said that he had paid his taxes and advised the people to pay their taxes. He pleaded against breaking the law in any way.

But it seemed the people were bent upon breaking the law. They stopped paying taxes and took the law in their hands. When Ghaffar Khan saw that his advice was not being taken, he left his village in the morning on 23 April to stop incidents of law-breaking. But he was arrested on the way under Article 40 of the Frontier Crime Regulations.

Almost at the same time the British governmeat started firing on the people in Qissa Khaai Bazar, Peshawar.

In India Gandhi started lhe movement of defiance of the ban on making salt. Consequently in the second week of April the provincial Congress Committer announced the programme of salt making in Shahi Bagh, Peshawar. April 23 was declared the day for civil disobedience. The government somehow came to know of the Congress and Bharat Sabha and decided to arrest the workers at midnight. But the Congress workes got the wind of it earlier and in an emergent meeting decided that no one should get arrested at night. On the morning of 23 April two workers were arrested from the

Provincial Congress Committees office. People at once came out to show solidarity with the arrested persons and commenced escorting the Police van taking them to the police lock-up. Near the Municipal Committee's office, the crowd became uncontrollable and cut the tyres of the Police van. They asked the Police to take the handcuffs off the hands of the two workers. Police had to release the arrested persons. Leading the procession of 20 thousand people the two workers reached the Kabuli Gate Police station and offered themselves to be arrested. By that time all the people from the city had assembled in Qissa Khani Bazar. The uncontrollable crowd raised the soigan of 'Inqilab Zindabad' and stoned the police station. Getting nervous the police sent an S O S call to the army and immediately military armoured cars started speeding towards the city. Many persons were run over by the armoured cars. The crowd went out of control. A young man at the risk of his life set fire to the tank of an armoured car. The soldiers sitting in the car were burnt to death. On this the army started firing, which continued from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. From 200 to 350 persons were killed. Not satisfied with the killing and bloodshed in Peshawar, they victimised the whole province and subjected it to a similar bloodbath. According to Allan Bakhsh Yusufi "the soldiers were let loose like hungry dogs to do whatever they liked. Consequently they burnt the ready crops and set fire to the offices of the 'Qaumi Majlis' in broad day light. Several houses were destroyed. Neither old men nor young children, nor women escaped their operations. In Otmanzai and Takar the offices of the 'Surkh Posh' were burnt. Peaceful processions were fired on. But as oppression increased more people started joining the movement. At the time of the arrest of Abdul Ghaffar the Khudai Khidmatgar numbered about 800 but soon it reached 40,000. About them the Chief Commissioner of the Frontier province issued the following order:-

Do not let those volunteers of the Congress who are in red shirts enter your village. They call themselves Khudai Khidmatgar but in fact they are disciples of Gandhi. They were clothes like the Bolshevicks and they want to create the same bad conditions as did the Bolsheviks in Russia.

The army of Gharwali soldiers refused to fire on the unarmed people. This was unbearable for the English. This army was

suspended on the same day. These soldiers were sent within three days to Havilian and Kakool. After Court Martial they were awarded rigorous imprisonment for ten to twenty years, and were herded in different jails. A great number of them were turned out of the army. After the departure of the Gharwali army from Peshawar the Naujawan Bharat Sabha held a meeting in Chowk Yadgar to pay tribnte to them. Afterwards a procession of 40,000 people placed flowers on the monument of the martyrs of Qissa Khani Bazar. This monument was built one day before by a fruit merchant Ashiq Hussain. He too was arrested for this national 'crime', and afterwards under dursss he was made to demolish the movement with his own hands.

After the Qissa Khani, the people were arrested in such vast number that there was no room left in the jail. When they could not be accomadated in jail, the prisoners were kepr tied in chains out-side in the open. Among the prisoners were the learned, the illiterate, women, men, children, old and young including two enuchs. 15

Under the office of Bharat Sabha Hafiz Abdul Karim used to sell caps. He was arrested after two months of the ending of Martial Law and he was asked to identify the people. He said that there was no question of identification for he himself was a member." For this he was sent to jail for six months. In the jail a minor boy prisoner, Sajawal by name, was subjected to severe punishment. The boy on refusing to ask for forgiveness was caned twenty times, as a result of which he lost his eyesight.

On this act of brutality, the whole press of the country unanimously raised its powerful voice. In order to pacify the situation an enquiry committee was formed under Justice Sir Sulaiman, but the work of torture inside the jails and that of shooting unarmed political workers outside continued unabated. On 31 May peaceful people were fired on in Bazar Kalan. This crowd was only carrying the bodies of two boys killed by an English soldier. In August army and police killd hundreds of Waziri tribesmen by firing on a peaceful meeting in Hathi Khel (Bannu).

Besides Sir Sulaiman's official committee, two other enquiry Gommittees were formed by the people. The Congress established a committee under the leadership of Patel but he was not allowed to enter Sarhad and he took statements of people at Rawalpindi. The report of this committee was confiscated just after publiction.

The second committee was formed by the Jamiat-e-Khilafat under the leadership of Allah Bakhah Yusufi. Its report was published under the name of the Frontier Tragedy but it too was confiscated under orders from the Govenment.

Thus in the year 1930 the people of the Frontier province were massacred in vast numbers. After Jallianwalla Bagh, these mass killings can be called the next greatest tragedy. But these incidents of foreign oppression have a bright side too, as Abdul Ghaffar Khan said in one of his speeches:-

> "Owing t^{o} repeated tyrannies the people became courageous and reckless. It became crystal clear that greater the violence was shown by the Government, greater was the resistence and higher the upsurge in the nationel spirit of the people."16

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