

KHAN ABDUL QAIYUM KHAN: POLITICAL CAREER FROM 1953- 1958

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Abstract

Before and after the creation of Pakistan, in the Political history of NWFP (present day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) very few persons dominated the scene, among those one was Abdul Qaiyum Khan. His political career covered a period of nearly four decades. In this article an attempt is made to focus on his political life from April 1953 to October 1958 that is after his resignation as Chief Minister and induction in Central Cabinet in 1953, as member of West Pakistan Provincial Assembly and finally as President of Pakistan Muslim League. This was the time of his downfall in his home province and rise in national politics. It also reviews the political insight and strength of Qaiyum Khan's personality. Moreover Khan Qaiyum, political and constitutional development of Pakistan is also analyzed.

Key words

Khan Abdul Qaiyum Khan, Muslim League, Legislative Assembly, Constituent Assembly, One Unit, West Pakistan Province.

Introduction

Khan Abdul Qaiyum became Chief Minister of the province of NWFP (present day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) after dismissal of Dr. Khan Sahib Ministry on 23 August 1947. He administered the province with iron hand. But towards the end of his rule he developed differences with the Centre.¹ After the dismissal of Khawaja Nazimud Din ministry in 1953, when new Cabinet of Mohammed Ali Bogra was sworn, Khan was inducted in the new cabinet as Minister of Food and Industry. Qaiyum Khan, totally unaware of these developments was called to Karachi to participate high level meeting.² On his return journey to Peshawar, he was informed by Major General Azam Khan by the orders of Governor General at Lahore Railway Station that he was no more Chief Minister of the Province.³ The unwilling Khan was replaced by Sardar Abdur Rashid Khan, Inspector General of Police of the Province, NWFP.

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Khan Abdul Qaiyum was included in Central Cabinet on 17 April 1953 as Minister of Food and Industry, with it his six yearlong rule over NWFP came to an end.⁴In Peshawar city, on 22 April 1953 the supporters of Qaiyum Khan and members of Provincial Cabinet held meeting in which unanimous resolution was passed expressing confidence in his leadership and stressed on his retention in the province.⁵ While the opposition leaders also held a public meeting in Peshawar city and expressed jubilation at his removal. Fida Mohammed Khan strongly cursed both Qaiyum Khan and Khwaja Nazimuddin and demanded fresh election not only in the province but in the whole country.⁶

Anyhow, Qaiyum Khan and his cabinet resigned at 9:45 a.m. on 23 April and Governor Khawaja Shahbud Din invited Sardar Abdur Rashid Khan to form new Council of Ministers.⁷Qaiyum Khan left for Karachion 24 April to take oath as Central Minister. He was seen off at Peshawar Railway Station by thousands of his admirers who chanted slogans of Pakistan Zindabad and Qaiyum Khan Zindabad.⁸

Declining Influence in Home Province

Sardar Abdur Rashid Khan was the choice of Qaiyum Khan. As a government officer he had nothing to do with politics but after becoming Chief Minister, as leader of the house he joined official Party, the Muslim League and was elected as member of Provincial Legislative Assembly.⁹

From the time of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan it had become customary in Muslim League Party that the office bearers were also Party executive. Along with Prime Minister ship he had got elected himself as the President of Pakistan Muslim League. This tradition was followed by the provincial chiefs; Qaiyum Khan after winning provincial election in 1951 was unanimously elected the leader of the house as well as leader of Muslim League Party.¹⁰

After induction in the Central Cabinet Qaiyum Khan retained the presidentship of the Provincial Muslim League and in this capacity paid frequent visits to his home province. Sardar Rashid in the beginning of his political career paid high tribute to the political services and policies of Qaiyum Khan and along with him toured different areas of the province and got valuable guidance from him. But after been elected as member of the Provincial Assembly¹¹ and probably on the instigation of the centre, encouraged by the opponents of Qaiyum Khan and induced by personnel ambitions he set his mind to get rid of Qaiyum and himself became president of Provincial Muslim League.

In August 1953 the Working Committee of Provincial League Party passed a resolution that every office bearer should have permanent residence in the province.¹² So Qaiyum Khan was left with no option except resignation from the president ship of NWFP Muslim League on 28 October 1953. Addressing the councilors he instructed them to vote to Sardar Rashid for he was suitable person for the job.¹³ The resignation of Khan was accepted by the Provincial Council of Muslim League and Sardar Rashid was elected as the President of League on 10 November 1953.¹⁴

This was not the end of Qaiyum Khan declining influence rather a prelude to the end. The Daily *Al-Jamiat* in its article leveled a number of charges against Qaiyum Khan and forwarded two more demands (a) removal from Chancellorship of the University of Peshawar (b) removal from membership of Provincial Assembly membership.¹⁵

Qaiyum Khan was life Chancellor of the University of Peshawar. About his nomination he himself once remarked in his address to the students of Islamia College in Khyber Union Hall on 12 May 1953 that in spite of his opposition the Select Committee had recommended his name. He then suggested an amendment and concluded that the Governor as in other provinces of Pakistan was the right person for the job¹⁶ (he did it as a seasoned politician he might have sensed what next was coming). The Frontier Legislative Assembly during its next session enacted an amendment in Peshawar University Act 1953 by which Qaiyum Khan was removed from the Chancellorship of University of Peshawar and the Chief Minister of the Province was made Chancellor during his term of office.¹⁷

Despite all these developments Qaiyum Khan in the capacity of the Central Minister of Food and Industry visited his home province. Sardar Rashid ceased to call upon him; he rather started avoiding Qaiyum Khan. In this environment of hostility when Qaiyum reached Peshawar Railway Station on his regular tour on 11 October 1953 he was welcomed with slogans of 'go back go back' and black flags were waved by mob of demonstrators. Demonstrations were also staged at Mall Road near Circuit House where Qaiyum Khan was staying. Qaiyum Khan alleged his opponents for all this while Sardar Rashid refused to accept the responsibility and showed his unawareness of the visit of Qaiyum Khan.¹⁸

In Central Cabinet Qaiyum Khan's appointment was short-lived and when Constituent Assembly was dissolved by Governor General on 24 October 1954 Qaiyum Khan was also relieved of his duties. As the conditions of his province were poisoned against him so

he settled down in Lahore and got himself registered as barrister at Lahore High Court.¹⁹

The dismissal of Constituent Assembly was followed by a constitutional tussle between Governor General and Judiciary which finally resulted in announcing of the election of Second Constituent Assembly from existing Provincial Assemblies, under the Governor General Order no 12. It was explained in the order that total number of seats will be 80, of which share of NWFP was 4 seats.²⁰ Qaiyum Khan filed his application from Muslim League Party. The Parliamentary Board of the Frontier Muslim League on 7 June 1955 in a meeting under the chairmanship of Sardar Rashid at Peshawar considered 25 applications for Muslim League ticket to the election of Second Constituent Assembly. The Board unanimously recommended the names of four cabinet members to the central Parliamentary Board for final approval, ignoring Qaiyum Khan's application and the Muslim League executive endorsed all four names. As a protest Qaiyum Khan announced to resign from Muslim League and its affiliated bodies on 13 June 1955, terming it a dead organization and decided to contest election as an independent candidate.²¹

The elections were held on 22 June and as was expected Muslim League won the election. Qaiyum Khan on his return to Lahore severely criticised the Provincial Government of its pressurizing measures used against opposition while Sardar Rashid insisted on fairness of election.²²

As Member of West Pakistan Legislative Assembly

A major national event of the year 1955 was the formation of Province of West Pakistan (One Unit). One Unit was the popular phrase used to describe the Integration of all areas in the West Wing of Pakistan into one province of West Pakistan through an Act called the Establishment of West Pakistan, 1955. It provided a single Provincial Assembly for all units of West wing. Under the scheme total numbers of seat for West Pakistan Legislative Assembly were 310. It also had details of the distribution of seats in the former units. It was also decided by Constituent Assembly that election to the West Pakistan assembly shall be conducted by the provincial assemblies on district basis that each district of West Pakistan shall be Electoral College for purpose of election to the one unit legislature.²³ According to schedule the elections were held on 19 January 1956. As the elections were on non-party basis so it centered on power groups of leading personalities. In Frontier Province among others one of those was Qaiyum Khan. As Muslim League members had majority in the former provincial assemblies so the party came out as a major political party.²⁴

Avoiding general tradition Prime Minister Choudhary Mohammad Ali didn't accept the office of the President of Muslim League so the deputy President Mir Ghulam Ali Talpur worked as acting President. After elections to the West Pakistan Legislative Assembly, the Party decided to reorganise itself. Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar was unanimously elected the President of Muslim League on 29 January 1956. Sardar Nishtar called a meeting of Muslim League Council on 30 January in which a resolution was passed to form Muslim League Assembly Party.²⁵ It was need of the time as before the establishment of West Pakistan province on 14 October 1955, Dr. Khan Sahib, a former Congressite, had been appointed as Chief Minister of the province on 4 April 1955.²⁶ This issue resulted into formation of Republican Party on 23 April 1956 and Dr. Khan Sahib got majority in the house through it.²⁷

As in formation of One Unit, political leadership was not taken into confidence so opposition to it was initiated before its establishment in the form of Anti-One Unit Front which later after inclusion of some other parties developed into Pakistan National Party. Khan Qaiyum rejoined Muslim League on 28 May 1956. He was active in the Assembly when the opposition under the banner of Muslim League tried to pass vote of no confidence on Chief Minister, Dr. Khan Sahib.²⁸ In return Muslim League made solemn pledge in writing with Pakistan National Party to support a resolution in West Pakistan Legislative Assembly to replace One Unit by a Zonal federation. This move resulted into the suspension of provincial assembly.²⁹

Qaiyum Khan as Chief Minister was in favour of provincial autonomy. He also had fame to keep vigilant eye on Frontier States and Tribal Areas. In West Pakistan Provincial Assembly Debates Abdul Qaiyum Khan in his speeches talked about the Tribal Areas that if any part of the area expressed a desire to be merged in the province and to be treated at par with the rest of the province it should be accepted. No part of that should be coerced to come into the West Pakistan administration. He asked from the house, "How long are we going to keep those areas out of the jurisdiction of the high court? At least the towns in the Tribal Areas where you have a settled administration should come under the jurisdiction of the high court. At present the political agents felt that they were rulers, this setup must be changed", he commented.³⁰ His opinion shows his great political insight of things. The arrangement suggested by him in the fifties, were implemented in 2018.

The daily *Dawn* reported on 28 March 1957 that Abdul Qaiyum Khan left Lahore for Karachi by *Tezgam* on what was believed to be a summon from Iskander Mirza for consultations on the situation

arising out of the suspension of the constitution in West Pakistan. Among number of rumors circulating was that Abdul Qaiyum Khan might be asked by the central leaders to head a non-Muslim League government. While Qaiyum Khan before departure declared that he, in any circumstances, would not compromise on principles. He owed his loyalty to the Muslim League and would adhere to its ideological commitment. So nothing came out of this visit.³¹

As President of Pakistan Muslim League:

Although in the last days weak and ill, Sardar Nishtar held office of the President of Pakistan Muslim League till his death (14 February 1958). The Working Committee of Party on 30 March 1958 decided to nominate Qaiyum Khan to succeed Sardar Nishtar and he was unanimously elected the President of League. The Muslim League under its new President, Qaiyum Khan invigorated with great enthusiasm and energy. Being a strong man, he kept a firm control over the activities of the League representatives in the Assembly. He made Parliamentary Group subservient to the League organization. Infused with a new spirit, the Party began to gain popularity.³² Qaiyum Khan embarked on mass contact tour of West Pakistan. He addressed grand public meetings in which he criticised even Iskander Mirza for his involvement in political affairs.³³ The newspapers of Karachi gave Khan Abdul Qaiyum Khan the title of *Khan-e-Azam*. Khan criticised the policies and conduct of politicians and Government especially the foreign policy of Pakistan. He warned the American Ambassador in Pakistan that his country should not interfere in our internal affairs. He also announced economic and agricultural reforms in the country.³⁴ His thirty miles long procession from Gujrat to Jehlum and well attended public meetings attracted the intelligentsia.

The general elections on national level were not held in Pakistan, though they were promised under the Constitution of 1956 in the month of November, 1957. They were then postponed to 1958. The way the general elections were postponed from time to time it became clear that Iskander Mirza was quite firm in holding the scepter in his hand.³⁵ There was a strong demand of general elections from all political parties. By June 1958 election commission had completed all the details even printing of electoral rolls in both wings of Pakistan. The election commission advised the central government to suspend the Provincial Governments three or four months before the general elections. The government had changed the date of election and the final date was expected in November 1958.³⁶ On 19 July 1958 the Election Conference unanimously decided that 15 February 1959 should be the date for the polling.³⁷ Abdul Qaiyum boycotted the

Conference, for he thought that if it was further delayed it would not be held for ever and circumstances proved it.

Qaiyum Khan had remarkable ability of rhetoric. Stressing the credibility of Muslim League and alleging other parties of anti-state philosophies he made remarkable speeches as President of Muslim League. Addressing public meeting at *Chowk Yadgar*, criticising other parties Khan Qaiyum said that political parties with philosophies diametrically opposed to the philosophy of Pakistan had sprang up in both East and West Pakistan and had actually succeeded in capturing political power. According to him *Akhand Baharties* were once again thinking in terms of uniting indo-Pakistan subcontinent. He listed them as these, the National Awami Party (earlier Pakistan Nation Party that has transformed into National Awami Party from July 1957), the Republican and the Awami League, only Muslim League, he claimed, stood for Pakistan's continued existence as sovereign Islamic state. About National Awami Party he said the chief weapon of it for fighting the elections was to raise regional and racial jealousies. He severely criticised Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Maulana Bahshani and G.M. Syed for employing methods unworthy of good Pakistanis. He objected Ghaffar Khan's trip to Kabul and said the approach of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan to politics had been narrow, shortsighted and selfish.³⁸ At another occasion he said, "We were determined to give a decent burial to the secular parties like the Awami League, National Awami Party and the Republicans who were out to destroy the ideological basis of Pakistan". Criticising the Republicans he said that the Republican Chief Minister was the same person who with the support of *Akalis* and Hindus congress were the architect of holocaust in 1947 in which one million Muslims lost their lives not to talk of loss of national assets. No Muslim, who had any sense of honour, could be proud of Qazilbash past as a Unionist. The real people who would be proud of his past would be no other than Tara Singh, Baldev Singh, Bhimsen Sachar whose game he played at a most difficult time in the history of the Muslims struggle for Pakistan. Khan said that the coming election would prove the 'Waterloo' of all the enemies of Pakistan who were relying for their wishful victory on the support of officials and tainted money from industrialists.³⁹

About addresses of Khan Abdul Qaiyum Khan, Army Chief Mohammad Ayub Khan referred in this manner in his autobiography that Qaiyum Khan was going round the country spitting fire and preaching civil war. He went about saying openly that if his party did not win the elections rivers of blood would flow.⁴⁰

Weekly *Chattan* wrote about the speeches of Qaiyum Khan in this way that the reference to democracy and free election from Qaiyum

Khan looks strange as during his premiership in the Frontier province, democracy existed in name only. In provincial elections 1951 Khan used all means to rig the elections. Even the general secretary of Muslim League Yousaf Khattak was deprived of party ticket. Khan Qaiyum placed strict ban on press. After becoming Prime Minister his first step certainly would be to place strict ban on press.⁴¹ About the conduct of other leaders of Muslim League the magazine referred to Maulana Bahshani claim that League leadership especially Khan Abdul Qaiyum Khan, Mian Mumtaz Daultana and Sardar Bahadur Khan had promised in writing to Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan to undo One Unit. The National Awami Party had the document in its possession and it would publish it at suitable time. The League leaders had kept silence on the matter. The Muslim League leaders alleged the others for political bargaining while they themselves were also involved? Why didn't they reply those allegations? The Magazine asked.⁴²

The magazine also wrote in its issue of 28 July 1958, that Khan himself during his Chief Ministership adopted such policies that leaders like Pir Sahib of Manki Sharif who did great job in Pakistan Movement especially during referendum, separated himself from Muslim League and finally from politics. Khan Bakht Jamal Khan former President Provincial Muslim League, Qazi Muhammad Aslam, Arbab Abdul Ghaffoor, Arbab Sikander, Muhammad Yousaf Khattak all were treated like Pir Sahib and they left Muslim League because of Qayum Khan. He even had intention to join Republicans Party and visited Uthmanzai, but Dr. Khan Sahib ignored him.

The grand public meetings and well organised demonstration of Para military section of Muslim League National Guards compelled the government to promulgate an ordinance banning the formation or maintenance by private persons or association of organized military or semi military wings.⁴³ Qaiyum Khan called a meeting of Muslim League working committee in Karachi on 24 September 1958. He himself travelled to Karachi from Lahore. His arrival caused great disturbance in the city. He demanded the investigation of the police violence at his arrival at Karachi railway station, under the supervision of high court judge. His demand was ridiculed in the weekly *Chattan* in this manner that Abdul Qaiyum Khan during his premiership ordered firing on red shirts, and rode on donkeys the respectable citizens of region and when red shirts demanded the investigation through high court judge Qaiyum never let them, now he is demanding the same.⁴⁴

Mohammad Ayub Khan who had developed till that time a sense of political and administrative insight decided to strike an action and that was Martial Law, which was promulgated on 7 October 1958. Under Martial Law, the Constitution of 1956 was abrogated, assemblies

were dissolved, all kinds of Political activities were banned etc. Blaming Qaiyum Khan for imposition of Martial Law, Ayub Khan wrote in his memoir 'what was more dangerous was that some of the politicians like Qaiyum Khan had started making contacts with certain members of the armed forces. They were spreading all kinds of rumours to isolate senior officers and to create groups of army officers to support them in the pursuit of their ambitions.'⁴⁵

Conclusion

The period under review was very important era in the career of Abdul Qaiyum Khan. He was forced to resign from a post that was assigned to him by the consent of Quaid-e-Azam (for the ruling junta of that time had diametrically different philosophy than the Quaid). He was forced to resign because he had lost support at the federal level after the death of Liaquat Ali Khan and he had become too powerful to be allowed further in the province. So the Federal Government decided to cut his base. Abdul Qaiyum Khan was thus inducted in the Central Cabinet. Though he was given an important portfolio of minister of food and Industry in the center, he lost his support in his native province, rather he faced a revolt in the province and lost the provincial presidentship of Pakistan Muslim League and even faced hostile demonstration on his visits to Peshawar.

Though Qaiyum Khan had many weaknesses as political leader, he had great quality of financial honesty and humbleness. After dissolution of first Legislative Assembly as he was relieved of his duties, he restarted his profession of legal practice for livelihood. It is so impressive that a person who remained so powerful Chief Minister of a province and then a Central Minister didn't hesitate to live like a common person.

Qaiyum Khan remained active in politics for many decades even after his removal from the Chief Ministership of NWFP (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and was able to lead his own faction of Pakistan Muslim League. This is also a fact that he remained an influential political leader till his last breath but the glory he had reached during his Chief Ministership was never regained by him.

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