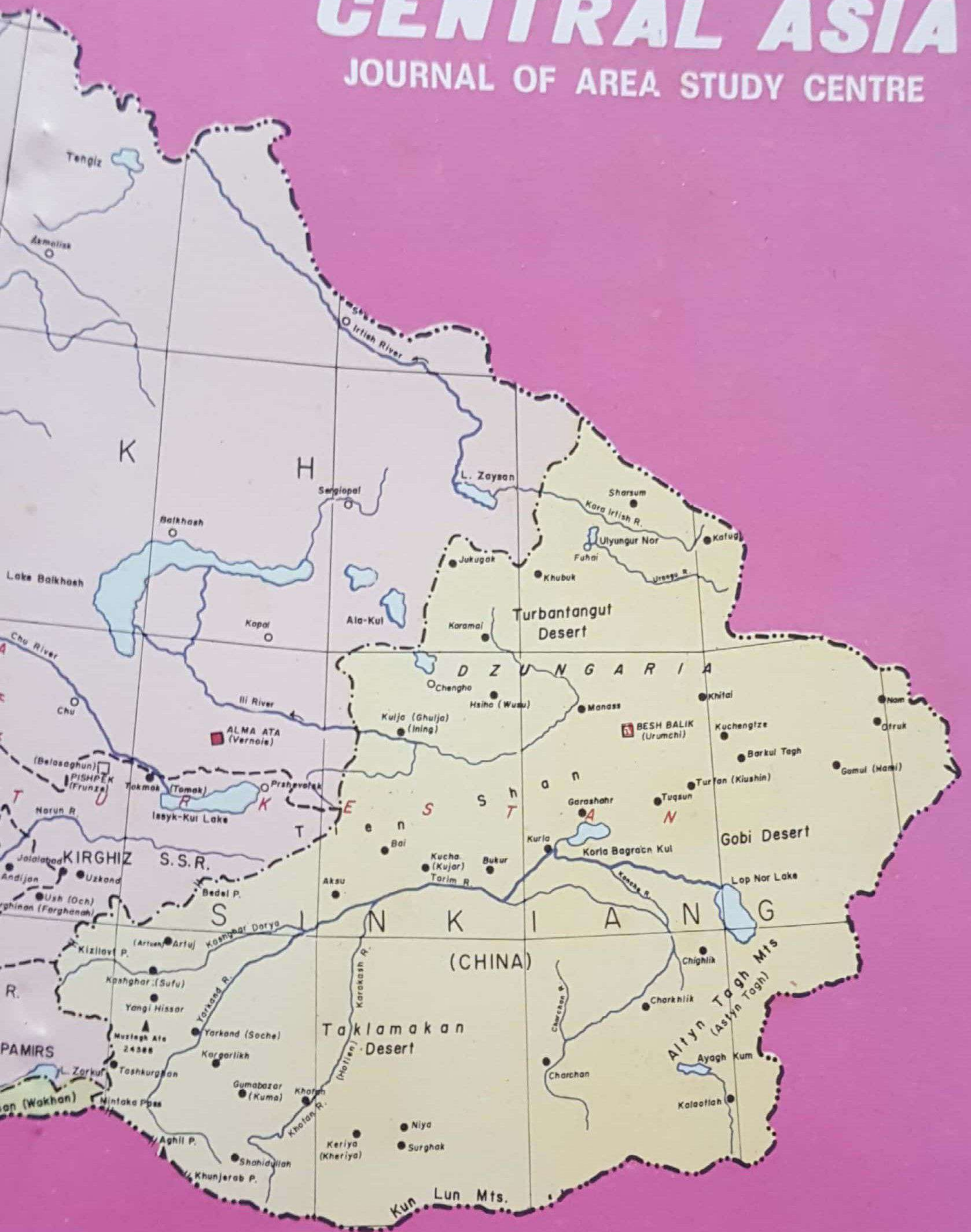


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Mian Akbar Shah - A Profile

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"There are men," writes J.W. Spain, "sitting quietly in their villages on the Frontier at this moment who have fought the Germans and the Turks in World War I, the Bolsheviks in Russia after World War I, and the Italians and Japanese in World War II. There are men who have been decorated by Queen Victoria and honoured by Lenin. There are men who have killed senior British Officers and who have helped crown a King in Kabul".(1) In addition, there were men in the Frontier who did their utmost to turn the tide of history. To some extent, they succeeded in getting their goal in the shape of an independent country — Pakistan.

In the following pages an attempt is made to provide an accurate and authentic life-sketch of one of the most important political figures of the North West Frontier Province. That stalwart was no other than Mian Akbar Shah of Badrashi (Nowshera). In search of freedom, Akbar Shah, with some of his comrades, left Peshawar, went to Afghanistan and when they found Afghanistan of no use to them, they crossed the Oxus and entered Russia — the land of Revolution. They were welcomed by the Bolsheviks in Tirmiz. Then they started their onward journey to Tashkent via Bokhara. After spending some time in Tashkent, Akbar Shah was invited to Baku, in order to participate in the Baku Conference. After getting training in

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Moscow, he, with his friend, was sent back to India via Iran. After a hazardous journey he succeeded in coming back to India. Along with some of his friends, he was imprisoned. After completing his prison period, he resumed and completed his studies in law at Aligarh. In 1930 he joined the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement and remained a true follower of Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Bacha Khan) till 1947.

On 18th January, 1899 a son was born to Mian Baz Gul of Badrashi (Nowshera). The infant was named Akbar Shah. After completing his early education in Nowshera, Akbar Shah was sent to Islamia College, Peshawar.(2) During his studies, he took keen interest in the then political conditions of India. In those days (1919) India was passing through the darkest period of its history. In the First World War the Indians supported the British cause. They helped their rulers both with men and money. They were promised rewards by the British. The war ended in favour of the British. After the War, the people of India, who had protected the British interests both in and outside India, were expecting rewards for the services rendered by them during the war. Instead, new oppressive laws were introduced in the shape of the Rowlatt Act.* The Government wished to curb the 'seditious activities' of the Indians. They witnessed serious threats in the shape of the Silk Kerchief Case,(3) Provisional Government in Kabul(4) as well as the flight of Indian students to Afghanistan.(5) The Government appointed a Committee under Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt. The Committee recommended that the main requirement of the situation was the strengthening of the 'ordinary machinery of law and order in such a fashion as to lend it permanently something of the power which it temporarily had acquired when buttressed by the Defence of India Act'.(6) The Committee gave Government powers to enable to 'deal effectively with the

* A Committee was appointed under S.A.T. Rowlatt. Other members were : B. Scott, C.V. Kumarswami Sastri, H.V. Lovett and P.C. Mitter. They, after long deliberations, presented some suggestions which were accepted and enacted. They were known as Rowlatt Bills.

difficulties that have arisen in dealing with conspiracies'.(7) Two Bills were prepared as a result of the Committee's recommendations and published in Part V of the Gazette of India dated the 18th January, 1919.(8) The recommendations were accepted and the Rowlatt Bill became law on 17th March, 1919.(9) After the publication of the Bill, widespread discontent started throughout the country. An all-India agitation started. Gradually the mobs turned to violence. The Government dealt with it with severity. The situation turned worse in Punjab. On 13th April, 1919, a peaceful, unarmed gathering in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, was fired on by one General O'Dyer. As a result more than three hundred people were killed and a thousand wounded.(10) Barbarities of the British were resented throughout the country. Outside the country the situation was alarming. Hostilities started between the British and the Government of Afghanistan. The newly-installed young Amir, Aman Ullah Khan, was known for his anti-British attitude. On his accession, he denounced the British policies towards Afghanistan. He demanded full sovereignty from the British regarding his country's foreign affairs. The British paid no attention to the Amir's demands. Soon war broke out between the British Indian Government and Amir Aman Ullah Khan. Though very short in its course, the Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919 had far reaching effects. Afghanistan got its complete independence. In short, keeping in view the internal and external situation, India was passing through the darkest period of its history.

Akbar Shah and some of his college friends hated slavery. Plans came under discussion for their future course of action. It was agreed upon that they must go to Afghanistan and with the help of Afghan forces fight for the liberation of their country. They left Peshawar and reached Charsadda. At Charsadda they were welcomed by Bacha Khan. He briefed them about their future course of action and gave an introductory letter to the students which was later on handed over by them to Haji Sahib of Turangzai. Haji Sahib at that time was in Lakarhi, a village in independent tribal belt. He was pleased to meet the young revolutionaries. Haji Sahib offered his help and support

and prayed for their success. Then they reached Chamarkand and finally crossed the border and entered Afghanistan. At Jalalabad they met Nadir Khan, the Commander-in-Chief of the Afghan army. He had great liking for the educated youth. From Jalalabad they went to Kabul. In Kabul they were provided with boarding and lodging by the Afghan Government.(11)

In the meanwhile general migration to Afghanistan started as a protest against the treatment meted out to the Ottoman Empire as well as to Turkish Khalifa. The Khilafat Movement started. The Muslims of India showed their resentment in different ways and even sent a delegation to England to approach the British Premier to express to him the deep attachment of the Indian Muslims towards that great seat of honour. But Lloyd George, the British Premier, did not pay any heed to their demands. The delegation came back to India empty-handed. Then the movement started throughout the country. Protest meetings were held in order to show complete solidarity with the Turkish cause. An offshoot of the movement was the Hijrat Movement. When the attitude of the Government became too bitter, there was no other alternative left for the Indian Muslims than to migrate to some other country. Their eyes fell on the neighbouring Afghanistan. When the news of the pitiable conditions of the Indian Muslims reached Amir Aman Ullah Khan, he at once invited them to Afghanistan. The Indian refugees reached Kabul in caravans.(12)

In Kabul the 'Muhajireen' were provided with boarding and lodging by the Afghan Government. Educated ones were offered attractive jobs. Even the Government showed its willingness to provide them with land for cultivation in Afghan Turkistan. There were some British spies in the rank and file of 'Muhajireen'. They exploited the situation fully. Muhajireen started talking against the Afghan Amir. They insisted on proclaiming war against the British. Amir Aman Ullah could not see in himself such strength as to challenge the British so early. He had already fought a war with the British. He advised them to wait and see. But the Muhajireen did not pay any attention

to his advice. Most of them started their journey back to Peshawar. Some of the 'Muhajireen' including Akbar Shah were residing in Jabal-us-Siraj. When they got information about the affairs in Kabul and the plight of the 'Muhajireen' they convened a meeting. The Lahorite group was most instrumental against the conciliatory policy of Amir Aman Ullah Khan towards the British. Haji Shahab-ud-Din and Miraj-ud-Din became the ring leaders. They instigated the Muhajireen to abandon Afghanistan as, according to them, there was no difference between India and Afghanistan. They intended to help their brethren, the Turkish Muslims; who at that time were in a miserable condition. The Afghan authorities did their utmost to stop them but the Muhajireen stuck to their decision. A caravan, including Akbar Shah and his friends started for Anatolia. After crossing the Oxus near Tirmiz they entered Soviet Russia. In Tirmiz they were greeted by the city Commissioner. After spending some days in Tirmiz, despite the warnings of the city Commissioner, they resumed their onward journey. Near Kirki they fell victim to the barbarities of the Turkomans who considered them to be the allies of the 'Jadidis' (Bolsheviks). Death sentence for the Muhajireen was announced but it was their goodluck they escaped death. In Charjoi a clear-cut division appeared within the rank and file of the Muhajireen. Half of them opted for Anatolia, while the remaining half went to Tashkent via Bukhara. In Tashkent they met the Indian revolutionaries M.N. Roy, Maulana Abdur Rab etc. Akbar Shah and his friends were admitted to the Turkistan Lenin Academy. Akbar Shah got the air force training.

They were unfortunate in a sense that some sort of rapprochement was reached between the British and the Russians. An agreement was signed according to which their training was stopped. But the most important and interesting feature of the treaty was that it was signed for the Asian part of Russia and the European Russia had nothing to do with it. The Indian students studying in Tashkent were sent to Moscow, where they were admitted in the Eastern University. The life in Moscow was one of the favourite themes of Mian Akbar Shah. He narrated the then conditions of Soviet Russia in general and gave special

attention to the affairs in Moscow. Students took active part in the reconstruction of Moscow. The shattered Soviet economy was on its way to development. It was in Moscow that Akbar Shah fell in love with an Armenian girl Anya Asayan. Other Indian students too enjoyed the company of their beloved ones.

From Tashkent Akbar Shah was invited to represent the Indian youth in the Baku Conference. In Baku he found his old companions in a very desperate condition. They were not allowed to enter Turkey. With great difficulty they came back to Baku and were waiting for a favourable reply by the Soviet authorities. They decided for their return journey to Hindustan. Akbar Shah succeeded in managing for their safe journey to India.

Akbar Shah was ordered to proceed to India. He narrates the whole story of his return journey in his book. From Moscow he went to Baku, then to Armenistan and then he reached the sea-port of Anzali. Then through Gilan, Rasht and Qazvin he reached Tehran. After spending some time in Tehran, he resumed his onward journey and via Qum, Isfahan, Yazdgard, Bushahr, Muscat, he reached Karachi. From Karachi Akbar Shah came to Lahore and after spending a few days at Lahore, went to Ziarat Ka Ka Sahib, spent a night with Mian Hamid Gul (Fakhr-e-Qaum Mian Sahib) and then proceeded to his village Badrashi.(13) G.G. Crosthwaite, D.C. Peshawar informed J.M. Ewart of Intelligence Bureau, Peshawar, of the return of Mian Akbar Shah.(14) Akbar Shah was imprisoned and was tried with some of his comrades under the Peshawar Conspiracy Case.(15)

After his release, he went to Aligarh and did his Graduation in Law. On his return to Peshawar he started legal practice. It was very difficult for Akbar Shah to remain silent for a long period. After studying carefully the then political conditions of his province he had no other choice but to join the Khudai Khidmatgars. Soon he became a member of Provincial 'Jirgah'. The Khudai Khidmatgars under the leadership of Bacha Khan, almost reached every corner of the N.W.F.P. to preach their hatred against slavery and foreign yoke. Akbar Shah accompanied Bacha Khan in his visits to the Khattak area. He liked

Bacha Khan very much. To quote his own words, Akbar Shah said that "he had never seen a leader so devoted to the cause of his people". He was very much influenced by Bacha Khan. Mian Sahib was very proud of those moments which he spent with Bacha Khan.

A time came when differences emerged in the right and left wings of the All India National Congress. Bose(16) a well known figure in the Nationalist Movement of India, became the Congress President in 1938. He did his utmost to popularize the Congress ideals inside as well as outside India. He made several extensive tours of the country and opposed the Federation as proposed by the British Government. This was disliked by some of the prominent Congress leaders. The Right Wingers feared the domination of Leftists in the Congress, so they decided to oppose Bose's candidature for the next term of Congress Presidentship.(17) Three prominent candidates were in the field contesting the presidential elections. They were Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Dr. Sitaramayya Pathabai and Subhas Bose. The election was to be held on 29th January, 1939. Maulana Sahib due to his ill-health retired from the contest, leaving the ground open for Sitaramayya and Bose. The Rightists in the Congress favoured Sitaramayya while the Leftists in the Congress openly came forward in Bose's support. Gandhi also supported Sitaramayya. They all pressed Bose to withdraw his candidature but Bose refused and said :

Uptil now I have not received any suggestion or advice from a single delegate asking me to withdraw from the contest. On the contrary, I have been nominated as a candidate from several provinces without my knowledge or consent and I have been receiving pressing requests from Socialists as well as non-Socialists in different parts of the country urging me not to retire. Over and above this there seems to be a general feeling that I should be allowed to serve in office for another term. It is possible that this impression of mine is not correct and that my re-election is not desired by the majority of the delegates. But this could be verified only when voting takes place on the 29th January and not earlier.(18)

Some members of the Working Committee of the Congress openly came out favouring Sitaramayya's candidature. But to the great surprise of the people, after the results were announced, Bose got 1580 votes while Sitaramayya received 1377.(19) Subhas Bose was therefore declared the President of the 52nd session of the I.N.C. Bose himself as well as his comrades refrained from making any hostile comments on the failure of Right Wingers. It was, however, Gandhi, who considered it his defeat, he said :

I must confess that, from the very beginning, I was decidedly against his election for reasons into which I need not go And since I was instrumental, in inducing Dr. Pattabhai not to withdraw his name as a candidate when the Maulana Sahib withdrew, the defeat is more mine than his. And I am nothing if I do not represent definite principles and policy. Therefore, it is plain to me that the delegates do not approve of the principles and policy for which I stand.(20)

Soon Bose was confronted with the most difficult situation when twelve members of the Congress Working Committee tendered their resignation from the Working Committee. Bose beseeched them not to forsake their support but did not succeed. The formation of a new Working Committee led to a serious crisis. The Right Wingers in the Congress missed no opportunity of harassing the president. Finally, Bose had no choice left but to give way to some one else to take over as the Congress president. He tendered his resignation on 29th April, 1939. Next day Babu Rajendra Prasad took over as the new Congress President.(21) After these happenings Bose decided to approach the masses directly. It was on 3rd May, 1939 that he announced making a 'Forward Bloc' inside Congress.(22) His aim in forming the Forward Bloc was to rally the entire left wing under one banner. It gained popularity on an all-India level. He emphasized their uncompromising struggle against the British Imperialism for winning independence for India. He pleaded for the mass civil disobedience movement. His ideas were disliked by the British as well as by the Congress High

Command. To them he was preaching violence which was against the creed of non-violence as adopted by the Congress. The Working Committee of the Congress met at Wardha on 9th August (1939) and expelled him for three years from Congress.(23)

Bose's cause was supported by Akbar Shah and some of his comrades in the N.W.F.P. He was made the Provincial Chief of the Frontier Province Forward Bloc. A very interesting feature in the whole drama was that throughout the said period Subhas never denounced his association with Congress and always considered his Forward Bloc within the Congress. Soon differences emerged in the rank and file of the Frontier Provincial Congress. In 1938 at the meeting of Provincial Congress Committee, Bacha Khan made it clear that it was quite impossible for them to remain in one party. He intended their expulsion from the party. Gandhi at that time too was in Abbottabad. He was informed of the happenings during Committee's meeting. He hurriedly intervened and within no time succeeded in making reconciliation between the two groups.(24)

In the first week of September, 1939, World War-II broke out. Bose had an idea to take advantage of the Great War, to meet the enemies of Britain in Europe and to oust Britain from India. After a long period of experience of public service in India he came to the conclusion that it was impossible to organise an armed resistance in the country without some help from outside. Bose was arrested on 2nd July 1940 and sent to the Presidency Jail, Calcutta. He was detained for an indefinite period. He made a plan for disappearing from India. On 29th November, 1940 he started a fast unto death as a protest against his detention. The British Government feared a countrywide protest in case of his death. On 5th December, 1940 he was released and brought to his Elgin Road residence at Cuttack and was kept in a kind of house arrest. During his period of seclusion only a few family members were allowed to see him. Bose created an impression that he was very ill. He grew a beard and

confined himself to his room. Then he wired Akbar Shah to see him. Akbar Shah boarded 'The Frontier Mail' and reached Calcutta. He contacted Bose in his house.(25) Bose revealed his plan to Akbar Shah that the World War provided them with a golden opportunity to get Indian independence. In that connection, he intended to visit Russia.(26) Akbar Shah offered himself to take him to Kabul and beyond to the Soviet Union where he had received political training.(27) Bose did not know Pashto. After consultation it was decided to present him as deaf and dumb. The date of his leaving Calcutta was fixed as 16th December, 1940.(28) After his return from Calcutta, Akbar Shah contacted his comrades Mian Mohammad Shah and Bhagat Ram and briefed them about the whole matter. It was agreed upon that they should receive Bose on the Peshawar Cantt. Railway station on 16th January, 1941. On that day Bose did not arrive. Akbar Shah and his friends were eagerly waiting for the arrival of Bose in Peshawar. It was on 19th January (1941) that Bose arrived in Peshawar. He was dressed in the North Indian Muslim dress with a black fez (cap), black sherwani, white trousers and a small black beard. During his one-week stay in Peshawar, Bose fully enjoyed the hospitality of Mian Akbar Shah. The complete story of Bose's stay in Peshawar was described in detail by Akbar Shah in his autobiography. It was decided that Bose should be accompanied by Bhagat Ram to Kabul. The whole account of that interesting but adventurous journey to Kabul, then stay in Kabul and how they established contacts with the foreign legations at Kabul was narrated by Bhagat Ram in his book entitled 'The Talwar Brothers and the Great Escape of Subhas Chandra Bose'! With great difficulty Bose succeeded in getting for himself a passport and visa from Italian Government. Bose left Kabul for Soviet Union by car. From Samarqand he travelled by train to Moscow and flew into Germany on 28th March ultimately reaching Berlin on the 3rd April, 1941.(29)

Akbar Shah remained a true follower of Bacha Khan till 1947. After the creation of Pakistan a turning point came in his life which created bitterness in his relations with his old comrades — the Khudai Khidmatgars. At the instigation of Khan

Qaiyum, the then Chief Minister of the N.W.F.P. he contested the Assembly elections and succeeded. He was one of the most prominent members of Nowshera Bar Association. It was in 1978 that he left practice. The remaining time he spent in Badrashi, where he was considered a living spirit for his people. This dedicated soul of the left movement died on 8th April, 1990 and was buried in Badrashi. He left behind two sons and five daughters along with his travelogue/biography entitled "Da Azadai Talash," which was translated and edited (in Urdu) by the author of these lines and published by the National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Islamabad.

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1. J.W. Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, The Hague, 1963, P. 17.
2. Akbar Shah, *Azadi Ki Talash* (Urdu) trn. and edt.) Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, Islamabad, 1989, P. 33.
3. In August 1916 a plot known as the 'Silk Letters Case' was discovered. Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi had sent some secret letters from Kabul for Maulana Mahmood al Hasan, who at that time was in Arabia. Those letters were handed over to Khan Bahadur Allah Nawaz Khan, who revealed all information to the Punjab Governor. As a reward some more territory was added to the existing one of K.B. Sahib. Large scale arrests were made throughout the country. Many Muslims were convicted on simple doubts of their hand in the intended Muslim rising against the British.
4. The Indian Revolutionaries in Afghanistan decided to form a Provisional Government of Indians at Kabul. They gathered and in 1916 formed the Provisional Government with the following as its members :

Raja Mahendra Pratap, President; Maulvi Barkatullah of Bhopal, Prime Minister; Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi, Foreign Minister as well as Minister for India. Their main

object was "to liberate India from the iron clutches of treacherous English and to establish indigenous government there". They encouraged those who harassed the British by saying. "Murder the English wherever you find them, cut the telegraph lines, destroy the railway lines and the railway bridges and help in all respects the liberating armies. None shall be molested but who shall resist. Your properties and your homes are safe," Zafar Hasan Aibak, Aap Biti (Urdu) I, Lahore, nd. P. 140.

The Provisional Government despatched letters to both the Governor of Russian Turkistan and the then Czar of Russia inviting Russia to throw over her alliance with Britain. The letters were written on golden plates which were handed over to the British.

5. In February 1915 fourteen students from Lahore left India for Afghanistan. They planned an organized struggle against the British in India. They included : Mian Abdul Bari, Sheikh Abdul Qadir, Abdul Majid Khan, Allah Nawaz Khan, Sheikh Abdullah, Abdur Rashid, Ghulam Hus-sain, Zafar Hasan, Abdul Khaliq, Mohammad Hasan, Khushi Mohammad, Abdul Majid II, Rahmat Ali and Sheikh Shuja Ullah.
6. L.F. Rushbrook Williams, *India in 1919*, Delhi : 1985, P. 25.
7. *Sedition Committee 1918, Report*, Calcutta : 1918, P. 195.
8. *The Rowlatt Committee Report*, F.No: 1010, B. No. 58, Special Branch, Peshawar, N.W.F.P. Provincial Archives, Peshawar.
9. J.F.C. Fuller, *India in Revolt*, London : 1931, P. 138.
10. *Disorders Inquiry 1919-1920, Report*, Calcutta : 1920, P. 45.
11. For more details see, *Azadi Ki Talash*. PP: 48-71.
12. For full details see; Dr. Lal Baha's and Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah's articles published from Islamabad and Peshawar.

13. Whole account given in 'Azadi Ki Talash,' Op. Cit.
14. C.G. Crosthwaite to J.M. Ewart, nd. *D.C. Peshawar. Office Record*, Part-I, S. No. 241.
15. Under 121-A of the Defence of India Rules, those returned from Soviet Russia were convicted under Peshawar Conspiracy Case. They included : Mian Akbar Shah, Feroz Din, Abdul Majid, Habib Ahmad, Rafiq Ahmad, Sultan, Abdul Qadir Sehrai and Gohar Rehman.
16. Bose received early education at a Missionary School; did his matriculation from Cuttak; got his collegiate education from Presidency College, Calcutta, passed his Degree Examination in 1919, sailed to England for I.C.S. In 1920 appeared in ICS but resigned and in 1921 came back to India. He entered active politics and was arrested in 1924. Acted at key posts in Indian National Congress. In 1938 he accepted the Congress Presidentship of Haripura Session. In 1939 Bose was elected the President of Congress for the second time but soon was compelled to resign. Bose was suspended from Congress for three years. In 1941 escaped to Kabul via Peshawar, escorted by Mian Akbar Shah and his friends, from Kabul went to Moscow and then finally to Berlin. In Berlin organised Indian National Army and himself acted as its Supreme Commander. On 18th August, 1945 died a martyr's death in an air crash outside his country.
17. Durlab Singh, *The Rebel President*, Lahore 1946, P. 111.
18. *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, I, Calcutta : nd. P. 314.
19. Singh, Op. Cit. P. 118.
20. I A R, 1939 I, Op. Cit. 320.
21. Pakhtoon, Utmanzai, 1st February, 1940, P. 6.
22. Ibid.
23. Shorish Kashmiri, *Delhi Challo* (Urdu), Lahore: 1946, P. 36.

24. Interview with Mian Akbar Shah, 8-9-1984, Badrashi.

25. Para 7 of the Bengal Governor Situation Report. 10 R/R/3/2/18 NIHCR Islamabad.

26. Akbar Shah, *Autobiography*, Un-published.

27. Ibid. for full details see Akbar Shah, *Da Azadi Talash* (Pashto), Peshawar, nd.

28. Sisir K Bose, *The Great Escape*.

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29. Reimund Schnabel, Tiger und Schakal Deutsche Indian Politik 1941-43 Ein Dokumentarbericht (*Tiger and Jackal: German Indian Politics 1941-43, A Documentary Report*). Wien. 1968. PP: 50-58.

