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Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala's Quest and Struggle for Pashtuns' Nationalism and Unity: An Appraisal

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Abstract

The history of Pashtuns shows that these people lacked effective leadership to lead them in stormy days. In spite of it, they found some prominent personalities in the past, who struggled their best to bring unity among them and to divert their struggle towards achieving their common goal of national unity. The soil of Swat is also gifted with some distinguished personalities, who hold national fame, for rendering valuable services in different fields of life and earned refute in history. Muhammad Afzal Kha, alias Khan Lala, was among such persons who was born in Drushkhela Swat in 1926 to Habib Khan, alias Darmai Khan, who was a prominent Khan in Swat State. Afzal Khan was a well-known personality of Upper Swat who worked for the unity among the Pashtuns and his six books are to signify his struggle for that purpose. He was concerned about the disunity among them. He urged them to resolve their issues through Jirga. For this purpose, he used to arrange Jirga and convened seminars of the Pashtun leaders for discussing their issues. Afzal Khan Lala was a staunch supporter of Pashtuns' national unity. The current study aims at highlighting his struggle for bringing together the Pashtuns and to remove hindrances in its way.

Keywords: *Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala, Jirga, Nationalism, Pashtuns, Swat, Awami National Party, Qaumi Inqilabi Party, Pakhtunkhwa Qaumi Party.*

1. Introduction

The administrative district of Swat is located in Malakand Division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It is known as the Switzerland of Pakistan and is renowned throughout the world for its breathtaking natural beauty. Additionally, this lush land has produced a number of notable individuals who have gained national recognition for their valuable contributions to various spheres of life and whose services have been recognized throughout history. These individuals include: Akhund Abdul Ghaffur (1794-1877),¹ Miangul Abdul Wadud (1881-1971),² Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb (1908-1987),³ Justice (R) Nasirul Mulk (born in 1950)⁴, Muhammad Rasool Jan (b. 1952),⁵ Tabassum Adnan (b. 1977)⁶ and Dr. Habib Ahmad⁷ are few names to be mentioned. One of them is Muhammad Afzal Khan, alias Afzal Khan Lala and Khan Lala (1926-2015), who was a luminary of Upper Swat. He was born in December 1926 at village Bara

Drushkhela, in Upper Swat. His father Habib Khan, was a prominent Khan in Swat State. He belonged to the *Muhammad Khel* branch of Yusufzai. He was a degree holder in Master in Political Science and LLB. He taught as a Lecturer in Political Science at Jahanzeb College and was the founding father of Swat Bar Association. He worked for securing the interests of the Pashtuns and struggled for their unity. He was also a writer and authored six books. Its subject matter is Pashtuns' unity.⁸

Pashtuns' history exhibits that they hardly had effective leadership to lead them during their harsh time.⁹ Despite this, they found certain notable figures in the past who did everything in their power to unite them and refocus their efforts on reaching their shared objective of national unity. A well-known figure in Swat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa made a concerted effort to unite their hearts. Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala gained fame among the Pashtuns because of his efforts to foster unity among them. The fact that they were scattered, worried him. He encouraged them to use *Jirga* to settle their differences, and to do so, he used to organise *Jirga* and called Pashtun leaders' conferences to discuss their problems. Afzal Khan Lala worked hard and was a fervent advocate for Pashtuns' national unity.¹⁰ He did not abandon his people to the Taliban during the Swat crisis, despite the fact that he and his house were frequently attacked. He stuck by them during their difficult period, even though many notable individuals had already left Swat and were relocated to other regions of the country during those tumultuous times. He was also able to remain in Swat because the government gave him strict security against the Taliban. The Pakistani government also awarded him *Hilal-i-Shujaat* in recognition of his opposition to the Taliban. On November 1, 2015, he passed away after a prolonged illness.¹¹

2. Nationalism

The word nationalism has its origin in the Latin word "Natio" which means "something born." The Romans gave it to people who did not belong to their race and were foreigners. The term nationalism was first used in 1798 indicating "love for a particular nation". The term has also its roots in the word "Nation" which is a concept that indicates a common cultural and ethnic identity of a particular people that develops sentimental and fervent tendencies among its members, thereby developing the qualities of ego, oneness and unity among them.¹² According to Palmer and Parkins, "A nation is a body of inhabitants of a country under a single independent government and welded together by the sense of belonging to the same race who share sufferings and happiness among themselves." Nationalism is a condition or status of belonging to a particular nation or having an identity with a nation or state. Nationalism is a bond between an individual and his nation.¹³ Nationalism is a condition in which people of the same culture, religion, tradition and social systems co-operate with one another for the achievement of common purposes. Such people love and assist each other and work for the mutual benefits of their community and they cannot be subdued easily, because they provide joint defense against any foreign aggression.¹⁴

Ibne Khaldun gave nationalism the name of "*Asabiya*" according to him, every person has a natural tendency to like and love his blood relatives, family members, tribe's men and fellow beings. People defend each other's rights and interests and fortify social cohesion because of "*Asabiya*" or nationalism. Every family attempts to control others through this wellspring of vitality and growth. He claims that nationalism is a source of power that allows people to control others and if it is strong, then they will shield themselves from the harshness of others. He

believed that most powerful source of nationalism was religion. He stated that state, government, and sovereignty represented the pinnacle of nationalism.¹⁵

3. Pashtuns' Nationalism

The term Pashtuns' nationalism is accredited with the notion that the hearts of Pashtuns of the world should be brought closer in order to solve their issues and wretchedness and to defend themselves against the perpetrators and oppressors. Pashtuns of the world belong to one ethnic and cultural community. Although, they live in different parts of the world, the majority are present in north western and southwestern Pakistan and south eastern Afghanistan along the border with Pakistan.¹⁶

Currently, sharpness can be seen in Pashtuns' nationalistic feelings. This tendency existed in them decades ago with ups and downs at different times. Before the subcontinent was divided, Abdul Ghaffar Khan's *Khudai Khidmatgar*, or Red-Shirt movement, was a nationalist movement that united the Pashtuns and inspired them with a sense of Pashtuns' nationalism. He was successful in organising Pashtuns against the British imperialism.¹⁷ Other notable Pashtun nationalist leaders include, Khushhal Khan Khattak, Mirwais Hotak,¹⁸ Ahmad Shah Abdali and Mirza Ali Khan (Faqir of Ipi).¹⁹ These leaders have played a great role to enhance nationalistic feelings among the Pashtuns and unified them to preserve their interests and rights.²⁰ Among them, the role of Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala for Pashtuns nationalism is of prime importance who worked hard to develop their nationalistic feelings.

Afzal Khan Lala's interpretation of Pashtuns' nationalism was to bring unity among them. For him, Pashtuns lived in an area that was geographically contiguous and presented a unified cultural whole with the same customs, habits, traditions and history. He asserted that although the Pashtuns were a single people by any standard, they were split up by outside forces, particularly the British, who divided them by drawing Durand Line in 1893. According to him, each country had its own geographical territory, and if any other country attempted to alter those borders, it sparked nationalist sentiments in its inhabitants to protect their homeland, because nationalism is ingrained in people's minds. He used to give the example of German nationalism of East and West Germany, who united in 1991, after being split apart by the allied powers in 1945 at the close of World War II. Furthermore, he asserted that Pashtun nationalism was a fact that was inextricably linked to their mindset.²¹

Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala was a Pashtun nationalist of the 20th century, he got fame for his unending struggle to bring unity among the Pashtuns of the world in general and of Pakistan and Afghanistan in particular. He was very curious about the absence of unity in them and used to say that "there are no sons in Pashtuns, everyone is a father and one father does not follow another". He used to give the example of the people of Swat who had no ruler from within themselves and were in a scattered position till the formation of the state in 1915.²²

Before the formation of the State of Swat in 1915, the State of Dir frequently attacked it and captured the lower Swat areas and also the *Shamizai* area of Upper Swat, where they had

built forts and forcefully collected taxes from the local population. The people of Swat suffered much under the cruelty of Dir forces. It was in 1908, that their barbarity reached its climax and the people of these areas were not in a position to tolerate it anymore. The British forces had occupied Malakand that lie to the south of District Swat, and had cast their eyes on it (Swat). Earlier, the British had also gained the support of the Dir State and they paid it 50,000 subsidy yearly. They wanted to contain the lower Swat areas with its help. (The State of Swat had no existence at that time). After Sayyid Akbar Shah 1849-1857, the State of Swat was in an anarchy-like situation with no ruler, when in 1915 Sayed Abdul Jabbar Shah was made its ruler but he ruled just for two years and was removed, Miangul family accused him to be a Qadyani.²³

The influential people of Swat were very anxious about this situation and wanted to select anyone from among themselves to lead the State in a proper direction. For this purpose, they arranged a *Jirga* at Kabal Swat. Masam Khan, the brother of Habib Khan was one of those influential persons, who arranged the *Jirga* at Kabal, in *Nikpi Khel*, in 1917 and formally coronated Miangul Abdul Wadud the next ruler of Swat State, who successfully eliminated the influences of Dir State from Swat and regained from it the occupied territories. Unity against the Dir State was thus established in Swat. Afzal Khan's uncle played his role to give a ruler to Swat, along with other members of the *Jirga*. Keeping in view the struggle of his uncle, for unity among the Pashtuns of Swat against the State of Dir, Afzal Khan also struggled for Pashtun's unity, when he came of age.²⁴

4. Afzal Khan Lala and his efforts for Pashtuns' Nationalism and Unity

Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala became a Pashtun nationalist after 1969 when the state of Swat was merged in Pakistan and championed their cause whether he was in government or out of it. He wanted Pashtuns to come closer to one another,²⁵ for this purpose, he used to arrange *Jirga* of Pashtun leaders in Pakistan and also participated in such gatherings abroad; in 1983, there was a Pashtun leader in Germany, who also advocated unity among them, his name was Dr. Kabir Stori. He made an organization of Pashtuns in Germany and at its convention, he invited Afzal Khan Lala. He went there at his own cost, although they insisted to pay him the ticket, but he replied that the ticket price should be spent on the newly created Pashtun organization. They named the organization as "Pashtun Social Democratic Party" (PSDP) in consultation with Afzal Khan Lala. While addressing the convention he said, "I am happy to see that the well-wishers of Pashtuns have gathered once again, thinking that what should they do to compete with the international community and what way should they adopt to achieve national unity for them".²⁶

After the Elections of 1990, when he became deputy opposition leader in the National Assembly of Pakistan, there he also worked for Pashtuns' nationalism and in one of his speeches, he used the word Pakhtunkhwa instead of North West Frontier Province (NWFP), although the speaker Gohar Ayyub interrupted him consistently, he continued and termed his spoken words as Pashtuns' identity.²⁷ The current situation proved him right, when the name of NWFP was finally changed to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010 in the 18th amendment to the constitution.

On 15th March 2014, Afzal Khan Lala was invited to a Pashtun gathering that was arranged in England in the name of Pashtuns People Association. He went there as he used to attend such

functions leading to Pashtuns' national unity. During his speech, he said that (PPA) was the sole representative association that clearly and blatantly spoke of the rights of Pashtuns and worked for securing their interests and played a great role in practical life towards achieving their goal of Pashtuns' national unity. Thus he never spared any opportunity where he could do anything for Pashtuns' nationalism whether at home or abroad.²⁸

Afzal Khan Lala did not differentiate among Pashtuns, Afghans and Pathans and termed them as a single community with different names. According to him the people of central Asia called them Afghans and the people of the Sub-Continent called them Pathans but according to ancient history, they took their name from the word Pakht as written in the *Vedas* that later became Pakhtuns. He said that Pashtuns were one nation no, matter by whatever name they were called Pashtun, Pakhtun or Afghan and stressed the need of unity among them. He also said that "every Pashtun is Afghan, but every Afghan is not a Pashtun." He was very upset about the disunity among the Pashtuns and used to say that "if a trophy of disunity could be given, Pashtuns would have been the champions".²⁹

While answering a question from Tahir Buneri regarding the role of unity in the defense of a country, Afzal Khan Lala pointed out that when the USSR attacked Afghanistan and took over it, no nation in the world could think about the expulsion of such a powerful country from the weaker, but the nation of Afghanistan united against the occupier and started a resistance movement with the help of USA and other NATO members, that ultimately defeated the USSR.³⁰ Similarly, China is a growing superpower and will prove a headache for the USA, but it will do as such not because of socialism but nationalism. Keeping in view these examples he said that "unless we achieve national unity we will not be able to achieve our goals in the world as a nation."³¹ Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala was convinced that the disunity among the Pashtuns started from their own home because they called their cousin *Tarbor* (a word that indicates enemy), although this relation was the nearest one but Pashtuns turned it into enmity.³²

According to him, "when Pashtuns go abroad they bury their enmity, hatred and grudges in the sand and respect one another much in foreign countries but when they come after some time, they dig out enmity, hatred and grudges again. They must act as such everywhere as they act in foreign countries and should create an environment of peace, love and cooperation among themselves that will ultimately lead towards unity."³³ He also stressed that Pashtuns must try their best not to conceal their identity when they go to other parts of the world or within Pakistan. He said, "When they change their Pashtun areas or their ancestral place, they adopt the culture and tradition of the other nations and their own identity become at stake, this is not good for the Pashtuns' national unity because specific culture and tradition is the pre-requisite of unity."³⁴ He mentioned the examples of Niazi Pashtuns of Mianwali, the Khans of Kasur and the Pashtuns of Ruhilkand in India, where the Pashtuns completely ignored their own culture and tradition and mixed in other communities of the concerned regions, he termed it very dangerous for Pashtuns' unity.³⁵

Haroon Rashid Khattak, who was also a Pashtun nationalist from Nowshera had continuous correspondence with Afzal Khan Lala regarding Pashtuns' national unity. In 1998, he

asked Afzal Khan through his letter to explain his views on Pashtuns' national unity and their scattered position in the world. Although both had no acquaintance at first. Afzal Khan still replied to him through a letter because he wanted every Pashtun to be the part of nationalist movement.³⁶ He replied to him through his letter and said that:

I respect your thoughts in this situation, it is the need of time to bury the differences and be united for the sake of national unity but it is not too easy as you have said. If the difference is just that of a turban (a sign of leadership), then I allow you to put it on the head of anyone whom you think fit, you will have just to inform me and I will follow you. Pashtuns were one nation and are still one but the British divided them into two parts in 1893.³⁷ They still live in a geographically contiguous area and has no name of its own. My politics is just of one sentence and that is; unless Pashtuns do not achieve national unity, they will not be respected in the world.³⁸

Afzal Khan Lala accused the British imperialists for their anti-Pashtun policy after their defeat in the first Anglo-Afghan war 1838-1842, at a time when Lord Auckland was the Governor General of India and Amir Dost Muhammad Khan was the ruler of Afghanistan. The British forces were defeated and 13,734 men of their forces were killed at the hands of the Pashtuns including their commanders Lord Macnaghten and Alexander Burness; who were also their chief negotiators.³⁹

As they were very clever, so they devised a plan to divide Pashtuns and save their empire. Their plan came to be known as a "Threefold Frontier Policy" According to this policy, they divided the Pashtuns into three parts some were left in Afghanistan some in Baluchistan and some in NWFP tribal areas now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.⁴⁰ The agencies in Pashtun areas (now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), were the result of their policy. Their objective was to keep the Pashtuns separated to save their Empire from their threats. Afzal Khan Lala severely lambasted the British for their anti-Pashtun policies that were still playing a role in the division of this nation.⁴¹ Therefore, he requested the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan to give free transit facilities to the Pashtuns living on both sides of the Durand Line.⁴²

Afzal Khan Lala was not only the name of a person but he was the name of a movement and that was the movement for Pashtuns' national unity. He took practical steps for the unity of the Pashtuns. He always advised them to know their self and act accordingly. He was among those Pashtun leaders who struggled for the unity among them.⁴³ He followed the footsteps of Khushhal Khan Khattak, Mirwais Hotak, Ahmad Shah Abdali and Abdul Ghaffar Khan and led their movement for Pashtuns' unity ahead in the 20th century.⁴⁴ On his death, many poets paid him tribute in their poetry.

5. Factors Affecting Nationalism

According to Afzal Khan Lala, there are many factors responsible for the rise and consolidation of nationalism in a country some of these are:

5.1 Leadership and Nationalism

On one side, Afzal Khan Lala was not happy with the behaviour of Pashtuns in terms of the absence of unity among them, but on the other side, he was aware of the fact that the cream leaders of any nation can play a great role in the unity of their nation. So, he embarked upon his mission to bring unity among the scattered Pashtuns.⁴⁵ Once he had a conversation with Miangul Aurangzeb (Prince of Swat State) on the topic of Pashtuns' unity, then Miangul said to Afzal Khan that if Pashtun nation united, he will place a turban on his head. He replied that he had been behind the bars for four years and had turned down the offer for the office of Chief Minister, just for the cause of national unity. He said that being a leader it was his responsibility to try his best to bring his nation together.⁴⁶ He used to give the example of Bismarck of Germany when he unified his scattered German nation in 1871. For him, a leader was the driver of the ship of his nation who could lead them in any direction. He frequently said that there were many capabilities in Pashtuns but they had no leaders to guide them in a proper direction.⁴⁷

5.2 Language and Nationalism

Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala was aware of the role of language in promoting nationalism among the Pashtuns. He considered language to be an important part of the culture. He was anxious about Pashtuns who were not giving any importance to their language. While responding to a question asked in an interview regarding the decision of the government to abolish the posts of lecturers Pashtu in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he replied that "in this regard our Pashtun history is not satisfactory, there is only one example of Pashtuns in the world that they have come in the governments but their language has not got the status of a national language".⁴⁸

According to him, many Pashtun leaders came in the world but they gave preference to other languages instead of Pashtu and intentionally ignored their language. When Timur Shah Durrani, the successor of Ahmad Shah Abdali came to power after the death of his father, he changed his capital from Qandahar to Kabul and issued a royal order to declare Persian as an official language of Afghanistan, replacing Pashtu. Nationalist elements in the country have also done nothing in this connection. He said that they must remove their internal differences and work for the development of their mother tongue which is the responsibility of every Pashtun. The *Mullahs* can also play their role but they take votes from the people and call their language the "Language of the hell". Pashtun journalists, poets and other men of the pen must create awareness in the people because, he says, "Those nations who lose their language, they perish away."⁴⁹

According to Afzal Khan, when the culture of one nation becomes weak and is not in a position to repeal the attacks of other cultures, another strong culture is to overtake it and its very existence become at stake. The creative minority of any nation can prevent the attacks of foreign cultures on their own. Today, Pashtuns give preference to the English language over Pashtu and also give importance to foreign dress because they are not capable to protect their culture from the onslaught of foreign cultures.⁵⁰

According to him, even, when they go to foreign countries, they forget to be Pashtuns and adopt the alien dress, language and their appearance also changes. This tendency was hazardous for Pashtuns' unity and must be prevented as soon as possible, so that they may not lose their identity. He appealed to the Pashtun leaders belonging to different political parties to get together and devise a plan to unify Pashtun nation and to work hard for the protection of their culture and identity.⁵¹

5.3 *Jirga* and Nationalism

When differences and issues arise among Pashtuns, they adopt a specific method to solve them and remove the discrepancies, that method is called *Jirga* (council of elders) which is a basic part of Pashtuns' code of conduct. In this method, the eldest and most experienced members of Pashtun community are invited to resolve the issues within their community members. Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala was also aware of the role of *Jirga* and stressed its arrangement to resolve issues without going to the long and unending proceedings of courts. His efforts in this sense are praiseworthy when he arranged a grand *Jirga* in Peshawar on 14th and 15th October 2000 and sent about 3000 invitation letters to the Pashtun leaders around the world who welcomed his invitation and participated in it on the same dates.⁵²

Some important remarks of Afzal Khan Lala regarding Pashtuns' *Jirga* are:

1. The only way through which we can settle our internal differences is *Jirga*, Pashtuns accept the decisions of *Jirga* with honor and respect.
2. Pashtun Nation has sought the solution of their every issue through *Jirga*, even they have elected their rulers through *Jirga*.
3. Unless, we do not combine our *Jirga*, our issues cannot be solved.
4. *Jirga* give respect to every participant in its decisions.
5. We are Pashtuns and respect our traditions, *Jirga* has a great status in those traditions.
6. The reason that we lagged behind is that we have ignored our *Jirga*.
7. Those who ignored *Jirga*, they ignored Pashtu.
8. Let us set in a *Jirga* and determine our future.
9. From Ahmad Shah to Bacha Khan, all Pashtuns have accepted the decisions of *Jirga* and we must also follow the footsteps of our ancestors.
10. If there is *Jirga*, there will be nation and if there is no *Jirga*, there will be no nation.
11. Pashtuns consider *Jirga* as honor for themselves.⁵³

Keeping in view the importance of *Jirga* in Pashtun culture, Afzal Khan Lala stressed the need of its arrangement continuously to point out the issues and to suggest suitable solutions for it. Afzal Khan Lala was too sensitive for the arrangement of Pashtuns' *Jirga* that when he arranged it in Peshawar in October 2000, he invited all Pashtun leaders to it irrespective of their political affiliation and urged them in his invitation letters that the *Jirga* will be free from political motives and its purpose will be just Pashtuns' unity and that how can we plan for future course of action.⁵⁴

He also divided the process of presiding the *Jirga* among the four regions of Pashtuns' population namely Northern Pakhtunkhwa that Haji Mullah Dad Khan represented, Tribal Areas that Darya Khan Zaka Khel represented, Southern Pakhtunkhwa that Haji Ayyub represented and Abdul Jalil Malang represented Afghanistan. Apart from it, Journalists were also invited who administered the stage including; Sohail Qalandar,⁵⁵ Shamim Shahid,⁵⁶ and Aqil Yusufzai.⁵⁷ Invitation letters were also sent to actors and singers and they participated in the *Jirga* they included Gulzar Alam, Zafar Iqbal, Ismail Shahid and Saeed Rahman Shino. The motive of Afzal Khan was to include every Pashtun belonging to different walks of life and to get their hearts together. All the participants praised Afzal Khan for his tremendous efforts for Pashtuns' unity.⁵⁸

5.4 Self-Determination and Nationalism

Self-determination or getting separate status within or without a country is a difficult task and nations struggle hard to achieve it. The stance of Afzal Khan Lala was quite visible who strongly urged that people cannot get self-determination or rights unless there is the sense of nationalism among them.⁵⁹ According to him if there is unity among a nation no one can scathe them, in this respect he gave the example of the Afghan people, when a strong superpower USSR attacked them in 1979, how they united and compelled the Russians to leave their country with the help of USA. Had there been no unity among them, they might not have expelled the Russians from their country.⁶⁰

When the unity of Afghans broke up after the withdrawal of the Russians their country suffered heavily as a result of their internecine war and the situation continues under the suzerainty of the United States. (USA left Afghanistan on 15th August 2021). Self-determination can be achieved through two methods political awareness and unity. He also used to give the example of Germany which was a scattered nation when Bismarck united them and now it is a great power in Europe. So, according to him, self-determination cannot be achieved without unity.⁶¹

6. Demand of Rights for the People of FATA

As a result of defeat in the first Anglo-Afghan war of 1838-1842, the British were bent on destroying the Pashtuns at any cost. The British were very clever and took revenge in the second war with the Afghans in 1878-1880, thereby, compelling the Afghans to come to terms.⁶² A border treaty was signed between them on 12th November 1893 between Amir Abdur Rahman and Mortimer Durand, known as the Durand Agreement and divided Pashtuns in three parts, i.e in Afghanistan, in the settled areas (as the British named it) of Baluchistan and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Tribal Areas, the British deprived the Pashtuns of Tribal Areas and a separate law in the name of FCR was imposed on them.⁶³

Afzal Khan Lala strongly criticized Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) and insisted that Pashtuns of the Tribal Areas should be under the same law as prevailed in the rest of the country.⁶⁴ The people were not given the right to vote and they were subject to the will of a political agent. Afzal Khan Lala did not consider the people of FATA to be separated from the rest of KP. When he was a Federal Minister of Tribal Areas in 1993 in the cabinet of Benazir, he

demanded the right to vote for the tribal people and also hinted to bring FCR to an end. All the politicians opposed and protested in the assembly against it. Benazir called him and insisted to take back his words but he said that the tribal people were Pashtuns and that he will unite them with the rest of KP and Baluchistan, because they were one nation and it was their right to be under the same law and the same political system of Pakistan.⁶⁵

7. Reasons of Resignation from Awami National Party

During the Swat State era 1915-1969 political activities were not allowed in any way. After the merging of the State in Pakistan in 1969, political system of Pakistan was also introduced there in Swat.⁶⁶ Afzal Khan Lala started his politics from the platform of National Awami Party that Abdul Wali Khan led and was a member of the cabinet of the coalition government of JUI and NAP under Mufti-Mahmood who was the Chief Minister after the elections in 1970. In 1989, he joined Awami National Party and was elected its provincial president. But on 11th February 1990, he announced the formation of ANP Haqiqi faction at Peshawar press club, the reasons he stated was the deviation of ANP from its charter, (when its leaders considered Punjab as the usurper of the rights and resources of Pakhtunkhwa), (then NWFP), negligence of the rights of the Pashtuns and its coalition with the PML, (a conservative party) after the elections of 1990, in July, he announced the formation of Pakhtunkhwa Qaumi Party along with the merging of ANP Haqiqi and Qaumi Inqilabi Party. On this occasion, Afzal Khan said, "Those political forces who help in the unity among the Pashtuns are my friends and those who put hurdles in its way are my enemies. Our aim is to achieve Pashtuns' unity through peaceful means. Peace will prevail when we will achieve our unity."⁶⁷

8. Formation and aims of Pakhtunkhwa Qaumi Party

The aims of the formation of a separate political party in the name of Pakhtunkhwa Qaumi Party, as stated by Afzal Khan, was to work for defending the rights of Pashtuns and to infuse in them the sense of single community, unity among the Pashtuns was the central part of its manifesto.⁶⁸ Afzal Khan took part in the elections of 1990 from the platform of PQP and became the deputy opposition leader in the National assembly of Pakistan. In 1993 he again won the elections under the banner of his party and as part of a coalition with Benazir, he became the federal minister of Tribal Areas and then Kashmir affairs. During his ministry, he tried to speak for the rights of tribal people that included the abolishment of FCR and introduction of adult voting franchise but the government did not give head to his demands and changed his ministry from Tribal Areas to Kashmir and Northern-Areas. When the government of Benazir was dismissed in 1996, Afzal Khan also resigned from politics as a result of the dissolution of a democratic government by President Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari and diverted his struggle to Pashtuns' unity.⁶⁹

9. Re-Joining ANP at the Inclusion of Provision of Pashtuns' National Unity in its Charter

Afzal Khan Lala left Awami National Party in 1990, on account of differences with its leadership. The ANP leaders were aware of the status and popularity of Afzal Khan Lala in Swat

who had won Provincial and National Assembly seats thrice from Swat in 1970, 1990 and 1993 respectively. So, they were making efforts to bring him back in the mainstream of ANP politics. In 2000 Afrasiyab Khattak came to his village Bara Drushkhela and invited him to join ANP, he replied that how to join ANP, for any personality or on some principles? Afrasiyab replied that on principles, then he said that he had only one principle; "Pashtuns' national unity on the basis of democratic struggle." ANP should include that in its charter then he will join it. In 2006, Afrasiyab and Mian Iftikhar Hussein came to Drushkhela again and brought with themselves a copy of ANP charter in which they had included the provision that he had demanded, at this, he joined ANP again and remained its member till his death in 2015.⁷⁰

10. Pashtuns' National Unity and Peace

According to Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala, peace in the Pashtun belt was not possible without their unity. If Pashtuns were united no nation in the world could harm them. Today, the regions of Pashtuns' belt faced deteriorated conditions and there was no peace at all. The reason was their internal differences and mutual hatred from which others took benefits and made their land hell for them. He stressed the need of unity for Pashtuns so that this region may prosper under the banner of peace.⁷¹

To maintain peace in Pakistan and Afghanistan, he stressed the need of cooperation between these two countries and pointed out many similarities among their people.⁷² He presented the example of Europe that how they united under a union and put their nation on the path of progress. He linked the peace in Pakistan with the peace in Afghanistan and used to say that both countries could form a confederation that Iskandar Mirza initiated and had visited Afghanistan for 14 days long visit and the plan was in the final stages but he was removed and with his removal, the plan also ended.⁷³

Pashtuns' belt in Pakistan and Afghanistan faced many ups and downs over the past few years. Foreign attacks from USSR in the 1980s and now the United States destabilized their region and numerous people lost their lives. The reason that Afzal Khan termed responsible for it was the absence of unity among the Pashtuns. If a nation is united they can live peacefully, they can develop trade, initiate infrastructure activities, enhance their literacy rate and can compete with other nations of the world but according to Afzal Khan, all these things can be achieved through unity. Afzal Khan Lala said that Pashtuns' national unity was the want of time to solve the burning issues that they faced today.⁷⁴

11. Pashtuns' national unity as a subject matter of his writings

Afzal Khan Lala has left behind some important academic works in Pashtu, they are: "*Da Durand Karkha*" (It is collection of speeches on the Durand Line), "*Qaumi Wahdat*" (The subject matter of this book is Pashtuns' national unity), "*Da Pukhtunkhwa Ghag*" (This book is the collection of speeches delivered in the parliament during his political career), "*Da Manzil Pa Lore*" (The central idea of this book is Pashtuns' national unity), "*Qaumi Jirga*" (This book provides for the role of *Jirga* in developing Pashtuns' national unity) and "*Da Pukhtano pa Khawra Pradai*"

Jagra" (this book is the collection of speeches delivered to a *Jirga* held on 29-30 May 2012 on the Afghan issue). His letters and interviews are also based purely on Pashtuns' nationalism and their issues.

12. Causes of Disunity among the Pashtuns

According to Afzal Khan Lala, if the history of disunity among the Pashtuns is studied, it will be clear that there were some causes that made this nation deprived of unity. The important causes were; they have been kept ignored of their history, their tribal nature, although they ruled a great part of Asia but the nature of the rule of Suri, Khilji and Lodi who were Pashtun dynasties in India was also tribal, lack of effective leadership who could hold them together, although their history is full of great leaders, but those who had the quality of uniting their people were few.⁷⁵ Internal rivalries, fight for power and illiteracy were also responsible for their scattered position. Even the struggle of Mirwais, Ahmad Shah Abdali and Khushhal Khan Khattak could not unify them.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Muhammad Afzal Khan, alias Khan Lala, was a well-known figure in Upper Swat, who worked for Pashtuns' unity and tried to infuse the sense of nationalism in their hearts. He also visited other countries such as Germany, Britain and Afghanistan and tried to remove the hatred from their hearts against one another. He was the supporter of Pashtuns' national unity and wanted them to come together and sort out the solution of their issues that they faced in the 21st century. Even the political life of Afzal Khan Lala was for the cause of Pashtuns' unity. Once he said that his politics consisted of only one sentence and that was "unless Pashtuns do not achieve national unity they cannot be honored", on another occasion he said that "we must act as one nation, even if we have political differences." Thus he tried his best to hold them together and to enable them to work for securing their interests.

Notes and References:

¹ Akhund Abdul Ghaffur popularly known as Saidu Baba was born in Jabrai in Upper Swat in 1794, he was a religious saint and influential personality in Swat. His descendants ruled over Swat State between 1876 and 1969.

² Miangul Abdul Wadud (Badshah Sahib), was the grandson of Akhund Abdul Ghaffur. He was the ruler of Swat State from 1917 to 1949.

³ Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb was the son of Miangul Abdul Wadud. He was the ruler of Swat State from 1949 till its merger in Pakistan in 1969.

⁴ Justice Nasirul Mulk was born in Swat on August 17, 1950. He remained the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan from 2014 to 2015. He also served as the caretaker prime minister of Pakistan in 2018.

⁵ Muhammad Rasul Jan was born in June 1952 at village Ningolai Swat. He is a Pakistani chemist in analytical chemistry. He served as a Vice Chancellor of Malakand University from April 2008 to October 2012. He also served as VC of Peshawar University and currently he is the VC of Poonch University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

⁶ Tabassum Adnan is a Pakistani women's rights activist from Swat. She won the US State Department's 2015 *International Women of Courage Award* for her efforts in seeking justice for the women of Pakistan.

⁷ Dr. Habib Ahmad was born in Matta village in District Swat in 1959, he was a Vice Chancellor of Hazara University from 2015 to 2016 and of Islamia College Peshawar from 1916 to 2020. He is also the author of more than 10 books in Botany. He served the Pakistan agricultural research council in Islamabad as well. The government also awarded him with *Tamgha-e-Imtiaz* in March 2011. He died on April 7, 2021 at a hospital in Islamabad during the Corona Virus Pandemic.

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- ¹² Bakhtiar, *International Law and Organizations* (Swabi: Arshad Publishers, 2004), 55.
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- ¹⁴ Oma, "National Unity," July 28, 2020, <https://www.tansicollege.edu.ng/content/week-9-national-unity>. Accessed September 15, 2022.
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- ¹⁶ Muhammad Afzal Khan, *Pukhtun Qami Wahdat* (Lahore: Millat Educational Printers, 1996), 6-7.
- ¹⁷ Muhammad Tahir Iqbal, "Historical aspects of Pashtun nationalism," *The Nation*, January 19, 2020, <https://www.nation.com.pk/19-Jan-2020/historical-aspect-of-pashtun-nationalism>. Accessed September 15, 2022.
- ¹⁸ Mirwais Hotak (1673-1715), was a Pashtun ruler of Afghanistan. He is called the Grand-father of Pashtuns, he was the *Emir* of Afghanistan from 1709-1715. He liberated Afghanistan from the influence of Persians and declared it an independent country.
- ¹⁹ Mirza Ali Khan (1897-1960), popularly known as *Faqir of Ipi* was a Pashtun chief from North Waziristan who started a guerilla warfare against the British Empire. On 21st Jun 1947, he, along with *Khudai Khidmatgars* declared Bannu resolution and demanded that the Pashtuns be given a third option to have an independent state of Pukhtunistan.
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- ²³ Fredrik Barth, *The Last Wali of Swat: An Autobiography as told to Fredric Barth* (Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1995), 21-32.
- ²⁴ Haroon Rashid Khattak, *Khan Muhammad Afzal Khan (Khan Lala): Da Pukhtun Qami Wahdat Alambardar* (Peshawar: Ighraf Printers, 2016), 88.
- ²⁵ Sadia Qasim Shah, "Afzal Khan Lala Championed Pakhtun Nationalism," *The Daily Dawn*, November 3, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1217158>. Accessed September 15, 2022.
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- ³⁵ Khan, *Pukhtun Qami Wahdat*, 34-35.
- ³⁶ Khattak, *Khan Muhammad Afzal Khan (Khan Lala): Da Pukhtun Qami Wahdat Alambardar*, 57-61
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- ⁴² Khan, *Da Pukhtano Pa Khawra Pradai Jagra (Alien's Fighting on the Soil of Pashtuns)*, 72.
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- ⁵⁵ President Peshawar Press Club.
- ⁵⁶ Bureau Chief, "The Nation" Peshawar.
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