

Ethno National Movement in NWFP

Lecture Delivered

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BACKGROUND OF NWFP

- North West Frontier Province is a province of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, located on both banks of the river Indus and stretches from the Himalays in the north to the deserts in the south where it is bordered by the Balochistan and Punjab provinces.
- On its Western flank is the rugged terrain of neighboring country Afghanistan, which is accessed by the historic Khyber Pass through the mountain of the Suleiman Range.
- Its borders touch or are close to those of China, the Tajikistan and the disputed territory of the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the north. The capital of the province is the city of Peshawar. It covers an area of 74,521 Sq. Km. According to the 1998 census, the total population of the NWFP was approximately 14 million.

REASONS OF THE RESIGNATION OF NWFP GOVERNMENT

- The dismissal of the National Awami Party's government in Balochistan and the resignation of its coalition government in the Frontier Province in 1973 reversed the hopeful trend of the forces of ethno nationalism participating in Pakistan's parliamentary politics.
- Bhutto encouraged rival political forces in NWFP and Balochistan to disrupt the NAP-JUI governments. Hayat Mohammad Khan Sherpao, minister for water and power in the central government, became the leader of the opposition in the NWFP Assembly. He could denounce the NAP - JUI government for its failure or solving the people's problems. Militant socialists in the PPP camp were eager to create class conflict in NWFP and Balochistan.

- Within weeks of his return from Shimla, Bhutto began accusing the NAP-JUI government in NWFP of seeking a confrontation with the central government. Qayyum Khan and other central ministers branded the NAP leaders as traitors.
- Meraj Mohammad Khan urged the peasants in NWFP to spill the landlords' blood and seize their lands. In some instances federal ministers harbored individuals against whom the provincial government in NWFP and Balochistan had issued warrants of arrest.
- At the same time, they condemned the NAP-JUI governments for failing to maintain public order. In December 1972, the NAP-JUI government arrested the leaders of the Jamote tribe in Lasbela. The Jamotes, who had long been rivals of the Mengal's, responded with an uprising.

▪Pleading insufficiency of regular police forces in the provinces, Attaullah Mengal, the Chief Minister, raised a private force, Lashkar. On 31 January 1973, the central government called upon Mengal to halt his operation and on 9 February it ordered federal troops into Lasbela to disarm his Lashkar and to relive the Jamotes. Governor Bazenjo and Chief Minister Mengal opposed the use of federal troops in their province and on the night of 14 February, Bhutto dismissed them. The NAP-JUI government in NWFP resigned in the protests.

GOVERNMENT ACTION AGAINST NAP

The center banned the NAP in 1975 alleging that it was working against the integrity of the country. It took the case against NAP in the Supreme Court. The center alleged in its reference presented in the court that the "National Awami Party has long been acting against the interests and security of Pakistan. Some of its leaders fought against the creation of this country, did not reconcile to its existence and never missed a chance of harming.

▪Specifically, the center charged that the NAP leaders in collaboration with the foreign governments especially India and Afghanistan were conspiring to dismember the country by carving out a new state Pushtunistan.

▪Furthermore they have been preaching the four-nation theory, proclaiming that there exist four nations in Pakistan, which have the right to self-determination, thus acting against the ideology of Pakistan. The centre claimed that it had removed the ban on the NAP in 1971 and had given the NAP a chance in good faith to form their provincial governments in the N.W.F.P. and Balochistan, but they proved both through their actions and utterances that they were working towards the disintegration of the country. They had even supported Sheikh Mujeeb Rehman's six points during the events leading to the dismemberment of the country in 1970 who was working for the secession of the country.

■ Wali Khan, in his statement to the court counter-alleged that it was in fact the centre, which wanted to push the N.W.F.P. and Balochistan out of the Pakistani federation by following extremely repressive and authoritarian policies.

The Supreme Court gave a one-sided verdict essentially supporting the government position. Despite the verdict, the Bhutto regime, behind the scene, kept making contacts with the NAP leaders, offering them release as well as the removal of the ban, if the NAP stopped opposing the regime. One analyst aptly noted:

The whole case was the product of Mr. Bhutto's vendetta against Wali Khan and his associates. It was designed to topple down the opposition government in the province.

■The militant elements of the NAP had crossed over the Pak-Afghan border and sought help from Afghanistan. Approximately, between 700-1000 hard core members launched the Pushtunistan movement under the leadership of Ajmal Khattak, the Secretary General of NAP,

Wali Khan declared:

The NAP believe there is one nation in this country and that is Pakistani nation - and, this Pakistani nation is composed of nationalities - who have their own distinct language and culture -

• **FORMATION OF NEW LEADERSHIP NWFP**

- After the NAP was banned, and its main leaders including Wali Khan were arrested, the second level leadership formed the National Democrat Party (NDP) in November 1975.
- Its program emphasized the rejection of all laws realigned foreign policy, equal rights and opportunities to all geographical historical and cultural entities within federal framework. Its program like its predecessor party NAP, emphasized complete provincial autonomy with only defence, currency, foreign affairs and communication with the federal government.
- It also stressed the reorganization of provinces according to linguistic and cultural criteria. The NDA President Sher Baz Mazari explicitly rejected the idea of an independent Pushtunistan and disowned the activities of the secessionist component publically.

Conclusion

- The Pushtunistan movement went into a near complete decline. Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan had been very important factor in leading to a dramatic decline in the public support for the Pushtunistan movement.
- The movement found itself completely discredited in the face of domestic and international changes. Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan (1979), diversion of Government attention and the decreasing value and support of NAP became the reasons for the decline of the movement.
- There were three important reasons for the declining level of support for the Pushtunistan movement. The PPP in league with the urban based Qayyum Muslim League continued to coopt the Pushtun educated middle classes through the coalition government in the province, who had already been alienated from the NAP during the Ayub era.

The Qayyum Muslim League, the traditional rival to the NAP received 22.6 percent of the votes while the PPP had received 14.2 percent in the 1970 provincial elections of N.W.F.P. The support base areas of the two parties were primarily the urban areas of the province. Both parties together (36.8%) fairly represented the urban areas of the province. The NAP which had acquired 18.3 percent votes in the provincial elections was primarily popular in the rural Pushtun areas, was weakest in the urban areas. The NAP's coalition partner JUI which had received 25.4 percent in the elections was also primarily a rural-based party. The PPP had little difficulty in forming a coalition government through democratic process when the NAP government resigned. This coalition government was a fairly good representative of the urban middle class of N.W.F.P., which was least sympathetic to the cause of the NAP.

Secondly, the increasing level of support for the policies of the PPP regime was especially visible among the students as well as some sections of radically oriented peasants of the province. The vigorous development initiatives taken by the PPP also began to strengthen its support among the younger, educated middle class. The Peoples' Party's affiliate student organization, Peoples' Student Federation (PSF) was able to win the Peshawar University Students Union Election in 1974. The results of the Students Union Election clearly showed the declining trend in the popularity of the Pushtun Students Federation, an affiliate of the NAP. It could poll only 32 percent of the total votes polled in the Election. The Peoples Student Federation was making its presence felt in other colleges of the province.

The PPP was also able to win the support of the only peasant-based leftist party of the N.W.F.P., the Mazdoor Kisan Party (MKP) which had started exploiting the tenants-landlords tensions in the NAP stronghold areas. The MKP leaders began to project the NAP as the party of the landlords and supported the more progressive PPP against the NAP.

Thirdly, another factor which may also have started eroding the support base of the movement is the high migration rate of the population of the NWFP to the Gulf countries. It was comparatively four times higher than the other provinces. The bulk of the migrants went from the rural areas of the province, especially from the same districts - Peshawar, Mardan, Kohat and Bannu, which were the main stronghold areas of the NAP.