

ROLE OF FRONTIER MUSLIM STUDENTS FEDRATION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR PAKISTAN, 1942-1947

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Abstract

The politics of North West Frontier Province (NWFP)[♦] in the last decade before partition was conspicuous for its marked difference with political scenario at the all India level. Although NWFP was a Muslim majority area but its people were opposed to All India Muslim League. They remained under strong influence of Khudai Khidmatgar because it was well organized and was working for the betterment of the common people of the province. Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan, the leader of Khudai Khidmatgar, was inspired by Gandhi and his policy of non-violence. He played a key role to awaken the people of the province against the British and to create an urge for freedom. The influence of Khudai Khidmatgar was so obvious that despite the strong efforts of the Muslim League and the demand for Pakistan in this province, Congress won the 1946 elections and was able to form ministry in NWFP. It was a great setback for the Muslim League and its demand for Pakistan as Congress formed the government in such a province where the Muslim population was 95%. This could obviously weaken the claim of Muslim League as the sole representative of the Muslims of India and Congress was in a position to challenge the very *raison d'etre* of Pakistan. At this critical juncture, Frontier Muslim Students Federation, the student wing of Muslim League in NWFP, came forward and changed the whole scenario.¹

In this paper, the role of Frontier Muslim Student Fedration (FMSF) for the creation of Pakistan is highlighted. In this regard, the formation of the FMSF, its propaganda campaign for Pakistan and the Muslim League and its reaction on important political issues would be discussed. The different strategies to propagate the idea of Pakistan were adopted by the students. It included direct contact with the common people, holding of Pakistan Conferences, celebration of Special Days, establishment of Pakistan Libraries and Study Circles etc. An attempt would be made to examine the main features of the contribution of the students of NWFP.

There are different opinions about the formation of the Frontier Muslim Students Federation. One account is that it was founded in early months of 1942 by the students of Islamia College Peshawar.² The other version is that it was founded in 1943.³ The students of NWPF, who were getting education in Aligarh University were the source of inspiration for the students of Islamia College Peshawer. . Among such students, Sardar Agha Khan, Baba Daust Mohammad Kamil, Imdad Hussain Beg, Fida Mohammad Khan, Mohammad Zaman Khan of Charsada, Hamid Ullah Khan of Banun, Ibrahim Khan of Dera Ismail Khan, Shahzada Taimur

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* The NWFP has now been renamed as Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa.

Jan of Kohat, Mufti Mohammad Idrees of Hazara were the most prominent.⁴

Islamia College was the only higher Muslim Educational institution in NWFP. The principal of college usually was a British. Students did not enjoy the right to form any Union except Khaiber Union which was working under the direct supervision of the principal of the college. Its members including Mohammad Tehmasip Papa, Mohammad Anwar Lala, Cheragh Shah, Mufti Abdul Majeed, Masud- ur- Rauf and Abdur Rashid had a meeting with the Muslim League leadership. After consultation, they sent a delegation to Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar to accept the portfolio of presidentship of FMSF, which he accepted and federation was formed. Inayat Kibrya, the General Secretary of FMSF, wrote down to Quaid-i-Azam in the following words:

Yes; we have organised our Frontier (Sarhad) Muslim Student Federation in this province and have achieved a good deal of success also, but there are some inherent difficulties that we have still to overcome. There is a general lack of political consciousness among the students and moreover the element of Congress mindedness is not negligible, therefore the road to victory is to be pursued with tenacious carfulness.⁵

Date was not mentioned in the letter, so the issue is still ambiguous about the exact date of establishment of FMSF. Quaid-i-Azam's message to FMSF can clarify the situation a little bit. This message was sent to them in April 1943, Quaid-i-Azam expressed:

This is a matter of joy and happiness for me that students of your province, like the Muslim students all over India, have been awakened You requested me to send you a message. I can convey you the message that Holy Quran is the great message for our guidance... I appeal to the brothers of NWFP, that they should understand the policies and programmes of All India Muslim League ... If ten crore Muslims have firmly decided to achieve Pakistan, no power of the world can stop us to achieve this objective.⁶

According to Arbab Mukhtar, one of the founding fathers of FMSF, the Muslim League was not an active and well organized party in NWFP till 1944. Congress and Khudai Khidmatgar had strong roots in the province. General Secretary of the Muslim League advised the students

of Islamia College to establish a students' Organization. After few days Shafi ullah Khan, Qauyum Khan and he (Arbab Khan) gathered at Royal Shahi Guest House, situated at the back of the Museum, to discuss the issue of organizing FMSF. They decided that such a person should be appointed as the President of the Federation, who must be a respectable figure of the province. After thorough discussion, they decided in favour of Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar who was later requested to accept the presidentship of FMSF. So Sardar Abdur Rab was its first President and Arbab Mukhtar was its first Vice President. ⁷ It can be concluded from this formation that its informal establishment took place in 1943 and it was formally established in 1944.

Islamia College was the only Muslim College in NWFP, so the head-office of the FMSF was at Peshawar. The district branches were formed in Mardan, Abotabad and Mansehra. In Noshehra district, the branch of FMSF was established in 1945.⁸

As the major objective of FMSF was to propagate the idea of Pakistan through out the province, so it immediately started materializing its major objective. It was indeed a difficult task in the Congress-oriented region. The difficulties of the students are clear by the following letter of Shahzad Gul of Mardan to Secretary of FMSF.

Congress is again getting popularity in and around our village (Mardan district). The mischievous speeches of Dr. Khan Sahib have converted a lot of new people towards Red Shirts. There is again a great voice of Red Shirts. They have opened their offices and a lot of people are becoming members of it. People are getting more and more against the Muslim League. They laugh at the name of Pakistan. As I try to make the situation clear to them they laugh at me more.⁹

The students of NWFP other than Peshawar were not clear about actual objectives of the Muslim League and the Movement of the Muslim League till the visit of Quaid-i-Azam in 1945. The students were so curious about their rights and duties that they asked about it by writing letters to the High Command of the Muslim League. One such letter said:

Mr. Secretary! Please write down to me in a letter to tell the rights of our students. Should we struggle for independence'.... Muslim League leadership of the province consists of government admirers and the elites

and it is impossible that they would fight for an independent country. Fighting and revolution against the government is basically the work of the lower classes and this very class is follower of the Congress.

Write down a detailed letter to me about my duties and responsibilities. Teach me properly about Pakistan and independence, the Muslim League and MSF so I can convey the message to the people here. And in result of getting strong, argumentative message, they would convert towards our ideas.

.... Sir I need Pakistan Book and Jinnah Book so I can convince the others properly after equipping myself with the complete knowledge.¹⁰

FMSF continued with its first round of propaganda campaign in hopeless circumstances. The meeting point of FMSF was Khaiber Union Hall and groups of 4 or 8 students were sent to far off areas to inform the people about the role of the Muslim League and the Congress.¹¹ Inayat Kibraya wrote down to Jinnah:

We have to prove to the public that the Sarhad (Frontier) Muslim Students Federation has distinctly got her own individuality. She believes and stands for Pakistan, secondly she receives directions from the Quaid-i-Azam and has nothing to do with the local leadership. Our present foothold and the measure of our success is entirely based upon these two facts.¹²

Over all the circumstances were not favourable during 1943-44 for the propaganda of the Muslim League ideology. This experience, however, was result oriented which equipped the students with arguments and trained them, how to convince the people? The first period of propaganda campaign was basically the training period of the students. They were now, properly prepared for more serious campaign in 1945-46.

During the last proceedings of the Annual session of FMSF, Rural Sub-committees were formed and sent in the villages for the election campaign.¹³ It was further decided that students of all the schools and colleges would avail the summer vacations for propaganda in rural areas of the whole province.¹⁴ After the annual session of FMSF, a large scale propaganda movement was started. This time, the students had clear-cut objective and it was to win the Elections. Almost each and every student

of Islamia College was member of the Federation. They started their propaganda campaign for the elections by holding a big students gathering at Mohammad Ali Park Peshawar. Meeting started at 8 p.m. Sardar Abdur Rab presided over the meeting. The Khaksars tried to disperse the gathering but failed. The impact of the meeting was positive on the public mind and they got the idea that students were doing the right thing.¹⁵

Quaid-i-Azam's visit to Peshawar was expected in 1945. FMSF sent the groups of students especially to those areas which were under great influence of Khuda-i-Khidmatgar and the Congress. The special attention was paid to select native students of the areas to be sent to Charsuda, Sawabi and Bannun which were the centres of the Red Shirts. Till that time, the Muslim League existed there in name only. A group of seven students including Syed Fazal Khuda was to visit Charsuda and Sawabi. Ihsan ul Wadud (Mama Jee) was very active member of the group and a very good debator. Syed Fazal Khuda was native of Charsuda and all of his relatives were Red Shirts, except one uncle, who was follower of the Muslim League. He helped the students to work in the area. Students entered a mosque and Mama Jee delivered a speech. He said if Muslims would not wake up and remain friends of Hindus, they would not be able to protect their religion in the near future. Side by side delivering the speech, students took out a long procession while passing through Charsuda, Parang, Tehsil bazar and Babra. People of the area, who were convinced by the arguments of the students attended the demonstration and listened to the speeches of Mama Jee, Mohammad Zaman and others at Tehsil Bazaar. A camp of FMSF was opened for 3 days and a lot of people got membership of the Muslim League.¹⁶

A group under Syed Fazal Khuda's leadership went to Mardan. According to him, the people of the area were under the strong influence of Khudai Khidmatgar that they said, "If Khan Abdul Ghafar is infidle (Kafir), so we are infidle (Kafir)."¹⁷ Here students had to face a difficult field of work. The anti-League elements threw stones and bricks on them. Sometimes they provoked childrens to raise anti-League and anti-Pakistan slogans. Even then, the Muslim students, got support of 40 to 50 % population on the issue of Pakistan before the visit of the Quaid-i-Azam. This change was possible due to faithfulness and continuous efforts of the students who were working in almost all the areas of

NWFP for the cause of the Muslim League.¹⁸ Moreover, the visit of Quaid-i-Azam proved very effective and a lot of people at least in urban areas started joining the Muslim League.

In June 1945, FMSF organized its first Annual Session. The objectives of the Conference, which were set by the students included to counter the propaganda of Congress and the Khudai Khidmatgar, to invigorate the Pakistan loving elements in the province, to contact the masses directly, to enhance the strength and prestige of FMSF, to create unity among the Muslims and finally to create a new and healthy leadership from below ranks of the Muslim League.¹⁹

The session started on 17th June and ended on 19th June 1945. Many resolutions were passed. The most important resolution said:

Sarhad Muslim Students Federation has full confidence in the leadership of Quaid-i-Azam. This meeting warns the government that any scheme which would not be acceptable to Quaid-i-Azam, would also be unacceptable for the FMSF. In such a case the responsibility of the results would be on the government.²⁰

The district branches of the federation followed suit. It was followed by the meetings and conferences of different district student federations. One such emergency conference was called by the Abotabad MSF. It was started with recitation. Speeches were delivered by the members to highlight the objectives of the Federation. Students were advised that they should be ready for every kind of sacrifice during 1946 Election campaign. The speakers emphasized that Muslims must be united. The meeting was over with the sayings of Iqbal.²¹ The conference was a grand success.

Celebrating the special Days was one of the important features of the activities of the students. As they were highly inspired by the Iqbal's ideas, so they were accustomed to celebrate Iqbal Day. One such day was celebrated in March 1943. It was arranged by the FMSF in collaboration with the Muslim League. It was successful and the message of Iqbal was conveyed to the audience.²² Another 'Iqbal Day' was celebrated in the first week of June. It was organized by the students, only.²³

Students of NWFP celebrated Pakistan Day regularly from 1944 onwards. In 1944, they invited Quaid-i-Azam to attend the ceremonies of Pakistan Day but he could not manage to do so. The Day was celebrated

on 26 March 1944, without Quaid-i-Azam. Unfortunately it could not be celebrated properly due to unfriendly weather. They decided to celebrate it once again after the Exams and invitation letters were written to high command of the Muslim League.²⁴

It was not a common feature in NWFP due to less Muslim educational institutions and low literacy rate. The grounds and class rooms of Islamia College were the biggest and the only major study circle in NWFP. Library of Islamia College too, was serving the cause to some extent. The educated people discussed Iqbal and Sa'adi. Pakistan literature was available only at the Muslim League offices.²⁵ However, a small Pakistan Library was opened at Noshehraw.²⁶

Islamia college's atmosphere was strictly kept non-political till 1945. We don't find any participation of the students in politics or even any comment from them on national issues. Their political life gradually started after the second visit of Quaid-i-Azam to NWFP in 1945.

At the occasion of Quaid-i-Azam's visit FMSF arranged for a convention in Peshawar. Quaid-i-Azam was its special guest. A lot of other important personalities including Qazi Mohammad Isa of Balochistan, Mian Iftikhar ud din of Punjab and Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar and Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan of NWFP, attended the Convention. Before the start of Convention, miles long demonstration was taken out by the students and masses of NWFP. The Convention was very successful. People of the province were quite astonished to see such a big gathering in a city of only few thousands.²⁷ The next day students arranged for a students meeting in the premises of Islamia college. A student leader Mohammad Tehmasip presented 8,000 rupees for the Muslim League fund which were collected by the students. While presenting the money he said:

Sir! Today we are presenting you only these 8000 rupees, but on your next visit, we will offer 8000 heads to you."²⁸

Quaid-i-Azam advised Muslim students to work hard for the Elections so that the Muslim League could be successful. Students along with their studies worked for the cause of the Muslim League. Students started the election campaign with a huge meeting at night on 21 December 1945, at Yadgar Chowk Peshawar under the auspices of the Muslim Students Federation.²⁹

Later they spread in the whole province. Jalat Khan, with some other students, went to Mardan which was a pro-Congress area. To attract the attention of the people, they always started their programme with recitation and Na'at and then speeches were delivered in simple and local language. They convinced the people to cast vote for the Muslim League, so a separate Muslim country could be formed where Islamic sharia would be followed. Islam was a sensitive point for the Muslims of the whole province. They were inspired by the ideas about Pakistan.³⁰ Similarly, Sher Khan with other members of his group visited Mardan and Swabi to propagate the idea of Pakistan.³¹

The best available account of the Election campaign was of Syed Fazal Khuda, an active member of FMSF. He opened camps of MSF at Charsuda, Swabi and Mardan and increased the membership of the Muslim League. A group under the command of Zaman Khan was sent to Swabi. It was strictly pro-Congress and Red Shirts area and no one could support Pakistan. The constituency consisted of 5000 to 6000 votes. Mian Zia ud din was the Muslim League candidate from there. He was fearful to visit the area due to the influence of Red Shirts. The group of students went there but no one was ready to listen to them. They returned to Mardan in the evening. They stayed in the house of Samin Jan Khan, a local leader of the Muslim League where in a meeting, Mian Zia ud din shared his problem with them. He was very worried about his constituency. Sameen Jan remarked that the students would sort out the matter.³²

The next day, he dropped the students outside Swabi and went away. The children of the area started stoning and abusing them. The students ran, and reached inside the village. People gathered around them. Pir Gohar, a group member, started reciting Na'at. Mama Jee delivered a speech. Meanwhile, a gun-man came and shouted, if the students would not quit the village within two minutes, he would kill them all. Students were so firm that they did not move an inch from their position. An old man reminded the gun-man the principle of hospitality of the Pathans. The old man asked for forgiveness and took the students to his *Hujra*. The next day he announced his membership of the Muslim League in a public gathering. In reaction some other people who came from the nearby villages got membership of the Muslim League and invited the group of students to visit their area.³³

Some students worked only in Peshawar and the surrounding villages. Among them Noor Illahi Malik was very prominent. He worked in the Constituency of Khawaja Ghulam Hussain.³⁴

It was the faithfulness and steadfastness of the students towards their objective, which brought success for them not only in Swabi for the second group of students but also for the other batches of students who were working in all other constituencies of NWFP.

The elections were held from 26th January to 13th February 1946. The results were announced on 18th February. Congress won 19 out of 50 seats of the provincial legislature of the NWFP. The Muslim League won 17 seats and remained on second number. The rest of the seats were won by the Congress allies including Jamiat-e-Ulema and Akali Dal. Although Congress formed the government, yet the Muslim League's position was far better than earlier. The number of votes cast to the Muslim League were the highest. This was a great success of the Muslim League as well as students because they were near to achieve their objective.³⁵

After elections, the students prepared themselves for the other tasks. Pandit Nehru's visit of NWFP was planned for the month of December 1946. FMSF called an emergency meeting in the college. They decided to persuade people to freely express their feelings against the working of the Congress government in the province and also against Nehru's policy towards the Muslims. Students were suggested to go back to their native cities and villages to start anti-Congress propaganda.³⁶

On the arrival of Nehru, students took out a procession with black flags, which marched towards Airport. All roads to the Airport were blocked by the police, but students selected a path to reach at the airport which the police could not track down. Lala Rafique, a student of Edward College thought of killing Nehru but dropped the idea. The police took Nehru out of Airport from the safe passage.³⁷ On the whole, Nehru was welcomed with black flags at each and every place of the province. People took out processions against him. Nehru attended many tribal Jirgas but he was not successful anywhere. At some places, tribal chiefs left Jirga without listening to him. Some others suggested him if he came with Quaid-i-Azam then could be welcomed.³⁸

Students of NWFP expressed their opinion on different political developments of the country. A special meeting of the MSF, which

claimed to represent 99% of the Muslim students of the province passed a resolution in which they approved "the lead given by Mr. Jinnah in accepting the Cabinet Mission's proposal and thereby laying the foundation of the greatest Islamic State in the world... and they assure their loyalty to Quaid-i-Azam to achieve the greatest objective of Pakistan."³⁹

The students expressed their satisfaction over Quaid-i-Azam's decision to join the Interim Government for the welfare of the Muslims of India. The students were hopeful that League members of the interim government must be in a powerful position to solve all minor and major issues of the Muslims like the issue of injustice of the Hindu teachers in the province of NWFP especially.⁴⁰

Alongwith the political activities of the province, the students of NWFP took part, whenever it was required, in the activities of the other provinces. They participated in the movement launched against the arrest of the Muslim League leadership in Punjab during Civil Disobedience Movement. Students of Peshawar participated actively in the processions and raised anti-Khizer government slogans.⁴¹

The Muslim League, due to the efforts of the students, got popularity in NWFP gradually. Khan Brothers' government started using government machinery to crush the Muslim League. Workers of the Muslim League were arrested without any warrant. Meanwhile an incident poured oil on troubled waters.

A converted Muslim lady married with a Muslim of Hazara. She was returned to her non-Muslim parents by the Khan government. This act was intolerable for the Muslims of NWFP. On 21 February the Muslim League arranged a protest rally against the government action which later on, was converted into Civil Disobedience Movement. Everyone was raising the slogan '*Lai Kai Rahain Gay Pakistan*'⁴². Within few days, jails of the province were filled with students and workers of Pakistan Movement.⁴³ Among the first prisoners of the movement, Ihsans ul Wadud Mama Jee, Syed Fazal Khuda, M. Zaman Khan and some other students of Islamia College were also included. This was the first ever occasion in the history of NWFP that students were put behind the bars.⁴⁴

Malik Ghulam Habib, a student, was one of the organizers of the demonstrations which were taken out from Raiti Bazar.⁴⁵ Malik Isa Khan

Aurakzai, student of 8th class only, disguised himself in a sweeper's get up, went to court of Deputy Commissioner, and secretly left the Muslim League flag on the roof of the court. Next day he went there and after removing the Union-Jack hoisted the Muslim League flag and raised the slogans of *Pakistan Zindabad*. As it was a sever offence against the state, so police arrested him and the court under a Hindu magistrate awarded him rigorous punishment for 1 year along with shackle. In jail, he with the other students, created trouble for the jail authorities on May 19, 1947. They raised slogans against the government. One of the popular slogans was repeated for many times. It was "*Butt Kai Rahai Ga Hindustan, Lai Kai Rahain Gai Pakistan.*"⁴⁶ (India will be divided, and Pakisan will be established) Police hit them, and fired shells of tear gas to disperse them. Twenty to twenty-five persons got sever injuries and two were martyred. Police while considering Malik Isa Khan responsible for this tragedy, filed a case against him.⁴⁷

Jalat Khan, a student of Islamia College was serving at another front. During Civil Disobedience Movement, *Nawa-i-Waqt* or any other pro-Muslim League newspaper was banned in NWFP. There was severe need of such a newspaper, which could convey the political scenario to the people. The responsibility was taken by Jalat Khan. He started cyclostyling a pro-Muslim League newspaper '*Nida-i-Millat*'⁴⁸ with the help of some other students and workers of the Muslim League. It was a dangerous task as Intelligence Agencies were always looking out such project. After cyclostyling, it was his duty to distribute the copies of newspaper in Peshawar city.⁴⁹

Nisar Ahmed Sadique a student of 10th class, organized a small band of the students of school who paid homage to the Muslim League flag on daily basis. Anoter responsibility of that small band was to take buckets and towels with them during the demonstrations to provide these to the demonstrators to save them from the effects of tear gas.⁵⁰

Besides these individual efforts of the students, joint efforts were more organized. FMSF always kept the movement alive. Even during the enforcement of article 144 of the law, they took out processions and held meetings. Not a single day went without processions of students and other groups of society for three months. Every day there were processions in Peshawar, Kohat and other towns.⁵¹

In April 1947, two hundred Red Shirts in plain cloths attacked the Muslim students and a clerk of Islamia High School Peshawar just to take revenge of their anger against the popularity of the idea of Pakistan. A lot of students got injuries and two were admitted in the hospital due to sever injuries. No action was taken by the police.⁵² This kind of incident created more anger among the students and they became more active.

As 3rd June plan 1947 announced the establishment of Pakistan, so Quaid-i-Azam asked the Muslims of NWFP through a Radio broadcast:

“I request the Provincial Muslim League of NWFP that they should take the peaceful Civil Disobedience Movement back, which they started in great helplessness.”⁵³

Still the target was not achieved. NWFP had to pass through a referendum to decide whether the people wanted their province to be included in Pakistan or not. Students of the Frontier were now ready to achieve another but final target.

A general meeting of FMSF, held under the presidentship of Syed Talib Hussain Bokhari, passed the following resolution:

We heartedly congratulate our Quaid-i-Azam on his achievement of Pakistan and we hereby pledge to do our utmost in the coming referendum in the frontier province under the instructions of the League High Command.⁵⁴

A Referendum Committee was formed to take care of the referendum-related issues. Students with the Muslim League workers worked day and night visited many areas and convinced the people to caste vote for Pakistan. Now the situation was changed in NWFP, as the idea of Pakistan was the most favourite point of discussion for the people over there. Referendum was held from 6 to 17 July. Government announced the result on 20 July 1947. Total 292118 votes were cast out of which 289244 votes were in favour of Pakistan, and only 2874 votes were in favour of India.⁵⁵

It was great success of the students and all the Muslims of NWFP. Now NWFP became part of Pakistan. The above mentioned details are the clear proof of the great contribution of FMSF. They started the work of popularizing the idea of Pakistan at such a time when circumstances were unfavourable and people were anti-Muslim League and anti-Pakistan. It was due to the determination and faithfulness of the students

which brought success for them and popularity of the Congress and Khudai Khidmatgar decreased. They achieved their goal step by step. They created direct interaction with the common people, held face to face talks with them; sometimes individually and sometimes collectively. They held objective-oriented Pakistan Conferences, celebrated some special Days publically. Further they participated in politics besides reacting in papers. Their participation in Civil Disobedience Movement was impressing. The unflinching efforts of the students and their cooperation with the other segments of the society made the then NWFP, part of Pakistan.

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