
Vocal for Local: An assessment of the role of Abdul Ghaffar Khan for the development of Pashto Language

Dr. Md Abu Katadah

Assistant Professor

T.K.R College of Engineering and Technology, Hyderabad, India

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Abstract:

Abdul Ghaffar Khan, revered as the "Frontier Gandhi," emerges not solely as a political luminary but also as a catalyst in the evolution of Pashto language during a pivotal epoch. This research paper delves into the profound influence of Khan's socio-political endeavours on the cultivation and elevation of Pashto language and literature. Drawing upon archival sources, contemporary accounts, and scholarly discourse, it examines Khan's multifaceted role in fostering linguistic consciousness and indigenous identity among the Pashtun populace.

Through a nuanced analysis, the paper elucidates Khan's strategic initiatives in establishing educational institutions, literary forums, and cultural platforms that engendered a renaissance in Pashto expression and discourse. Moreover, it probes Khan's advocacy for linguistic rights and the dissemination of Pashto literature as integral components of his broader vision for societal reform and emancipation.

In unraveling Abdul Ghaffar Khan's indelible imprint on Pashto language development, this study underscores his enduring legacy as a venerated figure whose unwavering commitment to linguistic revitalization resonates across generations.

Keywords: Pashto Language, NWFP, Khyber PakhtoonKhwa, Linguistic development, Pashtun identity

1. Introduction:

Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan rises as a monumental figure amidst the intricate tapestry of the socio-political panorama of the Indian subcontinent, notably in Khyber PakhtoonKhwa. His enduring legacy reverberates through the corridors of Pashtoon society, marked by profound contributions spanning education, social metamorphosis, and the cultivation of political consciousness. Additionally, his endeavours towards the advancement of Pashto Language hold paramount importance. This study delves into the crucial concept of social change, shedding light on Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's notable contributions, specifically in education and his endeavours towards fostering peace and harmony within Pashtoon society. He meticulously laid the foundations for the advancement of Pashto language, literature, and the dissemination of peace education, with the noble aspiration of forging a symbiotic connection between Pashtuns and the pervasive forces of British imperialism. His efforts resulted in the Pashto language movement, which stands as a testament to his invaluable impact on the promotion of Pashto language.

One of Ghaffar Khan's foremost contributions to Pashto language development was his unwavering commitment to education. Realizing the transformative power of knowledge, he established a network of schools, the Anjuman-e-Islahul Afaghina, which emphasized education in the Pashto language. By doing so, Ghaffar Khan laid the foundation for a literate Pashtun society that could appreciate and contribute to the richness of their linguistic heritage.

Ghaffar Khan's advocacy for social reforms had a profound impact on the linguistic dynamics of the Pashtun community. By addressing social and economic disparities, he created an environment that valued the Pashto language as a medium for discourse and progress. This paper analyzes the intricate relationship between social reforms and the development of Pashto language.

Ghaffar Khan's strive in nurturing a profound sense of cultural identity within the Pashtun community proved pivotal in the propagation and exaltation of the Pashto language. The Khilafat Movement and the Khilafat Tehrik, spearheaded by him, were instrumental in uniting Muslims and addressing social issues. Through these movements, Pashto language and culture became integral components of the collective Pashtun identity.

The paper examines the enduring legacy of Abdul Ghaffar Khan in contemporary times. Despite the evolving linguistic landscape, his contributions continue to inspire Pashtuns to take pride in their language and cultural heritage. The study underscores the relevance of understanding Ghaffar Khan's role in the context of Pashto language development

2. Historical Context:

Khyber PakhtunKhwa stands as a distinctive region ensconced within the territorial boundaries of Pakistan, situated geographically amidst the expansive canvas of the Indian

subcontinent, where the formidable peaks of the Hindu Kush mountains converge with the sprawling borders of Afghanistan. Once denoted as NWFP during the epoch of British colonial rule, it bore the mantle of the North-West Frontier Province, an indelible part of imperial dominion. In the contemporary tableau, the Pakistani government has bestowed upon it the appellation of Khyber PakhtunKhwa. The political tumult that has roiled this region, hitherto known as NWFP and presently acknowledged as Khyber PakhtunKhwa, finds its origins deeply embedded within the annals of British India's historical narrative. Over time, the area has undergone numerous transformations in its structural and administrative frameworks. To comprehend Ghaffar Khan's role in Pashto language development, it is imperative to contextualize his activities within the historical backdrop of British India. Born in 1890 in the Northwest Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan), Ghaffar Khan witnessed the challenges faced by the Pashtun community under colonial rule. The imposition of external languages and cultural norms prompted him to advocate for the preservation and promotion of Pashto.

3. Ghaffar Khan's Contribution to the Advancement of Pashto Language:

One of Ghaffar Khan's foremost contributions to Pashto language development was his unwavering commitment to education. Realizing the transformative power of knowledge, he established a network of schools, the Anjuman-e-Islahul Afaghina, which emphasized education in the Pashto language. By doing so, Ghaffar Khan laid the foundation for a literate Pashtun society that could appreciate and contribute to the richness of their linguistic heritage.

Ghaffar Khan initiated his social endeavours as an educator, aligning himself with the esteemed social reformer Hajji Fazli Wahid, renowned as Hajji of Turangzai, in NWFP. In 1910, they Collaboratively founded educational establishments, renowned as Dar-ul-Ulum in Utmanzai and Gaddar (Mardan), thereby setting the cornerstone for scholarly enlightenment. These institutions provided a blend of religious education and nationalist ideals, offering an inclusive educational environment devoid of discrimination. Though precise statistics concerning the abundance of these spiritual bastions, their scholarly disciples, erudite mentors, and financial sustenance elude us, their academic regimen embraced a spectrum of disciplines including the sacred scriptures of the Holy Quran, Hadith, Fiqha, the annals of Islamic history, Pashto literature, Mathematics, English, and Arabic linguistics. Additionally, vocational and professional skills were integrated into the curriculum. Notably, during that period, higher education facilities were absent in the region. (Khan, 98)

Following the arduous experience of migration in the 1920s, Ghaffar Khan came to the realization that migration alone wasn't a viable solution to India's problems. He believed that concerted efforts were necessary to address and overcome these challenges. Disenchanted

by

the outcomes of the Hijrat Movement, Ghaffar Khan found himself in Afghanistan, reflecting on the situation. However, he resolved to return to India and mobilize his people, recognizing education as the most effective tool for raising awareness of their rights. Proposing to his associates the importance of combating illiteracy and social maladies within Pashtun society, Ghaffar Khan understood the obstacles posed by British authorities against his educational endeavors in settled districts.

Teaming up with Fazal Mahmood Makhfi, Ghaffar Khan established a school in Khiloono, Dir, receiving commendation from the locals who enrolled their children. However, when the Nawab of Dir, also a political agent, learned of this initiative, he ordered the demolition of the school building and expelled Fazal Makhfi and Ghaffar Khan from the district.

With unyielding determination, Ghaffar Khan embarked on a poignant journey back to his native soil of UtmanZai, where he collaborated with erudite minds and reignited his educational and communal endeavors within the village. In unison, they vowed to navigate internal societal challenges and discord through peaceful methodologies, concurrently championing the cause of contemporary learning and the proliferation of Pashto language across the expanse of the region.

4. Formation of Anjuman Islah-ul-Afghaina

Abdul Ghaffar Khan embarked on a noble quest, delineating a series of objectives with the inception of the society "Anjuman-e-Islah-ul-Afghaina" in 1921, where he assumed the mantle of presidency, with Mian Ahmed Shah entrusted as secretary. The cardinal purpose underlying the formation of the Anjuman was the cultivation of solidarity among Pashtuns and the eradication of societal maladies. Additionally, the organization aspired to propagate Pashto language, literature, and a genuine reverence for Islam.

On April 10th, 1921, the inaugural branch of Azad Islamia Madrasa was unveiled at UtmanZai, followed by the establishment of supplementary branches throughout the Peshawar valley. Although precise numerical data regarding the proliferation of such madrasas remains elusive, a comprehensive inquiry suggests an approximate tally of 70 such educational institutions. The curriculum underscored teachings drawn from the Holy Quran and Hadith, Fiqha, Islamic historiography, Pashto literature, Mathematics, English, and Arabic studies. Moreover, vocational and professional skills such as carpentry, weaving, and tailoring constituted integral facets of the educational regimen.

Given the absence of institutions offering higher education in NWFP, students graduating from these madrasas sought enrollment at University of Punjab for advanced studies. These madrasas were founded by Main Maaruf Shah, Maulana Mohammad Israel, and Mian Ahmed Shah and served as educators without remuneration. On December 1st, 1923, the madrasa became affiliated with Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi.

The financial sustenance for these madrasas emanated from the generous contributions of Anjuman members, who altruistically allocated their resources to foster educational endeavors. Ghaffar Khan and his brother, Dr. Khan Sahib, epitomized their unwavering dedication by enrolling their progeny in these educational institutions, thereby igniting a spark of inspiration among fellow community constituents to emulate their noble example. The absence of fees and discrimination based on caste or creed contributed to the widespread popularity of these madrasas in NWFP, leading to a significant increase in enrollment from 140 to 300 students.

The Pashtun community holds religious education in high esteem. Ghaffar Khan's life exemplifies his religious devotion, though he diverged from the conventional image of a cleric. Instead, he was pragmatic and acutely aware of the everyday challenges facing Indian society. Ghaffar Khan firmly believed that education served as a catalyst for societal development, advocating for its use as a means to foster peace and instigate change.

Ghaffar Khan became the head of the Khilafat Committee in his community in 1921, and he later agreed to take on the role of President of the Provincial Khilafat Committee in the district of Peshawar, NWFP. He embarked on a province-wide tour to raise awareness about the Khilafat movement, delivering speeches aimed at galvanizing opposition against British imperialism. His anti-government stance led to his arrest on December 17, 1921, resulting in a three-year imprisonment aimed at quelling his dissent.

Ghaffar Khan became known as Fakhre-i-Afghan (the pride of the Afghans) due to his unselfish devotion, fostering sympathy, unity, and admiration among the Pashtun populace. His release in 1924 was met with warm reception from friends and family.

Ghaffar Khan performed the Hajj pilgrimage with his family in 1926, followed by an invitation from Sultan Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia to engage in discussions concerning Islam. Upon his return to India, Ghaffar Khan engaged with scholarly figures in NWFP, recognizing the absence of socio-political newspapers and thus launching a Pashto magazine, which swiftly gained popularity.

He established the Anjuman Islaha-ul-Afaghina in 1921, followed by the formation of the farmers' organization in 1927, subsequently renamed Anjuman Zamindaran and later Pashto in May 1928. Ghaffar Khan initiated the publication of Pakhtun magazine, which paved the way for the Khudai Khidmatgars Movement, grounded in the principles of nonviolence. By 1930, the movement had garnered 500 nonviolent adherents, swelling to 300,000 members by year-end.

Mian Akbar Shah, an impassioned stalwart within the Anjuman ranks, drew inspiration from his visit to the Soviet Union to establish a youth organization modeled after the Young Turks and Young Afghans of the era. Ghaffar Khan, impressed by the concept, envisioned a similar organization in Utmanzai. Consequently, a seminal gathering convened on September 1st,

1929, heralding the genesis of the Zalmo Jirga, with Abdul Ghaffar Khan elevated to the presidency and Mian Akbar Shah entrusted with the secretaryship. Membership, sans prejudice, beckoned all, underscoring a resolute commitment to abstain from communal entanglements. The sanctity of Pashto language presided over the Jirga's deliberations, championing the overarching objective of securing untrammelled autonomy and liberation for India through diverse stratagems.

Approximately 70 individuals joined the organization during the inaugural meeting, comprising primarily rural members without elite backgrounds. Notably, all members were engaged in academic pursuits and practical endeavors. In the wake of the triumphant inauguration of the Olasi Jirga, another entity arose in 1929 under the guise of the Khudai Khidmatgars Movement, swiftly ascending to eminence across the province as a formidable political force.

5. Formation of Khuadai Khidmatgar Movement

In the annals of 1928, profound political tumults reshaped the contours of Pashtun-dominated domains spanning Afghanistan and India. In the wake of the inception of the Annjuman-e IslahulAfghaina, the political echelons witnessed the emergence of a party christened Khudai Khidmatgars (Servants of God), swiftly ascending to prominence and acclaim within the region. Both organizations shared similar objectives, aiming to uplift Pashtun society and culture, foster a stronger sense of nationalism, and eradicate prevalent social ills from their communities. (Khan, 93)

The Khudai Khidmatgars were meticulously instructed to adhere strictly to established regulations and underwent specialized training. While they were also enlisted for military roles, a stringent oath was administered beforehand, binding them to refrain from resorting to violent measures in the execution of their duties. It was suggested that members wear a unique outfit that would help others recognize them as the "Red Shirts." (Khan, 143)

A distinguished hallmark of the Khudai Khidmatgars lay in their resolute allegiance to nonviolent principles. They eschewed the deployment of armed force against adversaries, opting instead for the cultivation of restraint and the demonstration of tolerant conduct. Such a methodology starkly contrasted with the prevailing ethos of blood feuds and resistance pervasive within Pashtun and tribal societies.

6. Conclusion:

Abdul Ghaffar Khan's multifaceted contributions to the development of the Pashto language were deeply rooted in his commitment to education, literature, cultural identity, and social reforms. By analyzing these aspects, this research paper provides a comprehensive understanding of Ghaffar Khan's pivotal role in shaping the linguistic landscape of the Pashtun community. The research concludes by highlighting Ghaffar Khan's enduring legacy

in contemporary times. Despite evolving linguistic landscapes, his contributions inspire Pashtuns to take pride in their language and cultural heritage.

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