

# Unpublished memoirs of Abdul Rahim Khan, a veteran journalist and Marxist in Pakistan

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During the 1880s the economic landscape of Western Punjab (now part of Pakistan) was radically reshaped. Through a vast irrigation project, consisting of a network of canals, large tracts of arid and barren lands were brought under cultivation. There were no individual property rights on these lands by the original inhabitants, and they were declared as 'crown lands'. There was a planned migration of people from the relatively overpopulated districts of Punjab to these thinly inhabited, mainly pastoral and waste lands. The migrants were settled in well planned villages on the basis of religion, caste, and the area they came from.

'Rais' (roughly, aristocratic) families associated with the pre-British political structure who had assisted the British in the suppression of the 'Mutiny' of 1857, or during the campaign to subdue north-western regions, received relatively large areas of land, say, 25 squares (a square is equal to about 25 acres). Families at lower levels in the social hierarchy ('sufaidposh'), who also helped the British in one way or another, received in the region of 10 squares. The third category was the 'abadkars', the landless cultivators from the relatively overpopulated areas. They received between one to two squares. Some of the crown lands were sold by auction.

I was born in 1928 in one such village, in the district of Lyallpur (now Faisalabad), which was part of the 'Chenab Colony'. (The new settlements were referred to as 'Canal Colonies'.) The village was located between Jhang city and Gojra, a railway station on the line between Lyallpur and Multan and beyond. It was predominantly a Christian village. Christian missionaries must have persuaded the Punjab government to allocate some villages exclusively for Christians. It was established around the year 1900. There were about one hundred families. Each received one square of land. Later some Hindu families arrived and opened grocery shops, and four Muslim families who were blacksmiths or carpenters. There were two Muslim barbers.

The missionaries set up one middle level school for boys and one for girls in the village. At a later stage they also set up a hospital. It was more like a small medical centre, and it functioned only when a British doctor was available. The nearest (proper) hospital was in Gojra, about eight miles away. Some Muslim boys from neighbouring villages attended the school. The medical centre, when open, also provided services to neighbouring (Muslim) villages. There was also a post office, manned by a primary school teacher on part-time basis.

My grandfather, with his family, arrived at the time when the village was established. He was not a cultivator, unlike other families who had been settled in the village.

Abdul Rahim Khan was born in a Muslim family in Malir Kotla. As a young man he had come under the influence of Christian missionaries and converted to Christianity. The missionaries arranged for him to study medicine and he qualified as a Licentiate of Medical Practice - LMP (a qualification below MBBS). LMPs were referred to as doctors. The missionaries must have thought it would be good to have a qualified LMP in the village.

Abdul Rahim Khan had eight children, six girls and two boys. I think he arrived in the village with four children, and four, including my father, were born later. Two of the girls became doctors (LMPs), one became a nurse and three school teachers. My uncle graduated as MBBS, and joined the railways - the North Western Railway (NWR) had a network of their own hospitals. (He retired as divisional medical officer after Partition). My father was the only one whose education did not go

beyond what was available in the village. Rahim Khan died soon after the last child was born, so that the land was managed by my grandmother. My father took over from her when he reached the age of 19 or 20.

I say this to draw attention to the fact that the level of education in my family gave it a special status in the village. And as a result, I grew up as a child with expectations very different from those of the average boy in the village. Visiting my uncle in Saharanpur and Rawalpindi I must have seen him as a role model and subconsciously formed the expectation that as a grown-up I would live in the same manner as he did. Under the Raj officers of the executive class lived in grand style.

I have mentioned that there were some Hindu and Muslim families in the village. There was complete respect for the two religions. As a child I never heard anyone making a disrespectful remark against other religions. Hindus and Muslims would not eat with each other or use each other's utensils, nor would they eat with Christians. I remember as a child asking why the Muslim barber who came to our house to cut my hair would not accept a drink of water from us. My mother replied that that was his religion. And that was that. Muslims and Hindus and Christians lived their cultural lives separately, but harmoniously.

From the time of the founding of the village there had been no significant economic or social change; the same pattern of life was repeated year after year. In 1939, with the outbreak of the Second World War this pattern was completely disrupted. British and Indian army officers arrived in the village in military vehicles to recruit young men. Many young men who were surplus to the requirements of work on land were happy to enlist. I remember one half-witted young man telling the British officer he would go and kill Herr Hitler. The traffic between the village and Gojra (our route to the outside world) multiplied. Before there was one tonga (two-wheeled horse carriage) plying between the village and Gojra, now there were four. Money started flowing to the families whose sons had enlisted and prices of agricultural commodities started to inflate. The life of the village irreversibly changed.

It was at this time that my father, on the advice of my uncle, decided that I should be sent away to a school where the quality of education would be better than what was available in the village. I was sent to Batala (in Gurdaspur district) where there was a good boarding school attached to a mission school, named after the Baring banking family. The school and the hostel had been funded by an endowment from this family. (The Baring Bank was a British merchant bank, founded in 1762. It was brought down in 1995 when it suffered a loss of £827 million pounds as a result of the reckless speculation by one of its traders.)

The boarding part of the school was a nice place, a sort of mansion house with an annex which the Church of England missionaries had bought from a Sikh prince. It was located outside the city, with vast open spaces, lots and lots of mango trees. (Plenty of fruit for stealing at night.) It had extensive playground facilities, and a swimming pool. The principal of the school with his family lived in the upper floor of the house. He had a master's degree from an American university, and spoke to us only in English. All the other boys in the hostel came from professional families. I was the only 'country boy', but I soon became 'urbanised'.

I was in Batala from 1939 until 1943 when I matriculated with a modest second class. There are two points worth mentioning.

It was in 1942, when I was 14 that I first became aware that there was an independence movement going on in the country. This was when the Indian National Congress launched its 'Quit India' movement. I observed a general 'hartal' (small shopkeepers shutting their shops) and people demonstrating in the city. I heard one teacher say to another that if things took a bad turn the boys would have to be sent home. The events made a vague impression on me, but I was not able to articulate any questions on the subject.

The second event also took place when I was 14. One day when I was walking idly around in the grounds of the hostel I saw two men, neatly dressed in salwar-kameez approach me. They said they had come from Qadian, a small town not far from Batala. Qadian was then the headquarters of the Ahmadiya Muslim sect - not regarded as Muslim by many Muslims. They had come to have a debate

with the Christians, and asked me if I would take them to someone with whom they could engage. I took them to our Farsi (Persian) teacher (the only teacher whom I liked) who lived nearby. He opened his house gate, greeted me nicely and asked the purpose of my visit. I told him what the two gentlemen were looking for. Quoting a verse from the New Testament, he said it is written not to throw your pearls before the swine, and shut the door.

The two gentlemen were naturally deeply hurt. I was left confused with the whole episode. As I mentioned earlier, I had been brought up with complete respect for other religions. This was my first awareness of inter-religious tensions. (The Farsi teacher was a recent convert from Islam to Christianity. I think it was the Sunni Muslim in him who responded with such vehemence.)

After the completion of my studies in Batala, I was sent to Murray College, Sialkot. This was a Scottish missionary institution. There were three Scotsmen on the teaching staff, including the principal.

I lived in the students' hostel. This was a different kind of life from that in Batala. There were no restrictions as there were in Batala. I could miss my lectures if I wished (I did not); there was no compulsion to go to church, and you could go to the cinema whenever you wished.

I had no guidance on the choice of my subjects. I chose the easiest option – arts, which included history, Farsi, psychology. English was compulsory.

Apart from about fifteen Christian students, all the hostel residents were Muslim. Most of them came from landowning families in the district. They were all 'country boys', as were most of the Christian students.

There was absolutely no political activity, even debate, in the college. Student organisations associated with the Muslim League or the Indian National Congress did not exist in the college. I do not think that the word 'Pakistan' was yet part of the vocabulary in the college.

As far as my intellectual development was concerned, the only thing I can mention is that I started to read books outside the prescribed courses. I borrowed from the college library Jawaharlal Nehru's *Glimpses of World History* and tried to read this massive volume. I remember reading a collection of short stories by Rabindranath Tagore and Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*.

During the summer vacations of 1943, I visited relatives in Saharanpur, Dehra Doon and Delhi. They say travel broadens the mind. A visit to the Doon School in Dehra Doon, India's Eton, brought into my consciousness an entirely new world. (The school was closed for the summer vacations and my uncle, with whom I was staying, was able to arrange a tour of the facilities of the school,)

I left Sialkot in 1945 with a middling second class.

I told my father that I had no intention of continuing my education in Sialkot; I wanted to go to Lahore, to Forman Christian (FC) College. But my Intermediate grade was considered not good enough for admission to FC College. A family friend suggested that the padre of Naulakha Church in Lahore (located near the railway station) might be able to help.

I went to Lahore, borrowed a bicycle from a friend and rode to the padre's house, next to the church. I was shown in and explained who I was and what I wanted. Without much discussion he said 'let's go'. He took his bike and we both rode to FC College campus, to the house (as I later discovered) of the principal catering officer of the college (an important position, since he managed the facilities in all the halls of residence.) The padre explained the reason for our visit, and turning to me in feigned sympathy, asked 'were you unwell during your exams?' I could hardly have said 'no'.

The catering officer took me to Mr Sinclair, the vice-principal of the college, and explained that my modest performance in my Intermediate exams was the result of me having been ill during the exams. Mr Sinclair was sympathetic. I would get admission. This was the beginning of a new life for me. I was now 17.

FC College had a huge, beautiful campus outside the city. I had my room in North Hall, on the bank of the Lahore canal. Accommodation was excellent, with modern toilet facilities (not the usual thing at the time). The common room had two English language daily newspapers, *The Statesman* (Delhi) and the *Civil and Military Gazette* (Lahore), and table tennis facilities. Out of nearly 100 students in the hall, about 20 were Muslim, two Christian (me included), a couple of Sikhs, the rest were

Hindus. There were three kitchens, and accordingly three sections of the dining hall. There was the halal section, a 'non-vegetarian' (non-halal) and a vegetarian. It was up to each student which section he wished to be in. In practice, the halal section was taken exclusively by the Muslims and the two Christians.

At the time I joined the college, it was impossible to be unaware of the political developments that were unfolding around you. Student organisations, offshoots of the Congress, the Muslim League and the Communist Party, were active on the campus; students were debating politics and arguing among themselves.

It was now almost universally understood that the British would have to go (though there were still some diehards in Britain, such as Winston Churchill, who still thought that the Raj might still be saved in some shape or form). In August (1945) the British Labour government announced that a general election would be held in India, and that after the election they would consult with the members of the newly elected provincial legislatures and the princes to establish a constitution-making assembly to arrive at the shape of the post-Raj settlement (including whether there would be Pakistan and, if so, the form it would take). Elections were held in the winter of 1945-46 in a fevered atmosphere. The Muslim League swept the Muslim-majority provinces of Bengal, Punjab and Sindh, but not the North West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa). (Balochistan had no provincial legislature.) The idea of the Muslim nationhood had achieved its legitimacy.

In February (1946), sailors on HMS Talwar off the coast of Bombay, mutinied. With their control of the signalling system they sent messages to other ships to follow. A few days later ratings on another naval vessel responded by training their guns on a British officers club. There was a distinct prospect of the mutiny becoming general, and then spreading to the air force. At the same time the Communist Party organised strikes throughout the country, which involved hundreds of thousands of workers. I remember the day when All India Radio played music all day. Leaders of both the Congress and the Muslim League found the developments profoundly disturbing and appealed for 'calm'.

In August, Jinnah declared the 16<sup>th</sup> of the month as a Direct Action day. There were communal riots in Calcutta, with extensive killings. The riots spread to Bihar, and there was danger that they would spread to other parts of the country. With the sailors' mutiny, widespread strikes and spreading communal violence it was apparent that things were getting out of control of all the parties concerned. There was a rush by all parties to the final settlement.

In this fevered climate I (at the age of 17) I became political. I listened to and participated in debates and discussions on the campus where student organisations, offshoots of the Congress, the Muslim League and the Communist Party, had become active. I attended meetings addressed by the leaders of various parties. I remember walking with friends from the campus to the other end of Lahore (open grounds near the Lahore Fort) to listen to various leaders' speeches.

During these months I came under the influence of a lecturer of psychology who introduced me to the People's Age, the weekly organ of the Communist Party of India. Edited by P. C. Joshi, secretary general of the party, it was beautifully produced with the highest journalistic standard. This journal showed me the vision of a new kind of human society that was being built in the Soviet Union. I became a communist.

I emphasise that there was no persuasion or intellectual argument on the part of the lecturer involved. It was sufficient for him to introduce me to the People's Age. I was ready for the conversion even though I had had no exposure to political matters previously. Why did the achievements of the Soviet Union appeal to me? I did not consciously try to work out the different aspects of the decision I had taken, it was more of an emotional conversion.

Neuroscientists tell us that there is a large amount of stuff that is hardwired in our brains that shapes our perceptions, preferences, etc. To put it differently, we act in a pre-determined way. The environment in which we are brought up modifies and reinforces these pre-determined perceptions and preferences.

As I have indicated, our family was quite well off by the standards of the time, and there were some

families in the village that were really poor. These were landless people who lived on casual work, when it was available. So as a child I was quite aware of the phenomenon of poverty and economic and social inequality. My father, to put it in modern political language, was a right-wing conservative who believed that poverty was a matter of choice – you were either lazy or stupid. (My siblings might not agree with this view of our father's politics.) My mother, by contrast, was sympathetic to the poor, and helped them whenever she could – always behind my father's back. As I was emotionally much closer to my mother, it is possible that as a child I began to look at the world through my mother's eyes, rather than my father's.

At this point an early experience comes to mind. When I was about twelve years old one of my doctor aunts was filling in for an English missionary doctor at the village medical centre. And so she had the use of the kothi (bungalow) that was purpose-built for the English doctors. One day my elder brother, seven years my senior and who was at the time doing a Master's in philosophy at St. Stephens College, Delhi, were sitting in the drawing room of the bungalow. I casually picked up one of the numerous books stacked on the shelves and started to browse through it. In it I saw a picture of a group of sinister looking men sitting around a table, as if in a conference. I asked my brother who they were and what were they doing. He looked at the picture, skipped through some pages and said 'Oh, they are communists.' Who are communists? I asked. Rather indifferently, he replied: they want to abolish private property and want it to be owned by the government. I thought it was a good idea, and declared that I would like to be a communist. He replied: you would then go to jail. The conversation did not proceed. I was left confused and unable to articulate the apparent paradox: why should the government jail people who want it to take over all property. It would take me some years before I could resolve it.

In Lahore, troubles – Hindu-Muslim riots – started in March (1947). Our exams (final BA) which were scheduled to be held sometime in May had to be postponed. The halls of residence were closed and the students sent home. It was expected that normal life would soon return and students – Hindus as well as Muslims – return to the college and normal teaching.

But things turned out very differently, and as a result of extensive rioting the exams had to be repeatedly postponed. I was confined to my village. I had my course books which I continued to study. I also had some other books with me. I remember reading during these months Maxim Gorky's *The Mother*, which made a strong impression on me. I also had a small pamphlet by the Russian philosopher G. V. Plekhanov on the materialist conception of history. But I was unable to make any sense of it. I subscribed to the *People's Age* and an uncle of mine to an Urdu language daily newspaper, the *Zamindar* (the cultivator). So I was well-informed about the events taking place in the outside world, and of course the coming into existence of Pakistan.

This was a time – mercifully a short one, some months – of utter madness, of mass inter-communal killings. No one would have imagined that things would turn out to be this way. As I have said, our village was surrounded by Muslim villages. The Christian people in our village had lived in peace with the Muslims in the area, their boys had daily come to the village to attend the middle school and they had come to avail of the medical facilities when available. During the time I am talking of Christians were left alone and there was no fear among them. But the Hindu families in the village were extremely nervous, and with good reason. However, they were assured by the people of the village that they were under their protection. A group of men, led by my father, with his gun slung over his shoulder, escorted all the Hindu families to Gojra where they boarded a train for Amritsar (in India, across the border from Lahore). We learnt later that they all crossed the newly established border safely. (My father never used the gun, as far as I know. Under the British, gun licences were given only to loyal subjects and those who had influence in the community.

By December all the cross-migration in Punjab – of the Hindus to India and of Muslims to Pakistan – was completed. The situation was now completely peaceful. The exam date was announced. The North Hall was practically deserted. All the Hindu and Sikh students were gone. We would never see our Hindu and Sikh friends again.

I had decided to make my career in journalism. But before I could start looking for a job I needed the results of my exams. Instead of going to my own village I decided to visit my maternal grandfather who lived in a village near Okara, in Montgomery (now Sahiwal) district. There my uncle, who was about my age and who had also completed his studies, suggested that we go to Karachi. One of his sisters, my aunt, lived there. She was a nurse in Civil Hospital.

Although life had returned to normal, railway train time tables remained disrupted. We waited for hours at Okara railway station for the train to Karachi, with no idea when it would arrive. I remember it was night and it was freezing cold. There were families with small children also waiting. The children were crying from the cold. At last the train arrived and our long journey to Karachi began.

Unlike the train passenger in Britain, the passengers in the sub-continent talked freely among themselves. They talked about all kind of things, the state of the harvest, family weddings, one's problem with toothache. The talk in our compartment was naturally about the recent events, the partition of the country, the recent inter-communal violence, the mass transfer of populations across the newly established border, and Pakistan and the future.

Two lines of thought were running through the conversation, though of course people were talking about all kinds of things. It wasn't against the Hindus as such, but about the superiority, perfection of the Islamic faith. During the discourse on this subject, one elderly man claimed that you could tell a Muslim by the light (noor) on his face, and as if to demonstrate the truth of his claim he pointed towards me. He wanted to witness the noor on my face. I don't think I ever received a better compliment. The other line of thinking referred to the future, the future of Pakistan. There was universal sense of optimism. We have plenty of fertile land. We will be able to feed ourselves. Above all, God is on our side.

After a couple of weeks of my arrival in Karachi I saw an advertisement for a proof-reader in the English language daily newspaper, The Sind Observer. I applied and was interviewed by the editor. He thought I was over-qualified for the job. (By the standards of the time I had good command of the English language.) But after some persuasion he relented and gave me the job. The monthly salary was 80 rupees. I think at the time a primary school teacher earned as much.

After a couple of months the Observer was banned by the order of the central government. I was without a job.

The central government had taken Karachi, the capital of the Sindh province and its main source of revenue, out of the jurisdiction of the province and made it the centrally-administered capital of Pakistan. Public opinion in the province was outraged, the provincial government, which protested, was dismissed. The Observer, expressing almost universal opinion in the province and campaigning against the separation of Karachi, was silenced. (The government in the North West Frontier Province was also dismissed, though for different reasons.)

Within about six months of its creation, the main fault line of Pakistan had been exposed, though few realised this at the time. The new country had been demanded and created on the notion that the Muslims of India constituted a nation – a Muslim nation. The ethnic diversity of the community was of course recognised, but it was considered of little or no significance. Now with the task of framing a new constitution for the country facing the leadership the ethnic or the 'nationalities' question could not be ignored.

To look at the issue from another perspective: Pakistan was an artificial country, it was a new creation. The leadership needed to create a new Pakistani national identity, to meld the different nationalities into a single nation, to make Pakistan a nation state. What was the idea that would bind, fuse the different nationalities together into a nation?

In his first address to the constituent assembly on 11 August (1947), Jinnah had told his audience '... in the course of time [in Pakistan] Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as the citizens of the state.' In other words, Jinnah was visualising a secular Pakistan. Pakistan would be a country where religion would be a private, not political, matter. In other words,

religion could not be the idea that would bind the nationalities together. What force would then meld the different nationalities into a new national identity?

However, by the time when the Sindh provincial Government was dismissed and the Observer banned, Jinnah's tone had changed. Addressing a public meeting in Dhaka (East Pakistan), he said (on 21 March, 1948): 'What is the use of saying 'we are Bengalis or Sindhis or Pathans or Punjabi?' No, we are Muslims, Islam has taught us this. Here I think you will agree with me that whatever else you may be and whatever you are, you are Muslims. You belong to a nation now.' Pakistanis are a nation because they are Muslims.

The context of the speech was the first murmurings in East Pakistan about the fear of the domination by West Pakistan (or rather by Punjab), and the beginning of the language movement (demanding that the Bengali language should enjoy equal status with Urdu as a national language). He told the meeting: 'The state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu [a language that is completely alien to the Bengali] and no other language. Anyone who tries to mislead you is merely the enemy of Pakistan.'

Three days later, addressing the students of Dacca University, he associated the nascent language movement with a 'fifth column'; there could only be 'one lingua franca'. Urdu, he added, 'embodies the best that is in Islamic culture and Muslim tradition.' He also spoke of the 'poison of provincialism' (demand for a substantial degree of provincial autonomy).

Although Urdu was the mother tongue of only a small part of the sub-continent's Muslim population, Muslim leadership after the 'Mutiny' of 1857 attempted to make it the symbol of Muslim identity, distinguishing it from Hindi, spoken largely by Hindus. In Pakistan, Urdu is the mother tongue only of the descendants of muhajirs (migrants, refugees) who migrated to Pakistan from the Urdu-speaking part of India at the time of Partition. Following the Muslim leadership at the time of the 'Mutiny', Jinnah in his Dhaka speeches was identifying Urdu with Islam, and now making it, along with Islam, the medium of nation-building.

After about a couple of months I noticed an advertisement in The Daily Gazette for the position of the head proof-reader, with a monthly salary of rupees 125. I applied and got the job. I must have worked there for about eight months. Then one day I sat down to write a 'letter to the editor' to Dawn (now the leading English language newspaper in Karachi and Sindh) criticising something it had said in an editorial. As I wrote it, the letter became longer and longer and became a general criticism of government policies as espoused by Dawn. I knew it could not be published as a letter to the editor, nor of course as an article. But I sent it anyway. I signed it as a 'humble Pakistani'. There was some indication that I was a young man working in a newspaper.

After two or three days, with great surprise, I saw a small box item on the letters page saying that a 'humble Pakistani' who had written a letter to the editor should come and see him. I saw the editor, Mr Altaf Hussain, who asked me a number of questions on my background, my present work, my career ambitions, etc. At the end of the interview he offered me the position of a junior sub-editor, with one month's probation, and told me to report to the chief-sub-editor. The chief sub-editor was an Englishman, Mr Brown, from Fleet Street, London. After a month, on a favourable report from Mr Brown, my position was confirmed, with a monthly salary of rupees 250. This must have been sometime in 1949.

Dawn was founded by Jinnah in New Delhi in 1941 as the organ of the Muslim League. With the establishment of Pakistan it moved to Karachi in August 1947. Most of its editorial staff had migrated with it. It continued to be the mouthpiece of the dominant section of the Muslim League. Sometime in 1950 (or perhaps a little later) the Daily Gazette ceased publication. After this, Dawn had the monopoly of the English newspaper readership in Karachi and Sindh.

Dawn's editorial policy, as noted, followed the line taken by the dominant leadership. It was, for instance, hostile to India, and emphasised the Hindu character of the country. It was referred to as Bharat instead of India or Hindustan. This was of course another aspect of the line of thinking suggested in Jinnah's Dhaka speech, that only religion could bind the different nationalities into a nation. Hindu India, Muslim Pakistan. It also regularly condemned the 'curse of provincialism'.

Sometime in the first half of 1953 I resigned from Dawn. There were both push and pull factors involved. Two incidents are worth mentioning.

During the period 1950-1953, the Korean War was big news. Reports from the news agencies poured all day, hour by hour. During the weeks I was on night duty I was assigned the job of constructing a coherent story from all these reports from different agencies for publication the next morning. (The chief sub-editor gave me this responsibility over the heads of more senior sub-editors.)

One night the editor, Mr Altaf Hussain, walked into the newsroom and informed us that the American ambassador had protested that our presentation of the news on the Korean War had a distinctly anti-American bias. He said nothing more and walked out. He knew that I was the culprit. The other incident occurred during the same period. The context was revolutionary developments in Iran. This is a fascinating story. In 1949-50, Iran experienced a democratic and nationalist revolution under the democratically elected Mohammed Mossadegh. He had two main policies, to curtail the powers of the Shah and make Iran a constitutional monarchy, and nationalise the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. In 1951 Iran's national assembly unanimously passed a bill to nationalise the AIOC.

Following this there was a US-British sponsored coup against Mossadegh, which failed. The Shah fled the country and made Rome his home. By this time Tudeh (communist) Party had emerged from underground and helped mobilise demonstrations supporting Mossadegh. The western press was now presenting Mossadegh as a dictator and a communist collaborator.

In August 1953 there was a second coup, by the Iranian army led by General Zahedi and the CIA. This time the coup was successful, the Shah returned to Teheran, accompanied by Allen Douglas, the CIA director. Mossadegh was arrested, humiliated, sent to prison. After three years, he was confined to house arrest. He died in the late 1960s, completely forgotten. The Shah became more authoritarian. The British monopoly of Iranian oil was broken, the American interests joining in. (In August 2013, on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the successful coup, the US state department released the documents clearly showing the CIA's role.)

Now, to come to the point. The Pakistan government had been cultivating the Shah. The Shah had visited Pakistan and was received with all the possible pageantry and ceremonial spectacle. (There were even rumours that there were attempts to find a Pakistani wife for him.) According to the author Ayesha Jalal (*The State of Martial Rule*), under the influence of General Gracy, the British commander-in-chief of the Pakistan Army (1948-51), facilities were created in Balochistan for an attack on Iran in case there were attempts to nationalise British oil interests.

As in the case of the Korean War, the chief sub-editor had assigned me the task of dealing with the reports from Teheran. One day I was summoned to the editor's office and I noticed a number of agency reports on the Iranian developments and my write-up that had appeared in the morning edition lying on his desk. He told me that I was 'mutilating' reports from the agencies. I stood my ground. I said the agency reports were biased and I was only restoring some balance in the presentation of the news. He was not persuaded, and dismissed me with a warning.

I knew at this point that my position in the newspaper was becoming uncomfortable. This was the push factor in my decision to leave Dawn.

Now to the pull factor. I had come to know Mian Iftikharuddin (through party work) quite well. Mian Iftikharuddin was a progressive member of the first constituent assembly. He owned the Progressive Newspapers Ltd. Which published the English language daily *The Pakistan Times* and the daily Urdu *Imroze* from Lahore. The *Imroze* had a daily edition published in Karachi. Faiz Ahmed Faiz, one of the great Urdu language poets, was the editor-in-chief of all the three newspapers. (Faiz was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize in 1962.) The three newspapers supported liberation movements around the world, supported the non-aligned movement, were generally sympathetic towards the Soviet Union, favoured a genuinely federal constitution (and confederation between East and West Pakistan) for Pakistan, and advocated land reforms. Mian Iftikharuddin wanted me to join *The Pakistan Times* as their Karachi correspondent. (The *Pakistan Times* at that time had the same kind of monopoly of the English newspaper readership in Punjab as Dawn had in Karachi and Sindh.) I



was happy to join The Pakistan Times, and so resigned from Dawn.

Sometime during 1949, while I was on day shift in Dawn, a member of the staff informed me that someone outside wished to see me. I went out and saw a young man in shalwar/kameez with a bicycle. He introduced himself and said that he had been designated by the central committee of the Communist Party to organise the Karachi unit, and that he wanted me to join the party. This was Hasan Nasir, working underground, with the CID (Criminal Investigation Department) after him, who was inviting someone, apparently a complete stranger, to join him in organising the Karachi unit of the Party.

To begin at the beginning. The Indian Communist Party held its second congress in Calcutta in February-March 1948. There were three delegates from West Pakistan: Eric Cyprian from Punjab, Jalaluddin Bokhari from Sindh, and Mohammed Husain Ata from the NWFP. There was a much larger delegation from East Pakistan. It was decided at the congress that Pakistan should have its own communist party. With the exodus of the Hindu comrades from West Pakistan, and with the number of Muslim communists very small, the Party in West Pakistan was in a very weak and disorganised situation. (There was no such problem in East Pakistan.) It was therefore agreed that some experienced Muslim comrades should, on a voluntary basis, migrate to West Pakistan.

Sajjad Zaheer, a distinguished literary figure, leader of the all-India Progressive Writers Association and member of the Central committee of the Indian party, accompanied by Sibte Hasan, an experienced journalist who had worked on the party's journals and Mirza Ashfaq Beg, arrived in West Pakistan soon after the Calcutta congress. Sajjad Zaheer became the general secretary of the Pakistan Communist (effectively, of the West Pakistan) Party and set about organising the various groups around the country into a coherent organisation.

Hasan Nasir, who in 1948 was only twenty years old, had been a member of the party in Bombay and was known to Sajjad Zaheer. But he migrated to Karachi on his own initiative. This was around the same time when Sajjad Zaheer arrived in Lahore (where the office of the central committee was located.)

In Sindh (including Karachi) only two Hindu party members stayed on in Pakistan – Sobho Gianchandani and Pohnu Mal. With the separation of Karachi from the Sindh province, Sobho confined his attention exclusively to Sindh. After a short period, Pohnu Mal retired from political activity. As there was hardly any Sindhi Muslim party member in Karachi the unit had to be created from scratch. It became Hasan Nasir's responsibility to create this unit.

I have already mentioned that I arrived in Karachi in December 1947 or January 1948. Sometime in 1948, as I was walking along Bunder Road I saw the party's red flag hanging out of the window of a first floor flat. I went up to the party's office and introduced myself to a comrade by the name of Hangal who seemed to be in charge of the office. I asked if I could do some work for the party. He gave me the task of taking clippings from various English language newspapers and pasting them on various folders according to the subject matter of the reports. I performed that task for a couple of months.

Now, Hangal (a Hindu comrade) migrated to India. And Sobho Gianchandani, a member of the Sindh provincial committee, who used to visit the office now and then, disappeared. He was either in the 'interior' of Sindh or in jail. In the same way, Sharaf Ali, who had recently migrated from India and who used to visit the office, disappeared. He was probably in jail. The office was now deserted except for a 'Malabari' comrade, a 'bidi' (a hand-made cigarette made from the leaf of a plant) worker who acted as a kind of caretaker. I visited him frequently.

That was the extent of my contact with the party when Hasan Nasir visited me. He must have thought that I was completely safe. Within a couple of months I was member of the Karachi district committee.

The membership of the Karachi unit was drawn almost entirely from members of the muhajir community who had been exposed to the independence movement and, more importantly, to Left politics before Partition. This is what distinguished the Karachi unit from all the other communist party units in West Pakistan. (I am drawing here on an essay I wrote on the occasion of the

celebration of the life of Mohammed Sarwar, a prominent student leader in the early 1950s in Karachi during 2009. The essay was entitled 'Karachi communists in the 1950s - a contribution to the Sarwar Reference'. It is available

on <https://www.scribd.com/.../Was-Marx-a-100-Materialist-and-Oth...>. It is also available on my website [ericrahim.co.uk](http://ericrahim.co.uk)

The Karachi party's main work was focused on the student front. This was primarily the case because the bulk of the party membership came from the student community. As member of the Karachi district committee I was 'in charge' of this front, and was the communication channel between the student cells and the district committee.

The student movement was initiated in the Dow Medical College. There was a 'mature' political group of students there including Mohammed Sarwar, Mir Ali Ahmed Hashemi, Mohammed Ghalib Lodhi, Ayub Mirza and Yusaf Ali. The Democratic Student Federation was formed there, and it was then extended to other educational institutions such as SM College and Urdu College. The names of SM Naseem and Jamal Naqvi immediately come to mind. A student journal, the Students Herald was launched, edited by SM Naseem. A school student wing of DSF was launched. The school students who played a leading part in the formation of this wing included Mohammed Shafi, Saghir Ahmed and Barkat Alam.

During this period (1949/50), the party also promoted the formation of the Pakistan-Soviet Cultural Association (I was its secretary and the link with the Soviet embassy), and a little later, the Pakistan-China Friendship Society. Also established was a Film Society whose aim was to show films from socialist countries. The aim of all these activities - lectures, exhibitions and film shows - was to bring to the attention of the Karachi public the economic and cultural progress that was being made in the socialist countries. Party members were also active in the Progressive Writers Association. And party members and sympathisers gave what support they could in the formation of the Karachi Union of Journalists and the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists. These were established on the initiative of independent-minded journalists, MA Shakoor, an assistant editor of Dawn, and Asrar Ahmed, correspondent of the American news agency Associated Press. (I was elected assistant general secretary of the Federal Union. The editor of Dawn considered the setting up of these unions a subversive act. Shakoor, and Mohammed Akhtar, the sports editor, were among those arrested in the swoop of 1954. By this time I had left Dawn.)

The party's main shortcoming lay in its ability to establish roots in the working class. Before Partition, Karachi had very little modern industry, though being a port city it had a significant degree of commercial activity. There was a flourishing Karachi Port workers union, there was a significant amount of work among the railway and tram workers, and so on. Some of the contacts with these workers were lost with the departure of Hindu party members and workers. The party was able to establish a strong union among the employees of the newly formed Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) which was led by party members Tufail Abbas and Iqbal Alavi. Party members were also active in the textile mills that were being established during the 1950s. Many of the workers in these mills were coming from the tribal areas of the North West of Pakistan. (I remember Hasan Nasir once telling me with some amusement that these tribal workers took the view that a union should be established to deal with a specific problem, and once the problem was solved it should be disbanded. At least initially, they did not like the notion of a permanent organisation.)

The student movement flourished in the period 1949-54. During 1953, the DSF presented certain demands to the educational authorities. Some of these demands could have been met easily while others would have required longer term solutions. The authorities mishandled the situation completely. They refused to meet a DSF delegation, and treated the demands with contempt. (The Karachi University vice-Chancellor, in fact, tried to set up a parallel, stooge student body.) The students took out a procession. Even though the demonstration was completely peaceful, the police lathi-charged the students. The following day there were further demonstrations. Members of the public joined in. And then the goonda (hooligan) elements joined the fray. Shops were looted, liquor

stores being the first victims. The federal minister of the interior, Gurmani, who happened to be driving in the area (Saddar) had his car stopped and torched by the goonda elements. (As a bystander, I witnessed the scene.) The police fired and several people were killed. Things got completely out of the control of the students, and any further demonstrations had to be cancelled. Naturally, this was big news in the country. Questions were asked in the constituent assembly (which was also the parliament). After these events a delegation of DSF toured the country and the All Pakistan Student Organisation (APSO) was formed. This was the high point of the student movement, and also of the Karachi district party.

The first major assault on the party came in 1951. This was related to the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. Led by Major General Akbar Khan, a number of army officers discussed the possibility of a coup and the overthrow of the government of Liaquat Ali Khan. Sometime in 1950 or early 1951, some of these officers approached the Communist Party and suggested that the party support the coup. I think the consensus among the party leaders was to advise against the coup, but Sajjad Zaheer, the general secretary, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the chief editor of The Pakistan Times and Imroze (who was formally never a party member) and Mohammed Husain Ata, a member of the central committee, attended a meeting of the army officers in Rawalpindi (the army HQ) towards the end of February or early March (1951). News of the meeting was leaked to the intelligence services. All those who attended the meeting were arrested, as were a number of party leaders and activists. The structure of the party was seriously damaged. (A special tribunal was set up to try the conspirators and the verdict was delivered in January 1953. All except Naseem Akbar, the wife of General Akbar (described by The Times of India as the Lady Macbeth of the conspiracy case) who was present at the crucial meeting, were sentenced to various prison terms. Sajjad Zaheer was released in 1955 and went back to India by an arrangement between the governments of Pakistan and India. The Indian Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru personally intervened to give Sajjad Zaheer Indian citizenship. (This is confirmed by Noor Zaheer, Sajjad Zaheer's daughter, an Indian national, with whom I am in contact.) Firozuddin Mansoor became the party's general secretary.

Hassan Nasir (secretary of the Karachi district committee) was arrested in 1952 (this is the year he mentions in his letter dated 14 October 1960 to his mother from the Lahore Fort, a prison where dangerous prisoners were kept for 'intensive' interrogation. (According to my recollection he was arrested sometime in 1953; I think he was a free man at the time of the students' movement of 1953.) Until then he had been able to evade the CID (Criminal Investigation Department) for they had no idea what he looked like. He had been underground since his arrival in Karachi. Nasir's arrest was a big blow to the Karachi unit.

In early June 1954, most of the members of the Karachi unit were arrested, myself included. (Some of the arrested were quite innocent of any party or even political affiliation.). The arrests were made under the 'safety laws' which gave government powers to keep anyone in indefinite 'preventive' detention. Those arrested included students (most of the leading figures in the 1953 student movement), writers, journalists, and trade unionists. They were given charge sheets with ridiculous charges, such as espionage for India and the Soviet Union. One was accused of being a 'Fabian communist'. I was accused of spying for India and the Soviet Union.

Life in Karachi jail was not unduly unpleasant. We were treated as 'political prisoners', kept together in barrack-like accommodation, separate from the 'ordinary criminals'. Food rations were adequate, though it was widely believed that the prison officials were taking their cut. We were allowed to cook our own food, with the help of an 'ordinary criminal' who was assigned to us as an assistant. Newspapers, including one from India (The Times of India) were allowed in. Friends and relatives outside kept up a regular supply of books - books that were available to them. A particular mention should be made of Sarwar and Akhtar's father who was indefatigable in this respect. There was of course a degree of censorship on the material that was allowed in. Books with names of Marx, Engels, Lenin, etc., and with references to Marxism, communism, or published in Moscow were disallowed. Books with titles such as 'introduction to dialectical materialism' and published in London were considered harmless. (Naturally, we read what was available to us. Among other works

I read were all the volumes of Winston Churchill's war memoirs and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.)

In due course, friendly lawyers started making habeas corpus petitions on behalf of individuals, and individuals started to be released on the orders of the Sind High Court. The release process took time. I was released after eleven months of incarceration.

Two major events formed the background to the 1954 arrests in Karachi and elsewhere and a formal ban on the Communist Party throughout Pakistan.

The central government had decided to hold elections in East Pakistan which were held in March 1954. Contrary to their expectations, the Muslim League, the ruling party (at least in name) was annihilated. The United Front, led by the staunchly nationalist Awami League, swept the polls. The United Front which demanded greater provincial autonomy, recognition of the Bengali language, with Urdu, as a national language, and a greater share in the running of the country, formed the government. Within a period of two months the provincial government that enjoyed almost universal support was dismissed by the central government on the pretext of threat to law and order. Iskandar Mirza, who had long been secretary of the Ministry of Defence and who had manoeuvred himself into the ruling junta, was sent as governor with complete power to rule the province. The widespread arrests (and ban on the party) immediately followed this event.

The second event that formed the background to the arrests was the formal decision by the government of Pakistan to enter into a military alliance with the United States. Right from the day that Pakistan came into existence its leadership had decided that given the hostility with India it needed an alliance with a powerful country to provide it with security against its more powerful neighbour. In May 1954, Pakistan and the United States signed the Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement. By widespread arrests of communists and the ban on the Communist Party, the government established its anti-communist credentials with the United States.

Although by the middle of 1955 most of those arrested in 1954 had been released, the Karachi party did not achieve the kind of vitality it had enjoyed during 1953-54. (My memory fails me at this point for I cannot recall if by this time Hasan Nasir had also been released. He was in Lahore Fort, not in Karachi jail.) The generation of students who had played a leading role in the student movement completed their studies and left colleges and universities. (Many of them would go on to make significant contributions to social life in Pakistan, but not to politics.) Student activity therefore significantly declined. (On this, see my essay 'Karachi communists in the 1950s' referred to earlier.) The work of the Pakistan-Soviet Cultural Association and the Pakistan-China Friendship Society continued in a modest way (with increased CID harassment), as did trade union activity. But the tempo of the earlier period was gone.

This raises the issue regarding the failure of the party not just in Karachi but throughout West Pakistan to recover and develop. Why was police repression so successful? What were the subjective (leadership) and objective factors responsible for this lack of development? It is difficult to separate these two sets of factors, and I focus on the objective factor.

First, the territories that constituted West Pakistan (where political power lay) were largely tribal in character (Balochistan and parts of the NWFP) or feudal (large parts of Punjab and Sindh). I do not think that there were any parts of the sub-continent that were as feudal in character as these. Social power therefore in the countryside lay with the feudal and tribal leaders.

Second, these regions had experienced very modest degree of industrialisation. And much of the business life was dominated by the Hindus, who migrated to India at the time of Partition. So we had very little of the bourgeoisie and therefore very little of the industrial working class.

Third, the Muslim population of this region had had very little exposure to the independence movement (which was also a democratising process). The Muslim League, where it existed, had only a flimsy organisation. The feudal landowners were generally content with the Raj. In Punjab, politics was dominated by the Unionist Party (appealing mainly to the agricultural interest) which was staunchly pro-British. The big landowners fell into line with the demand for Pakistan only in 1946 when the realisation of Pakistan became a distinct possibility. The economic and social conditions in

Sindh, Balochistan and the NWFP were even more backward.

My conclusion is that the upsurge of the 1950s, where it occurred, failed to sustain itself in face of repression because the economic and social soil on which it operated was so infertile.

From what I have said it should be clear that when Pakistan came into existence there was no social class that had the capacity to run the state. There was a power vacuum that was naturally filled by bureaucrats such as Ghulam Mohammed, Chaudhry Mohammed Ali, Iskandar Mirza and others, and the army.

I enjoyed my work for The Pakistan Times, reporting from the federal capital. A large part of the work centred on the proceedings of the constituent assembly. Looking back during this period two episodes (perhaps, one episode and one non-episode) come to mind.

First, I was able to interview Miss Fatima Jinnah, the sister of Mr Jinnah. I think this was the only time she agreed to be interviewed by a journalist. She was 17 years younger than Jinnah, and she was his constant companion. (Jinnah's wife died in 1929, and he never re-married.) The understanding was that the interview would only be about her memories of her brother. She reminisced movingly about her childhood and her relationship with her brother. Then at one point I asked her what kind of books the Quaid-e-Azam (the great leader, as he was called in Pakistan) read. She replied that the only works he read were law books, what he needed for his legal work, and official reports. I was taken aback, and insisted. What books other than those pertaining to law did he have in his library? None, she replied. And seeing the expression on my face, she remarked (or something to the effect) that he thought reading books affected one's original thinking. The article was published in The Pakistan Times.

The second episode (or non-episode) refers to scoop of the decade that never was. I have noted that in the 1954 election the ruling party was annihilated. The provincial government (dismissed within two months) that was formed was headed by A.K. Fazlul Huq, 80-year old leader of the Krishak Sramik Party, a relatively small component of the United Front.

Fazlul Huq was not the right person for the job, he lacked judgment. He was given to making contradictory statements. I remember him once talking to a group of journalists when someone pointed to his proneness to making contradictory statements. He responded by saying that his followers did not read newspapers.

During the period of his chief ministership, on his way from Karachi (where he was on an official visit) to Dhaka he stopped in Calcutta and made certain statements which were interpreted by some (The New York Times) as demanding independence for East Pakistan and by others as suggesting merger of the province with India. At this time there were also riots in certain jute mills in East Pakistan which resulted in large scale killing. The ruling circles were using all this material to construct a case against the United Front – a case based on the breakdown of law and order and a threat to the integrity of the Pakistani state. This was known to me, and many others.

To turn to the other side of the story: Through the Party's work for the release of the conspiracy case prisoners I had come into contact with Naseem Akbar. We had a common cause though from different sides – we were interested in the release of our people, and she in the release of her husband. Through this activity I had established a friendly relationship with Naseem Akbar, and through her with her mother, Begum Shah Nawaz, a respected member of the Muslim League parliamentary party. She had become a good source.

One day I happened to be in their house in Bath Island when Begum Shah Nawaz returned from a meeting of a selected number of members of the Muslim League parliamentary party who, I had learned, were to be briefed on the East Pakistan political situation. Begum Shah Nawaz appeared very depressed. I asked her if she and others had been briefed on the situation in East Pakistan. She did not reply. When I asked her point blank if 'they' were going to dismiss the provincial government, without replying she walked out the room. I was convinced that that was what was going to happen.

I went to my office and wrote a report predicting the dismissal of the East Pakistan government by the central government. The report included a detailed discussion of the possible consequences of

this momentous decision. The editor got cold feet and decided not to publish it. (The decision to dismiss the United Front government would turn out to be an important milestone on the road to the break-up of Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh in 1971.)

In 1956, I went to Dhaka to report on the special session of the constituent assembly at which the new constitution would be adopted. The new assembly reflected the changed political situation in East Pakistan, and the ruling junta in West Pakistan had reached an accommodation with the Awami League (the United Front had by now split). HS Suhrawardy, the leader of the Awami League, was now prime minister. (Suhrawardy was staunchly right-wing and equally staunchly pro-West. But he was completely secular in his outlook.)

In West Pakistan, the ruling junta had broken with the Muslim League and had created a new party, the Republican Party. This it had done in order to completely abolish provincial autonomy in West Pakistan (to which some of the League leaders were opposed), and create one administrative unit for the western wing of the country called One Unit. The idea underlying the new arrangement was to create a 'balance' with East Pakistan – West Pakistan would now confront East Pakistan as one united entity rather than as four separate units – Punjab, Sindh, the NWFP and Balochistan. There would be 'parity' of representation of the two units in Parliament, an arrangement to which Awami League had agreed. (East Pakistan had a larger population than the West.)

I remember the speech Suhrawardy made on the adoption of the constitution, particularly that part that dealt with the issue of separate/joint electorates. I thought at the time that it was the best speech (specially the part dealing with the issue of electorates) I had heard during my years attending the proceedings of the constituent assembly. He was defending the principle of joint (as opposed to separate) electorate. It was finally decided that the choice of the system of electorates would be left to each wing. East Pakistan chose joint electorate, West Pakistan, separate electorate. A day or two after Suhrawardy's speech I was having breakfast with Mian Mumtaz Daultana in Dhaka's poshest hotel. (Mian Iftikharuddin had booked me there.) Daultana, a graduate of Cambridge University, a big feudal landowner, was member of the constituent assembly, and at one time had been chief minister of Punjab. After a good, long discussion of the issue of separate/joint electorates, he said something like this: 'Of course, you have two good reasons for supporting joint electorates.' I knew exactly what he meant. First, I was a communist, second, I was a non-Muslim (Christian). On both counts I had no affiliation with Pakistan's (Muslim) ideology. It did not occur to him that East Pakistan had also rejected the system of separate electorates. Or, perhaps he did realise that they had also rejected what he thought was Pakistan's Muslim ideology.

The origin of the separate electorates system goes back to the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the British government had established a uniform system of administration throughout India. In due course the issue of some form of Indian participation in the administration (at local level with a limited franchise) arose. Muslim leaders argued that as the Hindus formed a numerically much larger community, Muslims would always be under-represented in elected institutions relatively to their number. The issue was important because, it was argued, that the Muslims were not only a minority community, but also they were in a weaker position in business and industry, professions and education. Therefore, in order to safeguard their interests (a) the number of seats in elected bodies be allocated to each community according to the numerical size of the community, and (b) that constituencies be determined on the basis of religion so that there would be Muslim constituencies in which only Muslims could vote, and similarly for the Hindus. This principle – the system of separate electorates – was accepted, and then also extended to the Christian community. After the creation of Pakistan, Muslims were in overwhelming majority; in West Pakistan minority communities formed no more than two – if that – percent of the population. Muslims now needed no safeguards.

However, the principle of separate electorates was more than just about safeguards. It was an institution signifying the separateness of the Muslim community from all other communities. It was

an ideology. It was Islam that provided the bond of a shared national identity to diverse ethnic communities that now formed Pakistan. This is the standpoint that Daultana and other Muslim League leaders from West Pakistan espoused. As noted, the people of East Pakistan did not share this standpoint.

It was at this time that the decision to form the National Awami (People's) Party (NAP) was taken. (Mian Iftikharuddin kept me informed of the progress of the discussions, and I reported on the final decision in The Pakistan Times.) The new party was to be formed through the merger of certain existing opposition parties and groups. Maulana Bhashani, a prominent leader of the Awami League (East Pakistan), an anti-imperialist and a staunch advocate of radical economic and social reforms had broken away from his party which was now part of the government led by Prime Minister Suhrawardy. He had a strong popular and religious appeal. (Mian Iftikharuddin once jokingly asked me if I thought Bhashani was such a man of God as he pretended to be and as his followers believed.) Equally radical was Mian Iftikharuddin's Azad Pakistan Party (APP), also staunchly anti-imperialist and advocating radical economic and social reforms. APP was largely operating in Punjab and Karachi, while, at this time, Bhashani's following was confined to East Pakistan. These two were the genuinely Left groupings.

Then there were, what we may call, nationalist groupings. These were Abdul Ghaffar Khan's Khudai Khidmatgars (God's Servants) based entirely in the North West Frontier Province, Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai's Wrore Pakhtun (Pakhtun Brotherhood) confined to Balochistan and closely aligned with Ghaffar Khan, and GM Syed's Sindhi Mahaz (Front) based in Sindh. (GM Syed was president of the Pakistan-Soviet Cultural Association, and as secretary of the Association I came to know him on friendly terms.) The principal concern of these three parties was provincial autonomy; they wanted above all destruction of One Unit and a loose federal structure in which the provinces would enjoy large measure of autonomy. Their concern with economic and social reforms (e.g. radical land reforms) in their province was minimal. They could not by any measure be considered as parties of the Left.

The common ground between these nationalist parties on the one hand and Maulana Bhashani and Mian Iftikharuddin on the other consisted of secular politics (none of them subscribed to the kind of Islamic ideology to which the Muslim League adhered), a genuinely federal system, and their agreement on a non-aligned foreign policy, the kind India had adopted.

Because of their different perspectives on question relating to economic and social reforms and the narrow nationalism of the three nationalist parties, the new formed party, the National Awami Party, was never able to achieve the kind of internal coherence that was needed for its development. With the martial law in 1958, like all other parties it was banned. After the ban was lifted the party broke up in different factions. Even in East Pakistan the party was split into the Bhashani and anti-Bhashani factions.

While in Dhaka, I was able to see the leaders of the East Pakistan Communist Party (which despite the ban and repressive measures adopted against it had remained intact). Sardar Fazlul Karim, a communist member of the new constituent assembly, with whom I had become friendly, had arranged the meeting. I faced four leaders, as if I was being interviewed. They made me talk most of the time, asking questions about the situation of the party in West Pakistan, about the political situation generally, and about individual leaders of various parties in the Western wing. I asked them about the Awami League as part of the central government. They did not think the 'honeymoon' with the ruling junta would last long. As it turned out, Suhrawardy was out in a year's time. After the meeting Sardar Fazlul Karim told me that all the four leaders I had met were members of the politburo. I felt greatly honoured.

Sometime in the beginning of 1957 I decided to move to Lahore. Party (now underground) activity in Karachi was at a low ebb. Also, I felt that I needed change in my professional work. The editor agreed to my transfer to Lahore.

The party activity in Punjab was even more depressing than what it was in Karachi. In fact, the party in Punjab had ceased to exist – there was hardly any activity. The members of the old central committee (who were based in Lahore) were engaged in other activities. Eric Cyprian was teaching full time in a college. (He had a degree in English from Oxford University, and before becoming a whole-timer in 1945 or 1946 he was a lecturer in Forman Christian College.) Mohammed Afzal had departed for London where he was doing chartered accountancy. Sibte Hasan was working full time as editor of the newly-launched (by Progressive Papers Ltd.) Lail-o-Nihar. Chaudhri Aslam was in full time legal practice. Firozuddin Mansoor was in poor health. The only exception was Mirza Ibrahim. He continued his work in the railwaymen's union which could function openly.

I had been transferred to Lahore but no decision had been taken as to the nature of my duties. On my own initiative I wrote some articles. (I remember writing one on the famous Lahore Museum and noting that in order not to offend the sensitivities of visitors, the director had covered the nudity of some female exhibits with pieces of cloth.) I suggested to the editor that the newspaper create a new position, that of a roving correspondent. He or she would visit neglected, relatively backward parts of Punjab (and eventually of the country as a whole) to highlight the economic and social problems facing the people in relatively deprived areas. To establish the feasibility of the idea I went to Shakargar, in Sialkot district, and wrote an article with the title 'The God-Forsaken Shakargar'. (The place was suggested by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who was born and brought up in that area. Although Faiz was the chief editor, he did not interfere in appointments, etc.) The editor did not like the idea of a roving correspondent; instead, he gave me the position of a senior sub-editor.

I was reasonably content in my new position for about ten months. But then I began to feel restless. I was now approaching the age of 30 years. Was I going to spend the rest of my life in the newsroom sub-editing? I decided to study economics in the hope that I would become a columnist specialising in economic issues. I discussed the idea with the editor who agreed, and suggested a leave of absence of two to three years.

I decided to go to London to study economics. I do not recall why I did not choose to do my studies in Punjab University (Lahore). An old friend, Dr. Abbas, was head of the economics department there. He had been a party member in Karachi, had gone to Holland and obtained a Ph.D. in economics. Perhaps I needed a complete change of scenery.

I wrote to a friend who was studying at the London School of Economics (LSE). As noted earlier, SM Naseem had been an activist in the student movement of 1953, and was the editor of the Students Herald. After doing his MA in economics from Karachi University he had gone to London to obtain a masters degree in statistics. He advised me to apply not only for admission to LSE but also to University College London, which also had an economics department. This turned out to be an excellent advice. I was not accepted at the LSE, but University College offered me a place. This was for the session beginning in September 1958. All that I needed now was a passport.

I made an application at the Lahore Passport Office. When after about a fortnight I returned to the office to collect my passport, I was told that I needed a 'clearance' from the Punjab C. I. D. (Criminal Investigation Department). I knew this was going to be a tricky business, there was no point my going to the CID office and requesting the 'clearance'.

I spoke to an old friend from my college days who had joined the police force and risen to the position of inspector. He had then resigned, studied law and became a lawyer. He was still in contact with his former boss, a deputy inspector general, now retired. My friend explained the problem to his old boss, who was sympathetic. He gave my friend his visiting card and advised that I see the superintendent of CID and give him his card. That is what I did. The superintendent asked me about my relationship with the retired DIG, who had also been his boss. I told him the truth. He told me that I would get the 'clearance'. It could take a couple of weeks.

I returned to the passport office after two weeks, and was told that I needed another 'clearance', this from the Central Intelligence Bureau, Pakistan's FBI. This was going to be trickier than getting the clearance from Punjab.

And so I travelled to Karachi. I renewed contact with my old journalist colleagues, and sought



someone who had access to Mian Anwar Ali, the director of the Intelligence Bureau (Pakistan's Edgar J. Hoover). After much exploration someone suggested that as Nawab Qizilbash was a good friend of Mian Anwar Ali he might be able to help. Qizilbash was a Punjabi grandee, a feudal lord, former Punjab Minister and close to the ruling circles. (Although Qizilbash himself did not drink he had a well-stocked bar in his Lahore mansion for visitors.)

I knew Qizilbash as a journalist, but not too well. Fortunately, it turned out that a friend of mine happened to know him much better. Asrar Ahmed (he represented the American news agency, the Associated Press in Karachi, and was one of the founders of the Karachi Union of Journalists) and I made an appointment with Qizilbash, and explained the reason for our visit. He was sympathetic and called Mian Anwar Ali on the phone. After some pleasantries he came to the point. Mian Anwar Ali was telling Qizilbash that Eric Rahim was a dangerous man, and Qizilbash was saying that it was all the more reason that he should be allowed to get out of the country, perhaps for good. Eventually, Mian Anwar Ali relented. I could collect my passport from the Foreign Office in about ten days. We were already into October (1958). The academic session in University College would already have started. I would take me at least another three weeks to get to London. I had missed the session. I sent a telegram to the admissions office of University College saying that because of the problems in obtaining the passport I would not be able to make it.

But I was going to collect my passport anyway. After about ten days of the meeting with Qizilbash I went to the Foreign Office. There I was told that my passport was ready for collection. It was a restricted passport, valid only for four countries and for three years, and that it could not be renewed without reference to the Foreign Office. What is more, it was conditional on my making a signed declaration that while abroad I would not engage in any political activities. I refused to sign the declaration and returned to Lahore without the passport.

Back in Lahore I consulted my friend Major Mohammed Ishaq, a former Rawalpindi 'conspirator', now a communist and practising at the Lahore High Court. Would it be feasible to make an application to the Lahore High Court asking whether the government had the right to deny me an unrestricted passport for the legitimate purpose of studying abroad, and to demand an undertaking that while abroad I should not participate in any legitimate political activity?

We decided to meet in his chambers near the Mall Road to discuss the issue. It was the 7<sup>th</sup> of October (1958). As I was getting ready to leave the house for my meeting with Major Ishaq my younger rushed in to inform me that he had heard it on the BBC that President Iskander Mirza had declared martial law in the country and that General Ayub Khan, commander-in-chief of the army, was to be the martial law administrator.

I saw Major Ishaq and we both agreed that the best thing I could do was to try to leave the country as soon as possible. (Major Ishaq was arrested soon afterwards.) I sent a telegram to University College informing them that I had succeeded in obtaining the passport and inquiring if there was still a place for me on the course. Within a day I received a telegram back with a welcoming response.

I travelled to my village to bid farewell to my parents, and then to Karachi. I went to the Foreign Office, signed the declaration they had demanded and received the passport. In the first week of November - I remember it was Guy Fawkes night - I was in London. My friends SM Naseem and MA Shakoor were at Victoria Terminal to receive me. It was the beginning of a new life.

#### FOOTNOTE

During my short stay in Karachi preparing to leave for London I was contacted by Abbas Khalili, secretary of the Ministry of Industries. I knew Khalili quite well in my capacity as a journalist. But more importantly I knew him at a social level as a close friend of mine, Jaffer Naqvi, was engaged to be married to one of his nieces. He knew he could trust me. He gave me a letter for his wife who lived in London. At this time he did not wish to communicate with her through the normal channels. The reason for this was that Iskander Mirza, who had as president of the country declared martial law and made Ayub Khan as the martial law administrator had been booted out by Ayub Khan. As Mirza belonged to the Shia sect of Islam there was a great deal of nervousness among the top

bureaucrats who belonged to the same sect. Khalili was a Shia too.

Immediately after arriving in London I phoned Mrs Khalili to inform her that I had a letter for her from her husband and that I would come to her house to deliver it as soon as my registration at University College had been completed. I was already five weeks late. She was very anxious about her husband and she wanted the letter immediately. She would come and see me the same day to collect the letter. That is what she did, and invited me to her house in Putney.

On the appointed day I arrived at her house and was welcomed warmly. There were about four other guests. As I was chatting to one of them I noted a new arrival. Guess who? Iskandar Mirza. This man had been the joint defence secretary in the last days of British India, the first secretary of defence after the creation of Pakistan, a position in which he had wielded enormous power, he had been governor of East Pakistan, then governor general, and finally president of the country under the 1956 constitution. Here he was at the beginning of his exile in London. He looked smaller than what I had thought. He looked at me and nodded in recognition - he knew me by face in my capacity as a journalist. I nodded back. I wondered if I should go and speak to him. But what could I say? 'How are you Mr Mirza today?' No, I did not speak to him. Later, as I was leaving I went up to him and said goodbye and shook his hand. But I did not say 'good luck, Mr Mirza'.

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## **Eric Rahim**

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## **P.S.**

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