

The Political Career, Contributions, and Unresolved Assassination of Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao at the University of Peshawar

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Abstract: *In the decade of 70's the law-and-order situation became worst in Pakistan in general and in NWFP (Now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) in particular, especially the political violence greatly increased in which number of prominent political leaders and workers lost their lives. The situation reached to the extent that educational institution was used for such political assassination. Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao the ex-governor and member of federal cabinet was one of the victims of the political violence of that era. On one hand his political murder not only initiated legal and political disputes between the then prominent political parties like Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and National Awami Party (NAP) which continued till the end of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's era during which NAP was banned and NAP leaders were mentally and physically tortured. On the other hand, his murder created an environment of unrest in institutions of higher studies. The lack of research on political murder in educational institutions like the University of Peshawar is a crucial oversight. Its implications on the academic atmosphere of the university in particular and its impacts on Pakistan's politics in general must be analyzed. This study attempts to highlight the life, political career, and services of Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao as governor of NWFP and his merciless assassination at the University of Peshawar in the hope that such sad incidents will be taken seriously by the state and law enforcement agencies and the state will try to stop the use of educational institutions for such atrocities, especially for the political murders.*

Keywords: *University of Peshawar, Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, National Awami Party, Pakistan People's Party, Daily Mashriq (Newspaper)*

Introduction

The first political assassination in Pakistan occurred on October 16, 1951, when the country's first Prime Minister, Khan Liaqat Ali Khan, was killed at Company Bagh (later renamed Liaqat Bagh) in Rawalpindi. Since that tragic event, Pakistan has experienced several similar incidents. The 1970s, in particular, saw a surge in political violence, leading to the deaths of several prominent figures as rising tensions fueled severe law and order issues. In this turbulent period, Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao, a senior minister in the Pakistan People's Party and a close ally of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, was tragically assassinated at the University of Peshawar on February 8, 1975.

Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao was one of the eminent political figures of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He served at important posts and rendered valuable services for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province and the people of Pakistan when he was a member of the federal cabinet during the era of Mr. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.

Research has been done on this era of political violence in Pakistan from different perspectives but no attempt has been made to highlight why educational institutions were used for such political assassinations? The objective of this study is to highlight the life, political services, and achievements of Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao during his governorship of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and then to discuss his assassination at the University of Peshawar in which some students and staff members also received serious injuries and some died after few days.

Early life of Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao

Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao was one of the prominent political figures belonging to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. He was born on 1st February 1938. He was the son of a famous Muslim League leader who belonged to Charsadda named Ghulam Haider Khan. From his childhood Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao was inclined to politics, that's why from his teens he started participating in political activities in his village and very soon became popular in the political circles of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao started politics during his student life when he was studying at Islamia College, Peshawar, he also remained a member of the Khyber Union and Sarhad Muslim Students Federation and showed the natural qualities of a leader¹.

Political Career

Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao started his political career from a local body's election and contested the election as an independent candidate, he was elected unopposed. In 1961 Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao joined the Council of Muslim League as he followed his elder brother Dost Muhammad Khan (who served as the youngest MLA from NWFP). Soon he became very popular in the party. In 1963 he was elected as joint secretary of the Council Muslim League. In 1964-65 Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao also fully supported Miss Fatima Jinnah during the presidential election against Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan.² In 1967 he joined the newly formed political party Pakistan People's Party founded by Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (at that time he was serving as senior vice president of the Muslim League in NWFP). Actually, on 30th November 1967 Pakistan People's Party was founded in Lahore by Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, four hundred delegates went to Lahore to participate in that ceremony and to pay allegiance to the new leader. Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao also participated in that ceremony and thus became a close associate of Mr. Bhutto³.

The first convention of PPP was held at Lahore in November 1967. Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao was nominated as convener of PPP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as Mr. Bhutto found the qualities of a leader in Hayat Sherpao's personality, that's why he was assigned the entire responsibility of organizing the infant PPP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On 1st December 1967, he was made the president of PPP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. PPP very soon flourished in Pakistan. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to the sincere efforts of Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao and at the national level due to the struggle of Mr. Bhutto⁴.

On 3rd November 1968 PPP's party convention was held at Sherpao, Charsadda, the convention was attended by a large number people including PPP workers and party leaders, Mr. Bhutto also attended the convention and delivered a historic speech to the workers as well⁵.

Life in Prison

During the agitation against General Muhammad Ayub Khan in 1968, Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao

¹ Muhammad Shafi Sabir, *Shakhsyat-i Sarhad* (Peshawar: University Book Agency, n.d), p.880.

² Iqbal Awan, *Hayat Shaheed* (Karachi: Q.A Publications, 1990), p. 39.

³ <http://www.nation.com.pk/15-Jun-2016/hayat-sherpao-of-kpk>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Chakar Ali Junejo, *Zulfikar Ali Bhutto* (Islamabad: Asad Printers, 1996), pp. 97-98.

took an active part in it as Mr. Bhutto started this agitation. When some political Leaders advised Hayat Sherpao to keep himself aloof from this agitation, Sherpao stated “I feel joy while struggling in the interest of the people whatever the result may be. It is not a divine law that dictatorship would survive forever... Days of the palace politics have gone. It is now the age of street politics”⁶.

After the sad event of firing on students of Government Polytechnic Institute Nowshera and Government College Nowshera at Rawalpindi during the protest gathering there that resulted in the assassination of a student, Hayat Muhammad Sherpao was arrested along with other eminent leaders of PPP including Mr. Bhutto under the Defence of Pakistan Rules. At first, Mr. Bhutto was kept in Peshawar Jail and then was sent to Bahawalpur Prison where he remained till February 1969⁷.

General Muhammad Ayub Khan decided to step down as protest against him reached its peak in March 1969, although in February 1969 General Muhammad Ayub Khan held a Round Table Conference with the opposition leaders but this conference resulted in failure. General Muhammad Ayub Khan handed over the administration of the country to General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan the then Chief of Army Staff.⁸

In December 1970 general elections were held in Pakistan. PPP contested the election based on “Roti, Kapra and Makan” and Awami League raised the slogan of “Six Points”. Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao contested the election from two constituencies, NA-1 and PF-1 facing Arbab Sikandar Khan Khalil (NAP) and Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan (Muslim League) respectively. Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao defeated Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan on the constituency NA-1, he got 24,797 votes while Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan got 22,922 votes⁹.

Contribution of Hayat Sherpao as the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

After the elections PPP formed its government in West Pakistan. Mr. Bhutto appointed Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao as the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he took the oath of governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 25th December 1971. He mainly focused on the backward and far-flung ignored areas of the province. Despite the fact that the province was facing a financial crisis he initiated a series of developmental projects in those areas¹⁰.

- **Solved Land Owners-Peasants Dispute:** The flood of ejection greatly harassed the peasants, Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao as a governor devised a tripartite system in which the land owners, peasants and the administration became the parties to stop the series of ejections. For the first time in the history of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, peasants were allowed to hold talks with the land owners on equal footing, but soon he was removed from the governorship and was included in the federal cabinet. This dispute again started and again a large-scale ejection campaign was launched. When Hayat Sherpao became a member of the provincial cabinet, he arranged a meeting of the two parties and successfully solved the dispute¹¹.
- **Solved problems of the Labour Class:** When Hayat Sherpao took the office of the governor, there was unrest in the labor class of the province, as the majority of them had been terminated from their jobs in the past and now they were struggling for their reinstatement. Hayat Sherpao removed the major disputes between owners of the mills and the labours working in different factories. The cases of the terminated labours were sent for the reinstatement to the Provincial

⁶ Muhammad Asif Qayyum, *Jawan Marg* (Lahore: Frontier Post Publication, 1995), p. 48.

⁷ Hassan Askari, Tahir Zaidi, *Hayat Sherpao Shaheed* (Karachi: Production Monitor, 1975), p. 14.

⁸ Professor Ghafoor Ahmad. *Phir Martial Law Aagya* (Lahore: Jung Publisher, 1990), p. 16.

⁹ *Mashriq* (Daily), Peshawar, 18th December 1970.

¹⁰ *Mashriq* (Daily), Peshawar, 5th June 1974.

¹¹ Ibid.

- **Reforms in Education:** Hayat Sherpao took keen interest to solve the problems of the student community. On 11th March 1972, he chaired the student convention of the office bearers of the college Unions held in Peshawar. During his address to the convention Sherpao mentioned the federal grant of two lac rupees to be spent on the development of colleges and to meet the needs of the students.¹³ He also issued orders to up-grade some educational institutions. The prominent were Government Higher Secondary School Wana, South Waziristan, Government Higher Secondary School Saidu Sharif, Swat to be up-graded to inter colleges and Government Inter College Peshawar, Government Inter College Tank, Government Inter College Mansehra, Government Inter College Haripur for Boys, Government Inter College Haripur for Girls, Government Inter College Lakki Marwar, Government Inter College Miran Shah, North Waziristan and Government Inter College Temergarah to be upgraded to the Degree Colleges and Government Degree College Mardan to the Post Graduate College.¹⁴

He also launched developmental projects in various schools and colleges of the province like the construction of a new building for Government College Abbottabad, new hostel and a mosque in Government College Peshawar, A hall and four walls of Government College Nowshera, Khushal Memorial Hostel in Islamia College Peshawar, new hostel at Government College Bannu, repaired old hostel of the college and a new building for Government College Charsadda, One hall and boundary wall for Government College Dera Ismail Khan and One Union Hall in Polytechnic Institute Dera Ismail Khan, new building of Government College Dir and extension in the building of Government College Mardan.¹⁵

Hayat Sherpao's Miscellaneous Reformatory Steps

- The re-organization of the Government Transport Service (GTS).
- The establishment of Land Commission for Dir, Swat and Chitral.
- The installation of check posts at different regions and the formation of Vigilance Committees to stop hoarding.
- Anti-adulteration Campaign.
- The construction of a Residential Satellite Town (Hayat Abad) at Peshawar with an area of 1500 acres.
- The project of Kalabat Town Ship (Hazara).
- The construction of Civil Colony in Miran Shah, North Waziristan.
- The installation of a telephone Exchange in Tangi Charsadda.
- Construction of different bridges, roads and electrification of various villages in different regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.¹⁶

After serving as the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for nearly four months, Hayat Sherpao was succeeded by Arbab Sikandar Khan Khalil of the National Awami Party (NAP), following a political

¹² *Shahbaz* (Daily) Peshawar, 19th January 1972.

¹³ *Mashriq* (Daily), Peshawar, 12th March 1972.

¹⁴ Official report released on 30th April 1974 and reproduced in Muhammad Asif Qayyum's *Jawan Marg*.

¹⁵ Naveed-ur Rehman, *Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao (A biographical Profile)* (Unpublished M.A Thesis, Pakistan Study Center, University of Peshawar, 1999-2001), p. 63.

¹⁶ *Ibid*.

compromise between the NAP and the Pakistan People's Party. This agreement aimed to ensure the smooth operation of democracy in the province. Sherpao then took on the role of Federal Minister for Fuel, Power, and Natural Resources in the central government. Simultaneously, he also served as the opposition leader in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly, where a coalition ministry formed by NAP and JUI was in power. According to the 1973 Constitution, a member of the National Assembly or the Senate was required to hold a portfolio in the federal cabinet. Since Sherpao was only a member of the provincial assembly, he did not meet this requirement and consequently resigned from the federal cabinet in February 1973.¹⁷

On April 15, 1973, a new coalition government comprising the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the Qayyum Muslim League (QML), and the United Front of Independents (UFI) was established in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with Inayatullah Khan Gandapur of QML as the head. Hayat Sherpao was appointed as a senior minister in the provincial cabinet and took the oath of office on June 4, 1974.¹⁸

Era of Political Violence

Since the establishment of Pakistan, political tolerance has been scarce. Following the assassination of Khan Liaqat Ali Khan in 1951, political violence began to take root, and by the early 1970s, violence had become a prominent feature of the country's national politics. A series of bombings claimed the lives of several prominent figures, among them the young, energetic, and dynamic Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao. Other notable political leaders who fell victim to this wave of violence included Abdus Samad Achakzai (Leader of the National Awami Party in Balochistan), Maulvi Shamsuddin (a Member of the Provincial Assembly from Jamiat-i Ulema-e Islam and former Speaker of the Balochistan Assembly), Nawab Muhammad Ahmad Khan, Dr. Nazir Ahmad (a Member of the National Assembly from Jamaat-e-Islami), Khwaja Muhammad Rafique (Leader of the Ittehad Party),¹⁹ Abdul Waheed, and Javed Nazir. Abdul Waheed and Javed Nazir also fell prey to the political violence of Pakistan.²⁰ These subversive activities of anti-state elements increased with time. According to an estimate, 54 bombs exploded in different parts of the country up to February 1975 which resulted in the loss of 25 lives with more than 80 casualties.²¹

Murder of Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao

'The tragic incident occurred at the University of Peshawar when Prof Abdul Ali Khan was Vice Chancellor, the senior minister of NWFP's provincial cabinet and a well-known member of the Pakistan Peoples' Party arrived at the History Department of the University of Peshawar hall on 5th February 1975 as the chief guest invited for the Students Union installation and the swearing-in of the newly elected office bearers. Dr. Munawar Khan, the Chairman of the History Department, cordially welcomed the chief guest. A powerful bomb detonated in the hall following the brief address of the chief guest. Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao died within minutes after being taken to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in serious condition after suffering severe injuries along with a few others. In this tragic incident, Abdul Hameed, the President of the Student's Union, succumbed to his injuries four days later, on February 12, 1975. Among the injured were Noor-ul-Haq Nadvi, a teacher of Hayat

¹⁷ *Mashriq* (Daily), Peshawar, 5th June 1974.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Ulfat Zahra, Political Assassinations in Pakistan with Special Reference to the Mystery of the Murder of Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao, 1975. *Pakistan Perspectives*. Vol. 25, No.2, July-December 2020, pp. 107-108.

²⁰ Hassan Askari and Syed Tahir Zaidi, *Hayat Sherpao Shaheed*, p. 131.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.83.

* Later on this hall was named as Sherpao Hall in the commemoration of that incident, now it is a part of Computer Science Department, University of Peshawar and is used as IT section.

Muhammad Sherpao at Islamia College Peshawar, Munawar Khan, Professor Hussain Khan from the Department of History, Syed Hassan Shah, the Registrar of the University of Peshawar, and several students from the Department of History. Notably, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Peshawar, Abdul Ali Khan, was absent during this critical event.²²

After the murder of Hayat Sherpao, on 10th February 1975 a 'Black Day' was observed by the Pakistan People's Party and Qayyum Muslim League in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A large gathering was arranged in Peshawar, the emotional party workers and participants of the crowd attacked the offices of Arbab Sikandar Khan Khalil, the shop of Haji Ghulam Ahmad Bilour and the office of National Awami Party's newspaper "*Shahbaz*" and burnt the entire record in the office.²³

The assassination of Hayat Muhammad Sherpao was widely condemned across the country. On the day of his funeral, all educational institutions, courts, government offices, and commercial centers were closed. Additionally, the province observed two days of official mourning in honor of his death.²⁴

Following the bomb blast, the Pakhtun Students Federation was blamed for the attack. A few days later, on February 10, 1975, the aftermath of the incident began to unfold. The federal government took decisive action, declaring the National Awami Party (NAP) an unlawful organization. Its offices were shut down, and a significant number of its leaders, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan, were arrested.²⁵

On the same day, the federal government issued two official notices, through which the National Awami Party was formally banned. Its properties and funds were seized by the federal government. Furthermore, in accordance with Section 4 of the Political Parties Act of 1962, the central government referred the matter to the Supreme Court of Pakistan for further legal proceedings.²⁶

The government arrested nearly 500 suspected leaders and supporters of the National Awami Party (NAP), among whom prominent figures included Arbab Saif-ur-Rehman Khan Khalil, Khan Abdul Wali Khan, General Gilani, Ghulam Ahmad Bilour,²⁷ and Arbab Sikandar Khan Khalil (former Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Due to the personal rivalry between Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Abdul Wali Khan, the blame for the assassination of Hayat Muhammad Sherpao was placed on the leaders of the National Awami Party.²⁸ Notably, during this period, Abdul Wali Khan and Bhutto were the principal political adversaries at the national level, with Abdul Wali Khan serving as the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly.²⁹

Since the case had been referred to the Supreme Court of Pakistan, the court issued notices to the detained leaders. In response, the National Awami Party submitted a detailed written statement to the Supreme Court in May 1975. In addition to this collective statement, several prominent leaders of the

* It was reported in the newspaper that Hayat Sherpao finished his speech but then some students of the students' Union again invited him to the rostrum for the announcement of donation to the newly installed student's Union, when he came to the rostrum, after saying a few words a powerful bomb exploded. ²² Naveed-ur Rehman, pp.78-79.

²³ Khan Wali Khan, *Bacha Khan au Khudai Khidmatgari*, Vol II (Charsadda: Wali Bagh, 1998), p. 136.

²⁴ Naveed-ur Rehman, p. 80.

²⁵ Hamid Khan. *Constitutional and political History of Pakistan*, Second edition. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 294.

²⁶ Hamid Khan, p. 294.

²⁷ Naveed-ur Rehman, p. 81.

²⁸ Arbab Anjum (Niece of Arbab Sikandar Khan Khalil), interview by the author, Tape recording, Peshawar, 11 April 2010.

²⁹ Hamid Khan, pp. 294-295.

National Awami Party, including Wali Khan, Sardar Khair Bakhsh Marri, Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, Sardar Attaullah Mengal, and Arbab Sikandar Khan Khalil, also submitted their individual written statements to the court.³⁰

In his book *Farayb-e-Natamam*, Juma Khan Sufi, a former activist of the National Awami Party, writes that a plot was devised on February 7, 1975, to assassinate Hayat Sherpao at Technical College Peshawar. The plan involved planting a bomb in a tape recorder, which would be placed on the rostrum under the guise of recording Sherpao's speech. However, the plan was thwarted due to the presence of Afrasyab Khattak (President of the Pakhtun Students Federation) on stage. The following day, Sherpao was murdered at the University of Peshawar. Juma Khan Sufi also named Amjad Ali and Anwar Bacha as the individuals who carried out the assassination. After the murder, both were sent to Afghanistan through Mohmand Agency, initially staying in Qandooz before moving to Kabul. Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao, Hayat Sherpao's brother, later confirmed that Amjad Ali and Anwar Bacha had stayed at Gul Abad in Charsadda, where the assassination plot had been devised a day earlier. However, he stated that they were merely pawns used by Hayat Sherpao's political rivals.³¹

On 21st April 1986 the former Prime minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto during her speech to a public gathering at Jinnah Park Peshawar stated: "O brave Pukhtoos of the Frontier, I have learned politics not only from my father Shaheed Bhutto, rather I was benefitted, too, from the young martyr of this soil i.e. Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao".³²

Conclusion

Unfortunately, Pakistan is facing a lack of political tolerance, the outcome of which is such tragedies as the murders of experienced political leaders and workers in public places and even at the most prestigious educational institutions like the University of Peshawar. Those murders remained a mystery with indecisive ending and created an environment of uncertainty, insecurity and unrest, especially in academic institutions, it also badly affected the reputation of those institutions where higher education is imparted to the youth of the nation.

The sudden death of Hayat Sherpao not only exposed the violent confrontation of political parties in Pakistan but also confirmed the weaknesses of political and law enforcement agencies where educational institutions are used for such violence. The assassination of Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao allowed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to press his political opponents as at that time the Vice Chancellor of Peshawar University was Abdul Ali Khan who was the son of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who remained absent during this ceremony, so Bhutto banned National Awami Party and blamed NAP leader for this subversive activity and allegations of treason were leveled against the NAP leaders.

This incident not only caused embarrassment for Pakistan at international level but also proved to be a shame for the administration of the University of Peshawar where such a veteran politician was murdered publically. This fact that a vested interest group could use educational institutions like the University of Peshawar for political violence is also highlighted.

After all investigations, it was declared an untraced incident, and the real culprits were not brought to justice, so it can be expected that in the future such incidents of political violence will continue in Pakistan.

It is need of the time to punish all the culprits involved in all forms of violent activities accordingly throughout Pakistan to set a precedent so that the enemies of the country think a hundred times before committing such crimes in the future. In this way, the state particularly the law enforcement agencies

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ulfat Zahra, pp. 110-111.

³² Iqbal Awan, *Hayat Shaheed* (Karachi: Q. A Publications, 1990), pp. 55-56.

will be able to prevent or to some extent decrease such cases of political violence and political assassinations in Pakistan.

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