



RESEARCH PAPER

Khudai Khidmatgars' Resistance against Colonial Rule and its Search for Affiliation

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DOI

[http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021\(5-II\)2.49](http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021(5-II)2.49)

PAPER INFO

ABSTRACT

Received:

October 13, 2021

Accepted:

December 26, 2021

Online:

December 29, 2021

Keywords:

Affiliation,
Congress,
Khudai Khidmatgars,
Muslim League,
Non-Violence,
N-WFP,
Pashtuns

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The people of North-West Frontier Province (N-WFP) suffered a worst kind of humiliation for gaining political and constitutional rights from British India. The Russian threat compelled the British to manage the affairs of N-WF from a security perspective. Viceroy Lord Curzon separated N-WFP from Punjab in 1901. The Pashtuns as part of Indian nation demanded rights and stood against British atrocities during Khilafat and Hijrat Movements. The Pashtun even started the non-violent Khudai Khidmatgars (God's Servants) Movement (KKM) as a social movement under the leadership of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. The British perceived it as inimical to its own interest, thus making the movement a torch-bearer of resistance in the province. As a movement of Pashtuns in a single province, it could not alone withstand the British Raj, for which it needed an all-India level political support of either All-India Muslim League (AIML) or All-India National Congress (AINC) which culminated in the affiliation with the latter. The present study endeavors to answer the questions that what kind of a resistance KKM put against the British colonial rule and why it made a quest for affiliation with a party at All-India level?

Introduction

N-WFP served as a gateway to India to many invaders for centuries. As an area of dry and mountainous character, agricultural land was insufficient, due to which the people developed warring attributes because survival was only possible through persistent warfare. During the Sikh rule, N-WFP was amalgamated with Punjab while the British separated it from Afghanistan through the Durand Line

agreement and divided the area between settle districts of Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Hazara and Dera Ismail Khan (Khan, 2003) which the British ruled through local loyalists by giving them *jagirs*, titles and cash *inams* (Shah, 1999) and five tribal agencies of Malakand, Khyber, Khurram, North Waziristan and South Waziristan

Which were placed under Political Agents and the Chief Commissioner as representatives of the Governor General (Shah, 2007).

The new province was created by Viceroy Lord Curzon in 1901 who felt dissatisfied with the management of the Frontier by the Punjab Government for delayed decision-making in times of urgency from foreign policy and defense perspectives. In the new province, administrative aspect was given priority over the political aspect (Rome, 2013). The British granted to the province limited constitutional power and paid no heed to the public demands. The province was used just as a "watch tower" to observe happenings outside India (Suleman, 2013). Tribal areas were only viewed in the context of British relations with Afghanistan which was unable to withstand expansionist Russia (Rome, 2013).

The tribal areas as international strategy to defend its Indian Empire (Awan, 1972), the British introduced there the special inhuman act of Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). Even N-WFP was excluded from reforms meant for India because it was neither a revenue generating province nor the Pashtuns have welcomed the colonial rule. For them the area of wild and savage Pashtuns who prefer death for their *Pashtunwali* (the way of the Pashtuns) code, deserved to be treated as a buffer zone between itself and Russia (Khan, 2003). As the Pashtuns were 'mad, fanatic and savage animals' and their area a 'gun powder magazine,' therefore, reforms would mean to give a fire match for explosion to gunpowder (Qayyum, 1945).

Various factors were responsible for provoking nationalism among the Pashtuns. Internally, the peasants protested against the burden of revenue. The dissatisfied small Khans with their selective patronage (Khan, 2003) resented colonial policies (Shah, 1999). Externally, the changing developments in Afghanistan, such as the modernization policies of the Afghan rulers (Amir Abd-ur-Rehman Khan, Amir Habibullah Khan and Amir Amanullah) have helped in the rise of nationalism in N-WFP. The steps of the Afghan Amirs for the promotion of Pashtuns and Pashto language were really a source of pride for the people of the N-WFP (Khan, 2003). The Pashtuns of N-WFP were greatly inspired by the policies adopted by their "spiritual home," Afghanistan (Rittenberg, 1977).

Literature Review

The independence Movement in India's North-West Frontier Province, 1901-1947 by Stephen Allan Rittenberg discusses historical and political development in the then N-WFP (renamed as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, KP) and also covers the story of KKM affiliation with Congress but this account misses out the strings that brought KKM to the decision of affiliating with All-Indian National Congress (AINC) instead of the All-India Muslim League (AIML). Besides, it also do not analyses that formal contact never took place between KKM and AIML.

The book of Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, *North-West Frontier Province: History and Politics* very beautifully covers the history and the politics in the province, particularly of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan *aka* Bacha Khan and KKM which aimed at rescuing the Pashtuns from their backwardness, social vices and brutal British policies. Although the book highlights the reason of KKM affiliation with congress but does not analyses the decision of Bacha Khan to affiliate his party with AINC instead of AIML.

Development of Political Consciousness

The partition of Bengal grabbed N-WFP into politics. Amir Chand Bombwal's newspaper, *Urdu Frontier Advocate* (1905) created political consciousness among the Pashtuns (Rittenberg, 1977). They condemned the Durand Line agreement for their division with the Afghans across border and that of the settled districts and tribal areas. N-WFP as compared to the rest of India wrestled with the issues of taxation, offensive polices, military treatment, and irrigation infrastructure that deprived it from education and sanitation. Such repressive measures persuaded the Pashtuns to resist colonial rule of the British (Banerjee, 2000).

The British imposed FCR in the new province too which allowed no evidence or appeal. Military expeditions and repressive measures of torture, and inhuman treatment were against the Pashtun sense of dignity. In such a situation the family of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan *aka* Bacha Khan started a *Jihad* for rescuing Pashtuns from British autocracy. During the times of Bacha Khan, the Indians both the Muslim-dominated AIML and the Hindu-dominated AINC resisted the British (Kurtz, 2009).

In N-WFP, a distinct party of Muslim League (ML) was founded by Mian Abdul Aziz, Qazi Abdul Wali Khan, Sayyed Ali Abbas Bokhari, Qazi Mir Ahmad and Hakim Muhammad Amin in 1912 which aspired to become a branch of AIML (Shah, 1992) but as the former was anti-British and the later was pro-British in character, so it was not given affiliation and it only survived for four years. Its members disappeared either for avoiding British atrocities or because of their own tempers (Shah, 1999).

The Frontier Congress though did not faced British humiliation but it lacked members and received little attention from the Congress in Punjab which at first amalgamated it in 1922 and then separated it. Since then it tried to maintain its independence from Punjab Congress but the Central Working Committee (CWC) advised them to increase numbers to 2,000 by maintaining a separate identity but it could only increase from 108 in June to 567 members in July 1930 (Shah, 1999).

Bacha Khan and the Indian Political Landscape

Bacha Khan was born to Behram Khan in 1890 at *Utmanzai* (Charsadda) in N-WF of India. He aspired for the uplift of Pashtuns through education, self-respect, tolerance, well-being and self-reliance (Esapzai, 2015), therefore, he along with Haji Fazl-i-Wahid *aka* Haji Sahib of Turangzai inaugurated *Azad Madrassa* of modern

education which was then closed by the British. Turangzai fled and lived as fugitive in the tribal region (Rittenberg, 1977).

The British got acquainted with Bacha Khan in 1919 during his agitation against the Rowlett Act in Peshawar (Swinson, 1967). His participation in the agitation won him the epithet of Bacha Khan and the very first detention (Rome, 2013). The imposition of humiliating peace terms on Turkey after the World War I by the British, a *Khilafat* Movement was launched by Maulana Mohammad Ali Johar and Maulana Shaukat Ali for the restoration of Ottoman Caliphate which was also joined by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi or Mahatma Gandhi later on (India Today, 1999). *Khilafat* Committees were formed in the five districts of N-WFP and later on *Hijrat* (Migration) Movement was observed with the same spirit in Peshawar which failed while the leaders of *Khilafat* Movement were arrested by the British in March 1920. Bacha Khan was arrested on 11 December 1921 (Rittenberg, 1977) and in jail, the call of the guard would disturb his sleep and in case of no answer, he would have to grind seventy kilos of corn. Even the food served in Jail seemed as mingled bread with cement and it was really hard to chew (Khan, 1969).

After his release, Bacha Khan started to unite the Pashtuns on a single platform. For eradicating social evils through education, he formed *Anjuman-I-Islah-al-Afaghina* (Organization for the Reformation of the Afghans) in April 1921 which promoted patriotism among Pashtuns (Rittenberg, 1977). Bacha Khan also revived Azad School system in the whole Peshawar Valley and for involving Pashtun youth in social and political activities; *Zalmo Jirga* (Youth League) was set up on the model of Young Turks, Young Afghans etc. He established a more vibrant social organization of KKM for elders in November 1929 in order to promote peace and harmony and appealed the people to join it (Shah, 2013). The non-violent KKM established schools and revolutionized the Pashtun society in art and culture. It tried to make the region economically stable and adopted military like actions, arranged marches, kept fasting, started hunger strikes and peaceful processions to resist the British rule which soon started imprisoning its members (Kurtz, 2009).

Bacha Khan learnt humanity, help of fellow humans, pride on one's nation and to remain a servant of God from Turangzai (Banerjee, 2000). To him, unrest among Pashtuns was due to the denial of rights to them by 'Black Law' of FCR. Even the British did not find their region suitable for the introduction of reforms there (Shah, 2007).

The brutal policies of British soon popularized KKM and its membership reached between 1200 and 1500 (Shah, 2007). The small Khans joined it for political reforms and greater role in the governance of the province; the educated Pashtuns joined it for the promotion of Pashtun culture and identity; the anti-colonial *Ulama* became part of it for the protection and promotion of Islamic values and for throwing the yoke of the cursed British rule and; the peasants joined it for security against oppressor loyalist *Nawabs*, *Khan Bahadurs* and big *Khans* (Shah, 2013).

Gandhi launched a civil disobedience movement for complete *Swaraj* (Independence) in 1929 and made a call to the Indians. At the Congress session in Lahore during 16-18 April 1929, President Jawaharlal Nehru asked for self-control and non-violence. Gandhi condemned "Salt Tax" as an extra burden on poor and started a campaign with the support of his companions from Sabarmati Ashram on 11 March. He enlisted people regardless of their caste, creed and religion and asked for unity and boycott of liquor, government jobs, institutions, taxes, foreign goods and to use local *Khaddar* instead of foreign cloth. British arrests of the leaders for intimidating the agitators had little effect on the movement. About 1,000 Muslims as part of the movement were also arrested in November 1930 (Shah, 2013).

Bacha Khan after attending the meeting of AINC in 1929 returned to the province with sensation and called a Jirga for the enrollment of *Khudai Khidmatgars*, KKs (Khan, 1969). He carried out the program of the Congress (Tendulkar, 1967) and made a tour of N-WFP for popularizing it. He told the people to boycott offices, foreign cloth and taxes because the British invests the profits in arms that are used against Pashtuns (Banerjee, 2000). Provincial Congress also joined the movement but being smaller in number was ignored by the administration. Then the Congress requested Bacha Khan for support and the Congress Committee assured him of sharing all the fruits with others of what it attains from British (Shah, 2013). Nehru later on himself acknowledged the leading role of Pashtuns in the movement (Nehru, 1992).

The Chief Commissioner of N-WFP asked Bacha Khan to disband his movement of Pashtun social welfare immediately which he refused. He then along with President Mian Ahmad Shah, General Secretary Salar Sarfraz Khan and other dignitaries like Akbar Khan and Haji Shah Nawaz Khan were arrested after their return from a meeting at *Utmanzai* in April 1930 (Khan, 1969). The Congress inquiry Committee which arrived for investigation in N-WFP was not allowed to enter the province. In response, the Pashtuns boycotted liquor shops which the British answered with section 144 and the imprisonment of Bacha Khan along with his supporters (Banerjee, 2000).

The British also imprisoned Congressmen in the Bala Hisar Fort on 23 April 1930 while those escaped surrendered in the morning. They were taken into a lorry by the Sub-Inspector, Ala-ud-Din Shah. People started chanting slogans of 'Long Live Revolution and Gandhi,' while proceeding to *Kabuli Thana* (Shah, 2013) at Qissa Khwani Bazar. The lawn of *Kabuli Thana* was hardly "820 yards long and forty feet wide" (Swinson, 1967). The lorry got punctured and the leaders requested the Sub-Inspector for joining the procession of around 800 peaceful people, to which he agreed. On reaching *Kabuli Thana*, an armored car called by the Deputy Commissioner (DC), H. A. Metcalf for averting the attack on the *Thana* crushed some 12 people, out of which seven people died on the spot. The charged protestors then injured the officials including the DC. The other three armored cars then massacred the Pashtuns between 200 and 300 (Shah, 2013). AINC immediately sent Vithalbhai Patel for investigation but he was stopped because British had adopted brutality

against the *Khudai Khidmatgars* but the Pashtuns remained non-violent and emerged nationalist heroes overnight (Banerjee, 2000).

The government inquiry report blamed the peaceful protestors for restricting police from reaching the *Thana*. It recorded that when riots were uncontrollable, the DC who was escorted by four armored cars was attacked and one car then accidentally rush over the crowd. Another one opened a burst for dispersing the protestors but of no avail, on which the soldiers opened fire to end the riots. Patel's report asserts that Metcalfe used the stroke of stone as a charge-sheet for breaking serious riots. Firing on those who came for collecting dead and injured was an unjust decision. The incident compelled the nationalists to join the civil disobedience movement (Rittenberg, 1977).

Another account records that when the imprisoned leaders were accompanying the protestors, the angry mob wanted to rescue their leaders and the DC had to call the military for easy heading to the north of Kabuli Gate. The two motor cyclists accompanying the armored car had mistaken their orders and one got killed by the armored car. The charged protestors set the car on fire and the DC received a message from the Headquarters to restore peace, and then the military sealed the Bazar and the Inspector General ordered for a fire till the clearance of the street (Swinson, 1967).

Bacha Khan said that massacre occurred because the British armored cars wanted brutal suppression of Pashtuns. A young man burned the armored to ashes and the British in response killed people (Khan, 1969) and imprisoned about 12,000 people since then which caused the issue of space availability in Haripur Jail and instead tents were provided but due to over crowdedness; nobody could even lie down for rest (Banerjee, 2000).

The authorities threw the dead bodies in to the river or burnt them to ashes. Khan Abdul Jabbar Khan (Dr. Khan Sahib), the brother of Bacha Khan managed to rescue the wounded in the *Khilafat* office but he and others were imprisoned for three years. The People of Charsadda gathered in front of police station but Bacha Khan asked them to remain peaceful who then performed the duties of traffic police themselves. Government warnings to the officials of dire consequences for not obeying orders were of no avail (Shah, 2013). The massacre though made the situation worse in Peshawar but the army controlled it successfully on 23rd April. The Chief Commissioner removed troops from the city for restoring peace but the troops occupied it again on 26th April and ruined the peace (Swinson, 1967).

In the tribal areas, economic deprivation and political disturbance in Afghanistan along with *Sarda* or Marriage Act of 1930, fixing girls' marriage age at 16 and boys at 18 years which it later on was changed to 18 for girls and 21 for boys, fatigued the tribesmen. This attack on religious liberty caused discontent among the Pashtuns who denounced the punishment for marriage of a bride less than fourteen and groom less than eighteen. Afridis and Orakzais were already distressed by the Shia-Sunni conflict at Tirah in 1929. Upper Mohmand tribe was not happy with the

subsidies. The British troops besieged Charsadda, Babara Village and Prang Village for nineteen days starting from 1st June for controlling political activities. At this juncture, Bacha Khan again contacted the leaders of the Mehsud tribe whom he knew even before April 1930, for compelling the British to withdraw from India while people from other districts favored fighting the British (Rittenberg, 1977).

In the face of British repressive measures against KKM, the membership of KKM increased and sometimes large number of people (reaching to 10,000) with Red Shirts could be seen in improperly arranged meetings. Sir Stuart Pears, Chief Commissioner informed Viceroy Lord Irwin about the serious situation of Peshawar District after which he was ordered to treat the civil disobedience movement harshly. Utmanzai along other villages was besieged where crops, *hujras* and libraries were burnt but the people remained non-violent (Shah, 2013). They refrained from violence because on one occasion when KKM beat three mullahs for calling them the "children of Lenin," Bacha Khan observed fast for three days (Banerjee, 2000). Both Bacha Khan and Gandhi were reformers with strong beliefs who favored self-discipline for the success of civil disobedience movement. Both have drawn the philosophical principles from the books of their respective religions (Banerjee, 2000).

Qissa Khwani massacre was followed by the incidents of Mardan where the people accompanied the arrested KKM leaders to the Prison and Police Inspector; Mr. Murphy started a lathi-charge on them on 26th May 1931 but some unknown person from the crowd killed Mr. Murphy. The troops besieged Guja Gari and burnt the *hujras* of the prominent KKM's leaders like Malik Masim Khan and Malik Amin Jan at Takkar for avenging the death of Murphy. The troops then killed twelve people in a funeral procession on 31 May 1930. Later on, the members of KKM in other districts were equally treated by calling them Bolshevik's agents. In the peaceful protest of Wazir tribe at Speena Tangi in Bannu on 24th August 1930, seventy people were killed and its leader, Ayub Khan along his companions was arrested. Though the authorities tried to ease the situation after the coercive measures but failed. The arrests of KKM and warnings of dire consequences by the government near Batagram fire backed (Shah, 2013). The strength of the members increased from 1, 000 or 15, 00 to 25,000 in Tehkal Bala meeting during 1931 (Banerjee, 2000).

Bacha Khan believed that non-violent people could not be crushed easily, so they are made violent because a non-violent Pashtun was feared more than a violent Pashtun. That is why they were called as the agents of the Soviets and Afghans, and their red uniform was targeted as that of Bolsheviks. Contrary to this, Bacha Khan neither had knowledge about the Bolsheviks nor had consulted any book about them. Even the label of Afghan agents was not justified because Nadir Shah condemned Bacha Khan and his organization (Rome, 2013).

The British asked KKM prisoners to seek pardon but only one or two percent sought apology for siding with the Movement. Those who did not apologized were forced to work on public roads and military basements, beaten with sticks, and heavy fines were imposed on them, for instance, about 92 villages were fined nearly 20,000 rupees in 1932 which could not even shatter the courage of the KKM. The non-violent

prisoners calmly tolerated British punishments in this war of patience (Banerjee, 2000).

The episode of 1930 in N-WFP showed non-violent politics much effective. The British persecuted the members of KKM at the time of the inauguration of new legislative assembly having limited powers in 1931 (Banerjee, 2000). The prisoners faced severe punishments like the educated worked on the wheel of an oil press (Khan, 1969). Once in Swabi Tehsil, the British not only fined and seized cattle of KKM members but also laid them down on the ground before burning sun with a heavy stone on their chests. Congress Report of 28th June 1932 about Mardan mentions the four volunteers whose villages were searched, destroyed their households and shattered the *purdah* (veil) of their women. They were asked to slap or hold each other's ears because Pashtuns were seen as a "warlike" stock (Banerjee, 2000). When the British tried to prove KKM as an agent of Russia (Rome, 2013), Khan Abdul Qayyum asked it to affiliate itself with a national organization (Shah, 2013).

KKM's Search for Affiliation

In N-WFP, as no political reforms were introduced, the Pashtuns remained focused on the backwardness of their own province or on the 'ideology of ethnic regionalism' instead of Indian political development. The tribal, cultural and social identifications weighed more among the Pashtuns for making them a unique ethnic group. They wished help from any political party to ensure their autonomy. As AIML submerged its identity into a broader Indian Muslim identity, therefore the secular AINC suited KKM (Banerjee, 2000). The ethnic ideology of Pashtuns was contrary to AIML's religious separatism despite the higher percentage of Muslims in the N-WFP. KKM then joined Congress and remained its part for seventeen years (Rittenberg, 1977). This affiliation was also due to the accusation of KKM by the British for creating problems that resulted in a ban. When British intended to hang prominent jailed KKM leaders, it decided to affiliate with a political party at All-India level but AIML had no intentions of opposing the British (Banerjee, 2000), holding a mild attitude towards the colonial rule which compelled KKM to join the Congress.

Subsequently, Bacha Khan was imprisoned for three years in Gujrat Jail. In his absence, colonial troops set on fire the offices of KKM at Charsadda. Mian Jaffar Shah and Mian Abdullah Shah kept informed Bacha Khan in jail (Khan, 1969) who advised them to meet AIML leaders like Malik Lal Khan, Malik Feroz Khan Noon and Sir Fazl-i-Hussain (member of viceroy Executive Council) but they refused help due to KKM participation in the Congress-led civil disobedience movement. These leaders thought that affiliation of KKM would boost the cause of Congress (Shah, 2013). This clear refusal disappointed Bacha Khan saying that in the absence of any no option, the drowning man had to catch any straw for saving himself (Khan, 1969).

Nevertheless, it seemed that Mian Jaffar Shah misperceived the *Khilafat* workers and Unionist leaders as AIML's leaders or had intentionally presented them as such. Malik Lal Khan, a prominent *Khilafat* worker arranged his meeting with President of the Unionist Party of the Punjab, Sir Fazl-i-Hussain (Shah, 2007). Hence this rejection was by the Unionist Party leader which wanted to erode the leading

position of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah who then went and settled in England (Batalvi, 2000).

The misperception tilted *Khudai Khidmatgars* to AINC. Gandhi facilitated affiliation of KKM with AINC, after which all the district and provincial committees of both were mingled. Another reason for affiliation of KKM with AINC was that Bacha Khan did not found AIML as a well-structured organization in 1931 which was incapable of deploying resistance against the British (Banerjee, 2000). Furthermore, Jinnah was also disappointed by the opposition of Muslim leaders at that time who established All Parties Muslim Conference and nominated the delegation of their own choice to the Round Table Conference. Jinnah participated in it as a nominee of the British (Rome, 2013).

Bacha Khan was already impressed by Gandhi and his philosophy of non-violence during the *Khilafat* Conference in Calcutta. A young man constantly interrupted Gandhi, to which he responded with a laugh. When he shared it with Mohammad Ali Johar who said that backward Pashtuns will now tell me the way of behaving, after which Bacha Khan left *Khilafat* committee (Khan, 1969).

Bacha Khan believed that non-violence based on brotherhood works for the development of social landscape and so he joined AINC for the benefits of the Pashtuns. He said that if his alliance with AINC proved disadvantageous for Pashtuns or their faith, he as first person will fight for protecting their rights and interests (Rome, 2013). Even Bacha Khan regarded AINC as a national party and a *Jirga* of Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians and Muslims (Gupta, 1976).

Though the formal affiliation of KKM with AINC took place in August 1931 but the former maintained its separate identity. Bacha Khan was accused by his close associates over affiliation with a Hindu-dominated organization, after which he tried to convince them by saying that he did it as a last option because Pashtuns needed an outside help for countering British atrocities for which he would give examples of Prophet Muhammad's (Peace Be Upon Him) alliances with Christians and Jews for the security of Muslims interests. The popularity of KKM in India was also because of affiliation with AINC (Shah, 2007).

Conclusion

The Pashtuns who resisted various invaders violently became part and parcel of a non-violent KKM. The British atrocities were enough for Pashtuns to be violent. The Pashtuns learned the philosophy of non-violence from Bacha Khan who took inspiration from Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and who strongly believed on non-violence as the most effective weapon to achieve one's goals. His movement, the *Khudai Khidmatgars* which was based on non-violence gave tough time to the British *Raj* for achieving free and independent India.

Although KKM was founded as a social movement to eradicate social evils among the Pashtuns and to start their social and educational uplift but the British atrocities turned it into a political movement and compelled it for affiliation with a

party of All-India level. KKM then searched for options and found that Muslim League as pro-British party is playing Muslim separatist politics which neither would resist it nor support it. Furthermore, KKM displayed ignorance by misperceiving some *Khilafatists* and Unionist Party leaders as Leaguers who refused it affiliation.

In such a situation, AINC as a secular organization allowed the KKs to maintain their distinct identity and autonomy. Besides it, Bacha Khan was greatly inspired by the personality of Gandhi as a non-violent figure. The KKs even before its affiliation with AINC used to attend its meetings and AINC leaders used to plead their case. AINC willingly affiliated KKM which found a party at all-India level for safeguard the interests of Pashtuns. Though some members of KKM were not happy over the affiliation but there was no third option available to rescue the Pashtuns from the brutal treatment of the British but these premonitions proved wrong and Congress betrayed KKM at the end, thus, making it alien in the Muslim majority state of Pakistan after independence.

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