

Book Review

**Syed Waqar Ali Shah, *North-West Frontier Province: History and Politics*,
National Institute of History and
Cultural Research, 2007.
Pages 190. Rs./-250**

Anything that exists in this universe has an identity which imparts meaning to its existence. Unlike the other provinces of Pakistan, the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP)¹ derives its name neither from its main inhabitants nor from its landscape, but from its strategically important position as a frontier. History and politics of NWFP enthrall many scholars; Waqar Ali Shah is no exception. He has spent much time and efforts exploring and studying North-West Frontier Province with major focus on its history and politics. The book under review is collection of the author's articles published in various journals. The objective to frame articles in a book is to highlight complex historical and political developments in North-West Frontier Province of India before its partition and the establishment of Pakistan.

The book begins with an overview that explores the geographical location and administrative districts of NWFP but repetition of geographical detail and initial history is a drawback for readers. In the first Chapter, author discusses all the existing theories of the origin of Pashtoon population i.e. Bani-Israel, Armenia, Abraham's descendants or Bani-Solymis and Aryans. He examined the arguments for and

1 Presently named as Khyber-Pakhtoonkwa

against the theories with the support of evidence but has preferred the 'Mixed Race Theory'.

The second chapter evaluates the constitutional policies of the British. It put forward the argument that NWFP was ignored for a long time by the British because of its "strategic location" and internal instability of the region. It highlights the role of the educated Muslims of NWFP particularly struggle of Sahibzada Abdul Qaiyum. It also touches upon themes such as Khudai Khidmatgars, reform controversy and Roundtable Conferences.

The third chapter 'NWFP and the Khilafat and Hijrat Movements' is an extension of chapter two. In this chapter focus has been on Khilafat Movement and Hijrat movement with special reference to NWFP. It gives subaltern² dimension of history by unearthing the accounts of "Tongawala" and "Fruit-seller from Lahore" is one of the book's great feats.

In the fourth chapter 'Abdul Ghaffar Khan' (known as Bacha Khan), an attempt has been made to describe the story of the struggle and achievement of eminent leader of NWFP who has been mainly instrumental in freedom movement. It also looks his role as a politician, social reformer and an educationist.

'Mian Akbar Shah', the fifth chapter presents a full fledge biography of Mian Akhbar Shah, a prominent freedom fighter of North-West Frontier Province. It analyzes his whole life including all aspects, specifically his participation in the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement and his role in Subhas Chandra Bose's escape.

The Chapter six, '*Women and Politics in the North-West Frontier Province (1930-1947)*' discusses the role of women under Khudai Khidmatgar Movement and Frontier Muslim League. Despite many restrictions on the Pashtoon females, they played an active and significant role in politics and literature than it is commonly perceived. Although while describing the status of women in Pashtoonwali, he has

2 Viewpoints of ordinary people who lived during that age.

ventured to take a soft stand by adopting a centrist approach. It provides detail of considerable efforts of Khudai Khidmatgars and Frontier Muslim league regarding women empowerment.

The Chapter seven describes the role of Amin al-Hasanat, Pir of Manki Sharif in Pakistan Movement. It is based on the unpublished correspondence between Pir of Manki Sharif and Quaid-i-Azam, which is in the custody of his sons and has not been given to any other scholar before.

The last chapter entitled '*Jinnah's Frontier Visits (1936 & 1945) and their impact on the Provincial Politics of the NWFP*', is detail of Jinnah's two frontier visits and their impact on the local politics and Pakistan movement.

As far as critical analysis of the book is concerned, theoretically, the book contributes to the fundamental literature in the area under investigation. It covers policies and historical events as well as eminent personalities and historic correspondence/visits.

The book is different from others as mainly the primary sources have been utilized. It is interesting in a way as it explores prominent personality related to the Khudai Khidmatgar, which also demonstrates the prime interest of author. No doubt, the study provides a scholarly treatment of the subject. As for its readership, not only students and lay public would find it interesting and informative. The book is an important read for all those researchers interested in firsthand account of the NWFP's history and politics as it has pointed out the prevalent scholarly misconceptions in the studies on NWFP.

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