

MILITARISM AND POLITICAL RESISTANCE IN SWAT: THE ROLE OF MUHAMMAD AFZAL KHAN LALA

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Abstract

Swat is an administrative district of Pakistan. It is situated in Malakand Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and is called the Switzerland of Pakistan due to its natural beauty. It saw many ups and downs during the past few years in which the Taliban Movement is of prime importance that was started in Swat under the command of Maulana Fazlullah. It was the time, when the Taliban targeted the prominent people of Swat along with government officials who were vocal against their ideology. Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala strongly condemned the Taliban, their interpretation of Islam and their atrocities against the innocent people. The Taliban attacked him and his home many times and his two bodyguards and two nephews Zakir Khan and Shakir Khan were also killed in an ambush. But despite it, he did not leave Swat and remained there till his death in 2015. Being a Pashtun nationalist, he did not leave his people at the mercy of Taliban and remained with them in their hard time of history, although many prominent people had already left Swat and were shifted to other parts of the country. Keeping in view his valor and bravery, the Government of Pakistan also awarded him with the Hilal-i-Shujaat. In this article, an attempt has been made to highlight his stand against militarism in Swat in 2007-2009. This study adds to the regional history of Swat and will prove beneficial for researchers and general readers.

Introduction

The history of the Pashtuns shows that these people lacked effective leadership to lead them in stormy days. Despite it, they found some prominent personalities in the past, who struggled their best to bring unity among them and to divert their struggle towards achieving their common goal of national unity. The important persons in this connection include; Bayazid Ansari (Pir Roshan), Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Abdul Wali Khan, Khushhal Khan Khattak, and Sartor Faqir, etc. At different times, these prominent personalities of Pashtuns tried to keep them welded and to prevent them from division. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, among such personalities, there was a prominent man in Swat, named Muhammad Afzal Khan, popularly known as Khan Lala, who had dedicated

his life to bring unity among the Pashtuns. He was a distinguished luminary of Upper Swat who worked for securing the interests of the Pashtuns, struggled for their unity and stood by them through thick and thin. Afzal Khan Lala was born in December 1926 at village Bara Drushkhela, in Upper Swat and belonged to the Muhammad Khel branch of Yusufzai Pashtuns. He was also a Law Graduate along with a Master Degree in Political Science and remained active in the politics of Pakistan from 1970 to 1996. The reason on account of which Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala got prominence among the Pashtuns, was his struggle for their unity. He was highly concerned about the disunity among them. He was a staunch supporter of the Pashtuns' national unity.

In 2007, the Taliban Movement was started in Swat having its roots in the old *Tehreek-e-Nafaze-Shariat-e-Muhammadi* (TNSM) that Sufi Muhammad led in the 1990s. This time Maulana Fazlullah led the movement who was popularly known as FM *Mullah* and was the Son-In-Law of Sufi Muhammad. This was the time, when the Taliban targeted the prominent people of Swat along with government officials who were stood against their ideology, movement and domination. Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala strongly condemned the Taliban, their interpretation of Islam and their atrocities against the innocent people. The Taliban threatened him and attacked him many times. In September 2007, his vehicle was attacked in which his two bodyguards were killed and he, along with his nephew Abdul Jabbar Khan, got seriously injured. His two nephews; Zakir Khan and Shakir Khan were attacked and killed in an ambush. But, despite all these threats and attacks, he did not leave Swat and remained there till his last breath. Being a Pashtun nationalist, he did not leave his people at the mercy of the Taliban and remained with them in their hard time of history, although many prominent people had already left Swat and were shifted to other parts of the country during those turbulent times. Keeping in view his valor and bravery, the Government of Pakistan awarded him *Hilali-Shujaat*. In October 2015 his health degraded and was admitted to a hospital in Islamabad, he soon recovered and came back to his hometown, but shortly he fell ill again and was shifted again to Islamabad on October 31, 2015. This time, he did not recover and breathed his last in the hospital on November 1, 2015. He was 89 years of age at the time of his death.

Background of Swat Crisis

Swat is one of the historical places in Pakistan. The area has seen several chapters of accidents throughout its history. It has remained under the Persian Empire in the 6th century BC. The Aryans also used this land when they entered the sub-continent. In 326 BC, Alexander the Great also passed through this land before attacking India. In AD 100, Swat was under the Buddhist rule and

was the part of Gandhara Civilization. Raja Kanishka ruled it from Peshawar. Many Chinese pilgrims such as Fa-Hein and Hiuen-Tsang, (7th century AD) also visited Swat valley and wrote about it.

The Muslims era in Swat began with the invasion of Mahmood Ghaznavi on Swat in the middle of 11th century AD. In 1048 he defeated Raja Gira and occupied it. Pashtuns, who came with Mahmood Ghaznavi settled in Swat and were called Swati Pashtuns. In the 16th century, the Yusufzai Pashtuns under Malak Ahmad attacked it, they expelled the Swatis along with their ruler Sultan Awais and occupied it. In 1827, Syed Ahmad Shaheed came to Mingora, Charbagh, Gulibagh and Khwaza Khela in order to get support of these people against the Sikhs. But the Muslims era in Swat had already begun with the invasion of Mahmood Ghaznavi on Swat in 11th century AD.

At the time of the Yusufzai conquest, the State was in chaos like situation and there was no central authority to unify its people. This situation led to the frequent attacks of the State of Dir on Swat and they had occupied its lower and upper parts, collecting taxes forcefully from the local people. The Yusufzai established their State in Swat in 1917 under the leadership of Miangul family who ruled it till 1969, when the State was finally merged in Pakistan.

The birth of religious movements in Swat began with the Mujahedeen Movement of Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed when he came to Swat for the purpose of organizing his army and to gain support of its people against the Sikhs. From 1857 to 1878 the religious movement of Akhund Abdul Ghaffur popularly known as Saidu Baba was in full swing and had great impact on the people of Swat. Apart from it, Maulvi Ahmad Jan known as Sandakai Mullah also played a significant role in the organization of the people of Swat and the ultimate defeat of Dir State. He was also involved in the selection of Sayyid Akbar Shah as the first ruler of Swat from 1849-1857. Being a religious cleric he had tremendous influence over the people of Swat.

Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) and its Impacts on Swat

The *Nafaz-e-Shariat* Movement was started in Malakand Division in the 1990s in which those elements played a crucial role who were former government servants, landlords, businessmen, and smugglers. When the government announced the end of Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) regulations in 1976 and hinted the enforcement of rules that prevailed in other parts of the country, in which the application of taxes was also included that was detrimental to their interests, then these elements started struggle to hinder the way of the government. To divert attention of the government, they made contacts with Sufi Muhammad who led a Madrassa in Maidan District Dir Lower and persuaded him to start a movement for *Nizam-e-Sharia*.

As the people of Malakand Division were not happy with the new civil laws enforced on them in 1976 as they were completely different from their former princely state rules; the new laws made the local influential people powerful and apart from filing their cases in the courts, the common people had to go to their *hujras* for helping them to resolve their issues, so Maulana Sufi Muhammad came forward and demanded the end of the newly introduced system of the country and the implementation of *Nizam-e-Sharia* in Malakand Division.

Maulana Sufi Muhammad who belonged to District Dir Lower and had got his religious education in Panjpir Swabi, was the head of a religious madrassa in Maidan and was a prominent member of Jammāt-e-Islami till 1989. He had won twice the membership of local district council elections and had also sympathies with Hikamatyar's Hezb-e-Islami party in Afghanistan. In 1992 he started his movement in Dir for the purpose of the implementation of Sharia. In 1993 his movement also spread to other parts of the province. As he faced opposition from the side of local *Jirga* system and political leaders, therefore, it was shifted to Swat in search of favorable environment.

In 1994, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government under Benazir Bhutto, announced the *Nizam-e-Adal* Regulations in Malakand Division under the pressure from TNSM, after the movement became more aggressive and took control of Saidu Sharif airport and police check posts in Swat. As there was no such a system in this region before, so it created more complications. The movement went on and became more aggressive. In 1999, the government of Nawaz Sharif announced another *Nizam-e-Adal* Regulations, but it did not satisfy the common people and the leaders of TNSM.

Maulana Sufi Muhammad was against democracy and considered it against Islam and when Taliban took over Afghanistan in 1996, he established relations with them. His movement also targeted political rivals and one of PPP Provincial Assembly member Badiuz Zaman was also shot dead. During the initial years of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, they prevailed in Malakand Division and strengthened its roots among the local population, but slowly, the movement lost its prestige in Malakand Division, as it was not too strong like the Afghan Taliban.

Taliban Movement in Swat

After the attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon in the United States on 9th September 2001, the situation took a dramatic turn. The US accused Osama Bin Laden of carrying out the attacks and demanded the Taliban to hand him over to the United States, but they refused to do so and as a result, the US attacked Afghanistan on 7 October 2001. Sufi Muhammad went to Afghanistan taking with him about 10,000 untrained men to take part in *Jihad* against the United States and her allies. As they were untrained, so many of them were either killed or arrested and those who remained safe, when returned back, were arrested in Pakistan along with Sufi Muhammad and were sent to Jail in Dera Ismail Khan. On 12th January 2002, the government banned TNSM.

When Maulana Sufi Muhammad was in Jail, his disciple and Son-In-Law Maulana Fazlullah, whose real name was Fazal Hayat and was the resident of

Imam Dheri Swat, started an FM radio. In 2006, when the US forces attacked a Madrassa in Bajaur agency in which many students including the brother of Fazlullah named (Samiullah) were killed. He contacted Molvi Faqir Muhammad and Baitullah Mehsud; the Taliban leaders in the tribal areas of Pakistan and started the Taliban Movement in Swat. He also opposed vaccine against polio and girls education in Swat. In 2006, Maulana Fazlullah directed his followers to burn musical instruments such as televisions, tape-recorders, VCRs and CD players etc. The local administration took action against him the same year but failed, because the local population supported him.

Some people are of the opinion that the district administration could not do anything, because the provincial government did not give them permission to do so and the result was that the movement spread in Swat Valley without any check. They went even to the extent of demonstrating weapons and also challenged the army and police. On 3rd July 2007 the Taliban attacked Matta police station with rockets in which a constable was killed.

Maulana Fazlullah also strongly condemned the operation at *Lal Masjid* and *Jamia Hafsa* in Islamabad. As a result of the operation of *Jamia Hafsa*, suicide attacks started in Swat and on 4th November 2007, the government started operation and the army took full control of the situation on 24th November the same year. Although the army pledged to clear the valley from the Taliban up to December but they were not successful. The year 2008 was a bloody one, when a suicide attack was carried out on 29th February in the funeral of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Javed Iqbal in which about fifty people were killed, it was a great tragedy in the history of Swat. The situation deteriorated more and more and Taliban diverted their attention to the prominent personalities of Swat who were the main hurdle in their way and were strongly opposed to their movement. Many Khans, Lawyers, Teachers, Doctors and some common citizens were on their hit list. The Taliban threatened them frequently that is why, many of them left Swat and shifted to

other parts of the country. The Taliban turned to brutal measures against those who were creating hindrances in their movement. They butchered the opponents in chowks in Mingora and created a very tense and horrible situation for the local residents. They first of all targeted the men who could spoke against them in public and in interviews to television and radio channels. The valley of Swat which was a place of peace and happiness, presented an image of terror, fright and panic in 2009. Fazlullah also permitted the targeting of government servants. So, keeping in view this situation everyone was in search of finding safe place outside Swat that led to the migration of a large number of people to the lower Khyber Pakhtunkhwa districts of Mardan, Charsadda and Peshawar. About 1.8 million people were displaced.

The Plight of Prominent People from Swat and Afzal Khan's decision to stay

Keeping in view the chronic situation and the atrocities of Taliban on the local population of the valley, especially the luminaries, majority of them left Swat and went to Peshawar and Islamabad for their safety and other districts of KP. Among them was former provincial minister and Pakistan Muslim League leader Shujjat Ali Khan, who along with his family shifted to Islamabad. The Taliban set his home on fire and also took control of his personal property. The home of Tahir Khan near Darmai village, who was the nephew of Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala, was also demolished. Being a Pashtun nationalist, whose aim in life was the struggle for protecting the rights of Pashtuns of Pakistan and their unity, trying to remove the hatred from their hearts against one another, how he could leave his people alone to the atrocities of Taliban. People called him Khan Lala and really he was the Khan Lala of everyone and proved like their elder brother. He supported the government of Pakistan against the terrorists, who had almost completely controlled the valley. He had two sons on high rank in military and as a result his sympathies with the military and the State of Pakistan was natural. The Taliban frequently threatened him but he never bowed his head before them. His family members and other

dignitaries counseled him to leave Swat but he said; “how can I leave my family spread over five villages and my people all over Swat.”

As Afzal Khan Lala struggled for Pashtuns national unity, he strived his best during these tumultuous days to unify the Pashtuns of Swat against the Taliban. It was because of this that he rejected even the stance of his family members to leave Swat in the face of threat to his life from the militants who were bent on targeting him and had restricted him to his home. He struggled for unity among the Pashtuns during his life and had arranged many *Jirgas* at Peshawar, the purpose of which was to hold the Pashtun nation together and to chalk out ways for the solution of their sufferings and issues, therefore, he was not in a position to leave the Pashtuns of Swat at the mercy of the militants.

Militant’s Attacks on Afzal Khan’s Life and Property

Afzal Khan Lala was on the hit list of the militants because he blatantly opposed their movement based on atrocities and the killings of innocent people. The militants used different tactics to terrify him and to prevent him from speaking against them but he was not the man to step backward from his stance on the militant movement and successfully opposed them till the end of his life. He refused to leave the ground to them by saying; “I would rather die than cede ground to the Taliban.” The first attack on Afzal Khan Lala occurred at Baidara Swat on 21st September 2007, when he returned from attending the funeral of a friend. He, along with his nephew Abdul Jabbar Khan were seriously injured and his two bodyguards were killed. He was shifted to the hospital at Mingora where he recovered from injuries. The militants carried out 10 assassination attempts on him but he survived, he did not surrender before them and used to criticize them publicly.

The militants did not forgive the old white bearded man and when he survived their attacks, they targeted his family and his home also. On 24th January 2008, the militants targeted a car near Baghdheri in which his two nephews named Zakir

Khan and Shakir Khan, were shot dead. It was a great tragedy for the family of Afzal Khan Lala. On the night of 12th August 2008, the militants attacked his home with heavy weapons including rockets and machine guns, the fight continued the whole night, but the guards of Afzal Khan Lala successfully defended him and did not allow the militants to enter his home, although the walls of Afzal Khan’s home were damaged. After that people expected that he will run away but he said; “I am from this soil. It is my home. My tribe is here. I want to live among my people. I will not run away”.

The militants were bent on completely destroying the influential persons in Swat District in order to fully implement their system on the local people leaving no one behind who will question their actions. As Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala was among those who had won the hearts of his people and stood behind them in thick and thin, was the target of the militants. When they failed to terrify him even in the face of terrorist attacks on him, they resorted to destroy his property. His home was damaged in their attacks and surrounding walls were impaired with rockets. His peaches and apple orchards were burnt and his shops and markets were also demolished. The militants wanted to weak him economically and so his sources of earning were also targeted.

Refusal to Negotiate with Taliban

Qari Mushtaq, who was the resident of Gulibagh Swat, had cordial relations with the maternal uncles of Afzal Khan Lala, who belonged to Charbagh Swat. Qari Mushtaq was 2nd in rank after Fazlullah and used to administer his FM, when he remained absent. The maternal uncles of Afzal Khan Lala were of the opinion to use Qari Mushtaq as an intermediary for talks between Afzal Khan Lala and Taliban for reconciliation. When they came to Afzal Khan Lala and offered an agreement between the two, the response of Afzal Khan Lala was as, “It is not acceptable to me to have a life of an hour with them.” The relatives of Afzal Khan Lala still tried to bring them together and sent Qari Mushtaq to Peochar where Fazlullah had arranged a meeting with his commanders. He rejected the request of Qari

Mushtaq simply on the grounds that his other commanders Ibne-Amin and Benawri Mullah will feel angry, who were against Afzal Khan Lala. Although he also told him that Afzal Khan was the elder of all of them, anyhow their efforts failed and the reason was also the refusal of Afzal Khan Lala, who was not in a position to reconcile with the Taliban.

During these deteriorated days in Swat, all the family members of Afzal Khan Lala; including Colonel Abdul Gaffar Khan, Abdul Jabbar Khan, Salah Uddin Khan and Dr. Muhammad Azim Khan, gathered and then decided that they should re-conciliate with the Taliban keeping in view the condition of Swat. They also formed a committee to meet with Taliban. But none of them dared to inform Afzal Khan Lala and at last his Nephew Dr. Muhammad Azim Khan took the responsibility to do so. He went to Afzal Khan Lala and informed him of the situation. Afzal Khan Lala replied, "I am with you and do not refuse to be with you but my personal opinion is against it and it does not seem to me that its result will be in our favor and it will harm us more." The militants had a great desire to capture Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala alive and had expressed it many times. When Afzal Khan was informed about the intentions of the militants, he said, "It is my firm belief that life and death, honor and dishonor is in the hands of Allah Almighty. God forbid, it cannot happen that they will capture me, but if they take control of me, I have advised my relatives to shoot me and not to hand me over to them."

The Taliban took over Swat in 2007 and remained in power till 2009 when the government carried out a successful operation against them and restored peace in the valley. During this time the Swat Valley suffered many hardships, ups and downs on the part of its citizens. Many of its residents migrated to Peshawar, Charsadda, Mardan and Islamabad in which many prominent personalities were also included such as Shujaat Ali Khan, Fateh Muhammad Khan, Jamal Nasar Khan and the family members of the last ruler of Swat 'Miang Abdul Haq Jahanzeb.

During these days the only person who stood against the aggression of the militants and their

atrocities and spoke frequently against them and their enforced system, was Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala. The militants used many tactics to capture him alive but in vain. They also attacked his home and damaged the boundary walls with rockets but could not succeed in their mission. They also arrested 24 of his guards, but could not downgrade his courage and stood steadfast till the end. He frequently told the people that he will not leave his home town Swat at the mercy of Taliban and had also turned down the plan of his family members for the reconciliation with the militants. Even President Asif Ali Zardari and Asfandiyar Wali Khan also appealed to him to shift to any other safe place in the country, but he refused to leave Swat. Even Afzal Khan Lala was an old man of 75 years at the time of militancy in Swat, he bravely faced the situation and did not leave the ground to the militants. He survived ten attacks on his life but did not lose heart. Keeping in view his bravery and courage that he showed at that time, the President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari awarded him with the (*Hilali-Shujaat*) in June 2009.

Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala did not support the movement of Taliban and extended his full support to the army and the State of Pakistan against the militants. He was strongly in favor of the training of local people to stand against the militants. For this purpose he appealed the government to train them to restore peace in the valley. He once said; "If these people are properly trained and armed, the Pashtun concept of "Badal" (Revenge) can make them fight back." He was of the opinion that army will not remain forever in Swat and so the regional people, if equipped well, will play a great role to defend their motherland. He further said, "To do so, we need to have a proper administrative system, backed by civilian security establishment, otherwise the Taliban may come again, only to inflict further pain on the local people and such military operation cannot deliver fruitful results, if there is no planning or strategy to consolidate the gains through administrative action, once the army withdraws". He also criticized the halfhearted action of the government to eliminate terrorism from the Swat Valley.

Afzal Khan Lala Stance on the Talibanization in Swat

Swat Valley remained under the militants control from 2007 to 2009 and the Valley passed through very crucial and critical time in its history. The process of Talibanization was not spontaneous but was the result of the past acts on the part of the military government of General Zia-ul-Haq. In 2009, when Afzal Khan Lala was admitted in Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Rawalpindi, a journalist asked him a question about the growth of Taliban in Swat. He replied to him that the movement was the result of the policies of General Zia-ul-Haq, when he prepared and trained people and sent them to Afghanistan against the forces of former USSR and the sponsor was the United States of America that provided millions of Dollars for that purpose to compel USSR to retreat. He clarified that many Taliban in the current movement in Swat were the remnants of Zia era, who now took up arms against the state who were prepared some years ago.

To clear the Valley from the militants, the Pakistan Army conducted military operations with different names against the insurgents. Firstly, the government launched an operation *Rah-e-Haq*, also known as the first battle of Swat (25 October 2007 to 8 December 2007) and cleared all the government buildings that the militants had taken over. It was carried out in three phases. Another operation in the name of *Rah-e-Rast* was started in May 2009 is known as the second battle of Swat. After successfully clearing the valley from the militants and restoring peace, the PPP government at center decided to establish a permanent Military Cantonment in Swat Valley. A senior journalist from Karachi called Afzal Khan Lala to know about his views on the government decision. He thought that Afzal Khan Lala will go against it like the other nationalist leaders who generally oppose the military, but the response of Afzal Khan Lala was different, he asked him, "Whether this army is national or occupying"? the journalist replied that the army was national. Then, Afzal Khan Lala replied that if it was a national institution then they were justified to establish a cantonment in any part of the country including Swat.

Afzal Khan Lala and the Swat Peace Deal

After the militants took control of the Swat Valley and remained dominant till 2009, during this era the skirmishes between the Pakistan army and the militants led to the destruction of infra structure, government buildings and private property of the citizens. The militants also killed and beheaded the politicians, singers and other opponents, then the government showed some sort of elasticity in its behavior and agreed to make peace with the militants accepting some of their demands. The agreement was concluded on 16th February 2009 and its main provisions included;

1. The government will enforce *Sharia* law in Malakand Division.
2. Gradual withdrawal of security forces.
3. Exchange of prisoners.
4. The Taliban will recognize the rite of the government and will cooperate with the local administration.
5. Taliban will not attack the shops of barbers and music and will not display arms publicly.
6. Cessation of the training camps of the Taliban and stopping suicide attacks.
7. Taliban will allow the vaccination of the children.
8. The Madrassa of Fazlullah was to be changed into an Islamic University.
9. Only those FM stations will be allowed having valid government license and the Taliban will left restrictions on the work of women at different institutions.

The agreement was signed at Frontier House Peshawar and about all the cream leaders of political parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa participated in it. On the conclusion of the treaty, all the people of Swat heaved a sigh of relief. The deal came to be known as "*Nizam-e-Adal Regulation*." Mian Iftikhar Hussain the Information Minister, Hidayatullah Khan Wazir the Livestock Minister, ANP spokesman Zahid Khan and commissioner Hazara Division Javed Khan were the signatories from the government side while Maulana Sufi Muhammad signed it on behalf of the TNSM. On 13th March 2009 the National Assembly ratified the Swat peace deal

and President Asif Ali Zardari signed it. Although the government of ANP was criticized for showing flexibility towards the militants, but they did all that for restoration of peace in the Valley. The militants were not true to their words, they just wanted to make themselves stable and took benefits from the peace deal, so it was not long standing and broke shortly that led to another military operation in the Valley in May 2009.

Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala was among those who were badly affected in the Swat crisis and had maintained a prominent position in the past, but it was strange that the Provincial Government of KP did not feel any need to invite him to the signing of the peace deal and completely ignored him. The behavior of the ANP government was strongly condemned in different circles including Afzal Khan Lala himself, whose stance on the agreement was different and on an occasion, he criticized the government and made it clear that apart from him the government should also have consulted the people of Swat in the peace deal signed with Taliban. He also predicted its failure and his prediction proved true, when the deal faced failure in May 2009, compelling the government to conduct another military operation in the Valley. The Awami National Party which was in power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, also did not take suitable measures for his security and he was left at the mercy of God who defended himself against the militants through his own guards, later on security was provided to protect him against the militant attacks.

Afzal Khan Lala not only worked for the interests of the Pashtuns of the world but he was specifically involved to work for safeguarding the interests of the Pashtuns of Swat. During the Swat State era, the ruler gave jobs only to those who would support him and other people were deprived of government positions who did not endorse his policies. One of the family member of Afzal Khan Lala was also forcefully removed from job at Saidu Hospital on personal differences. Afzal Khan had also quit his job as lecturer at Jahanzeb College Saidu Sharif, because his relations with the Swat State ruler were not good. Majority of the youths were jobless and had become burden on their families.

In 1969, the State of Swat was finally merged in Pakistan and the era of Miangul family rule came to an end. The system of Pakistan was introduced in Swat. The citizens were allowed to join Pakistan Army. At this occasion Afzal Khan Lala tried his best and got many youths of Swat enrolled in Pakistan Army. Keeping in view his struggle and desire to send youths to the Pakistan Army, the Army granted him the title of "Honorary Recruiting Officer" (HRO).

During the Swat crisis, Afzal Khan Lala remained like a strong wall against the attacks of Taliban and successfully thwarted them, although he was suffering from numerous diseases including high blood pressure and hepatitis (C), President Zardari and Army Chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani also praised him for his bravery. In October 2015 he did not feel well and was admitted in a hospital in Islamabad, but he soon recovered and came back to his home, but shortly he fell ill again and was shifted again to Islamabad on 31st October. This time his health did not recover and he breathed his last in the hospital on 1st November 2015. He was 89 years of age at the time of his death.

After his demise in Islamabad, his dead body was shifted to his home town Bara Drushkhela Swat where his funeral was offered. Hundreds of people participated in his funeral in which some prominent personalities were also present including; Chairman ANP Asfandyar Wali Khan, Amir Muqam (Advisor to the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif), Corps Commander Peshawar Lieutenant General Hidayatur Rahman, former Chief Minister KP Amir Haidar Khan Hoti and local government councilors of different areas of Swat. Apart from the participation of these people in his funeral, many other prominent personalities paid him tribute that included; Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Governor KP Sardar Mehtab Ahmad Khan, Chief Minister KP Pervez Khattak, Chairman PPP Asif Ali Zardari, and Malala Yusufzai etc. Keeping in view his services the government of KP renamed Government Post Graduate College Matta Swat as Government Afzal Khan Lala Post Graduate College Matta Swat.

Impressions of Some Eminent Personalities on the Death of Afzal Khan Lala

Being a prominent personality and his multi-faceted role in different walks of life and his services for the Pashtuns, many well-known personalities expressed their views on his death that included; Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Deputy Governor of Kunar Province Qazi Muhammad Nabi Ahmadi, Afghan Ambassador in Pakistan Janan Musazai, Chairman ANP Asfandyar Wali Khan, General Secretary ANP Sardar Hussain Babak, VC Bacha Khan University Charsadda Prof. Dr. Fazal Rahim Marwat, Ex. Director Pashtu Academy Peshawar University Muhammad Nawaz Tahir, Ex. MNA and Jammat-e-Islami member Fazal Subhan, Vice President Trade Association Islamabad Sayyid Zakir ShahBacha, Ex. MPA Charsadda Muhammad Arshad Khan and Ex. ANP President Bajaur Sheikh Jahan Zada. In his letter to his family, the President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai expressed his deep sorrow over his death and wrote that “he had dedicated his whole life for the services of his people. The services of Afzal Khan will ever be remembered. May his soul rest in peace” The Deputy Governor of Kunar Qazi Muhammad Nabi Ahmadi also expressed his regret over the sad demise of Afzal Khan Lala. He termed him the architect of Pashtun’s national unity and prayed for the eternal happiness of his soul. Janan Musazai the then ambassador of Afghanistan in Pakistan also felt grief on the death of Afzal Khan Lala, he expressed his views and said that Khan Lala was the elder of all Pashtuns, the people of Kabul also paid him tribute. He was a clear hearted Muslim and raised voice against violence and extremism.

Asfandyar Wali Khan said that Afzal Khan Lala spent his life for bringing unity among the Pashtuns and always struggled for peace. He stood like a hill against terrorism. Sardar Hussain Babak explained his views in sorrow on the death of Afzal Khan Lala and said that he was a traditional Pashtun leader and struggled till his last for the solution of issues of Pashtuns and played a great role against terrorism, he will be in the hearts of Pashtuns till the day of Judgement. Professor Dr. Fazal Rahim Marwat said on his death that, when

the name of Pashtun national movement is mentioned, the name of Afzal Khan Lala will also be remembered with it. He was an outstanding Pashtun leader and worked against terrorism and extremism in Swat, he remained there till his death, even the terrorists attacked him several times but he did not surrender to them.

Muhammad Nawaz Tahir who was also his class-fellow in Islamia College Peshawar, lamented over his death and said that “Khan Lala was well known personality not only in Pakistan but in Afghanistan as well. He will always remain alive in the hearts of Pashtuns”. Fazal Subhan was also saddened over the death of Afzal Khan Lala and said that he was an aged and experienced politician and had many services for his region. He also prayed for his salvation. Sayyid Zakir Shah Bacha also admired his services for Pashtun’s national unity and showed grief and sorrow over his death. Muhammad Arshad Khan said that “Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala spent his whole life to solve the issues of the Pashtuns and was the follower of Bacha Khan, he faced many hardships in his struggle for Pashtun’s National Unity and was not happy over the disunity among the them”. Sheikh Jahan Zada also expressed his sorrows on the death of Afzal Khan Lala and said that “he was a brave man and Pashtun nation will always remember his political, social and national services, they will follow his footsteps and will continue his movement for Pashtuns national unity”.

Conclusion:

Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala vehemently denounced the Taliban, their perversion of Islam, and their crimes against defenseless individuals. Although his family members and bodyguards were slain, the Taliban terrorized him and assaulted him several times but in vain. He did not, however, leave Swat and stayed there until the end of his life in spite of all these threats and attacks. Despite the fact that many well-known individuals had already fled from Swat and were relocated to other regions of the country during those volatile days, he remained a staunch supporter of Pashtun nationalism and

refused to leave his people at the mercy of Taliban, staying with them till his death. Keeping in view his valor and his stand against the militants, the Pakistani government bestowed upon him (*Hilali-Shujaat*), that is exception in the history of Swat. His health deteriorated in October 2015, and he was delivered to a hospital in Islamabad. He healed quickly and returned to his hometown, but he soon became unwell once more, and on October 31, 2015, he was taken back to Islamabad. This time, his health did not improve, and on November 1, 2015, he passed away in the hospital. When he passed away, he was 89 years old. In Pashtun society, he is still remembered with honour and dignity.

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