

The British Colonial Encounter with the Pukhtuns: An Appraisal of Faqir Ippi's Struggle against the British Raj (1936-1947)

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Abstract

The North-West Frontier region of the British Empire in India during the Great Game was part of the 'Ring Fence Strategy', framed by the Raj against its adversaries and rivals in Central and South Asia. To protect her 'Jewel in the Crown'- India, the British Raj made several moves in the strategically placed Pukhtun¹ land. The Pukhtun populace, adherent to their centuries old code of conduct, *Pukhtūwali*, consistently resisted the British encroachment of their territory. Mirza Ali Khan, popularly known as Faqir Ippi, was one of the many freedom fighters who challenged the imperialist power in this region. Taking notice of Islam Bibi's case, a Hindu Convert, Faqir Ippi mobilized the Pukhtuns of Waziristan in defying and fighting the British. He was a serious contestant to the British authority with his well-known fighting skills, effective planning and guerilla tactics in one of the most difficult terrains. The entire Tribal Belt, especially Waziristan, proved to be a 'turbulent frontier' for nearly eleven years, i.e. 1936-1947. This insurgency started bringing bad name to the crown and encouraging others to rise against the British. To contain and end Faqir Ippi's resistance, Governor George Cunningham hired the locals to instigate and bribe his followers to rise and fight against him. The aim of this paper is a critical evaluation of the British strategy in this region and an appraisal of Faqir Ippi's response and assessment of how successful he was in invigorating Pukhtun resistance to defend their motherland, using both colonial and local sources.

Keywords: British Raj, Great Game, Pukhtuns, Pukhtunwali, Faqir Ippi, Waziristan

Introduction

Karl Marx, while discussing 'history' and its importance states that 'history has no other way of answering old questions other than putting

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¹ Different variants of its spelling exist, i.e., Pakhtun, Pashtoon, Pashtun, Pukhtoon. Its plural is affixed by 's'. Sometime 'Afghan' is also used. However, in this paper it is spelled as: 'Pukhtun'.

new ones, and, therefore, the new questions are put to understand history accordingly.

There is a sizeable amount of literature on the Pukhtuns' resistance against the Raj, however, very few of those sources have glorified them (the Pukhtuns). The British sources consisting of voluminous episodes, have justified the British approach to administer this region through unique set-up, whereas the Pukhtun mindset has been presented as barbarous, savage and war-loving, fond of arms and fighting, and almost backward. The local response to colonial invasion has been termed as 'revolt' and 'rebellious'. However, only a few local scholars have critically analyzed these features (of barbarity and backwardness) and tried to probe if there is even any basis to such a portrayal of the Pukhtuns. In this regard, Faqir Ippi's role in the struggle against the British has been the subject of very few studies, of which only two have benefitted from the local sources.² It only proves how correct Chinua Achebe was when he said, 'Until the lions have their own historians, history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter'. Therefore, it is significant to discuss the struggle of Faqir Ippi and his approach towards the British using a perfectly balanced approach.

The British occupation of the Indian sub-continent and their direct control over North-Western border is an incredible story if the wilderness of that time is kept in mind. One of the fascinating features of the British policy was their attitude towards the resilient, hostile and confrontational tribes in North-West Frontier region. Before the British, many invaders tried to subjugate them but to no vain. Throughout the history, from Alexander to the Mughuls, the Pukhtuns gave tough time, and resisted and protected their motherland. The British, despite their military strength and power, devised different strategies and policies to control this region, however, they also faced continuous resistance and opposition in the Pukhtun region. One such adversary, among the Pukhtuns, who defied the British authority was Faqir Ippi.³

² Fazal-Ur-Rahman, has earned his PhD by submitting his dissertation to the Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad in 2011, entitled 'The Religio-political Movement of Faqir Ippi'. It was published in 2004 entitled *Batl-i-Hurriyat-Faqir of Ippi: Bartānvī Iqtidār Aur Firangī Tehzīb ké k̄hilāf Īman Parwar Jihād* in Urdu. Thus, he is the first and only Pukhtun (local) who has conducted academic research for a degree, the other one is an article (for academic purpose) on Faqir Ippi.

³ Javed Iqbal, 'An Overview of the British Administrative Setup and Strategy in Khyber 1849-1947', *IPRI Journal*, XI:1 (Winter 2011), 78-79.

The British, after coming into direct contact with the populace of this region, devised a two-pronged strategy,⁴ to ensure and manage internal harmony at the cost of political changes, and its protection from foreign aggression and invasions.⁵ Their grand strategy was part of the ‘Ring Fence Strategy’⁶ which encompassed the entire region surrounding India, i.e., Central Asia, Afghanistan, Persia (Iran) and the Persian Gulf. As a result, the region witnessed and experience profound, subtle, complex and complicated squabbling among the Imperial European powers. With this notion of protecting her ‘jewel in the Crown’, especially from the Russian threat via the North-Western border, the British established a vast buffer zone stretching from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Middle East.⁷

The British imperialism and importance of India

The British Imperialism⁸ was the result of the ‘Great Game’⁹ that compelled three big powers—Britain, France and Russia—to try their

⁴ Also known as British Imperial Strategy in India which was focused to achieve inner motives.

⁵ Daud Arbab, ‘Partition: A British Revenge on the Pakhtuns’, *Viewpoint* (Online Issue), No.123, 16 August 2012, www.viewpointonline.net/partition-a-british-revenge-on-pakhtuns.html. Accessed: 19 October 2012.

⁶ Peter J. Brobst, *The Future of the Great Game: Sir Olaf Caroe, India’s Independence, and the Defence of Asia* (Akron, Ohio: The University of Akron Press, 2005), 36, quoted by Salman Bangash in *Tribal Belt on the Anglo-Afghan Border: Its Genesis and Purpose During the British Rule in India* (PhD Thesis submitted to Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, 2012), 182.

⁷ Salman Bangash, *Tribal Belt....*, 46, 49-50.

⁸ The term ‘Imperialism’ contributes certain objectives or motives that are valued according to the need of time, and with solid justifications. Some of those values are political, economic, religious (missionary), exploratory, ideological and cultural. All such objectives are subject to change periodically and which are kept periodically, however, sometime with irregularity, and which are always kept hidden. ‘Imperialism Motives & Justifications’, <https://slideplayer.com/slide/10932259/>. Accessed: 20 May 2013.

⁹ A term usually attributed to Arthur Conolly (1807-1842), a British intelligence officer, explorer and writer, who worked for British East India Company, used to describe the rivalry and strategic conflict between the British and the Tsarist Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia. In Russia, the same rivalry and strategic conflict was known as ‘Tournament of Shadows’ Fazal-ur-Rahim Marwat, *The Impact of the Great Game on Pashtuns/Afghans*. However, Miron Rezun cites in his book, *Intrigue and*

best to surpass each other. However, the notion of the 'Great Game' came to surface only when it was first conceived and executed by the rulers of the British Empire.

The British India was respected as the heart of that Empire, and also its political playground, and Britain as its epicenter. Hence the power and strength of the British Empire was acknowledged across the globe.¹⁰ While the heart, i.e., India, served as the 'Jewel in the Crown' for the British Empire, the Indian North-West Frontier region served as the main vein linked to the heart of the British Empire and provided a strong base for the Crown.¹¹ In other words, on the one hand they ruled India through their laws, while on the other hand it was kept secure from any expected invasion via political alliances and military power. In this regard, D.G. Tendulkar is right to state that 'peace and progress on the Frontier were of little concern to the men who ruled India. Security was the all-important objective.'¹² This concern for security led the British to destroy many regions in British occupied territories, including India. Similarly, the North-West Frontier of India also faced destruction because of the policies the British implemented in this region out of their concern for security.

War in South West Asia (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 2, that the originator of the phrase 'Great Game' was J.W. Kay, who used it in his book, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, but British novelist Rudyard Kipling popularized it in his novel, *KIM* (Abdul Hafeez Khan, 'Centre of New Great Game', *The Dialogue*, 1:4). However, another view regarding use of the word 'Great Game' is that it was a British officer who first called it the Great Game. He played it exuberantly, and lost it in the terrifying way in which one lost in Central Asia, an Uzbek emir cast him for two months into a well filled with vermin and reptiles, and then what remained of him was brought up and beheaded. The phrase 'the Great Game' was found in his papers and quoted by a historian of the First Afghan War, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/33619/david-fromkin/the-great-game-in-asia>. Accessed 19 July 2015.

¹⁰ Stephen Luscombe, 'The British Empire Where the Sun Never Sets', www.britishempire.co.uk, Accessed: 15 May 2015.

¹¹ Daud Arbab, 'Partition: A British Revenge', *Viewpoint* (Online Issue), No.123, 16 August 2012, www.viewpointonline.net/partition-a-british-revenge-on-pakhtuns.html, Accessed: 19 October 2012.

¹² Quoted by Sultan-i-Rome, *The North-West Frontier (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) Essays on History* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 347.

Defending the Indian Frontier

The Indian region called North-West Frontier, was considered as one of the most attractive and appealing areas in memories of the British Empire. The 'Frontier' was unpredictable. Just anything could happen in a blink of an eye.¹³ Salman Bangash states that 'the British Empire was repeatedly faced with the dilemma of 'unstable frontiers', but, in South Asia, it had an additional anxiety.' In fact, the Russian Empire's expansion towards Central Asia in the 19th Century triggered the fear that Czarist intrigues and maneuvers might exploit and take advantage of discontent on the Indian borders.¹⁴ Therefore, the tactic of 'Use and Abandon' was adopted to operate various policies to achieve the objectives, as the great drama of the Northwest Frontier unfolded. Nobody was able to guess and anticipate the motive behind those policies. Sir George Cunningham, when asked to explain the use of different policies in this region, replied:

...the government has no one policy unless it be stated in terms so vague as to be really meaningless. Much less they have one treaty. There are half a dozen different kinds of engagements, written and unwritten. And I would say here-and it is to the credit of both the tribe and of Government-that I would always rely on the unwritten promises, given in solemn tribal gatherings, than on the printed words. The reason for all this variety is partly historical, partly differences between the characters of the different tribes, or differences in their internal organization, and, last but not the least, geography.¹⁵

On the question of using a correct policy, since 1860s, a series of discussions and debates have taken place. Thus, in 1870s, two separate approaches were adopted towards the North-West Frontier: the first supported the 'close border' policy, and the second advocated a 'forward policy'. The debate over this issue attained such seriousness that one office-bearer, posted in Frontier, observed, that 'by temperament or by profession a man belongs to the Forward or Backward School just as the man in the street may adopt a University on Boat Race Day'.¹⁶

¹³ Arthur Swinson, quoted by Salman Bangash, *Frontier Tribal Belt: Its Genesis and Purpose under the Raj*, 24.

¹⁴ Sir George Cunningham, 'Tribes of the North-West Frontier of India', *Cunningham Collection-Copies of the Cunningham's Articles mainly about N.W.F.P. 1937-62*, 25, Acc. IOR MSS EUR, D 670/28, British Library, UK.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Richard Isaac Bruce, *The Forward Policy and Its Results or Thirty-Five Years' Work Amongst the Tribes on Our North-West Frontier of India* (New

Hence, the 'Close Border Policy' was introduced which meant to remain close to the borders of India-and to guard those borders across the tribal belt. This approach aimed at checking the 'tribal raids with retaliatory military actions. Thus, the British maintained non-interference in the entire tribal belt. However, for the purpose of defense, the routine military activities continued through Punjab Frontier Force.¹⁷ This approach ensured friendly relations between the British Government and the tribal-peace was ensured. For their service towards the British, the tribes were granted monthly allowances. However, the tribesmen time and again violated those agreements, which ended the aforementioned allowances. Imposition of fines and putting blockades on the tribes remained the British practice, which paved the way for sending expeditions into the tribal territory.¹⁸

Thus, the abandonment of the 'closing to the border' move took place. It was replaced by the Forward Policy.¹⁹ This approach justified

York: Longman's, Green, and Co., 1900), 4-5. The writer of this book served as Political Agent in Balochistan; he was Commissioner and Superintendent at Derajat Division Punjab. See also: Brandon Douglas Marsh, *Ramparts of Empire: India's North-West Frontier and British Imperialism, 1919-1947* (PhD Thesis, University of Texas, USA, 2009). This thesis has been published but the researcher could not access it.

¹⁷ Punjab Frontier Force was raised under the supreme control of the Government of the Punjab, which in 1886 was amalgamated with the regular army (Javed Iqbal, 'An Overview of the British Administrative Setup and Strategy in Khyber 1849-1947', *IPRI Journal* XI, No.1, (Winter 2011), 79-80.

¹⁸ Javed Iqbal, 'An Overview of the British Administrative Setup and Strategy in Khyber 1849-1947', *IPRI Journal* XI: 1 (Winter 2011), 78-79. According to Javed Iqbal, between 1849 and 1899, the Punjab government undertook as many as 62 minor and major expeditions into the tribal territories.

¹⁹ The forward policy was often associated with Balochistan's 'Sandeman Policy', named after its progenitor, Sir Robert Sandeman (1835-1892). Sandeman, while serving as Resident in Baluchistan during the 1870s, introduced a policy of tribal 'control' based on allowances, the use of tribal chiefs to enforce control and the use of force when necessary (See: Henry Thomas Thornton, *Colonel Sir Robert Sandeman: His Life and Work on Our Indian Frontier, A Memoir, with Selections from His Correspondence and Official Writings* (London: John Murray, 1895). The system was successful and Sandeman's many disciples sought to expand the system to other areas. Sir Henry Dobbs, who served throughout the Frontier, Baluchistan, and Afghanistan, created a version of it in Iraq in the 1920s (See Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*). Brandon Douglas Marsh, *Ramparts of Empire: India's North-West Frontier and British Imperialism, 1919-1947* (PhD

maintenance of friendly relations with the tribes. 'This change', as Iqbal terms it, 'was directly linked to the Great Game in Central Asia.' Russia's expected designs to expand her territory into Afghanistan compelled the British to organize their defense accordingly. This (security) could be achieved by the occupation of the scientific frontier²⁰ based on the Kabul-Ghazni-Kandahar line. For this it was necessary to control the passes in the northwestern hills, to improve communications both in tribal and British held territories, and to set up advanced military posts in the tribal region with a view to facilitating the occupation of the strategic line. To the British, besides Islam and the role of Kabul, what primarily motivated them to act against the Pukhtuns was the Pukhtun 'instinct' for independence. The entire tribal area, especially Waziristan, remained a troublesome region for the British in their Indian Empire.²¹

Faqir Ippi's Struggle

*The Pathan tribesman has never been tamed. He has
independence in the soul.*

(George Cunningham)

As already discussed, the Pukthun resistance against the British Raj resulted in emergence of different movements that left their land-marks in the Pukhtuns' history. Those Pukhtun heroes who spent their energies against the Raj, included Maulana Najmuddin (Hadda Mulla Sahib), Mullah Powinda, Mullah Mastaan from Swat (Sarhor Faqir), Faqir of Alingarh and Mulla Syed Akbar. Most of the aforementioned Pukhtun leaders participated against the British in the famous 1897 uprising. Similarly, Fazl-i-Wahid (Haji sahib of Turangzai), Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Bacha Khan) and Mirza Ali Khan (Faqir Ippi) are also among those heroes who spent their strength and contributed prominently to motivate the public against the British Raj.

Mirza Ali Khan, who became known to his people as Faqir Ippi, was son of Arsala Khan; the latter was a known religious man and was respected in the region. He belonged to the Bangal Khel clan of the

Thesis, University of Texas, USA, 2009). This thesis has been published but the researcher could not access it.

²⁰ The term 'Scientific Frontier' has been used by John Dacosta in his book, entitled: *A Scientific Frontier; or, The Danger of A Russian Invasion of India* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., Ltd., 1891), 9-10. <http://www.archive.org/details/scientificfronti00dacorih>. (available online).

²¹ Brandon Douglas Marsh, *Ramparts of Empire: India's North-West Frontier and British Imperialism, 1919-1947* (PhD Thesis, University of Texas, USA, 2009), 21.

Maddi Khel Haibati branch of Tori Khel Wazir of North Waziristan Agency. As mentioned, his name was Mirza Ali Khan, however, due to his piousness and saintly character, he earned the title of Faqir Ippi which means a 'saintly man'.²²

To date uncertainty prevails about the birth of Faqir Ippi, and various scholars have shared their views according to their research findings. However, a group of scholars including Allen Warren, Abdul Hameed Tareen and Muhammad Nawaz Khan Mehsood have agreed to accept Faqir Ippi's year of birth as 1897. Additionally, an Indian newspaper *The Daily Mail* also supports the aforementioned date in its issue dated June 26, 1937.²³ While Fazlur Raheem Marwat claims differently; according to his statement Faqir Ippi was born in 1901. Milan Hauner states that he was born between 1892 and 1897, not being sure about the real year of Faqir Ippi's birth. Muhammad Nawaz Mehsood's claim regarding Faqir Ippi's birth can be accepted authentic as he has conducted interviews of various family members of Faqir Ippi, and states that he had studied many relevant documented proofs. Thus, he agrees with the view that he was born in 1897.²⁴

The father of Faqir Ippi had good terms with Gulab Din, the son of Mullah Powinda-one of the staunch enemies of the British in tribal area. Mirza Ali Khan (the Faqir Ippi) was educated at a mosque in his village, and then left for seeking a spiritual guide and mentor to enhance his capabilities. After going to different places, he managed to reach Afghanistan, and was accepted by Syed Hasan Naqeeb of Charbagh in Jalalabad to join his discipleship. Syed Hasan Naqeeb was one of the famous Sufis of Qadriya Sufi order. After his return to the hometown, Faqir Ippi was wed-locked with the daughter of Qazi Hayat-ud-Din.²⁵ Thus, after receiving invitation from the people of village 'Ippi', Faqir Ippi migrated and settled there as he was gifted a piece of land by the residents of Ippi for his residence and mosque.²⁶

Faqir Ippi was a pious man. At that time, Waziristan was like a pricking thorn for the British due to its proximity to Afghanistan. The

²² Fazlur Raheem Marwat, 'The Faqir of Ippi', *Celebrities of NWFP, Vol. I & II*, (edit.) Parvez Khan Toru & Fazl-ur-Raheem Marwat (Peshawar: Pakistan Study Centre, University of Peshawar, 2005), 190.

²³ *The Daily Mail*, India, 26 June 1937, 19.

²⁴ Mahsud, *Firangi Raj aur Ghairatmand Musalman* (Urdu), 180.

²⁵ Qazi Hayatuddin was also known as Shaherzad. Qazi Sahib had gone to Afghanistan at the time of Hijrat Movement (Migration Movement) and there he made a relationship with the Fatima Khel, who were living in village Kalan of Tehsil Banu.

²⁶ Marwat, *Celebrities of NWFP, Vol. I & II*, 191.

geographical location of Waziristan enhanced its significance, and additionally, the fear of Russian invasion allowed the British to devise different policies in order to ensure and prolong her stay in this region at any cost.²⁷ It is likely that the tribesmen were influenced by conditions prevailing in the surrounding regions which added to their resistance against the Raj.

In all likelihood, the incident of Masjid Shaheed Ganj took place in 1935, which affected the entire Frontier area. In 1935, at Lahore a Mosque was demolished to construct a Sikh *Gurudwara* (Sikh place of worship).²⁸ Although the case was presented at the court, yet it was resolved later without the involvement of judiciary. That incident resulted in law and order breakdown in Lahore as well as in the surrounding areas.²⁹ In the North-West frontier region, the incident added to the hatred towards the British government.

However, another incident that made the tribesmen rise against the British was the conversion of a Hindu girl to Islam, who took the name Islam Bibi after her conversion.³⁰ She loved a Muslim boy Noor Ali Shah and willingly married him after converting to Islam.³¹ This anguished her parents who took the matter to the court.³² The FIR lodged

²⁷ Asfandiyar, 'A Perangi Khilaf da Faqir Ippi Haley Zaley', (Pashto), *Pukhtun*, No.126, (April 2018), Bacha Khan Trust, Peshawar, p.35.

²⁸ There were different views regarding the construction of Gurdwara and martyring the Mosque. One view supported the justification that there was a Hindu *Mandar* at that place, the second and third views justifies *Mosque* and *Mandar* respectively. Shaheed Ganj is an area located in Lahore where the Sikhs had been killed and afterwards, they held it a sacred place, however, a nearby place of their worship *Gurdwara* was not although attached to it, yet, they thought it as their property.

²⁹ Marwat, *Celebrities of NWP, Vo.I & II*, 192.

³⁰ Islam Bibi was a Hindu girl whose name was Ram Kor. Her father was Mewa Ram and mother Minsa Divi. They belonged to Masaki village *Jandu Khel* District Bannu. She fell in love with a Muslim boy whose name was Noor Ali Shah (A School Teacher). Ram Kor embraced Islam and married to Noor Ali Shah, getting the name of Noor Jehan Bibi. But she preferred Islam Bibi (She got herself known as Islam Bibi).

³¹ Islam Bibi had given herself that name because in July 1928 another Islam Bibi (her name was Chunni Bhai) and belonged to Mianwali where she had fallen in love with a Muslim boy Nur Muhammad. He brought her to his own village Karbogha, she embraced Islam and then got married to Nur Muhammad. She was named as Islam Bibi.

³² Allan Warren, Waziristan, *The Faqir of Ippi, and the Indian Army; The North West Frontier Revolt of 1936-37* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 80-81.

mentioned the name of Noor Ali Shah, son of Abdullah Shah, as kidnapper. After the issuance of a warrant against Noor Ali Shah, the newly wedded couple got arrested near *Ghoriwala* (Dera Ismail Khan) police station while they were trying to escape to Afghanistan. They were sent to jail and when presented before the judge, she denied that she had been forcibly converted to Islam, the charge leveled against Noor Ali Shah. Moreover, she confessed that she and Noor Ali Shah had wedded according to Islamic injunctions. The court decided the case in favour of Mewa Ram and Minsa Devi with a plea that Ram Kor (Islam Bibi) was under 18 years and that she cannot be married until she attains the required age of consent.³³

The matter to keep Islam Bibi at a place other than Noor Ali Shah's house was solved and the court allowed to put her in the custody of Samandar Shah, a well-known Sikh doctor in the area. Similarly, Noor Ali Shah was sent to jail for three years on 25 May 1936.³⁴ The situation worsened when a furious mob sieged Samandar Shah's house, which led to the imposition of curfew. After this Islam Bibi was placed in the custody of two other imminent persons, Ghulam Haider Khan and Malak Taj Ali Khan.³⁵ The Hindus appealed to the court yet again to transfer Islam Bibi's custody to her mother for the time, until she attained 18 years of age. On 27 September 1936, the court decided in favour of the appeal. Thus, her mother took her to Hoshiarpur, India, and forcibly converted her to Hinduism and married her to a Hindu.³⁶

This decision of the court was considered by the people of Bannu as an interference in the Islamic injunctions. They also perceived as a violation of *Pukhtunwali* (the oral code of honour). It resulted in an outburst against the British. Since it was a matter of *Pukhtunwali*, the people of the area demanded *Badal* (Revenge). Justice for the newly converted Islam Bibi became the cause of dissatisfaction among the Pukhtuns of Bannu and Waziristan. Moreover, they demanded that the Government should not interfere in the religious matters of the Pukhtuns. Gatherings were held in mosques and courts of tribal elders (*Jargahs*) were formed, attended by Mirza Ali Khan. In those gatherings, it was decided by all to take revenge from the British. For this purpose, an assembly was held at Matasi, which was attended by Waziris, Mehsoods, Betanis, Bannosis, Khattaks, Marwats and people from Afghanistan. Several *malaks*, *khans*, eminent people of the tribes and other men also

³³ Marwat, *Celebrities of NWFP, Vol.I & II*, 193.

³⁴ In another source duration of the punishment was 18 months.

³⁵ Asfandiyar, *Pukhtun*, 35.

³⁶ Mahsud, *Firangi Raj aur Ghairatmand Musalman* (Urdu), 187.

attended it and Mir Zali Khan was unanimously chosen by them as their leader, who declared a holy war (*Jihad*) to avenge for Islam Bibi.³⁷

The Faqir Ippi, after taking over charge as the leader, held a meeting with Haji Sahib Turangzai, Pir of Landi (Naseem Shah), and Pir Naeqeb Shah (his own pir) and also with other renowned personalities to discuss issues in connection with methods of resistance and to know about proper war tactics.³⁸

Resistance Enters Active Phase

The situation worsened when only one of the three demands put by Faqir Ippi was accepted; that the government should ensure non-interference in the religious matters of Pukhtuns. The rejected demands were the following:

1. Islam Bibi should be allowed to go back and live with her husband Noor Ali Shah.
2. Masjid Shaheed Ganj must be given back to the Muslims.³⁹

Thus, British giving a deaf ear to the activities of the Faqir Ippi resulted in his emerging as a continuous source of trouble for the next eleven years of the Raj in India. The British Government tried its best to win him to their side by adopting various means, but failed. Faqir Ippi selected suitable companions for his squad titled '*Sarteeri*' (sacrifice givers). They also selected their caliphs and generals. People donated generously for the cause.⁴⁰

To start his activities of armed resistance, Faqir Ippi shifted to a place known as Khaisurey, and started a guerilla war against the British. With his rise against the British, Faqir Ippi's name spread to almost every nook and corner of India. He kept changing his strategy regularly. From Khaisurey he shifted to Arsalkot where other tribes, namely Gharbaz, Tani, Gayankhel and Zadran, also joined the movement. There, again, he changed his strategy and organized small groups and spread across the surrounding areas of Bannu and Waziristan.⁴¹ They attacked the British at their military barracks, or wherever they had opportunity. The British responded in January 1937 by levying a fine of rupees five

³⁷ Marwat, *Celebrities of NWFP, Vol. I & II*, 195-96.

³⁸ Asfandiyar, *Pukhtun*, 35-36.

³⁹ Mahsud, *Firangi Raj aur Ghairatmand Musalman*, 205; Fazl-Ur-Rahman, *Batl-i-Hurritar-Faqir of Ippi: Bartānvī Iqtidār aur Firangī Tehzīb Kē khilāf Īman Parwar Jihād*, Urdu, 102.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 196.

⁴¹ Mahsud, *Firangi Raj aur Ghairatmand Musalman*, 193.

thousand on the Turi Khel Wazir tribe for extending support to Faqir Ippi and also terminated 120 Khasadars from their service.⁴²

The Faqir with his forces fought so well that the British were compelled to ask Faqir Ippi for his suggestions for reconciliation. The Faqir responded by suggesting the following:

1. The Mosques damaged and demolished during the fighting with British would be rebuilt.
2. The British would avoid interference their religious matters.
3. The Pukhtuns should not be asked to compensate for the losses they caused to the British.⁴³

Faqir Ippi tackled all obstacles with patience and determination. He acted upon the reasonable advice and suggestions given by his elders regarding the armed clash. This attitude of him won the wholehearted support of the Pukhtuns and gave him an upper hand in the guerilla war against the British.

To ask the people to assemble in short time and to arrange meals for them without having any proper funding source was a hard task but Faqir Ippi accomplished it easily. Moreover, his strategy of grouping the people in the groups of two, three and four proved successful in particular.

In June 1937, a minister in the British Parliament explained the Jihad Movement of Faqir Ippi and the way he became the leader. He said that the British Government needs to stop his dangerous activities and should force the Turikhel to get Faqir Ippi out of their region. However, the *malaks* felt their responsibility and showed their unwillingness to harm Faqir Ippi until the government sent security guards to the lower Khaisurey according to the 1935 agreement.⁴⁴

Similarly, army was sent to lower Khaisurey, but the British still failed to get the tribes to promise that they would not oppose the army any more. The column of army was sent on 25 November 1936, however, the *malaks* had warned them and confronted the army and suffered casualties.⁴⁵

Faqir Ippi's fighting strategies were technically so sound that even the British were surprised and their officers could not keep themselves from appreciating him. According to General Holzort:

Faqir Ippi himself is the General of his own army and he had organized it with his own intelligence. He imposed tax on

⁴² Ibid., 196-99.

⁴³ Marwat, *Celebrities of NWFP, Vol. I & II*, 199.

⁴⁴ Mahsud, *Firangi Raj aur Ghairatmand Musalman*, 203.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 192-93.

the tribes and gathered army. He has designed the cannons of the old time and he was used to taking the care of army. When the need for gathering the army was felt, each soldier had to bring his own meal for ten days. After consumption of that meal the army had to spread to bring more meal.⁴⁶

In 1937, thirty thousand British soldiers were in the field to defeat Faqir Ippi but could not succeed. Faqir Ippi was elusive as a mirage. Major J.G. Eliot praised Faqir Ippi as a brave, persistent and distinct character, but he also acknowledged that the British were in hell due to Faqir Ippi. He said that the British Government was discontented to such an extent that always waged war against Faqir Ippi rather than his tribesmen or public. And even Faqir Ippi could have been killed with a single bomb out of the many bombs being targeted on him, and the war could have ended. Though the army had looked out for him for years, it was difficult to find him. Betanis, Mahsuds and Wazirs along with tribes from Afghanistan were following him. The best skill of his fight was his discrete nature. He was a man of determination and wanted to achieve his mission wholeheartedly. He strived hard to cause as much damage to the British as possible.⁴⁷

Another aspect of Faqir's struggle was his dedication and steadfastness. On the one hand, the British was equipped with all the modern weapons of war, including aircrafts, uncountable soldiers and financial soundness, on the other hand, Faqir Ippi and his forces lacked all such facilities. It was not easy to comfort the British but the companions of Faqir Ippi were standing by his side against the British. Marwat claims that Faqir Ippi had made different departments and had opened a factory for making weapons with the help of skillful Panjabi fellow technicians. He had a printer run by Fateh ul Mulk, a Yusufzai from Swat. *Zakat* and *Usher* (the money given on crops), money obtained in gratitude and war booty were his few sources of finance. Similarly, different religious institutions and well-off people from other provinces of India also used to send donations to the public treasury of Faqir Ippi.⁴⁸

On 26 February 1937, Faqir Ippi managed to resort to non-cooperation with the British and this technique also proved helpful. On Friday, during the sermon, all the *Malaks* and *Khasadars* were asked to resign from the British Government's service, and those (*Malaks* and *Khasadars*) who turn down this request, their funeral prayer in case of

⁴⁶ Asfandiyar, *Pukhtun*, 36.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁸ Marwat, *Celebrities of NWFP, Vol. I & II.*, 199.

their deaths, would not be offered by the *Mullahs*. Thus, most of the Malaks and Khasadars resigned from the British Government's service, however, some of them, after ignoring this announcement, faced a boycott only to pressurize the British.⁴⁹

When the British were irritated by Faqir Ippi and they could not apprehend him, air force was used to bomb the place where Faqir Ippi was residing, forced him and his followers to stay in caves. Instead of all these hardship, Faqir Ippi furthered his movement and turned harder to get the British out of the Pukhtun region.⁵⁰

Faqir Ippi's Activities during the World War II and the British Propaganda

After Faqir Ippi had become a permanent trouble for the British Government, the tactic of bribing the tribesmen via British agents was adopted. The tribesmen serving under Faqir Ippi were instigated to demand huge salaries for their services, and secondly, men were mobilized to defame Faqir in the eyes of fellow tribesmen by spreading the rumor that Faqir had established good relations with the Indian National Congress (INC), an organization of Hindus, the alleged enemies of Islam.

Cunningham states that, in May 1940, the religious scholars mostly from Jamiat Ulama Sarhad were hired through Mulla Marwat⁵¹ who managed to persuade the Badshah Gul, the eldest son of Haji Sahib Turngzai, and the Fakir of Spinkharre to influence the Faqir Ippi for showing only superficial displeasure towards the British rather than continuing active anti-British activities. The reason to convince the Fakir Ippi was orchestrated in the wake of new developments in the World War II; after Italy's entry into the war she was linked with Germany, and that the Russians too were 'no longer 'Ahl-i-Kitab', and since then there

⁴⁹ A boycott which was used as a tool by Haji Sahib Turangzai also against the allowance holders.

⁵⁰ Mahsud, *Firang Raj aur Ghairatmand Musalman*, 206.

⁵¹ The real name of Mulla Marwat was Abdul Qahar (born 1879 at Lakki Marwat and died in 1940), he was a theologian and an active supporter of the Khaksar Movement and of Jamiat-Ul-Ulama Sarhad, however, on the request of Khan Bahadur Kuli Khan he gave up his political activism and facilitated the British propaganda in coordination with Kuli Khan. For detail see: Muhammad Tariq, 'Mulla Marwat; Life and Career in the Politics of British N.W.F.P'. *JRSP*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (January-June, 2017), 147-162.

has been strong Islamic feelings against Russia, Germany and Italy alike', and thus the plan worked.⁵²

Interestingly, with the changing global scenario, in June 1940, the British Government felt the need to release tension with Russia and continue with the same spirit against the Italy and Germany. Thus, Kuli Khan, the British local officer and intermediary, was directed 'to moderate his anti-Bolshevik propaganda and to concentrate more on propaganda against Germany and Italy'.⁵³

In this regard, the local press was also mobilized and subsidized, news and articles were published and the British propaganda against her opponents was supported. Likewise, articles in newspapers and pamphlets were written by the concerned Mullahs themselves, were circulated in local areas and sent to certain important friends in Afghanistan. The editors of the newspapers were provided with addresses of two hundred (200) Malaks to send them issues of those newspapers and pamphlets. This was done to release tension between the British and the Fakir Ippi, and as planned, this practice of persuasion and mobilization bore the expected fruit. In July 1940, as Cunningham reports, the Jamiat Ulama received separate letters from Muhammad Waris, the Faqir Ippi's lieutenant and Bacha Gul, and 'both those letters were in friendly terms and showed no suspicion that they thought anyone was behind the Jamiat'.⁵⁴ This has been verified in another report with the following statement:

Faqir Ippi troubled the British for few years since 1936, however, then the situation turned peaceful due to the sincere efforts of Afghan Government, and that the Faqir Ippi remained calm and peaceful during the war years.⁵⁵

Similarly, Fazlurahman also states that during the war years, the ant-British activities of Faqir Ippi remained passive during the 1940s. Keeping in view the political developments in India, in 1941 he restricted his movement to Guruwekh.⁵⁶ In August 1942, the British

⁵² 'Correspondence with the External Affairs Department Regarding Propaganda Through Mullahs etc.', *Cunningham Collection*, Acc. MSS EUR D670/19, IOR, British Library, London, 3-4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁴ 'Correspondence with the External Affairs Department Regarding Propaganda Through Mullahs etc.', *Cunningham Papers*, Acc. MSS EUR D670/19, OIOR, British Library, London, 2-4.

⁵⁵ 'Tribes of the North-West Frontier of India', Micro Film, *Cunningham Collection-Copies of the Cunningham's Articles mainly about N.W.F.P 1937-62*, 27-28, Acc. MSS EUR, D 670/28. IOR, British Library, UK.

⁵⁶ The place was the headquarters of Faqir Ippi.

concentrated on the issue of 'Quit India Movement' with no proper confrontation with Fakir Ippi.⁵⁷ However, in 1947, at the time of partition of the subcontinent, he openly resisted establishment of Pakistan, a position adopted due to his active stance on Independent Pukhtunistan.⁵⁸

Boycott of the Referendum

After the announcement of partition plan by the British Indian Government, deciding on the accession of NWFP to India or Pakistan, a referendum was decided to take place in the NWFP on July 4, 1947. In this regard, the *Daily Mail* of India published the news that Faqir Ippi has decided to support the Khudai Khidmatgar Tehreek (Red Shirt Movement) and that he has directed his supporters to boycott the referendum. The majority population of the Frontier province, voted for Pakistan during the referendum, but Faqir Ippi did not accept Pakistan and was blamed for maintaining ties with Jawahar Lal Nehru.⁵⁹

Similarly, Faqir Ippi was charged for taking financial and technical assistance from Afghanistan and Germany. After the creation of Pakistan Faqir Ippi announced his independent government of Pukhtunistan and never visited Pakistan till his death.⁶⁰ A twisting point occurred, as Fazlur Raheem Marwat claims, that Faqir Ippi, in October 1958, turned indifferent towards the Government of Afghanistan, as the latter stopped financial assistance being provided by the Afghanistan

⁵⁷ Fazl-ur-Rahman, *Batl-i-Hurritar-Faqir of Ippi: Bartānvī Iqtidār aur Firangī Tehzīb ké khilāf Īman Parwar Jihād* (Urdu), (Lahore: Institute of Pakistan Studies, 2004), 266-68.

⁵⁸ 'Ipi Fakir Asks Pathans To Boycott Referendum', *Indian Daily Mail*, July 4, 1947, 1., Also available on Microfilm Reel NL2353, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Page/indiandailymail19460704-1.1.4>, Accessed: 29 March 2018.

⁵⁹ "Ippi Fakir Asks Pathans To Boycott Referendum", *Indian Daily Mail*, July 4, 1947, 1., Also available on Microfilm Reel NL2353, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Page/indiandailymail19460704-1.1.4>. Accessed: 29 March 2018. Further detail regarding Faqir Ippi's stance on Pukhtunistan is currently out of the scope as this article is focused on his anti-British struggle.

⁶⁰ Fazl-Ur-Rahman, *Batl-i-Hurritar-Faqir of Ippi: Bartānvī Iqtidār aur Firangī Tehzīb Ké khilāf Īman Parwar Jihād*, 413-414. Interestingly, time took such a turn that although the Faqir Ippi had opposed creation of Pakistan, however, a road in Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan, has been named after him.

Government to support the Pukhtunistan issue.⁶¹ Thus, Faqir Ippi stopped raising the slogan of Pukhtunistan, discarded the Pukhtunistan flag and hoisted his own previous flag, the 'Faqiri Flag'.⁶² Faqir Ippi died on 16 April 1960 in Guruwekh, North Waziristan and was buried there.⁶³

Critical analysis

Many of the British adversaries of the British used all their energy and skills to create tension in the Pukhtun region. The Raj was defied through various modes of resistance, however, the tactics used by Faqir Ippi remain matchless in championing the 'holy' and noble cause to resist the British. The use of sword in the traditional manner of Pukhtun tribal warfare against the British Raj made Faqir a hero in the eyes of his fellow countrymen and his enemies alike. The notion of Jihad, though was adopted also by Haji Sahib of Turangzai, yet, both were different from each other. Haji sahib prioritized the Pukhtuns' status and focused on socio-educational reformation, while Faqir Ippi had emerged in the eyes of the British only when the call to defend Islam was made in Waziristan. His struggle was the outcome of Islam Bibi's case and had no previous history of any social or religious service among the Pukhtun society. Nonetheless, he was a pious man who led pure religious life and drew inspiration from Haji sahib of Turangzai. His was an episode of religion led tribal resistance, unique in nature, which shackled the British authorities and compelled them to hire the likeminded people within the Faqir's community and spread propaganda against Faqir of Ippi. To quote, Mr. George Cunningham, "... were and mixed within the Faqir's army and after sometime demanded increase in salary...", this was done to malign Faqir in the eyes of Pukhtuns and to discourage people from joining Faqir's camp, however, it gained no proper attention. Like the

⁶¹ The flow of financial assistance by the Afghanistan Government for Faqir's propagation of Pukhtunistan cause had also been lessened in view of prevailing misunderstanding existed between Kabul based Afghan leadership and Faqir in 1952-53, however, it was restored after the efforts of the Governor of Southern Province, Faiz Muhammad who managed to defuse that tension. (James W. Spain, *The Pathan Borderland* (Hague: Mouton, 1963), 239.

⁶² Fazlur Raheem Marwat, 'The Faqir of Ippi', *Celebrities of NWFP, Vol.I &II*, 204; Marwat has quoted File No.1399, Tribal Research Cell, Peshawar.

⁶³ Fazl-Ur-Rahman, *Batli-i-Hurritar-Faqir of Ippi: Bartānvī Iqtidār aur Firangī Tehzīb Kē khilāf Iman Parwar Jihād*, 413-14. Interestingly, time took such a turn that although the Faqir Ippi had opposed creation of Pakistan, however, a road in Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan, has been named after him.

Indian National Congress in the Frontier, Faqir Ippi had also been considered a threat to British might, and so this propagation was needed to overpower him.

Conclusion

The fact cannot be denied that although Faqir Ippi had started his struggle in 1936, and the British Government was busy in the Second World War, however, his style of resistance was unique in nature. He exhibited persistence and great determinism as solo player in his struggle against the British, which considerably diminished the stature of the British among her subjects as well as in front of their rivals. The Faqir Ippi made no compromise, and without any regard overlooked international situation and launched campaign at a time when he did not have the slightest chance to win over international support against the British Raj. By making no compromises, he remained inflexible and stubborn to overpower his enemy. His inflexibility was due to his disciplined traditional tribal method of warfare. His abhorrence of the British bore no relation to *raison d'etate* although he received financial and logistic support from the then Afghanistan Government, specifically after the partition of the Indo-Pak subcontinent and at a time when he openly championed the cause of independent Pukhtunistan. He had technical expertise in designing an attack, and thus he always preferred to decide himself. Likely, whenever the casualties on his side would increase, he would decide a ceasefire and waited for another suitable opportunity to attack his opponent. In short, it can be concluded that although Faqir Ippi ran short of various means, however, he succeeded in giving a tough time to the British.