

One Unit and Sardar Abdul Rashid Khan

Syed Minhaj Ul Hassan & Asma Gul***

Abstract

Sardar Abdur Rashid Khan, Chief Minister of NWFP remained in office from 23 April 1953 to 18 July 1955. He belonged to the police cadre of the province and was inspector general at the time of his appointment. He was not a politician and never thought of becoming the chief minister of the province. Nevertheless he performed his duties well. It was during Sardar Rashid period that One Unit scheme was adopted. It integrated all the provinces and other units of West Pakistan into a single province. The plan was initially supported by him. Later on, as promises made to him were not fulfilled, he developed differences with the central authorities for which he was removed from his post.

Introduction

Sardar Abdur Rashid Khan, who replaced Abdul Qaiyum Khan as Chief Minister of North West Frontier Province, on 23 April 1953, was neither a freedom fighter nor a politician but was rather a bureaucrat and the choice of Abdul Qaiyum Khan and central authorities. The appointment of Sardar Rashid as Chief Minister was not only a surprise to the masses but even to Sardar Rashid himself.¹

Sardar Abdur Rashid Khan was born in 1906 in a respectable family of Peshawar. After completing his graduation from Islamia College he joined Police Service of the province in 1930. Later on he was transferred to Indian Police Service and remained on high posts. He was appointed Inspector General of police of NWFP² in 1951. Working on such an important post Sardar Rashid became close to the Chief

* Dr Syed Minhaj ul Hassan, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Peshawar, Peshawar.

** Ms. Asma Gul, Assistant Professor, Jinnah College for Women, University of Peshawar, Peshawar.

¹ Asma Gul, *The Administration of NWFP under Sardar Abdur Rashid Khan, 1953-55* (unpublished M.Phil thesis submitted to Department of History, University of Peshawar, 2010), p.1.

² Former North West Frontier Province presently known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Minister of the province, Abdul Qaiyum Khan. Moreover, he had the reputation of honesty and brilliance. He also had wide experience of administration and office work. So when Qaiyum Khan was inducted into the central cabinet after the dismissal of Khawaja Nazimuddin, the Prime Minister, Sardar Rashid was the perfect choice for the job, which was assigned to him.³

Sardar Rashid performed his role well. He maintained perfect law and order in his province and kept on track the speedy pace of development. As it became customary in the Muslim League that the office bearer was also part of executive so Qaiyum Khan, after winning election in 1951, got himself elected as leader of the party as well as of the house. According to the rule of law, it was incumbent on Sardar Rashid to be elected as a member of parliament within six months. On 2 August 1953, he was elected from the constituency of Dera Ismail Khan and as the President of N W F P Muslim League by provincial council, on 10 November 1953.⁴

The One Unit scheme

The formation of West Pakistan into One Unit was a major development during the era of Sardar Abdur Rashid Khan in NWFP, which culminated into the dismissal of Sardar Rashid ministry on 18 July 1955. One Unit scheme was integration of all administrative units of western wing of Pakistan. Although the formation took place on 14 October 1955, the last 9 months of Sardar Rashid's total 27 months were preoccupied by this issue.

If we trace the history of One Unit, many people claimed for presenting the scheme. It is said that a project of consolidating of West Pakistan administrative units into a single province was suggested to Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah by Sir Archibold in 1947, when he was advising Quaid-i-Azam on economic affairs. Quaid-i-Azam approved the scheme in principle, but believed that more pressing problems deserved priority.⁵ To achieve this, two serious proposals were considered in the life of first Constituent Assembly: one, the Zonal Confederation and two, One Unit scheme. The former which was presented in 1952 by Feroz Khan Noon, envisaged the abolition of all feudal principalities and provinces and the emergence of zonal federation

³ Aziz Javed, *Subah Sarhad ka Aainee Irtaqa* (Peshawar: Idara-i-Tahqiq-o-Tasnif, 1975), p.411.

⁴ *Al-Jamiat*, Peshawar, 11 November 1953.

⁵ K.K. Aziz, *Party Politics in Pakistan (1947-1958)* (Islamabad: National Commission on Historical and Cultural Research, 1976), p.30.

with three or four provincial units. The proposal of One Unit for West Pakistan was presented to the Muslim League parliamentary party's sub-committee on allocation of powers by the spokesman of the central leadership, Choudhry Mohammad Ali. Both proposals were intended to counter Bengali domination at the centre.⁶

The Bengalis had a majority in the Muslim League parliamentary party as well as in the first Constituent Assembly led by Nizamuddin, Nural Amin, Fakhrul Rahhman. They secured the alliance of Abdus Sattar Pirzada, the Chief Minister of Sindh and Abdul Qaiyum Khan, federal minister from NWFP to vote down both the One Unit and zonal sub-federation schemes whenever they were brought up.⁷

Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan in his autobiography laid claim that on 4 October 1954 during a sojourn at London, in a hotel, he wrote a document named: 'A short appreciation of present and future problems of Pakistan', in which he outlined the One Unit proposals.⁸ During the debate on One Unit scheme in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, the members made references to 'The Document', which had detailed practical plan and technique of One Unit drafted by former Chief Minister of Punjab, Mian Muhammad Mumtaz Khan Daultana.⁹ The purpose of this document was to provide the basis and rationale of unifying the province. Its importance lies in the fact that the Machiavellian strategy laid down by its author was faithfully followed during the process of enacting the One Unit.

The scheme was under consideration but was not enforced. The matter of urgency was the victory of the United Front in East Bengal Provincial Assembly elections in March 1954 with its demand of autonomy. The later events resulted in the dissolution of Constituent Assembly by Governor General Ghulam Mohammad, on 24 October 1954,¹⁰ and appointment of a cabinet with army chief, Ayub Khan, as Defense Minister, Iskandar Mirza, Interior Minister, Suhrawardy as Law Minister and later joined by Dr. Khan Sahib as Communication Minister.

⁶ Mazhar Ali Khan, *Pakistan: First Twelve Years (The Pakistan Times Editorials)* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.228.

⁷ M. Rafiq Afzal, *Political Parties of Pakistan, 1947-58* (Islamabad: National Commission on Historical and Cultural Research, 1976), p.158.

⁸ Mohammad Ayub Khan, *Friends not Masters* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.54.

⁹ Keith Callard, *Pakistan: A Political Study* (London: Unwin Brothers Ltd., 1957), p.61.

¹⁰ Zarina Salamat, *Pakistan 1947-1958* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1992), p.85.

Thus stage was set for a new brand of politics in Pakistan, virtually under the domination of civil bureaucracy.¹¹

The One Unit plan was first announced by the government in the conference of central and provincial leaders held in Karachi on 22 November 1954. Mohammad Ali Bogra, the Prime Minister, told the nation over radio that he and his colleagues after careful consideration had come to the conclusion to merge West Pakistan territories/provinces into One Unit. He also pointed out many benefits of the plan.¹² Keeping aside the benefits and real motives of the plan let us focus on the role played by Sardar Rashid in the scheme.

According to Mian Jaffar Shah, a leader and a cabinet colleague of Sardar Rashid, Sardar Rashid was called to Karachi by a special airplane on 14 November 1954. There he was briefed by the Prime Minister, Mohammad Ali Bogra, and Finance Minister, Choudary Mohammad Ali, of the plan. Sardar Rashid was asked to explain the scheme to his colleagues and others and seek their support for its formal acceptance. In return he got conformity from authorities for keeping the benefits to the province (which according to Sardar Rashid was demanded by him).¹³

The NWFP provincial legislative assembly was first to give consent to One Unit scheme on 25 November 1954 when the assembly met for the winter session. The resolution for the merger scheme was moved by Sardar Rashid that read as follows:

...having considered the Constitutional problems, this legislative assembly is of the opinion that the only just, honorable and workable solution lies in welding the various units of West Pakistan into single unified province and therefore it welcomes and supports the statement broadcasted by the Prime Minister of Pakistan on 22 November 1954.

In his speech Sardar Rashid supported the scheme and demanded its speedy implementation.¹⁴ Other cabinet members also supported the resolution. The Education Minister, Mian Jaffar Shah, said that they had

¹¹ Tariq Ali, *Can Pakistan Survive? The Death of a State* (London: Harmonds worth, 1983), p.48.

¹² *Dawn*, Karachi, 23 November 1954.

¹³ Rizwan Malik, *The Politics of One Unit: 1955-58* (Published M. Phil thesis) (Lahore: Pakistan Study Centre, University of Punjab, 1988), p.12.

¹⁴ Directorate of Archives and Library, Peshawar (henceforth *PA Legislative Assembly Debates* (henceforth *LAD*)) dated 25 November 1954, vol. xx no.1, serial no. 218.

not fought as Baluchi, Pakhtun, Sindhi, Punjabi and Bengali but as Muslims. In fact the abolition of provincial boundaries was long overdue.¹⁵ In the assembly it was supported by all 65 members present out of total 85. The four opposition members did not attend the session because the government had not accepted their demands made on 17 October 1954.¹⁶ (Subsequently, it was accepted by Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and princely states, either willingly or through coercive measures).

Later Sardar Rashid disclosed that he had convinced the central authorities for certain concessions for the material benefits of NWFP and those were as follows:

1. The capital of One Unit would be Abbottabad.
2. The share of Punjab in One Unit Assembly for initial 10 years would be 40 per cent.
3. The first chief minister of the province would be from NWFP:¹⁷

That was the reason while presenting the One Unit resolution in the Provincial Assembly, Sardar Rashid stressed that the scheme would benefit the province a lot.

A conference to discuss the scheme in detail was called at Karachi by the Governor General from 14 to 17 December 1954. It accepted the merger scheme and recommended that a council for the administration of West Pakistan should be immediately set up under section 135 of Government of India Act 1935.¹⁸ The council was set up on 17 December 1954 by the order of the governor general. The council consisted of the governor general, chief ministers of the provinces, chief commissioner of Baluchistan, chief minister of Khairpur, the advisor of Bahawalpur state and *wazir-e-azam* of Kalat state.¹⁹

According to Hyder Bakhsh A. Jatui, President Sind Hari Committee, the section 135 of the Act of 1935, presupposes and recognizes the existence and individuality of the provinces and the provision of a machinery (council) was only for setting up disputes between provinces and for co-ordination policies of provinces. So the entire proceedings of the so-called Administrative Council were

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Pir Ali Mohammad Rashidi, *One Unit ke Tarikh* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publication, 1993), p.10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.107.

¹⁸ *PA, The West Pakistan Year Book, 1956*. Lahore, Government of West Pakistan, serial no. 1458, misc. record list 11, p.12.

¹⁹ Governor General Order no.8. PA, serial no.96, bundle no.4, 1955, Sardar Abdur Rashid Collection.

therefore illegal and invalid.²⁰ But, as the center was inclined to go speedily through its design, it was decided that next sitting of the council will be held on 8 January 1955 at the Government House Peshawar to discuss the issue of selection of capital for One Unit^{21/22} A sub-committee appointed by the council visited two sites of Abbottabad and Mansehra; Saradar Rashid was in favor of Abbotabad. Sardar Rashid as member of the Council of Administration participated in its proceedings and stressed the authorities to get benefit for his province.²³

On 24 January 1955, he went to Lahore to press his demand for the location of the capital in NWFP. Even on 4th February 1955 he went to Karachi for that purpose and was assured that the capital would certainly be located in NWFP.²⁴ The *Dawn* reported on 27 January 1955 that it was learnt from the reliable sources that Lahore would be declared capital of the One Unit after the Council of Administration meeting. All were agreed but only the Frontier chief minister opposed to the choice of Lahore but he was likely to be persuaded.²⁵ Mian Jaffar Shah, who accompanied Sardar Rashid during his visit, was received by protests on his return, organized by the people of the province in favor of Peshawar to be the capital of West Pakistan. Mian Jaffar Shah assured them that it had already been decided when question was firstly raised and the people of NWFP would be benefited by the location of permanent capital in their province.²⁶

In the provincial budget debate of NWFP legislature in March 1955, the One Unit plan was strongly supported by Sardar Rashid and assembly members. The opposition members bitterly criticized the plan. The remarks of Mr. Khan Bahadur are worth mentioning: while replying to Mr. Samin Jan's objection, he said that earlier Sikhs and British dominated us, what is bad if we would be dominated by Punjabis.²⁷

²⁰ PA, Hyder Bakash Jatoti, *Democracy or Dictatorship in Pakistan?* 7 August 1955, Karachi, serial no.1013, misc. record list. 1. p.5.

²¹ There are valuable records in Directorate of Archives and Library, Peshawar, which has been referred in the article as Archives.

²² *Letter from the Secretary, Council for Administration of West Pakistan*, dated 31 December 1954, serial no.108, bundle no. 6, Sardar Abdur Rashid collection.

²³ *Khyber Mail*, Peshawar, 25 January 1955.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 February 1955.

²⁵ *Dawn*, 28 January 1955.

²⁶ *Khyber Mail*, 5 February 1955.

²⁷ Legislative Assembly Debates (LAD), dated 22 March 1955, serial no. 137, vol. xxi, no.4.

The center was impatient to work out the merger plan as soon as possible. The Administrative Council was instructed, in the second week of January (1955), to finalize its recommendations before the end of March so that One Unit might be inaugurated on 1 April 1955. By the end of February 1955 the Administrative Council completed its tasks.²⁸ But in the meanwhile first political and constitutional battle started. The judgment of Sindh Court in favor of 'Tamizuddin was challenged in the Federal Court by the Central government which supported the governor general.²⁹ Being encouraged, governor general promulgated, on 27 March 1955, West Pakistan (Establishment) Order 1955. And thus started government by ordinances which were checked by Federal Court and governor general was instructed to appoint Constituent Assembly to legislate.³⁰ Resultantly governor general issued an order on 28 May 1955 known as the Constitutional Assembly Order, announcing the composition and rules of election to the new assembly. The new assembly comprised 80 seats based on principle of parity. The share of NWFP was 4 seats, while one seat for Frontier states and three seats were allocated for Tribal Areas.³¹

In NWFP, the Parliamentary Board of the Frontier Muslim League held a meeting under the chairmanship of Sardar Rashid (chief minister) on 7 June 1955. It considered 25 applications for Muslim League tickets for election to the new Constitutional Assembly. The board recommended four candidates to the Central Parliamentary Board for final approval. These were Sardar Rashid Khan, Mian Jaffar Shah, M. R. Kiyani and Muhammad Jalaludin Khan³² (all cabinet members of NWFP).

Opposition

When the administrative arrangements for One Unit scheme were brought forward and majority of higher appointments were made, the people of NWFP felt that the pledges made to them were not honored. The share of NWFP promised in services was 20 per cent but till May 1955, while most of higher appointments were made, only two secretaries were appointed from NWFP. On this unjust arrangement thousands of workers

²⁸ *The Pakistan Times*, 25 February 1955.

²⁹ Rafi Raza (ed.), *Pakistan in Perspective: 1947-1997* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.7.

³⁰ K.J. Newman, *The Constitution of Pakistan* (Decca: Co-operation Book Society, 1960), p.11.

³¹ Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.92.

³² *Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore, 8 June 1955.

of Peshawar Secretariat protested. Sardar Rashid accompanied by Governor Qurban Ali Khan once again went to Lahore to meet Prime Minister Muhammad Ali and chief minister of Punjab to inform them about the discontent of their province. Again Sardar Rashid was cooled down by authorities by describing the benefit of One Unit.³³

From the Frontier province opposition was initiated by the leader of opposition, Pir Sahib of Manki Sharif of Awami League. In May 1955, Pir Sahib went to Karachi to meet Mr. Suhrawardy, the central leader of the party. He apprised him of anti-One Unit feelings among the people of the Frontier province. Mr. Suhrawardy refused to co-operate with Pir Sahib on this issue for as Law Minister he was one of the chief exponent of the scheme. Resultantly a breach occurred between central organisation and the NWFP branch's president and Pir Sahib was expelled from the party by the Central Working Committee, leaving only Khan of Lundkhawar a well-known leader from NWFP inside the organisation.³⁴

Pir Sahib started looking around for like-minded people to seek their co-operation in opposing the One Unit. Meanwhile the restriction on the entry of Khan Ghaffar Khan was removed on 12 July 1955. He also had anti-One Unit views, so an emergency compromise between Red Shirts and Awami League (Manki group) was made. A joint convention of important workers of two organisations was held at Manki on 29 July 1955. In that convention which was chaired by Ghaffar Khan, an 'Anti-One Unit Front' was formed and a resolution was adopted, demanding that the merger plan should not be implemented without ascertaining people's views, failing which both the parties would launch united struggle against its implementation. They jointly started their move from their tour of southern districts of Frontier from 2 to 9 August 1955.³⁵

Anti-One Unit Front (Red Shirts and Awami League) members and office bearers formed committees to carry out their activities. They held meetings and protests against the agreements made for One Unit administration. In one of their meetings they objected that all the secretaries that had been appointed so far in One Unit set up were from

³³ *Al- Jamiat*, Peshawar, 2 May 1955.

³⁴ Badiuz Zaman, *Pir Sahib Manki Sharif* (Unpublished M. A. thesis submitted to Pakistan Study Centre, University of Peshawar, 1985), p.114.

³⁵ *Note on Red Shirts (1953-69)* C.I.D report, dated 26.4. 1969. PA, file no. 18, serial no. 234, bundle no. 15, record list. 1.

Punjab with one exception i.e. Attaullah Jan Khan (D.C Peshawar), there were no other Pakhtun, Sindhi or Balochi.³⁶

Dismissal of Sardar Rashid

It was decided that the plenary session of the Second Constituent Assembly would be held on 7 July 1955. Sardar Rashid and his colleagues, the NWFP representatives to Constituent Assembly were invited by Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra to attend. Sardar Rashid due to his illness joined the session three days later.³⁷

Sardar Rashid had already developed differences with the central authorities on the arrangements made for One Unit. His main points of objection were concerning: (a) meager representation in high cadre services from NWFP, (b) not establishing capital of West Pakistan in NWFP, and (c) installation of Dr. Khan Sahib as Chief Minister.³⁸

His discontent was cashed by the Punjabi leadership led by Mian Mumtaz Khan Daultana who had some disagreements with the centre. While Daultana was approached and promised by Choudary Mohammad Ali that he would be inducted to the central cabinet, but before that settlement, Sardar Rashid was promised by him to provide with some secret documents which would reveal the details that were prepared to exploit the small provinces and drafted by Daultana. As was pre-planned, Sardar Rashid would disclose the documents in the Murree session of the assembly. However, the documents handed over to him were not original.³⁹ Later on he disclosed those documents in his Constituent Assembly speech in August 1955.

Sardar Rashid addressed the house on 12 July 1955. On that day very unusual thing happened. Bengali members of the house severely criticised the manner in which members of provincial opposition were arrested to weaken opposition. In reply, Sardar Rashid explained that there was no such example of his province. As regards to Khan Ghaffar Khan he said that ban on his entry in NWFP was placed by the central government; he himself would welcome him to his province. Responding, Iskander Mirza (Interior Minister) announced immediate removal of all restrictions on the movement of Khan Abdul Ghaffar

³⁶ Special Branch Report, dated 19.9.1955. PA, file no. 20, serial no. 1402, bundle no. 77, record list. 11.

³⁷ PA, Letter of prime Minister addressed to Sarder Rashid serial no. 73, bundle no. 3, Sardar Abdur Rashid Collection.

³⁸ *Imroze*, Karachi, 13 July 1955.

³⁹ Interview, Shaheema Rehman, daughter of late Sardar Abdur Rashid Khan. 25 March 2009, Lahore.

Khan. After proceedings of the house, Mirza verbally ordered, I.G Punjab police to issue orders for removal of all restrictions on the movement of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and he was informed on that day that he was free to go to any part of Pakistan he liked. It was reported later by Agha Kashmiri that Iskander Mirza used abusive language on the floor of the house against Sardar Rashid which did not suit to a gentleman like him.⁴⁰

It was rumored that Sardar Rashid might be removed from the office of Chief Minister. When Iskander Mirza was asked by reporters about the matter he refused to comment but only replied that One Unit should be established and no one could stop it.⁴¹ *The Pakistan Times* reported on 16 July 1955 that ‘the removal of Sardar Rashid seemed foregone conclusion after the sudden departure of the Frontier Governor to Peshawar. The head on clash between Frontier government and the central leadership on issue of One Unit has further intensified. Although there was a rift in the central cabinet over the timing of the removal the majority decision to do away with the present Frontier government prevail’.⁴²

Sardar Rashid on his part was prepared for all eventualities. He convened the Frontier Muslim League meeting on 20 July 1955 at Nathiagali, to discuss the situation and sought their verdict in favor of his stand. An official communiqué issued on 18 July 1955, however, stated that, ‘in exercise of the powers vested in the Governor under section 51 of the Government of India Act 1935, as adopted for Pakistan, the Governor of NWFP dismissed the Council of ministers headed by Sardar Rashid with immediate effect’.⁴³

Sardar Rashid was replaced by Sardar Bahadur Khan, the agent to Governor General in Baluchistan. Bahadur Khan, brother of Ayub Khan, was most suitable person for the job that was assigned to him. Some objections were made by the members of Frontier Provincial Assembly on the dismissal of Rashid’s ministry and appointment of Bahadur Khan as most undemocratic. But these were easily subsided.⁴⁴

Although removed from chief ministership Sardar Abdur Rashid Khan remained in the Second Constituent Assembly to which he was officially elected in June 1955. He lined behind Awami League which

⁴⁰ *Weekly Chattan*, 7:26 (27 April 1968), Lahore.

⁴¹ *Imroze*, 13 July 1955.

⁴² *The Pakistan Times*, 16 July 1955.

⁴³ *NWFP Government Gazette, Extraordinary*, notification no. 19. PA, serial no.73, bundle no.3, Sardar Collection.

⁴⁴ *Imroze*, 27 July 1955.

was the opposition party in the assembly and opposed the One Unit till its formation on 14th October 1955. Sardar Rashid remained in power in the One Unit administration for a short time. Sardar Rashid had a desire to disclose some secrets of the mischievous top leadership who maneuvered the One Unit scheme. Until his last breath he had some documents which he wanted to publish revealing secrets of the top leaders, but due to illness he could not work on it. When One Unit was finally dissolved, Sardar Rashid was the Minister for the Home Affairs, and very satisfied and contented over it.⁴⁵ In short, 27 months rule of Sardar Rashid as Chief Minister was a period of progress and a journey towards prosperity for the common man.

Conclusion

The induction in politics of a person like Sardar Abdur Rashid, of reserved and shy nature and by career and training a professional, was not a surprise in the country like Pakistan. It also magnifies the ethos of Pakistan's politics that the choice of system is not of public but of ruling elites.

It also highlighted the individual's attitude of love for power in our country. Once Sardar Rashid came to prominence he was eager to maintain it. Although critical to the appointment of Dr. Khan Sahib as first Chief Minister of the Province of West Pakistan, Sardar Rashid, later joined the party sponsored by him and accepted the post of minister in the cabinet. Thus he followed the same path adopted by nearly all persons in Pakistan politics: neither to resign voluntarily nor on principles, or either to abdicate from the post or politics.

The ruling forces chose Sardar Rashid to substitute Qaiyum Khan but Sardar Rashid lacked the shrewdness of politicians of his time. The political scene was dominated by Feroz Khan Noon, Mumtaz Dultana of Punjab, A. S. Pirzada and A. Khoro of Sindh, Iskandar Mirza, Chowdhri Muhammad Ali, H.S. Suhrawardi, Mohammad Ali Bogra, Ghulam Muhammad and so on. Majority of them followed no principles in politics. To achieve their end they could adopt any measure. They were main actors of One Unit political drama. Sardar Rashid was satisfied by the promise of the central government; he believed in their false promises and was first to endorse One Unit scheme. Perhaps, he could not see the real motives of the center or he might have thought it improper to doubt their intentions. Nevertheless he tried hard to safeguard the rights of his province but was trapped by the center and pro-One Unit politicians.

⁴⁵ Shaheema Rehman, *op.cit.*, 25 March 2009.