

SOCIO-ECONOMIC, AND RELIGIO-CULTURAL SERVICES OF SARDAR ABDUR REHMAN

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Abstract:

There are many unsung heroes in various parts of the Pakistan who contributed a lot for political development, religio-cultural revival and socio-economic upliftment of their people. Their services need to be explored and highlighted. This paper aims to accomplish this task and elucidates the contribution of a Sardar Abdur Rehman, a tribal leader of Galiyat, Abbottabad. His services extending over the period of fifty years of his chieftainship changed the course of history in his community. The able tribal leader transformed the community from an ancient tribal society to a modern, progressive and advanced society. He was able to achieve so many things in short span of time ranging from social, cultural, religious, educational and legal aspects due to his strategic foresight, unflinching resolve, untiring efforts and charismatic personality. His services for his community will be remembered for long time and are beacon of light for others aspiring to contribute for the betterment of the society.

Key Words: Sardar Abdur Rehman, Galiyat, socio-economic, cultural, religious, servies.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural history of the world shows that humanity only thrived once people congregated in the form of the tribes / societies and endeavoured together for the common good. The Great Civilizations in Rome, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Indus and Gandara are testimonies to the fact (Finely, 1983). People were glued with the bonds of language, culture, geography, religion, cast and creed. Strongest bond was based on the tribal structure where the population was small. People were knit together with the strong bonds of blood, culture and religion. It is evident that this tribal culture had a vast impact on political structure of the world (Bodley, 2011). There are many influential tribal leaders who laid the foundation of development and progress with devotion, commitment, unflinching resolve and keen foresight. Political history of the subcontinent is also replete with these examples. British oppressive regime in subcontinent further jelled the people due to their cultural, social, linguistic and religious biases (Hardy, (1972). Over the period of the times, these tribes became the driving force of the war of independence and Pakistan Movement. North West

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Frontier Province had a lead in this aspect as the people were closely knit in the tribal cultures and had religion, culture and traditions dear to them more than life (Kiran, 2017).

There are numerous tribal leaders who played pivotal role in this struggle. Sardar Hassan Ali Khan was one of the foremost runners of the War of Independence in Hazara Region (Watson, 1908). He got his strength from the subtribe leaders who not only devoted to his cause but had the fortitude to support him through thick and thin. Sardar Hassan Ali Khan alongside his subtribe leaders not only restored authority in the region but also forced the British authorities to reckon the strength and force. These subtribes were spread from Haripur to Muzaffarabad in Kashmir, from Mansehra to Lower Topa (Abbasi, 2014).

Galiyat due to its difficult terrain and staunch population was his forte. Sardar Abdur Rehman was one of the subtribe leaders who had established himself and unquestionable authority in entire valley of Nagribala stretching from Baragali to Sajikot. The area comprised of almost 20 square kilometres of the mountainous terrain.

Sardar Abdur Rehman was one of such leaders of the Tribe (Makarwali / Karlal) who not only laid the foundation of progress and development for his tribe but for entire community in the area. His services led to the transformation of remote tribal area into a vibrant, progressive and developed society. His charismatic personality united entire tribe together and magnetic bond with neighbouring tribes and communities. His selfless attitude earned him the respect of entire community and is still remembered with great respect and credit. His political services are profound and immense hence will be elaborated in a separate article. This article is an endeavour to highlight his personal life, social, economic, educational and religious legacies for his tribe and community.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Due to scarcity of the written account of his era most of the reliance is made on the narration of the people who saw him closely and followed his immediate era. Nonetheless most of his Legacies are living today and are testament to his contribution and services for the community in general and tribe in particular. The political imprint of Sardar Abdur Rehman is quite deep and profound on the area even after lapse of 70 years. Few of the aspects in his political struggle and services are elucidated in ensuing paragraphs.

LIFE AND SERVICES OF SARDAR ABDUR REHMAN

Sardar Abdur Rehman was the son of Sardar Ghulam Muhammad, the chief of the clan at the time of his birth. He was born in a village Nagri Bala, Abbottabad on 13th June 1863. He was 1st among his sibling which included one real and three stepbrothers, and three stepsisters. His father Sardar Ghulam Muhammad Khan was respected clan leader and was well known among other tribes (Ali & Naazer 2019).

Sardar Abdur Rehman was 5 feet 10 inches tall. He had a bright round face with broad forehead. He had black eyes with thick eyebrows. His cheeks were apple red from the

childhood. He had sharp pointed nose with blood red sleek lips. He had broad shoulders with the perfect muscular body. He had a charismatic personality, and everyone would fall in in love with him at first sight. He was very active from the childhood with interest in riding, archery, firing and hunting. Although he was very curious learner but could not find an opportunity to get formal education due to absence of any formal school / madrassah in the near vicinity. He was faithful Muslim who not only preached Islam but manifested it in letter and spirit in his life. Rigorous daily tribal life could not hinder him from performing daily prayers and fasting (Ali & Naazer 2019).

Role as a Chieftain of the Tribe

After the death of his father Sardar Ghulam Muhammad, in year 1901, Sardar Abdur Rehman was selected as the chieftain of the tribe. The selection of the chieftain was not a normal affair in those times as it had enormous impact on the overall outlook of the entire tribe. As per the practice in vogue he was the heir to the title, but it had to involve the consensus of the thirty plus sub-tribe leaders (Godin, 2008) Few days after the demise of Sardar Ghulam Muhammad, a tribal Jirga was announced which was to be attended by all subtribe leaders and other communities in the area. It used to be the extraordinary feast and was also attended by the neighbouring tribal chieftains. His coronation as a tribal chief was attended by thousands of people ranging over a vast area. According to one account he was presented 72 Turbans which was unprecedented (Khalil Ur Rehman. Sardar, personal communication, October 17, 2020). One each form as subtribe and from every chieftain attending the ceremony. His coronation was also attended by extraordinary public because of his charismatic personality, strength of character, love and affection for his people.

The vows he made during his inaugural speech were inscribed on his heart and close to his soul. The course of the history proved that he was true to his words and his honesty, dedication and hard work for his community kept him alive even after seven decades after his passing away. The prayers offered at the end of the ceremony were accepted in the eyes of Allah Almighty and his blessings and mercy always remained the guiding light in his path as a loyal and dedicated chieftain of the tribe (Muhammad Yaqoob, personal communication, August 11, 2006).

Challenges confronted by Sardar Abdur Rehman were multifarious in nature. They ranged from social, cultural, political, legal, economic and religious realms. Entire country was in poor economic state, so was his tribe. Developmental work was almost non-existent. To keep up with the progress of modern world he needed to traverse a long path. He had to get the people close to the modern education, reform the economy, knit the entire tribe together and make them a strong force to be reckoned with. He had to establish the political relations with the mainstream political junta. He had to cement his tribe with the religion practices. He had to gel the Sikh community in the society in order to ward off against the communal disharmony. He had to chalk out a policy and a framework for

almost 50 years of his chieftainship in which he could direct his tribe to progress and development without undermining their religious, cultural and social principles. He was an excellent planner and planned everything end to end. He kept his plan and worked tirelessly to transform it into a reality. Over the period his devotion, dedication, honesty, and unflinching resolve led him to the destination where he wanted to steer. He saved his community from going into oblivion. Despite being a tribal chieftain with meagre resources and remote terrain he managed to construct an educated, progressive, resilient, patriotic and vibrant tribe commensurate with the dictates of the modern world. For these are his legacies and for them he will be remembered through out written history.

The era of Sardar Abdur Rehman was full of events and circumstances. His era spread over the time when the history of Pakistan was in making. It was also era of making history in the Galiyat under his chieftainship. It can be rightly named as “Golden Era of Galiyat”. He had a foresight to make the right choices in the wake of complex and hard adversaries. Time proved that he was mostly right in the choices and had the foresight to stand on the right side of the history. Due to scarcity of the written account of his era most of the reliance is made on the narration of the people who saw him closely and followed his immediate era. Nonetheless most of is Legacies are living today and are testament to his contribution and services for the community in general and Tribe in particular.

Organization of the Tribe and Administration of Justice

Sardar Abdur Reham was a leader of a small tribe in the area, but his leadership qualities were venerated in entire union council. He organized the tribe into a force to be reckoned. There were no inter-tribe rifts, quarrels and disputes. He solidified them like one entity. He promoted the *biradri* system but for the positive aspects only. He always asked his tribesmen to do their best for the *biradri*. He used to name biradri as an extended family. He asked the tribesmen to stand by each other in thick and thin. Due to this bondage the small tribe could overcome all kinds of calamities whether it is a drought, rains, snow, disease or any authoritative oppression.

He was great proponent of intra-tribe harmony and friendship. Although he was leader of one of the tribes of Karlals but he was never tribe centric. His thinking horizon was very broad. He always had a top to bottom approach. He would think of community first, then for tribe and then for subtribe and keep his self interest at the last. Being a selfless person, he was respected by other tribes as well. He always welcomed the intra-tribe marriages. He advocated out of tribe marriages for the betterment of community. In his life he married many of his offspring's in other tribes. He would extend great respect to the other tribesmen and tribal leaders. For the reason he was respected in entire area. He would often be called to other Union Councils like Baghan, Nathiagali, Namli Maira, Manal Diwal and many other places for Jirga (Sardar Gul Zaman, personal communication, November 17, 2020).

He also organized his own court system and a tribal jail. He was very just and God-fearing leader who would not hesitate in administering the justice without any social, cultural, religious or domestic prejudice. His justice system was even admired by the British authorities in the region. The Sikh elders used to be part of local *Jirga*. Their bilateral disputes were being settled by him. They held him in great esteem and prestige. This was due to his personal charisma, leadership qualities and devotion to the justice that no communal riot occurred in his area of command.

He established such a legal system in the tribe that there were no major crimes. Murder and rape were taboos in his era. Theft and robbery would not be dared in his presence. He would listen to the people complains on daily basis and would administer justice without any prejudice. Being renowned for his impartiality and rule of Islamic law no one would dare to challenge his decision.

Sardar Abdur Rehman administered his tribe for almost 50 years and resolved thousands of disputes. His verdict was never questioned / contested because it always used to be just and appropriate in the eyes of the people. This is not less than a miracle for a tribal leader with no formal legal education and administering justice from normal disputes of daily nature to the most heinous crimes like murder for five decades without any demurral. Sardar Abdur Rehman deserve all due respect and appreciation for this feat of impartiality and supreme justice (Sardar Gul Zaman, personal communication, November 17, 2020).

Maintenance of Perfect Law and Order

It is indeed a matter of amazement that he was administering an area of 20 square kilometers of extreme rugged terrain with no legal framework, no police and no communication means and still having a perfect peace and tranquillity in the villages under his influence. He commanded his tribe by influence. People knew in the core of their hearts that he is noble, just and firm. Any injustice committed would not go unnoticed and evading his justice would be impossible.

Interaction with Sikh Community in Area.

Sardar Abdur Rehman was not only a great leader but also an excellent human being and practicing Muslim. Sikh community which was living in the UC Nagribala were under his direct command. Over the period, he developed very cordial relations with them. He allowed them complete freedom of action within their area of responsibility albeit with due regards to Muslims' traditions and customs. A noteworthy practice by the Sikh community was that they would voluntarily avoid using the musical instrument in proximity of his residence or once came across him due to sheer respect (Sardar Wali Ur Rehman, personal communication, March 2018). These events speak volumes about his leadership qualities and his respect for diversity of cultures and dignity of humanity.

He was so respected in the Sikh community that they would only finalize their weddings and engagements after his blessings. They would always invite him to the weddings and other cultural ceremonies. They would consider him the forte of their interests and security in the area. He would go all out to help them in difficult situations. It is said that he was so generous that he did not allow any visitors from Sikh community go empty handed from his home.

At the point of independence, he endangered his own life for the safety and security of the Sikh population of the area. Sikh community's houses were burnt by the charged mob. Despite his worsening health, he visited them and brought them back. He provided them the due refuge in his own home and later arranged their safe and secure departure to India. Sikh elders who left not only remained obliged, but their off springs visited Pakistan in late nineties in order to pay him tribute. Those families are still in contact with the descendants of Sardar Abdur Rehman (Sardar Khalil Ur Rehman, personal communication, November 3, 2020).

RELIGIO-CULTURAL SERVICES

Promotion of Islamic Values.

Sardar Abdur Rehman kept Islamic cultural values very dear to him. He would often celebrate Eid with the entire Tribe. Most of the time he would organize the feast in order to feed the poor and needy. Despite being chieftain of the tribe, he would sit on the same table with labourer, old, young, sane and insane. His tribesmen loved him from the soul. He would often arrange the marriages of the poor people in the community and bear all the expanses from his own earnings. He would go all out in supporting the people in the need. He was so kind that he would keep a separate share of animals and birds from his cereals which he used to have for entire year (Sardar Liaqat Ali, personal communication, October 15, 2016).

He was in love with Islam. He practiced it from his heart and soul. He was very regular in daily prayers and Thajjud. It is said that he always remained in state of Ablution. He preached Islamic values to his tribesmen and did practical manifestation himself. No one could dare speak except truth in his presence as he never ever spoke except truth. Once a person habitual of stealing was brought in his presence for administration of justice. The thief asked him to hand him over to police as he was sure to deceive them with his words but could not muster the strength to state lie in front of him. The thief not only returned his theft but also promised him to do away with the stealing.

He was a chieftain of the tribe and could leverage his position to accumulate the wealth and property for his family which he did not do. He remained financially upright throughout life. He would work in the fields, graze the animals, do wood picking, prepare mud houses, break the stones and remain forefront in community work. At the time of passing away his

assets had gone far less than what he inherited from his forefathers (Sardar Liaqat Ali, personal communication, October 15, 2016).

Establishment of Mosque

Being a religious man, he knew the value of Mosque in fostering a Muslim society. He acquired the most beautiful and central place in the village for a Mosque. He managed all its financial expenditures and constructed with the help of his tribesmen. He arranged for the Imam masjid to lead daily prayers and Khadim for the Mosque who would take care of the mosque and keep it tidy. He managed to lay a pipeline 2 miles away from the Mosque for 24/7 provision of the water. He also arranged the hot water for the Muslims in winters which was a luxury at that time. He himself would be present in all Jumma Prayers. He would also address the community on the festivities of Eid and other special occasions. This Jamia Masjid Nagri Bala is still very much centre of the unity of entire community. Its mystic Adhan echoing in the valley is testament to the consummate love of Islam in the heart of Sardar Abdur Rehman. He also established a small Mosque adjacent to his home in Madrassah. He would offer prayers five times a day in the mosque whether it is rain, dark, dust or snow. Consequent to his love and affection for Islam, Allah Almighty bestowed the honour to his successors to keep his legacy alive.

Abolition of False Fallacies

People were living with the Hindu and Sikh community for a long time. Over the period some of the fallacies of Hindu and Sikh culture made their way in the Muslim society. He was the first one to highlight them and paved way for the abolition of the same from the society. Poor farmers used to pour milk over a big rock near the Jamia Mosque Nagribala with the view that it would heal their animals and bring them the fortune. He confronted this fallacy and told the tribesmen that it is association with Allah Almighty and against the Islamic beliefs. Due to his efforts this was done away with in short time. Similarly, people would plaster their mud houses with mud plaster with the cow dung, considering it sacred and a source of prosperity for their home. He forbade them to do so and purified their beliefs. Thanks to his endeavours and his likeminded chieftain's whole valley is pure in beliefs and is following the Islamic instructions in letter and spirit (Sardar Gul Zaman, personal communication, November 17, 2020).

SERVICES FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA

Educational Services

Although he was not literate but due to his exposure to the British and other political elites in the area, Sardar Abdur Rehman was great proponent of education. He was wise enough to see the light at the end of tunnel. He knew that the only way to progress and development is to gain knowledge and education. He leveraged his position and got a primary school sanctioned for his union council. This was against the will and wish for

other neighbouring chieftains and they admonished him as well, but he knew that he was on the right side of the history (Sohail, Kanwal, Rizwan, 2018). This school, which was established in 1912 in his own house, became the “Aligarh of Galiyat.” All influential leaders and noteworthy people of the Galiyat studied from this school (Sohail Khan, 2009).

Sardar Abdur Rehman strongly believed only modern education can bring progress and prosperity in the area. Thus, he convinced some like minded chieftains to convince British to open a middle school in Nathiagali which became beacon of light for the entire region. This school paved the way for quality education for the poor people of the region and offered them great opportunities for progress and development.

These two education institutions changed the course of history for entire region. Modern education opened new avenues for the people. Union Council Nagri Bala is one of the most educated union councils of District Abbottabad till today. The most important legacy of Sardar Abdur Rehman in Union Council Nagri Bala can be termed as opening the corridors of education for his tribesmen (Sardar Gul Zaman, personal communication, November 17, 2020).

Women Education

Unlike other tribal chieftains he was strong proponent of women education may it be the religious education or worldly education. He would ask women to join in education schools and religious madrassahs with boys which was a taboo at that time. He was resisted a lot by other chieftains and his tribesmen. Over the period they also realized that he was right in his thinking. His love for education opened doors of education for women as well albeit not at par with men. As of now the literacy rate of women is 87 percent in the Union Council which is far higher than the most developed cities / towns in the country.

He was also proponent of religious education for the women. He believed only a good Muslim mother can raise good Muslim children who can bring good name to the religion, society and the country. For the same reason he hired well read religious Imam for religious education of the tribe. He arranged for them the house, livelihood and provided them esteemed place in the society, in order to work in harmony. Over the period all houses in the tribe were lit with the beauty of Quran and teachings of Islam (Sardar Gul Zaman, personal communication, November 17, 2020).

Economic Legacy

Sardar Abdur Rehman had a strategic foresight. He knew that the mountainous area with the scarce land and poor crop output would not be able to sustain its population for long. He knew that his future generations would be required to move out in order to earn a better lifestyle and livelihood. He planned to equip them with the skills and education which would enable them to keep pace with the advancement of the modern society. He devised a roadmap to revamp the economy of the entire tribe. Without disclosing it to

others he started to translate it on ground. He knew that this would only happen with the acquisition of modern education and development of road infrastructure in the area. His major economic contributions can be described as following.

Building of Road

After the War of Independence 1857, a God sent opportunity arose. British established Garrisons in Bara Gali, Kalabagh, Dunga Gali, Changla Gali and Barrian (Holmes, 1904). In order to logistically support them they made a jeepable track from Abbottabad onwards and connected it with Murree. In 1903, Sardar Abdur Rehman alongwith some other influential tribal leaders requested the British for extending the jeepable track from Kalabagh to village Nagribala and Makol which was granted after much of effort. Opening of jeepable track brought immense developmental opportunities with it. This 7 kms track proved to be the backbone of the progress and development of the area. Due to presence of this road Union Council Nagri Bala surpassed all neighbouring union councils in progress and development (Sardar Gul Zaman, personal communication, November 17, 2020).

Opening of a Post Office

He was also instrumental in opening of the first ever post office in any village. This post office helped in communication throughout the union council. It is still operational and is witness to the vision of his strategic foresight.

Sponsorship of Artisans

Sardar Abdur Rehman had great respect for the artisans in the community. He knew that without their help construction and progress is not thinkable. He patronized them. He introduced a Barter system in the tribe and implemented it vigorously which in turn helped the artisan community live a respectable life. He went against the traditions of other chieftains and encouraged the artisan community to educate their children. He provided them land and would assist them all the times when called for help. Despite being a remote agricultural economy, he integrated them well in the society and they lived a respectable life (Sardar Gul Zaman, personal communication, November 17, 2020).

Legacy of Sardar Abdur Rehman

Sardar Abdur Rehman was a visionary leader. His supreme quality was his outlook for the future. He knew that education and development will open doors of political peace and prosperity in the area. He strived hard to provide best education to his tribesmen at the time and without disregard to his authority in the area. He also opened the gates of progress and development for his people. He went against the popular opinions and did the best which could serve his tribe. He laid the foundation of political process in the society and due to his efforts now the entire tribe is well read and well versed. Many of his tribesmen have served Pakistan in many fathoms including his grandson Sardar Wali Ur Rehman who was one of the prominent social worker in Hazara region. His love for the

education brought fruits for the entire region after 70 years of his passing. The literacy rate in the UC Nagribala is above 90 percent which is comparable to the most developed parts of the country. Opening of the society for progress led to fabulous development of the area. Despite being mountainous area it has all basic amenities of the life including water, electricity, schools, hospitals, mosques, roads, markets and many more things. Entire Galiyat region is indebted to his political services which are foundation block of the progress and development of the region. His political wisdom, unflinching resolve and love of his people will remain beacon of light for the leaders to follow (Sardar Gul Zaman, personal communication, November 17, 2020).

End of Life

Sardar Abdur Rehman was a very agile and strong man. He lived for 90 years and remained healthy for most part of his life. He had serious health issues after 1950 and was mostly confined to his home. He could not move to distant areas but remained influential till he breathed his last. By October 1953 his health started deteriorating substantially and had fever most of the times. He reckoned that his time is near, so he called all his near ones and gave them the advice. "Remain United in the face of all odds. Keep good care of the people under your protection. Keep your Islamic values alive. Keep seeking education and strive for the progress and development of entire tribe. You are free to choose your chieftain after my passing away as I don't want to force my decision upon you. Leading tribe is a magnanimous responsibility and answering to Allah Almighty for people is indeed at great burden. Although I have tried to be impartial and just in my dealings but still being a human being, I am bound to commit mistakes. I seek your forgiveness. Please also seek forgiveness for me from those who are not present here. Keep me alive in your prayers as I would be requiring those for sure. You have all my best wishes and I entrust you to Allah Almighty who is exalted and refuge of Muslims." On 6 December 1953 he breathed his last in his hometown in Nagribala. His funeral prayers were one of the largest in the history of Galiyat and people kept coming for the condolences even after six months. He was rested in the native graveyard situated at Pari Pandi, Nagri Bala. **إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ**

CONCLUSION

Tribal culture is akin to the human society. Modern societies have developed from the tribal structure. Role of the visionary tribal leaders in development and progress of their societies is substantial. Tribal leaders with strategic foresight, devotion to the cause and love of their community are the foundation block of the present-day progress. Pakistan's present-day progress can also be attributed to the great, selfless and honest tribal leaders. Sardar Abdur Rehman was a star among the galaxy of these great men. He had a charismatic personality and was blessed with the countless potentials of a great leader. He utilized all his energies to transform his society from an old remote tribal society to a modern well read, educated and vibrant society. He tirelessly worked over half a century to

carve out the way for the progress and development for his tribe in social, cultural, educational, political, religious, economic and legal domains. He will always be remembered as a great visionary tribal leader with great dreams and utter determination for their practical manifestation. He is surely a beacon of light for those who want to lead to the path of progress and development for their people.

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