

Yousaf Aziz Magsi as an epitome of fearless Journalism: A Historical Review

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Abstract:

This article is an attempt to elaborate upon the journalistic contributions of Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi who broke the ice against the British colonial governance in Balochistan, writing an article, Faryad-e-Balochistan, in a Lahore weekly. He was fined and detained but did not give up writing, and financing newspapers. He wrote in several newspapers including Hamdard, Zamindar, Inqilab and many more, he also financed many newspapers from Karachi, Delhi and Lahore, such as Azad, Al Baloch, Balochistan Jadeed and Nijat, while political expressions were curbed in Balochistan. Furthermore, this paper will discuss Magsi's political awakening of the masses through various means like articles in newspapers, pamphlets (Balochistan Ki Awaz and Shams Gardi) and the All India Baloch Conferences. Thus, Magsi's journalism can be termed as an epitome of fearless revolutionay journalism.

Key Words: Yousaf Aziz Magsi, Journalism, British Colonialism, Sir Shams Shah, Anjuman, Balochistan, Zamindar, Faryad e Balochistan, Shams Gardi

Introduction

In the history of the subcontinent James Augustus Hicky is known as the first fearless journalist. He published the ever first newspaper of the Subcontinent, "Hicky's Bengal Gazette" or "Calcutta General Advertiser", on January 29, 1780 (Siddiqui, p. 64). Hicky's Gazette served as a public watchdog highlighting the wrong-doings and mismanagement of the government and fearlessly criticizing the policies of the East India Company (EIC). Mr. Hicky spoke against the corruption in his paper. There is long list who were criticized of corruption, one of them was Jon Zackerich

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Kierhander, a Swedish missionary. James Augustus Hicky accused him for selling types which were to publish bible in India (Hassan, 2006, p. 9). Hicky, for speaking against the corrupt officials was fined and imprisoned more than once.

Same happened with Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi when he spoke against the corruption of the then prime minister of Kalat, Shams Shah, who was a Punjabi from Gujrat. He wrote against Shams Shah in Indian newspapers, including *Zamindar*, *Inqilab*, *Siysat*, *Masawat* and *Hamdard*. He also sponsored some of these newspapers, regarding this Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai in his autobiography wrote:

My dear friend Nawabzada Yousaf Ali Khan Magsi was affluent and sympathetic to his nation at the same time. He spent a lot on party activities and social work and also sponsored the newspapers of Punjab, including *Zamindar* and *Inqilab*. Nawab Magsi spent lot of money to support these newspaper as these were carrying voice of Baloch people throughout India which otherwise was almost impossible at that time. (as cited in Marri, 2014, p. 134)

Zamindar was edited by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, which was started by his father Mualana Siraj ud Din in 1903, and once it had a circulation of 30,000 in the region which was unprecedented (Hassan, 2006, p. 66). It also sometimes published two editions, morning and evening (Waheed, 1998, p. 114). Maulana had support for the struggle of Balochistan being carried out by Yousaf Aziz Magsi and Abdul Aziz Kurd. He wrote articles and editorials in the support of the political struggle in Balochistan. He also published ads and news regarding Balochistan, and covered the All India Baloch conference and made a success (Kurd, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan Aur Balochistan, 2017). Maulana introduced the Baloch struggle to the world as it published 30,000 copies daily and became a voice for the people of Balochistan. Magsi mentions the names of Mualana Zafar Ali Khan and Abu'al Kalam Azad in a will because of their support to the Balochistan movement. He wrote:

Half of my wealth should be equally distributed among my brother, mother, wife and little Saifullah, and the remaining half should be given to Mualana Zafar Ali Khan, Mualana Abu'al Kalam Azad, Abdul Aziz Khan Kurd and Muhammad Amin Kosa... (Marri, 2017, p. 59)

According to Sardar Khan Baloch (1947), "This young man, preached a crusade against the pharaohs of capitalism, though he himself

was capitalist” (p.131). However, Magsi is known as the moving soul of the modern Baloch nationalism (Breseeg, 2004, p. 203). “In his articles, poems and private correspondence (1929-1935), he informed his readers that Baloch, like Afghan and Iran, is a separate nation, referring to the separate history and culture” (Baluch I. , 1987, p. 65).

Objectives of the Study:

1. To elaborate upon the journalistic contributions of Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi.
2. To know how Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi began to mobilize opinion of masses against the British colonial rule in Balochistan.
3. To find out what hurdles Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi faced while raising voice for the people of Balochistan.

Data collection Method:

As the historical nature of the study, only secondary sources were utilized to carry out this research. Various research articles, books, newspapers, reports and conference proceedings were utilized for this study.

Magsi: The first apostle Baloch Nationalist Movement:

Though Balochistan was an unpromising ground for nationalist movement’s growth as the population was scattered but in 1920s, a movement was initiated by some educated Balochs who started to question colonial governance (Swilder, 2014, p. 263).

AGG Armine Dew in 1919-20 mentions the lack of a free press as an important key in explaining the peoples’ ignorance. Because of the absence of mature print media, political leaders had no available medium to mobilize and motivate the people of Balochistan regarding political matters (Axmann, 2009, p. 76). Martin Axmann (2009) puts it as, “The British perceived this absence of a press as a very fortunate thing as, perhaps, it was for them” (p.76).

The nationalists’ activities were suppressed by the British and they also resisted the pressures for introducing education in the Baloch regions (Harrison, 1981, p. 22). Entrance of Indian newspapers was banned and even people from outside were prohibited to enter Balochistan (Bakhsh, 2014, p. 23).

Yousaf Aziz Magsi is regarded the first apostle of the Baloch nationalist movement. According to Muhammad Azhar (2016), “The definition of Magsi for Baloch Nationalism was based on religion, bloodline, tradition

and history. This was the start of Baloch nationalism with ethnic characteristics...the Baloch have always resisted all efforts at encroachment upon their independent status, whether by Iranian or British government.”

“His father Qaiser Khan had earlier received the title of “Nawab” from the British government. However, Qaisar Khan’s liberal and populist attitude did not suit the British authorities in those days. The British-appointed prime minister of Khan, Shams Shah (a non-Baloch Indian), forced Qaiser Khan to abdicate from the Sardarship” (Breseeg, 2004, pp. 230-204) and he with his son went to Multan in exile where Magsi imbibed congress ideas during his exile (Swilder, 2014, p. 264).

Bizenjo (2009) sums up that Magsi breaking the ice, severely criticized the British colonial rulers and the then Prime Minister Sir Shams Shah and calling upon the Baloch to be united for an independent Balochistan, re-kindled the fire of nationalism in the young pioneers (p.34). He demanded a constitutional rule through elected representation in Kalat State (Breseeg, 2004, p. 205).

Anjuman-e-Itehad-e-Balochan wa Balochistan (Organization for the unity of Baloch and Balochistan)

The Baloch nationalist movement became organized with the formation of the political party “*Anjuman-e-Itehad-e- Balochan wa Balochistan*” (also known as the *Anjuman*) in 1930s under the leadership of Mir Abdul Aziz Kurd and Yousaf Aziz Magsi. “The Anjuman called for democratic and social change in Balochistan in this regard the pioneers of Anjuman held the first All India Baloch Conference in Jacobabad in 27 to 29th December 1932 which was followed by another conference in Hyderabad as ‘Balochistan and All India Baloch Conference’” (Dashti, 2012, p. 303).

Magsi and Mir Azam Jan (Khan-e-Baloch-XII-1931-1933)

Shams Shah was trying to make his own, the Khan of Kalat or wishing to see Anwar Jan, Azam Jan’s brother on the throne, while the *Anjuman* was working in favor of Muhammad Azam Jan (Siddiqi, 2012, p. 56). “An agreement was reached between Azam Jan and Yousaf Ali Magsi that a constitutional form of government would be established in Kalat upon his ascending the throne” (Axmann, 2009, p. 146). *Anjuman* succeeded in getting Azam Jan on the throne as Khan-e-Baloch-XII in November 1931 in ceremony attended by the Viceroy. It was the first chance for the *Anjuman* leaders to voice their demands more openly (Axmann, 2009, p. 146), but during the said occasion the Viceroy cautioned the new Khan against the

Baloch nationalist (Swilder, 2014, p. 245). Then Mir Muhammad Azam Khan in a meeting with Yousaf Aziz Magsi and Abdul Aziz Kurd, warned them that the *Anjuman's* activism was dangerous (Swilder, 2014, p. 264). However, Baluch (2009) in his autobiography stated that, when the Baloch political leaders, Yousaf Aziz Magsi, Abdul Aziz Kurd, Muhammad Hussain Unqa, Muhammad Khan Marri, Malik Faiz Muhammad Yousazai, Abdul Rahman Bugti and others started 'Quit Balochistan Movement' against the alien ruler, Khan-e-Baloch, Muhammad Azam Jan quietly encouraged them (p. 110).

Magsi and Ahmed Yar Khan (Khan-e-Baloch- XIII) 1933-1947

After Muhammad Azam Jan, his son, Mir Ahmed Khan succeeded on the throne. He has stated that, "...I assumed the Khanship of Kalat, and set for myself a resolute mission of bettering the plight the Baluches, and raising them from the mire of ignorance to respectable rung on the social ladder" (Baluch M. A., 2009, pp. 17-18).

One of Khan's initial tasks was securing the collaboration of the younger educated generation engaged in politics, and prevail upon them to participate in his reform programs (Baluch M. A., 2009, p. 118). Yousaf Aziz Magsi was one of those young men, and according to Aziz Luni (2003), "In February 1934, Yousaf Aziz Magsi went to England on secret mission assigned him by Mir Ahmed Yar Khan" (p.295).

Balochistan and All India Baloch Conferences

The two All India Baloch Conferences, held in 1932 and 1933 were convened in Sindh, as the British would not have allowed such meetings in Quetta (Swilder, 2014, p. 264). Many progressive Baloch took part in the conferences and the tribal notables were the leading sponsors. The resolutions of the conferences reflected the heterogeneous interests of those who took part in it (p.265). Swilder (2014) puts it as, "the agenda of the second conference echoed the concerns expressed the previous year regarding political, economic and educational issues" (p.266).

Anjuman issued a statement which was published in daily *Zamindar* on October 22, 1932:

It has been decided to convene the Balochistan and All India Conference at Jacobabad in the month of December (1932). The Baloch are properly acquainted with democratic principles but our nation is being tremendously affected by external influences. Consequently, we have no choice but to organize ourselves by

establishing bonds of unity and alliance, otherwise, this result in our lagging behind all other nations. Our objectives are the following extremely important aims... unity of Baloch, compulsory education, protection of rights, religious education, and legal reforms. We have faith that members of our nation will spare no efforts to make this conference a success. (as cited in Baluch, 1987, pp. 153-154)

When Khan Achakzai was asked to chair the All India Baloch Conference (1932), first, he refused because of the name of the conference saying that, "I am not a Baloch to attend this conference and this does not mean I have any hatred with Baloch" (Tareen, 2016, p. 59), and the Balochistan was added to the name of conference keeping the geography of the regions where Pashtoons also live. Martin Axmann (2009) puts it as, "It is also of importance to note that the Jacobabad conference was not a purely Baloch, but a 'Balochistani' gathering. It brought Pashtuns and Baloch together on the platform of common interest of their joint homeland, comprised of a predominantly Pashtun British Balochistan and the Khanate of Kalat, dominated by Baloch and Brahui" (Axmann, 2009, p. 149).

A number of resolutions were passed during Balochistan and All India Baloch Conference. On 28th December 1932, the first day of the conference, the first resolution declared the purpose of the conference as:

The name of the conference will be the Balochistan and All India Baloch Conference. And the following will be its purpose: to make the economical, educational and political condition of the inhabitable of Balochistan and other Baloch of entire India better and to produce in them cooperation, union and feeling of brotherhood; and they should do their utmost to achieve the above mentioned purposes. (The Resolutions passed on 28th December 1932)

Journalistic contributions of Yousaf Aziz Magsi:

Magsi was a well-off young man who sponsored several Urdu newspapers published from Karachi which were called Baloch nationalist newspapers (Breseeg, 2004, p. 205). He founded the Baloch press and on his appeal several school teachers resigned from their jobs and stated publishing newspapers (Baluch I. , 1987, p. 65). Inyatullah Baluch (1987) writes:

The Baloch press published a series of articles on the subject of Baloch nationalism, imperialism, independence, and socio-cultural problems in order to foster an awakening of

consciousness. The most important writer was Magsi, who wrote in Urdu and Persian. (p.65).

Magsi saw the salvation of the Baloch in the adaptation of the principles of nationalism, socialism and progressive Islam (Baluch I. , 1987, p. 65). In the severe situation of Balochistan Yousaf Aziz Magsi was the one to change the mind of the people calling them to get united for the liberation of the homeland and provided Baloch the platform of the press (Shedai, 2013, p. 354). He knew the importance of press in political and social awakening of the people of Balochistan. He wrote in various papers and also sponsored several. He was centered on the silence of others who were not writing on the issues of Balochistan. In a letter to Muhammad Amin Khosa, he wrote:

Let me tell you something that the silence of the Baloch and the people of Balochistan on “white paper” will result bad consequences. For God’s sake turn over and contribute in newspapers against it at least once a week or two. (Marri, 2017, p. 64)

“Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi wanted to get the rights of Baloch through political and democratic struggle. He knew how much important is attached to a newspaper for a political movement” (Hussain, Tahir, Sadiq, & Baloch, 2017).

Faryad-e-Balochistan (Plight of Balochistan)

Faryad-e-Balochistan was the first political article to break the ice against the British colonial rule in Balochistan, which was written by Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi in November 1929 and published in a Lahore newspaper, *Masawat* (Marri , 2014, p. 28). In this article the demand for constitutional reforms was raised. Criticising the colonial rule it asked for the replacement of Mir Shams Shah. Nina Swilder (2014) puts it as, “Agency officials reported this to be the first time that Congress’s ideas had appeared in Kalat, and described the article as ‘highly inflammatory’” (p.264). In this article Magsi wrote:

The world is on the path of development but the people of Balochistan seem asleep as if they will awake on doomsday. It is my humble request to the people of Balochistan; for God’s sake don’t let people to make fun of you. It is the need of the hour to stand up. Stand up if you have the blood of your ancestors in your veins. Make a difference as they did. Break up the chains of slavery and make yourself an example for other nations. Put an end to

mutual jealousy and rivalry. Prove to be the greatest warriors in war of freedom and no one would get martyrdom before you eradicate the thoughts of cowardice and let the history prove. Learn from the sacrifices of the motherland. (as cited in Naseer, 2010, p. 448)

Political expressions were curbed in Balochistan till late nineteen twenties (Baloch & Shah, 1999). Publishing a newspaper was task beyond ones thoughts, reading newspapers was considered a crime by the colonial governance and writing in it was the biggest crime (Bugti, 2010, p. 135) which Yousaf Aziz Magsi committed. Consequently, Magsi was arrested in June 1930 on the charge of provoking 'rebellion in the Kalat State' (Siddiqi, 2012, p. 7). On July 17, 1930, a *Jirga* (An assembly of tribal elders) was held in Kalat and it did not only punish him but also criticized the writing and declared Magsi a victim of the thoughts of the errant people. He was detained in his uncle's (Sardar Rasool Bakhsh) house for a year (Marri, 2014, p.p. 30-31) and convicted to pay a fine of Rs. 12900 and submit securities for further good behavior (Luni, 2003, p. 294)

Balochistan Ki Awaz (Voice of Balochistan)

Balochistan Ki Awaz was pamphlet brought out by Magsi. Its aim was apprising the British Parliament of the socio-political conditions in Balochistan (Janmahmad, 1989, p. 168).

Newspapers that Magsi sponsored

Azad, Balochistan, Balochistan Jadeed, Al Baloch and *Nijat* were some of the newspapers which were started under Magsi's guidance and sponsorship. He also sponsored *Zamindar* and *Inqilab*.

Daily *Zamindar* of Maulana Zafar Ali Khan was banned under Press Ordinance Act in January 1933, when Magsi got the news; he left for Lahore on January 16, 1933. With his arrival he paid an amount of Rs. 3000 as security fee for *Zamindar*. During the same visit he attended conferences and raised his voice for the said paper in his speeches (Kurd, 2018, p. 114). Young Balochistan, a biweekly sponsored by Magsi, in one of its editorial notes, condemned the charges against *Zamindar* and asked people to protest against this act in India (Unqa, 1934).

Resolutions of Balochistan and All India Baloch Conference -1932 also acknowledged and thanked Mualana and his paper for the services they rendered to the Balochistan movement.

Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, in one of his poems, admired the growing popularity of Yousaf Aziz Magsi:

Lafz-ne- Baloch Mehr-o-Wafa Ka Kalam Hay,

Manee Hain, Is Kalam Ke Yousaf Aziz

Translation: The word Baloch is the word for love and affection. The meaning of this word is Yousaf Ali Aziz (as cited in Breseeg, 2004, p. 204).

Shams Gardi (Tyranny of Shams): Demands for people's basic rights

Yousaf Aziz Magsi and Abdul Aziz Kurd with the decisions of *Anjuman's* General Body published a pamphlet under the title of *Shams Gardi* in November 1931 from Lahore (Magsi & Kurd, 2017, p. 7).

Magai's all struggle was for the rights of the people of Balochistan, "though he was the son of one of the wealthiest Sardars, yet his habits as well as his way of living were simple. He proved himself an embodiment of 'simple living and high thinking'" (Kausar, 2004). When he replaced his brother Gul Muhammad Khan as *Sardar* of the Magsi tribe in 1933 and got himself deeply involved in economical, educational and social welfare of the people of Balochistan (Awan, 1985, p. 165), and utilized his pen this purpose.

Demand for Educational Reforms

There were 10 secondary schools in 1921 with 1927 students and only two girls' middle schools where only 12 local students were studying (Rizvi, 2008). From 1911 to 1921 only 19 local Muslims could pass matriculation, and only three local boys were awarded with open scholarships while the total population, according to the census of 1921 was 799625 (Districts 420648 and States 378997). In year 1931 the population was totalled 868617 persons (rural 371483 and urban 92025) (Rizvi, 2008), and the budget allocation for education was only Rs. 13000/- (Baluch M. A., 2009, p. 124; Bakhsh, 2014, p. 22). This issue was taken up by Yousaf Aziz Magsi and he wrote a writeup in *Shams Gardi* with the title of 'Lack of Education in Balochistan', and several resolutions were passed on education in the three day, Balochistan and All India Baloch Conference (1932) which demanded to improve female education, making primary education compulsory, increase in scholarships, number of schools and colleges, Education Department should be given to the natives, technical School be opened and necessary changes in curriculum.

Demand for the protection of the rights of farmers

Agriculture was one of the major sources of income including flock owning and camel driving during British period. Most of the area was pastoral-cum-agricultural. About 68% of the population developed on agriculture and related professions in 1911. Total agricultural workers in 1931 were 201706. (Rizvi, 2008).

Shams Shah started several cruel acts against the farmers, i.e., they were labored without payment while constructing official buildings and cleaning roads during the visits of high officials. They were also asked to pay a maintenance fee for the *karez* (underground channel to transport water) and the amount was not used on the *karez* (Magsi & Kurd, 2017, p. 29). The article of Magsi and Kurd 'Cruelty to Farmers' highlighted the all situation in detail and later two resolutions were passed on the second day of Balochistan and All India Baloch Conference (1932) which requested the government of Balochistan to remit 50 percent of land revenue, to provide more loan to *Zamindars* (The Resolutions Passed on 29th December 1932, No. 13), and an appeal was made for protective duty to be imposed on imported fresh and preserved fruit (No. 21).

Demand for reforms in recruitments

"The Baluches were deliberately debarred form key-posts in the Government of Kalat, while non Baluches and persons adept in the art of flattery occupied high positions" (Baluch M. A., 2009, p. 124). Magsi and Kurd (2017) wrote an article against this evil act, entitled, 'Nepotism in recruitments', in which they said, "Shams Shah is afraid of the appointments of Baloch on key position because he knows they will digout his wrongdoings (p.35).

Demands for tribal freedom

During thr British, the Khan of Kalat was the head of the State merely on paper. "For all practical purposes authority was vested with the Political Agents who functioned under the direct orders of the Agent to the Governor-General" (Baluch M. A., 2009, p. 124). Shams Shah interfered in tribal organization taking action against several Sardars, i.e, the Sardars of Mengal and Mohammad Haasni tribes were arrested. The Magsi tribe also became a victim which started migration to Sindh which is known as Magsi agitation.

Demand of Reforms in Justice system

All the member of 'Jirga Sytem' were nominated by Political Agents. Thousands of people were jailed without any trial. As Mir Ahmed Khan Baluch (2009), the then Khan, says, "Justice thus was openly denied to

people” (p.125). Magsi demanded ‘reforms in judicial system’ (Magsi & Kurd, 2017), noting the pending cases for several years, corruption and usage of abusive language in courts.

Conclusion

Journalism means collecting, analysing, verifying, and presenting information regarding current events, trends, issues and people (Mukharjee, 2007, p. 9). The first loyalty of Journalism is to its citizens (Kovach & Rosenstill, 2014, p. 72) and Magsi’s journalism possessed this element. In his writings and other activities, he exploited the grievances of the Baloch masses under the despotic rule of Shams Shah (Dashti, 2012, pp. 302-303). Thus, he searched for voices that went undiscovered and served as watchdog over government through revolutionary press.

As D. Mukharjee (2007) says, “the media appeal of a politician may be more important than his/her political skills” (p. 26), and the political opinions of journalists shape their framing and selection of news (p.21). Magsi was a politician and a journalist of great qualities, though his career was very short, about a span of five years.

His journalism is a fine example of revolutionary concept of press, a press of people who strongly believe that government they live under does not serve their interest and should be overthrow (Hachten & F.Scotton, 2007, p. 28).

Magsi asked A. Aziz Kurd, M. Hussain Unqa and Naseem Talvi to start papers from Karachi and other parts of India to support their political opinions. Before Magsi, Lenin also proposed revolutionaries to publish a newspaper inside czarist Russai which could be a cover for far-flung revolutionary organizations. The early *Pravda* (at one edited by Stalin), was published outside czarist Russai and copies of this paper smuggled and distributed widely (Hachten & F.Scotton, 2007, p. 28). There are several example of anticolonial movements in which newspapers were published that expressed the grievancses against British rulers, encouraged nationalism and advocated political independence (p.29). The papers sponsored by Magsi refelected his policies which were to get dawn of freedom for the people of Balochistan.

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