

Review of the Bacha Khan's Vision of Alternative Education

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It is commonplace to regard Bacha Khan and his movements as political, it is true they were political –all of us are political and what we do in our lives are political - however limited attention has been paid to Bacha Khan and his movements' educational aspect. Dr.Sohail Khan has made a timely effort to highlight educational aspect of Bacha Khan's efforts. His book Bacha Khan's vision of Alternative Education highlights Bacha Khan's educational undertakings during the reign of the British Raj in today's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Bacha Khan's Vision of Alternative Education is a thorough look at all the educational efforts made by Bacha Khan and his colleagues independently, at the outset, and from the platforms of Tanzem-e-Islahul Afaghina and Khudai Khidmatar later on collectively to educate Pashtun children in modern education. The book not only addresses the questions of educational approach of Bacha Khan and his comrades, the finances of the Azad schools, socio-economic and educational situation of Pashtuns at that time, curricula of the schools, but also the question of what it takes to start educating children of a major section of an ethnic group when the regime not only not support you but also suppress you and your followers for introducing social reform through education and other social activities.

The political and social affiliation of the author, Dr. Suhail Khan, Assistant Professor in the Department of Education and Chairman of Pashtu Department at Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan, with the founders of Khudai Khidmatgar as well as with Awami National Party (The Party which was established by the followers of Khudai Khidmatgar) and his academic background puts him in a stronger position and makes him a credible authority to easily collect data and present a factual picture of the struggle.

As far as I know, this is the first ever book solely been dedicated to the educational efforts made by Bacha Khan and his comrades. Bacha Khan and his movements are mostly seen as politicians and not educational reformers. It won't be wrong to argue that it is probably a coincidence that the book is launched in a situation when the Pashtun homeland face the same social problems that it was facing in the era of Khudai Khidmatgar. Some influential pundits are still opposed to the Pashtuns getting education

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and witness their language, culture and history being disfigured. Schools are burnt in the Pashtun land and all chances of development are snatched from them. On the other hand, it is surprising that Bacha Khan applied the approach of educating youths not only in modern sciences but also equipping them in vocational training almost eight decade ago. Western nations have been using the same method of education in their high schools but we are not using this method even today. The method, if followed by our educational institutions, will greatly reduce unemployment rate in our society. Adopting this method of education by Bacha Khan eight decades ago shows his farsightedness.

The writer's style of writing is compelling and non-judgmental. He has followed canons of research methods in doing his research. In addition to collecting data from the museums – from the newspapers, secret reports, and British officials' diaries - he has heavily relied on the primary data, interviewed ex- students and former teachers of Azad Madras's and has gathered information from the relevant academics as well.

The illustrations and statistics used in the book are extremely helpful in understanding the situation of that time and increases not only credibility of the book, unveil some very important facts but also shows the efforts that the author made in carrying out this huge undertaking. He, for the first time claims that 134 schools were established by Bacha Khan and Khudai Khidmatgar during their social reform activities. The author also reports that the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan was educated in Azad one of Azad Schools in Utmanzai. Unveiling such information shows the enormous zeal that he has for his work and hardships that he underwent in the course of this research. Compared to other books written on Bacha Khan's work, this book gives deeper understanding of the Khudai Khidmatgar's schools that Bacha Khan had established.

The author takes enormous efforts and travel to India, London and the most important places that he thinks has some valuable information of his interest in Pakistan to collect authentic information for the book.

However, there is room for further improvement in the book. Though facts have been well written in the book, in order for the readers to get deeper understanding of the topic I believe minor additions to the book will best serve the purpose and enhance usability of the book. The last chapter of the book needs to be replaced with a conclusion. Being an educationalist and involved in teaching for many years, Dr.Suhail is in a better position to evaluate Bacha Khan's approach of alternative education, its strength and weaknesses and tell the readers about his take away from the book in the new edition of the book.

Additionally, the book also needs to have the argument that the author wants to present to the readers. If this happens the readers will be able to clearly draw a line between a historical narration and critical evaluation of Bacha Khan's educational approach in the book.

Though the author has developed his PhD dissertation into a book, I believe that he should have and he has the liberty to change it to the book the way he wants.

One of the most important, implicit in presentation but academically priceless point that Bacha Khan's Vision of Alternative Education cements is that the Khudai Khidmatgar movement was social in nature from the outset. This point belies all the claims made by the British Indian Government about the nature of the movement that justified their suppression of the movement by labeling it as a Bolshevik Political Movement.

To close, the books has the potential to inflame further discussion on the topic and serve as a strong reference point for scholars and students interested in studying social movements in general and Khudai Khidmatgar and its contribution in educating youths of Pakhtunkhwa under the British Raj in particular.