

Political, Economic and Cultural Reforms under Amanullah Khan's Sovereignty

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1. Preface

In the contemporary history of Afghanistan and after the Great Ahmad Shah Baba; there is no king, prince or president who can compete with Prince Amanullah in terms of his patriotism, passion and love for independence and glory of the country as well as his resistance to end up foreigner's influence in domestic issues of the country. His name is associated with the independence of the country. One cannot find a patriotic, liberal and open-minded Afghan who recalls the independence of the country and, in the meantime, does not remind Ghazi Amanullah Khan and pay gratitude to his glories.

Prince Amanullah Khan in arhetic speech had publicly proclaimed the independence of the country with respect to the principal rights and values such freedom, equality and elimination of oppression. Proclamation of such policies were consistent with the long-held aspirations of the people and, therefore, was warmly welcomed and appreciated by the people.(6:543)

Ghazi Amanullah initiated reform from himself, family members, and royal family and as well as continued to his high ranking government officials. He knew that if water comes from a muddy or dirty source, then trying for cleaning it in the other end is all in vain. Therefore, in the first step, he freed many women men who were taken as slaves by Amir Habibullah Khan, and by issuing a decree, abolished sales of humans as slaves and forced labor. The king had denounced such actions defining it as immoral and against the ethics of humanity.

As part of his reforms, reduced all the staggering spending, and denounced revelry and luxury within the government offices. He himself wore simple traditional clothing; cut off the all the pension salaries, tribal allowances and privileges as well as food allowances of the royal family members that, for many years, had been offered by the Royal Palace to them. He affirmed that anyone who does not work should not be deserved with free allowances and entitlements.

King Amanullah in his historic speech dated 28 Feb 1919, outlined the main purpose of his monarchy "*When my honorable nation put the throne over my head, I made a commitment and took oath that the Afghanistan government, like any other independent countries of the world, must have its independent and autonomy inside and outside of the territory; forced labor is forbidden in any means and the people or citizens must only abide by law. Our government is trying to bring about such reforms in the country that will enable our nation and countrymen to take suitable position*

and place among the civilized countries of the world."(5:691)

After taking independence which was the first political achievement and success, the young king embarked on a series of comprehensive political, economic, cultural and social initiatives. Amanullah Khan's love and passion for the development, improvement, prosperity and modernization of the country was not a king's passion but was more similar to a poets and artist's passion which can be interpreted in terms of emotions and feelings. Ghazi Shah Amanullah was truly in love with his country and countrymen.

His majesty Amanullah Khan was an open-minded, intellectual, a tactful and political savvy, humble, intimate personality and had quite a strong love with his country and compatriots. His behavior with the people, intellectuals and evolutionists even before reaching the monarchy made him popular and dear to everyone and this attribute, thus, helped all the people to gather around the young king and show their support from his programs, policies and reforms. (2:166)

The major purpose of Amanullah Khan's reform, in the first stage, was to ensure national unity and afterwards, was leading the country toward development and improvement.

2. Amir Amanullah Khan's Reforms

Amir Amanullah Khan's reforms consisted of many stages. The first stage from 1919-1923 was one of the most successful stages of reforms which includes formation of the government structures; reforms in administrative, legal and judiciary affairs as well as establishment of a parliamentary mechanism.

The second stage of reforms from 1924-1928 was a period of transition that the process was implemented much slower due to Mangal's insurgence.

The third stage (July 1928-January 1929) which did not last more than six months was after Amanullah Khan's returned from his Europe's tour, and most of the programs remained as written proposals or policies drafted on papers.

In short terms, we can summarize the reforms under Amanullah Khan's reign into the following categories.

A. Administrative and Political Reforms

The core principle of Amanullah Khan's political reform policies were based on friendship, love and loyalty to his nation. To ensure national unity on the basis of equal rights

of the all the people before the law and as well as their involvement in political development of the country, he managed to draft the first constitution of the country entitled "Statute of the Supreme Government of Afghanistan" and, on 11th April 1922, the constitution was officially approved and ratified by 872 delegates of tribal elders and government officials gathered in a Loya Jirga in Jalalabad. According to the article 16 of the constitution, all the citizens are entitled to enjoy equal rights and privileges under the Sharia and government enacted laws.

The king believed that by enacting a comprehensive law free from prejudice and racism, drafting laws and regulations for governing administrative affairs, formation of a parliamentary body and segregation of the three legislative, executive and Judiciary bodies, he would be able to enforce rule of law and establish a centralized state. He believed that no one is known as Hindu, Hazara, Shia, Sunni, Ahmadzai, Popalzai and any other sect but rather identified as a united nation under the name *Afghan*.

Formation and structuring of the central government and ministries; administrative restructuring and segregation of state into 9 administrative divisions, 5 major provinces and 4 supreme sub-government states; adoption of law for issuance of national identity cards and birth registrations of the citizens, law for establishing administrative councils and boards of the provinces, proposal of establish a political party titled *Azadi*, establishment LoyaJirgas, advisory boards and councils; extension of diplomatic relations and signing agreements with major European and Asian countries namely England, Germany, Italy, Soviet Union, France, Turkey and Iran; Purchase of land for Afghan embassies and missions in foreign countries, abolition of privileges and allowances of the royal family members, enactment of pension laws and the transformation of national flag from a single black color into 3-coloured black, red and green flag were a few activities included in king Amanullah's reforming policy.

The first constitution contained many freedoms that Afghans were never enjoyed or entitled during the sovereignty of previous monarchies ever before. Abolition of slavery and sale of humans as servants, safeguarding personal and individual freedom and liberties, abolition of forced labour and freedom of selecting one's profession and educational discipline, ensuring equal rights of the citizens, abolition of torture, provision and safety of house and shelter, abolition of illegal confiscation of properties, freedom of media and publications, safety of official correspondence and couriers, and as well as assurance of justice were among the key aspects included and guaranteed in the constitution.(1:286)

In addition to the constitution; about fifty other laws, statutes and by-laws were enacted and enforced that encompassed diverse matters starting from government structures even to matters relating to domestic or family aspects. The major laws were "law on issuance/holding NID and Passport dated 5th Jawza 1302(27th May, 1923), statute on sale of state-owned properties and enterprises dated 17th Sawr 1302(8th May, 1923), statute of tariffs and custom duties on livestock and its associated products dated 17th Mizan 1302(10th Oct, 1923), General Penal statute dated 1st Mizan 1302(24th Sept,

1923), Domestic/civil service divisions statute dated 25th Jadi 1302(16th Jan, 1924), Military Services regulatory statute dated 1302(1923), General Budgeting statute, regulatory statute for media outlets and so on".

Adoption and approval of such laws and regulations considering the short time-span and lack of legal and judiciary experts in the country was obviously not an easy task to be fulfilled. In the first stage, Jamal Pasha, the leader of Turkey's Union and Development Party, together with his companions helped Amanullah Khan's government in compiling and adoption of the afore-mentioned laws but most of the credit goes to a Turkish expert, Badri Big, who had a collection of Turkish laws with him as well as a number of Afghan intellectual namely Abdul Hadi Dawi, Abdul Rahman Lodi, Sayed Qasim, Faqir Mohammad Khan, Faiz Mohammad Khan Naseri, Abdul Jabar Khan, Mohammad Reza, Taj Mohammad Khan Paghmani, Mir Ghulam Mohammad Ghubar, Ghulam Mohayeddin Arti, Mohammad Anwar Khan Bismel especially Mahmood Tarzi who helped the young king in design, adoption, implementation and execution of reforms. (6:604)

B. Economic Reforms

As part of the economic reform, young Amani government launched a series plans. The major highways and roads of Kabul-Torkham, Kabul-Kandahar through Chaman which were built by Amir Habibullah's government were renovated and rebuilt, and a large number of transportation and freight trucks started their business operations by passing the highways from one end to another. Also, preparation were undertake for building a motorway over the *Salang* tunnel to connect Northern provinces to the capital of the country, and another road to connect *Jalabad* through *Gharo canyon* to the Indian border.

The railway route between Kabul-Kandahar and its extension or development to Herat was one of the major projects in which a number German and French industries showed their interest by dispatching their technical experts for conducting initial reviews. Obviously, it would not have been possible to fund or implement such mega project without the technical and financial support of the economic giants or great economic countries. The telephone network between Kabul and other major cities was installed and the Capital of the country was linked to international hubs with the help Telegraph System.

In the industrial sector, In addition to producing the government-needed military equipment, measures were also taken to produce consumable items such matches(a stick for ignition of fire), Sugar and confectionery, Cement, underwear, etc and a number of industrial machines were purchased from different countries, especially from Germany which was a major industrial country. Moreover, serious measures were taken to ban the use of foreign goods especially the fabrics. The king himself wore home-made fabrics.

Although it was limited in terms of the volume of business transactions or exchanges, direct trade relations for the first time had started between Afghanistan and European countries namely Germany and the UK and that helped the

country's trading industry to exclude from the monopoly of British India and the Soviet Union. In order to better improve and develop business industry, a number of companies under the name Amanya, Samar and Rafiq had been established with the government's support and encouragement.

Anyway, the economic policy of Amanullah Khan which sought to expand exports, restrict volume of imports, create national industries as well as breaking the country's economic isolation in the result of its declaration of independence, provided widespread transformations in terms of quality in the economy of the country.(6:595)

In the economic sector, young Amir undertook measures to alleviate those formerly levied heavy impositions; and started to abolish imposed VAT on goods, Food allowances and coupons, allotment of cereals, lease of government levied tax, feudal intermediaries between tax payers and tax collectors, accumulative tax of non-counted livestock, forced labor, various tax and tariffs receivables from tradesmen craftsmen. The tax ceilings on lands were determined and the government was procuring all its needs by cash payments. The livestock of every farmer was counted annually and the tax was calculated based on the numbers of available animals. To better control and manage tax collection departments, a specialized school of management and administration was established in Kabul and various custom departments have been abolished. Investments surged forwards and accelerated. Business enterprises and companies such as lights production, car assembly, pharmaceutical, Rofaqa-e-Afghan, Etehad-e-Afghan, Qamar, Zia and Afghan-Russia joint commerce chamber had been established in Kabul. Amani government tried to import franchise agencies of foreign companies and to extend the railway network across the country.

In the Loya Jirga dated 1307(1928), it was announced that the government is trying to establish a well-equipped airplane repairing facility. A factory had been established for making white gunpowder; measures taken to initiate work on power stations in Paghman, Jalalabad and Kandahar; electricity provided to cement, leather, gunpowder and matchesmaking factories. Factories for car repairs and spare parts production; fragrance, soap or other cosmetics production, fabrics manufacturing, carpentry, ice-making, cotton and oil productions in Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar were established; and plans were made to set up factories for sugar, textile, button, butter and cheese production; oil extraction as well as an air post service between Kabul-Mazar and Iran-Turkey had been established.

Ghazi and Seraj dams were completed and measures were taken to restrain water of Nahr-e-Razaq and Samkani dams. Various projects were undertaken with regards to azure and petroleum mines of Badakhshan and Herat, respectively; numerous programs were designed for establishment and development of iron melting, coal, sulfur, and lead, marble and white mud production factories. Moreover, plans were made for management and administration of forests in Paktya and Asmar, extension breeding of horses, karakul and cocoons. In the result of implementation of such economic programs, government's revenues doubled compared to the

past by showing an increase from 80 to 180 million Afghanis per annum. (5:789)

A small fraction of Amanullah Khan's economic reform has been reviewed and mentioned in this paper.

During his visit to Europe, Shah Amanullah received a 6 million *Mark* loan on an 8 year repayment scheme from the German government which he used it to establish factories, equip military, purchase guns and other military equipment.

Sugar production and confectionary, textile production, wool cleaning and processing, chemical substances production, jacket weaving, dairy processing, and petroleum extraction factories; 24 socks weaving machines, 18 Buses, 12 firefighting vehicles, 2 small and large scale radio stations, surgical equipment and facilities, tractors, 53000 sets British guns, 106 artillery, 8 wings airplanes, 5 armored vehicles, 10000 armored safety hat, and 6 metrology machines were among a few things procured from the afore-mentioned loan.(8:19)

C. Press and Cultural Reforms

Although reforms had been generally started during Amir Habibullah Khan's reign, but was inclusively focused at the central level and the provinces were deprived of experiencing such reforms. Shah Amanullah tried to overcome this situation by establishing schools and publication of magazines/newspapers, and the first sparks of a new literacy culture emerged by publishing the *sarajul Akhbar* magazine/newspaper. In Amanullah Khan's tenure, the editor/author of the magazine/newspaper, Abdul Hadi Dawi, who had been appointed as the foreign minister was replaced by Aman Afghan, and then, Aman Afghan was replaced by Mir Sayed Qasim as the editor in-chief.

Itefaqul Islam under the auspices of Salahuddin Saljoqi in Herat, *Tolo-e-Afghan* under Abdul Aziz Khan in Kandahar, *Sitara-e-Afghan* under Ghulam Mohammad Hussain, and later, *Jabal-u-Siraj* under Mir Ghulam Mohamad Ghoobar, *Bidar* in Mazar-e-Sharif, and *Itehad-e-Mashreqi* in Jalalabad began their publishing. All these magazines/newspapers were published by the government but they had enough freedom in publishing their contents even that, sometimes, they became critics of the government. In addition to this, dozens of independent magazines/newspapers started to operate.

One of the major cultural measures taken was launching radio broadcasts in 1921 after importing the system and its installation inside the premise of the royal house. Afghan students were dispatched outside the country to learn the technique of Radio, and almost 800 loudspeakers were purchased in 1304, installed across the Kabul City.(9:912)

Beside other efforts, numerous educational facilities including the school of Telegraph, Arabic learning Academy or *Darul Oloom*, Mastoorat School, Rashidya School in Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar-e-sharif, Qataghan School and academy of basic medical sciences together with more than 320 schools were established across all the provinces. These schools were first taught by Indian teachers and, later on, by French teachers. Primary educations became

compulsory and literacy courses were created to nurture and enhance literacy skills, and, later on, courses were created for teaching religious subjects and modern sciences which, some of them, were personally taught by Amir Amanullah Khan.

Integrating and or introducing French, German and English learning textbooks in the curriculum of Amani, Esteqlal, Ghazi and Nejat high schools; recruitment of a team of mobile teachers for nomads, establishment of the association for women's protection and support, establishment of the National Police Academy, 2 schools for girls by Queen Suraya –Ghazi Amanullah Khan's mother, dispatching girls to turkey, and boys to France and Germany for pursuing higher educations were part of the reform policy. (1:494)

From the cultural perspective, the educational platform broadly developed and experienced widespread changes that, even, people in remote provinces of Paktya and Khost had made a 700,000 Afghanis contribution to the government for building schools in their provinces and localities. Moreover, 4 schools were established in Khost, Samkani and Zurmat and, in the meantime, the spirit of support from education had been induced all across other provinces. Hindus had also established their own school in Kabul and Kandahar.(4:248)

Fortunately, at the beginning of Amanullah Khan's reign, the country underwent a dramatic cultural and educational evolution, and Afghanistan's relations expanded with numerous countries of the world. During Amanullah Khan's monarchy, the government paid considerable attention to the development of educational sector as, in 1922, the Ministry of Education had been established for the first time in the history of Afghanistan.(3:160)

Similarly, a cinema in Kabul and theater in Paghman was established. Foundation of a National library was laid down and a unified metric weighing system has been developed. The Afghan currency which, prior to Amani's era, known as *Rupees* renamed to *Afghani*. (7:207)

The people of Afghanistan who were eager for progress managed to support the young government with all means, and virtually embraced all the new reforms. The public had voluntarily worked in the extension of road networks and strongly declared their support from the new industries and the democratic system. Also, women fulfilled their responsibilities by taking part in publishing the *Irshadul Naswan* magazine/newspaper and the association for women's support and advocacy (literary called *Hemayat-e-Naswan*). Overall, the public declared their strong support from all these anonymous reforms without any fanaticism, resistance and traditional conservatism. (5:789)

3. Conclusion

Despite all the challenges, Afghanistan has experienced numerous ideologies under Amanullah Khan's sovereignty. Independence, anti-colonialism spirit, development of economic plan and policies, cultural reforms, provision of human rights and the children rights as well as democratic values transformed the meaning and concept of patriotism in

the context of a nationwide intellectual platform in the country.

However, all these efforts were short term but these have been engraved in the minds of Afghans for over a century. The development policies and reforms of Shah Amanullah, who is known to be a champion and pioneer of modernization and fundamental transformations or developments in the country, can be proved as an effective model to be followed for another century.

The failure of Amanullah Khan's reforms, like any other major political phenomenon, had been the product of complex internal and external factors some of which were objective in nature, and others were associated with the secret service agencies outside the border of the country. The objective factors, in the first hand, emerged from the existing contradictions between the reforms being implemented and the interest of the ruling class of the society e.g. landlords, feudal, lords, aristocrats and a number of clergies and priests. Among all these factors, the opposition of the prominent members of the royal office and their compromise played a vital role in weakening the government. The king, who himself was engaged in a personal conflict between ethnocentrism and patriotism, encountered many problems. In addition to domestic problems, the secret service and intelligence network of east India Company and the British government, especially after the king's declaration of independence and his European visits, had extensively helped in suspension of reforms and collapse of the monarchy.

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