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## **Air Marshal (Retd.) Mohammad Asghar Khan's Struggle Against Ayub Khan**

Sanaullah,<sup>1</sup> & SafiUllah Khan Marwat<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract:**

The purpose of the study is to define and analyse the Asghar Khan's struggle against Ayub Khan's dictatorship in Pakistan's historical context. The researchers conducted the current study using the conventional approach to data analysis, as historical sources hold greater importance than methods. The research process primarily involved data collection, data analysis, composing the research with a descriptive and analytical approach, and drawing conclusions and findings. During the decade-long rule of Ayub Khan, Pakistan experienced significant political turmoil, particularly marked by the emergence of Asghar Khan as a key political figure. Asghar Khan began his political journey during this period, taking a strong stance against Ayub Khan's authoritarian regime. He actively struggled for the restoration of democracy, becoming a prominent voice of opposition. His dissent was most notably expressed through a press conference where he renounced his awards as a form of protest against the undemocratic practices of Ayub Khan's government. This act symbolized his commitment to democratic principles and his resistance to the military dictatorship.

**Keywords:** Asghar Khan, Ayub Khan, dictatorship, political landscape, political struggle, role

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the late 1950s, Pakistan witnessed a significant shift in its political landscape when General Ayub Khan seized control of the country, initiating a decade-long period of military rule. This era, marked by authoritarian governance, saw the emergence of Air Marshal (Retd.) Mohammad Asghar Khan as a prominent political figure. Asghar Khan, disillusioned by Ayub Khan's undemocratic practices, embarked on a courageous political journey dedicated to the restoration of democracy in Pakistan. His struggle against the military regime intensified over the years, culminating in a pivotal press conference where he publicly renounced the prestigious awards he had received, using this

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<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Scholar, Department of History & Pakistan Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: sanaphd@Yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of History & Pakistan Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, International Islamic University, Islamabad. Email: Safiullah.Khan@iiu.edu.pk

symbolic gesture to protest against Ayub Khan's oppressive rule. This act of defiance underscored Asghar Khan's unwavering commitment to democratic ideals and his determination to challenge the authoritarian status quo.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The research paper includes comprehensive literature review, but at here a few books have been covered for the readers in the literature review Mohammad Asghar Khan's book '*My Political Struggle*' (2008), which is divided into four sections. The first section delves into the writer's early life, while the second section chronicles the Tehrik-i-Istaqlal's activities from December 19, 1971, to January 12, 1975. Section three comprises the diaries of Mohammad Asghar Khan, spanning from February 9, 1975, to July 8, 2001. Finally, section four encompasses the author's reflections on the lessons of history. Through these sections, the book offers a comprehensive account of the author's political journey and his perspectives on the factors contributing to Pakistan's contemporary challenges.

In the book '*We've Learnt Nothing from History Pakistan: Politics: and Military Power* by M. Asghar Khan, there are valuable insights into Pakistan's political history from the 1960s to the present. The author provides an insider's perspective on the involvement of Pakistan's Armed Forces in politics, beginning with the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy in 1968, which ultimately led to the removal of President Muhammad Ayub Khan in 1969 after years of military rule. Throughout the book, M. Asghar Khan passionately opposes autocratic regimes, including General Yahya Khan's actions in East Pakistan and General Ziaul Haq's authoritarian rule in the 1980s. The narrative also highlights key moments in Pakistan's domestic and international affairs.

Mohammad Asghar Khan's book '*Milestones in a Political Journey* (2009), comprises of two parts. Part one is related to the letters written to the Tehrik-i-Istaqlal leaders during his five-years house arrest, speeches made against the military dictatorship as well as the authoritarian rule of an elected government, and statements written by the author to the judiciary and different dignitaries during his political struggle. Part two relates to the composition of the author's articles published in various English Newspapers. Although this book is helpful to Mohammad Asghar Khan's research questions and topic, it depicts writer's own views and arguments, which need counter examination.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The researchers conducted the current study using the conventional approach to data analysis, as historical sources hold greater importance than methods. The research process primarily involved data collection, data analysis, composing the research with a descriptive and analytical approach, and drawing conclusions and findings. The analysis has been included after each historical and pivotal moment to underscore the importance of these events to the reader. By placing the analysis immediately following these key moments, it allows the reader to understand the broader implications and significance of the events in context. This approach helps to draw connections between the events and their impact on the overall narrative or historical period being discussed.

Additionally, this method of analysis enhances the reader's comprehension by providing immediate reflection on what has just been presented. Analysis ensures that the significance of each event is not lost, but rather highlighted and explored in depth. This can lead to a more nuanced

understanding of the material, as the reader is guided to see why certain moments were crucial in shaping the course of history or the development of particular themes.

Both primary and secondary sources were gathered, and the study was accomplished using published primary sources in the form of letters, speeches and archival materials available in Pakistan Air Force Archives (PAF Museum Faisal, Karachi). Secondary sources were sourced through the available books in the main Central Library of International Islamic University Islamabad, IRI, IIUI, National Institute of Pakistan Study Library, Pakistan Study Centre Peshawar University and Central Library of QAU, Islamabad.

The primary sources, mainly the letters, speeches and diaries of Asghar Khan, are consulted. Among the secondary sources published books, biographies, autobiographies and articles were utilized and consulted. Asghar Khan had written more than 13 books on different topics, which provide a wealth of knowledge relevant to this work. All of these books provide the researcher firsthand knowledge on the topic. They provide information about Mohammad Asghar Khan's academic contributions. In the process of data collection, relevant facts were collected from the data. Those facts were cross-checked with the help of a variety of sources, as in primary sources, including interviews and discussions, were helpful for the reliability of the data.

The collected data were analyzed properly. The present study does not just rely on the information provided by available sources but also cross-checks the authenticity of information through criticism and comparison with one another as a tool of verification. The prime objective of a researcher in historical research is to maintain objectivity in their research work. Through this process, the present study narrates and analyses of historical events in chronological order to derive findings and conclusions about the topic under research.

### **AYUB KHAN TAKES OVER AND ASGHAR KHAN'S POLITICAL CAREER**

Iskander Mirza and Ayub Khan, having risen to more influential positions, could have taken full control of the country's affairs well before 1958. However, they exercised patience during this period of considerable strain. Iskander Mirza and Ayub Khan, despite having the opportunity, chose to be patient rather than seizing full control of the country's affairs before 1958. This patience is seen as significant in the context of political stability. Iskander Mirza assumed the presidency in March 1956 following the promulgation of constitution, but he was dissatisfied with his designated role. Iskander Mirza became President in 1956 after the promulgation of the constitution but wasn't satisfied with his role. He began to wield his powers excessively and arbitrarily. His leadership style raises questions about his ability to maintain political stability.

Over the course of his thirty-month presidency, he strategically manipulated party positions, leading to the rapid succession of four short-lived ministries. Notably, the shortest-lived was headed by I.I. Chundrigar, lasting a mere seven weeks. Iskander Mirza was aware that his actions had antagonised the prevailing political forces, especially the Muslim League led by Qayyum Khan and the Awami League under Suhrawardy's leadership. Recognizing that the upcoming general elections in the spring of 1959 would likely alter party dynamics in a way that would prevent his reelection as President, he chose to abrogate the constitution, dissolve ministries and assemblies, eliminate political parties, and impose Martial Law. This significant turn of events occurred on the

evening of October 7, 1958, when Ayub Khan assumed the position of Prime Minister, meaning that Ayub Khan played a pivotal role in the imposition of Martial Law (Jafri, 1966).

A critical analysis of the actions and decisions of Iskander Mirza and Ayub Khan in the political landscape of Pakistan leading up to the imposition of Martial Law in 1958 is presented. Iskander Mirza's strategic manipulation of party positions is depicted as a factor that destabilized the political landscape, suggesting that he was willing to sacrifice political stability for personal gain or power. His actions antagonized various political forces, especially the Muslim League and the Awami League, indicating that his decisions had far-reaching consequences and created political divisions. Iskander Mirza's decision to abrogate the constitution, dissolve ministries and assemblies, eliminate political parties and impose Martial Law is seen as a significant turning point, portrayed as a drastic measure taken to secure his position as he anticipated unfavourable outcomes in the upcoming general elections. The analysis presents a narrative of political instability, power struggles and authoritarian actions within Pakistan's political leadership during the 1950s, raising questions about the motivations and actions of key figures, especially Iskander Mirza and how these actions ultimately led to the imposition of Martial Law in 1958.

### **Ayub Khan Power for A Decade**

Ayub Khan commenced his decade-long rule with several advantages. Public sentiment, particularly in West Pakistan, favoured this change, as people held high hopes for quick solutions to their problems. The Army, relatively uninvolved in civilian affairs, added to his advantage and his secure position within the military further bolstered his standing. Additionally, Pakistan's key ally at the time was the United States, with which it had a mutual security pact. Washington's response to Ayub Khan's ascension should not be likened to the US ambassador's reaction to Iskander Mirza's removal on October 27th. President Eisenhower's Republican administration, like its predecessors, had a favourable view of dictators and Ayub Khan was well-acquainted with them. As the Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army, he had been a frequent visitor to Washington, maintaining strong connections with the Pentagon and Allen Dulles. Ayub's visits to Washington between 1951 and 1958 consistently included meetings with Allen Dulles.

It's important to note that Ayub's takeover was not influenced by the CIA, as Iskander Mirza was even closer to the United States at the time. Iskander Mirza's pro-American stance sometimes made the Americans uncomfortable, as he considered Pakistan's destiny closely linked with the West, acting as a steadfast ally. He showed no distinction between American and Pakistani interests, readily providing any assistance or information the United States sought. While Ayub Khan was more discreet in his demeanor, he shared the same belief. Ayub Khan's takeover likely appeared more organized to Washington, and thus, they preferred him over his predecessor, subsequently extending their full confidence and increased support. This period coincided with the United States' preoccupation with the expansionist policies of the Soviet Union and China in South and Southeast Asia, along with their frustration regarding Jawaharlal Nehru's noncommittal approach toward the West. The increased Military and economic aid provided to Pakistan in the ensuing years further solidified Ayub Khan's domestic position and the United States began to view Pakistan as one of its most steadfast allies (Khan, 2005).

Ayub Khan's assumption of power came at a time when there was public support for change, especially in West Pakistan. The military's relative detachment from civilian affairs gave him an advantageous position, and his strong position within the military establishment enhanced this further. The United States, Pakistan's key ally, had a favourable view of Ayub Khan. He had established connections with key figures in the U.S., such as Allen Dulles. His takeover was not influenced by the CIA, as Iskander Mirza had a closer relationship with the U.S. Ayub Khan shared Iskander Mirza's pro-Western stance, but he appeared more organized to Washington, making him a preferable choice. The U.S. saw Pakistan as a valuable ally during a period of concern about Soviet and Chinese expansion in South and Southeast Asia. Increased military and economic aid from the United States further solidified Ayub Khan's position domestically with, Pakistan being viewed as one of the United States' most steadfast allies.

Ayub Khan's decade-long rule began with several advantages, including public support and a favourable stance from the United States. The U.S. viewed him as a reliable ally during a time of shifting global political dynamics, particularly concerning the expansionist policies of the Soviet Union and China in the region. His strategic alignment with American interests and his organized approach contributed to the U.S. preferring him over his predecessor, Iskander Mirza. This support, both politically and through aid, played a crucial role in strengthening Ayub Khan's domestic position and solidifying Pakistan's status as a significant U.S. ally.

### **Asghar Khan Start of Political Journey**

Mohammad Asghar Khan embarked on his political journey after a pivotal press conference held in Lahore on November 17, 1968 ("A political shock wave," 1968). At that time, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who had recently resigned from Ayub Khan's government, paid him a visit in Abbottabad, where Asghar Khan was seeking a peaceful life. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was openly criticizing Ayub Khan's policies, despite having supported them for nearly a decade. The historical context of political unrest and discontent during that period in Pakistan set the stage for Bhutto's public dissent. Fearing arrest due to his criticism, Bhutto reached out to Asghar Khan for support. This visit indicates the level of trust and alliance between the two political figures during a time of political turbulence. Although Asghar Khan initially had no intentions of entering politics, but he engaged in a lengthy discussion with Bhutto about the political climate and fundamental rights under Ayub Khan's rule. He assured Bhutto that he would advocate for his right to express his views and criticize the government, emphasizing his belief in the fundamental rights of citizens. True to his word, when Bhutto was eventually arrested, Asghar Khan travelled to Lahore and conducted a press conference to fulfill his promise, advocating for Bhutto's right to express his views, even though it meant entering the political arena (Khan, 2008).

While interviewing the spouse of Asghar Khan, Amina Shamsie who explained her views:

The political journey of Mohammad Asghar Khan was a pivotal moment in his own life when he entered politics after serving in Pakistan Air Force in top position. Mohammad Asghar Khan started his political journey after a press conference held in Lahore on November 17, 1968. This event marks the beginning of his involvement in politics. Mohammad Asghar Khan's entry into politics was driven by a sense of duty to uphold fundamental rights and support a fellow political figure during a time of political upheaval in Pakistan (Personal communication, August 11, 2023).

### **Asghar Khan's Struggle Against Ayub Khan**

Ayub Khan had governed the nation for nearly ten years when, in late 1967, he fell seriously ill and was incapacitated for several days ("Asghar Khan declared that constitution," 1969). The country's constitution, which he had designed, specified that in such a situation, the National Assembly's Speaker, Abdul Jabbar Khan from East Pakistan, would assume the role of President. Surprisingly, this provision was not put into effect (Khan, 2005).

Ayub Khan's health had improved enough by the spring of 1968 for him to return to his duties, but he never fully regained his previous vigour. He increasingly relied on advisers with questionable qualifications. By October 1968, opposition against Ayub Khan was growing, marked by an assassination attempt during a public meeting in Peshawar and demonstrations occurring in various locations. Ayub Khan decided to suppress these expressions of public discontent with a heavy hand. A student was shot by the police at Nowshera and another at Rawalpindi. Some arrests were made and for a few days, everything appeared to be quiet. People who had been suppressed for years were bewildered and a protest movement that was beginning to develop came to an abrupt end (Mirza, 1987).

Asghar Khan's entry into the political scene is a notable development. Previously enjoying a peaceful retirement, he was moved to raise a voice for people's rights, highlighting the power of grassroots movements and individuals to bring about political change, especially during times of public unrest. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's arrest and Asghar Khan's decision to stand up for people's rights indicate the emergence of an opposition movement against Ayub Khan's regime, which would eventually lead to significant political changes in Pakistan. This situation illustrates the declining authority of Ayub Khan, his administration's authoritarian response to dissent and the rise of emergence of opposition figures like Asghar Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, all played significant roles in shaping the events of that time.

### **Asghar Khan Press Conference Received Wide Publicity**

Mohammad Asghar Khan's press conference received wide publicity in the foreign news media and featured in the first edition of at least one national newspaper before the government suppressed it. This press statement had an electrifying effect on the public mind. On the subsequent day, he was invited by Dr. Javed Iqbal, the President of the Lahore High Court Bar Association, to speak before the association. The entire lawyers' community, as well as the public, gave him an enthusiastic reception. After receiving an invitation from the Lahore High Court Bar, invitations from various bar associations across the country followed. He decided to accept as many of these invitations as he could. These journeys usually developed into processions with a powerful public response. The government must have realized that the determination with which the public was demonstrating could not be controlled by ordinary methods and decided not to use force. The government also deemed it imprudent to order Asghar Khan's arrest ("All the prominent leaders," 1968).

Mohammad Asghar Khan's press conference had a significant impact on the public and received extensive media coverage. The support from the legal community and the lack of a forceful response from the government suggest that his message struck a chord with a wide audience, leading the government to adopt a more cautious approach to dealing with the situation.

### **Asghar Khan's Entry into Politics had a Profound Impact on Pakistan's History**

Air Marshal Asghar Khan's entry into politics had a profound impact on Pakistan's history. His arrival was unprecedented, as no outsider had ever left such a lasting impression on the national stage. This phenomenon was partly due to his ability to articulate the public's discontent with Ayub's autocratic rule like no one before. His statement on November 17, 1968, was like a rallying cry; worth noting is that his stature had been foreshadowed by a series of articles he wrote for the press, where he shared his political philosophy, gaining widespread appeal. His straightforward language reflected his genuine intentions ("Asghar Khan's address," 1968).

When Asghar Khan announced his foray into politics, he was immediately recognized as a leader capable of guiding the nation towards democracy and freedom. Enthusiastic crowds, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, flocked to his meetings to hear these historic speeches, confirming his status as a leader for the times. Another reason for his acclaim was that his emergence followed the failures of professional politicians. Ayub had let down the people, but it was the collective failure of politicians that paved the way for Asghar Khan's rise.

Air Marshal Asghar Khan was a breath of fresh air. In an era marked by rampant corruption, his unblemished integrity stood out. As the architect of the Air Force, which played a significant role in the 1965 War, he enjoyed immense prestige, both generally and within the Armed Forces. This made him a formidable force that the government couldn't easily dismiss. His unassailable position gave immense strength to the democratic movement. What truly made Asghar Khan a national figure was his commitment to a national, rather than a narrow, agenda. He gained popularity in both East and West Pakistan. Asghar Khan entered politics not out of a thirst for power, he retired once the objective of reinstating democracy appeared achievable, in alignment with President Yahya's well-defined power transition plan. While not everyone may agree with his assessment and the choice to retire, many hoped for his selfless leadership on the path to the nation's destiny. Thus, the final chapter of the Air Marshal's political career, despite his inclination toward a simple retirement, remains unwritten (Suleri, 2005).

The unique and significant role of Asghar Khan played in Pakistani politics, characterized by his integrity, commitment to democracy and ability to resonate with the public, set him apart from other political figures of his time. Air Marshal Asghar Khan's entry into politics marked a pivotal moment in Pakistan's history.

### **Asghar Khan Renounced His Awards**

In order to give the movement greater impetus and express his disapproval of the regime, on January 29, 1969 ("Asghar Khan Renunciation of awards," 1969). Asghar Khan formally declined the civil honours of *Hilal-i-Pakistan* and *Hilal-i-Quaid-i-Azam* that had been conferred upon him (Khan, M.A.2009) By February 1969, the movement had gathered a powerful momentum and Ayub Khan began to realize that he would have to accede to public demands for fresh election based on adult franchise, which would allow every adult to vote for his chosen representative to the assemblies. This was significant shift from the Basic Democracies system in place at the at the time, which allowed only 80,000 members of an electoral college— 40,000 from each wing—to vote (Mahmood, 1987).

While conducting the interview with the political companion of Asghar Khan, Ahmed Raza Kasuri who explained his views

If I look into the strengths of Asghar Khan during his political journey, then I am very clear that Mohammad Asghar Khan's decision to decline the civil honours of Hilal-i-Pakistan and Hilal-i-Quaid-i-Azam is a symbolic gesture which reflects his disapproval of the regime led by Ayub Khan. This gesture indicates that Asghar Khan was willing to sacrifice personal recognition and prestige for a cause he believed in and that Asghar Khan's actions and the broader movement against Ayub Khan's rule had resonated with a significant portion of the population. This momentum is crucial in the context of political change. Ayub Khan began to realize that he had to accede to the public demand for a fresh election based on adult franchise. This demand represented a fundamental shift in the political landscape, as it called for a more democratic and inclusive electoral process. The earlier system of Basic Democracies, with a limited electoral college, was seen as undemocratic system (Personal communication, May 27, 2024).

Asghar Khan's symbolic action of declining civil honours showcased his strong opposition to Ayub Khan's regime, resonating deeply with the people. The momentum gained by the movement, along with the demand for elections based on adult franchise, played a pivotal role in shaping the course of Pakistani politics and facilitating a transition to a more democratic system. This period marked a significant shift in the political landscape of Pakistan, emphasizing the power of public sentiment and the willingness of individuals to take a principled stand for the greater good.

### **Asghar Khan Participation in Round Table Conference Called by Ayub Khan**

Around mid-February 1969, Ayub Khan, sensing the growing influence of public sentiment, convened a three-day round table conference (RTC) with political leaders to deliberate on the process of transferring power to the people. Held in early March 1969 in Rawalpindi, the conference was attended by nearly all political parties, except Maulana Bhashani and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Asghar Khan was invited as an independent participant (Ahmed, 1970). On the conference's inaugural day, Vice Admiral A.R. Khan, who served as Ayub Khan's Defence Minister, publicly alleged that Asghar Khan was collaborating with foreign entities to undermine Pakistan's interests. Asghar Khan vehemently disputed these accusations and subsequently decided to withdraw from the conference. However, in a gesture of reconciliation, the Minister of Information Khwaja Shahabuddin extended an official apology on behalf of the government, allowing the conference to continue. Ultimately, during the Round Table Conference (RTC), Ayub Khan consented to conduct General Elections based on the principle of one person, one vote (Khan, 2008).

Asghar Khan believed that Ayub Khan's proposal for a round table conference, following Ayub Khan's announcement not to seek re-election, should be embraced sincerely. He attempted to persuade Bhutto, who had declined to participate, citing advice from Bhashani that concessions from Ayub Khan would be available even to those who did not attend it. The conference concluded satisfactorily, offering Ayub Khan a graceful exit, while agreeing on basic rules for the transfer of power. Elections were scheduled under the principle of universal adult suffrage, intending to hand authority to the duly elected representatives of the population ("Asghar Khan's participation in RTC," 1969).



The RTC in 1969 marked a significant moment in Pakistan's political history, reflecting shifting dynamics of power and public sentiment. Ayub Khan's decision to conduct general elections was a pivotal step towards a more democratic system, met with both cooperation and skepticism from various political leaders. The absence of key figures like Bhutto and the allegations against Asghar Khan added drama to the proceedings, but the conference ultimately paved the way for a transition to a more democratic governance structure in Pakistan.

### **Asghar Khan Faced Organised Criticism by Religious Political Parties**

During Mohammad Asghar Khan's inaugural public gathering in Lahore in March 1969, he made a bold statement against the establishment of a government run by *Maulvis*, which elicited cheers from the crowd. However, in the following days, he faced criticism through statements and letters in newspapers, branding his remarks as 'un-Islamic'. The backlash indicated that he had struck the nation's raw nerve in the political landscape, suggesting a serious political misstep on his part. Some even advised Asghar Khan to issue a statement withdrawing these remarks, as otherwise the 'Islam-loving' public might take the offence (Khan, 1985).

Asghar Khan's statement resonated with a segment of the population disillusioned with the idea of a religiously driven government. The late 1960s was marked by political and social upheaval in Pakistan, and his remarks reflected the diverse political opinions within the country. His opposition to a government run by *Maulvis* can be seen as a calculated political move, to position him as a secular leader, opposing the growing religious influence in government. However, this also made him a target for conservative and religious groups, who held considerable sway in Pakistani politics. The pressure for him to retract his comments highlights the complexities of navigating the political landscape in Pakistan, where the intertwining of religion and politics creates a challenging environment for those advocating for secular governance. are deeply intertwined, and any deviation from the expected narrative can have consequences. The incident highlights the risks faced by political leaders who challenge prevailing narratives, revealing the delicate balance required in the discourse surrounding governance in a predominantly Muslim nation.

### **Asghar Khan's Meeting with Maulana Maudoodi**

A few days later, during the Round Table Conference in Rawalpindi, Maulana Maudoodi, the Amir of Jama'at-i-Islami, approached Asghar Khan and to inquire about his recent statement opposing a government run by *Maulvis*. Asghar Khan was somewhat surprised by Maulana's inquiry and replied simply that, to his understanding, Islam did not advocate a governance by any particular group or the clergy.

The Maulana said, "Asghar Khan (you) was absolutely right. Islam does not advocate government by any particular class" and added, "I will stop this criticism against you" (Khan, 1985).

The significance of this exchange was profound, as *Maulana's promise to stop criticizing Asghar Khan* did not register at that time. However, within a couple of days, letters and press statements against him notably diminished. This historical account sheds the light on the political and religious dynamics of the period.

Asghar Khan's statement about not favouring a government of *Maulvis* represented a challenge to the notion of religious leaders having a dominant political role. Maulana Maudoodi's willingness to seek clarification indicates an openness to dialogue, which is essential in any democratic society.

Maulana Maudoodi's agreement with Asghar Khan suggests a pragmatic approach, which could be seen as a recognition that a pluralistic society should not impose religious rule on all its citizens. This stance might have had a unifying impact, as it led to a decrease in criticism against Asghar Khan. The sudden cessation of criticism in the press and letters against Asghar Khan following this dialogue hints at the influence of media in shaping public opinion and shows how influential figures can sway perceptions. Asghar Khan's critical stance on religious domination in politics resonated with certain sections of society. Meanwhile, Maulana Maudoodi's response reflects an adaptability and an understanding of the importance of inclusivity in governance, showcasing the nuanced and dynamic nature of political interactions in a pluralistic society.

### **Mujibur Rehman's Release to Take Part in Round Table Conference**

Mujibur Rehman's trial commenced in 1968 and as discontent against West Pakistan escalated, the legal proceedings progressed sluggishly. Eventually, due to shifts in the political environment, his ongoing imprisonment became unfeasible. Consequently, when the round table conference was convened, he was released to enable his participation. During the conference, he presented his Six Points to Ayub Khan without insisting on their immediate acceptance. Instead, he advocated for a one-man-one-vote system and the reversal of the One Unit policy. Ayub Khan, however, maintained that these were for the new National Assembly to decide and focus on the conduct of elections and the transfer of authority. This was a reasonable stance for Ayub Khan, one to which no one could object, leading to a successful conclusion of the conference ("Successful conclusion of RTC," 1969). The conference represented the logical culmination of a great movement among the citizens of Pakistan, making it clear that they wanted to be masters of their destinies. They expressed, unequivocally, their rejection of Ayub Khan's Basic Democracy and his autocratic rule under a Presidential form of government, demonstrating a desire for substantial alterations to the nation's social and economic structure. They understood that these changes could only be achieved through representatives freely elected by the people (Afzal, 1987).

The historical events and political climate surrounding Mujibur Rehman's trial in 1968 and the subsequent round table conference highlight the prevailing discontent against West Pakistan during that year. This discontent contributed to the sluggish progress of Mujibur Rehman's trial. Political tensions were high in Pakistan at the time, setting the stage for significant changes and indicating that, due to shifts in the political environment, keeping Mujibur Rehman imprisoned became unfeasible. His release was facilitated to enable his participation in the round table conference, reflecting how political considerations influenced legal proceedings and underscoring the interconnectedness of law and politics. During the round table conference, Mujibur Rehman presented his Six Points to Ayub Khan, without insisting on their immediate acceptance, showing a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue. Ayub Khan responded by emphasizing that these matters should be decided by the new National Assembly, focusing primarily on the conduct of elections and the transfer of authority. This approach is viewed as a sound stance for Ayub Khan, prioritizing the constitutional process over unilateral decisions.

The conference ended successfully, representing the logical culmination of a significant movement where citizens of Pakistan expressed their desire to have more control over their destiny. They rejected Ayub Khan's "Basic Democracy" and his autocratic rule, marking a turning point in Pakistan's political landscape. This shift signaled a call for democratic representation and changes in social and economic structures. This pivotal moment in Pakistan's history, characterized by political tensions, the release of Mujibur Rehman and the round table conference, highlights the importance of peaceful negotiations and the role of the National Assembly in shaping the country's future.

### **Yahya Khan as a Successor to Ayub Khan**

S. Nihal Singh, a correspondent for the Indian Newspaper *Statesman*, who was present in Pakistan during that period, reported that a common question raised in Islamabad was, "Who will succeed Ayub Khan?" His response was straightforward, whoever holds the position of the Army's Commander-in-Chief at that moment. In March 1969, the involvement of the Army in politics had deepened, making it difficult for anyone leading this force to stand aside and watch what he regarded as his natural prize slipping out of his hands. Moreover, Yahya Khan was a highly ambitious person who had coveted this position for a long time. Aware that his role as Commander-in-Chief would come to an end if power shifted to elected representatives, he likely pondered, 'This is the moment.' Back in 1958, as a Brigadier, Ayub Khan had entrusted him with the intricate planning for the coup that brought Ayub Khan to power. From that point forward, Yahya Khan maintained a strong bond with Ayub Khan. Thus, when General Mohammad Musa retired as Commander-in-Chief in 1966, Yahya Khan's appointment as his successor was unsurprising.

The political situation in Pakistan in the late 1960s was marked by uncertainty regarding the succession of President Ayub Khan, who had assumed power in 1958 following a coup. By March 1969, the military's involvement in politics had deepened significantly, driven by a desire to maintain control, as the Army had a vested interest in preserving its power. General Yahya Khan emerged as a highly ambitious individual who had long coveted the position of Army's Commander-in-Chief. His ambition intensified with the realization that his role as Commander-in-Chief would come to an end if power shifted to elected representatives.

### **Yahya Khan Plan After Round Table Conference**

After the successful conclusion of the round table conference, Yahya Khan initiated his plan. He exercised direct control over Military Intelligence and had his brother in charge of Civil Intelligence. Together, they selectively provided Ayub Khan with information tailored to Yahya Khan's agenda. Ayub Khan, who placed great trust in these sources, soon became convinced that the law-and-order situation, especially in East Pakistan, had deteriorated to a point where holding elections and transferring power to civilians was no longer feasible. When Ayub Khan attempted to impose Martial Law in specific regions based on these misleading intelligence reports, Yahya Khan determined that the opportune moment for action had arrived.

After the successful round table conference, this constituted a betrayal of the nation, with Asghar Khan standing as the lone dissenting voice. In contrast, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in a press statement, expressed his support for Yahya Khan's Martial Law. This indicated that the fight for democracy was far from over (Gauhar, 1993). The political history of Pakistan specifically focuses on the

actions of key figures like Yahya Khan, Ayub Khan, Asghar Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Yahya Khan's manipulation of intelligence reports to further his agenda is a clear abuse of power and a betrayal of the nation's trust. His actions in exercising direct control over Military Intelligence and placing his brother in charge of Civil Intelligence were calculated steps to serve his interests, undermining the principles of democracy. Ayub Khan's unwavering trust in the information provided by Yahya Khan and his sources is indicative of a failure in leadership, highlighting Ayub Khan's vulnerability to manipulation and his lack of independent decision-making, which ultimately had serious consequences for the nation. The assessment that the law-and-order situation in East Pakistan had deteriorated to a point where elections and the transfer of power to civilians were no longer feasible is a significant claim. Asghar Khan's status as the lone dissenting voice in the face of these actions signifies his commitment to democratic principles and his refusal to condone the subversion of the democratic process. This speaks to his integrity and the need for voices of dissent in a healthy democracy. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's support for Yahya Khan's imposition of Martial Law indicates a complex political landscape. Bhutto saw an opportunity in these events, which could have implications for his political ambitions, concluding with the notion that the fight for democracy is far from over. The resilience of democratic ideals in the face of political manipulation suggests that, despite setbacks, the struggle for democracy continues.

This critical moment in Pakistan's political history, marked by manipulation, trust, dissent and political maneuvering underscores the importance of transparency, accountability and the protection of democratic institutions to prevent such betrayals of the nation's trust in the future. The actions of the key figures mentioned had lasting consequences for the nation, shaping the course of its political history.

### **Yahya Khan Suggestion to Ayub Khan to “Step Down”**

After concluding a meeting with his close advisers, during which Ayub Khan conveyed his intention to implement Martial Law in parts of Punjab and East Pakistan, Yahya Khan requested a private meeting with the President. Once others had exited, Yahya Khan conveyed to Ayub Khan that the proposed action was not only insufficient but also unworkable. He emphasized that if the military was to be deployed and Martial Law enforced, he, as the head of the Army, must assume effective control of national affairs. In his role as the Chief Martial Law Administrator, he needed to oversee and direct the entire government machinery. It didn't take long for Ayub Khan to comprehend the message. Roles had shifted and this time he found himself on the receiving end. By his position, Yahya Khan was politely but firmly dictating what he had previously conveyed to Iskander Mirza a decade earlier.

After ten consuming years in power, accompanied by his recent illness and the psychological effect of a countrywide popular movement that had broken his spirit to fight back, Ayub Khan readily agreed to Yahya Khan's suggestion to step down. Yahya Khan assumed control of the country's affairs as the Chief Martial Law Administrator on March 25, 1969, marking a significant turning point in the nation's fate (Khan, 2005).

A moment in Pakistan's history when General Yahya Khan persuaded President Ayub Khan to step down from his position and assume control as Chief Martial Law Administrator occurred on March 25, 1969 and had far-reaching consequences for the nation, illustrating a significant shift in power

dynamics. Ayub Khan, who had been in power for ten years, was initially contemplating the implementation of Martial Law in parts of the country. However, Yahya Khan's intervention effectively led to Ayub Khan's resignation, signaling a transfer of authority. Yahya Khan's role in this event appears to be crucial. As the head of the Army, he advocated for a more comprehensive approach to the crisis, emphasizing the need for him to assume control over national affairs. His persuasive abilities and position within the military influenced Ayub Khan's decision to readily agreed to step down, attributed to several factors, including his recent illness, the psychological impact of a popular movement and the realization that he had lost the support and ability to govern effectively. The significance of Yahya Khan assuming control of the country's affairs marks a turning point in Pakistan's fate, indicating a profound impact on the nation's political trajectory. The portrays a moment of political transformation in Pakistan and highlights the influence of Yahya Khan and the vulnerability of Ayub Khan's leadership, ultimately resulting in a change of leadership. The consequences of this event on Pakistan's history were substantial, marking a critical juncture in the nation's political landscape.

### **One Political Party Platform, Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP)**

After Ayub Khan's departure and Yahya Khan's assumption of power, several prominent political figures, including Nurul Amin, Chaudhry Mohammad Ali, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, Wali Khan and Mohammad Asghar Khan, convened in Lahore. They collectively decided to amalgamate their respective political parties into a single entity ("Asghar Khan met with," 1969). Their rationale was that only a party with a presence in both parts of the country could help maintain national unity. Wali Khan, while agreeing in principle to merge his National Awami Party (NAP), departed for the UK. He entrusted Mian Mahmud Ali Kasuri, NAP's Secretary General, to convene a meeting for approval from their national council ("Formation of One Political Party Platform," 1969).

However, Asghar Khan later contacted Kasuri, only to learn that Wali Khan had not left any instructions and it seemed unlikely that NAP's national council would support the merger. Consequently, the remaining parties proceeded with the merger, resulting in the formation of the Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP) ("The merger of PDP was announced," 1969) A gathering of these parties took place in Dhaka, where Nurul Amin was unanimously elected as its President, while Asghar Khan chose not to pursue any leadership role. The PDP marked a promising beginning, aiming to represent seasoned political leaders from both East and West Pakistan. Unfortunately, the narrow-mindedness of some West Pakistan politicians and their treatment of their East Pakistan counterparts hindered the party's functionality. Asghar Khan found it frustrating to work with them and eventually decided to resign from the newly established PDP and withdraw from politics altogether ("Asghar Khan announced to get out of PDP," 1969). He believed that he had partly achieved his original political goals. However, it soon became apparent that leaving politics was easier said than done. The brief period of Asghar Khan's political involvement and the political fervor it generated made it challenging for him to disengage from this sphere. Encouraged by the many supporters who had joined him in his political struggle, he returned to continue his efforts to ensure that the new military dictator would fulfill his promise of holding elections and steer the country toward a democratic path ("The formation of PDP," 1969).

The departure of Ayub Khan from the presidency marked a significant turning point in Pakistani politics and paved the way for a new political order under Yahya Khan. The decision by prominent

political figures from different parties to merge and form the PDP was driven by a desire to bridge the divide between East and West Pakistan and ensure national unity. This decision was a commendable effort to bring together seasoned leaders.

The departure of Wali Khan, a key figure in this unity attempt, to the UK left a leadership vacuum. His absence and lack of clear instructions created uncertainty within the National Awami Party (NAP) and potentially weakened the merger effort. Despite Wali Khan's absence, the remaining parties proceeded with the merger, resulting in the formation of the PDP. The election of Nurul Amin as the President showcased a consensus among the participating leaders, which seemed promising for the party's future. The hindrance of the PDP's functionality due to the narrow-mindedness of some West Pakistan politicians in their treatment of East Pakistan counterparts is a crucial aspect. This disparity and lack of understanding between the two regions were deeply ingrained problems in Pakistani politics. Asghar Khan's initial resignation from the PDP and withdrawal from politics showcased the challenges faced by leaders in disengaging from a political sphere. His return was likely driven by the persistence of political fervor and the expectations of his supporters. Asghar Khan's return to politics and commitment to ensuring that the military dictator would fulfill his promise of holding elections reflected the broader aspiration for democratic governance in Pakistan, which had been marred by military rule.

The historical account underscores the complex and tumultuous nature of Pakistani politics during the transition from Ayub Khan's presidency to Yahya Khan's regime. The attempt to form the PDP was a well-intentioned effort to bridge the East-West divide and promote national unity, but it faced challenges due to the deep-seated disparities between the regions and the absence of clear leadership. Asghar Khan's resignation and subsequent return highlight the resilience of political leaders in the face of changing political dynamics. His commitment to democracy and his supporters' expectations emphasized the enduring quest for democratic governance in Pakistan.

## CONCLUSION

This research paper covers a wide range of historical events and political developments in Pakistan, primarily focusing on the struggle of Mohammad Asghar Khan against Ayub Khan's military dictatorship. This detailed overview touches on various aspects of Pakistan's political landscape, revealing a compelling narrative of political upheaval during this period. Asghar Khan's entry into politics catalyzed a turbulent era, gaining widespread attention through his press conference during Ayub Khan's decade-long rule. His venture into politics intertwined with significant events, such as Mujibur Rehman's release and the lead-up to Yahya Khan's succession following Ayub Khan's reign.

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