

Profile and political ideology of Azam Inqilabi (31 Dec. 1948...)

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ABSTRACT

The Kashmir Issue has been boon of contention between India and Pakistan since 1947. It has not only posed serious security threats but has also resulted in the creation of a genre of Separatist leadership in Kashmir. Azam Inqilabi is one of the most senior Separatist leaders who has played a pivotal role in the rise and growth of Kashmir militancy. The present paper aims to delineate in detail the political ideology of Azam Inqilabi.

Keywords: Azam inqilabi, kashmir issue, UJC, guerilla warfare, JKLF, NLF.

EARLY LIFE

The man who played an important role to initiate the guerilla warfare in Kashmir through Operation Balakot goes by the name of Azam Inqilabi. Azam was the general secretary of *Mahaz-i-Azadi* (Independence Front), Chief Organizer of Islamic Students League and

founder of Jammu and Kashmir Muslim League (JKML) in 1982. He was also the founder Chairman of United Jihad Council, a conglomerate of 18 prominent militant organizations; ideologue of the famous HAJY¹ group and an instructor of militants in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK). Later on he exiled to Saudi Arabia and then to England, but choose to return back to Kashmir after retirement.

Mohammad Altaf Khan popularly known as Azam Inqilabi (literary Azam the revolutionary), presently residing at Nigeen Bagh, Hazratbal Srinagar is one of the most prominent militant leaders of Kashmir². He is the man who did several clandestine visits to Pakistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK) to seek support for his idea of guerrilla warfare in Kashmir. At last he

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succeeded and named the whole insurgency of Kashmir as operation Balakot³.

Azam seemed to be a born revolutionary. As a patriot Kashmiri says Azam, he drew inspiration from the mighty exploits of Kashmiri freedom fighters in general and from Maqbool Bhat in particular. A burning rage against foreign domination, against all injustice and national wrongs, flowed from his private talks, public discussions, books and articles⁴.

Azam Inqilabi belonged to a family which had strong affiliation with the Bakra (the traditional *Mirwaiz* family) political faction of Kashmir. Abdul Rashid Khan father of Azam Inqilabi accompanied Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah up to the line of control when the latter left the valley and went to POK⁵. Since at home Azam enjoyed the company of his father and grandfather (Noor-ud-Din Khan) who had communicated him innumerable stories of torture, hardships and intimidation which they had to undergo before and after 1947. This left a permanent imprint on the boy's psyche.

Azam Inqilabi was from a financial sound family. His father Abdul Rashid Khan after his B.A. joined the Forest College Dehradun (India). In 1947 after the completion of his degree he joined the Forest Department in Kashmir as a Range Officer and at least after thirty years of his long service retired while working on the same post due to his early career (inclination towards Muslim Conference). Abdul Rashid Khan died on 29, April 1990 when the movement in Kashmir was at its peak, leaving behind his wife Shafiqah and two daughters namely Sabiha and Arifa and his only son Mohammad Altaf (turned militant leader).

Abdul Rashid Khan was actually a resident of Hawal Chowk Srinagar where the family resided for more than one hundred and fifty years and thereafter shifted to the Posh Colony, Nigeen, Hazratbal Srinagar⁶. Mohammad Altaf Khan was born on 31, December, 1948 at Hawal Chowk Srinagar⁷. Azam acquired his initial education from various areas of Kashmir like Sopore, Verinag, Awantipora and Mattan because of the nature of his father's service. He passed his matriculation with 1st division from Islamic High Secondary School Rajourikadal in May 1963 and B.Sc from Islamia College Hawal Srinagar in 1968.

Political Stirrup

It was in 1965, when Azam was studying in B.Sc first year that he was arrested on the grounds of participating in "Tulba Movement⁸" in the post 1965 Indo-Pak war along with '300-400' Tulba (students)⁹. It was his first imprisonment for his pro freedom activities¹⁰. In jail, as it often happens, Azam met senior students and leaders of separatist movement, and there was plenty of time and opportunity to plan ahead. It was according to Azam Inqilabi this imprisonment in central jail Srinagar, which made up his mind to do something concrete for the liberation of Kashmir.

Meanwhile on advice of his uncle namely Abdul Hamid Khan Azam worked as translator in the State Assembly. And it was in the same Assembly where according to Azam, he succeeded to develop friendship with the M.L.A. of Chamb namely Bagat Chachuramji residing residing very close to Actual Line of Control (LOC). The main purpose behind this friendship was to cross the Line of Control. It was on February 16, 1969 on the day of Shivaratri when Azam marched towards Chamb (Chachuram's home) and in a mysterious way at 1 am he left Chachuram's house and proceeded towards Line of Control. After walking for hours together while seeing a '*Minar*' of a mosque he thought he had crossed Line of Control but was disgusted when he came to know that it was the Munaver Village of Chamb. After failing in his first attempt Azam approached his close friend Maqbool Ganie in order to manage a guide who will make his border cross possible. It was the time when famous Kashmiri separatist Maqbool Bhat broke jail in Srinagar and escaped to Pakistan in December 1968 and only three months later, in March 1969, Azam too crossed over to POK where he was arrested at Kotli sector by the Pakistan rangers. He was lodged in a Muzafarabad Jail for six months for the crime of illegally crossing over to Pakistan. "I crossed the Line of Control many times beginning in 1969 to seek Pakistan support to wage a war against the Indian government," Azam recalls. "I was given arms training, but returned disappointed, with only a vague promise that my proposal would be considered at a future date". Fired by the idea of guerilla warfare, he repeatedly made clandestine visits to Pakistan, the last when he was 43 years old, to secure

support for his separatist activities. During his final visit, he settled in POK for some time, giving ideological training to the new recruits¹¹.

Azam moved freely after his release from prison and started meeting 'revolutionaries' among them was pro-independent leader and Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) Chairman Amanullah Khan. On November 7 to 9, 1969 he attended the convention organized by the Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front in Muzafarabad (POK). The militant wing of the Front was National Liberation Front (NLF), and then headed by Maqbool Bhat. It was here that Azam encountered with, Bhat for the first time, and was asked to join NLF to impart arms training¹².

"Maqbool Bhat was a role model for me", Azam says. "As a young boy I had heard of several heroic deeds by Maqbool, and his contribution to the freedom struggle of Kashmir. It was like a dream come true to speak to my hero in person and that too on my favorite topic of armed struggle for the liberation of my home land". The very thought that he was now one of the associates of Maqbool and Amanullah Khan in charting a course for a wider Jihad in Kashmir gave the young Azam the feeling he had arrived in life¹³.

Azam trained for next six months with the NLF in handling firearms and fighting a guerrilla war. In May 1970, he started his journey back home with a group of four boys. After continuously walking for three days and nights, they were arrested in Keran sector of Kupwara by BSF. Azam was tortured for days together by the army to find out the reason for his going to Pakistan (POK) and returning in a clandestine manner. He was later handed over to the J&K Police. After trying for days together his family managed to get Azam released from Police custody on bail.

Once released on bail, Azam joined an underground movement namely Al-Fatah, Kashmir's first militant outfit which commenced its activity in 1966. Its activities were at peak in 1971, when after arrests in bank dacoity case, the recruits were detected and the organization was practically smashed¹⁴. Azam along with most of the Al-Fatah leaders was arrested and was sentenced for one year. In 1974, 27 years old Azam launched the

Student's Islamic Organization (SIO), along with Dr. Ayoub Thakur¹⁵ (a senior separatist leader and president of London based World Kashmir Freedom Movement)¹⁶. Azam was the chief patron of the group which worked in coordination with other organizations in the valley for the 'liberation of Kashmir'.

It was just in next two years that 'Student's Islamic Organization' got a new name as *Islamic Jamiat-i-Tulba*¹⁷(IJT) and Awami Mahaz acquired its new name as "*Mahaz-I-Azadi*"¹⁸. *Mahaz-i-Azadi* (Independence Front) has emerged as one of the most active groups in the struggle of Kashmir for liberation. The outfit was formed in 1975 by Sofi Mohammad Akbar, a veteran leader and a former colleague of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. He died in 1988 and Azam Inqilabi succeeded him as the Chief Organizer of the Mahaz. Later Azam Inqilabi set up a military wing of the Mahaz called "Operation Balakot" to pursue Jihadi movement of Syed Ahmad Shaheed¹⁹.

During Jan-Feb 1981 Azam left Valley and toured various places of repute in India. The prominent among them were Jamia Milia, Aligarh Muslim University, Nadvatul Ulema Lucknow, Darul Uloom Deoband, Shubli Academy, Banaras Hindu University and RSS training camp. On his return he wrote a book 'Qoul-i-Faisal' in Urdu²⁰.

Azam Inqilabi crossed over to Pakistan from the Uri sector on 19th of July 1983 for taking the movement ahead. He wanted the struggle to take a different shape. "I felt a solution was not possible without the use of force and neither was it possible without the support of Pakistan. After having deliberations with the leadership of Pakistan Azam Inqilabi was told that the country was not ready to support a covert operation against India. So, he had no choice but to cross back to Kashmir. According to Azam Inqilabi, from 1965-1983 he was having pro-Pakistan stance and from 1983 onwards he had made some ideological modification²¹.

From 1983 until the Assembly elections in 1987, Azam and his associates organized several protest rallies, strikes and poster campaigns to keep the flames of separatist movement burning. In 1987 the Assembly elections were held in Kashmir but the Election was highly rigged²².

Due to highly open rigging the youth lost faith and confidence in Indian Democracy. Situation deteriorated, youth became violent²³ and mass arrestment of MUF workers and leaders was made²⁴, Azam too was sent to Jail with other separatist leaders. After his release from prison, Azam declared a unilateral ceasefire on 22 Jan 1988 at Jamia Mosque Sopore, to continue his separatist activities underground. During this period, youth were being recruited all over the Valley by different militant outfits and sent across the LOC for training in arms.

The militancy of Kashmir took a new turn as the decade of 1990's progressed. Political killings were followed by group clashes among various militant outfits. The phase began with the assassination of Moulvi Mohammad Farooq on 21st of May 1990, sending shock waves throughout the Valley. Besides being the most respectable figure in Kashmir, the Moulvi was a very close friend of Azam and had, only before a day, fixed a date for meeting with him²⁵.

In order to stop this wave of political killings Azam once again embarked on a journey to Pakistan. Within a month in Pakistan, the Kashmiri ideologue managed a consensus of opinion on having a unified command of all militant organizations and thus United Jihad Council, a representative body of 18 militant outfits came into being. Azam was appointed as its first chairman²⁶. However barely a year had passed, the UJC split into two groups due to ideological confrontation between pro-Independent and pro-Pakistan groups. The fraction headed by Azam had to suffer and pro-Pak got momentum²⁷. In 1992 Azam left for Britain via Saudi Arabia and spent seven months in London. During his stay in Britain apart from addressing the gatherings of Muslims in from Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, Azam also launched the save Kashmir movement²⁸. This was January 1993, the same year in which his friends launched the All-Party Hurriyat Conference to give the freedom struggle an ideological and political platform²⁹.

In December 1993, Azam Inqilabi returned from United Kingdom to Pakistan and made efforts to pursue his pro-freedom agenda by putting pressure on the government of Pakistan through rallies and demonstration. However it was in 1995 that he was identified as a threat to Pakistani administration and was forced to leave Pakistan³⁰. Once

back in Kashmir, Azam called a press conference at his home on 16th January 1995, announcing to have shunned the gun.

Meanwhile it was in Nov-Dec, same year when Azam Inqilabi found a chance to address the Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi) as a separatist leader in a seminar on 'Kashmir' organized by South Asian Forum for People's Initiative³¹.

Today at 66, Azam Inqilabi is a broken man living a secluded life. The man, who was trampling highly snow ranges and mountains without stopping, is today advised by doctors not to speak continuously for an hour. Due to weak physique, he survives on regular doses of medicine.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. HAJY refers to Hamid Sheikh, Ashfaq Majid, Javid Mir and Yasin Malik.
2. Information based on field study.
3. Interview with Azam, 2013.
4. The statement is based on his interviews, public breathings, books and articles like " *Quest for Friends not Masters*, 2004", *Kauli Faisal* (2003), *Payami Hurriyat* (2006) and number of other Pamhlets.
5. Interview with Azam.
6. Interaction with the family at Azam's residence.2013.
7. Azam's School records in J&K State Board of School Education.
8. Bhat Sonaullah, *Kashmir in Flames*, p, 115.
9. Yoginder Skind, *Emergence of Jamaat-i- Islami in Jammu and Kashmir*, p,739. See also Peer Ghiyasu-d-Din, *Understanding the Kashmir Insurgency*, p, 4.
10. .Azam Inqilabi, *Quest for Friends Not Masters*, p,4.
11. Interview with Azam, See also Azam's *Payami-Hurriyat*, pp-14-15.
12. *Greater Kashmir*, 11 Feb.2006.
13. Interview with Azam, 2013.
14. Jagmohan, Malhotra, *My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir*, p 159.
15. Azam, *Payami Hurriyat*, p. 64
16. Sharma, Davinder, *India's Commitment to Kashmir*, p 21.
17. Yoginder Skind, op, cit, pp 736-737.
18. Shaheen Akhter, *Kashmir Uprising*, *Journal of regional Studies*, p 52.
19. Azam, op, cit, *Payam-i-Hurriyat*, pp,71-72.

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20. K. Santhanam, Agni Sreedhar, Sudhir Saxena, *Jehadis in Jammu & Kashmir*, pp 233-234.
21. Op, cit, Malhotra, Jagmohan, *My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir*, p, 362, See also *Secessionism in India*, p, 269.
22. Askari H. Zaidi, "Behind the Increasing Militancy in Kashmir" *The Times Of India*, Jan 10, 1990.
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24. Personal interview with Azam, 2013.
25. Op, cit, *Payam-i-Hurriyat*, pp, 131-132.
26. Azam, *Quest For Friends*, p. 139. See also Azam, *Payam-i-Hurriyat*, p. 136.
27. Interview with Azam.
28. K. Santhanam, Agni Sreedhar, Sudhir Saxena, *Jehadis in Jammu & Kashmir*, pp. 216.
29. Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir; Roots to Conflict, Paths to Peace*, p 130.
30. Interview with Azam, 2013.
31. Ibid.

