

Malalai of Mewaïnd: An Afghan heroine of Second Anglo-Afghan War

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Abstract:

The history of the world is full of epic stories of such heroes and heroines who by their glorious deeds have left remarkable marks in the annals of the world. They waged crusades against the forces of darkness and tyranny for the peaceful and honorable future of their people. Like other nations, the history of Pashtun is also full of such heroes. But unfortunately majority of these heroes are anonymous. The World and even Pashtun do not know about their struggle against the imperialistic powers. Malalai of Mewaïnd can also be classed with the rank and files of those greatest anonymous heroine of the World who drunk the cup of martyrdom for the freedom of her country Afghanistan against the imperialistic designs of the British. This research paper will highlight her sacrifice against the British imperialism. The research will be focusing to bring the achievements of Malalai of Mewaïnd into the knowledge of the people specially Pashtuns.

Key words: Forward school of thoughts, Masterly Inactivity, British Imperialism, Malalai

The relations of Great Britain with Russia remained strained during the first half of the 19th Century. Both the super powers found themselves on the opposite camps on the problem of “Eastern Question” Russia were desirous to push her interest towards the Balkans and Turkey but her attempt was foiled by Britain. That’s why Russia diverted her attention towards East and increase pressure on Persia and Afghanistan near the border of the British India. The ever-increasing pressure on the frontiers of British India forced the British Government to chalk out a comprehensive policy regarding to Afghanistan to curtail the influence of Russia there. (Sharma and Mahajan, 1998). During this era of tension there developed two schools of thoughts in Britain to check the influence of Russia in Afghanistan.

1. Forward school of thoughts
2. Masterly Inactivity

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The supporters of forward school of thoughts were convinced that Russia was seriously planning to attack India through the border of Afghanistan. Therefore the think tank of the said policy advised the British Government to check her advance at the border of Afghanistan. For this purpose the Government should make treaties with the Amirs of Afghanistan. Therefore, it was deemed urgent that the Amir of Afghanistan should either agree to such treaties or if he did not act according to the wishes of the British Government, he should be replaced by one who abide by the dictates of the British. For that if necessary, the British should interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan or even impose war on her. The supporters of the said policy, pleaded that at any cast the Amirs of Afghanistan, be helped financially and militarily, befriended, asked to enter into treaty and manage both its internal and foreign policies. The Conservative party followed this policy which resulted in two Anglo-Afghan wars (1839-42), (1878-80) (Forbes, 1892)

The throne of Kabul was not a bed of roses. Dost Muhammad Khan captured the throne of Kabul in 1826 as a result of the war of succession among the members of the royal family. On accession to the throne, Dost Muhammad Khan found himself surrounded with both internal and external threats. Qandahar and Herat were under the occupation of his brothers, Ranjit Singh had captured Peshawar, Shah Shuja, and the exiled ruler of Afghanistan was trying to recover the throne with the assistance of Ranjit Singh and the English. When Dost Muhammad Khan was fighting against these difficulties, Afghanistan fell into the prey of the politics of Britain and Russia. Russia had gradually extended her territory towards Central Asia, which was felt by Britain as dangerous for the security of her Empire in India. In 1830s Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Minister of Britain who was a staunch advocate of the forward policy took serious notice of the new developments. He appointed Lord Auckland in 1830 as a Governor General to materialize his mission. In September 1836, Lord Auckland deputed Alexander Burnes to Afghanistan to find out the possibility of some settlement with the Amir and the Russia sent Captain Vitkevitch as a reciprocal. Dost Muhammad was first more inclined towards English and warmly welcomed Burnes because he wanted the recovery of Peshawar with the help of English, but at the same time he also showed his inclination towards Russia to pressurize the English to meet his dream. In 1837 the political situation of Afghanistan further worsened when Persia attacked on Herat with the help of Russia. The British put diplomatic pressure on Persia under which she left the siege of Herat on 9 September, 1838. But however, Dost Muhammad Khan did not bow before the British Government and wanted to retain the independence and sovereignty of Afghanistan (Chris, 2004)

When Auckland failed to accomplish forward policy through Dost Muhammad Khan, he determined to oust him and place the fugitive Shah Shuja on the throne of Kabul who was in exile in Ludhiana. For this purpose he managed tripartite treaty between the English, Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja in June, 1838 which precipitated the First Anglo-Afghan war (1839-42). In 1839 the British army called the Army of the

Indusattack Afghanistan under the command of Sir John Keane and Mr. Macnaghten was appointed the principal advisor of Shah Shuja. Initially the British Army succeeded in occupying of Qandhar in April, 1839 and Ghazni in July, 1839. Dost Muhammad Khan fled from Kabul in August, 1839 and Shah Shuja entered Kabul on August 7, 1839. In November, 1839, Dost Muhammad Khan submitted himself to the English who was sent to Calcutta as a prisoner of war. Six British regiments were left in Kabul under the command of Elphinstone and the rest of the army returned to India. Shah Shujawas not a popular figure in Kabul and was widely seen as nothing more than an agent of the invaders. could not retain himself on the throne of Kabul for long time. On 2 November, 1841, a serious revolt broke out in Kabul commanded by Akbar Khan, a son of Dost Muhammad Khan. Soon the revolt spread far and wide which forced Mr. Macnaghten to sign a treaty with the Afghans on 11 December, 1841.

1. The English would leave Afghanistan as soon as possible.
2. The English would set free all Afghan prisoners, including Dost Muhammad Khan
3. Shah Shuja could live in Afghanistan or could go to India with English (Dalrymple, 2013)

Under this treaty the English army was permitted to leave Kabul for Jallalabad but treaties and agreements meant nothing to the tribal men of Afghanistan and they were attacked by the Afghans on several places on the way to Jalalabad. Elphinstone, Lawrence and Pottinger were made hostages, one hundred and six armed men who were sick were arrested and the rest of the army was killed on the way by the brave and freedom loving people of Afghanistan. Only one man Dr. William Byrdon reached Jallalabad alive on 13 January who transmitted the news of this disaster. However, General Nott and Colonel Sale protected Qandhar and Jalalabad respectively. Auckland was deeply disturbed, when the news of the disaster reached India. He immediately sent reinforcement under the command of Colonel Pollock, but before Pollock reached, Auckland was replaced by Lord Ellenborough, who assumed the office on 28 February, 1842. Having assumed his office, he determined recall the English army from Afghanistan after the restoration of its prestige. But when he heard the sad news of the defeat of General England at Hakalzai and Commander Palmer at Ghazni, he decided to withdraw the army, but his order was ignored but Colonel Pollock and General Nott and they decided to fight till the restoration of the prestige of the British Army. Pollock forced his way to Kabul after relieving Jalalabad. General Nott destroyed the fortification of Ghazni and met Pollock at Kabul, where all the British Prisoners were released, Kabul was occupied on 15 September, 1842 and the British Army returned India (Johnson, 2011)

The first Afghan war ended in failure and the British Government failed to install a friendly person on the throne of Kabul. The British puppet Government in Afghanistan quickly collapsed and Shah Shuja was assassinated in April, 1842. Dost Muhammad Khan, who had been freed by the English under the treaty between

Akbar Khan and Macnaghten, again captured the throne of Kabul and ruled over there till his death 1863. Dost Muhammad Khan kept himself free from the British influence. From 1842 till to his death in 1863, the British Government pursued the Forward Policy but failed to bow down Dost Muhammad Khan (Tanner, 2002)

The first Anglo-Afghan war ended in failure and brought no advantage to the English. Lord Lawrance (1864-69) followed the policy of Masterly Inactivity and refused to interfere in the fratricidal war among the sons of Dost Muhammad Khan. He clearly declared that the British Government would recognize whichever claimant capture throne of Kabul. Eventually, Sher Ali succeeded in the war of succession in 1868 and Lord Mayo acknowledged him the de jure Amir of Afghanistan. Lord Mayo (1869-72) also pursued the same policy of Masterly Inactivity. Lord Northbrook (1872-76) who succeeded Lord Mayo also embraced the same policy despite the fact that Russia had reached nearer to the frontiers of Afghanistan. Sher Ali under the fear of Russia sought the assistance of the British Government but Brook refused to change the policy of the Government. But he could not continue this policy because of the shift of power from Liberal Party to conservative party. The conservative Prime Minister, Disraeli followed the policy of forward school and directed Northbrook to ask the Amir to accept a British resident at Kabul but he turned down his advice and preferred to resign. Disraeli deputed Lord Lytton (1878-80) to implement his policy in Afghanistan. Thus the policy of Masterly Inactivity ended and Lord Lytton pursued the Forward Policy which resulted in the second Anglo-Afghan war in 1879 (Barfield, 2010)

After the declaration of war, the English army attacked Afghanistan from three side and defeated the Afghan army easily and Sher Ali, the Amir of Afghanistan took refuge in Russian Turkmenistan and his son Yaqub Khan was forced to sign Treaty of Gandamak on 26 May, 1879 by which the British Government accepted Yaqub Khan as the Amir of Afghanistan who would receive an annual subsidy of six lacs of rupees and military assistance in case of foreign aggression. In return for this the Amir agreed to receive a British resident at Kabul and to conduct his foreign affairs on the advice of the viceroy (Ghani, 1989). Under this treaty the British Government deputed Mr. Cavagnari as an ambassador to Kabul and peace remained there for some time but the freedom loving Afghans were not pleased with the new settlement and soon raised a standard of revolt on 3 September, 1879 and killed the British envoy on his arrival at Kabul. This incident led to the assumption of war. The English took immediate steps to suppress the revolt. Kabul and Qandhar were captured by the English forces and Yaqub Khan sought English shelter. He surrendered all his claims over the throne of Kabul and he was sent to India under the English protection. The British was confused about the fate of Afghanistan. They were in search of a puppet ruler with whom they could settle the issues easily but failed. They themselves were not in a position to hold it for long and Lord Lytton decided to disintegrate Afghanistan by placing a chief at Qandhar but the change of Government in England

led to the resignation of Lord Lytton. Lord Ripon was sent as a new Viceroy with instructions to carry out the policy of Masterly Inactivity (Ewan, 2002)

Malalai of Maiwand was a brave teenage heroine who turned the tide of a crucial battle during the Second Anglo- Afghan war and her action led to the defeat of the mightiest British forces. Malalai of Maiwand, popularly known as Malala or Malala Anna is a national heroin of Afghanistan who infused a new vigor and courage in local Afghan fighters against the British troops at the Second Anglo-Afghan (1880) at Maiwand (Charis, 2004). She is known as “The Afghan Jeanne D’Arc and as “The Afghan Molly Pitcher to the western world. This great heroin and pride of Afghan nation was born in the house of an Afghan shephrd in 1861 at a small village “Kheig” about three miles away to the South East of Maiwand in the Southern Qandahar province of Afghanistan (Qazi,)

During the second Anglo- Afghan war, Afghanistan was occupied by British- Indian forces and was attempting to colonies the area and annex to the British India. The main garrison was situated at Kandahar closest to the town of Maiwand. The military of Afghanistan led by commander Ayub Khan, son of Afghan Amir Sher Ali Khan, was fighting against the mightiest force of the world with full courage. Malalai’s father and her fiancé also joined Afghan Army. Malalai was among those Afghan women who were there to help the wound and provide water and spare weapons to the soldiers. (Johson and Jolyan, 2004). In July 1880, a fierce battle began between the British- Indian forces and Afghan Army at the battlefield of Maiwand. Afghan Army was fighting against the mightiest force of the world with courage and bravery but during the course of war the Afghan Army lost morale and was about to face defeat. (Abdullah, 2010). A young Afghan virgin Malalai appeared in the battle field and uttered the following Landai which infused a new spirit in Afghan fighters to redouble their efforts

With a drop of my sweetheart's blood,
Shed in defense of the Motherland,
Will I put a beauty spot on my forehead,
Such as would put to shame the rose in the garden
“Young love, If you do not fall in the battle of Maiwand,
By God, someone is saving you as a symbol of shame”(Okkenhaug and Flaskrud, 2005).

After hearing the Landai uttered by Malalai, the Afghan fighters began to fight with new spirit and during the course the leading flag-bearer was killed and Malalai came forward and held up the flag.

SibaShakibWrites in her book” She used her veil as a flag”(Shakib, 2011)

Malalai turned the tides of war and the Afghan forces conquered Maiwand in the result of huge casualties and sacrifices and Malalai was herself struck down and killed by British troops. She drank the cup of martyrdom for the sake of her native land but saved her soil from the chain of slavery. They had three times as many

casualties as the British, but the foreigners were forced to retreat to Kandahar. During the retreat a number of British soldiers became incapably drunk after raiding the officers' stores and had to be left behind to be slaughtered by the pursuing Afghans," said one account. (The backstory of Dr. John Watson, Sherlock Holmes's fictional sidekick, said he was wounded at the Battle of Maiwand, and his injuries forced his return to London. The veteran Pashtun poet Ajmal Khattak express his emotions about Malalai in the following lines,

My Malalai is living, and they praise others beauty.

Though they have eyes, they are blind (Haq Haqmal, 2008)

When the Mewaind was conquered in the result of huge casualties and sacrifices and Afghan conquerors were going to bury their martyrs, Ghazi Sardar Muhammad Ayub Khan asked who was this girl who caused Afghan Army emotional and courageous in such a sensitive and tender situation by his Landyas. One of the soldiers replied: She is Malala: the daughter of a shepherd, the resident of Mewaind, she is very brave, so she could be buried along with other martyrs. Ghazi Sardar Muhammad Ayub Khan replied in positive and she was submitted to soil along with other soldiers with pray from Allah Almighty to bless the soul of martyrs. (Wanger, 2012).

The people of Afghanistan viewed Malalai of Mewaind as a heroine of Afghan nation with great reverence. Many schools, hospitals and other institutions have been erected in Afghanistan in her memory and Malalai is a very famous girl's name in her native land. The stories of her bravery and courage are told in the Afghan school text books. Many poems have been written in her name. Minari Mewaind has been built at Kabul by His Majesty King Zahir Shah in 1959 in the commemoration of the battle of Mewaind. The landay uttered by Malalai in the battle of Mewaind has been inscribed on it.

"Ka pa maiwand kishaheednashway..

Garanalalaya, be-nangi ta di sateena!" (Momand, 2010).

Conclusion:

In the preceding pages an attempt has been made to highlight the part played by Malalai of Mewaind in the second Anglo- Afghan war. The Afghan forces were at the verge of defeat when young Malalai appeared in the battle field and uttered the Landay

"Ka pa maiwand kishaheednashway..

Khudaygolalaya, be-nangi ta di sateena!"

Which infused a new spirit and courage in Afghan forces which resulted in their victory and led the defeat of the British Army. Though Malalai drunk the cup of martyrdom but she saved the Afghan nation from the chain of slavery.

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