

THE STORY OF RAFIQ AHMAD'S TRAVELS

[In 1920, Rafiq Ahmad, then twentythree years of age, set out on his travels. Now he is sixtythree. It is, thus, after the lapse of forty years that I have heard him tell me, in Urdu, the story of his travels, and I noted it down in Bengali. I do not claim it to be an exact recording of what he said. I jotted down his words so that I could, if necessary, give them a literary shape in my own language. For this task I have had another advantage. Many of Rafiq Ahmad's travel companions were, in later years, my colleagues in the Communist Party. With two of them I have even spent some time together in jail. More than once have I heard from them about their journeyings. In those days, of course, I kept no notes of such talk. This was why

I have tried to keep a record when I heard the story again from Rafiq Ahmad's lips. As a matter of fact, I gave him some trouble and brought him down to Calcutta last July (1960) in order to gather from him anew what I had heard several times earlier.

Some of Rafiq Ahmad's travel companions are now dead, some have given up political work and nearly all found themselves, after partition, in Pakistan. Rafiq Ahmad alone has fallen to India's share, for his home is in Bhopal city.

Reminiscence after forty years have passed makes errors in dates unavoidable. It is nearly impossible to remember the inaccessible roads and alleys of foreign countries visited long ago. In the Central Asian regions of the Soviet Union stupendous changes have been taking place and old landmarks must be difficult to recognize. From these points of view the story of his travels is bound to have some deficiencies. Even so, it has its value. One can learn from it of the first beginnings of the Communist Party of India.

Where I have differed from Rafiq Ahmad in the estimation of persons or where I have feared he was omitting something I have indicated what I have had to say in brackets []. And in my version of his travel story I have described him as relating it in the first person singular.

—Muzaffar Ahmad.]

On April 18, 1920, a Khilafat conference was held in Delhi. My elder brother Kabir Ahmad and I went to join this conference from Bhopal, our hometown. Most of the speeches at the conference were on the subject of *Hijrat*. From Punjab Maulana Sanaulah (or Ataulah?) was among the speakers.

I cannot quite remember the names of others who also spoke. One Ghulam Muhammad was a leading advocate of the *Hijrat* movement. He was perhaps a resident of Amritsar. I had heard that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was also, from behind scenes, supporting the movement.

The word *Hijrat* means leaving one's country in order to avoid continuous repression. The propagandists of *Hijrat* were asserting that British tyranny could no longer be tolerated, and there was no other way than that of leaving the country. In regard to Turkey, Britain had given promises that she did not perform. It was from this disillusionment that the *Hijrat* movement began. At that time Amanullah, king of Afghanistan, had also proclaimed that fugitives from India would be welcome in his country. No doubt he had thought that many brainy people would emigrate and Afghanistan had need of them.

My brother and I decided not to go back home, but to start from Delhi for Afghanistan. At the conference we had met a man from Gujranwalla of the name of Malik Lal Muhammad. He assured us that he would make all arrangements for our journey. Thus we went, first of all, along with him to his home. He gave us a letter of introduction to a man in

Peshawar, and we took his leave. When we reached Peshawar, no one answering to the name he had given could be found at the address supplied. Nor could the local people tell us of anybody of that name who had stayed anywhere in Peshawar at any time. Luckily, we got to know a trader named Haji Jan Muhammad; he helped us in every way and gave us instructions regarding the route. Thus, we set out again on our journey. At Jamrood, on the way, the *tehsildar*, an officer of the British Government, asked us all kinds of questions. When my brother Kabir Ahmad told him that he was employed in Bhopal State he was not permitted to travel any further. The *tehsildar* ordered that I could go ahead, and on my own I went on. At that time I had only six rupees in my pocket. I was, of course, walking all the way. I reached the first Afghan outpost, Dakka, *via* Landikotal. I met with no obstacles there and proceeded towards Jalalabad, where General Nadir Khan was in charge. [Later, General Nadir Khan defeated Bachcha-i-Sakka in battle and ascended the throne of Afghanistan. His son, Muhammad Zahir Shah, is the king at present.] At Jalalabad I met General Nadir Khan who kindly ordered arrangements to be made for my food and rest. Later, when I set out for Kabul, he was good enough to order a horse for me.

It was the month of May and one afternoon, at about four, I reached Kabul. King Amanullah must have known that I had been on my way. Almost immediately after my arrival at Kabul, I was taken into his presence. Not many words passed between us. I was the first

among those who had embarked on *Hijrat* to reach Kabul, and I imagine the king wanted to find out what sort of people were coming to Afghanistan. However, he directed that all facilities for my stay be arranged.

That same evening four more reached Kabul. They were, all of them, educated young men. They were: (1) Muhammad Akbar Khan, resident of Hazara district in the North West Frontier Province and a B.A. student at Islamia College, Peshawar; (2) Gawhar Rahman Khan, resident of village Darbesh near Haripur in Hazara district; (3) Sultan Mahmud, of Haripur in Hazara district; and (4) Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah, of Nowshera in Peshawar district. I did not care to ask if these four friends had also been presented to the king. I belonged to Bhopal while they came from the North West Frontier province. It took time for us to know one another intimately. At the outset we observed to some extent the conventions common to conspirators. Who knew what was in the mind of the other fellow?

When Indian newspapers reported the safe arrival at Kabul of several of us, large groups of people started towards Afghanistan. As news came that many of them had reached Dakka, the Afghan authorities sent us on to Jabloos Siraj on the ground, as they told us, that room was needed for the fresh arrivals. I had no idea how far Jabloos Siraj was from Kabul, but it took two days to reach there on foot. I have forgotten to note one thing. At Kabul we had come across some Indian exiles; as a matter of fact they had asked us to tea. Among them were

Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi and several others; besides, there were Abdur Rab Peshawari and Trimul Acharia (Acharya). It was Abdur Rab who particularly advised us to go to Russia. He told us that in Russia revolution had taken place and if we went there we could see and learn many things. We agreed at once that we should do so. From that time onwards our constant thought was about ways and means of reaching that land of revolution.

There were all kinds of people among those who had set out on *Hijrat*. Quite a number were truly moved by religious zeal to leave the country; the appeal of the preachers of *Hijrat* had overwhelmed their minds. Most of the young men probably thought that since the British had broken their assurances they should go to Turkey *via* Afghanistan and fight for Turkey's interests. Only a minority of these young men nursed the idea that from abroad they could discover methods of striking at British rule in India, and for them it was a great opportunity to be in the company of those who had set out on *Hijrat*.

Gradually, at Jabloos Siraj, there congregated some one hundred and eighty of these people. Abdur Rab sought permission from the Afghan government for himself and some other *Muhajirs* to go to the Soviet country, but it was refused. There was, of course, no real obstacle in the way of him and his companions going. However, we found ourselves plunged in serious discussion at Jabloos Siraj. It was somewhat on the lines that follow: King Amanullah would give us no facilities to fight

Britain; he wanted only to put pressure on the British Government in India in order to secure a treaty on favourable terms, and at this time negotiations were being conducted at Mussoorie for the terms of a treaty to follow the Afghan war of 1919.

The Afghan government had got to know of the kind of discussion we were having, and stopped the sending of more people to Jabloos Siraj. Some of us, thus, became anxious for the journey to the Soviet country. The Afghan government had already rejected our application, along with Abdur Rab's. So we applied, along with others, directly to the king, praying that we might be allowed to go to Anatolia (Turkey). The authorities showed dilatoriness over our petition. Then we wrote to say that if the king did not give us permission we would set out without it. To frighten us, there were gun-emplacements alongside the road, but we were not cowed. At long last we received permission to go.

The one hundred and eighty of us who had come on *Hijrat* to Jabloos Siraj were divided into two groups. We were, eighty of us, in On the way to Tirmiz the first group, and our elected leader was Muhammad Akbar Khan of Hazara district, whose name has been mentioned before. I was not sure of the number of those who were in the second group. Muhammad Akbar Jan of Peshawar, who was chosen to be its leader, was not a particularly good person. However, we started on our journey one day under Muhammad Akbar Khan's leadership. In our group there were Meer Abdul Majeed, Firozuddin Mansoor, Shaukat Usmani, Masood

Ali Shah, Gawhar Rahman Khan, Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah, Abdul Qadir Sehrai, Fida Ali, Ghulam Muhammad and others. I shall relate here an event that took place on the way. Reaching Mazar-i-Sharif we spent the night at a *serai* (tavern). A Turk came to us there and suggested that he might join and go with our group. On that day Sarfaraz, who had been with us, was found missing. We took the Turk along with us in his stead and called him Sarfaraz. How we profited from having him with us will be related later. We got him to wear clothes like we did. What he told us about himself was roughly this: he was once in the Turkish army, but during the Tsar's rule was somehow arrested on Russian territory and was exiled to Siberia; it was after the revolution that he was released, but he could not muster sufficient courage to return to Turkey or could not find an opportunity to do so; since then, he had been in Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan; his mother tongue was Turkish but during his long stay in Siberia he had learnt Russian and living in Afghanistan had also picked up Persian.

To cross the Hindukush on foot is no pleasant experience. If I had kept a diary I might have described in detail the tale of that woeful trek. In many places the ice had not melted; it was bitterly cold. How difficult it was to climb a mountain range like the Hindukush will be easily guessed. Even so, our trek ended one day and we descended to the plains. At that spot the *Amu Dariya*, flowing down from the mountain, was a very broad stream. Just across it was Tirmiz, in Soviet territory. We waded through

a lot of mud and sand and crossed the river in a boat. Many of us lost our shoes and our pyjamas were torn. Anyway, during the Tsarist regime Central Asian towns were divided into two sections—a Russian and a native area. The fort at Tirmiz was in the Russian sector. We went to a tavern (*serai*) in the native quarter. As soon as the news of our arrival reached the fort, two persons, including an interpreter, came and saw us; the talk was in Russian and was interpreted to us in Persian. We were informed that arrangements were being made so that we could stay in the fort. A little later, Red Army soldiers and officers came, with a band playing music, to offer welcome. They assumed we were Indian revolutionaries and escorted us to the fort. As far as I can remember, it was some time in July, 1920. We were physically exhausted after our crossing of the Hindukush. Our fatigue, however, was relieved after a few days' rest in Tirmiz fort. We then felt eager to go further ahead. The Commandant of the fort told us we could go when the steamer service was available. He asked us also to see how the Soviet country had changed after revolution. However, he could not tell us for certain when the steamer would be available. Our companions were not willing to wait much longer, for most of them were anxious to be in Anatolia, fighting for Turkey.

At Kirkee, in Turkmenistan, there was a fort. We had no idea that this was to be our destination. Since the dates of the steamer service were not known, we decided to go by country boat. The eighty of us boarded two boats and sailed down the *Amu*

Dariya. The Turkmenistan territory begins at a little distance from Tirmiz (now in Uzbekistan); this is now the Turkmenistan Republic. At that time, however, the Turkmen had risen against the revolution. When we were going along their territory they called the boatmen and asked them to bring the boats to their side of the shore. We did not understand why they did so. We could not imagine that Muslim Turkmen could intend any harm to us, since we had left home on account of British tyranny. If we had the faintest inkling of their mind we could have anchored our boats on the Afghan side, for one side of the river was still in Afghan control. As soon as we got down from the boat we found ourselves surrounded on all sides. We were told that we were to stay there for the time being and could only leave if permitted to do so by the Chief (*Kalantar*). None of us knew Turkish but Sarfaraz explained it to us in Persian. We learnt that 'Kalantar' meant 'Chief' and we knew we were prisoners. That night we spent at the riverside under Turkmen surveillance. As soon as it was dawn, we saw that nearly a thousand Turkmen had gathered with big staves in their hands. The first thing they did was to search our persons and our luggage. Making sure that we had no arms they began to shout at us: 'Haiko! Haiko!' We came to know that 'Haiko!' meant 'Move off quick!' Through Sarfaraz we tried persistently to explain to them that we were Indian Muslims, forced by British tyranny to leave our country. Forthwith they re-

torted: 'The British? Oh, they are good people. It is from them that we are getting help!' They refused to listen to anything that we would say. They just took it for granted that we were Bolsheviks. In our company Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah looked so that he could be easily thought of as a European. It was not only that the colour of his skin was very fair; his eyes also were blue.

The Turkmen were driving us off like beasts; not a few blows fell on our backs. At about noon, the eighty of us were herded into a room and they went for their food. After a time they came back and made us march out again. While we were being badgered in this way, men and women of the village, young and old, emerged out of their homes and gave us blows with something or other. Their idea was that they were earning the pious wages of a war of religion. When it was dark we were shut up in a *serai*, and were told that if we had money we could buy some bread. The village boys brought bread and sold it to us at cut-throat prices. We stayed there for a few days. Many of us were reading the Quran and performing *Namaz*. At this the Turkmen used to call out: 'Look, look how the *Kafirs* (unbelievers) are performing *Namaz* (prayers) and reading the *Quran*.'

Meanwhile, at noon one day some Maulavis with their young disciples came to us. They were well-dressed and looked well-fed. They told us that since most of our things had already been looted and the rest could easily be stolen, it was advisable for us to hand over what we had to them for safe custody.

They prepared separate lists of our effects. There were fools among us who also entrusted their cash with the Maulavis. Everything was loaded on the back of camels and the Maulavis went off.

We had again to do the forced marches. Then we were taken to an open space surrounded by trees. It was there that our trial began. The idea of shooting us was being discussed. Our Turk companion, Sarfaraz, began crying when he heard this and conveyed to us what was going to happen. Many of us also started to cry. It was then that our leader Muhammad Akbar Khan shouted to us: 'Don't be afraid, brothers, we will never die like dogs. The terrible ordeal of the Hindukush crossing could not kill us. Rest assured we shall not die here.' As a matter of fact, some of us were cogitating in our minds that when the Turkmen turned towards us in order to shoot we would, each of us, clasp one of them and try to crush him with all our strength!

Orders to shoot us down had been given when suddenly an old man appeared on horseback. Everything about him was white—his horse, his beard, even his clothes. The old man made a statement: 'Papers of the Afghan Government have been found on the persons of these men. If we kill them, the Afghan Government may carry out raids against us. And, of course, the Red Army will attack us also. It is better to keep these men imprisoned'. The advice was followed, and we were divided into small groups and kept under restraint in separate camps. This place was not far from Kirkee fort. On one side of the fort was the *Amu Dariya*, and at some distance

on three sides, Turkmen tents were struck, their villages being a little further away. It was from these tents and villages that attempts to attack the fort were then being made. Food came to the tents from these villages. We were kept in these tents and our captors slept outside at night. Four of us were in each tent. As we lay down to sleep, each of us had our feet jutting out of the tents' extremities, and our captors tied our feet so that we could not, even if we tried, drag them inside. When we were thus under restraint, the Turkmen guards gave us part of their food. This is how we spent nearly a week.

Twenty or twentyfive yards away from the tent, where I had been allotted with three others, there was an unmetalled road. One night, at about two o'clock, we heard the mixed noise of footsteps on that road. It was a moonlit night. We raised our heads and saw through the chinks in the tent that large numbers of people were running away with their household effects and domesticated beasts. We saw also that seven or eight of our companions were also being driven off with them. Our feet were tied; we could not move or do anything. So we just lay there, holding our breath. When morning came we could hear nothing; nobody was moving about. We wondered if our guard had run away also. After a while, however, he came and untied our feet. And then he said: 'You stay inside the tent; try to get out and you will be shot!' For some time we stayed quietly inside, but after a time we realized that our guard had fled. We came out to the road; there was

no one about. We could not clearly think out which way to go. Somewhat without thought we moved in the direction that we saw so many people taking the night before. We went quite some distance and saw seven or eight of our group sitting under a tree. We saw also that some more were coming from different sides. Altogether we turned out to be forty or so. Evening came and we lay down to spend the night. A few tents were also put up nearby. When we got up the next morning we were famishing; for a whole day and night we had had nothing to eat. In the hope of getting some food, three or four of us went towards a village. Immediately as we entered the village we saw a wheel-barrowful of peaches; inside a room there was milk left on the oven. Thus wandering about, we found eggs and dry bread and other things and sent them on to our friends. Going further afield, we saw an old lady and a young man and woman at the door of a house, and went towards them. I do not know what had seized my mind but with my left hand I pressed down the young man's hand and with my right gave him a resounding slap on the face. All three of them cried out, and the young man signalled to me to indicate a door. In the meanwhile Sarfaraz had reached there. I opened the door and saw that half the room was filled with tea-chests and the other half with our things—not only what the Maulavis had taken but also what had been looted earlier. Of course, a few things were also missing. The young man came forward and said something. Sarfaraz explained that we could take away our things but not the tea-chests, which be-

longed to the young fellow's employer. We grabbed our things and went off.

We decided that we should go towards the Russian fort, but where, in the name of goodness, was it situated? Sarfaraz pointed in one direction, for the sound of gunfire had come from that side, and we proceeded that way. What would happen, we wondered, if the Russians imagined we were enemies and shot us down? We searched for maize or *jawar* stalks and tied white clothes to them; this was the white flag with which one of us walked ahead and others followed. Outside the fort there was barbed wire fencing, behind which were the barracks. We saw behind the barbed wire fencing a Russian sentry on horseback. Sarfaraz spoke in Russian to this sentry about us. The sentry asked us to lay down on the ground what we were carrying and put up our hands, which we all did. After that we were all taken to the barracks behind the fencing. A Russian officer interviewed us and we gave him our answers. An Afghan trader was present at the time and he acted as our interpreter, translating whatever we said in Persian to the Russian officer. Arrangements were made for our food and lodging in the army barracks; each of us got some bedding as well. Red Army soldiers went out to look for our companions and brought them back to us. On the third day Muhammad Akbar Khan, leader of our group, rejoined us. There were now altogether some sixty of us. We never got track of the other twenty; probably they were killed by Turkmen.

We fancied no more travel by boat and decided

to wait till the steamer arrived to take us to Charjao where there was a railway station. [Charjao is now a big town in the Turkmenistan Republic.]

One day, as I was standing outside our barracks, I saw a Russian cavalryman coming towards us with the corpse of a soldier tied to his horse. He indicated to me by sign that he wanted a drink of water. I got a jug at once and held it before him. He took a drink and rushed to the fort. I have already stated that our barracks were just alongside the fort. Almost at once bells in the fort rang out very loudly, and everybody, men as well as women, ran towards the front. The barrack officer came to us and said: 'It is not safe any longer for you to be here. You are our guests and it is our duty to put you up where you can be safe. You will therefore please move at once into the fort where you will be secure'. Twenty of us came forward and said 'Give us arms, we will also fight'. In a happy mood the officer gave us some rifles and said that we might help in defending the sector which faced the *Amu Dariya*. In the trenches we did our duty, two at a time, and in this way resistance was offered to the attack of counter-revolutionaries for about a week. Then the Commandant of the fort came and told us: 'We have repulsed the attack on us of the counter-revolutionaries. More troops came by steamer to reinforce our strength. And now we shall take the offensive and attack the enemy. You need not join us in this attack, but if you wish to do so you are welcome'. Three of us—Shaukat Usmani, Masood Ali Shah and myself—joined in the attack on counter-revolu-

tionaries. [When the Meerut Conspiracy Case was going on, Shaukat Usmani was expelled from the Communist Party of India on the charge of having betrayed weakness. It was evident from his later activities that Masood Ali Shah was a British spy. But it is difficult to say if he had already become a British spy when he left the country. That, of course, would not be surprising.]

After only three days' offensive, the Turkmen counter-revolutionaries were utterly defeated.

It was now time for us to leave Kirkee. A steamer had come with an armed escort and all sixty of us got on board. This steamer took us to Charjao. Red army soldiers played their band at the steamer jetty to welcome us. We stayed three days in Charjao and received lavish hospitality. It was while we were there that we could get to know one another well. Till then we could never be sure what was in the mind of the other fellow. Charjao was a railway junction, trains from many directions passing through. About half of our group expressed the desire to go to Anatolia, and arrangements were made by the Soviet authorities accordingly. The rest of us took the train for Tashkent. In this latter group were (1) our leader Muhammad Akbar Khan, (2) Meer Abdul Majeed, (3) Sultan Mahmud, (4) Firozuddin Mansoor, (5) Gawhar Rahman Khan, (6) Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah, (7) Abdul Qadir Sehrai, (8) Fida Ali, (9) Ghulam Muhammad, (10) Jafar, (11) Abdulla Safdar, (12) Abdul Matin, (13) Abdur Rahim, (14) Shaukat Usmani, (15) Tajuddin (16)

Masood Ali Shah, (17) Muhammad Hossain, (18) Abdul Qayum, (19) Rafiq Ahmad, and others. We went from Charjao to Bokhara, which was on a branch railway line. Even without going to Bokhara we could have gone to Tashkent, but I do not know for what special difficulty we had to spend three days in Bokhara. We stayed in the Emir's guest house; the Emir, of course, had run away already. From his royal wardrobe each of us got a cloak (*Fargul*). At last leaving Bokhara, we arrived at Tashkent. Meanwhile, Abdur Rab Peshawari had reached there with his entourage whom we had met at Kabul. It was these people who took us from the railway station to 'India House' which was the name given to a building where Abdur Rab was also staying. Later we came to know that Abdur Rab and his people had discovered that we were to be put up there and so, without informing anyone, had escorted us from the station.

Soon after our arrival, Manabendranath Roy (M. N. Roy), his wife Evelyn Roy, Abani Mukherjee and his Russian wife, and Muhammad Shafiq came to see us. I did not know how and when Shafiq had got there. Abdur Rab was making a special effort to persuade us to join his group. But we could hardly understand what his group was like and what its position was. We only heard him over and over again calling himself the father of the revolution. Later, M. N. Roy also had detailed discussion with us. He tried to explain to us how India would proceed in the path of revolution. Our political knowledge was extremely limited. But we could follow

a good deal, though not all, of what M. N. Roy expounded to us. In those days we understood nothing about the Communist Party. However, we decided to work under M. N. Roy's leadership. Later Trimul Acharia came and joined Abdur Rab. Since we joined M. N. Roy's group his position in the Communist International, in relation to Indian affairs, was somewhat strengthened. As far as I remember, it was September, 1920, when we reached Tashkent.

I have so far omitted saying one thing. I have related already that two groups had travelled from Jabloos Siraj in Afghanistan. We were in the first group, led by Muhammad Akbar Khan, while the second group started on its journey, under the leadership of Muhammad Akbar Jan of Peshawar. It was later that we learnt that this latter group also had reached Bokhara. Muhammad Akbar Jan had a brother who worked in the office of the Afghan Consul at Bokhara. Perhaps it was for this reason that he took his group to Bokhara. Among his following there was Habib Ahmad Naseem; Muhammad Akbar Jan had some differences with him and got him arrested. Habib was in Bokhara jail, and was later transferred to the prison in Tashkent. When we heard of this, we told M. N. Roy about it and on his intervention Habib was released. Most of those in Muhammad Akbar Jan's group had gone back home, and those who had not returned joined Enver Pasha. At first, Enver was in Moscow, under the protection of the Soviet Government. Later he went to Central Asia, declared a revolt against the Soviets, and died in battle.

A few days after reaching Tashkent we found that Usmani had disappeared somewhere. Later, M. N. Roy spoke to me and asked me to go to Andijan and Osh. Andijan was the birth-place of the emperor Babar. The purpose of sending me to those places was to try and discover routes to India. I had read Persian up-to Munshi Fazil's course. Possibly it was because of this that I was sent to Andijan. When I got there I found Shaukat Usmani, also on the same errand. Some Hindus from Sind had permanently settled there for purposes of trade, and Shaukat Usmani had formed contacts with them. From Andijan I went to Osh; it was a mountainous area, already covered over with snow. I am not quite sure, but perhaps this was the area once called *Takht-e-Suleiman*. I could do nothing at Osh. How could I find the way to India when snow fell all around? The terrible cold and frostbite made my feet swollen. I went back as soon as I could to Tashkent and started taking lessons at the newly established Indian Military School.

Along with military training, political education was also imparted to us at the school. We learnt how to operate a machine gun. We learnt gunnery also, in part. One of us was taught to fly an airplane. Of course we had a regular course of drill and other things.

At that time trade agreement talks were going on between Britain and the Soviet Union. One of the terms of the agreement required abolition of the military school at Tashkent. Britain altogether disapproved of Indians being anywhere in Central Asia.

I shall mention an event which happened while we were in Tashkent. We were in India House, and one day when Abdul Qadir was having a walk in the streets, a fire broke out for some unknown reasons, in an ammunition magazine. Noting the blaze Abdul Qadir started running, and a soldier on duty, observing his flight, shot him in the leg and he fell down. When it was discovered that he was an Indian he was admitted to hospital and intimation was sent to India House. In hospital he was treated with utmost consideration.

[Abdul Qadir was later one of the accused in the Peshawar Communist Conspiracy Case. He was acquitted after trial. But he did not keep quiet after his release. In association with the Indian police and the British Government he did many wicked things. He wrote many articles, which were printed in London journals, attacking the Soviet country, the Communist International and the Communist Party of India. By way of reward he even got a job at London University, the job of teaching *Pushtu*. He was a resident of Peshawar, and before he went abroad with those who undertook *Hijrat*, used to teach *Pushtu* to British officers. His later activities give rise to the suspicion that the British officers themselves had sent him to accompany those who went on *Hijrat*. Can it be that it was he himself who had set fire to the magazine at Tashkent? Who knows?]

As far as I can recollect, it was the month of May, 1921, when the Tashkent military school was closed and we went to Moscow. The Eastern University to teach Marxism-Leninism to peoples of the Orient had just been established in Moscow.

We were admitted to the university, and our lessons began. In a short while many of us joined the Party. After we went to Moscow, Shaukat Usmani was the first to join the party. Afterwards, Gawhar Rahman Khan, Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah and Sultan Mahmud followed suit, the three of them together. Later Meer Abdul Majeed, Firozuddin Mansoor and Fida Ali Zahid came to the party, followed soon afterwards by Fazle Elahi Qurban and Abdulla Safdar. Gawhar Rahman Khan and Mian Akbar Shah had recommended the name of Abdul Qadir Sehrai for party membership, but Shaukat Usmani and Masood Ali Shah were strenuously opposed, and thus he could not at first become a party member. Masood Ali Shah had joined the party at Tashkent itself. Some time later, however, Abdul Qadir got his party membership. Abdul Qayum also had made his application, but no one recommended it.

Zakaria, who was a party member already, was staying in Moscow at the time. In 1915, fifteen college students of Lahore had crossed the North West frontier and gone abroad. Among them were Muhammad Ali and Zakaria. The former also had joined the Communist Party, but I never had any contact with him. I heard later that Zakaria had secured a doctorate from some European university.

I do not even know where he is now or whether he is alive.

Several Indians who were staying in the Soviet Union had earlier declared themselves communists. I have noted already that some of those who had left India on *hijrat* and were admitted to and studied in the Eastern University at Moscow had also joined the Party. In 1921 these people came together in Moscow and formed the Communist Party of India. As a matter of fact, the Communist Party of India had been set up towards the end of 1920 at Tashkent, though some of us had not yet joined it. Now we formed the party though we were away from home; we did so because we felt it was necessary. [In 1921 efforts were also being made in India to organise a Communist Party.] I do not know Bengali, but I have heard that Dr. Bhupendranath Datta has written a book in Bengali where he has expressed grave resentment that the foundations of the Communist Party of India were laid by young men who had left India on *hijrat*. Perhaps the idea is that the Party should have been formed with old "revolutionaries" like Dr. Datta himself. If Dr. Datta and his friends had accepted the communist ideology, wasn't it for them to join the Communist Party? And why was it that they did not do so? They went to Moscow when we were there. Virendranath Chattopadhyaya had a very sweet disposition; besides, he knew Urdu well. This is why I had known him intimately. Hearing him talk about his views I felt convinced, however, that he had not come to Moscow for joining the

Communist Party. Whatever Dr. Datta might say, we had earned membership of the Party; we did not just pick it up from our path. It was we who took up arms on behalf of the first State in the world which the working class had set up. Dr. Datta should, I feel, have borne this in mind.

After the *emigre* Communist Party of India had been organised in Moscow, it was affiliated to the Communist International. Muhammad Shafiq was the party's first Secretary; a Working Committee was appointed, with Manabendra Nath Roy, Shafiq and Abani Mukherjee as its members. Roy could represent India in Moscow only on account of the formation of this *emigre* Communist Party of India. Otherwise, he would have remained in the Communist International only in his capacity of an individual leader, but not as the special representative of India.

We had left our country once, but after joining the Communist Party we were again anxious to return home. For, our field of work lay only in our country. It was settled also that we would soon be sent back home, and were told, each of us, to choose a companion. At the outset the idea was that two should travel together. Shaukat Usmani chose Masood Ali Shah, and Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah was to be Gawhar Khan's companion. Abdul Majeed selected Firozuddin and I had Habib Ahmad. The first pair to go off was Shaukat Usmani and Masood Ali Shah, followed by Gawhar Rahaman Khan and Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah. Perhaps both these groups found their way through Iran. Meer Abdul

Majeed and Firozuddin Mansoor went as far as Azerbaijan to get on to the road to Iran, but they only could find no clear route and returned again to Moscow.

It was not easy for us to go back the way we had come. But we were determined somehow to return to India. And there was only one rather inaccessible route which we could think of—the Pamir route. Not, let it be remembered, the Pamir of today but of 1922.

We were getting ready for the most trying experience of our life, and one day towards the end of March 1922 we set out from Moscow. Here are the names of those of us who travelled together:

1. Meer Abdul Majeed, 2. Rafiq Ahmad, 3. Firozuddin Mansoor, 4. Habib Ahmad Naseem, 5. Sultan Mahmud, 6. Fida Ali Zahid, 7. Abdul Qadir Sehrai, 8. Sayeed, 9. Abdul Hamid, 10. Nizamuddin.

Fazle Elahi Qurban and Abdulla Safdar were also to have come with us, but till the end they did not. Sayeed, Abdul Hamid and Nizamuddin had never become members of the Party. Abdul Hamid was well-known as 'Master' Abdul Hamid; this was because he had taught Urdu in Kabul. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union was in charge of all arrangements for our journey. First, we rushed at one go, by rail to Tashkent. Reaching there, we waited for news regarding the next stage of our journey, the idea being that as soon as the news came we would set out. Our Russian friends told us that the Red Army would be moving from

Morgellan to the Pamirs and that it would be convenient for us if we went along with the soldiers. When we learnt the date of the Red Army's departure from Morgellan we were sent there by train, with a Russian friend accompanying us. After we reached there, the soldiers travelled further by train towards Osh, and we went too by the same train. Beyond Osh there was no railway. The soldiers remained at Osh for a few days in order to collect provisions and the beasts of burden necessary for the march. Our Russian comrade took leave of us after he had put us in the charge of the military commissar at Morgellan. Inside the Red Army corps there was a regular unit of the Communist Party, which indeed was keeping a sharp eye on us. Soon afterwards we left Osh and the story of our melancholy journey began. We had not been permitted to keep a diary of this journey; if we could keep a daily and hourly record, we could today explain the kind of road we encountered and the way we crossed it. I have forgotten many names of places we passed on the way. When we started from Osh we were all given a *postin* (leather cloak) to wear. The cold in Pamir was unbearable. At one spot we crossed the Amu Dariya. Once before we had crossed that river near Tirmiz, where it descended from the mountains to the valley, and it was while going by boat on it that we had fallen in the clutches of the Turkmen. Again, it was at Kirkee that we had, arms in hand, defended the Amu Dariya's bank. It seemed as if the Amu Dariya was keeping us company. However, the Amu Dariya

we crossed after starting from Osh was a hill stream, by no means wide but with a very sharp current, the water reaching up to the horse's belly. Crossing the river, we stayed two days in Kubasa, and then resumed the journey. Many horses died of strain before we reached Murgab. It was so steep that the animals could not just make it. We were given sugar in cubes, so that if in trouble over breathing we could put it in our mouth. When our horses died, Red Army troops lent us theirs and walked on foot. The provisions were being taken on the back of camels. As the quantity of provisions decreased with the journey there was room on camelback, and thus we sometimes rode on camels. The horses could stick it no longer and were just dying off. The soldiers had, almost all of them, to march on foot. When it became the turn of the camels to die, we would sometimes ride two to a camel. At this rate all the animals died and we had to make do on foot, till at last we reached Kharog, the last point of the soldiers' march. 'Kharog' is perhaps pronounced 'Harog', for in the Russian 'Kh' is sounded as 'H'. We were there for eight days, resting. We were to start again on our journey; this time, however, the army was not to be with us.

Thus we began making preparations for the journey. The clothes we had worn before were no longer serviceable. We had to dress ourselves as the local people did. Clothes worn locally had to be procured in exchange of ours. So we put on as they did, pyjamas and kurtas made of blanket pieces and a heavy, long cloak (Fargul) of the same

material. Every article of apparel seemed lined with numberless lice. We also put on the local variety of headgear. What gave us trouble, however, was the footwear. We had to put on the *chamoos* shoes worn by local people; these had no soles and if we stepped on gravel and chips of stone it was excruciating. The local people could wear such stuff easily; their patience was infinite and the soles of their feet were hardened.

At Harog we divided ourselves further into smaller groups. This was because it was not advisable for many people to travel together in that area. We were four in the first group: (1) Meer Abdul Majeed; (2) Firozuddin Mansoor; (3) Habib Ahmad Naseem; and (4) Rafiq Ahmad.

Starting from Harog we went down the side of its fort Iskasm. It was after nightfall when we reached a village. When we asked for accommodation for the night, the man who owned the house made all arrangements for us but sent intimation to the fort, as soon as we had retired for rest, that spies had come into the village. The commandant of the fort ran down at once with some soldiers and pointed his rifle straight at our breasts. As soon as we spoke, he of course recognised us, and then he gave us a lot of advice. He told us that our hosts were not good people and that we should leave before daybreak without letting them know the direction we were taking. Returning to the fort, he got a bundle consisting of eatables and cigarettes and came down himself to give it to us. We left that same night at about 2 A.M. Quite some dis-

tance away, there was a big house belonging to a man called Sulaiman; it was a lonely building, there being no human habitation on all four sides of it, and was known to people as 'Jay-e-Sulaiman' (Sulaiman's seat). We reached this place at about ten in the morning and handed to Sulaiman the letter of introduction that we were carrying. He was in a room where there were a number of other people. He read the letter, and told us, 'Oh yes, goldsmiths are wanted at Sognan and you will have good business there'. He spoke this only to throw the other people who were in the room off the scent, as it were. After they had left, he discussed everything in detail with us and gave us careful instructions. He said to us: 'There may be in your way *khuds* (declivities) on the hillside two to four thousand feet in depth, and once you fall into one of them you are done for. Not a trace will ever again be found. It may also be that snow has collected on the path and some of it extends on to the *khud*. As you walk on it the pressure of your feet may break the ice and you may drop into the gap. So, when you walk on snow, carry a stick and beat it on the ground to make sure if it breaks up'. There were many other things also that he told us. We stayed as his guests for two days. This was the area where we were to make our entry into Afghan territory. If one goes from Pamir to the Chitral area in India (now in Pakistan), one has to cross a short stretch of Afghan territory. On the map it looks a tiny strip. But it is difficult to express in words its inaccessibility. The frontier at this point

has a peculiar figuration. The Amu Dariya, its width rather small, flows very rapidly, on one side of it the Pamir area of the Soviet Union and on the other Afghanistan. Quite commonly, the father lived on the Soviet territory while the son was on the Afghan side; they talked to each other across the river, and could even throw things from one side to the other. Sulaiman changed our money and gave us Indian rupees. He also furnished us with a guide, who however charged us a fee of four pounds.

At dead of night we rode on camel's back to cross the river to Afghan territory. It was to be the last time we crossed the Amu Dariya. Now our trials and tribulations began anew. We had crossed the Hindukush and even the high tableland of the Pamirs. But everything paled before the dangers and difficulties of the path that we now encountered.

The Road to India We followed our guide, but he did not stay very near us but kept himself somewhat distant. We could hardly have the advantage of speaking to him. Once inside the Afghan border, we had to climb very steep hills which were an extension of the Hindukush, crowned at the top by perennial snow. On the hills there were no trees, not even grass. How can I convey the agony which the *chamoos* shoes were giving us? There were Afghan forts in the lower slopes; dogs started barking as we were climbing uphill, and the soldiers in fort, suspecting the movement of people, came out with their lanterns. We noticed a sort of cave

under huge boulders and lay down there, as if we were dead. The soldiers actually passed overhead, muttering angrily: 'Where have the rogues vanished? Let their fathers die burning!' We learnt later that 'let their fathers die burning' was an Afghan swear phrase. Anyway, this was how we made our journey. Meanwhile, snowfall had begun heavily, and to escape its tortures we spent the next night also in a cave. When we could not walk any longer on account of incessant snowfall we would plant four sticks, tie the ends of our rug and sit under the awning thus improvised. When the load of snow on the rug grew too heavy, we had to get up and shake it free of the load. It has even happened so that climbing down a steep slope we found no way of doing so except by tying our luggage to our head, lying on the hillside and just letting ourselves slide down. After the first night in a cave, Habib Ahmad said to us: 'I just cannot walk any longer. You leave me here and go ahead. I don't mind what happens to me'. At this Majeed and I took over his load, and we told him sharply that he must come with us. After a while, Mansoor also gave up and said he could not proceed any further. Then two of us, Majeed and I, shared his load also. At one spot, while we were going up alongside a *khud*, we tied a rope round the waists of Habib and Mansoor, and held it firmly in our hands in order that in their weakness they might not lose their balance and fall into the *khud*. The condition of both Mansoor and Habib was, indeed, most distressing. Having walked continuously on snowbound paths, their feet had

swollen and were bleeding and their toe-nails had dropped off. It was sheer agony for them to make the effort of walking.

After three days of footing it in the Afghan border we entered one evening the territory of Chitral State. There was no human habitation near this border. Our provisions also were exhausted. We had to spend the night in a cave, without a bite of food. The guide that Sulaiman had given us watched us, of course, from a distance. He came to see us next morning. He had some provisions with him. Together, we crossed a stream; we had to carry Habib Ahmad and Firozuddin on our shoulders as we did so. Across the river we picked up some straw and pieces of wood, and with these we lit a fire under a stone. The guide mixed some water with his *atta* and kneaded it; then the bread was prepared and baked on the heated stone-slab. The five of us sat together in a circle and ate it with great relish. Then the guide took leave of us. While going he wore an air as if we had never even known him. We never asked his name, nor did he want to know ours. We were implicated in an affair which required this kind of reticence and discipline.

Chitral was a native state included in India. The state, as well as the capital, had the same name, Chitral. The ruler of this State was called 'Mehtar'. Perhaps the same posture of things continues even after the formation of Pakistan. However, after the guide left we continued our journey on foot. At nightfall we reached a village. By payment of some money we could arrange board and lodging for the

night. We tried to hire a horse or a mule, at least for Mansoor and Habib, but we failed. In the morning the four of us set out again on our travels. As the day advanced, we reached a village and offered to pay for our food. The man we had spoken to asked us if we would care for some *ash*. We agreed with alacrity because we had found in Bokhara that *ash* was a kind of *pilao*. However, as we sat down to eat, we saw that it was boiled *atta* salted to taste, and we had to gulp it down. In the evening we reached a spot which was a stronghold of the disciples of the Aga Khan. Even a representative (*khalifa*) of the Aga Khan stayed there. A free-for-all eating house was also there, and whoever wanted it could get a couple of *chapatis* and some lentil soup. We made a meal of it and stayed for two days in the local inn. It was no longer possible for Firozuddin Mansoor and Habib Ahmad to walk on with us, because their feet were bleeding badly. After two days, however, we could resume the journey, for we had succeeded in hiring horses for them. It was nearly evening when we reached the town of Chitral. The people there thought we were wandering mendicants (*fakirs*), and some even called out to us and offered alms. Majeed and I went to a shop and bought shoes; Mansoor and Habib were not, however, in a position to put them on. There we purchased some material from the shops and gave orders to a tailor to make ordinary Punjabi clothes for us. It was agreed that the clothes would be supplied to us before the next morning. The idea was that with these Punjabi clothes on we would

mingle with the crowd and be indistinguishable, and after that we could go whichever way we liked. So we had *kabab* and *roti* at an eating house and spent the night at an inn.

I have omitted saying one thing. When after entering Chitral State we were going towards the capital town, we had met a group of travellers who told us, in answer to our query, that they were going for the *Haj* pilgrimage. We further asked them where they could go for *Haj* in that direction, and they replied they were going to Mazar-i-Sharif. (We had earlier been to Mazar-i-Sharif on our way to Tirmiz, and we remembered it was a place of pilgrimage indeed). Thus we realised that there was a road in the neighbourhood which headed towards Mazari-i-Sharif, and if driven to it, we could say we were returning after performing *Haj* there.

But what we had thought of did not happen. I do not know how, but the city police chief had got to hear of our arrival. It may be that the Punjabi tailor, sensing something fishy in our great hurry, had informed the authorities. Otherwise, the police chief would not have bothered about the doings of four men dressed in the garb of fakirs. Very early in the morning, he came and directed us not to leave the inn and go anywhere. A little later we were produced before the *Mehtar's* Private Secretary. We told him we were coming back from pilgrimage at Mazar-i-Sharif. That was what the Secretary reported to the Ruler (*Mehtar*), who ordered that each of us be given a cloak and fifty rupees for food. Till now, thus, everything was happening in our favour.

However, there was an English newspaper on the Private Secretary's table, and losing grip on himself Habib Ahmad took a quick glance at it. This roused the Private Secretary's suspicion and he gave a sepoy a letter for the political agent of the British Government, saying to us as he did so: 'You please go with the sepoy and see the political agent for a while'. We felt the game was nearly up. We changed into the clothes the tailor had made for us, and went to meet the political agent. He was a Muslim gentleman. Outwardly he was polite and told us, 'You stay in the town for the time being; later, you may go where you please.' But we saw a sepoy following us everywhere. It did not take us long to realize that we were under arrest.

The man from whose shop we had bought the material for our clothes in Chitral was also called Akbar Khan and he belonged to Peshawar. We learnt from talks with him that he was related to our Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah. He had asked us to a meal, and after we came back from the Political Agent's office we went to his house and after food stayed there overnight instead of returning to the inn. It was from his house, again,

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that we left the next day for Peshawar. For each of us a donkey had been hired. A sepoy also marched alongside. At every police station on the way the sepoy was relieved by another who took his place. In this way we went ahead and on the fourth day we reached Dargahi. It was from there that our journey by train began. The sepoy reached

us at the police station and left us there. The officer-in-charge told us that guards to escort us were expected from Peshawar and that we would have to wait till then in the police station. He did not treat us badly; we were permitted to move about freely inside the station, and at night he did not even lock the door behind us. Later, many sepoys turned up from Peshawar and our journey began. This time we were handcuffed, though of course the manacles were taken off after the train started. We had started in the morning and we reached Peshawar at about eight or nine at night. The officers took us first of all for our meal at a hotel. This eating place was known as 'Haji's Hotel'; I had had my food there when I was on the way to Kabul and the proprietor, recognizing me, fed us with great cordiality. Cleverly evading the eyes and ears of the police he managed also to note down our respective addresses. I was to learn later that to everyone's family he had sent word of our arrival and our arrest.

We spent the night in the police lock-up. The next day we were produced separately before Abdul Aziz, Superintendent in the Criminal Investigation department (C.I.D.). Our persons and effects were searched, but nothing incriminating was found. We had jotted down addresses on small sheets of paper, but while on the train we had gone into the lavatory and destroyed them. Abdul Aziz arranged that we were separated from one another and sent to four different police stations. The next morning we were taken separately to Abdul Aziz's residence and had our statements recorded. That same day we were pro-

duced before a British police officer; perhaps he was the Inspector-General or the Deputy Inspector-General of Police. We were also produced on the same day before a magistrate who ordered that we should be put in separate cells in the police lock-up. We spent a few days in this condition, and knew no news of the others in our group. Then, one day, we were sent to a jail; even there we were locked up in separate cells. We were kept inside the cells day and night. The morning after my first day in jail, the warder unlocked my cell and with him I saw Muhammad Akbar Khan in prisoners' clothes and in fetters. I was surprised to see him there in that condition. He left with me, surreptitiously, a bundle in which there were some tobacco, paper and *chakmaki* (pebbles which, rubbed against each other, produce a flame), and he whispered to me, 'I am here also; don't lose your nerve'. Who could imagine that our group leader Muhammad Akbar Khan would have to look after us even inside jail? I shall relate later the story of his being clapped in jail. As long as I was in the cell, some unknown person or persons threw me some tobacco through the opening in the back ventilator; the same happened in the case of other friends, and it was all Muhammad Akbar Khan's doing! Thus we spent two months in the dark prison-cell. Meanwhile, those of us who were following in our wake had arrived. It was easy for the police to arrest them after we had been already grabbed. We were going to be hauled up under section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code, which related to the offence of conspiracy with a view to depriv-

ing the King-Emperor of his sovereignty over India. It was necessary, under the law, to obtain permission for invoking this and certain other sections from the Central or the Provincial Government before the prosecution could be launched. The magistrate was to hold an inquiry while the prosecution was to be conducted before the Sessions Court. For purposes of proving the charge against us it was necessary to wait for others arriving after we did and also to secure permission of the Central Government to start the prosecution. When these two requirements were fulfilled we were produced in a magistrate's court, and we made a plea that for facilitating our defence we should be lodged together in jail. The magistrate accepted our plea and issued orders accordingly. From that day we were put up together in the jail. I do not exactly remember the date; it was, as far as I can recollect, somewhere in the beginning of February, 1923.

Here is a list of the accused in this case:

1. Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah (resident of Nowshera, Peshawar).
2. Gawhar Rahman Khan (resident of village Darbesh adjoining Haripur in Hazara district).
3. Meer Abdul Majeed (resident of Lahore city).
4. Firozuddin Mansoor (resident of Sheikhpura town).
5. Habib Ahmad Naseem (resident of Shahjahanpur in Uttar Pradesh).
6. Rafiq Ahmad (resident of Bhopal city).

7. Sultan Mahmud (of Haripur, Hazara district).
8. Abdul Qadir Sehrai (of Peshawar).
9. Fida Ali Zahid (of Peshwar).
10. Ghulam Muhammad (of Hazara district).

The accused nos. 1 to 9 were members of the *emigre* Communist Party of India. Ghulam Muhammad, accused no. 10, had returned long ago from Tashkent, and had never joined the Communist Party. His name was added to the list of the accused a few days after the case started in the Magistrate's Court. The object of the Government was to secure him as an approver. From among the communists, Fida Ali Zahid, turned out to be an approver.

Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah and Gawhar Rahman Khan had returned home safely and gone into the independent tribal territory. In between India and Afghanistan there were the settlements of free tribal peoples who owed allegiance neither to Afghanistan nor to India. After our arrest, Gawhar Rahman and Akbar Shah returned to India again and were taken into custody.

Ah yes, I recall one other thing. The hotel proprietor in Peshawar who had got our addresses, had written to our homes, and in the majority of cases our relatives had come to our assistance. Those who were in Peshawar and in Hazara had, of course, got to know of the case themselves. In the Magistrate's Court we did not defend ourselves. Only we employed a lawyer to see to it that the magistrate or the government advocate did not violate any legal provisions.

Ghulam Muhammad was linked together with us by the prosecution really in order to utilize his services as approver. But in the lower court he gave evidence in our favour, perhaps in order that he might be putting up with us in jail. Whichever way he gave evidence, we should not have allowed him to be in our company, because even as an accused, he had turned a witness. When the trial began in the Sessions Court he was taken away from us and he gave evidence hostile to us with a vengeance. Fida Ali Zahid was staying separately from the beginning. In the lower court he gave evidence against us, but in the Sessions Court he retracted it. I do not know what guile of the Government this was due to; in any case both these people, having turned approvers, secured pardon and release.

In the Sessions Court our case was conducted efficiently. Some of our friends' people spent money over it. The famous Urdu writer and lawyer (later judge of the Lahore High Court) Sir Abdul Qadir, had appeared for us; we heard that he charged very little by way of his fee. I think that it was on account of the appearance of such capable lawyers that our punishment was light. There were two assessors in the Sessions Court, and they had pronounced us innocent. The judge, however, was not bound by the view of the assessors.

It was in the second week of May 1923 (unfortunately the exact date escapes my memory) the judge gave his verdict. The two approvers, of course, were released, and so was Abdul Qadir Sehrai who was to be in later years a sworn enemy of communists.

Those who got convicted were:

1. Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah.
2. Gawhar Rahaman Khan—both of them sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment each.
3. Meer Abdul Majeed.
4. Firozuddin Mansoor.
5. Rafiq Ahmad.
6. Habib Ahmad Naseem and
7. Sultan Mahmud—all five sentenced to a year's hard labour each.

This was how the first Communist Conspiracy Case in India concluded. We did not on this occasion prefer any appeal against the conviction.

[In the second week of May, 1923, Shaukat Usmani was arrested in Kanpur, Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta and Ghulam Hossain in Lahore. The Government of India had intended to haul them up also in the Peshawar case. Shaukat Usmani and Ghulam Hossain were even taken to Peshawar jail. But the Peshawar Conspiracy Case was then nearing completion. It was perhaps on that account that these three people were not prosecuted in the case but were imprisoned instead under Regulation III of 1818. The next year, of course, all three of them were charged in the Kanpur Communist Conspiracy Case. Ghulam Hossain tendered an apology and got his release. In the Kanpur case, Shripad Amrit Dange and Nalini Gupta were also tried. Dange was arrested in Bombay before the case started. Nalini Gupta was a state prisoner in Calcutta under Regulation III of 1818.]

Let me now say something about the treatment we received. We were not put in fetters before investigation started in the magistrate's court. However, the day it started the fetters were clamped on us and we had to wear them till the verdict was delivered in the Sessions Court. They were taken off the day our sentence was pronounced. In the North West Frontier Province those who were sentenced to three years or more had fetters put on them; those with lesser sentences could do without them. We never received any special treatment as prisoners; always we were treated as ordinary convicts. It was in Peshawar Central Jail that we did our term. One thing requires to be noted. The first Communist Conspiracy Case in India was held in the North West Frontier Province. In the British regime this was nothing but forbidden territory. That is why news of our trial did not travel across India, let alone the world outside.

I have often spoken in these pages of Muhammad Akbar Khan. In our journey to Tashkent we had been together. He did not stay there long but along with us he had joined the military school, though not the Communist Party. His life's dream was to liberate India from British subjection. He had not left India out of religious fanaticism or to fight for Turkey in Anatolia. He returned to India secretly, in accordance with the Party's instructions. His task was to set up a printing press in the tribal area and arrange the production and distribution of leaflets and posters. He had bought a printing machine and had

Muhammad
Akbar Khan

succeeded in sending it to the free tribal area. It still remained for him to despatch some more materials needed for the press, when he came to know that the police had got scent of his return home. His friends gave the advice that he should go to the tribal area himself and stay there for some time. In the disguise of a doctor he was on his way to the tribal area when, near the frontier, he was caught. He was also prosecuted under section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code. At the Sessions Court he was sentenced to three years' rigorous imprisonment. While in jail he managed to smuggle out a letter to one of his colleagues which safely reached its destination. The letter contained instructions regarding the despatch of the remaining materials for the press in the free tribal area. It further contained a direction that news of his arrest should be sent to *Sonali Dantwala* ('the fellow with gold in his teeth'). Muhammad Akbar Khan's colleague was going himself with the press materials when he was caught at the frontier. Later his residence was searched and the letter smuggled out of jail by Muhammad Akbar Khan, which his foolish friend had carefully preserved in the house, was discovered by the police. Muhammad Akbar Khan, was in consequence, put up for trial on a second charge of conspiracy under section 121-A of the Penal Code, and his colleague, herein referred to, was a co-accused. In the view of the police, *Sonali Dantwala* was no other than Muhammad Ali, of whom I have already spoken. In this second trial Muhammad Akbar Khan was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for seven years and his colleague got the same sentence for

five years, the former's two sentences running consecutively. It was an inconceivable thing that for having smuggled a letter out of prison one could be prosecuted under section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code. But such a thing did happen in the North West Frontier Province during the British regime.

I have heard that those who had gone to Anatolia did not have to fight; fate had reserved imprisonment for them.* At any rate they were in jug for a fairly long time. Before they had reached

About those had gone to Anatolia, an Indian secret service agent named Mustafa was arrested there. This man was to win notoriety as Mustafa Sageer ('Sageer' meaning 'small', while

*Pandit Rahul Sankrityayan has written a book in Hindi entitled "New Leaders of New India". Here he has printed a statement made by Fazle Elahi Qurban. In the same way as I have done in this book about Rafiq Ahmad's recollections, Rahulji also heard the story from Qurban himself and then wrote it down in his own words. According to Qurban, he also had joined the others on the road to Turkey from Charjao (Rahulji calls it Charajui). They went to Krasnador via Ashkhabad, and thence by steamer to Baku. At that time the Turks, under the leadership of Mustafa Kamal, were fighting a life-and-death struggle against the Greeks for maintaining the freedom of Turkey. The Soviets were helping the Turks in all manner of ways. It was in Baku itself that Turkish forces were being organised. Turkish soldiers, who had been prisoners of war in Russia, were equipped with arms by the Soviets and sent on to Baku. There, Turkish officers organised them into platoons and sent them into Smyrna.

The *muhajirs* wanted to be taken to the Turkish forces in Baku itself. Even the names of some of them were taken down. But platoon after platoon left for Smyrna, while the *muhajirs* were languishing behind in Baku. It was when they realized that they were not trusted that they went back to Tashkent. It was thence that men of this group returned to India. Fazle Elahi Qurban there

Mustafa Kamal was the 'great' Mustafa). I have heard also that after a time the Indians were released and they could get back home. Let me hope that at long last they had woken up to real understanding. Some among them, inspite of the beating they received at Turkmen hands, gave over all their money to the Turkmen *maulavis*. And though they had survived the sentence of death the Turkmen had pronounced upon them, they refused, at Kirkee, to fight the Turkmen because they were also Muslims. In spite of all this, how solicitously the Red Army had tried to help them and show every consideration and esteem!

(*Parichaya*, Bhadra-Aswin, 1367, September, 1960)

joined his former companions. The story of Indian *muhajirs* having been thrown into Anatolian prisons finds no corroboration from Qurban's version of the events.