

Remembering
M. Shariff Khan, SQA, PSP
Former IGP West Pakistan
(1908-1992)



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MOHAMMAD SHARIFF KHAN, SQA, PSP
FORMER IGP WEST PAKISTAN

Shariff Khan was amongst the few exceptional senior IP officers who opted for Pakistan at the time of independence. In fact, he arrived in Karachi eight days prior to independence after his services were specially requisitioned by the then Chief Minister, Sindh, Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah.

Shariff Khan had a stellar career. After leaving his mark as SSP Karachi (1947-1951), he subsequently held various important positions as first native IG Sindh (1951-1955), IG Prison, twice Chairman of Road Transport Board, West Pakistan, IG Railways, Additional IG West Pakistan and IG West Pakistan from 1958 to 1962. He retired in 1963 as Chairman Road Transport Board West Pakistan. After retirement, he served as Director of Dalmia Cement and represented Gas Development Corporation of Canada in Pakistan. He passed away in 1992 in Karachi at the age of 84. He was conferred Sitara-e- Quaid-e-Azam for his meritorious services.

Early Years

Shariff Khan was born in 1908 in Pune, India in a family of Sadozai Pathans. His father Mohammad Hanif Khan, employed in Excise Department was unfortunately murdered. After the demise of his father, Shariff Khan was brought up by his uncle Risaldar Major Raheem Khan.

Shariff Khan after his graduation won King's Commission in British Army. He later passed out from Sandhurst as a commissioned officer at the young age of 22 years on 2nd December 1930. After serving in Army for few years, Shariff Khan in 1940 as per account of Suleman Shariff his adopted son, opted to sit in the ICS exam, which he successfully passed

and was accordingly allocated Indian Police Service on 15.04.1941. He underwent his Police Training at PTC Nasik in Bombay Presidency and later served in various districts of Bombay Presidency till 1947. Shariff Khan married the daughter of Sir Suleman Cassim Mitha, a prominent business tycoon of Bombay and one time Muslim League President of Bombay. They had no children but adopted Suleman Shariff as their son.

Professional Career

Shariff Khan joined police in 1941 after his ten years stint in the army. During the pre-partition period he successfully served in various sub divisions/ districts of Bombay Presidency notable among them were Thane, Satara, Balgum, Ratnagri now in present day Maharashtra state of India.

At the time of independence he was amongst the few senior Police officers of IPs who opted for Pakistan spurning serious offer from the Indian dominion. He had 17 years of service under his belt when he was appointed first native SP of Karachi city in late 1947 which had recently become the capital of newly independent Pakistan.

Post Independence Career

Shariff Khan's assumed the office of SP Karachi at the time of epic turmoil in the wake of worst communal carnage after 14th August 1947.

In 1947, the population of Karachi within few months swelled manifold due to huge influx of Muslims refugees from India. This mushrooming mass of refugees not only created law and order problem in the city but it also became haven for Muslims criminals converging from all over India, resulting in unprecedented high level of crime rate in Karachi. This situation was further compounded by Karachi Police's indiscipline/inefficiency, corruption and desertion of Hindu staff. On top

of this, Shariff Khan initially didn't get the requisite support from his own officers and men.

Shariff Khan, undeterred by these trying and adverse circumstances controlled the ensuing situation by his sheer professionalism, leadership, hard work and personal integrity. It is worth mentioning that during his three years spell as SSP Karachi, he not only successfully quelled two police strikes but also personally spearheaded rooting out of organized crime often sponsored by venal officials in Police force.

Shariff Khan main forte was his integrity. In this regard, I would like to briefly quote the contents of one of his confidential letters, wherein he voluntarily divulged to the authorities the family background of his wife who happened to be daughter of Sir Suleman Cassim known to be business tycoon in erstwhile united India. In the instant letter, Shariff Khan disclosed the very nature of business of his own family and his wife's closest relatives. He reiterated that his position in Police did not in any way promoted or supported their business interests. This very act of voluntary disclosure on part of Shariff Khan speaks amply of his moral uprightness specially when seen in the present day scenario/ perspective.

Shariff Khan had remarkable insight into Karachi's rising crime rate more on the lines of a trained sociologist. In this regard, his detailed confidential letter to IG Karachi in 1948 is worth reading. This letter highlights multitude of factors for sudden rise of crime i.e. huge influx of refugees, dire economic conditions, police inefficiency, lack of training facilities, low pay and inadequate housing and other facilities for police as well as rampant corruption in the police.

Acutely aware of the police patronage of the vice dens, Shariff Khan personally raided number of vice dens and exposed the bad hats in police which were supporting such vice dens.

Shariff Khan considered the traits of honesty and discipline as essential quality for officers. In one of his confidential dispatches, he opines "A police force cannot improve unless an example of honesty and discipline is set before it by the officers and they are taken to task and frequent lectures are given to them to goad them improve".

As a senior officer, Shariff Khan walked the talk and regularly lectured his officers on character building.

At the same time, where he was cognizant of strong character for police officers he was equally not oblivious of their hardship and plight due to their inadequate pay and facilities. He frequently wrote letters to higher authorities on the plight of constabulary.

In one such letter addressed to his IG, he forcefully stated that "In my opinion the question of improving the conditions of service of the present constabulary is far more urgent and important than the question of increasing the actual strength. It is far better to have small well disciplined, efficient and contented police force than to have one which is indisciplined, corrupt, inefficient and discontented. I have been making a number of representations to you since Feb, 1948 for improving the conditions of service of the existing constabulary".

He persistently badgered the higher authorities to urgently review the paltry pay package and inadequate housing facilities for the constabulary as he believed that "dissatisfied constabulary will have no heart in their work".

Shariff Khan strongly believed that policing system inherited from British imperialists needed reorganization as it was unsuitable for policing free people. "At present we are carrying on with a system which belongs to an imperialistic government established centuries back for the purpose of ruling another race with a few patches here and there.

Shariff Khan stoutly defended the police at every forum. He never allowed powerful quarters to deprive police of its due credit. He always made it a point to give police's version proper coverage in highest forums and press.

Training

Shariff Khan strongly believed that up to date training played a significant role in making a force professionally efficient and disciplined. In 1947, Karachi had no training facilities to train its police force. To bridge this yawning gap, he started a make shift training school from his own resources to train his existing force and the new entrants.

He further elaborated that new entrants if properly trained and adequately paid can come up to the expectations of the people of newly independent country. In his own words "These youngsters could be trained and moulded in the new atmosphere of a free country where they have to serve as honest and disciplined servants of the public. It is difficult to expect this attitude from ex-policemen who have practically spent their life in corruption and in ruling the public with a rod of iron as a tool of an imperialistic nation". Precisely for the above reasons, he strived for Police Commissionarate system in Karachi.

Primitive method of Investigation

Shariff Khan found Karachi's Police method of investigation crude and primitive as it mostly relied upon coercion/ torture to extract

information or confession from the suspects/ offenders by maintaining gangs of criminals to give information about other gangs. In this regard, he repeatedly exhorted to his subordinates to follow modern ways of detection besides maintaining up to date crime record. He tasked his police stations to prepare detailed crime notes, open and maintain history sheets and carry out regular surveillance of notorious and known criminals.

Lobbying for Police Commissionarate System

In order to arrest increasing crime rate and public disorder due to rapidly growing population of Karachi after independence, Shariff Khan ardently believed that Pakistan's new capital cannot be best governed and effectively policed by an imperialist and archaic police system. In pursuance of this, he behind the scene lobbied for tabling of the bill for introducing Police Commissionarate System in Karachi in Pakistan's first constituent assembly. Unfortunately, with the demise of Quaid-e-Azam, the powerful lobbies in the establishment scuppered the bill in late 1948 thus defeating one such first attempt to reform policing in the country. Lamentably, in the last 75 years, little has changed since then.

As a professional police officer his heart was in the right place, he did not believe in discriminating citizens on the basis of their religion. Shariff Khan sincerely carved about safeguarding the life and properties of minorities. In a number of instances, he restored properties which were illegally taken over or dispossessed by Muslims refugees.

Appointment as IGP Sindh

After serving creditably as SSP Karachi for more than three (03) years, Shariff Khan became the first native IGP of Sindh on 01.08.1951,

where he again served with distinction for more than 3 years till 13.01.1955.

During his tenure as IGP Sindh he carried on the rightsizing and reorganization scheme of Sindh Police which was earlier proposed and got approved by his predecessor Mr. Walter Pryde. The nascent organization of Sindh Police Rangers which Policed border areas was vastly reinforced in his tenure. Sindh Police Rangers later on became Pakistan Rangers now controlled by the Pak Army.

Moreover, Shariff Khan as IGP Sindh took effective measures against the menace of dacoity and was instrumental in arresting notorious Abdul Rahim Hingoro alias Rahim Badshah, a fugitive Hur leader thus effectively mopping up the last remnants of Hur movement in Sindh. This fact has been duly mentioned by A.T. Lambrick in his book on Hur movement "The Terrorist".

Shariff Khan alarmed by cross border raids/ movement of criminals from across the border, instituted a system of flag meetings between the senior officials of border police of India and Pakistan.

IGP West Pakistan

In 1958, Shariff Khan reached the pinnacle of his career when on 18.07.1958 he was appointed to the top slot of IGP West Pakistan. He remained IGP West Pakistan for more than four (04) years. During his tenure, law and order and crime situation remained under control.

The first major screening out of corrupt police officers was initiated by him in 1959.

However, the crowning feature of his tenure was splendid Police Centenary Celebrations in Lahore in 1961. The event was not only

participated by Police officers and elites of the country but also attracted distinguished police officers and delegations from across the world, particularly from Common Wealth countries. As a rare gesture, government of Pakistan also issued a special stamp to commemorate the Police Centenary.

Chairman Transport Board

His last posting was Chairman, West Pakistan Transport Board where he was instrumental in planning Karachi's Mass Transit System and Karachi Circular Railway in collaboration with Japanese government. Unfortunately, due to neglect of successive governments both projects are consigned to dust bin of history.

Patronage of Sports

Shariff Khan was great patron of sports in police. Due to his active patronage, Police in those days became a powerhouse of sports. In his tenure, hockey, volley ball and athletics flourished. Police Hockey team reigned supreme in those days boasting players of the stature of Munir Dar and Zakauddin

On the whole, a brave visionary leader whose lofty ideas did not disconnect him from hardships and plight of his constabulary. An officer and gentleman who with great aplomb and tactfulness handled most difficult situations in his Police career.

Indeed, a towering, multifaceted personality loved by his officers and men will always be remembered for his sterling qualities of head and heart.

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