

Bacha-i Sakkao's movement

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On the death of Khabilulla Khan in 1919, Emir Amanulla Khan assumed the Afghan throne. Inspired by European nationalist ideas, Khan embarked on a course of reforms designed to unify Afghanistan into a modern nation-state. He adopted a constitution that advanced individual freedoms, the rights of women, and religious tolerance. However, the creation of liberal democratic modernization met with great popular opposition. Many Afghans resisted the radical changes, owing to a long tradition of Islamic religious conservatism and the inability to unify the country, which was divided by ethnic, regional, and clan loyalties. Amanulla Khan's effort to reform centuries-old family and marital traditions provoked wide opposition at the grassroots level. While conflict escalated into a series of ethnic and clan revolts, Amanulla Khan's determination to continue his program of Afghan transformation was not diminished. On returning from a long trip to Europe in 1928, Khan sought to accelerate and expand social and economic reforms. As the plans were implemented, an organized, broadly based social protest movement was gaining momentum in Afghanistan's northern provinces, led by Tajik Habibulla Kalakani, better known under the nickname Bacha-i Sakkao (Son of a Water Carrier).

Kalakani formed an army of resistance fighters comprised predominantly of Tajik and Uzbek nationals rather than Pashtun peoples of Afghan origin. The Khazara, Afghan indigenous people, despite extensive and longstanding grievances against Kabul, did not join the uprising. Ideologically, Bacha-i Sakkao was a militant Islamist movement that promoted the restoration

of the Holy Caliphate, an orthodox government based on the principles of the Qur'an.

In January 1929, the capital city of Kabul was captured by Kalakani and Amanulla Khan abdicated and escaped to India. Bacha-i Sakkao named himself Emir Habibulla II and established an authoritarian government that was highly unpopular, remaining in power for nine months. The Pashtun people considered Bacha-i Sakkao a foreign usurper, and this sparked nationalist sentiment in Afghanistan. A Pashtun militia was mobilized by Nadir Khan, the former minister of war, that successfully drove out Bacha-i Sakkao from Kabul. He was later captured and hanged. The new king, Nadir Khan, repealed many of Amanulla Khan's reforms and instituted an authoritarian government.

SEE ALSO: Afghanistan, 1978 Revolution and Islamic Civil War; Afghanistan, Resistance to 19th-Century British Invasion; Bin Laden, Osama (b. 1957) and al-Qaeda; Durrani Empire, Popular Protests, 1747–1823; Taliban, 1996–2007

References and Suggested Readings

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