

The Chagha Party of Shakardara Town

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The aftereffects of 9/11 affected many parts of the world, especially Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Pakistan the intensity was observed more in the province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The militant groups emerged from all around the province. After strong resistance and onslaught from the armed forces of Pakistan, the militants were compelled to find safe havens for themselves. Shakardara town of district Kohat was the most suitable place for the militants and miscreants, as it has a hilly topography and an enormous number of hideouts and gateways.

The entrance of the unknown persons in the town was a matter of concern for the inhabitants of the town. The Chagha party has existed traditionally since 1997 and even before in one form or another; however in a disorganized manner. The members of the LSO reorganized, restructured and formalized the party and now the party is active and serving the area for peace. Most of the regular members of the party are retired Pak Army personals.

Mr. Fazal Rahim (Subedar Retired from the Pakistan Army) was one of the most active members of the Chagha party, who led the party for several years. He died in a sad incident when his son in law, who was an untrained driver, crushed him with a car unintentionally in his own hujra during Ramazan last year. After his passing, the charge of leading the party was entrusted to Mr. Mumtaz Khan.

There are number of heroic exploits of the party. Some of its very famous deeds are as follows:

- In the year 2009 militants besieged the oil fields of OGDCL with an intention to destroy it with rockets and other explosive devices. The Chagha party gave a call in the whole town and the villagers came out with their weapons and covered the militants from all around, who were hiding in the hills around the oil fields. After intensive fighting, the militants left their positions and fled away. Thus the Chagha party saved the precious installations of the government, for which they were appreciated by all.
- To keep the town clean from miscreants, the elders of the Chagha party have decided that any unknown person who intends to settle in the town temporarily or permanently would undergo an extensive identification process. Moreover, a local of the area will provide an undertaking in favor of those who intend to settle in the town. The Chagha party conducts an identification process for such matters and then shares its results with the government through the local Police Station. Pursuing this decision, in the year 2006, some persons who were presenting themselves as Talibans, sought permission to live in the town. These persons had already

developed some linkages with a few locals who were ready to fulfill all the requirements for them which had been set by the Chagha party. After probing the matter, the Chagha party reached to a conclusion that these persons were trying to settle with vicious intentions in the town. Therefore the Chagha party straight away rejected their request. As a result, the leading members of the Chagha party faced tough times for quite a long time but they stood strong against them and ultimately succeeded in averting the pressure.

- A group of looters who had looted a bus near Shakardara, were chased by many villagers at the call of the Chagha party. At a location, which is now called Hamid Chowk, the members of the Chagha party and the looters confronted each other. The looters opened fire on the members of the Chagha party, which resulted in the martyrdom of Mr. Hamid. All three looters were killed on the spot and their looted items were recovered. The spot is now officially called "Hamid Chowk" as a token of affliction for Mr. Hamid, who gave away his life for the sake of peace in his town. Now, the Chagha party arranges tournaments and firing competitions to commemorate the sacrifice of Mr. Hamid Khan.

The Chagha party is not only involved in anti-militancy activities but it also plays its role in combating local conflicts and abuses. They resolve matters of conflicts which arise within a family or among families, on domestic issues to avoid matters of divorce and reduce tensions.

On a number of occasions, the Police Department has appreciated the importance and brave deeds of the Chagha party. It is also evident from the books of the Police department that because of the existence of the Chagha party in the area, the rate of crime has declined many fold in Shakardara town.

In the situation where not a single place can claim freedom from the militant activities, Shakardara town is perhaps a singular area which is 100 percent free from such abuses. Had the Chagha party cease to exist, Shakardara could have been the most favorite habitat for miscreants as it attracts them for its geographical and topographical advantages.

Hats off to such people who suffer unrest for the sake of providing rest and peace to others!