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Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo: The Evolution of a Leftist Politician in Balochistan

Abstract

Political landscape of Balochistan has always been marred by ethnic and progressive issues. Ranging from provincial autonomy to separatist movements, Balochistan has been largely an integrated unit of the federation of Pakistan. It produced variety of leaders who propagated ethnic Baloch interests with clear leftist and progressive outlook in politics. Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo was among those politicians in Balochistan who upheld ideas of fraternity, human dignity, and liberal democratic principles. Some of the author has mentioned that he was a formal member of the Communist Party of Pakistan. Coming from politically less-exposed society, he carved out a place for himself on national level during Pakistan first decade after independence. This article traces the political career of Bizenjo from the time of pre-1947 India. He remained active in the politics of the Kalat State spreading anti-imperial, leftist and anti-Khan ideas. The study investigates the principles and the techniques he followed in the political milieu of Balochistan and Pakistan. It analyses the ethnic discourse, his reservations on the issues related to Balochistan and the role he played on national level. It would have also been explored that why he was arrested by the successive regimes and what charges were brought against him. The article explores that how the evolution of a leftist-cum-regionalist politician took place with convincingly nationalist political bearings.

Introduction

Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, one of the most popular¹ Pakistani Baloch politicians, was born in November 1918 in the village of Shank Jhao.² He belonged to the Himalani branch of the Bizenjo tribe. From his school days he was a good football player both at Quetta and Karachi. He played several matches in Bengal, Bihar, UP, the Punjab, Bombay, Jaipur, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Madras, Bangalore and Mysore. These exposures provided him the rare opportunity to know the subcontinent with its fascinatingly diverse social, cultural, climatic, geographical and also political hues and colours.³ During his stay at Aligarh, Bizenjo received profound exposure to a variety of ideologies. In fact, he was attracted towards the political philosophy of the Indian National Congress which professed to strengthen Indian Nationalism and to speak for all the people regardless of their race, religion, caste or language. Another reason might be the progressive and secular nature of Baloch society and its effects on his personality. This characteristic developed a sense of progressiveness in his personality. He was more attracted towards the secular and more nationalist approach of Gandhi and Nehru.⁴

There is a heated debate on the point that whether Bizenjo was a communist or not? Some writers, mostly leftist, are of the view that he was a card-carrying communist. He has started his political career from the platform of the Communist Party of India (CPI). Selig Harrison has quoted K. B. Nizamani, secretary of the CPI for Sindh and Balochistan branch, that during late 1930s, Bizenjo was a communist. It was after the CPI changed its stance on the Muslims' demand for Pakistan that he created differences with the party leadership.⁵ Jamal-ud-Din Naqvi has mentioned Bizenjo as a card carrying communist with strong ideological attachment with the CPI program.⁶ In fact, he enjoyed friendly relationship with communist comrades throughout his political career. Owing to his pro-Soviet and communist leaning, many hard-line Baloch separatists charged him as more of communist than Baloch

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nationalist. For that matter, his close liaison with a number of communists i.e. Nawaz Butt of Karachi, Shamim Malik of Lahore and with many other well-known progressives made him suspects in the eyes of his Baloch nationalist fellows.⁷

Bizenjo in the Politics of Kalat State

No political activity of any kind was permitted in Kalat-Baluchistan before 1927. Politics in the form of political parties, rallies and meetings were mostly unknown to the people of these areas. Although, politics was forbidden in the Kalat and other feudatory states, especially for the government servants, a few young officer of the state formed a clandestine group in order to give a channel to their views. In fact, Mir Yousaf Magsi, an influential member of the powerful Magsi tribe, spearheaded this movement for the establishment of proper political platform in Kalat. In the latter half of 1930s, two political parties came into existence. One was *Anjuman-e-Watan* (fatherland party) of Abdu Samad Achakzai in British Baluchistan. Second was the Kalat State National Party (KSNP) founded by Yousaf Magsi, Mir Abdul Aziz Kurd and Malik Faiz Muhammad on 5 February 1937. Unity of the Baluch people, independent status for Balochistan, the introduction of responsible government with the Khan of Kalat as a constitutional head, securing Baloch heritage, and adoption of a nationalist approach and maintaining national integrity of Balochistan were important points incorporated in the manifesto of the KNSP. The KNSP was as against the *sardari* system and the role of the *sardars* (tribal chiefs) as it was against the British.⁸ Due to opposition from the KSNP, the British failed to obtain the lease of the port from the Khan of Kalat. A number of Baluch *sardars* had also ill-feelings towards the KSNP due to its antipathy towards the *sardari* system.⁹ It was during this time that a troika of British agent, tribal *sardars* and Khan of Kalat was created to counter the growing influence of the KSNP. But it failed to completely diminish the position KSNP had acquired for itself among the Baloch people.¹⁰

In those days, Mir Ghous Bakhsh Bizenjo was active the Baloch League platform in Karachi. He was unanimously chosen to represent the League in the upcoming annual conference of the KNSP in Mastung. By a conspiracy of the troika i.e. British political agent, the *sardars* and the Khan of Kalat, the conference was sabotaged. Bizenjo was selected, by the KSNP leadership, to meet the Khan of Kalat and apprise him of the miss happening in Mastung. The meeting failed to reach any understanding, and on July 20, 1939, the KSNP was officially banned and orders were issued to expel all the prominent leaders of the KSNP from the state. Bizenjo was detained in the Khan's guest house in Kalat. However, he was determined to struggle under the banner of the KSNP against the British colonial government on one hand and the retrogressive social system on the other.¹¹

In 1945 the KSNP affiliated itself with All India State Peoples Conference (AISPC), a subsidiary organization of the Indian National Congress. AISPC looked into the political interest of those parties who were operating from princely states. Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah were respectively the president and vice president of the AISPC.¹² Meanwhile, the KSNP had by then become a component of the nationalist movement and become linked with the freedom movement in the subcontinent.¹³ Bizenjo, being the nominee of the KSNP, actively participated in the deliberations of the AISPC. He was made the member of its working committee which was a rare opportunity for the young Bizenjo to interact with the leading politicians. In that capacity he worked with famous politicians such as Nehru, Sheikh Abdullah and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.¹⁴

Bizenjo and Kalat's Accession to Pakistan

The KSNP was in favour of Balochistan becoming "an autonomous and equal federating unit" in the "independent and sovereign federation of India" after the withdrawal of the British imperialists.¹⁵ Interestingly, the Congress high command, in a united India, vehemently opposed any idea of an independent Kalat state and reversion of the leased territories to it. This is despite the fact that the Baloch politicians remained comparatively close and influenced by Nehru's political ideology. Contrary to the KSNP political approach, Nehru had clearly stated that a state situated on a strategically important border area could not be allowed to stay away from the union of India.¹⁶ Ghous Bakhsh Bizenjo did not oppose this stand of Jawaharlal Nehru. Although, the Khan of Kalat strenuously made his efforts, for Kalat remaining an independent Baloch state. But Bizenjo and other Congress leaders from Balochistan were at that time struggling for the attainment of the ideal of a united India instead of an independent Balochistan. It made his position more ambiguous on the ground that on the one hand KSNP claimed sovereign status for the Kalat state and on the other; it affiliated with a Congress subsidiary organization on all India level.

The 03 June Plan provided for a referendum to be held on June 30, 1947 in Shahi Jirga excluding the *sardars* nominated by the Kalat state and the non-official members of the Quetta Municipality to decide the future affiliation of British Balochistan with India or Pakistan. At the end the verdict came in favour of joining Pakistan. It was a unique development for the state of Kalat and its Baloch nationalist elements. The Khan of Kalat then signed a standstill agreement with the Government of Pakistan. There was a deadlock on the two important issues of Kalat merger with Pakistan and the question of the leased areas. The Khan was not in the position to take any step regarding the political future of the state due to the pressure of the nationalist elements.¹⁷ He stated several times that Kalat was an independent state. "He substantiated his argument by drawing parallels with the king of Nepal who had an independent status, diplomatic privileges and immunities granted by His Majesty Government. He considered himself to be like the kings of Afghanistan, Iran and Nepal."¹⁸ He hobnobbed with the idea of independence and refused to join the new state of Pakistan. The Muslim League, which had by this time become very popular in Balochistan, was insisting on accession of the Kalat state with Pakistan. On August 15, 1947, the Khan declared independence of the state and appointed Douglas Y. Fell as his foreign minister.

After declaring independence the Khan also started pressing the government of Pakistan for the return of the "leased areas" including Quetta, Pishin, Bolan and Chagi. This demand was opposed by Pakistan on the ground that as successor state of the British India in relation to foreign states, it had inherited all treaty obligations incurred by the British India.¹⁹ By the Pakistani government's manoeuvring, the three coastal Baloch states of Kharan, Makran and Lasbela separately effected accession in favour of Pakistan. This made Kalat a remote landlocked state in the hinterland of Balochistan. When the question of accession of the state to Pakistan came up for discussion in the Kalat State Assembly, Mir Ghous Bakhsh Bizenjo opposed any such move on the ground that simply being Muslims did not entitle Pakistan to claim Balochistan. *Darul Awam* (Lower House) of the Kalat state passed a resolution in favour of an independent Balochistan on 14 December 1947. Bizenjo commented on the issue in the *Darul Awam* of the Kalat State in the following words:

The British Government, by force of arms, enslaved most parts of Asia. British Government was tyrannical, oppressive. It robbed us of our independence. We had never been a part of Hindustan. Pakistan's demand that Kalat, which had earlier been known as Balochistan and had been the national homeland of the Baloch, should merge with Pakistan is unacceptable...Pakistan's condition is that until and unless the government of Baloch went to them with bowed heads and in humility, Pakistan would not talk. We are ready for friendship with honor not in indignity. We are not ready to merge within the frontiers of Pakistan.²⁰

If that was the case then, according to him, Iran and Afghanistan should also be incorporated in Pakistan. He opposed the accession of Kharan, Makran and Lasbela without the consent of the Khan. He stressed that instead of accession, they were ready to enter into treaty relationship with Pakistan as a sovereign independent nation.²¹ Bizenjo had never disowned this speech even after he transformed his political orientation and became a patriotic Pakistani. When he was arrested by the Bhutto's regime on the charges of treason, even at that time he stated that he delivered the speech when Kalat was not formally a part of Pakistan.²²

Bizenjo in the Post-1947 Political Landscape

In fact, the Khan of Kalat affixed his signature to the agreement of accession on March 27, 1948. Bizenjo has, in his autobiography, criticized the Khan as a broken man, and accused him of lacking convictions to own up and defend independence of his state. The person, who had throughout his political career struggled for making Balochistan a constituent part of the federation of India, opposed its accession to Pakistan in the garb of Baloch nationalism. With the accession of the state of Kalat, the KSNP was banned, and most of its leaders were arrested. Bizenjo continued to bemoan the lack of "sharp national consciousness", an "irresistible urge for independence" a "dedicated leadership" and "a readiness to render the supreme sacrifice for their cause" among the Baloch.²³

In mid-1955, Agha Abdul Karim, younger brother of the Khan of Kalat, and Muhammad Hussain Unqa were released from jail. Both of them arranged meeting with Mir Gul Khan Naseer, Qadir Bakhsh Nizamani. Ghous Bakhsh Bizenjo was in Karachi who was also invited to participate. They discussed the need for forming the new political party in Kalat. They agreed on forming a new party which was named as the *Ustaman Gal* (party of the people). The aims and objectives of the new party were not different from those of the KSNP. Agha Abdul Karim and Muhammad Hussain Unqa were respectively elected as President and Secretary of the new party. These leaders defied the ban and started political activities in Balochistan. Public meetings and rallies were organized to popularize its programme. Abdu Samad Achakzai took an active part in the rallies and programmes held in Kalat.²⁴

In 1955–56, efforts began to be made in the West Pakistan for uniting the regional nationalist groups into a single political party. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din played important role in bringing unity among these two groups.²⁵ These efforts materialized in December 1956 into the formation of the Pakistan National Party (PNP) in Lahore. The new party was an amalgamation of the Sindh Awami Mahaz (SAP) of G. M. Syed, *Wror Pakhtun* of Abdu Samad Achakzai, *Ustaman Gal* of Ghous Bakhsh Bizenjo, the Khudai Khidmatgar of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Sindh Haree Committee of Hyder Bakhsh Jatoti and Azad Pakistan Party of Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din.²⁶

The PNP leadership held discussions with the Awami League (Bhashani) led by Maulana Abdul Hamid Bhashani with a view to join forces and to form a “progressive, secular, anti-imperialist, anti-feudal all Pakistan Political Party.” For this purpose, a conference was convened in Dhaka in July 1957 in which a new party with the name of the National Awami Party (NAP) was formed. Maulana Bhashani was elected as president of the new party and Mahmud-ul-Haq Usmani (West Pakistan) as the General Secretary. The party’s main aims were included non-aligned, independent foreign policy and abolition of One Unit and reorganization of provinces on linguistic basis and federal system with maximum provincial autonomy in which all powers, except defence, foreign affairs and currency would rest with provinces. The NAP leadership attacked Pakistan’s alliance with the capitalist bloc and the One Unit in no uncertain term.²⁷

On October 5, 1958 the Khan of Kalat was arrested with charges of rebellion against Pakistan. The arrest of the Khan of Kalat and conviction and imprisonment of his brother, Agha Abdul Karim provoked the Baloch tribesmen to rise in revolt against the government. Bizenjo was the president of Balochistan NAP who criticised One Unit and martial law regulations. He was arrested along with his companions and kept in the notorious Quli Camp under the custody of the army. Bizenjo was released after one year imprisonment but cases were initiated against Nauroz Khan and his companions. Again, he was arrested and thrown into the Quli Camp for the second time.²⁸

Bizenjo was release from jail in early August 1962. He, along with Sardar Attaullah Mengal and Nawab Khair Bakhsh Murree arranged protest rallies and meetings in Baluchistan and Karachi. Attaullah Mengal was arrested in Karachi. Bizenjo and Khair Bakhsh Murree left for Dhaka with a view to apprise the people of East Pakistan of the happenings in Baluchistan through press conferences and statements. On return from East Pakistan, Bizenjo was arrested and sentenced to two years imprisonment under the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) and sent to Hyderabad jail. Other Baluch leaders such as Gul Khan Naseer, Sardar Attaullah Mengal and Akbar Bugti were already in jail. With arrest of the Baluch politicians, the affairs of Balochistan were in turmoil. “The government’s writ was largely tenuous.....In reality the province was ruled by naked conversion.”²⁹

Bizenjo and the Electoral Politics

In 1964, Bizenjo was a candidate of the Combined Opposition Parties (COP) for the national assembly seat from Kalat division. He lost this election to Sardar Duda Khan. In the 1965 presidential elections, the NAP proposed the name of Fatima Jinnah, the sister of the Quaid-i-Azam, as the opposition candidate against Ayub Khan. She became a candidate of the COP. Bizenjo was assigned the task of coordinating election campaign in Balochistan. A few days before elections, Bizenjo was arrested and released after elections results had been announced. Fatima Jinnah was, as expected, defeated because Ayub Khan had all the state resources and machinery at his backing.

In May, 1966, Bizenjo contested the by-election for the National Assembly seat in Karachi. Ayub Khan awarded the ticket of Conventional Muslim League to Khan Bahadur Habibullah Piracha. Both the Nawab of Kalabagh, the governor of West Pakistan, and Mahmoud Haroon were against awarding this ticket to Piracha. So they whole-heartedly supported Bizenjo. Infuriated over this incident Ayub Khan dismissed both the Nawab of Kalabagh and Mahmoud Haroon.³⁰ In June 1966, Bizenjo was found guilty and sentenced to 14 years rigorous imprisonment on charges of keeping currency notes stamped with the slogan of “*One Unit tor do* (Scrape the One Unit)”. He was first kept in the Sahiwal jail and then shifted to Sargodha.³¹

Ayub Khan transferred power to General Muhammad Yahya Khan on March 25, 1969. Yahya Khan dissolved the One Unit, restored the former provinces of the West of Pakistan, and held general elections on December 07, 1970. In East Pakistan, the AL won 160 of the total 162 seats of the National Assembly reserved for the Eastern Wing and, thus, secured an absolute majority of the total 300 seats. The Pakistan People Party (PPP) got 84 of the National Assembly seats, all from West Pakistan. On February 13, 1971, Yahya Khan announced that the inaugural session of the National Assembly would be held on March 03, 1971. Bhutto refused to attend it unless and until the AL reached a settlement with him on power sharing in the centre before convening of the National

Assembly. Members belonging to the smaller parties of the West Pakistan including Bizenjo and some PPP MNAs had reached Dhaka. On February 29, 1971 Yahya Khan announced postponement of the opening session of the National Assembly.³²

This action of Yahya Khan caused deep resentment and anger in East Pakistan. Protest demonstrations started throughout the province. Curfew was imposed in Dhaka. Wali Khan and Bizenjo met Mujeeb on March 14. They insisted on him to meet Yahya and find a way out to ensure transfer of power to him in a peaceful manner. Mujeeb agreed to this suggestion. Yahya-Mujeeb talks began on March 16.³³ The Yahya-Mujeeb talks failed, military operation was launched which culminated in the separation of the East Pakistan. There is no doubt that the NAP endorsed Mujeeb's Six Points program, but its leaders, Wali Khan and Bizenjo, deserve credit for attempting to find a way out for a political solution of the deadlock over the East Pakistan issue. They were in favour of retaining unity between East and West Pakistan.³⁴

Bizenjo during the Bhutto Era

On December 20, 1972 Bhutto took charge as the president and civilian Chief Martial Law Administrator of Pakistan. The NAP and JUI leaders signed an accord with Bhutto on March 06, 1972 under which the NAP and JUI approved continuation of martial law in the country up to August 14, 1972, and Bhutto agreed to the NAP-JUI forming governments in the NWFP and Balochistan.³⁵ On April 28, 1972, on the recommendations of the NAP, Arbab Sikandar Khan Khalil and Mir Ghous Bakhsh Bizenjo were sworn in as governors of the NWFP and Balochistan respectively.

On May 01st, 1972, Attaullah Mengal and Maulana Mufti Mahmood took oaths as chief ministers of Baluchistan and NWFP respectively. This was the first ever elected government of the province of Balochistan. From the day first, the political atmosphere between PPP and the NAP was ripe with suspicions and recriminations against each other. The NAP leadership believed that it was difficult for Bhutto to coexist with a NAP government in a province which was situated in close proximity to the Persian Gulf and Iran, and where his party had not won even a single seat. The situation demanded patience, forbearance and a sense of peaceful coexistence. But, instead, both sides adopted an uncooperative attitude towards each other. The NAP accused the central government of trying to subvert the provincial government of NWFP and Balochistan, pressurizing the two on the issues of expulsion of the non-Baloch from Balochistan and the Pat Feeder incident, and using Nawab Akbar Bugti for creating problems for the Balochistan government.^{36,37}

In February, 1973, the government of Pakistan received information that crates of arms had been flown from Baghdad to Iraqi Embassy in Islamabad. A search of the embassy was conducted with diplomatic protocol, despite protest of the ambassador. Large quantities of arms and ammunitions were recovered. The Iraqi ambassador was declared persona non-grata. On February 15, Bhutto dismissed the NAP governors of Balochistan and NWFP, and its government in Baluchistan. As a protest the NAP-JUI government in NWFP resigned. Stories in the government controlled press began to appear that these arms were intended to be conveyed to the NAP government in Balochistan to be used in its secessionist war against Pakistan. But the NAP leadership denied these charges. According to Bizenjo:

No one bothered to reflect why NAP, which was in power in Balochistan, would want to use such a long and circuitous route via the Iraqi Embassy in far-away Islamabad to smuggle so called Russian weapons into Baluchistan, when they had the 900-mile long Makran sea coast with small ports in addition to nearby Karachi Harbour, available for safely executing such a secretive enterprise?³⁸

Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo was of the view that progressive slogans were incorporated in the PPP manifesto to attract the poor masses and to disintegrate the socialist elements. The inclusion of fundamental rights of the people was duly opposed by the PPP leaders to be incorporated in the 1973 constitution. He blamed Bhutto and the PPP for extinguishing the socialist elements in the country. He condemned the way the anti-*sardari* resolution of the NAP was opposed by the socialists in the PPP. He alleged that due to the alliance of the so called socialists and capitalists in the PPP, the NAP government in Balochistan was dismissed.³⁹ In one of his speeches, he declared:

The result was that to protect *sardars*, *wadiras* and *jagirdars* and save their monopoly on mine power in the province that these socialists come across together and dismissed the elected government. They were well aware that in the presence of a progressive government in Balochistan they would not be able to smoothly rule over Sindh and the Punjab. I say that in the name of socialism they destroyed the very concept of socialism in Pakistan.⁴⁰

Bizenjo was among those leaders who kept a sort of liaison with Bhutto for smoothly managing the political issues between NAP and PPP. However, the tone of Bhutto faded all the available options. In the given circumstances Bizenjo changed his reconciliatory role. Apart from others, he blamed Bhutto for the destruction of socialist and progressive forces in Pakistan.

Bizenjo and the Hyderabad Tribunal

On February 10, 1975, Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao, governor of the NWFP, was assassinated in Peshawar. The same day, in reaction to this incidence, the federal government declared ban on the NAP and confiscated its funds through an executive order. The NAP leaders, including Khan Abdul Wali Khan and Bizenjo, were tried in a tribunal in Hyderabad for anti-state activities. The NAP leaders denied the authenticity of these charges and argued that they were based on the mala-fide intentions. In this respect, Bizenjo gave a long and detailed statement in the Supreme Court. He denied having ever worked against the integrity of Pakistan or having conspired with its enemies. He stated that some individuals in the NAP might have given some statements and indulged in activities deemed inimical to Pakistan but these were their individual acts having nothing to do with the NAP. He argued that the NAP could not be held responsible for individual acts of its members. The Supreme Court upheld the federal government's order of banning the NAP. The NAP leaders, including Wali Khan and Bizenjo, remained in jail till February, 1978 when they were released by an order of the then military ruler General Zia-ul-Haq.⁴¹ After release from jail, Wali Khan joined the National Democratic Party (NDP) which had been established by the leftist and regionalist elements after the banning of the NAP in 1975. Sher Baz Khan Mazari was its founding president. For some time, Bizenjo remained detached from the NDP, and later on developed differences with Wali Khan due to his hostile attitude towards the Saur revolution in Afghanistan under Noor Muhammad Tarakai, Wali Khan's soft corner for Zia's martial law and his dictatorial attitude during the Punjab elections. In 1979 he, along with Gul Khan Naseer and Attaullah Mengal, founded the Pakistan National Party. He remained its president till his death in 1989.

Conclusion

Mir Ghous Bakhsh Bizenjo was a dynamic but controversial politician of Pakistan. He may be truly called the founder of modern politics in Balochistan. He was impressed by the Congress ideology of Indian nationalism and tried for the preservation of his ideal of a united India with Balochistan being its constituent unit. That is why he opposed Balochistan becoming a part of this Muslim state. When goal of the united India not being realized, he became an exponent of an independent Balochistan. After the creation of Pakistan, he became an ardent supporter of the rights of the provinces against centre. He strongly opposed the One Unit of West Pakistan and termed it as a conspiracy of the elite to suppress the ethnic identities and rights of the provinces. He had his own vision of a federal system in which centre would have control only over foreign affairs, defence, currency and communications, the rest of the powers being allotted to the provinces. His concept of federalism was heavily tilted towards the federating units. He never reconciled himself to the idea of a strong centre or a balance between powers of the centre and provinces. He has made strenuous reconciliatory efforts held negotiations with other national leaders during the crisis of 197. He, along with Abdul Wali Khan met Yahya Khan and Mujib-ur-Rahman to prevent the crisis. During Bhutto government, he continued efforts with the same spirit to keep a working relationship with the PPP government at the centre. Due to these positive efforts for the strengthening the federation he has been popular with the title of *Baba-e-Muzakirat* (father of negotiations).⁴² Despite all his regional-cum-national bearings, Bizenjo has always remained under suspicion in the eyes of the successive rulers, both the military and civilian. He was even accused of conspiring with foreign powers for attempting to create an independent Balochistan, a charge which he always denied. He asserted that he wanted greater provincial autonomy within the framework of the federation of Pakistan. These are, after all, only allegations.

References and Notes

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