

Foundations of Students' Activism: A cursory Study in Pakistani Political Settings of Preliminary Democratic Decade

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Abstract

Pakistani politics is mostly based on individuals instead of institutions. There is lack of strength, and strong bonding and this gap give space to other individual leaders or pressure groups to fill this gap. Students being young and energetic are used and exploited and they put their part in this political process. On the other hand, they exert positive influence to run the political system in right direction. After the independence of Pakistan, students played their role in manifestation of political set up, agitation role as a pressure group, and deep involvement into policymaking and the political processes. The creation of Pakistan goes deep into the Pakistan Movement where students played their vital role. Since that time students' unions or groups had accelerated and established strong system in Pakistan. The ongoing study highlights the aspect of pre- and post-partition student activism, with particular deliberation to the early democratic decades (1947-1958).

Keywords: student activism; British Empire; Freedom Movement; Pakistani political setting; Left-Right milieu; Language Issue

Introduction: Retrospect of Early Stages of Students' Activism (1905-1947)

The roots of students' role in Pakistan Movement and their role in Pakistan political affairs are linked with the educational system of the British times (1857-1947). British colonizers established most of the educational institutions in their occupied areas where they found fulfillment of their motives.¹ All the main universities established by the British empire and students could not find any means to express their political opinion as an active group till the start of 20th century when political activism especially in the

¹ Wagoner, Robert, (1972), *Party Politics Pressure Groups*, New York: Thomas Nelson Company, 1972, P.121.

wake of the Partition of Bengal in 1905²It was for the first time that there was students' outburst. The political party system in India needed to evolve; the demand of Indian liberation was not the agenda of two political Parties the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League till the first decade of the 20th century. When political parties were not playing their role for Indian liberation from British Empire, 'student activism' filled this gap and they provided political leadership of the time. For example, during the movement against Partition of Bengal (1905-1911), Hindu students took an active part e.g. the students of Punjab took part in first strike in 1905 that was carried out by the Indian students of King Edward Medical College (est. 1860) at Lahore to protest against the laws of discrimination³. Students nourished their political consciousness by protesting against Rowlett Act 1919, they actively took part in Khilafat Movement (1919-1924), and election campaigns in the longer run.

The pre-independence role of the students consists of two phases. The first phase starts with the War of Independence 1857 and continued up to the formation of the Congress Ministries 1937⁴. During this phase, different educational institutions were established to develop political awareness among the youth and provided platform for students to participate in political activities. Therefore; the institutions at Aligarh (est. 1875) and Nadva-tul-Ulema Lucknow (est. 1894) provided grounds to students, especially they provided platform to Muslim League to flourish.

The second phase of students' political consciousness covers the time span of 1937-1947. They were the forefront of the both movement for the Indian freedom and the movement for Pakistan. For the students of India, it was a period of struggle, revolution and reform. They were delighted with the spirits of success and excited by the predictions newly established state had to offer them. In newly established State of Pakistan, they had to face and handle many problems that got birth with the beginning of the new Islamic State of Pakistan. The rehabilitation of refugees was a major task to be dealt by the new state that is why Quaid-e-Azam detailed to the deputation of students to gather and help the refugees in all aspects because, it was the issue that the

² Iqbal, Muhammad,(n.d), *Education in Pakistan*, p.41.

³ Ahmed, Azizuddin ,(2000), *Pakistan main Talba Tahreek*, Urdu, Students Movement in Pakistan Lahore: Mishal Publications, p.52

⁴ Hodson, H.V., (2001), *The Great Divide: Britain-India-Pakistan*, (Reprint), London: Oxford University Press, p.138

Pakistanis had solve at first priority⁵. With change in the dimension of political scenario of Pakistan, students' activities also diverted their line of action and nature of their activities.⁶ Quaid-e-Azam always valued the students' role in the establishment and development of the nation. In his view, students were the true nation-builders in future and they had to equip themselves by discipline, education and training of the strenuous mission lying ahead of them. Therefore, they should remain ready to shoulder all the responsibilities, which they had to bear in the development and establishment of newly born country in the time of crisis⁶.

Students Political Activism: Left-Right Milieu

When some of the issues of rehabilitation and migration were subsided to some extent, the students involved themselves to politics again and tried to influence the policymaking. At that time, the political parties and students' organizations worked together. Political parties influenced the students and used their talent, skill and potential. Many political parties, which emerged after independence of Pakistan, they tried to bring the existing students' organizations under their control⁷. The Communist Party worked for the formation of Democratic Students Federation (DSF), and Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (IJT) was established by Jamat-i-Islami on 23 December 1947 on the advice of a JI stalwart Maulana Naeem Siddiqui (1916-2002). On the other hand, the Awami National Party (ANP est. 1986; former NAP; est. 1957) influenced the National Students Federation (former DSF renamed NSF in late 1960s). The main purpose of these political parties was to acquire help to form pressure groups and to train and get educated political leadership for them but their motives distracted the innocent students from their main aspirations and dreams of life and they became part of pressure groups⁸. These pressure groups with the passage of time became reason of destruction and violation in the society. Students involved in crimes just to get power and enjoy the

⁵ Afzal, Muhammad Rafiq, (2000), Selected Speeches and Statements of the Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah 1947-48, (ed.), Reprint, NY: OUP, p.449

⁶ Mirza, Sarfaraz Hussain, (1990), *Muslim Student and Pakistan Movement*, Vol.1, Lahore: Pakistan study center Punjab University, p.4

⁷ Mirza, Sarfaraz Hussain, (1990), *Muslim Student and Pakistan Movement*, Vol.1, Lahore: Pakistan study center Punjab University, p.113

⁸ Ahmed, Azizuddin, (2000), *Pakistan main Talba Tahreek*, Urdu, and Students Movement in Pakistan Lahore: Mishal Publications, p.52

political fame.

Language Issue: Student Politics in East Pakistan and Sindh (1948-1952)

After the creation of Pakistan, the central government took such massive steps that gave sense of deprivation to the masses of East Pakistan and Sindh and as a result it affected the emotions of students of colleges and universities.¹¹ Students became advocates of nationalist movements. In some case, political parties used these students to create violence in the country. The 56 per cent population of Pakistan belonged to Bengal that had played vital role in Pakistan Movement (1940-1947). The Muslim League was also formed in Bengal and after thirty years All India Muslim Students Federation was founded in the same province.⁹ There was emergence of controversies but especially about the question of Bengali as a national language of Bengal but central government focused on Urdu as a national language (Dil,2000:142). This controversy went serious and the Bengali students agitated and motivated to run the Bengali Language Movement. Students led many youth rallies and publications were circulated to assert their linguistic and cultural rights as Bengalis. At this stage, students were exploited by the political parties on linguistic grounds and controversies weakened the nation (Dil, 2000:143). In the meantime, East Pakistan Muslim Students League came into being in January 1948. The motives of this league soon changed from Muslim Bengali Nationalism to Bengali Nationalism. Students were unhappy at the policies of the central government especially concerning East Pakistan. The Bengali students were used as a tool on political grounds. It created frustration and chaos to develop a gulf between two parts of the country. In February 1948, Mr. Dhirendranath Datta, a member of the Constituent Assembly from East Pakistan Congress Party, proposed a bill for an amendment in the Assembly Rules in order to grant permission to the members of Assembly to speak in Bengali besides English and Urdu at the Assembly floor. However, the bill was highly opposed by central leaders and rejected by the House. When the students of East Pakistan got the news against the proposed motion, they got infuriated.¹⁰

The linguistic issue reached in the nook and corner of the province, the flag of

⁹ Talbot, Ian, (1999), *Pakistan: A Modern History*, Lahore: Vanguard, p.187

¹⁰ Ahmed, Azizuddin, (2000), *Pakistan main Talba Tahreek*, Urdu, and Students Movement in Pakistan Lahore: Mishal Publications, p.52

movement was in the hands of young blood, so an action committee named the State Language Committee of Action (SLCA) was formulated in Dhaka University in March 1948. The students of Dhaka, Rajshahi, Jessore, Faridpur, Chittagong and other areas showed their concern enthusiastically¹¹. Students of Bengal instead of utilizing their potentials in education and flourishing nation in educational and research fields were used for political purposes. Police used the *lathi* (baton) charge against the students who protested against the House's decision and took part in violence in the province. Most of the students were jailed and rest of the students protested and went on strike from 12 to 15 March 1948. It not only affected the educational system but also involved students in crimes who took law and order in their hands instead of holding books (Salamat, 1992:73).

The situation got worse when the Governor General of Pakistan was going to visit Bengal on 19th of March so the provisional government became nervous and the then CM Khawaja Nazimuddin (1947-1948) sought help of Muhammad Ali Bogra to enter into negotiations with the SLCA. As a result, a resolution was passed that at provisional level Bengali would be official and educational language and recommended that National Assembly to consider Bengali as one of the state languages¹².

MA Jinnah, the Governor General of Pakistan visited East Pakistan as per schedule and in his address, he clearly mentioned one language as a nation language because he thought that no nation could stand consolidated if they had different state languages. He accepted Bengali as a provisional language but declared Urdu as a national language. Those who had already sown the seed of hatred and dispute on the basis of language, used and exploited the youth and used them as a political tool to weaken the nation and by using the educational institutions as political battle fields. Bengali Youth protested and Dhaka University campus became the center for students' meetings in support of Bangla language (Bangladesh, 1950:71). Many rallies were arranged to provoke the masses they educational platforms turned into political rivalries. Jinnah met the representatives of the committee but the youth was so manipulated by negative forces that they were not convinced. In January 1952, this issue was again highlighted on the

¹¹ Ahmed, Moudud, (1976), *Bangladesh: Constitutional Quest for Autonomy 1950-71*, Dhaka university press, 1976, p.20

¹² Umar, Badruddin, (2004) , *The Emergence of Bangladesh: Class Struggles in East Pakistan 1947-48*, Karachi : OUP, p.32.

return of PM Khawaja Nazimuddin (1951-1953) from Karachi; students raised the slogan of wishing Bangla the state language. The Youth League emerged as the most influential organization during the linguistic movement (Dawn, 22 February 1952).

The organization started working more enthusiastically and a strike was observed on 30th January, an All Parties Central Language Action Committee was formed and Qazi Ghulam Mahboob was its convener. On 21st February, the committee decided to call a strike in East Pakistan. The innocent young blood was used to segregate the nation into two nations.

As preparations and planning was under process, the government decided to implement ban under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP) 1898 in the city of Dhaka, banning all the assemblies and demonstrations. The students decided to violate the law and order. Students emerged in groups and raised slogans against the government policies, police came in action in this riot many lives were lost and students got injured. Therefore; since 1952, the 21st February has been observed every year as a day to honor the martyrs of the Language Movement. In solidarity with this movement UNESCO declared 21st February as International Mother Language Day. At last, after two years of this incident the Bengali tension forced and convinced the National Assembly to entitle Urdu and Bengali as to be the official languages. Although the target was achieved yet it indulged the youth on the path of crime to take their rights in any form whether by violating the law and order situation prevailing in the state. Students of Sind remained also energetic and motivated; they launched a movement to detach Karachi from Sindh province. The Sind Muslim Students Federation (SMSF) passed a resolution on 30 January 1948 that they wanted referendum throughout the province. On 20 February 1948, the SMSF celebrated "Karachi Day" and students did not join the educational institutions; instead they took part in processions. Their future was in education but other forces were using their talent in other non-educational activities¹³. The government announced Sind in One Unit but the students of Sind resisted the decision, they raised voice. Sind Awami Mahaz was leading the agitation and students took active part in the political activities of Mahaz. The opponents of One Unit were arrested on the order of Muhammad Ayub Khoro. The

¹³ Umar, Badruddin, (2004) , *The Emergence of Bangladesh: Class Struggles in East Pakistan 1947-48*, Karachi : OUP, p.34.

Youth, who had to lead the nation on the path of progress, were misled by the political forces and it weakens the infrastructure of the nation and the country. In Punjab, students also protested different issues and played their role in law making. The responsibilities of lawmakers were on the shoulders of students, they were involved in all political and controversial forums. Students of Lahore took part in a procession against wheat shortage. They also took part in Khatm-e-Nabuwwat Movement. In mid-1948, anti-Ahmadiya Movement reached at its climax, all Muslim students' federations boycotted it. Ahmadis were declared non-Muslims and removed from the posts. The *Majlis-i-Amal* of Ulema was formulated in July, 1952 and students were an active participant in it. The anti Ahmadya movement gained great support by the students³². In any nation or country when political leaders and the authorities do not perform their duties well then the young generation is the only source to spread awareness and support nation effectively. In our country, students are misled and by the leaders and political men.¹⁴

Student Politics in Doldrums: Dilemma of Martial Law

In 1958, Martial Law was imposed; the political parties in Pakistan had no grounds and resources to face the prevailing situation. There was not a single political party to resist or object the Martial Law. At that time, military was in full swing in setting its rules and punishing the innocent citizens it was only students groups raised their voice against the dictatorship of Ayub Khan.¹⁵

These students' pressure groups proved to be the true leaders but on the other hand, students took the whole system in their hands by violating the law and order in the country. All the political parties used this young blood for the propagation of their programme. Students negated the Ayub Khan's policies of education became the reason of their anger. It was a crucial time for the newly established state to flourish and progress and its youth had to seek knowledge and progress through education, but they were involved in the political issues. They were pushed towards crimes as they violated the law and policies of the administration. Youth's future was at risk because they were involved indirectly or directly in crimes. The emergence of pressure groups affected the nation and stability of the country. The nature of the objectives and role of students as

¹⁴ Khalid, Mansoor, (1989), *TalbaTahreekan*, Vol.11, Lahore: Al BadarPublication1989, P.158.

¹⁵ Hassan, Mahdi, (1996), *Pakistan ki Siyasat awr Awam*, (Urdu), Pakistani Politics and the Public, Lahore: Sarang Publication, p.260

pressure groups is different from one society to the other.

Conclusion

The Pakistani political system is weak and ineffective that is why it leads towards a crisis of leadership. This gap is usually filled by the Para-political forces like students' pressure groups. These pressure groups are exploited by the political leaders and political leadership for their own purposes at the risk of youth's precious future. Students get themselves involved in crimes and violate the law. Although they give new direction to the political development but on the other hand they plague the society.