

The Politics of Left-Wing and Right-Wing in Pakistan: A Critical Appreciation



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Abstract: *This research article provides an insightful understanding of the politics of right and left wing considering the ideological foundations since the pre-partition era and its connotation in the political landscape of Pakistan. Various political organisations emerged venturing secular, socialist, and progressive adherences protecting the rights of peasants, labour unions, minorities and disenfranchised segments of the society through economic and social equality. On the other hand, right-wing encapsulates the nationalist, conservative, and religious orientation mustering support from clergy and conservative strata of society. Furthermore, this paper investigates how these two narratives assisted Pakistan in formulating external and domestic policies taking into account their success and failure in national and global contexts.*

Key Words: Left Wing, Marxist, Progressive

Introduction

Hegelian dialectics advocate the idea that the discourse of history is driven by the ideological evolution of human society. This idealism paves the way for the materialistic and empirical changes in the societal structure that push it ahead. Just like, all other civilizations and states, Indian civilization and later on Pakistani state had also witnessed ideological developments. The major shift and breakthrough in the Indian context is rooted back to 1857 and the rest is evident in history. Aligning the indigenous context with the international arena, the twentieth century had witnessed two ideologies, claiming to be the Meta narratives, on rival lines. This rivalry was prominent enough after WWI and thus resulted in some impacts in India too in the form of some communist groups and associations challenging to imperial agencies of colonizers. These associations grew with the passage of time in numerous shapes and names and continued in Pakistan after separation. Pakistan, the country with thirty-three years of Martial law has witnessed an extreme rise and fall of these ideological associations,

two of them representing Meta narratives of either capitalism or communism or even religion Islam.

Research Objective

The core contention for writing this paper is to find the ideological demarcation that separated the different associations and groups in the political paradigm of Pakistan. Furthermore, this difference witnessed one particular ideology getting victorious over another. It should not be seen as a coincidence that right-wing narratives always get prominence. Rather there must be some substantive factors involved behind their success. These factors also served as primary questions in this paper.

Conceptual Framework

The paper revolves around the ideological differences existing among different socio-political factions of Pakistan. These encapsulate the socialist ideas, that seemed to be born from the writings of German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, advocating for the fiscal equality of all human beings, eradicating existing class differences and capitalist

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exploitation. These ideas were further moderated to align with other demographic factors of the society leading to Maoism or Leninism, represented by different groups in Pakistan too. The associations adhering to Lenin's interpretation of Marxism acclaim Leninism with their identity. Other Marxist groups, following the interpretation of Mao Zedong, in order to establish communism are conceived as Maoist groups. These different interpretations gave rise to different factions, and later on, social democrats too. This idea flourished after the defeat of the Soviets in 1988 mainly. This doctrine is considered to be somehow a Marxist monologue diluted by Fukuyama's thesis, to consider democracy inevitable, even to reach communism too. All of these foundations are laid against the narrative of capitalism advocating for a free market economy and a liberal fabric of society. Being a dominant world order, many political parties and groups of left-wing ideologies including different Marxist groups have failed to counter this capitalist doctrine and consequently, Pakistan is still a capitalist democratic state. Within this framework, another character is important in this ideological wrestling which is the religious fundamentalism demanding the orthodox imposition of Islam and considering it as a way of reviving the glorious past. Different political associations are based on this doctrine in Pakistan and they hold strong positions in the political spectrum discussed in detail afterwards.

Literature Review

Many notable writers and eminent scholars are born in Pakistan representing ideological orientation in their literary works. The difference in literature reflects their ideological leanings on the political arena of the state. In 1930, one of the prominent leftists *Sajjad Zaheer* convinced other leftist intellectuals in India to form the Progressive Writers Association (Jalil, 2014). Soon after the creation of Pakistan, leftists and socialist writers transformed this organisation into the All Pakistan Progressive Writer's Association (APPWA). Progressive papers were established to propagate the leftist narrative. Pakistan Times became the prominent newspaper left under him and the weekly literary paper of *Lail-o-Nehaar* was also launched. Notable figures like *Ustad Daman* had inspired large masses towards this ideology. His Punjabi poems had even impressed *Faiz Ahmed Faiz* to be one of his admirers. *Abid Hassan Manto* was also utilizing the APPWA

platform to spread the ideology through his essays entitled *Nuqta-e-Nazar* (Manto, 2003) *Makhdoom Ameen Faheem*, the founding leader of PPP had also produced huge literature on his radical socialist ideas. One of the most celebrated writers of the left is *Sibt-e-Hasan*, he efficiently and factually penned down his anti-religion, anti-state and progressive ideas in different books. One of his books "*Moosa sey Marx Tak*," holds the position of an academic guide for young students. Two renowned poets *Faiz Ahmed Faiz* and *Habib Jalib* have also published abundant poetic elements of leftist politics in Pakistan. Conversely, the right-wing was also active from the very beginning of Pakistan and was sponsored by the state to inculcate religious, nationalist, and two-nation ideological narratives in the masses. *Jamat-e-Islami* had a large number of publications claiming Pakistan as a religious state. *Maulana Maududi* compelled people to believe in the Islamic foundations of the state. Later on, even *Ayub Khan* established the Writers Guild, where different writers were missioned to propagate anti-left agenda in their writings. A prominent writer, *Quadrat Ullah Shahab* belonged to this production lobby of literature. Later on, writers like *Wasif Ali Wasif*, *Bano Qudsiya* and *Ishfaq Ahmed* were also allegedly called to be rightist writers. However, the right-wing in Pakistan has not seen highly intellectual figures like *Rasool Bux Palejo*. He wrote eight political and eight books on literature. Even contemporary writers like *Hussein Haqqani*, *Ayesha Jalal* and *KK Aziz* are advocating the case of the left much more effectively than the rightist narrative, whose primary source seems to be the textbook of Pakistan Studies and orthodox literature of theism of Islam.

Right-Left Dilemma and History

The identity of political stakeholders as right or left according to their ideological orientation is traced back to the French Revolution of 1789. During this era, the members of Parliament who were against the existing socio-political order of the society and wanted to replace it used to sit on the left side of the King in parliament. Whereas, those who were aligned with the existing policies and social fabric of the French state sat on the right side. This practice generated the terms of right and left political orientations. Afterwards, it was frequently used to identify ideological leanings all across the world. As indicated by definition, leftists always oppose the existing doctrine of society. From

this logical deduction, it can be concluded that all the progressives, anti-nation, anti-capitalism, social democrats, communists, and anarchists are called leftists in the Pakistani paradigm. While, conservatives, Islamists, Capitalists and pro-state, loyalists could be framed as rightists.

This split could be identified during the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. The Russian Revolution and the establishment of the USSR as a major contender for power against the US had an influence all over the world including India. Even Lenin himself had a great interest in this subcontinent. Marx termed this region as "Interesting Country". This keen connection of Soviet Communism with India resulted in the creation of the Communist Party of India in 1925. Later on, with the idea to establish a socialist state, several uprisings and acts of defence against the British Raj were led by the CPI. The notorious Meerut Conspiracy case of 1929 proved to be a catalyst. This case reminded people of the 1924 Kanpur Bolshevik conspiracy case. When *Lala Rajput Rai*, a radical lawyer and leader protested the entrance of the Simon Commission in Lahore in 1928. British police beat him up and he passed away.

These acts of violence and suppression infuriated the ideological rivalries in India. Left-wing political parties especially communists who believed in the violent eradication of capitalists and colonizing structure were brutally quashed by the imperial government. British were supported by right-wing parties like the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. But these crackdowns were not mighty enough to cease the revolutionary mission of Indian leftists thus they kept on carrying their struggle. In Calcutta, the CPI was able to mass mobilize workers heralding the "Workers Socialist Republic" and "Government of the Workers and Poor Peasants." People registered in huge numbers to attend the Kissan Conference through CPI's Kissan Sabah (Grover, 2023). The conference's resolution from 1939 urged complete political freedom and independence which could only be attained via popular power.

In 1939, Germany launched attacks on Austria, the Czech Republic, and Poland. Things were getting turbulent once again. Sooner full-fledged war was announced on France and Russia. Britain plunged into the war and started accumulating support from

colonies. The same thing was demanded from India but communists refused to enter into war on behalf of capitalist Britain. In this regard, India hosted the world's first anti-war workers demonstration on October 22, 1939, led by communist leaders. One of the major ideological mistakes these leaders made was supporting Muslim nationalism. The motive behind this act was to get rid of British colonizers. However, according to Marxist paradigm, a state cannot be based on religion and even left hard liners negate the whole concept of territorial state. But this historical mistake of communists of India could not be denied. Through the verdict of June 3rd, 1947; two capitalist states; India and Pakistan were created on 15 August 1947.

Left After Independent Pakistan

The Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) inherited the two-stage theory of revolution from the CPI. At the time of partition, there was a strong feudal system in Sindh, Baluchistan and Punjab. Communists of India consider these feudal more harmful and exploitative than bourgeoisie politicians therefore they joined the Muslim League in accordance with their theory. They sided with the bourgeoisie in the Muslim League against the feudal rulers. The CPP was a "Stalinist" group like the CPI, aimed at setting up a socialist country because it had been forecasted that the newly emerged country was prepared for the revolution.

Leftists of Pakistan on their way

Mian Iftikhar-ud-din, who was the former communist leader and had joined the All India Muslim League, demanded land reforms to water down the feudal structure. But AIML rejected this demand after the death of Jinnah. This denial was obvious because Muslim league had previously joined hands with feudalism to support their cause of independence and in return, they would be provided protection by the state. This refutation urged Mian Iftikhar ud Din to resign from the Muslim League. He established his own leftist party named Azad Pakistan Party (APP) with a manifesto of bringing democratic socialism to Pakistan. This platform also initiated the progressive publications named Pakistan Progressive Papers and some other magazines.

During that time, the CPP was also very active and successful in organizing labour, trade unions, and peasant organizations between 1948 and 1951 in

Pakistan. The Muslim League was outstripped by the CPP, particularly in Karachi, Lahore, and Dhaka. The country was soon to be a socialist state but state-sponsored propaganda was spread in the form of the Rawalpindi conspiracy case and *General Akbar* was held the main character. Many other communist leaders, including renowned poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz were arrested. Some fled foreign and others were behind bars. This was the first full-fledged clampdown on left-wing politics in Pakistan. Communist Party was banned in the alleged case of trying to overthrow the government through military-quo thus it had to come up with some 'front organizations'.

The Democratic Student Federation (DSF) was one of these that emerged in 1952 in West Pakistan as the largest conglomerate consisting of students. This group was successful in procuring the University of Karachi's new campus owing to its manoeuvre in 1953 for improving the educational institutions. Unfortunately, the CPP and its front organisation DSF were banned due to the 1954 unrest in which many civilians were killed. Initially, these left-oriented organisations were dominant. Over the national language controversy, Muhammad Ali, the leader of the Muslim League split from the party and established Ganatantri Dal (GD). As an alliance of the United Front, GD secured a large number of votes in the provincial election of 1954. Rightist groups became overwhelmed from the rising momentum of the Left. In 1955, NSF was founded to counter the influence of the left in educational institutions. Eventually, the former DSF members "infiltrated" this student union and transmuted the ideological stance.

The year 1957 had great significance for the politics of the left in Pakistan. Eight parties forged and founded the National Awami Party (NAP). These include: Bacha Khan's Khudai Khidmatgar, Awam Jamat from Balochistan, Sindhi Mahaz, Awami League (Bhashani Group), Ganatantri Dal, and Mian Iftikhar Azad Pakistan Party (Paracha, 2014). The Left was dominating the political spectrum. However, the uprising of the working class in Lahore overtook the country as the capitalist setback escalated. Ayub Khan declared martial law, crushed the movement in 1958 and restricted all political associations. After the lifting of the ban in 1962, the NAP emerged as Pakistan's most powerful political party with mass public support. These left politics became so accepted that the NSF also adopted the same ideology in 1955.

The year of 1965 could be called the most unfortunate year for Left politics in Pakistan. This year, left wing faced the first major breakthrough with the split of NAP into Pro-Moscow and Pro-China factions. By this time, Ayub Khan had understood that his pro-American policy was not producing any fruitful results; therefore, he agreed with Zulfikar Bhutto's idea of pro-Chinese policy. Soon, Pakistan and China were close to each other. In September war broke out with India and China fully supported by calling it the People's War. Thus, a pro-Chinese faction of communists also supported Ayub Khan. At the start of the same year, NAP had supported Fatima Jinnah as the candidate for President against Ayub Khan starting the downfall of the Left in Pakistan. The capitalist boom after WW2 had also vital impacts on Pakistan. The process of industrialization got impetus. The left, instead of associating with the proletariat class, started finding progressive people in the bourgeoisie. The sloganeering was the only source of contact with the working class. Meanwhile, on September 1, 1967, former foreign minister Ayub Khan, unhappy with the Tashkent Agreement broke out with him and established his own socialist organisation: Pakistan People's Party (PPP). It was desired to be progressive and democratic with three different wings including Islamist, socialist, liberals, and progressive (Tribune, 2022).

By that time, both factions of communists, pro-China-Moscow were supporting Ayub against Bhutto. The split in NAP became clearly visible with the Wali group tilted towards the Soviets and Bhashani towards China (Tariq, 2018). This support to Ayub remained no more when NAP Wali actively participated in Anti Ayub Demonstrations in 1968. NAP Wali was further fractioned into the Mazdoor Kisaan Party (MKP). This faction was somehow radical. It did not believe in democracy and called it a bourgeoisie method of governance. MKP was motivated by Mao Zedong's 1949 Chinese Revolution and decided to initiate a violent resistance against the country's landed gentry. Training and provision of equipment to peasants was started in Charsadda District by the MKP. By 1972-73, the guerilla fighters had driven out landowners and taken over significant tracts of territory. The land was divided up among the villagers.

Leftists flooded the political landscape of Pakistan. Baloch Student Organisation (BSO) was also an important player, founded in 1967 to secure the

political and educational interests of Baloch students in Karachi. It worked in alliance with the National Awami Party (NAP) due to Marxist ideological leanings. In the contemporary time, five of the BSO factions are still operating in Pakistan for Balochistan separation. The NSF started agitation against Ayub Khan for supporting the capitalist ideas and Western form of government in the year 1968. However, several groups emerged due to a split in this student federation and joined hands with NAP and Bhutto.

By 1970, ZA Bhutto was accused of drifting away from his socialist mission and he had joined hands with feudal of Sindh to increase the vote bank in upcoming elections. This had created a strong sense of grievance among hard-line Marxist leaders of the PPP. They broke away with ZA Bhutto including Rasool Bux Palejo. As a left-wing Sindhi nationalist party Awami Tehreek was established in 1970 by academics and activists from the Sindhi middle-class. Rasul Bux Palejo, a Marxist, founded the party primarily to oppose the "hegemony" of progressive Sindhi nationalist parties which Palejo blamed for being under the sway of feudal lords.

The 1970s was the year of general elections in Pakistan and finally, the time of democracy had come. Prior to this election, NAP was offered to make an alliance with PPP but it refused. The result of the 1970 elections brought ultimate victory to the PPP in West Pakistan and pure leftists were defeated once again. However, the PPP also called it socialist but ZA Bhutto had joined hands with feudal to get votes and it was alleged not to be socialist anymore. During the 1970 elections, in Balochistan and NWFP, the majority of seats were won by NAP Wali. They formed their governments in 1972 in these provinces. Two provinces came under the Pakistan's People's Party as East Pakistan gained independence.

When NAP Wali formed provincial governments in Sindh and Balochistan, its previous faction Mazdoor Kisaan Party (MKP) came into direct armed conflict with NAP and accused it of being the protector of the capitalist elite misusing and misrepresenting the socialist narrative. NAP Wali alleged central government of the PPP for using MKP against it to destabilize its provincial governments.

In the very next year, NWFP witnessed a face-to-face confrontation between two leftist parties. MKP started a militant movement and occupied a large area

of the Swat region. They confiscated the private lands and redistributed them among peasants. In the very same year 1973, the central government of PPP dismissed the NAP government in Balochistan by accusing it of helping Baloch separatists. After two years in 1975, a PPP minister was killed at Peshawar University and thus NAP was banned! By that time, MKP had also been divided into three factions due to internal conflicts. Thus, the left in Pakistan was again fallen and broken.

The next general elections were to be held in 1977. In these elections, leftist parties once again tried to get power. They formed their own alliance of 9 parties the National Democratic Alliance (NDP) to counter PPP. Meanwhile, General Zia imposed another martial law in the country and all the political shows were suspended. But this fact remains a history that the Left remained highly active and mobilized in opposing Zia policies and government. They came up with many new faces to counter Zia's element in society. One of these was the establishment of Black Eagles. This student group was established in Lahore in 1980. Despite having a violent moniker, BE was primarily an organisation founded to fight the Gen. Zia regime and the right-wing organizations' growing electoral power on college campuses. Many former NSF members are also part of it.

Black Eagles had some success in Lahore's student union elections and won some major positions in universities. In 1987, it was abolished. In the same course period, militant left-wing organizations were rising. The AZO (Al-Zulfiqar Organisation), which emerged in 1979 on leftist ideology, was the new revolutionary group founded by *Shahnawaz* and *Murtaza Bhutto*. It was an armed guerilla fighter group with a purpose to end Zia-ul-Haq fascism and establish a communist state. In order to get support from Soviet soldiers they set up their base camp in Kabul under a socialist government.

In 1980, guerilla fighters of this organisation looted the banks and killed the jury members who executed Bhutto. A member of this group, *Salamullah Tipu*, hijacked a PIA plane in 1981. The issue stirs resentment between Murtaza Bhutto and Benazir. The attempt to assassinate Zia during his India visit created a tussle between Tipu and Murtaza. Ultimately, the AZO disintegrated in 1992 and turned into a Sindhi nationalist entity. Murtaza was killed in

1996 through an alleged police encounter (Paracha, 2018).

The struggle of the left remained continued. In 1981, to oppose the militant dictatorship of Zia ul Haq, the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) was formed. This movement was joined by all leftists, liberals, and socialists to get rid of the dictator. The faction of Mazdoor Kisaan Party (MKP), Pakistan National Party, and Awami Tehreek of Rasool Bux Palejo, forged an alliance of nine parties established in 1977 to form Awami National Party (ANP). The next few years were again the highs and lows for leftist groups in Pakistan. Due to the fusion of various leftist and bourgeois nationalist parties in 1987, the National Revolutionary Party (QIP) was once again created; however, it was abolished the next year.

When the Workers Party and the Qaumi Mahaz-e-Azadi, two Maoist parties, combined in 1988 to establish the AJP (Awami Jamhori Party), it was only a matter of months before the merger broke down just before an election. Meanwhile, the USSR's breakdown was a major setback for the left all over the world including Pakistan. This was the time for democracy to come back therefore the Struggle Group was already working within the PPP when it was established in the Netherlands in 1980 without compromising socialism. This decade of make and break saw the merger of the Communist Party of Pakistan with the Mazdoor Kisaan Party to form the Communist Mazdoor Kisaan Party. Finally, this charged atmosphere came to an end in 1999, when General Musharraf took over the government in a military coup and Benazir and Nawaz Sharif were sent into exile. The politics in general and leftist politics in particular remain stagnant for the next 10 years.

Later in 2012, leftists made an effort to reunite. In November this year, three parties, the Labour Party, the Awami Party and the Worker Party joined

to form the Awami Worker Party of Pakistan (AWP). The latest rising leftist political group appeared in 2018 in the name of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). It has the anti-state narrative regarding Afghanistan insurgency and condemns Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan on behalf of Kashmir. It openly challenged the radical policies of Taliban and other terrorist groups, opposes the state's sponsored genocide of ethnic minorities and advocates for Pashtun identity in Pakistan. Currently, PTM could be called the only active and rising group left in Pakistan. The state has officially banned it but still, a large number of masses are getting associated with it.

Conclusion

There had been a constant tussle between the right and left ideological factions of Pakistan. This tussle had begun right after the independence and had traces in the pre-partition politics of India. During the initial years, leaders appeared to be contradictory in their ideological framework. These ideological differences grew into the rivalry that fetched many losses in Pakistan's history. Beginning from the Rawalpindi conspiracy case to the establishment of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), the left has always struggled hard but could never manage to get the absolute central authority. Consequently, Pakistan is still a religious state deriving its foundations from nationalism and Islam (two paradoxical ideas). Leftists had made many blunders in the form of their cyclic approach of decamping which is discussed in depth. Until the 1970s, leftists had been in a very strong position and they may have achieved the power to turn the country on a new track. However, internal disputes further strengthened the rightists instead they failed to avail themselves of golden opportunities and the rest is history!

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