



Political Existence and Question of Historical Agency: Performance of Pakistan People's Party in Punjab (1999-2018)

Muhammad Yasir Ali

Assistant Professor

Department of History and Civilization Studies

Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan

Yasirbzu@yahoo.com (CA)

Abstract

Pakistan People's Party has gone through difficult times since 1999. They went through split in the parliamentary party by giving birth to 'parliamentarians', lost leadership, attained power and experienced the lowest electoral score in the political history between 1999 and 2018. These two decades have been crucial not only for the Pakistan People's Party but also for the overall political development in Pakistan. Enforcement of emergency, introduction of 'enlightened moderation', war on terror, charter of democracy, eighteenth amendment and above all the slogan of 'tabdili' accredit this era for a deeper analysis of the events. Plethora of work has been done on the political, social and economic aspects of this period in the political history of Pakistan. This paper analyses the relationship of political existence with the historical agency to understand the events of political success and failure in the light of historical standards of existence. It defines the historical standards on the basis of sociocultural dynamics of society and on the basis of these standards analyses the performance of Pakistan People's Party. It argues for the deterministic presence of History as an agent in the social and political development. This paper extends the argument, while answering the question of nature of socio-cultural and historical relevance of a political party, to the understanding of existing material on political development, understanding of socio-cultural transitions and by understanding the emerging socio-cultural realities. It concludes the discussion with linking the performance of Pakistan People's Party with the historical dimension.

Keywords: Pakistan People's Party, Politics, History of Pakistan

1. Introduction:

The question of political existence has been important for both political leaders and political parties. The expression of political existence in modern political structures is relative to its historical context and historical situation. If we recognize history as a process then it consists of dialogues between ever changing socio-cultural values and traditions. Continuity of historical process and its socio-cultural aspects detach history from the past and relate it with the present contemporary world.¹ Existing literature examines political personalities and parties through particular methods of political criticism. This examination is compartmentalized in a complex way. Most of the analysts do political analysis by taking the particularities of the modern political structures. They detach particular aspects from the political and democratic structures. The democratic and political spirit of detached parts is compromised. This compromise remains hidden in the debris of certain mediatized propaganda culture. This is very easy and common practice in post-colonial states. This is also an established tradition in Pakistani context. It is the application of these reductionist angels that pave way for the personalization of politics and alienation of political structures from the spirit of modernity.

This conduct has been maintained from the early period of political development in Pakistan. It is evident from the written history of period from 1947 to 1958 that partial observations dominate the sources. This period is mostly entitled as the period of failure of political development. It is needless to mention that this period witnessed certain political and constitutional confusions but still burden of responsibility cannot be largely put on the shoulders of politicians. Accounts of Ayub Khan's period also try to maintain the ambitiousness of politicians and their dividend behavior. From the leadership of NAP to the personalities of Mujeeb al-Rehman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, political personalities are blamed to be ambitious and intriguing. In the recent history, Pakistan People's Party is an example. Political performance of PPP has been observed in the particular political language. Party is included in the list of main actors behind dismemberment of Pakistan. Party leadership is represented as feudal.² Another cultural expression to alienate party from its electorate is to defame the party leadership on sectarian basis.³ Their secular stance is related to the individual aspect of western modernity instead to political secularism.⁴ Other allegations are political

mismanagement and corrupt attitude of the leadership. Even the evolutionary trends in PPP's political career are perceived as a result of certain determinism and as a reaction of rival party particular stance or action.⁵ Its historical reflections are presented as non-historical and degenerative. PPP has largely been described only as a medium that provided means of political expressions to the Bhutto family.⁶ These kinds of analysis and approaches have extended certain cultural influences that go against the PPP as a political party, especially in Punjab province. This study is an attempt to understand the historical and socio-cultural aspects of party's performance in Punjab. It will focus on the historical process as an agent of political change. This methodology is adopted to expand the understanding of political success and failures instead of limiting it to the political reappraisals or victimizations. Before discussing the historical causes of poor performance of PPP, it is pertinent to mention its traditional stance.

2. Historical Evolution of PPP (1967-1999)

Cultural script of PPP combined religion and modernity by fusing Islam with socialist ideology.⁷ Party, from the day of its creation argued for the socialist state structure.⁸ They took part in 1970 and 1977 elections with the socialist and Islamic slogans. Policy of nationalization of industry and educational institutions along with land reforms manifested the socialist agenda of Z.A. Bhutto. Religion was maintained by raising the voice for the right of self-determination of Kashmiris in Indian held Kashmir, initially. Bhutto also appeared to the champion of international unity of Muslim countries.⁹ His policies and political script was focused to attract masses and middle classes from both urban and rural areas of Pakistan. He was successful in this regard and his popularity is evident from the response of electorate from western part of the country. While in power, Bhutto took great care of his electoral slogans. It worked well, in the particular social context of that period. Rural life was dominated by feudalism with a clear divided between haves' and have nots'. Peasants and laborers supported the party on the basis of its socialist agenda.¹⁰ In a way both the party and its electoral base had a shared context. Masses in the rural and urban side had scene certain hopes of betterment in the economic and political reforms of Ayub Khan Regime. Same was the case with middle classes that they had a modern experience of political representation and economic opportunities in

Ayub Khan's period.¹¹ It is still debatable whether economic, political and agrarian reforms of Ayub Khan proved to be fruitful or not, yet it is established that Ayub Khan tried to modernize the state and governance.¹² They were able enough to understand the modern political slogans and could also trust them. Ayub Khan also tackled the question of religious authority in a modern and institutionalized way.

Bhutto period agricultural and economic developments reflected themselves in Punjab till the end of Zia regime. A process of social change was initiated both in the rural and urban Punjab. Although the mechanism of agrarian reforms was not maintained as per true spirit of reform yet it created certain social impacts. It created a new class of land owners.¹³ This period also witnessed an emerging relationship between sources and means of agricultural production. Agricultural lands were started to be contracted on rent. Contract farming rose in this era and its social expressions were different from that of feudalism or land lordship.¹⁴ But still the power in rural Punjab remained in the hands of so-called feudal. This evolutionary process gave a challenge to feudalism as a system of social relations and connectivity but, to an extent, kept its cultural make-up. This is evident from the fact that feudalism was culturally utilized by the emerging classes to frame new and popular identities.¹⁵ A new business class was also flourishing at the urban centers in Punjab. Afterwards *Anjuman-iTajran* had a vital role in the politics in the urban centers of Punjab.¹⁶ It was in this context that Party went through a complicated shift from socialist-religious script with the new script that advocated free economy, federal state and parliamentary form of government.¹⁷ As narrated above that it was a complicated shift and this complication is evident from the continuity of old socialist slogans till 1990s. Party under the leadership of Benazir Bhutto took an altogether different stance by leaving the socialist model of Z.A. Bhutto. She, instead, advocated the cause of federal state with parliamentary form of government by advocating provincial autonomy and modernization of governance.¹⁸ She also relied on the so-called feudal electorate in Punjab to counter the electoral claims of emerging PML (N) and rest of religio-political parties. Party's new rival PML (N) scripted capitalist models in religious rapping and it went well against PPP.¹⁹ Process of social transformation was going on and was rapidly changing the nature of social networking and creating demands for new scripts. It was basically the rival scriptural claims that kept PPP and

PML (N) in entanglement throughout nineties. PML (N) had an edge that both party and its leadership were also the part of emerging social classes against the traditional place of PPP. Before going to describe the socio-cultural and historical reasons behind the poor performance of PPP, next section describes the major socio-cultural and historical transformations that occurred in the last two decades.

3. Socio-cultural Developments (1999-2020)

Twenty first century had an interesting start in Pakistan. Pakistan was being governed by a chief executive who was trying to justify his rule by engaging particular political forces. Pervaiz Musharraf, apparently appeared to be an enlightened and moderate chief executive, initially tried to make his way with the help of religio-political parties and the political parties inclined towards right wing.²⁰ He has not only to extend his credibility to people but also to manage the popularity of PML (N) and to extent of PPP in Punjab. War against terrorism turned to political tables in Pakistan and Musharraf regime had to adjust her political composition.²¹ It was not only politics but society as a whole was transforming. People in the first decade of twenty first century in Pakistan had been the eyewitness of Islamization of Zia regime and regional *Jihadism* of 1990s. They also had particular educational training that was being offered both by public and private sectors. These socio-political transformations gave new composition and outlook to existing social institutions and cadres. This part describes these emerging patterns.

3.1. New Orientation of Social strata:

Feudalism has been generously used term in Pakistani context. Traditionally, society in Punjab is feudal dominated but with the passage of time it has gone through major transformations. These transformations have expanded the meaning system attached with the feudalism. This transformation, no doubt has expanded the meaning system of feudalism but it happened at the cost of its traditional structural formation. Feudalism, from the 1980s onward, can be categorized into two parts i.e. feudal as a social cadre and feudalism as a system of meanings. Feudal cadre had been struggling hard to maintain its social sway from 1980s. They had to face new challenges from the emerging middle classes in the urban centers. Emerging classes stood

up with rival electoral claims and it happened in the shape of introduction of business community in politics.²² They also had to face an industrial challenge from this emerging class. The processing units of their agricultural products were in the hands of newly emerging business class who manipulated the prices and production. When it became difficult for the land owners to comprehend this system, they begin to rent their lands to land contractors.²³ Their size was also going on to shrink day by day. It was the cultural alienation of this class that compelled them to shift their capital from agricultural production to urban investment. After passing through the challenging last two decades of previous century, feudalism as a class transformed itself in the earlier two decades of twenty first century. With the inclusion of new land owing classes they have established themselves on corporate lines.²⁴ This modernization brought feudalism a new social face. Peasantry and subject classes are invisible in new structure, for example. They have supported their agricultural production with self-industrialization. They have emerged as an altogether different phenomenon as compared to the feudal classes from 1970s to 2000.

On the other hand, feudalism as a system of meaning got flourished, both in the urban and rural Punjab. It was more protected by the emerging classes as compared to the traditional feudal. Although the social transformation was at peak yet feudalism was playing significant role in shaping the identities in Punjab. A sharp division between *kami* and *khandani* and diverse and complicated usage of different titles of grace made the newly emerging classes saviors of feudalism.²⁵ Emerging classes required respectable identities, especially in western and south parts of the province. Change of cast, for example, became the order of the day. Feudal title of grace like *Nawab*, *Makhdoom* and *Malik*, that were conferred upon the traditional feudal class by the British Colonial administration were self-adopted by this emerging classes.²⁶

Similar structural changes can be traced in the masses and middle classes. These two decades also witness the remarkable increase in the statistics of middle classes in the country. These middle classes do not resemble the middle classes of 60s and 70s. They are less inclined towards west and use alternative blends of modernity with religion for their identification. Their background representations contain Islamization, sectarianism and imprints of war on terror. They are living

in the age of expansion of media and popularity of social media. Now almost everyone has his or her own social media accounts that are relating them with their contemporary world.²⁷ Now they are not only readers and listeners of the traditional media but through social media account they themselves participate in the construction and reconstruction of mediatized realities. This aspect was missing in the lower masses and middle classes of sixties and seventies. They are reluctant to accept any idea or practice that does not contain a religious symbol. They are also educated on different lines. In other words they have different historicity as compared to their predecessors. This expressional difference of their 'historical being' compels them to act differently and also requires different aspects of social mobility.

3.2. New Orientation of Socio-Spatiality:

From academic discourse to journalistic debates, the terminologies related to the socio-spatial identities are still being used in their traditional meanings. A sharp distinction between urban and rural life is still maintained on the same basis as were defined in the traditional culture. Like social strata, their socio-spaces have also gone through certain drastic transformations. Without considering these transformations, true sense of historical development and process of history remains incomprehensible.

New social relations in urban and rural sides emerged in these two decades. The changing nature of relationship gave a new orientation to social institutions.²⁸ Disempowerment of real feudal class coincided with a transformation of agri-based social relations. Peasants are replaced with monthly paid workers and cultivation of land is largely in the hands of growers with modest land ceiling or in the hands of agricultural land contractors. Currently, in Punjab, that particular peasantry is absent from the scene that once had been the audience of PPP.

Rural side is also 'urbanized' in a sense that villages in contemporary Punjab have advanced infrastructure of communication and education.²⁹ Rural side in Punjab is having both public and private sector involvement in education till higher secondary level at least. They are well connected with cities and have many common grounds of understanding that they share with the urban fellows. This is also evident

from the fact that share of business community in the political representation of rural side has increased in the last two decades.

Urbanization has been increasing since the earlier times. From the period of Ayub Khan onward, cities are continuously increasing their size. Lahore, Gujranwala, Faisalabad and Multan have witnessed a remarkable population growth in the last two decades.³⁰ This 21st century urbanization is different from that previous one. It is facilitated with advanced technology. Development of new sense of enclave societies is also changing the urban life styles. Defense Housing Authority and Baharia Town group have revolutionized the urbanization.³¹ Their enclave model is also adopted by the rest of investors in real estate business. These enclave societies are creating new patterns of social stratification. They are presenting new sense of neighborhood and have also introduced newer concept of proprietorship by replacing the registry with file. These new forms of urbanization are creating new sectarian and ethnic sensitivities that will be appearing soon in the sectarian and ethnic discourse in Pakistan. Not only PPP but also PML (N) is struggling to attract these newly emerging classes. As these trends are newer, and are not directly related to the high or traditional culture, in Punjab, so these can be termed as popular socio-culture trends.

4. Resultant Socio-cultural patterns and political Confusions:

These are popular socio-cultural trends with entirely different understanding of state and society. The people who are living in these newly emerging social structures are subject to various cultural confusions and these cultural confusions are evident in their social, religious and political behavior. These resultant cultural confusions are directly affecting the historical process. People are unable to understand modern political language. They also distance themselves from the traditional socio-cultural structures due to their new social identities. They still consider the diminished feudalism to be existent and consider PPP as representative of feudalism. They usually equate presidential form of government with any Islamic models of governance of their own choice.³² They consider demand for provincial autonomy as an act against the solidarity and integrity of state.³³ In this scenario PPP and any other political party are left with limited choice of political

performance. Either they struggle to maintain the true spirit of modern politics and modern state or to compromise the modern spirit of political institutions for an 'alternative' political institutionalization.

These rapid social transformations are creating cultural confusions in politics. It is a period of presence of diversity of popular cultural trends that are presenting the historical process in certain artificial manner. It is not a simple task for any performer to be the part of this process with a clear script. In case of PPP, a transformation from Socialist to capitalist approach was easier as compared to a get a cultural credibility of change of leadership from Benazir Bhutto to Asif Ali Zardari. The failure of PPP in the extension of its political ideals to electorate in Punjab is more historical in nature based on the standards of socio-cultural relevance.

5. Historical analysis of PPP's Performance:

Discussion in the above two sections conclude that historical process in Pakistan has been transformed with the changing socio-cultural patterns. This transformation is natural as per the evolutionary nature of history. It is an epistemological issue. The creation of political binaries has played havoc with the historical epistemology of the public. It is not only PPP that has fallen a pray to this two-fold socio-cultural confusion but its partners in the political field also face the similar issues. Case of religio-political groups is even worse than PPP.³⁴ Religio-political parties, even, could not benefit the background representations of Islamization, Jihad and war against terror. Their electoral support has been decreasing throughout the last two decades. As mentioned above that this socio-cultural confusion is two-fold. It is evident from the fact that on one end PPP herself remained unable to adapt to the changing demands of historical process. On the other hand this confusion was maintained by the political binaries that have been trying to fix the political identities and ideologies by going against the tides of history. Their fixation neglected the socio-cultural and everchanging nature of history. This negation not only created the element of extremism but at the same time drove many political and ideological structures towards the social and historical irrelevancy. PPP has been diminished from the political scenario. They are still part of the politics. Although party's electoral support has been decreased yet it could re-assert its electoral

and political claims by reconstructing their socio-cultural and historical understanding.

References:

- ¹ Daniel Little, *New Contributions to the Philosophy of History*, (New York: Springer, 2010), 1
- ² Stanley Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan: His life and time*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7-10
- ³ K.B. Sayeed, "How Radical is the Pakistan People's Party", *Pacific Affairs*, 48, no.1 (1975): 42-59
- ⁴ Saneela Jawad, *Feudal Lords continue to dominate the 'democratic' system*, *Pakistan Today*, August 21, 2016 ⁵ Jalil Ahmed, Sajid Hussain Turmani and Kashif Ahmed, "Ideological Transformation In Pakistan People's Party: From Z.A Bhutto To Asif Ali Zardari (1970-2013)", *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6, no. 10 (2022): 1788-1798 ⁶ Pakistan People's party has been identified by a particular section as a medium of representation that was constructed by Bhutto family. According to them PPP has just to serve the purpose of dynastic politics. They neglect the fact that even this hereditary succession is not a simple phenomenon but it also had to pass through certain annals of political culture for authenticity and validity.
- ⁷ Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, (London: Hurst and Company, 1998), 218
- ⁸ Babafemi A Badejo, "Bhutto and the PPP's Socialism", *India Quatrely*, 44, no. ¾ (1988): 240-252 ⁹ Rafi Raza Sanghro and Jalil Ahmed Chandio, "Emerging the Concept of Islamic Socialism in Pakistan: Historical Analysis on Political Debates of 1970-1971 Election Campaign", *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 8, no.2 (2019): 51-61
- ¹⁰ Ronald J. Herring, "Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and 'Eradication of Feudalism in Pakistan'", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15, no. 12 (1980): 599-614
- ¹¹ W.M. Dobell, Ayub Khan as President of Pakistan, *Pacific Affairs*, 42, no. 3 (1969): 294-310
- ¹² Yasmin Saikia, "Ayub Khan and Modern Islam: Transforming Citizens and the Nation in Pakistan", *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 37, no.2 (2014): 292-305
- ¹³ Shaikh Muhammad Rashid, "Land Reforms in Pakistan", *Social Scientist*, 13, no. 9 (1985): 44-52
- ¹⁴ Sukhpal Singh, "Institutional and Policy Aspects of Punjab Agriculture: A Smallholder Perspective", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47, no.4 (2012): 51-57
- ¹⁵ Muhammad Yasir Ali Khan, *Sectarian Discourse in Pakistan: A case Study of District Jhang (1979-2009)*, (Munich: Grin Verlag, 2020), 65-71
- ¹⁶ Javed, Umair. "Ascending the Power Structure: Bazaar Traders in Urban Punjab." In *New Perspectives on Pakistan's Political Economy: State, Class and Social Change*, edited by Matthew McCartney and S. Akbar

- Zaidi, 199–215. *South Asia in the Social Sciences*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)
- ¹⁷ Badejo, “Bhutto and the PPP’s Socialism”
- ¹⁸ Jalil Ahmed, Sajid Hussain Turmani and Kashif Ahmed, “Ideological Transformation In Pakistan People’s Party: From Z.A Bhutto To Asif Ali Zardari (1970-2013)”
- ¹⁹ Zubaida Zafar and Umbreen Javaid, “Religion and Politics in Pakistan: A Historical Study of Islamization”, *The Journal of Political Science*, xxxvii (2019): 82-95
- ²⁰ Vali Nasr, *Military Rule, Islamism and Democracy in Pakistan*, *Middle East Journal*, 58, no. 2 (2004): 195-209
- ²¹ Ibid
- ²² Nazeer Maher and Tariq Malik, *Changing Patterns of Political Dynamics in Pakistan: Exploring Grassroots Social and Political Realities*, (Islamabad: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021), 78-81
- ²³ Sukhpal Singh, “Institutional and Policy Aspects of Punjab Agriculture: A Smallholder Perspective”,
- ²⁴ Ibid
- ²⁵ Khan, *Sectarian Discourse in Pakistan: A case Study of District Jhang (1979-2009)*, 65-71
- ²⁶ Ibid ²⁷ Muhammad Muzaffar, Sarwat Chodhry and Naila Afzal, “Social Media and Political Awareness in Pakistan: A Case Study of Youth”, *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 3, no.2 (2019): 1-13
- ²⁸ Khan, *Sectarian Discourse in Pakistan: A case Study of District Jhang (1979-2009)*, 71-78
- ²⁹ A.Z. Mughal, “Rural urbanization, land, and agriculture in Pakistan”, *Asian Geographer*, 36, no.1 (2019): 81-
- ⁹¹
- ³⁰ Nasira Jabeen, Umm-e- Farwa and Musa Jadoon, “Urbanization in Pakistan: A Governance Perspective”, *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 54, no.1 (2017): 127-136
- ³¹ Defense Housing Society and Baharia Town group have successfully launched enclaved housing societies. From the status of proprietorship to the sensibilities of neighborhood, many aspects are new in the context of society and culture in Punjab.
- ³² After the passage of 18th amendment in the constitution of 1973, the opponents of the amendment oppose it by supporting the cause of strong center and Presidential form of government. This trend has been prominent on social media.
- ³³ Sadia Sherbaz and Kareem Khan, *18th Amendment and deprivation*, The Express Tribune, March 13, 2020 ³⁴ Hasnul Amin, “The Islamist Politics in the Era of Neoliberal Globalization The Case of Jamaat-E-Islami Pakistan”, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5, no.15 (2014): 507-518