

ESTIMATE OF THE NATURE AND CONTENT OF PAKISTANI ELECTORATE-FROM 1947 TO DATE

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ABSTRACT

The people living within the main land of Pakistan comprise many societies, composed of more than one factors. There is a variety of religious sects and factions, ethnic and linguistic groups, the ruling elite class with aristocratic designs, and deprived and destitute poor classes with rural urban discrimination. Seemingly, Pakistani nation is held together by external compulsion or by sheer necessity or by the dint of the historical factors. These and many other phenomena put a question mark on the rationale of national unity today. This can be further explained by analyzing the factors that have cultivated the regionalism and provincialism in the country, which have led to the succession of unstable governments, and political instability. Furthermore, the periodic eruption of religion and ethnic tensions that at times led to the bloodshed and lawlessness in different parts of the Pakistan is basically the by-product of historical process as well as cultural variations that lie beneath the surface and ready to be ignited time and again. In the article in hand, an effort has been made to present a careful estimate of the nature and content of Pakistani electorate right from the creation in 1947 to its modern day role as electoral college in country's politics.

Keywords: Democracy, Religion, Politics, Electorates, Cultural Variations, Education System

INTRODUCTION

Religion-Politics Interplay and Designing the Nature of Country's Electorate

Religion played a vital rather decisive role in the struggle for a separate homeland during the Indian Independence Movement (1857-1947).¹ Although there were many other factors yet religion overlapped and masterly controlled the circumstances. In the context of Pakistan different religions and different sects establish the mindset of Pakistani electorate.² This is so because of the mistaken conception about the religion. There is a variety of philosophic arguments to show that the religion need not be the cause of disunity. On the other hand, secularists argue that the Pakistan movement was motivated by secular rather than religions considerations and, henceforth, religion should cease to be the bone of contention. They take Quaid-i-Azam M.A. Jinnah's address to the inaugurals session of the first Constitution Assembly of Pakistan (CAP) on 11 August 1947, as the guiding principle in this connection that "You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion cast or creed....that has nothing to do with the business of the state."³ Without going into historical details, this fact cannot be ignored that from the very beginning, Hindu resentment against Muslim rule in India (1206-1857) and the Muslim Communalism (1867-1947), motivated them to exclude Muslims from political and economic life.⁴ The Muslim community was overwhelmingly in a pitiable condition. All control of the government machinery was in the hands of Hindus while the share of Muslims was nothing but deprivation and discrimination.⁵

However, it is to say that the prime and sole motivation for pre-partition Muslim electorate was a well-defined vision of an Islamic state to be run according to an Islamic constitution. Later it was doubted on the grounds that how could the various sects with their sharp theological differences agree on the nature and contents of an Islamic Constitution?⁶ This issue, being a controversial one, needs a lot of elaborations and discussions and plays a decisive and key role in the voting and decision-making process of the country.⁷

Language Phenomena

Another factor, as important as religion, which grips over Pakistani electorate, is the multifold language phenomena prevailing as an indigenous problem right from the time of country's inception. Here an attempt will be made to discuss and analyze different issues associated with the language as well as the language controversies that have caused dissension between linguistic groups.⁸ There is no doubt that all languages, spoken in a specific region serve as a means of communication, but it is not true that for any one linguistic group any other language would serve the purpose equally well.⁹ This is not necessarily because some languages are better means of communication or in some sense more developed than others, but because the language of any linguistic group has its own sound rhythm and symbols which embody the characteristic spirit or ideas, and historical experience of that particular group as well.¹⁰ Nevertheless it is not only that sometimes words of one language have no exact equivalences in another, or that the poetry of one language cannot be appropriately translated into another language, but also that the sound rhythm, are different causing profound communication barrier.¹¹ The proud harsh and militant sound rhythms of the *Pashto* language invariably colors the emotions and the thought process is known only to a linguistic or the bilingual.¹² Also the earthy and relaxed rhythm of the *Punjabi* or *Siraiki* colors the thought process and the feelings in a way that the polite and less physical rhythm of Urdu does not. It might seem a small matter that two members of a linguistic group can express the same feeling or the same thought in the same way with the same sound emphasis or with the use of symbols common to the language, but in reality it is what gives to each linguistic group the feeling of separate entity. On the other hand, sharing common values or even common customs is not sufficient to break down this feeling of separate entity, but the ability to speak the same language as well.¹³

In perspective of Pakistani electorate, any effort made for the political solution to the problem of separate linguistic groups by the imposition of a common language alien to the majority of those groups, was always seen with an eye of suspicion.¹⁴ This is true in case of East Pakistan that never sacrificed to the imposition of Urdu, as a notional as well as official language of the United Pakistan (1947-1971).¹⁵ It was considered just a temporary solution instead of a long-term remedy. Unfortunately, no planned efforts from the beginning, were made to develop a naturally emerged mode of communication to take the place of the arbitrarily imposed language, ultimately leading to the development of more cooperative and more united Pakistani electorate.¹⁶

Defective Education System Leading to Unawareness about Legitimate Rights

The third major issue that puts a remarkable question mark on the soundness of Pakistani electorate is the defective education system. The British introduced in India, an education system which was calculated to leave the critical and constructive abilities untouched, meant to develop a personality servile and unquestioningly subservient to the colonial masters.¹⁷ Pakistan came into existence with the same legacy and no effort was made to get rid of this education system.¹⁸ The role of education in national life is overwhelmingly critical and decisive. The education, on one hand, inculcates those moral values which enable an

individual to utilize his knowledge in the national interest while on the other; it should impart knowledge having social utility.¹⁹

The country education system lacks both these roles. In Pakistan elite class has developed its own separate education system to fulfill its specific, aristocratic, hegemonic and despotic designs. This is on one hand discriminatory in nature and content while it is feudal and oligarchic on the other.²⁰ While the masses are compelled to attend such institutions where education is imparted for name's sake without emphasizing on the exposure of critical and constructive abilities of the individual. This situation has given way to a culture that has become highly superficial and imitative and the country is compelled to import experts to solve the problems.²¹

The lack of education creates a number of problems for the masses who generally do not know their legitimate rights and thus fall prey to the stakeholders in power play. It is a dilemma that the use of power in our society is arbitrary. In a society where effective checks against a misuse of power do not exist, a highly selfish and individualistic ethic will emerge, preventing the development of a common sentiment that, in turn, will lead to the disintegration of society.²² The existence of arbitrary power in Pakistan explains the lack of identity with the national interest not only at the individual but also at provincial level. Provincialism, for instance, also exists because some provinces feel that the central government is misusing power against their interests and no checks have been introduced against the misuse of power. The fact is that, no matter what institutional checks are introduced, they cannot be made operative without bringing change in the attitude of the people. They lack the spirit of law abidingness. Even best laws introduced in a society, lacking education in a spirit of law abidingness, are to be continuously violated.²³ Similarly, whether we give complete freedom to the judiciary or the press or introduce checks against the misuse of power; it will continue to be misused if the people are not educated in the right spirit. The greater check against the misuse of power is the internal and not the external check and realization of responsibilities comes only through education and mental training.²⁴

Tribal and Ethnographic Ramifications

Above mentioned factors, in Pakistani perspective, constitute the mindset of the electorate and motivate them how they behave in voting and participate in the decision making process of the country. The off-shoots of these factions are various and multi-fold. Ayesha Jalal (1995) maintains that “caste like social forms of organization in the various regions of Pakistan have very different connotations and implications at the level of everyday culture and political practice. Tribal and *biraderi* or clan-based matrilineal kinship ties play an important part in social and political organization[Sic].....Demographic specifications and variations in patterns of urbanization have served to qualify the social, cultural and ideological implications of tribal and *biraderi* structures in Pakistan's regional formations. Owing nothing to Islamic religious doctrine, these vertical and horizontal clan-based social bonds operate differently from cast by *Jati* which assigns not only occupational but also ritual status rooted in structures of power and dominances”²⁵

This clearly results into the power game of pressure groups and interest groups in the culture and politics of the country. These groups struggle for their representation in the legislatures.²⁶ However, some interest groups are always well represented like landlords, industrialists and people with significant economic power etc. On the other hand due to a variety of factors including the economic and social structure of the nation paltry classes cannot show significant representation. According to Javed Jabbar (1996) “thus a major interest group i.e. the poor, while going through the delusion that they are duly organized as an interest group though the political party or movement that they support may, in real terms

be deprived of representation inside the legislatures as well as deprived of interest groups outside legislatures because a political party led by individual who masquerades as champions of the poor pre-empt any potential attempt to set-up a special interest group for the poor. A country may have democracy, may have regular election and yet may continue to deprive the majority of authentic participation in the legislatures or even in interest groups.”²⁷

It is to be noted that remarkable changes in the class structure of the country were observed in the post-partition milieu. Industrialization and urbanization as well as the flow of the remittances from overseas resulted in the emergence of a new class phenomenon, a bourgeois proletariat of the cities and towns, multi-ethnic, multi-sect, resistant to structural changes. Majority of people, having the rural background, do not contribute to the change in objective conditions in their localities.²⁸

Weakness of Political Institutions

As far as the weakness of political institutions is concerned, this is one of the inherent problems that country faced in post-1947 milieu. This weakness stemmed from the lack of political experience of the leaders. Especially, the All India Muslim League that had emerged as the sole representative of Indian Muslims had nominal experience at the mass level. Most of its leaders especially, the landed aristocracy of Punjab had joined the party during the last two years or so to save their vested interests in the face of imminent partition of India.²⁹ Hence, the political party culture, being the soul of democracy, could not gain ground in the country. Politicians who were the master controller of the nascent state had no culture of mutual cooperation and coordination to deal with party conflicts, intra-party democratic norms, internal checks in the wake of the use of arbitrary power and realization of responsibilities in the greater national interest.³⁰ The same case was with the provinces, with the exception of East Pakistan which had a long experience in parliamentary democracy.³¹ While the leaders of other areas that came to constitute Pakistan had little or no experience of participating in political institutions. Jackson (1975) is of the view that unfortunately these were the personal interests and ambitions of individual political leaders as well as the conflicts between the centralists, who favored a strong federal government and the provincialists, who favored the principle of provincial autonomy, preventing the Constituent Assembly from meeting its responsibilities efficiently.³²

This phenomenon can be proved with the fact that it took almost nine years to deliberate and negotiate for a constitution. Even after the promulgation of the 1956 constitution, the political scene was marked by frequent squabbling among politicians that led to short-lived governments in the country.³³ This situation gave way to the freakish but active role of the civil and military bureaucracy. For example Malik Ghulam Muhammad and Iskander Mirza both were the civil and military echelons. Their intervention weakened the democratic institutions.³⁴ According to Javed Jabbar (1996), “.....except obviously for the government that took office with the creation of Pakistan, not a single government in our entire history can claim to have been ‘legitimately’ in office. Even the 1947 government outlived its transitory legitimacy when it failed to ensure the formulation of a constitution within its first year of power. Since then each successive government at the centre up to 1958, which being able to claim a limited degree of parliamentary endorsement, or lack of it, or a kind of ‘successor’ status was inherently illegitimated because it was not formed as a result of a general election held on the basis of adult franchise. The irony is that when the first ever election on a one person one vote basis was held in December 1970, the consequences led to a party being inducted into office that had polled a minority of the total notional vote.”³⁵

Nevertheless, in spite of populism and majority politics, it must be appreciated that the national political consensus on the 1973 Constitution was possibly the single most outstanding achievement of Bhutto Government (1972-77). It is also to be noted that it were the country's electorate, though a fraction may be, turned against the despotic design of Bhutto's populism, when they refused to accept the results of 1977 General elections. However, this act by no means gave legitimacy to the armed forces to intervene. If a particular party did commit excesses during 1972-77, this did not necessarily justify the protracted exclusion of PPP and other parties from a chance to exercise power. On the other hand electorate had never been taken into confidence and had never been reassured that the arrival of political parties into power would not cause anarchy in any way.³⁶

Question Mark on the Legitimacy of the Political Parties

The above discussion puts a question mark on the legitimacy of the political parties, participating in the democratic process of the country. Is there any kind of internal democracy within the structure and functioning of the political parties? Reportedly until 1986, all the political partial parties combined, were estimated to command just one per cent of the country's adult population as total membership i.e. less than 450,000 out of 45 million adults; while the estimated fee-paying members were about half a per cent.³⁷

Now comes the question why and which party to associate with? And it will be both complex and complicated one to answer this question on the grounds that the parties have different criteria to be offered to the candidates and members to join. The first and foremost criterion for the selection of a party is the ideological position of the party and its ultimate agenda to improve the quality of life.³⁸

Beyond the secular and theocratic distinction between parties, there is a notable similarity in the all over theme and intent of the manifestoes of the parties. Both the leftist and rightist parties claim for the social welfare and economic uplift but they have failed to give a solid line. Leftists try to infatuate against the US imperialism which the rightists, especially the religious parties fail to distinguish between the need for national modernization and the pressures of westernization and are unable to comprehend the nature of contemporary changes in civilization; the result is more chaos.³⁹ Jones (1980) explains this phenomenon in a more precise manner by saying that "the overthrow of the Bhutto Government reminds us again that the representative institutions and procedures of modern statehood-constitutions parliaments, political parties and elections-have not found easy implantations in Pakistan despite the endorsement of this path to political modernity by the Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah."⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

It hardly seems necessary to recount the political and economic damage done to this troubled state by the absence of political order. The democracy often tests the patience of those who most admire it. The profundities of a representative form of government are frequently counter-pointed by the sheer inanities of populism. Pakistan's current experience of its political system is only one facet of the sphinx-like character of democracy. Perhaps the trouble begins with the fact that while people do vote with utter sincerity they do not always vote with wisdom. Vulnerable to words and statements that stoke their fears and raise their hopes, people too easily fall prey to manipulative leaders. However, to the confidence of electorate the political parties must ensure a transparent but effective process of political emancipation, legal and social justice, economic advancement and social uplift through human resource development and proper allocation or appropriation of national resources.

Only by ensuring this, the electorate as well as the masses will be able to play an effective role in the country, in the region and in the world.

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