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Electoral History of Pakistan: Recontextualising the Party-less Election of the 1985

Abstract

This research article¹ has attempted to explore, investigate and analyse the causes, effects and impacts of the 1985 party-less election held under Zia's dictatorial reign. Zia executed Martial Law in 1977 and except Bhutto's party; all other mainstream political parties profoundly lauded the Martial Law and amplified their bolster to the tyranny because they had already faced the dictatorial attitude of Bhutto in guise of democracy and considered that Zia's dictatorship would be better than PPP's worst democratic government. It was within few years that only one or two political parties remained with their previous stance and maximum mainstream political parties left Zia and joined the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD)¹ which had been initiated by pro-democratic political parties against the dictatorial rule of Zia. MRD launched resistance movement against Zia but it was not effective enough to get its political objectives. The main issue was disorganization and disunity of the member parties and Zia got benefits from their conflicts with his political tactics. To satisfy the major demand of the the political forces to restore democracy, President Zia announced the elections in 1985 on non-party basis. MRD's member parties boycotted the elections which gave a chance to ethnic, regional and linguistic-based local political groups to come forward and participate in National Politics. This article searches that how and why MRD failed to get its political objectives during the 1985 elections? What were the motives of President Zia behind arranging for the 1985 elections and how he succeeded in attaining his goals? The article further discourses democratic development with a special introduction to the growth of the political system in Pakistan after the election of 1985 and explores different aspects which the political parties to favor Military's rule in the early years of Martial law.

Key Words: Elections, Zia, PPP, Jama"at Islami, Islam, MRD

Introduction

On July 05, 1977, General Zia kept command through forcing Military coup. He immediately took some necessary steps and suspended the constitution of 1973. National Assembly, Senate and all four Provincial Assemblies were also dismissed. Z.A. Bhutto was arrested and sent to the prison. Only Fazal Ellahi Ch. was allowed to proceed as President.² Begam Nusrat Bhutto as Chairperson of PPP filed a writ in Supreme Court and resisted the legitimacy of Military Law.³ Court declared that the Military coup was legal on the establishment of "Doctrine of Necessity."⁴ Court reexamined that "the political developments after the elections of 1977 had brought the nation on the brink of collapse"⁵ and in these circumstances, the constitution did not delicate the arrangement so the Military Rule was lawful and legal.⁶ General Zia assured for holding new elections and retrieval of democracy within three months and proclaimed that he had lifted all restrictions from Judiciary and that courts were independent in their judgments. But afterwards, Zia took the supplication that all political pioneers met with him and they asserted on delaying in coming polls. So he imposed restrictions on all types of political activities and deferred the coming polls without announcing the next date of elections.⁷

General Zia misshaped the soul of the suspended constitution by presenting a few basic alterations in it. He was afraid of political parties so he introduced "Provisional Constitutional Order" of 1979 to enforce restrictions on all type of political activities in Pakistan. According to that order, prior permission from election commission was compulsory for any political activity to be launched by any political party. That order also bestowed the authority to President that he could impose ban on any political party. Later, that authority was denied by Benazir Bhutto (Chairperson PPP) in Supreme Court and Court stated that authority invalid and void in 1988.⁸ In 1981, General Zia introduced another Provisional

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Constitutional Order (PCO) which produced stricter alterations within the Constitution.⁹ According to that PCO,
Article six of the constitution was suspended¹⁰ which made the President more powerful and “the core of authority”.

General Zia and political leadership had contrasting opinions on the nature of the democratic system. He desired to implement Islamic laws and Islamic democracy instead of western type parliamentary system in which the Prime Minister was an authority on all institutions. On the other side, prominent democratic parties were demanding for the implementation of Parliamentary System in which Prime Minister was the head of government and President, was to be head of state and just to play its symbolic role. Neither Martial Law authorities nor political leaders gave any respect to put the standards of vote based system into action.¹¹ On December 19, 1984, General Zia has chosen himself as the President through the “Referendum”. Within the survey of the referendum it was inquired from voters that do they underwrite the method of Islamization. “Yes” means that the voter was supporting Zia and his Islamic policies and had selected him as President of Pakistan. It was a special strategy of decision indeed¹² and that referendum provided legal protection to General Zia to hold the two portfolios at the same time and Zia got the benefit of it and remained President and COAS, even after the end of Martial Law.¹³ Political parties and Media severely criticized the referendum.

Like-minded opposition political parties planned to initiate a united effort for the restoration of democracy from the platform of Movement for the Restoration of Democracy. The newly designed united front started an agitation movement against the dictatorial rule of Zia. Eleven different political parties joined that coalition to oppose Zia’s dictatorship.¹⁴ The first step, taken by that alliance against Zia’s policies, was the boycott of the presidential referendum held in 1984. On the demand of MRD, President Zia forced to declare the elections of National Assembly on February 25, 1985, and voting for four Provincial Assemblies was declared after three days of the national polls, on February 28, 1985. It was decided that the elections would be conducted on a party-less basis and under strict conditions on political parties. Election Commission delivered stern order for the eligible contenders. All contenders were exhorted to take part in an election without displaying any political attachment with any political or religious party. The contenders were strictly forbidden to conduct the corner meetings or political gatherings. The usage of any type of loudspeaker or megaphone during political campaign was prohibited.¹⁵ Political procession, rallies and political march was banned. Candidates were allowed to distribute their manifesto through pamphlets. Display of big hoardings or picture billboards were also prohibited.

After the announcement of party-less election in 1985, MRD parties like a referendum, again adopted the policy of boycott and decided not to participate in these none-party elections. Before elections MRD called a meeting in Lahore to plan a combine action policy about polls and with a unanimous decision, MRD announced to stay away from these elections. After that meeting, in a news conference, they contended that beneath the management of Military Tyrant, the conduct of fair, free, clean and reasonable polls would not be credible. All parties collectively decided that MRD coalition members would not take part in upcoming elections and that coalition would remain active even after elections. MRD requested the masses to boycott the elections because under the Martial Law administration free and fair election would not be possible.¹⁶ MRD parties also condemned the military participation in politics and demanded that Martial Law should be lifted before the elections.

Despite the demands and boycott of MRD, the elections were held on time and voters’ participation in elections was outstanding.¹⁷ Voters did not give any importance to boycott call and rushed for the polling. Even a large number of members of MRD coalition partners and a few pioneer members of PPP also participated in the elections on individual basis, without showing their association with their party and violated the party discipline.

Later PPP and MRD leadership confessed that their announcement of boycotting the elections was a bad decision. On that situation Christina Lamb stated in her book that later several PPP leaders confessed that their choice to stay away from the polls was a botch and that boycott fulfilled Zia's wish and he succeeded in his goal to keep PPP and MRD political leadership away from National politics. Christina Lamb stated that after three years, when Junejo was terminated and a new election was announced in 1988, PPP leadership rushed towards the elections and Benazir Bhutto was the first politician who reported her cooperation in those polls on "whatever basis"¹⁸ Rasool Bax Raees stated about that situation that in 1985 party-less elections were held and MRD boycotted that election. Several prominent and senior politicians kept themselves away from the election procedure but later they realized their political mistake when they saw themselves out of national politics¹⁹. That was the reason that they took part in bye-elections enthusiastically.²⁰ A few other pioneer political leaders too criticized that boycott choice of MRD. They contended that PPP and MRD's that choice created a vacuum for the political supporters of Zia and they got a chance to enter in national politics. It was a reality that Zia succeeded in his goal but he was still under the political pressure of MRD even he ordered the Governor of NWFP to keep an eye on the activities of PPP leadership because Zia was fearful that MRD and PPP leadership could announce support for an anti-establishment candidate in the National Assembly which could be challenging for the establishment in future political affairs.²¹

Zia announced polls on a party-less basis which indicated his deep political observation on the political and democratic system of Pakistan. He knew that after the successful boycott campaign by MRD parties, people rejected the referendum and its results showed that masses are not satisfied with Martial Law's policies. Now the Zia was afraid that the same turnout in coming elections can weak the writ of Martial Law government so he preferred nonparty election on party-based election.²² The second key motive for none-party election was that Zia was also afraid of the popularity of PPP among masses. In party base elections there was a chance that Pakistan People's Party could form her government in Centre with the help of MRD parties, which was not acceptable for Zia on anycast. The third and solid reason for that party-less election was that in non-party elections, regional, territorial, local and divisional level political leaders have a strong chance to get elected. Such local cadre of elected representatives were not able to discuss the national issues in Parliament. They were not able to criticize government policies. Their top priority was local issues so it was very easy for Zia's Military government to control and treat them. While on the other hand, prominent, senior and experienced political leaders and famous political party's candidates had strong affiliations with their party and party leadership so it was very difficult to convince and control them under government's motivation.²³

In that party-less election, MRD parties boycotted the polling and remained aloof from the political process. Now the *sardars*, *Petharadars*, *waderaz* and *Saanen Sarkars* (local heads of their regional political parties) got a chance to get elected. Election was going to be held after less than a decade so they participated in the elections with full intentions. The turn-out of votes in that election was also astonishing and dissimilar to the referendum 1984. More than Fifty-Two per cent voters participated in the elections and cast their votes.²⁵ It was a remarkable turn-out which amazed not only political leadership of MRD but Military establishment itself. PPP chairperson acknowledged it as a success of democracy and declared it as a mark of refusal of Zia's rule and a negation of the policy of Zia's Islamization by ordinary people.²⁶ On the other hand, President Zia was pleased to see the turnout of the voters in election 1985. That remarkable turnout was showing that masses were supporting his policies and they had faith in his government.

More than 1200 contenders took part in that election for the 207 total Muslim seats of Lower House of the Parliament.²⁷ According to the results, a large number of Zia's cabinet members²⁸ and Majlis e Shora²⁹ lost their seats which showed that masses rejected the old companions of Zia. Public also rejected those candidates who were contesting the election from religious-based political parties even Jamat e Islami which was considered as government party, could not secure sufficient seats³⁰ and entered the Parliament with only 06 seats. PPP also boycotted the election but partially as a lot of its leaders participated in the elections in an independent capacity and got elected. Perhaps PPP was the only political party who succeeded to get reasonable seats and her 50 candidate won the seats out of 52 total election contestants on independent capacity.³¹ The result of the elections was so stunning that the National Assembly was filled with almost all new participants. Most of them were common and

ordinary people. A large number of these representatives were consisted of those people who were entering that house first time in their life.²⁴

According to observers, critiques and political analyzers, elections were free, fair and clean and any involvement and meddling of Military authorities or establishment could not be found. It was the reality that Zia and establishment did not need to involve themselves in that election because the main threat for their rule (PPP) already had gone on boycott, so establishment remained neutral and impartial. The defeat of Zia's cabinet members was also a proof that Zia did not try to affect the election results and remained aloof from all election process. Finally, it was the fact that Zia was not interested to bring genuine spirit of democracy in Pakistan; these elections and restoration of democratic system was just a cover to show that Pakistan was a democratic country.³² The weakest democratic system was the best choice for Military establishment of Zia so all the machinery of the government and establishment remained impartial in that election and International observers could not trace any rigging, engineering or involvement of the establishment during that election.

President Zia was successful in his goal but the party-less elections created some complications in the democratic system of Pakistan. According to the researchers and social scientists, these elections left harmful effects on working capability of the National Assembly as well as on future politics of Pakistan. They argued that after the ban on political activities and announcement of party-less election main political, religious parties and prominent political leaders boycotted the election under the umbrella of MRD which gave a chance to regional and local level politicians to take part in national-level politics. According to Chandio, "these elections contested basically on personal relations. Election candidates used their relations to mobilize and convincing the voters. Candidates used their personal religious, brotherly, ethnic and cast relations to convince the ordinary voters to come on polling stations and support them. It increased the voting turnout."³³ But unfortunately, these elections enabled the linguistic-based regional and ethnic political groups to get access to the national politics and several small political groups like Pushton Federation, PPI, Jiyay Sindh and MQM were empowered and later these groups played an important role in the national politics of Pakistan.³⁴ BB the Chairperson of PPP commented that the party-less elections transcended ethnic and regional boundaries.³⁵ Tahir quoted that "Opportunist local holders principally the landowning rural class emerged victorious in the elections and the regime was more than happy to make them a junior partner in the power game both at the Centre and in the provinces."³⁶

On March 02, 1985, Zia issued an Ordinance named "Revival of the Constitution of 1973 Order"³⁷ afore to the first meeting of National Assembly. That Ordinance made critical extractions from its unique grounds and ideas. Through that Ordinance about 65 Articles of the real constitution were revised.³⁸ After proclamation of this Ordinance; all administering powers were moved to President. Now Prime Minister, the actual head of the Parliament was downsized to a subservient and subordinate position. President Zia pronounced it an adjustment of power and control between President and Prime Minister.³⁹ He contended that these powers were given to President in 1973 structure in a humiliating way.⁴⁰ He claimed that he would utilize these newly bestowed powers when Prime Minister, National Assembly and Cabinet will lose the confidence of masses.⁴¹

On March 20, 1985, the first session of the newly elected National Assembly was held under the command of Chief Executive. Zia as President, first time exercised his newly bestowed powers and nominated Mohammad Khan Junejo as Prime Minister of Pakistan; who was a senior politician from Sindh.⁴² To run the Parliament, and initiate Parliamentary democracy, Junejo shaped a group of MNA and formed a new political party named "Muslim League Parliamentary Party" (MLPP). That step of Junejo started Parliamentary politics in National Assembly because the Members of National Assembly joined MLPP and it emerged as government party. Similarly, those who did not join MLPP and automatically became members of opposition party. Surprisingly, Zia did not oppose Junejo's that act and kept calm on all that political procedure. Later, the newly emerged Electoral College elected the members of the Senate.⁴³

In October 1998, the new Ordinance presented in Lower House of Parliament to make it a part of Constitution. The House passed that alteration with the full mandate and bestowed the President with different powerful authorities.⁴⁴ Now after the approval of 8th amendment, President could nominate the leader of the Lower

house, COAS, Judges of Supreme and High Courts and other high profile officers. President had full authority on all institutes even he could dismiss Federal government without counselling PM and could terminate Parliament too.⁴⁵ President could ask the PM to take a fresh vote of confidence from Parliament. PM was also bound to promulgate the Ordinances which were issued by President time by time. In that Ordinance, total strength of Lower House was expanded and extended from 200 members to 207 members. Now President was not only the Head of State but the head of government too. The foremost vital portion of RCO was related to the Martial Law regime's orders which General Zia issued after forcing Military Law. The newly elected Parliament supported and repaid all decisions of the Military Courts, laws, previous Ordinances issued by Zia as President, confirmation of referendum, Military law's directions, and all previous orders of Martial Laws which were issued between July 05, 1977, to September 13, 1985.⁴⁶ After the modification President became the most effective, authoritative and Powerful individual and Zia set up a "National Security Council" consisting of 11 members⁴⁷ to bargain the issues of National Security. The individuals of that National Security Council were designated by President Zia himself. In the result of that 8th modification, a "quasi-parliamentary" shape of government has come into being.

Conclusion

The Election 1985 of Pakistan was devised to deprive the political parties from coming into power and control the political system and democracy by the Establishment. In 1985, the elections were held after eight years of the dictatorial period under the dictatorship of Zia and some democratic lovers gave all the credit to MRD parties that their protest and resistance movement forced Zia to conduct the elections. It may be partially right but the real picture was that Zia longed to show the international community a democratic picture of Pakistan. He was longed to hide his Martial Law rule under a democratic cover. He never afforded to impose real democracy in Pakistan because the real and original democratic system could become a threat for his own tyrannic rule; so he decided to conduct the election on the party-less basis and imposed such a strict and severe restrictions on political activities which could not be bearable for any political party; so according to his expectations, MRD went to boycott and her action left the political arena of Pakistan open for second and third leadership of political parties which consisted on local, regional and ethnic type leaders.

Throughout the ruling period, Zia tried to stay away from direct involvement in political activities. He imposed restrictions on political parties and allowed only such small groups or political parties for their political activities which reinforced his rule. Pakistan Muslim League (Pagara) and jamaat-i-Islami along with other minor religious-based political parties were allowed to take part in all political activities. But in elections 1985, all such political groups could not get success and lost their seats. Besides these minor political groups, several members of Majlis e Shora and few cabinet members of Zia's cabinet also lost the elections. The results of the elections showed impartiality of the government in elections. President Zia did not need to manipulate the elections because after the boycott of MRD there was no chance that regional and ethnic-based newly elected split groups could form a strong opposition.

As was expected and devised in the party-less elections, Zia created a political class with a different political approach which helped him justified his military coup and actions taken thenceforth. After elections, the National Assembly filled with inexperienced, local based and party less new entrants. These newly elected members had no previous political experience even they had no political vision or any political agenda. Without any manifesto or plan, how could they prepare National Policies or could pass the legislative bills. These untrained politicians were a blessing for the dictatorial period of President Zia. He used their disabilities and presented the 8th amendment bill in the Parliament which was approved by the house without any delay. No strong voice arose in the favor of any change, modification or alteration in that amendment bill. It was such a democracy which Zia wanted and he succeeded in his goals. But Muhammad Khan Junejo forced Zia to restore democracy and let the political parties work for the betterment of state and society.

References and Notes

- ¹ A coalition of eleven Pakistani political parties known as the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) formed in 1983 to pressure the dictatorial regime of Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq to hold elections and suspend the martial law. The MRD, which remained mostly nonviolent, was strongest among supporters of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in Sindh Province.
- ² Abdul Hafeez Khan., *The Conspiracies Against Pakistan and the Women in the Lives of Politicians*, (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1991), 82.
- ³ Sajjad Ali Shah., *Law Courts in a Glass House: An Autobiography*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 110.
- ⁴ Ibid., 106.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Hafeez Khan., *Women in the Lives of Politicians*, 83.
- ⁷ Verindor Grover and Ranjana Arora., *Elections and Regionalism in Pakistan*,(New Dehli: Deep and Deep Publication, 1995) 49-50.
- ⁸ Murtaza Anjum., *Siyasat, Aain Aur Adalat*, (Lahore: Fateh Publishers, 2001), 53-54.
- ⁹ Sajjad Ali Shah., *An Autobiography*, 121.
- ¹⁰ Sultana Uzma., *Jamhoriyat kay Katil Kon?* (Urdu), (Lahore: Jung Publishers, 2012) 154.
- ¹¹ Grover and Arora., *Elections and Regionalism in Pakistan*, 45-46.
- ¹² Raza Rafi, ed., *Pakistan in Perspective 1947-1997*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001) 36.
- ¹³ Ibid., 38.
- ¹⁴ Shahid Javed Burki., *Pakistan under Zia, 1977-1988*, (Asian Survey 28, no. 10, October 1988)
- ¹⁵ Muhammad Ali Sheikh., *Benazir Bhutto: A Political Biography*, (Karachi: Orient Books Publishing House, 2000), 95.
- ¹⁶ The News, September 19, 1984.
- ¹⁷ Asghar Khan has a different opinion about turn out in the elections of 1985. He mentions the names of those districts where the turn-out was very low. Among those districts were Abbottabad, Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Mardan, Quetta, Sahiwal, Faisalabad, Vehari, Multan and Sargodha, where turn-out was near about 30 percent but the election commission announced that 52.9 percent. Sartaj Aziz disputes the claim of Asghar Khan with the statement that the voter's turnout was quite impressive. Out of 33 million registered voters, 17.3 million or 53 percent cast votes for National Assembly candidates and 18.5 million or 57 percent for provincial assembly candidates."
- ¹⁸ Christina Lamb., *Waiting for Allah, Pakistan's Struggle for Democracy*, (New Delhi: Viking Penguin Book, 1991), 58-63. ¹⁹ Rasul B. Rais., *Pakistan in 1987: Transition to Democracy*, Asian Survey 28, no. 2, part. 2 (February 1988), 128. also see <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2644814> ²⁰ Ibid. 129.
- ²¹ Pumphelet on *Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD)*, (Lahore: PPP information Cell, 1992), 123
- ²² Amir Ali Chandio., *Non- Party based General election of 1985: Causes an effect*, (International Conference on Social Science and Humanity IPEDR vol.5, IACSIT Press, Singapore, 2011), 86.
- ²³ Ibid., 88. ²⁴ Ibid., 93.
- ²⁵ *Politics without Parties, A Report on the 1985 Party less Election Pakistan*, Lahore: Society for the advancement of Education (SAHE).(n.d).
- ²⁶ Makhdoom Sayed Ghyur Abbas Bukhari., *Benazir: Beti Say Qaid Tak*, (Lahore: Multi Media Affairs, 2004), 134.
- ²⁷ *Politics without Parties, A Report on the 1985 Party less Election Pakistan*, 32.
- ²⁸ Six of his nine Cabinet Ministers who ran for the National Assembly were defeated, as were many of his other associates. ²⁹ Andrew K. Wilder., *The Pakistani Voter Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in the Punja*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press. 1999), 73.
- ³⁰ *Politics without Parties, A Report on the 1985 Party less Election Pakistan*, 29.
- ³¹ Amir Ali Chandio., *Non- Party based General election of 1985: Causes an effect*, 83.
- ³² Ghafoor Ahmad., *Wazir-i-Azam Benazir Bhutto: Namzadgi Say Bartarfi Tak*, (Lahore, Iqra Enterprise, 1995), 224.
- ³³ Ameer Ali Chandio., *Non-Party based General election of 1985: cause and effect*, 82.
- ³⁴ Tahir Kamran., *Sovereignty in Pakistan and the basis reasons of Power*, (Lahore, Fiction House. 2000), 79. ³⁵ Benazir Bhutto., *Daughter of East, An Autobiography*, (London: A Mandarin (Paperback) London UK, 1994), 313 ³⁶ Tahir Kamran., *Sovereignty in Pakistan and the basis reasons of Power*, 78.
- ³⁷ <https://historypak.com/the-eighth-amendment-1985/> accessed on November 02, 2016.
- ³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ General Zia argued that “lacunae discovered in 1977 in the power of the President had been removed according to the constitutional and political requirements of Pakistan. He referred to the Constitution of India and said that the provisions being incorporated through the RCO regarding in the Indian Constitution.”

⁴⁰ He was of the opinion that the expression used in the 1973 Constitution „the President will act on the advice of the Prime Minister and such as an advice shall be binding on him” was an insulting manner of giving power to the President.” ⁴¹ *Nawa e Waqt*, March 12, 1985.

⁴² Hamid Yusuf., *Pakistan A study of Political Development 1947-97*,(Lahore: Sang-E- Meel publications,1999), 207.

⁴³ Hafeez Khan., *Women in the Lives of Politicians*, 90.

⁴⁴ The President was given the authority “to nominate and appoint the Prime Minister at his discretion from amongst members of the National Assembly. Similarly, the provincial Governors were vested with the power to appoint Chief Ministers of their respective provinces from amongst the members of the Provincial Assemblies.” ⁴⁵ *Dawn*, October 06, 1985.

⁴⁶ H. A. Rizvi., *The Military and Politics in Pakistan: 1947-199*, (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications. 2000), 263.

⁴⁷ It consisted of 11 members, “President, Prime Minister, Chairman of Senate, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Chief of Army, Navy and Air Force.”