
History of Student Politics and Its Revival in Pakistan

Abdul Qadir Mushtaq

Nasir Amir

Fariha Sohil

Zil-e-Huma Rafique

Muhammad Abrar Ahmad

The notion has developed that inclination of the students towards politics keep them away from the academic activity. Political trends among the students promote atrocities, torture, kidnapping and murder. These were the factors that urged General Zia-ul-Haq to impose ban on political activities in educational campuses. It became a state narrative during 1977-1988. Afterwards, the counter narrative was developed which justified the student politics. But undue interference of the political parties in student politics and draconian laws of the university administrations did not provide them space to flourish. From last few months, the efforts for the revival of student unions have started. This paper analyses those efforts in context of student solidarity march and the resistance which was faced by the participatory students and their leadership. It also elaborates the ideological impact on student politics. A survey was conducted to understand student's perspective on revival of student politics in educational institutions. Interviews of the students were conducted. What was the response of the political leadership on demands of the students? It is descriptive and analytical study.

Introduction

Pakistan is a state with strong and vigor class structure that culminate its roots in political, social, cultural, educational and religious spheres of life. Political culture is dominated by feudal-industrialists-religious-bureaucratic-military oligarchy. These sections of the society contest elections with great pomp and show of wealth and develop the perception about electoral system of Pakistan that only influential and financially sound leadership can contest elections and will strive for the prosperity of labor class which has majority in Pakistan. In this way, three classes establish the cluster of the society, feudal, industrialist and labor. There is no need of struggle to feudal class for their survival because their ancestors were allotted agriculture lands by their masters in colonial period. The tenants make strenuous

efforts for the cultivation of the land but major share of crops are gone to the land owners. Second major class of this feeble society is the cluster of industrialists; they invest huge wealth and establish their industries. The major contribution in their success is the effort of labor class that manufactures the goods. The industrialists sell these goods on high prices but give very low remuneration to labor. It is another form of exploitation that gives impetus to trade unions and labor unions. These three classes are distinct from each other in culture, traditions, institutions, thoughts and way of living. Feudal and industrialist classes prefer inter-marriages and their second option is the servants of official institutions like bureaucracy, police, judiciary and armed forces. Oligarchy of these sections is established over the system of Pakistan and they look after the interests of each other. But this oligarchy form only twenty percent of the population of Pakistan. Eighty percent population consist of labor class which has distinct its culture, traditions, institutions and way of living from upper two classes. This class sends their children in government schools and feudal-industrialists prefer private educational institutions for schooling of which are meant for that class. The educational system of Pakistan generates two classes for running the affairs of the state. The graduates of the private institutions come with extra exposure and modern knowledge that depends on international standard of curriculum and way of teachings. The graduates of government institutions have less their exposure and are followers of traditional education with this perception that modern education is harmful for society and they refuse to accept the modern techniques of education. Simultaneously, the examination system in government institutions do not base on thoughts or creative things but it depends on set pattern that do not lead towards creativity. The government educational institutions are generating social, political and religious blind followers. The future of Pakistan's education system turns darker every passing day. Quality of education offered in our country has plummeted way below what could be considered remotely acceptable by any standard and divides between the haves and have nots is abysmally huge. Quality education is becoming more and more unattainable for the hard working middle and lower class strata of society. The elite of the country are the only ones who are able to achieve quality education that too by paying staggering amounts of tuition fees. The change in society is not possible without rooting out those elements which have crept into the system of Pakistan. The characters of this change may be deprived classes of society i.e farmers, labor and students. Sadia Baloch from the University of Balochistan says

“We do not want education to be based on class differences. All students should have access to the same systems and quality of education....”¹

Pakistan has traced the history and evolution of student politics since the partition of sub-continent. The politics of students can be summarized with some historical events. During the Partition of Bengal, the students protested against the partition and British goods.² In 1905, the students of King Edward Medical College Lahore also participated in the strikes against discriminatory laws. The participation of the students in politics before partition can be discussed in two phases. The first phase

commenced from 1857 and continued till 1937. Second phase remained successful during 1937 to 1947. They enthusiastically remained at the forefront of Indian Liberation Movement and the movement for Pakistan.³ Sarfraz Hussain Mirza has written his book on “*Muslim Students and Pakistan Movement*” (Vol. 1, Lahore, Pakistan Study Centre Punjab University, 1990). With the creation of Pakistan, the state of opportunities came into existence with the vision of its leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He was very hopeful about the dynamic role of students during partition movement. His point of view on the future role of students was that:

“You (the students) are the main nation builders of tomorrow and you must fully equip yourself by discipline, education and training for the arduous task lying ahead of you. You should realize the magnitude of your responsibility and be ready to bear it.”⁴

In 1947, the only established student organization was Muslim Student Federation (MSF). On December 1947, The IJT was established at Lahore. In 1948, The Democratic Student’s Federation was established. The National Students Federation (NSF), The Peoples Students Federation (PSF), the Anjuman Talaba-e-Islam (ATI), the Imamia Students Organization (ISO), The Pakhtun Students’ Federation (PkSF), the Baloch Students’ Organization (BSO), the Punjabi Students’ Federation, the Jiye Sindh Students Federation and the All Pakistan Mohajir Students Organizations (APMSO), were the main student organizations in Pakistani educational institutions.⁵

Sr#	Name	Ideology	Year Formed
1	Muslim Students’ Federation	Populist	1937
2	Jamiat-e-Tulaba	Islamist	1947
3	Democratic Students’ Federation	Leftist	1950
4	National Students’ Federation	Leftist	1953
5	Baloch Students’ Organisation	Ethnic	1967
6	Pakhtun Students’ Federation	Ethnic	1967
7	Anjuman-e-Tulaba-e-Islam	Islamist	1969
8	Imamia Students Organisation	Islamist	1972
9	People’s Students Federation	Leftist	1973
10	All Pakistan Muttahida Students Organisation	Ethnic	1978
11	Insaaf Students’ Federation	Populist	2007

The first organized student effort in Pakistan was in favor of Bengali language.⁶ The students of Dhaka University played significant role in this movement. In Sind, The students protested to detach Karachi from Sind. On 30th January 1948, The Sind Muslim Students Federation passed a resolution in which it was clearly stated that Sind students were against the proposal of separation of Karachi from the Sind.⁷ The Sind students also agitated against One Unit in West Pakistan. In 1952, the students of the Punjab registered their protest against the report of Basic Principles Committee. The Punjabi students also played role in the

Khatam-i-Nabuwat Movement (1948-1953).⁸ Ayub Khan introduced education policy (1961-62) in which three years degree program was launched. Against this decision and West Pakistan University Ordinance of 1962, the students protested and forced Ayub Khan government to revisit the Ordinance.⁹ They also played a significant role in the political movement against the Tashkent Declaration (1966) which became a major cause of the down fall of President Ayub Khan in 1969. In 1972, Z.A. Bhutto recognized newly born state Bangladesh which was most disliked decision for the rightist students' organizations. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government in 1977 made students' unions a part of the university governance structure and took following decisions

- (a) Representatives of the students' union were given the membership of the university syndicate –
- (b) Member of university senate,
- (c) Member of academic council
- (d) Member of disciplinary committee

The student organizations also participated in movement of Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government in 1977.¹⁰ The martial law dictator Gen. Zia Ul Haq imposed restrictions on student unions (1984). The question arises what were the major advantages of the presence of student unions in educational institutions?

- (a) Ban on student unions was dispel the concept of responsible governance among youth
- (b) The student unions were training grounds for students

Educational institutions produced seasoned political leaders for the political culture of Pakistan. Mr. Javed Hashmi, Mr. Liaqat Baloch, Mr. Jahangir Badar, Mr. Ahsan Iqbal, Mr. Ghulam Abbas, Mr. Altaf Hussain, the Quaid (Leader) of the MQM founded the APMISO and Dr. Abdul Hayee Baloch, President of the National Party, played active role in the politics of Pakistan.¹¹

In 1988, democratic system was restored and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto decided to lift ban on student unions in educational institutions. During 2018 elections, PTI mostly relied upon youth and urged them to play role for the survival of Pakistan but after winning elections, no unified policy was introduced for youth. The government in its first year of rule decided to reduce the higher education budget. This decision marked Pakistan into the list of those countries that spend less on education. It is also alarming that administrations of the educational institutions force the students to submit an affidavit about his involvement in political activities. Under these circumstances, Students Progressive Forum (PRSF) took bold step and decided to gather students against these policies in educational institutions. Student Action Committee was established on 2nd November 2019 (Lahore) at national level to demand the restoration of student unions. From all over of Pakistan, the representatives of student unions were the part of SAC. SAC conducted corner meetings in different educational institutions and gathered the list of demands from the students. The

important members of the SAC were HaiderKaleem (Lahore), WaqasAslam (Karachi). On 2nd November 2019, the SAC decided that different groups would merge together and hold the Student Solidarity March. On 29th November 2019, the Progressive student's collective (PSC) launched demonstrations in fifty cities of Pakistan. Students of various institutions from all provinces of Pakistan (Sind, Punjab, KPK, Balochistan), parents, lawyers, NGOs and civil society members participated in demonstrations. Student's Solidarity March had one elementary agenda: to unite students on one platform and built an unshakeably strong movement to raise awareness regarding student issues. Students from Balochistan protested against the involvement of the vice chancellor in the harassment of the varsity's students. The students from Gilgit-Baltistan demanded the standard educational university in GB and declared one existing university substandard. The prominent participants in Sind were Muhammad Hanif and JibranNasir with other fourteen hundred participants (Karachi), Comrade ImdadQazi (communist party Pakistan), DrBukhsalThallu (Awami Workers Party), Amar Sindhu, Ali BukshalThalu, Aneel Hub Ali, MehrunNisaChanna, InayatKhaskheli (Hyderabad). Transgender students also joined the Student Solidarity March in Karachi. They rejected the administration's claim that unions are hurdles in promoting education. There are basic facilities (water, electricity) in educational institutions. The faculty members have also the right to form unions for their basic rights. A ban on union was conspiracy against the political culture and democratic system of Pakistan.¹²

In Punjab, Protestors gathered in Nasser Bagh and marched towards Punjab Assembly in Lahore. They presented thirteen demands to the government. In Islamabad, D-Chowk became a center of their activities. In Balochistan Quetta, protest rally was gathered at Baldia Lawn. In KPK Peshawar, the protestors arranged a rally from Peshawar Press club to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. Awami National Party supported the student solidarity march.¹³ The students presented their demands keeping in view their regional requirements. The basic demands of students were as under

1. Reinstatement of student unions and ban on student unions should be lifted
2. Education system depended on class structure should be eliminated
3. Education fee cuts and taking back recent decision to increase fee. There would be no increase for the next five years.
4. Harassment on campuses is alarming. The students should be given representation in harassment committees. Furthermore, judiciary should inquire the sexual harassment faced by students in university of Balochistan.
5. Restoring adequate budget for the Higher Education Commission and allocate at least 5 % of total GDP for education.
6. Abandoning the privatization of educational institutions
7. No exploitation of students through security forces
8. No politically motivated cases on students

9. Basic facilities like proper hostels, water and shuttle services should be provided to students in all educational institutions
10. The reconstruction of Educational institutions which were damaged during military operations
11. At primary level, compulsory status should be given to all national languages
12. Students be given access to the budget and audit reports of their universities
13. Article 25 A of the constitution should be implemented and all educational institutions should impart free education
14. University in every district
15. The quota of people from far-flung areas should be increased¹⁴

The participants raised different slogans in Students Solidarity March in different provinces. But the major slogans were as under

1. Hum KyaChaathe? Aazaadi (Karachi)
2. Surkhhai, surkhhai, Asia Surkhhai (Hyderabad) (Lahore)
3. Hum le karaheingaAazaadi. Tumhedeniparaygeaazaadi (Hyderabad)
4. Students live for the sake of truth. (Peshawar)

The student solidarity march was appreciated by few government ministers in their tweets and the leadership of Pakistan People's Party also. The Governor Punjab, Ch. Muhammad Sarwar, assured his support to the protestors. In spite of this, the FIR no. 990/19, civil line police station, The Punjab Sound system Regulation Act 2015 and the Punjab Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance 1960 sections 290, 291, 124 A, was registered against Ammar Ali Jaan, Farooq Tariq, AlamgirWazir, IqbalLala, Muhammad Shabir and Kamil Khan. The major allegations in FIR was as under

- (a) Forcefully blocked traffic in Faisal chowk Lahore
- (b) Used loudspeaker for their speeches
- (c) Speeches against state and state institutions
- (d) Instigated the students against state¹⁵

The administrations of educational institutions used to snub the protestors and few of them were cancelled their M.Phil degree. The governor of the province of Balochistan also issued directions to the university administrations to place ban on all political activities and gatherings on its campuses. AlamgirWazir, student activist, made speech in Student Solidarity March and had gone missing after that speech.¹⁶ Akhtar Khan was also arrested by the Punjab Police. He is one of the sharpest critics of politics in contemporary Pakistan. The leadership of Student Solidarity March declared it an attack on critical thinking in Pakistani society.¹⁷

The Progressive Academics Collective (PAC) registered their protest on 1st December 2019 with condemnation of the unlawful abduction of AlamgirWazir and the registration of FIR against the leadership of Student Solidarity March. PAC declared charges unfounded and it showed authoritarian attitude of the state

in its dealing with peaceful protestors. In FIR, the charges of sedition were leveled against the participants in student solidarity march. Against these charges, the leadership appeared before human rights committee in Senate (Upper House of the Legislature) and they defended citizen's right to protest and highlighted the injustices meted out to Alamgir Wazir. They ensured the government agencies that they would remain within the ambit of the constitution of Pakistan and hoped that administrators would shun their conspiratorial thinking.¹⁸

The response of the major political parties was not encouraging towards Student Solidarity March 2019. Pakistan Muslim League (N) remained totally out of scene.¹⁹ The chairman of PPP, Bilawal Bhutto tweeted in favor of student politics

“The PPP has always supported student unions. The restoration of student unions by SMBB was purposely undone to depoliticize society. Today students are marching in the Student Solidarity March for the restoration of unions, implementation of right to education, end to privatization of public universities, implementation of sexual harassment legislation, right to student housing & demilitarization of campuses. The spirit of activism and yearning for a peaceful democratic process from a new generation of students is truly inspiring.”²⁰

On 4th November 2019, the Sind Assembly passed Resolution calling for lifting of ban on student unions. The Resolution was moved by Pakistan People's Party member Nida Khuhro and was endorsed by three opposition parties; MQM, Grand Democratic Alliance and PTI. The resolution was passed unanimously and also called for the introduction of a code of conduct to avoid conflict between various student organizations.²¹ The Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan pledged to restore student unions in institutions. He reaffirmed that comprehensive policy would be designed for smooth working of the unions.²²

The chief Minister of Sind government also announced his support for the restoration of student unions in educational institutions but he laid emphasis on the implementation of Student Union Bill 2019. The main points of the Student Union Bill 2019, Provincial Assembly Sind, are as under

- (a) It will be unlawful to promote hatred among different factions of the students in educational institutions.
- (b) Ban on keeping, showing and usage of weapons in educational institutions
- (c) Student unions will consist of seven to eleven members that will be elected through elections
- (d) The student unions will work for social and academic welfare of the students.²³

Notes and References

- ¹Quoted in DAWN Newspaper, dated 25th November 2019.
- ²Noor-ul-Huda, *Tameez-ud-Din vs Wafaq-e-Pakistan*, P. 54.
- ³Mahboob Hussain, *Students as the Pressure Group in Pakistan's Politics 1947-1958*, Pakistan Journal of History & Culture, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, 2012.
- ⁴Rafique Afzal, *Selected Speeches and Statements of the Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1947-48)*, PP. 449.
- ⁵Revival of Students' Unions in Pakistan Discussion Paper Revised: September 2008, Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
- ⁶Sarfraz Hussain Mirza, *Muslim Students and Pakistan Movement*, P. 4.
- ⁷Zahid Choudhary, *Political History of Pakistan*, P. 225.
- ⁸Bashir Ahmed, *Ahmadiyya Movement: British – Jewish Connections*, P. 306.
- ⁹Aziz ud Din Ahmed, *Pakistan Mein Talba Tahreek*, PP. 86-93.
- ¹⁰Revival of Students' Unions in Pakistan Discussion Paper Revised: September 2008, Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
- ¹¹Revival of Students' Unions in Pakistan Discussion Paper Revised: September 2008, Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
- ¹² DAWN, 30th November 2019.
- ¹³ DAWN, 30th November 2019.
- ¹⁴Pamphlet of Progressive Student's Federation. November 2019.
- ¹⁵Official copy of FIR, from Police station civil lines, Lahore.
- ¹⁶Naya Daur, 27th November 2019.
- ¹⁷DAWN, Dated 05-12-2019.
- ¹⁸ DAWN, 10th December 2019.
- ¹⁹Shahzad Nasir, 30th November 2019, social Media.
- ²⁰ DAWN, 30th November 2019.
- ²¹DAWN, Dated 5th November 2019.
- ²² The Dependent, 6th December 2019.
- ²³Daily Jang, 9th December 2019.