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The Rise of Religious Politics in Pakistan: A Case Study of October 2002 Elections in the NWFP (KP)

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Abstract

The impressive gains of the six-piece religious party alliance, the MMA (*Muttahida Majlis-i-Am*), in October 2002 Elections in Pakistan represent a mass mobilization in the name of Islam on a scale not seen since the creation of Pakistan. The theory of 'Islam in danger' was raised both against foreign, i.e., American neo-imperialism and against what were seen as 'un-Islamic forces' within the society. The concept of political Islam and its manipulation by the Islamists stirred the political will of the masses. October 2002 polls marks the ever first time experience of the NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), at least in the post-independence period, where a pre-electoral religious-political parties' alliance (the MMA) ruled the province with apparently no threat from the central government. The replacement of political forces/parties in certain regions (dominating by them since 1937) with relatively inexperienced religious leaders, unexposed to modern western education required the attention of all the stakeholders, including the international actors, now very active in the region. In this paper, we try to look into and analyse religion, politics and ethnicity with particular reference to the causes of and factors for the success of the MMA in the Pakhtun dominated areas in Pakistan.

Keywords: 2002 General Elections; MMA; religion; politics; ethnicity; KP (NWFP)

Introduction

The incident of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent counter-terrorist strikes on Afghanistan had enormous impacts for Pakistan body politics. It affected the outcome of the October 2002 election results as well. The Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-i-Azam group (PML-Q) won 118 national assembly seats out of 342 followed by 80 seats of Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People Party Parliamentarians (PPPP). The astonishing development in Pakistan's political history was the landmark victory of the religio-political alliance, the Muttahida Majlis-i-Aml (the MMA)¹ which won 30 out of 36 National Assembly seats in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Having total sixty one seats in the national assembly, the MMA emerged the third largest party in the national assembly. The MMA successfully grabbed the position of the leader of opposition for Mawlana Fazlur Rahman, head of the Jamiat ul ulama-i-Islam-F.² Winning 53 out of 99 general seats, the MMA formed its government in the NWFP, while in Baluchistan it became a partner in the coalition government with the PML-Q.³ The entrance of the religio-political parties in the government needs a scholarly attention as it re-emphasise the role of religion in politics in certain societies. For a proper understanding of this phenomenon background knowledge of the region in terms of political dynamics is necessary.

Islam and Afghanistan as determining factors in NWFP Politics

The ethnic-cum religious nationalism and happenings in Afghanistan usually remained dominant factors in the NWFP politics. Pakhtun viewed Islam as one of the principal constituents of their Pakhtun self-definition. To them, Muslim ways of life and Pakhtun culture are not opposite rather complementing each other. They were always ready to rise in support of religion particularly if it is not contradictory to some of their cultural traits. Secondly politics of the province had always been affected by the happenings in neighbouring country Afghanistan. This is true for the past as well as for the present political dynamics of the region. Historically speaking, the Anglo-Afghan wars of 19th century, and the final one in 1919, perturbed Pakhtun in the NWFP. In late 1920s, Pakhtun were unhappy over the political turmoil in which Amanullah Khan was expelled by a Tajik, Habibullah Kalakani (known as Bachai Saqao) from Kabul. Pakhtun intellectuals in the NWFP saw the secret hand of the British intelligence in the king's exit. Pakhtun in the NWFP showed sympathy and solidarity with anti-British elements in Kabul, and even supported them financially (Rauf, 1999:68).

In the aftermath of the 1929 events in Kabul, the leadership in the NWFP decided to launch an organised movement. In the year 1929 Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his associates started Khudai Khidmatgar (servants of God) for the uplift of Pakhtun community and against the British imperialism (Shah, 1999:167). Khudai Khidmatgar broadly based its philosophy on bringing reformism in the primordial and customs ridden Pakhtun society through persuasion and modern education. Khudai Khidmatgar, Bacha Khan and his brother Dr. Khan Sahib dominated politics of the province in the days to come.

Certain historical events and anecdotes related to British India also had concern for the people of Afghanistan. The flight of students from Lahore to Kabul (during World War I) in protest against the British antagonistic policies towards the Ottoman Empire; the 'Silk Handkerchief Conspiracy' movement of the ulama of Deuband in 1915-16; the Mujahidin movement of the later followers of Sayyed Ahmad Shahid (1786-1831); and the Indian Hijrat movement of 1920 are occasions where Afghanistan share its sympathies with the people of British India particularly with Pakhtun of the NWFP.

The Afghan factor remained intact in the post-independence days of Indo-Pak subcontinent also. In the early days, Afghanistan rejected Pakistan's claims of British inherited legacy at least on the question of its Durand Line. Kabul government strongly reacted when the One Unit Scheme⁴ was adopted in 1955. The use of force in the tribal areas by General Ayub Khan in 1960s was also resented by Kabul. Z. A. Bhutto's government crackdown against Pakhtun nationalists in mid 1970s once again created distance between Kabul and Islamabad. These strained relations sometime led to break of diplomatic relations. The political developments in Kabul also responded reactions from the people in the NWFP. The overthrow of Zahir Shah and coming of Sardar Dawud got a mixed reaction but Soviet intervention in 1979 affected more than anything else the economic, political, social and cultural life of the NWFP.

Pakhtun commitment to religion as described earlier does not mean their adherence to the religious political parties headed by *mullah* at least in the elections. Most of the Pakhtun consider adherence to Islam and obedience to *mullahs*, the stakeholders of Islam, entirely two different and fully separable entities. According to Pakhtun nationalists, traditionally *mullah* has had an inferior place in Pakhtun society. They were considered as members of a professional group, never very high in society and used to have four main duties: to sit in the mosque and lead prayers; to give *azan* in the ear of a new-born baby

as a ritual of initiation; to ensure performance of the funeral ceremony, i.e. to correctly place the dead body in the graveyard with the appropriate words of blessing; and to perform *nikah* (a contractual bond) of marriages.⁵ The political role of the *mullah* was largely circumscribed by other political parties and landed interests groups.

The role of clergymen greatly changed in the end of 20th century in Pakhtun society, primarily due to implicit and explicit external influences and interventions. The traditional leader in prayers became active in the newly created political stage. The formation of a religio-political government (after October 2002 elections) was unprecedented in the history of the NWFP.⁶ This was the ever first time since the partition of India in 1947, that the NWFP was placed under a pre-electoral alliance government and composed of clerics.

The rise of religious activities in Pakhtun regions begins with the arrival of Soviet forces in Afghanistan in 1979. Those who resisted the Soviets in the guise of mujahidin became strategic partner of the military and security agencies in Pakistan. They got the real taste of power when the three major sources of power Allah, Army and America combined to contain the 'infidel' USSR by waging an international jihad (Anwar, 2007). The US and its Arab Allies financial providence strengthened religious elements in Pakistan in general and NWFP particular. The role of Iran after 1979 revolution in fomenting religious enthusiasm and fanaticism in Pakistan cannot be ignored. There were only 30 religious parties, organisation and groups in Pakistan in 1979 which increased to 245 in 2003 (Rana, 2003). The number of madrasas also increased to a substantial level. According to the ICG Report Official estimate indicates that 151 new *madaris* were opened during 1979-82 and 1000 during 1982 to 1986 (ICG, 2002:9). These developments gave rise to *jihad* culture in society in 1980. Pakistanis fought shoulder to shoulder with the Afghans against the Soviets. Those who were killed their martyrdom was celebrated by the Jihadi organisations. A conspicuous number of Pakhtun trained with sophisticated arms entered in the social and economic fold. The whole phenomenon is locally described as 'Kalashnikov Culture' means the accumulation of weapons and increase of use of force for achieving ones objectives particularly in educational campuses. In 1988, the main architect of this policy, Zia ul Haq died in an air crash. But the sympathisers of *jihadis* continue to enjoy a proportionate chunk in the legal, political, economic and educational structures of the country. The democratic governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in 1990s were unwilling or were not allowed to roll back the well-entrenched infrastructure of

Jihad. However the religious elements/forces failed to muster electoral support of the masses primarily due the active involvement of established political leaders in the society.

After the 1999 military *coup d'état* of General Musharraf, the national political leadership had no other way but to leave the country. The prolonged absence of these political leadership affected the social stratum of the NWFP which was very much vulnerable to the religious catchwords. Weaknesses of moderate mainstream political parties at the social level further the shattering of the Pakhtun social fibre and created a leadership vacuum (Waseem, 2006:196). This vacuum was filled by the religious parties, having a widespread backup of mosque and *madrassa* network (Zaman, 2002:235). The Musharraf-led military government is also blamed for a covert support to religious elements. In the wake of religious fanaticism in Pakistan he would have posed himself to the West particularly to the US as the only alternative to counter the religious fanaticism in Pakistan.

Another factor which contributed to the religiosity of Pakhtun is the growing strength of the Tabligh-i-Jama'atin in the province (see for details Haq, 1972 and Masud, 2000). In the last few years, Pakhtun tilt to religion is successfully exploited by this movement while explicitly professing no political agenda. In the annual gathering of the Tabligh-i-Jama'at, Pakhtun participation is greater than any other community. The NWFP is the most suitable bastion for the Tabligh-i-Jama'at, as this province had hardly any population having divergent views to Jama'at's theological legacies.

The MMA and the October 2002 Elections

The analysis of factors/causes of the success of the MMA and failure of other political parties in October 2002 elections would not only help to understand a major turn in the NWFP politics but would also enlighten us in religious and political dynamics of one of the most volatile regions of the world. These factors/causes have been divided into three categories: Core Factors, Supportive Factors, and the Catalyst.

CORE FACTORS

Core factors refer to those which contributed directly to the achievement of better results by the MMA in the October 2002 election in Pakistan.

1. Unification of Religious Parties and Schools of Thought

Alliance of the religious parties was one of the major factors/causes that led to the victory of the MMA in the October 2002 General Elections. Before the electoral alliance, certain developments inside and outside the country obliged the religio-political parties to come under one umbrella. One such development was Deuband Conference hosted by JUI-F in Peshawar in April 2001.⁷ It may be regarded as the first leg of the religio-political parties' election campaign, and it came in the wake of a strictly enforced ban on political activities in the country. The conference was attended by religious scholars and leaders from a number of Muslim countries, including India, Afghanistan, Iran, UK, UAE, Libya and Saudi Arabia. This conference attracted nearly one million people, and filled up Peshawar's roads and streets for three days. The most important episode was the audio messages of Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar, who criticised the west for their antagonistic policies toward the Muslims. This conference boosts feelings of all religious elements in Pakistan in general and in the NWFP particular to confront all elements who could not align with them under one umbrella.

Prior to the MMA, there had also been two such alliances; Milli Yakjehti Council (MYC), formed in 1995 to curb sectarian conflicts in Pakistan. It was eventually derailed due to differences between the JUI (F) and the JUI (S) over the distribution of the alliance offices and Islami Muttahida Inqilabi Mahaz (IMAM), a 29 religious party's alliance led by the JUI (F) in early 2000. Unity of the religio-political parties the MMA was originally not for electoral purposes but to block what they viewed as incursion of 'western ideology and culture' in the guise of certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs), especially in Baluchistan and the NWFP (Herald, 2002:46). In the post-9/11 political scenario, these parties shifted their concerns to the defence of Pakistan and Afghanistan which were in danger as perceived by the US. The religio political parties now started demonstrations and called for strikes for the safeguard of Pakistan and Afghanistan particularly in the wake of Musharaf's decision to side the Americans in their 'War against Terror'. Maintaining a consistent stride, the religio-political parties' alliance protest campaign was finally converted into an electoral campaign when the then government announced general elections to be held on 10 October 2002.

In the year 2001, the MMA was formed consisting of six religio-political parties. It was considered a good omen on the part of the religio-parties to the people of Pakistan. In Pakistan's political arena, masses had often criticised political clergy

by asking 'If, as they say, they work for the sake of Islam and the Islamic system of government, then why there are different religious parties and sects?' Consequently, the clerics had usually failed to mobilise public support for them in elections.

Pakistan's religious population is divided into various groups dominated by *Deobandis* and *Barelvi*, and Shia. The first two groups belong to the Sunni school of thought. The former is 'an orthodox religious movement professing its loyalties with some puritanical tinge to the *Hanafi* school of Muslim *fiqah*' (Faruqi, n.d. vii). They demystify the role of saints and believe in simple ceremonies, and lays stress on getting rid of all types of heresies. The *Barelvis* are primarily aligned against the neo-traditionalist *Wahabi* interpretation of fundamental Islam. Its leader and founder, Ahmad Raza Khan (1856-1921), tried to recast the Prophet's *sunnah* (tradition of prophet) according to his own perception of the *Fiqh-i-Hanfi* (Ahmad, xiv). The *Barelvi* tendency is more inclusive, follows cultural *sufism*, and celebrates 'urs (death anniversaries of saints). The two factions of the JUI are followers of the *Deobandi* school of thought, while the followers of the JUP belong to the *Barelvi* School. The Shia sect is having many views divergent to the majority Sunnis including a special reverence and religious authority to the house of holy prophet which they called Ahl-i-Baiat. Islami Tehrik Pakistan (ITP), formerly known as Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Fiqh-i-Ja'faria Pakistan was the only Shi'a political party in the MMA. The JI, which consists of the urban educated, professional and business classes, is considered to be more orthodox than other religious groups. Its recruitment is largely drawn from modern educational institutions, rather than the traditional madrasas. The JI worked as a bridge between different schools of thought now united under the MMA. The Jami'at Ahl-i-Hadith, which follows the Prophet's tradition and disavows any particular school of thought as such, is associated with the *Wahabi* sect in popular parlance. This process of unification of these groups had advantages; the unity of the MMA was above sectarianism, which remained a serious social problem of the 1980s and 1990s, and has created a situation of agreement between self-identified allies on most issues. Secondly through a unified forum, the MMA constituent parties become able to pool votes into one basket. Otherwise, the vote bank of the religious parties would have been dispersed in different factions, sects and parties. Thirdly, majority of people, ambivalent about making a choice among various religious parties, were now convinced enough to accept a combined appeal of the religious parties under a common electoral symbol, book.

2. Political Fallout of Crackdown on Seminaries/*Jihadi* Network

Pakistan's educational system lacks uniformity. Along with modern educational institutions, a parallel system exists primarily to impart learning, teaching, and training in certain traditional and religious disciplines. These institutions get financial support from the wealthy man and families through their zakat and other donations. In terms of administration country's leading religious parties, sponsor most of these schools. Dr. Mahmood Ahmed Ghazi, the then federal minister of religious affairs, reported that there were about 10,000, *dinimadaris* (religious seminaries) boarding 1.7 million students in 2002 (Khokhar, 2006). Majority of the militants, who fought alongside *Al-Qaida* and *Taliban* troops in Afghanistan, had been educated in these religious seminaries under the auspices of CIA-ISI joint mission. These seminaries were increasingly seen as breeding grounds for the 'foot-soldiers of militant Islam', motivated and trained to wage *jihad*, be it against communism in Afghanistan, or the Hindu-India domination in Kashmir.

In the beginning of 2002, the military government started to reform the religious schools and issued the '*Madaris* Registration and Regulation Ordinance'. The *Ulema* thought that the reform scheme was brought on the behest of the US and other western countries to curtail the religious sentiments among the people. Government failed to remove this impression. Most of the religious leaders and organisations rejected the government's orders requiring religious seminaries to register, and to reform their curricula in accordance with the ordinance. The inability of government in implementation of its policies weakened state functionaries while on the other it strengthened the position of religious leaders in society.

The MMA's election strategy was implemented with a strong and effective network of *madrasas* and *jihadi* organisations. These madrasas having more than one million students became functionally useful in election. They provided street power and organisational support to the MMA, which seems to be another factor enabling the MMA to have a wholesale electoral campaign with a common electoral agenda. They were successful in pooling the otherwise divided votes into a single box in October elections. In the wake of 9/11 and the attack on Afghanistan, Musharraf banned several terrorist outfits. However, their activists were released and they took part in the elections as they were now organised under different names. Such a network immensely helped the MMA and gave them an extra edge over other political parties in the elections which were dysfunctional due to General Musharraf's military rule.

3. People's Thirst for *Sharia* Rule

Despite all internal contradictions among religious parties, classes and sects the MMA patched up their rift by providing a common agenda, a common cause: *sharia*, the 'Islamic system of governance'. In the elections campaign of October 2002, the MMA leaders continuously excited the masses against the establishment, constantly criticised the policies of the military regime in Pakistan. Furthermore, they concluded that the plight of the Muslims all over the world was due to the failure of the *ummah* to establish a socially just and Islamic system of governance which in their eyes was *Sharia*.⁸ The thirst for *Sharia* rule was also evident in the movement launched in 1977 by PNA (Pakistan National Alliance) against Z. A. Bhutto which finally concluded in the overthrow of Bhutto and imposition of martial law General by Zia ul Haq. He exploited the Islamic sentiments of the people.

4. Ethnic Factor

The MMA won majority seats in Pakhtun dominated areas of the NWFP and Baluchistan. The MMA won 27 out of 29 National Assembly seats in these areas, while the remaining two seats went to PPP (Sherpao Group) as both parties had a pre-electoral seat adjustment. In the Pakhtun areas of Baluchistan, such as Zhob, Pashin, and Loralai, the MMA achieved better results than the Baluch dominated areas. The Pakhtun population in Karachi also contributed to better results of the MMA in constituencies where Pakhtun were considerable in numbers (Waseem, 2006:58). Top leadership of three integral component parties of the MMA were Pakhtun such as Mawlana Fazlur Rehman, Mawlana Sami-ul-Haq and Qazi Hussain Ahmad. They understood well the psyche and mentality of the Pakhtun voters. They addressed the people in their own mother tongue, and thus fully utilised the situation better than the other political parties and leaders.

The destruction caused by the war in Afghanistan after 9/11 created an impression that the war was Pakhtun-specific, which incited Pakhtun against the attackers, the government and the political parties who supported the war on terror in Afghanistan. The Pakhtun living in the two provinces of Pakistan had deep fraternal relations with those suffered under laser-sights and daisy cutter bombs in Afghanistan. Anti-war and anti-government sentiments among the Pakhtun increased yet more when the wounded and dead bodies of Pakhtun taking part in *jihad* in Afghanistan returned to the country. Thousands of Pakhtun under Mawlana Sufi Muhammad, leader of the TNSM, crossed Pak-

Afghan border to take part in Jihad against the US forces. A large number of people is still missing or in a precarious conditions in the jails of Afghanistan. The fact that the Pakhtun-nationalist ANP party, supporting the attacks on *Taliban*, could not catch the Pakhtun sentiments in the 9/11 election campaign, helped the religious parties in winning seats in the Pakhtun belt (Ahmad, 2002).

5. Voters' Grievances Against other Political Parties

Pakistan's politics revolves greatly around the leaders and personalities of the political parties. Over the years, the disenchantment of the public with the PPP and the PML-N has increased because of widespread charges of corruption, embezzlement, nepotism, and miss-governance, publicised by the military government. Poor performance of these political parties was substantially attributed to the absence of main national leaders from the country. This absence tarnished their image in the eyes of the people, who start considering their self-exile as an act of cowardice because of their fear of imprisonment or threat to their life. Such lack of resoluteness in their character undermined the credentials of the other political parties, and strengthened the *locus standi* of the *mullahs*. Regarding this situation, Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais, a leading political scientist said,

Never have the people of Pakistan voted in such a large numbers in favour of religious parties before...Again, this change is not confined to the old, ignorant, rural people, but young, urban and professional class seems to be tilting toward the religious parties...But the trend is visible and, if the mainstream political parties continue to ignore the fundamental issues of good governance, good state and society, the general public including the middle class may embrace the fold of religious parties.¹⁹

The MMA, in contrast to other political parties, had been very vocal against America's high-handed tactics in Afghanistan and its interference in Pakistan's policies, actively mobilised the people against Musharraf government, and never hesitated to go behind bars. Compared to the issue-driven campaign of the MMA, the conduct of the non-religious parties appears to most observers as vacuous and spineless.

6. The MMA Election Symbol 'the' Book

The MMA was allocated book as an electoral symbol in the election 2002. In the election campaign, leaders and supporters of the religious parties emphasised, in their Friday sermons, orations, and public speeches, that it was

mandatory upon Muslims to cast their votes in favour of 'the' book. 'The' book, they said, meant nothing other than the Holy Qur'an itself. Posters, pamphlets, brochures, leaflets, charts printed for election campaign explicitly symbolised the Holy Quran as a ballot icon.¹⁰ They termed the election as a battle between Islam and *kufr* (infidelity).¹¹ It is plausible that some of the masses did indeed take the election symbol, 'the Book', as the holy Qur'an itself as majority of the population particularly among Pakhtun are illiterate. There is likelihood of people, on the polling day, who were yet undecided due to the vacuum caused by the absence of the mainstream political game players, stamped their votes on 'the' book, considering it a token of reverence for the holy Qur'an and an act to beautify not only this life but the other world also. That is why the non-the MMA political parties and candidates accused the MMA and its candidates for playing with the people's loyalties to their faith and making political capital out of it (Waseem, 2006:96).

Supportive Factors

There are certain factors which provided a favourable environment for the MMA to attract Pakistani voters in the 2002 election. Some of these factors have its origin in the regional and international events happened in and around Pakistan, while others were result of the policies adopted by the then Musharraf's government ostensibly for its own benefits. All these factors are grouped as supportive factors for the success of the MMA in the 2002 election.

1. Musharraf Earnest Quest for legitimacy

Since his military takeover in October 1999, Musharraf had promised an end to religious extremism and promotion of a moderate Islam. His decision to join the international coalition against terrorism after September 11, 2001 did bolster his image as a reformist and a secular leader in the international community. However, he also needed to have legitimacy for his rule not only at the international level but also in home. It was thought that Western governments' support to his policies was not enough. The public still considered Musharraf as a military dictator. Only elections in Pakistan could have provided such legitimacy to his rule. He needed a result showing his popularity and strength among the masses in the proposed elections. Parties like Nawaz Sharif's PML-N and Benazir Bhutto's PPP were sensed to be the real threat to his design of legitimising his rule through election. Thus Musharraf opted to follow his military predecessors by forging alliances of convenience with religious entities in order to counter his

arch political adversaries. Musharraf has been reported, in his three-hour long meeting with Qazi Hussain Ahmad, to have expressed his determinations to block the PPP's return to power, and thus wanted all anti-PPP forces to join hands.¹² The threat of Nawaz Sharif's PML was subsided with cutting it down after creating PML-Q headed by Choudry Shujaat Hussain once interior minister in Nawaz Sharif government.

To bring his blue eyed politicians and certain political parties inside the parliament, Musharraf's regime manoeuvred, rather engineered, the October elections. The anti-Musharraf parties' particularly the PML-N and the PPP complained about rigging in the October elections. Some of these complaints have been endorsed by the European Union Observers Mission (EUEOM). The mission noted official interference in favour of the pro-government 'King's Party' i.e. PML (Q) and to some extent the MMA before and on the polling day.¹³ In one of the pre polling manipulation of results, the PPP claimed that in the month of September, just before the elections, 140 election officers were moved from their places (Herald, 2002:10). These transfers and postings traditionally benefit those who are in government in Pakistan. Even before the elections, the PPP proclaimed pre-poll riggings and voiced that in the forthcoming elections, religious parties would have been given favour. For example, the government did not provide enough time for the election campaign as there was ban on political activities and it continued for too long. Its repeal was announced on 28 August 2002 and become effective only on 01 September 2002, thus giving very little time for the political parties to address its electorates effectively. On the other hand, the MMA was allowed to hold processions and rallies even in Rawalpindi, where the military headquarters are located, while the Muslim League (Nawaz) and the PPP were denied the same permission of such public gatherings (ICG, 2002:16). Furthermore, for mobilization of mass support the MMA launched a train march from Karachi to Lahore to Peshawar on 28 August 2002 without any restriction of the then government. These religio-political parties already had pulpits in the mosques from where they could openly discuss political issues with their electorates.

2. Political Unrest and Alternative Government

Pakistan was facing severe economic crisis due to economic sanctions after the nuclear test in 1998. The Kargil Crisis (1998-99) and the retreat of Pakistan military from the Tiger Hill further increased the distance between military and political leadership. Nawaz Sharif was made responsible for this humiliating retreat. The country was passing through a period of serious economic crises as

a result of economic sanctions by the international community after the nuclear test in 1998. The political instability, government-opposition tussle and religious fanaticism all had their origins in the short-term political expediency and charge of corruption of Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto's elected governments in the past eight years make these governments unpopular (Sheikh, 2002:41-42). The fragile political system of Pakistan aggravated when General Musharraf ousted the elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on 12 October 1999. Pakistan once again slipped away from democratic norms and the response of the international community was seriously condemning and censorious in the beginning.

In early 2002, India, imitating the United States, declared a preemptive strike policy on the 'terrorist groups' in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and piled one million troops on Pakistan's eastern boundary.¹⁴ They campaigned to equate the movement of freedom fighters in Kashmir with international terrorism, and suggested the US-led war against terrorism should be fought in Kashmir as well. On the western border of Pakistan, the US military deployment in Afghanistan was felt by the public as to be inching towards insecurity. People watched the removal of the friendly *Taliban* regime with suspicion, and doubted the sincerity of the American friendship towards Pakistan.

People were generally fed up with political parties and their leadership and thus wanted a change in the political-cum-administrative spheres. The MMA, which run better electoral campaign and held huge public meetings in Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, attracted the masses as to be a serious alternative contender of power in Pakistan.¹⁵

3. New Electoral Rules 2002

The Government announced a new eligibility criterion for candidates in the election. Accordingly, one of the pre-requisite was that a candidate must have certain educational qualification to contest election for the assemblies. The Chief Executive's Order (No.7 of 2002) stated that 'a person shall not be qualified to be elected or chosen as a member of *Majlis-i-Shora* (Parliament) or a Provincial Assembly unless he is at least a graduate possessing a bachelor degree in any discipline or any degree recognized as equivalent by the University Grants Commission under the University Grants Commission Act, 1974 (XXIII of 1974)'. Certificates issued by religious seminaries (*madradas*) called *Shadat al Aalmiya* were equivalent to a university degree by the then University Grants Commission and thus accepted for contesting the October polls by the mullahs

whereas many veteran politicians, including Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan,¹⁶ the leader of the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD), were debarred to take part in the election. Consequently, many politicians were disqualified on one ground or another from taking part in the elections. The provision greatly benefited the religio-political parties as they had enough persons in each constituency to qualify for contesting elections.

4. The Government Media Policy

Media plays a very crucial role for the neutral or undecided voters to reach a decision about a candidate or political party in the election campaign. As Pakistanis had little access to private media reports, thus they have to rely on the state run media apparatus. The people in rural areas which constituted 70 % of the total population, Radio Pakistan and Pakistan Television are the only accessible means to information. In the election, coverage in the government controlled media was also biased towards mainstream political parties. The PML-Q and the MMA were provided more coverage on the Pakistan Television (PTV), the only state-run channel, than the PPP and the PML-N. According to a survey, in the first phase of the campaign, the MMA received an average of seven minutes and 48 seconds of coverage, while the largest party, the PPP, received only two minutes and 53 seconds in the state-controlled television news bulletin *Khabarnama* (national news bulletin).¹⁷

The Catalyst: 9/11 & Pakistan's Entry in the US-led War in Afghanistan

International politics, economics, national interests, and diplomatic relations among many a world state took a sudden and immediate turn when the twin cities of America came under terrorist attack on 11 September 2001. In Pakistan, the response of the religious parties was a little more ambivalent in its combinations of expressions of satisfaction, sorrow, and other emotions over the attacks on America. Shah Ahmad Noorani termed it 'the wrath of heaven brought about by the wails and cries of the oppressed nations.' Qazi Hussain Ahmad denounced it as open terrorism and ruled out Muslim involvement in the event. He even reminded the US the event of the Oklahoma City bombing, for which Muslims were held responsible; they were arrested, but investigations proved later that these allegations were false.¹⁸ Mawlana Fazlur Rahman condemned the attacks, but labelled them 'a lesson' for US policy makers. He advised them to stop their cruelties against innocent people in the Third World countries. Mawlana Azam Tariq stated that the US should realise that when its cruelties are boundless, the reaction would be equally dreadful. Leaders of the

Mujahidin fighting in Kashmir avoided giving any comments over the events. Mawlana Samiul Haq ruled out Osama's involvement in the attacks, and expressed his fear that the US would use Pakistan's soil as a base to target Afghanistan. He warned that the people of Pakistan would not tolerate the use of its soil, airspace, or intelligence of Pakistan against the neighbouring country.¹⁹

Soon after 9/11, the US administration concluded that Osama Bin Ladin and the *Al-Qaida*, operating from Afghanistan, were behind the attacks, and that any successful counter strikes would not be possible without the support of Pakistan. Addressing the American nation, President George W. Bush plainly declared "we will make no distinctions between those who planned these acts and those who harbour [the ones responsible]." Colin Powell, the US Secretary of State, addressing the national security meeting at the White House, asserted 'We have to make it clear to Pakistan and Afghanistan [that] this is show time' (Abbas, 2005:217). Consequently, Pakistan joined the US-led coalition against war on terror in Afghanistan. The immediate entry of Pakistan into the alliance and the subsequent heavy bombardments and air strikes on the people of Afghanistan, aroused public opinion against both the US and the military regime in Pakistan. This played the role of catalyst in the wining of the MMA in the October polls.

Prior to the 9/11 events, Pakistan pursued a *pro-Taliban* policy, recognised *Taliban* government in Afghanistan followed by Unites Arab Emirate and Saudi Arabia. *Taliban* had its roots in the religious madrasas in the NWFP. Two of the important religious parties of Pakistan JUI-S and JUI-F had very close relations with *Taliban* government. These parties in their propaganda machinery successfully glorified some aspects of *Taliban* government such as simple life of government officials, peace and speedy justice in society. These were at the lowest ebb in the pre-Taliban governments in Afghanistan. The citizens of Pakistan were not required to have a passport or visa while travelling to Afghanistan. This provided an opportunity for outsiders to get a look at the socio-economic and political conditions of the Afghans, and above all, the *Taliban* brand of Islamic government. During the last days of the *Taliban* regime, the trade activities between Afghanistan and Pakistan increased to a considerable level which was satisfactory for the Islamabad. Pakistan military establishment was also satisfied with a decreased role of the Indian lobby in Kabul. However the post 9/11 US policy threatened the Taliban government in Afghanistan of dire consequences if it did not fulfil US demand of handing over Usama Bin Laiden the US, the main accuser for 9/11 incident in New York.

Around the same time, Pak-Afghan Defence Council (PADC), carrying 35 religious parties under the chairmanship of Mawlana Sami ul Haq, declared that if the US attack Afghanistan, the religious parties would wage *jihad* against the US; and the whole Islamic Community would be bound to support the religious decree of *jihad*. Musharraf was characterised as traitor of the Muslim Nation and Taliban were termed as 'a symbol of Islam'. Mufti Nizamudin Shamzai, the chief Mufti of a Ja'amiyat-ul-Islamia seminary in Karachi and leader of JUI declared as "Musharraf openly supported the US and its allies against Taliban. And under the Islamic law if any Muslim cooperate with infidel against Muslims, he must be ex-communicated from religion" (Zaman, 2002:24). The presence of FBI agents in Pakistan's soil was propagated as being a serious threat to the sovereignty of the country.

MMA exploited the impacts of the on-going war in Afghanistan, and termed it a crusade war against the Muslims. They held public rallies throughout the country, and went to the roads and streets in protest, describing the crises as 'Islam in danger.' According to the PEW survey, 81 per cent of Pakistanis opposed the anti-terrorism move in Afghanistan (PEW, 2002:53-63). In the 9/11 context, Islamabad's U-turn policy disgruntled many stakeholders in Pakistan. With the sudden changes in Pakistan's foreign policy, without a concurrent change in mass opinion or interest, alienated *pro-Taliban* religious hard liners in Pakistan. The anger of these well-organised groups and clerics excited the sentiments of the Pakhtun and turned a broad spectrum of interests into a religio-political matter in public debate. The government used force to prevent anti-US rally and arrested many of the activists.²⁰

The MMA's political strategy and public popularity increased even more when the US unseated President Saddam Hussain, on the pretext of WMDs, ensuring public freedom and promoting democracy. After the rise of the religious right in Pakistan in the October elections, Juan Cole of Michigan University criticised the foreign policy of the US aimed at curbing extremism, promoting democracy, beating the drums of war, and supporting dictatorial regimes friendly to the United States. After commenting on the American policies in the Middle East he reverberate that the same policy is counterproductive in Pakistan (Cole, 2002).

However, all the other factors related to the rise of the MMA have had precedents in Pakistan's history, perhaps not all at once. In all previous circumstances, religious parties gained only a marginal role in positions of real power. What was different this time? First, it is fact that all these events took place at once, a coincidence of history. And secondly, it is the events of

September 11 and the subsequent highly aggressive change in American foreign policy especially towards the Muslim world, caused anger among the people. It roused anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism and thus swung the political pendulum to right in Pakistan. The MMA exploited these sentiments against Musharraf regime and its pro-government candidates and political parties in October 2002 Elections and successfully converted it into political victory for the religio-political parties never happened in the history of Pakistan.

Conclusion

The NWFP, a volatile region lying between the Central Asia and the South Asia, remained a hub for the activities of international actors since the Great Game of the 19th century and thus affected the society and the culture of the Pakhtun. The Afghan internal affairs also influenced the trajectory of politics as people of the NWFP are having ethnic affinity with the people of Afghanistan. Till 1970s, the Afghan affairs manipulated Pakhtun nationalist slogans. But the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 liquefied Pakhtun nationalists' euphoria and caused rise of Islamic jihadi culture in the province of course with the overt and covert support of some vested international actors. In the final analysis the American intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 drastically affected the economic, social and political landscape of the province. In such a situation 2002 general elections were held in Pakistan. Pakhtuns, unlike the past, expressed their support to religious political parties. This decision was mainly based on the feelings of hatred against the American policies in the Middle East in general and in Afghanistan in particular. Convergence of interests with the military junta also made it possible for the MMA to encounter the main political parties in a befitting manner. However, unity of religious parties under the banner of the MMA and the capabilities of the religious demagogues to muster the entire situation into an electoral victory played decisive role in the success of the MMA in the NWFP and in the Pakhtun-dominated areas in Baluchistan. For the first time in Pakistan, the international scenario, the military will, and the unity of the religious parties together made the entrance possible of the MMA into the power echelon. On the basis of the foregoing discussion, it may be reminded that the mobilisation of people and the articulation of their interests on religious grounds are still relevant in political studies. It should not be dealt as an obsolete idea and it should be taken as an integral part of the policy making process at least in some parts of the Third World.

Notes

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- ¹ The MMA was a conglomerate of Six religio-political; Jamat-i-Islami, Jamiatul Ulama-i-Islam (F), Jamiatul Ulama-i-Islam (S), Jamiatul Ulama-i-Pakistan, Jamiat Ahl-i-Hadith and the only Shia party, Islami Tehrik Pakistan (ITP), formerly known as Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Fiqh-i-Ja'faria Pakistan (TNFJ).
 - ² Makhdom Amin Fahim of the PPPP blamed the government for favouritism to the MMA as he was leader of the largest opposition party in the parliament.
 - ³ In the provincial Assembly of Baluchistan the MMA won 15 seats while Muslim League-Q won 19 seats. As no party had a clear majority, hence the MMA-Muslim League coalition government came into existence.
 - ⁴ In this scheme the NWFP was merged in West Pakistan and thus lost its separate entity.
 - ⁵ Interview with Ms Bagam Nasim Wali Khan, leader of Awami National Party, November 12, 2004.
 - ⁶ Though early in 1970s Mawlana Mufti Mehmud, father of Mawlana Fazlur Rahman, headed the provincial government but that was equally shared by NAP (National Awami Party) a non-religious political party.
 - ⁷ It is interesting to note that the NWFP chapter of the Jamiat-ul-ulama-i-Hind was the only organisation in pre-partition India which hosted the 8th annual conference of JUH in Peshawar in 1927. None of the political organisations including INC and AIML could do that in the entire period of freedom struggle.
 - ⁸ *Dawn*, Karachi, 17 Oct. 2002. "the MMA to Enforce Shariat Laws" online: www.dawn.com/2002/10/17/nat8.htm
 - ⁹ *The News*, Islamabad, November 29, 2002.
 - ¹⁰ Field observation.
 - ¹¹ "The MMA Using Religion to Woo Voters." *The News*, Islamabad, October 01, 2002.
 - ¹² *Dawn*, Karachi, August 16, 2002.
 - ¹³ "John Cashnahan Rejects EU Media Report", *The News* October 01, 2002. See also "Pakistan Rejects EU Poll Criticism" on http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/2322745.stm. Accessed March 3, 2007.
 - ¹⁴ After the bomb explosion in the Indian parliament in December 2001, India put pressure on Pakistan and brought its army close to the border of Pakistan. It withdrew her army back in December 2002.
 - ¹⁵ Interview with Rahimullah Yousafzai, an expert on the region, February 15, 2005.
 - ¹⁶ Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan scornfully commented that if a member of the parliament was required to be a graduate degree holder then the president of the state must have a PhD. (most of the military officers who were the then rulers of Pakistan were even not graduates).

- ¹⁷ Leading up to Election Day, the news bulletin devoted six hours and twenty minutes to the elections. The MMA was given 36 minutes, following the highest, 44 minutes, received by PML-Q; while the PPP hardly got 29 minutes. See Pakistan Liberal Forum. *Media Monitoring Elections October 2002*, Islamabad.
- ¹⁸ *The News*, Lahore, September 12, 2001.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.* September 13, 2002.
- ²⁰ On 20th September the government used force to prevent people from participating in an anti-US rally, and arrested around 100 students from colleges and universities (*Dawn*, Karachi, September 21, 2001).

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