

Muttahida Qaumi Movement: Mode of Politics and Political Attitudes

*Muhammad Abid**

Abstract

The emergence of Muttahida Qaumi Movement, popularly known as MQM, as a political party has created turbulence on the political scene of Pakistan, especially that of urban Sindh, for over three decades. It introduced a different style of political culture and apparently due to the same innovation, it has been facing a host of problems. Once a party, which stood intact in the face of military operation and deliberate onslaught from the state institutions, it is, nowadays, fragmented in three distinct sections. Issuing any statement of its founder and central figure, Altaf Hussain, or displaying his picture on Pakistani media, is banned. Moreover, even his name has been excluded from his own party's manifesto. Seemingly, the political career of Altaf Hussain has been closed, and the state would not allow him to resume his previous standing.

How the events led to such an impasse? What factors led MQM to this course of action? To answer these and similar questions about MQM, one needs to study the MQM style of politics and political attitudes critically in the context of urban Sindh, particularly in the historical backdrop of socio-economic and political conditions of Karachi. One also needs to take into account those factors that were instrumental in the formation of such characteristic style and culture of politics, which had become a hallmark of MQM. This analysis helps in identifying and comprehending those factors which, though, not known in the political literature of the world, are operative on the ground in urban Sindh.

This article comprises three sections: the first explains the historical background of the formation of MQM; the second takes an account of MQM as a political party, its organisational structure and mode of operation. The last section includes the analysis of the subject.

Historical background

Muttahida Qaumi Movement was established as the Mohajir Qaumi Movement in the country's largest metropolis, Karachi, in 1984, in a peculiar set of circumstances. Since its inception, this organisation has been playing a dynamic and stormy political role both at the national and provincial level. It has set examples of collaboration and alliances with Muslim League (N), Peoples Party and Muslim League (Q)—parties

* Muhammad Abid, Lecturer, Liaquat Government College, Malir, Karachi.

having diverse and contradictory approaches as compared with its own. It also supported the dictatorships of General Pervez Musharraf for many years to win his favor for staying in power for years in a row, a distinction no other party can boast of. Moreover, MQM introduced certain new trends in national politics. It can very legitimately take pride in sending the people from lower-middle class, living in houses of mere 80 sq. yards, to the most powerful echelon of national polity as representatives of the people. Some of them were selected as mayors of the cities as big as Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur. It is important to mention here that Karachi is either the first or second largest metropolis of the world as per latest estimates, though the results of the latest census of Pakistan do not endorse this. The census results are found highly disputed by the experts. These are also challenged as being a product of conspiracy against the MQM, the representatives of Karachi, and the Urdu-speaking community living here. The party, has been charged of a host of crimes—insurgency, sedition, anti-state activities, burning the national flag, taking funds from India for destabilizing Pakistan, sending its workers to India for terror-training, killing its political opponents and dissidents, extortion of money, damaging property, looting, arsons, civil disturbance, and calling strikes to inflict damage to the national economy. As a result of these allegations MQM had to face state operation thrice: In 1992, when Nawaz Sharif was Prime Minister, and MQM was coalition partner with his ruling party in the centre, the murder of Hakim Mohammad Saeed was blamed on MQM. So the coalition broke, and an operation was started against the MQM in Sindh after imposing governor rule. In 1995, when Benazir Bhutto was Prime Minister for the second term, with MQM as coalition partner, differences erupted again between the two parties and an operation was again launched against MQM under the supervision of the then Interior Minister, Lt. General Naseerullah Babar. Then in 1993, under premiership of Nawaz Sharif, when the deteriorating situation of law and order in the country demanded desperate measures, and terrorism was to be rooted out altogether, a National Security Plan was designed for the whole country. In Sindh, and Karachi in particular, the action against terrorists and criminals, which is still going on, was declared to particularly target the MQM.

Even before the operation of 1992, the MQM leadership had started going into exile (mostly self-exile). Its prime leader, Altaf Hussain, has not only been staying in England since then, but also running his party from there quite effectively, another marvel of MQM. Despite all the above mentioned qualities of the MQM, surprisingly and interestingly, the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and

Transparency (PILDAT), in its report published in 2015, have rated MQM as the fifth among the eight largest parties regarding internal democracy. However, in 2016, its ranking has dropped to seventh.¹ To have a general understanding of its internal democracy, organisational structure, internal dynamics, political attitude, and the style of politics, one has to look into the conditions and factors which operated behind the formation of MQM.

MQM was not an instant reaction or an off-shoot of the resentment of any ethnic group of Karachi, rather it was a product of decades' long sense of deprivation and severity of disgrace meted out to the Urdu-speaking community of urban Sindh. It is generally believed that General Zia-ul-Haq, the third military dictator of Pakistan, supported establishment of MQM, but his was a limited role, merely confined to allowing the prevalent bitterness and hatred among the urbanites against the Peoples Party in Sindh. Although the military ruler was not capable of inculcating any original sense of unity around one particular ethnic/political identity, yet he had the capacity to use the existing centrifugal tendencies by airing differences and coloring them as per his own designs. This is what exactly General Zia did. Students who were in colleges of Karachi in the 1980s, are witness to the fact how in 1978 the all Pakistan Mohajir Students Organisation (APMSO), established in the University of Karachi by Altaf Hussain, permeated into the city colleges. Its meetings used to be held secretly. Later, when in 1984, it gave birth to a political party, the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM's initial real name), even then the secrecy continued. And it is a historically documented fact that within two years, 1987-1988, Altaf Hussain was calling upon Urdu-speaking Karachities to get a Kalashnikov by selling off their TVs, boldly and openly in the streets and parks of the city. The call still reverberates in the air.²

It was a time when a military dictator was in power. Obviously, one can guess that this much boldness was supported by then president, army chief, and chief martial law administrator, and a general—Zia-ul-Haq. However, neither any single documentary evidence is available to prove this assertion, nor a set of evidences can be put together to conclude this. There is even little chance of any such thing coming up in future as such matters are not put in writing or recorded in any other form. It cannot be argued that there existed any direct link between Zia

¹ *Assessing Internal Democracy of Major Political Parties of Pakistan*, Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, December, 2014, p.14.

² Interview with Syed Taj Hyder, senior PPP leader, 7 July 2017.

and central leadership of MQM, yet there must be some sort of collaboration. The only reason to build this collaboration must be their common enemy—the Pakistan People’s Party. However, one must not ignore the very clear and outright statement of General Mirza Aslam Baig, a confidant and military heir of General Zia. Responding to a question in a TV interview, he said that MQM was formed by Gen Zia.³

Anyhow, the question remains, was MQM formed merely to fulfil political designs of a military dictator, or was there any historical inevitability behind it? This matter is explained by an author, an ISPR officer and an insider, who indicates that MQM was initially motivated by the Mohajirs’ sense of deprivation. Though the young leader, Altaf Hussain, had relations with Maj. Gen. Muhammad Afzal Khan, the then Martial Law Administrator of Karachi, and the Chief Minister, Syed Ghaus Ali Shah, such links were, however, not much instrumental in creating MQM. The event was a historical necessity which was to emerge at some time due to the prevalent attitudes of provincialism and prejudice.⁴

So this testimony confirms that if MQM have been a party formed merely at the behest of a dictator, then after the demise of that dictator MQM should have met the same dreadful fate as faced by other dictator-induced parties, e.g., The Convention Muslim League of General Ayub Khan, or Muslim League (Q) of General Pervez Musharraf. As we have seen MQM has prospered as a party for the last three decades and also claims the mandate of the urban centers in Sindh to date. So it is safe to assert that MQM was not, solely, a product of General Zia’s whims and wishes.

Urban development factor and rise of MQM

It was in 1947, at the eve of partition of India, and demise of colonial rulers, that Karachi got the status of capital of the newly created dominion of Pakistan. This was a historic decision for Karachi. Its population swelled from about half a million to 20 million in 70 years. In 1947, Karachi was comparatively a smaller city than the existing cities of Bombay (new name Mumbai) and Delhi. As a result of partition, Karachi received a huge bulk of partition migrants, who, due to economic opportunities offered in a port and capital city, found Karachi more attractive a place to settle than any other city, though Lahore, Rawalpindi, Hyderabad and other cities also received a significant

³ Salim Safi, ‘Jirga’, Geo TV, 13 April 2015.

⁴ Brigadier Abdul-ur-Rehman, *Mohajir: Pachaas Sala Safar ki Daastan* (Lahore: Azad Enterprises, n.d), p.90.

number of such migrants. Majority of those coming to Karachi were Urdu-speaking or they opted Urdu as a medium of communication. Their previous work experience as educated, skilled functionaries of the state apparatus of pre-partition India or other artisanal trades logically convinced them to settle in Karachi. The government's facilitating efforts to settle them and the migrants' hard work soon turned this small city into a sprawling urban centre, the megapolis of the country and became one of the ten major cities of the world around the turn of twenty-first century. Its political and economic importance increased side by side, and the same processes affected its political dynamics as well.

From 1947 – 1958 majority of the settlers in Karachi, who formed majority of the population of the city, were still entrapped in the aftermaths of partition. Despite their problems these people were devout supporters of the Muslim League, the party headed by Quaid-i-Azam, because it had realized the dream of independence. During this period, in every election, limited or otherwise, Karachi stood as a supporter of the Muslim League. General Ayub's martial law in 1958 was also welcomed by the Karachities in general. However, some measures taken by the Ayub regime offended them. The foremost step was shifting of capital from Karachi to Islamabad; the Urdu-speaking people were most affected by this decision, second only to the Bengalis, for their employment opportunities were radically reduced. Apparently it was an administrative decision, but it was moved by an ethnic bias, as Javed Hashmi refers to Ayub having said: 'these Mohajirs would not let anyone stay in peace'.⁵

Second major step was sacking of over 200 bureaucrats, including senior civil service officers called the 'key-stones of British Raj',⁶ all Urdu-speaking, under the charges of corruption, in the clean-up operation after martial law. These seniors included chief commissioner Karachi, governor of State Bank, and others. Ayub wanted to replace them with his chosen officers who could carry on his agenda.⁷ The third offending step was the presidential election of 1964, held not directly but through 80,000 basic democracies, representatives. A large number of political parties formed an alliance, Combined Opposition Parties (COP), putting Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, sister of founder of the nation, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, as their presidential candidate. Such a popular figure posed big challenge for Ayub to win the election. He won by

⁵ Makhdoom Javed Hashmi, *Haan Main Baghi Hon* (Lahore: Sagar Publishers, 2005), pp.53-54.

⁶ Brigadier Abdur Rehman, *op.cit.*, p.62.

⁷ *Ibid.*

utilizing all the state machinery,⁸ yet his defeat in two big cities of Karachi and Dhaka showed a high degree of political awareness of the electorates, their devotion for Muslim League, and opposition to dictatorship. And this factor saw endorsement in the nation-wide anti-Ayub movement ignited in these two cities. Ayub had to step-down. The following military ruler, General Yahya Khan, held general elections in 1970 on the principle of adult-franchise. The results showed a division in the mandate of Karachi; economic troubles and inefficient rule by the Muslim League had drifted Karachities away. Then election results were as follows: Pakistan People's Party 2, Jamaat Islami (JI) 2, Jamiaat-ul-Ullem-e-Pakistan (JUP) 2, and independent supported by JI, 1.⁹ Muslim League was swept away, seemingly, the Karachities were then out of Muslim League's charisma, as they independently chose their parties having diverse approaches and ideologies. There were five Urdu-speaking and two Sindhis among seven selected candidates. Out of 16 provincial assembly seats, PPP won eight, JI and JUP candidates occupied the rest. Among these, 12 candidates were Urdu speaking. Later on a court decision replaced an Urdu-speaking candidate with a one from Punjab.¹⁰

The Bhutto era (1972-1977) highlighted the differences between the Sindhi and Urdu-speaking communities in the Sindh province. Migrants at the time of partition had mostly settled in Sindh, thus threatening the majority status of the Sindhis. The naturally growing sense of alienation and insecurity of the Sindhis was addressed somewhat by the policies of the Bhutto regime. But, the Language Bill presented in the Sindh Assembly produced¹¹ language riots of the 1970s. A number of Mohajir families had to migrate to Karachi after this, leaving the rest in the interior of Sindh in a state of insecurity.¹² Consequently, in 1976, in general elections Bhutto's PPP was contested by PNA – an alliance of nine political parties – which was overwhelmingly supported by the Urdu-speaking residents of Karachi and Sindh. The PPP won only two seats from Karachi, like the previous elections, though total Karachi seats were increased from seven to

⁸ Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan Pakistan's First Military Ruler* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1993), pp.274-75.

⁹ www.na.gov.pk

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ethnic conflict in Sindh*, PILDAT, October, 2011, p.17.

¹² Sibte Hassan, '1972 riots, was it a language issue', this was originally published in *The Herald*, August 1972 issue. available at: <http://herald.dawn.com/news/1153263>.

eleven. Six Urdu-speaking representatives were elected.¹³ However, 1976 election results were rejected on alleged rigging charges followed by nation-wide protest by PNA, a move understood to be tacitly supported and unchecked by the military,¹⁴ as it wanted to get rid of Bhutto. Finally martial law was imposed on 5th July 1977, toppling Bhutto who was later hanged because of a disputed decision which is still regarded as a 'judicial murder'.

General Zia's first eight-years in office as a dictator were supported by the Mohajirs, PPP being a common enemy. The Mohajirs, however, felt that all political parties, and the army as well due to its dominance by the Punjab, had their roots outside Karachi, hence were least interested in resolving their issues. Then to whom should they look up to, was a big question. When General Zia announced non-party elections in 1985, Mohajirs of Karachi, remained perplexed about choosing the right candidate for solving their issues, for the independent candidates had no party backing apparently. So, people questioned the utility of casting votes, whereas the issues of abolishing quota system or repatriation of Biharis from Bangladesh were no ordinary issues. A very non-serious attitude was shown towards elections both by Urdu-speaking voters and candidates. For instance, Zain Noorani's picture with Jinnah cap and *sherwani* appealing more than other candidates' pictures, was a determinant of Landhi's peoples' voting preference, although he was made Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs in Muhammad Khan Jonejo's cabinet.¹⁵

Within such a political chasm or vacuum, logically only that force and entity was to be welcomed which articulated and advocated peoples' real concerns, and could speak in their own idiom. Ultimately, this vacuum was filled by a political party formed by young students, who faced discrimination in educational institution. They formed a students' organisation first, then to grapple with issues faced by their ethnic community formed a political party. There were certain minor but persistent issues irritating them since decades. These included: maltreatment of Mohajir commuters by non-Mohajir staff of public transport, non-local police mishandling the accused persons in police stations, unemployment, quota system and poverty, among others.

Among these, the issue of quota system was Sindh specific, while other problems were generally prevalent in other provinces too. Urban Sindh residents were allowed 2 per cent quota in government jobs.

¹³ <http://www.ecp.gov.pk/Documents/GE%2007-03-1977.pdf>.

¹⁴ Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *If I am Assassinated* (Lahore: Classic, 1994), pp.viii-x.

¹⁵ Daily *Jang*, 11 April 1985.

Poverty, police maltreatment was all over, but why the Karachities were reacting so bitterly, is a crucial question. In fact, their issues were significantly different from other parts of the country. As the Karachities were complaining against non-Urdu-speaking, hence for every problem that took an ethnic colour their developed a sense that Urdu-speaking were particularly targeted. This ethnic difference might have shaped the behavior of non-Urdu speaking police or transporters to some extent. The politicians and military rulers instead of cooling down such animosities, intentionally aired them either out of imprudence or to lengthen their rule. Moreover, not only the political opponents but the persons in authority also promoted degrading labels about the Mohajirs.¹⁶ Eruption of Sindhi-Mohajir riots during Bhutto regime were seen by the Mohajirs as promoting this divide.

In short, it can be argued that MQM was born out of various interplaying factors that were of both long-term and short-term in nature. The long-term factors, in the words of Altaf Hussain included Sindhi-Urdu conflict soon after independence, small urban quota in jobs, Biharis' issue after 1971, police maltreatment and rulers' high-handedness.¹⁷ Among the short-term factors were traffic accidents in Nazimabad, killing of a college student, Bushra Zaidi, and few days later a mini-bus-train collision in Quaidabad triggered a series of urban violence.¹⁸ According to Altaf Hussain, during the riots in Landhi-Korangi, he received message from police superintendent to cool down public fury. He went on the scene and made people to stop burning tires etc.¹⁹ This was the time for the authorities to realize that if people could stop rioting on Altaf Hussain's call, they might start rioting if he calls so. This is what the Karachities did on his calls for years to come and no one could stop them effectively till recent years. Furthermore, few more incidents had a triggering effect. These include: firing and killing of people intending to join an MQM meeting in Hyderabad on 31 October 1986;²⁰ mass murder in Qasba and Aligarh Colony on 16 December in the same year;²¹ operation in Katcha Qila Hyderabad in 1990, and similar

¹⁶ Ahmed Salim, *Muhajir Qaumi Movement, Tashkeel aur Jidojohad* (Lahore: Saarang, 1997), p.40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.180-84.

¹⁸ *Dawn*, 6 April 1985.

¹⁹ Ahmed Salim, *op.cit.*, p.75.

²⁰ Altaf Hussain, *My life's Journey, The Early Years (1966-1998)* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.66.

²¹ *Jang*, 15 December 1986.

other events, all added to the ethnic hatred.²² Along these gory incidents, inciting speeches of Altaf Hussain were establishing him as a staunch spokesman of Mohajir cause, and so the people started rallying around him. Thus a persistent bias and unjust attitude shown by the establishment, bureaucracy, politicians and dictators alike, first led to the establishment of a students' organisation and then a political party for upholding Mohajirs' cause.²³

Political approach and outlook

Amidst an ocean of religious, secular, ethnic and national organisations/political parties, active in Karachi and urban Sindh, MQM chose for itself a path of conflict with rest of the parties. It also established clash and competition with other ethnicities (Pakhtuns, Punjabis, Sindhis, and at a later stage Balochs). It was inevitable, at least the MQM leaders thought so, that for a new organisation or a party to get it recognized as distinct and, thereafter to maintain its credibility, to choose the policy of violence, intolerance and insecurity. Such a strategy was thought fit for its survival, and the same strategy defined the contours of its internal structure and mode of politics. Later on, when MQM got a share in the state apparatus and its power-sharing experience increased, the same strategy was reinforced as a key towards success.

Interestingly, the MQM has been fearful of its own supporters' mercurial tendencies. MQM felt that their support will not continue if their allegiance with their nationality's identity is not strengthened and the sense of insecurity is not kept alive and sharpened. This was reflected in MQM policy of training its workers through an extensive network of units and sectors at the lanes and locality's levels, and consolidating the workers' consciousness through discussion forums and training sessions. The big army of workers trained this way, imbibed an exceptional sense of loyalty with the leadership. They were bound by a particular oath, exhibited specific attitudes, and were assigned the task of keeping a watchful eye on every one living in their lanes. Such characteristics of MQM workers could not alter even after three decades. In this context, the following section attempts to explain internal working and internal democracy within MQM.

²² 'Massacre Pakka Qila Hyderabad', posted on 27 May, 2014 by Mustehkum Pakistan, available at: <https://mustehkumpakistan.wordpress.com/2014/05/27/massacre-pakka-qila-hyderabad/Hyderabad>: MQM's Pucca Qila, December 21, 2007.

²³ Mustafaf Aziz Abadi, 'MQM Kun aur Kesay' an interview, *Jang*, 18 March 2013.

Organisational structure

If compared with other political parties of Pakistan, one can see that MQM has the most tightly-knit and defined organisational structure. In the centre it has the biggest number of committees, all very active and functional. At the lower rank, the units and sector offices used to remain actively busy in organisational activities. The MQM tiers of control and leadership has been as follows:

Quaid-e-Tehreek: It is difficult to guess whether the MQM leaders had ever benefitted from the elaborate and widely acknowledged political theories, or have organised their organisation under the guidelines given by Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Machiavelli or Karl Marx, or studied any books on history and politics to perpetuate their hold on their people. Though MQM and Khaksar Movement of Allama Mashraqi have remarkable resemblance regarding their organisation, it may not be true to assert that Altaf Hussain and early days' leadership of MQM could have studied Khaskar Movement before organizing MQM. However, it is true that Altaf Hussain and his fellows definitely had a good observation of Pakistani politics. They knew that though it is not easy to reach the top in Pakistan but it is much more difficult to stay there. Furthermore, to fill the political gap, voicing people's concerns is not sufficient for continuing the magic and charisma of leadership. The leadership, in all cases, needs a multi-dimensional importance vested in itself. About this issue, a leader of MQM wrote that blind faith in leadership is the first and essential step to maintain discipline in any movement. This faith connects and keeps different elements tightly woven in a movement.²⁴ This is more true in a complicated political system of Pakistan where you first need a big agricultural landholding with innumerable peasants working on it for their livelihood who offer unconditional loyalty and support, then an undisputed spiritual dimension, and lastly a helpless 'community' or, in better words, a 'nationality'. Obviously the MQM had no land to claim on so this deficiency was met by expelling others from Karachi through urban violence. Spiritual dimension was also fulfilled; a scholar commented that 'Altaf Hussain had been allocated the status of a pir [saint] much early by the people when they saw his picture on the leaves. If the Sindhis have Pir Pagara, then the MQM also needs to have a 'blessed' saint'.²⁵

²⁴ Dr. Imran Farooq, *Nazm-o-Zabt kay Taqazay* (Karachi: Publication Department MQM, 1986), p.10.

²⁵ Dr. Mehdi Hassan, *Pakistan ki Siasat aur Awaam* (Lahore: Saarang Publications, 1997), p.225.

Altaf Hussain, to continue his undisputed prime position introduced a strict check and balance system in his party and supervised this system personally, hence no one could rise to claim his heir-ship. It is not true that his position was not challenged from within the party, as one can see separation of one faction of original MQM — MQM Haqiqi — which worked as a separate party, but Altaf Hussain's position remained unaltered by this. One of his close fellows explains his role as having resemblance to that of Queen of England.²⁶ His name was written in the constitution of the party as the founder and ideologue, the central committees sought his guidance on important matters.²⁷ When such an un-challengeable status was accorded to Altaf Hussain, soon after establishment of MQM, the question arose as to the possibility of MQM surviving after Altaf Hussain. He had no clear answer to this question. In one TV interview he was asked: 'there seems no second-tier leadership, and your party does not seem to be a dynastic one, is it not your responsibility to train such leaders in the party?'. He responded that he had created a bunch of leadership, who one after another can take charge, if the top leaders are eliminated.²⁸ Later he asserted that: 'MQM cannot work without me; whatever conditions may arise, I'll continue as the head of the party'.²⁹ He did not want to delegate his powers to anyone. It is not surprising that he would not let anyone to take his position, but he is not willing to allow this even after him, as he never proposed name of his heir. His struggle to launch a party, to establish it firmly, and developing its organisational structure, put together logically justified such an attitude, as one would find in certain other countries. Kemal Ataturk of Turkey, was very strong in his party and was supported by the army yet he was very cautious. It was only a little before his death that he openly mentioned the name of Ismat Anunu.³⁰ Similar trend was visible in Nazi Party of Germany, Communist Party of the USSR, and the party headed by Mussolini in Italy.

To keep him above any questioning, Altaf Hussain also changed his statement about his family's migration to Pakistan. Soon after his success in 1988 elections, in an interview with Mahmood Shaam, a senior journalist, he disclosed that his family migrated to Pakistan after

²⁶ Muhammad Waseem and Mariam Mufti, *Political Parties in Pakistan, Organization & Power Structure* (Lahore: LUMS, 2012), p.44.

²⁷ Muhammad Waseem and Mariam Mufti, *op.cit.*

²⁸ 'Ajj Shahzaib Khanzada kay Sath', *Geo* TV network, 11 March 2015.

²⁹ *Jang*, 1st May 2015.

³⁰ C.H. Dodd, 'Political Succession in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey', ed., Petter Calvert, *The Process of Political Succession* (London: Macmillan press, 1987), pp.82-83.

1950.³¹ Later, perhaps he realized that the migrants coming after 1950, in settled conditions were actually declared as ‘the beneficiaries’, who sold off their property in peace and calculated opportunity of settling in Pakistan, whereas, the first wave of migrants were moved by their love for new homeland, and they had to leave in the turmoil and bloodshed of 1947 and 1948. So in his biography Altaf Hussain avoided to mention date and time of his family’s migration from India to Pakistan.³²

Party chairman: Apart from the Quaid being above all posts in the party, there was a post of party chairman, which was once filled by Azeem Ahmed Tariq, but none after him came to that post.

Convener and deputy convener: These are the two most active posts in the party. The convener convenes and presides the session of rabta committee. His vote is decisive if on some issue a ‘tie’ situation emerges. Apparently, the convener is the party chief in all matters, whereas the deputy conveners could be up to six, as per party by-laws they were assigned the task of assisting the convener in disposing all matters. Though Article 13 of the country’s constitution calls for filling these posts through elections, but in practice many such office-bearers were replaced and posts filled by new persons without election.³³

Central secretariat: The central office of MQM, located in Federal B. Area, Karachi, is popularly known as ‘nine-zero’, the ending numbers of Altaf Hussain’s land-line telephone. It has also been his residence. It was open round the clock for visitors, throughout the week. One could always find at least one member of the rabta committee for guidance there, till it was sealed by the Rangers in 2016. International secretariat in London, kept an eye on party affairs and worked in direct contact with the branches and sub-offices of the MQM in other countries, too. Members of MQM rabta committee in London secretariat worked on the same pattern as followed by those in Karachi secretariat. Since Altaf Hussain has been staying in London for over two and half decades, he has been contacting and addressing his party workers and supporters from all over

³¹ An interview with Altaf Hussain ‘Mohajir Qoumi Movement: Jisy Nazar Andaz Nahi Kiya Ja Sakta’, conducted by Mehmood Shaam in *Sindh ki Shahri Siyasat mein Talatum Paida karnay walay Altaf Hussain kay Azaem aur Iraday* (Karachi: Shibal Publication Ltd., 1987), p.17.

³² Altaf Hussain, *op.cit.*

³³ *Assessing Internal Democracy of Major Political Parties of Pakistan, op.cit.*, p.47.

the world. In both Karachi and London offices, established sections have been working efficiently to manage finance and other organisational matters. Nowadays, in Karachi, such matters are dampened but the temporary office in PIB Colony is discharging such duties for the MQM. In London, matters are almost the same with little difference.

Organisational committees: There are six most important committees in MQM: Karachi tanzeemi committee, Karachi muzafati organizing committee, defence-Clifton residential committee, Punjabi-Pakhtun organizing committee, Sindh tanzeemi committee, and Punjab organizing committee — all being directly accountable to the rabta committee. Apart from this, in terms of sub-organisations and associated institutions, MQM has been regarded as the most organized and systematic party in Pakistan.

Along with regional organisations MQM has strong functional compartments, such as: news room section, video section, photo section, administration committee, khidmat-e-khalq foundation, shuhda workers committee, buzurg wing, khawateen wing, labour division, speech committee, communication and media wing, legal aid committee, employment cell, transportation committee, workers' problems committee, election cell, central information committee and All Pakistan Mohajir Students Organisation.³⁴

The city of Karachi has been divided into 26 sector offices, and 216 unit offices. Each sector has 7-13 unit offices. MQM first contested in the local bodies elections when Karachi was divided in local bodies sections. The same were announced to be the units of the party, and they are still same, though the city and the whole province have been reorganised many a time. During Musharraf era, a new demarcation scheme was introduced as the system was changed to induct union councils and town councils. These offices were open in the evening hours daily. The in-charge of the one unit was called unit in-charge, and each unit had a bazurg (senior citizens) committee, with a separate person of old age. Women were represented in each unit, too. With a very dynamic and active functioning, such unit offices could discharge any organisational duty on a short notice. In Hyderabad, too, such MQM offices were equally active. Though other cities of Sindh have presence of MQM, yet such an elaborate network of offices has not been built there. All units in a sector submit their report weekly to the respective sector, and sector in-charge has to supervise and stay in touch with the sub-offices. The sectors, on the other hand, used to submit their reports

³⁴ Muhammad Waseem and Mariam Mufti, *op.cit.*, p.47.

to the Karachi organizing committee regularly, housed in the round-the-clock working office at 90. The organizing committee submitted all matters to the rabta committee, which used to instruct accordingly.³⁵

A well-known journalist has given an eye-witness account of the impressive strength and organisational structure of the MQM. He concludes that he had not seen any party ‘where workers were busy untiringly in late hours of night in a disciplined manner’. Party leaders have denied having any intelligence wing, but have reported having 43 sub-organisations.³⁶ This must be mentioned here that only four days after the journalist’s visit, on 11 March 2015, Rangers raided the MQM office from five till nine in the morning and recovered a huge stock of arms and ammunition in and around the nine-zero and arrested over one hundred terrorist, target killers and convicted criminals. This story ended logically, on 22 August 2016, when Altaf Hussain uttered extremely hateful and irresponsible statement about Pakistan in his broadcast speech from London to nine-zero centre. The speech provided irrefutable evidence of the allegations against him of anti-state activities and promoting insurgency. Obviously the state was left with no option but to seal the MQM office and ban the speech broadcast of Altaf Hussain. Moreover, many MQM offices were demolished in Karachi and in other areas of Sindh. This damaged the street power of MQM enormously. The state, instead of banning MQM as a political party handed the case over to the higher court, where it is still in process and people are waiting for the verdict. The speech fragmented the MQM, which now stands subdivided into three factions: MQM (Pakistan), MQM (London), and Pak Sarzameen Party. What could not be done by the state and military operations was easily done by one speech of its apex leader, Altaf Hussain.

Ideology: Though MQM describes itself as a liberal and secular party, its ideology has undergone alterations. Initially while entering the electoral politics, it projected itself as a ‘*haqparast*’ party, which meant that the party was an upholder of truth, even its candidates were called ‘*haqparast*’. Then the compulsions of changing time drifted its leader away and he gave a new ideal of being ‘practical and realist’. He declared this principle time and again.³⁷ So it is no way wrong to assert that MQM, despite calling itself a liberal and secular part, has shown a compromising and accommodative attitude, which could have been

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp.44-46.

³⁶ *Jang*, 7 March 2015.

³⁷ Muneer Ahmed, *Altaf Hussain* (Lahore: Gora Publishers, 1996), p.60.

anything but not ‘*haqparasti*’. Its approach of politics was also more in harmony with accommodation than liberalism and realism. The MQM, following the same policy, had clashes with all political and religious parties, and built alliances with them, too, to show its practical and realistic approach. On few occasions, this political expediency was contrary to its liberal and secular claims. For instance, in 2010, in the issue of arrest, and 86 years punishment by a US court to Dr. Afiya Siddiqui, a woman of Pakistani origin, which had infuriated religious parties of Pakistan, MQM remained quiet. But suddenly, on 16 September 2010, after the party was facing troubles due to murder of Dr. Imran Farooq, it joined the protest on 26 September 2010 at Tibet Centre, Karachi, along with religious parties like JUI and Sunni Tehreek. Later on MQM again kept silence. The matter could not yet be explained by the MQM to set the record straight.³⁸

Moreover, MQM distanced itself from its long-standing and Mohajir-unifying demands like making Karachi a new province, repatriation of Biharis from Bangladesh and abolishing quota system in high level jobs, perhaps due to its practical and realist approach. Today, these demands are no more on MQM agenda. About making Karachi a separate province, Altaf Hussin has explained that he was in favour of making Karachi a separate province earlier but when he saw conditions of Mohajirs and Mohajir students in the remote areas of Sindh, revised his idea as Karachi as a new province would amount to injustice to the Mohajirs in Sindh.³⁹ This was, of course, a realist demand; however, MQM and its leaders have been referring back to the old demands for political bargain. Whenever they had friction in relation with the Sindh government the walls of Karachi and Hyderabad were full with demand of Mohajir province. It shows that the old demands have become redundant for MQM; only practical and realist approach is now followed by the party.

Membership procedure: Anyone who supports the political philosophy of MQM and keeps attendance regular in any unit office, and is wishful to be a member, is so accepted. However, earlier such persons were made to give an affidavit, which was unique at least among the political parties of Pakistan. It indicated a tight party discipline and exceptional degree of loyalty to the party leader which was reflected in such clauses as:

³⁸ *The Express Tribune*, 29 September 2010.

³⁹ Ahmed Salim, *Mohajir Qaumi Movement, Tashkeel aur Jidojehad, Dastavezi Haqaiq* (Lahore: Saarang Publishers, 1997), p.74.

I swear by my mother that if I come to know of any conspiracy, activity, or planning against the MQM or its Quaid Altaf Hussain, I'll without any delay, will convey that to the Quaid-e Tehreek Altaf Hussain or the central leaders, and will not hide anything due to any expediency, even if the conspirator is my real mother, brother, father or relative.⁴⁰

Though the present leadership of MQM denies any need to have such an affidavit but the workers can be seen practically bound by loyalty of a similar nature.

Decisionmaking and policymaking procedure and its locale: The MQM had a well-knit and disciplined system of decisionmaking and policymaking, where all important matters were consulted and then sent to the rabta committee for decision after deliberation and voting. Very crucial matters were even consulted with the workers at the grassroots level. MQM many a time conducted voting widely on important issues by its workers. All this, however, has proved farcical since there are many such instances where the overwhelming opinion of the grassroots workers was rejected and decisions were made quite contrary to that. One such example is that of joining hand with the PPP after 2013 elections, about which referendum was held all over the country on 20 June 2013,⁴¹ 80 per cent views were against it, but the party decided the other way without disclosing the results.⁴²

Other documents about MQM, its website and TV interviews of its leaders prove the fact that legally the final decisionmaking power in MQM rests with the rabta committee, but this committee has no value in front of Altaf Hussain, who has been removing it partially or fully at several occasions in the past. Worst was the case when on 23 May 2013 at the 90 centre, when Altaf Hussain made a sobbing speech complaining the indifference shown to him by the rabta committee. Soon after this, many top leaders of rabta committee were beaten up by the workers. Then Altaf dissolved the whole rabta committee, but reformed it within few days.⁴³ Similarly, on 20 July 2014, Altaf Hussain dismissed 19 prominent members of the rabta committee again on the charge that its members were not discharging their duties properly. They, however, were restored within 12 hours.⁴⁴ One may ask who after 19 members'

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.309.

⁴¹ *Jang*, 21 June 2013.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 23 April 2014.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 24 May 2013.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 July 2014.

dismissal was left in the rabta committee, to decide about restoration. Moreover, if restoration came through endorsing decision of a body, then how could just one person dismiss in the first place? Not only this, Altaf Hussain has been routinely suspending members of any committee or the whole committee at once. It affirms the fact that Altaf Hussain has not only been the ideologue of the party but has had held the highest controlling powers as well.⁴⁵

This proves that the decisionmaking power in MQM was restricted to only Altaf Hussain. His position always remained beyond any questions. He used to take all the decision but it was shown as if it is done by the rabta committee. The situation was in fact verse. The slogan on Karachi walls: '*manzil nahin rahnuma chaheay*', i.e., we need the leader and not the goal. This is no doubt a proof of his workers' devotion to him, yet this is no way a reflector of democracy and democratic traditions. Historically, birth of MQM was facilitated by the feeling of insecurity and uncertainty that Urdu-speaking people were not given their due rights in the provincial and central government, and the goal was achieved through MQM. Yet the MQM had to face some hard facts, such as the minuscule number of Urdu-speaking people vis-à-vis the non-Urdu people in Sindh because of which MQM could not realize its wish to capture power in the province or the centre through traditional means. To get more than what it deserved, the party even supported the generals and dictators, a policy which benefitted MQM in the short run, but it divested itself of democratic values that it needed.

Successes and failures of MQM

Successes: The greatest success of MQM, no doubt, has been of binding the people of diverse social, linguistic and ethnic identities, into one identity. It is a common understanding that all migrants from India spoke 'Urdu', but it is a fact that the areas of origin of the Mohajirs were diverse and they learnt Urdu after they arrived here. Strangely enough, such people had participated in the freedom struggle abandoning their diverse ethnic, linguistic and regional identities, and were united in one identity of Islam to attain 'Pakistan'. And after they achieved independence, their frustrations forced them to seek a new identity altogether. This identity was carved out of the migration process at partition. MQM, no doubt, had played a vital role in cementing them and putting them under one label.

⁴⁵ *Assessing Internal Democracy of Major Political Parties of Pakistan, op.cit., p.47.*

The second noteworthy achievement of MQM was to maintain and retain its vote bank and credibility for over three decades, unlike any other party in Pakistan. It has won continuously so far, but now in the elections of 2018, which faction would lead is yet to be seen.

Another success of MQM lies in the fact that for the first time in the history of Pakistan, it sent the real lower and middle class people to the highest representative houses of national power. Such were its candidates who could not even afford to pay their security deposit for election. In a country where party tickets are ‘purchased by the landlords and capitalist class, elite dominate the election scene. MQM’s experience has been indeed unique and laudable.

Failures: MQM, a party borne out of prolonged discrimination and prejudice faced by Mohajirs, perpetuated the same discrimination and conflict with all other ethnic groups taking it as a means of its own survival. It could have channelized the genius and energy of its community in a constructive way. This policy of confrontation stood in its way when MQM tried to expand its area of activity beyond urban Sindh and to include other deprived sections, too. Its characteristic policy of hostility was well-known hence its good gestures were not trusted in the new zones that it tried to reach.

MQM did not represent landlords or wealthy capitalist class, so it had to rely for funds and support on its own community, for running its party. Apart from donations, *fitra* at *Eid-ul-Fitr* and income from sacrificial animals’ hides on *Eid-ul-Adha*, were two major sources. This collection was made by the unit and sector level workers, swelled by time, and the collectors started collecting much more than what was needed by the party, hence they developed personal interest as well. Such corrupt practices became norm, so much so that the highest personality in the party also came under the charge of money-laundering.

Another drawback of MQM has been that it promoted the political approach based on arms in urban Sindh and Karachi, as the JI had once done in educational institutions. The result was bloodshed for three decades. MQM might say it was pushed in this direction, but the MQM leadership should have had the wisdom to see that the party was misdirected by those elements whom it had chosen to fight against. Another drawback of MQM politics has been that it did not bring any improvement in the political system of Pakistan rather it tried to take advantage of the existing loopholes of the political system, especially of the electoral system to win by hook or crook. The party has been also issuing policy statements about emerging important issues of national and international significance, but it never tried to find any solution for

them which should not have been the approach of a *haqparast*. On such serious issues as heavy load-shedding, dewatering of Karachi, or inefficiency of the civic service agencies, they simply say 'see our statement on the record'.

Another regrettable quality of MQM has been to promote personality-worshipping, aggrandizing the persona of Altaf Hussain. Its slogan 'we need only the leader, not the objective', was an outright fascist slogan. It was also imposed on the party. Whatever Altaf uttered was to be obeyed and defended, regardless of that uttering being illogical or disputed.

Conclusion

MQM establishment as a party affirms the theory of economic and class conflict giving birth to political parties. The actual conflict in Sindh has been economic, where old Sindhis initially developed an apprehension about the Mohajirs (migrants) who wanted to control their resources. Later similar apprehensions developed among the Mohajirs against migrants from provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The confrontation thus has now been among different ethnicities or nationalities for control over economic resources.

This is a class conflict, too. Majority of the Mohajirs joining MQM are from lower or lower middle classes. They believe that only two per cent of people control all the national resources, they are sure if they are united and launch a political struggle, they can shift this balance of power in their favour. This is the real cause behind continuous people's support to MQM despite its repeated follies and faltering non-serious attitudes. The supporters of MQM feel they have no other option as they cannot support any party that is headed or controlled by leaders from feudal or privileged classes.

A question about MQM's drifting from its original agenda and manifesto is also important. In fact, MQM withdrew from its original professed goal within a short time. For example, soon after 1988 election victory they thought Mohajir Qaumi Movement is not suitable to extend party influence in other parts of the country, so they changed its name to 'Muttahida Qaumi Movement'. Next was the list of initial demands which were not included in the manifesto or pursued in the assemblies, but they were used as 'teasing tools' or 'bargaining chip', and they were propagated not through media but by wall chalking. These included demand for Karachi province, repatriation of Biharis, or ending quota system. Statements are issued when desired, but no concrete action or well thought-out strategy seems to be in place.

MQM's policy of confrontation with other ethnic groups is still followed religiously, as it caters to a needed sense of insecurity from outsiders and security from own kind, the insiders, to rally them around one slogan or one personality. The recent operation in Karachi has helped restore law and order and business activity in Karachi, which is definitely a positive sign for the state and the federal and provincial governments, but some crucial questions still demand their answers. For instance can one expect that issues of Karachi and Sindh have been resolved by disintegration of MQM, or shrinking of its street powers. Can Mohajirs now sleep in peace and think that their demands have been met; are apprehensions of old Sindhis removed; is there any think-tank to work out a logical solution for the ethnic conflict; can a two per cent quota for Karachi be justified; will another militant wing of the party may not be allowed again by the higher authorities or government to build strength and gain power through militancy, such and other questions are still pushing for answers. Until then the present achievements and indicators of improvement will remain unreliable and transitory.