

Politics of the Pakhtuns' Integration in the Federation of Pakistan

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Abstract

The politics of NWFP have been of special attention due to political and strategic reasons for the colonial rulers and after independence for the successive governments of Pakistan. No matter what, they have been in power or out of power ANP (Awami National Party) and its predecessor NAP (National Awami Party) remained mostly all over in the politics of Frontier. They have owned and championed the causes of Pakhtuns and also of the people of Frontier at large. Circumstantially and by remaining consistent with ideals of the founding fathers, ANP remained mostly in opposition.

Other mainstream parties such as Muslim League, PPP and religious parties challenged its influence and vote bank and skillfully outcaste it from the echelon of powers gives way to a debate whether or not the Nationalist politics have been pragmatic enough to reconcile or coincide with changing political environment or preferred to remain stick to their ideals and course of action.

There is a stark difference in the cold war politics and post-cold war politics. In the light of former the main cause of Pakhtun politics that is independent Pakhtunistan proved unfulfilled. However, in the case of later that dream does not seem to be materialized. Because even war on terror has not caused impetus for the demand of joining Afghanistan or declaring independence by the tribes on the Pak-Afghan border, despite military operation for the last four years, though alienation in the tribal Pakhtuns from the Central government is natural.

Other causes such as Provincial autonomy, changing the name of NWFP to Pakhtunkhwa, socio-economic reforms, Kalabagh dam and military operations in the tribal areas have the capacity to become rallying point for Pakhtuns and also would bring ANP to the center stage of politics in Frontier.

Introduction

Interestingly Pakhtun politics and Frontier politics overlap even in scholarly discourses, which reemphasizes the significance of geography and also ethnic homogeneity for the national identity of Pakhtuns. Of course it need not to be interpreted to the disadvantage of the minority groups residing in Frontier though it reiterates the demographic majority of Pakhtuns and also their leading role in politics and economic spheres of the province.

Historically, the minority groups which are quite a few such as Kashmiris, Qazalbash, Gujar, Kohistanis, Kalash, and Khowar-speaking Chitralis¹ have over the ages politically and economically reconciled with the Pakhtun majority if not ethnically. Similarly, the experiences of 60 years as constituent unit of Pakistan explains that Pakhtuns in all key areas of national life in have more to share with Baloch's, Sindhis, and Punjabis rather than with their brethren(Pakhtuns) across the border in Afghanistan. Author should mention that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the ansequent refuge taken in Pakistan by million of Pakhtuns weakened political links between the people both sides of the Durand line.

As part of the federation NWFP shared issues of underdevelopment just like other units with the center. However, solutions to those problems and in particlur strategies for their settlement are peculiar to Frontier. Over the decades leaders of the Pakhtun nationalist movement have been instrumental in articulating issues of the Pakhtuns and also ventured to suggest solutions, ranging between full autonomy to national independence.

Political squabbling between nationalist elements and the Muslim League, as the founding party of Pakistan, in the beginning became one of the main features of the Frontier politics. Later other mainstream parties also challenged the nationalists' position on the Pakhtun problems and their solutions. In the 70's Pakistan Peoples Party emerged as the mainstream national party and overshadowed other national and regional parties. During the 80's Muslim League, revived once again, played a leading role in the national politics. At present religio-political groups (Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal) have emerged as political force of national stature. They have contested the paramount role of the nationalists as they gave tough competition to NAP (National

¹ Punjab government, Gazetteer of the Peshawar District, 1887-98, Lahore, 1989, p.63. See also Dr, Razia Sultana, Pkhtoon Settlement in the Peshawar Valley: An Appraisal, Pakistan Quarterly Journal of the Historical Society, Vol.L, No.4, Oct-Dec, 2002, P.72

Awami Party) in the provincial elections of 1970 and also competed neck to neck with ANP (Awami National Party) in the local bodies' elections held in 2005.

The experiences of the nationalists have been a mixed bag of alliance politics with same and diverse ideological groups which included the leftists, Maulana Bhashani faction from East Pakistan, Ganatantari Del² in the 60's and later with the Muslim League Nawaz group and also intermittently the religio-political groups were joined for asserting their role for the sake of safeguarding Pakhtun interest in the framework of mainstream politics. However, these marriages of convenience on the part of NAP (later ANP) disillusioned the public, rank and file and even some of the top leadership of the party such as Ajmal Khattak. It reduced the popularity of ANP to only two districts of Frontier namely, Charsada and Mardan.

The future forecasting of Pakhtun politics in current scenario due to complexity become a difficult task. However, two factors help to predict the chances of ANP showing better results in the coming elections of Feb, 2008. One is disillusionment of the public with MMA government performance during five years in power in NWFP. Secondly, the fragmentation of other leading political parties such as PML (N) and PPP especially, after Ms. Benazir Bhuttos's brutal assassination would favorably augur to ANP election results.

The memories of old issues still linger on such as provincial autonomy, renaming the province and also prejudices against the biggest unit (Punjab) of the federation. Some new ones are added such as the Kala Bagh Dam and also demands for the socio-economic reforms, which the Pakhtuns are long awaiting. The question how to deal or solve the issues of Pakhtuns would matter a lot and would also determine reciprocal relationship between the federation and the Pakhtun concentrated areas.

Introduction to Pakhtun Politics

There is a history of changing paradigms of Pakhtun politics especially in the Frontier and also in pockets of Balochistan. Even the Pakhtun element from across the border (Afghanistan) has been influencing the situation over the decades. In the British colonial period the hallmark of the nationalist political movement was an anti-British struggle and an effort to halt the division of India, which in another words meant an opposition to the creation of Pakistan. This stand the ANP could hardly

² Feroz Ahmed, *Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan*, (Oxford University Press, Karachi: 1999) p.216

sell to wider public in Pakhtun concentrated areas, particularly when the partition took place and Pakistan as an independent state came into being. Although the public appreciated the socio-cultural and educational efforts of the Khudai Khidmatgars (the predecessor of NAP and ANP) for introducing political awareness among the Pakhtuns.

The politics of Khudai Khidmatgara during the colonial period was making sense to people in the Frontier as they were struggling against the colonial power, however, after the creation of separate homeland for the Muslims of subcontinent they could not articulate convincingly their stance for independent Pakhtun state nor they mobilize people for securing maximum autonomy.

During the post-colonial period especially after the creation of Pakistan the Frontier nationalist movement tried to reconcile with the new realities on the one hand, and on the other hand, engaged in confrontation with the federation for securing more autonomy. This struggle took several shapes throwing up many demands, which ranged between secession to merger with Afghanistan, that eventually assumed a moderate shape of struggle for securing maximum autonomy within the framework of Pakistan. Though the extreme goal has not so far been a success, latent desires of the Pakhtun nationalists have the potential to reemerge. It means that their desires have faded but have not died down completely. The issues of the likes of Kalabagh Dam can reunite the Pakhtuns to make a common cause against the center on the platform of nationalist movement.

The third main shift appeared after the demise of veteran Pakhtun leader Bacha Khan and the decline in the overall leadership of the Pakhtun nationalist movement, which besides other factors brought the religious element in the limelight of the Frontier politics. There is also likelihood that Pakhtun leadership might shift from the nationalists Pakhtuns to a Islamist Pakhtuns as has happened in neighboring Afghanistan has been and is currently in place in the border provinces of Pakistan³ where MMA (Mutahida Majlis-i-Amal, a conglomeration of six religio-political parties) is in power since October 2002 general elections till Oct. 2007. In case the situation would have matched in both the countries what would have been likely scenario that certainly raised the threat perception of Pakistani authorities. At present there is little possibility of such instances to happen as the religio-political forces in both the countries are once again reversed into struggling phase.

However, the current political trends indicate that the nationalist elements are gaining ground, which is evident from the results of local

³ Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, Vanguard books, Lahore 2005, P.219

body polls during the summer of 2005. The nationalist elements in collaboration with the Jumat-i-Islami fielded joint candidates. But Jumat-i-Islami is out of the loop for the Feb18, 2008 elections. So fourth shift seems to be in the making, which can either end in the favor of nationalist elements or ANP might reconsider sustaining National and Provincial seats accommodation with moderate and liberal parties. So the political scene of the Frontier is fluid and any of the two options might succeed in the upcoming elections.

Pakhtun politics during the initial years of Pakistan

Dominantly populated by the Pakhtuns the frontier politics show parallel political trends. For example, in the referendum of 1947 Frontier joined Pakistan with an overwhelming majority which the Nationalist elements boycotted for their own reasons. At that time the province was under Congress rule, which was not in favor of a referendum that was scheduled to be held on the basis of two options; either to join Pakistan or India. They demanded the enlistment of the third option of Pakhtun independent state on the ballot, which was turned down by the British authorities in consensus with Muslim League and top Congress leadership. The author should mention that since the third option chance had been omitted from Bengal and Sindh, at the behalf of Congress, it could not be re-introduced in the case of the NWFP. Consequently the nationalist elements among the Pakhtuns boycotted referendum as a token of protest.

The results of the 1947 referendum demonstrated that there were two types of Pakhtuns, one were ready to joined Pakistan and the other stayed with the newly established state under the compulsion of new political realities. These contradictory trends also indicate the divisive nature of politics among the Pakhtuns of Frontier. In Balochistan there is tight demographic competition between Pakhtuns and Baloch. So the Pakhtuns of Balochistan share unanimity in a broader ethnic sense with the nationalists of Frontier rather than Baloch nationalists though their economic and even political interests are better served with the Baloch.

The role of Afghan governments before the Soviet intervention was quite clean on the Pakhtun issues as they from time to time backed the cause of Pakhtunistan. This independent Pakhtun state was not to be amalgamated with the Afghan part of the Pakhtun people⁴. This position of the previous Afghan governments proved detrimental to the cause of the Pakhtuns. Throughout the early decades of the creation of

⁴ Ferroz Ahmad, *Ethnicity and politics in Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1999, *Ibid.*, p.185

Pakistan Afghan irredentist claims over the border region of Pakistan and its dispute over the Durand Line remained a great source of tension for both the sides. The Afghan authorities named the Pakhtunistan issue a 'national issue' and raised it in the UN General Assembly⁵. They also provided asylum to the nationalist leaders such as Abdul Ghafar Khan, Abdus Samad Khan Achakzai, Afarsiyab Khattak and Ajmal Khattak⁶ from time to time, which added to the tension between the two countries.

Given the cold war cordiality between former USSR and Afghanistan the Soviet governments were also sympathetic to the Afghan nationalists' cause. That was the time when Pakhtun nationalists received, at least, moral and symbolic support from external elements, though some official sources of the government of Pakistan claimed they had received material support as well. However the decline of Afghan nationalist leadership particularly after the disintegration of former Soviet Union, hampered that symbolic support to the nationalists. It demoralized the leftist elements in the ANP and also ruptured the ideological cover of the movement.

Internally the movement faced many ups and downs. After the declaration of one unit in 1955 the Pakhtun cause and its leadership almost disappeared due to integration of four provinces into one. However, in different ways two elements kept the candle alight, one was the appointment of Dr. Khan Sahib as the first chief minister of united West Pakistan, second, Ghafar Khan, popularly known as Bacha Khan, formed a National Party in collaboration with G.M. Syed, Haider Bux Jatoi, Abdul Samad Achakzai, Prince Karim and Mian Iftikharuddin⁷, which secured Pakhtun presence in the mainstream politics. Those were the days when Pakhtun politics used to be issue oriented so a common cause against the federation was ventured in collaboration with the leadership of East Pakistan. The smaller provinces of West Pakistan generally found a support in the shape of alignment with East Pakistan against the domination of Punjab, as the largest province of West Pakistan. Maulana Bhashani joined the National Party and made it into National Awami Party (NAP). Even Awami League shared the concerns of the Pakhtun nationalists however the only difference, which existed between the two, was over the strategy not of the cause. They in the United Democratic Front fought against President Ayub in the election of 1965 focusing on provincial autonomy and restoration of provinces as main agenda of the election. Failure of the United Democratic Front

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.184.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.184.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.216.

ensured the victory of President Ayub in the 1965 election. However the aftermath of the elections turned the tables on the winners and brought the losers in the limelight.

Shifting political trends

The National Awami Party contested the general elections of 1970 on the issue of provincial autonomy and also for the sake of parliamentary democracy and non-aligned foreign policy in an alliance with the Awami League. Though Pakistan Peoples Party in West Pakistan and Awami League in East Pakistan emerged as the majority parties in the parliament however NAP also performed well in NWFP and in Balochistan, which gave impetus to it to form coalition government in both the border provinces. However, the dismissal of Frontier government and resignation of Balochistan government became a turning point in Pakhtun politics. Consequently tension between Wali Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto exacerbated to level that Wali Khan (the leader of Pakhtun movement) landed into the camp of the religio-political groups, which catapulted him to the center of the political stage as a leader of the opposition at that time.

This shift made him face hardships of prison and also banning of his political party (NAP). The Bhutto era caused serious damage to the party and its leadership. It also brought about significant change in the ideological patterns of the Pakhtun politics. Wali Khan transformed from socialist, liberal and nationalist in to capitalist and integrationist. Since no major change can possibly be explained without a rationale so during the 70's Bhuttophobia provided a new ideological cover to NAP politics.⁸ Incarceration of the Wali Khan came to an end when General Zia-ul-Haq released him after overthrowing Bhutto government in July 1977.

In the 1980's Bacha Khan, architect of educational reforms and also of Pakhtuns political consciousness among Pakhtuns passed away. The task to reunite Pakhtuns and give them a solid leadership became daunting. Even external factors were not in favor of the Pakhtun nationalist elements. After Soviet occupation of Afghanistan along with world wide condemnation, and local resistance began against the occupation. It did not allow the socialist Afghan government to take up the causes of Pakhtun nationalists in Pakistan. So Pakhtun politics could hardly respond to the posed 90's and 90's huge challenges.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.213.

Pakhtuns' integration in the federation

In Frontier politics while nationalists championed Pakhtun politics without much positive impact, and the ANP, as a regional party, endeavored to make alliances with national parties to project regional agenda in the national framework. However these efforts were inconclusive and ANP cantered to remain as a regional party. The national stature parties' on the other hand, galvanized large number of public following, leaving little room for ANP to maintain its own popularity.

In recent year, national media has came forward in a big way in projected an integrated picture of all the four provinces to the federation. Themes of programs and discussions we work for the unity and unanimity of all the regions of the country, and the bringing diverse cultures and regions of the country into national ambit.

Moreover, rather than highly why purely regional idealize the education system has focused on the national character which has created a mindset in favor of integrated Pakistan. After declaration of Urdu as a national language it automatically became the language of national education system upto intermediate level. It was later in the day that regional languages were introduced for imparting education up to the primary level. Though the educational profile of Frontier is not impressive however it does not make a unique case because Frontier shares throes of underdevelopment with other partners of the federation. Staying together in the federation provides an opportunity to make a common cause against illiteracy and chalk out a grand strategy to promote quality education in the country. Even the problems of the educated Pakhtun youth are more or less the same as of Baloch, Sindhi and also of Punjabi youth.

Even developmental projects, though inadequate for the uplift of Frontier people, however they have been resulted from national development policies and plans, which have cemented the bond of Frontier people with the federation of Pakistan. Frontier has got its own industrialists, who are investing in local industry without competing with outside competitors and also investing in national industries in competition with other competitors. During the President Ayub's era and even afterwards Frontier represented three families the list of 22 industrialist families namely Hoties, Khanzadas and Khattaks.⁹

The hard core Nationalists contradict development policies of the center vis-à-vis Frontier by quoting the case of Gadoon Industrial zone

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.221.

which was meant for industrializing Frontier provinces but in reality outside elements particularly industrialists from Punjab have exploited this opportunity for their own advantage.¹ Secondly share of the Frontier in royalty of the electricity from Tarbela Dam has also been a consistent demand of the Nationalists to the central government and almost a bone of contention between the two.

Besides, mentioning indicators of integration by no means conclude that the Pakhtun nationalist leaders were incapable to deliver. Unfortunately two factors worked instrumentally for distancing nationalist elements from contributing to the solidarity and progress of Pakistan. One was the deliberate effort of the authorities to label Pakhtun nationalist as traitors thus left no stone unturned to demoralize them by unleashing all sorts of pressure tactics. The iron man of the Frontier, Qayyum Khan was in the forefront to imprison or keep the nationalists under house arrest.¹¹ Secondly, the authorities having all power and resources at their disposal kept on contributing though only in piecemeal to the development of the Frontier which convinced the general public to move towards integration rather than enduring hardships by siding with the imprisoned nationalist leaders who were themselves at the mercy of the authorities. Besides, national media and other mainstream policies induced majority of Pakhtuns on the path of integration rather than to rally around the question of greater autonomy or self-determination.

The back bone of the nationalist movement here and elsewhere are the educated bourgeois who for the sake of share in resources and preservation of their language and culture join the nationalist movement. The Bangladesh nationalist movement, which convinced the middle class to struggle for the self-determination, is the classic example, on the contrary Pakhtun nationalist movement could not convince or mobilize the military and civil officers to unite for the cause of the Pakhtuns against the center. In the military and civil bureaucracy the Pakhtun ratio is higher than their population and size. Their presence in military and bureaucracy is around 20 to 25%, which is well over their population size¹². In trade and other businesses they are sharing throughout Pakistan. Especially the trucking business is Pakhtun monopoly. Even the inter city transport service in big cities like Karachi is controlled by the

¹ Prof. Dr. Wiqar Ali Shah, Chairman Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Dec.2007.

¹¹ Afarsiyab Khattak, Former HRCP Chairman, during an interview in Summer, 2004.

¹² Stephen Cohen, *The idea of Pakistan*, p.218.

Pakhtuns. They are enterprising people and have demand all over the country.

The current scenario

The July-August, 2005 local bodies' polls revived some hopes of the reemergence of the nationalist elements. However it equally indicated radical shift of leadership of the Pakhtuns from nationalists to fundamentalists Pakhtuns. In both the border provinces the religio-political groups were in power and even ANP forged alliance with Jamat-i-Islami for launching joint candidates in some districts during the 2005 local bodies' selections.¹³

The situation in Balochistan and also the emergence of nationalist Pakhtun President, Hamid Karzai, in Afghanistan might have revived some hopes of the nationalist elements in the Frontier however to what degree these developments are going to give impetus to the Pakhtun causes or strengthening position of the nationalists in dealing with the central government is premature to be predicted at this point. It would have been too speculative to forecast that in case the religio-political Pakhtun element would have remained sustain their power in the two border provinces and some kind of come back of the Taliban happened or some other faction of the same ethnic composition and ideology emerged in Afghanistan would such a situation provided a favorable opportunity to settle the Pakhtun causes in nationalist Pakhtun's favor or would such developments augur equally favorable to the federation of Pakistan or would pose a challenge to its integrity caused serious concerns to the authorities. Given the current dynamics of the regional politics such an equation is next to impossible. Even the survival constraints of both the sides would not allow them to opt for political integration or even risk independence because the successive Afghan governments defined independent Pakhtun state as the one comprised of only Pakistan side of the Pakhtun territorial concentration which does not include the Afghan side of the Pakhtun areas and reduce the viability of the perceived future Pakhtun state. Besides, the pragmatism of the religious Pakhtun element as compared to the nationalists would not allow them to go to the extent of establishing independent Pakhtun state because contemporary political determinants show propensity to economic integration and more and more regional cooperation rather than divisions and disintegration of the existing states.

It would not be too speculative to foretell that nationalist forces if even not sudden would make a come back in the near future. Given the

¹³ The daily Dawn, date?? July, 2005.

fact of the rise a religio-political Pakhtun rise in power in the Frontier as a temporary phenomenon the chance of the nationalists for the comeback is not too whimsical. Also the issues of the likes of Kalabagh and initiatives for socio-economic reforms for the well-being of the Pakhtuns have the power to make ANP once again popular among majority of the frontier public provided a visionary leader take over the command of the party and articulate a convincing rationale for relevance of its objectives and strategies to the present ground realities of the Pakhtuns or larger public of the Frontier. The upcoming general elections of Feb 18, 2008 would confirm the speculation whether or not religio-political Pakhtuns would continue in power. It would also confirm the future of the nationalist elements whether they would show electoral strength or would they take a long route to make crucial adjustments with other mainstream national parties to ensure its long awaited come back.

Conclusion

Pakhtuns claim to be a nation. However circumstances have made Pakhtun situation different for being divided into three regions, just like the Kurds, they are a nation but as formation of Kurd state is impractical so are the circumstances Pakhtuns separatist aspirations. Even other factors such as vagueness of ideological rationale, leadership crisis and also successful efforts of other political forces at work have made the cause of the nationalist Pakhtuns difficult to be achieved.

The second point, which alienated the Pakhtuns from nationalist leadership, was the *fluid position* of their politics. They have been struggling for secession and provincial autonomy simultaneously, which makes little sense to even the intellectuals of the Pakhtun politics. Officially they would demand maximum autonomy but in private and from across the border asylum abodes would reiterate the desire for establishing independent Pakhtun state on the pattern of Bangladesh which has made their cause self-contradictory.

Thirdly ideological cover of fighting the cause of oppressed Pakhtun nation was also hardly convincing for the Pakhtuns at large. The Pakhtun candidates' failure in the Pakhtun districts of Balochistan in 1970 elections and even in Frontier squeezed their popularity to two districts also served as barometer for gauging the diminishing popularity of their cause.

Fourthly, the factors of integration played a significant role for out casting the nationalist politics. Media, education system, national development program and also other national level political parties worked together for galvanizing larger Pakhtun population into national ambit.

Fifthly, gone are the days of ideological and issue oriented politics. It is time of quick fixes and short –term gains. The Pakhtun politics are not saved from it. The alliances of the ANP with unlikely political partners such as Muslim League and even Jamat-i-Islami is one good example to explain this change which is hardly acceptable to the old guards.

Sixthly, of course it is time to work together with other political forces within the national ambit for the better future of Pakhtuns and of the country at large. It is the time of integration and joining hands, secession or even annexation does not make good politics. The Pakhtun politics need to bring about positive change in leadership and party rationale, which would give impetus to the struggle for uplift of Pakhtuns and also the rest of the inhabitants of Frontier in the national orbit. The nationalists also have to meet the challenge posed by Pakhtun religio-political elements to restore their historic political influence in the province. In case it does not happen the shift to religious Pakhtun leaders would be a turning point in the history of Frontier and would make very interesting politics absolutely to the disadvantage of the Nationalist.

For obvious reasons further dismemberment of Pakistan is neither in favor of Pakhtuns nor of the region at large. At the same time over centralizing of the federation is also not doing any good. Provinces need to be autonomous enough to deal with their issues on their own. That would determine amicable relationship between the center and the federating units, of course including Pakhtun concentrated areas would feel more integrated in the federation than before. The author could mention that an ethnic division of Pakistan, could result simultaneously in the ethnic division of Afghanistan.