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From Pressure Group to Political Stakeholders: A Causal Analysis of the Role Transformation of the *Ulema* in Pakistan (1947-53)

Abstract

The politics of South Asia has always witnessed the ever-escalating role and influence of religious authority. However, it was the twentieth century, when this particular group held a considerable weight in the mass politics, particularly before and after the creation of Pakistan. The very event also highlights the transforming role of Muslim religious groups from pressure groups into political stakeholders. Soon after the inception of Pakistan, the entity which merely was a pressure group took hostage of the political authority at times and played a crucial role in designing the future course of the state and society. In the wake of such a powerful and influential presence, it becomes mandatory to undertake the study of factors which led to such a ground-shaking transformation.

Introduction

Ulema or religious scholars have been influential in the history of Pakistan. From Objectives Resolution (1949) up to the more recent 17th amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan and the politics of *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA), *ulema* influenced the state policies and decisions due to the eminent status they enjoy among the masses and the leaders of political parties.

Practically, the Muslims of India accelerated the demand for Pakistan after Lahore Resolution (March 24, 1940). Jinnah and the All India Muslim League (AIML) defended the case of 'Muslim Separatism' against the British, the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Muslim advocates of composite nationalism i.e. the leaders of *Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind* (JUH). Likewise, *Majlis-i Ahrar-i Islam* (later *Majlis-i Ahrar-i Pakistan*), *Jammat-i-Islami Hind* (later *Jammat-i-Islami Pakistan*, JI) and the Khaksars detested the demand for Pakistan. With few exceptions, most of the *ulema* abhorred the politics of AIML based on the idea of Muslim separatism or the Two Nation Theory vilifying the demand for Pakistan. They referred to the future separate state as *Na-Pakistan* and *Palidistan* (literally meaning polluted land) and also labelled Jinnah as *Kafir-i-Azam* (the Greatest Infidel). However, not so long after the creation of Pakistan, the very group which had vehemently opposed the demand of a separate state for the Muslims became the champions of declaration of Islam as the state religion and implementation of Islamic *Shariah*. One may ponder how the anti-Pakistan *ulema* became

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stakeholders in the politics of the state they had opposed at the very first place. The present study deals with the causal analysis of role transformation of *ulema* from a pressure group to political stake holder during the first decade of history of Pakistan. The present study is deals with the evolution of *ulema* on the political stage of Pakistan as political stake holders.

1. Ulema in Pakistan: From Pressure Group to Political Stakeholder

Pakistan came into being without the requisites of a state.¹ It was denied the essential elements required to govern the state.² Indian leaders were hopeful that the Muslims would soon come to their senses and would beg to rejoin the Indian Federation.³ The influx of periled migrants, setting up of an altogether new infrastructure, uncertainty of boundaries, and management of awfully insufficient resources soon turned the joy of success into the necessity of survival.⁴

While the government machinery was busy fighting for the survival of Pakistan, the *ulema*, practically free from any administrative or political challenge or responsibility, started calling for the enforcement of the *Shariah* in Pakistan. Jinnah's message to the masses that they consider themselves as 'Muslims' and Pakistanis first and later as Punjabi or Bengali was used latter by the *ulema* for realization of their dream of Islamization of Pakistan.⁵ The *ulema*, hitherto mere a pressure group, embarked on their journey to become political stakeholder in Pakistan. This transformation took place in following three phases:

1.1 From Inception to Objectives Resolution (March, 1949)

Islam was the rallying cry during Pakistan movement. Jinnah could garner *ulema*'s support only due to the name of Islam. *Ulema*, who had been a much neglected class since the assertion of the British supremacy in India, took idea of Pakistan not only for an Islamic state but also an opportunity to revive their previous significance in the state apparatus they enjoyed previously.

After 1947, the *ulema* started exerting pressure on the political elite to enforce *Shariah* as the state constitution. Maulana Shabbir Ahmed Usmani (1887-1949), the founder Chief of JUI and supporter of Jinnah, established *Jamiat-i Mujahideen* party on the eve of independence (August 14, 1947). The party marched through the streets in Karachi hailing the Islamic traditions and drove against the non-Islamic traditions.⁶ All Pakistan Arabic Society, that included Usmani and Shorish Kashmiri (1917-1975)⁷, was established to promote Arabic language in Pakistani society.

In January 1948, Mawdudi initiated a series of lectures on the 'nature of Islamic politics, the idea behind it and the constitutional framework' through which the Islamic way of life be introduced and induced in the lives of the masses.⁸ On January 13, 1948 JUI passed a resolution demanding the creation of the office of *Shaikh-ul-Islam*. The office bearer, it demanded, should be a leading religious scholar and have the executive and judicial authority to supervise the *kazis* throughout the state.⁹ For *ulema*, the office of *Shaikh-ul-Islam* meant the revival of privileges they enjoyed before the British.

In May 1948, the JUP observed the *Yaum-i-Shariat* Day for the establishment of an Islamic state¹⁰ and by mid-1948, a committee under the leadership of a Brelvi

alim Abdul Alim Siddiqui was formed which drafted the Islamic constitution of Pakistan. The leaders of JUP met Jinnah, to cash back their allegiance which they lent to Jinnah during Pakistan Movement, and presented their draft which Jinnah assured to be incorporated in the future constitution of Pakistan.¹¹ The nature of their demands remained unknown for Jinnah died and along with him, the demands as well.

During Jinnah's life, pressure from the *ulema* could gain nothing but mere assurances that Pakistan's future constitution would be based on Islamic *Shariah*.¹² Those assurances relieved the *ulema* of their insecurities for some time. After the demise of Jinnah, the *ulema* were apprehended by Liaqat Ali Khan's secular administration and the impression it gave that Islam was nothing but a rallying cry for Pakistan Movement.¹³ Federal government desperate to finalize agreeable constitutional formula and muster popular support for Kashmir cause succumbed to the demands of *Ulema*. In return, the *ulema* (Usmani in particular) played a significant role in mobilizing the masses by declaring Kashmir war as *jihad*.

However, the *ulema* were vexed by the appointment of the PML Parliamentary Committee to draft the Objectives Resolution under the supervision of Zafarullah Khan, an Ahmadi. The *ulema* got infuriated on such a selection specially when, in June 1948, Mirza Mahmood Ahmed (1889-1965), the then religious leader of the Ahmedis, had advised the Muslims not to agitate for the enactment of Islamic *Shariah*. Usmani tackled the situation in an astute manner. On January 3, 1949 he presented a resolution in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (CAP) demanding an advisory committee of *ulema* and other Islamic thinkers to advise framing the constitution of Pakistan on the lines of Quran and *Sunnah*.¹⁴ The second issue that caused insecurity and suspicion among *ulema* was the detention of Mawdudi for disagreement with government's stance over Kashmir *jihad*. Consequently, Mawdudi, along with his closest associates, was put behind the bars for next two years in October 1948.¹⁵

During January and February, 1949, the Islamists launched a country-wide campaign in support of Islamic constitution of Pakistan. Usmani bashed the government in a conference of the East Pakistan JUI held on February 9-10, 1949 at Dhaka, criticizing the detainment of Mawdudi. The speech was intimidating and posed a grave threat to the government because the non-League influence was stronger in East Pakistan. Binder holds that the message conveyed was that the nature of the state could be overlooked by *ulema*, but not their status as interpreters of *Shariah*.¹⁶ However, this conclusion is misleading for *ulema*'s role as interpreters of *Shariah* in a secular state was practically of no use.

Mawdudi continued his struggle even in jail and motivated his party members to approach Usmani and other *ulema* to make a united religious front against the government. Provisional *amirs* of JI, Abdul Jabbar Ghazi and Abdul Ghaffar Hassan, worked to influence the content and spirit of the upcoming Objectives Resolution.¹⁷ The religious parties and groups outside the CAP also increased pressure to amend the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and other laws in the light of *Shariah*.¹⁸

Another factor that compelled the central government to pay heed to the demands of *ulema* was the bitter feeling between the centre and the provincial leagues.

Liaquat was not comfortable with the leaders of the provincial Muslim League who were more than ready to exploit the weakness in an inchoate political system.¹⁹ Liaquat had practically no constituency in what became Pakistan.²⁰ He needed some ground to anchor his control over the central and provincial leagues. Objectives Resolution (March 1949) provided that. The resolution changed the future course of Pakistan for the sovereignty was rested with God, and the interpretation of the 'Code', every Muslim is required to follow, i.e the Quran, rested with *ulema*. Thus Objectives Resolution, the first constitutional document of Pakistan accommodated *ulema* aligning their interests with that of Liaquat. It meant recognition of and increase in the political stake of *ulema*.

The Objectives Resolution gave a 'tactical' advantage to *Ulema* for their first demand was granted.²¹ For *ulema*, it was a great achievement to become a stake holder, although not official by then, of the very state they had opposed at the first place; and their felicity was justified in successfully undertaking such a momentous task. However, Maududi, unlike his colleagues, was not much enthusiastic. To him, it was only a beginning. He commanded the JI to educate the masses lest the government interpret *Shariah* in a way that may lead to an un-Islamic Pakistan.²²

1.2 From Objectives Resolution to Second Basic Principles Committee Report (1952)

CAP formed a Basic Principles Committee (BPC) of twenty five members right after adoption of Objective Resolution. The Committee was permitted to include ten more members from within or without the Constituent Assembly. It was given the task of framing the constitution of Pakistan.²³ A Board of *Talimat-i-Islamiah* was also formed to advise the BPC. Syed Suleiman Nadvi (1884-1953) was called from India to Pakistan to chair the Board. Other members of the Board were: Mufti Mohammad Shafi (a Deobandi scholar; 1897-1976), Prof. Abdul Khalid, Dr. Hamidullah (1909-2002) and Maulana Zafar Ahmed Ansari.²⁴ Maulana Abdul Hamid Badayuni demanded the representation of the JUP on the Board so as to incorporate the opinion of the Brelavi *Ulema* also, but, interestingly, his plea was not entertained by the government.²⁵

Nadvi did not join the board until 1951 and the board formulated the recommendations in his absence. The recommendations were presented to the sub-committee for Constitution and Power which did not incorporate the suggestions of the board to any considerable extent. Nonetheless, it accepted the incorporation of the Objectives Resolution as a directive principal of state policy.²⁶ The interim report of the BPC was presented to the CAP on September 28, 1950.²⁷ It was neither welcomed by the *Ulema* and the religious parties who considered the Islamic Provisions, offered in the interim report, inadequate²⁸, lacking concrete measures²⁹ nor by the Bengalis who complained that the formula of representation would reduce their majority into minority.³⁰ The BPC in its attempt to appease everyone satisfied no one.³¹ Mawdudi, although, lent his full support to the government in Federal-Bengali rift, did not stop criticising the government for its failure to address either the inclusion of Islamic provisions in the report or the distribution of power justly.³²

The severe criticism from the Bengalis and the *ulema* compelled the government to withdraw its report on November 21, 1950.³³ The recommendations were invited for the improvement of the Interim Report. By that time, the federal government was already frustrated by the demands of the Bengalis on one hand and the rift in provincial leaders³⁴ on the other hand; it was in no position to open another front with the *ulema*. In frustration, the government asked the *ulema* to present a viable solution if they had any. However, the federal government did not stop giving the impression of its inability to materialize the aspirations of the masses regarding Islam.

The *ulema* accepted the challenge of the government. JI initiated negotiations with the leaders of JUI³⁵ which included Ihtisham-ul- Haq Thanvi (Usmani's successor), Zafar Ahmad Thanvi (1893-1974) and Mufti Muhammad Shafi to draft recommendations of the Islamic provisions in the future constitution of Pakistan. From January 21-24, 1951, a conference was convened at Karachi,³⁶ under the presidency of Syed Suleiman Nadvi, which was attended by thirty-one *ulema* belonging to various schools of thought.³⁷ The *ulema* showed unprecedented unity in developing the consensus and dispelled the impression that they could never converge at any single agenda. At the end of the conference, the *ulema* came up with Twenty-Two points which they presented to the sub-committee of the BPC. The unanimity which the *ulema* showed by presenting a single agenda established their potential to emerge as a stake holder in the future politics of the country.

After Liaquat's assassination in October, 1951, the relations between JI and the government ameliorated. The reason was Nazim-uddin and his cabinet members, many of whom were Mawdudi's personal friends.³⁸ Mawdudi availed the opportunity and advanced his party agenda on concrete lines by demanding several changes in government's apparatus. Fearing that the sub-committee might not change its acceptance of the twenty-two points and its incorporation in the final report, JI's activities regarding Islamic provisions reached fever pitch. The sub-committee had a clear idea that the Board of *Talimat-i-Islamiah* did not enjoy the previous confidence of *ulema*.³⁹ It, therefore, had to deal with the suggestions of both the Board of *Talimat-i-Islamiah* and the Twenty-Two points of the *ulema*. The final result was that all the suggestions of the Board except four were accepted; while *ulema*'s fifteen out of twenty-two recommendations were considered.⁴⁰ The acceptance and incorporation of the demands of *ulema* by a constitutional body added to the prestige of *ulema* and put them on a pedestal where people could look up to them for their demands regarding Islamic outlook of the state in a political premise.

The final BPC Report was presented to the CAP on December 22, 1952.⁴¹ The most significant part of the Report was the one declaring the enforcement of the repugnancy clause for it implied the board of five members, well versed in Islamic law, to advise the Head of the State. Objections on the bill would be referred to the Board which would decide about its repugnance in the light of Islamic teachings.⁴² The final report gave many concessions to the *ulema* for their 'unofficial' status was going to be 'official'. This was another major development that strengthened the footing of the *ulema*. The group was slowly and gradually being recognized by those who wielded power. The *ulema* were still not satisfied for another of their

recommendations was not paid any heed to by the Government, i.e. declaration of the Ahmedis non-muslim minority.

1.3 Anti-Ahmediyyah Riots (1953)

After the establishment of Pakistan, the Ahrars kept silence⁴³ for they had no moral ground to intervene in any matter regarding the society or government of the state, they had vehemently opposed at the first place. Until Objectives Resolution, the Ahrars followed the PML in politics. However, after 1949, they resumed the politics of agitation. Even before the creation of Pakistan, the only demand to which Ahrars remained stick to was the declaration of Ahmedis⁴⁴ as non-muslim minority and their removal from all the key posts.⁴⁵ In Pakistan, the Ahrars made the same demand with reference to the status of Ahmedis. On May 1, 1949, All Pakistan Majlis-i-Ahrar made its first public demand to declare Ahmedis as non-muslim minority and the dismissal of Zafarullah Khan from the central cabinet. Unlike other religio-political parties, the Ahrars were least concerned with the theological aspect of the Objectives Resolution⁴⁶ Mian Mumtaz Doltana, who owed 1951 Provincial elections of Punjab victory to the Ahrars, turned a blind eye to their anti-Ahmadiyya activities. Another factor was the newly found alliance between Iftikhar Hussain Mamdot and JI. Doltana, under no circumstances, could have afforded to have his ministry labelled as 'secular'.⁴⁷ With Daultana's sweep across the Punjab, the Ahrars became more confident about their activities and turned the Ahmediyyah issue into a national debate. The *ulema*, whose unofficial status was about to become official in near future, thrown in their lot in favour of demands made by Ahrars.⁴⁸ Although there was a consensus among *ulema* on the doctrinal issue reference Ahmedis even before the movement, the event which ignited the country-wide agitation was the speech by Zafarullah Khan on May 17, 1952 in Lahore.

On May 18, 1952 a board of *ulema* under the supervision of Suleiman Nadvi was constituted to lead the movement. The board put forward the same three demands which the Ahrars had been making since 1949, i.e. Ahmedis be declared non-muslims, Zafarullah Khan be relieved of his post and the dismissal of the Ahmedis from all the key posts.⁴⁹ The board also established a *majlis-i-amal* [council of action] to implement its recommendations. A futile attempt was made in August 1952, by a delegation of *ulema* who met Nazimuddin to apprise him of their demands regarding Ahmedis.⁵⁰ In January 1953, an All Pakistan Muslim Parties Convention was held to discuss the Ahmediyyah issue.⁵¹ An action committee was also formed to exert pressure on the government to accede to the demands of *ulema* in this regard. Until then, only the migrants had been the constituency of *ulema* or the Islamic groups, anti-Ahmediyyah Movement opened the gates of Punjabi politics for *Ulema*.⁵²

Fate of anti-Ahmediyyah Movement flooded *ulema's* demand for an Islamic constitution and the struggle they made for it. It practically weaken their political strength for the next several years; however, the position to which they had risen between 1947 and 1952 was too prominent for a pressure group. During all those years, the pressure from the *ulema* and its recognition by the government along with all those efforts it made to take *ulema* across the board provided the former with a new avenue of political mobilization. The anti-Ahmediyyah Movement and

successive incarceration of *ulema* rather bridged up the distance between *ulema* and the masses and brought the two closer than ever before.

Conclusion

The role of *ulema* in Pakistani politics evolved in an atmosphere of insecurity of the Bengalis, uncertainty of the federal government, skirmishes of the political leaders, maladministration and mismanagement of the resources and the vacuum created after Jinnah's demise. The scheme of events unfolded itself in such a manner that provided the *ulema* to gain a considerable bargaining position within the state. After independence, while the government machinery was busy fighting for the survival of Pakistan, the *ulema*, practically free from any administrative or political challenge or responsibility, started calling for the enforcement of *Shariah* in Pakistan. Jinnah's request to the masses to unite that they consider themselves as 'Muslims' was taken by *ulema* as a golden opportunity which they availed in the best possible way.

It would have been strange if *ulema* did not struggle to carve out political space in the newly established state of Pakistan. They could not have dreamt of anything beyond the role of pressure groups or allies of major political parties in united India. It is evident from their first four decades of interaction with political actors and system in colonial India that they survived either as an ally of AIML or INC. However, partition provided them with an opportunity to come to the mainstream politics in the centre. They had in their mind the role played by their predecessors during Muslim rule in India and in Muslim empires. Their demands for the office of *Sheikh-ul Islam* and that of *Qazis* reflect their ideal about the role and status they had in mind. Moreover, they observed that though Jinnah was willing to accommodate their demands regarding the nature of state and their respective role in it but his demise meant an end to any such development. The *ulema* needed a window to become a part of the mainstream politics and that window was created by the government itself when it officially accommodated the *ulema* in the constitution formulation and state building processes for the then government had no clear vision of state and its nature. Resultantly, it had to incorporate the demands of *ulema*. The chaos and uncertainty in provincial politics also weakened the government's position and adversely affected its credibility.

The demands of *ulema* got popular by then and the government was left with no choice other than accommodating their demands. Also the government needed the support of *ulema* to keep Kashmir struggle alive. Once *ulema* were incorporated into the proceedings of constitutional development, their return became difficult. The last hurdle in gaining strength was their lack of unity which was overcome during the formulation of the Twenty Points of *ulema* and in the course of anti-Ahmediyyah Movement and asserted them as the stakeholders in the politics of Pakistan.

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- ⁴² Salamat, *Pakistan 1947-1958*, 53.
- ⁴³ Afzal, *Pakistan*, 105.
- ⁴⁴ Ahmedis (Qadianis) are the followers of a 19th century cleric Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1835-1908) who claimed to receive divine revelation and thought himself a Prophet also. According to the majority belief, Prophet Mohammed was the last of the Prophets. Mirza was declared a heretic and out of the fold of Islam.
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