

Students as the Pressure Group in Pakistan's Politics 1947-1958

Mahboob Hussain*

Abstract

Since the creation of Pakistan the students, one of the most important and influential political actors in Pakistan's politics, expanded their role and established their primacy to the political process which manifested in different forms, i.e., active role in the political setup, agitational role as a pressure group, and penetration into the policy-making and the political processes. They played a very significant role in the political development during the first parliamentary phase of Pakistan's political history. The present study hopes to have a comprehensive and full analysis of the role of students as a pressure group in the politics during parliamentary period 1947-58. The underlying hypothesis is that the students' role as a pressure group in national politics during that era was highly significant in nature. It not only filled the void created by the crisis of leadership, but also initialized at least the struggle against the policies of political leadership.

Introduction

Pressure Group is one of the most important concepts of modern Political Science and after the political parties, they

* Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

are the most important political organizations.¹ A pressure group is any group organized around a common set of interests that tries to influence government policy. The group may have a relatively narrow set of interests, as is the case with single issue group, or it may have more broad-based concerns, as is the case with some special interest or public interest groups. Some pressure groups may offer select benefits to their members.² The term has a degree of overlap with 'Interest Groups' and other professional organizations. Despite this commonality between the two concepts, both are different in nature. Interest Groups are "associations formed to promote a sectional interest in the political system."³ Thus trade unions, professional associations, employer's organizations and motoring organizations are usually referred to as Interest groups.

Pressure Groups, on the other hand, are voluntary organizations formed "to promote a cause or political position in a society."⁴ These groups can operate in a number of different ways. They seek to exert pressure at a number of different points in the political system. However, themselves, they neither directly seek elective office nor put forward a programme covering the whole range of governmental activities. The methods which pressure groups utilize have various forms under variable situations. These methods range from 'the strike' which is used by the trade unions or the students organizations and the direct action frequently used by the movements which feel marginal to the political system as a whole, 'withdrawal of co-operation' is another method used by the pressure groups. A variety of tactics may be used by the pressure groups. They can be direct or indirect. Trade unionists may threaten to withdraw their labour from work. They can go on strike in order to achieve their objectives. The students' organizations can exert pressure on

1 Robert Wagoner, *Party Politics and Pressure groups* (New York: Thomas Nelson Company, 1972), p.106.

2 Frank N. Magill, (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Sociology* Vol. II (1995), p .949.

3 David Robertson, *The Penguin Dictionary of Politics* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 159.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 274.

the administration of the educational institutions to accept the demands as the representatives of the students' community. They can go on strike. At times they go for agitation against the policies of the administration. Among the direct tactics, mass rallies, marches and demonstrations are very effective methods. Sometimes indirect methods are used as well to advance their cause. Lobbying is another tactic used by the pressure groups.

In this way, the pressure groups and interest groups have become a key element in understanding the political system. Among them the students' organizations are potentially very significant and effective pressure groups. Throughout the 20th century the students' organizations have been one of the leading actors of the political system in many countries of Asia, Europe and Americas. Their potential sensitiveness to the political development earned them the protection of the political parties and their leadership. Many of the political movements in Asia and Europe were strengthened by the involvement of the students' organizations.

The idea of pressure groups was first developed in the United States where it served as a basis for studying the actions and influence of private groups and organizations on public power. At first, the idea of pressure groups referred only to "private" groups, but there is a growing tendency to expand the concept to include "public" groups.⁵

We can discern two kinds of public groups. The first conforms to the example just given that is official agencies of government acting like pressure groups to defend the interest of their agencies. The second type is made up of government officials who constitute a kind of secret fraternity, hoping to monopolize the top administrative posts and positions of influence.⁶

Studies of interest groups, elites, and political parties also have their own independent origins, although they, too, have been brought within the framework of systems analysis.

5 Wagoner, *Party Politics*, p. 106.

6 *Ibid.*

Pressure groups and political parties, for example, have been described as “agencies for the articulation and aggregation of interests, which in turn provide inputs (demands) for the political system to convert into outputs (decisions and actions).”⁷ But pressure-groups analysis antedates the advent of *Behaviouralism*. The modern concern for the subject starts perhaps with studies of prohibition and other pressure groups during the 1920s. More generalized and theoretical treatments of pressure groups and political parties resulted in part from a revived interest in the work of Bentley in the 1930s and 1950s.⁸ The study of elite began at least as early as 1936 (Lasswell’s “influentials”), and it came to the forefront in the 1950s in community studies made by political scientists in Atlanta, Chicago, New York, New Haven, and elsewhere.⁹ Such studies had long been familiar in sociology, but they acquired special significance in political science, because democratic values seemed threatened by the possible existence of elites. Despite declarations of their concern to establish a value-free science, American political scientists have thus tended to cleave to the traditional democratic ethic, in which elites are presumed to have no place.

Generally, pressure groups have least connections with political parties. However, some have occasional relations during an election or a strike. Still others have an organic relationship with a political party, which is to say, there are permanent structural ties between the party and the pressure groups. There are three possible relationships:

- i. Some pressure groups are more or less subordinate to the parties.
- ii. Some parties are more or less subordinate to the pressure groups.
- iii. There are cases of equality between pressure groups in the pursuit of common objectives.¹⁰

7 The New *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: Macropædia (1993) Vol. 27, p. 335.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

Pressure groups act on two different levels. On the one hand, they exert direct pressure on government organs, cabinet ministers, members of parliament and high administrative officials. On the other hand, they exert indirect pressure on the populace to produce a public attitude that will, in turn, influence government leaders, who are always attentive to public opinion.¹¹

Pakistan's politics is mostly based on individuals rather than the institutions which often lack strength. Political parties are weak and not developed thus creating an empty space giving other forces like individual leaders and interest or pressure groups, an opportunity to fill this gap. Students are one such pressure group who can take advantage of the situation and play a significant role in political process. They are formidable and influential political actors in Pakistan's politics, capable of influencing the nature and direction of political development. After the creation of Pakistan, the students expanded their role and established their primacy to the political process which manifested in different forms, i.e., active role in the political setup, agitational role as a pressure group, and penetration into the policy-making and the political processes.

The students' role in Pakistan's politics is the direct outcome of their role in the Pakistan Movement. Indeed the students' role had accelerated the pace of Pakistan Movement and had injected a new life in it. The roots of student's role in Pakistan Movement and later on in Pakistan's politics are linked with the educational system of the British period. The British colonizers established educational institutions mostly in the areas which they had occupied earlier and or where they found fulfillment of their vested interests. Some of the provinces moved forward in the field of education and some lagged behind.¹² Eventually, the level of political consciousness remained different in different provinces. By the end of 19th century, there were five Universities established in India namely, Calcutta University (1857),

11 Wagoner, *Party Politics*, p. 121.

12 M. Iqbal, *Education in Pakistan* (Lahore: Aziz Publishers, 1993), pp. 40-41.

Bombay University (1857), Madras University (1857), Punjab University (1882) and Allahbad University (1887). However, in these universities students could not find any means of freely demonstrating their opinions as politically active group till the end of the 19th century.

Not to speak of students, the political party system in India was yet to evolve on sound footings. The demand of Indian liberation was not on the agenda of the two main political parties, the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League, till the first decade of the 20th century. Despite these odds, the students began to struggle against the foreign rule and backed up the national political leadership of the time. For example, during the movement against the partition of Bengal, in the words of Moulvi Tamiz-ud-Din Khan,¹³ "All students of our schools, without distinction of religion, whole heartedly participated in the boycott under the influence of oratory of Congress leader Ambeka Charn Mojamdar."¹⁴ The students of Punjab took part in the first strike in 1905 that was carried out by Indian students of King Edward Medical College at Lahore, to protest against discriminatory laws.¹⁵ Furthermore, during the Migration Movement¹⁶ protests against the Rowlatt Act¹⁷ and election campaigns,¹⁸ students duly participated and nourished their political consciousness. The pre-Independence role of the students comprises of two phases. The first phase commenced with the war of independence (1857) and continued up to the formation of the Congress Ministries (1937). During this phase, several universities and colleges

13 Moulvi Tamiz-ud-Din Khan (1889-1963), was the President/Speaker of Pakistan's first Constituent Assembly.

14 Noor-ul-Huda, *Tameez-ud Din vs Wafaq-e-Pakistan* (Lahore: Frontier Post Publications, 1992), p. 54.

15 Prabodh Chander, *Student Movement in India* (Lahore: All India Students Federation Publications Department, 1938), p. v.

16 See K. K. Aziz, *The Indian Khilafat Movement 1915-1933. Documentary Record*. (Karachi: Pakistan Publishers, 1972).

17 See A.B. Keith, *Constitutional History of India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).

18 See H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide Britain-India-Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

were established, many run by Indians themselves. These institutions served to create political awareness among the youth and also became platforms where students could participate in political activities. Institutions such as Aligarh and *Nadwatul Ulema* became the recruiting grounds for both Muslim League and Congress.

The second phase of student's political consciousness was characterized with enthusiastic participation of students in politics. From 1937-47, students were a force to be reckoned with. They were at the forefront of both the movement for Indian liberation and the movement for Pakistan. For them this was the period of reform and revolution, strife with opportunities to demand and affect change. After the departure of British from India and the creation of Pakistan, the enthusiasm of students was further enhanced. They were exhilarated with the feelings of success and excited by the prospects newly independent states had to offer. In Pakistan, they also had to deal with many problems that were created with the birth of a new state.

Soon after the establishment of Pakistan the newly born state had to face countless problems such as the rehabilitation of refugees. Quaid-i-Azam told the deputation of students that he "would ask the students to come forward in large numbers to help the refugees and afford them relief in every possible way as that was the immediate task confronting the nation at the moment."¹⁹ Students offered their services once again, to overcome the problems including the settlement of refugees. As the political condition of the country faced crisis, students' activities also changed their nature and direction. Quaid-i-Azam's viewpoint on the future role of students was that: "You (the students) are the nation-builders of tomorrow and you must fully equip yourself by discipline, education and training for

19 Rafique Afzal, *Selected Speeches and Statements of the Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1947-48)* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1980), pp. 449.

the arduous task lying ahead of you. You should realize the magnitude of your responsibility and be ready to bear it."²⁰

When the burden of migration and rehabilitation subsided to some extent, the students turned to politics again and tended to exert their influence on policy making. During this period, the student's organizations and political parties went hand in hand. Political parties, from the right wing or from the left wing, tried to make their impact on students. To utilize their potential, many political parties that emerged post-independence, opened their sub organizations for students or tried to bring the existing students organizations under their control. For example, the Communist party worked for the formation of Democratic Students Federation (DSF), and *Jamat-i-Islami* established *Islami Jamiat Talaba* (IJT). National Students Federation (NSF) was also influenced by the (National Awami Party) NAP. The objective of the political parties, regarding their interest in the students, was to acquire help from a forceful pressure group and to get educated political leadership for them.

Immediately after the creation of Pakistan the central government took such steps that resulted in the rise of sense of deprivation among vast circle of masses in the East Pakistan and Sind. This naturally affected the students of colleges and universities. The students, once the frontline character of the Pakistan movement, now became exponents of nationalist movements.

Fifty six percent of the population belonged to East Pakistan at the time of independence. Bengali Muslims had taken an active part in Pakistan movement, the Muslim League was also formed in this province, after thirty years the foundation of All India Muslim Students Federation was also laid down in the same province.²¹ But, controversies developed over the question of Urdu language after 1947. Bengalis demanded their language as the national language, while the central Government was determined to declare

20 *Ibid.*

21 Sarfaraz Hussain Mirza, *Muslim Students and Pakistan Movement*, vol-I (Lahore: Pakistan Study Centre Punjab University, 1990), p. 4.

Urdu as the sole national language. This controversy developed into a serious national crisis in the coming years. The Bengali students were deeply inspired and soon they came on the forefront of the Bengali language movement.²² Numerous youth rallies were held and publications were circulated to awaken the people in the context of their new challenges in Pakistan and to assert their linguistic and cultural rights as Bengalis. For example, in 1947, an eight-page pamphlet entitled *Pakistan Students Rally: Aims, Objects and Programme- Draft Constitution* was printed at Comilla.²³ Subsequently East Pakistan Muslim Students League came into being in January 1948. Sheikh Mujeeb-ur-Rehman, the then student of Dhaka University, was appointed organizing secretary of this new organization.²⁴ Soon, the word Muslim was deleted from the East Pakistan Muslim Students League. The change of nomenclature was not a trivial matter; it was a sign of the changing phenomena of Muslim Bengali Nationalism into pure Bengal Nationalism. The same students, who had actively participated in the struggle for Pakistan earlier, joined this new organization with a new mood. They were unhappy over the policies of the central government regarding East Pakistan.²⁵ The Bengali students demanded a status of National Language for Bengali language along with Urdu. Students became frontline force in this movement that was the first student movement of high magnitude after the independence.

In February 1948, Mr. Dhirendranath Datta, a member of the Constituent Assembly from East Pakistan Congress Party, presented an amendment bill seeding an amendment in the Assembly Rules. The Bill aimed at granting permission to the Members to speak in Bengali besides English and Urdu

22 Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1999), p. 187.

23 Anwar Dil, *Bengali Language Movement* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 2000), p. 142.

24 Aziz-ud-Din Ahmad, *Pakistan Main Talba Tahreek* [Urdu: Student Movement in Pakistan] (Lahore: Mushal, 2000), p. 52.

25 Moudud Ahmad, *Bangladesh: Constitutional Quest for Autonomy: 1950-71* (Dhaka: University Press, 1976), p. 20.

at the Assembly floor. The resolution was immediately opposed by central leaders and was rejected by the House.²⁶

When they received the news that the motion had been rejected, students of East Pakistan became agitated.²⁷ In this way the demand was suppressed in the Assembly but the slogan in favour of Bengali began to be raised in the East wing of the country. The linguistic issue reached in streets and slums of Dhaka and other major cities of East Pakistan in February 1948. The flag of the movement was in the hands of Students League. To enhance the pace of the movement, an Action Committee was formed in Dhaka University in the first week of March 1948. The Action Committee was called the State Language Committee of Action (SLCA). The students of Dhaka and the district towns of Narayanganj, Rajshahi, Jessore, Faridpur, Chittagong and other areas responded enthusiastically. Police lathi-charged the students and a huge number of them were arrested in Dhaka, Jessore and other areas as well. In protest against the police repression, students all over the East Bengal went on strike from 12 March to 15 March.²⁸

The situation grew worse in the days that followed. Quaid-i-Azam's visit to Dhaka was due from 19 March. The provincial government became nervous and Nazimuddin, under pressure of widespread agitation and the impending visit of the Governor-General, sought the help of Muhammad Ali Bogra to enter into negotiations with the SLCA. An agreement was signed by Nazimuddin with the SLCA on 15 March, which, inter alia, provided that:

1. The Provincial Assembly shall adopt a resolution for making Bengali the official language of East Pakistan and the medium of instruction at all stages of education; and

26 Zarina Salamat, *Pakistan: 1947-58: A Historical Review* (Islamabad: NIHCR, 1992), p. 73.

27 Badruddin Umar, *The Emergence of Bangladesh: Class Struggles in East Pakistan (1947-1958)* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 32.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

2. The Assembly by another resolution would recommend to the central government that Bengali should be made one of the state languages.²⁹

Quaid-i-Azam, as the governor general of Pakistan, came to visit East Pakistan on 19 March. He announced in Dhaka "without one state language, no nation can remain solidly together and function."³⁰ While addressing convocation in Dhaka University on 21 March, he remarked that while the language of the province can be Bengali, the "...state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language. Anyone who tries to mislead you is really an enemy of Pakistan."³¹

The remark evoked an angry protest from the Bengali youth who took it as an offence. The Dhaka University campus became the central point for student meetings in support of the Bangla language. His statement was repeated by many at political rallies to incite the masses. Eventually, Jinnah met the student representatives of the Action Committee to persuade them of the necessity of having one national language, but the students were not convinced.

The new phase of the language movement began on 27 January 1952, when Khwaja Nazimuddin came to Dhaka from Karachi. Addressing a meeting at Paltan Maidan, he said that "the people of the province could decide what would be the provincial language, but only Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan."³² There was an instantaneous, negative reaction to this speech among the students who responded with the slogan, "*Rashtrabhasha Bangla Chai*" (We want Bangla as the state language).³³

The formation and consolidation of the Youth League in 1951 turned out to be a very important factor during the language movement because, though no single political party or person was there to claim legitimately the leadership of the

29 Umar, *Emergence of Bangladesh*, p. 34.

30 Afzal, *Selected Speeches*, pp. 85-86.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Dil, *Bengali Language*, p. 177.

33 Umar, *Emergence of Bangladesh*, pp. 183, 205.

movement, the Youth League emerged as the most influential organization during the whole movement.³⁴

A strike was observed in Dhaka University on 30 January, 1952. The representatives of various political and cultural organizations held a meeting on 31 January chaired by Maulana Bhasani. An All-Parties Central Language Action Committee was formed with Qazi Golam Mahboob as its convener. The Language Action Committee decided to call a strike and organize demonstrations and processions on 21 February throughout East Pakistan.³⁵

As preparations for demonstrations were underway, the government imposed ban under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, in the city of Dhaka, banning all assemblies and demonstrations. A meeting of the Central Language Action Committee was held on 20 February under the chairmanship of Abdul Hashim. Opinion was divided as to whether or not to violate the ban under Section 144.³⁶ The students were determined to violate the ban and held a student meeting at 11:00 A.M on 21 February at the Dhaka University campus, then located close to the Medical College Hospital. Thousands of students from different schools and colleges of Dhaka assembled on the university campus. When the students emerged in groups, shouting slogans, the police resorted to baton charge; even the female students were not spared.³⁷ The students then started throwing brickbats at the police, who retaliated with tear gas. Unable to control the agitated students, the police fired upon the crowd that was proceeding towards the Assembly Hall (at present, part of Jagannath Hall, University of Dhaka). Three young men, Rafiq uddin Ahmad, Abdul Jabbar and Abdul Barkat were fatally injured. Many wounded persons were admitted to the hospital. Among them Abdus Salam, a peon at the Secretariat, subsequently succumbed to his wounds. A nine-year-old boy named Ohiullah was also killed. (A memorial, the Shaheed

34 *Ibid.*, p. 183.

35 Dawn, February 22, 1952.

36 Umar, *Emergence of Bangladesh*, pp. 198-200.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 206.

Minar, was built later to commemorate the martyrs of the language movement.) Since 1952, 21 February has been observed every year to commemorate the martyrs of the Language Movement. (UNESCO declared 21 February as International Mother Language Day). Two years after the incident, Bengali agitation effectively forced the National Assembly to designate "Urdu and Bengali and such other languages as may be declared to be the official languages of Pakistan."³⁸

The second province of Pakistan where students remained dynamic to a great extent was Sind. Regarding Sind, students launched a movement to detach Karachi from the Sind province. The Sind Muslim Students Federation passed a resolution on 30th January 1948, in which it was clearly stated that Sind students were against the proposal of separation of Karachi from the Sind province. They desired to hold a referendum throughout the province on this issue.³⁹ The SMSF celebrated "Karachi Day" in the whole province on 20 February 1948 and students remained absent from their educational institutions and took out processions.⁴⁰

When Sind was amalgamated in One Unit the students of Sind extremely resisted this measure by the government. *Sind Awami Mahaz* [Sind People's Front] was leading the agitations against the One Unit scheme. The students took active part in the activities of the *Mahaz*. When *Mahaz* declared to observe the Sind day in the province the students stood by the *Mahaz* prominently. The Students' organizations of Sind also participated in the advisory committee that was formed to decide over the strategy in opposition to the One Unit Scheme. When the arrests of the opponents of the One Unit were ordered by Muhammad Ayub Khoro, new chief minister of Sind, a large number of students was there among the detainees.⁴¹

38 Ahmad, *Pakistan Main Talba*, p. 63.

39 Zahid Choudhry, *Political History of Pakistan*, Vol. VI (Lahore: N.P., 1994), p. 223.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

41 Ahmad, *Pakistan main Talaba Tehreek*, pp. 69-70.

Students of the Punjab also constituted a front against the report of Basic Principles Committee in 1952.⁴² In this front, beside Democratic Student Federation, the three other were Punjab Students Committee, Jinnah Awami Students Federation and Muslim Students Federation. Students of Lahore held a procession against the shortage of wheat in 1952.⁴³ Students of the Sind and especially Punjab, also played their role in the *Khatam-i-Nabuwat* Movement. The anti Ahmadya Movement took shape in mid-1948 and reached its climax in 1953.⁴⁴ Its roots are linked with the Anjuman Ahmadya, Karachi's public meeting held on 17 to 18 May, 1952. Sir Zafarullah was the main speaker. He called in his speech "Ahmadyat a plant implanted by God Himself and that plant had taken root to provide a guarantee for the preservation of Islam in fulfillment of the promise contained in the Quran, that if this plant was removed, Islam would no longer be a live religion but would be like a dried up tree having no demonstrable superiority over other religions."⁴⁵ After Zafarullah's speech, strong resentment was expressed and the protest started in Karachi and the Punjab.⁴⁶

An All-Parties Muslim Conference was held at Karachi and four demands were formulated: "Ahmadis be declared a non-Muslim minority; Sir Zafarullah be removed from the office of Foreign Minister; Ahmadis be removed from key posts and to achieve aforesaid objects an All Pakistan Muslim Parties Convention be called"⁴⁷ The *Majlis-i-Amal* [Executive Board] of *ulema* was constituted in July, 1952 in order to devise measures to secure acceptance of the demands; the students were an active force behind the

42 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Shorish Kashmiri, *Tehrik- Khatam-i- Nabuwat* (Lahore: Chatan Publication, 2003), p. 131.

45 Munir Report, 1954.

46 Bashir Ahmad, *Ahmadiyya Movement: British-Jewish Connections* (Rawalpindi: Islamic Study Form, 1994), p. 306.

47 Kashmiri, *Tehrik- Khatam-i- Nabuwat*, p. 131.

Majlis-i-Amal.⁴⁸ The anti Ahmadya movement rapidly gained momentum by the support of students. Demonstrations and meetings were held and processions were taken out all over the country in support of popular demands and student's bodies participated in these activities.⁴⁹

When Martial law was imposed in 1958, the political parties in Pakistan had neither the grounding nor the resources to face the kind of situation that Martial Law created. None resisted or raised any objection and the Military authorities did not face opposition in consolidating their position.⁵⁰ When there was utter silence from political parties, and the Martial Law was in its full swing and military courts were giving punishment to citizens for minor crimes, students stepped forward against the dictatorship of Ayub Khan, and they took over the role of leadership instead of political parties. Parties also got fresh blood of students to propagate their programme.⁵¹ Against the Ayub's education policy (1961-62) the students protested against the point of three years degree course. University Ordinance 1963 was another provocative issue for the students' agitation.⁵²

The underlying argument here is that the nature, objective and role of the students as a pressure group vary from one society to another. The third-world countries, like Pakistan where politics is highly personal in nature, the political institutions, being weak rather ineffective, lead towards a crisis of leadership. This gap is generally filled by the para-political forces like students' pressure groups. The national political leadership and the political parties exploit these pressure groups to give direction to the political development. Thus, the students' pressure groups become

48 Ahmad, *Ahmadiyya Movement*, pp. 306-7; Saleem Mansoor Khalid, *Tulba Tahreekan*, Vol. II (Lahore: Al-Badar Publications, 1989), p. 158.

49 Ahmad, *Ahmadiyya Movement*, p. 308.

50 Mahdi Hasan, *Pakistan ki Siasat awr Awam* [Urdu: Public and Politics in Pakistan] (Lahore: Sarang Publication, 1996), p. 260.

51 *Ibid*.

52 Ahmad, *Pakistan Main Talba Tahreek*, pp. 86, 93.

very instrumental in harnessing the political development and give some new life to the political system.