

**National Integration in Pakistan: The Case of Muhajirin Qawmi Movement (MQM)**

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Ethnic violence in the province of Sindh in Pakistan has assumed serious magnitude during the recent years. One major reason for this unending bloodshed has been the Muhajirin alienation, which has overshadowed other ethnic problems in the country. The Muhajirin Qawmi Movement (MQM), the party of the Muhajirin, which appeared in the mid-eighties, swept the polls in the 1988, 1990 and 1993 elections for the urban seats in the provincial assembly of Sindh. During the last two years it has been subjected to a very harsh 'Operation clean up by the army' and is held responsible for the law and order problem in the Sindh province. There are widely divergent perceptions about the origin and nature of Muhajirin discontent.

The secession of East Pakistan in 1971 and emergence of Bangladesh was the culmination of a process of alienation of the Bengali people, which represented the failure of national integration in Pakistan. However, once Bangladesh had separated, it was believed that since West Pakistan was territorially more compact and in which various ethnic communities had much in common, culturally and socially, the process of nation building and national integration would be less painful than in the united Pakistan, which was a geographical oddity.

This has not happened. There are many studies available now analysing the reasons for the failure of national integration in Pakistan. The problem of nation building in general and in the developing countries in particular is also a topic of lively debate among political scientists and sociologists. According to Myron Weiner, national integration is the process of bringing together culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial unit and the ultimate aim is to establish a national identity. Plural societies are more oftenly involved in this process because of the existence of distinct ethnic, religious, linguistic or other groups and strata<sup>1</sup>. Charles W Anderson also defines national integration almost on the same lines. According to him it means integrating the nation in spite of the centrifugal sub-national loyalties to racial, linguistic, ethnic, caste or religious groups; establishing and maintaining political order in the face of endemic violence and finding a workable ideology<sup>2</sup>.

Rounaq Jahan, who has done pioneering study on the problems of national integration which she thinks is a term interchangeable with nation building argues that social group cleavages in multicultural states are both horizontal (i.e. ethnic, religious, linguistic, tribal) and vertical (i.e. class, caste, sectarian). The most immediate loyalties of the vast

majority of people in these States go to units other than the nation state<sup>3</sup>. According to Myron Weiner, national integration comprises five tasks: the creation of territorial nationality, the establishing of a national central authority, the bridging of the elite mass-gap, the creation of a minimum value consensus and the devising of integrative institutions and behaviour<sup>4</sup>.

It is in this perspective that problems of national integration in Pakistan have to be studied. During its chequered history of more than forty-eight years, though the Pakistani State has been in existence, the dominant elites have failed in the task of nation building. There is as yet no evolution of a Pakistani identity. The successive regimes have clamoured about Pakistan being an Islamic State but their policies have led to aggravation of sectarian strife and upsurge of ethnic conflicts. This failure was exemplified by the alienation of the Bengali population in the sixties, which culminated in the break up of Pakistan and emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. There were some specific features of the process of alienation and separation of Bangladesh from the Pakistani State and some others, which are common in most of the multi-ethnic newly independent countries. Overall, it was a case of internal colonialism, and favourable international environment.

## **MQM**

With the birth of Bangladesh one of the major problems of integration in Pakistan were removed but others equally serious remained. The emergence of Muhajirin (Urdu speaking migrants) as an important factor in the crisis of integration in the successor state of Pakistan has assumed importance since the late seventies. In the mid-eighties the Muhajirin Qawmi Movement, an organisation of the migrants was founded under the leadership of a young and charismatic man, Altaf Hussain, MQM soon caught the imagination of the migrant youth of Sindh and the headlines in the media in the wake of ethnic riots in Karachi and other parts of Sindh and also sweeping electoral victories in the municipal elections in several cities in the province. The MQM has broken into the base of the Jamaati-I-Islami in that province. So far the urban centres in Sindh were the strongholds of the fundamentalist Islamic parties.

The origin and growth of the Muhajirin movement has been subject of analysis by several scholars. They widely differ in their propositions. Feroz Ahmed has produced a very comprehensive study of the origin and growth of the MQM<sup>5</sup>. In the very first few lines of his study he has pointed to the widespread rumours about the MQM connection with the Zia regime. Although according to Feroz Ahmed himself Zia policies supported Sindhi nationalism and eroded the Muhajirin share in the bureaucracy, he goes over the generally known factors which gave rise to Muslim separatism in the Muslim minority provinces in India before independence and asserts that the ideology of Muslim separatism was quintessentially the ideology of the Urdu speaking Muslims. Ahmed has rightly pointed out that most Urdu speaking migrants who came to Sindh were not driven out from their homes by communal riots but had come over after a conscious decision. The Urdu speaking migrant communities were, by and large, lower middle class but real power within the community lay with the bureaucrats and salaried professionals. Since

most of the Urdu speaking migrants settled in Sindh and they constituted almost 20 percent of the population of the province. The Muhajirins were mostly urban, non-feudal and non-tribal. They developed a Muhajir-Centric view of Pakistan as a military Muslim/Islamic State with the hegemony of Urdu and special privileges for the professional middle class. But this worldview was what Pakistan was all about. Feroz Ahmed presents no critique of this perspective. During the Ayub era whereas the Muhajiris upward mobility continued, in the bureaucracy the number of Muhajirs began to decline. This was also influenced by the shifting of the capital from Karachi to Islamabad. This was accompanied with large number of Punjabis getting governmental jobs in other provinces also.

The 1971 emergence of Bangladesh created a new situation in Pakistan. On one side the episode had shaken the two nation theory and the concept of one Pakistan was shattered; on the other four major ethnic communities of the country became aware of their identities and the major loser of this were the Muhajirs. Redressal of Sindhi grievances by a Sindhi democratically elected government adversely affected the Muhajirs. Feroz Ahmed has conceded that the process of Punjabi domination of the Pakistani bureaucracy had accelerated and Sindhi language by the Sindh government aroused the Muhajir suspicions of sidelining the Urdu language and provoked violence in the province. These events alienated the Sindhis and Muhajirs from each other. Feroz Ahmed argues that with the iron fist of Islam, the Zia government carried forward the Punjabisation of power to its limit. In the process, in ethnic terms, Pushtoons emerged as the junior partners of Punjabis. The share of the Muhajirs in civil bureaucracy was further reduced under Zia. Muhajir youth found it increasingly difficult to get government jobs. The proportion of Muhajirs in the population of Karachi went down further under Zia. This was brought about by the migration of Afghans and Pushtoons into the metropolis in the wake of the war in Afghanistan.

Another eminent Pakistani scholar has analyzed Muhajir problem in somewhat different way. Hamza Alavi agrees with some of the basic premises of Feroz Ahmed<sup>6</sup>. Alavi, says that Pakistani nation has been appropriated by Punjabis who dominate the ruling bureaucracy and the military ever since its inception. The Punjabi-Muhajir partnership continued till the 1970s. The underprivileged regions have tended to see themselves as subject people. Alavi has traced the growth of the middle classes what he has called the salariat in Punjab and north India. The Muhajir-Punjabi alliance was broken by the weakening of the bureaucratic power by Bhutto's administrative reforms and by the Zia regime. It was this development that compelled Muhajirs to perceive themselves as the disadvantaged group, and prompted the birth of the MQM. In Sindh, the Muhajirs are in competition for jobs with the Sindhis but on a national level they both are confronted with Punjabi domination. Alavi claims that the worst contradictions of the politics of ethnicity in Pakistan are concentrated in Sindh. According to him, Sindh is truly a multi-ethnic province. Historically, many ethnic communities have settled in Sindh but they are regarded as Sindhis. A distinction is made in the case of those who came to Sindh after partition, i.e., the Muhajirin. Though after partition, in the urban areas, Urdu speaking Muhajirs were in a majority, but with migrations from the NWFP and Punjab, the Urdu speaking population of the cities has gone down but the Sindhis are still outnumbered by

non-Sindhis. Once the Muhajir influence in the bureaucracy waned they began to demand strict adherence to the quota system in allocation of jobs. Earlier they used to oppose the quota system, as they perceived it to restrict their number.

Alavi says that the foundation of the MQM represented a change of the ideological paraphernalia of the Muhajirs. Now their emphasis was on their ethnic identity rather than Pakistani identity. The MRD movement against the Zia regime during the same period had its main impact on Sindh. Sindhi leaders had also secured the cooperation of the Muhajir leaders. The Movement for the Restoration of Democracy launched by the opposition parties led by the PPP against the Zia regime in 1983 helped to integrate Sindhis and Muhajirs to some extent. Sindhi leaders had recognised that unity of Sindhis and Muhajirs would be great asset, as it would help to get the Punjabis off their backs. But later, the MQM on its part began to demand the recognition of Muhajirs' as the fifth nationality. On the other hand, the chauvinistic elements among the Sindhi leadership began to incite hostility among the Sindhis against the Muhajirin.

Whereas both Feroz Ahmed and Hamza Alavi have analysed the MQM phenomenon from a scientific viewpoint, the study by Tahir Amin adopts the Jamat-I-Islami's understanding of the MQM and the ethnic movements in Pakistan in general<sup>7</sup>. According to him, Gen. Zia's policy of appeasing Sindhi nationalism and also its bid to weaken the PDP led to rise of Muhajirs. Among other factors for the growth of Muhajirs ethnic consciousness, he has also referred to the conspiracy on the part of the State and India fuelling ethnic consciousness.

The views of the three Pakistani scholars are poles apart on the main substance of the MQM phenomenon. Feroz Ahmed does not go into the basic causes of the failure of the national integration in Pakistan. Actually he has evaded some of the basic problems, which were inherent in the very concept and demand for Pakistan. The two-nation theory's emphasis on Islamic unity completely ignored the fact that the Muslim majority areas comprised Bengalis, Pathans, Sindhis, Baluchis, etc. In all the debates and discussions in the years before partition there was nowhere any indication that the diverse ethnic communities that inhabited Pakistan would need something more than Islamic spirit for national integration. The same spirit of unconcern pervaded the Muslims of the Muslim-Minority provinces as to how they would benefit from the creation of Pakistan in areas far away from their homes. Many of the leaders of the Muslim-Minority provinces who arrived in Pakistan soon after partition did not understand the implications of the division of India into two sovereign states. Actually apart from some cursory references to the transfer of population between the two dominions no where much attention was paid to the future of those who were the spearheads of Pakistan movement.

Feroz Ahmed and Hamza Alavi both refer to the fact that the dominant classes in the provinces that comprised Pakistan had not supported the Pakistan movement. That there was a Congress government in the NWFP till a week after Pakistan came into being and which could be disposed off only with some transgression of democratic norms. Even in Punjab, the Unionist Party government existed till a few months before independence. The almost total migration of Hindu and Sikh members of the administration left a

vacuum in the newly created state of Pakistan. Early Pakistani accounts are full of tales of how the new capital of Karachi had hardly any infrastructure for running the country. It was this to some extent that left the scope open for the migrants from India to occupy leading positions in the administration.

## **Sindhis**

Once Pakistan's native ruling classes roused themselves they succeeded in gradually pushing the Muhajirs out of the positions they had so conveniently occupied. The successive purges of the administration during Yahya Khan and Bhutto regimes were mainly directed against the Muhajirs<sup>8</sup>. The gradual purge and later decrease of the Muhajir's share in the government jobs has not correspondingly increased that of the Sindhis. The Muhajir's share in the government jobs has not correspondingly increased that of the Sindhis. The Muhajir leadership had recognised early that Muhajirs interest could not be protected in antagonism to those of the Sindhis. They had seen the negative consequences of the Sindhi-Muhajir clashes at the time of the language agitation in the early seventies. It was influx of Pathans and Punjabis in Sindh, which was jeopardising the Muhajir interests. The MQM foundation document has shown awareness of this complexity of the situation. The document had demanded that (1) only the real Sindhis (Sindhis and Muhajirs) should have the right to vote in Sindh; (2) business licenses should be given only to those who have the franchise to vote; (3) 'stranded Pakistanis' (Pakistanis living in Bangladesh-Biharis) should be allowed to settle and become citizens of Pakistan; (4) Afghans should be restricted to refugee camps in NWFP and Baluchistan; (5) Local bus service should be taken over by the Karachi Municipal Corporation; (6) Non-Sindhis's and non-Muhajirs should not be allowed to buy property in Sindh; (7) Muhajirs quota be revised. Though some aspects of this programme could not have found favour with the Sindhis, particularly the repatriation of the Biharis and the revision of the Muhajir quota, but on the whole the document could help to promote cooperation between the Muhajirs and Sindhis.

The critical issue in the province has been that Muhajirs are perceived, not without justification, as the cause for the deprivation of the Sindhis. Ever since 1947 there has been not only the influx of Muhajirs into the province but Pathans, Baluchis, Punjabis and Afghan refugees have also been coming in threatening to turn Sindhis a minority. Sindhis have always been under represented in the bureaucracy, military and public enterprises of the country. What was more painful above all for the Sindhis was that their language, Sindhi, had been ignored in favour of Urdu. Even strict implementation of quota in recruitment for jobs does not significantly improve the Sindhi share in services because of low literacy and poor educational facilities in the rural areas.

The extreme Sindhi nationalists, however, have focussed on the negative aspects of the Muhajir problem to demand that Muhajirs be thrown into the ocean. Both Rasul Bux Palijo and Hakim Ali Zardari (father-in-law of Benazir Bhutto), formerly in the Awami National Party, have spoken in these reckless terms. This attitude does not serve to find solutions to the Sindhi Muhajir problems or rather it aggravates them. True the Muhajirs who came from the north Indian states belonged to the middle class *salarial*, business and

trading class. These Muhajirs had not been driven out by force as those from East Punjab had been. The Urdu-speaking migrants had left their homes out of choice whereas the poorer sections both in the urban and rural areas of north India had by and large not migrated to Pakistan. There was no compulsion on them to leave. This social process was an implication of the nature and character of the Pakistan movement, and also of the Muhajirs.

These areas of north India from which the Muhajirs came had been the centre of Muslim culture and growth of the Urdu language. Muslim landlords had played a significant role in this evolution. This had bred a feeling of cultural superiority and arrogance, which the Muhajirs carried to Pakistan. Having become part of the ruling elite arrogating to themselves the authority of cultural elite, the Muhajirs themselves became an impediment to integration in Pakistan. The only resistance to Muhajirs (and also of Punjabis) political and cultural dominance was put up by the Bengalis who had an equally rich culture and a more democratic political tradition. Muhajirs, who had migrated to former East Pakistan, remained completely alienated from the Bengalis and when the latter rose up against West Pakistani domination, they became the target of the Bengali hostility.

## **Reaction**

The demand by the MQM that Muhajirs be recognised as the fifth nationality has aroused widespread condemnation both from the Islamic fundamentalists like the Jamaat-i-Islami as well as the Sindh extremist nationalists. The Jamaat-i-Islami's political philosophy has been that all Muslims constitute one nation. It was on this basis that they had opposed the Pakistan movement, which was based on the concept of Muslim nationalism. The Jamaat has even claimed that Islam favours a unitary form of State<sup>9</sup>. The MQM has also been accused of wanting a separate State of Muhajirs called Urdudesh or Jinnahpur, an impression, which flows out of MQM leader's glib talk of Muhajirs being a separate nationality. The MQM leader Altaf Hussain has, however, denied the charge, claiming that the party wants Muhajirs rights within the framework of Sindh and Pakistan. Actually the MQM has never attempted to amplify what they mean by their demand for recognition as a nationality. To many in Pakistan such a demand is reminiscent of Jinnah's demand for Muslims to be recognised as a nation in undivided India and consequent demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims.

Rasul Bux Palijo, a Sindhi leftist takes an extremely provocative attitude to the demand for Muhajirs to be considered a nationality. He said that as far as Muhajir nationalism is concerned, if any one calls himself a Muhajir after 40 years, it means Pakistan has not suited him. Some one comes from another country and settles in a country. The problem ends there. If they are still refugees after 40 years, the United Nations has set up a Commission for them<sup>10</sup>.

The demand for Muhajirs for being considered a nationality arises out of a perceived threat of the process of marginalisation of the community, which imagined itself to be the dominant entity. "Why is it that primordial collectivism is more salient among those who occupy the periphery rather than the centre of the system", asked T. K. Oommen. He

answers himself and says that quest for community is likely to crystallise more easily among the deprived and deprivation is not only in economic and political terms but also in terms of denial of one's cultural identity<sup>11</sup>. The MQM represents not a community of the deprived but the one facing threat of deprivation.

As far the question or recognition of Muhajirs as a nationality is concerned, it is related to the process of nation building in Pakistan. "In Multi ethnic societies, one discerns two simultaneous and ongoing processes of nation building, (a) the formation of an inter-ethnic composite of a homogeneous national personality with a secular outlook through the state apparatus, and (b) the transformation of an ethnic group in a multi-ethnic society to an ethnic community to nation"<sup>12</sup>. The latter is called an ethnic nation and approximate to sub-nation or nationality. What is important here is the processual relationship. The recognition or denial of it as a nationality is irrelevant here. Similarly the degree of assimilation of different ethnic communities are a long process for which forty-seven years is not necessarily an adequate time. Forcing the assimilation of Muhajirs as some Sindhis want to impose is likely to lead to tensions and conflicts<sup>13</sup>.

## **Conclusions**

The only solution to the ethnic problem lies in a restructuring of Pakistan's federal system<sup>14</sup>. The minority ethnic communities have nursed a grievance of Punjabi domination. The Muhajirs who were partners of Punjabis for a long time in this domination have lost their position and have been replaced by Pathans. Any redressal of Sindhi grievances is not possible without adversely affecting the privileged positions the Muhajirs still occupy. That was the reason why Benazir Bhutto could not have fulfilled the MQM-PPP agreement signed in December 1988. Some of the provisions of that agreement would have militated against the interests of the Sindhis, the main base of the PPP<sup>15</sup>.

With the restoration of democratic processes in Pakistan after 1988, and if democratic institutions are strengthened, the nation building tasks may take their own course. However, they are beset with complex problems<sup>16</sup>. The continued military action in Sindh against the Mujahirs had forced the MQM to boycott the National Assembly election in October 1993. The low voter turn out in the urban Muhajir constituencies for the National Assembly and subsequent MQM victory in the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, where it won 27 seats out of 99, and emerged as the second largest party after the PPP showed that the MQM and its leader Altaf Hussain continues to hold the loyalty of the overwhelming mass of the Muhajirs. The solutions to the ethnic problems in Sindh are to be found in peaceful democratic process and not in brutal repression.

## **Foot Notes**

1. Myron Weiner, "Political Integration and Political Development", In Jason N. Finkle and Richard W. Gable (Eds.) Political Development and Social Change (New York, 1971, pp. 643-654.

2. Charles W. Anderson, Fred R. Von der Mehden and Crawford Young, *Issues of Political Development* (New Jersey, 1967), pp. 18-53.
3. Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (Dacca, 1977), p. 2
4. Weiner, n.1
5. Feroz Ahmed. *The Rise of Mujahir Separation in Pakistan*, *Journal of Asian and African Affairs*, Washington, D.C., 12 (1989).
6. Hamza Alavi, *Nationhood and Nationalities in Pakistan Viewpoint*, Lahore, 13 July 1989, 20 July 1989, 27 July 1989.
7. Tahir Amin, *Ethno-National Movement of Pakistan*, (Islamabad, 1988).
8. T.P. Wright, "Indian Muslim Refugees in the Politics of Pakistan", *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Studies*, London, Vol. XII, No. 2
9. For Jamaat's views on Island and Nationhood see, Kalim Bahadur, *The Jammah-Islami of Pakistan*, *Political Thought and Political Action* (New Delhi, 1978).
10. Jang, Karachi, 18 March, 1987.
11. T.K. Oomen, *State and Society in India: Studies in Nation Building*, New Delhi, 1990, p.45.
12. Urmila Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1990), p.25.
13. *Viewpoint*, Lahore, 2 February 1989.
14. Charles H. Kennedy, "The Politics of Ethnicity in Sindh". *Strategic Digest*, New Delhi, Vol. XXII, No.3
15. For the text of the MQM-PPP agreement, see *Viewpoint*, 8 December 1988.
16. For a very comprehensive analysis of the ethnic conflicts and problems of national integration in Pakistan also see A.K.M. Abdus Sabur, "Pakistan: Ethnic Conflict and the Question of National Integration", *BISS Journal*, Dacca, Vol. 111, No. 4, 1990.