

Historical Account of the National Democratic Front (1962) in the Framework of Structural Functionalism

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Abstract:

The urge for a democratic system and constitutionalism has always been cherished by the political parties and their leadership in Pakistan despite differences in their ideological orientations and political approaches. This urge became more vivid whenever the military took over. This paper looks at the activities of the opposition political leaders and government from the broader perspective of structural functionalism. National Democratic Front (NDF) was the first united effort to oppose the martial law of General Muhammad Ayub Khan (1958-1969) as a system and a new structure imposed on the country. A unique feature of the Front was that in the absence of political parties; individual politicians set a platform for opposing the military law regime and pressed for restoration of parliamentary democracy in Pakistan, an adjusted functionality to the superstructure imposed by martial law authorities. Within this framework, the present paper deals with the background and the new constitutional structure of 1962. It further deals with the changed functionality of the political opposition from the prism of strategy, strength, weakness, and ultimate achievements of the front along with various structural changes of the government to counter the opposition politicians and parties. The NDF adopted itself each time the rulers denied any space for political activities having control of the structure. Even in the scarcity of space NDF and its associated leadership sneaked opportunities for themselves to outmaneuver the government in their strive for constitutionalism, democracy, electoral politics and revival of party politics in Pakistan.

Key Words: Pakistan, structural functionalism, opposition, political structure, martial law, dictatorship, alliance politics, political parties.

INTRODUCTION

Since its creation, Pakistan has fluctuated periodic structural changes initially to draft and adjust with the independence and adopt a structure that suits people's need and aspirations. This initial phase with immense difficulties and bargaining amongst the political leadership of the time was followed by a series of military involvement that scraped the prevailed structure for imposing a new structure of their own genius and facilitation. Each time the structural change fell heavy on the old structure's political leadership who were forced to adapt themselves to the new structure. The efforts to resist or assimilate with both the old and new structures have made Pakistan's political chessboard active. The political tug of war amongst civilian leadership in the first decade has given chances to political maneuver and opportunists to mingle in. The armed forces were attracted to grab the powers in its own hands. Once the army got power in 1958, it tried to impose its own structure. The following section focuses on the responses of the opposition leaders of the time towards the structural changes brought by the military ruler General Muhammad Ayub Khan. The objective of the present study is to

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highlight that how structural changes shaped the politics and political approach of the opposition political leaders and how their struggle shaped the politics of General Ayub.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

Suppression and silencing of the political parties depend on the control and the structural changes brought by the authoritarian regimes. However, determination of the political leadership and commitment of the masses along with strong structural organization and firm roots of political parties result in weakening and eliminating authoritarian regimes. This paper looks at the activities of the opposition political parties and the government from the broader perspective of structural functionalism. Within this framework, the government holds and shapes the structure through governmental policies, regulations, legislations, and control over the state resources and apparatus. However, the opposition functions within the structure provided by the government. The opposition parties were initially divided, but due to the state imposed bans and restrictions denying any playing space, they reunited to pressurize the government. The government, through its control, changes the rules of the game by benefiting some of the opposition parties and further tightening the screws on some other; to create cracks and weaken them. Each imposed weakness cements the bond of unity amongst the sufferers making much tougher opposition for the government (Hussain, 2008). This struggle continues till the success or loss of one of the rivals.

In light of this theoretical structure, the activities of one of the opposition alliances National Democratic Front is discussed in this paper along with the policy responses and corresponding adjustments and readjustment from both the ruling elite and the opposition leaders.

Political parties in Pakistan are discussed by (Afzal, 2002), (Mehmood, 1988), (Younis, 1993), (Rizvi, 1987), (Sayeed, 1967) and (Salamat, 1992). Most of these authors have studied the political parties and their activities in historical description. Younis, (1993) dealt with political analysis but his focus is on the politics of the component parties rather than the structure.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For writing this paper, the historical approach of description is adopted. The events are discussed and analyzed from the primary and secondary data sources.. Books, research, and newspaper articles are used to draw information. The collected information is then analyzed in the border framework of structural factionalism, a theory mainly employed in sociological studies but also used by historians and political analysts.

AYUB REGIME: STRUCTURAL CHANGE/BACKGROUND

The first decade after the emergence of Pakistan (1947-1957) is termed as the period of worst political crisis and instability in the 70 years political history of the state. Internationally, Pakistan's prestige was low and her economic development was fraught. Wrangling politics caused riots within the provincial legislature of East Pakistan causing physical assault on elected Speaker and the death of Deputy Speaker Shahid Ali Khan (Mehmood, 1988), along with injuries to thirty assembly members (Chiragh, 1983). In the backdrop of this incident on 7th October 1958, the Constitution of 1956 was scrapped and martial law was imposed; which curtailed all political activities in the country. Soon Elective Bodies Disqualification Ordinance was issued to screw down politicians (Muhammad, 1992).

In August 1959, the Elective Bodies (Disqualification) Order (EBDO) was introduced, providing certain former political leaders with the option of being tried for "misconduct" or disqualifying themselves from engaging in political activity. The special police establishment undertook investigations of 38 cases under EBDO and seventeen persons were convicted and debarred from politics. The great majority, however sensing their probable disqualification opted for self-imposed retreat from public life. EBDO was further amended on 5th March 1960 to expand its scope to retired, dismissed government officials or those who have resigned from the services. Ayub also described politicians as no better than demagogues and responsible for developing parochial and regional loyalties instead of national (Sayeed, 1967).

Emergence of New Structure (the 1962 Constitution):

After assuming power, Ayub Khan introduced several reforms and issued an ordinance to structure the system according to his planning. All sorts of political groupings and political activities were banned. He introduced his own brand of local bodies known as Basic Democracies. According to the system, the electorate in Pakistan had to elect 80000 basic democrats who then had the power to elect members to various assemblies and the President (Khan M. A., 1967). On the first anniversary of the military coup, i.e. on October 27, 1959, President Ayub Khan promulgated the Basic Democracies (BD) Order, providing for the establishment of a five-tiered structure at the base of which were to be Union committees and Union councils in the urban and rural areas respectively. These primary bodies were to be elected directly through adult franchise system. One Councillor or Basic Democrat had to represent from 800 to 1500 persons. In all there would be 80,000 Basic Democrats (later increased to 120,000) half representing constituencies in East Pakistan and half those of West Pakistan. The system was probably considered to produce a rural elite in place of the distrusted political urbanite elite which would align itself with the government in national reconstruction without the "disruptive" influence of party politics (Yousaf, nd).

Ayub Khan had personal liking for Presidential system of governance; therefore, the 1962 Constitution was presidential in nature. Martial Law was lifted on 8th of June 1962 and the same day, the new Constitution was also promulgated (Ali, 1992). President Ayub, after affixing his signature on March 1, 1962 explained the main features of the new Constitution over Radio Pakistan as "blend of democracy and discipline" (Dawn, 1962). The 1962 Constitution was a mere show of efficiency and fulfilment of Ayub's pledges. Under this Constitution, all executive powers were wrested in the hands of President. There were several preventive laws used frequently to silence political dissent with arbitrary means (Khan N. N., Personal communication, Feb. 12 1998). The net result was complete confusion and disillusionment among the people in general and politicians in particular.

Changed Functionality

The new Constitution of 1962 was rejected by most politicians opposing the regime of Ayub Khan. They opposed the Constitution as there was no provision for political parties and their activities. Hence, they maintained that unless political activities are allowed revival or formation of political parties be withheld. The new Assembly, too, proved to be very defiant. Its members soon started to organize themselves into "like minded groups" and demanded in a chorus "democratization" of the Constitution (Saharn, 1983). These champions of democracy were, however, divided amongst themselves as to the degree of its democratization. On the one hand, were those who wanted to have a

revision to the parliamentary pattern. While on the other hand, there was a section of the Muslim Leaguers, who wished to retain the broad structure of the Ayub Constitution, nevertheless, liberalize it by removing some of its undemocratic features like suspension of justiciable fundamental rights, the ban on political parties and the system of indirect elections (Saharn, 1983). The formation of political parties and contesting the elections were legalised through Political Parties Act of 1962 on July 16th (Younis, 1993). According to the Act, neither restrictions on the number of parties, nor any regulation of collection or administration of party funds were required. The formation of parties “having the objective of propagating any opinion or acting prejudicially to the integrity or security of Pakistan,” or in receipt of foreign aid was, however, banned. The Act also forbade association with any foreign aided party. Dismissed government servants and disqualified ministers and governors on charges of gross misconduct were debarred from joining any political party. Similarly, persons disqualified through EBDO and those imprisoned on charges of moral turpitude for more than a year were also banned from becoming members of political parties (Saharn, 1983).

These steps of the regime denied any kind of a room for politicians and political parties to be involved in political activities. The stage was thus prepared only for pro-regime politicians and parties.

Re-assembling for New Functionality (The Formation of National Democratic Front)

After the adoption of the Political Parties Act, those Ministers who had supported the broad structure of the Ayub Constitution organized themselves under the Convention Muslim League (CML) in September 1962 (Younis, 1993). Ayub Khan joined this party on 23rd May, 1963 and was made its president in December 1963.

The political parties Act barred the politicians previously disqualified under Public Office Disqualification Order (PODO) and EBDO from joining any political organization. This change in political structure brought through the political parties Act, compelled the opposition politicians to function differently to adjust their political activities within the limits of the new law and political space. Resultantly, in order to restore the parliamentary system of democracy, the opposition political leaders on 5th October 1962 (Muhammad, 1992) attempted to create a broad based political front of individuals to strive for democratisation of the country. The National Democratic Front (NDF) enjoyed the support of 54 (Afzal, 2002) or 55 political leaders from both East and West Pakistan (Rizvi, 1987). None of them gave the complete list of the politicians who supported this grouping. The prominent among them were Maulana Maudodi, Yousaf Khattak, Sardar Buhadar, Fazualur Rehman, Mumtaz Daultana, Z. H. Lari, Ghulam Ali Talpur, Ayub Khoro, Abu Hussain Sarkar, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, And Noorul Amin etc. (Afzal, 2002). Majority of these leaders promised to not revive their parties until the complete restoration of democracy. Leadership of the CML (Khwaja Nazimuddin Group), National Awami Party (NAP) and Jama'at-i-Islami (JI) had reservations on this issue and made the revival conditional with amendments in the Constitution.

The Front leadership was unanimous on their demand that, “Pakistan should be governed by a democratic constitution” (Dawn, 1962). To achieve this goal, political organizations like the JI, Krishak Saramik Party (KSP), NAP (Muzaffar and Taha Groups) and Nizam-i-Islam Party (NIP) all extended their cooperation to the alliance and agreed to the appeal of Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy to withhold the revival of their respective parties for the time being (Muhammad, 1992).

New-Functionality-NDF's Resolution for the Restoration of Democracy and Expansion:

The alliance passed its famous resolution for the restoration of democracy on January 28, 1963, which described that democracy being stifled through the imposition of military rule in the country. It further highlighted the growing frustration of the masses about their gloomy future, uncertain political situation, visible danger to the integrity, solidarity, stability, and future of democracy in Pakistan. It showed its firm conviction to intensify its efforts and sacrifices for the cause of democracy in Pakistan. It urged, for urgent need of united and coordinated efforts of all segments of the society individually and from party platforms to double up their cooperation for immediate and full restoration of democracy in Pakistan (Dawn, 1963). The Front then tried to press upon their demands in its various meetings held in both parts of the country.

The Martial law regime was not tolerant to these developments as it too responded strongly by launching a campaign against the leadership and supporters. Members of the Front were looked at with great suspicion, and official agencies were monitoring their activities. Arrests and other pressure tactics were used to calm them down.

NDF lost its founding leader Suhrawardy who died in Beirut on 5th December 1963 (Islam, 1987). The illness and death of Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy was a great setback for the alliance as he was a seasoned politician and instrumental in uniting the opposition leaders. He himself was a popular opposition leader and enjoyed mass support at both the wings of Pakistan.

The NDF however, got a new life in January 1964 when three major political organizations, the Awami League (AL), the NAP (Nassrullah Group) (NAP-Nasrullah), and the CML (Noorul Amin Group) joined the NDF (Rizvi, 1987) in order to push demands for the establishment of "full and complete democracy" (New York Times, 1964).

The NDF was thus an alliance of all those politicians who felt at odds with the presidential system. In fact the extension of United Front and its major components were the various fragments of the old East Pakistan United Front and a faction of Muslim League (Noor-ul-Amin Group), their former sworn enemy plus most elements of the old NAP in both the provinces. The alliance demanded the removal of all political restrictions and a return to the parliamentary Constitution. Submerging their normal hostilities and differences the EBDOnian leaders of the NDF abjured the revival of their separate political parties until the President should restore democracy (Kahin, 1984).

The Front apparently adopted one point strategy, demanding parliamentary democratic Constitution. But in reality, the Front was demanding many other things as an outcome of this demand, including division of powers through separation of executive and judiciary, guarantee of fundamental rights, financial empowerment of the parliament, reduction in taxes, control over fixing the prices of agricultural products like wheat, jute and daily commodities and restoration of the 1956 Constitution. The Front was strongly against any kind of military alliances with other countries and believed in friendly relations with all states. The Front was also committed to the principled stand of not accepting one man's rule which the 1962 Constitution has granted to the office of the President (Younis, 1993).

Controlling the Strings – Revival of Political Parties

The Front continued its struggle by arranging mass rallies and processions despite all harsh and suppressive measures of the government. However, it failed to achieve its goal, due to grave differences in the ranks of the affiliated parties especially, on the revival of the political parties. The revival of CML (Khwaja Nazimuddin Group), NAP and JI proved to be major setbacks for the Front and it started losing political ground.

Convergence into Pakistan Democratic Party:

With the parting of ways of the three key parties, NDF started losing its importance. Yet it remained somewhat functional, and in June 1969, the Front culminated in becoming a new political party, "Pakistan Democratic Party" (PDP) in combination of AL (Nawabzada Nasrullah group) NIP and Justice Party (Mehmood, 1988).

CONCLUSION

NDF being the first ever alliance to oppose the Martial law regime in the country can be credited with the courageous voice for representative and parliamentary government. It broke the shackles of political stagnancy. Although political parties were banned yet the politicians in the individual capacity strived for constitutionalism, democracy, electoral politics, and revival of party politics. The NDF, though it faced the challenge to become a full-fledged opposition alliance throughout its life, yet succeeded in pressurizing the government to allow political parties to function in search of legitimizing its own rule. Apart from it, NDF provided a base for the formation of full-fledged electoral and opposition alliances in the presidential election of 1965.

Furthermore, analysis shows that the NDF was not a complete failure rather, it provided a platform not only to the EBDOed but other politicians of different political hues. It crafted a common plinth to organize a front against the forces at whose hands all of them felt they had equally suffered. It made a fissure between democracy and dictatorship by asserting democratic political activities in the martial law regime. Furthermore, it provided a base for another alliance, the Combined Opposition Parties (COP); which challenged and gave a tough time to Ayub Khan in the 1965 elections.

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