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***Biradari* Politics of Alliances and Opposition in Jhang District during the Military Regimes: A case Study of General Pervez Musharraf's Rule**

Abstract

Biradarism is also fundamental characteristic of socio-politics of district Jhang [Pakistani-Punjab]; its dominant biradaris have immense potential to decisively influence national, provincial and district levels politics [on behalf of their eco-social supremacy]. The formation of electoral alliances is based on the collaborative interest-based national and local [biradari] power politics. Number of alliances were locally constituted by national aristocracy [especially by dictators]. Locally-constituted-alliances under different dictators had further strengthened the exploitative grip of these biradaris. The most decisive alliances [and their respective oppositions] were formulated during different elections of Musharraf's regime; in which Syeds collaborated with Lalis and Qazis; Sials with Syeds and Moulvis [Religious groups]; and Sahibzaadaaz with Cheela-Sials.

Biradaris [clans/castes] have been remained the integral part of mainstream politics in Sub-continent, particularly in western Punjab [Pakistani] and most importantly in its sub-units like Jhang district. After the creation of Pakistan, their dominant eco-social roles have become more vibrant in all respects, especially in politics. Every biradari has different levels of importance due to its numbers, economic resources, political affiliations, land holdings and social networking.¹ These are the basic factors, which lead the biradaris to hold power at local level [Biradarism] as well as at provincial and national levels. Biradaris are embodiment of power in Pakistani politics.² Their role remains dominant in towns, villages and [even] in cities. The dominant biradaris of Jhang are holding all kinds of power since pre-partition periods; which [powerfulness] has still been carried on.³

Land holding is one of the prominent factor in determining the dominance of these biradaris. In fact, a biradari is more powerful and has much social status if it

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holds huge agricultural land as compared to the land possession of other lower *biradaris*.⁴ Presently, the huge land holdings and the active participation in businesses have further boosted *biradaris* dominant roles. So, the importance of dominant *biradaris* of Pakistan and especially of Punjab has undeniably been admitted due to their social, cultural, religious, financial, administrative and political factors.⁵

Dominant *biradaris* of the Punjab have their bases in rural areas [their constituencies and land-holdings]; they are also the permanent residents of big cities.⁶ In this regard, the rural areas of Punjab are completely occupied by these *biradaris*, because of their powerful role in all walks of rural and urban lives.⁷ Throughout the political history of Pakistan, *biradaris* remained the center of attraction for political parties of so-called democrats and more importantly of the dictators. These dominant *biradaris* have vast and non-controversial vote banks; therefore, political parties and the dictators preferred these *biradaris* and their electables.⁸

The Punjab has the largest number of seats in National and Provincial assemblies; every unit of this province has immense importance [particularly, the traditional electables and their *biradaris*];⁹ the aristocratic-stakeholders of this Punjabi politico-administrative elite give much importance to powerful *biradaris*, such as, Watoos, Lagharis, Qurashis, Kharrs, Makhdooms, Cheemas, Chatthas, Sials, Syeds, Lalis, Qazis, Sahibzaadaaz, Shaikhs, Baloaches, Nissowaanas, and Bhattis etc.¹⁰

Politically, these dominant *biradaris* focus on the alliances [collaboration] with different “popular” political parties, with other *biradaris* and also with the subalterns [the poor/workers/proletariats]; these elitist groups also shifted their loyalties again and again for perpetual powerfulness. They supported the democratic governments as well as military dictators. Some of the *biradaris* also opposed the martial laws but their number and period of opposition was very short and passive.¹¹

Biradari politics of *Jhang* has actually been carried on alliance-based [collaborative] power politics; to somehow different from other districts due to the presence of engineered sectarianism. In past, different alliances were made [at national level] to counter the respective oppositions; which directly influenced the prevailed *biradari* politics of *Jhang* too. Different clans of district *Jhang* as well as of rural Punjab remained active in the promotion of such national alliances for example, Movement for Restoration of Democracy [MRD] Pakistan Democratic Alliance [PDA], and Islami Jamhoori Ittihad [IJI] etc. It was also difficult for the political parties to get success without the support of these dominant *biradaris* and the prevailing religious elements of *Jhang*.¹²

These *biradaris* performed crucial role during military periods. The Basic Democracies System [thick protective cover] of General Ayyub Khan¹³ and his “selection” as president of Pakistan was also due to the support of powerful *biradaris* of Punjab [which had also controlled the local religiosity].¹⁴ It shows the importance of rural areas’ leaders for military dictators, and role that played by these influential groups [and their locally patronized sectarian factions].¹⁵ In context of Zia’s regime, some of the factions of influential *biradaris* of *Jhang* opposed this third military rule very passively and indirectly. On the other side, this passive-opposition of local context [for instance the *Syeds*]¹⁶ also contested the elections of 1985 [Sardarzada Zafar Abbas Syed (uncle of Syed Hassan Murtaza) elected MPA] with the support of military dictator.¹⁷

These dominant *biradaris* of *Jhang* also played a vital role during the period of emergency of General Pervez Musharraf. The establishment of Pakistan Muslim League (Q) by General Musharraf was in fact an alliance of multiple political factions against the rival political parties; Pakistan Peoples' Party and Pakistan Muslim League [N].¹⁸ Most of these strong *biradaris* of *Jhang* were previously supporting Pakistan Muslim League [N], now shifted their loyalties and joined Pakistan Muslim League [Q]. The politically, socially and financially strong members [the Heads] of these *biradaris* contested the general elections of 2002 by using the platform of Pakistan Muslim League [Q];¹⁹ for instance, M Tahir Shah, Ghulam Bibi Bharwana-Sial, Shaaikh Waqas Akram, Sahabzada Mehboob Sultan and Syeda Abida Hussain contested almost all their previous elections by using the platforms of different political parties.²⁰ Now, in 2002, they shifted their loyalties and contested the National Assembly elections by using the platform of Pakistan Muslim League [Q]. It shows that dominant *biradaris* shifted their loyalties from one political party to the other. It remained the prominent feature of dominant *biradaris* of Punjab and especially of district *Jhang* that they changed their political affiliations and constituted the alliances in accordance with their financial [agricultural, industrial], social [Cultural] and political interests.²¹ They did not care about promotion of democracy, containment of dictatorial rules and collective good for the laymen. Their ultimate goal was to secure their personal interests and the interests of their “new” party/alliance [particularly the ruling one or expectedly to rule]. So, the security and promotion of the vested interests remained utmost purpose;²² which was possible only through becoming the part of the government not of any kind of opposition or any bloc or alliance of opposition.²³

One of the fundamental purpose of dominant *biradaris*, to support the military dictators, was to safeguard their huge agricultural land and the established feudalism. In past, different democratic governments as well as military governments started land reforms; so that they could compel dominant *biradaris* to support the concerned government.²⁴ So, these land reforms initiatives of different democratic and military governments were taken, and the dominant *biradaris* also

became the part and parcel of upcoming governments [especially of military] to secure the assets.²⁵

In adolescent democracies like Pakistan, where there are many regional political parties and where there is a history of unrestrained political mayhems; the political alliances matter. The majority of the alliances which were formulated with the help of non-democratic forces; such alliances not only disturbed the natural democratic growth in Pakistan but also disturbed eco-social development of this very country [collective good].²⁶ Actually, such alliances were constituted among different national, regional and local level *biradaris* and political parties to counter the opposite political parties and groups [particularly the subalterns]. In the situation of different cultural and identical diversities, to maintain national solidarity is very difficult task.²⁷ So, it is one of the major cause that the political parties cannot attain the majority in the elections. Political parties in Pakistan have different bases and famous for different identities; for example, Mutthida Quomi Movement [Urban Sindh], Awwami National Party [KPK], Pakistan Peoples' Party [Sindh], and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz [Punjab]. In this scenario the political parties either of democrats or of dictators had to make alliances for electoral success.²⁸

Biradari politics of district *Jhang* had also witnessed the power politics of alliance-orientation, especially in context of dictatorial rules of political history of Pakistan. *Biradaris* of this very district cooperated with one another and also tactfully collaborated with the masses for electoral victories. The politics of these *biradaris* of *Jhang* had much relevance with the Ranajit Guha's theory of maintaining dominance [but without hegemony] with collaboration and consent [through different kinds of Alliances] instead of violent opposition.²⁹

The politics of alliances is basically the politics of collaboration and consent which is based on the alliances among different political parties [at upper levels] and among different powerful *biradaris* [at lower levels]. The role of non-political elements [the sectarian one too] also remained active in formation of these alliances. In fact, no political party could win the elections of national, provincial and local levels without such tactful collaboration; and cannot win the absolute majority without such collaborative-alliances [of political parties, and powerful *biradaris*]. Some of the alliances [of National level] in political history of Pakistan were constituted, such as, Combined Opposition Parties (COP), Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD), Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDA), etc. Moreover, the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) was also one of the prominent alliance of political parties of opposition in Pakistan against Benazir Bhutto. And, majority of these alliances were trickled down at grass-root levels [to compel and attract locally powerful families to join] for the perpetual success.³⁰

The politics of rural and urban areas is still different with respect to *Biradarism*, voting behavior of the subalterns, electioneering-process and the formation of alliances [also with the lower classes]. In urban areas the voters are mostly educated and they judge their candidates on the basis of their services. In rural areas the voters are mostly uneducated people [socio-economically dependent] and they have different parameters, on the basis of which they cast their votes. So, it creates imbalance in respect of attainment of majority; and this uncertain phenomenon leads towards the constitution of natural and unnatural alliances. Because, the scattered victories of political parties temporarily show their influence [on behalf of powerful *biradaris*] in one specific region instead of two-third-majority.³¹

Firstly, General Ayyub Khan imposed martial law [October-1958 to March-1969]. He introduced and enthusiastically followed Basic Democracies [BD] system³² to empower again the locally dominant *biradaris* and created tactful consent-based alliances for the newly established presidential system of government. In this context, the President was selected [indirect election] with the votes of 80000 basic electorates/democrats [directly elected in controlled socio-political environment of locally authoritative groups].³³ Some of these *biradaris* also opposed General Ayyub passively and indirectly [*Shaaikh-Salmana-Syeds of Chiniot, Jalal-Khanana-Sials of Jhang, Khahathias of Shorkot*]. So, to counter this passive rivalry of different opposite *biradaris*, General Ayyub introduced land reforms which expectedly resulted in shifting the loyalties of such *biradaris*.³⁴

The support of different *biradaris* of Punjab was in fact an alliance with this first military dictator. In district *Jhang* such *biradaris*, like *Shah-Daoultana-Syeds, Sahibzaadaaz, Lalis, Qazis, Mighana-Sials* and *Bharwana-Sials* joined hands with this first military ruler.³⁵ On the other hand, the despotic rule of Ayyub Khan proved destructive for parliamentary democracy; political leaders were imprisoned, political parties were banned, opposition was not tolerated, newspapers were censored and taken over into government custody. But, Ayyub's regime continued to be opposed by nationalists from West and East Pakistan. Yet, Ayyub Khan sought some form of public lawfulness [as all next military dictators also followed]; to lift martial law in 1962 and subsequently imposed the presidential-constitution. The military government was continuously focusing on the support of the veteran landlords of rural Punjab, on behalf its B.D. system. So, Ayyub Khan, with the help of local dominant *Biradaris/Classes*, "successfully" maneuvered political clouts both at upper and lower levels and got selected as the second president of Pakistan. He made the invisible and unannounced alliances with locally powerful Punjabi aristocratic *biradaris of Jhang*; for instance, Mahar Ghulam Haider Bharwana, col Syed Abid Hussain, Noor Muhammad Sial, Sardar Gulam Muhammad Shah Sahibzaadaa Nazeer Sultan and Mehr Dost Muhammad

Lali etc.; these all politicians supported General Ayyub Khan. As a result, the absolute favoritism of Ayyub Khan in different political, social, administrative and financial contexts was given to these loyal and friendly families.³⁶ In January 1965, General Ayyub Khan was again 'elected' president of Pakistan by an electoral college composed of Basic Democrats, who had been patronized by the first military regime since their own elections in 1959. Behind his success, there were hidden alliances with such *biradaris*. General Ayyub Khan fully patronized these friendly and collaborative *biradaris* [which were already powerful] of rural Punjab and also of district *Jhang*.³⁷

The military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq was cruel for some of the dominant *biradaris* too, due to their passive and temporary opposition. District *Jhang* has a specific feature that it has versatile religious factions and all of them have their own politico-administrative clouts too; especially the *Shias*, *Sunnis* and *Ahmadis*.³⁸ Most of the dominant *biradaris* have *Shia* background and some also have *Sunni* background, [*Bharwana-Sials*, and *Sahibzaadaaz* (*Awans/Faqeers*)]. On behalf of some ideological differences of *Shias* and *Sunnis*, this district initially faced state-patronized favoritism for *Sunnis*.³⁹ So, *Shia* dominant *biradaris*, submissively opposed [later on, they also became the part and parcel Islamized-Controlled Democracy of Zia]. On the other side, the *Sunni* dominant *biradaris* dutifully sided with General Zia. In this way, a socio-political and sectarian rift was created between *Shias* and *Sunnis* of *Jhang*.⁴⁰

General Zia-ul-Haq had actually adopted some different strategies to create alliances with these *biradaris* of *Jhang*; he promoted *Sunnis* [alliances with the religious clerics and supported them in non-party based general elections of 1985 as well as in local bodies' elections which were held during the peak time of General Zia; Maolana Rehmatullah, Moulvi Manzoor chinioti, Moulana Haq-Nawaz *Jhangvi* were the strong supporters of General Zia from district *Jhang*]; and also constituted alliances with *Shias* too [*Arif Khan Rajhabana-Sial*(of *Shorkot*), *Syed Fakhar Imam* (*Shaaiaikh-Salamana-Syed*), *Syeda Abida Hussain* (of *Shah-Jewana-Syeds*), *Sardar Muhammad Ali Shah* (*Shah-Daoultana-Syed*) etc; because of their eco-social powerfulness which always exhibited in politics].⁴¹ In local government elections and in non-party-based general elections [1985], instead of opposition of military establishment, *Shia* dominant *biradaris* of *Jhang* won the majority of the seats. Later on, the victorious candidates of these *biradaris* also joined this third military government.⁴² Later on, these *biradaris* were also called [*Shah-Daoultana-Syeds*, *Lalis*, *Sials*, *Sahibzaadaaz*, *Bharwana-Sials*] pre-establishment *biradaris*.⁴³ The religious group won negligible seats who had the real support of Zia.

In context of Musharraf's rule, it has been observed that to remain with this apparently enlightened moderate dictator was necessary for these all-time

powerful families; after the imposition of emergency of General Musharraf, majority of them [powerful families] became the part of the alliances of this fourth military dictator.⁴⁴ The Musharraf's regime and its alliances with these *biradaris* [through PML (Q)] particularly in his first general elections [2002] had much importance. This time the military dictator created [earlier] a separate political party [New King's Party PML(Q)] and then tried "successfully" to win the support of all factions, basically of dominant *biradaris* of whole of the Punjab and its local units, especially of *Jhang*.⁴⁵

Although, Pervez Musharraf dismissed Nawaz Sharif's legitimate democratic government; but majority of the electables [belonging to the dominant classes] of Pakistan Muslim League (N) [in *Jhang*] shifted their [with particular contexts of *Syeds*, *Sahibzaadaaz* and the *Sials*] loyalties and joined the new king party Pakistan Muslim League (Q).⁴⁶ By viewing the political history of these *biradaris* of *Jhang*, that their candidates for National and Provincial Assemblies who contested the elections of 2002 by using the platform of Pakistan Muslim League (Q), had already used the platform of Pakistan Peoples' Party or PML (N) in previous elections [of 1997]. The joining of new king party by these dominant *biradaris* was the result of the "attraction" [slogan of enlighten moderation] and fear of coercion by newly established martial law administration of General Musharraf. Similarly, the long military period of Musharraf was also depended upon such alliances with these kind of very influential *biradaris*. On the other hand, this military dictator too protected their interests at all costs [in which Makhdoom Syed Faisal Sahlah Hayat was the Federal Interior Minister, through the alliance of PPPP and PML(Q), and Tahir Shah (brother of Sardar Muhammad Ali Shah), Gulam Bibi Bharwana (Minister of state for Education), Shaaiekh Waqas Akram (Minister of state for Labour and Manpower and Federal Minister for Education), Sahibzaadaah Mahboob Sultan won the National Assembly elections on behalf of PML(Q) and got official and non-official benefits].⁴⁷ So, the majority of these decisively strong *biradaris* of Punjab supported Pakistan Muslim League (Q) which was backed by General Musharraf. Similarly, the electables of these *biradaris* of *Jhang* knew that in the presence of General Pervez Musharraf no other powerful bloc could survive or prosper. Therefore, the *biradaris*, such as, *Sials*, *Bharwana-Sials*, *Jalal-Khanan-Sials*, *Syeds*, *Sahibzaadaaz*, *Shaaiaikhs*, *Qazis* and *Lalis* supported Pervez Musharraf and fully took over the pivotal roles of local, provincial and national levels of power politics during the whole tenure of General Pervez Musharraf.⁴⁸

In 2001 and 2005 local bodies elections, the alliances worked again and again and got elected Sardarzada Zulfiqar Ali Shah [son of Sardar Syed Muhammad Ali Shah of *Rajoa-Chiniot*] as tehsil Nazim of Chiniot, Mahadhu Lal Hussain Janjiana Sial elected tehsil Nazim of tehsil Shorkot, and in tehsil *Jhang* Shaaikh Muhammad Akram [father of Shaaikh Waqas Akram] elected tehsil chairman.

Similarly, Sahibzaada Hameed Sultan of Shorkot elected district Nazim along with the Qazi Hassan Ali [son of Qazi Safdar Ali] of as his *Naib-Nazim* on the basis of allainance of *Sahibzaadaaz* and *Qazis*. So, under the patronage of fourth military dictator, the alliances produced results at all levels of politics and these powerful families took all kind of advantages of all levels.⁴⁹

Undoubtedly, power politics of alliances through *Biradarism* has been the dominant factor of politics of *Jhang* district. So, these powerful *biradaris* always remained intact with power politics of both kinds: the dictatorial and the democratic. They remained the essential parts of different alliances of upper and lower levels; these *biradaris* joined different alliances either of dictators or of the democratic forces. These *biradaris* could not follow any rule or regulation having democratic bases or even the established moral bases of politics. These powerful groups always shifted their allegiances in accordance with the changing requirements of the coercion and collaboration of the respective main stream rulers and of the ignorance and consent of the ruled. Whenever a political party contested the elections or a dictator wanted to get absolute majority, they depended upon these *biradaris* [in Ayub Khan's martial law, these dominant *biradaris* fully supported this very first coup, later on during the second martial law when General Zia-ul-Haq dismissed the democratic government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and imposed martial law, these *biradaris* also supported the despotic rule of General Zia, as Sardar Muhammad Ali Shah Became Federal Minister for Railways and chairman Federal Public Account Committee]. So, these *biradaris* played vital roles in prolonging and strengthening the respective governments, particularly of military dictators. Military dictators also maintained personal "goodwill" with these dominant *biradaris* [Musharraf's friendship with *Bharwana-Sials*]⁵⁰ and their concerned electables; so, most of such electables got national fame particularly in Musharraf's regime. So, on behalf of huge land holdings, socio-cultural supremacy and finally the expected political powerfulness of these *biradaris* had always enhanced their importance not only for the voters [the subalterns] but also for the democratic political parties and dictatorial power politics; which had been carried on through alliances [collaboration] with the voters, political parties and finally with the dictators.

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