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# Religious Motivation behind Political Movement: A Case Study of *Nizam-e-Mustafa* Movement

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## Abstract

The year 1977 is marked fateful for the democracy in Pakistan as it witnessed the elections, the agitation against alleged electoral rigging of Z.A. Bhutto and ultimately enforcement of martial law. This paper revisits the usage of religious concepts and ideals to pursue the political ends, a trend quite common in Pakistani politics. The paper analyses the composition, leadership, formation, demands and results of the agitation that in the end was labeled as Tehrik-e-Nizam-e-Mustafa (Movement for the System of Prophet). It is argued that religious mantras were raised and utilized skillfully for the purpose of mobilization and motivation of the general public who were called to streets to pressure Bhutto for political deal. The multi-dimensional nature of the allied political parties in Pakistan National Alliance that led the protest movement have been highlighted in support of the argument. The parties belonged to both religious and secular strata and they came close to each other in order to gain a common political cause to oppose Bhutto. The parties did not agree on the religious objective. They, in the contrary, agreed on political objective of re-election and ouster of Prime Minister Bhutto. The protest movement was closed without achievement of religious goals but the leaders claimed success on the grounds of political gains. It is, therefore, concluded that religious sentiments of people were provoked as motives to join the political protest movement. The absent of mention in parleys and post movement silent escape from the demand of the enforcement of system of prophet has been exposed. The paper surveys the history of demonstration through examination of documentary and archival sources, narratives of oral history, and primary as well as secondary sources of the time under study.

Anti-Bhutto Movement in Pakistan generally titled as the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Nizam-e-Mustafa (the Movement for the Enforcement of system of Prophet Muhammad) in 1977 was initiated on allegations of rigging after the sweeping electoral victory of then Prime Minister Z. A. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP). The Movement ended when the deteriorating conditions of law and order as well as display of public sentiment in the demonstrations provided a reason for martial law imposed by General Zia-ul-Haq on 5 July 1977. The expression of Islamic demands in the Movement was also used as a justification for the stress on Islam exerted by Zia regime in the aftermath of this movement. It is general misconception that the Movement was raised exclusively for the enforcement of Shariah. Actually the Movement was a political movement jointly raised by secular, liberal and religious elements. Religious issues were used to intensify the political strength and public support behind the political stance of opposition.

The necessity of electoral alliance in opposition to Bhutto's PPP expedited almost whole opposition to join as soon as the announcement of the election was made. On 10 January 1977 a meeting of political parties of United Democratic Front on the house of Rafiq Ahmad Bajwa in Lahore concluded with the formation of Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) comprising nine political parties. Muslim League (Qayyum) was only substantial political party that remained out of alliance.<sup>1</sup> It was agreed in the founding meeting that secular Tehrik-i-Istiqlal and religious Jamiat Ulama-i-Pakistan (JUP) would be given more than 50 percent share of total seats in election under PNA. The religious parties got the position of Secretary General of alliance as it was to be nominated by JUP. The central parliamentary board of the parties would consist of the heads of component parties.<sup>2</sup>

Hatred for Bhutto was the cohesive factor in PNA that comprised heterogeneous groups. Most of these parties were basically secular and liberal in their outlook. Three religious parties Jamaat-e-Islami (JI); Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) and JUP advocated basing the government and the society on Islamic principles.<sup>3</sup> Two parties National Democratic Party (NDP) and Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP) had leaning towards left. the Tehrik- i-Istiqlal (TI) whose rank and file consisted of retired bureaucrats and defense personnel and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) represented the liberals. Two insignificant groups – the Kashmir Muslim Conference (KMC) and the Khaksar Movement (KM)<sup>4</sup> could be marked as mixture of religion and politics.

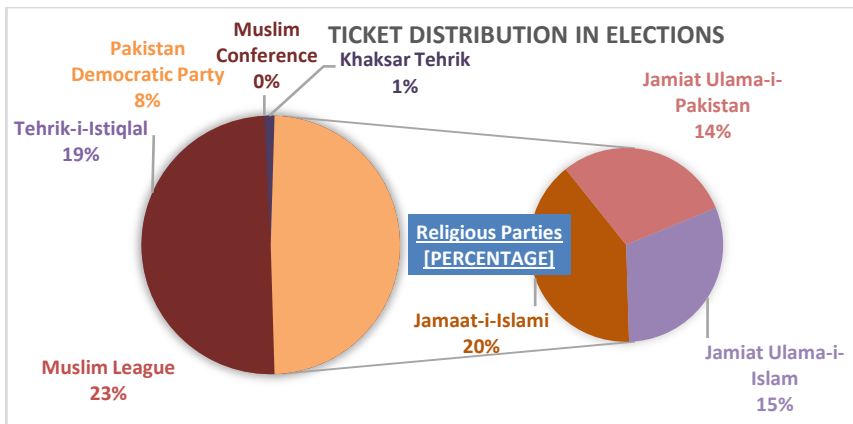
Both religious and liberal types of parties needed alliance to contest popular Bhutto as they all had not succeeded in gathering popular support behind them. Ultra-rightist Jamat-i-Islami derived its main support from small traders, shopkeepers and sections of the professional class. It was especially popular in Karachi among the bourgeois section of those refugees who had migrated from India and who clung to what they considered to be the national ideology, identifying

Pakistan with Islam. Being largely urban based and having tight organization, Jamaat had never attained popularity among the general population.

Tehrik-i-Istiqlal (TI) represented mainly the professionals and large industrialists and began with an appeal to small producers, both urban and rural. Later it started seeking support from other disgruntled sections of the population as well. Led by a conservative leader, former Air Force Chief Marshall Asghar Khan it accepted in its membership progressive civil libertarian lawyers such as Mahmud Ali Qasuri. Notwithstanding its effort, TI had not attained the popularity among the working class and peasants.

The National Democratic Party was formed in late 1975 by Sherbaz Mazari, a Baloch from Dera Ghazi Khan. He was previously a leader of the independent group in the national assembly. Its manifesto was clearly trying to appeal to the former supporters of NAP in Baluchistan and Northwest Frontier Province.<sup>5</sup>

The tickets in elections distributed to the parties in central component of the Movement – the PNA – elaborated slightly equal representation of both secular and religious parties. Liberal parties got 51 % of total tickets with breakup that Muslim League got 36 Tehrik-i-Istiqlal got 30, Pakistan Democratic Party got 13 and Khaksar Tehrik got 2 seats. While religious parties were allotted 49 % of the total tickets. Jamaat-e-Islami got 31, Jamiat Ulama-e-Pakistan got 23 and Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam got 24 tickets.<sup>6</sup>



The equal distribution of tickets in religious and secular parties of PNA marked that the Movement was not completely a movement for the demand of Sharia. Other than firmly aligned groups under the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) (such as the Sind Peasant Committee, the Sindhi People's Movement, the Pukhtoonkhawa National Awami Party [a splinter from NAP in North West Frontier Province], Mazdoor Mahaz [Workers Front], Workers Party, etc.) did not form part of the PNA but struggled in the Movement independently.<sup>7</sup> They were mainly leftist groups. These parties in the movement did not demand the Muhammadan system

(*nizam-e-Mustafa*) and they kept themselves confined to verbal support only. In start it was not one of the objectives of the movement. The protest was against the election rigging and its goal was removal of Bhutto from power. In order to win public feelings the demand was adopted later.<sup>8</sup>

There was agreement in all components of Movement on the main objectives of re-election and overthrow of Bhutto and these were objectives focused by all components of the movement. The religious demands were voiced only by the religious leadership and secular as well as leftist components of the Movement did not endorse them. There was obvious lack of agreement among component parties on the pronounced religious objectives.

Enforcement of Shariah was not the main demand of Movement. On the contrary re-election due to rigging was the main demand. The chief demand was that the Army should form the government and ensure 'free and fair' elections.<sup>9</sup> One striking feature of slogans was prospect for enforcement of Islamic laws.<sup>10</sup> Generals stressed that movement started against election fraud but later it converted into movement for *sharia*. Not to mention that its leaders mentioned this system in start and it was also a part of PNA's manifesto. Later this subject got significance in the movement.<sup>11</sup> Asghar Khan confirms that the implementation of the Shariat was not one of the demands made by the PNA on the government and no one took the PM's offer of 17 April to join the Advisory Council for the implementation of the Shariat seriously. This was obviously made to side track the main issue of re-election.<sup>12</sup>

The demands presented during talks were not religious but mainly focused on the political objectives. The leaders of PNA presented 30 demands and proposals<sup>13</sup> Major demands were the resignation of Prime Minister Bhutto, creation of new election commission headed by military and judiciary, new national and provincial elections, release of almost 50 thousand political prisoners, and end to martial law as well as press censorship.<sup>14</sup>

Evidently in the initial stage, TNNM called for resignation of Prime Minister Bhutto, formation of caretaker government, establishment of new election commission and new elections under army supervision.<sup>15</sup> For pre-conditions of the talks the PNA came out with demands for fresh polls, resignation of Bhutto and the reconstitution of a new Election Commission.<sup>16</sup> In response to the Bhutto's offer of talks the PNA President and religious leader, Maulana Mufti Mahmud reiterated that the talks should precede in case of the acceptance of the three basic demands which were political and did not include enforcement of Shariah. On 20 March two new demands were made by Asghar Khan as pre-conditions for talks. They were the lifting of the emergency and the release of all political prisoners and detainees in the country.<sup>17</sup> On 24 March when PNA rejected third offer of Bhutto of discussion, Mufti Mahmud repeated demand that Bhutto should resign, election commission should be dismissed, and elections should be annulled.<sup>18</sup>

People were motivated to join the protests through provocation of their religious sentiments. Only the upheaval in Punjab could be fruitful for acceptance of political demands of the Movement. Though the opposition probably had greater resources in other parts of the country, it had little chance of forcing Bhutto from office unless it could create serious trouble in the Punjab.<sup>19</sup> In order to get support of people of Punjab the religious motives could be better mode of appeal. Therefore religious demands were pronounced loudly so that people might be attracted to the demonstrations.

The government decided not to allow ulema and their followers to organize protests in mosques on 31 March and the police beat up the congregations and arrested a large number of persons including eminent religious leaders. The departure from the sanctity of mosques by police and FSF gave religious orators an opportunity to condemn Bhutto's government as anti-religious and did much to whip up hatred and contempt against him.<sup>20</sup>

As the main demands of the Movement were political the talks and offers of Bhutto also mainly concerned with political issues. Bhutto's main concessions and offers to the movement remained mainly political. These offers included fresh elections and referendum. It was his sixth attempt of reconciliation on 19<sup>th</sup> April when feeling the impact of religious demands in the public he offered program of legal and social changes designed to appeal conservatives against him. He declared 'immediate' prohibition of alcoholic beverages, banned gambling, proposed more strict censorship regulations in conformity with 'moral standards of Islam' and promised to move country closer to codes of Quran. He promised to reinstate commission on Islamic law. Despite these offers to appease religious circles in the Movement, Bhutto did not altogether negate the significance of main political demand. He reiterated his offer to call new elections for provincial assemblies and, if opposition won, to call new parliamentary elections.<sup>21</sup> On 24 April Bhutto again made the promise to implement Islamic Laws as a concession to religious elements of PNA.<sup>22</sup> NA on May 11 passed a bill banning intoxicating liquor.<sup>23</sup> Opposition did not pay much heed to the Islamic steps of Bhutto and rejected Bhutto's concession for it was the political gimmick.<sup>24</sup>

With intensification of PNA campaign, Bhutto felt that mixture of religious fervor with politics was fatal and in order to counter religious approach to get political objective he started to emphasize religious issues. The word "socialism" was dropped from literature of Peoples' Party and in its place was substituted the more cumbersome phrase "Musawat-i-Mohammadi" - literally translated as "equality of Muhammad". It was in sharp contrast to the concept of trinity propounded in the last elections - socialism, Islam and democracy. Bhutto's turn to Islam during TNNM was not altogether new. The use of religious issues for politics by his opponents and public bent to religion made Bhutto highlight already existing Islamic aspects which Bhutto himself used to attract religious sentiments. PPP manifesto

already had promised to "ensure that Friday as the weekly holiday, make the teaching of the Holy Quran an integral part of eminence as a centre of community life, establish a federal Ulema academy and other institutions , and a variety of other concessions to Islam."<sup>25</sup>

There was absence of mention in parleys and post movement silent escape from Islamic ideals. The main and major points of discussion during talks were ouster of Bhutto, re-elections and interim government during new elections. Religious issues were sidelined by government and the Movement's leadership alike. In the middle of parleys all sides had apparently agreed to a new National Assembly election, but differences over timing made the agreement meaningless. The opposition wanted an immediate election – one of their earlier proposals called for one in 30 days. Bhutto wanted as much time as possible to rebuild his position.<sup>26</sup>

The leaders of religious parties – Professor Ghafoor Ahmad and Mufti Mahmood – were compromising and liked the successful end of negotiations with the provision of re-election under Bhutto. They negated the terms of references for enforcement of Islamic law. On the contrary to their compromising attitude the hard line had been taken by liberal Asghar Khan when talking parties were very close to a settlement. Kausar Niazi said that both sides had agreed to another general election in the autumn.<sup>27</sup> Details of election machinery awaited final negotiating session. Spokesmen for both confirmed on 14 June that opposition demand for interim government to replace that of Bhutto had been dropped.<sup>28</sup> It was announced on 16<sup>th</sup> June that an accord had been reached between the parties, and that the same would be reduced into writing.<sup>29</sup> The opposition gained a public commitment from Bhutto to hold new elections. Obviously it was not Islamic issues where the religious parties were prone to compromise. CIA reports also confirmed on 24 June that a compromise agreement with had reached on 15 or 16 June and some important details of the agreement were left to be worked out in meetings between opposition representatives and one of Bhutto's ministers,<sup>30</sup>

On 2 July Bhutto and PNA negotiators agreed on plan for new elections. Agreement was approved by opposition's central council. Alliance negotiator Ghafoor Ahmed said formal version of pact, if approved, would be signed by Bhutto and alliance leader Mufti Mahmood<sup>31</sup> An announcement on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1977 that full accord had been reached and the formal agreement would soon be signed by both the parties after had been formally ratified by the General Council of the PNA.<sup>32</sup>

The terms of the agreement were not acceptable to a group led by Asghar Khan said that the PNA's main negotiating team had gone beyond its brief. According to Asghar Khan the question of the release of political prisoners had not been satisfactorily settled. But the PNA Secretary General Ghafoor Ahmad said all main issues had been settled. He said the joint draft composed on contained enough

safeguards to ensure free and fair elections. This was the objective of the PNA's movement and negotiations with Bhutto.<sup>33</sup>

Four main factors seemed to contribute in the failure of compromise; Bhutto's visit to Muslim countries before signing the pact, Pirazada's contemptuous behavior and ,opposition's loss of confidence and Army's restlessness. Not any one of them was concerned with Islamic issues. In the last ten-hours round of talks; there was disagreement on political matters like when the assembly would be dissolved (The government said the July, opposition said next week), on when troops would be returned to barracks in Balochistan (The government said the November, opposition said next month) on what powers would be given to the "implementation council" that would oversee the act.<sup>34</sup>

Ironically the movement ended without the achievement of religious goals but there were ironic political claims of victory of people. After Martial Law, the PNA began to disintegrate on the issues of participation in the "Civilian Cabinet" of the ruling junta, the election schedule, Islamization of laws, denationalization of industries and educational institutions, and foreign policy. The first to break away from the PNA was the TI, closely followed by JUP, while the NDP disassociated itself a little later. The PML was split into three rival factions while the NDP was bifurcated into two groups.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

TNNM was a political movement and religion was only used to attract the public support. The composition, leadership, objectives, demands, tactics, incidents and even anti-Movement measures of government all indicate that the Movement was not religious one. It was post Movement official narrative of martial law government that stressed the Religion as main focus of the Movement.

## Notes and References

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<sup>9</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, "Democracy and Dictatorship in Pakistan," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*; January 1, 1978; 8, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Syed Afzal Haider, *Bhutto Trial* (Islamabad: National Commission on History & Culture, 1996), 136

<sup>11</sup> Chishti, *Bhutto, Zia aur Mein*, 138

<sup>12</sup> Mohammad Asghar Khan, *Generals in Politics Pakistan 1958-1982* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1983), 110

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<sup>33</sup>*The Guardian*, 4 July 1977.

<sup>34</sup>*The Guardian*, 6 July 1977

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