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# Marxist Political Traditions and Left Politics in Pakistan: Understanding the Role of Awami Worker Party and Fanoos Gujjar (2012-2018)

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*Marxism has inspired revolutionary movements around the world. The methods and strategies adopted by Marxists groups and parties have varied but with the variations in space and times. The presence of Marxists and leftists in Indo-Pakistan sub-continent is as old as the politics itself. One often reads of Indian National Congress and All India Muslim League as the pioneers of participatory politics in sub-continent. What is often overlooked is the presence of communist and Marxist ideas within these parties. The first organized expression of Marxist politics in united India however was the establishment of Communist Party of India (CPI). CPI stood for the liberation of India as a first step towards the achievement of a free India. The real freedom, the party believed would come only when the exploitation of the masses ends. When India was partitioned, CPI got split into CPP, The Communist Party of Pakistan. The Marxist ideology and CPP underwent different phases of evolution in Pakistan. This work mainly focuses on the Marxist traditions which influenced the left politics and establishment of Awami Workers Party as an attempt to reunite the Marxists and leftist movement in Pakistan. The party was established in November 2012 to rebuild working class politics by uniting the hitherto dissident leftist groups in the country. It was a merger of Awami Party, Labour Party and the Workers Party. Taking cognizant of the contradictions within the prevailing structures of power, the party envisaged to build a New Leftist movement. This research attempts to study the growth, evolution and possible contradictions of Awami Workers Party with special reference to the life and struggle of Fanoos Gujjar.*

**Keywords:** Left Politics, Marxism, Awami Worker Party, Fanoos Gujjar

## Introduction

The Marxist philosophy and political framework can be understood by the interpretation of economy and its relation with the human history by Karl Marx as “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”<sup>1</sup>. The core element in the Marxist framework is the ‘class struggle’ and its relation with the economic structure of the society. In fact, Karl Marx divided the human history, according to its relations with the economic structure, into five distinct stages i.e. the primitive society, the age of slavery, the age of feudalism, the age of capitalism and the advanced communism, the final stage of human history<sup>2</sup>. While explaining the stages, Marx viewed the class struggle between slaves and their masters, peasants and their feudal lords and the capitalist (the Bourgeoisie) and the workers (the Proletariat). According to Marx, the Proletariat would lead the revolution against the Bourgeoisie towards the final stage of human history that is advanced communism there would be a classless society.

The time when Marx wrote his famous *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), was the age of Industrial revolution. Marx defines two classes at the age of capitalism i.e. the Bourgeoisie who controlled the political authority and the Proletariat, who worked for the Bourgeoisie to increase the industrial capital<sup>3</sup>. According to Marx, the multiple increase in capital added miseries to the Proletariat which led to the class consciousness among the Proletariat and class struggle started against the Bourgeoisie<sup>4</sup>. Marx termed the industrial growth and the rise of capitalism as the worst stage of human history due to inhuman behavior, brutal exploitation of the working class and illusionary methods of the Bourgeoisie in the realm of politics and religion to control the Proletariat<sup>5</sup>.

The development of class consciousness and class struggle of the Proletariat against the capitalists, Marx argues that the technological advancement, multiple growth in industrial production, massive urbanization and the rise of political consciousness in the Proletariat which led the Proletariat in confrontation with the Bourgeoisie<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, the Proletariat struggle would shape a revolution and will abolish the existing class structures in the society. In fact, the Proletariat would act as the agent of progress in that classless and stateless society. In the views of Marx, the class based societies require states because there are conflicts in different class structures of the state and the Proletariat revolution will eliminate these hostilities therefore the concept of state is useless in the advanced communism<sup>7</sup>.

The materialistic interpretation and conception of human history by Karl Marx remained a foundational stone in formulating the Marxist political framework. Indeed, economic interests remained an important factor in studying the political as well as the social movements. Marxism has inspired revolutionary movements around the globe. The methods and strategies adopted by the Marxist have certain variations according to the geographical conditions. Perhaps the most prominent example of Marxist revolution inspired by the Marxist ideals in the history has been the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin in 1917 followed by the Maoist Chinese 'Cultural Revolution' in 1949.

Ironically, the Marxist framework was tailored according to the geographical conditions of that country. For instance Lenin tried to redefine the characteristics of an industrial society in fact he attempted to include the peasantry class along with the Proletariat class<sup>8</sup>. The main argument of Lenin that there would be a better chance of revolution in backward countries where agricultural economy is dominant over the weak structural of industrial capital and he stressed upon worker's and peasant's revolution instead of worker's revolution<sup>9</sup> whereas Mao heavily relied on the peasantry class for the Chinese revolution though Mao's thought was inspired by the writings of Lenin<sup>10</sup>. In fact, Lenin introduced two new terminologies i.e. "the masses", the majority of exploited segments of society which included workers and peasants, and the "the vanguard organization", the professional revolutionaries who would provide true consciousness and political knowledge to the masses.<sup>11</sup>

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the age of industrial development and social as well as political movements. In addition, the latter half of nineteenth century had witnessed the imperialist rules directly or indirectly. The emergence of The Marxist-Leninist revolution in Russia inspired the social movements against the imperial forces especially in the British India. After the Bolshevik revolution, the communist party of India was created in 1925<sup>12</sup> which at the time of its inception faced vicious opposition and repression from the British government. The Marxist activities in British India were curtailed through the massive arrests of the communists. For this reason, majority of the communists aligned themselves with the progressive elements within the Indian National Congress whereas during the Pakistan movement, majority of the Muslim communists joined the campaign of All India Muslim League<sup>13</sup>.

Initially, the communist party of India did not support the idea of partition of India and campaigned for the united front against the British

imperialism. The reason behind the opposition of division was that the communists believed that the divided regions of united India could be handed over to national bourgeoisie and could serve the feudal interests<sup>14</sup>. But afterwards, in early 1940s, the communists supported the idea of partition of India on the basis of political consciousness among the Muslims in India<sup>15</sup>. Resultantly, the communists worked for the Muslim League cause in 1945-46 elections. But the call of Direct Action Day and Quit India movement created a rift between the Muslim League and the communists as the latter was of the opinion that it was unjust to call such actions which caused the civil war in the country<sup>16</sup>.

### **Left Politics and Marxist Political Traditions in Pakistan**

After the creation of Pakistan, Marxist politics remained intact in the political arena but the social milieu in Pakistan was against the communists and Marxist ideology. However, the Communist Party of Pakistan was established in 1948 in Calcutta and Sajjad Zaheer was first secretary general of this party who upon his arrival in Pakistan reorganized the trade unions in urban centers such as Karachi and Lahore<sup>17</sup>. During this period trade unions were mobilized to bring the peasantry and landless labor together to launch a resistance against the bourgeoisie forces in the country. Sajjad Zaheer was of the opinion that the communists should take inspiration from the Leninism and he was hopeful in bringing the communist revolution in Pakistan<sup>18</sup>.

The Marxist politics of the communist party remained focused on the formation of trade unions and Industrial workers. In fact, the communist party was following the footprints of Lenin that the Proletariat would lead the revolution along with the peasantry. Sajjad Zaheer realized the weak structure of the Proletariat in Pakistan therefore he directed the trade unions under the communist party to create class consciousness among the peasants and landless labor to revolt against the landlords for their own liberty<sup>19</sup>. The politics of agitation by the communist party through its unions and the accused links of communist party with Rawalpindi Conspiracy led the government to ban the activities of communist party<sup>20</sup>. The immediate cause behind this was the labor agitation in Eastern wing of the country where Muslim League was wiped out in the provincial elections in 1954<sup>21</sup>.

When the communist party was banned, a wave of state oppression against the communists started. Some Marxists argue that the repressive measures against the communists and the worker's union were on the behest of the US and there were cold war rivalries between the US and Soviet

Russia whereas the US had its defense alliance with Pakistan<sup>22</sup>. The Marxist leadership dispersed and remained underground. But during this period of repression, the unrest among the workers due to the economic issues was increased during the 1954-57 period<sup>23</sup>. The absence of leadership from the agitation of workers made such resistance fruitless and brought further state's rage against the communist in Martial law period of Ayub Khan. With a harsher attitude towards the Marxists and communists with respect to the previous governments, Ayub Khan paid his attention towards the industrial growth. Along with the industrialization, land reforms were introduced just to facilitate the interest of specified class instead of peasantry and landless workers.

The period of early 1960s had witnessed the international transformation in Marxist politics with 'Sino-Soviet split'. This split had its impacts on the Marxist movements and regimes internationally as well as on the Marxist ideology and politics in Pakistan. The Marxist politics witnessed a division within its ranks as the pro-China Marxist faction and pro USSR faction<sup>24</sup>. The divisions within Marxist groups were witnessed when massive protests were started against the Ayub Khan regime. The Mazdoor Kissan Party and the Pakistan People's Party were formed at that time. The urban working class supported the Marxist politics of PPP whereas the MKP was influenced by the Maoist philosophy reorganized the peasants in Punjab and NWFP (now KPK)<sup>25</sup>.

The Maoist group in East Pakistan was led by Maulana Hamid Khan Bhashani who parted his ways from National Awami Party which had the tilt towards Russian ideology. After the elections of 1970 and separation of East Pakistan, Z. A. Bhutto came to power who was considered to be a Marxist politician and had the support of working class and trade unions. There were hopes that Bhutto would implement the Marxist political framework but such hopes were shattered when there was a rise of clashes of trade unions with the government<sup>26</sup>. Though Bhutto increased the wages, introduced the social security for the working class and nationalized the industry but all such steps were initiated and controlled by the old bureaucratic structures to facilitate the traditional economic structure of the state<sup>27</sup>.

The phase during 1967-72 was called by Marxists, a class movement in Pakistan and the failure to move forward for a class revolution was the diversion of this movement towards the ethnic lines which caused the separation of East Pakistan and defeat of Military<sup>28</sup>. In fact, this period was considered to be time of social upheaval by the working class in Pakistan. The humiliation and defeat of Pakistan's military exhausted the ruling

bourgeoisie and they were not in the mood to face another mass movement in future<sup>29</sup>. The military took over the reins of state affairs which started a new wave of repression against the Marxists. The Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and the US sponsorship gave the opportunity to military regime to crush the Marxist elements in Pakistan.

The post Zia period witnessed the rise of religious fundamentalism in Pakistan and in the name of religion there was severe exploitation of lower classes in Pakistan. In addition to this, the policies of International Monetary Fund had adversely affected the economic fabric of the state as well as the on conditions of common man. In commenting the post Zia era, Marxist believed that the social conditions were made by the 'traditional bourgeoisie' and their parliamentary democracy and called it a fabricated drama veiled by the skepticism of 'war and peace', 'conflicts of fundamentalism and secularism', 'nationalism and sectarianism' just to perpetuate their rule in the country<sup>30</sup>.

The ideological stance of Marxist politics was revolved around the notion that at the time of partition and de colonization of the state, the superstructure of the state was dominant and no class had the control over it<sup>31</sup>. Ironically, the state played an intermediary role in perusing and protecting the not only economic but also political interest of the 'metropolitan bourgeoisie', 'indigenous bourgeoisie' and the 'Land lords'<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, the state acted on behalf of this nexus among the interest based classes to maintain the social order in the society<sup>33</sup>. It is evident from the study of early phase to the end of twentieth century that state had protected the interests of such classes at the expense of crushing the Marxists voices and exploiting the masses in one way or the other.

### **Ideological Position of Awami Worker Party**

The traditional argument of the Marxist politics in Pakistan was challenged by the Marxists in the changing world of twenty first century. A new debate started on the 'class question' that how the informal sector of the economy and its patronage system through the traditional Bourgeoisie was created during the post Zia era. According to Asim Sajjad Akhtar<sup>34</sup>, the boom in informal sector of the economy and the chains of patronage emerged which caused the emergence of an 'Intermediate Class' in the social milieu of the society<sup>35</sup>. This intermediate class includes the merchants, traders, transporters and political ethnic groups and this class exists in the urban and rural areas of Pakistan. Further this intermediate class had developed its relations with all levels of patronage and this way they exploited the

respective subordinate classes through their patrons<sup>36</sup>. Indeed, the addition of intermediate class along the traditional bourgeoisie is the core element of Marxist politics of Awami Workers Party (AWP), the area under research.

### **Program of Awami Workers Party**

The Awami Workers Party was created with the merger of Marxist and left political parties namely the Pakistan Workers Party, Pakistan Awami Party and Labor Party Pakistan in November 2012<sup>37</sup>. Abid Hassan Manto became its first president, Fanoos Gujjar first chairman and Farooq Tariq became its first general secretary<sup>38</sup>. The party program at the time of its creation was to ‘pressurize the state to organize a plan the economic system, nationalization of the industry including the industry operating by the military, opposition against the aggression of imperialist forces, voice for the human rights especially for the liberation of women under the patriarchal system and Pakistan’s multinational essence will be established’<sup>39</sup>.

The establishment of AWP created many speculations within the Marxist circles in Pakistan. The Marxists and leftists belonged to AWP believed that the creation of the intermediate class and the system of patronage created a systematic way of exploitation of the subordinate classes and called it as ‘the dialect of order and change’<sup>40</sup> therefore it is required to reorganize the Marxist and leftist forces to set a mass movement to challenge this order. On this policy the traditional Marxists alleged the members of AWP of the deviation from the classical Marxism<sup>41</sup>. Besides, there were also other rumors in Marxist circles that this alliance would only act like a pressure group instead of initiating a mass movement and eventually it would meet the same fate as the previous Marxist movements had faced<sup>42</sup>. Contrary to these assumptions, the general opinion of the Marxist was welcoming and praised their effort.

### **Class Struggle and Role of Awami Workers Party**

Awami Workers Party after its creation held many seminars, conventions and recorded many protests to create the class consciousness among the subordinate classes but also resisted the government policies which it considered to be the main factor in the miseries of people. Before its first congress<sup>43</sup> it held a women convention to unveil its policy regarding the women. The press release stated that the principle role of women in Pakistan’s economic structure had neglected previously, the struggle for women empowerment to bring about the structural changes in the society is

the main policy of AWP so that the slogan of party 'equality is a right not a concession' could be materialized<sup>44</sup>. The party demanded to end the discriminatory laws and customs regarding the women and stressed upon the participation of women the political movement for their rights.

On terrorism and religious fundamentalism, the AWP gave a clear stance that religion and state affairs must be separated. In past, the Marxist had always struggled to resist against the Islamic policies of the state. In a press release, the AWP condemned the policies of Zia that used religion to legitimize his own role and the present state of terrorism and fundamentalism is the outcome and legacy of his political Islam<sup>45</sup>. The military operations in the tribal areas are not the solution of this problem and state has to think about its religious policy. If the same policy is carried by the state, the miseries of common man especially the children and women would be multiplied. Last but not the least, the military operations and the permission of drone attacks are the result the nexus between Pakistan's ruling elite and the imperialist forces around the globe<sup>46</sup>.

The AWP organized the Kissan committees and tried to reorganize the unions against the feudal structure, implementation of land reforms, to raise voice for the landless tenants, against the exploitation of mills and factory owners and labor rights<sup>47</sup>. In addition to this, to resist against the policy of privatization from its platform, the AWP tried to form anti privatization alliance to stop the privatization of PIA, Railways and PTCL<sup>48</sup>. Further, the AWP stressed upon the 're politicization' of the unions so that a mass struggle would be launched against the exploitation structure of the state, ruling elite and their patronized proxies who had made the lives of common man miserable<sup>49</sup>. AWP believed that it is the only platform for the organization of a long term struggle for a socialist and progressive movement.

Besides this re organization, the most important campaign of AWP was against the demolition of *Katchi Abadis* in Islamabad. The AWP called this campaign against the law and created All Pakistan Alliance for *Katchi Abadis* (APAKA)<sup>50</sup>. According to AWP, the way and the pattern of demolition of the *Katchi Abadis* is a violation of the basic rights of life of inhabitants, 'housing and privacy' which could not be justified in any legal pretext and on the same time criticized the state's narrative which alleged the people of these localities as Afghan and terrorists<sup>51</sup>. The AWP insisted upon a peaceful solution for this problem otherwise there would be option for these working class and vendors for a civil mass movement. The AWP along with APAKA moved to Supreme Court for the lawful solution of this



problem and Supreme Court ordered to half the demolition of *Katchi Abdis*<sup>52</sup>.

### Fanoos Gujjar and Class Question

Fanoos Gujjar (late) was the founding member of AWP. He throughout his political career struggled for the socialist democracy and remained a committed revolutionary in the leftist and Marxist political history of Pakistan. His entire political career was a fight for the rights of under privileged classes of the society especially the *gujjar* tribe of Buner and a struggle for the secular state<sup>53</sup>. He started his political carrier from student politics later he joined Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Wali Khan but soon differences were created between them and Fanoos Gujjar parted his ways and formed his own Marxist party with the name of Pakistan Awami Party<sup>54</sup>. In creating the new alliance in the shape of AWP, Fanoos Gujjar was at the forefront in bridging the ideological differences within AWP<sup>55</sup>.

Fanoos Gujjar played an important role in mobilizing the peasants in KPK and Punjab from the platform of AWP and raised his voice against the increasing religiosity in the *Pushtoon* society which according to him was the major cause behind the women oppression as well as the religious minorities in the province<sup>56</sup>. He condemned the brutalities of demolishing of minoritie's houses and shops in his home district Buner<sup>57</sup>. He campaigned against the *Jirga* system and forced marriages in the *Pushtoon* society. In his opinion the women suffered more than any segment of the society after the wave of Islamic fundamentalism in the post Zia era<sup>58</sup>. On feudal structure of the society, Fanoos Gujjar was of the opinion that the intermediate brokers such as mill owners and *Arhties*, had exploited the small farmers with the patronage of big land lords and industrialists<sup>59</sup>.

Hence, the political struggle of AWP and Fanoos Gujjar played a vital role in creating the class consciousness among the down trodden segments of the society. However, the class struggle of AWP and Fanoos Gujjar can be differentiated on the basis of localities. The AWP got the fame when it had highlighted the issue of demolition of *Katchi Abadis* and it got the mass support from outside the realm of Marxists therefore the AWP party contested the local body elections in Islamabad. On the contrary the politics of Fanoos Gujjar was confined to the KPK generally and in Buner district specifically where he contested the provincial and national assembly elections since 1988. Ironically Fanoos Gujjar also influenced the Marxists and leftists of the Punjab province where there were the peasant movements such as the Okara military farms and kiln workers of *Toba Teek*

*Singh* but the main focus of his politics remained in KPK<sup>60</sup>. Evidently, Fanoos Gujjar supported the Pushtoon ethnic and nationalist movement “*Pushtoon Tahafuz Movement*” (PTM) and he not only endorsed the demands of PTM but also attended their rallies and endorsed their stance<sup>61</sup>.

## Conclusion

As the Marxist philosophy is concerned with the unification of workers, the Proletariat, to seize the means of production and thus bring about a revolution in which the oppressed, the Proletariat will overthrow the capitalists, the Bourgeoisie which Marx believed the oppressors. In the context of British India, the Marxists took the question of partition as the Muslim political consciousness against the British imperialism therefore they supported the cause of partition. But after the Partition, the Marxist politics remained under the severe repression throughout the twentieth century. The bourgeoisie in the state structure perceived the Marxist politics as a threat for their economic interests. Therefore, they countered the Marxist politics through religion. The changing circumstances of twenty first century undermined the Marxist ideals and Marxist politic which was under great repression in Pakistan. At this point, the Awami Workers Party, the alliance of Marxists once again raised the class question. The abundance of informal economy in the society created intermediate class besides the traditional bourgeoisie. The AWP and Fanoos Gujjar played an important in creating the class consciousness among these downtrodden subordinate classes and had kept the classical Marxist class question alive.

## Notes and References

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