

The Status of Left-Wing Politics in Pakistan after the Dissolution of the Soviet Union

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Abstract

The disintegration of the Soviet Union had a detrimental impact on Pakistan's already fragmented and feeble Left politics. The retreat of communism in Moscow disappointed Leftists in Pakistan. Faced with disillusionment and frustration, prominent figures in Pakistan's Left politics responded to the anti-communist measurements in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during late 1980s in various ways. Some Leftists embraced other social and political ideologies, others went to the field of NGOs, while some remained steadfast in their commitment to the Marxist ideology. Soon after the disintegration, the Leftist political groups in Pakistan attempted to form a broader alliance but this experiment proved unsuccessful. Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, these fragmented Left groups struggled to find cohesion. However, in the second decade of twenty-first century, there was a resurgence and a renewed sense of unity within the Left can be noted. Even after some success, the Left is unable to assert it as a political alternat in a time when there is a political vacuum and the mainstream parties failed in addressing the issues of the masses. Left is facing some serious internal and external challenges. Without overcoming these challenges, it can be safely assumed that the Left would be unable to play prominent role in the second half of 2020 too.

Key Words: Left Politics, Pakistan, Disintegration of Soviet Union, Political Alliance.

Introduction

The aim of this research article is to investigate the status of Left-wing politics in Pakistan after the dismemberment of Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the symbolic fountainhead of communism, in December 1991. Left politics is closely linked with principles of social equality and egalitarianism. Leftists advocate for maximum government intervention. The Left-wing tends to be progressive and socialist, supports

the principle of equality, advocates the rights of the marginalised groups including working class, women and poor. Due to such characteristics, Leftism poses hostility to the interests of traditional elites and status quo. Leftists consider social security of the masses to be the key responsibility of the government. Socialism represents the standard ideology of the Left, whereas Communism is the more extreme variant. The foundations of the scientific communism were laid by the German Philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883) and his collaborator Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). For the purpose of this study, political parties and organisations in Pakistan that adopt Marxism as the core ideology of their political agenda have been considered to be the part of Left-wing. The primary data for this article has been collected from the current and former members of the Left political parties during 2020-21.

Leftist Political Parties in Pakistan

Following the disintegration of USSR, several new Left political parties and organisations, other than the traditional one, have been established. Some of the newly established parties are altogether new one while the other have been created by merging smaller Left groups and parties. In addition to the traditional Marxist parties in the country, five new Left parties have emerged. The Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party was established shortly after the Soviet Union's disintegration. National Party (NP) is another Left party which came into existence in 2003. Awami Workers Party (AWP) is yet another left party. Barabari Party Pakistan (BPP), a center-Left political party, was established in 2017. Pakistan Inqilabi (revolutionary) Party (PIP) is the most recent addition among these Left parties, established in 2020. Among these parties, three, excluding MKP and PIP are registered with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The NP's electoral symbol is the hand tool 'Saw', BPP's symbol is the 'Pen' and AWP's symbol is 'Bulb'.

Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party

In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution, the pre-existing Marxist parties, especially the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) and the Mazdoor Kissan Party

(MKP), merged to form a unified Left-wing party known as the Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party (CMKP). However, some of the leaders of Communist Party of Pakistan in the CMKP decided to revive their party (i.e., CPP) in 1999. Over time, the Mazdoor Kissan Party was also re-organised as a distinct and independent political entity. Since then, both the CPP and MKP experienced internal divisions, resulting in various factions as splinter leader have formed their own factions, each with its own interpretation of Marxism. The Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party under the leadership of Mahfooz Khan Shujaat, continues to operate and it is based at Multan.

National Party

The National Party (NP) is a Centre-Left political party that advocates for social democracy in the country. According to its constitution, it draws inspiration from Marxism to address Pakistan's political, social and economic challenges. Formed in 2003, the NP resulted from the merger of the Balochistan National Movement, led by Abdul Hayee Baloch, and the Balochistan National Democratic Party, led by the late Mir Hasil Khan Bizenjo. In the 2008 general elections, the NP, whose primary sphere of influence lies in Balochistan, opted to boycott. Nonetheless, during the 2013 elections, the party achieved notable success by securing a significant number of seats in the Balochistan provincial assembly. Due to this electoral achievements, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch, the NP's president, assumed the role of Chief Minister in Balochistan for a duration of two and a half years, following a power-sharing agreement with the PML-N. Since 2014, the NP has expanded its presence to other provinces of Pakistan. The party's mission is to transform Pakistan into a social democratic country (Khan Q. , 2020). It is noteworthy that NP is the only secular and Leftist party to have successfully formed a provincial government in Pakistan after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Awami Workers Party

The making of the Awami Workers Party began around 2009-10 and was finalised during the inaugural AWP congress in 2014. This process involved two distinct phases

of merging. In the initial phase, the Awami Jumhoori Party, led by Abid Hassan Minto, which was facing significant challenges following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and, Awami Jumhoori Party, the Communist League and Pakistan Socialist Party amalgamated in 2001. During this period, the Workers Party of Pakistan, working under the leadership of Sardar Shaukat Ali, assumed a new name of National Workers Party (NWP). In 2010, a faction of the CMKP and NWP united to create Workers Party of Pakistan in 2010. Two years later, this party was joined by Awami Party Pakistan and Labour Party Pakistan, which had been founded in 2005, leading to the formation of the Awami Workers Party (AWP) in 2012. The inaugural and official foundation congress of the AWP took place in 2014, and the party is duly registered with the Election Commission of Pakistan, utilising the electric light "Bulb" as its electoral symbol (Shahjahan, 2020). In the 2018 general elections, AWP fielded few candidates, although none of them secured a significant number of votes. It is worth noting that in 2019, the Labour Party Pakistan separated from AWP.

Barabari Party Pakistan

The Barabari Party Pakistan was established by Jawad Ahmed, a renewed pop-singer and musician, in 2017. The party follows a Left-of-Centre ideology. It took part in the 2018 general elections but did not manage to secure any seats. The motto of the party revolves around promoting economic equality and ensuring a just society through the fair distribution of the means of production. It strongly advocates for "equality of rights to resources and equal access to opportunities for everyone, irrespective of factors such as race, religion, gender, nationality or ethnicity". The party avoids explicit references to the terms like Marxism and socialism, still it focuses on championing the cause of have-nots. Though it emphasises the importance of involving youth in politics but BPP opposes the presence of political parties within educational institutions, arguing that it tends to divide the student community. The party is dedicated to achieving social

improvements within the existing constitutional framework (Our Vision, 2019), (Khan D. S., 2020).

Pakistan Inqilabi Party

The Pakistan Inqilabi Party was established in Lahore on January 24, 2020, by former Moist members of the National Students Federation (NSF). The party is staunchly anti-imperialist and is committed to advocating for the rights of labour, peasants, women, students and other suppressed classes. The party has intentions to actively participate in the political process by participating in the elections for the local government. According to Adil Mahmood, a member of the Central Executive Committee, the party's objectives deliberately avoid mentioning Marxism or socialism as part of their strategic approach, though it is definitely a Left party (Mahmood A. , 2020).

Traditional Left Parties of Pakistan

The dissolution of Soviet Union also impacted the already established Left-wing parties, i.e., Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) and Mazdoor Kissan Party (MKP). Following is the discussion regarding the above-mentioned parties.

Communist Party of Pakistan

The Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) was founded in 1948. The disintegration of Soviet Union impacted it negatively and now it is divided into three factions. Following the Soviet Union's disintegration, the Communist Party of Pakistan and Mazdoor Kissan Party (MKP-Maj. Ishaq group) merged in 1995 to form the Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party (CMKP) under the leadership of comrade Imam Ali Nazish. However, not all CPP members supported this merger, and an independent faction, known as Democratic group, emerged under the leadership of Engineer Jamil Ahmad Malik (Malik J. A., 2020). Furthermore, in 1999, Imadadullah Kazi and Maula Bux Khaskheli decided to revive the original CPP. In 2002, the CPP experienced another split during its seventh congress in Hyderabad, when a faction led by Rauf Korai (Khalid Thaheem

group) breaking away from the CPP (Dawn, 2002), (Dawn, 2003). Jamil Malik and his Democratic Group rejoined the CPP during the same congress.

However, Engineer Jameel Malik quit this faction (Imdad Kazi), and established his own group of CPP in 2006 (Rahman T. , 2006). Presently, the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) is splintered into three separate factions. The first is under the leadership of its chairman Engineer Jameel Ahmad Malik. The second faction is functional under the leadership of Imdad Kazi as Secretary General and the third is headed by its Advocate Khadim Thaheem as Secretary General. All three factions assert to represent the original CPP, and there is a dispute among the factions regarding the party's name. Engineer Jameel Ahmad Malik, a CPP member since 1969, asserts that the faction led by him was registered (from 2012 to 2017) with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and used the election symbol 'Sickle'. Jameel Malik's group of CPP is a democratic party that advocates for social and economic change through a political process rather than armed resistance. He further states that the decision to abandon armed resistance was actually made during the CPP's seventh congress, which took place in Hyderabad in the year 2002. CPP (Jamil Malik) is "against the naked aggression of American imperialism ... and to build Pakistan a socialist country." He claims that only CPP (Jamil Malik) remained registered with the Election Commission of Pakistan and the party operates its own website. He further opines that "The other factions of CPP are neither joining the democratic struggle nor they believe in armed struggle." The CPP faction led by Engineer Jamil Malik rejects the involvement of the military in the political affairs of the country. CPP (Jamil Malik) participated in the 2013 general elections but did not secure significant support in terms of votes (Malik J. A., 2020).

According to CPP (Kazi) "three groups are ruling the country and despite having differences, they are united to loot hapless people". These groups include the elected government, security organisations and the American and multinational monetary institutions. "The people of Pakistan must understand the prevailing situation and

prepare for a revolution to get rid of the exploitative forces” (Dawn, 2011). Communist Party of Pakistan (Khalid Thaheem) expresses concerns about the military’s involvement in the country’s political affairs and emphasises, “the army should restrict itself to its professional responsibilities”. The party also opposes the growing role of international corporations in the economic affairs of the country (Dawn, 2003) . Furthermore, the party’s general secretary points out that “the outdated constitution is an obstacle to reforms” (Dawn, 2008) . The party leader stresses “the need for a new democratic and secular constitution in the country”. Taheem calls for declaring the feudal system unconstitutional and recognising the farmers’ right to land as a legal entitlement (Dawn, 2002), (Dawn, 2009).

Mazdoor Kissan Party

After the disintegration of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, the Mazdoor Kissan Party (MKP) joined hands with its traditional ideological rival, the Communist Party of Pakistan, with the aim of achieving a broader representation that encompassed both rural and urban areas. Traditionally, the MKP had a strong following in rural areas of the country, while the CPP had a base of intellectuals in urban centres such as Karachi and Hyderabad. After the Soviet Union disintegrated, these once-opposing parties decided to merge, giving rise to the formation of the Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party (CMKP). However, within few years after its formation, the CMKP experienced a split in 1999, when some member of the CPP left the party, still, the CMKP continued to function as a political entity. During a party congress of the CMKP in 2002, they adopted the name of MKP as most of the communists in the party had left it. This led to the removal of the term ‘Communism’ from its name.

The following year (i.e., 2000), a congress of the CMKP took place in Charsadda (Mandani), during which Abdul Khaliq Baloch assumed the role of Chairman, and Afzal Shah Khamosh became the general secretary of the party. Both had the support of Mir Jan Jamali, a former chief minister of Balochistan. The sixth national congress of

CMKP was held at Lahore in 2002. At this congress, some of the members of CMKP restored Mazdoor Kissan Party without fulfilling the constitutional obligations. Members of the Central Committee (CC), Afzal Shah Khamosh, Syed Muhammad Azeem, Hamid Hashmi, Nisar Khan Advocate, made this decision against the votes of 18 other members. The other members of the Central Committee elected Sufi Abdul Khaliq Baloch and Ijaz Ghani as the leaders of the CMKP. A subsequent meeting of the CC of the Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party was scheduled for 2009 in Karachi to make preparations for the national congress in Multan. However, before the meeting took place, 15 CC members met and joined MKP (Khamosh group). Shortly thereafter, Khamosh expelled them from his party. These members then reorganised the CMKP and arranged a merger with Abid Hassan Minto's Workers Party of Pakistan, just one day before the meeting was to occur. Today, MKP exists in four factions: Khamosh, Bangash/Salar, Kamil, and Taimur group.

Attempts for the Merger of the Leftist Parties

Following the Soviet Union's collapse, Leftist political parties and groups found it increasingly challenging to assert their influence in the country's political landscape. In order to overcome this situation, the Left-wing parties have been attempting to form a grand alliance, while some of them are even exploring the possibility of merging. In the twenty-first century, the Left realised that the historical division based on being pro-China and pro-Moscow faction are no longer relevant, therefore, divisions on these grounds stand outdated and irrelevant.

At the provincial level at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the leadership of MKP (Khamosh group), NP and AWP came to an agreement to form an alliance in 2017, which was named Pakhtunkhwa Democratic Alliance (PDA). However, the formal announcement of the alliance was delayed due to the shocking and unjust lynching of Mashal Khan, who was falsely accused of blasphemy by vigilantes at AWKUM (Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan). The press conference intended for the launch of PDA

was delayed and, ultimately it never held. Subsequently, a broader alliance named the Pakhtunkhwa Democratic Alliance (Pakhtunkhwa Jumhoori Ittehad) was formed and its members are Qaumi Watan Party (QWP), MKP, NP, AWP, and Pakhtunkhwa Ulasi Tahreek (Anwar, 2020), (Khan Q. , 2020).

In March 2018, the Lahore Left Front (LLF) was founded, uniting seventeen Leftist groups and parties to address common issues faced by socialist groups and organisations. Notable members of LLF include; Anjuman-e-Muzareen Punjab, Anjuman-e-Taraqi Pasand Musanifeen, AWP, BPP, CPP (Kazi), Feminist Collective, Kashmir National Students Federation, Kissan Rabita Committee, Pakistan MKP (Khamosh group), Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign, Jammu & Kashmir National Student Federation, People's Solidarity Forum, Punjab Union of Journalists, Progressive Students Collective, Progressive Labour Federation, Revolutionary Students Front and Railway Mehnatkash Union.

The Front is coordinated by Farooq Tariq and its primary goal is to advocate for the establishment of a socialist, secular and just State in Pakistan (News, 2018) , (Mahmood A. , 2018). It's worth noting that a similar front does not exist in other city of the country and Leftist groups from other regions of Pakistan have not been invited to be the part of this Front. The formation of LLF has, therefore, contributed to the isolation of Left-wing elements in other parts of Pakistan (Khan Q. , 2020).

The efforts to merge three major Left parties, namely AWP, MKP (Khamosh), and NP, were initiated but eventually did not come to fruition. The reasons behind these parties' positions on the merger underscored their differing ideologies. MKP adheres to classical Marxism, but AWP and NP aimed for a more inclusive and expansive structure with no strict party hierarchy. There was a debate regarding whether the new party should be highly centralised or allow intra-party factions. There was a suggestion that the party should adopt federalist principles, enabling each nation of Pakistan to form its own

party. Dr. Taimur Rahman explains “these questions do not have easy answers” (Rahman D. T., 2020).

A Leftist scholar, Qaiser Khan, asserts that impetus for the merger primarily originated from the members of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2019, where Leftists have a more open channel of communication, and they frequently participate in the meetings of other Leftist groups. This environment has fostered enthusiasm for the merger among Leftists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The central committee responsible for the ultimate decisions regarding the merger, was comprised of the central presidents of the respective parties (Khan Q. , 2020).

Conversely, MKP (Bangash), CPP (Jameel Malik), CMKP, Barabari Party Pakistan, Pakistan Inqilabi Party do not support the idea of merging with any other parties. On the other hand, Imtiaz Alam, a former member of MKP and a journalist, is also working to bring together Leftist groups on some minimum agenda (Hassan, 1999). Dr. Shahnaz Khan believes that the prospects of forming an alliance or achieving a merger have not materialised so far, because various Left groups are divided over issues of ideological allegiance. She points out that within the cultural context of the Sub-continent, the Left needs to have a charismatic personality and popular figure for success (Khan D. S., 2020).

Challenges in the Left’s Efforts to Unite

Dr. Taimur Rahman, teaching faculty at LUMS and a member of the sub-committee for the merger, believes that achieving complete consensus among all Leftists on a single agenda is an unrealistic goal. He argued that not only in Pakistan but in any country, it's challenging to achieve complete unity among Leftist groups. He quoted the example of AWP, which even after years of its establishment, still exhibits the presence and influence of individual group in it. This makes it challenging for any merged Leftist party to operate as a fully cohesive entity (Rahman D. T., 2020).

The legacy of Bolshevism and Menshevism within the Marxist movement still endures in Pakistan. Each Marxist leader in the country maintains their own unique perspective on Left politics and approaches to their work. Some Leftist ideologue prioritise the national question, while others emphasise class struggle. Likewise, social democracy is valued by some, while others focus significantly on gender-related issues within Left politics. The diversity in political ideology and methods to achieve their goals further sets them apart. Some of the Left advocate for armed struggle because they believe in 'revolution the only solution', others place their faith in constitutional processes, while the strategy of entryism is also favoured by some, which involves infiltrating a political party with the aim of influencing or subverting its policies.

The debate over whether to employ armed struggle (the "bullet") or democratic methods (the "ballot") is a significant impediment to the consolidation of the fragmented Left. Additionally, there is a wide spectrum of Marxist ideologies present, including Marxists, Marxist-Leninists, Marxist-Leninist-Stalinists, Trotskyists, and those who find Mao Tse Tung's strategies more suitable. However, such opposing debates among the Left cannot be attributed to the Soviet Union's disintegration.

According to Qaiser Khan, there is no substantial disagreement over the leadership position, as National Party seeks a greater role Balochistan, Awami Workers Party focuses on Punjab and Sindh, while Mazdoor Kissan Party concentrates in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. While the party members support a merger, the leadership remains stuck to their respective philosophies. For instance, they have not yet reached a consensus on terms like the 'right to secession' and 'voluntary federation' (Khan Q. , 2020).

According to the National Party's provincial general secretary for KP Engineer Sahibzada Abdul Haleem, the merger process got stuck due to debates on philosophical terms, such as socialism and social democrats, related to the proposed party's objectives

(Haleem, 2020). Yousuf Anwar, a scholar and Leftist worker, summaries the state of the Left in a French phras *sauve qui peut* (a state of panic and disorder).

Engineer Jamil Malik (chairman of a faction of the CPP), suggests that it's an old tradition among the Leftist parties to merge and then eventually disintegrate. The mergers result in a change in the party's name as the merged groups adopt a new name for the party. Party workers lose their political identity twice; first during the merger process, and then again after its breakdown. He winds up that merger is an ineffective idea and that the Left leaders should instead form a broader Left alliance based on shared consensus and mutually agreed-upon principles.

Resurgence of the Leftist Politics in Pakistan

The once-popular Left parties and their structured grassroot movements have waned in Pakistan due to multiple factors. Prominent Leftist leaders, including the late Mir Hasil Bizenjo and Imdad Kazi, have attributed the decline of powerful Left parties and movements in Pakistan to various factors. They concur that General Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorial regime played a significant role in weakening the Left. Gen. Zia's policies, which emphasised religion and sectarian divisions, led to the fragmentation of politics, trade unions, and society along religious and ethnic lines. This division extended to labour organisations, causing further disunity (Abd-us-Satar, 2019). Nonetheless, Abd-ur-Rauf (former member of the Communist Party of India in 1946, age 95) is optimist about the future of Left politics in Pakistan.

Despite the current challenging circumstances, he holds a positive outlook regarding the potential for revival and growth of the politics of the masses. According to him, Marxist must maintain an inherent optimism because the world is always in the process of change, and based on Marxist principles, it can be deduced that the current difficult phase will not persist indefinitely (Rauf, 2020). On the other hand, Liaqat Ali, a former member of the CPP and now a progressive publisher based at Lahore believes that socialism has proven to be an ineffective theory, because it failed in practice. He

suggests that those within the Left who staunchly adhere to classic socialism are dogmatic, while those who have adapted their ideology lack the capacity for mass-level politics. In his opinion ideological frameworks have become irrelevant in contemporary politics and the era of underground parties, armed resistance, violent takeover of power is a thing of the past. Ali further points out that in Vietnam the socialist eventually transitioned to market economy after a social revolution. In Pakistan, none of the Left groups are effective and the Leftists in Pakistan only make claims about being Left. Ali also points out that in Pakistan the conditions for classic socialism are not conducive. The country's economy is still rooted in feudalism, which cannot directly lead to socialism. Therefore, Ali believes that Pakistan needs capitalism and liberalism in the first stage. He suggests that the Left should first establish a mass-based social democratic party because social reforms introduced democratically are more sustainable (Ali L. , 2020).

Mehboob Khalid, a long-standing member of the CPP since 1960, contends that classic revolutions have historically been rooted in nationalism. He maintains that the ruling elites in all provinces of Pakistan are equally oppressive, and external forces like the Indo-American lobby manipulate the grievances of oppressed nationalities for their own interests against Pakistan (Mehmboob, 2020).

Despite the challenging environment for Leftist politics in Pakistan, some progressive politicians maintain an optimistic outlook. Chaudhry Manzoor, former MNA and PPP's Information Secretary, is confident in the revival of the Left politics in Pakistan. He draws parallels with socialist leaders like Jeremy Corbyn in the UK and Bernie Sanders in the US who gained popularity and ran for political office. Chaudhry Manzoor also asserts that the PPP is returning to its socialist roots by advocating for the rights of workers and labourers. (Abd-us-Satar, 2019).

Dilemma of the Left

The Leftist elements in Pakistan lack a clear focus on the politics that truly serves the interests of the masses. Pakistani Marxists support nationalism and federalism, oppose establishment and are anti-*mulla* (clergy) but their politics often fail to genuinely address the concerns of the masses. According to Dr. Noaman Ali (assistant professor LUMS) Marxists have been ineffective in practice, struggling to mobilise the masses, and, like bourgeois political parties, often engage in politics confined to drawing rooms and discussions at social media. This lack of substantial ideological work on Pakistan-specific issues has led Dr. Noaman Ali to question whether most of these individuals can truly be considered Marxists (Ali N. , 2020).

Engineer Sahibzada Abdul Haleem, a former member of the CPP and the current provincial general secretary of the NP for KP, expresses profound disappointment with the current status of Left politics in the country. He underscores that the Left has failed in building a cadre due to negligence towards the organisation of study circles. Despite their claims of championing the cause of the oppressed, major Left groups like NP, AWP, and MKP-Khamosh lack leaders from labour and peasant backgrounds. Instead of pushing for genuine structural change, they are merely trying to improve the existing system, which, in Haleem's view, is a futile endeavor. Haleem suggests that the Pakistani Left should draw from the example of the Communist Party of Nepal, which, despite a successful accession to government in 2005, failed to bring about substantial change due to its continuation within the previous system. He identifies several structural issues in Pakistan's Left politics, including the lack of a cadre-building policy, course outlines for study circles, and more Marxist leaders than workers.

The narcissistic nature of the old Left leadership, which prefer to live in the past, hinders progress. He points out that many socialist leaders have failed to pass on the Marxist ideology, even to their own children, let alone popularise it among the entire youth of the country. In contrast, organisations like Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) are effectively disseminating their ideologies through study circles, school curricula, and educational

institutions. He laments that, unlike a science, unlike a science, Marxism is often perceived as dogma in Pakistan. Due to these reasons, the Left's political influence in Pakistan is waning over time (Haleem, 2020).

Professor Sarfraz Khan, provincial president of NP, disagrees with this argument and asserts that Left politics is fundamentally progressive. He argues that inheriting ideology from parents, similar to inheriting property, is not a progressive concept. He concludes that a Leftist doesn't believe in imposing his/her ideas on anyone, not even on their own children (Khan P. D., 2020). On the other hand, Qaiser Khan believes that the Left-wing political parties have lost their effectiveness, and they are primarily engaged in philosophical discourse, whereas the common man is not versed enough to appreciate philosophical debate. He suggests that the Left should shift its focus away from theoretical discourse and, instead, concentrate on addressing the real-life issues faced by the masses (Khan Q. , 2020). The decline of the Left in Pakistan is evident, and the prospects of its resurgence are uncertain. While the Left claims to represent the interests of the marginalised and oppressed classes, it often lacks members from these lower classes. The original goal of the Left should be to involve the labourers and peasants in the realm of politics. According to Engineer Abdul Haleem, "There is no longer any representation of the original Left movement in Peshawar, which used to be a hub for Leftist politics during the Cold War. Today, however, there are no offices of the AWP and MKP in Peshawar".

This decline of Left can be attributed to regressive policies of the State that have led to the disappearance of lower-middle and lower-class participants from the political arena. According to Abdul Haleem, the Left parties tend to operate within the framework of capitalist system because the Left parties lack authentic Marxists. The quickest path to introducing socialism in Pakistan would be through a revolution, otherwise, the progressives will have to struggle for a long time. The leadership of the Marxist parties is predominantly in the control of the upper-middle class. Without the

political leadership being firmly in the hands of the proletariat, any meaningful and decisive struggle for the masses may remain elusive since the concerns of labourers and peasants are often given secondary importance by the current affluent leadership. It's crucial for the proletariat to lead such movements, as they have nothing to lose but their chains (Haleem, 2020).

Right-wing political organisations in Pakistan have been actively involved in publishing textbooks for educational institutions through which they promote their ideology. In addition, they have even established schools, hospitals, and other welfare institutions for the wellbeing of the masses. In contrast, Leftists have only been distributing pamphlets and chanting progressive slogans. According to Ali N. (2020), the Left leadership often criticises society without making concrete contributions, and they have been primarily publishing leaflets for the last many years. Prof. Sarfaraz Khan argues that Right-wing political organisations establish private educational setups because it aligns with their political programme. The Left, on the other hand, believes that providing free education to every child is the duty of the State, as promised in Pakistan's constitution. The Left opposes publishing textbooks and private educational institutions since they view it as the State's responsibility to ensure equal access to education for all citizens. Rightist organisations engage in these activities for business and financial gain, which often puts them at odds with the Left, as the Left advocates for free education and healthcare for all citizens. Prof. Khan also notes that Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has been actively establishing educational institutions since the State no longer employs them as a 'thunder squad' to counter to Left in Pakistan (Khan P. D., 2020). The Left in Pakistan continues to confront not only the political Right but also the powerful Establishment in the country despite the absence of any imminent akin to the collapse of the Soviet Union (Minhas, 2020).

The senior progressive writer and scholar, Saleem Raz (late), who used to be a prominent and honoured figure at the meetings of progressive organisations especially

in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In his presidential addresses he always tried to provide guidance to Leftist participants, offering corrections on various aspects including their strategy, communication, history, etc. He emphasised the importance of adopting a realistic and honest approach. On one occasion, he offered some valuable wisdom to the former members of the communist movement, stating that;

"man's ideas evolve over time, and if someone has now shifted from his past ideological beliefs, he should not be ashamed of his former political ideology. Instead, he should confidently acknowledge that he was once a communist but has since changed his ideology." (Raaz, 2020).

Yousuf Anwar suggests that the future of Left politics in Pakistan might be significantly influenced by the personal financial interests of certain leaders. The leadership of MKP (Khamosh) aligns with Aftab Ahmad Sherpao, an influential landlord and former chief minister, and an influential landlord, and its members vote for his party, Qaumi Watan Party, in general elections". In return for this support, Aftab Ahmad Sherpao provides financial backing for the political activities of the Khamosh group. This financial interdependence could make it challenging for MKP's leadership to join a Left party that intends to participate in elections. Furthermore, the activities of Pakhtunkhwa Democratic Alliance, which includes AWP, MKP, NP, PUT, and QWP, are primarily funded by the ex-chief minister. The political inclination of the Afzal Khamosh group can be inferred from its approach. For example, MKP (Khamosh) invited figures like Aftab Sherpao, his son Sikandar Sherpao, Mian Iftekhhar Hussain ANP, along with other local leaders of Awami National Party and Pakistan People's Party as chief guests at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of MKP held in Hashtnagar (Charsadda) in November 2019. In contrast, the Afzal Bangash/Salar group invited popular public figures like Manzoor Ahmad Pashteen, Abdul Latif Afridi (late), Said Alam Mahsud, Sana Ejaz, and others as guests in its own golden jubilee celebrations of the Mazdoor Kissan Party (Anwar, 2020). Dr. Taimur Rahman, general secretary Khamosh group, clarifies that MKP (Khamosh) invited opposition leaders to the golden jubilee celebration of the

party with the intention of isolating the ruling party (PTI), despite the differences they may have with these parties. However, he also points out that his party, the MKP, deliberately chose not to participate in the protest, Azadi March, led by Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman in October 2019 against the government of PTI (Rahman D. T., 2020) . Though, this protest was supported by other opposition parties, nonetheless, MKP made a deliberate decision not to join this anti-government demonstration.

Amjad Saleem Minhas, a former member of the CPP who is now a progressive publisher based in Lahore, believes that capitalism is a prominent and irreversible reality that has steadily evolved over the past two centuries. The progress and achievements of capitalism cannot be refuted by reverting to the classical version of Marxism. The speedy advancements in science, technology, computer and media, etc. characterised by exponential growth (i.e. 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, and so on), have far outpaced the development of Marxism, which could not keep pace with these developments. Saleem Minhas suggests that the prospects for a revival of Marxism are not promising because it has not demonstrated the scientific validity as claimed by Marxists (Saleem, 2020).

Dr. Syed Muhammad Azeem, a member central committee MKP (Khamosh) and teaching faculty member at LUMS, observes that the Left in Pakistan is often appears to engaged in activities just for the sake of being active. He identifies several shortcomings within the Pakistani Left, including lack of radical leadership, generation gap, and deficiencies in revolutionary theory. Azeem notes that Leftist leaders have grown somewhat complacent and less committed to hard work. They are neglecting essential activities like studying books, reading newspapers, and writing about the social and economic issues in the light of the Marxist theory. Due to these reasons, their perspective is narrow, their understanding of both national and international affairs is inadequate, and they lack a solid ideological foundation for the just society they advocate. Instead of developing a robust ideological framework, they tend to focus on

criticising religious figures and the military while showing admiration for India (Azeem, 2020).

Engineer Sahibzada Abdul Haleem underscores the existence of class distinctions even within Left politics. Faiz Ahmad Faiz has become the Left-icon for the upper Leftist classes. Furthermore, he mentions how some affluent Marxists use to organise annual events like the *Faiz Aman Mela* (Faiz Ahmad Faiz Peace Festival), primarily for financial gain. Haleem illustrates the class disparities by highlighting the contrast between the son of the renowned progressive poet Ahmad Faraz, who held a position as a federal minister in the pro-establishment government of Imran Khan, while the daughter of Habib Jalib, the iconic revolutionary poet, is earning a living by working as a taxi driver. These examples highlight that class distinctions are present everywhere in our society, including within the Left (Haleem, 2020).

The Pakistani Left has, in many ways, become conservative in its actions. An example of this is the commemoration of the 57th death anniversary of Kakaji Sanobar Hussain Momand (1897-1963), held in January 2019, organised by the Pakhtunkhwa Democratic Front. The event took place at the residence of Major (R) Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao, situated in the upscale and posh University Town area of Peshawar. The stage was predominantly occupied by the political and academics elite of the older generation, while the attendees belonged to the upper-middle class. Notably absent were representatives of peasants, labourers, women, while just one student was present at the event. Even the workers in the building where the event occurred were unaware of its purpose. During the event, two resolutions were passed unanimously that were, however, conservative in nature. The first resolution called for the government to reconstruct Kakaji's tomb, while the second proposed naming a side-room in Nishter Hall, Peshawar, after Kakaji. Strikingly absent from these resolutions was any demand for the reprinting of Kakaji's out-of-print books, which could help spread his message and legacy to the younger generation.

There was also no urge to translate his works into other languages. Furthermore, the resolutions did not demand the government to recommend Kakaji's books to be included in educational institutions' libraries. Although the speakers at the event praised Kakaji's efforts in advocating for peasants and the common people, the progressive leaders failed to follow his footsteps by taking practical measures to make his work more accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences. It is a fact that Kakaji devoted his life to addressing people's problems by living among the masses, yet the progressive leaders failed to emulate this aspect of Kakaji's legacy.

Way Forward For The Leftists

The current state of Left politics in Pakistan is marked by substantial decline, plagued by internal conflicts, reduced efficacy, and a lack of distinct orientation. Former Left-leaning political parties such as the PPP and ANP have significantly shifted from their original positions. The representation of the Left in Pakistan's parliament is negligible, and even those who claim to uphold Leftist ideals often fail to effectively champion progressive causes. In light of these challenges, what strategy and path should Marxists adopt to enhance their relevance and impact on Pakistan's political landscape? Following is an evaluation of the opportunity of the way forward for the progressive and Leftist elements in Pakistan.

Khalid Mahmood, former member of the Qaumi Jadojhd-e-Azadi in 1978 and currently the member of the Awami Workers Party, maintains an optimistic view regarding the resurgence of progressive politics in the country. He suggests that the existing disarray and limited influence of the Left should not be a cause for despair, as political dynamics are in a constant state of flux. In his opinion, the key for the Left is coming together, combine their endeavors, and, in doing so, they can advance more rapidly.

The Left must focus its efforts on engaging with labourers, students, and women. To bring about a positive change in favor of the Left, it is essential to educate these

groups through extensive use of study circles, the distribution of journals, and the effective utilization of social media. In recent years, Leftist groups have successfully organised various events such as the Faiz Aman Mela in Lahore, taking place since 2016 (in the month of February), and the Habib Jalib Awami Mela, which is held annually since 2019 (in the month of March). The Left should prioritise direct engagement with the general populace and foster meaningful interactions.

The vice chairperson of Barabari Party Pakistan, Dr. Shahnaz Khan, suggests that in order to achieve unity and a clear direction, the Left should steer away from debates surrounding ideologies like Stalinism, Leninism, and Maoism. Instead, it should formulate a localised approach, taking into consideration the unique cultural diversity and religious sentiments that exist in the region, and then develop its strategy accordingly. Amjad Saleem Minhas holds a pessimistic view regarding the prospects of Left politics in Pakistan. He draws a parallel between the resurgence of socialism and the revival of theocracy. In his opinion, religion has been a significant and enduring factor in human societies since the advent of agricultural revolutions, and it is not feasible to completely disregard its influence in a country like Pakistan. Although the capitalist system has reduced the religion's role in politics and reduced its authority and control over the State, still religion remains a powerful and relevant force in Pakistani politics. It is true that religious politics may not experience a revival in industrialised nations, but religion continues to be a personal matter of the individuals and thus an integral aspect of the society, addressing individual spiritual needs. Marxists argue that the prospect of seizing the State based on religion is unlikely to materialise in Pakistan because religious revivalism is improbable. Minhas argues that, much like religious revivalism, a resurgence of Marxism is unlikely to happen, as history rarely sees a full-scale revival of any ideology. Therefore, he emphasises the need for a scientific approach to address contemporary challenges, advocating for the ongoing quest to find new solutions (Minhas, 2020).

Currently, the Left movement in Pakistan lags significantly, nonetheless, numerous isolated Leftists are scattered throughout the country. Any party that focuses on engaging with the working class would have the potential to sweep away the scattered Leftists. The Marxists in Pakistan have not formulated a localised model of socialist governance, and their lack of preparation leaves them without a concrete socialist programme ready for immediate implementation. For instance, Left politicians advocate for free and mandatory primary education in the child's mother tongue, but they have not put forth concrete plans addressing the costs and the implementation process of providing this education to all children. Furthermore, the Left lacks a detailed strategy for creating textbooks to be included in the envisioned progressive curriculum.

According to Prof. Dr. Muhammad Azeem, two essential elements are needed for an effective Leftist movement: ideology and class composition. Without the right class composition, even a sound ideology may not yield the desired results. If a workers' party is primarily composed of petty bourgeois intellectuals instead of labourers, the party's view would be vague and ambiguous, as has been observed with the dominance of PWA members in the CPP in the past. Within the spectrum of Leftist political parties, AWP stands out as a relatively significant political party, while others like MKP and CPP carry less influence. A Trotskyite tradition is also gaining ground; however, they favour entryism over independent struggle. According to Dr. Muhammad Azeem, the Left that establishes strong ties with the working class, maintains a robust Leftist ideology, and adopts a militant approach will ultimately emerge victorious. He envisions that a Left with new perspectives like feminism and post-colonial theories will triumph over liberalism and other such ideologies (Azeem, 2020).

Dr. Shahnaz Khan, vice chairperson BPP, recommends that the Left should shift its focus away from the dialectics and refrain following historical figures from the previous

century like Stalin, Mao, Trotsky, etc. and others. Rather than adhering to these historical figures, the Left should formulate a distinctive local perspective that addresses the issues faced by the common people in Pakistan. Progress in terms of mergers or alliances will remain limited as long as Left-wing parties and organisations persist in their adherence to these personality-driven 'isms.' To succeed, the Left must take into account the objective conditions in Pakistan, recognising the country's cultural diversity, religious sentiments, and its geostrategic significance.

The tendency of the Left in Pakistan to be anti-religion and anti-establishment is not conducive to effective political action within the country. Instead, the Left should advocate for the right to a better quality of life. To promote the Left's agenda, having a well-known and recognisable public figure can be instrumental, facilitating media coverage and enhancing the chances of political success. The Left must adopt a fresh strategy as it contends with the formidable power of global capital and strong nation-States. It should relinquish the Cold War-era mindset and distance itself from ideas that are no longer progressive. There is an opportunity for the revival of the Left if it can effectively mobilise the masses, and there is promising responsiveness in this regard. However, financial limitations present a significant obstacle, as Left organisations typically lack adequate financial resources (Khan D. S., 2020).

The current dominance of global capital is transitory and expected to be short-lived due to the intricate problems within the capitalist system. For instance, the United Kingdom's decision to exit the European Union (EU) was influenced by its corporate sector's reluctance to provide free services to the public. EU member States are striving to achieve social democratic standards. Financial crises are intensifying in capitalist nations, which they aim to counter through the exploitation of national issues and white racism. Policies like Trump's "America First" and strategies employed by leaders like Modi in India, such as the Balakot airstrikes in February 2019, the revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019, and the Citizenship (Amendment)

Act (December 2019), etc. are designed to engage the population in unproductive discourses. The global spread of COVID-19 has exposed deficiencies in healthcare systems, even in so-called advanced nations. Moreover, countries were also reluctant in sharing their advancement in COVID-19 research.

The Role of Youth

Young people have traditionally been a dynamic force within society, often viewed as the vanguard of fresh and innovative ideas. Empowered with appropriate training and resources, youth possess the potential to enact significant societal change (Fatima, 2019). Paradoxically, despite comprising a substantial portion of the population in many countries, individuals aged 18-30 are frequently marginalised from mainstream political parties' decision-making bodies. This exclusion results in frustrated and disillusioned young people and contributes to a stagnant political process that contributes nothing but maintains status quo (Overview, 2020).

The active and meaningful participation of youth in politics holds the potential to bring about significant change. It is an encouraging sign that “more young people than ever before are actually becoming engaged in local community campaigns and other political activities” (Youth and Politics, 2020). Nonetheless, the young people are increasingly displaying interest in politics on a global scale. Some political parties are acknowledging the growing engagement of young individuals in political activities. Even less mainstream political ideologies, once considered on the fringe, are now attracting young people who align themselves with these movements. Youth's active and meaningful involvement in politics has the potential to be a catalyst for transformative change. It's a positive development that more young individuals are actively participating in local community campaigns and other political endeavors.

In Pakistan, where the youth make up a substantial portion of the population, they have historically played pivotal roles in various political movements, including those associated with Left politics. Farooq Tariq believes that the rising awareness and

activism among the youth, in addition to workers, women, and other marginalised groups, are posing a challenge to the hegemony of the ruling class. Due to this important role of youth, he envisions the establishment of a nationwide new party focused on youth and students' projects. He holds high hopes for the youth, especially in cases where they have already organised themselves, such as the Haqooq-e-Khalq Movement (People's Rights Movement) in Lahore or student mobilisation by the Progressive Students Collective in the big cities of Pakistan (Tariq, 2020).

A significant challenge faced by Leftist political parties is the dominance of the old guard within their ranks. The older members hold key positions in their parties and often maintain a perspective rooted in the methods and techniques of the Cold War-era. Furthermore, they are divided along lines such as Stalinism, Trotskyism and Maoism, etc. and are primarily concerned with issues related to the national question. In contrast, the younger generation of political minds rises above these ideological debates (Azeem, 2020). Uniting various minor Leftist groups under a single canopy requires mobilising the youth. This sentiment is echoed in the words of Mao Tse Tung, as cited by the peace activist and writer Imtiaz Alam, that "it is the youth that come up with radical new ideas, while the old fogies generally resist change" (Alam, 2019).

The foundation of the Awami Workers Party (AWP) was in part, made possible by the efforts of young Marxists within the merged groups. The AWP's website acknowledges the role of young activists in the merger process, emphasising that they are unburdened by the Cold War sectarian conflicts. Qaiser Khan believes that the old cadre is a significant obstacle to the Left's progress. They have not effectively built a cadre in the past, and they continue to neglect cadre development in the present (Khan Q. , 2020) . Prominent figures from the old cadre have led their respective Left organisations for several decades and are likely to maintain their positions till their health allows, as they have not trained a cadre to take over. Syed Muhammad Azeem suggests that the dominance of outdated and obsolete old cadre within the Left makes it

necessary for young Marxists to found their own Left organisations (Azeem, 2020). The progressive and Leftist parties in Pakistan are facing a lack of representation from the youth. Historically, the Left used to recruit its members from student organisations, trade unions, and peasant communities. However, these avenues have all been restricted or banned in Pakistan. Additionally, trade unions have been stripped of their political influence. Furthermore, the curricula and the academicians in educational institutions do not encourage critical discourse (Rahman J. u., 2021).

Conclusion

The Left in Pakistan is struggling to make a significant impact on national politics due to its fragmentation into multiple groups and its disconnection from the general population. One contributing factor to their limited popularity is their lack of representation in the mainstream national media. A notable issue with the Left is that many of their leaders and activists are not studying books and other literature, which hinders their ability to formulate a coherent political strategy.

For instance, the Left in Pakistan struggled to effectively communicate the peaceful and smooth political transition in the Soviet Union in 1991 as a testament to the strength of the Soviet system. The Left in Pakistan was not able to explain the nonviolent and constitutional transition in the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991 to the people that the disintegration was actually the strength of the Soviet system. The Left advocates for free education and healthcare for all in Pakistan, yet they lack a well-defined plan outlining how to attain this goal, including the necessary infrastructure and funding. Instead, they often refer to examples from other countries where education and healthcare have been provided for free.

The Left in Pakistan often experiences internal divisions, but there are also ongoing efforts to unite its various factions. While activists and intellectuals are advocating for a merger and proposing alliances as a way to strengthen the Left, the leadership is hesitant and reluctant to pursue such mergers due to ideological

differences. Consequently, many individuals in Pakistan who support Marxist ideas distance themselves from any specific Left party. Despite persisting differences among various Leftist organisations, it remains possible to garner support from many of them by reaching a minimum level of consensus. Left-leaning groups of all shades can discover common ground on issues such as unemployment, inflation, education, healthcare, agricultural reform, women's rights, minority rights, democracy, and the fight against religious extremism. It is imperative for the Left to acknowledge the reality that their presence and influence among the general masses and their popularity in the street is quite limited.

The Left requires the support of passionate and committed trade union leaders, similar to those they had during the Cold War era, like Dada Amir Haider Khan (1900-1989) in the shipping industry and Mirza Muhammad Ibrahim (1906-2000) in the railways. On the other side, the Marxist parties should ensure adequate representation for peasants, workers, women and students within their party structures. While non-workers and individuals from the bourgeoisie can also be party members and position-holders. There is a noticeable trend in the Left political parties that their leadership is mostly in the hands of their respective theoreticians. It's important to recognise that popular politics has its own demands and it often requires a different skill and it is not necessary that a brilliant academic intellectual may be equally successful in the field of politics. To achieve the desired political outcomes, Left political parties could benefit from a separation between political leadership and theoretical expertise.

The Left in Pakistan, represented by various political parties and groups, has struggled to cultivate a strong, energetic and dedicated cadre. Without establishing deep connections with the masses, achieving success becomes quite challenging. The Left needs to focus on raising awareness among the masses and winning public support. The assessment suggests that Left-wing politics is likely to encounter significant obstacles and challenges due to the absence of a prominent, mainstream Left-wing

party in the country's political landscape. Furthermore, Pakistan's educational curricula and media have been shaped in a manner that promotes an anti-Marxist perspective, to the extent that even educated individuals in Pakistan often equate socialism with atheism. The Pakistani Marxists are either failed to undo the impacts of such propaganda or they do not bother to present their own counter narrative.

It is imperative for the Left to conduct a comprehensive examination of Pakistan's economic conditions and seek to understand the underlying causes of the unstable economy. The implementation of land reforms is essential in Pakistan. Furthermore, it is vital to create an environment that fosters the intellectual and political growth of the youth. To bring about a substantial change in the socio-economic conditions, the Left would require the support and collaboration of trade unions, which have been significantly weakened due to repressive legislation. Leveraging social media and other modern communication platforms can aid Marxists in uniting various Leftist factions. For all these achievements, Left political parties must involve youth in the decision making bodies.

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