

The Politics of Pakistan Awami Tehreek: An Assessment

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Abstract

Pakistan Awami Tehrik (PAT) is a political party founded by renowned Islamic scholar Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri in 1989. The party has strong roots among the people of Bravelvi school of thought which is the dominant sect in Pakistan. The Chairman and founder of the party openly claims to be a staunch Bravelvi. The formation of PAT was highly disliked the pre-existing religious political parties which represented the Bravelvi school of thought. It was alleged that Dr Qadri wanted to divide the Bravelvies and the new party would weak the political strength of Bravelvies. The other religious political parties also did not welcome the PAT due to one reason or the other.

The PAT came into limelight in 2012 when its workers gathered in Islamabad for a dharna. Siyast nahe Riasat Bachao, (save the country and not the politics) was the slogan of PAT. The party demanded for a new political system. The PAT parlayed the system of capital and its sit-in troubled the PPP government. Again, the part made a big sit-in in Islamabad and gathered its worker all over the country. The dharna lasted for several days and its was shook the government of Nawaz Sharif.

The present study is an effort to assess the politics of PAT. It highlights the political ideology of the party and its involvement in day to day politics. The study traces out the causes of poor performance of the PAT in the electoral politics. Meanwhile, the ideological shift of PAT leadership with passing time is also be discussed in this paper.

Key Words: Awami Tehreek, Bravelies, electoral politics

Introduction

Pakistan Awami Tehreek PAT is not a significant political party in a sense that it largely revolves around its chairman. The politics of the party and its manifesto is overshadowed by its popular personality of its head Tahirul Qadri. The style of politics of PAT also describes the personality of Qadri and his ideology regarding political and democratic sphere.

FORMATION OF PAKISTAN AWAMI TEHREEK

Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) is a political wing of Minhaj-ul Quran and it was formed by the renowned religious scholar, legal expert, teacher, statesman and writer Muhammad Tahir- ulQadri. He was born on 19 February 1951 in District Jhang. He claims that his name was suggested by his father in a dream by prophet Muhammad (PBUH). According to Qadri's claim his father Fariduddin Qadri was a Doctor, Hakim as well as an Alam. He completed those three degrees at a time; Passed Dars-i-Nazami from Farangi Mohal Luknow, obtained degree of Hikmat from Tayaba College at Lucknow and Medical degree from George medical college (Qaumi, 1989). However, it seems unrealistic to complete these degrees in a short interval of four years. Possibly, Qadri merely made an effort to eulogies the personality of his father.

Qadri initiated his education by taking admission in a missionary school "Sacred Heart" at Jhang. He did matriculation in 1962 and got admission in FSC Pre-Medical. Qadri obtained 616 marks but fail to get admission in any medical college. So he did his B.A as a private student and consequently got admission in Dars-i-Nizami at Jamia Qutbia Rizvia Jhang. Qadri completed the course of Dars-i-Nizami in 1970, and subsequently got admission in Mater of Arts in Islamic

Studies as a regular student in Punjab University. He earned his master's degree with distinction in 1972 and obtained Gold Medal. He studied law at the University of the Punjab in Lahore, where he graduated with an LLB in 1974. Qadri continued his education and obtained Ph.D. degree from Punjab University in 1984 by writing thesis on the topic "Punishment in Islam, their Classification and Philosophy."

He started professional career as temporary lecturer of Islamic studies in Government College Jhang. Later he was selected lecturer Islamic Studies through Punjab Public Service Commission and appointed at Esa Khail, in District Mianwali in the end of 1974. This place was not suitable for the Qadri and he wanted to shift in a big city where he could continue his educational activities. Next year, after the demise of his father, he made effort for his transfer in his own district. Failing with, he tendered his resignation and started legal practice in District Jhang. He moved to Lahore in 1979. Following period of legal practice as an advocate, he taught law from 1978 to 1983 in Punjab University (Siara, 1989).

Qadri founded Minhaj-ul Quran in 1981. Mian Muhammad Sharif, the father of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sahrif offered him to lead jumma prayer in his Ittefaq Masjid which he duly accepted. He was also selected for a Dars-I Quran program faham-ul-Quran launched on Pakistan Television (PTV). Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) was formed by Qadri on 25 May 1989. According to party sources about one hundred thousand people attended its inaugural session held at Lahore near Moche gate. It is alleged that Qadri was able to gather a large number of people in the first session on the pretext to announce how the interest free economy could be launched. It was announced in the inaugural session that the PAT would be secular and its door would be opened for everyone without distinction to creed, cast and religion. The inaugural session was named as Mustasvi Inqalab Conference. PAT impressed very few Politicians and stalwarts avoid joining the new political party. The ex-provincial minister Raza Zakori and Akhtar Rasool were only remarkable figures who had joined the party (Al-Arabia, 2014).

FAILURE IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

PAT plunged into electoral politics in the elections held in 1990. Several candidates contested the elections for the membership of National Assembly but none of them was able to win the seat. The

security of almost all the candidates was confiscated owing to their poor performance. On seeing the fateful situation, the party announced to boycott the upcoming elections of provincial assemblies on the pretext of rigging on mass scale. Subsequently, the party also boycotted the general elections of 1993 and 1997. It again plunged into electoral field in 2002, this time its pattern Tahir-ul-Qadri was able to secure his seat from NA-127, a constituency in Lahore. Qadri welcomed the rule of General Musharraf and remained very close to him. However, within a short period he dissatisfied with the Musharraf regime and the performance of parliament. He said goodbye to parliamentary politics and resigned from his seat in 2005. He declared that in future, his party would not participate in electorate politics. According to him this system could not provide justice to the people. The change could not be possible through existing system (Al-Arabia, 2014).

The history of electoral politics vividly revealed that PAT was badly failed in that field. The party was unable to gain people confidence. Perhaps it was the fear of defeat that forced the party to boycott the elections held in different times. The causes of party failure are many. Qadri belonged to Barelvi school of thought, and he openly professed of that. Qadri was severely criticized by the Barelvi led political party Jamiat-i-Ulama-i Pakistan. Qadri was accused to divide the Barelvis and to weaken their political strength. It was suggested that he should join the Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Pakistan instead of establishing a new political party. He could not obtain the confidence of other religious political parties' i.e. Deobandi, Ahle- Hadidh, Jamaat-i-Islami etc. He forged an alliance in 1991 with Tehreek-i-Nifaz-i-Fiqah Jafria, led by Mufti Jaffar Hussain Shah, a Shia led party, and Tehreek-I Istaqlal. This also annoyed the Sunni religious class who is largely not in favor of any coalition with Shia community. On the other hand the party was not strong enough to perform well in the electoral politics. The boycott of general elections held in different times prevents the party to develop its routes among the masses.

AMBIGUOUS POLICY TOWARDS ISLAMIC LAW

The literature of PAT severely condemns the highly influenced feudal elements in the society of Pakistan, show its commitments to the eradication of poverty, social injustice, exploitation and corruption. The party is also committed to support democracy, devolution, an

independent judiciary and fundamental human rights including gender equality and religious freedom.

The PAT chairman once viewed that only those political parties and candidates were allowed to contest elections who wanted to impose Islam in the state. Those who do not believe to enforce Islam as an ideology are not allowed to contest the elections. Examine his views regarding Islamic law in his early writings

“There is no law in an Islamic state that is superior to the law given by God and His prophet (Peace be upon him), i.e. Quran and Sunnah. Therefore, neither constitution nor any other laws framed by the people for regularizing for the affairs of the organs of the state and the citizens can claim supremacy over the laws formulated by the Quran and the Sunnah. No state can be an Islamic state without declaring Quran and Sunnah and other recognized laws of Shariah the unconditionally supreme law of the land as well as the constitution prepared under these laws.”

However it is surprising to note that PAT did not include in his agenda the imposition of Islamic system in Pakistan. The party issued its manifesto in 2002, according to which the key priorities were education economy, poverty, health, justice, law and order and technology. The whole manifesto is drafted on secular basis. It is surprising that a party whose chairman is renowned religious scholar and the author of a number of Islamic books did not include a single sentence in his manifesto about the imposition Islam in Pakistan. On the other hand the Minhajul Quran, a journal published under the auspices of Qadri largely addressed the religious issue. There are several articles that talk about the imposition of Islamic system of government. Qadri accused other religious political parties for their secular approach and antipathy towards Islamic law. But paradoxically the manifesto of PAT is silent about that issue. It also seems that PAT is not clear regarding the ideology of state. Sometime it demands for Islam as state religion and vice versa. For instance an article was published in a journal that is launched under the supervision of Qadri's wife it was claimed that Muhammad Ali Jinnah wanted a secular Pakistan. There is no place for theocracy in Islam and the state should not interfere in the affair of religion and sects of the people.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER PARTIES

PAT relations with other religious political parties were never remained up to the mark. Jamiat-i-Ulama-i Pakistan a Bareilvi based political party is more critic of PAT than any other party. PAT was denied the membership of Islamist alliance Mutahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) formed in 2002 because it was accused that PAT was supporting the moderate reforms of Pervaiz Musharraf. On the other hand at that time Qadri was severely criticising the Jihad movement in Pakistan and Afghanistan. He openly declared that the Taliban movement in Afghanistan is not waging jihad but it isfasad. Later he wrote a book *Dehshat Gardiaur Fitna Khawaraj* in which he made an effort to prove that Taliban has adopted the ideology of Khawaraj (Qadri, 2014).

PAT is also the severe critic of jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan. Qadri accused that party had no routes in masses and its power lied in students union. The religious political parties were also not happy due to the attitude of PAT towards minorities. On 22 February 2001 its chairman stated while addressing a ceremony that PAT is fighting for the rights of every religion. If party came into power it would allow the Christian to perform their prayer in mosques provided that where churches are not existed, and that is in conformity with the teaching of Islam. It was the tradition prevailed during the era of Holy Prophet. The traditional scholars vehemently criticised the statement of Qadri and declared it against the spirit and teachings of Islam.

Before the formation of PAT, Qadri had cordial relations with Sharif Family. He led the Jumma sermon in Ittefaq Masjid situated inside the Ittefaq Foundary belonged to Sharif family till 1989. He declared Nawaz Sharif his friend and brother. Qadri obtained material benefits from Sharif family several time. Due to the influence of Sharif Family, a land 162 kanal in Town Ship (Lahore) was allotted to Minhaj -ul Quran with a nominal price of 8000 per kanal. Qadri admitted that he approached Nawaz Sharif for the recruitment of his nephew in police Department as Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) which he duly did (Ausaf, 2001). It was the influence of Sharif Family that introduced Qadri to the broader public through his popular show, "Fehm -ul Quran", which was broadcast on state television. However his relations with Sharif family became cold perhaps the family was hesitating to fulfil all the demands of Qadri. After the formation of PAT Qadri began to criticise the Nawaz government but it was merely due to the personnel grudge and animosity. In 22 April 1990, Qadri issued a statement, accusing some unknown persons fired bullets at his house

and tried to kill him. He accused Sharif family for this heinous act and claimed that the family wanted to kill him. Justice Akhtar Hussain the judge of Lahore High Court investigated the matter and presented finding report according to which the incident was fake and not real (Zindgi, 1990).

Qadri was the bitter critic of Pakistan People's Party and its co-chairperson Benazir Bhutto during Zia ul Haq era. He also challenged the rule of woman and called it contrary to the injunction of Quran and Sunnah (Jhang, 1987). He clearly declared that the decision of Maulana Maududi to support Fatima Jinnah during election was wrong. But when his relation with Sharif family became cold, he turned toward PPP and established cordial relation with the higher echelon of the party. It is alleged that on the inspiration of PPP he accused Sharif family involved to kill him. PAT also joined the Awami Ittehad an opposition alliance against Nawaz Government formed in 1998 and the Party remained its part for a year and half. It played a significant role in Punjab and gave tough time to Nawaz Sharif government.

Benazir visited several time to Minhaj- ul Quran secretariat and Qadri's house. According to Qadri she was highly influenced by the social, welfare and educational projects of Minhaj-ul Quran and also visited its London center in 2003. In the presence of Qadri, she duly filled the life time membership form of Minhaj-ul Quran and became its sympathizer. On the assassination of Benazir PAT announced seven days mourning and awarded Benazir with the title of Martyred of Democracy. PAT chairman claimed that Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was killed due to continuation of nuclear program and arrangement of 2nd Islamic summit in Islamabad.

CORDIAL RELATIONS WITH ARMY RULER

The PAT leadership remained very close to military establishment. Qadri made effort to come close to Zia ul Haq. When General Zia ul Haq was the president of Pakistan, Qadri was close to Sharif family and was the Imam in their Ittefaq Masjid. He delayed the Jumma sermon for about 45 minutes when he came to know that Zia was coming to perform his prayer. He publically prayed many time for the safeguard of Zia. He also appreciated the Zia's policy of Islamization. On the behest of Zia he was nominated as an expert of Islamic Studies in Federal Ministry of Education. PAT chairman was amongst one of the first prominent figures who stated that coup of General Pervaiz Musharraf was legitimate and necessary. He also declared that political

parties are inefficient and corrupt and hailed Musharraf as the saviour of Pakistan. During the politics of agitation since 2012 it seems that PAT was the part and parcel of army's playing card. The army wanted to achieve its objectives without direct involvement. The army built up pressure through PAT on Nawaz government.

On the one hand PAT talks about democracy and democratic norms but on the other hand it always favored martial law. Moreover, the attitude of the party during sitting at D-Chowk and Long March was not democratic.

DUAL POLICY of PAT CHAIRMAN

When Minhaj-ul Quran came into being in 1981, no one knows that it would take the shape of political party. Qadri declared that he had no aim to enter in politics and Minhaj-ul Quran is purely a religious organization. Later he declared that he and his family members would not take part in active politics neither they would take any position if the political party was formed. Qadri vividly declared that he would never contest the elections and Minhaj-ul Quran would not take part in electoral politics. But the truth is that he not only formed the political party but also became its Chairman and contested the elections held in 2002. He became the Member of Parliament and later resigned. In his long resignation letter, which consisted of 80 pages he upbraided the powerless parliament. The most important issues could not be discussed in Parliament, he wrote in his resignation letter. The system is corrupt and through the existing system the plight of masses could not be changed. The party had decided in its inaugural session that it would contest the election once or twice. Now our faith on Parliamentary system had been over. In November 2007 the PAT's General Council passed a resolution in which it decided not to participate in the 2008 elections. The stated reasons were that while the PAT believed in democracy and the electoral process, the system at the time was so corrupt and otherwise suspect that it had become the "antithesis of democracy." The call was made for support for the PAT's boycott of the election and demands for reforms in the electoral system.

PAT did not contest the general elections held in 2013 because its demand for electoral reforms were not addressed. But surprisingly on 2 October 2014 Qadri announced while addressing the gathering in Islamabad that the party would participate in upcoming elections. In

local bodies elections held in 2016, PAT actively took part though its performance was not different from previous one. PAT claimed that on its platform 20 chairman, vice chairman and 400 councilors had won the elections. Beside the party also repeated its former claim that in the presence of existing system and ruler the fair elections could not be held. On the one hand the party is severely criticizing the existing electoral and democratic system and boycotted the two general elections held in 2008 and 2013 but on other hand it contested the local bodies' elections which were held according to the same electoral system under which the party boycotted the general elections. It is indeed a big contradiction in party policy and the cause of confusion for a lay man.

DEMANDS FOR ELECTORAL REFORMS

The party demands for the proportional representation parliamentary system on the same parameter as it is imposed in France, Turkey, Germany, Sweden and many other countries. It shall be declared obligatory for the voters to cast their votes. The interim government should form under the auspices of judiciary. The chief election commissioner should be a man of integrity for amongst the honourable judges of Supreme Court.

CULTURAL WING OF PAT

One of the purposes of the formation of Minhajul Quran was to prevent the society from wrong doing. In an interview Qadri told the advantages of the movement while saying "Many people told me that the boy of their street went to cinema but after joining the Minhajul Quran he is completely changed." He was in the favor that women should not join those jobs where they have to work with male counterparts. He also opposed the women participation in athletic games like hockey, cricket and football. But contrary to that he announced to establish the cultural wing of PAT. Many actors and actresses joined the wing; the celebrities were Firdos Jamal, film star actor Nadeem, Afzal Ahmad, Versatile artist Anwar Sajjad, sayyid Noor, Rohe Babno and many others (Insasf 2000). It was also announced that a cultural show would be arranged on 10 July 2000 on the Urs of Sufi Saint Hazrat Ghulam Farid. The renowned singers Abida Perveen and Suria Khanam would perform in that show. The secretary general of PAT cultural wing recommended the name of

Abida Perveen for the president ship of women wing (Economist, 2013).

RELATIONS WITH SHIA POLITICAL PARTY

PAT remained very close to Tehreek-iNifaz-iFiqah Jafria (now Tehrik-e-Jafaria). It forged a close alliance with that party in 1989. The Chairman PAT eulogized the personality of Imam Ruhollah Khomeini a Shia political reformer of Iran to appease the Shia community. Shia community also supported the long march of PAT and actively participated in it. But if we study the early writings of Chairman PAT before the formation of alliance with Tehreek-iNifaz-iFiqah Jafria, we found a criticism on that community in his writings. For instance he declared that it is beyond thinking to perform prayer behind a Shia imam. Those who do not believe on the sacristy of Sahaba are kafirs in his opinion.

IDEOLOGY OF PAT

It is indeed very difficult to understand the ideology and purpose of the formation of the PAT. Its different wings are too contradictory with each other. Examine the ideology of Minhajul Quran and the cultural wing of PAT; one is trying to prevent the people from going to cinema the other is encouraged for it. One wing is against singing songs and the free amalgamation of male and female the other is made an effort to promote it. Sometimes the party supported the secular Pakistan and claimed that Jinnah struggled all his life for the sake of secular Pakistan. He did not take part in Khilafat movement because it was the pure religious movement. There is too much variation PAT's ideology. The party is not clear about its ideology and its workers are also confused.

PAT LONG MARCH IN 2013

In December 2012, after living for seven years in Toronto(2005-2012) Canada, Qadri returned to Pakistan and initiated a political campaign against PPP led government. Qadri called for a "million-man" march in Islamabad to protest against the government's corruption. On 14 January 2013, a crowd gathered at the city's main avenue. Thousands of people pledged to sit-in until their demands were addressed. When PAT started the long march from Lahore, about 60000 people joined it. Qadri told the rally in front of parliament that there is no

Parliament; there is a group of looters, thieves, and dacoits. Our lawmakers are the lawbreakers (Walsh, 2013). After four days of sit-in, the Government and Qadri signed an agreement named Islamabad Long March Declaration, which promised electoral reforms and increased political transparency. Although Qadri called for a "million-man" march, the estimated total present for the sit-in in Islamabad was 50,000 according to the government reports.

INQILAB MARCH 2014

On 17 June 2014, a violent clash occurred between the Punjab Police and PAT activists resulting in the deaths of 14 workers and 85 injured. After almost 11 hours of standoff, the anti-encroachment squad of the police force launched an operation to remove the barriers from the road leading to the offices of Minhaj-ul Quran and the residence of Qadri in Model Town, Lahore. On 14 August 2014, Qadri led thousands of people towards the federal capital, Islamabad, from the provincial capital, Lahore.

On 16 August 2014, the Inqilab March began, with sit-in protests with allied partner Imran Khan, chairman and founder of Tehreek-e Insaf (PTI) and organizer of 2014 Azadi March, in the capital of Pakistan, Islamabad. Qadri demanded the resignation of Nawaz Sharif, the then prime minister of the country and Shahbaz Sharif, the then chief minister of Punjab, dissolution of national and provincial assemblies. He gave ultimatum of 48 hours to the government. After the announcement of the Azadi March, it was expected that PAT allied the PTI's Azadi March with his own Inqilab March. This alliance between the two parties resulted in two parallel marches by Qadri and Imran Khan (with the goal of mutual protection in any civil crackdown).

Imran Khan and Qadri did not fully join their protest marches nor decline to support each other. On 10 August 2014, Qadri formally announced that his party's political march, the Inqilab March, would precede parallel with PTI's Azadi march. Both marches were organised to take different routes, albeit closely mirroring each other. It is apparent that the two parties have similar objectives yet different aims and strategies. The announcement of two parallel marches by parties in opposition gave rise to speculation that a coalition between PTI and PAT was possible. The chiefs of the two parties never clearly stipulated a formal coalition; but an informal agreement to support each other was achieved. On 11 August 2014, Qadri and Khan both announced that there would be two parallel marches, informally allied

together for the dismissal of the government. The Inqalab march of PAT abruptly ended without gaining any objectives.

DEMANDS AND CHARGES OF PAT AND THEIR JUSTIFICATION

While addressing a large gathering at Minar-i Pakistan, PAT Chairman elaborated:

We need to create an environment conducive to sustainable economic growth and social development. Through change and reforms we need to remove the opportunities for corruption to occur in electoral process and political process of our state. Through reforms and change we need to empower and enable the people to become true democratic citizens and through change and reforms we need to fight against terrorism and extremism and we want to bring back peace and security.... Now is the true time to change.

Qadri demanded the people that they should revolt against the existing electoral system and come on street like the people of Egypt, Libya, Tunis, and Syria. It is better to die on street with effort than die in house with effortless.

Qadri pointed the shortcomings of existing system and said that there is rule of minority, the parties and their leaders are corrupt and the electoral system is too costly. The middle class could not bear the expenditure of elections and therefore out of the election contesting process. There are few families who are ruling the state. The political parties have no manifesto and there is blacking form splinter groups for the formation of government. Moreover the elections are not held free and fair. He declared that the existing system is contrary to the teachings of Islam. Qadri also favoured the two-party system as compare to multi- party system (Minhaj-ul-Quran, 2014).

The aforementioned charges put forth by the PAT Chairman are not new. The shortcomings that described by PAT are more or less occurred in every democratic country. Take the example of USA presidential elections in which American Government spend millions of dollars; the most costly elections of the world. India is the largest democratic state of the world where the democratic process is continued since 1947 without any interruption. All those shortcomings are more or less existed in the political system of India as well. The politicians are corrupt; middle class have less opportunity to contest

elections. The charges that put forth by PAT, one can say in its favour that ratio of these faults is high.

PAT is unable to find any concrete solution of the problems the country has faced. The solution is based on merely hollow slogans. Some of the reforms suggested by PAT are unpractical, and contrary to the constitution of 1973 i.e. the implementation of proportional representation. However PAT was able to mobilize the large number of people. Its gathering in Islamabad was attended by thousands of people and these people were more organized and peaceful as compare to the workers of other political parties. The workers of PAT are more committed and sincere to its ideology; the party was successful in training the people in positive way.

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