



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Leftist Activism in Challenging Times: A Journey of Resistance in Pakistan (1947-1988)**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article provides a comprehensive exploration of leftist activism in Pakistan from 1947 to 1988, unraveling its multifaceted history. Amidst evolving political and societal dynamics, leftist activism emerged as a potent force driven by unwavering commitment to egalitarian ideals and social justice. Early leftists, within a socialist framework, aimed to address profound socioeconomic disparities in the nascent nation. Through meticulous analysis of historical records, primary sources, and scholarly accounts, this study delves into the ideological conflicts and contributions of iconic figures like Nazeer Abbasi and Jam Saqi, highlighting the transformative role of coalitions like the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD). It emphasizes the enduring resilience of leftist activists in their relentless pursuit of a just and equitable society. The insights gleaned offer valuable lessons for contemporary activism in Pakistan, emphasizing unity, commitment to democratic values, and empowering marginalized communities in the ongoing quest for social justice.

**KEYWORDS** Democratic Students Federation (DSF), Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), National Awami Party (NAP), Russian Revolution

**Introduction**

The history of Pakistan, spanning from its inception in 1947 to the watershed year of 1988, is a complex and multifaceted narrative of political upheavals, societal transformations, and ideological struggles. Within this intricate tapestry, leftist activism emerged as a potent and enduring force, driven by an unwavering commitment to egalitarian ideals, social justice, and the empowerment of marginalized segments of society. In the face of authoritarian regimes, political crackdowns, and ideological shifts, leftist activists exhibited remarkable resilience as they ardently fought for a progressive and equitable society.

The origins of leftist activism in Pakistan can be traced back to the early years of the nation's formation. Amidst the challenging circumstances of identity consolidation, governance establishment, and socioeconomic disparities, diverse ideological streams, including leftist thought, began to take shape. Envisioned within a socialist framework and fueled by global revolutionary movements, early Pakistani leftists aimed to address the profound socioeconomic inequalities that plagued the fledgling nation.

However, the journey of leftist activism was far from straightforward. The formative years witnessed ideological divergences within leftist circles, reflecting varying approaches to achieving transformative societal change. An exemplar of this era's fervor was Nazeer Abbasi, a charismatic and passionate radical leader from Sindh. Abbasi's journey from humble origins to becoming a firebrand activist embodied the dedication and determination that defined many leftist pioneers. His multiple arrests and confrontations with the authorities underscored the perils and sacrifices inherent in challenging the status quo.

The tumultuous era of Ayub Khan's rule introduced new dimensions to the struggles of leftist activism. The imposition of martial law in 1958 marked a turning point, curtailing civil liberties and sparking a fervent battle between the government and leftist activists. In

the face of adversity, leftist student organizations, labor unions, and grassroots movements continued to voice their dissent against Ayub Khan's regime. Notably, the emergence of the National Awami Party (NAP), a coalition of leftist and nationalist forces, became a significant political development during this period. NAP advocated for democratic governance, socioeconomic parity, and provincial autonomy, amplifying the voices of the marginalized.

The trajectory of leftist activism underwent another seismic shift with the ascent of General Zia-ul-Haq to power in 1977. Zia's rule ushered in a daunting phase for liberal and progressive factions in Pakistan. Operating under the guise of Islamization, Zia aimed to curtail civil rights and stifle leftist activism. Figures like Nazeer Abbasi and Jam Saqi emerged as icons of resistance against Zia's oppressive regime. Their unwavering commitment to democratic values, labor rights, and social justice symbolized the unyielding spirit of leftist ideology in the face of adversity.

Amidst these turbulent years, the formation of the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) in 1981 emerged as a turning point for leftist activism. This multifaceted coalition united journalists, human rights advocates, politicians, and various leftist parties in a collective stand against Zia's dictatorship. Together, they championed an array of causes ranging from press freedom and gender equality to provincial autonomy and workers' rights. The coordinated efforts of the MRD played a crucial role in weakening Zia's hold on power and eventually led to the restoration of democratic governance.

Throughout these tumultuous years, leftist activists navigated multifaceted challenges, including state censorship, arbitrary arrests, and brutal crackdowns. The suppression of free speech and censorship of media outlets tested the resilience of the fourth estate, prompting journalists and writers to devise innovative strategies to express dissent. Notably, women activists within leftist circles also played a vital role, with organizations like the Women Action Forum (WAF) challenging Zia's regressive policies and advocating ardently for women's rights.

In this article, the complex web of leftist activism in Pakistan between the significant years of 1947 and 1988 is attempted to be untangled. By exploring the development of communist ideology and the conflicts of iconic figures such as Nazeer Abbasi and Jam Saqi, and the transformative role of coalitions like the MRD, this narrative aims to illuminate the enduring resilience of leftist activists in their unyielding quest for a just and equitable society. Through meticulous analysis of historical records, primary sources, and scholarly accounts, this study aims to provide a thorough understanding of how communist activists navigated Pakistan's turbulent political landscape, ultimately leaving a lasting impression on the course of the country's history.

## **Literature Review**

Salim & Abbas (2017) covers another important character related to the left history of Pakistan. The work focuses on the life and times of Jam Saqi who holds a prominent position among the left leaders in Pakistan. This work has tried to do full justice to the struggle and woes of the left leader who spent more than eight years in jails. By throwing light on his memoirs, the book actually presents a parallel history of Pakistan by focusing on a true left intellectual who guided scores of the workers and leaders of the left with his razor sharp analysis and sagacity.

Similarly, Haroon (2016) also touches on the struggle of a left worker and human rights campaigner. The author has highlighted the resistance of women against the autocratic policies of the dictators. According to the author, the left workers and its women bodies have bravely stood up to the dictators and usurpers to safeguard their rights. Their role during the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy gets discussed and also the resistance of the women against the draconian laws.

Abidi (2005) has shared with us the tribulations of the leftists in Pakistan. Being a witness to many important episodes of our history, his work is a valuable document that sheds light on the initial days of left activism in the country. The most important phase of the left struggle gets its due share in his work as he deftly ferrets out many facts pertaining to the targeted attack on the rational and leftwing voices in the country. The author also discusses the impact of the state highhandedness on the growth of progressive and leftist ideology in the country.

Ali (2015) analyzes the rise of left politics in Pakistan and discusses its journey up to the early seventies. His work carries lots of credibility as he has drawn heavily on documents and archives related to the subject. The work starts off from the initial days and sums it up by the early seventies but still it couldn't be neglected at all. The various phases of the leftwing struggle and its impact on society were discussed in a great way in this work.

Salim (2020) delves deep into the life of a left-worker Saif Khalid who witnessed many important developments firsthand. The work puts more focus on the students' upsurge during the 60s and makes a special mention of the activities of the students belonging to the left school of thought. The internal friction between many left parties in the name of the ideology and the merger of the left parties was also touched in the book. The important feature of the book is about the upsurge of students which led to the downfall of the Ayub regime.

Muhammad (2015) work is the most comprehensive and useful as regards the farmers struggle in Pakistan. Coming from a peasant background himself, the author has ably captured the activism of the poor and oppressed farmers of the country. He has devoted a special portion to the historic conferences of farmers in his work. His firsthand account about some of the big gatherings of the left farmers across the country with a special emphasis on the 1970's mammoth conference of Toba Tek Singh could be categorized as one of the best on the topic.

Minto (2016) has also discussed the rise of the leftwing in Pakistan and has also talked about the challenges that it had faced since 1947. He has also written about the internal friction and clash of ideas in the left parties in Pakistan with the help of various reports of the proceedings of various conferences and other related activities. That makes his work more credible and authentic for the students and researchers of the left politics in Pakistan. He was of the view that the oppression of the state didn't let the leftist thought flourish in the country as they didn't want to turn the newly founded state into a welfare state with equal rights to all the citizens.

Zaheer (2007) has written a valuable tome about one of the most important chapters of left history in Pakistan. He has discussed the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case of 1951 when the state clamped down a ban on the Communist Party of Pakistan and put the entire cadre of the party behind the bars. He explains the whole historical episode with great analytical skills and expertise and his work helps us understand the real reasons behind the state's antagonistic policy towards the progressive and leftist parties and its workers.

Malik (2017) brings to life the leftist history through his personal memoirs. It is a personal document interspersed with important historical development related to our history. He has discussed the journey of leftwing politics in Pakistan since our initial days and he notes that the authorities were wary of the ideology of left as its radical and pro people politics could shatter the status quo that suited the state. He has also written brief sketches of some of the leaders and workers with whom he hobnobbed over a long period of time.

## **A Brief Overview of the Communist Movement in India**

The left-wing activism in the Indian subcontinent has a historical trajectory that predates the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. While Pakistan's leftist movement has its distinct narrative, it's important to acknowledge the roots of leftist thought in the broader context of the Indian freedom struggle.

### **Early Influences and Preceding Factors**

The foundation of leftist activism in the Indian subcontinent was laid during the struggle for independence from British rule. While the Indian National Congress was at the forefront of demanding freedom, some of its leaders and workers were deeply influenced by communist ideologies. This convergence of nationalist and leftist aspirations shaped the early landscape of left-wing activism. Leaders such as Subhas Chandra Bose, M.N Roy, and Bipin Chandra Pal stood as towering figures who espoused communist ideologies within the larger spectrum of the freedom movement. Their commitment to social justice, workers' rights, and the plight of the marginalized mirrored the core principles of communism. They saw communism as a means to empower the oppressed and create an equitable society.

### **Ghadar Party and Overseas Radicalism**

Interestingly, the seeds of leftist activism found fertile ground not only within the subcontinent but also among the Punjabi diaspora overseas. The Ghadar Party, formed in 1913 in San Francisco, USA, by individuals like Lala Har Dayal and Sohan Singh Bhakna, exemplified the global reach of revolutionary ideas. The party aimed to use more radical and direct methods to overthrow the British colonial rule and sought to inspire people within India to stand against their oppressors. Despite facing challenges such as immigration restrictions and governmental crackdowns, the Ghadar Party managed to influence individuals like Kartar Singh Sarabha and Bhagat Singh, who later became iconic figures in India's struggle for independence. The influence of these overseas activities underscored the global nature of left-wing activism and its impact on shaping the revolutionary spirit within India.

### **The Spark of Change: Russian Revolution's Ripple Effects**

The turning point for leftist activism arrived with the momentous 1917 Russian Revolution. This uprising of the proletariat class inspired activists worldwide, presenting an alternative path to achieving social change and justice. In India, the impact of the Russian Revolution acted as a catalyst, prompting a reevaluation of the existing methods of struggle. Leaders like M.N Roy, who had been exposed to international socialist movements and had personal connections with prominent figures like Lenin and Trotsky, were instrumental in channeling this global momentum into Indian left-wing activism. Recognizing the potential of socialist principles to address the nation's issues of deprivation and poverty, M.N Roy and comrades established the Communist Party of India in 1920.

### **The Struggle for Recognition and Workers' Rights**

The early years of the Communist Party of India were marked by challenges posed by the British government's crackdown on leftist activities. The Kanpur Conspiracy Case of 1924 highlighted the state's efforts to suppress the emerging communist movement. However, these tactics failed to deter the resilient workers and leaders who pursued their agenda with unwavering determination.

As the party grew in influence, its focus expanded to engage with a broader spectrum of society. Initiatives like the All India Trade Union Congress and student organizations laid the foundation for mobilizing workers and students under the umbrella of leftist activism.

Notably, the Progressive Writers Association contributed to this effort by challenging traditional norms through literature, ultimately helping in spreading the message of socialist ideals.

### **Towards Partition and the Path Forward**

The years leading up to the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 were pivotal for the Communist Party of India. While it supported the Muslim League's demand for a separate homeland, it continued to advocate for socialist principles within the framework of an independent India. With the partition, however, the movement faced challenges as many Hindu and Sikh comrades migrated, leaving a leadership vacuum in Pakistan. To address this void, the party deputed Syed Sajjad Zaheer to lay the groundwork for the Communist Party in Pakistan. The challenges of establishing the party from scratch were immense, but dedicated individuals like Zaheer, Hasan Nasir, and others worked tirelessly to spread the message of equality and justice.

### **The Founding of Communist Party of Pakistan and Ruling Establishment Antagonism towards the Left**

The birth of Pakistan in 1947 was marked by challenges stemming from partition, including a humanitarian crisis and financial constraints. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's progressive vision aimed for an egalitarian society, but his demise in 1948 led to a power vacuum exploited by the civil and military bureaucracy.

Prior to partition, the All India Muslim League recognized the need for upliftment through a manifesto crafted by figures like Danial Latifi, reflecting a commitment to equity. However, post-partition, the bureaucracy and military seized control, sidelining political parties and suppressing the nascent communist movement, which was viewed as a threat.

Early leftist activism was evident in figures like Dr. Abdullah and Dada Ameer Haider advocating for rights in regions like Lyallpur. Haider Bakhsh Jatoti fought for landless farmers in Sindh. However, left-wing ideologies were vilified by the establishment, and Mian Iftikharuddin's efforts at economic and land reforms faced resistance, leading to his resignation.

The Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) was established in 1948 with Sajjad Zaheer leading. The party aimed to build support across society's segments for a revolutionary change. State agencies closely monitored and targeted leftists due to perceived threats.

In contrast to India's democratic trajectory, Pakistan's establishment shied away from democratic norms to consolidate power, leading to a struggle between the burgeoning leftist movement and the repressive state apparatus. This historical chapter paved the way for resilient left-wing activism in Pakistan, driven by the pursuit of justice and equality.

### **The Main Dimensions of Leftist Activism in Pakistan (1948-1970)**

#### **Inception and Growth of Leftist Movement**

From the earliest days of Pakistan's existence, leftist leaders such as Sajjad Zaheer, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, and Sibte Hasan worked tirelessly to establish and strengthen the Communist Party's presence in the country. Their efforts were aimed at attracting a larger following to the leftist ideology. The seeds of resistance were first sown in Karachi, where students mobilized to demand their rights, including better facilities and a relaxed fee structure. The administration's apathy and delay in addressing these demands ignited the flames of discontent. The Democratic Students Federation (DSF), a left-leaning student body formed in 1950, played a pivotal role in organizing and leading these protests.

### **Democratic Students Federation (DSF): Catalyst of Student Activism**

The DSF emerged in Rawalpindi in 1949 and quickly gained traction among students who were influenced by Marxist and Leninist ideals. It sought to challenge the rise of right-wing politics on campuses and advocate for a liberal, secular Pakistan with equal rights for all citizens. Similar sentiments led to the formation of DSF chapters in other cities, such as Karachi, where medical students at Dow Medical College joined the movement in 1950.

The DSF's alignment with the Communist Party of Pakistan enabled its growth and influence. A convention held in Karachi in 1953 gathered students from across the nation, where they devised a charter of demands addressing various issues faced by students. The catalyst for decisive action came on January 7, 1953, when students in Karachi declared their intention to march for their rights. The authorities' response was to impose Section 144, but students persisted and faced police resistance. Tragically, the confrontation resulted in several student deaths and nationwide protests, marking a turning point in leftist activism.

### **The Emergence of National Awami Party (NAP) and the Ayub Khan Era**

The left-wing movement gained momentum with the emergence of the National Awami Party (NAP) in 1957, which united various left-wing factions despite inner conflicts. The repressive policies of the Ayub Khan era were met with fierce opposition from leftist leaders, and student protests in the late 1960s became emblematic of the period's heightened left activism.

### **The Farmers' Struggle and Rural Activism**

The reach of leftist activism extended beyond urban centers and students. In Sindh, leaders like Haider Jatoi and G.M. Syed worked for the rights of landless farmers ('Haris') even before partition. Post-1947, their efforts continued, driven by Marxist ideals. The movement gained traction in areas around Faisalabad, with leaders like Dada Feroz Din Mansur advocating for revolutionary changes to the irrigation system and equal distribution of water resources. Farmer's conferences and study circles were organized throughout the country, focusing on issues such as water mismanagement and exploitation by powerful landlords.

### **The Left's Opposition to One Unit (1954-1956)**

The imposition of the One Unit Scheme in West Pakistan in 1955 fueled leftist opposition. The scheme, perceived as an attempt to diminish the majority of East Pakistan and weaken the federation, was met with protests and rallies. The Communist Party, Azad Pakistan Party, and Sindh Awami Mahaz formed an anti-One Unit Front, organizing meetings and demonstrations against the scheme. As hopes for the 1956 general elections were deferred, left-wing parties intensified their protests, advocating against One Unit and election delays.

### **The Ruling Establishment's Crackdown on Communist Party (1951-1954)**

#### **Early Days and Suppression of Leftist Movements**

The Communist Party of Pakistan, established in 1948, embarked on an ambitious mission to mobilize students, workers, farmers, and trade union leaders in support of its communist ideology. However, the party encountered immediate resistance from right-wing leaders and state authorities, who labeled them as 'anti-state' elements and accused them of being 'foreign agents.' This branding was part of a concerted effort to delegitimize and suppress the leftist movement in the country.

## **The Case of Mian Iftikharuddin and the Azad Pakistan Party**

Mian Iftikharuddin's efforts to resettle refugees through his pro-people strategy faced opposition from both the government and religious clerics. In 1950, he formed the Azad Pakistan Party, a prominent left-wing political entity that aimed to champion the rights of marginalized sections. However, religious leaders launched a smear campaign against leftist leaders, using religious rhetoric to tarnish their image. The government played a role in this propaganda, contributing to an atmosphere of hostility towards left-leaning individuals and groups.

## **Vernacular Press and Opposition to Leftists**

The vernacular press, particularly newspapers like Ehsan and Chatan, played a role in amplifying baseless campaigns against leftist activities. These newspapers propagated unfounded claims that the leftists sought to undermine moral values and spread foreign agendas for personal gain. Despite these efforts, left-wing activists continued to organize and advocate for their beliefs.

## **Crackdown and Suppression**

The leftist movement's growing influence and popularity posed a threat to the ruling establishment's interests. The government under Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan utilized tactics of divide and rule to maintain its grip on power, adopting autocratic measures rather than promoting democratic governance.

## **The Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case**

In a bid to consolidate power and curry favor with the American lobby, the government exploited an alleged conspiracy to overthrow it. On March 9, 1951, in what came to be known as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, prominent figures including Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Gen Akbar Khan, Sajjad Zaheer, and Muhammad Husain Atta were arrested. The pretext for this action was used to suppress leftist activism. The Communist Party's offices were sealed, and workers were forced to operate underground to evade state oppression.

## **Banning the Communist Party and its Timing**

The Communist Party of Pakistan was banned in 1954, a move that aligned with the signing of the military pact between Pakistan and the United States. This ban reflected the government's apprehension about the left-wing movement's egalitarian message gaining traction among the masses. The pretext of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case was merely a facade to suppress the leftists, indicating the lengths to which the authorities were willing to go to curb the movement's influence.

## **Continuation of Activism through Regional Left: Rise of NAP and Awami League**

### **Rise of NAP: Strengthening Regional Left**

The emergence of the National Awami Party (NAP) in 1957 marked a significant moment for the regional left in Pakistan. NAP provided a crucial organized platform for leftist workers and leaders, including those from the proscribed Communist Party of Pakistan. In a climate of political oppression and bans on left-wing activities, NAP became a beacon of hope, uniting left-leaning individuals to advocate for their ideals.

Prominent figure Hasan Nasir, seeking refuge in Karachi, joined NAP after being forced to leave Pakistan. His courage inspired others to follow suit, aligning various left-

leaning factions within NAP. The creation of the Awami Muslim League (AML) in Dhaka in 1949 also contributed to regional leftist activism, attracting nationalists and communists with its progressive agenda.

### **National Awami Party (NAP) as a Catalyst**

NAP's establishment in 1957 was historic, providing a unifying platform for left-wing workers and leaders. Figures like Maulana Abdul Hamid Bhashani, Mahmood Ali Kasuri, Mian Iftikharuddin, G.M Syed, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and Haider Bakhsh Jatui joined, reflecting the party's diverse ethnic representation. Its inclusive nature made it a target for the perceived threat it posed to those in power, causing concern among authorities.

### **Hasan Nasir's Impact on NAP**

Hasan Nasir's involvement infused NAP with energy and dedication. He engaged with industrial workers, farmers, teachers, students, and marginalized communities, focusing on Karachi's underprivileged areas and discreetly spreading leftist messages in Sindh's interior. His efforts led to over eleven left-wing candidates winning seats in Karachi's 1958 local body elections. Despite his arrest and torture by state authorities, Hasan Nasir remained committed to a democratic, prosperous, and egalitarian Pakistan. His tragic death in 1960 while in custody elevated his status as a symbol of determination and sacrifice.

### **Awami League: A Voice of Regional Left**

The rise of the Awami Muslim League (AML), formed in Dhaka in 1949, was another pivotal moment. Initially focused on democracy, elections, and provincial autonomy, dropping 'Muslim' from its name in 1955 signaled a shift towards secular and progressive politics. The party's opposition to Urdu as the national language resonated with Bengali sentiments. Evolving into the Awami League, it attracted nationalists, leftists, and progressive voices. The party's program and focus on regional autonomy gained popularity, backed by figures like Maulana Bhashani, Shamsul Haq, and Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. Victory in the 1970 general elections solidified Awami League's position as a major political force.

### **Leftist Activism in Crisis (1965-1968)**

During the period of 1965-1968, the leftist movement in Pakistan faced internal contradictions and ideological divisions. Debates within leftist parties gave rise to new factions, ultimately weakening the movement's coherence and impact. These divisions were particularly pronounced within NAP, which split into two factions—NAP(Bhashani) and NAP(Wali)—due to differences over aligning with the policies of China or Russia. This division proved detrimental to NAP's overall strength and effectiveness(Yaqubi, 2021)

### **Downfall and Disintegration of NAP (1963-1967)**

The National Awami Party (NAP), established in 1957 with a progressive and egalitarian program, emerged as a major political force. NAP's manifesto focused on empowering common people, farmers, workers, and marginalized groups. The party emphasized an independent foreign policy, equal rights, and provincial autonomy except for defense, foreign affairs, and currency. However, the rise of Ayub Khan's dictatorship in 1958 led to bans on political activities and publications. Despite facing repression, NAP reemerged in 1964 to support Fatima Jinnah in the presidential elections against Ayub Khan. The party's role was crucial in challenging the autocratic regime. NAP's involvement in student protests against the University Ordinance and its participation in the anti-Ayub movement showcased its commitment to democratic values.



However, ideological divisions within NAP, particularly between pro-China and pro-Russia factions, led to its fragmentation in 1968. This internal rift compromised NAP's effectiveness and undermined its ability to represent the left. The disintegration of NAP was a setback for the leftist movement, leaving it fractured and dispirited.

### **Awami League's Shift towards Regional Autonomy (1965-1968)**

Awami League's origins can be traced to its opposition to the imposition of Urdu as the national language. Over time, the party evolved into a significant voice advocating for regional autonomy, especially in East Pakistan. The growing discontent in East Pakistan was driven by the perception that West Pakistan was infringing on their rights and resources. Awami League's demand for increased provincial autonomy gained momentum, reflecting the changing sentiments of the people. This demand was rooted in the belief that safeguarding the federation required greater devolution of power. The party's stance on regional autonomy resonated deeply with the people of East Pakistan.

### **Left Politics in Bhutto Era (1972-1977)**

During the Bhutto era (1972-1977), left-wing politics in Pakistan witnessed a complex interplay of ideology, pragmatism, and political maneuvering. While Bhutto presented himself as a proponent of left-leaning politics, his approach was shaped by the need to navigate the religious sentiments of the population and the constraints of political reality.

Bhutto's 'Islamic Socialism' was an attempt to meld leftist ideas with religious sensitivities, as leftists were often labeled as 'atheists' in Pakistan. He knew that maintaining public support required a balance between socialist ideals and religious inclinations, leading to a more pragmatic stance (Paracha, 2015). Some left-wing leaders aligned with Bhutto due to his promises of socialist reforms and redistribution of wealth.

Prominent leftist figures like J.A Rahim and Sheikh Muhammad Rashid found allure in Bhutto's vision of a national-level party with leftist leanings. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) initially gained popularity by promising land redistribution and improved conditions for workers. Bhutto's 'Roti, Kapra aur Makan' slogan was reminiscent of the socialist ideals of 'Peace, Land, and Bread' championed by communist leader V.I Lenin (Sanghro & Chandio, 2019).

The 1970 general elections marked a high point for left politics, with the PPP and the Awami League, both social democratic parties, gaining significant support. However, Bhutto's autocratic tendencies and dismissal of governments led by the leftist National Awami Party (NAP) created a rift. NAP was banned, leading to its fragmentation and ultimate decline (Yaqubi, 2021).

Bhutto's policies initially carried a radical leftist orientation, with nationalization and land reforms. However, his shifting political tactics and autocratic behavior led to disillusionment. Bhutto's government faced resistance from industrial workers and land reforms were met with mixed responses (Paracha, 2015)

Amidst Bhutto's evolving policies, the left continued its struggle. The emergence of the Pakistan Socialist Party in 1972 under C.R Aslam represented a Marxist perspective, while leaders like Jam Saqi and NSF focused on mobilizing student and worker activism. Leftist students demanded free education, job security, and social justice, reflecting the core principles of egalitarianism (Salim & Abbas, 2017).

Despite Bhutto's policies and actions, the left maintained some level of unity, supporting the 1973 constitution despite its differences with the government. NAP

remained a force of opposition, advocating for provincial autonomy, peace with India, and the welfare of farmers and workers (Salim, 2020).

Ultimately, Bhutto's government faced opposition from various quarters, leading to his downfall in 1977. The Pakistan National Alliance, supported by a faction of the left, campaigned against Bhutto's alleged election rigging. This unrest inadvertently paved the way for military intervention and the onset of Zia-ul-Haq's authoritarian regime.

Zia's regime imposed a reign of terror on the left, damaging the progressive fabric of society. The Bhutto era, marked by a mix of socialist aspirations, pragmatic political tactics, and autocratic tendencies, left a lasting impact on the trajectory of left-wing politics in Pakistan.

### **Leftist Activism in Tumultuous Times: The Leftist Resistance against the Dictatorial Regime of Zia-ul-Haq**

The era of Zia-ul-Haq's rule posed immense challenges for Pakistan's liberal and progressive voices. Zia aimed to regress the nation by enacting laws under the banner of Islam, targeting civil rights advocates, leftist activists, and leaders. He encouraged right-wing ideologies on campuses, all while leveraging religious rhetoric to advance his agenda. His relentless pursuit of this agenda led to the suffering of countless leftists, exemplified by the tragic case of Nazeer Abbasi.

Nazeer Abbasi, an emerging left-wing leader from Sindh, dedicated his life to the cause of the marginalized. He stood up against oppression, fought for farmers' rights, and voiced the concerns of the underprivileged. Despite arrests and torture, Abbasi remained resolute. His pamphlet denouncing Zia's policies highlighted his unwavering stance against the dictator (Aziz, 2011). Abbasi's relentless activism ultimately led to his tragic demise in the hands of the regime, underscoring the lengths to which Zia went to suppress radical voices.

Another towering figure in the left movement was Jam Saqi, a close comrade of Nazeer Abbasi. In 1980, both were arrested for writing against the martial law regime. While Nazeer Abbasi met a tragic end, Jam Saqi endured imprisonment and harassment. The regime's intention was clear: to break his spirit and resolve. Despite the adversity, Jam Saqi remained steadfast, supported by leaders like Benazir Bhutto who stood by him (Salim & Abbas, 2017).

Sindh emerged as a stronghold of leftist resistance, with the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) gaining momentum against Zia's authoritarian regime (Aslam, 2021). This indigenous movement comprised various parties, including the Mazdoor Kisan Party, Quami Mahaz-e-i5oAzadi, National Democratic Party, and Pakistan National Party, united against the dictatorship. The MRD demanded democracy, press freedom, independent judiciary, and workers' rights (Mushtaq, n.d.).

Sindh's resistance symbolized the broader struggle against Zia's draconian laws. Women's Action Forum (WAF) protested against anti-women laws, while journalists and human rights activists stood up against censorship. The movement found strength in its unity against repression, as lawyers, intellectuals, and democratic leaders joined hands to challenge the regime (Haroon, 2016). The MRD's persistence and sacrifices forced Zia into a corner. The press, stifled by censorship, maintained its resilience. Zamir Niazi's efforts to publish a book despite censorship exemplify the lengths to which journalists went to expose the regime's brutality (Niazi, 1986)

Zia's rule finally came to an end with his death in 1988, following which Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan. The united struggle of the left and mainstream parties

culminated in the return of democracy, marking a victory over repression. This triumph was a testament to the determination of the left's workers and the Pakistan People's Party, who lit the torch of democracy in the face of adversity.

In retrospect, the leftist resistance during the Zia era exemplified the undying spirit of those who championed democratic ideals, human rights, and social justice. Their sacrifices and relentless struggle played a pivotal role in breaking the shackles of dictatorship and paving the way for a democratic Pakistan.

### **The Aftermath of Zia-ul-Haq's Rule and the Continued Struggle**

After the demise of Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan entered a new phase in its political landscape. The left-wing parties that had valiantly resisted Zia's repressive regime now faced the task of rebuilding a democratic society. The scars left by the dictatorship were deep, and the challenges were manifold. The struggle for the restoration of democracy had taken a heavy toll on the leftists, with many leaders having sacrificed their lives or enduring long incarcerations. As the nation embarked on a path towards democracy, these leaders had become symbols of resilience and determination.

One of the key figures who emerged as a beacon of hope during this transition was Benazir Bhutto. She, too, had faced the brunt of Zia's dictatorship, enduring imprisonment and exile. Her return in 1986 marked a turning point, rekindling the spirit of democratic ideals. The left-wing parties, despite their ideological differences, rallied behind her leadership, recognizing the need for a unified front against oppressive forces.

The years that followed saw the left parties focusing on a range of issues, from labor rights to social justice, economic reforms to land redistribution. The legacy of the Bhutto era still reverberated within the left-leaning circles, with discussions and debates about the efficacy of his policies. Some believed that Bhutto's pragmatic approach had diluted the original socialist vision, while others acknowledged his efforts to address economic disparities.

As the democratic institutions slowly regained their strength, left-wing parties found renewed avenues to advocate for their causes. The labor movement continued to be a central focus, with workers' unions pushing for better wages, safer working conditions, and social security measures. The leftists also emphasized education and healthcare reforms, recognizing the significance of investing in human capital.

During this period, the left-wing activists also played a vital role in advocating for minority rights and gender equality. Women's participation in politics and social spheres became a priority, and left-leaning women's organizations worked to challenge patriarchal norms and discriminatory laws.

### **Contemporary Challenges and Future Prospects**

The left politics in Pakistan continued to evolve, responding to the changing dynamics of society and global trends. The advent of the 21st century brought new challenges, including the rise of extremism and terrorism. Left-wing parties found themselves confronting not only economic inequalities but also ideological battles against radicalization.

The left's commitment to secularism and pluralism became even more critical in the face of increasing religious conservatism. Their emphasis on social justice and inclusivity became a counter-narrative to extremism, drawing on the country's diverse cultural and religious heritage. In recent years, left-leaning activists have also taken up environmental causes, advocating for sustainable development and ecological conservation. Their efforts

to bridge the gap between economic progress and environmental responsibility have resonated with a new generation of Pakistanis.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this comprehensive exploration masterfully traced the evolution of left-wing activism in Pakistan from 1947 to 1988. The narrative seamlessly woven together the challenges faced by early leftist leaders, the unwavering resilience of activists, and the monumental resistance against authoritarian regimes. The periods of Ayub Khan's and Zia-ul-Haq's rule are dissected, highlighting the formidable opposition from students, workers, farmers, and other grassroots movements. The rise of the National Awami Party (NAP) and its pursuit of democratic governance and socio-economic equality finds its place, along with the intricate dance of the Bhutto era and the tumultuous fight against Zia's oppressive martial law. The crescendo of the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) resonates powerfully, echoing the collective call that shattered Zia's grip and heralded the return of democratic governance. Amidst the challenges of the late eighties, the narrative remains steadfast, showcasing the lasting impact of left-wing activism in shaping Pakistan's history. Through meticulous analysis and a tapestry of interconnected themes, this journey underscores the endurance of those who championed justice and equality, leaving an inspiring imprint for generations to come. The narrative of their struggle, ultimately vindicated by the resurgence of democratic governance, attests to the enduring power of ideals in the face of adversity.

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