

MOHAJIR QAUMI MOVEMENT (MQM)

(A LINGUISTIC AND RACIAL POLITICAL PARTY 1979-1988)

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ABSTRACT

MQM is a political party which plays an important role in the politics of Pakistan. It is trying to increase its influence in all provinces of Pakistan and for this purpose branches are being established in the various cities of Pakistan. It claims to be the representative of the deprived people of all Pakistan. This paper presents the study of MQM with special reference to its creation and what were the factors behind its creation. This study will also disclose the relation of MQM and military dictator Zia. What is the main dispute between the religious sections and MQM, Punjabi and MQM, Pushtoon and MQM? How the agencies played a role in strengthening the unity and harmony among the Mahajirs? Is MQM politics based on regionalism and racialism?

KEYWORDS: MQM, Pakistan Politics, Mahajirs,

INTRODUCTION

With the partition of India and Pakistan, a large number of Muslims migrated from India to Pakistan with great difficulties and losses. The Muslims were murdered and killed by the Hindus on their travel to Pakistan. These people had the different languages and cultures. They settled in the various cities of Pakistan but most of them settled in Sindh. The settlement of the Mahajirs in various districts of Sindh can be seen:

District	Refugee Population	Urban	Rural	Urdu M. Tongue
Dadu	20720	9194	11526	16589
Hyderabad	205641	177180	28461	181869
Larkana	25682	16501	9181	24732
Nawabshah	93345	41136	52209	77827
Sukkur	93739	66636	27103	87877
Tharparkar	88765	28323	60442	72077
Thatta	5851	1813	4038	3546
U.S.F	6535	3937	2598	6058
Khairpur state	10013	4889	5124	8912
Karachi	616906	616906	-----	565816
Total	1167197	966515	200682	1045303

(Source: Population census 1951)

From among the most of settlers was Urdu speaking (they had migrated to Pakistan from United Province, Bihar, Hyderabad, Rajasthan, Delhi, Bhopal, Juna Garh etc) and they had settled in the major cities of Sindh. A large number of Mahajirs were from Punjab who waded through rivers of blood to reach Pakistan. These refugees, who were far more in number than the refugees in Sindh, assimilated with the soil of Punjab, speak Urdu, do not call themselves Mahajirs. Those Mahajirs who had settled in Punjab did not have any confrontation within the local population of Punjab. Due to this, they made progress economically and they did not need to establish any kind of separate organization for their getting rights. That's why the word Mahajir is not used for them. The settlers who had settled in Sindh, especially in the major cities of Sindh, had the confrontation with the local Sindhis. They felt themselves the deprived class. The term Mahajir is specially used for them and most of them are Urdu speaking. Quaid Muhammad Ali Jinnah was personally interested in the settlement of refugees of Sindh and he adopted to become the minister of Refugee Rehabilitation. Liaquat Ali Khan had also migrated from India to Pakistan and became the Prime minister of Pakistan. In 1981 census, the households speaking Urdu as mother tongue were 22.64 % of the total population of Sindh. With the passage of time, sense of deprivation was developed in the Urdu speaking community that proper share was not being given to them and the settlement of the people of other provinces in Sindh, especially Karachi, was a major threat to them. Karachi had near about 8 million plus population and 54.3 percent were Muhajirs, the Sindhis were a mere 6.3 percent and rest were pathans and Punjabis. But

Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM)

they thought that Economic, social and political rights of Mahajirs were usurped. Few Urdu speaking students felt the need of the association of the Mahajirs and launched a vigorous move for it. The comparison of the Urdu speaking people with the people of other speaking languages in Sindh can be seen in the table

Languages	Population %
Sindhi	52.4
Urdu	22.64
Punjabi	7.69
Balochi	4.51
Pushto	3.06
Siraki	2.2
Birahvi	1.08
Hindko	0.36
Others	5.97

(Sources: Census 1981)

In 1978, All Pakistan Mahajir Students Organization was established in the institution of Jamia Karachi for the protection of the rights of Mahajir students (Ten thousands Mahajir were studying there) but it could not gain grounds due to the opposition of Jamaat-i-Islami. The few Mahajir students of Jamia Karachi made strenuous efforts to unite the Mahajir community under the banner of APMSO and different camps were established at the time of admissions for guideline of the new comers. In the student's union elections of 1979, APMSO candidate got only ninety five votes out of ten thousands students. In spite of these frustrated results, the workers of APMSO continued their efforts for the protection of the rights of Mahajir students. Next year, APMSO got nine hundred votes and it was an encouraging response. Jamaat-i-Islami was losing due to the increasing influence of APMSO. That's why it used the force and compelled the leaders of Mahajirs to leave the institution. The workers of Jamaat assaulted over the workers of APMSO. Due to these differences, APMSO leaders were banned in the university. After the failure of APMSO, the few Mahajirs students launched a campaign for creating awareness within the Mahajirs about their rights in the Mahajir dominated areas. For this purpose, MQM was established in 18th March 1984. In the beginning the response was very cold but with the passage of time, it used to become a popular organization in Karachi and Hyderabad. In APMSO, there was only a majority of youngsters but in MQM the aged people also joined along with the young generation. The members of MQM were mostly from middle and lower middle class. The leaders of MQM felt proud over this and claimed that MQM is the party of ordinary persons not the feudal. It was their stance that if the Sindhi, Punjabi, Sairki, Baloch, Kashmiri could form their organizations then why not Mahajirs. It was their right to organize themselves. The Mahajirs considered themselves the deprived class of Sindh and demanded the following rights:

- The population of Sindh, especially Karachi was increasing day by day due to the settlement of the population of other provinces. It was a matter of deep concern for Mahajirs. So such kind of people should be sent to their own provinces. The government land which had been illegally occupied by the Punjabis or Pashtoons should be vacated.
 - They felt that the proper share was not being given to them in every field of life either it is police department or bureaucracy or any other.
 - They demanded that the right of vote in Sindh should only be given to the local people not those who had come here from other provinces.
 - Preference in jobs should also be given to the local people.
 - Quota system should be observed according to the ratio of population.
 - The admissions in the educational institutions must be observed with the preference of the local students.
 - The share of the health department in budget must be increased so that the proper health facilities should be provided to the local population.
 - KESC should not be the part of WAPDA and the jobs should not be given to the people of other provinces.
 - The power should be given to the Sind government to collect sales tax.
 - Arms licenses should only be given to the Sindhis and the Mahajirs. For issuing arms licenses, simple procedures should be adopted.
1. In the cities and villages of Sindh including Karachi and Hyderabad, fastest modern transport system (Electric trains) should be developed.
 2. In the cities of Sindh, the official transport should be given under the control of local government institutions.
 3. The driving licenses should only be issued to the Sindhis and Mahajirs.
 4. Concession in transport fares should be given to the Sindhi and Mahajir students.
 5. The age of the voter must be eighteen years.
 6. The Khokhra Par way should be opened for Sindhis and Mahajirs so that they might easily travel to India and meet their relatives.
 7. The ratio of fuel adjustment charges should be equal in all parts of Pakistan.

Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM)

8. The death days of Shah Latif and Liqauat Ali Khan should be celebrated as a national days with official holidays.
9. The degree colleges of Hyderabad should be affiliated with university with the post graduate facility.
10. Universities and colleges should be launched in all major cities of Sindh.
11. With the agreement of Afghan government, the refugees should be sent to their own country.
12. The system of contract labour must be eliminated from industrial and other business related organizations.
13. The repatriation of stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh to Pakistan be carried out without further delay.¹

These were the major demands of MQM which created unity and harmony within the Mahajir community.²

MQM, first of all focused on the two major cities of Sindh i.e. Karachi and Hyderabad. Before the popularity of MQM in Karachi and Hyderabad, Jamaat-i-Islami was very strong. But Jamaat had failed in countering the popularity of PPP³ within Sindh. Due to delaying tactics of Zia in holding elections, jamaat was not comfortable with his government but inspite of this, jamaat was the part of the government. On the issue of Zia government, Jamaat had divided into two groups. Jamaat's Karachi organization, led by Prof. Ghafoor Ahmed and Munawaar Hasan did not accept the alliance of Mian Tufail Mohammad and Zia. Due to this division, Prof Ghafoor and Munawaar Hasan openly criticized the Zia government during the election campaign of 1985. Though Jamaat never joined MRD⁴ but due to criticism on Zia government, the impression was established that Jamaat was a part of MRD. Due to anti Zia policy, leaders of Jamaat-i-Islam in Karachi lost their seats in the election of 1985. It could secure only two seats from Karachi. This division within jamaat started its decline in Karachi and it provided an opportunity to MQM to flourish.⁵ Since the

¹ Muneer Ahmed, *Altaf Hussain*, pp. 315-335.

³ The Pakistan People's Party was founded by Z.A.Bhutto in November 1967. The PPP is a left-of-the-centre party with a socialistic socio-economic program. PPP participated in the elections of 1970 and put up 119 candidates for the National assembly from west Pakistan and it secured eighty eight seats out of 144 seats allocated to western Pakistan. In the provinces, it gained majority in Punjab and Sindh. After the separation of east Pakistan, it established government in west Pakistan. Stanely Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan: His Life and Times*, PPs. 100-135.

⁴ MRD was an alliance of nine political parties. These were, Pakistan People's Party, Muslim League (Qasim Group), JUI, National Awami Party, Pakistan Democratic Party, Pakistan National Party, Kisan Mazdor Party, National Democratic Party, Quomi Mahaz Azadi. On 6 Feb. 1981, the PPP and some smaller parties formed a group Movement for the Restoration of Democracy that worked for putting an end Martial Law and demanded the free and fair elections in accordance with the suspended constitution of 1973. Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, P. 356.

⁵ Shuja Nawaz, *CROSSED SWORDS*, P. 382

partition of India, Mohajirs had always identified with Islam and Pakistan. They always provided support to the JI. But it was the first time that they refused to reconcile with JI.⁶ Zia decided to promote MQM so that the influence of PPP could be decreased and secondly he wanted to keep the Jamaat-i-Islami under control through the fear of increasing role of MQM in major cities. It is also remarkable that the policies of Zia regarding the political culture of Pakistan became the strongest factor in growing provincial and intra-provincial disparities which promoted tension between the Punjab and the non-Punjabi province as well as significant linguistic minorities. It was the factor that raised the sudden popularity of MQM.⁷ Ghous Ali Shah played role on the behalf of Zia in creating liaison between the government and the Mahajirs.⁸ After this alliance, MQM started the public rallies and public meetings in 1986. The first major public meeting was held in Nishter Park Karachi in which a great number of Mahajirs were there. The main slogans were “Nara-a-Mahajir - Jia Mahajir”. The media coverage was remarkable and in the front page of the newspapers, the activities of MQM were highlighted. Within two years, it became a party of thousands Mahajirs.⁹ In the period of military dictators, the media works under the control of the government. The news of MQM at the front page of the newspapers was not possible without the support of the government in that period when the political activities were strictly prohibited. Even censorship was so much strictly observed that few newspapers faced closures due to anti-Zia policies.¹⁰ On the other hand, the government machinery became successful in creating rift among the Punjabis, Pukhtoon, Sindhi and Mahajirs. First it settled the Afghan refugees and then created parallel arms and drugs economy.¹¹ The leaders of MQM used to criticize the leadership of Punjabi and Pukhtoon and declared them the root causes of all evils. Armed cadres of MQM fought skirmishes against Pathan and Punajbis. The people from the different parts of Pakistan had settled in Karachi for business and few had come here only for jobs. MQM developed the thinking of the Mahajirs that such kind of people should go their own provinces and seek jobs. Mahajirs had the first right in jobs in Karachi. It also raised the protest on the sindhi Domicile and ID cards of those people who had come from other provinces. It was dire need to scrutine the Domiciles and ID cards. MQM also raised objection on the settlement of Afghan refugees in the cities of Sindh. It was their demand that these refugees should be limited with the Afghan border. After establishing the hegemony over Karachi, MQM focused on Hyderabad and second great public meeting was arranged in Paka Qila on 31 October 1986. The firing was opened on the different rallies which were going for Public Grand Meeting. The government did not take any drastic action against the culprits.¹² Perhaps it was a part of the conspiracy because such kind of events strengthened the

⁶ Ian Talbot, *Pakistan-A Modern History*, P. 265.

⁷ Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*, PP. 107-8.

⁸ Muneer Ahmed, *Altaf Hussain*, P. 26

⁹ Khalid Athir, *Safra Zindgi*, PP. 45-52.

¹⁰ Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*, PP. 104.

¹¹ Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*, P. 108.

¹² Khalid Athir, *Safra Zindgi*, P. 46.

Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM)

Mahajir unity and helped Altaf Hussain¹³ in becoming a popular leader. The Grand Public Meeting in Hyderabad was very successful. Thousands of people joined the gathering with enthusiasm. At the end of the meeting, Altaf Hussain left Hyderabad for Karachi but at Ghaghar Railway track he was arrested on 31 Oct. 1986.¹⁴ It was a strange decision of government because Altaf did not instigate the audiences against the government on the incidents of firing in Karachi and Hyderabad. These are the techniques of the establishment for increasing the popularity of the leaders. The detainment of Altaf entered him in the list of major leaders of Karachi. On 24 Feb 1987, he was released from jail and the cases were withdrawn. After his release from jail, Altaf Bhai went to the houses of those people who had been murdered or injured in different events and arranged Quran Khawni at their homes. During this task, he received a wonderful reception from Mahajirs. The government had become successful in achieving the targets. False and minor cases were registered in different police stations against the leadership. These cases were of ridiculous nature. The case of Korngi police station can be quoted here "Altaf Hussain robbed the cap and belt of the police officer".¹⁵ What were the motives behind such kind of cases?

On the other hand, the police officers teased the Mahajirs through different ways so that resentment might be created and sense of unity should be developed. On 31 March 1988, police fired on the funeral prayer of a woman in which few persons met their death.¹⁶ On 12 December 1986, the events of Aligarah and Qasbah colonies not only added fuel to the fire but developed the hatred against other regional forces and the government. During this attack, more than 300 men, women and children were massacred. Mahajirs's houses were burnt and looted. The attacks on the Mahajirs in Shah Faisal colony and Korangi town and silence of governmental machinery left no stone unturned in gathering Mahajirs under the banner of MQM.¹⁷ Such events developed the unity within the Mahajirs. Altaf Hussain and the other leaders of MQM declared the police department the real responsible because the main officers of this department had come from other provinces of Pakistan and that's why they were least interested in the affairs of the local population. Local population was not the part of police department. It was the demand of MQM that the local people should be recruited and preference also be given. It was the weapon of MQM which was used for creating sympathies in the hearts of Mahajirs for MQM. Same method was adopted for the bureaucracy and MQM always instigated the people against bureaucracy. It was their opinion that bureaucracy was also responsible for all evils because

¹³ Altaf Hussain was born on 17 Sep 1953 in Karachi. He did matric from government Boys Secondary School Jail road Karachi in 1969. After his FSC from City college Karachi, he got admission in Islamia Science college and did BSC. In 1979, he passed B. Pharmacy from Karachi university. During his education in Karachi university, he faced very tough time from the students of Jamaat. Even he was banned in the university. He also did job in the hospital as a trainee. He also served in medicine manufacturing company. Then he went to USA where his brother has settled. After two and half years, he came back to Pakistan. Muneer Ahmed, *MQM*, PP. 10-20

¹⁴ Khalid Athir, *Safra Zindgi*, P. 48.

¹⁵ Muneer Ahmed, *MQM*, PP. 25-28.

¹⁶ Khalid Athir, *Safra Zindgi*, P. 51.

¹⁷ *Abid.*, p. 53

most of the officers had come from other provinces. It was said that the alliance of government, police, bureaucracy and agencies against the Mahajirs was working. Such kind of approach was adopted by the leaders of MQM and exploited the emotions of Mahajirs.¹⁸ The history of Pakistan is itself evident of the facts that the institutions of Military, Police, Bureaucracy and Agencies sowed the seeds of separatist movements. The example of East Pakistan can also be quoted. Zia government used the institutions for creating disharmony among the different sections of society on linguistic bases and used these groups for his own purposes and also engaged the people in fights, bloodshed, kidnappings etc.

There is no blinking fact that before the existence of MQM, a lot of other organizations were working for the rights of Mahajirs but not so much powerful as the MQM became within span of time. MQM, in the start, was only representative of Mahajirs and always promoted the feelings of racialism and regionalism. Later on it claimed to be party of all deprived people of the whole Pakistan but the Mahajir title did not include it in the national parties of Pakistan.

MQM started its politics from the local government elections. First time in the period of Zia, this organization participated in the elections of Local government (1987) with the slogan of "Jia Mahajir" and won a great majority in the cities of Karachi and Hyderabad. The leaders of MQM declared it a referendum in the favors of Mahajirs. That's why they always preferred the politics of Local Government so that the maximum representation should be ensured. MQM won the elections with the support of Mahajirs and it also claimed the true representatives of Mahajirs only but after the victory in the elections, Altaf Hussain (who was in Central jail Karachi at that time) issued a statement to the elected consulers that they should forget the events of past and rendered the services to the public without any discrimination. He passed statement that it did not matter either any Punjabi, pakhtoon or sindhi lived in areas of Mahajirs.¹⁹ The results of the

In Karachi, the major forces were Punjabi, Pakhtoon, Mahajirs and religious parties. The government of Zia created such kind of environment in which these forces were against each other. Punjabi-Mahajir differences, Pakhtoon-Mahajir differences, Jamaat and Mahajir differences embroiled the situation in Karachi and eliminated the peaceful atmosphere. The major cause of dispute within these groups was the hegemony over Karachi. The government never made efforts to dismantle their differences but it ensured to add fuel to fire.²⁰ The Pakhtoon leader Khan Abdul Wali Khan came to Karachi for visit in 1986 but the government refused to enter him in the vicinity of Karachi. The Jamaati-i-Islami was the part of the Zia government but the game of cat and mouse was being played between MQM and Jamaat. The military dictator divided forces on bases of regionalism and linguistics and sowed the seeds of hatred and agony which can be seen in 2011 also. The events of bombings, firings, attacks on transport, deaths tolls are the assets of Karachi and Hyderabad.

¹⁸ Muneer ahmed, *Altaf Hussain*, pp.315-318

¹⁹ *Abid.*, p. 55

²⁰ Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan At The Crosscurrent of History*, P. 199.

Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM)

The Afghan war also left long sighted impact on the politics of Karachi. Massive supply of sophisticated weapons to the Afghan Mujahideen led to the proliferation of arms in the country from Peshawar to Karachi and produced the Kalashnikov culture. Another result of the ten year long Afghan war was the drugs smuggling as the principal conduit by which weapons reached the Afghan rebels in the North became one of the main organized routes by which heroin reached Karachi for Trans shipment to Europe and USA. The mafia which was created by Afghan war used to exert its influence over Karachi which was not acceptable to the Mahajirs and tussle was started between these factions.²¹

1986 was very important in the politics of MQM. First time Sindhi-Mahajir conflict had started. Few personalities of PPP and Mumtaz Bhutto with the collaboration of Hafeez Pirzada made an effort to instigate the Sindhis against Mahajirs. In Karachi, the conflicts had started among the Mahajirs, Pathan and Afghans. The transport of Karachi was under the control of Afghans and Pathans, that's why the Mahajirs used to fire on the transport and burnt the buses in the Karachi. In the same year, conflicts came to surface between the Pathans and Mahajirs in Karachi and Hyderabad. It was the first time when MQM weaponized itself and faced the opponent forces with latest weapons.²² From where MQM got weapons? There were two options i.e military and Pakistani agencies or Indian government. There were the more chances of first option because it was necessary for Zia government to strengthened MQM against other forces (Jamaat-i-Islami, PPP).It was the interesting that the Zia government first ignited the smoldering embers of Mahajirs through different horrible events and later on provided them the weapons for fighting. It was year when most of Mahajirs felt the importance of MQM and considered it the cure of all diseases.

S No	Major Events In 1986
1	Pathan -Mahajir Conflict in Karachi
2	10 December 1986, MQM declared it a Black Day
3	Attack on Orngi Town, 75 Mahajirs met their death.
4	12 December 1986, the events of Aligarah and Qasbah colonies
5	Altaf Hussain was arrested by Police
6	Sahrab Goth. Firing on the carvan of MQM
7	attacks on the Mahajirs in Shah Faisal colony

²¹*The Far East Economics Review*, March 5, 1987.

²² Muneer Ahmed, *Altaf Hussain*, pp. 103-107

Though, MQM faced the allegations of different kinds from the opposite forces. 1. Few declared it a terrorist organization due to torture cells and kidnapping of the adversaries.

2. Few thought it a separatist movement,

3. Few imagined it an agent of India.²³

Perhaps these different titles had been assigned given to the party for changing the mindset of the population of Pakistan who had declared the formation of MQM the result of conspiracy of Zia government against the opposition parties.

Though few writers have also mentioned the sponsorship of ISI for MQM to weaken the PPP and MRD in Sindh but the leadership of MQM have refuted such kinds of allegations. Since the partition of India, they have always identified with Pakistan and Islam. Before the period of Zia, they always supported Jimaat-i-Islami.²⁴

CONCLUSIONS

MQM started its career with the slogan of Jia Mahajir. The word Mahajir is only used for a person who is Urdu speaking and had migrated from India to Pakistan. From 1984 to 2011, it has proved itself the party of Urdu speaking people only. Due to this stance, it has refused to accept the presence of Punjabi, Pushtoon in Urdu speaking areas. This claims that it is the representative of the deprived people of Pakistan but it has failed to dismantle the notion of Jia Mahajir. The manifesto of the party revolved around the interests of Mahajirs and the leadership was also elected among the Urdu speaking community. No Punjabi or Pushtoon can become the leader of MQM. It has developed its differences with other political parties on linguistic and regional bases. It was their main demand that the people who had come to Karachi from other provinces should be sent to their own provinces. With such kind of demand, how a party can become a national political party?

It was established in 1984 and within the span of two years it became the true representative of Mahajirs. It was allowed to gather the political rallies at the time when all political activities had been suspended. The Zia government gave it a free hand to flourish. But on the other hand, with the help of agencies and police, the attacks were done frequently on the Mahajirs but such kinds of activities were ascribed with other regional forces. In this way, the confrontation had started with the regional forces of Sindh. It was strange that most of these forces were also working under the banner of military leadership and were also at daggers drawn with the weapons of agencies and government. In these conditions, nobody could dare to challenge the rule of Zia government. The government was in a position to crush the rivals on the

²³ Muneer Ahmed, *Ataf Hussain*, PP. 34-40

²⁴ Ian Talbot, *Pakistan-A Modern History*, P. 265.

Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM)

name of peace which had been disturbed by the linguistic and regional forces. Cases were being registered against the opposition leaders and they were trialed in the military courts. PPP was not the part of this confrontation but its political workers were facing the faked charges in the courts.