

GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan inherited a highly centralized colonial state structure characterized by bureaucratic dominance and a fragmented social fabric divided along religious, ethnic, linguistic and sectarian lines. However, the early civil society of Pakistan emerged as a significant actor in addressing the immediate socio-economic crises faced by the nascent state, particularly the rehabilitation and settlement of refugees. The research highlights the contributions of major civil society organizations including Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam, Pakistan Red Cross Society, All Pakistan Women Association (APWA) and the Edhi Foundation, in providing humanitarian assistance, healthcare, shelter and social support services. It also examines the role of prominent civil society activists such as Fatima Jinnah and Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan. Moreover, the study argues that although political instability, military interventions, bureaucratic control and weak constitutional development constrained the growth of an autonomous civil society, these early organizations laid the foundation for future civic engagement and social activism in Pakistan. Using a historical-analytical approach, the paper concludes that civil society in Pakistan evolved from informal relief and charitable activities into a gradually organized sector contributing to social welfare, advocacy, and democratic development.

Keywords: Civil Society, State, Partition of India, Colonial legacy, Refugee Rehabilitation, Social Welfare, Advocacy, Democratization

Pakistan emerged as an independent state on August 14, 1947 inheriting a colonial legacy of state structures. It was highly centralized, authoritative and personalized in nature. Its tremendous strength was clearly observed from top to bottom which made least spaces to public participation, accountability and even rule of law. Moreover, Pakistan inherited a deeply divided and sternly fragmented civil society on religious, sectarian, ethnic, linguistic, and racial lines. In spite of this perilous division, AIML appealed to all section of the civil society for support in the struggle of separate Muslim state. However, AIML progressively achieved its objectives. From this colonial historical legacy, the state and civil society

of Pakistan have quickly evolved since independence.

Apart from geographically ungainliness of the state, Pakistani society had demographic, sectarian, cultural, ethnic linguistic plurality. Such differences and diversities need could have been reconciled with the projection of common bonds and further concrete initiatives for the stability and integrity of the country (Weiss & Gilani, 2001). A weak political system mostly alienated from the general masses fully dominated by civil and military bureaucracy came to craft the new state of Pakistan. At first, the civil society was largely restricted to the oppositional functions with symbolic appearance occasionally. In the

urban areas, civil society was comprised of lawyers, journalists, educationists, professionals and prominent families. While in rural areas, clans, landlords and hereditary chieftains were the civil society of Pakistan (Qadeer, 1997).

Fatefully, Pakistan, as a colonial-model state faced gigantic challenges including a worsening law and order situation due to partition, mass migration and communal riots in the very beginning. Afterwards, political volatility and constitutional differences further aggravated the crisis particularly weakening the country's political and administrative structure. As a result, bureaucratic and military elites emerged who got the control and patronized the state's political system (Qadeer, 1997). The first two decades shows that civil bureaucracy was the center of power in Pakistan. The men at the top of the bureaucratic structure in British India the Indian Civil Service (ICS) were a group of most privileged civil servants who predominately owned the systems of new state (Shaikh, 2009).

Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah always understood the gravity of situation of extreme societal diversities and differences. He was first to declare that Pakistan would be a nation state on the foundation of social justice and Islamic socialism which emphasized equality and brotherhood of man. Therefore, it is obvious that he envisioned Pakistan to be welfare state. His concept of state was that "the state exists not for life but for good life". Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah frequently said that Pakistan had been established for providing equal opportunities and respectable living for the poor people who are a large majority of the population of Pakistan (Cheema, 2006). In first address on August 11, 1947 to the first constituent Assembly of Pakistan, he clarified that:

"Now if we want to make this great state of Pakistan happy and prosperous we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people, and especially of the masses and the poor ... If you change your past and work together in a spirit that every one of you, no matter to what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, no matter what is his colour, caste or creed, is first, second and last a citizen of this state with equal rights, privileges and

obligations, there will be no end to the progress you will make" (Ghazali, 1999).

He desired to shape Pakistan as modern, progressive and democratic welfare state. The state has key features like good governance, rule of law, democracy, justice, tolerance, freedom particularly religious freedom and interfaith harmony. He believed that the new state would be a modern, progressive and democratic with sovereignty resting in the people and citizens of the state would have equal rights irrespective of caste, color and creed (Munir, 1980). Jinnah's address also mirrored his vision for the nascent civil society of Pakistan. He believed that strengthening of civil society would play multiple roles in promoting social welfare and the development of masses at all levels. Moreover, he saw civil society as a watchdog for the rule of law and democratization in the state of Pakistan. Notably he mentioned:

You are free; you are free to go your temples, you are free to go your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed

That has nothing to do with the business of the state. Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindu and Muslim should cease to be Muslim, not in religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state (Khan, 2001).

After the creation of Pakistan, The development of civil society was severely hindered by the several factors, including political colonial inheritance of state structure, alienated political culture, lack of constitutionalism, dearth of political leadership, extreme bureaucratization, and ever-increasing political role of the military that followed by frequent military takeovers. This highly critical situation fractured political parties, including the founding one AIML. Moreover, caused rising tensions among different state actors, clashes among state institutions and the emergence of religious, sectarian, linguistic and ethnic elements have further impeded the process (Iob, 2018). However, the Pakistani society had a robust historical tradition of progressive civics bodies, particularly Islamic philanthropy (Gul, 2018).

At the time of partition of 1947, one of the most disastrous initial issues was the massive migration of Muslim population from Indian Territory. Early violence and riots erupted firstly in Bengal province and afterwards extended to other areas of the Subcontinent immediately. The correct number of casualties could not be exactly known. However, death toll figures range from five hundred thousand to fifteen hundred thousand lives. It is clearly that displacement due to partition largest mass migration of thirteen million seen as largest migration in twentieth century (Shaikh R. A., 2009). A flood of refugees not only caused an epochal change in the demographic balance between the rural and urban sector but also strengthened the bureaucracy in Pakistan (Khan, 2017).

The nascent civil society of Pakistan vigorously responded to the social welfare needs of the people especially playing an important role in rehabilitation of Muhajirs (migrants) who migrated from India caused a major challenge. The budding Civil Society of Pakistan effectively acted in tackling their rehabilitation and settlement issues (Pasha & Iqbal, 2003). Various CSOs built new small health units, maternity centers and hospitals where medication services were being provided without any cost to these them (Asian Development Bank, 2009).

Immediate after partition 1947, the budding civil society of Pakistan actively involved in the various activities of accommodation and relief to migrants people from India. The Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam, the Girl Guides (GG), Pakistan Red Cross Society (PRCS) and National Guards (NG) worked widely for food, shelter, education, health facilities and other facilities (Asian Development Bank, 2009). Besides, some steps were taken to integrate refugees into local communities and to create social cohesion and support networks. Therefore, community centers were set up to support refugees particularly for national sense, ownership and integration (Khan, 2017).

Over time, the civil society of Pakistan shifted initiatives from early relief and recovery phase to the permanent settlement and rehabilitation of refugees migrated from India. They were The Family Welfare Cooperative Housing Society

(FWCHS) Lahore, the Social Welfare Society (SWS) Lahore, Islamic Relief and Charitable Trusts (IRCT) and Mujahid Welfare Organization (MWO). Besides, activists of different CSOs worked closely with provincial governments and municipal corporations Karachi, Lahore, and Quetta for refugees' settlement and rehabilitation. Similarly, civil society of Pakistan faced other challenges including communal riots, poverty reduction, education facilities, healthcare provision, women's issues, population control, ethnic clashes, cultural disharmony and other political problems (Khan, 2021).

Fatima Jinnah was deeply involved in social welfare activities especially specific to women in Pakistan. Fatima Jinnah (1893-1967) was a prominent personality of Pakistan movement. She was the younger sister of Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the first Governor-General of Pakistan. She was rendered her tireless efforts in the Pakistan Movement by working alongside her brother and other leaders to achieve separate and independent homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. Her political activism was aimed to make Pakistan a just and equitable society and welfare state. She contested Presidential Election in 1965 as joint candidate of Combined Opposition Parties (COP) (Nation, 2017).

She also served as the Leader of the Opposition of Pakistan from 1960 until her death in 1967. She led the AIML (Women Wing) vigorous and generous support to the cause of migrants' relief, rehabilitation and other social services. She also worked with All India Women's Conference (AIWC). Fatima Jinnah emphasized on the active participation of women in politics as well as in other fields of life. She was a fervent supporter of equal opportunities for men and women. The Pakistan Girls Guides Association (PGGA) was organized by Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah under the auspices of Ms. Fatima Jinnah on December 29, 1947. Mr. Jinnah became the life patron of the PGGA on her request. Ms. Begum G.A. Khan was elected as the Chief Commissioner of the forum (Nation, 2017).

Begum Rehna Liaquat Ali Khan laid foundation of Women's Volunteer Service for Refugees Rehabilitation (WVSRR) in 1948. Begum Rehana

Liaquat Ali Khan also known Gul-i-Rehna (1905 - 1990) was wife of Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan. Her origin name was Sheila Irene Pant. She was remained as the first lady of Pakistan 1947-51. She was also leading economist and politician and actively took part in Pakistan movement and in making the new nation prosperous after partition in August 1947. Begum Rehna Liaquat Ali Khan served as the Governor of Sindh province from February 15, 1973, to February 28, 1976. Her tenure as Governor was memorable for many reasons as she was the first woman to hold this office in Pakistan. Later on, she also founded the Pakistan's Women's National Guides (PWNG) and Pakistan Women's Naval Reserves (PWNR) in 1949 (Asian Development Bank, 2009).

The WVSRR played significant role in early relief and later rehabilitation activities for the refugees. These activities include provision of food, cloth, shelter, healthcare and others. Begum Rehana Liaquat also established All Pakistan Women Association (APWA) in 1949 and Liaquat Memorial Fund (LMF) in 1951 after the death of his husband Liaquat Ali Khan (Rehman, 2006). Similarly, Begum Jehan Ara Shah Nawaz founded United Front for Women's Rights (UFWR) and Pakistan family Planning Association (PFPA) in 1953. (Asian Development Bank, May 2009). These voluntary independent forums laid the foundation of future civil society activism in Pakistan.

In the initial years after partition, a substantial number of migrants from India arrived in Pakistan. This provided a unique opportunity to the budding civil society of Pakistan to function and gain recognition as a major stakeholder. Subsequently, the civil society of Pakistan was involved in providing relief and rehabilitation activities to refugees and other basic necessities. In the 1950s, voluntary independent forums and other charity organizations sustained their efforts to assist with migrant rehabilitation and social services. During the time, some urban-based social welfare organizations started to operate at a national level. The (APWA) was one of them. Primarily, these independent forums concentrated on advocacy and efforts made at protecting women's rights in Pakistan. It marked a significant

step towards addressing gender issues and promoting social justice in Pakistan (Pasha & Iqbal, 2003).

The Edhi Foundation (EF) was founded by Abdul Sattar Edhi in 1951 Abdul Sattar Edhi (1928-2016) a well-regarded Pakistani humanitarian, philanthropist, social activist and ascetic. Originally, he belongs to Bantva Gujarat British India. After the partition 1947, he migrated from India to Pakistan and settled in Karachi. Initially, Abdul Sattar Edhi founded a small dispensary in Karachi in 1951 to provide basic healthcare facilities to lowest income poor families. This simple beginning led to the establishment of what would become the Edhi Foundation. Therefore, he set up and ran the Edhi Foundation one of the largest social welfare organizations of Pakistan. He with his family fully devoted lives for social and philanthropic works for humanity (Yousaf, 2020). Basically, it is aimed to provide extensive humanitarian works like essential services to the poorest of the poor sections of the country. It is a premier welfare organization emerged after the creation of Pakistan that has grown with great public trust due to its remarkable and keen voluntary services particularly in the situation of emergency control and management. The EF has largest ambulance vehicle service in Pakistan which offers free emergency medical transportation across Pakistan. The foundation also owns many hospitals, dispensaries and maternity homes where provides free healthcare to poor and marginalized people. Besides, the Edhi Foundation runs numerous mobile clinics for far-flung remote and underserved regions to provide medical services (Yousaf, 2020).

Furthermore, the Edhi Foundation has been playing very important role in disaster management activities including relief, recovery and rehabilitation activities since its inception. It has provided humanitarian aid to the affected by conflicts worldwide. The Foundation also manages many orphanages and shelter homes for elderly individuals deprived from family support. The foundation provided food and health facilities in them. Similarly, the Edhi Foundation provides shelters, food and health facilities to those women who are victims of domestic violence

and abandonment. The organization provides free burial and funeral services to those poor and unprivileged people who cannot afford. It is unique service of the Foundation that it collects and buries unclaimed bodies with proper records (Candland, 2024).

In 1951, the Government of Pakistan sought to get assistance from the UNO in socio-economic development programs. Consequently, the UNO Social Welfare Consultants (SWC) arrived in Karachi in 1952 which is marked an important event in the economic history of Pakistan. In view of extreme deficiency of trained people, the consultant advised to prioritize social work training and other resource development initiatives in Pakistan. In view of advice, the government devised a comprehensive plan for structured social welfare program. Resultantly, the government established a Planning Board and Social Welfare section (SWS) to tasked policy draft for social development of Pakistan (Rehmatullah, 2002).

In 1956, the Government of Pakistan established National Council of Social Welfare (NCSW) to support voluntary social organizations and independent associations by providing financial assistance, capacity building and consultative services. Later on, provincial councils were set up to assist in the extension and coordination of voluntary welfare organizations across all the provinces. The prime aim of the council was to extend financial, material and technical assistance to non-profitable sector of Pakistan so that it would be able as stakeholder for social sector development of Pakistan. (Rehman, 2006). Later on, it was declared a consultative forum and its actual mandate and functions were shifted to the Directorate General of Social Welfare (DGSW) (SPDC, 2001).

To sum up, Pakistan inherited a colonial legacy of highly centralized and authoritative state structures with fragmented and fractured civil society. In spite these gigantic challenges, the early Civil Society of Pakistan played an active in the country's early formative years particularly in the rehabilitation of migrants from India after Partition 1947. However, political instability, military influence, bureaucratic dominance and

weak democratic traditions hindered its development in Pakistan. However, organizations such as the EF, APWA, and others emerged as key actors in social welfare, disaster relief and advocacy. Over time, the Civil Society of Pakistan evolved from informal relief efforts to more structured engagements in education, healthcare, human rights and advocacy.

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