Transformation from Ethnicity to Violence: A Case Study of Mutahida Qaumi Movement, 1983-2013

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ABSTRACT

Migration from Muslim minority provinces of India at the time of partition in 1947 changed the ethnic composition of the urban areas of Sindh (second largest province of Pakistan) particularly of Karachi. The migrants called themselves Mahajirs. During 1960s, government policy of concentrating industrial growth in Karachi stimulated huge internal migration of other groups too like Pakhtun and Punjabi, which further complicated the ethnic scenario of the region. Sindhi-Mahajir conflict in initial stage was a struggle for identity between migrants and native Sindhis but later it became a tussle over the allocation of resources between them. The situation became complex with the passage of time owing to the presence of other stakeholders in the power politics—Pakhtun and Punjabi settlers. This conflict gave way to the formation of Mahajir identity which resulted in emergence of Mahajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) in 1980s.

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It emerged as a strong regional political party. Internal divides of this party stimulated violence in the major cities of Sindh, particularly in Karachi. Using primary and secondary sources, this study intends to explore the factors behind the emergence of Mahajir identity and rise of ethnic conflict leading to violence in major cities of Sindh. It also studies the rise of MQM and its role in the ethnic conflict in urban Sindh and in the politics of Pakistan.

Introduction

Pakistan has a heterogenic society where different ethnic groups were living together before independence. Federal form of government managed the presence of sub nations and their interests by distribution of power between centre and the provinces. However, the secession of the East Pakistan in 1971 was an irreversible setback to the federation of Pakistan on one hand and a warning to ponder the regional and ethnic interests in the leftover Pakistan. Ideologically East and West Pakistan were united but ethnic differences in combination with other problems led to the separation of the former. Later, Pakistan continued to rife with ethnic problems in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab. However, the ethnic problem of Sindh is more complex. These problems were due to non-representative political culture, extended military rule, unequal economic distribution among the regions and communities, and politicization of regional issues. These ethnic sentiments were further exploited by foreign involvement. Malik contends that:

> The regional classification, provincialism, historic and cultural postulations, lingual commonalities, and economic denominators have, with variations, continued to play a major role in the formation and transformation of ethno-nationalist movement in the country.[1]

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1   Iftikhar H. Malik, *State and Civil Society in Pakistan: Politics of Authority, Ideology and Identity* (Macmillan, 1997), 172. Also quoted in Farhan Hanif Siddiqi, *Politics of Ethnicity in Pakistan: The Baloch, Sindhi and Mahajir Ethnic Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 47. See Also Yonatan Tesfaye Fessha, "Institutional Recognition and Accommodation of Ethnic

However, the role of government and its mishandling of different nationalities also resulted in the rise of ethnic divide in Pakistan.

Migration at the time of partition of India changed the ethnic composition of Sindh province. Karachi, the capital of Sindh, is hub of economic activity in Pakistan and, therefore, each group, living in Sindh, wanted to establish its hold in Karachi. Sindhi-Mahajir conflict at the initial stage was a struggle for identity but later it became a tussle over the allocation of resources which turned into ethnic conflict between native Sindhis and Mahajirs. The situation became complex owing to the presence of other stakeholders in this power politics; Pakhtun and Punjabi settlers. This conflict gave way to rise of Mahajir identity which resulted in the emergence of the MQM in 1980s. It emerged as a strong regional political party which resorted to political violence with all the rival groups in urban Sindh with its sizeable militant wing. Later, internal divisions of this party further stimulated violence in the major cities of Sindh, particularly Karachi and Hyderabad.

During the democratic transition in post-Zia period since 1988, the MQM remained coalition partner in all the governments except one and also in opposition later in alternative spells. Due to its dominant position in urban Sindh especially Karachi and Hyderabad, it secured five per cent of national vote which was translated into 13 seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan in the General Elections of 1988 and 1990. This success was supported by 28 seats in Sindh Provincial Assembly. The MQM boycotted the elections of 1993. In the national elections of 1997 it again won 12 seats claiming a share of slightly fewer than five per cent of national votes.[2] These results provided the MQM

Diversity: Federalism in South Africa and Ethiopia", Ph. D Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Law, University of the Western Cape, June 9, 2008 and *Asian Survey*, 36, no. 7 (July, 1996): 673-90.

2   This number was secured in a House of 207. Later, in 2002, number of National Assembly seats were increased to 342.

leverage to bargain with every government on its own terms to enforce its agenda.

Despite claims of being a democratic party it joined hands with the military government of General Musharraf. It later joined the PPP government following its victory in the elections of 2008 and enjoyed multiple privileges as a coalition partner both in the centre and provincial governments of Sindh. But the terms of coalition were dictated by MQM and it threatened to break up with the elected governments if they failed to accommodate its demands.[3] This attitude gave rise to strong politicization on an ethnic basis between Sindhis and Mahajirs, but also with Pakhtuns as one of the major stakeholders. The demand to divide Sindh on ethnic grounds has been visible in wall chalking, though MQM denied that.[4]

This paper studies the factors that led to the emergence of MQM and the reasons for which it resorted to violence on ethnic basis. It also studies the role of different political and military governments in aggravating the nature and volume of ethnic conflict leading to ethnic violence *viz-a-viz* the Mahajir-Sindhi problem in urban Sindh. It argues that violence along ethnic lines leads to more rapid polarization than normally expected in a pluralistic society. That was exactly what happened when MQM took to violence as an ultimate resort to meet Mahajirs' socio-economic challenges.

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3   It walked out of coalition government just 18 days before the elections in 2013.

4   In 2012, the Sindhi leaders demanded ban on the rallies and public gatherings demanding a separate Mahajir province. "The Leaders of the Sindh United Party, Jeay Sindh Tehreek (Long Live Sindh), Awami Jamhori Party (Peoples' Democratic Party), Awami Tehreek (Peoples' Movement), and Sindh Dost (Sindh's Friend) Democratic Party also expressed their reservations over calls for a separate province." Imtiaz Ali and Zeeshan Azmat, "PPP Sees Conspiracy in Mahajir Province Demand," May 20, 2012,http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-4-109267-PPP-sees-conspiracy-in-Mohajir-province-demand

Theoretical Framework

Identity consciousness divides a nation into different groups on the basis of racial, lingual or regional division. An important factor in definition and classification of interests and identity formation is further added to this division. Many countries in the contemporary world are suffering from such problems. In the post-World War-II era, ideology has been replaced by ethnicity as a source of political activism in multiple regions. In the age of globalization, ethnic and separatist movements have become a challenge to the new world order.[5] Ethno-linguistic groups are claiming a separate political identity, causing the devolution of power from the national level to the provinces and in some cases to the local level. These communities which have been living within the nation state now are asserting their political strength in most of the cases by demanding provincial autonomy if not complete independence.[6]

Ethnicity, basically, refers to the feelings of oneness of a group, because of sharing the same culture, language, traditions, region, food, and customs. Language is the main tool of uniting an ethnic group. Cartwright indicated that ethnic leadership appeals to and influences the community through direct contact for collective or group benefits, which can be either of a material or of an intangible nature. It is true particularly, in the event of the political structure being in the hands of a particular dominant ethnic group that subordinates other/others.[7]

Everybody is a part of an ethnic group which is natural as well as unavoidable but when a group begins to feel itself superior to others by virtue of its especial traits, it becomes

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5   Malik, *State and Civil Society in Pakistan*, 172.

6   "Nation Identity, Strategic Culture and Security Interests: Three Hypothesis," *SIIS Journal, n*o. 2 (2003) retrieved on July 1, 2012. *www.irchina.org/en/xueren/china/view.asp?id=863,*.

7   John Cartwright, *Political Leadership in Sierra Leone* (London: Croomhelm, 1978), 117.

the starting point of formation of an ethnicity. The sense of superiority leads to violating and discriminating against the rights of other people. Group tussle for power sharing, societal rewards and resources is ethnicity in itself. In fact, the identities formed on common language base (primordial) and taking political forms (instrumental), cause ethnic competition and conflict. The factors contributing to ethnic competition include a sense of belonging and security; the fear of being deprived of the resources; feeling powerless; and the superiority of one's culture and language over the others.[8]

Fredrick Barth defines ethnicity as "social organization of cultural difference." [9] When a group of people condition their actions on ethnic lines in everyday life, it is the social dimension of ethnicity. Fearon says that "Ethnicity can be socially relevant in a country without it being much politicized, and the degree to which ethnicity is politicized can vary across countries and over time."[10] Pakistan has different ethnic groups mainly from its four provinces, and a fifth ethnic group composed of migrants from India called Mahajir. They all are the example of primordial ethnicity that later became political. In addition to these five groups, other small ethnic groups are also there. The Table 1 shows division of these ethnic groups. Each group has dominant position in its area.

8　　Michael Hechter, "Response to Cohen: Max Weber on Ethnicity and Ethnic Change," *American Journal of Sociology*, 81, no. 5 (March 1976): 1162-68.

9　　Muhammad Shahid Khan, "The Politics of Identity: Ethno-Political Identity," *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 30, no. 2 (2009). See also Smith, *Champion Encyclopaedia of Anthropology*, 706 and 152.

10　James D. Fearon, "Ethnic Mobilization and Ethnic Violence," Department of Political Science, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6044, forthcoming in the Oxford Handbook of Political Economy. August 11, 2004.

Table 1: ETHNIC GROUPS AND THEIR COMPOSITION

Ethnic Group	Percentage of the Total Population and the Major Ethnic Group
Punjabis	44.15
Pakhtun	15.42
Sindhi	14.1
Siraiki	10.53
Mahajir	7.57
Baloch	3.57
Others	4.66

SOURCE: Syed Afzal Moshadi Shah and Shehla Amjad, "Cultural Diversity in Pakistan: National vs Provincial," *http://www.mcser.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=78%3Asyed-afzal-moshadi-shah-shehla-amjad&Itemid=63*, retrieved on 29-06-2013.

Sindhi Identity

Sindhi people are inhabitants of Indus River Civilization, rich in culture and traditions. They have been living in Sindh for centuries. A few Baloch tribes are also settled in Sindh. Some of them are Sindhi speaking while some are still Balochi speaking but they have assimilated in the host society. Same is the case of people living on bordering areas of Punjab. They are Seraiki speaking but have adopted Sindhi culture and traditions.[11] Prior to partition, urban Sindh was inhabited predominantly by Hindus and migrants. No Sindhi salaried class existed. Business and administration was in the hands of migrants even before partition.[12]

The Sindhi nationalism and consciousness of separate identity was there even before partition of India. Sindhi was the only provincial language which was used as a medium of instruction in educational institutions before partition

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11   Stewart Morris, "Why has Pakistan Experienced so much Ethnic and Sectarian Strife since 1947?," Paper 27, *the Sociology and Politics of South Asia*, Retrieved on December 12 2012. *http://www.stewartmorris.com/essays/27Chandra4.pdf*,.

12   Moonis Ahmer, "Pakistan: The Sindhi-Mohajir Conflict," in Montique Makenkamp (ed.), *Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia* (London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2003), 452.

because Sindhi leadership refused to adopt Urdu for this purpose. It was also the official language in lower courts, administration and journalism.[13]

The Sindh Assembly was the first to vote in favour of Pakistan in 1947, but at the same time Sindh government was against the decision of making Karachi as the capital of new state of Pakistan because in that case they had to lose control over the revenues of Karachi port. The influx of Mahajirs was attached with this decision which was not accepted by native Sindhis. Later developments further intensified the sentiments of nationalism resulting in the formation of nationalist movements like *Jye-Sindh* (Long-Live Sindh).[14] The allocation/sharing of resources became the source of conflict between the migrants and the native Sindhis. In fact it sowed the seed of conflict between Mahajirs and Sindhis.[15]

Mahajir Identity

Mahajir is a term used by and for those people who migrated to Pakistan following the Partition of India in 1947. Muhammad Waseem defined Mahajir as a community that does "not belong to any of the nationalities of Pakistan (Punjabis, Sindhis, Balochs, or Pakhtuns) or migrated from those areas of East Punjab whose language and culture was not Punjabi."[16] They were more educated and urbanized. They earned their place in business and bureaucracy.

The process of identity formation in migrants from India started in the initial settlement period after partition. Mahajirs

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13   Muhammad Fayyaz, "Ethnic Conflict in Sindh, Background Paper," PILDAT, Retrieved on May 15, 2013. *http://www.pildat.org/publications/publication/Conflict_management/EthnicConflictinSindhOctober2011*.pdf.

14   Fayyaz, "Ethnic Conflict in Sindh".

15   Lionel Baixas, "Thematic Chronology of Mass Violence in Pakistan," online *Encyclopaedia of Mass Violence*, June 24, 2008, Retrieved on December 13, 2012. *http://www.massiveviolence.org/PdfVersion?id_article=112*.

16   Mohammad Waseem, "Ethnic Conflicts in Pakistan: The Case of MQM," *Pakistan Development Review,* 35: 4 part II (winter 1996): 618.

who settled in the Punjab and KP were absorbed in the host societies culturally or at least accepted the dominance of the latter, largely because of having more or less the same culture and language. But in Sindh, the case was entirely different. The first reason was that the Mahajirs were really different from the locals in language, culture, living style and education. The native Sindhis were predominantly rural based. Since Mahajirs enjoyed unchallenged position in the urban areas, therefore learning local language and adopting local culture was not necessarily a matter of survival for them. The second reason was that their own identity was a symbol of pride since they had been on the frontline in the struggle for Pakistan from the platform of Muslim League. The third reason was their better education, which was the source of their upward mobility in business and jobs. Mahajir became the dominant community in trade and businesses in both public and private sectors. This superiority of Mahajir hindered the process of assimilation leading to intensification of ethnic sentiments after a generation in both new and old Sindhis.[17]

Fragile democracy in the early period of newly born state had problems with developing a representative political culture, when all political power was in the hands of a bureaucracy which was overwhelmingly dominated by Mahajirs. On the other hand, Sindhis belonging to rural class were under the clutches of feudal class. The literacy rate was low and they were negligible in bureaucracy. The power equation in terms of economic, social and political power was drastically imbalanced in favour of Mahajir.

The first challenge to the dominance of the Mahajirs came when the army, dominated by Punjabis and Pakhtuns, imposed Martial Law in Pakistan in 1958 and later shifted the capital of the country from Karachi to Islamabad in 1960. It was a permanent blow to their dominant position in

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17   Tariq Rehman, *Language and Politics* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10-11.

government institutions and decision making. The reason was the emergence of local groups, which assumed predominant power especially Punjabis and Pakhtuns in the new capital. Later in 1980s the socio-economic changes in cities of Sindh like Karachi and Hyderabad due to Pakhtun dominance in economy further reduced the influence of the Mahajir community leading to riots.[18] Since Mahajir were a minority group, they felt insecure against the dominance of native Sindhis who started asserting their claims on all economic and political offices in their home province. That sense of insecurity resulted into politicization of the community. In such a scenario, Mahajirs felt the need of a separate political party based on their separate identity. Later the formation of MQM, an ethnic political party, shifted Mahajir community's loyalties and the Mahajir identity became synonym with the MQM.

The General Elections of 1970 amplified the ethnic divide within the province when the native Sindhi voted for the PPP, under the leadership of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, a Sindhi feudal landowner. The Mahajirs voted for Urdu speaking candidates in cities. Sindhis were fighting for keeping political control over province. That resulted in a huge gulf between Mahajirs and Sindhis culturally and socially. Hostility further mounted due to political decisions of the government. The first decision which stimulated the main phase of ethnic hostility appeared in 1972 when the PPP government announced a quota system for jobs and places in government educational institutions. It was decided that 60 percent of the seats would be given to the rural areas and 40 per cent seats to urban areas; nationalization of industry and banks also benefited native Sindhis and harmed Mahajirs' interests. Sindhi language was imposed as a medium of instruction in schools and language of courts. Mahajirs felt the need to get politically organized to defend

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18   Rodney W. Jones, "The Prospects for State Failure in Pakistan: Ethnic, Regional, and Sectarian Fissures,"
      http://www.policyarchitects.org/pdf/Pak_statefailure_ExSumm.pdf

their economic survival.[19] All these decisions increased the divide between the Mahajirs and native communities.

The General Zia's period further deepened the ethnic divide in the province. Pakhtuns and Punjabis in Sindh became economically active, with Pakhtuns capturing local transport system and Punjabis entering into job market.[20] They also earned their place in business to threaten Mahajir control in Karachi and Hyderabad. The Mahajirs anxious about their social and economic position decided to organise a political party to defend their interests. In August, 1984 Altaf Hussain formally declared the creation of MQM. He held the establishment responsible for discrimination against Mahajirs and for violating their socioeconomic rights. There was clear evidence that General Zia supported the MQM as a balancing force to the PPP's influence in Sindh. With the creation of MQM, confrontation continued albeit the strategy of reconciliation was also taken up by both Mahajirs and Sindhis in an effort to unite against common rivals; Pakhtuns and Punjabis. In fact the MQM had to confront all major ethnic groups in urban Sindh and the federal and provincial security forces as well.[21] The MQM handled all the conflicts on behalf of Mahajirs as a sole representative of the Mahajir community.

Emergence of Mahajir Qaumi Movement

The MQM is an ethno-linguistic political movement cum political party.[22] It was a response to the squeezing socio-

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19   Ahmer, "Pakistan: The Sindhi-Mohajir Conflict."

20   Mahajirs had preferential treatment in jobs starting from teaching to office jobs, market jobs to small and big business on their arrival to fill the vacuum left by strong Hindu community of Sindh. Asim Sajjad Akhtar, "The Mahajir Mind," *Dawn,* August 26, 2018.

21   Moonis Ahmer, "Ethnicity and State Power in Pakistan, Karachi Crisis," *Asian Survey,* 36, no. 10 (October 1996), 1032. See also Iftikhar H. Malik, "Ethno-Nationalism in Pakistan: A Commentary on Mahajir Qaumi Mahaz (MQM) in Sindh", *Journal of South Asian Studies* 18, no. 2 (1995): 12.

22   Tariq Rehman, "Language and Ethnicity in Pakistan," *Asian Survey* 37, no. 9 (Spring, 1997): 833-39.

economic opportunities available to Mahajirs in the host society when they migrated from India and landed in Sindh.[23] Students played an important role in promoting the sense of Mahajir nationalism because they suffered directly due to imposition of quota system in institutions of higher education and jobs. They united themselves in the form of All Pakistan Mahajir Student Organization (APMSO) in 1978. General Zia-ul-Haq's policies provided fertile grounds to raise the slogan of 'Mahajir Identity'.[24] The APMSO was formed by Altaf Hussain who was a student in Karachi University. APMSO started mobilizing the young Mahajirs to launch struggle for their rights.[25]

Later, Altaf Hussain formed the Mahajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) in March 1984 by combining all cadres of the APMSO.[26] It happened just six days after General Zia-ul-Haq extended the quota system for another 10 years. [27] The founder of MQM and most of its activists were from lower middle class and experienced unemployment and abuse of power from police, feudal lords, and bureaucracy. Altaf Hussain himself came from such a background. He is a Karachi-born Mahajir who graduated from the Pharmacy Department of Karachi University. He along with his other loyal friends such as, Farooq Sattar, Abdul Razzak Khan,

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23   These opportunities were available due to migration of the educated Hindu community to India, virtually all from urban Sindh, they enjoyed privileged position and became key actors in cities especially Karachi, the national capital at that time.

24   Mahajir students established this organization to protect the interests of Mahajir students. First challenge to this organization came from Islami Jamiat-i-Talaba (Islamic Student Federation; a student wing of Jamait-i-Islami). Second challenge was from Peoples' Student Federation, which resulted in loss of life and militancy in the student organizations.

25   Malik, "Ethno-Nationalism in Pakistan".

26   There were evidences that Gen. Zia supported its emergence as an opposition party to the PPP. The MQM challenged the PPP in its home ground and reduced its influence to the rural Sindh. Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 452-53.

27   Ahmer, "Ethnicity and State Power in Pakistan: Karachi Crisis".

Imran Farooq, and Azeem Tariq played an important role in mobilizing the Mahajir identity.

Although the MQM began with raising voice for the rights of Mahajirs, it later became a full-fledged regional political party, the second largest in Sindh, with an ability to influence the national politics. Its liberal and progressive manifesto attracted the educated people. However, its secular ideology is a source of uneasiness for many.

Political Struggle of MQM

The MQM established its hold over the Mahajir community by protecting their interests and articulating their demands. It also started public welfare like free dispensaries, free bazaars and maintenance services etc. Later, it was alleged to be an ethnic party responsible for intimidation of opponents, violence, killings and other terrorist activities.[28] Despite all allegations, the MQM continued to exist as the most powerful political force in urban Sindh. Ethnic divide further augmented due to party-less elections conducted by General Zia in 1985. In Karachi and other areas of urban Sindh, the MQM supported candidates won the elections. The MQM registered its presence through landslide victory in the local body elections of 1987 in Karachi and other urban areas of Sindh just after three years of its emergence.

In 1988, the PPP won the general elections and formed coalition government with the MQM's support in Sindh. Both the parties signed Karachi Accord which was named as "Charter of Peace, Love and Rights". Leadership of both parties declared it an effort to unite the rural and urban Sindh.[29] The government of PPP pledged to implement that accord, but following the serious differences, the MQM broke

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28   Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History,* 453.

29   10 out of its 59 points were related to education. It also addressed the longstanding issues of domicile and job quotas. It demanded for compensation for the victims of Hyderabad bombing. *Dawn Overseas Weekly*, week ending December 14, 1988.

the agreement in 1989 blaming the former for not fulfilling its promises.

In 1997, its aims and goals began to embrace more national perspective. It renamed itself as the Mutahida Qaumi Movement (Joint National Movement) claiming itself a national organisation to bail out all deprived factions of Pakistan. The effort to extend its area of influence to the other provinces was checked due to rifts within the party which divided the MQM into two factions: MQM-Altaf and MQM-Haqiqi.[30]

The tension led to a wave of violence in Karachi that claimed a loss of several lives in cross firing between the APMSO and Peoples' Student Federation (PSF). The coalition between the PPP government and the MQM became quavered.[31] The day after the opposition tabled the no confidence move in the National Assembly, the MQM decided defection from the government. Altaf Hussain concluded a 17-point new accord with the IJI mainly highlighting the repatriation of Biharis.[32] Although the PPP government won with 12 votes, the loss of 14 MQM members was a serious blow to democratic process.[33] Although the MQM did not decide to walk out of government coalition in Sindh but it remained at forefront in the anti-PPP movement and conducted grand rally at the Quaid-i-Azam Mausoleum for the show of power. It was one of the largest in the political history of Pakistan which again resulted in a grave wave of violence with a death toll of 57. The MQM's

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30   *Dawn Overseas Weekly*, week ending December 14, 1988.

31   Three MQM ministers resigned from Sindh provincial government. Altaf Hussain declared that this violence is targeted due to the fear that MQM might not unite the oppressed classes against exploiters in Pakistan. *Dawn Overseas Weekly*, week ending, April 4, 1989.

32   Biharis were the Urdu speaking who migrated to East Pakistan at the time of partition of India in 1947. They were living in camps in Bangladesh since 1971, separation of East Pakistan.

33   Khalid-bin-Saeed, "The Three Worlds of Democracy in Pakistan," *Contemporary South Asia* 1, no. 1 (1992): 62.

show of power continued with increasing death toll. Ghulam Ishaq Khan, the then President of Pakistan, took notice of the situation and summoned Aitizaz Ahsen, the then Interior Minister to explain the deteriorating law and order situation in Karachi.[34] It adversely affected the already fragile economy and business because Karachi was the only port and the economic hub of Pakistan.

The rising violence led to change of Chief Minister Sindh from Mr. Qaim Ali Shah to Aftab Shaban Mirani. However this change could not address the wave of violence in urban Sindh. Law enforcement agencies failed to address the situation. The government got further panic when in Hyderabad, city police in a search operation for illegal weapons, killed 40 people.[35] Nonetheless, the inability of the government to deal with violence in urban Sindh by the MQM was one of the major reasons that led to the dismissal of Benazir government in 1990.

After the elections of October 1990, the MQM formed a coalition government with the Muslim League. During this period, differences emerged within MQM and its small faction detached from it. It was generally believed that this division was instituted by ruling Muslim League within the MQM to strengthen its position in Sindh. The then provincial government called Army to control violence in 1992 in the region. The federal government responded positively and launched military operation namely 'Operation Clean-Up'. The MQM responded with further strikes and attacks on the Pakistan Army. The Jinnah Purr controversy also played an important role in the political violence in Karachi. The army claimed to have discovered maps showing an independent Mahajir country and blamed the MQM for planning to

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34 *Dawn,* February 9, 1990.

35 Police version of the incident was that they opened fire in retaliation to the firing from the homes. Both parties claimed their innocence but whatever the real picture was, 200 people were killed in the protest against this incident in Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukhar.

separate Karachi from Pakistan.[36] The plot for secession was never proved and most people thought of it as a hoax. Nevertheless, Altaf Hussain left the country because warrants were issued for his arrest on murder charges. He resorted to self-exile and since then he has ruled the party organization through satellite phone from North London without physical presence in the country.[37]

The MQM boycotted the 1993 general elections as a protest against military operation but participated in the provincial elections. In 1993 elections, it again became the coalition partner of the Benazir government. But ethnic violence between two groups of Mahajirs continued with a little break in 1993 and 1994 claiming more than 1800 lives in Karachi.[38]

In order to get rid of its ethnic identity and to adopt a more nationalist outlook, the MQM changed its name officially. In 1997, it adopted its new name 'Muthhida Qaumi Movement'. It participated in the general elections of 2002 as well as in 2008 and became a coalition partner of the PPP in Sindh as well as in federal government. With Musharraf's military *coup* in 1999, the whole political scenario changed. Both Sindhis and Mahajirs had realized that living together is unavoidable. The only beneficiary of this situation would be either the military or bureaucracy. Both sides started avoiding direct violent confrontations. While the MQM announced to roll back all practices; tension from both sides has been eased and both have embraced a realistic coexistence.[39] However, far-reaching initiatives are required to develop a feeling of mutual trust and understanding among the ethnic groups.

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36   The Pakistan Army claimed that they recovered maps of a separate country for the Mahajirs which was to be named as Jinnahpur after the name of the Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Father of the Nation.

37   Hassan Askari Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 212.

38   Hassan Askari Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 212.

39   Ahmer, "Pakistan: The Sindhi-Mohajir Conflict."

MQM's Involvement in Illegitimate Activities

The bitterness of the language riots of 1972 led to the violent ethnic conflict which transformed Karachi into a battleground in post-1985 era.[40] Violent clashes continued to rise despite the fact that 1988 onwards the MQM remained part of every government. In order to exert pressure on provincial governments, the MQM launched huge rallies and strikes in Karachi. Those who did not want to close their business were forced through violence. At the same time, the MQM was alleged to be involved in generating funds for weapons and other illegal activities with the help of Mahajirs living abroad. Iftikhar Malik says that its involvement in terrorist activities created impression of being "a terrorist organization working for the Indian RAW and the former KGB to destabilize Pakistan."[41] However, no links could be proved at official level.

During the Operation Clean-Up in 1992, the army unearthed the MQM's torture cells.[42] The army registered cases of kidnapping, rape, extortion and murder against the MQM top leadership including Altaf Hussain, Farooq Sattar, Safder Baqri, Salim Shehzad and many others. To avoid arrest, most of the MQMs leaders went underground. The MQM became the pioneer in criminal and terrorist activities followed by other political parties working in Karachi and Hyderabad. Many politicians and landlords were breeding dacoit gangs and used them for looting and for political purposes as well. With the army action they feared that their fire-power will be targeted. They were giving direct

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40   Tariq Rahman, "Language, Politics and Power in Pakistan, the Case of Sindh."

41   Malik, *State and Civil Society in Pakistan,* 224.

42   Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *The Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) in Karachi January 1995-April 1996*, November 1, 1996, accessed on April 17, 2019.*https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a85d4.html*

statements that army was destroying Sindhis alone and protecting the MQM.[43]

The army was called many times to control unending violence in Karachi. In 1994, following the Army withdrawal, the paramilitary forces could not establish peace in Karachi. The ethnic and political conflict of Sindhi-Mahajir and the MQM splinter group was further complicated by sectarian violence. Although sectarian violence was a separate issue but it added to already complicated situation. More than 750 people were assassinated along with a great loss of public and official property in 1994 alone. The PPP government blamed Indian intelligence agencies for the bloodshed in Karachi. In 1995, more than 1,700 persons, including more than 200 law enforcement personnel, were killed in Karachi. The MQM remained in violent confrontation with the government.[44] In following years, the situation in Karachi was that of almost a civil war. The MQM adopted an agenda to hit and run. They demanded the withdrawal of cases against Altaf Hussain and their other leadership.[45]

Political instability in the federal government and expediency to work with the MQM as a coalition partner allowed the latter to play its ethnic agenda in urban Sindh. The MQM's terrorist activities continued during the Martial Law of 1999.[46] The whole nation and civil society were against the emergency rule imposed by General Musharraf and his unqualified dismissal of the Chief Justice of Pakistan, but the MQM, despite its claims to be a democratic party, stood with the military dictator. The MQM's activists killed 45 people in

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43   Huma Yusuf and Syed Shoaib Hassan, "Conflict Dynamics in Sindh," United States Institute of Peace, 2015, *https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW104-Conflict-Dynamics-in-Sindh-Final.pdf*

44   Yasser Hossain, "Whodunnit?," in *Newsline*, November 1995.

45   Malik, "Ethno-Nationalism in Pakistan".

46   "The Pakistani Lawyers' Movement and the Popular Currency of Judicial Power," Harvard Law Review Vol. 123, no. 7 (2010): 1705-26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40648496.

Karachi just to stop Chief Justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Chaudhry's visit to Karachi on May 12, 2007. They blocked the roads and attacked private T.V. channels. It started its rally to stop the rallies of PPP and ANP because both parties were supporting the then Chief Justice. Video clips captured by independent sources exposed that the MQM workers were involved in killing.[47]

General Musharraf made a deal with the MQM before it agreed to join the coalition government to improve law and order situation in Karachi. The MQM made a number of demands on the Musharraf's government which included compensation for the victims of extra judicial killings and the release of thousands of their activists from jail. But Musharraf could not deliver up to the MQM's expectations, so violence erupted again. It appeared that the problem of identity was real for the Mahajir community.

On November 22, 2009, the government released limited list of beneficiaries of a legal act called the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) which granted amnesty to public office holders, politicians, political workers and bureaucrats who were accused of corruption, embezzlement, money-laundering, murder and terrorism between January 1986 to October 12, 1999. The MQM leaders were included in the list of beneficiaries for political cases, but criminal cases against its leadership were not addressed under the NRO.[48]

Although, the MQM joined coalition government of the PPP in 2008-2012, it continued to threaten the stability of political system by blackmailing the government to follow its agenda.

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47   "May 2007- Karachi Violence," accessed on retrieved on July 16, 2013, *http://forum.pakistanidefence.com/index.php?showtopic=66653*.retrieved on 16/07/2013.

48   The MQM Chairman Altaf Hussain had 72 cases on him including 31 murder cases and 11 attempted murders. Farooq Sattar, another MQM leader had 23 cases including 5 murder cases and 4 attempted murders in Pakistan. The murder of Hakim Muhammad Said was also included. However, these cases have so far been in cold corner.

Violence did not end in Karachi and 2011 was the bloodiest year of street rivalries in Karachi. Hundreds of people were perished. Over 300 people were killed in sniper shootings in July 2011 and 47 were killed in a single day of August 17, 2011 when the MQM agreed to re-join the government. The Pakhtun-Mahajir rivalry became another source of unending violence between the activists of MQM and the ANP.

The worst kinds of violence and terrorist activities continued during the election campaign of 2013 with a high death toll of the MQM and the ANP workers including the innocent people, with clear targeting of law enforcing personnel. The native Sindhis and Mahajirs both have learned co-existence. They know that they have to live with each other, therefore peace is in their mutual interests, but the complex ethnic paranoia is out of their control.

Conclusion

The MQM is an ethno-linguistic movement that started in response to the declining socio-political and economic influence of the Mahajirs. It started against perceived threat by the provincial government's actions to protect Sindhi language and culture but later both the native Sindhis and Mahajirs learned coexistence. The complex socio-economic challenges with a complicated ethnic composition in cities of Sindh and especially in Karachi led to the realisation that the Mahajir community should be assembled politically to secure its interests. The counter politicization of other stakeholders, Pakhtuns, native Sindhis, Punjabis and others led to riots and escalating violence, which became uncontrollable by any government of Pakistan.

Initially, during 1970s it was possible to solve the problem through negotiations and by developing trust among old Sindhis and new Sindhis. But the over reliance on ideology, and ignoring regional and linguistic identities led to obfuscating the problem. Non-representative culture, prolonged military rule and fragile democracies all contributed to complicate the situation. No government, either military or civilian, could develop trust through

negotiations among the stakeholders. Although the conspiracy theory of foreign involvement in Karachi cannot be denied but the actual conflict in Sindh is mismanagement of the issues of inhabitants of this region by the federal and provincial governments. In the process of politicization of ethnicity, the MQM resorted to violence to secure the interests of a community which became a synonym with Karachi. The major source of violence in Karachi is the non-compromising attitudes of the MQM and the ANP on the socio-economic interests of their communities. A broader political dialogue among all stakeholders, facilitated by the civil society could be a hope for ending violence in Karachi. Before that as a confidence building measure fair trial of all the major incidences of violence such as, Sohrab Goth incident, 1991 Karachi violence, Operation Clean-Up, and May 12, 2007 incident should be conducted to bring peace in urban Sindh.