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“Main Nahin Manta” I Refuse to Accept: The Left and the Struggle for Civil and Democratic Rights in Pakistan, 1947–1977

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Abstract

*The left of Pakistan presents the mirror image of the country's religious right: a second movement without an electorate that conducted its politics through the public arena. This article reconstructs the left's struggle for the civil, democratic, and federal rights of Pakistan's citizens between 1947 and 1977, through the editorial voice of the Pakistan Times and Imroze, the assembly interventions against the safety acts, the student movement of 1953, the defense of the Bengali language and provincial autonomy, the resistance poetry that carried the argument past the censor, and the mass movement of 1968–69 that carried it into the streets. The state answered this arena, unlike the arena of the religious right, with bans, seizures, and imprisonment rather than concession: the Communist Party outlawed in 1954, the Progressive Papers seized in 1959, the movement's energies absorbed and then repressed by the Pakistan People's Party after 1972. Yet the left's bequest proved durable in a different register. It wrote the democratic vocabulary of Pakistani politics, *jumhur*, *dastoor*, *awam*, *fundamental rights*, so completely that even the governments that broke it campaigned in its language, and its refusals, condensed in Habib Jalib's refrain, outlived every regime they refused.*

Keywords: *Pakistani left; civil rights; democracy; press freedom; Progressive Papers; Habib Jalib; provincial autonomy; public arenas*

Introduction

In the hill station of Murree, at a mushaira attended by government advisers and high officials, a poet stood up during the Ayub years and rejected the constitution of Pakistan to its face. Habib Jalib's poem “Dastoor,” built on the refrain *Main Nahin Manta*, I refuse to accept, dismissed the basic law of 1962 as a lamp burning only in mansions, and the recitation, before the very servants of the regime it defied, took the country by storm; within months the poem was traveling from platform to platform, its title advertised on rally posters to swell the crowds.¹ The scene condenses this article's subject. A movement that never held office, never commanded a major electorate, and spent much of the period banned or jailed, nonetheless conducted, in public, the most sustained argument for democracy in Pakistan's first three decades, and conducted it so memorably that its refusals became the common property of the crowd.

By the left this article means a connected family of formations rather than a single party. Its institutional core ran from the Communist Party of Pakistan, founded out of the Indian party at partition, through the National Awami Party that succeeded it after the ban; its cultural wing was

¹Habib Jalib, *Kulliyat-e-Habib Jalib* (Lahore: Mawwara, 2005).

the Progressive Writers' Association and the literary world around it; its press was the Progressive Papers Limited, publisher of the English-language Pakistan Times and the Urdu Imroze; and its social base lay in the trade unions and student federations of the cities. The article's argument is that this left was the mirror image of the religious right examined in a companion study: a second movement without an electorate operating through the public arena, but with the opposite fate, for where the state purchased the right's calm with constitutional text, it answered the left's pressure with bans, seizures, and jail, and yet it was the left's vocabulary that Pakistani politics ended by speaking.²

A firewall must be declared at the outset, because parts of the left's story are already in print. The left's ideological contest with the religious right over Islam, nationalism, and culture, the debates of Safdar Mir and Maududi, Faiz's pluralist account of Pakistani culture, the loyalty controversies with Hasan Askari and M. D. Taseer, and the partition poetry, has been documented in a published study, as has the communists' alliance with the Muslim League in the 1940s; the League's own commitments of that decade are treated in another.³ This article therefore holds itself to the question those studies left open: not what the left believed about the idea of Pakistan, but what it did, in press, assembly, procession, and verse, for the civil and democratic rights of the people who lived in it. The two inquiries meet, but they are not the same, and the second has never been told as one story.

The sources are the arena's own records, and they must be read with the arena's biases in view. The spine of the evidence is a systematic reading of the Pakistan Times and Imroze files across the period, the left's daily voice and the fullest record of its rights agenda; around the newspapers stand the assembly debates, the resolutions of the writers' organizations, the poetry that circulated where newsprint could not, and the memoir literature of the participants.⁴ The papers were partisan, which is precisely their value: an editorial is evidence of what its faction argued, dated and in its own words, and the protocol throughout is corroboration, the left press checked against the record of its adversaries and against the scholarship. Partisanship, handled so, is not a defect of this archive; it is the content under study.

The Inheritance: A Co-Founder's Promissory Notes

The left entered Pakistan not as an alien graft but as a junior co-founder, and the point governs everything that follows. The story is told elsewhere and needs only its conclusion here: the communists of the Punjab, on their party's instruction, joined the Muslim League in 1944, supplied it with organizers when it desperately needed rural reach against the Unionists, and gave it, in Danyal Latifi's manifesto, the most progressive platform the League ever ran on, with its planning, nationalization, minimum wages, and minority safeguards.⁵ Like the pirs whose parallel story this series has told, the left therefore held promissory notes from the founding: it had backed the demand for Pakistan on the explicit assumption that the new state would have

²Muhammad Shafi and Tahir Kamran, "Leftist Literati, Activists: Debating the Idea of Pakistan in Public Arenas (1947–77)," *Journal of Research in Humanities* 58, no. 2 (2022): 122–35. That article documents the left's ideological contest with the religious right and the loyalty debates among the literati; the religious right's own campaign is examined in a companion article derived from the same dissertation. The present study is confined to the left's struggle for civil, democratic, and federal rights, and does not repeat that material.

³Muhammad Shafi, "Debating the Idea of Pakistan as Modern Islamic State during 1940s," *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society* 34, no. 2 (2021): 45–60.

⁴This and the following sections draw on a systematic reading of the *Pakistan Times* and *Imroze* files, 1948–1977, held in the Lahore Museum Library, the Quaid-e-Azam Library, and the collections of Government College University, Lahore.

⁵Shafi and Kamran, "Leftist Literati"; Kamran Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam: Communist Politics and Class Activism in Pakistan, 1947–1972* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

room for progressive action, and after August 1947 it presented the notes, not for the Shariah, but for democracy, rights, and the welfare of what its writers called the awam, the people. The left's first investment in the new state was a printing press, and the choice reveals its theory of politics. Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din, the wealthy Lahore progressive who had crossed from Congress to the League, founded the Progressive Papers, launching the Pakistan Times on the eve of independence and the Urdu daily Imroze months after it, and gathered to them an extraordinary editorial company with Faiz Ahmad Faiz at its head.⁶ Where the religious right's first postcolonial instrument was the campaign and the left's Indian inheritance might have suggested the cell, the Pakistani left began with newspapers, because its wager was that the new state could be argued into keeping its promises. The wager gave the left its greatest instrument and its greatest vulnerability in one: a movement whose parliament was its press could be silenced by seizing it, and in time it was.

The Press as Parliament, 1948–53

Imroze declared its constitutional doctrine in its first editorial, and the doctrine was popular sovereignty. Writing under the title "Hum aur Aap," We and You, on 4 March 1948, Faiz Ahmad Faiz set out the paper's charter: the people of Pakistan were the real owners and guardians of the state, and the paper would judge every act of government from their side of the relationship.⁷ The formulation deserves a historian's pause. Seven months into independence, with the Constituent Assembly unelected by adult franchise, the ruling party unchallenged, and the constitutional future undrafted, a mass-circulation daily had defined the state as the people's property held in trust, which is the whole of democratic theory in a sentence. The left press would spend the next decade drawing out the entailments, and the state would spend it demonstrating how unwelcome they were.

The vocabulary the papers built became the argument itself, and two words carried most of the weight. Imroze wrote insistently of jumhur, the people as sovereign, arguing that every social, economic, and political step must be judged from the standpoint of the citizens as the state's real custodians; the Pakistan Times pressed the phrase unfiltered democracy, demanding rapid elections on adult franchise and unconditional fundamental rights, and both papers kept the rights of minorities, women, and the working classes standing on the agenda when no other institution would seat them.⁸ Vocabulary is the arena's infrastructure: a public that has words for popular sovereignty can demand it, and one that lacks them cannot. The left press was manufacturing the words, in Urdu and in English, week after week, and their subsequent career in every Pakistani democratic movement is this section's claim to significance.

When the executive enlarged its own powers, the left press treated the enlargement as a constitutional emergency, which in a functioning parliament an opposition would have done. Upon the Constituent Assembly's amendment of the independence framework to enhance the Governor-General's powers, Imroze published, on 22 July 1948, the editorial "Ain Mein Tarmeem," Amendment in the Constitution, objecting that an extraordinary piece of legislation had been passed in unholy haste and warning that exceptional laws demand exceptional circumstances, which the government had not shown.⁹ The episode set the pattern of the following years: the concentration of executive power that would culminate in the dismissals and

⁶Zamir Niazi, *The Press in Chains* (Karachi: Karachi Press Club, 1986); Saadia Toor, *The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

⁷Imroze (Lahore), March 4, 1948; Tahir Kamran and Muhammad Shafi, "Balancing Islam and Democracy: The Evolution of Pakistan's Constitutional Framework and Minority Rights, 1947–1958" (book chapter, forthcoming).

⁸Imroze (Lahore) and *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), editorial files, 1948–1958.

⁹Imroze (Lahore), July 22, 1948.

dissolutions of the 1950s was contested, at each step, most consistently in the columns of the left, so that the constitutional history of the period cannot be written from the official record alone without losing the argument the officials were overriding.

The left's boldest rhetorical stroke was to claim the founder for democracy, and Sibte Hassan made the claim with texts in hand. Against the drift toward detention, intolerance, and the theocratic reading of the state, the Marxist intellectual argued that the Muslim League and its rightist allies were bending democratic institutions to the interests of the landed elite, and that Jinnah's own public record refuted them: the Quaid-e-Azam had declared, in April 1946, "It is not for a theocracy, nor for a theocratic state," and had, whatever his religious idiom, publicly envisaged a modern democratic Muslim state.¹⁰ The maneuver mattered because it contested the ground the right claimed as its freehold. In the left's hands the founder became a civil-liberties authority, and the argument that democracy was Pakistan's founding promise, not an import against it, entered the arena where it has remained ever since.

Against the Safety Acts: The State Answers, 1948–59

The safety acts were the new state's first rights crisis, and the left led the resistance to them in the chamber itself. The public safety legislation of the early years licensed detention without trial, and Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din, almost alone on the League's own benches, turned the acts' genealogy against their authors: these were the instruments, he argued in the assembly, that the colonial power had used against Indians to suppress the discourse of freedom, and they were now being re-imposed upon the citizens of Pakistan in the name of the state's interests.¹¹ The argument's form is worth noting, for it became the left's signature: not an appeal to foreign standards but an audit of the state against its own founding claim, that independence had ended the subject's condition. A government that jailed without trial was, on this audit, continuing the raj under new management, and the charge stung precisely because it was framed in the state's own currency.

The writers organized the same resistance in their own estate, and paid for it in reputation before they paid in liberty. At the first conference of progressive writers and journalists in the new state, the assembled literati resolved against over-centralization, against the harassment and detention of political activists and intellectuals under the safety laws, and against the anti-democratic measures curtailing, as the resolution had it, the voices and pens of the country; the counterattack, in which the rightist critics arraigned the progressives as fifth columnists and demanded certificates of loyalty, is documented in the companion study and is recalled here only for what it proves, that a resolution on civil liberties was answerable, in the Pakistan of 1948, with an accusation of treason.¹² The exchange fixed the terms on which the rights struggle would be fought for thirty years: the left said rights, and the state's defenders heard sedition.

The students forced the rights question onto the street in January 1953, and the state's reply wrote the pattern in blood. The Democratic Students Federation, the left-led student body of Karachi, marched that month on a charter of educational demands, fee reductions, facilities, and the ordinary infrastructure of learning, and the police answered the processions with firing that left students dead in the capital's streets; the movement's aftermath, mass mourning, city-wide strikes, and a shaken government conceding demands it had refused to hear, demonstrated both faces of the arena at once.¹³ For the young men and women of the federations, the lesson of

¹⁰Sibte Hassan, *The Battle of Ideas in Pakistan* (Karachi: Pakistan Publishing House, 1986).

¹¹Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, *Debates* (Karachi: Government of Pakistan Press).

¹²Shafi and Kamran, "Leftist Literati"; Sheema Majeed, ed., *Maqalat-e-Muhammad Hasan Askari* (Lahore: Ilm-o-Irfan Publishers, 2001).

¹³Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam*.

1953 was the left's standard one, that the state answered petitions with force and force with concessions; for the state, the lesson was that the campuses had become the left's parade ground, a conclusion with a long future in the politics of Ayub's decade and after.

The formal machinery of the left was then dismantled in two strokes, and neither was answered by any court that mattered. The Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case of 1951, in which communists and sympathetic officers were tried in secret for an alleged coup design, gave the state its warrant and the right its polemic; three years later, in 1954, the Communist Party of Pakistan was banned outright, its assets seized and its cadres driven underground or into jail, extinguishing the organized center of the movement seven years into the state's life.¹⁴ The chronology bears emphasis against a persistent misremembering that dates the ban to 1955: the proscription came in July 1954, in the same season that broke the first Constituent Assembly, and the coincidence is instructive, for the executive that dissolved the parliament and the executive that outlawed the opposition's furthest wing were the same executive, clearing the same ground.

Around the bans stood a standing apparatus of press control, and its texture belongs in any rights history of the period. The instruments were various and cumulative, security laws under which editors could be detained, press advice by which officials dictated silence on specified subjects, the withholding of government advertising from disobedient papers, and the pre-censorship that martial law would later formalize, and the left press lived under all of them while its rivals lived under few.¹⁵ Zamir Niazi, the historian of Pakistani censorship, has catalogued the machinery; what the catalogue means for this article is that every editorial cited above was written under threat, which changes its evidentiary weight. A demand for unfiltered democracy printed by a paper that could be silenced for printing it is not commentary but action, undertaken at cost, and the historian should read the files accordingly.

The decapitation came in 1959, and it confirmed the left's instrument by destroying it. Within months of the coup, the Ayub regime seized the Progressive Papers under the security laws, taking the Pakistan Times, Imroze, and their sister publications out of the left's hands and converting them, in due course, into organs of the state's own trust; the parliament of newsprint that Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din had built was thereby nationalized against its purpose, its editors dispersed, its founder broken in the years before his death.¹⁶ The seizure is the exact counterpart, in this article's mirror-image scheme, of the concessions catalogued in the companion study of the religious right: where the arena of the mosque was answered with constitutional text, the arena of the press was answered with confiscation. The asymmetry demands explanation, and the article returns to it; but its immediate effect was to push the left's argument out of the editorial column and into the only media the state could not seize, the procession and the poem.

The Federal Question: Language, Autonomy, and One Unit

The left's rights agenda had a federal dimension from the beginning, and it was almost alone in West Punjab's arena in pressing it. Against the centralizing drive of the early state, the consolidation of authority at the centre, the impatience with provincial claims, and eventually the amalgamation of the western provinces into One Unit in 1955, the left argued a position that sounded eccentric in Lahore and prophetic later: that provincial rights were democratic rights, that a federation which silenced its units was rehearsing the silencing of its citizens, and that the diversity of Pakistan's peoples was a fact to be represented rather than a danger to be

¹⁴Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam*.

¹⁵Niazi, *The Press in Chains*.

¹⁶Niazi, *The Press in Chains*; Toor, *State of Islam*.

administered.¹⁷ The position flowed directly from the doctrine of “Hum aur Aap”: if the people were the state’s owners, they were its owners in Bengal and Balochistan as much as in Punjab, and a centre that overrode them there could not be trusted here.

The Bengali language movement tested the position, and the left press passed the test at real cost. When the centre’s insistence on Urdu as the sole state language brought the students of Dhaka into the streets in February 1952, and police firing made martyrs of them, Imroze gave the language activists extensive coverage and support, arguing in its editorial of 3 March 1952 that there was no justification for the use of force against students.¹⁸ For an Urdu newspaper published in Lahore, the heart of the language’s own constituency, to defend the Bengali demand was to argue against its own market’s sentiment, which measures the position’s principle. The communists’ East Pakistan organization went further, circulating in the same month its directive for the equal status of all the languages of Pakistan’s units and instructing its workers into the movement, so that the left, east and west, stood publicly on the same federal ground.¹⁹

The Pakistan Times made itself the standing tribune of the provincial voices the centre was working to silence. Across the 1950s the paper consistently supported the marginalized advocates of provincial rights, Abdul Ghaffar Khan of the Frontier, G. M. Syed of Sindh, Abdul Samad Achakzai of Balochistan, and the Bengali leadership from Suhrawardy to Bhashani and the young Mujib-ur-Rahman, printing their cases when the official press rendered them invisible and questioning the state’s suppression of autonomy’s advocates.²⁰ The roll matters because of what became of the men on it: jailed, disqualified, and vilified across the period, they were the losing side of Pakistani politics for twenty years, and the left press was their platform when they had no other. A history of Pakistani federalism’s eventual vocabulary, provincial autonomy, units’ rights, the federation as compact, will find much of it coined or kept alive in these files.

The price of the federal position was the treason charge, and its currency shows what the left was up against. When the progressives supported the Bengali language demand, the rightist critic Muhammad Hasan Askari declared the demand and its left supporters to be serving Sardar Patel, the Indian home minister and the era’s byword for Pakistan’s enemies, an extraordinary statement that converted a linguistic claim by the state’s own majority population into an Indian conspiracy.²¹ The charge’s logic, that federal dissent equals foreign service, would outlive Askari and the decade, and 1971 would demonstrate its cost beyond any editorial’s power to say. This article keeps to its period and its restraint: it records only that the left argued, publicly and early, that the federation would break where it would not bend, and that the argument was answered, publicly and early, with the vocabulary of treason.

The People’s Court: Poetry as the Arena’s Medium

When the state seized the presses, the left’s argument moved into a medium no ordinance could confiscate, and the mushaira became its parliament. The gathered recitation of poetry, an institution of the subcontinent older than print, possessed every property the moment required: it was oral, so censorship arrived too late; it was memorable, so the audience carried the argument home intact; it was performative, so a refrain could be answered by a crowd in real time; and it was respectable, so the state attacked it at the cost of attacking the culture itself.²²

¹⁷Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁸Imroze (Lahore), March 3, 1952.

¹⁹Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam*.

²⁰*Pakistan Times* (Lahore), editorial files, 1948–1958.

²¹Muhammad Hasan Askari, *Maqalat-e-Muhammad Hasan Askari*, comp. Sheema Majeed, 2 vols. (Lahore: Ilm-o-Irfan Publishers, 2001).

²²Jalib, *Kulliyat-e-Habib Jalib*.

The left had cultivated poets since the Progressive Writers' founding, but after 1959 the relation inverted: the poets were no longer the movement's ornament, they were its infrastructure, and the political history of the Ayub decade cannot be written without treating verse as the primary document it became.

"Dastoor" was the medium's masterpiece, and its career maps the arena's circuitry. Jalib's rejection of the 1962 constitution, first recited at the Murree mushaira in the presence of government advisers and high officials, travelled by memory and recitation until the poem's refrain was a public possession; its burden, that a constitution serving mansions and opportunism was a lightless dawn the poet refused to accept, said in six words of Urdu what the seized editorial pages could no longer print.²³ The recitation before officialdom deserves its own note, for it enacted the poem's claim: the refusal was performed in the state's hearing, not behind its back, which is the difference between dissent and an arena. The state's subsequent attentions to Jalib, the arrests and proscriptions that punctuated his career, complete the demonstration; governments do not jail what they have not heard.

The opposition politicians discovered what the poem could do to a crowd, and their discovery is a datum in the history of political communication. In the Combined Opposition Parties' campaign against Ayub in 1964–65, the organizers of the rallies in Lahore, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, and Karachi prepared posters advertising that Jalib would recite "Dastoor," and the advertisement multiplied the public presence at the processions; the poem, that is, had become mobilization technology, a draw the platform speakers could not match and a summary of the case against the regime that no manifesto compressed so well.²⁴ The episode belongs in this article rather than a literary study for exactly that reason: the verse is here evidence not of sensibility but of capacity, the left's demonstrated ability, five years after losing its press, to assemble publics around a constitutional argument by other means.

Faiz's dawn had meanwhile become the era's shared cipher for democracy deferred, and the cipher worked because the whole arena knew the code. The imagery of night and morning that ran through the progressive poetry of the period, examined as literature in the companion study, functioned politically as an evasion-proof vocabulary: a poet who spoke of the lingering night and the withheld dawn had said nothing a prosecutor could quote and everything an audience could hear, and the very ubiquity of the code, in mushairas, in songbooks, in the memory of the crowds, meant the argument for rights survived in public through the years when its prose statement was a punishable act.²⁵ The historian of censorship usually counts what was silenced; the Pakistani case obliges a second ledger, of what silencing displaced into forms it could not reach, and the second ledger is fuller than the first.

Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi carried the critique into the village, and his stories indicted the social order the safety acts protected. Where the poets addressed the state, Qasmi's fiction, "Bain," "Kharbuzay," "Ek Aurat Teen Kahaniyan," and their companions, anatomized the countryside's standing machinery of oppression, the collaboration of landlord with zaildar, numberdar, patwari, and police, the exploitation of tenants and kammis, the helplessness of poor women before feudal and clerical power alike.²⁶ The stories belong in a rights history because they extended its map: the left was arguing that unfreedom in Pakistan did not begin at the police station but in the revenue record and the landlord's courtyard, and that a democracy of the ballot alone would leave the village's subjects exactly where the raj had left them. It was the period's

²³Jalib, *Kulliyat-e-Habib Jalib*. Also see Niazi, *The Press in Chains*, 112–115.

²⁴Jalib, *Kulliyat-e-Habib Jalib*.

²⁵Shafi and Kamran, "Leftist Literati."

²⁶Toor, *State of Islam*.

deepest account of what the awam actually endured, and it was published as literature because it could not have survived as journalism.

From the Streets to the People's Party — and Back to the Streets, 1957–77

The left rebuilt its political vehicle in 1957, and the rebuild was designed for the federal and democratic fight. After Maulana Bhashani, the peasant leader of the east, toured West Pakistan to gather the scattered activists, the National Awami Party was assembled from the existing progressive fragments, declaring for the democratic rights of the people, the eradication of feudalism, and industrialization in the interest of all; its leadership drew together the most advanced progressive forces of both wings, and its platform united the two halves of the left's agenda, civil liberty and provincial autonomy, in a single organization for the first time.²⁷ NAP's founding proved the movement's resilience three years after the ban; its later fracture, in 1968, along the pro-Moscow and pro-Peking line that split the world movement, would prove the movement's vulnerability at the very hour of its greatest opportunity.

The Ayub regime completed the left's case against it by its treatment of labor, and the decade of development bred its own gravediggers. Under the military government the bureaucratic and military oligarchy enforced an anti-labor order in which strikes were rendered effectively illegal and the trade unions' role was systematically minimized, while the celebrated growth of the decade concentrated its rewards in the famous few families of the industrial elite.²⁸ The configuration handed the left the oldest of its arguments in its strongest form: a state that forbade the worker's only weapon while enriching his employer was demonstrating, better than any pamphlet, whose interests the suspension of democracy served. By the decade's end the argument had an audience the left had never commanded before, in the mills of the west wing's new industrial belt and on campuses that remembered 1953.

The movement of 1968–69 was the arena's greatest victory in the period, and it spoke, by common consent, the left's language. The rising against Ayub, spearheaded by students and swelled by workers, the urban poor, and the rural working classes, achieved what no election had been permitted to attempt, the fall of the regime, and scholarship has recorded the essential point for this article: the movement itself, in its demands, its slogans, and its social composition, proposed the language of the left, so that even participants who had never met a communist marched under the vocabulary this history has traced from the editorials of 1948.²⁹ That the left's parties, freshly split, could not harvest what the left's language had sown is the period's structural irony; the harvest went instead to a new claimant who had learned the vocabulary's power precisely by watching the crowds respond to it.

The Pakistan People's Party absorbed the left's men and its words together, and for a season the absorption looked like arrival. Bhutto's party campaigned on a manifesto whose formula, Islam our faith, democracy our politics, socialism our economy, all power to the people, and whose slogan of roti, kapra, aur makan, bread, clothing, and shelter, translated two decades of progressive argument into electoral Urdu; and into its councils came a roll of the left's intellectuals and activists, J. A. Rahim, Mubashir Hassan, Miraj Muhammad Khalid, Safdar Mir, Khursheed Hassan Mir, Sheikh Rashid, and their fellows, drawn by the promises of nationalization, an independent foreign policy, and justice for the working classes.³⁰ The elections of 1970 then delivered the demonstration the left itself had never been allowed: the

²⁷Toor, *State of Islam*.

²⁸Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam*.

²⁹Mariam Mufti, Sahar Shafqat, and Niloufer Siddiqui, eds., *Pakistan's Political Parties: Surviving between Dictatorship and Democracy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020); Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam*.

³⁰Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam*; Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History*.

western electorate, offered the left's themes on a mass party's platform, embraced them, and the movement without an electorate watched its vocabulary win one, in other hands.³¹

The reversal came from within the victory, and it returned the left to the streets it had briefly hoped to leave. In power, the People's Party met the labor militancy its own campaign had summoned with the state's old instruments, and Bhutto's public warning that the strength of the street would be met by the strength of the state was redeemed in the repression of the Karachi workers' movement in 1972, when police fire on striking labor announced that the era of borrowed vocabulary had reached its limit.³² Kamran Asdar Ali's reconstruction of those events closes the arc this section has traced: the movement's energies, gathered in 1968–69, electoralized in 1970, were spent by 1972 against the very government they had installed, and the left ended the period as it had spent most of it, in opposition, in the arena, and under the baton, while its former ministers administered its former program.

The Ledger: What the Left Won Without Winning

The comparison with the religious right can now be drawn exactly, and its asymmetry is the period's deepest lesson about the Pakistani state. Both movements lacked electorates and both substituted the public arena; but the state bought the right's arena with text, names, oaths, and amendments, and met the left's arena with the ban, the seizure, and the jail. The explanation is not mysterious. The right pressed the state in a currency the state's own legitimacy was denominated in, Islam, so that concession cost words; the left pressed it in currencies it could not devalue, property, alliances, and the Cold War alignment that made every communist a security file, so that concession would have cost interests. Governments pay in whatever is cheapest; the ledger of this article and its companion records the two prices, and the two arenas' opposite fates follow from them.

Yet the left's bequest proved durable in the register the state could not confiscate, and the constitution of 1973 carries part of the proof. The fundamental rights chapter of that constitution, its guarantees of expression, association, and due process, and its federal architecture of provincial autonomy, wrote into the state's deepest law the demands this article has traced from "Hum aur Aap" through the safety-act debates to the tribune columns of the Pakistan Times, and it did so under a government staffed, in part, by the left's own absorbed intellectuals.³³ The credit is not the left's alone, and the chapter's subsequent suspensions mock any triumphalism; but the vocabulary in which Pakistanis have demanded those rights back, in every movement since, is the vocabulary whose manufacture this article has documented, and vocabularies are the arena's most permanent products.

Honesty requires the ledger's debit column, and it is long. The left's electoral weakness was real and never overcome; its dependence on a single press group made it decapitable at a stroke, and it was decapitated; its organizational history was a chronicle of bans, splits, and infiltration, with the 1968 fracture arriving at the worst conceivable hour; its absorption into the People's Party traded its independence for offices its members soon lost; and its Cold War entanglements, real and alleged, gave its enemies a treason charge that never wore out. Nor should the movement's internal silences be passed over: a politics of the awam conducted overwhelmingly by literate men of the cities had its own exclusions, of the village women Qasmi wrote about and the workers the federations spoke for, and the arena the left built, like the arenas of its rivals, admitted the people's name more readily than the people.³⁴

³¹Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History*.

³²Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam*.

³³The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973.

³⁴Toor, *State of Islam*.

Conclusion

Refusal was the left's characteristic public act, and the paradox of this history is what its refusals built. The movement traced here refused the safety acts, refused the Governor-General's aggrandizement, refused One Unit and the single language, refused the constitution of 1962 to the regime's face, and refused, at the last, the government its own energies had made; and every refusal was delivered in public, at cost, in the arenas that bans and seizures could not close. Out of that thirty-year refusal came the most constructive artifact of the period, a complete democratic vocabulary, *jumhur* and *awam*, *dastoor* and *haq*, rights and autonomy, minted in the editorials of a seized press and kept in circulation by poems the crowds knew by heart. Pakistan's democrats have drawn on that mint ever since, most of them without knowing the account they draw on.

The series of which this article is part has argued that the constitutions of Pakistan are the minutes of its public arenas, and the left's case completes the demonstration by inversion. The religious right's minutes were entered as text; the left's were entered as scar tissue, in the bans, the seizures, and the martyrologies, and in the rights chapter that a chastened state conceded when the arena's bill came due in 1973. Main Nahin Manta, the poet said at Murree, before the regime's own advisers, and the sentence outlived the constitution it refused, the regime that constitution served, and the poet himself. That a four-word refusal should prove more durable than the documents of three governments is the left's epitaph and its vindication, and it is also this series' thesis in miniature: in Pakistan, the argument was always the event, and the arena kept better records than the state.

Note: This article is extracted from Muhammad Shafi, "Debating the Idea of Pakistan in Public Arenas: A Case Study of the Punjab (1947–1977)" (PhD diss., Department of History, Institute of Global and Historical Studies, Government College University, Lahore), completed under the supervision of Hussain Ahmad Khan.