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**Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazal) Pakistan:
From Political Conservatism to Modernity:
A Case Study from 2002-2017**

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Abstract

Besides few exceptions, Muslim societies as a whole have been alien to the ideal and modern concept of democracy. One of the main reasons of anti-democracy approach is due to the colonial regimes and their political system, ruled over the Muslim majority countries during colonial era. Muslim scholars and intellectuals have been playing pivotal role in shaping the understanding of masses both in favour and against the concept of democracy. JUI-F Pakistan has been going through inevitable political shifts and ideological transformations due to various social, political and religious reasons. Once a staunch supporter of Afghan Taliban and militant groups is now supporting the cause of peaceful political change and implementation of *Shariah* through state machinery by taking part in democratic process. Various events in the past and present show its transition from a politically conservative and exclusivist religious political party into a more vibrant and inclusive political party having room for engaging previously violent militant organizations like *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP)* and having inclusive approach toward religious minorities. Although some of the scholars of *Deoband* still favour militant groups and support their cause like JUI-S but, JUI-F Pakistan is an exception in this case. The overall political role of the party may not be totally and ideally democratic but, the events show their in-depth understanding of the on-going political shifts and ground realities taking place at regional and global level. An attempt has been made to study and analyze the role of JUI-F Pakistan with reference to the important shifts in their political approach and ideology since 2002 to 2017 with reference to democratic transition.

Key Words: JUI-F, Pakistan, Democracy, Militancy, *Shariah*

Introduction

The Islamic Political Parties in Pakistan, un-like their other mainstream counterparts, are less prone to personality orientation and are mainly determined by ideology, though personality-factor is playing a significant role in ideological goal setting and direction-finding. They are acting as centripetal forces by monopolizing Islam. Conventionally, there are three types of Islamic organizations in Pakistan. One; believing and participating in parliamentary politics, second; limited only to socio-spiritual matters and the third; is the pro-violence *Jihadi*, mostly emerged during USSR invasion of Afghanistan (also called *Afghan Jihad*). However, all these types are interlinked in one way or another.

Among these three types of Islamic Organization, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazal) is the first type among the above-mentioned three types, headed by Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman.

Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman, born on 19 June 1953 in Abdul Khel, a small village of district Dera Ismail Khan, is currently a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan and the President of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazal). He hails from a religious and political family of D.I.Khan. He got his early education from native village and later on from Jamia Qasim UI Uloom Multan and Dar UI Uloom Haqqania Akora Khattak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He also taught at Jamia Qasim UI Uloom Multan for many years.¹ His father, Mufti Mahmud was a renowned Islamic scholar and politician who served as the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (then North West Frontier Province – NWFP) from 1972 to 1973.²

¹ Shamsi, Abul Hassan Qari Shams Uddin. *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Aur Qaid-e-Jamiat*. Mansehra: Jamia Islamia Taleem UI Qur'an, 2012.

² "Profile: Maulana Fazlur Rahman". BBC. 6 November 2002.

After the death of his father, he began his political career as the Secretary General of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) in 1980. Later on, JUI split into two factions in the 1980 namely Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazal), the main faction led by Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Sami) led by another renowned scholar Maulana Sami Ul Haq, known as 'Father of the Afghan Taliban' and currently serving as Director General of famous religious seminary, Dar Ul Uloom Haqqania located in Akora Khattak Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The main cause of the split was that Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman opposed the military regime and proposed agenda of Islamization of the then military dictator, General Zia Ul Haq.

After that he won elections as the member of the National Assembly of Pakistan in general elections, 1988 for the first time from D.I.Khan and established links with Afghan Taliban. He again contested the election of the National Assembly of Pakistan in general elections, 1990 for the second time from the same constituency but did not win the election. He was elected as the member of the National Assembly of Pakistan in general elections 1993 for the second time on the ticket of Islamic Democratic Front from the same constituency and won the seat. Once again, he contested for the elections of the National Assembly of Pakistan in general elections, 1997 for the fourth time but did not win the seat. He led several anti-American and pro-Taliban rallies and protests in the major cities of Pakistan after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 following 9/11 attacks. He criticized the US government and its aggressive policies and threatened to launch jihad against the United States if the bombings continued. He also criticized and warned the then President of the Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf for supporting US in the "War on Terror". Consequently, he was placed under house arrest in his native village Abdul Khel for inciting the masses against the armed forces and for trying to overthrow the government.³ Later on, he was set free and the charges against him were dropped in 2002.

He was elected as the member of the National Assembly of Pakistan in general elections, 2002 for the third time on the ticket of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). After winning the elections of NA, he became a potential candidate for the post of Prime Minister; however, he failed to be appointed. He also served as the leader of the opposition from 2004 to 2007 during presidential era of General Pervez Musharraf.

He contested for and won the seat of the National Assembly of Pakistan in general elections, 2008 for the sixth time on the ticket of MMA. He remained Chairman Kashmir Committee from 2008-2013 and 2014 till today. He was elected as the member of the National Assembly of Pakistan for the fourth time from Bannu constituency.

Table Showing his Political Journey to National Assembly of Pakistan

Election Year	Constituency (s)	Result	Votes Polled	Total Votes
1988	N.A 18 D.I.Khan	Elected	62,472	373,098
1990	N.A 18 D.I.Khan	Not Elected	62,890	377,482
1993	N.A 18 D.I.Khan cum Tank	Elected	59,233	419,717
1997	N.A 18 D.I.Khan cum Tank	Not Elected	53,948	446,445
2002	N.A 24 D.I.Khan N.A 25 D.I.Khan cum Tank	Elected in both constituencies	N.A 24= 43,124 N.A 25= 59,102	N.A 24= 267,513 N.A 25= 271,364
2008	N.A 24 D.I.Khan N.A 26 Bannu	Elected from N.A 26 Bannu	N.A 24= 45,990 N.A 26= 91,484	Not Available
2013	N.A 24 D.I.Khan N.A 25 D.I.Khan cum Tank N.A 27 Lakki Marwat	Elected from all three constituencies	N.A 24= 92,395 N.A 25= 77,595 N.A 27= 85,051	N.A 24= 230,943 N.A 25= 196,678 N.A 27= 175,901

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan Result Gazettes

³ "Maulana Fazl, Samiul Haq under house arrest". DAWN.COM. 8 October 2001.

He is generally considered a pro-Taliban religious politician, known for his close ties with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan established by Afghan Taliban after the USSR withdrawal. However, he called himself a moderate religious political leader having no connections with the Islamic extremists and religious hardliners.⁴ He consistently calls for implementation of Sharia law in Pakistan through peaceful democratic means; however, he forms alliances with secular political parties as well. He is also known for changing his ideologies and alliances with the political parties in Pakistan.

He had been the target of three assassination attempts by the banned militant outfit Jundullah, an extremist militant outfit of the banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), but remained unscathed in both in 2011 and 2014.^{5,6,7}

JUI-F is one of the renowned religious political parties of Pakistan having large number of vote bank in Khyber Pakhtunkwa and Balochistan including Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) along with certain level of political representation and well-wishers in other provinces of Pakistan like Punjab, Sindh and Gilgit Baltistan. JUI has an inherent link with its Indian counterpart, Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind. JUH played decisive and effective role against the colonial powers of sub-continent and took part in the struggle for the freedom from colonial powers and consequently independence of the sub-continent. After the culmination of the independence movement in 1947, Maulana Shabbir Ahmed Usmani formed another party namely Markazi Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam and Mufti Mahmood was made as its President in 1962 that he held till his demise.⁸ JUI split into two factions in 1980 namely JUI-F, led by Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman and JUI-S, led by Maulana Sami Ul Haq when Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman refused to accept the military regime and Islamization policy of General Zia Ul Haq. Another short term alliance between JUI-F and JUI-S was seen in the formation of MMA, but later on, JUI-S left the alliance due to the inclusive political approach of Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman by willing to make alliance with other moderate political parties that was disliked by JUI-S due to its exclusivist political approach. It faced another divide in 2008 when a Balochistan-based leader and activist of JUI-F, Maulana Asmat Ullah, reportedly diehard follower of Jihadist ideology and pro-Taliban, parted ways and founded another party namely JUI-Nazariyati on the premise that Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman has set aside the ideology of armed struggle (Jihad). It is an irony that the same leader established a political party instead of launching Jihadist movement as he claimed while parting ways from JUI-F.

JUI-F is gradually leading towards the democratic culture. The party has yet to achieve more within the party by strengthening the democratic norms like intra-party election is an essential and inseparable part of an ideal democratic system, but Maulana Muhammad Khan Sherani, a senior leader of the JUI-F from Balochistan and former chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology, was forced to withdraw his nomination as he was contesting election of party chairmanship against the current chairman Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman.⁹ A sense of opposition, though at minor level, is prevailing against the dynastic leadership of Maulana brothers in the party since the demise of his father, Mufti Mahmood. Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman is MNA, his brothers Maulana Atta Ur Rahman is also member of the Senate of Pakistan¹⁰ and ex-Federal minister of Tourism while Maulana Lutf Ur Rahman is member of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly and leader of the opposition as well, moreover, his youngest brother Maulana Obaid Ur Rahman is also opposition leader of the district government Dera Ismail Khan. JUI-F has not yet conducted intra-party elections even though it was supposed to do so in April 2017 as per the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which states that intra-party elections must be conducted after every three years¹¹ while JUI-F conducted intra-party elections in April 2014. In this connection, Election Commission of Pakistan recently issued a warning notice to Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman for conducting the intra-party elections.

⁴ "JUI to strive for Sharia through ballot, says Fazl". DAWN.COM. 23 September 2012.

⁵ Newspaper, From the (30 March 2011). "Suicide bomber targets Maulana Fazl's convoy; 10 killed".

⁶ Fazl escapes second attack in two days". DAWN.COM. 31 March 2011

⁷ Shah, Syed Ali (23 October 2014). "Two killed as JUI-F chief Fazlur Rehman escapes suicide attack in Quetta".

⁸ Amin, Husnul. *Post-Islamism: Pakistan in the Era of Neoliberal Globalization*. Islamabad: Iqbal International Institute for Research & Dialogue, IIU, 2016.

⁹ Khan, Said Alam. *JUI-F Internal Elections Today*. Islamabad: Tha Nation, 2014.

¹⁰ <http://www.senate.gov.pk/en/profile.php?uid=871&catid=&subcatid=&cattitle=>

¹¹ PILDAT. *Assessing Internal Democracy of Major Political Parties of Pakistan*. Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development & Transparency, December 2014.

Internal Organizational Structure of JUI-F

The JUI-F is less tightly managed, confirming a more diverse range of opinions that often reveal divisions between hardliners and more relatively moderate members. But with limited mechanisms to ensure party discipline, this loose structure can also result in lack of communication between and within party levels. Hence many relatively junior party workers and officials are often unaware of the party's policy and even its structures.¹²

The secretariat includes four provincial bodies, representing each province and including entities at the district and Tehsil levels. The central and provincial levels each include a president, 4 vice-presidents, 1 Nazim (mayor) and 7 other members. The party constitution requires elections to these offices every 3 years. At each tier, there are 3 distinct bodies: the Majlis-e-Amoomi (General Council), the Majlis-e-Shura (Consultative Council) and the Majlis-e-Aamila (Central Working Committee). Their duties are as follows:

- Majlis-e-Amoomi: internal decisions regarding the constitution and elections. It elects thirty members at the Tehsil (town) level. These thirty then elect members for the district level, who in turn elect one member for the province. The provincial members elect one federal representative;
- Majlis-e-Shura: policy decisions relating to the JUI-F's participation in government and national politics. Its members are selected by the provincial presidents and must not exceed forty five in total (fourteen of whom are Majlis-e-Aamila members), with at least 25% religious scholars at the district level and 50% at the province and central levels; and
- Majlis-e-Aamila: policy implementation, having fourteen members.

According to the JUI-F constitution, "The provincial electoral boards will nominate the candidates of national and provincial assemblies on the recommendation of the district election board. The provincial board's decision will be final. In case of any dispute, appeal can be made to the centre".¹³

The mosque and madrasa network remains the main artery of JUI-F recruitment, with mosque leaders and religious scholars often using sermons to broaden the party's outreach. The JUI-F requires a nominal fee from its members for the first three years. While the party does not have organized fundraising mechanisms, it relies on local donations countrywide by religious scholars and mosque leaders.

Enforcement of Shariah: Ballot or Bullet?

It is believed that the religious political parties have been posing a threat to democratic reforms and development by having potential violent opposition,¹⁴ but the overall political role of JUI-F seems quite different. Unlike the militant groups of Pakistan like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its sub groups, JUI-F has always emphasized peaceful political change and enforcement of Shariah by taking active part in the democratic process and strengthening democratic culture and institutions instead of meddling into direct and violent conflict with the civil and military institutions. Such militant groups tried to kill Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman and assassinated hundreds of members including parliamentarians and scholars affiliated with JUI-F including renowned religious scholar and man of letters Maulana Hassan Jan, Maulana Merajuddin and quite recently a suicide attack on General Secretary of JUI-F and currently serving Deputy Chariman Senate of Pakistan, Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri¹⁵ etc. for not owning the Jihadist ideology and strategy of the militant groups and taking part in an 'Un-Islamic Political System' like democracy.

¹² Constitution of the Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam, November 2009 edition, Crisis Group translation.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Group, International Crisis. *Islamic Parties in Pakistan*. International Crisis Group, December 2011.

¹⁵ Sherani, Syed Ali Shah, Hafeezullah (12 May 2017). "25 killed as Deputy Chairman Senate Haideri's convoy hit by explosion in Mastung". DAWN.COM.

Although democracy was considered as something alien to Islam and a manifestation of the Western agenda of subjugating Islam and Muslims, but JUI-F has dramatically changed the point of view and understanding of the traditional religious scholars regarding democracy to a great extent. Basically, they are not against the democratic and popularly elected system of governance, because the party constitution itself manifests their democratic approach. It states that all important decisions shall be made on the basis of majority opinion. A new development has been taking place that exclusivist social reformist movements like Pir Zulfiqar Ahmed Naqashbandi, basically a Sufi scholar leading a large number of Deobandi Muslims having inclination towards spirituality, and Tablighi Jamaat, a reformist movement of Deobandi school of thought solely established and dedicated to the preaching of Islam at grass-root level, are in close contact with Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman and showing their interest in the democratic system of Pakistan by voting JUI-F.

JUI-F seems inclined to the development of democratic process by not joining movements like Difa-e-Pakistan Council (DPC), an alliance of pro-establishment and religious political and Jihadist parties that was formed after the civil military tension on some security and defence issues. The same approach was witnessed in the recent tussle between civilian government and military establishment under the disguise of Panama Paper case, in which the Supreme Court of Pakistan disqualified Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif for the position of premiership although he was elected through popular majority votes. JUI-F preferred to favour and defend the civilian government instead of toeing the line of the establishment as it was done by Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and other religious political parties.

JUI-F is going through democratic transitions within the party. Although it still needs to foster the democratic culture in party but, it will take more time and it will be able to adopt it with the passage of time and gradually. Diverse opinions are voiced about the weakness and strength in the organizational structure of JUI-F and have been labeled as a party of clergy and madrasa graduates only, but it is fact that they appointed a person like Akram Khan Durrani as a Chief Minister, who is not a religious person or graduate of madrasa in actual sense instead previously he had political affiliation with a secular and nationalist political party namely Awami National Party (ANP).¹⁶ Moreover, the last general elections in 2013 and local government elections in 2015 witnessed another shift in the political outlook of the leadership of JUI-F.^{17, 18, 19} They nominated such candidates, who do sport popular religious symbols like beard, turban, certain dress etc. The author observed that all three constituencies of the provincial assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa PK-74, 75 and 76 were allocated to members of local elite families. The same trend was also observed in local bodies elections throughout Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well.

Militancy versus Democracy

The very first article of the 2013 election manifesto of JUI-F starts with the statement that “Peace will be our primary priority in politics”.²⁰ Distancing itself from the pro-establishment political movements and joining hands with those favouring smooth and continuous democratic process, it shows that JUI-F has adopted the policy of bringing change through democratic process instead of joining hands with militant and Jihadist groups.²¹ Consequently, the party has been facing the dire consequences in shape of assassination attempts on the top leadership, parliamentarians, scholars and activists. Even though the party sacrificed a lot of well-learned and knowledgeable religious scholars, seasoned parliamentarians and devoted activists, but it never resorted to retaliate in same coin. Instead it motivates its members to keep trust in the democratic transition that requires long-term strategy with patience and sacrifice instead of adopting the short-term acts of violence and militancy by terrorizing the masses and engaging in an unnecessary armed struggle against the military and armed forces of the country.

¹⁶ Amin, Husnul. *Post-Islamism: Pakistan in the Era of Neoliberal Globalization*. Islamabad: Iqbal International Institute for Research & Dialogue, IIU, 2016.

¹⁷ Group, International Crisis. *Islamic Parties in Pakistan*. International Crisis Group, December 2011

¹⁸ Amin, Husnul. *Post-Islamism: Pakistan in the Era of Neoliberal Globalization*. Islamabad: Iqbal International Institute for Research & Dialogue, IIU, 2016.

¹⁹ Zia Ur Rehman, Militants Turn Against Pakistan's JUI-F Islamist Party, <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/militants-turn-against-pakistans-jui-f-islamist-party>

²⁰ JUI-F Elections Manifesto 2013

²¹ Zia Ur Rehman, Militants Turn Against Pakistan's JUI-F Islamist Party, <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/militants-turn-against-pakistans-jui-f-islamist-party>

Sectarianism and Pluralism

History witnessed a divide in JUI-F due to the pluralist approach of Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman and a new violent and militant, basically anti-Shia group came into being namely *Sipah-e-Sahaba* Pakistan (Soldiers of Companions). SSP emerged as a defender of the religious position and dignity of the Pious Companions (Allah be pleased with them) of the Messenger (peace be upon him) as a reaction to the organized campaign of defaming and disrespecting the Companions (Allah be pleased with them) by few extremist Shia scholars. It hurt the religious sentiments of those hardliners and they started reacting with the same coin and eventually resorted to violent struggle against Shia community. Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman never favoured their understanding and strategy of dealing with the issue. Consequently, he was criticized and even attacked by the fanatics but he distanced himself from the anti-Shia approach. That's why a considerable number of Shia community in his native district, DIKhan, cast their votes in favour of Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman in every election. Due to his pluralist political approach, he also gains the favours of Bareilvi voters as well i-e majority religious community of the district. It has been witnessed in recent years that leadership of the same anti-Shia militant groups have been taking part in the democratic transitions like Maulana Ahmed Ludhyanwi has been one of the close affiliates of Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman and recently Maulana Masroor Nawaz Jhangwi, son of renowned anti-Shia scholar Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangwi, affiliated with banned SSP, working as Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat now, won by-election for the provincial assembly of Punjab after being convinced by Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman about the need and importance of democracy in Pakistan and hazardous impacts of sectarianism, extremism and violence for almost all segments of the country, including religious segment. After winning the by-elections, he not only joined JUI-F as well as publicly distanced himself from the anti-Shia rhetoric.²²

Women in Politics: Past & Present Perspective

The sense of gender segregation based on a specific understanding of Islam still exist in JUI-F as the party constitutions has nothing regarding the women, youth and minorities. Their election manifesto of 2013 contains few promises regarding the rights of women, youth and minorities like it states that "women would be made equal citizens bringing at par with their male counterpart in all walks of life and women in all state affairs and in all spheres will be equally treated with their male counterparts".²³

Although they opposed the role of women as a political leader in past, but they have been changing their perspective gradually. They not only allowed their own women being members of the parliament and provincial assemblies on reserved seats as well as voted in favour of Miss Fehmida Mirza, she was the first female speaker of the National Assembly during Pakistan People's Party (PPP) regime from 2008-2013.

They have a women wing led by Miss Naeema Kishwar and their meetings are held separately from their men counterparts of the party.²⁴ Currently, there are two women parliamentarians on reserved seats belong to JUI-F namely Naeema Kishwar and Shahida Akhtar Ali, who is also sister-in-law of Maulana Fazal Ur Rahman.

Minority Rights

JUI-F leadership organized a 3-days conference and invited leaders of almost all political leaders, ambassadors of various countries and Bishop of Pakistan as well. It was first political gathering organized by a religious political party in which a non-Muslim representative was not only invited but given opportunity of sharing his views with the participants also. It shows their pluralist political approach. Currently, they have a Christian minority's senator, Asia Nasir in their party and she confesses that the party never forced her to follow their way of Islam instead she is free to espouse and practice her own religious teachings.²⁵

JUI-F election manifesto 2013 contains few promises regarding the status and rights of religious minorities in Pakistan as it states that "Minorities will be equal citizens of Pakistan and they will have all freedoms

²² Reuters, I have become more moderate, says Masroor Nawaz Jhangvi, Dawn.com, December 21, 2016 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1303657>

²³ JUI-F Elections Manifesto 2013

²⁴ PILDAT. *Assessing Internal Democracy of Major Political Parties of Pakistan*. Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development & Transparency, December 2014.

²⁵ Group, International Crisis. *Islamic Parties in Pakistan*. International Crisis Group, December 2011.

guaranteed in Islam and the constitution, which include: Religious Freedom, Non-Muslim minority in the country will enjoy religious freedom, civil rights, and impartial opportunity for access to justice".²⁶

²⁶ JUI-F Elections Manifesto 2013



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