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State of Media Independence and Journalists' Struggle for Press Freedom in Faisalabad, Pakistan

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Abstract *This research paper presents an overview of the journalists' efforts for the maintenance of the fundamental right of Freedom of Press & Expression in Faisalabad, Pakistan. The current study also observed the role of media personals as a silent speed breaker against the powerful dictator of the time General Parvez Musharraf and his regime in the third-largest city of the Pakistan Faisalabad. The study explains the scenario of resistance in the journalistic community against Musharraf's draconian rule in the country, especially focused on the struggle of media personnel in Faisalabad, against Musharraf regime for the freedom of expression as well as freedom of media. The study assesses the scenario to break the political silence during the rule of a powerful military dictator in 2002 as well as in 2007. This paper may be helpful to understand the struggle against the Musharraf regime by journalists in Faisalabad. The study resulted that journalists of Faisalabad broke the silence by opposing the dictatorship of the Musharraf regime and played a significant role as human rights defenders in 2002 and also at the time of promulgating the emergency in November 2007. The study is the outcome of the qualitative content analysis of media reports as well as in-depth interviews of the senior media professionals and the sound survey of the literature published on democracy, basic human rights, and freedom of expression and the media.*

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Introduction

The Army Chief General Parvez Musharraf captured the power corridors on 12th October, 1999 and dissolved the federal as well as provincial governments. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, including his family members and party leaders, were arrested during a Military operation (*Dawn*, 13th October 1999). Ahmad (2013) presented a view that it was the fourth time that the military directly intervened in ruling affairs. Previously, the military had intruded in power corridors for three times, in 1958 under the command of General Muhammad Ayub Khan; in 1969 under the command of General Yahya Khan; in 1977 under the command of General Zia ul Haq. The drill towards power passageways of the military was revised once again in October 1999 under the command of General Pervez Musharraf. The studies presented a scenario that international forces, especially the USA, always supported the Military Rule in Pakistan, including the Musharraf regime, due to their hidden agendas and interests in the region. During that USA secretly supported the policies to snub the freedom of media and supported regimes activities to control the power structure of the country (Alam, Bhatti & Ali, 2020).

The Military regime was not ready to hear any voice against his dictatorship. The fundamental rights of the populace were suspended and snubbed all over the country, and all have to just be silent. Musharraf regime strictly banned political activities, and a number of political leaders as well as workers were arrested throughout the country. The leadership

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of the ruling party, Pakistan Muslim League-N (PMLN), was arrested or escaped from the scene. At the time of the military coup, opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was in self-exile to London. Although Miss Bhutto was a democratic face of the country, but she welcomed the dissolution of the Nawaz government and demanded early elections (*BBC*, 14th October 1999). By assessing the mood of Military rulers, outgoing premier Nawaz Sharif adopted the option of ten years' exile from a country with his family after an agreement with the Musharraf regime on 10th December 2000 (Dawn, 11th December 2000).

The Situation of Press Freedom in Pakistan during the Musharraf Regime

The constitution of Pakistan clearly admitted the right of freedom of expression as well as freedom of press and media in the country under article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan as;

"Every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, and there shall be freedom of the press, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defense of Pakistan or any part thereof friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, [commission of] or incitement to an offense".

The constitution of Pakistan not only support the freedom of expression under article nineteen, but it also supports the right to have information from all the governmental departments. Article 19-A identified it as, "Every citizen shall have the right to have access to information in all matters of public importance subject to regulation and reasonable restrictions imposed by law". The studies about political systems presented a view that the democratic system always supported the freedom of press and freedom of expression, which is the base of democratic values. These also studies unfilled another view that the issue of freedom of media exposed the state of incompletion of democracy as the Shah et al. (2017) commented on the matter with the words, "without active, free and strong media, democracy is not completed, and in countries where freedom of the press is limited, democratic values had not been established". The all previous studies regarding the political views of Muhammad Ali Jinnah presented a clear point of view that the founder of Pakistan had clearly supported the freedom of expression as well as freedom of the press and encouraged to launch new newspapers for raising the voice of the masses (Shah et al., 2017).

The studies presented a view that Pakistani media is facing draconian laws which snub and hit the press as well as media personals (journalists and non-journalistic staff) in many respects. The attitude of rulers for controlling the media with harsh hands in Pakistan is not the practice of recent times, but from the very first day after independence, this attitude was adopted by the power corridors of the country. Some hidden forces skillfully practiced for censorship on media and tried to stop Quaid-e-Azam's first speech in the constituent assembly and issued press-note (Parveen, 2019). The previous research showed that the Media had to face violent behavior of power-corridors in Pakistan, both in political governments (democratic or semi-democratic periods) and in all four military regimes. The media could not have enjoyed the scenario of freedom of the press as well as the scenario of tolerant behavior of ruling class throughout the history of Pakistan, except PPP government during 2008-2013 (personal communication Nadeem Javed, President Faisalabad Union of Journalists, on 30th January 2021). The attitude of the ruling class to control the press in Pakistan has its roots in the colonial history of the sub-continent. The same attitude of the ruling class in the sub-continent was extracted during the War of Independence in 1857 and during the independence movement, especially in last three decades before the partition of the subcontinent. Iqbal (2010) presented a historical view before and after the partition, which resulted into that from the War of Independence till the partition, the British government applied frequent measures to control the press, and especially the Muslim press had to face strict actions during that period of history. According to Niazi (2009), the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, clearly supported to launch of the Nawa-e-Waqt, Jang, Dawn, and Pakistan Times. The name of Jinnah was printed on the Masthead of Pakistan Times. Jinnah always praised the role of Muslim media during the independence movement and encouraged the free media after the partition.

Pakistan had been declared as a democratic country from its very first days, which required a democratic attitude of its ruling class and democratic fundamental rights for all, including media. But Pakistan has draconian rules and

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regulations to control the independence of media from the very first day after the country's formation (Naqvi, 2015). There were a number of anti-independent media legislations made in the early days of the country to control the media. These draconian laws were used against the media outlets, media workers, publishers, and printers of the newspapers, magazines, and journals. The revisions of studies on the subject of political history and the role of media evidence showed that "Central Press Special Powers Act 1947, Security of Pakistan Act 1952, Safety Act of 1950, Public Order Ordinance of 1960" were frequently used against the journalists and media outlets (Balouch, 2016). Jabbar & Isa (1997) explore that the period of the Ayub regime can also be used as draconian time regarding press freedom. Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) was seizure, and the newspapers of Progressive Papers Group were occupied by the Ayub regime. The culture of Press-Advice was also started by the Ayub khan and his successor dictators, General Yahya Khan, General Zia-ul-Haq, and General Parvez Musharraf) flourished this culture to control the media (Ali & Khalid, 2012). There was the only period of PPP governments, one tenure of ZA. Bhutto, two of Benazir and one of Zardari, when treasury bench seemed to be tolerant on media criticism. The period of Nawaz Sharif could also not be considered a time of wellbeing for media in the country (Shah et al., 2017).

Struggle for Press Freedom

As the studies presented a worse scenario of press freedom in the country from the very first day after independence, the democratic forces and organizations of journalists' rights, especially the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), launched struggles for freedom of the press as well as freedom of expression against all the beneficiaries of draconian rules. PFUJ was established to counter the activities of rulers against media and journalists in the early days of the 1950s under the leadership of M.A. Shakoor. PFUJ launched struggles for press freedom against draconian rules of Ayub Khan, Zia-ul-Haq, Pervez Musharraf, and civilian followers of Military rulers whenever they tried to attack the media and snub the press independence. The role of journalists belonging to Faisalabad in press freedom remained significant in the movements against Ayub, Yahya, Zia, and Musharraf. Various Journalists, including Shamsul Islam Naz, Agha Arbab, Javed Siddiqi, Khalid Abbas Saif, Ali Muhammad Mahi, were arrested and jailed (Siddiqui & Raza, 2021).

Voices for Press Freedom during Musharraf's Referendum in Faisalabad

After the exile of Nawaz Sharif, there was complete silence in the country's political sphere. There was no strong voice against the draconian rule of Parvez Musharraf but some statements in media and all the political leadership just watching the situation. In this scenario, the regime presented the devolution plan of local bodies system and announced to hold local bodies elections in phases from December 2000 to August 2001 in phases. After successfully holding the local bodies' elections, Musharraf announced a referendum to seek public validation for his rule in April 2002 (Human Rights Watch, 2005). President Musharraf launched a countrywide program to address public gatherings for seeking populace support in a presidential referendum (Behuria, 2009). His second address was in Faisalabad, and it became the event to break the silence against the draconian rule of a military dictator. The journalists of Faisalabad raised voices for press freedom in front of Musharraf during public gatherings, they were baton charged (*Lathi Charge*) by police, but they launched a protest which continued for more than 60 days.

The public gathering was arranged by the district administration in the Iqbal Cricket Stadium Faisalabad, it was the second congregation in regard to the upcoming presidential referendum. President Musharraf was on stage, and Governor Khalid Maqbool was criticizing the media on reporting for the first public gathering of the referendum. The journalists present there to cover the event, embarrassed on speeches against the media. The seasoned journalist and former vice president of Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), Shamsul Islam Naz, stood and voiced against the slandering wording of Governor Punjab against the Press. The journalists present there for reporting boycotted the referendum second meeting then and there and left the stadium as a protest rally, raising slogans against the Musharraf regime. Police stopped the journalists and baton-charged them due to raising the anti-Musharraf slogans. Around two dozen journalists

were injured with the brutal action of police (*Daily Shelter*, 15th April, 2002).

It was the first protest against Musharraf since he was in power and Sharifs had been exiled from the country including seasoned journalist Shamsul Islam Naz, Javed Malik, Sarfraz Sahi, Javed Siddiqi, Hamid Yaseen, Agha Arbab Khawer, Ghulam Mohyuddin, Mian Iftikhar, Ruman Ahsan and some media representatives from Lahore, 23 journalists were injured with baton-charge. Sahi and Malik were seriously injured, and others were minor. The protest was launched against baton-charge on journalists from the police, and it expanded in entire the country. Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) staged a countrywide protest, while the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) and other organizations also protested on the incident (*Dawn*, 16th April 2002). Later, the Faisalabad Union of Journalists filed a petition in court of law against police baton-charging the media persons. District and Session Judge Faisalabad, Javed Iqbal Siddiqi, was nominated as one-man tribunal to inquire the matter, and tribunal summoned President Parvez Musharraf, his military secretary, Home Secretary Punjab Brig Ijaz Shah, Director General PID Akram Shaheedi, DIG Police Faisalabad Tallat Masood, SSP Faisalabad Tasaddaq Husain, SP city Arshad Shah, DCO Faisalabad Iqbal Ahmad, record keeper of the police wireless branch, wireless operators of police performing duty on the incident day (*Dawn*, 28th April 2003).

Breaking the Silence in Musharraf's Emergency

In March 2007, Chief Justice of Pakistan (JCP) Iftikhar Chaudhary's refusal for resignation became a big silence breaker in Pakistan. During the lawyers' movement, restrictions on media for covering the movement push media personals into agitation, and PFUJ launched a countrywide series of protests. Not only journalists but political parties, civil society also joined the countrywide agitation, but silence in Faisalabad could not be broken. The political personalities as well as civil society did not show courage to lead the protest against the military dictator. The lawyers in Faisalabad welcomed the former JCP once, but before the visit of Iftikhar Chaudhary, they remained silent. In this situation of fear, FUJ gave them a platform for agitation and civil society as well as political personalities joined the pretest of journalists. After the visit of former JCP, the lawyers demonstrated a series of protests rallies, but the rallies by lawyers stopped with the proclamation of emergency on 03rd November 2007.

At the time of promulgating the emergency, police seized the district bar and press club in Faisalabad along with other areas of the country in the morning of the 04th November (*Express*, 04th November, 2007). Pakistan Bar Council, PFUJ, and other organizations working for restoration of fundamental rights announced a protest against the emergency. Bar Councils announced a boycott of judicial proceedings from the 05th November and gave a call for countrywide protest rallies. PFUJ also gave a call for protest from 05th November and demanded to liberate press clubs around the country, but only two clubs could be liberated till 05th November, National Press Club Islamabad and Faisalabad Press Club. Both the press clubs were freed with the personal efforts of the local journalists (Nadeem Javed, President Faisalabad Union of Journalists, personal communication, 30th January, 2021).

The Faisalabad Press Club (FPC) was liberated on the afternoon of 04th November after the protest and sit-in in front of the Police Head Quarter. After dialogue police vacated the press club and FUJ shifted its protest to press club (*Dawn*, 05th November, 2007). It was the first-ever protest against the emergency and continued till the lifting of the emergency on 22nd November (Parveen, 2020). FUJ arranged a pretest in front of the Press Club, only journalists joined the pretest in the first three days. However, civil society and human rights defenders joined the FUJ protests from 07th November. FUJ gave protest a tilt and announced symbolic *QUL* (A prayer after being buried) of the Musharraf regime on 10th November, this idea of peaceful protest gained public attention and a large number of human rights activists joined it. After the *QUL*, an unannounced rally around the District Council and Press Club.

The agitation was continued that local police attacked on Press Club when FUJ's protest was in continuity on 21st November 2020. It was reported as, "Faisalabad Police on Wednesday baton-charged and tear-gassed journalists protesting against emergency rule and curbs on the media at the Faisalabad Press Club here on Wednesday. More than 12 journalists were injured and sixteen were arrested. It is reported that police cordoned off the area when the

protesting journalists started gathering at the press club. Police entered the club, used batons and fired tear-gas shells to stop journalists from taking out a procession. According to sources, including a woman, around a dozen journalists, Shamsul Islam Naz, Ghulam Mohyuddin, Hamid Yaseen, Muhammad Yousaf, Humaira Chaudhary, Mirza Javed Iqbal, Naseer Ishaq, Nadeem Javed, Muhammad Usman, Muhammad Khalil, Naeem Chaudhary, Qadeer Sikander, Malik Naeem, were injured in the police action. TV journalist Usman who recorded the police brutality on his video camera was severely beaten and dragged on the road by police. Police arrested sixteen journalists but they were later released on the directives of DIG (Operations) Aslam Tareen. Local police after the attack, sealed the press club, and journalists were not allowed to take their vehicles parked inside the boundary (*The Post*, 22nd November, 2007). The police high-ups justified the action and said that police are left with no option but to stop the protesters from taking out the rally. The journalists decided to hold a protest against the police action on Thursday" (*Dawn*, 22nd November 2007).

It was brutal action of local police, but journalists faced it with courage. They remained firmed with their ideology of press freedom. FUJ continued its struggle for press freedom and protests were launched. The District Bar Association Faisalabad joined the FUJ's protest on 22nd November 2020 and strengthened the journalists' voice for freedom of expression. The same day, the emergency was lifted. Addressing the 22nd November procession, the FUJ leadership demanded to lift all curbs on Media around the country and to give the right of expressing themselves for all. They said that "the journalist community of Pakistan and PFUJ has serious concern over torture, and arrest of journalists, censorship and curbs on media houses, threats to owners and journalists by anti-media forces to compel them to toe the official line or face government's wrath. They said that General Pervez Musharraf is directly responsible for the current crises of the country. Musharraf deliberately enforced censorship and promulgated emergency in the country. The censorships on media are not acceptable and the government has to step back in this regard. The responsible officials from the police department, of baton-charge on journalists, protesting inside the press club must be accountable and removed from their posts. FUJ was protesting peacefully inside the club and there was no chance to disturb the law and order situation in the area. "The baton-charge and tear-gassed on journalists inside the boundary walls of press club, clear the stance of PFUJ and FUJ regarding the brutality of government and officials". We condemned fresh black laws to bring the media under full control of government must not be accepted, and Musharraf regime must be step backed" (*Daily Shelter*, 23rd November, 2007).

Conclusion

The Journalists in Faisalabad served to strengthen the democratic norms in society and tried to empower the political system during the Musharraf regime. Their struggle for press freedom and fundamental rights during the Musharraf regime is a significant part of the democratic history of the country. Their efforts for the democratic rule in the country presented their picture as true democratic citizens and serving as the human rights defenders. The scenario shows that the journalists of Faisalabad are as silence breakers during military rule as both the times they quickly reacted on non-democratic actions of the powerful military dictator of the time.

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