



RESEARCH PAPER

Politics of Ethnic Identities and Conflicts: A Case Study of Hazara and Siraiqi Ethno-Nationalist Movements in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

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Since its inception, Pakistan has been beset by a multitude of traditional and non-traditional threats to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. More specifically, ethno-nationalist movements of various shades continue to threaten the physical cohesion of the country. Pakistan is one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world. The persistent and pervasive socio-economic underdevelopment of certain ethnic groups drives identity politics and centrifugal tendencies in the country. The centre-province friction has been a major fault line holding the country back from metamorphosing into a vibrant and strong federation underpinned by distributive justice, ethnic harmony and cultural pluralism. Significantly, the tone and tenor of ethnic politics has been changing over time from the search for socioeconomic, political and cultural security to the vociferous demand for carving out new provinces along ethnic lines. By critically analyzing the cases of the *Siraiqi* and *Hazara* ethno-nationalist movements, this scholarly endeavour seeks to dissect the dynamics and drivers of sub-nationalism (identity politics); the urgency and importance of new provinces; and the best possible solutions to the ethno-nationalist movements. In sum, this piece of the scholarship will go a long way in providing conflict-resolution-oriented policy input to the policymakers for the amicable resolution of the knotty ethnic question.

Introduction

South Asia is multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and a hub of sub-nationalist regions. Disappointingly, ethnic diversity causes many clashes and forms much discontent both at the social and state levels in South Asia. (Karamat, 2006 p. 7) Most of the sub-national movements are raising a voice for distinct political identity in the South Asian region as one sub-national group has demanded on a cultural basis and the other on a religious, linguistic, and administrative basis. Historical events have shown that some 15 ethnic clashes occurred in duration since the 1950s in the South Asian region. India has perceived 8, followed by three in Pakistan and one separately in Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Sub-nationalist movements,

Khalistan, Tamil Nado, and East Pakistan, rose from the mishandling of the self-sufficiency strains, which led to the conflict escalation. (Abbasi, 2020, p.)

Ethnicity can be described as a social phenomenon from the perspective of identity. In the contemporary environment, mostly developing states have strong beliefs, not on region or nation as a social identity rather stalwart of the tribe and kin group that ultimately further strengthen the ethnic bonding. Social scientists generally use the “index of ethnolinguistic fractionalization” (ELF) to measure the difference in societies with special reference to ethnic differences. In this index, the homogenous societies have zero scores whereas the heterogeneous societies can score a maximum of 100 depending on if each person in the society has a separate ethnic identity. (Muqarrab, 2020, p. 1)

Managing ethnic diversity “has remained a challenge for the Pakistani federation since its inception in 1947. Even after the separation of East Pakistan in 1971, the autonomy movements in minority provinces have remained alive. Resultantly, the federation adopted the eighteenth constitutional amendment in 2010 to satisfy the numerous autonomy demands of the smaller provinces. However, after this development, the demands for the creation of new provinces by the provincial minorities in certain regions of the state have got momentum. These demands have shaped another challenge for the turbulent federation.” (Mushtaq, 2016, p. 3)

Whenever an elite and a dominant ethnic group try to dominate over the right of the outlying minorities (regional, linguistic, religious or other), the consequence has been either a passionate partition advent of subnational movement, succession to achieve those privileges. Numerous ethnopolitical movements and conflicts became impetus in the post-world war period in South Asia. (Abbasi, 2020, p. 2) Gurr stated that four causes regulate whether or not the subgroups will activate against the other group or state dominance. First, political, economic and social, inequalities between groups. Secondly, a group’s identity factor, thirdly, Headship is vital to the growing and raising of sub-national movements, Lastly, ethnic conscription must provoke a reaction from the other leading group or state against which it is responding. (Abbasi, 2020, p. 2). Similarly, Cohen (2005) believes that “Pakistan is plural and highly diverse society in terms of language, ethnicity and religiously. He further remarked that ‘Pakistan is one of the world’s most linguistically and ethnically complex states’” (p. 201).

Pakistan is a multi-ethnic state with a social configuration of diverse identities and cultures. As a result of independence in 1947, multiple ethnic identities with racial and lingual differences settled into a federal state in the South Asian region. Different people from different geographical locations and socio-economic backgrounds were epistemologically united on the name of Islam. But ontological analysis of the preparation situation reveals that the desire to safeguard the societal, political and economic rights of downtrodden common masses and the power-grabbing aspiration of political elites led them towards resistance but with the unifying force of Islam which galvanized their cultural diversities. These identity groups in the case of

Pakistan are also linked in domains of political and economic strengths. (Saeed, 1980, p. 5).

Consequently, as rightly contended by a Pakistani scholar Amin (1993) says that "One major unresolved area of conflict in Pakistan is the problem of ethnic and regional sub-nationalism in the smaller provinces. Although Pakistan is now a more cohesive state than it was before the separation of East Pakistan, critical problems remain unresolved and tend to complicate the process of nation-building."

There are four main reasons why turned into a hub of conflict in the four provinces of Pakistan and caused many ethnic conflicts at different levels. First, conflicts are based on resources, especially those dealing with water, mineral, energy, and natural resources. Second, ethnic and sectarian conflicts Third, minorities conflict and finally, the proclamation of sub-provincial identities claiming a separate provincial status. (Ahmar, 2013, p. 9)

According to Mushtaq, "the provincial minority groups are concentrated in a particular region of the respective provinces: Siraikis in Southern Punjab, Hazarewals in Hazara region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Pashtuns in northern Baluchistan are demanding merger of Pashtun Baluchistan with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and a separate province, and Mohajirs in the urban Sindh, particularly in Karachi and Hyderabad. The provincial minorities are demanding separate provinces for their groups in the respective provincial regions. The Siraikis have launched a movement for the creation of Siraiki province comprising south Punjab. The Hazarewals are demanding the province of Hazara consisting of the eight districts of Hazara division of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province." (Mushtaq, 2016, p. 4) likewise, the people of Bahawalpur Division have been asserting the reinstatement of the provincial status of the region which is situated in the south Punjab province. Moreover, similar kinds of demand are more or less the same in all the regions of Pakistan. (Mushtaq, 2016, p. 7)

Theoretical Essence

Post-independence ethnic imbalance led to inequality throughout Pakistan. Disparities are caused by unequal development and human insecurity. And this happens due to uneven socioeconomic and political opportunities for different identities. (Chenoy, 2009, p. 116)

Delineating the Mythological Framework

For the current research, the major sources for the data collection that have been utilized were primary and secondary. The primary resources include the official reports, group discussions, and open-handed interviews. The available secondary resources include, Research Articles published in various HEC recognized journals, Books, magazines, newspapers and other sources. Therefore, the methodical approach depends to conduct an in-depth study of official documents, research journals, books, newspapers and essays was conducted.

In this paper, qualitative and quantitative disparities within each province are being highlighted by utilizing reports of human and social developmental indices along with analytical discussions of academia by using social repositories, electronic and printed journals, books, newspapers, blogs, maps, reports and conference paper series and related website pages. The current research also focused on quantitative key variables and applied these variables to measure the sources. In the first part, a qualitative analysis of each province is discussed while in a later section this claimed disparity within the provinces is argued quantitatively by employing facts and figures.

Literature Review

Adeney (2007) has advocated a rich material concerning ethnic conflict regulation in India and Pakistan. The focus is on the formation of regional and segmental administrative units. The research also helps to understand the ethnic division in Pakistan and India to realize its current results. The conclusion recommended sufficient power-sharing and administrative management in Pakistan. Veena (2008) deals with the subjects of development, democracy, and dissatisfaction in the general framework of South Asia and the particular contexts of the key countries of the region. Major challenges provoking development and democracy in South Asia, including the interface between multi-cultural democracy, sub-nationalism, identity, and development in India; a movement for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan; and the Maoist drive and its democratic accommodation in Nepal are part of the thorough discussions in the book.

Sen (2006) illustrates three different methodologies of nationalism. Amartya argues that violence and conflict have been on the rise in the recent past. The world is divided among cultural, civilization, and religious boundaries. People are discounting other commonalities like morals, sciences, professions, language, politics, class and literature.

Naz (2019) has pointed out the politics and Ethnic Identities in Pakistan and elaborated on the Cross-Sectional Provincial Analysis of Human Security in Pakistan. The study has been keen analysis in a historical and normative way. He further highlighted some core factors behind the major causes of the rise of the ethnic movement in Pakistan.

Mushtaq (2009) has examined the ethnic diversity and formation of federalism on regional patterns in Pakistan. He examined that the formation of federalism on consociational principles could be the main pattern for Pakistan to resolve its administrative and communal problems.

Ethno-Nationalist Movements and Demands for the Creation of New Federating Units

It is generally “acknowledged that each province of Pakistan is associated with a certain ethnolinguistic group Punjab with *Punjabi*, Sindh with *Sindhi*, Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa with *Pashtun*, and Baluchistan with *Baloch*. However, the ethnolinguistic composition of each province demonstrates a substantial minority group. The provincial minority groups are concentrated in a particular region of the respective provinces: the Siraikis in southern Punjab, *Hazarewals* in the Hazara region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Pashtuns in northern Baluchistan, and Mohajirs in the urban Sindh, particularly in Karachi and Hyderabad". (Mushtaq, 2016, p, 5)

The cross-sectional provincial analysis of Pakistan suggests that these prominent and dominant provincial ethnic groups which sustain high status on the human developmental index in various provinces in Pakistan are also politically active ethnic identities in each province or vice versa. In the state of Pakistan which is ethnically diverse, these four dominant provincial ethnic groups have an ethnic clash with provincial minorities ethnic groups in each province including Punjabi ethnic group with Siraiki in Punjab, Sindhi ethnic group with Urdu speakers in Sindh, Pakhtun ethnic group with Hazarawal in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluch ethnic groups with Pakhtun in Baluchistan. These ethnic provincial minorities are demanding separate provinces for their ethnic groups in the particular provincial regions. (Mushtaq, 2016, p. 9)

The Demand for Siraiki Province

The Siraiki movement is a movement for a new province in Punjab. Siraikistan province has Twenty-one districts in Punjab, two districts from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province and two agencies that are Siraiki speaking areas. Makhdoom Moin-ur-Raheem Qureshi al-Hashmi, Chairman of Pakistan Siraiki League. Pakistan, Siraiki League and Pakistan Siraiki Movement have announced to join hands with Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT). (Hayat, 2021, p. 2)

According to Feroz Ahmed "Punjab is relatively prosperous and the most populous province of Pakistan. However, the southern part of the province is relatively underdeveloped and poorer. This region is comprised of three divisions, i.e. Multan, Bahawalpur, and Dera Ghazi Khan. Historically, the people of South Punjab had a distinctive identity and political history. Multan had a provincial status during the Mughal period. Subsequently, it was made a part of Punjab during the Sikh era. Dera Ghazi Khan had remained a part of Baluchistan before its merging into Punjab and had 'tended toward Baloch identity.'" (Ahmed, 1998).

Generally, the Siraiki region has a rich history. "According to some Siraiki nationalists the origin of Siraiki identity back to the accession of Multan province with the Lahore province in 1818 by Ranjeet Singh (Langah, 2005). Since its accession, a sense of marginalization and relative deprivation was created among the people of the Siraiki region. The local folklore of that period established the concerns and feelings of the people of this region. The Siraikis argue that the region remained downgraded and neglected even during the British period." (1857-1947). Some mega projects were initiated by the British government such as canal colonies, the establishment of cantonments brought prosperity and development to Northern and

Central Punjab. But these projects proved unfruitful for South Punjab (Mushtaq, 2017, p. 3)

Before the Bahawalpur merger into the Province of West Pakistan, it had a provincial status under the one-unit scheme, which was not restored after the dissolution of the one-unit scheme on 1st July 1970. Hence the people of this Siraiki region had propelled a movement for the reinstatement of provincial status in 1970. Over time the Siraiki province movement lost its demand. After the passage of the 18th constitutional amendment in the constitution of Pakistan, the demand for new provinces re-emerged by certain provincial ethnic minorities. Similarly, the movement for Bahawalpur province in the Siraiki belt has once again got momentum. (Javaid, 2009).

In fact, “there are two types of demand in Siraiki region, at first Siraiki group has been demanding for the restoration of the status of Bahawalpur as a Province and other demanding for a separate Siraiki province. Bahawalpur was a princely state that acceded to Pakistan and was granted provincial status in 1953. Under the one-unit scheme in 1954, Bahawalpur was merged with the province of West Pakistan. However, when the one-unit scheme was abolished in July 1970, Bahawalpur was granted a status of a division in the province of Punjab.” (Ahmed, 1998).

After the *Punjabi* ethnic group, Siraikis are the second larger majority in the region. It has been contended that the claim of Siraiki province has no application for the majority of people in Bahawalpur. Only a unit of Siraiki speaking people has maintained the idea; the rest of Siraikis request for restoration of Bahawalpur province. In addition, other major groups in the region like Punjabis and Urdu speaking people are “totally against” the demand of Siraiki province (Mushtaq, 2016, p. 5)

The people who are now “believed to be Siraiki- speaking’ had different languages: ‘Riyasti’ had remained the language of the majority in the state of Bahawalpur, Multani in Multan, and ‘Derewal’ in Dera Ghazi Khan and its surroundings. However, since the 1970s the people identify themselves as Siraiki and feel more pride in the Siraiki language, culture, and identity. South Punjab (Bahawalpur, Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan Divisions) makes up almost 48.5% of the total territory of Punjab and inhabits 28.23% of the total population of the province, the majority of the people are Siraiki speaking. However, there is a considerable Punjabi speaking population in the region. Equally, the Urdu speaking population has a significant presence in the urban centres of the region.” (Shaheen, 2015, p.100)

Mostly, the Siraiki people presented the case for a separate province on socio-economic grounds. Formerly, “the demand for improved recognition of the Siraiki language has remained a vehicle for Siraikis to express their desire for a more equitable treatment” (Mushtaq, 2011, p. 6).

Nevertheless, since mid-the 1970s they have started demanding the creation of a “Siraiki province by proposing the division of Punjab”. “The areas mentioned in the

proposed province of Siraikistan include the divisions of Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, and the districts of Jhang and Dera Ismael Khan (Langah, 2011). Evidence reveals that there are different perspectives regarding the name and the boundaries of the proposed province (Mushtaq, 2011). The nationalists demand a Siraiki province based on the Siraiki identity, namely Siraikistan. Others argue for the creation of a province on administrative grounds, namely the province of South Punjab". Moreover, the people of "Bahawalpur are demanding for Bahawalpur province outside of the proposed Siraiki province" (Mushtaq, 2011). The Siraiki nationalist parties have no plea for the Siraiki constituency. However, it has been observed that "the Siraiki issue is an important factor in the politics of region". The results of general elections between 1988 and 1997 exposed that the Siraiki voters were inclined to the PPP and the Punjabi speaking voters support PML-N at several polling stations (Wilder, 1999, p. 2).

Demand for Hazara Province

Hazara region consisted of Hindko speaking population that is consisted of eight districts, with a total population exceeds to 7.8 million. In the *Hazara* region, 87 percent are Hindko speaking and the remaining 13 percent belong to other ethnic communities. The people of the *Hazara* region "*Hazarawal*" (various ethnolinguistic groups inhabited in *Hazara*) restarted the demand for *Hazara* Province when in April 2010 the 18th constitutional amendment has been inducted into the constitution of Pakistan. They are mainly claiming to certify the balance of power between provincial and federal governments by producing federal-provincial forums. Unlikely, changing the name of NWFP to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been strong demand of the Pashtun nationalist to reflect the ethnic identity of Pukhtoon people like the other major ethnic groups such as Sindhis, Punjabis and Balochis. (Government of Pakistan, 2022)

"The movement for a separate *Hazara* province got an impetus when on April 12, 2010, seven people were killed by police firing on a demonstration in Abbottabad which was demanding a separate provincial status for *Hazara* division. Since then, lawyers, political parties and other segments of civil society in *Hazara* have been holding protest meetings and rallies against what they term 'repressive' policies of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government of Peshawar in denying the people of *Hazara* their due rights and status. To what extent the movement for *Hazara* province is legitimate and why it has not been able to muster support in the general elections held in May 2013 needs to be analyzed in some detail." (Ahmar, 2013, p. 12)

The Pashtun nationalist politics has been famous in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa even before the partition of India in 1947. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan also known as Bacha Khan, had propelled a movement for a separate motherland for the Pashtuns people of Pashtunistan who was ruling in NWFP which is now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This movement remained popular in Peshawar valley and its surroundings Pashto speaking areas. Though, the people of the *Hazara* region supported the All India Muslim League in both 1937 and 1945-46 elections and also to win the referendum in July 1947 that was directed to choose the political fate of the then N.W.F.P now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Traditionally, “the people of *Hazara* region have well-preserved their distinctive identity. They had disconnected themselves from the Pashtunistan movement and Pashtun nationalist politics. When the NWFP was renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010 through the 18th constitutional amendment, the *Hazarewals* protested against this decision. Resultantly, they appealed for a separate province comprising the various district of the *Hazara* division for Hazarewals. The activist groups of the *Hazara* province movement including the Tehreek Huqooq-e-Hazara, Tehreek-e- Sooba Hazara Pakistan, and Hazara Qaumi Mahaz are working for the rights of Hazarewal. Hindko-speaking people Hazarewals are the second largest group of the province”. They are mostly living in the *Hazara* region. This division consists of eight districts including Mansehra, Batgram, Haripur, Abbottabad, Upper Kohistan, Lower Kohistan, Torghar and Kolai. The Hazarewals make up 87% of the population of the region. (Mushtaq, 2016, p. 8)

Conclusion

Pakistan is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious state of South Asia and inhabits people with racial segregation, sectarian divide and lingual, cultural and ethnic diversities. So the problem of the Pakistani federation is not limited to the discourse of unevenness among federating units.

In the provincial landscape of Pakistan, the dynamics of conflicts are primarily lingual and ethnic. From ethnic and lingual cleavages and conflicts, no province of Pakistan can claim to be free. Undoubtedly, yet within a provincial set up the provinces of Pakistan are named ethnologically, there are various sub-ethnic identities in all four provinces. For example, in Baluchistan, the Baluch people are living and which also reflects the land of Balochs, a sizeable population is non-Baloch composed of Pashtuns and *Brauhis*. Similarly, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there is a considerable non-Pashtun ethnic group called Hindko, likewise in Punjab, a substantial group of Siraiki speaking population in the southern parts of the province has been demanding a separate province. Similarly, in Sindh, the non-Sindhi population is considerable primarily composed of *Mohajirs* (Urdu speaking), *Baluchs*, *Pashtun* and *Punjabis*. All these provincial ethnic identities have been asserting separate provinces or more autonomy in their respective regions.

In sum, the ethnic movements in the provincial minorities have been asserting a separate province in Pakistan. Presently, Pakistan is confronted with maintaining the integrity of its political boundaries while at the same time the problems to satisfy the needs of different ethnic benefits within its borders. It is imperious for Pakistan to reorganize its system to accommodate this reality. Efforts towards achieving egalitarianism, democracy, and devolution of real political powers and administration will save the day for Pakistan. Without this, a sense of deprivation could increase strength and lead to more consistent floods of ethnic militancy.

The state of Pakistan has been badly failed to accommodate these ethnic, sub-national and ethnonational groups at a larger level, especially in the case of Hazara and Siraiki ethno-nationalist movements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab

respectively. Unlike the neighbouring country, India had been accommodating sub-national ethnic groups since its creation. As India is a more ethnically diversified society than Pakistan and created 14 new provinces after its formation and Pakistan could not create any new ones.

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