

Issue of SaraikiStan: Post 18th Amendment

Sana Ullah* Ijaz Khalid† Shazia Hassan‡

Abstract

The paper primarily focuses on salient dynamics voiced for division of Punjab and establishment of Saraiki Province and is aiming to aware coming parliamentarians regarding the sensitive issue so that they can make themselves capable to develop skill to resolve such generic issues. The non-justifiable allocation and distribution of resources by the federal government not only created hatred between East and West Pakistan in 1971 but later on among four provinces of Pakistan as well. For the last more than seventy years, the inspirations of ethnicity and regionalism evoked by Pukhtoons, Baluchis, Muhajirs and Saraikis made the process of national integration complex and so politicized different socio-economic and issues concerning different people of different regions which sometimes led to civil war situations in Pakistan. Though state's constitution provided equal rights and opportunities to all nationalities in all spheres of life. However the feeling of provincialism or regionalism awakens in the minds when the people of a particular area are continuously neglected by the ruling class and so they are politically educated as backward and discriminated people by their local leaders. In this way, these leaders keep political hold over the specified area and its people. Regional disparities in terms of revenue and consumptions have awakened the perception of ignorance and discrimination and this is the reason that PML (N) faced severe hurdles and the repatriation of its own parliamentarians as the Saraiki community has been continuously neglected by the Punjabi dominated Political Party in the National legislature.

Key Words: Ethno-Nationalism, Identity Crisis, Deprivations, Regionalism, Saraiki Nationalist Movement, Eighteenth Amendment

Introduction

The demand for Saraiki province sought great importance due to existence of Saraiki speaking people in the province of Punjab and in order to overcome the socio-cultural and politico-economic deprivation of these people, division of Punjab is required. Saraiki population in Pakistan is 10.53%, and in Punjab is

*Demonstrator & PhD Scholar, Department of Political Science, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Pakistan. Email: sanaullahawkumian@gmail.com

†Demonstrator & PhD Scholar, Department of Political Science, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Pakistan.

‡Assistant Professor, LMS Department, Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

17.3% in census. It is therefore that they demand the territorial division of this province into two unequal parts i.e. Southern and central Punjab and this demand has sought greater importance when 18th amendment has been asserted into the state constitution (Mother tongue , 2011). A research based historical facts of the aforesaid language can be traced back from the colonial era where British were deployed in different areas like Multan, Muzafar Garh and Dera Ghazi Khan conducting translations and linguistics surveys (Pasha, 2011). But despite identifying areas, the language recognized today was neither given the standard name nor was recognized by the government language planning and publication just as other languages discovered during the colonial era and was known by Jatki', 'Jagdali', 'Lahnda', and 'Western Punjabi' as regional names by the British masters (Jukes, 2003).

Multan remained under a rule of a Muslim ruler Muzafar Khan Sadozai till 1818 when he was defeated by a Sikh warrior Maharaja Ranjit Sing after 17 unsuccessful conquests. Ranjit Sing who had already subjugated this area and established 'Punjab'= the land of five rivers, realized the military and trade significance of Multan as well and so appointed Mul Raj as Governor of Multan but kept its autonomous status (Steinbach, 1976). The official language of this territory during Sing rule was Persian and cultural language was Bhraj Bhasha, dominating other native languages of the area. That's why struggle for provincial autonomy had been going on since beginning of 19th century. However Mul Raj was defeated by British in 1848, acceding area of Multan with that of Lahore and named it Punjab (<http://www.kashmiralight.com/images/treatyOfamritsar.pdf>).

One may say that linguistic and culture issues were intentionally pushed back by both Sing and British. The irrigation projects, green revolution and such other developments being introduced by the colonial rulers in order to develop racial supremacy and providing socio-economic benefits to certain races which emerged landlord and economically upper class of Punjabis and the native people remained oppressed and backward. Such policies are still adopted by the present government even, making certain cities of Punjab economically and administratively better by allocating economic and industrial resources in specified cities like Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Rawalpindi and Islamabad etc. Resultantly Punjab was dominated by the Punjabi settlers and Urdu speakers who called themselves as Muhajirs (immigrants of India) and were in minority. These settlers were mainly pushed back by the Political or Military heads such as Liaqat Ali Khan, General Zia, General Musharraf and Nawaz Sharif to increase their strength as compared to Saraiki speakers (Ziring, 1997).

The Punjabi-Muhajar ruling class is under-estimating and disregarding other linguistic groups in Pakistan, while other ethnicities like Saraiki, Sindhi, Baloch and Pakhuns consider the former one as being 'outsiders', 'immigrants' who occupied their native provinces in newly established state. Outsiders

consider Saraiki not a language but an accent, *ung* or variant form of Punjabi and that's why secured no acknowledgement during Ayub Khan (1958-1969) rather Hindus and Sikh made cross border relations and supported Punjabi culture in Pakistan (Shackle, 1972). Similarly during Bhutto regime (1971-77), no any positive initiative was taken by him. In 1970's when languages were associated with different identities, the resistance for Saraiki also became strengthened. It was a period of national insecurity when various ethnicities within Pakistan allied together against dominated Punjabi elite (Reporter, 17th April 2004).

The first Saraiki literary conference was held and standardized name for their language as 'Saraiki' and then a movement started in 1975 for attainment of its socio-political status. During General Zia-ul-Haq (1978-1988), the organization of 'Saraiki Lawyers Forum' led to the creation of 'Siriaki Sooba Mahaz' by Taj Mohammad Langah in 1984. The present 'Pakistan Saraiki Party' is the final version of Saraiki identity at national and international level and is still headed by Langah. He is a barrister by profession and was an important figure in Bhutto's government but left PPP only with a view to represent Saraiki people. In the reign of Benazir Bhutto (1988-98) and Nawaz Sharif (1990-93, 1997-8) governments, teaching of Punjabi language and Punjabi literature was actively published and started. The Saraiki literatures, its writers and folk culture were collectively published as part of Punjabi culture and literature and were being taught and published as part of Punjabi syllabi in higher educational institutions (Rahman, 1998). The aim was to enhance and strengthen Punjabi population's political position by allying with Mohajirs, as separately they were in minority in Punjab. Same was the case in Musharraf (1999-2008) regime, although Saraiki was recognized as a distinct language in the 1981 census. These are the realities which put the political status of Saraiki people into very background and therefore they started demanding Saraiki province with the name of 'Saraikistan' and central Punjab (Khan, 1975).

Onset of the Saraiki issue

Saraiki ambition was agitated in 2009 when southern Punjab considered the area and its people as discriminated despite of their due rights in social development. In a question-answer session held in 2009 in National Assembly regarding the loan taken by the ministry of communication from the World Bank worth Rs. 20 billion for construction of roads but not a single road has been constructed in a Southern Punjab, in an another project of Rs. 20 billion of Asian development Bank only 37 kilometer road was built from Multan to Muzaffargarh (Missen, 2011). Similarly out of 18 developmental projects all over the state, 8 were initiated in central and northern Punjab but not in South. Same is the case with the amount of Rs, 5 billion, 490 billion were cited in somewhere else and 10 billion were utilized in southern part of the province. This is the reason why local

politicians both in national and provincial legislatures opted for a separate province. Establishment of a new province inside Punjab is not a new issue rather it achieved importance when one unit was dissolved by Yahya Khan and Bahawalpur district was annexed to Punjab (Latif, 2011). The Saraiki movement was though started in 1960 not on political bases but purely a cultural and linguistic based movement but later on it was transformed into a political movement and as a political party as well. Currently there are six main groups and political parties working for a separate province (Saraikistan. [http:// waseb.wordpress.com](http://waseb.wordpress.com), 2010).

- Saraiki Qaumi Movement
- Pakistan Saraiki Party
- Saraikistan Qaumi Movement
- Saraiki National Party
- Saraikistan Qaumi Ittehad
- Saraiki Sooba Movement (A registered party with Election Commission) in 2002.

Among other grievances of the people, concerned one is that what Bahawalpur produce from cotton are not spent on it in order to develop the living standard of common people. Estimates available show that in southern Punjab 43% people live below poverty line as compared to rest of Punjab which show 27% poverty growth rate. That's why Saraiki put demand for an increase in quota for the region but all in vain. Demand for a separate province has been ripe now and it must consist of at least 22 districts purely speaking Saraiki language (Mayo, 2009). The existence of a separate province will affect a distinct budget which will worth more than 5 billion, this will give a boost to cotton and other agricultural products and industrial goods which will ultimately benefit the local people and will become less dependent on upper and central Punjab (Chaudry, 2011).

Geographic Location

The territorial limitations of Saraikistan can best be understood by studying map given by PSP; however the boundaries of Saraikistan can be stretched to main divisions of Punjab - Multan, Bahawalpur, Sahiwal, Khaniwal, Sargodha, Jhang, Rahim Yar Khan, D.I.Khan, D.G.khan and Tang. These cities are agriculturally rich as well. Moreover Saraiki is the second largest speaking language in the provinces of KPK, Sindh and Baluchistan even but has never claimed on areas of Sindh and Baluchistan (N.Langah, 2005).

Political Efforts for Saraikistan

According to the independence Act, the rulers of States of Pakistan had to opt about their future with India or Pakistan. The Nawab of Bahawalpur State was though pressurized by India to accede to India but he acceded to Pakistan and was given the status of administrative province. Provincial elections were held and Nawab was appointed as ex officio governor of the province (Grierson). However after declaration of West Pakistan provinces as 'One Unit' (which was undemocratic and unconstitutional), and the framing of 1956 constitution on 'parity' basis having equal seats in national assembly and providing equal rights in all regions was firstly rejected by East Pakistan which later on resulted in breakup of Pakistan in 1970. After that, powerful Pakhtun and Baloch leadership, pressurized bureaucracy for dissolving One Unit and creation of five provinces but besides Punjab, Sindh and N.W.F.P (now KP), Baluchistan was made the fourth one and ignoring the creation of the fifth province- Bahawalpur.

The Saraikis started a movement in April 1970. Riaz Hashmi leader of anti-One Unit movement recorded a petition in the Supreme Court and claimed that the federation is bound for restoration of Bahawalpur province as it existed on the eve of 'One Unit' and had not restored like other provinces. He argued that the last ruler of Bahawalpur and great friend of Quaid had committed to the Nawab of Bahawalpur through various letters, agreements and treaties to give due autonomous status to the people of Bahawalpur in any future federation (Katherine, 2011). This petition was dismissed by the Supreme Court on the slipshod ground that Hashmi had no *locus standi* to file the petition. He proclaimed that if the provincial status of Bahawalpur is not revised, then the entire Saraiki region will fight to create 'Saraikistan'. Hence the word, 'Saraikistan' was first introduced by Hashmi (Hashmi, 1972).

Issue of Saraikistan and 18th Amendment

Complications further occurred for 'Call for Saraiki province' or 'Saraikistan' when 18th amendment has been inducted in the constitution of Pakistan claiming to ensure balance of power between federal and provincial governments by creating federal-provincial forums but unlikely the Pukhtoon nationalists demand to change name of the province from N.W.F.P to KP in order to reflect ethnic identity of Pukhtoon people just as Sindhis and Balochis (<http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/>). This demand regarding Saraiki people was not accomplished as the province of Punjab will then be divided among Punjabis, Muhajir settlers and Saraiki indigenous people. Although the governmental machinery has realized the importance of ethnic identities on the occasion of floods in Saraiki region which was badly affected but as far from

center of ruling- Lahore, in-time access couldn't be made which both national and international powers strongly felt that if provincial government's headquarters were at Multan, the calamity would be easily handled and rehabilitation would take place. But as usual, negligence of the ruling class, demand for 'Saraikistan' boosted. However a good effect of the 18th amendment was that for the first time Saraiki issue has been discussed inside parliament and accepted that this is not a dialect but a language having its specific identity and spoken in Pakistan and so required equal provincial status like other languages of the state.

Regarding the 18th Amendment and Saraiki province the ethnic activists and common masses have given varied opinion. Some are of the view that 18th amendment will ensure their struggle for provincial rights while others are of the view that amendment has done nothing for Saraiki people rather subjugate them more under Punjabi nationality and it has though acknowledged 'Khyber Pakhtunkhwa' but has arisen resistance from other parts as well like, 'Demand of Hazara province' by 'Hindki' speaking people and other parts of the province (Liaquatpuri, 2010).

Political Parties' Viewpoint

Moreover ML (N) supports KP and Hazra movement for its vote bank and cheap popularity and ML (Q) opposes it (Khubarai., 13th April 2010). The PM Yousaf Raza Gailani, during PPP government (2008) while conducting a meeting in Jalalpur (Multan) declared that creation of Saraiki and other small provinces will be the PPP's forthcoming election manifesto, not only this but Zardari has also announced that a Manifesto committee of PPP will formulate suggestions for 5th federating unit of Pakistan. However 'Pakistan Saraiki Party' National Council in a high profile session rejected this declaration of PPP and stated that announcement by PPP was meant only to put PM L(N) in obscured situation and get sympathies of Saraiki people and if PPP is sincere in fulfilling demand of 70 million Saraiki people then PPP which has currently majority in the parliament, should introduce 20th amendment in National Assembly as majority of MNAs from Saraiki region of all parties support the matter in favor of the demanding people (President, 2011).

The CM of Punjab after loss in by- election in D.G Khan by a member of PML (Q) on 25000 votes with the support of Saraiki nationalists, gave a statement that PML (N) has no objection in the creation of new provinces- Saraiki or Hazara (Awan, 2013). The president of PSP in an interview declared that if the division of Pakhtun and Saraiki entities occurs on the pattern of East and West Germany, North and South Korea, Arab and Israel Palestine or Azad and occupied Kashmir by the establishment of Pakistan, bloodshed will definitely occur (Sayyed, 2011). However divergent opinion of two Muslim Leagues,

Punjabi-Muhajir ruling class, establishment, agencies and PPP's Punjab politics seem it impossible to pass 20th amendment on the floor of assembly and make certain the establishment of Saraiki and other provinces and that is why Saraiki nationalists have lost faith on their allies (Mirza, 2016). This is reason that Pakistan Muslim League (N) lost support of the MNAs belonging to Southern Punjab and voiced for fighting the Saraiki rights through a platform of Pakistan Saraiki Party in general election of 2018.

Conclusion

Ethno-Nationalism has ever remained an important issue causing political instability and development of the state. Though certain necessary actions were taken in the past but the disputed socio-economic cum political matters were not tackle with full enthusiasm. Despite of the legitimate right and demand of the Saraiki people for division of Punjab into two with Bahawalpur as the centre of Southern province (Saraikistan) or named as Province of Bahawalpur whatever the situation may be but the realities lie in the fact that deprivations do exist in the related region which must be addressed in the coming tenure of the democratic government. Democracy believes in solution to the problems through pacific means and avoidance of any clash which, may disturb the politico-economic stability of the whole state. A good platform for such issue is public opinion to be sought from civil society, parliament and provincial assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

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