

## **ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND NATIONHOOD IN PAKISTAN: A STUDY**

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The history of Pakistan as a nation indicates that it was formed on the singular ideology of 'Islam as a state religion. However, the 'Two-Nation' theory, on which Pakistan demanded a separate statehood, proved futile after the 1971 bifurcation of the 'Islamic state' into two independent states. It appears that other factors other than religion have played an important role in the formation of Pakistan as a nation. So, instead of looking at Pakistan through the prism of religion alone, the rise of ethnic movements of various groups' calls for a different approach. Since its inception, Pakistan has witnessed numerous turbulent events, many of which were driven by ethnic conflicts. The parting of the eastern wing of Pakistan in 1971, the upsurge in the interior of Sindh, repeated resistance movements in Balochistan, the unsettled grievances of Pashtuns, and the highly discontented Muhajirs, underline the explosive nature of Pakistan's ethnic problems and the failure on the part of the state to come in terms with the ethnic diversity of the country. As the understanding of any problem precedes the solutions, it becomes crucial to have a deep analysis of the ethnic problems of Pakistan. The sustenance of the multi-ethnic culture weaving it with the concept of the nation-state is vital for its survival.

The dissolution of several multi-ethnic states like the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia opened a new wave of ethnic group mobilisation in places like Uzbekistan, Latvia, Slovakia, and Serbia. In the decolonisation era in the mid-20th Century, ethnic identity became the source for political, economic, and cultural empowerment. This research article analyses the working of ethnic identity politics in Pakistan.

### **Ethnicity in Pakistan**

As ethnic groups, either dominant or subordinate, transform and organise themselves into political conflict groups to protect their perceived interests, the emotional proximity of their internal ethnic cohesion rises. This intensification further increases if the members of the ethnic group also perceive themselves as sharing common political and socio-economic experiences<sup>1</sup>. One of the serious challenges that Pakistan has been dealing with since 1947 is the self-assertion of various ethnic groups. The problem with Pakistan is the positive

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correlation between asymmetries in power and asymmetries in size, coupled with a negative correlation with asymmetries in resources. As Feroz Ahmed says, "Given the ethnic specificity of the armed forces and the spending of the largest portion of the budget on defence, a more equitable distribution of resources among ethnic communities is unthinkable without drastically altering the ethnic composition of the military and/or reducing the military budget<sup>2</sup>." The government of Pakistan has always treated ethnic problems as law and order issues rather than sympathetically giving an ear to their grievances. Instead of accommodating the minority ethnic groups into the polity, the political elites have grossly neglected them. Pakistan is a multi-ethnic state marked by the acute semi-feudal and semi-colonial social order. It has been reasserting itself for the past several years in the form of the nationalities' demands for greater autonomy and proper status for their language.

"Ethnic politics in Pakistan is a story of ambiguous, often turbulent relations between the centre and the provinces and the net result of political, economic, and cultural alienation. At another level, it is a saga of majority-minority discord, aggravated by rapid demographic changes pushing new economic forces and contestations over census statistics, quotas, and jobs<sup>3</sup>." Veena Kukreja comments that the ethnic problems in Pakistan are a 'classic divide' between the centralists and the autonomy seekers. The former wanted a unified Pakistan, which reflects in the One-Unit formula applied by the government. On the other hand, the latter insisted on recognising Pakistan as a multi-national state where the wishes of the provincial government should also be taken into account by the federal government. With differing intensity, various factors like regional identification, historical and cultural postulates, lingual commonalities, and economic denominators have played a vital role in the rise and stabilisation of ethno nationalism<sup>4</sup>.

Language is also at the heart of Pakistan's ethnic problem. Tariq Rehman writes that the language issue in Pakistan is about hegemonic and counter-hegemonic movements, compromises and balances between various groups, and strife and equilibrium<sup>5</sup>. Like Bengali language movement was counter-hegemonic and emphasised language and culture rather than the Islamic identity and became a prototypical case of ethnonationalist assertion in the country.

### **East Pakistan/Bengali Nationalism**

The first ethnic problem that came on a big scale after the independence of Pakistan was that of the Bengali ethnic group. As a language, it is the fifth most spoken language globally and descended from ancient Brahmi script.

One of the main issues present in all other ethnic groups in Pakistan is being a

minority community vis-à-vis Punjabis. Interestingly this factor was absent in this ethno nationalist group, constituting around 54 percent of Pakistan's population. Rounaq Jahan remarks that the power structure inherited after partition had in effect little Bengali participation. The policy pursued by the national elite in the early years, a policy of one state, one government, one economy, one language, tended to perpetuate the already existing imbalance and was an essential factor in the growth of Bengali alienation in the very first decade of Pakistan's existence<sup>6</sup>. The Bengali language became the vehicle for the expression of their nationalist sentiments. The educated Bengali people opposed the imposition of Urdu, which was spoken by the west's elite and a remote language to the people of the east. Bengalis were not only fiercely proud of the rich literary heritage of the Bengali language, but Urdu was a language they hardly understood. The sweltering discontent ultimately led to the Bengali Language Movement, which was suppressed, and on 21st February 1952, some activists were killed by the police in Dhaka. This date (Language Movement day) became a symbol of resistance against the Punjabi-dominated West Pakistani ruling elite<sup>7</sup>. Rahman opined, "Although after 1956, the main emphasis of the Bengalis was on an overtly economic and political matter, cultural and linguistic matters also remained important. They were crucial insofar as they contributed to identity formation<sup>8</sup>."

Despite being a majority group, the under-representation in the military and bureaucracy of the Bengalis further aggravated the east-west divide. Jahan observes that Bengalis constituted 5 percent of the military elite and 10 percent of the entrepreneurial class<sup>9</sup>.

The regional economic disparity, imbalance, and exploitation provoked bitter opposition and resentment towards the federal government. The people of East Pakistan considered themselves to be treated like a colony of West Pakistan. East Pakistan had more cotton textile mills than West Pakistan, but by the 1970s, it ended as the biggest market for export of finished textile goods from West Pakistan, proving the discriminatory treatment of the federal government. The West Pakistani elites' economic policies and development strategy led to the unprecedented development of the Western wing at the expense of its Eastern counterpart<sup>10</sup>. Richard Nation observes that a double edifice of exploitation has built on the unique structure of two separate economies politically united within a single Pseudo-National state. Both the traditional forms of social and imperial exploitation were compressed in Bengal<sup>11</sup>.

With the growing discontent, Bengalis in Pakistan, led by the Awami League and its charismatic leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, launched massive civil disobedience and autonomy movements, notably the six-point movement. The six demands put forward in the movement were:

- J The constitution shall provide a federation of Pakistan on the Lahore Resolution and a parliamentary form of government with the rule of a legislature directly elected based on universal adult franchise.
- J The federal government shall deal with only two subjects: Defence and Foreign Affairs, and all other residuary matters shall be vested in the federating states.
- J Adequate constitutional provisions should be submitted to stop the flight of capital from east to west Pakistan. Two separate yet freely convertible currencies for two wings should be introduced. A separate reserve bank should be established along with an independent fiscal and monetary policy for east Pakistan.
- J The power of taxation and revenue collection shall be vested in the federating units, and the centre will have no such authority on the issue. The federation shall be entitled to a share in state taxes to meet its expenditures.
- J There should be two distinct accounts for the foreign exchange earnings of the two wings; the foreign exchange requirements of the federal government should be met by the two wings equally or in a ratio to be fixed; indigenous products shall move free of duty between the two wings, and the constitution shall empower the units to establish trade links with foreign countries.
- J Eastern Pakistan shall have a separate militia or paramilitary force and Navy headquarters in Eastern Pakistan.

According to Kukreja, points three, four, and five of this six-point program were related to the direct control of the economy. This shows that the people of East Pakistan felt that they could manage their socio-economic strategy of development and put forward the demand for autonomy<sup>12</sup>. These movements are essentially seen as having played a pivotal role in promoting the already resurgent Bengali nationalism.

In November 1970, the devastating 'Bhola cyclone' crashed into the southern part of East Pakistan, killing many people, making it the worst natural disaster of the 20th Century. The Pakistani government was very slow to respond to the disaster. Coupled with immense anger caused by this slow response to the cyclone and the already boiling nationalistic fervour in the province, the Awami League won a decisive victory in national elections held in December 1970. The success was on such a scale that it gave them the power to form a government independently. However, the Pakistani political and military establishment led by Yahya Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto refused to allow the party to form a government and Sheikh Mujibur Rehman to become Prime Minister. With the rapidly growing tensions, Bengalis across the province united to resist the Pakistani establishment. On 25th March

1971, the Pakistan Army launched the deadly 'Operation Searchlight' followed by the nine-month-long Bangladesh Liberation War. The Pakistani forces committed atrocities across the province, and 10 million Bengalis fled to India. An estimated 1 to 3 million people had been killed in the war. The war ended with the eventual intervention of India and the subsequent defeat of Pakistan<sup>13</sup>. The Bangladesh Liberation War was a defining point for Bengali nationalism as it united the people across the region. With the division, it was proved that although the basis of Pakistan's origin was religion, it proved an ineffective basis for the sustenance of nationhood.

### **Sindhi Nationalism**

Sindhis account for 14 percent of the population of Pakistan, which forms around third-largest population in the country. Area-wise, Sindh is the second-largest province. Nevertheless, despite the concentration of commerce and industries in Sindh, which has the highest per capita income in the country, the state has the most impoverished rural inhabitants. Adeel Khan observes, "Such a striking disparity has made the province the hotbed of various kinds of nationalism, ranging from separatists and right-wing autonomists to socialist intellectuals and left-wing peasant groups. It is a measure of the political system of Pakistan that Sindh is the most developed province in the country while its indigenous people are, after Baloch, the most marginalised<sup>14</sup>."

Adeel Khan says that Sindhi nationalism is the product of and a response to the interventionist nature of the modern bureaucratic state. The indigenous people feel that their identity and culture are being threatened by how the state imposes itself on the people. The Sindhis realised this soon after partition when they had to face the Punjabi bureaucracy and military. Most Sindhis believe that the "most repressive form of colonialism was after the creation of Pakistan<sup>15</sup>."

Sindh is the ethnically most diverse province of Pakistan. It is due to the international migration of people into the region during and after 1947 and the internal migration since 1947. Sindh has experienced a vast influx of immigrants both from India (Muhajirs) and Pakistan. The mass arrival of Muhajirs and the later influx of Pashtun and Punjabi immigrants to Karachi and other parts of Sindh caused a great deal of resentment among the local Sindhi population. Sindh had received immigrants from its adjoining territories throughout its history. Still, all of the immigrants had assimilated themselves to the culture of Sindh. However, the Muslim immigrant's large-scale influx, the circumstances of partition, and the settlement patterns made the assimilation of the Urdu-speaking population quite tricky<sup>16</sup>. Hamza Alvi also says that in Sindh, the worst contradictions of the politics of ethnicity in

Pakistan are concentrated<sup>17</sup>. In due course of time, the influx of other ethnic groups, including the dominant Punjabis and Pashtuns, led to the demographic changes of the province<sup>18</sup>. These dominant ethnic groups have been attracted by economic opportunities like the financial lure of Karachi and the availability of relatively cheap land on the boundary areas of Punjab. Moreover, because the possibilities can be better seized in the urban areas, the migrants have settled in the urban areas of Sindh. In Karachi, Sindhis constitute only the fifth largest ethnic group, constituting an overwhelming majority in Sindh's rural areas<sup>19</sup>.

The Punjabi Muhajir dominating Pakistani establishment accused the Sindhis of 'provincial particularism'. Nevertheless, the main reasons for the growth of ethnic nationalism in Sindh included economic downslide, the social upheaval, the deteriorating law & order situation, the fear of being swamped by outsiders, and the Pakistani state's less than sympathetic response to Sindhi grievances<sup>20</sup>.

It is believed that initially, the demand for 'Sindhudesh' (Sindhi Homeland) was directed primarily at the Muhajir community. The factors which further aggravated the fear of Sindhis were the Urdu imposition and the One-Unit plan. The Sindhis, despite being Muslims, never related to Muslim refugees or Muhajirs. Hindus shared a common language & culture with the Sindhi Muslims, whereas the Muhajirs, apart from religion, shared nothing else<sup>21</sup>. Several Sindhi Hindus opted to remain in Sindh even after partition because there was no history of conflict between Hindu and Muslim Sindhis. Large tracts of land in Sindh were allotted by the ruling bureaucratic-military oligarchy (mainly Punjabi) to senior officers of the bureaucracy or the military or their relatives rather than Sindhis. These new landlords in Sindh tend mostly to be absentee landlords, and they brought with them Punjabi tenants or labourers, whom they could better control and rely upon than local Sindhis. So this proved to be a double deprivation of lands as well as jobs. In urban areas too, valuable land and property were allotted to persons in these categories<sup>22</sup>.

Muhajirs considered themselves the descendants of Muslim rulers and looked down upon Sindhis as 'feudal, primitive & backward'. Muhajirs had an air of arrogance about 'being there not by kind invitation but by right,' and the insensitive and authoritarian attitude of the state only rubbed salt on the wounds of Sindhis<sup>23</sup>. During the One-Unit period, Sindhi lands were awarded to non-Sindhis, especially Punjabis and Pakistan civil and military officials<sup>24</sup>. The Punjabi-dominated government of Pakistan needed Muhajir's political support, so it started the 'preferential treatment' of Muhajirs.

Economic statistics have further generated a deep sense of alienation and polarisation in Sindhis. There has been rapid commercial growth of Karachi with relatively little

corresponding benefits to the indigenous Sindhis. Kukreja writes, "The Urban areas of Sindh account for more than half of Pakistan's industrial concerns. It contributes 30 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 21.3 percent of the agricultural GDP, with country's highest per capita income. It accounts for 43 percent of the construction industry<sup>25</sup>." Urban Sindh is the financial capital, having the headquarters of most of the country's national banks, significant branches of international banks, insurance companies, and shipping concerns. Karachi is a major port, and it also has the headquarters of the navy<sup>26</sup>. Such activities have certainly created a sense of deprivation in the hinterland.

The language riots, along with demographic and economic statistics, have played a crucial role in ethnic mobilisation. As already mentioned, the Urdu imposition by the centre alienated the Sindhis. During the One-Unit period, Sindh was deprived of its local language as the medium of instruction. After abolishing the One-Unit plan, it was demanded that the Sindhi language be restored, but Muhajir students protested against this, and violence followed. Later the Sindhi students also retaliated by burning pictures of Mohammad Iqbal. Muhajir students also burnt books of Sindhi in the Institute of Sindhology. After that, the army was stationed in Hyderabad, and Karachi was put under curfew. Also, the Sindhi language bill of 1972 established Sindhi as the province's sole official language, which escalated the ethnic tussle between the two groups<sup>27</sup>. All this intensified the division between the two ethnic groups in the province.

The Quota System introduced in 1948 to correct the regional inequality was actually in favour of Muhajirs. By 1951, Sindhis became a minority in Karachi, as 57.1 percent of its population now consisted of Muhajirs. According to the 2018 census, urban Sindh has almost double the population speaking Urdu than the Sindhi. The military bureaucracy has not entertained employing Sindhis because they are mistrusted for having ethnonationalist tendencies. As a result, most of the vital army and civil positions in the interior of Sindh are entrusted to non-Sindhis<sup>28</sup>. Sindhis remain grossly under-represented.

Regarding the representation in the army, the Pakistani army is 'exclusively' Punjabi and Pashtun, accounting for almost 95 percent share of its strength. Particularly in military rule(which has been a routine in Pakistan), Sindhis feel more alienated than ever. Adeel Khan says that the pent-up Sindhi anger against the military exploded in August 1983 when the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) called for a countrywide protest against military rule. The intensity and potency of the unrest were unprecedented in Sindh. Sindhis confronted the heavily armed military force with courage, and it took days for the army to contain the situation. This situation also made Sindhis more sceptical of the

Punjabi military of giving them a fair deal, and the latter, in retaliation, intensified the persecution of Sindhis<sup>29</sup>.

Nevertheless, the most significant impetus for Sindhi rationality is linked with the career and demise of the late Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who belonged to a prominent Sindhi landowning family. He empathised with Sindhi grievances and pursued policies like land reforms to rectify the injustices done to them. Nationalisation of heavy industry, banks, and insurance was taken as anti-Muhajir moves. Z. A. Bhutto's overthrow by a military coup and eventual execution gave Sindhi ethnic sentiment a focal point<sup>30</sup>.

John Coakley says that Sindhis perceived Zia's rule-at best, oblivious to the grievances of Sindhis, and at worst, conspiring to fortify further the position of Punjabis at the expense of Sindhis. However, the assassination of President Zia in August 1988 & the subsequent election of Benazir Bhutto as Prime Minister dramatically changed the situation. Bhutto's regime, led by a woman from Sindh, was considered more accommodating of Sindhi interests<sup>31</sup>. Adeel Khan too observes the decade of the 1990s as that of indifference. He further says that Sindhi politics tend to get radicalised during military rule and the reason is quite apparent- Sindhis having almost no representation in the Pakistan army<sup>32</sup>.

Adeel Khan says, "Sindh continues to be the troubled rather than the troublesome provinces that the Pakistani establishment likes to present it as<sup>33</sup>." Sindhi sentiments should not be labelled as 'provinciality' or 'narrow' nationality. Instead, the interests of the ethnic group need to be assimilated by the Pakistani government. He says "that the Sindhis have remained suspect in the eyes of the establishment, despite their support for the Federalist People's Party and their rejection of nationalist and separatist groups, speaks volumes about the nature of the Pakistani state system<sup>34</sup>."

### **Muhajirs Movement**

Etymologically, the word Muhajir is an Arabic word that means an emigrant. In Urdu, Muhajir denotes a person who has performed a 'Hijrah' or 'Hijrat', meaning migration. 'Hijrah' is the Arabic terminology used to describe the mass exodus or emigration of Muslims, including Prophet Muhammad, from Makkah to settle in a city called 'Yathrib', which later came to be known as 'Madina'. In the Islamic religious context, 'Hijrah' or 'Hijrat' refers to the migration of Muslims to escape religious persecution; hence 'Muhajir' is someone who migrates.

Sometimes, the term is used broadly to include Muslims from Bihar (whose mother tongue is not Urdu but the Bihari language such as Maithili, Magahi, and Bhojpuri) and Muslims from Gujarat, with mother tongue Gujarati but who also speak Urdu alongside



their mother tongue. Thus, the terms 'Muhajir' do not precisely define an ethnic group since many of these people came from diverse ethnicities as they migrated from various parts of Northern and Central South Asia at independence. Many can trace their family roots further back to the Middle East, Persia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. Regardless of their origin, the one uniting factor for them is that their mother tongue is Urdu.

The Urdu-speaking Indian Muslim migrants, the Muhajirs, who migrated from the Muslim minority provinces of India, were the most ardent supporters of state nationalism until the 1970s, after which they began to think of their separate ethnic identity<sup>35</sup>. In 1984, they formed Muhajir Quami Movement (MQM) to assert this identity. Muhajirs remained committed to the 'Two-Nation theory' and possessed a hostile attitude toward ethnic nationalism. They pressed for the adoption of the Urdu language as a source of identity and unity. Sindhis viewed such an assertion as an attack on their culture and traditions. Steps taken to replace Sindhi with Urdu in educational institutions became a cause of insecurity among the Sindhis. They developed hostility against the Urdu-speaking migrants from India and against the state's power.

After partition, the first decade saw the Muhajirs seeking a dominant position in Pakistan's political and bureaucratic arena. However, by the end of the 1950s, Punjabis and Pashtun pushed the Muhajirs from the power sector. Ayub Khan's decision to move the capital to Islamabad from Karachi was also seen as an attempt to marginalise Muhajirs. Then in the 1960-80 period, the Muhajirs witnessed a decline in their political and economic status because of the Quota system<sup>36</sup>. Then the policies of Z.A.Bhutto were also perceived as pro-Sindhis and anti- Muhajirs. The language controversy in 1972 further gave a dramatic blow to the Muhajir's expectations from the government. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 as an independent country also was a defining moment for the Muhajirs as their long-term belief in the Two-Nation theory was shattered with the withering away of the east division (comprising of Muslims only) from the hands of West Pakistan.

Zia-ul-Haq's politics of 'Punjabization' also raised suspicion in the Muhajirs. Share of Muhajirs in civil bureaucracy further reduced under Zia regime. Kukreja observes that the feeling of relative deprivation and loss of hope raised their sense of identity. The MQM addressed the Muhajir's search for identity and became an important example of 'Collective mobilisation of ethnic loyalties<sup>37</sup>.' The state tried to deal with Muhajir nationalism by using force (particularly against MQM supporters), encouraging Punjabi and Pathan settlers against the MQM, and promoting division within the MQM. However, the state was not trying to deal with the problem of Muhajir or Sindhi nationalism politically, the result was more insecurity and ill will in Sindh against state policies.

One interesting observation that Adeel Khan makes is that when the Muhajirs had an unjustifiably large share in the government sector, they were champions of state nationalism. However, when the balance of power shifted to their disadvantage, they started expressing their discontent with the state<sup>38</sup>. The paradox present in the Muhajir politics is that, on the one hand, they are fighting against the Punjabi domination of the state and on the other hand, in Sindh, they are equally opposed to the Sindhis, who also are opposed to the Punjabi authority of the state. Ironically, today Muhajir politics is directed against the same state system in the building of which it played a vital role.

Now the radical elements of MQM are agitating for a separate state, and the government is becoming more and more brutal in its opposition to the demands of MQM. But as Kukreja observes, there is no military solution to the problem of Karachi<sup>39</sup>. Khan also says that the phenomenal popularity of the MQM is due to the sufferings of common Muhajirs in their daily life, rather than the ideological antics. The Pakistani state may have been successful in breaking the organisational structure of the MQM but has not been able to dent its support base. For that state needs to respond to the needs and aspirations of common Muhajirs<sup>40</sup>.

### **Pashtun Nationalism/Regionalism**

In 1893, with the drawing up of the Durand Line, Pashtuns were divided between Afghanistan and British India, which was resented by the Pashtuns and gave rise to Pashtun nationalism. Later also, Pashtuns were forced to join Pakistan against their wish. After partition, they wanted reorganisation of boundaries to make Pashto speaking area a single province within the federal setup of Pakistan<sup>41</sup>.

Khalid B. Sayeed says that in 1947 no ethnic group other than Pashtun was more conscious of its separate linguistic and cultural identity<sup>42</sup>. However, Adeel Khan considers such a statement as overblown and overestimated. He also refutes the claim of Ernest Gellner that the rise of national sentiment is a result of industrialisation, as the Pashtun region was one of the most backward and underdeveloped regions in British India<sup>43</sup>.

Veena Kukreja observes that since independence, the campaigns launched by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan had underdevelopment as the focal point. The centralised bureaucratic system was controlled mainly by Punjabis, and its effort to replace the decentralised agro-illiterate semi-tribal system led to the rise of Pashtun nationalism. The North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) was always kept in a state of underdevelopment by the Punjabi-dominated government. Several large-scale industries in NWFP lagged far behind the other provinces in gross and per capita regional product. The Pashtuns complained of the lucrative

amount of revenues that the central government used to fetch from the province, the unwillingness of the central government to amend the allocation procedure, which favoured the centre at the expense of already underdeveloped area, raised fear in the minds of Pashtuns<sup>44</sup>. Pashtuns have an intense devotion to Pashto language and literature, but because of Afghan's claim over Pashtunistan and its support of Pashto, Pakistan's ruling elite was always mistrustful of Pashto<sup>45</sup>.

One interesting point that Adeel Khan talks about is that these disparities have failed to accentuate ethnic discontent because the benefits that Pashtuns have accrued from Pakistan have outweighed it<sup>46</sup>. Pashtuns have a fair amount of representation in the army, which was a practice started by Britishers as they considered Pashtuns as 'good' soldiers. Pashtuns held key positions in civil and military bureaucratic setup. Unlike Sindh and Balochistan, the land resources of NWFP(now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) are firmly in local hands. Administratively too, NWFP is ruled by Pashtuns. Pashtun nationalism arose as an anti-colonial movement. After partition, it turned into a party of those who aspired to control administrative power in the province and have a sizable share in the Pakistani state system<sup>47</sup>.

The Pashtun movement gained ground on two issues: transborder linkage with the Pashtuns in Afghanistan and the fear of cultural & socio-economic submergence at the hands of Punjabi-Muhajir elites.

The structure of Pashtun nationalism changed after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which resulted in the training of militants by Pakistan in the Pashtun belts. Later with the American Global War on Terror, those militants proved to be Frankenstein's monster for Pakistan. The sub nationalist tendencies of Pashtun have found a new impetus with the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and its offshoot in Pakistan as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

### **Baloch Nationalism**

Baloch have an interesting combination of the smallest percentage of the population and the largest percentage of Pakistan's land area. Like Pashtuns, Balochs were never a supporter of Pakistan; instead, they wanted a separate statehood and never desired to be a part of Pakistan. Nevertheless, Jinnah's 'forced annexation' of the area led to the incorporation of Balochistan in Pakistan. This started the contestations between the Balochs and the government. The Balochs have time and again raised their head in revolt against the government. The grievances that started with the forced incorporation continue to date, which shows the attitude of the government towards the grudges that these people carry for a long time.

There have been five major ethnic movements against the government. The problem of Balochs is that of political isolation and economic deprivation, which induces their mobilisation time and again. Their representation in the army, military, bureaucracy is negligible, creating economic insecurity and identity crisis among the Balochs. Moreover, the exploitative policies of the federal government have further alienated the Balochs. The vast natural resources that Balochistan is having in the form of minerals, metals, gas fields are exploited by the Punjabis without providing any benefits, including the royalty, to the Baloch people in return.

The social sector also is very backward in the province. The labour force comes from other regions, and it is an outright encroachment on their land. The health and education facilities are not at all up to the mark. The most recent insurgency problem that finds its beginning around 1999 and continues till date had these socio-economic imperatives as one of the main reasons. In collaboration with China, the establishment of Gwadar port in the province as part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), without even consulting Baloch people, has added to the grievances.

Regarding the seriousness of the grudges of this ethnic group, Kukreja comments, "To be able to get the Balochs into the national mainstream, Pakistani rulers will have to bring an authentic socio-economic change which may bring them at par with other constituent units of Pakistan, namely, Punjab, NWFP, and Sindh. Unless the government can come to terms with the tribal sensitivity, the Baloch problem will continue and may progressively get out of hand<sup>48</sup>."

### **Punjabi Domination**

In all the ethnic groups discussed above, one thing common was the exploitation and domination by the demographically largest single ethnic group of Pakistan- the Punjabis. They constitute around 48 percent of the total population of the country. Looking at the history of Punjabi domination, it could be seen that they inherited the power from Britishers. The Britishers saw them as the group which can adapt to the British model of military operations; therefore, the Punjabis were chosen in the British colonial armies. Today the majority of Pakistan's army has recruits from Punjab. During the military regimes of Ayub Khan and Zia-ul-Haq, the Punjabi-dominated military started 'Punjabaization' campaign. The shifting of capital from Karachi in Sindh to Islamabad in Punjab by Ayub Khan was also one of the moves to consolidate the supremacy of Punjab<sup>49</sup>.

Looking at the dominance of Punjabis in every field be it military, bureaucracy, political establishments, it seems the principle that Pakistan follows is that all Muslims are equal,

but Punjabi Muslims are more equal than others. This attitude led to the emergence of Bangladesh as a separate country in 1971. Pakistan is not ready to learn from its mistakes and behaving in the same exploitative way with the other ethnic groups as earlier it used to act with the Bengali ethnic group.

One of the primary reasons at the heart of Pakistan's ethnic dilemma lies the Punjabi domination. They form the majority of the population and are becoming predominant in Pakistan's major national elite communities. The solution to the problem of ethno regionalism lies with the structural reform of Pakistan's federal structure, which would give equal weight to all the ethnic groups.

A special mention of Saraiki is also recommended here. As per the 1981 census, Saraiki, for the first time, was counted as a separate language, and it came to the notice that 9.8 percent of Pakistan's population speaks this language. This raised the demand for a separate Saraiki province. The dominance of radicalisation and sectarianism in the Southern part of the Punjab province in Pakistan has a majority of Saraiki speakers giving birth to the idea of a separate province. However, the Saraiki issue is not that of secession<sup>50</sup>. According to the 2018 census, the number of speakers of this language has increased to 10.53%. It has become the fourth most spoken language in Pakistan after Punjabi, Pushto, and Sindhi. It ranks ahead of Urdu and Balochi languages. In the Punjab province, it is the second most spoken language after Punjabi<sup>51</sup>.

### **Comparison between Various Ethnic Groups**

The Bengalis had reasonable grievances that despite being a majority with 54 percent of the population, their area was treated like a colony; all the power was located in West Pakistan. Politically also they were subjugated. The western wing of the country was prospering at the expense of the eastern part. The Bengali language was also threatened with the imposition of Urdu. So it was cultural, economic, and political subjugation of a province 1500 miles apart from its other part.

If Sindh is to be analysed, it has grievances against the Muhajir community, the Urdu-speaking immigrants from India. The highhandedness with which the Sindhi language was suppressed and how the Sindhis have become minorities in their land, especially in urban Sindh where the percentage of Muhajirs outweighs that of Sindhis, was considered as attempted cultural genocide. After Balochs, Sindhis are deemed to be the most marginalised group. Their grievances mainly revolve around their suspicion towards Muhajirs and their relative underrepresentation in various government sectors. So Sindhis have to confront exploitation on two fronts: from the most dominant ethnic group-Punjabis, because of the

stronghold at the centre and a large number of Punjabi settlers in the province and the Muhajir's encroachment of Sindh.

After the movements of 1983 and 1986, the Punjabi army is permanently stationed in the province, and the Punjabi settlers on the other hand, led to the feeling of polarisation in Sindhis. So, it can be established that the national question in Sindh has not had its roots in economic exploitation alone, but other factors such as cultural, social, political exclusion have catalysed the situation markedly.

MQM artificially creates the Sindhi-Muhajir conflict that revolves around violence to maintain and prolong its hold over the Muhajirs of Sindh. When MQM was first elected in the local bodies' elections of 1987, it failed to deliver the goods to its constituency, and now it requires violence to continue its hold, and it keeps on terrifying the people with a false sense of threat<sup>52</sup>. Muhajirs were with the central government as long as the latter patronised it. Once the Punjabi-dominated government stopped the favours, the nationalist feelings in Muhajirs subsided. They want their stronghold back, so they are fighting the central government, maintaining their supremacy in the Sindh province, and fighting with the local people.

According to S Akbar Zaidi, "The Pashtun nationality has probably the best conditions for the development of nationalism in Pakistan today<sup>53</sup>." As discussed above, there has been a 'clearly visible' channel of surplus extraction in Balochistan, which becomes a target for nationalists, but this exploitation is absent in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The dominant factor affecting the Pashtun ethnicity is non-economic and is not precisely related to the conflict between 'We vs. Punjabis', as with all the other ethnic groups. Zaidi comments, "The relationship of the central government in Islamabad with Afghanistan, and the solution to the 'Afghan Crisis' will be the determining factor of the Pashtun national question, rather than any direct economic confrontation with the centre or the dominant Punjabi nationality<sup>54</sup>." In 1969, the autonomous princely states of Swat, Dir, Chitral, and Amb were merged into NWFP. Then later in 2010, the province was renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after continuous efforts by the Awami National party towards the renaming, which gives a feeling to the residents that this is their land. In 2018, the FATA region was also merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Pashtun nationalists for a very long time fond themselves enclosed by all sides and corners; Pakistan was shedding Pashtun blood in tribal regions of FATA with their military operations. The Al Qaeda and Taliban militants spilled Pashtun blood across the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Americans and NATO forces till early 2021 were splashing

Pashtun blood in Afghanistan. All these factors are reinforcing feelings of injustice and oppression.

Balochistan is a society composed of various tribes and dominated by Sardars in a feudal setup. The majority of the people are still involved in agricultural activities. There has been no substantial development of any native industrial bourgeoisie amongst the Baloch in Balochistan. Baloch nationalists argue that had the natural gas of the Sui Gas field been used for the development of the province, today, the region would have been amongst the most developed in the country. The people of this resource-rich province feel blundered again and again by their countrymen. Zaidi talks about the 'vicious circle' of poverty which implies that there will be no development in Balochistan because there is no development in Balochistan.

Further, Zaidi observes that the Zia government worked to develop some of the areas of Balochistan, including communication and transportation. The amounts spent on developmental activities substantially increased compared to Bhutto, but this did not assure the development of the people that it ought to do. The money is being spent at strategic points, which would ultimately benefit the central government. The Balochs feel that their province has been exploited by the other ethnic groups, especially Punjabis. According to Zaidi, "The educated youth had to confront a non-local bureaucracy which had been present in the province for many years before the locals were available for these jobs. There have also been demands for rapid industrialisation in the province, but they have mainly been subdued, and the demand for jobs has been the demand from the vocal sections of the nationalists<sup>55</sup>."

In the peculiarity of issues between the Baloch and other ethnic groups, the case of East Pakistan comes closest. In both Bengali and Baloch cases, the exploitation was done at various levels. There was an exploitation of land resources by the government for economic benefits. There was a negligible representation of the people of those groups in the military, bureaucracy, or other public sectors. Politically also, powers were not in the hands of the people. However, the significant difference between the situations of these two groups apart from the negligible number of Baloch population, includes the separation of East and West Pakistan by 1500 miles of Indian Territory, which never allowed cultural bondage to develop. Only the elites used to talk at the political level, and there were no people to people contact. Bengali people were very proud of their rich heritage of Bengali literature, which is not so prominent in Baloch people regarding their language. There are other factors also which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Looking at the 1998 census report, if a comparison is made between Khyber Pashtunkhwa (erstwhile NWFP), Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan, the average annual growth rate from 1981 to 1998 was lowest in Balochistan with 2.47 percent. The literacy ratio was also the lowest, with 24.83 percent, against Pakistan having 43.92 percent. The enrolment ratio of Pakistan, on the whole, was 35.98 percent, while Balochistan had only 23.53 percent. The unemployment rate also depicted a gloomy picture with 33.48 percent against 19.68 percent of Pakistan. If 1981 census reports are to be analysed, the situation of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pashtunkhwa was almost the same. A comparable situation can be seen in the latest 2018 census reports. This shows the gross neglect of Balochistan by the government. The issues are at various levels and yet to be resolved. Balochistan is relatively low on Human Development Index too. The peculiar features of the Baloch ethnic group also pose a hindrance in the solution, like the Sardari system is an intrinsic part of their tribal setup but is also responsible for the backwardness and illiteracy of the people. The uniqueness of various ethnic troubles in Pakistan is pretty different from each other. Nevertheless, one thing that is common in all the ethnic groups vis-a-vis Punjabis is that they all fear Punjabi domination in all the spheres, be it political, economic, or social, since the policies of ethnic integration have been selectively applied in favour of Punjabis. Pakistan, being a multi-ethnic democratic can strengthen its roots of democracy only by being more assimilative towards the grievances of the multiple ethnic groups present there.

### **Foot Notes**

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