PAKISTAN'S SINDHI ETHNIC NATIONALISM

Migration, Marginalization, and the Threat of "Indianization"

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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 the Baloch, the most marginalized. In no other region of Pakistan is the divide between urban prosperity and rural deprivation as wide as it is in Sindh. Due to the concentration of commerce and industry in its capital city, Karachi, Sindh has the highest per capita income in Pakistan, while its rural inhabitants are among the country's poorest.[1]

Such a striking disparity has made Sindh a hotbed of various kinds of nationalism ranging from separatists and right-wing autonomists to socialist intellectuals and left-wing peasant groups. An interesting characteristic of Sindhi politics, however, is that since the first free national elections in 1970, Sindhis have overwhelmingly voted for a federalist party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), founded by Sindhi politician Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. His daughter, Benazir Bhutto, now leads the PPP.

This article examines the roots of ethnic nationalism of the indigenous Sindhis, who come predominantly from a rural background. The main thrust of the argument here is that their nationalism is the product of and a response

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Asian Survey, 42:2, pp. 213–229. ISSN: 0004–4687

1. Anwar Syed, *The Discourse and Politics of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 191. According to one estimate, soon after partition Sindh's per capita income was 40% higher than that of Punjab's. See Theodore Wright, "Center-Periphery Relations and Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan: Sindhis, Muhajirs, and Punjabis," *Comparative Politics* (April 1991), p. 301.

to the interventionist nature of the modern Pakistani bureaucratic state. Although identity, culture, industrialization, print capitalism, and class do play a role in the formation of ethnic nationalism, it is only an auxiliary one. Sindhi ethnic nationalism developed as a response to the treatment that individuals of this category get from the state.

Historical Background

The social and political landscape of Sindh traditionally has been characterized by isolation from the power centers, repressive feudalism, the stranglehold of the *pirs* (religious guides), and exploitation by settlers. Because of its geographical location, Sindh was a peripheral region throughout Mughal rule in India. Sindhi clans resisted the central state's attempts and rebelled against its heavy revenue demands; therefore the Mughal system could not be applied in its entirety. Hence, the political and socio-economic structure that developed in Sindh was different from the northern regions of Punjab and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

The British took over Sindh in 1843 and after four years made it part of the Bombay Presidency. Although Sindh's autonomous status came to an end, the local elite's power and prestige were left intact for both political and administrative reasons. Gradually, however, the modern state apparatus started to intervene. This infusion brought about some significant changes in Sindh in local power relations and economic structure.

Sindh's historical experience has shaped its modern history in a way that is quite distinct from that of other regions of Pakistan as well. In most parts of the pre-colonial India, there were no individual owners of land as the state itself was the supreme landlord. The situation in Sindh, however, was quite different. By the time the British took over, powerful individuals had already become the de facto owners of land during the Talpur's rule (1782–1843). These de facto landowners had established one of the most repressive feudal systems on the Indian Subcontinent. As a consequence, Sindh had developed into becoming more of a fiefdom of the local elite rather than a part of the central power. This situation did not change under British colonialism, as the British applied no uniform agrarian policy to all regions; rather, it varied according to the particular conditions of a region and the influence and power of the local elite.

Despite colonial interest in developing Karachi as a port city, Sindh remained isolated across its mountains, deserts, salt flats, and swamps. It was regarded by some as "a backwater, out of touch with the rest of the Presidency and out of sympathy with it."[2] Though administratively part of the

2. Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 68.

Bombay Presidency, its legal and governmental system remained different. Most of the Bombay Legislative Council enactments did not apply to Sindh, which was ruled under a separate system of government and an almost independent judicial system.[3]

Pre-Partition Politics

All these factors helped shape the future course of Sindhi politics, especially the post-partition politics of regional and ethnic nationalism. A Karachi-based Hindu trader-politician, Harchandra Vishindas, first made the demand for the separation of Sindh from the Bombay Presidency in 1913. His call was couched in the usual nationalistic jargon of "Sindh's distinctive cultural and geographical character," but in actual terms it was the voice of a comparatively fragile commercial class of Sindh that felt threatened by the more prosperous Bombay traders.[4] Vishindas was soon joined by a Sindhi Muslim politician, Ghulam Mohammad Bhurgri, who, though originally a *wadero* (landlord), was a successful London-educated lawyer representing the Muslim urban interests.

In 1909, the colonial administration, faced with the growing radicalization of the nationalist forces, had adopted a strategy "to encourage provincial ambitions, and particularly Muslim provincial ambitions, to offset challenges to its authority at the centre."[5] The Morley-Minto Reforms introduced an elected element to the provincial councils and for the first time it was allowed that provincial grievances could be voiced and provincial governments be confronted with them. With the official blessings, Sindhi *waderos* and *pirs*, too, became active participants in provincial politics.

Separation of Sindh

In 1936, Sindh was separated from the Bombay Presidency and accorded the status of a province. The campaign for the separation of Sindh was based on the belief that Sindh had lost its distinct identity under the Presidency, but the underlying reason was the step-motherly treatment that Sindh was subjected to by the Presidency's administration. That Hindus had a majority in the Presidency and Sindhi Hindus grew more prosperous during that period helped to create a communal wedge between Hindus and Muslims. After the separation, while the communal feeling did not disappear, it undoubtedly lost intensity. Muslims now enjoyed a solid majority in the province and therefore they had little reason to worry about the dominance of a Hindu minority,

3. Ibid., p. 69.

4. Sarah Ansari, "Partition, Migration and Refugees: Responses to the Arrival of Muhajirs in Sindh during 1947–48" in *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence*, eds. D. A. Low and Howard Brasted (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 186.

5. D. Page, *Prelude to Partition*, p. xii.

however prosperous and influential it might be. This Muslim majority status would also later shape the Sindh Muslim community's attitude toward Muslim League (ML) politics.

Sindhi politics during the decade prior to Partition were marred by interpersonal and factional squabbling between *waderos.* But these issues would take a backseat to a more overarching one: whether Sindh should become part of Pakistan or not. Within a few months after the separation of Sindh, a non-communal party, Sindh Ittehad Party (SIP), was formed on the pattern of Punjab's Unionist party. Its sole objective was to protect the interests of Sindhi rural elite, both Muslim and Hindu. During the 1937 elections, the SIP won the largest number of seats in the provincial assembly.[6] At that time, the ML was virtually non-existent in Sindh and could not even win a single seat there.

Support for Pakistan

The decade before partition saw Sindh as a politically unstable province where the making and breaking of governments and ministries had become routine. The task of exploring Sindhis' aspirations became even more difficult because Sindhi Muslims consisted of mainly two classes, the *waderos* and the *haris* (landless tenants). The middle classes were insignificant in number.

Yet another source of repression was the *pirs*, who not only were some of the largest landlords in the province but also held sway over the spiritual life of Sindhis, as religious guides and messiahs. Such almost total control over the temporal and spiritual beings of the majority of Sindhi Muslims, coupled with the lack of communication and education facilities, made it difficult to know their real desires and preferences.

In the 1940s, there were only two political forces who had a presence throughout India: the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Despite the growth of regional political forces, Sindhis had to choose between the two main national political parties. The pitfalls of an alliance with the Congress were many: the Congress's radical anti-imperialism and confrontational politics did not suit the interests of the Sindhi elite, while the dominance of the Hindu minority over the economic and administrative sectors of Sindh remained an unhappy feature that from the Sindhi Muslims' point of view could become even worse under Hindu-dominated Congress rule. Furthermore, at least two of the Congress's professed objectives appeared ominously threatening to the interests of Sindhi elite. First, there was the Congress's promise of land reforms, which the Sindhi elite, whose numbers

6. G. M. Sayed, *The Case of Sindh: G. M. Sayed's Deposition for the Court* (Karachi: Naeen Sindh Academy, 1995), pp. 18–19.

included some of India's largest landowners, did not even like to be mentioned, let alone implemented. Second, there was the Congress's plan for a strong central government, which allowed little autonomy to the provinces. Furthermore, Congress's politics of mass mobilization were not attractive to the Sindhi elite. Sindhi *waderos* abhorred the idea of any contact with the *haris* for that might have led to awakening of the latter's political consciousness and the weakening of *wadero* control.

On the other hand, the ML's elitist and communalist politics were more palatable to the taste of the Sindhi elite and more suitable to their interests. As recipients of official honors and titles, the Sindhi Muslim elite felt more comfortable with the ML's so-called constitutional rather than confrontational politics. Also appealing was the League's demand for autonomous Muslim states within the Indian union. Therefore, in 1943, ML members in the Sindh Assembly passed a resolution demanding "independent national states" on the basis that "no constitution shall be acceptable . . . that will place Muslims under a Central Government dominated by another nation."[7]

However, this did not mean that Sindhi politicians were in favor of the ML's demand for Pakistan. Ayesha Jalal has argued that one of the most influential ML politicians, Ghulam Hussain, was "an outspoken enemy of the Lahore resolution [later called Pakistan Resolution]" and "all against Pakistan." According to Jalal, Ghulam Hussain believed that even Mohammad Ali Jinnah himself (Pakistan's founder) did not have his "heart in the proposal at all."[8] For the Sindhi elite, the situation was a careful balancing act; they feared Hindu domination under India's rule and Punjabi domination in case of the formation of Pakistan.

The Growth of Sindhi Ethnic Nationalism

A prominent Sindhi nationalist, Allah Bux Soomro, was a staunch opponent of Pakistan. Shortly before he was killed prior to Partition, he is reported to have said to G. M. Sayed, a separatist Sindhi nationalist who had once supported Pakistan: "You will get to know that our difficulties will begin after Pakistan has come into being. . . . At present the Hindu trader and money lender's plunder is worrying you but later you will have to face the Punjabi bureaucracy and soldiery and the mind of UP." Soomro then emphasized: [A]fter the creation of this aberration (Pakistan) you will have to struggle to fight its concomitant evils."[9]

7. Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1992), p. 110.

8. Ibid., p. 109.

9. Sayed, *The Case of Sindh*, p. 46.

From the Sindhi point of view, it was a prophetic warning. Soon after Partition, many Sindhis realized that the creation of Pakistan did not mean independence for them rather but domination of another kind. As Allah Bux had warned, they had to face the Punjabi bureaucracy and military, as well as the mind-set of Muslim settlers, the Mohajirs. Soon after Partition, Sindh was to lose the distinctive regional identity it had regained after its separation from the Bombay Presidency. The most visible aspect of this transformation was the replacement of the regional language, Sindhi, by the language of the north Indian Mohajirs, Urdu. Urdu was not used in Sindh even during colonial rule. Based on this author's 1997 and 1998 interviews with prominent Sindhi politicians, it is not surprising then that most Sindhis believe that for them the most repressive form of colonialism started after the creation of Pakistan.[10]

As detailed above, Sindh was one of the most impoverished provinces of Pakistan despite having agricultural surpluses. Its capital, Karachi, however, had rapidly become an important commercial and industrial port city. Karachi had been the birthplace of Jinnah. Because of its modern infrastructure capacity, Karachi was selected to be the capital of the new state. Following Partition, Karachi attracted the bulk of the Urdu-speaking Muslim refugees from India. Sindhis initially welcomed these two developments, but eventually they proved to be a burden.

The Influx of Refugees

The partition of British India posed a daunting problem for the administration of the nascent state of Pakistan. Sindh was one of the provinces that was comparatively least affected by communal clashes. However, Sindh was the one most affected by the influx of refugees that accompanied Partition.

There were many political, economic and cultural reasons for how Sindhis would eventually respond to the refugee problem. All these factors left indelible marks on the ethnic interaction within the province; relations between Sindhis and Pakistan's other ethnic groups, especially with Punjabis and Mohajirs; and, of course, on the relationship between the province and the central government. The initially sympathetic Sindhi response to the refugees' plight did not turn into opposition and antagonism for reasons of provincial particularism. Rather, the economic downturn, marked social upheaval, a deteriorating law and order situation, the growing indigenous fear

10. The interviews were conducted during September-December 1997 and again during August-November 1998 in Karachi, Hyderabad, and Islamabad. The individuals I met in Karachi included Gafoor Ahmed Naib Amir, Ishtiaq Azhar, Hussain Haqani, Fakhrudin G. Ibrahim, Arif Hassan, Ghaurul Islam, M. A. Jalil, Hasnain Kazmi, Hamida Khuhro, Nisar Khuhro, Ghulam Mustafa Shah, Imdad Mohammad Shah; in Islamabad, Zafar Abbas, Eqbal Ahmed, Iqbal Jafar; in Hyderabad, Ibrahim Joyo and Rasul Bux Palejo.

of being swamped by outsiders, and the Pakistani state's less-than-sympathetic response to Sindh's grievances combined to feed the growth of Sindhi ethnic nationalism.

After the initial influx of refugees, it became obvious to most Sindhis that the situation for them would not be a simple matter of welcoming their Muslim brethren. Having to cope with refugees seemed likely to transform their life for the worse, for the simple reason that the incoming Muslim refugees were destitute while the departing Hindus were predominantly prosperous people who had been managing Sindh's economic and commercial life. Another problem was that the number of incoming refugees was too large to manage. As a consequence, the massive influx generated social disorder in what had been to that point a comparatively peaceful province. Sindhis further believed that the Muslim refugees were responsible for the communal violence that had led to the large-scale Hindu exodus.

In May 1948, after a heated debate the constituent assembly resolved to turn Karachi into a centrally administered area. Sindhi politicians protested that their province was being symbolically beheaded and the Sindh Muslim League Council adopted a resolution censuring the decision for creating a "grave and deplorable" situation in the region.[11] But turning a deaf ear to the protests, Jinnah urged the Sindhis to accept "willingly and gracefully" the decision of the "highest and supreme body in Pakistan."[12] On July 23, 1948, Karachi was placed under the direct control of the central administration.

Following Partition, Sindh experienced severe economic stress, caused by the departure of prosperous Hindus, the arrival of a large number of destitute Mohajirs, and devastating floods. The situation was exacerbated by the loss of Karachi, which was a major source of Sindh's revenue. The central government had promised to pay compensation, but Sindh only received six million rupees for an estimated loss of around 600 to 800 million rupees.[13]

The center's interference in Sindh's affairs did not stop there. More draconian actions were yet to come. To muzzle the opposition to the influx of refugees, in August 1948 the governor-general issued a proclamation under Section 102 of the Government of India Act 1935 and declared a state of emergency. The declaration was issued on the grounds that "economic life of Pakistan is threatened by the circumstances arising out of the mass movement of population from and into Pakistan."[14] The outcome of this decision was that more refugees from Punjab were forced onto Sindh.

11. Ansari, *Partition, Migration, and Refugees*, p. 97.

12. Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1973), p. 252.

13. Nadeem Qasir, *Pakistan Studies: An Investigation into the Political Economy 1948–1988* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 24.

14. Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, p. 267.

The One-Unit Scheme

One of the most damning acts of the Pakistan government to undermine regional identities of various ethnic groups was the imposition of the One-Unit scheme on the four provinces of West Pakistan. The idea of amalgamating the four provinces into one administrative unit might have been as old as Pakistan itself, for the state had come into existence with an anomalous power arrangement: Bengalis formed the majority of Pakistan's population, but state power was in the hands of the Punjabi-Mohajir axis. In any representative dispensation, Bengalis would overturn that arrangement. The Pakistani ruling elite had no intention to allow such an eventuality.

Because of the Bengali majority in the constituent assembly, the issue of One Unit was never discussed there during its seven-year existence. When the proposal was put before the ML parliamentary party, it was defeated by 32 votes to two. But that did not stop the Punjabi-Mohajir-dominated establishment from pushing through a proposal that they had begun to articulate soon after Pakistan's creation on the basis of "administrative efficiency, greater economy, and as a foil against provincialism."[15] General opposition to the plan was based on two considerations. First, the plan was perceived as a West Pakistani attempt to obstruct the Bengali majority and create a semblance of parity between the two unequal wings. Second, it was believed that the intention, the methods adopted, as well as the content of the scheme were arbitrary and in violation of democratic norms.

The imposition of the One-Unit scheme represented the first serious blow to whatever little democratic political process there was in Pakistan. Its implementation had necessitated, first, the dissolution of an unwilling constituent assembly on October 4, 1954. This was followed by the dismissal of provincial governments who were opposed to the plan. On March 27, 1955, the governor-general amended the Government of India Act 1935 through an ordinance that empowered him to create the province of West Pakistan comprising Punjab, Sindh, the NWFP, and Balochistan.

Sindhi reaction to the plan was resounding and unequivocal: the community saw it as an attempt to establish Punjabi domination over the smaller provinces and negate their regional autonomy and ethnic identity. Sindh's chief minister, Pirzada Abdus Sattar (1953–54), was supported by 74 out of 110 Sindh assembly members in his opposition to the plan. This sizeable opposition did not impress the central government. Instead, the elected chief minister was dismissed and replaced by an unelected individual, Ayub Khuhro. Ironically, Khuhro had been disqualified under the Public and Rep-

15. Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1991), p. 197.

resentative Offices (Disqualification) Act (PRODA) from holding a public office for seven years.[16]

Punjab was the only province to benefit from the new arrangement at the expense of the smaller provinces. Sindh was to bear the heaviest brunt. During Pirzada Abdus Sattar's chief ministership, the Sindh government's agenda included demanding the return of Karachi, resisting the award of Sindhi land to civil and military personnel, building irrigation works, and promoting Sindhi culture and literature. But after the implementation of the One-Unit scheme, all Sindh-oriented policies were shelved and resources channeled to national projects. The promotion of Urdu as a national language was expedited and the use of Sindhi language systematically discouraged in municipal administration. In 1958, Urdu replaced Sindhi as the medium of instruction. After the construction of Kotri Barrage, the number of Punjabis settling in the province suddenly increased in the 1950s when the newly irrigated land that had been created was allotted to army pensioners, mostly of Punjabi origin. Of the land irrigated by the Guddu Barrage, 598,525 acres were reserved as state land. By 1971, 142,473 acres were allotted to non-Sindhis, mostly Punjabis.[17] Sindhi nationalist, G. M. Sayed, quoting a Punjabi writer, Azizuddin Ahmed, claims that from 1958 to 1963 75% of the allottees were non-Sindhi.[18]

Sindhi Nationalism during the Bhutto Interregnum, 1971–1977

On March 30, 1970, the Province of West Pakistan (Dissolution) Order was promulgated. Three months later the former provinces of Punjab, Sindh, and the NWFP were reconstituted. In addition, Balochistan was also accorded the status of province. This order ended the One-Unit scheme. In the same year, Pakistan held its first free general elections. Instead of leading to a unified elected government, the results of the elections provided the stimulus for Bengali disenchantment. The West Pakistani establishment refused to transfer power to the majority party in parliament, the Awami League, because its support came exclusively from East Pakistan. In one year's time, after a

16. The purpose of PRODA was to grant the governor-general arbitrary administrative powers. Under the provisions of PRODA, the governor-general was not required to consult his ministers. PRODA also allowed the governor-general to disqualify those politicians who "incurred the displeasure of the central government."

17. The allottees included civil and military personnel, Punjabis displaced by the construction of Mangla Dam and federal capital areas, Islamabad and some frontier tribesmen. For detailed figures, published by the government of Sind, see Herbert Feldman, *The End and the Beginning: Pakistan 1969–1971* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 57.

18. Sayed, *The Case of Sindh*, p. 146.

bloody civil war and the armed intervention of India, Pakistan's eastern wing had seceded to become the independent state of Bangladesh.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was not only Pakistan's first elected prime minister—he was also a Sindhi. Bhutto's PPP had won 62 out of 82 seats in Punjab, 18 out of 27 in Sindh, one in the NWFP, and none in Balochistan. Obviously, Bhutto had come to power on the basis of support from the largest province of Pakistan, Punjab. For this reason, he could not be expected to rule against the interests of the dominant province. However, neither could he ignore his support base in Sindh. It was a difficult situation in which the two provinces that had voted for him had a clear clash of interests.

Nontheless, without hurting the Punjabi interests and provoking the wrath of his main constituency, Bhutto promoted certain policies at the federal and provincial levels that benefited Sindhis. He did so at the expense of another dominant group, the Mohajirs, which was already losing out its privileges to the Punjabis who had also become the overwhelming ethnic majority after the secession of East Bengal.

The Impact of the Language Riots

The termination of the One Unit scheme was, for Sindhis, only a partial recognition of their distinctive regional and ethnic identity. Sindhi nationalists and intellectuals next demanded that the Sindhi language be restored as the medium of instruction. When Mohajir students protested against the move, violence ensued that resulted in Sindhi students burning the pictures of the Punjabi poet, Mohammad Iqbal. This act was significant because Iqbal was the individual credited with having first conceived of an independent state for Indian Muslims and was therefore a major symbol of Pakistani nationalism. Mohajir students retaliated by burning Sindhi books in the Institute of Sindhology.

The clamor of Sindhi demands became all the more boisterous after the PPP came to power in December 1971. In July 1972, a parliamentary bill was introduced in the Sindh provincial assembly to make Sindhi the medium of instruction. The bill had clearly stated that "Sindhi and Urdu shall be compulsory subjects for study in classes four to 12 in all institutions in which such classes are held."[19] However, the pro-Urdu lobby interpreted the gradual recognition of Sindhi as a detriment to the usage of Urdu. The bill's introduction led to Mohajir violence against Sindhis in Karachi and the burning of the Department of Sindhi at Karachi University. Mohajirs were further alarmed by an unofficial move by the Sindh assembly to make it compulsory for government employees to learn Sindhi within three months.

19. Tariq Rahman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 124–25.

The situation between Sindhis and Mohajirs deteriorated further when delegates to a central government-appointed committee proposed demands deemed unacceptable to members of the ethnic group to which they did not belong. The committee, generally known as the language committee, was set up soon after the language bill in July 1972. It comprised some of the most prominent and representative academics and politicians from both ethnic groups. The Mohajir team included I. H. Qureshi, Ghafoor Ahmed, G. A. Madani, A. B. Haleem, and Hussain Imam, whereas the Sindhi team included Sheikh Ayaz, Qazi Faiz Mohammad, Mohammad Khan Soomro, Ali Bakhsh Talpur, and two Sindh government ministers, Qaim Ali Shah and Dur Mohammad Usto. The committee first met on July 10. However, it did not reach an agreement. Some of the Sindhi demands were directly related to provincial autonomy. One was the recognition of Sindhi as not only the official language of Sindh but also one of the national languages of Pakistan. They also called for the recognition of Pakistan's four provinces as being "four nations living in a confederation." They further demanded the return of the land that had been given away to non-Sindhi military and civil officials; the provincialization of the railways, post, and electronic media; and, an increased share for Sindh of the water from the Indus River. Other demands that called for the establishment of a militia comprised indigenous Sindhis and the appointment of the same to all the top administrative posts in the province.

Mohajir delegates issued their own demands. Although Mohajirs constituted approximately 20% of Sindh's total population, they called for equal status for their language, Urdu.[20] Mohajirs also demanded a 50% share in all the top administrative posts in the province and an exclusive reservation of technical and professional colleges in Karachi for themselves. Finally, Mohajirs also demanded that the city of Karachi should be made an autonomous entity.

The Quota System

Another contentious issue was that of the quota system. A quota system biased in favor of Mohajirs was introduced in 1948 to redress the regional inequality in representation in public employment. By 1951, Sindhis had become a minority in Karachi with 57.1% of its population being Mohajir.[21] Before Bhutto's election, the martial law government of General Yahya Khan (1969–71) had already worked out a new formula to rid the quota system of

20. Even as late as 1981, the census showed that Mohajirs formed 24% of Sindh's population. See Charles H. Kennedy, "The Politics of Ethnicity in Sindh," *Asian Survey* 31:10 (October 1991), p. 941.

21. Shahid Javed Burki, *Pakistan under Bhutto 1971–1977* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), p. 12.

its urban bias by devising a 3:2 representation formula for rural and urban population, respectively, in provincial and federal services.[22]

During Bhutto's period, further changes were made to the system. Karachi's separate share was scrapped and the merit category was reduced from 20% to 10%. While all four of Pakistan's provinces were designated a share on the basis of their total population, the situation in Sindh was different. There, the huge gap between the rural and urban sectors meant that the provincial share would be subdivided further into 11.4% rural and 7.6% urban.

The Bhutto government made a conscious effort to increase Sindhi representation in the state and public sectors. But given the decades of Sindhi underrepresentation, it required years of concerted effort to rectify the numerical imbalance. The Punjabi-Mohajir-dominated civil and military bureaucracy presented a major obstacle to administrative reform.

Military Rule and Sindh

In July 1977, after weeks of unrest following the contested results of a general election, General Zia ul-Haq deposed the elected government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Zia imposed martial law, suspended the Constitution, and within two years had Bhutto hanged following a dubious trial.

For most Sindhis, Zia's military rule was perceived as that of an occupying army, primarily because Sindhis were underrepresented in the military. Pakistan's army is almost exclusively Punjabi and Pakhtun, who combined to make up over 95% of the military. Pakistan's army alone is estimated to be 60%–65% Punjabi and 30%–35% Pakhtun.[23] But the disproportion extends to other areas of government. Despite reforms in the quota system, Sindhi representation in the civil services has also been marginal. According to the 1981 census, Sindhis composed 11.7% of Pakistan's population, but only after extensive efforts did the share of Sindhis in senior administrative posts rise from 3.6% in 1974 to 6.8% in 1983.[24]

Under the period of Zia's military rule, the channels through which Sindhis were able to articulate their demands became scarce. All those individuals employed during Bhutto's rule were expelled from government and public sector jobs. 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. Response to the MRD's call in the rest of the provinces was lukewarm, but in Sindh it turned into a massive

22. Mohammed Waseem, "Affirmative Action Policies in Pakistan," *Ethnic Studies Report* 15:2 (1997), pp. 228–31.

23. K. B. Sayeed, "The Role of the Military in Pakistan" in *Armed Forces and Society: Sociological Essays*, ed. Jacques Van Doorn (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), p. 276; and Kennedy, *The Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 946.

24. Ibid., p. 943.

popular agitation. So spontaneous and widespread was the unrest there that not only the military rulers were perturbed but also the MRD leadership itself was surprised. Indeed, the intensity and potency of the unrest was unprecedented in the history of the province. Many Sindhi protesters resorted to jailbreaks as well as attacks on police stations, banks, and trains. It soon became obvious that the administration in rural Sindh was faced with an upsurge that bordered on civil war. The army was called in and the administration launched a massive witch-hunt of political workers and PPP sympathizers. The military regime labeled the unrest a conspiracy to create a separate state of Sindhu Desh.

But the brutal military response to the agitation proved to be the first serious blow to the military regime. During Zia's rule, the generals had every reason to take the intensity of the Sindhi sentiments seriously and they intensified their persecution of Sindhi rural opposition. Paradoxically, the military leaders sought to divide the Sindhi nationalist leadership based on their mixed support for Bhutto.[25] The military regime soon made attempts to harness anti-Bhutto forces in Sindh, but one of the problems was that Sindhis had almost totally rejected Sindhi nationalist parties and voted for Bhutto's PPP. In the 1970 general election, for example, the PPP had won 18 of the 27 national assembly seats in Sindh. However, the PPP secured only 28 seats of the 60 in the Sindh assembly. Mohajirs had predominantly voted for two religious groups, namely, the Jamiat-i-Ulema Islam (JUI) and the Jamat Islami (JI). During the brief period of electoral rule, the Sindh nationalist parties did not win a single seat. The so-called father of Sindhi nationalism, G. M. Sayed, lost his constituency to the PPP's candidate. The trend continued in the 1988 elections, when Sindhi voters favored the PPP and rejected all nationalist groups, with the PPP increasing its share of the vote from the 44.9% gained in 1970 to 47%.

Despite such evidence of strong support for the PPP, the military regime still made attempts to coopt some Sindhi nationalist leaders—Zia ul-Haq even paid a visit to G. M. Sayed. On the other hand, the military encouraged the Mohajir constituency in Sindh to engage in its own brand of ethnic politics. Until then, most Mohajir protests had centered on an activist student organization, the All-Pakistan Mohajir Students Organization (APMSO). But by a few months after the Sindh agitation, the APMSO had become the backbone of a broader political group, the Mohajir Quomi (National) Movement (MQM). Some circumstantial evidence shows that the formation of the

25. One of the Sindhi nationalists, Hamida Khuhro, told the author in an interview in 1997: "It's very difficult for me to say anything positive about Bhutto." G. M. Sayed is reported to have said: "These brainless Sindhis worship Bhutto who was hung by the Punjabis after he had served their purpose." Cited in Hassan Mujtaba, "Sindhi Separatism: Myth or Reality?" *Newsline* (Karachi), February 1992, p. 41.

MQM was encouraged and even financially supported by the military regime.[26]

Interestingly, the unabashedly anti-Sindhi and anti-Bhutto MQM found its most visible sympathizer in the person of G. M. Sayed. The MQM and Sindhi nationalists shared some objectives. After the abortive Sindhi agitation, Sindhi nationalists realized that they needed support from the major towns of the province, which were (and are) predominantly Mohajir. As for the MQM, its flirtation with Sindhi nationalists was also based on pragmatic considerations. The MQM considered Sindhis to be a lesser threat than it perceived Punjabis to be. The movement also wanted to avoid a Bangladesh-like situation.

But despite their common anti-Punjabi-Pakhtun rhetoric, the MQM and the Sindhi nationalists were unable to reconcile their clash of interests. By 1987, the MQM had become an important political group in Pakistani politics with widespread support among Mohajirs. For all intents and purposes, the MQM had become the sole representative of Mohajirs. In contrast, the Sindhi nationalists were by no means the representatives of Sindhis, who had instead remained loyal to Bhutto's PPP. Inevitably, Sindhis and Mohajirs locked horns in a series of violent acts, starting with the September 1988 killings in Hyderabad.

The Post-Zia Period: The Violent Province

It is the tragedy of countries such as Pakistan where an institutionalized political system does not exist that individuals rather than institutions play a decisive role in any political change. The country's political system has continuously been dominated by military and civil bureaucracy and so has always been dependent on the appearance—or disappearance—of an individual on the political scene. Thus, it was only after the mysterious death of military dictator General Zia ul-Haq in a plane crash in 1988 that the Pakistani state establishment opted for party-based elections.

In the November elections that year, the right-wing alliance called the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI, Islamic Democratic Alliance) was unable to defeat Benazir Bhutto and her PPP. It emerged as the political party with the largest share of votes in both the national and Sindh provincial assemblies. The party's margin of victory, though, was rather thin. In the national parliament,

26. In a personal interview, Brigadier A. R. Siddiqi, former director of the Pakistan army's Inter-Services Public Relations, said that MQM chief Altaf Hussain was "very close to the deputy martial law administrator of Sindh. Hamida Khuhro told me that when the Sindh chief minister, Ghous Ali Shah, was accused of giving Rs 30 million to Altaf Hussain, the chief minister said: 'I helped it (MQM) to cut Jamat Islami to size'."

the PPP held only 93 of the body's 207 seats. Obviously, it was in no position to form a government on its own and to seek coalition partners. The MQM, meanwhile, was the third largest group with 13 seats, with the IJI in second place with 55. In the Sindh provincial assembly, the PPP swept the rural constituencies, winning 67 of 141 seats. The MQM took second place, sweeping the urban votes and winning 26 seats. The Sindhi nationalist groups could not secure even a single seat.

Under these circumstances, it was only natural for the PPP to seek MQM support, which could enable formation of a government at the federal level. Such a coalition could have left the PPP in a better position to deal with the deteriorating situation in Sindh. This, however, was no easy task, for the MQM was virulently anti-Sindhi while the PPP was the de facto representative party for that ethnic group. Nonetheless, despite the difficulties the PPP and the MQM were able to reach a compromise and the MQM supported the PPP's bid to form a parliamentary government in Islamabad.

Owing to the cementing of this alliance, Benazir Bhutto became the prime minister that December. After an 11-year absence, a popular Sindhi political leader was once again ruling Pakistan. But the PPP's tenuous victory presented new challenges. The Zia years had led to the entrenchment of the army's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) into almost every sector of the state and society. The ISI had backed the creation of the PPP's strongest opponent, the IJI. More electoral difficulties were created for Bhutto by the fact that, although the PPP had won a majority of the national assembly seats in Punjab, it had lost the Punjab provincial assembly to the IJI.

The situation in Sindh was precarious. Although the PPP had secured the support of the MQM, the traditional enmity between Sindhis and Mohajirs could hardly permit the alliance to be tension free. There was little chance that the PPP-led coalition would last long with Pakistan's largest province out of its control and ruled by its archenemy, the IJI's Nawaz Sharif. Moreover, Sindh was in the grip of rural *dacoits* (bandits) and urban terrorists. Benazir Bhutto's government was dismissed in August 1990.

By the time of Bhutto's dismissal, the Sindh law and order situation had deteriorated to almost total breakdown. The antagonism between Sindh's two major ethnic groups had reached new lows. The PPP can be blamed for its inability to arrest the deteriorating situation in the province, but no independent observer can accuse it of contributing to make the situation worse. During the less than two years of Benazir Bhutto's rule, the ISI had played an active role in keeping the situation in Sindh as explosive as possible. The

agency did this as part of its overall strategy to undermine the PPP-led coalition government.[27]

After the 1990 election, the MQM entered an alliance with the IJI. The coalition formed governments at the national level as well as in Sindh. But despite being part of the government, the MQM continued to support terrorist activities in urban Sindh. On the other hand, rural Sindh remained under the control of Sindhi *dacoits.* Often young and unemployed, they included doctors and engineers whose jobs were terminated by the military regime. It is not surprising that in 1984, some of the most notorious *dacoits* were operating from the student dormitories of Sindh University. No less depressing was the situation in urban Sindh, where unemployed Mohajir youth, seeing little hope of a better future, were attracted to the terrorist activities sponsored by MQM and wreaked havoc on the life of Sindhi urban dwellers.

In mid-1992, the IJI government launched an army action, called Operation Clean Up, against both Sindhi *dacoits* and the MQM terrorists. Although the operation succeeded in its crackdown on the former, it was less successful in breaking the latter's hold over urban centers of Sindh. The violence continued. In the city of Karachi alone, snipers killed 1,113 people in 1994. By 1995, Karachi had become the most dangerous city of Asia, with a murder rate that reached 2,095.

In 1993, the PPP was once again voted to power at the national level. With the army's operation having failed to control violence in urban Sindh, the law and order situation in the province was one of the main challenges for the PPP government. In 1995, the further escalation of violence in Sindh led the government to launch yet another brutal crackdown on MQM militants. The 1995 crackdown used the combined force of various security agencies under the command of the Ministry of the Interior. The operation was more successful than preceding ones and as a result the urban centers may have become less violent, though they are still far from being safe.

In 1996, the PPP government was once again dismissed. Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan ML (PML) came to power for 1997. Despite the PPP's successful anti-terrorist operation, Sindh remained a problem province. Using the continuing violence in Sindh as an excuse, Nawaz Sharif's government dismissed the elected provincial government in Sindh in 1998. He imposed direct rule and appointed one of the prime minister's advisers as the central government's representative in the province. That arrangement remained unchanged until General Pervaiz Musharraf's military takeover of October 1999.

27. I am indebted to some senior police officials in Karachi and Hyderabad, who did not want their names to be disclosed, for the information on the ISI's intervention in the civil administration and its clandestine activities.

Despite the violence, as far as Sindhi ethnic nationalism is concerned, the decade of 1990s can be termed as one of indifference. The lack of interest in ethnic-based nationalism in the post-Zia period is the most striking aspect of Sindhi politics. An overwhelming majority of Sindhis voted for the PPP and only a few for the Sindhi nationalist groups. Sindhis political radicalism appears to revive during periods of military rule. The reason for that is quite obvious: Sindhis have virtually no representation in Pakistan's army.

Conclusion

What emerges from this article is that Sindhi nationalism is a response to the modern state system, one that was introduced by the colonizers and became more interventionist after the creation of Pakistan. Under colonialism, Sindh was relegated to the status of agricultural hinterland where its resources were exploited but the services sector neglected. After Partition, the province was turned into a refugee center, its land given away to outsiders, its resources channeled to serve the center and Punjab. Moreover, its provincial autonomy was violated, and, through the One-Unit scheme, its regional identity was eliminated and language displaced.

Under the circumstances, to label Sindhi sentiments with the misleading charge of provincialism or narrow nationalism not only betrays the repressive assimilationism of the Pakistani state but also reveals the dominant groups' attempt to deny the existence of inequality and exploitation to which Sindh has been subjected. Despite the Sindhis' overwhelming support for the PPP—and their rejection of nationalist and separatist groups—that they have remained suspect in the eyes of the establishment speaks volumes about the nature of the Pakistani state system.

After two separate army and security agencies' operations, Sindh may no longer be the most dangerous province in Pakistan. Nevertheless, it continues to be a troubled, rather than troublesome, province. The situation shall remain so until what is perceived to be the highly centralized state system of Pakistan is changed. That possibility does not seem probable in the near future, especially in the context of ongoing military rule.