

## Ethnic and Political Dynamics in South Punjab: The Evolution of The Saraiki Movement

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### Abstract

the Saraiki ethnic group in Pakistan, is vividly characterized by its unique linguistic identity. The quest for a separate Saraiki province, "Saraikistan," began in the 1960s, driven by Saraiki nationalists advocating for cultural and linguistic recognition. This movement has faced opposition from its rival of the Bahawalpur restoration movement. Political manoeuvres, by mainstream political parties, such as the Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League, have further complicated the issue. The study explores into the socio-political background of South Punjab, highlighting the historical grievances and the rise of Saraiki ethnicity. It examines the phases of the Saraiki movement, from cultural advocacy to political activism, and its interactions with state policies, particularly the controversial One Unit scheme and its aftermath. The article concludes by outlining the ongoing struggles and fragmented efforts of various Saraiki parties in the contemporary political arena.

**Keywords:** Saraikistan, Ethnicity, Genesis, New Province, Dynamics, South Punjab

### Introduction

Saraiki is an ethnic group in Pakistan, as they distinguish themselves on the bases of lingual identity (Rehman, 1996). As per the last 1998 census report the population of Saraiki speakers in overall Pakistan is 10.53 percent and in Punjab stood at 17.4% but an estimated population of Saraiki speakers in 2017 is 20.68% (Pakistan G. O., 1998). It's imperative to mention here that the latest census results were not publicized officially pertaining to some controversy over the results. South Punjab is known as Saraiki region where different communities are living like Punjabi, Baloch and Sindhi but the dominant language of the area is Saraiki (Khan A., 2005). The language in this area has not been called Saraiki for most of the time, rather it was called Muzaffargarhi, Multani, Uchi Riasti, Derewali, Hindko etc. In 1960, with mutual understanding and consensus among the Saraiki nationalists, it was called Saraiki, the language of Southern Punjab (Rehman, 1996). Saraiki dialect is likewise used in the areas of Sindh like Sukkar, Jacobabad, Khairpur as well as in Marri Bugti and Kachi region of Baluchistan and Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Khan H. A., 2004).

The struggle for formation of "Saraikistan" or Saraiki Province is not a new phenomenon. The movement and demand for Saraiki province, on lingual and cultural identity was going on since 1960 in various forms propagator by Saraiki nationalists, intellectuals, poets and academicians. Saraiki movement does not persist as violent as other ethnic movements in Pakistan expect one case in April 1970 (Pildat,2011). Saraiki movement was always confronted by protagonists of Bahawalpur and promoting the issue of Bahawalpur

restoration movement. Pakistan People's Party championed this issue and move a bill for the formation of new province in Southern Punjab to address the grievances of this area. Pakistan Muslim League in response presented two resolutions for the demarcation of South Punjab Province and Bahawalpur Province. South Punjab Province movement got momentum and enter in a new phase when Janoobi Punjab Suba Mahaz merge with Pakistan Tehreek I Insaf before two months of 2018 general elections with this promise that after coming into power Pakistan Tehreek I Insaf will create a new province in Southern Punjab (Express, 2018).

This study aims at explaining the phenomena of divergence of political interests upon the formation of new province in Southern Punjab. It is important to study the historical background of Saraiki Movement and its development over the period for the creation of South Punjab or Saraiki Province and what are the conflicts that have been remained between state authorities and the Saraiki nationalists in past and what is the current debate over creation of South Punjab Province. Under the main concept of "elite competition" this chapter will highlight the socio and political landscape of South Pakistan, rise of Saraiki ethnicity, evolution of Saraiki conflicts with state, present disclosure for the creation of South Punjab Province.

### Social and Political Landscape of South Punjab

Pakistan is divided into six major parts according to their geographical specifications. 1. Northern Mountains 2. Western Mountains 3. Salt Range and Potohar Plateau 4. Upper Indus Plain 5. Lower Indus Plain 6. Baluchistan Plateau. Pakistan is a multiethnic and multilingual country having multiple ethnic and lingual identities. Punjab is associated with the language of Punjabi, the people of Baluchistan speak Balochi, Sindhi language is spoken in the province of Sindh and so on. The present chapter focuses on the genesis of Saraiki Movement for the creation of new province on lingual and administrative grounds in South of Punjab. So, it is essential to know the location and socio-political background of Saraiki belt. The word Punjab is derived from *Punch Aab*, which means "The land of Five Rivers" and it is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of population. Geographically and economically Punjab is divided into three main regions such as Southern Punjab, Central Punjab and Potohar or Norther Punjab (Lieven, 2012). The area from district Rawalpindi to Chakwal district is the part of Potohar, central Punjab starts from Sialkot to Lahore region and Southern Punjab included Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Gazi Khan Divisions Saraiki belt in Southern Punjab is known as the area where Saraiki language is vocalized (Rehman,1997).

Fig:01, Map of Punjab



Source: PI LDAT discussion paper,

Southern Punjab has no defined demarcation line. Saraiki belt is situated near the adjoining border of Sindh Province and deemed to have been most populist and ancient because of the

land of saint and shrines ( Sheikh Bahauddin Zakariya, Shah Shamas Tabrez , Shah Rukne- i- Alam and others) South Punjab region is poorly developed, impoverished and lacks enough health services. For the most part of this region is warm and chalky, but land is lush by the virtue of canal system. As per the ethno-nationalists( Nukhbah Langah, Faraz Khan Noon, Zahoor Derjha) it comprises four divisions of Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Gazi Khan and two districts of Jhang and Dera Ismail Khan Sargodha (Khan H. A., 2004)

Fig 02: Map of proposed province Saraiki Province by Pakistan Saraiki Party



Source: <https://waseb.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/seraikistan-map.gif?w=390&zoom=2>

Different accounts have been given to describe the word "Saraiki", according to one account it came from Sindhi word *Siro* which means "of the north" in Sindhi. "*Wicholo*" which is too a Sindhi word means that center signifies the area of Hyderabad and *Lar* which points out the areas of southern Sindh (Majeed, 2014) Though, Ahmad Hassan Dani, a famous anthropologist( as cited Hussain Ahmad) sees it in a different way, in his opinion word "*Sauvira*" is mentioned in *Mahbharta* instead of "*Siro*" and had changed from "*Sauvira to Savistan*." and remained to be a province in ancient India. Saraiki nationalists takes the view the word "Saraiki" means "Language of Chiefs" (Khan,2004). Sheik Ikram ul Haq, he is of view that Saraiki was used as language in Multan which was the capital of Sindh during the time of Alexander the great and the old name of Multan was "*Muli-us than*".

As compared to Northern Punjab, Southern Punjab has substantially more feudal in this way it is culturally more like Sindh and linking South Punjab towards Sindh as it has strong traditions of saints and shrines(Lieven, 2012)". In terrestrial locations, the regions where Saraiki language is vocalized is extended from Punjab to Sindh and towards the areas of Baluchistan and KPK. Southern Punjab comprises three divisions of Multan, Bahawalpur, and Dera Ghazi Khan and eleven districts of these divisions thereby South Punjab constitutes the area of 99572km and in the total of Punjab it makes 48.5% (Khalid, 2014). As compared to North Central Punjab, Southern region less behind in terms of education and health facilities and industrial development also facing poverty and deprivation (Punjab Development Statistics: 2010). The following given table shows the per capita income and less distribution of fiscal resources in the eleven districts of Upper Punjab and the rest of Punjab.

Figure: 03 Allocation of finance and population of Southern Punjab

Year	Total ADP (Millions Rs)*	Allocation for 11 Districts of South Punjab (Millions Rs)*	Percent Allocation to 11 Districts of South Punjab	Percent Population of 11 Districts to total of Punjab
2003-04	30.500	7.100	23.279	31.16
2004-05	43.440	9.460	21.777	31.22
2005-06	63.000	11.790	18.714	31.28
2006-07	100.000	17.760	17.760	31.34
2007-08	150.000	22.040	14.693	31.40
2008-09	160.000	25.700	16.063	31.46
2009-10	172.00	41.880	24.349	31.52
2010-11	182.000	52.819	29.021	31.57

Source: PILDAT discussion paper (2010)

The main source of income in this region is agriculture. The influence of feudalism, semi tribal system has affected the social structure of South Punjab. The local feudal has great control over the industrial and agriculture sectors. A system of peasantry and slavery is being continued by local feudal. The whole region is politically and economically dominated by these feudal (Khan,2004).The major tribes in Southern Punjab are Legaris, Mazarais, Gillanis, Abbassis, Qureshis, Makhdooms, Hashmis and so on. (Shafique, 2013) The Saraiki Speakers claim their separation on the assumption Saraiki is different from Punjabi and has its own right. It is not a dialect of Punjabi, but Saraiki language is the mother of Punjabi (Rehman, 1997).

#### Rise of Saraiki Ethnicity in Pakistan

In the past century, we have seen many ethnic conflicts and politics of ethno-nationalism across the world. Pakistan is not an exceptional case in this regard. Since its inception in 1947, Pakistan has unique examples of ethnicity in the shape of Bengali, Sindhi, Mohajar, Baloch Saraiki and Hindko movements. Pakistan has lost its eastern wing and face the issue of disintegration due to the language issue and domination of Punjabi elite in the country. Bengali wanted the same status for Bangla language as Urdu was enjoying the national status of Pakistan (Rehman,1997). There were also other factors behind the disintegration of Pakistan, but the language issue was the major cause. The focus of this chapter is to study the background of the Saraiki movement. So, therefore it is important here to catch a sight of the construction of Saraiki ethnic identity and what are the important factors behind the construction of Saraiki identity.

In 1886 under a scheme British Government started the construction of canal system in Punjab. A vast number of people from Upper Punjab were settled in the area which is called today as Saraiki belt. These people were Punjabi speakers but known as *Abadkar*(settlers) in Southern Punjab. (Khan, 2004) After the partition in 1947 internal migration also taken place Mohajar people settled there which creates as sense of alienation in the local residence. In 1950s, hundreds and thousands of acres of barren land was allocated under Thal scheme, to Punjabi migrants for cultivation. This further hurt the Saraiki sentiments and create the feeling of deprivation. These two groups of people were like aliens in the eyes of local residents. The

bonding was also strong between these two groups of *Abadkar* and had a sense of being superior. They called local people as *Dhagga* (crude) *Munafiq* (duplicitous) and in counter local people called them *Panahger* (asylum seeker). These are the reasons why residents considered themselves alienated and distinguish themselves on the bases of their Saraiki language.

#### **Evolution of Saraiki Movement and Conflict with State**

The origination of Saraiki identity can be found back in 1818 when Maharaja Ranjeet Singh annexed the area of Multan province with Lahore. The annexation of the Multan region created sentiments of marginalization and denial among the people of this region. Before this marginalization the area of Saraiki belt remained an independent region. Resistance was agitated by the Saraiki poets, philosophers and writers. Later, this region was conquered by British Government (1857-1947) and this Territory remained abandoned. During British Government, the project of canal system (1886-1888) and formation of cantonments constrained in Northern Punjab. These projects were useless and unproductive for this region because out of nine canal colonies only one canal was established in the south Punjab. (Hashmi and Majeed, 2014). After the creation of Pakistan, South Punjab remained neglected and degraded” Green Revolution” was also restricted only in Central Punjab and fruitless for Southern Punjab. The Saraiki Movement has two phases. The first phase was started in 1960 for the lingual and cultural recognition and the second phase in started for the provincial autonomy in late 1970s.

#### **First Phase of Saraiki as Cultural Movement**

In the 1960s the first phase of the Saraiki movement was started by local intellectuals and nationalists by raising the issue of non-Saraiki settlers in this region and their control over politics and economic resources. The construction of cultural identity shaped during the time when the thousands of barren lands were given to these *Abadkars* (settlers) for cultivation and with the passage of time these *Abadkars* dominated the whole area. These *Abadkars* were literate and financially stronger than Saraiki residents. These *Abadkars* never tried to submerge with local culture, but they emotionally and ideologically created links with Upper Punjab. The Saraiki speakers felt a threat to their culture and language after the domination of non-Saraiki settlers in South Punjab. Initially the Saraiki Movement was based on cultural and linguistic identity. Efforts were made to create communal identity to persuade Saraikis and other groups that Saraiki is a distinct language and diverse from Punjabi (Asif, 2020). A different identity construction was started by Saraiki activists and intelligentsia based on Saraiki language.

The word Saraiki was first used by Saraiki intelligentsia and linguists seemed that it would be applicable at border region. During a meeting it was decided that the local names used for language such as *Multani*, *Riyasti*, *Uchi*, *Balochki* and should be replaced by one single name as Saraiki and used for all these dialects. In 1961 a cultural organization *Bazme Saqafat* was established by Riaz Hashmi aimed at promoting and preservation of Saraiki Literature. (Khan,2004) The purpose of this organization is to generated Saraiki Works but further conversion of the poetry of Khuwaja Farid into Bengali, Urdu and English. Another important development in this regard was the official endorsement for Saraiki. One of the top civil servants during Ayub Khan’s rule, Qudrat Ullah Shahab started patronizing this issue and said that Saraiki was different from Punjabi.

He was accused by Punjabi intelligentsia and elites for patronizing Saraiki issue and making it against Punjabi Identity (Rehman, 1996). In 1964 Another significant development for Saraiki cause was the establishment *Saraiki Adabi Majlis*. This organization aimed to bring Saraiki Language, culture, and history into limelight (Khan H. A., 2004). The first phase of this movement was purely based on cultural and linguistic promotion of Saraiki. The factors behind this movement were the differences of Saraiki versus Punjabis and the recognition of Saraiki as separate language. But this culturally based movement transformed into political movement when the state's discriminatory policy of merging Bahawalpur state into Punjab during one unit. The people of this region started a political drive for the revival of Bahawalpur Province Movement (Langha N. T., 2012).

### **The Second Phase of Saraiki as a Political Movement**

In second phase the evolution of Saraiki political movement and conflicts with state are discussed in a chronological order

#### **The One Unit Scheme**

During the period of 1955, the Government of Pakistan decided to amalgamate the population of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, NWFP and all the princely states into one unit (Langha N. T., 2012). The formulation of one unit (which was totally unconstitutional, undemocratic move in the country and against the wishes of people), was based on parity system created two wings, East and West Pakistan. This parity formula was adopted to tackle the Bengali nationalism in the country (Majeed, 2014). The areas of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, NWFP and princely states of Bahawalpur and Khairpur were included in the West Pakistan (Hassan, 2017). The formulation of one unite was the biggest stroke in the way of integrity of Pakistan, resulting later with the breakup of East wing of Pakistan. The activities of Bahawalpur legislative assembly were also suspended.

The reaction of the public was obvious in this matter, people from Baluchistan, Sindh, NWFP created anti one-unit front to dissolve the scheme of one unit (Khan H. A., 2004). During this period, the Chief Martial Law Administrative, General Ayub Khan imposed a coup in 1958 and put all the nationalist leaders and protesters behind bars. Later with strong resistance and agitation, movement got momentum which forced Ayub Khan to proceed a committee under the head of Supreme Court Judge, named Fazal e Akbar. This committee suggested the termination of one unit and demand the making of fifth province of Baluchistan and the restoration of Bahawalpur State (Rehman, 1996).

#### **Termination of One Unit and Demand for Saraikistan Province**

Subsequently the dissolution of one unit in 1970, the areas of Sindh, Baluchistan and NWFP inducted into Punjab Province, but the Bahawalpur state was not restored and fused with Punjab Province. This decision created great resentment in the people of Bahawalpur (Hassan, 2017). Consequently, people started protesting this amalgamation and different political clusters were shaped for the revival of Bahawalpur restoration. The *Bahawalpur Muttahidda Mahaz* (which is also known as Bahawalpur Unit Front) was the famous one, among these groups, starting protest the government's decision.

The Urdu speaking population of this area also took part in this procession. The front remind succeed by creating an awareness of distinctive identity among people. Through these processions state authorities getting offended and as a result on April 1970, police unlocked fire on demonstration, murder two people and wounded many, leaders (Seth Ubaid Rehman,

Chaudhary Farzand Ali, Maulvi Nazim UD Din, Sardar Mahmud Khan) of this front were arrested. (Rehman, 1996) Even though, Fazal -e- Akbar Committee suggested the restoration of Bahawalpur and demand for a fifth province. (Majeed, 2014) (Rehman, 1996) Riaz Hashmi, a leading Saraiki nationalist took this matter into Supreme Court Pakistan and registered a plea and argued that Pakistani state was responsible for the restoration of Bahawalpur as it existed independent state but not restored as other provinces were restored. Unfortunately, this plea was discarded, and the decision was based on slipshod base that Riaz Hashmi had not *locus standy* (privileged or ability) to file this plea. In response he announced that if the status of Bahawalpur as independent state was not reconsidered then a conflict would be started throughout the region for conception of "Saraikistan". Therefore, the term Saraikistan was first used by Riaz Hashmi. (Hassan, 2017).

Despite all the strong struggle Bahawalpur Province movement went into sand in 1972 and the Saraiki Political Movement was started for provincial autonomy. Renowned Saraiki nationalists Riaz Hashmi, Seth Ubaid Rehman now began its works for the cause of Saraiki Province Movement and connected with Pakistan Saraiki Party formed by Taj Muhammad Langha (Khan H. A., 2004). Tariq Bashir Cheema during the debate over new province in National Assembly said that in the 1973 Constitution, two members of National Assembly Mulvi Nizam ud Din Haider and Noor Muhammad Hashmi belonged to Bahawalpur region, they had not signed the constitution because Saraiki issue was not discussed (Cheema, 2018).

#### **Saraiki Movement During 1977 to 2000 An Era of Slow Development**

In the year 1972, Bahawalpur Province Movement completely fizzled out various protagonists of this movement join other groups and movements for greater Saraiki identity (Fayyaz, 2011). After that the significant step was taken in this regard by the establishment of *Saraiki Adabi Majlis* (Saraiki Literary Society) It was first major step to politicize the issues of cultural, economic and underdevelopment of the Saraiki region (Faiz, 2018). Saraiki Literary Conference was organized in Multan in 1975 which was landmark development in Saraiki identity politics. The aim of this conference was the promotion of Saraiki language and culture. Saraiki nationalists organized different forums to raise the voices against the government's unequal and prejudice policies.

However, several cultural and political organizations flourished in this region like Saraiki Qaumi Mahaz, the Saraiki Literary Conference, *Saraiki Lok Sanjh*, Saraiki Suba Mahaz. These are the cultural and political organizations which worked for Saraiki cause, but all these organizations have a lack of mutual understanding and of distinctive nature. These organizations did not mobilize people on one plate form due to differences in their politics and did not even win any single election. During Zia regime (1977-1988) Saraiki was recognized as a separate language which was another great victory for the Saraiki political leaders, nationalists, and intelligentsia (Rehman, 1996).

In 1989, Saraiki Conference transformed into a political party as Pakistan Saraiki Party. (PSP is the only registered Saraiki party during Taj Muhammad Langha's life.) (Rehman, 1996). Initially the objectives of Saraiki Conference were based on social cultural promotion of Saraiki but after transformation into political party its objectives were also changed to recognize Saraiki as ethnic identity.

#### **The Emergence of Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement (PONM)**

In 1998, another significant development for Saraiki movement was the formation of Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement by an alliance (Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, Awami Tehreek Sindh Taraqi Passand Party, Baluchistan National Movement, Saraiki Movement etc.) (Assadullah, 2020). PONM's first meeting was held in Islamabad on 1 and 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, its demands were on a par with Sheikh Mujeeb UR Rehman's Six points (Khan H. A., 2004):

All the federating units in Pakistan including Saraiki should be autonomous. The province of Pashtun areas should recognize as Pakhtunkhwa and the areas where Saraiki language is spoken should be known as Saraikistan. The languages of Punjabi, Pashtun, Balochi, Saraiki, and Sindhi should be declared as national languages of Pakistan. Every Province should have an equal share and representation in Pakistan's defense forces with its population. The parity formula should be adopted for all the people in federating units in federal body of Pakistan like services, and other institutions. The matters of settlement among the above nations shall be resolved through mutual consensus. However, Saraikis were victorious at the platform of PONM and recognized as a fifth nationality of Pakistan. PONM raised voices for Saraikistan and demanded that Saraikis should be recognized as Saraiki ethnic identity on national as well as international forum (Assadullah, 2020).

#### **Revival of Bahawalpur Restoration: Period of Change in Conflict: 2000 to 2010**

During the time of 1999, General Pervez Musharraf forced the Martial Law in the country. This Military takeover expelled all the political parties and political actions. PONM became ineffectual because of the absence of the leaders who left the country and due to lack of correspondence and conflicts among the leaders of PONM. Once again Saraiki nationalist started working for Saraiki Movement during this time 2002 elections were held in the country, but Saraiki activists unfortunately did not make any good impression, and their participation was not much significant (Majeed, 2014). The situation in other provinces remained as same, all the nationalist parties failed due to bad performance in elections and the leaders put blamed on government for rigging in the election (Khan H. A., 2004).

The major hurdle came in the way of Saraiki Movement when the former information Minister and Senator Muhammad Ali Duraani reinvigorate the Bahawalpur Movement by demanding Bahawalpur as an autonomous entity. After the termination of one unit there remained no split over the matter of the movement for Saraikistan, and the enclosure of Bahawalpur division in Saraiki Movement. (Ayaz, 2014) Tariq Bashir Cheema during speech in National Assembly said that we want an autonomous status for Bahawalpur we do not have any objection upon the creation of Bahawalpur Janoobi Punjab, but we do not want the supremacy of "Takhate Lahore" and stressed that Bahawalpur Province should be separate from Southern Punjab. (Cheema, 2018) Saraiki nationalists accused government authorities of reviving the Bahawalpur Sooba Government and believed that it is conspiracy of the establishment against Saraiki Movement. (Langha, 2011)

In 2008, 2013 and 2018 general elections Saraiki parties did not maintain their position again they gave same results as in 2002 elections failed by native people. In recent elections held in 2018 Pakistan Saraiki Party secured only 6523 votes for National Assembly, Saraikistan Democratic Party won 724 and 675 votes for National and Punjab Assemblies (Pakistan, Party wise vote bank for National and Provincial Assembly, 2018). Currently, there are more than a few key regional parties working in Southern Punjab for Saraiki cause, all these parties are struggling for a separate regional autonomy on the bases of ethno-nationalism. But unlikely all



these parties are scattered due to intra-party conflicts. These parties are following (Pildat,2011).

Pakistan Saraiki Party (registered party with election commission)

Saraiki Quami Movement

Saraiki National Party

Saraikistan Quami Movement

Saraikistan Quami Ittehad

Saraiki Sooba Mahaz (registered party with election commission since 2002)

### Conclusion

In this paper, researcher has tried to cover the evaluation and development of Saraiki Movement from 1960 till 2010. It has also discussed the conflicts of Saraiki nationalists with the state in a chronological order to see how the problems persist over the issue of Saraiki and why the nationalists mobilize this movement. The next chapter will deal with how the politics of new province takes a new turn under the three different democratic regimes of Pakistan People's Party (2008-2013), Pakistan Muslim League-N (2013- 2018) and under the current government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf.

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