
Saraiki Province Movement in Punjab: Causes, Prospects and Challenges

Muhammad Asif^{1*}, Manzoor Ahmad Naazer¹ and Riaz Ahmad²

1. Department of Politics and IR, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

2. School of Public Policy and Administration, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Shaanxi, China.

Received: December 13, 2019

Published Online: April 24, 2020

Abstract

Pakistan is an ethnically diverse country. Therefore, a federal system has been introduced after the independence. However, powers may not be fully decentralised to the federating units which created sense of deprivation particularly among the people of smaller provinces and less developed areas. To alleviate their concerns and grievances, the 18th Constitutional Amendment has been brought about and more autonomy has been given to the provinces. However, the amendment could not address the problems of ethnic minorities living in different provinces. This article explores the prospects of creation of a Saraiki or South Punjab Province. The article uses a qualitative research technique employing historical and descriptive methods. The data has been collected mostly from secondary sources. The findings show that Punjab is the largest province in terms of population, and it is difficult to manage its affairs efficiently from the Capital, Lahore. The provincial government faces difficulty to address the grievances of the people living in far-flung regions such as South Punjab. The growing inequalities led to the revival and intensification of the movement for the creation of Saraiki Province.

Keywords: New Provinces, Provincial Autonomy, Ethnicity, Saraiki Movement, South Punjab

1. Introduction

According to the latest census, Pakistan has more than 200 million population spread over four provinces, capital territory, and autonomous regions. The bulk of the population is concentrated in the province of Punjab that has over half of the total population of the country. Administratively, the four provinces have no capacity to ensure the participation of a large number of populations in the government's decision-making process. One solution to address this problem is to create new provinces because having more provinces will bring closer the centre of power to a large number of populations (Rasool, 2018). More provinces also mean that funds are transferred to less developed areas, which may enable them to use as they desire. Localisation of the new centres of power and financial resources through the creation of new provinces would improve governance, public accessibility to funds and services to people on one hand and strengthen democracy, federalism and national unity on the other. Federalism is suitable for heterogeneous and diverse societies because it combines in itself the features of unity and diversity (Ahmad, 2013; Naseem & Mahmood, 2019). Federalism is evolved and shaped by its social and political environment. The number of provinces in the federation and

satisfactory distribution of power among diverse groups is inevitable for the stability of federalism because it greatly affects the politics of state (Ahmad, 2019).

The presence of one dominant group within the state affects the politics of the country and also causes resentment and sense of deprivation among small provinces and ethnic groups. One way to safeguard the domination of such powerful groups is to sub-divide the dominant group because this sub-division alleviates and reduces the danger of the potential oppression of the majority group. Many of the tension in the federation of Pakistan are also related to the fact that Punjab has 54 per cent of the total population of Pakistan. As a result, it has more influence in the politics of the country because of its more representation in the legislature and civil and military administration (Adeney, 2007; Adeney 2009). Moreover, its large size is an important cause of disharmony and distrust between Punjab and smaller units (Adeney 2012; Waseem 2011). The division of Punjab would not only ensure a durable solution about resources allocation and representation but also reduce the perception of its domination over other provinces. But this is not an easy task because it is not in the interest of the dominant section whose political and economic interest is linked with the unity of Punjab and not of its division. The ethnic domination of few has reduced the identity of all other sub-groups, which is an important cause of alienation in backward and neglected regions such as South Punjab.

2. Literature Review

Anderson, (2008) stated that population of federations all over the world vary. For example, the population of India is over a billion people, while St. Kitts and Davis have populations of few thousands. In certain federations, the largest federating unit is bigger than many countries such as Uttar Pradesh in India have 160 million populations and California in the United States has 34 million populations. These questions of absolute size and population greatly affect the government capacity and political dynamics of the country as well. Homogenous units could contribute to federal stability and improve the efficiency of government, while heterogeneous units may cause conflicts and tension within the state. Adeney (2007) argued that the size of the province affects the politics of the country. Therefore, for ending the domination of big units, promoting harmony among all units and to improve the efficiency of government, establishment of new administrative units are essential.

Rasool (2018) asserted that Punjab is the biggest province of Pakistan in terms of population and it is difficult for one provincial government to manage the affairs of the province effectively. He, therefore, proposed that for removing these problems and improving governance, the Saraiki Province in South Punjab should be established. Langah (2012) claimed that the Saraiki area is a separate ethno-linguistic region, but this fact was ignored by both British and Pakistani leaderships. He maintained that Saraiki people have not been given their due and rightful place in the politics of Pakistan that was the main cause behind the demand for the creation of a Saraiki province. Rehman (2019) claimed that the Saraiki region in South Punjab consists of three divisions and 15 districts whose common language is Saraiki. This language is also spoken in a few areas of Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering South Punjab. The people of this region demand a separate province.

Javaid (2009) noted that Saraiki Province Movement began in the 1970s. In the beginning, it was a cultural and linguistic movement, but later, it turned into a political movement that was supported by all local parties and groups in the region. Feyyaz (2011) argued that the settlement of outside people in South Punjab, backwardness despite producing more income and the issue

of separate identity are the main causes behind demand of Saraiki province. However, the major factor which created momentum in the SARAIKI PROVINCE MOVEMENT is an economic imbalance between South and rest of the Punjab. Siddiq (2009) explained that after the establishment of Pakistan, the federal system was introduced, and the same system remained to continue under all the constitutions. But disharmony among the provinces still exist which created the feeling of alienation particularly among the people of backward regions like South Punjab. Waseem (2010 & 2011) argued that constitutional powers given to provinces under all the constitutions of Pakistan were not utilised in its proper framework and also institutional mechanism given under different constitutions for strengthening federalism have not been fully materialised.

Rizwan (2015) claimed that efforts have been made through the 18th Constitutional Amendment, to remove the feeling of alienation and mistrust of people of smaller provinces to some extent. However, the amendment also brought negative impacts on ethnic minorities in different provinces such as Saraiki speaking people in Punjab, Mohajir in Sindh, Pakhtuns in Baluchistan, and people of Hazara division in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Thus, movements for the establishment of new provinces in various parts of the country once again got revived or intensified (Gilani, Salim, & Khan, 2017). Razia (2011) argued that 18th Amendment and 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award further strengthened the power and positions of already dominant political groups in provinces. Some regions are rich in resources but have poor social and economic infrastructure. Therefore, now they are demanding new provinces for the improvement of governance, ensuring rule of law and equitable development, national unity and strengthening federalism. Hussain (2019) claimed that in the 2018 general elections, all political parties contested the election on the slogan of creating South Punjab Province. After the election, resolutions for the creation of a new province in South Punjab was also submitted in both National Assembly and Provincial Assembly. However, no concrete measures have been taken so far.

Zafar (2018) noted that all political parties and their leadership used the slogan of Saraiki Province and also highlighted different problems of the region. The grievances of the people of South Punjab cannot be removed without creating a new province, which is also vital for strengthening democracy and federalism in Pakistan. Faiz (2018) claimed that re-organisation of the boundaries of Punjab province is essential for improving governance and better management of the resources. After the election of 2018, Usman Buzdar who hails from South Punjab has been chosen as chief minister of the Punjab province and a committee comprising of Shah Mehmud Qureshi and Khushro Bakhtiar have been set up for consultation with other political parties on the issue. Ahmad (2019) asserted that creation of the new province in South Punjab will produce positive impacts on overall social and economic development of the region by further localising a new centre of power and new opportunities for development.

3. Research Methodology

The research method adopted in this study is qualitative and descriptive in nature. This method has explored the hidden factors which became the causes for the demand of new provinces in Pakistan. The study highlighted the need and importance of new federating units in general and Saraiki Province in particular, for strengthening democracy, federalism, and efficiency in governance and to promote national unity in the country. For the collection of data, secondary sources have been used and data has been collected from different secondary sources i.e. libraries, comments, opinions and analyses published in different newspapers, research

magazines and other sources from the internet which were relevant and important for this research. All the data have been collected manually from the concerned resources and arranged accordingly. For the analysis and interpretation of data, thematic analysis technique has been used. This technique is commonly used by the researchers of social sciences in qualitative, case study and descriptive research. During this process, it was also explored that all political parties and its leadership used slogan of Saraiki Province at the time of election to get maximum votes. In addition, speeches and interviews of political leaders published in the newspapers are also consulted for this study.

4. Discussion and Findings

4.1. Evolution of Federalism in Pakistan

Since the establishment of Pakistan, there has been a continuing debate on the grant of provincial autonomy to the provinces. At the time of independence, there were three provinces, besides former princely states, tribal areas, and federal capital territory in West Pakistan and one province in East Pakistan. This first Constituent Assembly, in its long deliberation spread over seven years, discussed the various solutions of provincial autonomy. Under the 1956 Constitution, the federal legislature was provided in which both East and West wings were given equal representation based on parity (Siddiq, 2009; Kundi, 2002). The Constitution of 1962 also adopted the principle of parity between two wings, but that Constitution too was federal only in name and all powers were exercised practically by central government. As a result of the over centralisation, the gulf between two the wings of the country further widened and after the war of 1971, Bangladesh was separated from Pakistan and became an independent state (Khan, 2017; Waseem 2011).

After the separation of East Pakistan, the new Constituent Assembly was formed, which ultimately succeeded in framing the Constitution of 1973, with the cooperation of all political parties in the Parliament. Unlike the previous two constitutions, federal legislature under the Constitution of 1973 is bicameral. It consists of two houses i.e. National Assembly and Senate. In lower house representation to provinces has been given based on population, whereas in the upper house equal representation has been given to all the provinces. The second aspect of provincial autonomy is the sharing of power between the centre and provinces. Under this arrangement, federating units are the real and ultimate repository of all powers in many subjects (Anderson, 2007; Shahid, 2015). But a suitable environment essential for the promotion of federalism could not develop in Pakistan since its establishment. It is a fact, that all the provinces of undivided India did not have autonomy in true sense. Some of the units have already existed and others joined the federal union because of the partition of the provinces of Punjab and Bengal at the time of independence. But later, the unity and harmony may not be promoted due to ethno-lingual differences in the backward regions of Pakistan (Khan, 2017; Kundi, 2002; Talbot, 2002).

The highly centralised regime of General Musharraf again brought the issue of provincial autonomy in the limelight. During Musharraf rule (1999-2008), the smaller provinces felt the weight of highly centralised military government, where all decisions were practically taken by the federal government and provinces were just required to carry them out (Naazer, Mahmood, & Ashfaq, 2017). Regardless of the debate on provincial autonomy since the establishment of Pakistan, there has been a continuing tendency toward centralisation rather than decentralisation. The federal government under all the constitutions controlled all

important subjects, departments, and revenues heads. This situation certainly accentuated the feeling of alienation among the people of oppressed and backward regions (Siddiqa, 2009).

The powers and authority given to federating units under all the constitutions were not utilised in their proper framework. The mechanism given in all three constitutions for strengthening federalism and promoting harmony and national unity in the country have not been fully materialised. That is the reason the supremacy and domination of the federal government still remained at all level of government, which is the main cause of resentment among the ethnic minorities living in existing federating units in Pakistan (Waseem, 2010). The feeling of alienation and distrust between centre and provinces has been removed to some extent under 18th Constitutional Amendment by giving more autonomy to them. However, it is also a fact that this amendment has also brought negative impacts on ethnic minorities within existing provinces such as Sarakis in Punjab, Muhajirs in Sind, Pakhtuns in Baluchistan and people of Hazara Division in KP province. Thus, new amendment also failed to respond to the demand of oppressed sub-nationalities within existing provinces (Rizwan, 2015; Hafeez, 2014).

The 18th Constitutional Amendment and 7th NFC Award met the demand of the nationalist political parties mainly of smaller provinces (Musarrat, Ali, & Azhar, 2012). But these developments, as some critics point out, further strengthened the power and position of already dominant political groups in the provinces, which created a sense of deprivation in small ethnic groups. This environment of mistrust, dissatisfaction and disharmony still exist among minority ethnic groups within provinces, where the dominant groups still try to impose its hegemony over the former. Furthermore, some regions are rich in natural resources and are also largely contributing to the economy of the state but possess poor socio-economic infrastructure. Therefore, for the promotion of good governance and self-rule and preservation of separate identity, minority ethnic groups are demanding new units (Hassan, 2017; Hafeez, 2014). The movements for the creation of new provinces have been started by minority ethnic groups in different provinces of Pakistan, such as Saraiki Province Movement, and Bahawalpur Provinces Movement in Punjab; Muhajir Province Movement in Sindh and Hazara Province Movement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Musarat, 2011; Adeney 2012).

4.2. Origin of Seraiki Province Movement

Since independence, Pakistan passed through various phases of political development. Power has changed hands between civilian and military governments, but these governments failed to provide basic necessities of life to its citizens, especially those living in remote and backward regions. The South Punjab is one such example. Both the military and civilian government have neglected this region and it could not get proper attention and its due share from state resources. It is believed, that this kind of discrimination in the allocation of developmental resources and backwardness of the area led many to fear that the next battleground after FATA might be South Punjab as militancy and extremism were gaining ground there (Siddiqa, 2009). Economic infrastructure in North and Central Punjab is more developed than South Punjab and more industries are not located there. The major part of the military and civil bureaucracy belongs to North and Central Punjab. All this is the perfect condition of alienation and hopelessness, which forced the people of South Punjab to take desperate action and outcome of all these developments, was a slow and steady rise of social and political mobilisation, which later on changed into a conflict situation (Ahmad, 2017).

It is important to note that there are no formal boundaries of South Punjab as it is not a formal

entity. However, it is generally accepted that it consists of three divisions: Dera Ghazi Khan, Bahawalpur, and Multan, which are further sub-divided into fifteen districts. Historically, Saraiki as a regional language/dialect has been existed since long. Previously it was regarded as a variant of Punjabi language. Since 1960, it has been used for the purpose of writing. It was recognised as a separate language in 1981 during the government of General Zia-ul-Haq. The acceptance of Saraiki as language means that people of South Punjab could identify them with one identity. It is also spoken in part of Sind, Baluchistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa bordering South Punjab (Rehman, 1999). The origin of Saraiki Province Movement can be traced back to 1970s, when one unit was abolished by Yehya Khan and Bahawalpur was annexed with Punjab Province. It has been viewed as a violation of an agreement signed by the princely state of Bahawalpur with the federal government in 1955. In the beginning, it was a cultural and linguistic movement that later turned into the political one especially after start of Bahawalpur Province Movement (Rehman, 1999). However, due to the military government of Zia-ul-Haq (1977-88), the movement could not make headway and went underground. After the death of Zia-ul-Haq, Saraiki Province Movement once again revived.

4.3. Causes behind demand of the Saraiki Province

There are a number of grievances, concerns, issues, and problems identified and highlighted by the political parties and other organisations. However, due to less attention of federal and Punjab governments, the leadership and masses of South Punjab were forced to start Saraiki Province Movement. A number of political parties and activist groups are struggling for the creation of a separate Saraiki or South Punjab province. These include Pakistan Saraiki Party, Saraiki Qaumi Party, Saraiki National Party, Saraiki Qaumi Ittehad, Saraikistan Qaumi Movement, and Saraiki Sooba Movement (Javaid, 2009). Some important causes of the movement are as follow:

- a) Settlement of the people from other areas is not liked by the people of the Saraiki belt. The process of settlement began during the British period, when in 1886 construction of canals started and the colonies of the canals were open for settlers from other regions. After the Sutlej valley project, new settlers came to the region. This development was criticised and not liked by the people of South Punjab. The census of 2017 shows that over 21 million populations speak Saraiki language across the country.
- b) Another notable complaint of Saraiki people is that South Punjab produces more income than what is being spent on it. It is believed that Bahawalpur is major producer of cotton and income earned from it is not being spent there and there is a feeling that Saraiki belt is being exploited economically. According to available estimates on poverty, more than 43 percent of the population of South Punjab is below the poverty line as compared to 27.7 percent of the entire population of Punjab Province. Therefore, the major demand of Saraiki political activists and leadership is that the quota in employment for Saraiki people should be increased (Feyyaz, 2011).
- c) Saraiki intellectuals demand that all provinces should be formed on ethno-lingual basis. They claim that the growing disparity between Central and South Punjab has made the issue inescapable. They also claim that nobody could object to this demand as Sindhi live in Sindh, Punjabis in Punjab, Balochi in Baluchistan and Pakhtuns live in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (Chandio, 2009).

- d) But major factor contributed to the revival of the Saraiki Province Movement relates to the economic imbalance between South and the rest of Punjab. The new province would have a separate budget which shall be larger than presently allocated for South Punjab. It is believed that it will create employment opportunities, improve the efficiency of government, and step toward alleviating poverty in the region. According to the report of the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) that cotton and agriculture industry will get a boost and people of Saraiki region will benefit from their own resources rather than on the support of upper Punjab (Chaudhry, 2009).

The 18th Constitutional Amendment and renaming of NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa gave momentum to the politics of new provinces in Pakistan. The renaming of NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was not liked by people of Hazara Division due to which Hazara Province Movement was revived. It also changed the political dynamic of the South Punjab and helped revive the Saraiki Province Movement. This amendment shifted the emphasis of state and highlighted the importance of ethnicity as a defining principle of the politics of federalism in Pakistan. The ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) at that time expressed its desire to make a new province in Punjab. Re-designation of federalism in Pakistan through the empowerment of provinces and rationalisation of the size of existing provinces was deemed vital for stability and national unity of the country (Siddiqi, 2015).

South Punjab is mostly backward, underdeveloped, and predominately, comprises of rural areas. It has no quota in services and, therefore, has a fewer share in civil and military bureaucracy. This region is also known for a lower standard of education and development. Comparative conditions of various districts of Punjab province on the basis of social and economic indicators such as child mortality rate, immunisation, education, school enrolment and the ratio of employment, showed that certain districts of South Punjab such as Rahim Yar Khan and Rajanpur are ranked among the lowest as compared to some of the districts of Central and North Punjab (Siddiqi, 2015).

The percentage of children who are never enrolled in schools is 30 percent in South Punjab, as compared to 27 percent in West Punjab, 20 percent in Central Punjab and 6 percent in North Punjab. Similarly, in case of girls, the figure stood 44 percent in South Punjab, as compared to 43 percent in West Punjab, 33 percent in Central Punjab and 15 percent in North Punjab. The evolution and development of Saraiki consciousness slowly and gradually deepen, especially due to developmental disparity between Saraiki and other regions of upper Punjab. The local population is increasingly aware about the fact that civil servant and military officials have acquired assets and have access to resources of the land, which is beyond the reach of the local population (Siddiqi, 2015).

The current Saraiki Province Movement got momentum not only by steps taken by PPP government, but also other parties such as Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), which would indirectly benefit from such redesigning of federalism in Pakistan. Taj Muhammad Lunga and other Saraiki Nationalist leaders also gave impetuous to Saraiki Province Movement. Their claim revolves around the separate ethno-linguistic identity of Saraiki people, which was ignored by both British and Pakistani leadership. They believed that Saraiki people have suffered subjugation since 1818 when Sikh captured their land. They also claim that Saraiki is an important ethno-linguistic identity that was forcedly merged with Punjab. They claimed that Saraiki people have not been given their due and rightful place in Pakistani politics (Langah, 2012; Mushtaq, & Shaheen, 2017).

Though Taj Muhammad Khan Langa had started the movement of Saraiki province, however it could not gain clear success. It was because the electable feudal of South Punjab have always been part of mainstream political parties for vested interest. The PPP tried to exploit the situation and raised the slogan of South Punjab province after its leadership realised that party has been losing ground in Central Punjab. Similarly, PML-N did the same and half-heartedly supported the move (Khosa, 2019). The leadership of Jannobi Province Mahaz contested the election of 2018 on the slogan of South Punjab province. However, after coming into power, no sincere efforts have been made for the establishment of new province. Similarly, the opposition parties also confused the issues by demanding the restoration of Bahawalpur province (Faiz, 2018).

The demand of South Punjab province is attached with two political views held by different groups in 1970. Bahawalpur based movement revolve around the restoration of geographical and administrative boundaries of Bahawalpur State and the activities of Multan based linguistic and nationalist movement working for the creation of province comprising all those district of existing Punjab province where Saraiki language is spoken (The News International, 2018). Though the demand of South Punjab province is not new, but latest move in this direction was made in April 9, 2018, when Janoobi Punjab Mahaz was established by some disgruntled politicians of PML-N, who blamed their party for failing to establish South Punjab province. Later, JPM merged into PTI and in the election of 2018, PTI won more than 55 seats from South Punjab (Faiz, 2020).

4.4. Prospects of the Creation of Saraiki Province

The demand for the establishment of Saraiki province evolved due to economic, social, and political grievances of the people of South Punjab. All the districts of Saraiki belt are far behind from the districts of North and Central Punjab in the index of social and economic development. Moreover, less allocation for development budget for the region and non-compliance with the share of jobs reserved for the region justify the establishment of the Saraiki province. The demand for the re-organisation of the boundaries of the Punjab province is also rooted in the argument that it is not always possible to have efficient and effective governance and administrative structure to provide civic services to the entire population on the basis of equality. Hence, the demand of Saraiki province is also justified for better management of the resources and socio-economic development based on equality (Faiz, 2018; Mushtaq, & Shaheen, 2017).

Thus, the possible establishment of Saraiki province has several merits: firstly, it can be an effective way to address the dissatisfaction and a sense of deprivation among the people of South Punjab. Secondly, the size of the province of Punjab has made it increasingly difficult to govern efficiently and effectively from Lahore, the capital of the province. Thirdly, new federating unit in South Punjab will bring a positive impact on the socio-economic development of the country as localisation of new power centres will also create new opportunities for its citizens. Fourthly, it will reduce the size and population of the present Punjab province that will help strengthen federalism in Pakistan and promote national unity (Ahmad, 2019). Census Report 2017 shows that population of Punjab is 110 million and if it were a country; it would be the 12th most populated state in the world (Faiz, 2018).

The prospects of creation of the Saraiki province apparently seem bright as all major political parties manifestly supported this demand. None of the main political party has expressed its

opposition to the demand. During the campaign of the 2018 general election, all political parties and its leaderships used the slogan of Saraiki province for attracting voters. The present government of PTI won the seats in South Punjab by promising the people of the region to create South Punjab province in the first 100 days of its rule. Now the question arises do we need to re-design the boundaries of existing provinces? The answer is yes, we need new provinces and we need to re-demarcate the British drawn boundaries of the provinces because it is vital for strengthening democracy and federalism in Pakistan (Zafar, 2018).

Traditionally, the region of South Punjab is home to some leading electable politicians owing largely to feudalism in the region. The careful use of Saraiki card in South Punjab enabled PTI to win more than 55 percent seats with the support of electable in the election of 2018. Another positive development for Saraiki nationalists came when Usman Buzdar who belongs to South Punjab was chosen as Chief Minister of Punjab province. Meanwhile, a committee comprising of two federal ministers, Makhdoom Shah Mehmud Qureshi and Makhdoom Khusró Bakhtiar was constituted for consultation and convincing other political parties on the issue. All these developments have created optimism about the possibility of converting the dream of Saraiki province into reality (Faiz, 2018).

After the elections, both PPP and Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) announced the support for the creation of Saraiki province as promised during the election campaign of 2018. President of PML-N Shahbaz Sharif and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto also assured their support for Saraiki Province. Similarly, the leadership of other political parties, including Awami National Party (ANP), MQM besides others supported the demand for Saraiki province. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmud Qureshi, who belongs to Saraiki belt, emphasised the need for setting up of a Parliamentary Committee consisting of members of all parties to decide the issue of Saraiki Province (Hussain, 2019). Shah Mehmud Qureshi stated that bill for the creation of South Punjab province would be presented in National Assembly. He also stated that PTI is lacking two-third majority in Parliament, but the government will try to get the co-operation of other political parties. Therefore, in first phase separate secretariat will be established for South Punjab province. An Additional Chief Secretary and an Additional Inspector General of Police will be appointed for new secretariat, one will establish his office in Multan and other in Bahawalpur (The Times of India, 2019).

4.5. Challenges to Saraiki Province Movement

The critics of Saraiki province have explained that at present Pakistan faces social and economic problems, therefore new provinces including Saraiki province is not possible now. New province in Punjab will give impetus to movements of other provinces and next few years the energies and resources of the government and political parties would be invested in confrontation over the creation of new provinces. In this situation the immediate issues such as nation building, economic development, health care and quality education will be ignored (Ahmar, 2016). The constitutional procedure to alter the boundaries of the provinces is also difficult. It requires two-third majority for amendment in article 239 of the Constitution and also approval with 2/3 majority from concerned Provincial Assembly (Hafeez 2014). PTI and PPP want to establish a single Saraiki or South Punjab province while PML (N) wants two provinces i.e. Bahawalpur and Saraiki Province. Pakistan Muslim League (Q), a major ally of PTI government in the centre and in Punjab province, also supported PML-N stance on this issue. Its leader and federal minister Bashir Cheema stated that his party would not support the idea of creation of South Punjab province unless the proposal to create a separate Bahawalpur

Province is included in the scheme. In fact, this is what the Punjab Assembly had passed in 2012 (Zafar, 2018; Khan, Shaheen, & Ahmad, 2019).

PML-N also submitted a constitutional amendment bill in the National Assembly, seeking the creation of South Punjab province and Bahawalpur province. This was announced by PML (N) leaders, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Ahsan Iqbal and Maryum Aurangzeb during a press conference. They also stated that the bill was in accordance with the party manifesto and in the light of the already passed resolution of Punjab Assembly in May 2012 (Wasim, 2019). The idea of creation of new provinces including Saraiki or South Punjab province has become a political issue for political parties which have divergent interests and policies on the subject. Apparently, all of them support the demand but their actions and policies reflect something different (Khan, Shaheen, & Ahmad, 2019). Their policies are based on their political goals and priorities. For instance, PPP supports the demand of creation of Saraiki or South Punjab province apparently for two reasons: to increase its vote bank in South Punjab and undermine the influence of PML-N that rules Punjab for about 10 years (2008-2018). It also wants to weaken the dominance of Punjab by dividing it into two provinces (Zafar, 2018).

To undermine PPP's stance, PML-N supports the idea of creation of two provinces instead of one in South Punjab. Enjoying majority in the provincial assembly of Punjab, it successfully got passed a resolution in 2012 demanding creation of provinces of Bahawalpur and South Punjab. But PPP supports creation of one province in South Punjab and does not seem supportive to the PML-N idea of creation of a separate Bahawalpur province where the former has less vote bank as compared to other parts of South Punjab. PTI's goals and policy in South Punjab are similar to that of PPP as both these parties have weak position in other parts of Punjab and they want to establish their hold in South Punjab if it is separated as a new province (Wasim, 2019; Khan, Shaheen, & Ahmad, 2019). MQM aspires to create a province comprising urban areas of Karachi and Hyderabad in Sindh and to create a suitable ground for that it supports creation of new provinces in Punjab. But PPP is bitterly opposed to any new province in Sindh. However, this factor also stumbles the creation of the Saraiki Province. The powerful establishment besides some political parties, scholars and analysts are opposed to the idea of creation of any new province in the country as it would open a Pandora box and instigate demands of creation of more provinces in other parts of the country including Karachi (Wasim, 2019; Khan, Shaheen, & Ahmad, 2019; Hussain, 2014).

These political considerations prevent main stakeholders including political parties and establishment from reaching on a consensus regarding creation of new provinces. This is the main reason that political parties have not discussed it seriously and instead they were motivated by point scoring, rhetoric and attracting the audience particularly voters in their respective constituencies mainly in South Punjab. The consensus among political parties is vital to amend the relevant provisions of the constitution necessary to create any new province including Saraiki province. However, it seems less possible under the prevailing charged and divided political environment. The major parties like PTI, PML (N) and PPP are not serious about the issue (Khan, Shaheen, & Ahmad, 2019).

5. Conclusion

The mainstream national political parties support the idea of creation of a Saraiki province and they took several initiatives to pursue this objective. However, their goals, priorities and political considerations diverge sharply which prevent them from coming closer and reaching

to a consensus on the issue. Unless they come out of their narrow political considerations and short terms goals, they are not likely to reach to any consensus necessary to create new provinces including Saraiki province. Other stakeholders including military bureaucracy are apprehensive of creation of new province in any part of the country fearing that such a development can spur demand of a creation of a separate province in urban Sindh which might threaten national security in the future. All stakeholders including major political parties and military establishment needs to revisit their position and reach to a consensus on this issue. They must agree on the establishment of a parliamentary committee or commission to devise a broad-based formula for the creation of Saraiki province. It may also suggest a mechanism that can help check separatism as well as equitable distribution of resources for people of all provinces. The establishment of Saraiki or South Punjab Province may help in improving the governance, better utilisation of the resources, creating unity and cohesion among the different parts of the present Punjab province. It will further localise the centre of powers which will bring about positive change in the lives of the people of South Punjab as new social and economic opportunities will be available at their doorsteps. This development will not only strengthen federalism and democracy; but also promote national unity in as it will empower all ethnic identities living in various parts of the country.

References

- Adeney, K. (2007). *Federalism and ethnic conflict regulation in India and Pakistan*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press.
- Adeney, K. (2009). The limitations of non-consociational federalism: The example of Pakistan. *Ethnopolitics*, 8(1), 87-106.
- Adeney, K. (2012). A step towards inclusive federalism in Pakistan? The politics of the 18th amendment. *The Journal of Federalism*, 42(4), 539-565.
- Ahmad, M. (2013). Integration theory and the role of the core state in regional organizations. *Regional Studies*, 31(3), 41-71.
- Ahmad, R. (2019, March 23). Politics of new provinces in Pakistan (Interview by the principal author Muhammad Asif).
- Ahmar, M. (2016). The dynamics of Pakistan's intra-national security: The role of new provinces. *India Quarterly*, 72(1), 16-29.
- Anderson, G. (2008). *Federalism: An introduction*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Chandio, M. (2009, June 27). A case for Saraiki province. Retrieved from Dawn News. <https://www.dawn.com/news/869754>
- Chaudhry, I. S. (2009). Poverty alleviation in South Punjab: An empirical evidance from the project area of Asian Development Bank. *International Research Journal of Finance and Economic*, 23, 23-32.
- Faiz, A. (2018, November 6). What lies behind demand for separate province in South Punjab. *Herald*. Retrieved from <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398695>
- Feyyaz, M. (2011, March 1). Demand for Saraiki Province. *PILDAT*.
- Gilani, S. M. S., Salim, A. & Khan, N. U. (2017). The role of Muttahida Qaumi Movement in Sindhi-Muhajir controversy. *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)*, 1(1), 71-82.
- Hafeez, M. H. (2014). Constitutional framework for formation of new provinces in Pakistan. *International Journal of Business, Economics and Law*, 4(3), 4-10.
- Hussain, J. (2014). Is the creation of new provinces in Pakistan the need of an hour? *Defence Journal*, 18(3), 11-23.

- Hussain, J. (2019, January 28). PML (N) submits bill seeking creation of Bahawalpur, South Punjab provinces in NA. Retrieved from Dawn News. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1460373>
- Javaid, U. (2009). Movement for Bahawalpur province. *Journal of Political Studies*, 15(1), 41-57.
- Khan, H. (2017). *Constitutional and political history of Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Khan, S., Shaheen, M., & Ahmad, M. (2019). Horizontal inequalities and identity conflicts: A study of Pakistan. *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 56(2), 307-22.
- Khosa, M. (2019, January 24). South Punjab Province: A gimmick or serious move? Retrieved from Naya Daur, <https://nayadaur.tv/2019/01/south-punjab-province-a-gimmick-or-serious-move/>
- Kundi, M. A. (2002). Federalism in Pakistan: Problems & prospects. *Asian and African Studies*, 11(1), 37-48.
- Langah, N. T. (2012). *Poetry as resistance: Islam and ethnicity in Postcolonial Pakistan*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- Musarat, R. (2011). Constitutional provisions on creation of provinces and suggested model. In M. H. Nuri, M. Hanif, & M. N. Khan, (Eds.). *18th Amendment Revisited*. (155-68). Islamabad: IPRI.
- Musarrat, R., Ali, G., & Azhar, M. S. (2012). Federalism in Pakistan: Current developments. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 2(4), 450-59.
- Mushtaq, M., & Shaheen, M. (2017). Saraiki Province Movement in Punjab Pakistan: Prospects and challenges, *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society*, 30(2), 139-50.
- Naseem, K., & Mahmood, A. (2019). Yardsticks of Federalism: Relevance for Pakistan. *Asian Journal of International Peace & Security*, 3, 46-57.
- Naazer, M. A., Mahmood, A. & Ashfaq, S. (2017). Political rights situation during Musharraf era: 1999-2004. *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)*, 1(1), 20-31.
- Rasool, A. (2018, May 08). How can a country of 200 million only have four provinces? Retrieved from Dawn News. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1406387>
- Rehman, T. (1999). *Language, education and culture*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Rizwan, S. (2015). *18th Amendment: Opportunities and challenges of devolution in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Shahid, Z. (2015). Federalism in Pakistan: of promises and perils. *Perspectives on Federalism*, 7(1), 117-45.
- Siddiq, A. (2009, July 03). *More provinces?* Retrieved from http://zaviews.blogspot.com/2009_07_03_archive.htm
- Siddiq, A. (2015). Reimagining Pakistan: Identity politics in a national security state. In A. Faiz, (Ed.). *Making federalism work* (Chapter 8). Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Talbot, I. (2004). The Punjabization of Pakistan: Myth or reality? In Christophe Jafferlot (Ed.). *Pakistan: Nationalism without a nation*. Zed Books.
- The Times of India. (2019, May 15). Pakistan to bifurcate Punjab to create new South Punjab province: Shah Mehmood Qureshi. Retrieved from, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/pakistan-to-bifurcate-punjab-to-create-new-south-punjab-province-shah-mehmood-qureshi/articleshow/69345162.cms>

- The News International. (2011, November 29). Bahawalpur province revival a conspiracy. Retrieved from, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/333670-‘bahawalpur-province-revival-a-conspiracy’>
- The News International. (2018, April 13). MRBP reject inclusion of Bahawalpur in proposed South Punjab province. Retrieved from, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/303800-mrbp-reject-inclusion-of-bahawalpur-in-proposed-south-punjab-province>
- Waseem, M. (2010). *Federalism in Pakistan*. Islamabad: Forum of Federation and Centre of Civic Education.
- Waseem, M. (2011). Pakistan: A majority-constraining federalism. *Indian Quarterly*, 67(3), 213-28.
- Wasim, A. (2019, January 1). PML (N) demands creation of Bahawalpur, South Punjab Provinces. Retrived from Dawn News. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1460487>
- Zafar, S. A. (2018, September 09). Is South Punjab Possible? Retrieved from The News International. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/366783-is-south-punjab-possible>