CONSEQUENCES OF CULTURAL EXCLUSION IN PAKISTAN'S SARAIKI REGION

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ABSTRACT

    In this paper, we have developed an analytical and empirical case study of the Saraiki region based on Kymlicka's understanding of cultural exclusion.[11] The study discusses that the Saraiki nation suffers cultural exclusion along with economic and political exclusions in Pakistan. In particular, the paper focuses on the aspects of cultural exclusion. To materialize the claims made in this paper, we have argued that the Saraiki people have started to disregard their language and they are becoming passive to exhibit their identity. Their language, culture, history, art and heritage are badly affected due to suppression of their identity. Consequently, they are beginning to infer that their culture and language are inferior. The members of Saraiki community feel discomfort in practicing their culture and values. The parents hesitate to speak their indigenous language the Saraiki language with their children. The school students lack self-confidence while speaking Saraiki in public domains. Consequently, these people are deviating from their cultural heritage, heedlessly ignoring their festivals and funfairs. Their cultural representation on national-level has been marginalized, whereas their art, culture, and handicrafts are being disregarded. Thus, state should take serious measures to promote cultures and languages of people in general and Saraki region in particular.

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Keywords: Cultural Exclusion, Language and Politics, Identities, Cultural Diversity.

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[11] There is no as such uniformed and universal definition of cultural exclusion. It has many shapes, forms and dynamics. Cultural exclusion as discussed by Will Kymlicka basically is that when a group specifically its language, culture, customs, religion, traditions, norms, art and lifestyles are suppressed by the state is called cultural exclusion (Kymlicka, Will, 2004:4).

INTRODUCTION

It is an established fact recognized by the United Nation (UN) that cultural right receives less attention in the generic framework of human rights. In 2002, according to Article 27 of the ICCPR, the UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, passed a resolution on promotion of the enjoyment of cultural rights of every one and respect for different cultural identities which has actually acknowledged the fact that the people are assertive to demand for the respect of their respective cultural identities (Fukuda-Parr, Sakilo, 2004). Furthermore, the recent research carried out by the UN reveals that suppressed groups have to face discrimination on the basis of culture and religion.

Pakistan is a federation comprising of multiple ethnicities, each speaking a different language (Rahman, Tariq, 1997:833-839). This country consists of four different provinces, Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, along with some other federally-administered areas. Among these, Punjab is the largest province with two major ethnic groups called the Punjabis and the Saraikis (Ayesha Siddiqa, 2013:25-33). The genesis of the Saraiki movement in order to struggle for the rights of the Saraiki people dates back to the 1960s (Shackle, Christopher, 1977:379-403). The Saraiki region is geographically located in the central part of Pakistan (Shackle) and in the southern part of Pakistan's largest province, Punjab. They have been living over centuries, and their native language is known as Saraiki. This region has its own unique history, culture and civilization. This region used to be a state in ancient India by the name "*Sauvira*" (Ahmad Hassan Dani, 1981:35-42) and later on remained as a province Multan during Mughal period [1526-1707] (Abul Fazal, n.d.:1036-1037). In 1818, Sikh Mahraja Ranjit Singh invaded this region and merged Multan province into the Punjab province and glorified only Punjabi identity (Singh, Pritam, 2012:153-172). Since then Saraiki identity, language and geography has never been recognized in the country. The people of this region have been demanding their cultural and political rights since 1960s. They have been facing various economic and political issues including non-recognition of Siraiki identity.

Reasonable literature produced throughout the world reveals that there have been a number of groups across the world that are economically and politically privileged but culturally marginalized. The prime examples of such regional groups are Catalans in Spain, Welsh in Wales and Quebecoise in Canada. These regional or sub-national groups have strived for regional autonomy not because of economic or political deprivation. In fact, there economic and political rights are well preserved. The reason for their regional autonomy was cultural exclusion as their language and culture have been stigmatized by the central government (Kymlicka, Will, 2010:97-112). Likewise, the Chinese in Southeast Asia are privileged economically. For instance, in Indonesia Chinese form 3% of the total population yet is the dominant economically (control 70%private economy). They are economically privileged but facing cultural exclusion. Until recently, Chinese education has been restricted (Ho, Chin Ung, 2000). Furthermore, the Lebanese in West Africa are dominant in trade and yet have faced cultural exclusion as their religion, language and culture are invisible in public domain (*Ibid*). This is a dubious claim that economic and political privileges eradicate cultural exclusion. This is a serious issue which requires certain policies to address it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

First of all, we have contemplated theoretical and general understanding of politics of recognition, particularly focusing on the identity crisis in Europe, Asia, and South Asia. For theoretical purpose, books and research articles on nation-building, multiculturalism and post-colonial understanding about cultural identity have been studied. Several books such as *Multiculturalism in Asia (Kymlicka, Will, 2005)* by Kymlicka and Baogang, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory (Parekh, Bhikhu, C., 2002:231)* by Parekh, *The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism (ibid)* by Will Kymlicka, *Nation Building and Nation Destroying (Connor, Walker, 1972:319-55)* by Connor, and *Why Minority Rebels: A Global Analysis of Communal Mobilization and Conflict Since 1945 (Gurr, Ted Robert, 1993:161-201)* by Gur were thoroughly reviewed for framing the necessary theoretical framework. These books and research articles have discussed the

issue of identity suppression, cultural exclusion, state homogenous policies of nation building and their repercussions on the sub-national groups across the globe. The relevance of this literature review has not only proved helpful to develop a good theoretical framework for our research, but it also assisted to compare this topic in hand with various other similar issues on global scale. These major state-of-the-art research works have provided us with the idea of identity disputes and their socio-cultural consequences faced the regional groups.

The second category of textual material is about Pakistan's national identity, discourses and practices with respect to ethno-national and linguistic diversity, focusing on the Saraiki language and customs in particular. For instance, *Language and Politics in Pakistan (Rahman, Tariq, 1996:71)*, *Ethno-nationalism in Pakistan: Domestic and International Factors* (Amin, Tahirs, 1993) have dealt with the issue of ethno national problems in Pakistan and have traced the genesis of ethno linguistic problem in Pakistan. These two important books have dealt with the issue of identity politics from the perspective of instrumental and modernist approach which only focuses on economic deprivation of marginalized groups. Both works have not touched upon cultural exclusions of Saraiki ethno-national group. *Federalism and Pakistan (Sayed, Khalid Bin, 1954:139-143)* has concentrated on Constitution of Pakistan and its fundamental flaws to manage diversity. *Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imagining (Jalal, Ayesha, 1995:73-89)* dealt with the national identity based on Islam as crafted by the state. This seminal work actually lays a strong foundation to our proposed research study by analyzing the state policies around the national identity in the name of religion Islam. *Poetry as Resistance: Islam and Ethnicity in Postcolonial Pakistan (Langah, Nukhbah Taj, 2012)* is a recently published book dealing specifically with the stance of Saraiki nationalism in contemporary time. It has not engaged with socio-cultural consequences that Saraiki nation is facing. The core argument of this book is that the Saraiki creative writers, poets and nationalists are posing potential resistance against the state and demanding their rights of cultural identity. *Kia Hum Ekathay rah Saktey Hain (Aziz-ud-Din, 1992)* (Can We Live Together) is another core contribution to this topic. He discussed the state relations with five different sub-national groups and pointed out the Saraiki nation from a historical

point of view and identified the problem of the Saraiki nation within the context of Punjab. His work is very important from historical accounts and suggests that the five nations, namely, Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, Pukhtuns, and Saraiki nations can only live together if the state accepts diversity and makes a transparent policy for them. In this work, the author has completely ignored the grievances of these sub-national groups from a cultural point of view. *Re-Thinking Punjab: The Construction of Saraiki Identity* by Ahmad Hussain is another very significant work in this respect. In this book, the author has argued that Pakistani Punjab province is not homogenous. The Saraiki geographical boundary, history and culture should be taken into account. He also identified those factors which ultimately became the driving force for development of the Saraiki identity. Furthermore, he claimed that the economic and political deprivations are the driving force of the Saraiki nationalism. The book ignores the key factors of loss of cultural heritage, invisibility of language as major point of discussion. Another important relevant work *Saraiki: A Language Movement in Pakistan (Shackle, Christopher, 1977:379-403)* has dealt with coherent discussion about the Saraiki issue, its fundamentals and dynamics, and its origin.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this study is qualitative. We have used two different methods: expert interviews and content analysis. For the purpose of generating additional knowledge and its validation this research is based on expert interviews, which are taken from a small group of individuals who are experts on the demography of the area under discussion.

In addition, we have analyzed various materials ranging from media reports, academic literature to interview data. The initial procedure for content analysis is to define relevant material to answer the research question. It takes a lot of careful attention towards the analysis of material. We examined the quality and relevance of the material and discussed the directions and situations in which the material was first produced.

FORMS OF CULTURAL DOMINATION

Saraiki people normally face several consequences of cultural exclusion. Cultural domination is the foremost. For instance, it is employed that Saraikis have no distinction when it comes to cultural differences in terms of language, life style, traditions and customs. The Saraikis are associated with the dominant Punjabi ethnicity. With this narrative, it is automatically assumed that only one sub-national group inhabits in the province of Punjab. This dubbing of identity is cultural domination. Saraiki language is not considered as one of the main languages spoken in the country. Siraiki people don't receive any respect in public representation. They are disparaged and stereotyped pled in their daily interactions with others in the Saraiki language. Similarly, oral history of Saraiki traditions, customs, folklores, and anecdotes are not properly researched. History of the Saraiki people and their culture are not scientifically explored. Due to these reasons, it became extremely difficult to understand the problems of Ssraiki people.

The language of the dominant ethnicity is proliferated in most public institutions of the country. Their heroes are commemorated and rewarded nationally. Moreover, people from the other areas are encouraged to migrate to the Saraiki-dominated areas to outnumber them at their historic habitat. Privileges are given to only that group and culture (Aziz-ud-Din, 1992:167). Saraiki language and culture are invisible in public and private sectors. Exclusions of traditions in public institutions can also be witnessed. Saraiki nationalists argue that having public funded media, schools, colleges, and universities operate in Saraiki language can enhance high level educational attainment. People might excel in professional life and can get skilled accomplishments in the society. But because of its non-recognition cultural identity, these cultural-cum-economic aspects of Saraiki people are being smothered for several decades. Saraiki language is not being diffused which is the carrier of glory of the past.

LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION SECTOR OR IN TEXTBOOKS

Education is a very crucial area in terms of this controversy (which language should be the medium of education) across the world. Language and its repertoires are formed or shaped in the

schools. The medium of instruction is very important in the public education sector. Education in multicultural societies has been the main cause of development in many multinational states of the world. Some examples are Japan, South Korea, and China, where progress and prosperity happened only due to the provision of local languages. On the contrary, in Pakistan, the medium of instruction in educational institutions on all levels, from schools to universities, is either Urdu or English. Saraiki people have developed feeling that their language is not the part of mainstream education; neither is it playing role to give consciousness to the people.

The Saraiki people are socially underdeveloped and immature, and hence, politically marginalized. Their language is threatened by the national dominant group. As Stephen observed while discussing the marginalized ethnic groups that "a vast majority of today's threatened languages are spoken by socially and politically marginalized or subordinated national-minority and ethnic groups (May, Stephan, 2001:125).

Most Saraiki intellectuals claim that their historical inheritance in written and verbal forms is being stolen from them, and the modernization of their culture is hampered due to the cultural exclusion of their people. It could have been properly interpreted and transmitted to the current and future generations. However, the precious asset of cultural inheritance are withering away from the new generations, and instead, the young children have to memorize the history of the dominant group in the country. Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal opined that education should be given in native languages as it is easier for children to understand the concepts in their mother tongue.

Other aspect of cultural exclusion shared by many interviewees is that recognition of Saraiki identity does not only serve the Saraiki people's instrumental needs but it can also give a sense of belonging to the people of Saraiki region. The Saraiki people face difficulty while interacting with the members of other ethnic groups in the country, especially in case of lower social strata, the laborers, mesons, vendors or those who drives, rickshaws, and taxi drivers (major faction of Saraikis) outside the region. They are severe victims of disrespect and more witness of their identity suppression. Those who

are adults and the part of different education and government institutions are facing stricter remarks by the others in terms of their dictions when they speak dominant language.

The refutation of teaching Saraiki language at schools and colleges is another important cause of its decline. Textbooks and written literature (officially) is abandoned in Saraiki. Loss of the group's oral history is one of many consequences.

Saraiki is quickly becoming a deserted language: phenomena that was being observed and reported by Dr. Saiqa Imtiaz Asif, based on her empirical research paper titled, *Shame: A Major cause of Language Desertion* in Multan district. The Saraikis, according to her, are teaching Urdu and English language to their children. There are two basic reasons behind this shift: one, the demands of the school authorities, while two instrumental aspects of the languages. These two languages are beneficial for political and economic gains. The Saraiki parents feel proud that their children do not have any inclination to speak Saraiki. This is a heartfelt consequence of the cultural exclusion. The important dimension, Saiqa concludes is that the Saraikis feel embarrass when it comes to their language and she uses the word "shame" that is the major cause of desertion of Saraiki language.

Marginalization of Identity

Language is a defining feature of identity. Recognition of Saraiki identity means that people are being encouraged to raise or educate their children in their language. There are many productive and meaningful activities that take place in Saraiki language. The language in public institution is the one aspect of language promotion. Its usage in economy and civil society has equal significance. If a dominated language is sponsored by state patronage, the bearers of that language normally benefit, and therefore the key positions in the area of administration, politics, economy and prestige. Preferences are given to those who command (the bearers of dominant language). An interesting observation made by renowned scholar of Pakistan Tariq Rahamn who presented a paper in an International conference titled, *The Politics of Naming the case of Urdu*: that how language and identity go side by side:

"One crucial issue in the language studies in the naming of languages as this carries considerable political and social implications. Urdu has had several names of which Hindi, *hindvi* and *hindui* are the oldest and Urdu is the latest. Each of these names is associated with different and at time antagonistic, conceptions of identity. Thus each name has political significance in relation to the identity construction of Hindus and Muslim identities in British India and at present (Rahman, Tariq, 2013).

Loss of Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage is an essential asset to preserve. It is considered to be an essential factor to drive the nations. It is being defined as representation, practice, expression, knowledge and skill around the world. It is being transmitted from one generation to the next one which is an essential medium to provide communities with sense of identity and continuity. It has oral expressions and traditions where language acts as a carrier of cultural heritage (Moghadam, Valentine & Manilee Bagheritari, 2007:9-18). The preservation of culture endorses the fact that expression, inspiration, and source of pride in local traditions constitute primordial identities. According to Ashu Lal the local government is changing the names of places which have historical importance. Cultural fairs are being banned which normally provide space for people to know their cultural values. In support of his claims, Mr. Lal provides the example of Lali Sen a place near suburbs of district Laiyyah where the names of different roads and places have been replaced. Formerly, these names would represent indigenous traditions, heroes, poets, and cultures.

Apart from these repercussions, Saraiki history; culture and territory have been assimilated since the invasion of Mahraja Ranjeet Singh. There have been recurrent attempts as migrants are being settled in this region, and are not helping for the flourishing of the Saraiki culture is another area that can be explored and investigated.

Suppression of Culture and Religious Extremism

A large number of precedents show that suppression of cultural rights lead to violence and intolerance in a society. Culture always possesses sort of a potential to govern the life of its members.

Elimination of cultural values and norms need strong alternative ways which can fulfill the social and psychological needs of a cultural identity group. This alternate way, according to Liebman, is religion which uses as vehicle to religious norms and values:

> "The third dimension of religious extremism is the rejection of cultural forms and values that are not perceived as indigenous to the religious tradition. Such a position is difficult to maintain for any but the strictest sects. Pursuing the goals with consistency would mean the creation of alternate channels for cultural transmission (publishing houses, newspapers, radio, television stations). Even if the group is small and intimate enough to forego such channels, it must still prohibit exposure to the media in the hands of the outsiders. This is what the Edah Haredit does. Other groups may be less extremist, less willing to adopt a public stance of hostility toward the media, or more anxious to use the mass media to convince others of their cause. However, they protect their own adherents by so occupying them with all kinds of activity (study of sacred text is an example), that they have no leisure time for exposure to the mass media (Liebman, Charles S., 1983:75-86).

This implies that the religious extremism is used to alienate people from their cultural practices. It is because, people have strong association with religion, this can be exploited when masses are compelled to read specific rigid interpretation of sacred texts in particular context. The Saraiki cultural values, such as dancing, music, poetry, and drum-beating etc., are deeply embedded in the society, especially during weddings and other festivals. However, one can easily witness how these cultural values are being distorted by religious bigots in recent times.

Saraiki nationalist Ashiq Buzdar says that those parts of Saraiki region where cultural shows (festivals) were conducted regularly, traditional fairs celebrated and poets have their impact on the Saraiki people who are immune to religious fanaticism. Some examples of regions, where people are deeply embedded with cultural identity, are *Mehrey Wala*, *Dareeja Nagar* and *Hasil Wala*. Few years ago, fairs and social gatherings *natak* (artistic performance of group of people

on the stage) were a good social and cultural practice in some parts of this region. But gradually, they started vanishing from the public sphere and they are now entirely invisible in culture. In spite of a lack of education, less economic opportunities people are peace-loving, kind-hearted and have strong association with humanitarian values. They are not fanatics, and less religious gathering happen in these areas. It is only because of the people's association towards their cultural identity and practices of social and cultural values.

Similar observations are made by Saraiki writer and poet Shahid Aziz:

> For more than two decades, I have been writing poetry and hosting poetic seminars, but recently, I have observed strange activities. The district government is reluctant to allow the people to conduct these kind of healthy and purely cultural practices not only in Dera Ghazi khan but in other parts of 'Wasaib' (Saraiki region) as well. Whenever we ask to conduct such seminars, the police deny permissions in the name of security. On the contrary, religious gathering "Mazhabi Ijtama", preaching and movements of preachers (based on hatred and intolerance) are being done in our 'Wasaib' under the protection of police simultaneously.

Shahid Aziz actually contemplates that the cultural activities, festivals, symposia and traditional shows in this region are meant to be celebrations of peculiarity of culture and harmony among people. But they are being denied such activities.

CONCLUSION

The Saraiki people are going through different kinds of cultural consequences where there language, culture, history, art and heritage are badly affected due to suppression of their identity. As a result, they have inferred that their cultures and languages are inferior (Langah, Nukhbab Taj, 2011:21-36). Therefore, it is evident that they are deviating from their local and native language, and encouraging their children to speak other more dominant languages. Children in schools do not feel convenient due to a different medium of instruction than their mother languages. Many children, hence, abandon schools and cannot become literate citizen. Consequently,

Saraikis do not find endorsement of their cultural distinction in the Constitution of Pakistan for not having the provincial unit representative of their cultural identity. In most national cultural events, Saraiki is dubbed to be a part of Punjabi, due to which common Saraikis have no occasion to take pride in their culture. Therefore, the social bonding of culture among people is weakening, and people are taking refuge under religious and sectarian bonding. A number of recent studies and news reports have concluded that the region is becoming a center of religious extremist groups, and militancy is on the rise. The major consequences due to the overlooking include, feelings of backwardness and ignominy, local language desertion in public and private domains, language switching from Saraiki to Urdu to English, deficiency of language in educational institutes. On a severe note, these factors have resulted in militancy and religious extremism (Tahir Abbas, 2014).

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