



DRIVING ETHNICITY THROUGH INSTRUMENTALISM: GENESIS OF SINDHUDESH MOVEMENT

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Abstract

This research article examines the conditions under which Sindhudesh Movement gained popularity and initiated its true struggle on lingual basis along with economic deprivation and cultural discrimination after the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971. Paul Brass's theory of Instrumentalism has been briefly employed to give to understand how elites use population falling in the periphery of the society to ensure their stature and power by translating their grievances into discrimination and ultimately mobilizing them to launch a struggle. Sindhudesh has more to it than just looking at its successes and failures. This research article sketches out why Sindhudesh gained status, and how elites have been using Sindhi nationalism, ethnicity and identity as a tool and an "instrument" to effectively attain their interests by the help of secondary research sources. The research paper concludes Sindhudesh have been used as an "ethnic card" by political units and elites to fulfil their interests.

Keywords: *Sindhudesh, Nationalism, Ethnicity, Political Elites, Instrumentalism, PPP, MQM, Language*

Introduction:

Ethnicity is a multifaceted and very intricate phenomenon. The primal body of literature reveals that ethnicity is an eternal element. Geertz states that ethnicity is attributed at birth which originates and penetrates in human society's configuration from clan-to-clan and kin-to-kin. Upon scrutinizing on an infinitesimal level, ethnicity is a psychological and social practice which equips



an individual with a sense of belongingness and a way to identify him/herself with a distinct group of people in terms of identity, culture, language, values, norms and obligations (Geertz, 1963).

As States are made up of multiple ethnic groups (majority and minority), a sense of being a marginalized group basing upon multiple facets of ethnicity often leads to intra-state rivalry or manifestation of hostile behavior. Azar suggests that multi-ethnic societies are more prone to identity-based conflicts. Whenever an ethnic group intercepts that its basic human needs such as security, access to equal opportunities, livelihood, and most important of all, “*identity*” is endangered, it triggers their defensive mode on (Nicholson, 1992).

Michael Hechter further narrowed down the complex phenomenon of ethnicity into two categories in his theory of *Internal Colonialism and Cultural Division of Labor*. He divided society into two segments; Periphery and Center. He discusses that the Center holds more meaningful, powerful and broad-ranging work spectrums, whereas Periphery consists of individuals holding minimal jobs or jobs that directly or indirectly facilitate the Center. But this dichotomy often causes cohesion, resulting in intra-state conflict, among the marginalized ethnic groups due to economic irregularities or persecution (Nagel and Olzak, 1982).

As the center is made up of *elites* of the ethnic group, they steer the direction and dimensions of ethnic outlook. Paul Brass has played a very pivotal role in sketching out the *Elite Perspective* and how their role forms the contours of ethnic identity. He argues that ethnic identities are generated by elites on the basis of religion, symbols, artifacts or language so they have well rooted and historical links which they can use to their benefit at any given time (Brass, 2000).

The world has witnessed thousands of intra-state ethnic conflicts on the basis of their distinct identity such as Yugoslav War, Basque conflict, prejudice and discrimination against Blacks, Mexicans and Asians in the USA, communal conflicts in Sudan, unrest in Rwanda, Chechnya and Darfur etc. Similar to other regions, the South Asian Region has had its fair share of ethnic movements, for instance, Assamese and Sikhs in Punjab province of India, Sunni Shia ethnic movement in Iran etc (Heisler, 1977).

If we further inspect on a microscopic level, many ethnic conflicts and movements emerged in Pakistan as a result of partition. Punjab, Balochistan, KPK and Sindh, all four provinces got plagued by ethnic movements when Bengal (East Pakistan) extended the demand of autonomous State making language their foundation concern. As a result, in the 1960s and 70s, Sindh propelled an ethnic separatist movement, Sindhudesh, endangering the already fragile structure and conditions of Pakistan (Safdar et al., 2021, pg. 1-9).

As reflected in previous text, the phenomenon of ethnicity is extremely multi-faceted which requires an in-depth analysis and inquiry to understand what motivates people into being



associated with a certain ethnic group and maintain a distinct identity which further inculcates the feeling of nationalism. Although a big body of literature is available on Sindhudesh movement, it has rarely been discussed under theoretical framework, and more on terms of its success and failures, to inquire how Center (elite) uses ethnic discrimination as an *Instrument* to its advantage.

Keeping these points in mind, this paper focuses on two main questions:

1. Why do Sindhis want to disaffiliate from Pakistan and form an autonomous State?
2. How political parties, such as Pakistan People's Party, used Sindhudesh Moment to further their gains and interests under the framework of Paul Brass's Instrumentalism?

This paper is designed in a followed manner; *first*, the existing literature will be review regarding Sindudesh and the driving forces behind the initiation of the movement, *second* section will shed light upon the role elite political parties have played in order to serve their vested interests in the name of ethnic identity under the framework of Paul Brass's Instrumentalism. Conclusion discusses the ramifications of the Sindhudesh movement towards Pakistan and whether the movement is still popular among Sindhi nationalists or have lost its grounds.

Sindhudesh: From Integration to Demanding Disintegration

The term Sindu Desh and Ghulam Murtaza Syed (G. M. Syed) go hand-in-hand. G. M. Syed (1904-1995) was a well-known Sindhi politician famous for his contribution in academia. In 1943, he got constitutional resolution passed in favor of Pakistan from then Sindh Assembly under British India, however, later on he laid foundation for separate Sindh identity on ideological basis and introduced Sindu Desh movement (Siddiqi, 2015).

After the partition from British India, Pakistan had four provinces Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and NWFP (KPK). Sindh had the status of separate province until in 1955 when the Constituent Assembly merged all provinces under one unit, West Pakistan. In February 1956, One Unit Project (the merger of West and East Pakistan) was adopted in Pakistan's constitution. The demand of Bengalis of a separate State on the basis of their language ignited the separatist movement among Sindhis as well. As soon as the merger took place, Sindh lost its status as a province because then Pakistan had only two provincial units; West Pakistan and East Pakistan Shabbir et al., 2021, pg. 140-148).

Even though Bengalis were at lead in supporting the establishment of Pakistan, after the independence Pakistan was hardly a year old when separatist movement from East Pakistan started emerging. Bengalis insisted on their ethnic identity and that their language must be given a national status. Since Pakistan was struggling with numerous economic, social and political challenges,



situation became worse and ultimately Pakistan lost one of its precious part which became a separate state of Bangladesh in 1971 (Kukreja, 2020).

Soon Sindhi politicians realized that they will remain subservient to either Federal or Central government because it was highly dominated by Punjabi elites. Siddiqi states that it became evident that the educated Muhajir community, who spoke Urdu, would rule in Sindh as well and the Punjabi bureaucracy would rule in general (Siddiqi, 2010). The Urdu-ization left Sindhis feeling marginalized on their lingual basis which resulted in agony and distress amongst the working middle class (periphery).

In 1948, Karachi was disjoined from Sindh to declare as the capital of Pakistan. It mobilized mass body of young Sindhi student and Sindh Muslim Student Federation started marching against the separation chanting slogans “*we will take Karachi, even if we have to shed blood.*” (Khuhro and Khuhro, 1998). Sindhi poets, scholars and writers also played a fundamental role in building a body of literature stating the magnitude of Sindhi culture. One of the most renowned Sindhi communist leaders and a poet, Hyder Bakhsh Jatoi, wrote numerous poems. One of his poem states:

Ae Sindh to mathān sadā ṣalāt ā salām ā!

O Sindh, may prayers and peace always be upon you!

Bahārian ain barkatan jo mīnhan tote ām ā!

May blessings rain upon you!

Aẓīm tunhinjo shān ā sa’īd tunhinjo nām ā!

Great is your glory, majestic is your name!

Sadā’īn khūsh rahīn ṣanam! Du‘ā hī ṣubuh shām ā!

Beloved, may you always stay happy! Here is my prayer, morning and evening!

Du‘ā hī ṣubuh shām ā du‘ā hī ḍīnhan rāt ā!

Here is my prayer, morning and evening, here is my prayer, day and night!

Ae Sindh to mathān sadā ṣalāt ā salām ā!

O Sindh, may prayers and peace always be upon you! (Levesque, 2020)

The literature and poetry acquainted the younger generation of Sindhis to get closer to their ethnicity, values, struggle, sacrifices, distinct identity and their ancestral roots. Isajiw, in his paper titled “*Definition and Dimensions of Ethnicity: A Theoretical Framework*”, has dichotomized Internal and External facets attached with ethnicity. The internal facet consists of ideas, reputation,



attitudes and outlooks. These facets can and cannot be interlinked/interdependent. The three integral parts of internal facets are:

1. Moral (Responsibilities attached with ethnic groups)
2. Cognitive (Knowledge of values, personalities, heritage and symbols attached with ethnic groups)
3. Affective (if an individual has the sense of security and is comfortable with the cultural values of an ethnic group)

Whereas, the external facet consists of social and cultural activities that are visible and through which behavior can be observed. For instance:

1. Speaking the language of ethnic group (traditions)
2. Being part of social gathering (Picnics, religious ceremonies etc)
3. Attending ethnic establishments (institutes, mosques, church etc)
4. Being part of associations (political or social wings)
5. Build ethnic network in the society (within and outside boundaries) (Isajiw, 1993)

There are two conditions in which an individual identifies him/herself with an ethnic group; when he or she has had lineage or when he or she has been socialized in it. As all ethnic groups in a society have different sets of practices and cultures, they tend to behave differently as well which then makes “*behavior*” a key to understanding the array of expressions and actions in order to identify the certain characteristics about its members (Isajiw et al., 1993, pg. 177-196).

Blend of external and internal facets of ethnicity along with reimagined historic heroes and their stories by Sindhi scholars and poets paved the way for Sindhis to imagine their identity as both cultural, lingual and political units. The distress of being marginalized on lingual basis and losing autonomy to either federal or center, the agony started to reflect in the behavior of Sindhi young students as their institutions, especially universities, began showing inclination towards left-wing establishments. One political unit after another started emerging criticizing Pakistan and its leadership which sparked a terrain of misadventures between mobilized students and police. In March 1967, students decided to protest against the removal of VC Hasan Ali Abdur Rehman (Sindh University) and were opposed by the police which resulted in detention and arrests of many protestors and public gatherings were declared prohibited under section 144 of Criminal Code of Pakistan (Tahir, 2010).

Although no deaths were reported during this event, it got marked in the history of Sindhis as “*Sindh’s May Day*”. It caused resentment against the regime and way to the emergence of many more political ethno-nationalist associations, some extreme in their stance and ideologically motivated and some moderate. Most prominent were *Jeay Sindh Student Federation* (JSSF-1969),



Jiay Sindh Mahaz (JSM-1972), *Jeay Sindh Qoumi Mahaz* (JSQM-1995), *Jeay Sindh Muttahida Mahaz* (JSMM-2000), *Sindhudesh Liberation Army* (SLA-2010), *Sindh Tarraqi Pasand Party* (STP-2011) and *Sindh National Movement Party* (SNMP-2011). Solangi explains that every nationalist unit is a face of Sindhudesh and are working to ensure their rights and demand autonomous Sindh. But every ethno-nationalist unit has its own orientation towards a single goal. For instance, STP and JSMM initiated their struggle with the help of weapons and arms but later became moderate in their strategy. SLA is inspired by BLA and holds a terrorist agenda, whereas JSQM is striving for rights on ideological and religious contours (Solangi, 2014).

Together these ethno-nationalist units have carried out more than hundreds of terror attacks, damaging State properties, infrastructure and institutions to claim their autonomous status, which apparently Pakistan was failing to provide. Pakistan came into being on the basis of Two Nation Theory (Muslim and Hindu are different from each other), having separate State status to Punjab, Balochistan or Sindh was never the agenda but few scholars such as G. M. Syed transformed it into an issue and made it a lingual and late national conflict (Khan, 2017).

G. M. Syed transformed political, social and economic grievances into an out-and-out separatist movement by early 1970s causing many nationalist students to break away from their student organizations and initiate their own to be a part of wider political arena (Syed, 1988). Since G.M. Syed was good friends with Sheikh Mujib Ur Rehman, he thought if Bengalis could acquire a separate State on the basis of their language, why not Sindh. That's when he started inculcating the ideas in Sindhi society that they are being marginalized and discriminated against, and later making an issue out of Urdu being declared as the national language of Pakistan. The attacks and riots by the ethno-nationalist caused the separatist movement to get recognition internationally (Dar, 2021).

As a result of the mobilization ethno-nationalist Sindhis received from prominent figures such as G.M. Syed, Karachi and its surroundings, especially Hyderabad and Jamshoro, still experience violence outbreaks every now and then to form what they call a separate "Sindhudesh".

Sindhudesh: Role of Political Associations and Paul Brass's Instrumentalism:

Nationalism, ethnicity and ethno-nationalism have been the hot topics of discussion among the scholars, academics and political experts. Paul Brass's framework of *Instrumentalism* deliberates on the "instrumental" characteristic of ethnicity. He argues that nationalism is ignited by opposing elites whose power, status, affluence and wealth is highly dependent on it, so for them ethnicity and identity plays a part of opportunity to create a widespread struggle. He states, "*elites and counter-elites within ethnic groups select aspects of the group's culture, attach new value and meaning to them, and use them as symbols to mobilize the group, to defend its interests, and to compete with other groups.*" Brass further deliberates that ethnicity, identity and nationalism is



often exploited by competing elites when they have political or economic gains (above the others) to achieve, so nationalism becomes a tool to work towards interests it is conceived to serve (Ozirimli, 2010).

Brass constitutes that there are three chief factors upon which nationalist movement largely rely (in quest for power against other/dominant ethnic groups) for their survival and articulated demands. *Firstly*, the policies that are followed by the participants of the movement, *Secondly*, the reaction of government towards the demands presented by ethnic group, *Thirdly*, the common political background. He describes that associations having control over the resources are considered more overpowering than the others which enables them to be followed by the community that eventually makes them effective and lead identity based group. To become effective and popular, political associations must outdo its competitors to represent the grievances and interests of the ethnic group (Ozirimli, 2010).

As discussed earlier that separation of Bangladesh in 1971 gave Sindhudesh movement a push forward to have their own separate State as well under the leadership of G.M. Syed on the basis of language. Although open support to the idea of separate State for Sindhis caused G.M. Syed to become politically isolated, he still enjoyed immense support from Sindhi population and various student unions from Sindh University (Levesque, 2020). For the supporters of Sindhudesh movement, nationalism was way beyond just backing for a separate State, but to transform the cognitive domains of people to further advocate and impose their ways of philosophy (Barth, 1998).

Post-independence, the idea of integration Pashtun, Baloch, Punjabi, Sindhi and other minorities was based on two aspects; language: Urdu and religion: Islam. All primordial attachments were to be put at back foot for parallel and simultaneous growth ahead (Qureshi, 1956). In the conventional electoral politics, Sindhi nationalism was used to create an impact against the others. Many journalists have discoursed that whenever Pakistan People's Party was losing strength in electoral process, "Sindhi Card" was played and people's sentiments attached with it were greatly exploited. Injustices were often highlighted to the Sindhi voters to claim inclusion of Sindhi population in mainstream politics, a gimmick used by elites to stay in power (Shah, 2010).

Political parties such as Jiay Sindh Mahaz and Pakistan People's Party were not together initially but they were moving in the same trajectories. The interconnections continued, e.g. Gul Muhammad Jakhrani, a staunch supporter of Sindhudesh, who was initially denied a membership with Jiay Sindh Mahaz on the claims of being involved in violent activities till late 2000s, joined PPP and won elections in 2008. Now the question arises how a member involved in violent and criminal activities managed to win elections in Sindh? During his public addresses, Jakhrani strategically adopted "nationalistic tone", talking about the injustices Sindhis were facing in



Pakistan, he tapped in the emotions of Sindhi population and chanted about the sacredness of Sindhi philosophy (Levesque, 2021). Brass's Instrumentalism also discusses that elites use ethnicity, nationalism and identity as a tool to mobilize the masses in order to secure their powerful positions. "Sindh Card" has been exploited way too many times by the elites who gained popularity and power out of it, whereas the common population suffered all the wrath.

The popularity, support and ingress of Sindhi nationalists and activist into mainstream political parties helped in developing a compressed relationship between activist parties and Pakistan People's Party and become significant elites in the central Political arena. This mainstream political arena provided Sindhi nationalists and activists to emerge as a pressure group to advocate and endorse their demands. Many political activists and members of PPP have close ties with student associations backing separatist movements in Sindh (Levesque, 2021). As Paul Brass states that in order to become a popular political association and elite to "represent" the grievances of people, one must outdo its rival. As many nationalist parties failed to rise to power, PPP remained a sole political unit in Sindh for decades, outdoing its rivals in both Urban and Rural Sindh through using and applying nationalistic phrases and developing emotional pomposity (Khan, 2017).

Other than PPP, another political unit, MQM, has close ties with G.M. Syed as both strived for the rights of Sindhis. Alongside G.M. Syed MQM propelled violent struggle against Panjabi dominated bureaucracy (Haq, 1995). MQM stood with Sindhis on the issues of quota system and attainments of their rights along with favoring Urdu speakers. This was always an alliance of convenience between Sindhi nationalists, PPP and MQM. But, after enjoying several years of support and intensified activities, Pakistan started cracking down against political entities such as MQM to weaken the stronghold of nationalists and street power which was ultimately damaging and endangering the fabric of Pakistan (Gayer, 2014).

The significant downfall in the popularity of PPP and MQM in Sindh cause many blows to Sindhudesh movement. The ruling elites of Sindh supported provincial autonomy regardless of the fact how detrimental it will emerge for Pakistan. But the current political units have worked hard for the representation of Sindh and catering the grievances to minimize the vacuum for separatist movements (Khan and Mushtaq, 2017).

Terrorism in the Name of Separatist Movement:

Recently, Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army claimed responsibility for two low-intensity blasts that took place in Hyderabad damaging railway tracks. Responsibility was claimed via email to a journalist saying the blasts were a reminder for "*outsiders*" to evacuate Sindh as soon as possible (ANI, 2022). Just a year ago, Chairman of Jeay Sindh Qoumi Party, Nawaz Khan Zaunr, condemned the terror and criminal activities of Sindhudesh Revolutionary Party stating that such



acts undermine the true essence of the movement. He further clarified that him and his party members have no affiliations with such units (Dawn, 2022).

Since the beginning of 2021, SRA has seemed to have adopted the strategies of Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and Baloch Revolutionary Army (BRA). The railway track blasts in Hyderabad is just one trivial example of militant attacks against other ethnic groups i.e. Pashtun and Punjabi. In one attack, militants killed a member of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Rana Sakhawat Rajput in broad daylight because he was a Punjabi by ethnicity. Same chants were made at the time of his murder that all “outsiders” must leave the land of Sindh. As per his family, not a single PPP leader came forward to even attend the funeral of Rajput. In another incident a Pashtun cobbler was murdered at his shop along with 10 other criminal activities during the entire year. The Pashtun community has started showing its resentment against the discriminating attacks saying that they feel threatened and vulnerable to terror activities against them (Rehman, 2021).

This reflects another aspect described by Brass in his concept of *Instrumentalism* that whenever elites find it feasible the use of ethnicity or identity card they use it to maximize their power and resources, but when it is threatening to their stature, they abandon it. Sindh Desh received attention from the elites of the political arena when it was at its peak but once the political dimensions changed, the supporters and anticipators of separate Sindhi State were left to speculate. Since, Sindhi nationalists could not reach the level of popularity as PPP or MQM, many ethnic militant units came into being.

Conclusion:

Nationalism, ethnicity and identity based conflicts have been one of the chief and obstinate problems since the separation of Bangladesh in 1971. The drift between Sindhis and other ethnic groups in Pakistan kept growing on the basis of language and other economic differences which eventually gave way to a formal launch of *Sindhudesh Movement*. Sindhi nationalism remained sedentary for a long period of time until Sindhi activists started joining political units such as Pakistan People’s Party.

This research article’s findings suggest:

- 1: Though personalities like G.M. Syed stood firm with the Project Pakistan and supported the independence, as soon as Bangladesh separated from Pakistan due to lingual differences, Sindhudesh Movement also followed the same contours and initiated struggle for separate State under Syed.
- 2: As Sindhis have always complained about being understated in bureaucracy, Sindhudesh movement has been used as an “instrument” by political units such as



PPP's elite leadership to gain support and maintain a powerful hold over Urban and Rural Sindh. The grievances of Sindhi population were used as an effective tool to expand PPP's influence.

- 3: Paul Brass's theory of *Instrumentalism* suggests that elites of the central political arena mobilize people against their grievances and deprivation. They promise to become the representatives of an ethnic group to further struggle for the attainment of their rights but their interests remain personal, which means they use the identity and ethnicity card when it is in their favor and abandon when their interests feel threatened.

These findings suggest that Sindhudesh has always been looked at only from the lens of success and failure. Brass's theory entails that there is more to Sindhudesh than only success and failure. The political associations have been actively using the separatist movement as a tool to attain and ensure their political hold, power and resources. Still, ethnic nationalist failed to gain popular support and the Sindhudesh movement became restricted to few resentful nationalists and leaders who are facing seclusion.



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