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Call for Siraiki Province

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Introduction:

This paper focuses on ethnic politics, primarily with reference to the Punjab province of Pakistan. The issue of the division of Punjab has increased in importance due to the presence of Siraiki-speaking population within this province.¹ In order to overcome the social, cultural and political deprivations that they face, this population demands the division of Punjab into two unequal parts on linguistic basis: Southern and Central Punjab. My focus in this paper is on how this demand has become convoluted, particularly after the recent insertion of the 18th Amendment in the 1973 constitution of Pakistan. In order to elaborate and understand this complex debate, I start by presenting a brief background of Siraiki language and the context

¹ For the figure given to Siraiki population in census, see <http://www.census.gov.pk/MotherTongue.htm> (accessed on 24th April 2011). The population indicated in Pakistan is 10.53%, and in Punjab is 17.3%. For the figures for Siraiki-speaking population residing in the province of Punjab collected for the 1998 census, see Table 1, ‘Table 18: Population Distribution by Mother Tongue, Rural/Urban Areas and District: 1998’, in *Hand Book of Population and Housing Census Punjab*, Government of Pakistan: Population Census Organisation Statistics Division, September 2003, pp. 33-37. The figures that this table gives for Punjabi and Siraiki population residing in all the areas of Punjab is 75.2% for Punjabi and 17.4% for Siraiki, which clearly indicates why Siraiki activists challenge these figures. These census figures are challenged by the Siraiki activists as indicated in the following document: See Writ Petition filed in 2004 by Taj M. Langah versus The Federation of Pakistan, The Province of Punjab, The Province of Sindh, The Province of Balochistan, The Province of N.W.F.P, Interior Ministry of Pakistan through its Secretary, The information Ministry of Pakistan, The Minister of Water and Power, The Water and Power and Development Authority, The Census Commission of Pakistan.

of Siraiki movement, then I discuss the problems of provincial autonomy in Pakistan and finally, I discuss how the 18th Amendment has impacted upon Siraiki resistance.²

Siraiki: Discovery, Resistance and Boundaries

Before understanding the Siraiki demand and the current debates surrounding this issue in Pakistan, it is important to briefly discuss the way in which the term ‘Siraiki’ was coined and how it took the shape of resistance in the postcolonial era. The emergence of Siraiki resistance has to be studied against the backdrop of these historical facts. Tracing back the records of how this language was discovered, the preliminary research on ‘proto-Siraiki’ was conducted by the British officials posted in the areas like Multan Muzafargarh and Dera Ghazi Khan during the colonial era, who conducted translations and linguistic surveys, compiled of glossaries and dictionaries.³ However, despite identifying the areas where this language was spoken, the language identified as Siraiki today was neither given a standardized name, nor official recognition through language planning and publication unlike many other languages discovered during the colonial era. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it had not attained the status of a ‘language’ in the colonial era and was therefore known by its regional names like ‘Jatki’, ‘Jagdali’, ‘Lahnda’, and ‘Western Punjabi’ by various colonial officials posted in these areas.⁴

² My forthcoming publication, *Poetry and Resistance: Islam and Ethnicity in Postcolonial Pakistan* (Routledge 2011) based on my doctoral thesis primarily focuses on the subject of Siraiki identity and I have also linked this debate with the resistance literature produced in the Siraiki region. Some sections of this paper are based on the material and sources that I collected for this book. However, this paper is the updated version of my PhD research, primarily because new political developments have taken shape in Pakistan, one of them being the addition of 18th amendment in Pakistani constitution and the recent acknowledgement of Siraiki identity amongst the major political circles of the country.

³ Some of these colonial documents and their re-published editions are as follows: George A. Grierson, *The Linguistic Survey of India*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government printing, India, 1903-22; E. O’Brien, *Glossary of the Multani Language Compared with Punjabi and Sindhi*, Lahore: Printed at the Punjab Government Civil Secretariat Press, 1881; Andrew Jukes, *Dictionary of the Jatki or Western Punjabi*, ed. by Shaukat Mughal, Multan: Jhoke Publishers, 2003.

⁴ Ibid.

One of the possible reasons behind such vague identification of this language during the colonial era could be the fact that a Sikh ruler, Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1818-1849) already occupied this area before the British rulers realized the military and mercantile importance of his territory established as 'Punjab' – 'the land of five rivers'.⁵ Ranjit Singh having seventeen unsuccessful conquests conquered Multan defeating the last independent ruler of Multan, Muzafar Khan Sadozai on 2nd June 1818. Even Ranjit Singh kept the autonomous status of Multan, which today represents the centre of Siraiki peoples' struggle for provincial autonomy had maintained the status of an autonomous state even during this era. Singh appointed Mul Raj as the governor, who bitterly fought British to keep his autonomy and was finally conquered in 1848 on which the British merged the Province of Multan with the Province of Lahore and called it Punjab province. The British rulers asserted their supremacy by convincing Singh to sign the Treaty of Amritsar in 1809, which demarcated and confined his territory to the south bank of the river Sutluj.⁶ It is therefore important to point out that before the British arrival, Punjabi and native (Siraiki) populations were residing within this region without any geographical barriers. The official language during Singh's rule was Persian and the main cultural language was Braj Bhasha. Both these languages along with Punjabi culture dominated and impacted the status of other native languages and populations residing within this region. As a matter of fact, the political interests of both Singh and British rulers politically dominating this area pushed the linguistic and cultural issues related to the native populations residing within this 'Punjab' into the background.

The roots of the problem also lie in the colonial language and settlement policies in the area of Punjab. A lot of Punjabi settlements had already been organized in this area by colonial rulers as part of irrigation projects, development and 'green revolution' in the colony

⁵ See Henry Steinbach, *The Punjaub: Being a Brief Account of The Country of the Sikhs*, Karachi, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, pp. 1-14

⁶ For the documentation of this Treaty see, <http://www.kashmiralight.com/images/treatyOfamritsar.pdf> (accessed on 30 April 2011).

areas of Lyallpur, Multan and Montgomery. Part of such British efforts was giving racial superiority to certain races and giving them social and financial benefits. For example, Punjabi 'Jats' were regarded as a tough race by colonial masters, and were therefore installed in these colony areas to cultivate and develop barren lands. Such policies created a landed and economically superior class of Punjabis in this area, while the natives remained backward and oppressed. Moreover, these policies also changed the topography of the present Siraiki area, a strategy which is still followed by the present Pakistani rulers who focus on economically and administratively stabilising certain cities of Punjab such as Lahore, Faislabad, Sheikhpura, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Gujrat and Islamabad, by locating almost sixty percent of the economic and industrial resources of Punjab here.

In the postcolonial era, the domination of Punjabi settlers persisted after the arrival of more Punjabi and Urdu speaking migrants in Pakistan. The Muslims who fled to Pakistan during Partition called themselves *Mohajirs* (migrants) and now constitute mainly Urdu-speaking or Punjabi population. Interestingly, like Punjabis, the Urdu-speaking migrants have also politically dominated the country as they have received support through most of the political regimes of Pakistan, primarily during the era of the first *Mohajir* Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan (1896-1951), and later during the military dictatorship of the two Mohajir Generals, Zia-ul-Haq (1977-88) and Pervaiz Musharraf (1999-2008).⁷ In general, this originally migrant population still numerically remains a minority in Pakistan and in order to increase their numerical strength, the Punjabi community have allied with these *Mohajirs* and received support from Punjabi rulers like Nawaz Sharif. It is significant to mention here that Punjabis and *Mohajirs*, due to their experience of migration and support for Muslim nationhood, have also exploited Islam and Urdu as being the real identity markers in

⁷ For the developments taking place during Bhutto to Zia eras, see, Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1998, pp 215-83; Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan in the Twentieth Century: A Political History*, Karachi & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 423-502.

Pakistan. In this process, the Punjabi-*Mohajir* ruling elite is still disregarding other ethnic and linguistic groups in Pakistan, while the other ethnicities in Pakistan, like Siraiki, Sindhi, Baloch and Pashtoons regard this community as being ‘outsiders’, ‘settlers’, ‘immigrants’ or ‘new-comers’ who occupied their native lands in newly created Pakistan.

In the discussion above, I have indicated that certain gaps in colonial research on this language, the historical realities of Sikh and British domination over Punjab and the colonial policies in general have resulted in Punjabi and *Mohajir* population’s stance that the language spoken in this region (called Siraiki today) is not a language but only a ‘*lehja* (accent), *ung* (part)’ or ‘variant’ of Punjabi.⁸ On the basis of such assumptions, this language received no acknowledgement during the Ayub Khan (1958-1969), Sindhi Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971-77), General Zia-ul-Haq (1978-1988), Benazir Bhutto (1988-98), Nawaz Sharif (1990-93, 1997-8) and Musharraf (1999-2008), although it was recognised as a separate language in the census from 1981. Furthermore, by 1962, Indian and Sikhism inspired cross border relations developed a staunch Punjabi culture in Pakistan, particularly during the Punjabi government of Nawaz Sharif (1990-1993 and 1997-1999). This was also the time when the teaching of Punjabi language was introduced and Punjabi literature was actively published. Most importantly, Siraiki literatures, creative writers and folk culture were collectively being tagged and published as part of Punjabi culture and literature and were being taught and published as part of Punjabi syllabi in higher education institutions.⁹ The objectives behind such Punjabi efforts were to enhance the Punjabi population’s political

⁸ A similar contestation is also visible amongst the speakers of Bhojpuri and Hindi language in India.

⁹ There is some research done on Siraiki language and culture in the postcolonial era but it has not been given proper attention. Even distinguished researchers like Christopher Shackle have stopped focusing on Siraiki literature and identity in their recent works. Pakistani linguist and academic, Tariq Rahman, despite keeping a close eye on ethnic politics in Pakistan has not focused on recent developments within the Siraiki movement (personal communication 26th March 2011). For Shackles’s work on Siraiki, see for instance, Christopher Shackle, ‘Siraiki and Siraiki literature, c.1750-1900, in Upper Sind and South-West Panjab’, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1972; Christopher Shackle, *From Wuch to Southern Lahnda: A Century of Siraiki Studies in English*, Multan: Bazm-e-Saqafat, 1983. For Rahman’s earlier work, see *Language and Politics in Pakistan*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998

positioning, which numerically represented only a minority of the population in Punjab and wanted to increase its strength by allying with *Mohajirs*.

Some of the above mentioned facts undermined the historical and political status of the Siraiki-speaking population, which gradually started demanding the creation of a Siraiki province by proposing the division of Punjab into two unequal halves: Southern Punjab (the name proposed by Siraiki activists for this region is ‘Siraikistan’) and central Punjab. During 1970s, a time when languages were associated with identities as exemplified through the creation of Bangladesh, Siraiki resistance too became stronger against the cultural and political domination of Punjabi and *Mohajir* ruling elite within Pakistan in general and Punjab in particular. This was also a period of national insecurity when the prospects of linguistic ethnic and cultural awareness of different linguistic groups such as Sindhis, Pakhtuns, Balochs and Siraikis allied together against the Punjabi and *Mohajir* dominated ruling elite.¹⁰ For this reason, giving a standardized name to this language and distinguishing it from Punjabi or any other language in Pakistan through a distinct script and keeping this language alive by getting it printed and published became a primary concern for politically conscious intellectuals belonging to this region. Thus, the Siraiki movement began in 1975 when the first Siraiki literary conference, for the first time standardized its name as ‘Siraiki’, also moved towards standardizing its script.¹¹ The script committee at this conference decided that there were five letters in *naskh* script which they found phonetically different from Urdu, Punjabi or any other language of Pakistan. In the later years, several other semi-literary and political events, like *Jashn-e-Farid* (paying tribute to Siraiki mystic, Khwaja Ghulam Farid 1845-1901), the organization of ‘Siraiki Lawyers Forum’ lead to the creation

¹⁰ For one example of this response expressed by the leader of Balochistan National Party, which demands a new assembly and a constitutional framework within Pakistan with equal representation for all federating units, see Staff Reporter, ‘Mengal calls for New Charter to bolster Federation’, *Dawn*, 17 April 2004, <http://www.dawn.com/2004/04/16/nat6.htm>, accessed 17 April 2004, (para. 2 of 13).

¹¹ Umar Kamal Khan, *Proceedings of Pehli Qul Pakistan Siraiki Adbi Conference*, Multan, 1975.

of Siraiki Sooba Mahaz by Taj Mohammad Langah in 1984. The present Siraiki movement or ‘Pakistan Siraiki Party’ is the final platform representing Siraiki identity at national and international level and is still headed by Langah.¹²

The areas which constitute Siraikistan

This emergence of Siraiki resistance takes us to the question of which areas constitute this so called Siraiki province. The territorial boundaries of Siraikistan can be more clearly sketched through studying the map proposed by the Pakistan Siraiki Party, which represents its cultural, linguistic and geographic borders and boundaries (See, Figure 1).¹³

Insert Figure 1 somewhere about here

It is significant to note that the language termed ‘Siraiki’ since 1970s is also the second language spoken in the provinces of Sindh, Balochistan and former North West Frontier Province or N.W.F.P (in the areas of Dera Ismail Khan and Tang). However, the area specified by the ‘Siraikistan’ map includes the four agriculturally rich divisions of the Punjab province: Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, and District Jhang in Punjab and Dera Ismail Khan in former N.W.F.P. Despite the fact that Siraiki is spoken in all the four provinces of Pakistan, this map does not indicate any territorial claim over the areas from the

¹² For a detailed discussion on this transformation of a literary conference into a resistance movement, see my forthcoming book. Barrister Taj Mohammad Langah is the person who contributed towards the transformation of the Siraiki Sooba Mahaz movement into Pakistan Siraiki Party, which is the still actively representing Siraiki people in Pakistan. Being an important part of Bhutto’s government, Mr. Langah left Pakistan Peoples’ Party at the peak of his political career in order to represent Siraiki people. He has rejected any governmental position to continue with this struggle for the creation of a Siraiki province.

¹³ This is the map proposed by Siraiki activists. This image is published in a pamphlet titled: ‘The Demands of Five Million Siraiki People on the Occasion of Pakistan Siraiki Party’s 10th Anniversary’ held on 10 April 2004 at Multan Arts Council (Multan: Siraiki Literatures & Research Commission of Pakistan Siraiki Party, 2004).

Sindh and Balochistan provinces.¹⁴ However, it includes Dera Ismail Khan Division (comprising the areas of Dera Ismail Khan and the Tank Districts), which were historically part of the Siraiki-speaking area before the creation of the N.W.F.P in 1901. These cities indicated on this map include Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Ismail Khan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Rahim Yar Khan, Sargodha, Mianwali, Jhang, Sahiwal, Khanewal, Bahawalnagar, Lodhran, Pakpattan, Muzafargarh, Rajanpur. Together, they constitute the proposed area of ‘Siraikistan’. Let us now turn to a discussion on how this demand for Siraikistan has complicated the issue of provincial autonomy within Pakistan.¹⁵

Provincial Issues in Pakistan

Provincial autonomy in Pakistan in general has its roots in policies introduced and decisions made in the colonial era, during and after Partition. British rule in India was maintained through legislation enacted by the British Parliament. Under the 1935 Act, some provinces had more powers than others because later they were turned into judicial commissioner’s provinces (such as the former N.W.F.P and even the present Sindh province), headed by a commissioner who was the administrative as well as the judicial head.¹⁶ Between 1925 and 1935, there was a heated debate in the British Parliament and Indian press about introducing federal or unitary system in India. Indian public opinion demanded a federal form of government. Furthermore, there was also a debate regarding how much autonomy the future federating units of India should have.¹⁷ Part of this debate was an idea proposed in one

¹⁴ For a discussion about the territorial boundaries claimed by Siraikistan, see N. Langah, Interview with the President of PSP on 6 November 2005.

¹⁵ For a different view on the areas where this language is spoken today, the political parties representing this demand, Bahawalpur vs. Siraiki province and the stance of various political parties on Siraiki province, see Muhammad Fayyez, ‘Demand for Siraiki Province (Background Paper)’, March 2011, <http://www.pildat.org/Publications/publication/PAP/BPDemandforSaraikiProvince090311.pdf> (first accessed on 25th April 2011).

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion on Government of India Act by David Steinberg, see http://www.houseof david.ca/goi_1935.htm (first accessed on 25 March 2011).

¹⁷ See Katharine Adeney, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict Regulation in India and Pakistan*, New York: Palgrave, 2007 especially Chs 3 and 4.

of Jinnah's famous fourteen points: the separation of Sindh from Bombay on the grounds that Sindh, linguistically, culturally, historically and geographically has never been part of Bombay. This formula also recommended the same status for then N.W.F.P as well as the state of Qalat and Balochistan province excluding the Pakhtuns speaking area of present Balochistan. Among others the two weighty arguments that persuaded the sub-committee of the Round Table Conference (which included British, Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, Indian Christians and Muslim representatives) was that both the two major political parties of British India, the Muslim League and the Congress, in their manifestos proposed the separation of Sindh from Bombay. However, this sub-committee although it recommended the former N.W.F.P also to be a full province, did not decide the future of Balochistan, which remained a tribal and subjugated territory even after independence.¹⁸

The debate about separate Muslim Nationhood culminated in the Lahore Resolution on 23rd March 1940, which is now famous as the Pakistan Resolution.¹⁹ The Pakistan Resolution argued that a future Muslim state will give the maximum provincial autonomy to the federating units. This has subsequently been interpreted to mean that defence, foreign affairs, finance, parts of communication and currency will be controlled by the central government but all other subjects would lie with the provinces, which shall be autonomous and sovereign from the centre. Although the original words have been manipulated by the successors of Jinnah, the fact remains that the principle of federal form of the government that is the quantum of autonomy for the states or provinces had been decided by Jinnah and the founding fathers of Pakistan. The leading role for demanding identity and maximum provincial autonomy was played by Bengali leaders and Jinnah himself. The Bengalis could foresee that unless they had maximum autonomy, how they could work with West Pakistan

¹⁸ See, Umbreen Javeed, Concerns of Balochistan: Effects and Implications on Federation of Pakistan, *Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, 113-125

¹⁹ See, M.A. Malik, *The Making of Pakistan Resolution*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

being one thousand miles apart. In view of the above historical record, it is ironic that today in Pakistan, when Sindh, Balochistan, N.W.F. P. (now Khyber Pakhtun Khwa), province and the people of the Siraiki area when they demand the same quantum of autonomy as agreed and propounded in the 1940 resolution, it is denied to them.

These problems persisted even after Pakistan became an independent country on 14th August 1947, without having its own constitution. It functioned under the Government of India Act 1935, supposedly a federation with Punjab, Sindh, N.W.F.P and East Pakistan as its provinces, British Balochistan comprising the Pashtoon speaking area of present Balochistan, Quetta, Murree and Bugti agencies as federally administered area and Qalat, Makran, Kharan, Lasbella Princely States, Qalat being the largest one at that juncture. There were six states in the then N.W.F.P. Province, Swat being the largest, the state of Khairpur in Sind and Bahawalpur State in the Punjab Province. According to the independence Act, in India as well as in Pakistan, the rulers of States had to decide their accession with India or Pakistan. The ruler of Bahawalpur State despite great pressure from India decided to accede to Pakistan. The Amir of Qalat declared independence as he claimed he was never completely part of British India like other Princely States. But his rebellion was crushed on the orders of founder of Pakistan himself. The ruler of Swat also desired independence but could not declare it.

The Princely state of Bahawalpur, which is most relevant in the present discussion, was elevated to the status of an administrative province in the postcolonial era. There were elections of the provincial assembly which were naturally managed and Nawab of Bahawalpur was made ex-officio governor of the province. The state of Bahawalpur was a Siraiki state where Siraiki language was taught and even proceedings in lower courts were

conducted in Siraiki.²⁰ However, within a few months of the creation of Bahawalpur province, a unit which became known as West Pakistan was created by merging all the provinces and the princely states and regarding them as 'One Unit'. This move was completely undemocratic, unconstitutional and against the wishes of people of West and East Pakistan. Under this device a new constitution of Pakistan was framed in 1956 comprising two wings called West and East Pakistan. This new constitution was formed on the principle of 'parity' that is equal seats in the National Assembly and perhaps equal rights in all other organs of the state. This denied the population of East Pakistan their majority in the National Assembly.

This in fact, was a single biggest blow to the integrity of Pakistan resulting in the breakup later in 1970. However, from the first day, the Sindhis, Balochs and Pashtoons launched a movement against the dismemberment of One Unit, i.e. West Pakistan and restoration of former provinces, including that of Bahawalpur. A committee by the name of anti-One Unit Front was formed, which included its members from Sindh, Balochistan, N.W.F.P and even Riaz Hashmi from the former Bahawalpur province. The leaders of this front went into jails during Ayub era, some for as long as ten years. In response to demands of this front, under the chairmanship of judge of the Supreme court, namely Fazl-e- Akbar, a commission was formed to decide the future of 'One Unit'. Earlier, there was a demand in the Assembly of West Pakistan in 1958. Shortly before General Ayub imposed Martial Law in which the assembly unanimously demanded dismemberment of 'One Unit' and creation of four or more provinces in West Pakistan. The fourth province was Bahawalpur in which former Multan Division, which included present-day Dera Ghazi Khan division was also recommended and the fifth province was Balochistan. The Fazl-e-Akbar committee took

²⁰ It must be pointed out that the language of Bahawalpur was identified as Bahawalpuri or Riasti by the colonial researchers, however, in the postcolonial era, it was the same language which was being regarded as Siriaki. For more details on Bahawalpur, see Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*.

several years and went around the whole of West Pakistan and took evidence and recommended the dismemberment of West Pakistan by creating again four or more provinces. However, by the time this report became public in January 1970, Ayub Khan was overthrown and Yahya Khan according to the recommendations of the committee announced the dismemberment of One Unit without going into the details of the recommendations.²¹

The Pakistani bureaucracy, while dismembering 'One Unit', due to the pressure of the then powerful Pashtoon and Baloch leadership, created four provinces, with Balochistan as the fourth, but ignoring the creation of the fifth province. Many of these provinces nominally represented an ethnic and linguistic group which reflects through the names given to these provinces, except N.W.F.P. However, all had significant linguistic minorities. In Punjab a linguistic and ethnic Siraiki entity also existed. In the case of Balochistan, the wishes of Baloch and Pashtoons of present Balochistan were ignored and instead of including the Pashtoon area of Balochistan in the former N.W.F.P it remained in the Balochistan province continuing a feud between the two ethnic groups in Balochistan, which has not been resolved even in the 18th Amendment.

When the former Bahawalpur province was not restored, the people of Bahawalpur launched a movement in April 1970 and on the 4th April, the security agencies of Punjab crushed the movement by firing and killing two people and arrested hundreds of people. One of the leaders of anti-One Unit front movement who hailed from Bahawalpur, Riaz Hashmi, filed a petition in the Supreme Court claiming that the federation was bound to restore the Bahawalpur province as it existed on the eve of 'One Unit' and having not restored like other province and in fact rather creating a new province of Balochistan, the federation has betrayed the benefactor of Pakistan. He argued that the last ruler of Bahawalpur and great

²¹ For further discussion on structural challenges of Pakistani federation, the issues of proportionality during before the creation of Bangladesh, see Katharine Adeney, 'The limitations of non-consociational federalism - the example of Pakistan', *Ethnopolitics*, 8 (1): 87-106, 2009.

friend of Quaid had committed to the Nawab of Bahawalpur through various letters, agreements and treaties to give due autonomous status to the people of Bahawalpur in any future federation.²² This petition was dismissed by the Supreme Court on the slipshod ground that Hashmi had no *locus standi* to file the petition. Consequently, Hashmi published a book in which he has lucidly argued the case of Bahawalpur province and has also published all the letters, correspondence, agreements with Jinnah and the state of Pakistan. In his preface he suggests that if the provincial status of Bahawalpur is not revived, then the entire Siraiki region will fight for the creation of 'Siraikistan'. Hence the word, 'Siraikistan' was first introduced by Hashmi which is supported by the image of the map of the proposed Siraikistan on the back cover of his book. This is how the word 'Siraikistan' and its map became icons of Siraiki identity for the Siraiki activists.²³ Later, Hashmi joined Langah's Pakistan Siraiki Party and the name 'Siraikistan' was also acknowledged by this party.

It may be noted that the demand for Bahawalpur province separate from Multan became popular in Pakistan in the recent years and was propagated by various politicians, establishment and agencies of Pakistan in order to divide the Siraiki people.²⁴ However, it remains a fact that Bahawalpur province is not 'ethnically-neutral' due to the large Punjabi and *Mohajir* settlements in that area.²⁵ Moreover, in the opinion of some political analysts, two separate provinces: Bahawalpur and Siraiki will result in two financially poor provinces.²⁶ It must be said that the language that was spoken in the state of Bahawalpur or

²² For further discussion on One Unit and its impact on federalism in Pakistan, see Katharine Adeney, 'Regionalism, identity and reconciliation: federalism in India and Pakistan', <http://www.psa.ac.uk/cps/2000/Adeney%20Katharine.pdf> first accessed on 15th April 2011).

²³ Riaz Hashmi, *Brief for Bahawalpur Province*, Bahawalpur: Bahawalpur Sooba Mahaz, 1972.

²⁴ One of the most important names amongst such leaders is that of the Senator, Muhammad Ali Durrani.

²⁵ 'Ethnically neutral' is a term used by Ayesha Siddiqi in her latest communication with me on 26th March 2011. I had contacted her to discuss her views in relation to the ascending Siraiki issue in Pakistan. For more discussions on the ethnic mixture in the area of Bahawalpur as exemplified through the presence of Siraiki community in this areas, see Hussain Ahmed Khan, *Re-Thinking Punjab: The Construction of Siraiki Identity*, Research and Publication Centre, National College of Arts, 2004.

²⁶ Ayesha Siddiqi as cited above.

was taught and used for legal proceeding in the lower courts was in fact Siraiki.²⁷ If the Bahawalpur province had been allowed to exist since that time, it would have been a Siraiki-speaking province and in due course of time the former Multan division, which included the present Bahawalpur division could have been included in this and the demands of Siraiki speaking area to have their identity and autonomy could have been met as early as mid-1950s. An evidence of this is the merger of the Bahawalpur movement in the Siraiki movement in the 1970s, when Riaz Hashmi also joined Pakistan Siraiki Party created by Taj Mohammad Langah. However, it must be clarified that the recent demands of for the resurrection of Bahawalpur province are the political agenda of the Establishment and not necessarily the majority public opinion representing the overall Siraiki population residing within Punjab (including Bahawalpur).

Conclusion: 18th Amendment and the Call for Siraiki Province

In the light of the above discussion, it is important to review the recent addition of the 18th Amendment in Pakistan's constitution as it has further complicated the call for Siraiki province. By giving vast powers to the parliament, prime minister and judiciary, and much increased provincial autonomy to the provinces under the constitution, this amendment has limited the presidential powers, amending some of the laws introduced by President Musharraf. This amendment offers a greater role to the parliament and prime minister, who now transfers to the position of chief executive of the country, removes limits on PMs serving more than two terms, gives greater independence to the judiciary whereby the president or PM will have no direct role in judicial appointments, and there will be federal and provincial

²⁷As mentioned earlier, according to the colonial researchers, the language spoken in this area was tagged as Bahawalpuri. See Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*.

balance of powers through the creation of federal-provincial forums.²⁸ Amongst all these important moves taken via 18th Amendment, the country's North West Frontier Province (N.W.F.P) has been renamed as 'Khyber Pakhtun Khwa', thus apparently acknowledging the demands of the Pakhtun nationalists who have been demanding to change the name of N.W.F.P – it being a colonial tag. For them, the name of their province should reflect the ethnic identity of the people just like the other ethnic groups in the rest of the Pakistani provinces, such as Sindh and Balochistan. As indicated in my earlier discussion this does not include Punjab because this province remains split between the Punjabis, *Mohajir* settlers and the Siraiki indigenous majority.

As a matter of fact, the acceptance of Pakhtun identity as reflected through the 18th Amendment has further boosted the morale of Siraiki nationalists to reinforce their demand for 'Siraikistan' and to some extent the Establishment has also realized the importance of ethnic and linguistic identities in Pakistan. This was evident when during the recent floods the Siraiki region was badly affected and since this area was far away from Lahore, the centre of ruling elite, the Pakistani establishment as well as the international powers vehemently felt that if the administrative headquarter had been in Multan, the gravity of the flood would have been diminished. In this way, the rehabilitation process could have been easily achieved.²⁹

Another positive impact of the 18th Amendment is that for the first time this issue is being debated on all the political fronts and even in the Parliament. Thus, the 18th Amendment has for the first time highlighted the fact Siraiki is not a dialect or accent of Punjabi, Sindhi or any other language spoken in Pakistan. In fact, it is an independent language, representing a historical identity and culture, which clearly requires an independent

²⁸ See the online version of Constitution of Pakistan <http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/> (first accessed on 23 March 2011).

²⁹ See, <http://voiceamidstsilence.blogspot.com/2011/05/case-for-seraiki-province.html> (first accessed on 2 May 2011)

provincial status along the pattern of other provinces of Pakistan. Furthermore, there is also a considerable level of awareness that Pakistan is a multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic state.

As far as the Siraiki activists and the public opinion from this region are concerned, the 18th Amendment has received a mixed response from various quarters in Pakistan. Various political factions and literary circles within the Siraiki area gave two opposite responses. The first group, which perhaps constitutes the minority, thinks that this amendment has given birth to a new political situation through which the nation is assured that their struggles will be acknowledged in Pakistan.³⁰ The second group is clearly protesting that this amendment has practically done nothing for the betterment of the Siraiki people. Furthermore, the provinces having attained maximum provincial autonomy, although not according to 1940 Lahore Resolution as claimed by nationalists in Sindh, Balochistan and Pakhtun Khwa area, the Siraiki nationalists claim that they have been further subjugated by the Punjabi nationality. The acknowledgement given to 'Pakhtun Khwa' is also observed as something which will enhance the resistance amongst other ethnic and political groups which lack representation in Pakistan. Some Siraiki factions argue that even people from FATA, Balochistan and former N.W.F.P are unhappy about the name Khyber Pakhtun Khwa.³¹ The Nawaz League and Q League are being criticized for having a split opinion; Q League is opposing Pakhtun Khwa while N League is supporting the creation of a Hazara and Siraiki province in order to maintain their popularity and vote bank within these regions.³² Siraiki activists have criticised these parties within assemblies who, in their view, have stabbed the Siraiki movement in its back by refusing to acknowledge the existence of Siraikis as a

³⁰ Razish Liaqatpuri, 'Siraiki Vusaib: Atharveen Turmem ky baad', *Khubrain* (Multan), 16 April 2010.

³¹ *Khubrain*, 13 April 2010.

³² Ibid.

deprived nation with an independent ethnic and linguistic basis. They blame the Punjabi-*Mohajir* ruling elite and establishment for this.

After the statement of the prime minister in a recent public meeting in Jalalpur (Multan district) that the creation of Siraiki and other smaller provinces will be part of the next election manifesto of PPP.³³ Furthermore, President Zardari has announced the formation of a manifesto committee to look into the question of the creation of a Siraiki province, which will formulate proposals and suggestions for the creation of a fifth federating unit and to include the demand in the next general elections. However, the constitution of the committee is such that Siraiki nationalists in a recent high profile session of Pakistan Siraiki Party National council have rejected the PPP announcement.³⁴ They expressed the view that this is only meant to put the PML N and the Punjab government in an awkward position and win the sympathies of the Siraiki people - to be able to complete their tenure and to strengthen their vote bank. The nationalists were of the view that if the PPP is sincere in meeting the demand of 70 million Siraiki speaking people, they should introduce a 20th amendment in the present parliament as other than PPP, the PML Q, ANP, MQM, JUI F and even MNAs of PML N from Siraiki region support the Siraiki province. Therefore the present assembly has a mandate for the creation of fifth province, in that the majority of parliamentary parties and its members support the aspirations of the Siraiki people. Were parliament to approve the bill, the bill goes to the President for an assent. Before the president signs the bill, there is a requirement that the provincial assemblies, the territories of which are

³³ PPP's decision of including Siraiki province in its next election manifesto is being discussed in the entire media and press. Some of the examples can be accessed through these links with press statements by Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gillani and other important PPP representatives, see: <http://pakobserver.net/201103/14/detailnews.asp?id=80868>, <http://www.dunyanews.tv/index.php?key=Q2F0SUQ9MiNOaWQ9MjMyNTc=>, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2011%5C03%5C15%5Cstory_15-3-2011_pg7_17 (first accessed on 25 April 2011).

³⁴ This discussion is the outcome of my attendance of Pakistan Siraiki Party's National Council session followed by a public meeting on 9th April 2011 at the historic town of Uch in district Bahawalpur. I also conducted an interview with PSP president on this occasion.

required to be included in the new province should pass a resolution by a two thirds majority. Just in the case of the 18th and 19th Amendment, which were passed unanimously, it is hoped that if a 20th amendment is introduced into the parliament, it would be only a broad consensus in the national parliament as well as the provincial assemblies has been achieved. The senior leaders of the Siraiki movement are clear in their mind that the amendment must be by consensus. After that, there will be no hurdle in the provincial assemblies. Recently evidence also indicates that the ruling PPP and sections of the establishment have already made contacts with the Siraiki nationalist leaders for help and co-operation to prepare the necessary constitutional amendment.³⁵

However, the PM's statement of including the demand for Siraiki and other smaller provinces in the manifesto has nefarious connotations. The Chief Minister of Punjab has miserably lost recent by-elections in his stronghold constituency of D.G. Khan to his arch rival PML Q candidate, who had managed to get the support of Siraiki nationalists and won by a margin of 25,000 votes. He therefore made a statement that the PML N has no objection for the creation of other provinces, including Bahawalpur in the proposed province of Siraikistan and Hazara in the present Khyber Pakhtun Khwa province. The Siraiki nationalists insist that there is only a serious demand for the creation of Siraiki province and the voice of Bahawalpur and Hazara has been recently injected by the establishment in order to divide the natural and historical Siraiki and Pashtoon entities.³⁶ The president of the Pakistan Siraiki Party declared that if the establishment attempted the division of Siraiki and Pashtoon entities on the pattern of East and West Germany, North and South Korea, North

³⁵ Private Interview with Mr. Langah on 22nd April 2011 after a meeting with member of the President's manifesto committee. Mr. Langah said that his Pakistan Siraiki Party's central office in Multan is also being approached by the establishment to discuss the party manifesto, map of the proposed province and also have asked them to assist the committee.

³⁶ Nukhbah Langah, Interview with PSP President conducted at central office of Pakistan Siraiki Party at Multan on 11th April 2011.

and South Vietnam, Arab Palestine and Jews Palestine, Pakistani and Indian Kashmirs; he can predict bloodshed in the Siraiki and Pakhtun territories as well.³⁷

In answer to the recent pronouncements of the Law Minister of Punjab (who is the spokesman of the leadership of PML N) that if Punjab is divided, without dividing Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtun Khwa, there will be stiff resistance by the PML N, Lanagah retorted that we are not dividing Punjab but we are only demanding restoration of ancient status of Siraiki land and people.³⁸ There is no such claim of Urdu speaking ethnic group on Sindh for the division of that natural land and similarly the Balochs of Balochistan are willing that their Pashtoon territories should be part of Pakhtun Khwa province.³⁹ Thus, the outburst of the Punjab Law Minister is likely to create one bigger hurdle in the creation of the Siraiki province and will require a lot of soul searching, sagacity and fairness by the leadership of PPP, PML N and some religious parties.

In conclusion, Siraiki nationalists have lost faith and co-ordination with their political allies, particularly the Pakistan Peoples' Party and are publically protesting.⁴⁰ Keeping in view, maligned opinion and malafide motives of agencies, establishment and the Punjabi-*Mohajir* ruling elite and the mood of two Muslim Leagues, as well as PPP's Punjab chapter and pre-general election complexities, a 20th Amendment in order to create a Siraiki province seems practically impossible in the present political scenario.⁴¹

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹ For Altaf Hussain and MQM's unit with Sindhis, see 'Altaf Hussain's open letter to the most reverend Sindhi elders, caring mothers, loving sisters and exuberant youth', <http://www.mqm.org/English-News/Jan-2000/ah-letter-sindhi-260100.html> (first accessed on 25th April 2011).

⁴⁰ *Khubrain*, 23 April 2010.

⁴¹ Taj Mohammad Langah, *Khubrain*, 24 April 2010.

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Map

This image is published in a pamphlet titled: ‘The Demands of Five Million Siraiki People on the Occasion of Pakistan Siraiki Party’s 10th Anniversary’ held on 10 April 2004 at Multan

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