

Ethnicity and Nationalism in Pakistan

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Farhan Siddiqi, an academic from Karachi University, has a strong theoretical background in ethnic studies. The book under review, which is based on his PhD thesis, provides the historical context of how the Baloch, Sindhi and Mohajir ethnic conflict in Pakistan took shape and examines the relationship between the Pakistani state and government, and ethnic groups and movements. Siddiqi argues that the Pakistani state mainly serves the interests of the dominant Punjabi majority. He rightly draws the distinction between the state and government. According to him, while politicians manifest the government, the army and bureaucracy reflect the state and how both remain indispensable for emerging ethnic conflicts.

Siddiqi assumes that the study of nationalism is to conduct and evolve relevant ideologies, discourses and movements with the purpose of achieving statehood,

The Politics of Ethnicity in Pakistan: The Baloch, Sindhi and Mohajir Ethnic Movements by Farhan Hanif Siddiqi (London: Routledge, 2012; pp 147, £ 80.

or even provincial autonomy (p 9). He further argues that a coercive state denies ethnic demands made to it either through coercion or by evoking intra-ethnic conflict. Explaining kinds of nationalism, the core of the debate, the writer subscribes to the London School of Economics scholar Earnest Gellner's non-territorial nationalism but skips over Anthony Smith's definition, which emphasises the roots of a particular people in a particular territory over time.

Baloch Conundrum

Discussing Baloch nationalism, Siddiqi highlights the treatment meted out to the Baloch in Pakistan. From the forced accession of the princely state of Kalat to Pakistan in 1948 to the dissolution and

merger of the various states of Balochistan into "One Unit" in 1955, force was used time and again to subdue the rebellious Baloch. Subterfuge was also used, as in the case of Mir Nauroz Khan who agreed to surrender in exchange for amnesty but was arrested for treason and his sons and nephews hanged in Hyderabad Jail in 1960.

From 1973 to 1977, the Baloch again took up arms against the government after then president Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dismissed the elected government of Balochistan province. Hostilities ceased after Zia-ul-Haq staged a coup against Bhutto and declared martial law. To mollify the Baloch, he released the leaders of the insurrection but did not address their problems. In the aftermath of the resurgence in hostilities in 2004, one of the last remaining leaders, Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, who had gone underground, was murdered in 2006 on then president Pervez Musharraf's orders. Nonetheless, a low intensity conflict is still going on in Balochistan.

Siddiqi argues that to a large extent the Pakistan state successfully used intra-ethnic feuds among the Baloch, the conflict between Baloch and Brahui, and the discord between the Baloch

and Pashtun to neutralise the Baloch secessionist movement. He further argues that Pakistan can keep the Baloch in check only through the use of force. This assumption is contestable. After Bugti's murder, according to some reports, young Baloch no longer identify themselves with Pakistan but with an Azad Balochistan (Masoud Ansari, "The Battle for Balochistan", *Newline*, September 2006, pp 18-45) .

The trouble in Balochistan is no longer Pakistan's internal affair. It is being discussed in the US Congress and the United Nations has sent a Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances to investigate allegations of enforced disappearances or missing persons in Balochistan and Sindh. Thus, the Baloch cannot be indefinitely kept in Pakistan, either through coercion or by creating a few hundred low-grade jobs.

Sindhi Ethno-Nationalism

Discussing the pre-partition and the post-partition political scenario of Sindh, Siddiqi elucidates that the Sindhi who enthusiastically joined Pakistan became embroiled in the conflict with the state, which led to the development of Sindhi ethno-national parties (p 75). He suggests that the reasons for the rise of Sindhi ethno-nationalism include the separation of Karachi from the rest of Sindh, introduction of Urdu as the official language of the country and ignoring the Sindhi language, Li-aquat Ali Khan's derogatory remarks about the Sindhi people, and migrant bureaucrats usurping jobs left by Hindus (pp 81-82). The allotment of agricultural land left by Hindus to migrant claimants should have been included in this list of grievances against the state. Siddiqi also considers the formation of One Unit in 1955 and the allotment of land to Punjabi settlers as reasons for Sindhi resentment against the state. In addition, the most severe shock to the Sindhi people was the hanging of former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1979.

The Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) against the Zia regime was launched in 1984 by the Pakistan

Peoples Party (PPP) and supported by the Sindh Awami Tehreek headed by Rasool Bakhsh Palejo. However, the Sindhu Deshis, led by G M Syed, distanced themselves from MRD and went in the favour of the regime as well as the state. This event vindicates Siddiqi's assertion that the state succeeded in exploiting intra-ethnic differences between pro-Pakistani and pro-independence Sindhi groups. Similarly, the differences between the Sindhi people and migrants were also successfully exploited by the state.

The writer believes that nationalist activity has abated in Sindh. As a reaction to the bomb blasts by Shafi Burfat's Jeay Sindh Muttahida Mahaz (JSMM) in 2011, the state killed three activists of his organisation and demonstrated its will to deal with the nationalists (p 116). This assumption seems to be incorrect for if one reads Sindhi newspapers, especially around Pakistan's independence day, one will come across the opinion that due to the mishandling of the super floods and rains in 2010 and 2011, rampant corruption, and PPP's policy of appeasement of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), more and more Sindhi are disenchanted not only with the government but also with the state. This phenomenon will certainly boost Sindhi nationalism.

Migrant Identity

In his study of the Mohajir movement, Siddiqi covers its construction, objectives, and the differences within it and with other ethnic groups. He agrees with the senior militarist strategist, A R Siddiqi, that living amid territorial nationalist groups such as the Sindhi and Punjabi, the pre-partition Mohajir identity was reinforced among the migrants. In 1984, MQM was formed for the purpose of attaining objectives such as recognition of migrants as a "nation" and having a separate province for them (pp 100-01). It is noteworthy that the notion of "Mohajir Nationalism" is not acceptable to other ethnic groups of Pakistan. Even some MQM ideologues feel that since they do not have a cultural homogeneity, their party cannot claim to represent a nation (Nadeem

Paracha, "Enter Altafism", *Dawn*, 12 August 2012).

Siddiqi also focuses on the intra-ethnic conflict between the two factions of MQM, between MQM activists and the Sindhi, and between the Pashtun and MQM musclemen. Arguably, MQM has put its constituents on the warpath with major ethnic groups in Karachi. In addition, despite the fact that the migrants, according to Siddiqi himself, control trade and industry, their main political party, MQM, was twice in conflict with the army and paramilitary forces (1992-93, 1995-96), which Siddiqi calls the state. The Sindhi blame MQM for implicitly supporting the plan to divide Sindh. Although MQM has remained a coalition partner of every federalist government of the time, the state probably does not trust it because MQM has clashing with them twice. And MQM has the potential for clashing with the state for a third time in its bid to create a Singapore-like city state carved out of Pakistan.

In sum, Siddiqi's main thesis that the three above-mentioned ethnic movements are not secessionist in their nature is debatable. However, these movements can be accommodated in Pakistan when markedly significant changes in its structure are brought about. A confederal structure may be helpful for national integration. One may disagree with some of Siddiqi's ideas, but his book is recommended to anybody interested in Pakistan's ethnic politics.

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