
Quest for Seraiki Identity

Posted by admin - 2007/07/04 11:20

Fayyaz Baqir

Recent quest for Seraiki identity was triggered off with the separation of eastern wing of united Pakistan and dissolution of One Unit in West Pakistan. At this time a secular rationale for creation of "new" Pakistan as continuation of Indus Valley Civilization and wheeler's five thousand year's of Pakistan caught the attention of politicians, intellectuals and political analysts. For the first time in Pakistan's history the tradition of forging national unity on the basis subduing various cultural, linguistic and social identities under state patronized identity was openly debated. Due to rapid urbanization during the past decades and emergence of middle class in urban centres of present Pakistan people from various regions, ethnic groups and diverse political leanings and ideologies started discussion on various components which constituted their social, cultural and political identities. They also started questioning the centralized political system which imposed serious restrictions on the expression, growth and harmonious development of these identities.

An important component of this debate on national and sub national identities was the question whether expression and growth of diversity strengthened or undermined national unity. Events that followed provided significant evidence that it is not expression of diversity but the ability to deal with diversity and draw on its strengths that determined the outcome of freedom of expression in this regard. The debate and struggle on this viewpoint still continues and people are very intelligently drawing conclusions from this debate. Defining cultural and national identities and articulating the rights of people with distinct identities is a very challenging and demanding task. However, the quest for articulating these identities and their legitimate rights has become very complex and complicated. The factors contributing to this complexity are underdevelopment of various regional language, extreme variations in the dialects of local languages, dominance of oral over written linguistic tradition, rapid movement of ethnic and linguistic groups outside their hinterland and permanent settlement in other linguistic and cultural landscapes, multi cultural and linguistic character of Pakistani cities and geographic regions, lack of serious research on cultural and regional inequalities, a strong desire in certain political tendencies to play the "nationalist" card as a short cut to power and dominance of desperation and rhetoric in our political culture. Due to these factors we have emotionally charged and substantially weak and unpopular expression of nationalist politics in Pakistan.

Seraikis like other nationalist constituencies have also been approached on the basis of nationalist rhetoric to fall in line behind "nationalist" parties. However, nationalist politics in Seraiki area has been moving in circle and not moved forward at all. Part of the reason for this failure is lack of a deeper understanding of Seraiki question. Describing the unique identity of Seraiki people in contemporary Pakistan is a larger than life enterprise. Despite an intense desire among Seraikis to find an expression for their unique position in contemporary Pakistan little research and discussion has taken place in this regard. The purpose of this paper is to describe some unique social, cultural and historic characteristics of Seraikis and try to assess their position in relation to a despotic or pluralistic political discourse. I am trying to raise some questions and not to answer them. The purpose is to encourage a serious debate and not to close the debate by providing a "final" answer.

Seraikis have many unique features which separate them from all other language, geography and ethnicity based "nationalities" in Pakistan. In the first place Seraikis are the only group who live inside the borders of contemporary Pakistan. All other major national groups are spread across the border between Pakistan and its neighbouring countries. Secondly, Seraikis constitute second largest linguistic group in each province of Pakistan. Unlike other nationalities they are spread all over Pakistan. Seraiki is spoken by people living along the river valleys of Indus and its tributaries and occupy centre stage in what can be called cradle of Indus Civilization. Seraiki towns and urban centres have a good mix of Seraiki and non Seraiki speaking people and non Seraikis living in Seraiki areas are accepted as Seraikis by local people. Seraiki land lords are among the biggest land holding land lords in Pakistan and have been important share holders of power under various political dispensations. Major Seraiki towns are home to Sufi shrines, universities, colleges, radio stations, seats of power, trading centres and cultural heritage. Religious Seraiki religious leaders, zakirs and khatibs are spread all over Pakistan. Seraiki poetry and music is popular among non-Seraiki speaking as well. Seraiki have found respectable representation in civil and armed services of Pakistan and small and corporate business sector.

All these characteristics set Seraikis apart from all other nationalities in Pakistan. Their interests like their national identity are not strengthened by politics of separation and creating a Seraiki province but by forging unity among its people inhabiting the entire landscape of contemporary Pakistan. Seraikis are the true descendents of Indus Valley Civilization and a connecting thread to contemporary Pakistan. Their identity is destined to be linked with rediscovery of deeper inner unity among various linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups in Pakistan. It should not be reduced to fit in with narrowly defined political interests based on ignorance of Seraiki history and culture.

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Re:Quest for Seraiki Identity

Posted by admin - 2007/07/15 16:52

Dear respected Ustad Ejaz Khan sahib,

As we talked, I offer my comment on Fayyaz Baqir's article in the following.

Truly yours

Dr. Ahsan Wagha

Thanks for the dispatch. I had already read Baqir's article and read it again on your special link. One must appreciate this effort for it is a reminder to friends to produce serious answer to the question of Siraiki identity as it was most of the time attempted by outside scholars only. (Rasoolpuri's recent booklet on the subject remains the only good exception).

To do some justice to Fayyaz Baqir's effort, I quote and comment on two points in his write-up:

1. he observes in the outset; “

Recent quest for Siraiki identity was triggered off by separation of eastern wing of united Pakistan and dissolution of One Unit...”

The Siraiki identity was not triggered off but evolved over a period, although short, earlier than the separation of the eastern wing. And on record are serious works on linguistics, seen as development of identity, one being that by Bahal, a Hindu scholar from Multan who did his PhD from France on sounds of the language in 1940s. The thesis is in French ..“the injuctifs ...(today known as ‘implosives’, I can't recall the full reference ...).

The ‘Al-Ansar’ Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi’ had worked for education in mother tongue the area and had developed a primer with diacritics for the special Siraiki phonemes again in early 1940s.

Afterwards, in the period from the 1950s to early 1960s, the scholars and intelligentsia in Multan were seriously engaged in searching and agreeing on a single name for the language until the name Siraiki was adopted, although not unanimously at that time. The whole exercise which is well documented was a beautiful expression of rise of a cultural identity in its modern sense—all such efforts are theoretically seen as components of ‘identity’.

As far the effects of the fall of Dhaka and the dissolution of One Unit, this if triggered anything, was the movement demanding restoration of the status of the Bahawalpur state because the instruments of the annexation of the state provided space for the demand.

2. My second observation is about the assertion in the last paragraph;

“ ... their (the Siraikis’) interests, like their national identity, are not strengthened by politics of separation and creating a

Siraiki province, but by forging unity among its people inhabiting the entire landscape..."

(i) Placing 'separation' with 'creating a province' is a bit simplistic, because 'separation' and 'province' are two separate things.

(ii) This statement of excluding Siraiki on the issue of separation implies as if the other identities—Pakhtun, Sindhi, Baloch, Baltis and others are strengthened by separation. Actually not a single identity in Pakistan claims separation.

(iii) The Siraikis are very much in pursuit of a province to be carved along the lingo-cultural lines (although few like me are opposed to formation province in given circumstances).

My heartiest reflection is, it very nice write up.

Ahsan Wagha

Post edited by: admin, at: 2007/07/16 10:58

Re:Quest for Seraiki Identity

Posted by admin - 2007/07/16 09:51

"Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past."

George Orwell.

Farooq Abbas Miana

Nothing more would have explained importance of History of Seraiki Wasaib for Seraikis as explain these two sagacious lines of George Orwell. It is must for all Seraikis to read History of Seraiki Wasaib and analyze those factors which led to dismal and deplorable condition of 50 million Seraikis living in Pakistan. Unfortunately, Seraikis today are not master of their destiny, they cannot make any decision effecting their collective lives. Due to lack of control over decision making process, along with any thing else they do not have any history of their own. Intentional efforts are being made to deface this 50 million strong true Pakistani nation and give it a false label of a Punjabi. History being a memory of nations is a major source for all nations, which reminds them of their past, it explains them lot of things and provides justification for whole range of issues. History only is the mechanism by which nations could understand their present and formulate their future line of action. Thus in order to deface any group and deny its existence it becomes imperative for a dominant group to corrupt and to send to oblivion the history of depressed group. That is what Punjabis have done with Seraikis. Seraikis are not aware of what happened to their land in past, they are not alive to the fact that for centuries their areas served as battle grounds and they were denied rights in their own hmoie. If Seraiki do not look back into history, it is impossible for them to understand reasons for their current miserable plight. If History of Seraiki Wasaib was written and all the Seraikis had access to it, Punjabis definitely would have find it difficult to keep this nation enslaved and Seraiki province would have appeared on the political map of the world quite a long ago.

Multan is mother of all Seraiki areas, because in past they all were part of it and parted from it during long course of history. Today we find some Seraiki areas incorporated in Punjab, while others are part of NWFP, Baluchistan and Sindh. In past they were part of one single administrative entity called Multan. Multan in history existed as an independent state, a province, a division and now as a district. It is one of the few living cities of the world which have their origin in pre-historic times. There are countless references about Multan in ancient and medieval history. Medieval historians describe Multan as province of Sindh, during Ghaznavid period it was a separate province, it existed as independent state under Nasir-u-Din Qabacha. Then during Sultanate era it was a province which owed its allegiance to Dehli. It became independent state under Langhas, later on it became province of Mughal era. Although Multan was biggest and hence most important province of Mughal empire, but it is the period when question was put on its territorial integration. It lost its significance to great extent when Lahore gained importance. During the centuries which followed Multan kept losing its territories and its grip on its peripheral areas became weak. It lost lot of area in south to Daudaputras when they established State of Bahawalpur. In west and north-west Dera Ghazi Khan and Dera Ismail Khan came into existence and at a times remained independent of influence from Multan. Finally, the Sikh Invasions of 19th century snatched identity of Seraiki wasaib from it and labeled the whole wasaib as Punjab. However it is

interesting to note that Multan remained a separate province in Maharja Ranjeet Singh's Punjab.

Punjab is phenomenon of yesterday . Although Punjabi speakers existed from time unknown but there was no Punjab , as there is no Seraiki Wasaib today , but that does not mean Seraikis never existed. It has its origin in early part of 19th century when short lived Sikh rule was established as a result of rise of Sikh Religious Nationalism and conquests made there after. The areas what now are called Pakistani Punjab and Indian Punjab were brought under Sikh dominion (there were some other territories which now are separate provinces of Hariana, Himachal, Some areas were incorporated into N-W.F.P in 1901). However Sikh rule proved to be short lived and after British takeover the Sikh dominion became part of British Empire. This is the point where Multan's separate identity as an administrative unit was merged with that of erst-while unknow Punjab. Before British take over Punjab was an independent state and Multan was it's province. When Punjab became province of British empire , status of Multan was reduced to that of a division. The British Bureaucrats and Civil servants , who although did great a job of writing extensively about history , culture, geography , geology etc. of the areas under their control. But they overlooked some facts and considered Seraiki as a dialect of Punjabi . Although some Punjabi intellectuals of that time who wrote about Punjabi labguage , considered Seraiki as a separate language. Similarly, today even , Sikhs do not include Seraiki areas in the definition of Punjab.

When both India and Pakistan gained independence , Indians keeping in mind the ground realities and in order to provide sound foundations to the newly created country carved two states out of the over stretched East-Punjab in 1967 (A separate article , supported with authentic maps and historical facts will be uploaded to explain , how Indians managed over stretched province of East Punjab). Where as Pakistan fell in the hands of naive politicians , who grossly failed in managing the affairs of the state and could not draft a constitution for quite a long time. They lacked political acumen, sagacity and foresightedness. So not only the failed to realize ground realities , but took actions which proved fatal for Pakistan , one such action was declaring urdu as a national language (India declared 14 languages as it national languages) , the second blunder was keeping over stretched Punjab intact , not only this they also merged State of Bahawalpur in it . Today all smaller provinces seem fed up with the politics of this big brother . Which infact is not big, it derives its powers from Seraiki land and people included in it . If we listen to history and act according to what it tells us , we can get rid of lot of ominous political tensions , which are eroding very basis of federation of Pakistan.

Today Seraikis are in control of Punjabis and reading history written either by Punjabis or by the people who don't belong to this area. So we are told the we always were part of Punjab and Seraiki is just a dialect of Punjabi. It in fact is a political wickedness , by doing so they are usurper economic and political rights . They want to deprive us of our history and identity , because only in this way they will be able to maintain their unholy dominance on us. Because who controls the past , controls the future. http://www.wasaib.com/components/com_fireboard/uploaded/images/wasaib.JPG

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Re:Quest for Seraiki Identity

Posted by admin - 2007/07/16 10:51

Zafar Lund

dear ijaz baloch

I have read the article of Fiaz Baqir the main question is who will do work for language and cultural promotion and and will aware at gross root level to people about their rights!st it had done Seraiki Lok Sanjh now there is need a political party who should work for language and cultural promotion and at gross root level for people's rights through peace full struggle.

zafar lund
