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Historical and Political Development of Gilgit-Baltistan: The Ancient Empires to current Political Development

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Abstract

Gilgit Baltistan geographically lies at the extreme north of Pakistan and it has an area of around 72,496 km. The area is a rugged mountainous terrain with eminent mountain peaks, including K2 and Nanga Parbat, over 5 100 glaciers, numerous rivers, plateaus, deserts, lakes, valleys and plenty of natural resources. The historical and political history of the Gilgit Baltistan analysed in the research paper is that which emerged during the antiquity time up to today. It concentrates on how the region was affected by different ancient civilizations such as the China, Central Asia, the Arabs, the Mughals and local dynastic constructions. The history of Gilgit Baltistan was as follows the Megalith Builders, Dardic peoples, Scytho-Parthian, Kushan, and Huns peoples, plus medieval local dynasties, such as the Tarkhan of Gilgit, the Maqpoon of Skardu. The modern history of politics in the region began with the conquest of Sikhs and Dogras in 1840, and the setting up of Gilgit Agency in 1877 by the British against the Russian expansionist visions. This was put into contract in 1935 when the British leased the area to a period of 60 years. Control was restored to the Maharaja during the Second World War, but as part of the partition of India of 1947 Muslim elements of the Gilgit scouts with the aid of local chieftains and volunteers freed 28,000 sq miles of the Dogra rule on 1 November 1947 as part of Pakistan. However, it has been irresolvable to address the constitutionality of Gilgit Baltistan in 78 years working with a Karachi Agreement of 1949 as the local government surrendered to the federal government without direct representation and original conflict was frozen in the agreement. Later reforms were the Frontier Crimes Regulation, the Northern Areas Executive Council and the Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009 which sought to put in place political, judicial, and financial processes. These measures however, failed since they refused to give them a representation by the Pakistani National Assembly, senate, National frontier Commission and National Security Council. The Gilgit Baltistan Order of 2018 successfully centralized power on the Prime Minister, a step that created popular unrest. Though the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government was to improve political and the constitutional problem, later in the years, there were no real changes which were possible, and measures like the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly (Constitutional Status) Bill could not lead to the significant change.

Key words: Gilgit Baltistan, History, Political Development, Dominations. Rule,

Introductions

Gilgit Baltistan is a region which is to the north of Pakistan and occupies an area of about 72,496 square kilometres. The area is characterized by a rich mountainous terrain, comprising of Karakoram, Pamir, Hindu Kush and the western Himalayas distinguished by high mountain peaks like K2 and Nanga Parbat. It boasts of approximately 5,100 glaciers, diverse rivers, plateaus, deserts, lakes, beautiful valleys and abundant natural resources. The exotic culture, historical wealth of different sites and ethnically diverse people have served to draw in millions of tourists, invaders and missionaries that date back to the ancient times to the modern times.[1] The region is of high geopolitical, economic and political significance, it serves as a passageway between Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, and India. It has always existed within different empires like the ancient China, central Asia, Arab, Mughal, local dynasties and other ancient civilizations.[2] Historical analysis reveals that the region was among those that were subjected to various empires including ancient China, Central Asia, Arabs, Mughal, local dynasties as well as other ancient civilizations.[3] To the antiquity, Gilgit -Baltistan fell under a variety of empires, such as the Megalith Builders and the Dardic peoples, the Suthar-Parthians, the Kushans and the Huns. In the medieval times the local dynasties were having control of many regions of the area. After the fall of these local lords, the Sikhs and Dogras of Jammu merged into Gilgit Baltistan conquering it in 1840.[4] In the year 1977, British domination started as Gilgit was made an agency. In 1978, a British political agent, Colonel J.Biddulph (25 July 1840-24 December 1921) was commissioned. The main reason behind the creation of Gilgit as an agency was to negate the influence of Russia. The Crimean War had witnessed just one example of Russian expansionism in that Russia had increased its influence in several territories that caused British caution over this tendency. This would be followed by further events especially the World War 1 and the Bolshevik Revolution that impacted British strategic thinking. First, the British tried to oppose the socialistic ideology in India because the territory was in a strategic position near the Russian borders. On 1 April 1935, a lease of sixty years giving Britain control of Gilgit was signed between Britain and Maharaja Hari.[5] Another realignment occurred following the outbreak of World War 2, when the British gave the administrative authority to Maharaja Hari. On the other hand, the All-India Muslim League in the Indian subcontinent was a struggle to claim a separate homeland to Muslims, after a long struggle over the decades they achieved independence out of the British colonial power and the Hindu based nation which then formed the newly formed country Pakistan on the 14th of August 1947.[6] But the merger of Gilgit-Baltistan with Pakistan is a special occasion in the subcontinental history. Although nearby areas witnessed the mass politicization and movements to gain independence against the colonial rule and form a new Islamic state, Gilgit Baltistan was left largely unaffected by the obvious mass movements due to its isolated and off-putting terrain. However, just before the liberation, Muslim troops of the Gilgit Scouts, with the help of the local chieftains and volunteers, freed an area of 28,000 square miles forcing Dogra troops to retreat, and leading to an accession to the newly formed Islamic state.[7] Nevertheless, the constitutional and political role of Gilgit-Baltistan has been unclear for almost 7 decades. following the Karachi Agreement of 1949, the Kashmir issue, and its repercussions. This tri-party agreement between Pakistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and the All- Jammu and Kashmir Muslima Conference transferred the administrative powers to the federal government without the representation of local people and hence consolidated a position, which still has basic uncertainties about the citizenship, political emancipation and the rights of its approximate two million citizens.[8] Further developments and reforms began after independence on 1 November 1947, and these reforms included issues like the promulgation of the Frontier Crimes Regulation, also known as the Black Law. Perceived to offer

a political, judicial and financial empowerment framework, despite some administration being brought by later orders, such as the Northern Areas Executive Council and the Local Finance Ordinance, the 2009 Gilgit-Baltistan Self-Government and Empowerment Order appears to offer such a structure. The 2009 ordinance, however, was noticeably weak on imparting representation to the National Assembly, Senate, and important financial institutions (NFC, IRSA, EC, NSC) of Pakistan, which continued to aggravate identity crisis and created images of deprivation in the system.[9] Hope created by the 2009 order lost its strength because of the implementation of the 2018 Gilgit–Baltistan Order, which redevolved major powers under the Prime Minister. Protests against the 2018 order did not succeed to a large extent, and the Kashmir problem remained an indelible part of hopes to be constitutionally recognized and politically liberated.[10] As the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) assumed control of the federal power, it used constitutional status as a political tool in the Gilgit-Baltistan election campaign, vowing publicly that the PTI's victory would end the historic constitutional/political imbalance. PTI succeeded in the election, although it did not take decisive measures to put right the situation of Gilgit-Baltistan. The problem was never solved, with successive legislation acts such as the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly (Constitutional Status) Bill and the creation of a committee led by Prime Minister Imran, failing to put an end to the prevailing ambiguity; thus, seven decades on Gilgit-Baltistan has not been given its constitutional status and consequently, the government was never able to act substantively, about it.[11]

Literature Review

The study has been conducted by conducting extensive literature review of a very broad spectrum of literature that comprises scholarly articles, books, newspapers, periodicals and past empirical research. The publication of Dr. Ahmed Hassan Dani titled History of Northern Areas of Pakistan is thus considered to be the best source of information with references to the historical movement of Gilgit Baltistan. The monograph chronologically visits the region since prehistoric periods to the age after independence with more emphasis being on the sovereignty fight against the Dogra Raj.[12] In Gilgit Baltistan: Between Hope and Despair, Priyanka Singh provides an in-depth discussion of the position of Gilgit Baltistan in the overall Kashmir issue and explains why the latter deserves new attention and a specific strategic vision. Another topic that the author addresses concerns the involvement of China into the region, its strategic applicability to the regional discourse and how this applies to the Indian claims over territories.[13] The Gilgit Baltistan Conundrum: The Dilemmas of Political Integration by Sajjad Ahmed studies the situation and history under which Gilgit -Baltistan sought to have autonomy and become a part of Pakistan. The research gives the emphasis to the ongoing conflict, political challenges, constitutional ambiguity and the efforts of Pakistan to transform the region into an area of province.[14]

In the book, Amanullah Khan, Gilgit Baltistan, a Disputed Territory or a Fossil of Intrigues, challenges the status of Gilgit-Baltistan as a slum area of through history and whether or not it is a disputed area or a conspiracy in history. This work examines the geopolitical processes that have influenced it to attain its present position providing details about its controversial history.[15] Delusional states: Feeling Rule and Development in Pakistan Northern Frontier by Nosheen Ali explores the complex associations between the concepts of governance, affect and development in the Northern regions of Pakistan. This is because Ali explains the influence of state policies on emotional experiences of local populations, and thus determines the political dynamics, and also introduce a complex examination of the interactions between emotions, government systems, and development processes.[16] The historical narrative, geographic importance, and freedom movement in the region are put forward in the article by Sikandar Khan Baloch, in the most precise way, in his article, Giligit and Baltistan: In the Wonderland of Asia.[17] The Gilgit ert Rebellions/ written by

Major William A. Brown, records the struggle of the freedom and how the author played a significant role with the Gilgit Scouts in the year 1947.[18] The Urdu-language book, Gilgit Baltistan ki Tareekh, Saqafat, or SiyaSaht (Gilgit Baltistan History, Politics, and Tourism), by Alam gives a comprehensive chronicle of traditions and culture of the region as well as its historical evolution.[19] The article The Tragic History of Gilgit -Baltistan since 1947 by Satinder Kumar Lambah provides an in-depth account of the historical development, system of governance and problems of the area since 1947. The story focuses on the political uncertainty, political governance, sectarian violence, demographic changes and the effects of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The author puts the uncertain position of Gilgit-Baltistan in context of the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir, where there is neither a clear demonstration of the national or state identity, which worsens the problems of governance. The sectarian violence has been named as a new emerging issue that is further heightened by the arrival of external settlers and unemployment levels. Nevertheless, the paper does not delve deeper into discussing the thoughts and desires of Gilgit-Baltistan residents, which is more of a macroscopic picture, which could not be enough to reflect the sentiment and the desire of the local community.[20]

Arhama Siddiqa in her essay, Reforms in Gilgit-Baltistan, is a detailed summary of the politics and incompatible stands surrounding Gilgit-Baltistan, with Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order of 2009 and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Although it is an in-depth analysis, it fails to bring in the views of local inhabitants. The paper explores the position of the political leaders of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), India and Gilgit-Baltistan but does not include actual contributions of the people living in this region. Identifying these local aspirations, issues, and expectations is critical to defining the socio-political situation and possible barriers to the policy implementation.[21] The Gilgit Baltistan Reforms by Ershad Mahmud is a thorough overview of the history, politics, and constitutionality of the Northern Areas of Pakistan especially Gilgit -Baltistan. The paper is devoted to the reforms presented by President Musharraf in 2007, which cover the political and administrative changes. It defines the strengths which include a detailed analysis of the previous reforms, strategies, and effects on Kashmir conflict, and economic and social changes involving the development initiatives of Pakistan-China. However, the author lacks an adequate analysis of the law reform and the implications of such a reform to the local legal system.[22] The article Law, Governance, and Culture in Gilgit -Baltistan by Livia Holden is a substantive overview of the historical, legal, and cultural aspects of the region. The author mentions critical situations that have characterized the disputed status of Gilgit -Baltistan, disputes jurisprudence on the constitutional rights, and mentions modern megaprojects like Bhasha Dam and CPEC. In his suggestion to de–colonize the anthropological analysis of Gilgit-Baltistan, Holden offers to include the work of scholars established in the region. The given view provides opportunities to conduct new studies on ways to harness cultural expertise and reconfiguring legal frameworks and the governing practices.[23] The article, Gilgit Baltistan, Identity Crisis and a Constitutional Limbo by Sajid Ali discusses the complex matters of history and constitution related to Gilgit-Baltistan. It also shows how the people are struggling to acquire constitutional rights and also the problem of the region being linked to Kashmir. The paper has determined a number of themes: the historical context, geopolitical relevance of the region, the legacy of the Silk Route, and changing relevance of CPEC. It examines the constitutionalist uncertainty because the alleged independence in 1947, especially the connotations of the Karachi Agreement. The author also covers different stakeholders' perspectives and says that there are no elaborate political and social developments in the present. In order to enhance the analysis, further examination of political mobilization over the recent years, local reactions towards leadership and international stakeholders is required.[24] The article by Jamil Nagri, Tariq Naqash, and Zulfiqar Ali, Pakistan: Gilgit -Baltistan in a Constitutional Limbo offers an in-depth analysis of the historical, political

and constitutional complexity of Gilgit-Baltistan in the national context of Pakistan. The authors chronicle the path of the region starting back in the nineteenth century in the integration of the region into the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the events of the accession in 1947, and the following constitutional predicaments.[25] The paper Constitutional Rights for GB by Afzal Shigri discusses the historical background of the Gilgit-Baltistan campaign to get constitutional status. The author emphasizes the armed resistance to the Dogra rule, the further joining to Pakistan and the threat of the region which persists. Although the Shigri speaks about the attempts of the Pakistan People's Party to relax the repressive rules, the author mentions the fact that the denial of the constitutional rights to Gilgit-Baltistan inhabitants is still observed, and the problem is connected to the overall dispute concerning Kashmir and the constitutional insecurity of the region.[26] The paper, titled Gilgit Baltistan and the New Great Game by Aziz Ali Dad highlights unusual political position of Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan and calls upon the need to amend the constitution and reorganize institutions to preserve the social and political freedoms. Focusing on the fact that the legality of huge projects like CPEC cannot be implemented until strong legal frameworks are in place, the author alerts of the possible exploitation case, and the local political leadership should take the initiative to provide fair development that would be in harmony with the contemporary values.[27] The thesis presented by Colonel Imtiaz ul Haque, which is titled Determining the Political status of Gilgit Baltistan and Future Perspectives, looks at the contemporary history of the region. He analyses the strengths and weaknesses of 2009 Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Government Order that show conflicting opinions of society. Colonel Haque asserts that Gilgit Pakistan has the prospects of boosting the economy of Pakistan in terms of hydroelectricity mining and natural resources. His study is a premonition of issues in governance that can give voices to political awareness of people in Gilgit - Baltistan.[28]

In his thesis Analyses the empowerment and self-governance reforms in Gilgit-Baltistan in 2009, Noushad Ali uses a discourse analysis of the Self-Governance Order in order to determine its effect on socioeconomic development in the neighborhood.[29]

The thesis or paper by Hamna Tariq titled The Permanent Liminality of Pakistan Northern Areas: The Case of Gilgit Baltistan explains the history and the political background of the Northern Areas of Pakistan, which lacks provincial status in Pakistan, is ambiguously tied to Kashmir, and has had grievances about this.[30] According to a thesis by Zakir Hussain, the thesis is called Geostrategic Significance of GB, in which the author examines the political, economic and security interests of Pakistan, India, and China. He focuses on the strategic value of Gilgit-Baltistan and the role played by Chinese and Indian interests on this front, such as media proliferation in India and claims of Gilgit-Baltistan's role in Indian and Chinese economical joint ventures with the local communities.[31]

History from Pre to Modern

The Early History

In his monograph A History of Western Tibet, A.H. Franke designates a people he calls the Rock Art People as the oldest inhabitants of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB).[32] He dates their settlement to the 5th millennium BCE, and describes them as hunter-gatherers who ate animals as food, had a cosmology based on shared spirits, but wore pieces of their flesh to regulate their body temperature. They worship mountains which defines their religious practice. Franke believes that the people in the area were indigenous when there is no evidence pointing to the boat building that could allow the cross of the Indus River.

The Megalith Builders

The megalith Builders are considered to have moved out of Swat and Chitral and with them the technology of stone cutting. They built houses of mud-bricks along the banks of the rivers and created irrigation drains known as Megalith Water Challan. They had material culture in terms of copper, bronze, gold, iron and silver tools of quotidian use. They counted on the domestic animals like horse, cattle, goat and sheep as the majorly dependent elements of their economy. The Megalith Builders have been segregated into two separate streams: the former being directly related to Chitral, inhabited the Pamir areas; the latter were related to Swat and occupied the areas of Chilas, Darel and Kohistan.[33]

The Dardic People

In his article The Dards and Connected People, Professor G. Tucci records that the Dardic people existed in GB during the Achaemenian reign that took place in the 4 th century BCE. There are two sub-groups of Dardic; Shin and Yashkun. People along the same lines of Hunza and Nagar are termed Yashkun, and people along the same lines of Gilgit, Chilas and the areas surrounding them are referred to as Shin. The Dardic peoples also traded with the partnering nations in Central and East Asia and their main mode of exporting was mined goods and gold.[34]

Scytho-Parthians

In 1 st century BCE, the Scytho-Parathians took root of what is presently called Gilgit-Baltistan. They had their own culture, their political and social system. They also had close relationships with Taxila and learned a lot about governance and established interregional relationships. They were more Buddhist than Christian.[35]

The Great Khusana

Khusana had been established between 1st to 3rd century A.D. By then when it was expanded to GB the Khusana had already established control over China and Central Asia. The first emperor who widened the scope of the Kushans was Vima kadphises who introduced a system of administration, promoted agricultural activities, and also new cultivars and fruits. Gold was oversees as monetary unit in this region in the first place. The empire traded via the Silk Road promoting Zionist culture and Zionist education.[36]

The Post-Khusana Period

The Khusana empire collapsed at the end of the 3rd century A.D. after which the whole region was annexed by Sasanians of Persia. The Sasanians established a new paradigm of culture and civilization and ruled until the 3rd and 4th centuries. By the start of the 5th century, local empires had declined and Hunas began to conquer the territory.[37]

The Hunas

The downfall of the Sasanians saw the Hunas forming an empire. The ethnicity of the natives is controversial; many authors have argued on their origin. Some claim that it had a Chinese origin but most maintain that the Hunas were a derivative of tribes in Central Asia. The Huna influence erupted eventually under de facto rule after which there was a short lived 40 years' rule by the Shashi and Dardic rulers.

Medieval History

Professor Ahmed Hassan Dani argue that Gilgit was still home to the Palola, Patola or Balol throughout the 6th, 7th and 8th centuries. These rulers, according to Dani, had a good relationship with the Tang emperor of China and the Kashmiri ruler in terms of diplomacy. During the medieval

era, the State of Bolor was divided into two regions, the eastern region which was called Great Bolor and with its seat at Skardu, Vault, and the western region which included Gilgit, and was called Little Bolor. The history of Gilg changed in the 8th century when Arab armies invaded central Asia and took over most of the territories. On the other hand, Tibetan communities spread to the neighboring territories. The position of patola was undermined and the Turks requested the help of the Tang court; the emperor of China on his part assisted the Turks and Patola Shahis. In 750 the Tibetan army lost the war, and the Patola Shahis were restored to the Chinese possession. In the larger region of Baltistan, the Tibetans had retained major parts of the region. The history of the ruling families in different places within area of Gilgit Baltistan, during the medieval period was as follows: [38]

a. Tarkhan of Gilgit.
b. Maggot Family of Nagar.
c. Ayash Family of Hunza.
d. Kator Family of Chitral.
e. Khush Waqt Family of Yain and Masuj.
f. Brushaal of Puniyal.
g. Maqpoon of Skardu.
h. Rajas of Rondu, Astor, Kartaksha (Kharmang) and Tolti.
i. Amachas of Shigar.
j. Yabgus of Khaplu.

Modern History

Professor Dani, in his opinion, declared the modern age in the South Asia region when the Europeans were becoming prominent colonial powers. The United Kingdom was able to expand its colonial territory globally even into the South Asian regions which were absorbed into the British Empire. The dynamic as well as the political, social and economic aspects of British domination in the 18th and 19th century were after the breakup of the Mughal Empire during the preceding 18th and 19th centuries. The trading activities of East India company shifted to the expansion of imperial interests which culminated in domination of Indian affairs by the British Empire. [39] India is a country that has experienced political instability and this played out in the history of GB when the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh gained control of Punjab. Ranjit Singh tried several raids into Kashmir; in 1819, having made some initial failures, Ranjit Singh achieved the help of the Hindu Brahmains and led a victorious campaign with the help of Diwan and Gulab Singh of Jammu. The Sikh army also defeated the Kashmiris army, thus, facilitating the Sikh rule in the country. In 1839, Ranjit Sing was killed amidst the increase of the family environment and exchanges among the military generals. Gulab Singh, the ruler of Jammu, became the most influential leader of that era dominating the North, who reached Jammu and North by the help of successive campaigns. He conquered Skardu and Ladakh in 1840.

In 1846 the British and the Sikhs ended up a war which ended in favor of British. Gulab Singh remained impartial and fulfilled the functions of a decoder in favor of the British. This saw the signing of two treaties; the treaty of Lahore and the treaty of Amritsar. The Treaty of Lahore was drawn up on 9 March 1846, and the following terms were decided upon: the Maharaja ceded all forts, principalities, rights and interests in the hill country between the rivers Beas and Indus including Kashmir and Hazara, to the Company on payment of one crore rupees, which gave them permanent control.[40] The clauses mentioned above were included in the Treaty of Amritsar that was signed on 16 March 1846 between the British Empire and Gulab Singh.

Gilgit Revolt

This time Gohar Aman was an outstanding leader of the opposition, unlike other leaders in GB. In 1841 he declared himself a king. The Degras army paid several raids to Gilgit which they were chased off by strong forces of Gohar Aman. In 1852, Amon and the locals with the help of Gohar Aman revolted against the Sikh-supported monarch, Karim Khan, and ousted him. Gohar Aman reigned up to his demise in the year 1860 where he is considered a great military leader in GB. After his death, in 1860, Sikh armies seized Gilgit and Gilgit was converted into Wazir Wazarat of Gilgit and Skardu. According to Josef Korbel in Danger in Kashmir, the contemporary history of Gilgit -Baltistan started when this land fell into the possession of Jammu and was ruled by Dogra dynasty. The Kashmiri people who had historically been Hindu but had followed the Islam religion during the last five centuries of the millennium were having complicated relationships with the Dogra rulers causing them to experience economic crises and famines.[41]

The British Domination

The Gilgit Agency was created in 1877. In the year 1878, Colonel J. Biddulph, a British political agent, was summoned to administer Gilgit and halt Russian influence and this was increased by the subjugation of territories by Russia during the Crimean war. The Agency had three administrative units: The first was the Gilgit Wazarat of Maharaja which included the southern part of the country till Astore and the northern slope of Burzil, the second one was the Wazir of Kashmir State that reported directly to British Government and included Hunza, Nagar, Yasin, Ghizer, and Chilas; and finally, the third administration was the Baltistan Wazarat of Ladakh, which had Skardu and Kargil.[42]

Lease of Gilgit-Baltistan

The British policy was changed after the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, as it changed the balance of geopolitical forces. The British were out to eliminate socialism ideology in India and GB was viewed very close to Russian borders, and this was considered a strategic issue by them. The British government signed an agreement with Maharaja Hari Singh on 1st April 1935.[43]

The Agreement contained:

Article I: The Viceroy and Governor-General of India has the power to take civil and military control of the territory of Gilgit Province west of the right bank of Indus, but not the territory belongs to the dominions of His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir.

Article II: Salutes and customary honours will be given on birth of the Maharaja, Baisakhi, Dussehra, and Basant Panchami and any other agreed occasion.

Article III: no British Indian troops will be sent in the State of normal circumstances through the part of the Wazarat of Gilgit Province in which we are not on the left bank of the Indus.

Article IV: The right to mining does not cease with the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir rather, the issue of prospecting licenses and mining leases shall be issued throughout the agreement period.

Article V: The agreement is to last sixty years of the date of the ratification and then end.

The British Domination End

By the end of the Second World War, the colonial powers were also weakened and the majority of the colonial peoples demanded to be autonomous. The British chose to leave the sub-continent which was partitioned into India and Pakistan. The 1935 lease treaty gave up the Gilgit Agency to the Maharaja of Kashmir and actually terminated British rule in the region.

War of Independence 1947-1948

World War II led to the political agitation of India as the population demanded being free of the British governance. Britain started to lose its strength, and hence it planned to hand over power to India. During 3 June the British declared that they would divide India into two states India and Pakistan. The region of Gilgit-Baltistan was geographically remote and therefore had little communication with the rest of India. Radio sets were few and far between among the rajas and mirs, access to newspapers was small, and the mass population had no clue as to what was going on in the country except for occasional reports of happenings in Kashmir. The partition of India came to the attention of Muslim people in the middle of June 1947 and to more or less an extent, the Muslim population supported Pakistan. On August 1947, the British viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, expired the lease prematurely and gave over the power to Maharaja Hari Singh. Maharaja Hari Singh urged the local leaders to decide the future of this region, insisting on the advantages of having an independent state that is not dependent on India as well as Pakistan. He later joined hands with India 26 October 1947. The majority of Islam people resisted the assimilation with India. On 31 October 1947, the Gilgit Scouts, led by Major Brown, rebelled against Governor Brigadier Ghansara Singh, he was also aided, with the help of Muslim sepoys, to arrest this officer and a short-lived movement to independence followed. On 1 November 1947, military and political local leaders proclaimed the formation of the Islamic Republic of Gilgit but the issue lasted fourteen days until the territory was handed over to Pakistan on matters of security and political interests. After the war of independence, Baltistan region was freed, on 14 August 1948.[44]

The Elusive Seek of Autonomy: Political Development of Gilgit -Baltistan 1947-2024.

Gilgit -Baltistan (GB), a mountainous and rugged region located in Northern Pakistan, has always remained trapped in a cloak of ambiguity over its geopolitical future and fate and its destiny is always intertwined with the Kashmir issue. On November 1, 1947, Dogra and the British rule were toppled by local revolutionaries who appointed Raja Shah Rah with the presidency, Mirza Hasan Khan with the military command and Lt. Ghulam Haider with the political agency of the new state, the Islamic Republic of Gilgit. This temporary independence, characterized by another flag flying over the house of the governor, was only 16 days long. Pakistan designated Sardar Muhammad Alam as political agent on November 17 and the people of GB willingly accepted the accession without any conditions. However, this accession established the precedent to decades of the centralized rule, marginalization, and the failed pledges of self-government. The story of GB in the analytical sense of the word indicates a trend of strategic integration by Pakistan, which focuses on security rather than the empowerment of the locals, in the wider context of the Indo-Pak war. This exclusionary practice is manifested in the Karachi Agreement of 1949.[45] It was signed on April 28 by Pakistani, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and the All-Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference representatives (with no input of GB) to divide the Kashmir-related affairs. Pakistan took over the defense, foreign policy, UNCIP related transactions, refugees, and more importantly, GB affairs. AJK was in charge of the management of its territory, whereas the promotion of referendum and political coordination were the tasks of the Muslim Conference. The fact that GB voices lacked elucidates a paternalistic structure the Muslim Conference had no legal capacity to act on behalf of GB, but the accord established federal superiority. This action although stabilizing the north Korean base of Pakistan angered the locals and created resentment that would lead to future movements. It emphasizes the manner in which GB was subjugated as a side body of Kashmir which did not give it the power to decide its fate.[46] The governance in GB changed gradually after its union as it was disrupted by its controversial status. The Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas (KANA) was created in 1950 and the region was renamed Northern

Areas and the responsibility changed to a federal joint secretary as resident by 1952. Another role played by the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), a law of the colonial era (1867) depriving of any right to appeal, legal representation or evidence is that it remained in effect even after independence. Created to subdue the tribal territories, FCR had suffocated the dissent in GB which was contrary to the unconditional accession of the region. This black law was a representation of continuation of colonial oppression existing in the Pakistani rule whereby control was overruled over justice. The nascent resistance was witnessed in the 1950s and the 1960s. In 1956, a league named Gilgit league was established by the independence hero colonel Mirza Hasan Khan which demanded the right and abolition of the FCR but was suppressed under the martial law formulated by Ayub Khan. Education and migration to the city gave birth to such organizations like the Gilgit Baltistan Jamhoori Mahaz and Tanzeem u Millat, which protested throughout Pakistan, making people aware of feudalism and repression. Although they were suppressed, these groups generated political awakening, and it would be a good example of how local grievances were enhanced by diaspora networks. An episode in 1971, in which protests against the dismissal of a school principal resulted in riots, cost lives and created arrests, but also gave way. The amnesty and reforms of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a turning point.[47] The period of Bhutto (1972-1977) introduced significant changes through the abolition of FCR, feudalism (Rajgee Nizam) and agency position. He abolished the state of Hunza and Nagar, abolished the State Subject Rule, created districts (including Diamer, Ghizer, Ghanche), and changed the Northern Areas Advisory Council (NAAC, 1970) into the Northern Areas Council (NAC) by the 1974 Legal Framework Order (NALFO). Economically, GB was incorporating with infrastructure in place like the Karakoram Highway and subsidies. But, analytically, these were de-facto actions, KANA and the federal capital still had the power, and the exposures of reforms as instruments of assimilation as opposed to actual devolution. This military rule by Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988), named GB as Martial Law Zone -E, formally asserted it as part of Pakistani territory with no connection with Kashmir. He nominated GB representatives to the Majlis-e-Shura he appointed to Majlis -e -Shura, and assured National Assembly representation, however, no contacts were received. In 1985 the report on the future of GB by a committee was not followed and showed empty promises in the face of sectarianism and strategic reasons.[48] Party-based elections were furthered under Benazir Bhutto 1st and 2nd periods (1988-1990, 1993-1996) in 1994, who increased NAC by 26 members, appointed a Chief Court and made advisors. Nonetheless, the KANA minister as the chief executive consolidated the powers and appointed deputies who were not elected could do little to check the bureaucracy. Locals were aggravated by this de-facto province status because reforms gave authorities to non-representatives. The case of Al-Jihad Trust v. 1999 (frdeail) The central focus was federation of Pakistan. It insisted on the right to a decree that included GB and removed taxes until home rule, the deactivation of non-military authority, and an independent judiciary, and a parliamentary representation within six months. Left to remain unfulfilled, it revealed the helplessness of the judiciary before the apathy of the executive, which was concerned with the Kashmir sensibilities.[49] The amendments of NAC in the year 1999-2008 by Pervez Musharraf changed its title to Northern Areas Legislative Council (NALC), increased its number of seats to 29, including that of women, and its powers to include law-making in 40 subjects. His 2007 package established a Legislative Assembly which made legislations on 52 items, redesigning roles. Accepted by Kashmiri leaders, it nevertheless institutionalized bureaucracy, unable to bring in autonomy.

the reforms of GB, which reached the Empowerment and Self-Governance Order of 2009 under PPP, have been gradual but inadequate prompting identity and rights discussions. Being linked to Kashmir, the progress is frozen, refusing to be a full citizen. This in-between continues to bring about dissatisfaction that demands real integration.[50] Incremental reforms that have been short of the expectations of Gilgit-Baltistan locals have characterized the process of Gilgit-Baltistan

seeking meaningful autonomy and constitutional recognition by Pakistan, creating a cycle of hope and disappointment. Another milestone toward the territory of granting provincial-like status was the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order (GBESGO) of 2009, proposed by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) under President Asif Ali Zardari. It was the first time when GB was called not Northern Areas but this time it was promised to be autonomous in political, financial and judicial areas. The order allowed the election of a chief minister and a governor to be determined by the president with the recommendation of the prime minister and the minister of the Kashmir and GB affairs acting on a transitional basis as Babar Sattar, one of their key advisors pointed out in briefings to the media. This was billed as the greatest administrative empowerment with the GB Legislative Assembly (GBLA) having the ability to make in-house legislations. However, on an analytical level, GBESGO institutionalized federal control thereby bringing out the conflict between the devolution discourses and the centralized dominance in the face of Kashmir conflict. The GBLA which included 33 members, 24 of whom were to be elected directly, six to be women proportionately with 6 to be technocrats, acquired the legislative powers over 61 subjects, including the presentation of the budget being similar to other provinces. It was made up of the GB Council that comprised of the federal parliamentarians, the minister of Kashmir affairs, the GB chief minister, and six members elected by GBLA. It was by empowering over 55 subjects in the third schedule that shared governance was symbolized by the council. Nevertheless, the three-layer system, including the federal authority regarding defence, foreign policy and U.N.C.I.P. endorsement resolutions; council its list; and GB government resolutions, was predominantly towards Islamabad. This control over local agency was eroded by the nomination by the prime minister of six members of the council without oaths or accountability together with the bureaucratic over-reach of the Kashmir Affairs Ministry. Even the chief secretary, though, held on to excellent power, and made elected representatives peripheral. This arrangement, alongside the progressive identity, in fact, concentrated power in the hands of non-locals, creating resentment and emphasizing how the discontented status of GB merited indirect rule.

With the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government, this intensified with the Sartaj Aziz Committee of 2015, which included some of the most important officials including the attorney general and foreign secretary. In its report of 2017, it suggested provisional provincial status based on the 1999 Supreme Court decision, with constitutional reforms in Articles 1, 51 and 59, which would take national assembly and senate representation, three reserved seats across the divisions of GB. It placed an emphasis on unifying de-facto, giving GBLA additional legislative authority further than the Article 142 issues, introducing the observer privileges to organizations like NFC and IRSA, and economic incentive through CPEC industrial areas as a way of managing disparities. This report was in line with the spirit of the 18th Amendment devolution, which required consultation by Kashmir Affairs Ministry. These proposals, which were analytically sound, namely meant inclusion without compromising the Kashmir position of Pakistan but its implementation was slow, showing some sense of bureaucratic inertia and geopolitical sensitivities. Based on this, but provoking controversy, the Gilgit Baltistan Order 2018, passed by a federal cabinet and announced by prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi when visiting GB, was based on it. The GBLA was also empowered, some three years later, by secrecy, for 62 subjects but vetoed by the prime minister in assembling legislature, imposing taxes and having the power to suspend rights struck on emergency--68 subjects within federal jurisdiction. Demonstrations followed directed by opposition parties, Awami Action Committee and traders to the level of strike, rallies and violence with the police in Gilgit and Skardu. Protesters found it retrogressive in contrast to GBESGO 2009 where the government referred to the cabinet of the local chief minister. This secrecy and federal encroachment helped towards the sense of colonial rule, setting off officialization with outrage on the part of the people.[51] The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)

administration led by Imran Khan brought forward expectations after the elections of 2018. Status and a provisional province status had been advocated by a committee headed by Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, which allegedly got the approval of Khan. Interventions by Kashmir leader however stampeded the process, citing effects on the Kashmir issue, by meeting figures like Foreign Minister Shah Mohammed Qureshi. In 2020, Khan made a visit to Independence Day about developing the country: tourism, skiing, apricot processing, hydropower, and subsidies instead of keeping constitutional commitments. Although the demand of province status, representation in federal institutions, and amendments without a change in Article 1 is unanimously passed by GBLA, there was no action. Further postponements to reforms were caused by the fall of the government through no-confidence in April 2022 and the indifference of the then administration of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). In 2024, GB limbo again came before the Supreme Court over a case concerning judges appointment with Chief Justice Qazi Faez saying GB didn't have any status, and could be included through referendum in the areas under Pakistan occupation, and referring to the Indian occupation of Kashmir.[52] The other attorney general used international conventions as obstacles. GB as of late GB still lacks full provincial status, even after announcements of 2020.

Conclusion

The history of the evolution of GB into the provinces of antiquity through to its present integration into Pakistan is a complicated account of existence, geo-political significance, and unreliability of institutional uncertainties. This historical nature of the region as outlined in this piece of analysis can be dated back to prehistoric society, manifested through rock-art imagery, admiration of the mountainous topography, and hunter-gatherer livelihoods in the fifth millennium BCE. These initial aspects evolved into successive periods of the social cultural organization, driven by the introduction of irrigation and metallurgical tools, betrayed by the Megalith Builders of Swat and Chitral, and trade connections between the peoples of Dardic origin in the fourth century 218 BC, as a result of which it is possible to substantiate the essence of the region.

Later generations were marked by the introduction of new influences: Buddhist patronage during the Scytho-Jacques, access of the Silk Road by Kushan access to the gold coinage replacing silver, and administration reform leading to a standardized system of gold coins. Sasanians organized other political archetypes but the Huns were only a short-term empire. The Patola Shahis, the dynasty which had maintained diplomatic relations with China and Kashmir as well as the local dynasties such as Tarkhan of Gilgit and Maqpoon of Skardu, also diversified their religion, and thus survived the onslaught of the Arab and Tibetan forces.

The period of colonization was a turning point since the region capitulated to the South Asian military rule of the Sikhs and Dogras in 1840 and became a constituent of the princely State of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1877, another British strategic action under Counter-Russian arguments caused an agreement of leasing in 1935. The event of independence of the Gilgit Scouts in 1947 and this followed by being absorbed by Pakistan represents a landmark moment in the self-determination but also brought forth unfamiliarity. The Karachi accord of 1949 signed without substantive local stakeholder involvement solidified the entrapment of Gilgit-Baltistan to the larger Kashmir wrangle, thus denuding it of part provinciality and full citizenship. This rather contradictory position has only served to continue a feeling of deprivation by resulting in partial reforms, oppressive nature of the Frontier Crimes Regulations, minimal autonomy brought about by the 2009 Empowerment Order putting no national representation in it, and further centralization under the 2018 Order a factor that only caused population dissatisfaction yet did not bring about any real change.

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