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Reorganizing Punjab on Administrative Lines: Potentials and Challenges

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Abstract

Pakistan is a federal state, but it has not developed the factual strength of federalism as it is observed in the developed federal states. Pakistan is a polarized state its society is divided ethnically-Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi and Pashtuns. All communities have been raising their voices for the distribution of fair resources. Pakistan, as a federal state, has not been able to provide equal economic dividends to its people neither ensured good governance owing to overpopulated provinces that have poor infrastructure and dominated by the feudal mindset. Provincial governments also have been inefficient in curbing the social and economic disparity—South Punjab reflects a picture of bad governance. South Punjab contributes economically, politically and to uplift the whole Pakistan, but the South Punjab remains ignored by the top political and bureaucratic establishment which is increasing the sense of exploitation among the people of Southern Punjab. The new province should be created to provide the administrative balance between the new and old Punjab which is lacking for decades. This administrative balance would [then] change the fate of the neglected region and its people.

Keywords: Province, Punjab, Pakistan, potentials, challenges, administrative balance

Introduction

The debate for the provincial arrangement and demand of a new provinces in Pakistan has been very central. However, this debate has often been marred by the political point scoring and has not been recognized as one of the major economic, political, social, and administrative issue in Pakistan. Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan, although contributes around “50% in Pakistan’s overall economy and has a sound economic and infrastructure base”, is faced with several impediments in relation to administrative efficiency in governance and management of provincial affairs. These efficiency challenges manifest most clearly in regional disparities within the province. The low performance of Southern Punjab on a range of socio-economic indicators is in stark contrast with those of central and northern Punjab. Formation of a new province primarily on administrative lines as a policy option offers tremendous potential in addressing this regional disparity in the province. While there are number of factors that have been debated to serve as a basis for formation of a new province such as political, ethnic, linguistic etc. This paper will mainly study the potential, prospects, and major impediments in carving out the new province on administrative basis.

The paper will tend to investigate the question like will the new Punjab reduce the regional disparity? The paper will also examine possible challenges towards formation of new province and the means to overcome them. Moreover, the study will highlight administrative and political problems in the formative phase of the new province along with the recommendations to navigate through those teething problems.

Pakistan's Constitution of 1973 has defined Pakistan as a federal state. Historically, Pakistan inherited a political base and borrowed the federal state system from British India. Despite its political instability – during civil and military governments– federalism, theoretically, remains intact but empirically it has been puzzling and complicated. The ruling elites have never practiced the proper character of 'federalism' in accordance with Constitution which strongly strengthened alienation among provinces and the different ethnic factions. For instance, fissiparous movements have been emerging in Sindh and Balochistan- hence Balochistan is experiencing unrest and increasing security challenges to the state of Pakistan.

Punjab plays pivotal role in national politics and South Punjab, in fact, determines the fate of a political party which forms the government in center. Few families [Saraiki and Balochi] from South Punjab have always been in power and remained politically dominated, few ruled as President, Prime Minister, and Governors. Some politicians retained powerful portfolios but failed to deliver for their constituencies and the people who elected them. The demand to make new province in Punjab was induced by the then government's decision after new name of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The new, politically, left an ethnic implication and the non-Pashtun community, Hazara, also demanded separate province. Saraiki, in South Punjab, has demanded a separate province their own. They believe Punjabi establishment is exploiting their resources- mainly in Lahore city (Rizwan 2011).

During Zardari's regime Parliament [National Assembly] approved a resolution in favor of a new province in South Punjab. The Punjab Provincial Assembly which was dominated by the opposition party in the National Assembly, Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), was a ruling party in the largest province of Punjab. PML-N party also granted a separate provincial status to the former princely state of Bahawalpur. Two national political parties, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and PML-N, agreed to make a "National Commission" to define the boundaries of the new province. During the last PPP's government (2008-2013) Punjab Assembly passed a resolution in May 2012 followed by the National Assembly which had approved resolution for the new province in Punjab- new province would be based on "certain administrative, geographical, historical, Constitutional and political fact" (Mahmood 2012). Resolutions in the both assemblies remained a political draft without implementation.

In resolution the respective legislators, from South Punjab, demanded to resolve immediate issues- distribution of water, judicious, geographical demarcation, and other Constitutional and legal administrative problems-people face in far flung areas in Punjab. Since the Punjab was being ruled by Shahbaz Sharif, the former chief minister, the demand for the new province was astutely ignored. Surprisingly, the legislators from South Punjab also remained silent. The then Prime Minister, Yousaf Raza Gilani, who belonged to South Punjab, did not play his role in making the new province.

PML-N came in power in 2013 and formed its government in Center and Punjab only, but it ruled over the whole of Pakistan. Consecutively elected, Chief Minister, Shahbaz Sharif called himself Khadim-e-Aala (servant of people). Khadim-e-Aala had exercised his powers to control Punjab- via video links (News 2016) - discussed administrative issues of Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, and Rajanpur through video links. During flood, he visited flood areas and preferred to spend his time with flood victims to show himself as a "caring and sympathizer of the poor people but after that he or his team

never resolved the problems and people were left to suffer”. Consequently, PML-N lost its ten years of power in elections 2018.

During elections 2018 Saraiki politicians established their own party, Janoobi Punjab Subha- Mahaz- South Punjab Province Movement (JPSM) and raised slogan for a separate province. President of SPSM, Khosro Baktiar, who was previously associated with PML-N said, “the party has been ruling more than 30-40 years kept South Punjab with itself not for the sake of federation but just to keep on ruling” (Dawn 2018). JPSM played a strong card of “Protecting South Punjab” from the old ruling family and strongly developed their consensus on one point agenda of carving a new province which influenced the voters’ behavior and changed the political game in Punjab and center because the new regional party had refused to be a part of PML-N and PPP as these two parties failed to give equal opportunities and due share to the people of South Punjab and region, as a result, South Punjab has been neglected and underdeveloped during these governments.

In election 2018 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) successfully engaged ‘Saraiki Nationalists’ those were leading JPSM (Ayaz 2018) under senior politician and the former Prime Minister, Mir Sher Balakh Mazari, promised to create Saraiki Province. After a year the PTI legislators, Sardar Nasrullah Khan Dreshak, and Samiaul Hassan Gilani, introduced the bill on a separate province of South Punjab. New province of South Punjab included; Multan, Bahawalpur, and Dera Ghazi Khan Divisions- a multi-ethnic territory- having own provincial assembly and the high court” (Anis 2019). during their governments PPP and PML-N had already tabled the “province specific” bill in the lower and upper houses.

What is New?

The PTI’s government committed to create a new province to meet the demand of Saraiki ‘Nationalists’ and promised to remove deprivation and sense of exploitation in South Punjab. The first thing which, in fact, shocked the political elites and even the people of Punjab- was the new face of Chief Minister of Punjab, Usman Buzdar, who hailed from a very remote area -Taunsa Sharif, the most neglected and backward area of Punjab. Buzdar was not acceptable to many seasoned politicians in Punjab because he had no experience and competence to deal with such a large populated province. But Prime Minister Imran Khan nominated him and challenged, indeed, the most influential and politically strong and old dynasties in Punjab- those demanded a separate province. Appointing Buzdar, a low-profile man, as Chief Minister of Punjab is believed to send a message to the traditional politicians that how an unpopular local politician would help to develop South Punjab which has been ignored by the previous representatives and the ruling class. Imran Khan also picked Dost Muhammad Khan Mazari as Deputy Speaker in the Punjab Assembly and two top positions were granted to South Punjab to remove the grievances of their people and guarantee the political inclusion of south Punjab.

During his first visit to his area, as Chief Minister, Buzdar said “I will alleviate the deprivation of south Punjab, especially of districts Rajanpur and Dera Ghazi Khan, as we are well aware of the problems of common dwellers of the area” (Birmani 2018). The people had great hopes but he disappointed common man, “there is no change. People have the same problems- poor infrastructure, poor governance, and no basic facilities for the folks” revealed by a local resident in Bahawalpur (Aqsa 2019).

What Went Wrong in South Punjab?

In Pakistan, particularly in Punjab, sincere efforts have never been made to resolve the people troubles. The governments explored and exploited the available resources in South Punjab and people residing in these areas live under poverty since decades. It is ironic that there has been an institutional decay, in the richest, vibrant and pluralistic province, which needed good governance the most. As

we know without the good governance state and society remain fragile, and vulnerable which eventually threatens the state and security. It is the lack of good governance which has promoted the culture of corruption. Strong check and balance have not been ensured by the previous powerful Chief Minister (s) of Punjab. Consequently, powerful individuals and groups- politically supported have emerged and they expanded their personal business and property. Some of them have grabbed lands and control transport to exploit the poor people in neglected and ignored South Punjab. Could these influential individuals be stopped by the new administration? This would be a great challenge. The previous government of PML-N launched Metro Bus service only to facilitate the people of big cities and small cities of Punjab remained neglected although they also pay direct tax like the developed cities of the rest of the country have the equal rights to enjoy economic dividends (Anis 2019).

Much of South Punjab has been facing formidable challenges. Undemocratic institutional culture, poor governance, economic and social inequity and inequality, high rates of unemployment, youth radicalization. These factors are enough to increase alienation in South Punjab.

It is a political dilemma that policy makers have been associating, themselves, with the different ethnic groups for their own political purposes and interests- this undemocratic political behavior diminishes the sense of equal justice” (Akhtar 2009). Though Punjab has never experienced ethno-political phenomenon - the influential families, groups and individuals always captured the highest positions and their vote bank never decreased even the candidates contested election as an independent or associates themselves with any political party. Like other provinces, Balochistan and Sindh, most voters are politically ignorant. KPK is the only province that has established its identity as the most ‘politically conscious province- they never trial their representatives time and again. As far as Punjab is concerned its people would not change their mindset and have kept on bringing the two parties in power in the province, PPP or PML-N. The election 2018, however, has changed the map of Punjab’s politics as PTI, the first time in Pakistan and Punjab’s political history, successfully broke the status quo and replaced the PML-N along with ruling party in Punjab.

For decades Punjab experienced nepotism and bad governance, consequently, the bourgeoisie class-landlords, and politicians, dominated and exploited the people of Punjab. Punjab has been under the political and bureaucratic influence and they ignored the most significant part of Punjab-South Punjab. The nexus between politicians and bureaucrats have immensely exploited the resources of South Punjab, the main source of revenue. Interestingly, the political representatives, from South Punjab, have been part of the governments during civil and military regimes. Sadly, they never developed their own constituencies. The feudal mindset deprived the people of their fundamental rights. Political representatives intervene in administrative department and they act like people’s masters not servant. This author has visited District Rajanpur, the most neglected area, which is also considered as the last part of Punjab. This district is a gateway for the inter-provincial trade and connectivity. District Rajanpur has been suffering from low rates of economic growth. This under-developed part of Punjab needs enough jobs, quality education and good hospitals. There are many neglected Districts and Division in Punjab which need to be developed. The PTI’s government is determined to develop this area which certainly would change the lives of people. Shahbaz Sharif also introduced the “Danish School System” but ignored public Schools that are owned by the state which has further made the condition of public Schools pitiful. However, “the present Punjab government, under Usman Buzdar, decided to close the Danish Schools to divert the resources to education and health projects” (Rizvi 2018) in ignored areas.

The previous governments failed to uplift the people of South Punjab rather they have been collaborating with influential people to get political support. South Punjab has massive potential but “powerful civil bureaucrats with political roots in Central Punjab” are promoting the culture of nepotism and favoritism. The PTI’s government and the Chief Minister of Punjab Buzdar, though, ensured the supremacy of law to punish those who have plundered the resources of Punjab. On the

other hand, it has introduced revolutionary policies regarding socio-economic change to uplift the youth and unemployment.

Opportunities and Challenges

South Punjab's deprivation and marginalization can only be mitigated with the reorganization of Punjab on administrative lines. These challenges are due to the incapacitate administration. One Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary may not be able to pay attention to such a large, diverse and heavily populated province. Dividing Punjab into two to three administrative units would be in the best interest of the people of Punjab. It apparently seems difficult, but it is not impossible. However, it will become impossible if weak parliamentary system prevails (Beg, 2017) where political parties have failed to deliver in accordance with democratic norms and values- ignore indisputable issues- public welfare and development.

It will be wise to use the term rightsizing (Asma 2018) of Punjab to cater the emotions of all the people residing in the most populous province of Pakistan. The creation of new province or even the provinces will provide the ample opportunities for the people of the South Punjab or south west Punjab. A new administrative setup will provide the peripheral Punjab to have its own separate budget which, hopefully, if utilized on providing better socio-economic opportunities to the people, would change the fate and long-term deprivation of the people.

The agrarian economy of South Punjab has the capacity to develop the region. The separate quota system for the province will further facilitate the young population to acquire better education facilities and have an equal distribution of jobs. The South Punjab's backwardness in terms of education restricted the youngsters to compete in the western Punjab and hold the bureaucratic positions. In the region for the longest time have been only two universities; Bahuddin Zikrya University and Islamia University Bahawalpur. These limited Higher Educational Institutions further created a sense of deprivation in the young population who were willing to acquire higher education. The education at the lower level is not less pitiable as compared to western Punjab. Data collected by the Punjab Development Statistics reveals the comparative analysis of the various level of education in different districts of Punjab.

From the total number of 1159 only 302 are in South Punjab and rest are in the other areas of Punjab that elucidates the unfair education system. A separate province with its own budget on education may help to shrink this gap of education and the province can have a better education system (Punjab development Statistics/Bureau of Statistics Punjab 2017).

Politically the region has also not given enough stature and representation in the government on the positions of Chief Ministers and governors relatively to the rest of Punjab. Since the inception of Pakistan, till now, only 3 Chief Ministers of Punjab have been from South Punjab. The administrative division in South Punjab also presents a very dark picture and cultivates the sense of deprivation in the native people of South Punjab. The staff recruited at divisional level in management plans in Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh, Rahimyar khan, and Multan were non-Saraiki (Alvi 2017)-Saraiki community, therefore, feels neglected or deprived of their socioeconomic rights. The corruption in the whole administrative setup further plagued the developmental projects. There is a huge disparity in South Punjab -in health, education and administration departments (Hashmi 2013).

Health facilities also present a bleak picture of South Punjab and demand the utmost attention of the government, though the PTI's government-initiated health care and educational reforms but it would take time to remove the people's alienation. According to Punjab Development Statistics 2017, out of 373 numbers of hospitals only 98 are in South Punjab which are not enough and are also not well equipped. According to Punjab growth strategy, Punjab, the only province, has the facility of well-

equipped and largest number of hospitals in Pakistan, but few hospitals are located in Southern Punjab and this geographical discrepancy of central Punjab and peripheral Punjab accelerated the grievances of South Punjab when they have to travel to the urban centers for health treatments. A report published in *Dunya News* mentioned that “Punjab government has reserved whopping Rs 36.75 billion for Lahore’s medical colleges and hospitals in the budget for the FY 2017-18 whereas a petty Rs17.75 billion has been reserved for the provision of medical and health facilities to the residents of Southern Punjab, thus widening the budgetary allocation gap by over 100pc” (*Dunya News* 2017). With the formation of new province and separate health budget, people of South Punjab will have health facilities available in their near cities and not only in developed cities of Punjab.

All the issues discussed above highlighted the legitimate demand for the geographical and administrative reorganization of South Punjab on the grounds that demographic pressure constraints the development of South Punjab on an equal and fair basis. A separate province with a separate administrative setup in Punjab would be able to provide opportunities to the marginalized population of south Punjab and would focus on the socio-economic problems and development of the region. The creation of the new province will not only improve the impoverished health, education and administrative setup, it is also believed that the new province will generate a good relationship among all provinces. Kalabagh Dam is the most disputed matter among the provinces. Sindh, KPK, and Baluchistan have shown their fears regarding its construction in the Mianwali district and consider it as a “threat” to these small provinces, creation of new province and inclusion of Mianwali in it will mitigate the tensions between these provinces over this matter (*The Tribune* 2019).

All the development plans associated with the reorganizing Punjab come with the baggage of obstacles and challenges demanding utmost attention from all the stakeholders including federal government, provincial government and local people of South Punjab. The formation of new province will be dependent on that how these challenges will be dealt.

This author interviewed a retired bureaucrat in Islamabad who said, “reorganizing or dividing a rich Punjab would not be in the interest of the strong Punjabi establishment which has ruled for years (Talat, 2019) -they have captures mainly high official positions in central and South Punjab. Local communities hardly enjoy high portfolios. These strong Punjabis [politicians, businessmen, and bureaucrats] would not allow a new province to emerge and challenge their monopoly over the whole Punjab. Punjab’s population, presently, is estimated at around 110 million, (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics Government of Pakistan) which is 53% of Pakistan’s total population. This major difference gives Punjab over-whelming, socioeconomic and political, power over the other three smaller provinces (Ayaz 2018) Balochistan, KPK and Sindh. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the mother tongue of around 17 percent of the people in Punjab is Saraiki. This means that there are 18.7 million Saraiki speaking people in Punjab, which makes the rest of Punjab’s population 91.3 million (<https://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/population-mother-tongue>). The creation of new Punjab would reduce the great economic share and the old Punjab would decrease down to around 44 percent- and the powerful Punjab’s strength in the National Assembly would be curtailed and its share in the federal divisible pool of taxes would shrink by almost 10% (Ayaz 2018) this political damage may not be acceptable by the elite of central and upper Punjab periphery .

The creation of new provinces will challenge the inordinate decision-making power, at present, Punjab enjoys over bureaucracy and military. Having the largest population among the provinces, Punjab’s quota in bureaucracy and military is relatively higher than other provinces and so as the influence over the major military and decision-making posts. Thus, the new province would challenge upper and central Punjab which would restrict any movement that will challenge their status quo. According to General Aslam Beg, “The four federating units do not provide administrative balance. Punjab alone constitutes 62% of Pakistan, causing serious weaknesses in the system of governance” (Beg 2017).

The other impediment is the rigorous Constitutional amendment required by the two third majority to create the new provinces-both the federal and provincial assemblies would pass the new resolutions to make the new arrangements of the provinces. The article 239, of Pakistan constitution of 1973, says that “A bill to amend the constitution which would have the effect of altering the limits of a province shall not be presented to the President for assent unless it has been passed by the Provincial Assembly of that Province by the votes of not less than two-thirds of its total membership.” This clearly states that after the approval from both federal legislatures’ houses bill must be passed by the concerned provincial legislature by a two-third majority. The serious problem lies in gaining such a large consensus at once and secondly, the ruling party does not want its power to be divided.

The other challenge lies in developing a consensus among the south Punjab political parties and the people that the new province needs to be created either on ethnic lines or on administrative grounds. The present movements in South Punjab for the creation of new province are assertive to have a new province on ethnic/lingual basis and not on the administrative. An active and the former Chairman of the Pakistan Seraiki Party (PSP), Taj Muhammad Langah, said “we want a new province comprising 21 districts on the basis of shared language, culture, and history, the proposed name of ‘Janoobi Punjab’ is out of the question, we will not accept any name other than ‘Seraiki province’” (Zaman 2012). Another Saraiki local party, Seraiki Awami Sangat Pakistan, also insisted on that the new province should be named “Seraiki province” not South Punjab (Express Tribune 2019). This ethno-lingual approach would fuel ‘ethnic politics’ and escalate ethnic conflict in Pakistan. The ethno-lingual reorganization of Punjab will incite all the ethnic, cultural and lingual communities, large or small, in almost every province to stand and demand for a separate province which will exacerbate the political situation and may create a political turmoil.

South Punjab has a heterogeneous society accommodating different ethnic groups. Not all the districts of South Punjab possess the Saraiki speaking majority. Mianwali, for example, comprises 74.17 percent of Punjabi’s and only 12 percent of Saraiki speaking population (Butt and Ahmad 2016). Vihari and Khanewal are the other districts that have Punjabi and Urdu speaking majority as compared to Saraiki speaking. This amalgamation of Punjabis, Urdu and Saraiki speaking population in South Punjab does not represent an ethnic cohesion that lay the foundation of a new province on an ethnic-lingual ground. The demand for the creation of a new province in South Punjab is not new- it is old and based on the socio-economic, political, and cultural grievances of the people of the region- sense of deprivation alienate the local population and widen the gulf between the state and society. The creation of a new province on these ethno-lingual grounds may create a situation like in KPK. After the 18th amendment, when the KPK was renamed on ethnic-lingual basis, the ethnic community Hazara in KPK showed a strong resentment and latterly demanded a separate province for them (Khattak 2013). The reorganization of Punjab may create a political rift if it has been organized on ethnic or lingual grounds and not on administrative.

Political point scoring between political parties also hinders the efforts of creating a new province. PML-N did not want to create a new province in Punjab on which it ruled for decades and any move to challenge their status quo in the past had been sabotaged by the silence of the ruling party of the province. In 2011, PPP, in order to abolish the monopoly of PML-N in Punjab showed an interest in creating Saraiki Province, the PML-N leader Shahbaz Sharif, however, responded with a warning of division of Sindh and specifically Karachi as a separate province, he said “ if you want to divide Punjab, divide Sindh as well” (The Express Tribune 2011). MQM also presented several proposals in assembly in the support of new provinces and easing out the constitutional procedures required in the creation of new provinces (Qamar Zaman 2021). These ventures of MQM’s are deemed as the first steps to divide Sindh (Tunio 2017). Same as when PTI raised the voice for

Another trend has also been observed that new province movements gained momentum during the election time period. The slogans of new provinces help the political parties to gain political support from these provinces. These types of point-scoring by political parties, either supporting the new province movement to end up the monopoly of their rival party in the province or to get the power, will hinder the formation of the new province.

Conclusion

Pakistan, in general, and South Punjab particularly have always experienced bad governance which increases social and economic disparity. Mismanagement and poor governance have greatly affected inhabitants. Pakistan is a Federal State but the four Federating Units, in Pakistan, do not provide administrative balance. Punjab alone constitutes 62% of Pakistan, causing serious imbalance, and weaknesses in the system of governance. It has been the poor performance by the ruling elite that forced the people of South Punjab to have their own province. Sadly, the Saraiki belt has always been neglected not only by the Punjabi ruling elite also by the Saraiki elite did nothing to develop the most ignored belt in Punjab. Political voices are always raised only to politicize this critical issue. In digital epoch modern and advanced technology - vibrant electronic and social media- has created great awareness among the people and they compare their areas with more developed cities. South Punjab, however, should not be based on ethnic identity [Saraiki]. The “New Punjab”, we think, would be acceptable to the all communities in South Punjab.

The hopes are high that the formation of new province will change the fate of the local people within months after creation. However, the new province/s will not initially be able to deliver but with the passage of time there is a high probability that it will meet the hopes of the people of South Punjab. The new province will face many challenges in its formative years. The availability of funds will be the first challenge for the new province as Pakistan is facing severe economic crises and establishing a whole new administrative and political setup demands a lot of non-development funds. South Punjab is primarily an agrarian base of Punjab and is landlocked, after having its own province it will be dependent on central Punjab, Sindh, and center to meet the demands of the people and establish an economic base required to run the province.

The Province will also face the problem of developing an administrative setup and cadre in the formative years. However, it could have asked the federal government to depute some officers there for some time until the province itself would be able to run the matters. The new Punjab will also have to check the uncontrolled influence of local elites and feudal who have been dominating the regional politics since the inception of Pakistan. If the new province formed, remains under the ‘elite capture’, there would be a meager probability that it could change the fate of the province. The regional political elite will also have to avoid using the ‘ethnic card’ for their political purposes and rather focus, primarily on the socio-economic development of the region.

Although the new province will face a lot of challenges in its formation and even after formation, it is the only solution left to curb the regional disparity between the South and West Punjab. The strong center and strong provinces now after the 18th amendment, have failed to deliver and the region is socially, economically and politically backward. The “New Punjab” is now the only hope for the native people for their social, economic, and political development.

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