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**Indo-Pak Partition and Ethnic Crises in Sindh****Wali Muhammad Shah**

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Sindh, Pakistan/ P. hD scholar at Pakistan Study Centre, BZU Multan.tarique.keerio@quest.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

1947 partition has played key role in tension between Sindhis and Muhajirs in Pakistan, focusing on the different events of 1988. This paper aims to uncover the historical roots, causes and consequences of the conflict while providing insight into its broader implications for Pakistan's political and social fabric. Studies that integrate both Sindhi and Muhajir perspective particularly with respect to the political, economic and social underpinning of the conflict. Existing literature often focuses on isolated narratives, failing to address the systematic factors contributing to such interethnic violence. The objectives of this study include analyzing the historical context of Sindhi-Muhajir relations, identifying the triggers of the historical partition, and assessing its long-term impact on ethnic relations, governance, and policy in Pakistan. Using a qualitative approach, this study draws on witness interviews, oral histories, and archival research. Key findings reveal that the events of partitions were not an isolated event but a result of systematic political, socioeconomic, and ethnic issues rather than a singular incident. Factors such as the quota system, unequal resource distribution, and political manipulation fueled tensions. The aftermath entrenched ethnic divides, undermined governance, and perpetuated cycles of violences. This study highlights the need for inclusive governance, merit-based resource allocation, and robust mechanisms to address historical injustice. Promoting interethnic dialogue and strengthening civil society's role are essential for fostering social cohesion. Moreover, this research provides a framework for policymakers and scholars to understand and address ethnic conflict in diverse societies.

Keywords: Sindhi Muhajir Conflict, Partition, Political Challenges, One Unit.

Introduction

In 1947, Pakistan was founded basis on a shared and the Two Nation Theory, which emphasized the unity of Muslims as a distinct nation deserving a separate state. While the religious identity aided in the unity and independence, forming a new state of Pakistan was challenging, interconfessional integration, which created a tension and conflicts among different groups. The regions that Pakistan joined had no similarities like ethnicity and cultural. These religious identities were not enough to unite the diverse state as evident in the separation of east Pakistan in 1971 (Rasool *et al.*, 2023). Pakistan's four provinces have their own culture, histories and languages leading to the tension within the country. Among these

provinces, Sindh has great cultural diversity as compared to the other provinces. It is important to first define the concept of ethnicity. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, an ethnic group is a social group or category that is set apart and bound together by common ties such as race, nationality, language and culture. Birthplace, relatives, religion, language, and shared cultural traditions are examples of known as Primordial Affinities and Attachments, which are core of ethnic identity. According to David Crystal, ethnic groups often experience a sense of self-defined inclusivity based on traditions that are exclusive to them and not shared by people from other groups (Siddiqi, 2010). Such traditions play a vital role in preserving the uniqueness and unity of ethnic groups. Since the late 1970's Sindh faced significant ethnic conflicts due to its ethnocultural diversity, weak democratic system economic inequalities and the rise of separatist movements in Sindh. Ethnic identity became a major influence in political and social life because of underlying issues, particularly in from the 1980's onward. When the Muhajir arrived in Pakistan they primarily lived in urban areas such as Karachi and swiftly rose to prominence in government, business and academia. Their urban background and relatively higher literacy rate provide an early edge resulting in their domination in important areas. Sindhis who have traditionally lived in rural areas, feel increasingly marginalized (Rasool *et al.*, 2023). Over time, this difference bred anger, as Sindh saw Muhajirs expanding prominence as threat to their culture, language and political identity. The situation worsened in the 1980's when Karachi became a focal point of ethnic and political rivalries. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), with its significant Sindhi support frequently clashed with the growing Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), which advocate for Muhajir rights (Waseem, 1996). The MQM, founded in the mid 1980's, acquired popularity among Muhajirs by addressing their concern about political and economic marginalization. On the other hand, Sindhi nationalist group became more vocal, fearing that their identity was being eroded by dominance of Muhajirs in Karachi. This tension grew into regular frequent clashes and protest making the city a hotspot of ethnic strife. These tensions reached a boiling point on September 30, 1988. One of worst event happened in Hyderabad history when a rally organized by Sindhi nationalist parties and became violent. A peace protest rally suddenly devolved into Chaos and clashes between Sindhi Muhajir groups the violence spread over a city. This resulted in losses of life, widespread destruction and loot. Due to mobs targeting each other's houses, businesses, and towns dozens of people were killed and several others were injured while sparking widespread fear and distrust across the province. The incident, often referred to as the 30th of September Hyderabad massacre, the tragedy revealed how precarious ethnic harmony is in Karachi and Hyderabad. It's not only deepened the divide between Sindhi Muhajirs but also highlighted the inability of the state's incapacity to resolve their complaints. While Sindhi nationalist stepped up their demand for the defense of their cultural and political rights, the MQM, which was already gaining political traction, used the incident to solidify its position as the representative Voice of Muhajir Community. The PPP, caught between its national agenda and its Sindhi roots struggled to manage the fallout of this tragedy. The 30th of September event represented the culmination of years of rivalry and mistrust between two groups that had previously lived in relative harmony. In the aftermath, both sides increasingly retreated into their ethnic identities, leading to heightened polarization (Seyyed, 1992). This event remains a grim reminder of how ethnic and political conflicts can tear apart a city and its communities. Despite various attempts at reconciliation in subsequent years, the impact of this incident continues to shape Karachi's sociopolitical. This research aims to analyze the causes, interactions and consequences of the incident on September 30, 1988, highlighting the delicate ethnic harmony in Hyderabad Sindh,

the role of ethnic violence contributing as a factor and long-term effects on the sociopolitical environment of the region.

Literature Review

The source used for this research includes both primary and secondary material. The review of books related to the topic and providing essential historical insight and understanding the issues. Waseem (1996), discuss the MQM political strategies in Sindh. The book explores the rise of MQM, the emergence of MQM and its socio-political impacts, and the dynamics of its partnership with other political entities in the region all are examined in the book. It explores the leadership, ideology and the function of the MQM in Urban Sindh, especially in Karachi. The book also highlights the internal and external factor that contributed to the party's success and its impacts on Sindh Political landscape. It offers thorough analysis of the political movements and tactics that have shaped MQM role in province. The study (Seyyed, 1992) traces his political journey in Karachi and his involvement in the All-Pakistan Muhajir Student Organization, (APMSO) and founding MQM in 1984. It discusses participation of students in election movement and their important role in promoting the rights of Muhajir community are covered. This book explores the significance of MQM and identifies the basic long-term causes of this incident e.g. Quota system, Urban Rural disparities, such as education and government sector in Sindh (Siddiqi, 2010). The political scenario at that time, focusing on MQM's struggle and faced challenges. Politics of Sindh Under Zia Government offers in depth examination of Pakistan federal political system. It provides the causes of ethnic tensions in Sindh, which align with background of Sindhi and Muhajir Conflicts. The dominance of non –non-Sindhis in Sindh and policies such as one unit scheme are discussed as a main factor that contributed to Sindhi's sense of deprivation. These issues laid the groundwork for the Ethnic conflicts in Sindh (Govindani & Menon 2026). All the parties, formation, aims and ideologies that work as the factor of the Ethnic violence and give a better understanding of political scenario at that time of September 30, 1988, in Sindh. Conflicts Dynamics in Sindh by Huma Yusuf and Syed Shoiab Husan, this study examines the complex and dynamics nature of conflict in Sindh, focusing on the tension between provinces traditional reputation of tolerance and diversity and the rising threat of extremism, crime and violence in general. Historically, Sindh has been a melting pot of diversity of culture, language and religion which makes it unique. his literature provide an insightful full foundation for understanding the dynamics of ethnic violence in urban Sindh. Specifically, Karachi and Sindh, from the mid 1980 onwards. Khan, (2020) argues the ethnic violence in Sindh cannot be reduced to simple communal differences among migrant groups. Rather it underlines how the process of violence itself in the formation and mobilization of ethnic identity, particularly through the time of MQM. The central argument of that the development of ethnic violence and ethnic identity politics are interwind challenges conventional interpretations of ethnic identity, as a purely primordial and communal construct. It turns the attention how political mobilization shapes ethnic conflicts, which is the key viewpoint that help us comprehended Sindhi-Muhajir Interactions more deeply. These points support the argument of the event on September 30, 1988. It implies that the incident results from political mobilization and a manipulation that strengthened ethnic division rather than just being a manifestation of pre-existing ethnic tensions.

Research Methodology

This research follows a qualitative approach, using both primary and secondary sources to examine the Sindhi-Muhajir conflict of September 30, 1988. The study focuses on historical analysis, exploring political, economic, and social factors contributing to the conflict.

Combination of archival research, literature review, and interviews ensures a comprehensive understanding of the topic based on (Delovarova et al., 2026).

Data Collection

Data is collected from secondary sources such as books, academic journals, newspaper articles, and government archives. These sources provide historical context and background information on ethnic tensions in Sindh. Additionally, primary data is gathered through interviews with experts, historians, political analysts, and individuals who directly experienced the conflict. These firsthand accounts offer valuable perspectives and insights into the events.

Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns, causes, and consequences of the conflict. Historical records and scholarly sources are cross-examined to verify accuracy and credibility. Interviews are transcribed and categorized based on key themes such as political influence, socio-economic factors, and personal experiences. This structured analysis helps in understanding the root causes, impact, and long-term implications of the conflict.

Results and Discussion

The Sindhi-Muhajir conflict traces its origin to the socio-political landscape of postindependence Pakistan. Sindh, the country's second largest province, has a history of ethnic and political unrest, notable between the indigenous Sindh people and the Muhajir group (immigrant). The history of province marked by the challenges of accommodating these varied communities, which included permanent Sindhi people as well as Migrants who arrived in the region, particularly during Pakistan's early year of establishment. The Challenges of Migration After Partition (Khan, 2020). The event that led to the partition of British India in 1947 were a turning point in the history of Subcontinent (Rasool *et al.*, 2023). As religious cultural and social issues culminated in formation of two independent nations- India and Pakistan. According to the 3rd of June plan 1947, areas with the Muslim majority given to Pakistan and where most Hindus were allocated in India. Both Punjab and Bengal were divided into two due to their heterogenous population, one side being primarily Muslim and other Hindu. 1As a result, Muslims from region under the Indian authority started to migrate to Pakistan in great numbers. Around 1.5 million registered migrants arrived in Pakistan which made it extremely difficult for the country in terms of settle large number of populations. The migrants also had to deal with cultural differences, such as differences in languages, customs, dress and other aspects of life (Kennedy, 1991). When people from different social, cultural and traditional origins are forced to settle in a completely different environment (Khan, 2020). This created so many challenges not only for migrants but also for the local population of Sindh. These challenges were most noticeable, during the first five to ten years after independence.

Migration to Sindh: Origin of Muhajirs

Being the nearest city to India, Karachi became one of the primary destinations for migrants, who were mostly Urdu speakers and had completely different customs from the Sindhi heritage. Most Urdu-speaking people from Delhi, Central Province, as well Gujrati-speaking people from Rajputana, and Bombay, migrated to Karachi, which was the capital of Pakistan at that time (Govindani & Menon 2026). By May 1948, Karachi had become the center for the middle-class Muslim Muhajir refugees, who had left India, with 470,000 refugees significantly change city's demographics. In 1941 Muslims were 42 percent of Karachi's population but had grown to 96 percent in 1951. From 1941 to 1951, the city's population had tripled. The most common language in Karachi is now Urdu; Sindhi was the mother tongue of 51 percent population of Karachi, but that number had dropped to 8.5%. Up to 1952, 100,000 Muhajir

migrants landed in Karachi every year. Sindh provided Sfood shelter to migrants, and a peaceful settlement occurred. Before partition, urban areas in Sindh were primarily populated by non-Muslims, therefore the entrance of Muhajirs helped counteract the demographics changed in Sindh. Over a time, these migrants were known as “Muhajirs”, which is an Arabic word meaning migrants. Beyond Karachi Muhajirs settled in other important cities of Sindh such as Hyderabad, Sukkur and Mirpur Khas. With their growing presence, they developed a unique ethnic identity, and their influence on Pakistan's politics over a time. Their path from displaced from individuals to becoming a politically recognized group, marking an important chapter in Pakistan history, changing the social, political fabric of Sindh for future generations (Siddiqi, 2010).

Social and Political Changes in Sindh

The migration of Muhajirs to Sindh, transformed the social and political landscape of the provinces. Muhajirs came and settle in urban areas of Sindh. It was the big problem for Sindh Government to settle and accommodate. First difference took between the federal authorities and Sindh administration on the issue of Muhajirs. Karachi was chosen as the capital of Pakistan. The Sindh Government, led by Chief Minister Ayub Khuhro, initially distribute planned to distribute migrants across the province. However, they lacked of facilities and resources, they were unwilling to migrants. As a result, Khuro's relationship with Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. The division between Federal and Provincial administration was further highlighted by disagreements over the distribution of evacuee properties and the upkeep of peace and order. Central Government decided that Karachi would become under control of federal Government and separated from the rest of the province. Sindhi Nationalist objected but they were too weak to arrest any pressure on Government. It became the core issues for Sindhis; 3People of Sindh opposed the division of Sindh. Sindh Muslim league and other parties were opposed it. the representative of Sindh in constitute assembly raise their voice against the separation of Karachi and passed the resolution unanimously on 2nd February 1948. 4Before that the Sindh Musim League council passed a strong resolution against the proposal. Sindh Awami Mahaz against the proposal and arranged the meetings and the demonstrations in Karachi and other cities of Province. The tension in Sindh escalated due to settlement of Muhajirs, disputes over evacuee properties, the separation of Karachi and the marginalization of Sindhi language. 5The Sindh Awami Mahaz, led by G.M. Sayed, strongly opposed Karachi separation from Sindh, resulting many of its member being arrested and tortured. The Sindh Hari committee also expressed its disapproval bypassing a resolution against the separation of Karachi on May 30-31, 1948, in Ratodero. The day of Karachi was a protest day in Sindh on July 2, 1948, against the Federal Government decision. 7Ayub Khuhro the Chief Minister of Karachi was the vocal opponent of Karachi's separation. His opposition led to his dismissal by the Governor of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah on April 26, 1948, Jinnah authorized the special emergency powers granted under the Government of Indian Act 1935, as amended by the Pakistan Provisional Constitution order 1947. After Khuhro's removal, Pir Ilahi Bakhsh took over as a Chief Minister of Sindh. He fulfilled all the orders of Federal Government. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, a Muhajir leader with strong influence over the Muslim League, was instrumental in convincing Jinnah and the Constituent Assembly to separation of Karachi from Sindh. On July 23, 1948, the Governor-General of Pakistan used his powers under the section 290-Aof the Independence Act 1947, to formally bring Karachi under the federal control through the Pakistan (Establishment of the Federal Capital) Order, 1948. The separation of Karachi had long- term socio-political impacts on Sindh. One of the most immediate impacts was the erosion of Sindhi language and Identity in the city. The newly founded Federal

University of Karachi has removed Sindhi as a language option for examination. The Federal Secondary Education Board implemented a curriculum that marginalized Sindhi pupils, making them to choose between English and their own tongue. Many Sindhi-medium primary schools in Karachi were converted to Urdu or closed, reducing access to Sindhi education. The Muhajir community with a literacy rate of 70% compared to 10% among local Sindhis, quickly secured key positions in government and the public sector. As a result, many Sindhis felt economically marginalized, believing that Muhajirs were being favored in employment and governance. This led to demands for a separate quota system to ensure fair representation at the national and provincial levels. Language became another major point of contention between Sindhis and Muhajirs. Sindhi nationalists advocated for Sindhi to be recognized as the official provincial language and insisted that it should remain the medium of instruction at least primary level. However, the Muhajir community viewing Urdu as the symbol of national unity, opposed this demand and insisted that Urdu be the exclusive language of teaching at all education levels. The first eight years after independence laid the foundation for deep-seated grievances among Sindhis. The rapid settlement of Muhajirs, uneven access to employment and education, the separation of Karachi, and declining the importance of Sindhi Language all led to a sense of alienation and resentment. These unsolved issues would eventually lead to political and ethnic conflicts determining Sindh's future for decades.

One Unit Policy

The introduction of the one-unit policy by the Pakistan government in 1955 became a major turning point of Sindhi nationalists. This policy aimed to combine the four provinces of West Pakistan into a single administrative body, while considering the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as a distinct entity. The central government portrayed it as a move towards national unity and administrative efficiency, but in Sindh, it was met with strong resistance. For Sindhi nationalists, one unit was a direct threat to the autonomy of Sindh. They regarded it as an attempt to marginalize smaller provinces while consolidating power in the hands of Punjabi dominated central government. The elimination of provincial autonomy meant that Sindhi's distinct identity, language, and administrative structure were subsumed into the greater West Pakistan context. The Anti-One-unit movement scheme emerged as a response to the controversial One Unit, which aimed to combine provinces into a unified unit (Khan *et al.*, 2020). Politicians opposed this policy with many political parties from Sindh, N.W.F.P, and Baluchistan joining the cause. The Azad Pakistan Party and Sindh branch of the Awami League also supported the movement. Under the one-unit system, Sindhis faced discrimination, with large numbers of Punjabis and Pashtuns migrating to Sindh, and increasing the fears about the loss of Sindhi's political and cultural identity. Hyder Baksh Jatoi responded by promoting Sindhi rights and creating the "Jeay Sindh" slogan. Muhajirs and other non-Sindhi groups, however, rejected this; Moulana Modoudi even declaring it mean the death of Pakistan. Meanwhile, Z.A. Bhutto began using Sindhi nationalist sentiments in his speeches to rally support. On 4th March 1967, the students of the University of Sindh marched from campus to Hyderabad city. Protest was subjected to lathi charges, tear gas, and open fire by police and law enforcement (Seyyed, 1992). Many students were injured and arrested. This day became the National Day of Sindh and was celebrated. The agitation became a part of the movement against the president Ayub Khan. It was spread throughout the country. As a result, President Ayub Khan had to resign and Yahya Khan was appointed as Head of the State and Chief Administrator of Martial Law. He abolished the One Unit and restored the previous status of the provinces of West Pakistan on 31st December 1969 which became effective on June 1, 1970. He also declared the first General Election of Pakistan in 1970. However, for Sindhi Muhajir group, the

aftermath of the One-Unit abolition created new challenges. While the restoration of provincial autonomy and the growth of Sindhi nationalism boosted the Sindhi people it also raised concern among Muhajirs about their position in the Sindh (Ali, 2024). As Sindhi nationalist stepped up their attempts to promote Sindhi language, culture, and political rights, Muhajirs felt increasingly marginalized, especially when the attention shifted towards the dominance of Sindhi identity in the region. This era marked the beginning of a complex and ongoing struggle for both Sindhi and Muhajir communities to define their position within Sindhi's political and cultural framework.

Fall of Dhaka and Its Impacts on Sindhi-Muhajir Relations The fall of Dhaka in 1971 reshaped Pakistan's ethnic politics, particularly in Sindh. Sindhi nationalists interpreted it as evidence that smaller provinces may be marginalized by Punjab centralized government. Drawing similarities with Bengali issues, they stepped up demands for autonomy, cultural preservation and economic rights. For Muhajirs, this period marked a decline in their socio-political dominance. Before 1971, Muhajirs held dominant position in administration, business and politics because of their close alignment with central government.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Policy Towards Muhajirs Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto rise as Pakistan's first Prime Minister from rural Sindh transformed the political and economic environment for Muhajirs. The muhajir families like Bohra, Khoja, and Memon were the vanguard of the industrialization and were dominant in the business of the country. During 1960s, President Ayub Khan's economic policies led to significant wealth accumulation for many. Z.A. Bhutto challenged their dominance by nationalizing industries in the 1970s. He declared Sindhi as a compulsory language in Sindh at par with Urdu. The muhajir did not like this move and violence broke out in Karachi and Hyderabad. Sindhis got the jobs also in Islamabad specially in education and health department (Waseem, 1996). In 1972, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's nationalization policy took control of key sectors, including factories, financial institutions, and schools. This shift aimed to redistribute wealth and prioritize Sindhis got the jobs in many companies after the implementation of the policy of nationalization also mentioned Under the PPP government many Sindhis got jobs in the nationalized sectors. that many Sindhis benefitted from this policy, improving their socio-economic standings. However, this changed weakened the Muhajir community's influence in business and industry, escalating ethnic tensions between Sindhis and Muhajirs.

20 Zia-ul-Haq's Policies and The Rise of MQM The policies of President Zia-ul-Haq were also instrumental in creating ethnic violence in Sindh province because it suited him to perpetuate his rule. As he earlier did in Punjab, now he wanted to create political leadership which would challenge the supremacy of the PPP in Sindh. Zia policies further entrenched the ethnic divide by emphasizing Islamization, which many Sindhis viewed as a threat to their cultural and political sovereignty. The military dictatorship also promoted Muhajir political power in urban Sindh, further marginalization the Sindhi minority. As a result, tensions between Sindhis and Muhajirs rose to unprecedented heights, setting the stage for long term political and ethnic strife in the province.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the 1988 Hyderabad massacre and the broader Sindhi-Muhajir conflict were not sudden, isolated outbursts of communal hatred, but rather the tragic culmination of decades-long, systemic political, socioeconomic, and institutional friction. Beginning with the demographic shifts and administrative fallout of the 1947 Partition such as the separation of Karachi from Sindh and early disparities in literacy and civil service representation the seeds of mutual distrust were planted early. Subsequent policies, including the centralizing "One Unit" scheme, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's nationalization drive, the introduction of the quota system, language disputes, and General Zia-ul-Haq's political maneuvering,

progressively deepened the rift between the rural-based Sindhi population and the urban-based Muhajir community. The findings emphasize that when political elites and state structures manipulate ethnic identities for short-term political gains rather than addressing core economic, linguistic, and governance grievances ethnic polarization reaches a volatile tipping point. In the case of Sindh, the retreat of both groups into defensive ethnic identities (exemplified by the rise of the MQM and vocal Sindhi nationalist movements) severely eroded the state's capacity to maintain social cohesion and offer neutral governance. Ultimately, the paper underscores that achieving long-term peace in Sindh requires moving beyond superficial attempts at reconciliation. Sustainable stability depends on structural reforms, including inclusive governance, merit-based and equitable resource allocation, transparent quota mechanisms, and institutionalized interethnic dialogue. By addressing historical injustices and dismantling the incentives for ethnic political manipulation, Pakistan can begin to heal its social fabric and build a framework for managing ethnic diversity peacefully.

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