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An Ancient and Modern Narrative of Nationalism and the Concept of National Unity in Gilgit-Baltistan

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ABSTRACT

The Gilgit-Baltistan region is located in the north of Pakistan. This area, comprised of enchanting valleys and mountains, is surrounded by the dominion of three major global powers. On one side lies China, which not only stands out in the world due to its ongoing rapid development but also attains remarkable heights in terms of defense capabilities. On another front is Russia, endeavoring not only to reestablish its lost power but also aiming to once again hold the reins of world nations. On the third side, there is India, the world's second-largest population and the largest democracy, whose focus is persistently directed towards anti-Pakistan conspiracies. Moreover, India consistently includes the assertion of its eternal right to Gilgit-Baltistan in its day-to-day affairs.

Being encircled by these three global powers, the Gilgit-Baltistan region holds a position of sensitivity not only for Pakistan but also of significant importance for the inhabitants of Gilgit-Baltistan themselves. Furthermore, numerous global powers consider it imperative to incorporate this territorial expanse into their analytical studies.

In a time when the watchful eyes of global powers are consistently fixed on this region, any efforts initiated by nationalists will not only arouse suspicion but will also lack credibility in the eyes of the public. The article being discussed addresses the fact that the inclination towards nationalism in Gilgit-Baltistan has been cooling over time. While the sentiment of nationalism itself is not a negative aspect, the motivating factors that have hindered its development in Gilgit-Baltistan until now warrant consideration. Although certain impediments to the growth of nationalist sentiment have been identified within this topic, it should be acknowledged that this subject will never be confined within the scope of research.

Keywords: Gilgit-Baltistan nationalism, national unity Gilgit-Baltistan, identity formation Gilgit-Baltistan, regional pride Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

National sentiment serves as a milestone for any society. In regions where people shy away from nationalism, they effectively erase their existence in the world. This is because the spirit of nationalism reflects a glorious past, a clear vision of the future, and serves as a model for emulation. There was a time when humans were unaware of concepts such as nationalism, civilization, and culture. Their days and nights were spent in a migratory existence. If they had any concerns, it was solely about survival, which depended on access to food to satisfy their hunger. Therefore, wherever food was available, people tended to settle there. The lives of ancient humans did not significantly differ from those of animals, except for the mode of locomotion; humans required two legs for walking, while animals used four. (Niyazi, K. 2023, Maat, R. K. 1950) Despite being endowed with the blessing of intellect, human beings, as the most exalted of creatures, performed their daily tasks with a remarkably low level of thinking. Their social structure was fragmented, and power was attributed a divine status. The absence of national sentiment resulted in a significant gulf of alienation among them, leading to hostility. Conflict, animosity, spite, and uncivil behavior characterized their everyday lives. Consequently, there were no distinguishing traits or qualities in the people of that time that would allow us to claim they were the creators and forerunners of the modern world.

However, gradually, these individuals began to enter a new era of civilization. They moved closer to aligning themselves with national sentiments and establishing a centralized environment. They identified pathways to liberate themselves from the previous civilization, which lacked even a rudimentary concept of a cohesive society or a compact nationalism. Thus, these ancient humans shed the shell of a fragmented civilization and embraced a new era.

They had been endowed with a spirit of inquiry, dedication, and hard work; then came a sudden transformation that propelled them towards the heights of success, initiating a new trajectory for the world. Those who were initially unworthy of emulation suddenly became guiding lights for future generations. They then turned their attention toward nationalism and gradually succeeded in forging distinct identities based on race, religion, sect, and beliefs. Indeed, nationality serves as the primary source of human identity. When this attribute exists within a particular group of humanity, that group can reach great heights of success, as nationality represents a strong and enduring unity among the human collective. (Stalin. n.d.)

The origins of human life lie in the maxim that necessity is the mother of invention, and civilization and refinement were made possible precisely through these inventions. As human needs expanded, so did the drive and zeal within human temperament to explore and innovate, and with each new challenge arose a new invention. Put differently, this narrative can be articulated as follows: initially, humans trembled before difficulties and problems and lacked the resolve to resolve them; consequently, wherever obstacles and issues appeared, they sought to evade them and relied on easier alternatives to sustain their way of life. The journey from living in caves to the valley of civilization is the result of that very fear coupled with

determined struggle. It was also not feasible for humans to overlook every problem. And even if they had attempted to do so, for how long could that continue? Since humans did not receive in their own capacities the rewards of continued labor, they, on the one hand, sank into the depths of despair, while on the other hand, a desire to regain momentum emerged within them. It is important to note here that, at that time, human labor was confined to securing two meals a day; yet, in exchange for this modest exertion, humans sought a substantial return. Therefore, ultimately, a decisive step had to be taken: the first major act of revolt against the prevailing mode of life—one rooted in ignorance and an unawareness of a refined social order. (Farid, P. D. A. 2000) Although elements of nationality existed even in ancient ways of life, that lifestyle was characterized by a lack of consensus, unity, harmony, and administrative competence. For the longing to live, to realize desires, and to establish the best form of society, there was no other path for humans than to escape that way of life. This is why humans rebelled against everything that obstructed the path of progress. Many ages passed, and every new influence tore down the marks of the past and continued its own journey. Since human labor possessed a certain continuity, there was no question of any interval. As humans moved from era to era, inch by inch, and entered the new world of civilization, they began to witness unprecedented stages of progress in their steps. So rapid was the journey from barbarism to civilization that the term "nationality" began to become very clear. (Maududi, S. A. 1935) Undoubtedly, the concept and notion of nationality have never stood apart from civilization and culture. Nations have, on the basis of these two elements, forged their national identities and sustained them on the global stage. Today, as humanity continues an unbounded march of achievements—an era in which examples from the past seem almost unimaginable—the fields of education and research, science and technology, discussion and debate, interpretations and theories have reached such heights that human intellect is left astonished. In a context where civilization flourishes and the idea of nationalism becomes more widespread, it is appropriate to consider that the rise and fall of nations are tied to the perfection of mankind and to the refined contours of civilization. It is also crucial to ask: what is the significance of civilization in human life, and why is the civilizational dimension essential for the formation of a strong nation? Specifically, one might ask whether the fundamental purpose of human creation is merely the ascent of civilization and the perfection of culture. If we were to attribute humanity's creation solely to these two elements, we would risk overlooking other factors, which would be an illogical stance. Nevertheless, to substantiate the relevance of the topic under discussion, we must acknowledge that the rise of civilization and culture indeed contributes to the shaping of a correct identity of nationality. Indeed, the corpus that comprises civilization, ethics, politics, society, and the rights of humanity embodied in the idea of civilization and culture forms a totality. From our perspective, the interrelationship between civilization and nationality is so profound that neither can exist in a meaningful form without the other. Some scholars go so far as to maintain that the sense and impulse to be a single

nation based on color, race, cultural traditions, and homeland (Civilization) is embedded in human nature. (Yusuf. S. A., Zahidi. A. Z, 2020). In contemporary discourse, the fundamental element of national formation is unity and solidarity. This impulse toward nationality also underpinned the founding of Pakistan. Leaders engaged in political struggle viewed the Muslims of the subcontinent as a single entity, and thus as one nation. (Qurishi, W, 1977) However, the claim to nationality in this context was entirely political, with the primary aim of establishing a separate homeland. Yet, stating that nationality can be confined solely to political struggle is both vague and inappropriate. We must consider all elements through which nations are formed and command respect in the world as components of nationality. In particular, the religious element cannot be ignored as a fundamental component of nationality, for without it one cannot properly identify a genuine nation or construct a coherent theory of nationality. In the circumstances that made the creation of Pakistan possible, on the one hand political consciousness was the objective, and on the other hand the protection of religious beliefs was an inseparable part of that objective. With this in mind, when we turn to the modern life of Gilgit-Baltistan, we observe a community that is, on the one hand, adorned with the word “civilization” in its cultural sense, yet remains to become acquainted with the word “civilization” in its more comprehensive sense. This region, despite its abundance of natural resources and minerals, continues to struggle to discover civilizational pathways. It cannot be denied that Gilgit-Baltistan, by virtue of its geographical, historical, and cultural status, holds immense significance not only for Pakistan but for the world. (Hashim, A. u. R., Shafiq, S., & Gul, S, 2024) As stated in the abstract of this research article, three major powers currently flank Gilgit-Baltistan, and it is certain that these powers cannot overlook the geographic importance of Gilgit-Baltistan. In such a delicate situation, and when the people of Gilgit-Baltistan do not enjoy civilizational facilities, it would be open to other nations to pursue any kind of scheming. Gilgit-Baltistan, owing to its comprehensive geographic significance, desires to remain connected to the civilizational world. This region, which can play a significant as it already does role in Pakistan’s collective development, also lies at the core of various institutions at the individual level. Therefore, rather than viewing Gilgit-Baltistan’s nationality through a conspiratorial lens, it should be regarded as a local, community-based endeavor. Just as nationalism is present in the other provinces of Pakistan, the same element, if it arises in Gilgit-Baltistan, poses no problem.

Research Questions

This research article is grounded in responses to the following questions:

- (1) Has the driving force behind the profound transformations in human life been the “necessities”? What circumstances arose that compelled humans to gradually incorporate change as an intrinsic element, thereby disowning their original way of life and creating a new world? Despite relying on a life akin to that of caves, how did humans develop such curiosity and inquisitiveness?

- (2) What are the outcomes of the ongoing journey between ancient and modern civilizations? How did the era of primitive civilization, which heavily depended on cave-like living, become stigmatized for humans, and what motivated their embrace of new civilizations? What have been the results of the civilizational and cultural advancements achieved so far?
- (3) Does the concept of national unity in Gilgit-Baltistan conceal elements of “rebellion”? Is the notion of 'ethnicity' within Gilgit-Baltistan’s cultural and civilizational life rooted in patriotism, or is it a manifestation of rebellious thinking?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This Article has been primarily developed using a cultural and analytical research approach. The primary reason for employing a cultural research method is that the author has a direct connection to the Gilgit-Baltistan region, and consequently, possesses a thorough familiarity with its culture and civilization. This grants the author a characteristic of observation and experience. The second research approach is analysis and interpretation; studying Gilgit-Baltistan’s history, customs, and cultural traditions can serve as a unique subject for contemporary researchers. Through this research article, I have made a concerted effort to draw the attention of researchers to this topic. I leave it to the readers to assess the extent to which this effort has been beneficial.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on access to available scholarly materials, the author asserts that, to date, no comprehensive or precise research has been conducted on this topic. There are, however, some superficial writings related to the concept of national identity, and within the context of Gilgit-Baltistan, the idea of national unity has been discussed positively in columns and News articles. Specifically, certain linguistic organizations have expressed views on this matter. Nonetheless, no research-oriented paper or scholarly work has been formally established. The primary reason for this may be that, in Gilgit-Baltistan, regionalism tends to be less prevalent compared to a broader sense of Pakistanism, which is considered a positive phenomenon. Although some limited efforts can be observed, these are superficial and lack the depth and elements of rigorous research.

The Concept of National Unity in Gilgit-Baltistan:

Compared with other regions, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, who possess a measured and thoughtful outlook, do not appear to be aware of threats such as terrorism; however, it is also observed that they are not closely integrated with the modern world. Unconsciously, a majority here tends to support the modern world, but consciously and in practice, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan often bear a burdened status. For more than half a century, old ideas and theories have been employed to prove the greatness of the nation, and these efforts continue today. In particular, presenting the governance style of the ruler Goher Aman in a geographically distinct

form (Chitral, Gopis, and Yasin, within present-day Gilgit) is being used to assert that this region too possesses a glorious past and that a courageous king's oversight has revealed Gilgit-Baltistan's national identity. (Sarfaraz, M. 2024) An impartial researcher might question whether Raja Goher Aman's governance included the sciences and arts or even hinted at modernity. When one considers the contemporary circumstances and their effects, nothing of that sort appears notable. Those who study Gilgit-Baltistan's antiquities and identify tourism-related matters suggest that in Raja Goher Aman's state policy, individuality rather than nationality is discernible. At times he seems to dominate Gilgit Agency, and at other times he is described as having killed Shah Sikandar. He had established a governance enclosure over a very limited territory, thereby underlining his own "raja-ship." (Haqqani, A. J. 2018) In a situation where there is no hint of progress, only a few strands of governance and remnants of governance-like authority are visible. The erroneous and baseless assumption that the person named Goher Aman was intrinsically linked to the system of governance as an enduring jewel would be nothing more than wishful thinking, having no connection to reality. The question is: if Goher Aman's style of governance were exemplary, why do his abilities and the signs of his nationality not appear today? There is neither a model of national architecture nor an abundance of knowledge and arts, nor any traces of public welfare, nor any evident efforts toward national cohesion attributed to the subject. It is settled that paths to the future can be determined only by moving away from the past, and the present cannot be steered in the right direction. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan, their geographical status, national identity, and even their cultural character have not yet been determined. Like inhabitants who do not reside locally, outsiders, sitting hundreds of miles away, have spread their culture to such an extent that Gilgit-Baltistan's own culture has become confused and blended. Not only culture, but even the geographic boundaries have been lost in the battered pages of history. (Mehr, A. 2009) There are, however, certain aspects that we can strictly term as intrinsic to Gilgit-Baltistan's internal culture. For instance, the practice of Nasalo (Haqqani, A. J. 2019) and Shap (Akhtar, F. 2021), the tradition of village winter gatherings around folk tales, the use of a cap adorned with peacock feathers (especially the white cap), and the nomadic way of life on privately owned lands within the interior villages. (Dolti, M. B. 2022) There has already been substantial change in the aforementioned matters, and many aspects of cultural heritage are on the verge of becoming obsolete.

From the outset, Gilgit-Baltistan has largely lacked a sense of tribal solidarity as a unity. In light of Ibn Khaldun's well known concept of "Asabiyyah," the idea of a distinct nationhood in Gilgit-Baltistan is, in fact, illusory. He construed Asabiyyah as a fundamental force without which no missionary effort can advance, no Prophethood can succeed, and no empire or kingdom can endure. (Ibn Khaldun, A. 2008) In this regard, it can be stated that, whether in the past or in the present, there has been no centralized nation-state established in Gilgit-Baltistan, nor have the shadows of chauvinistic exclusivity been visible here. From the pages of history, it is

evident that this region has consisted of multiple polities (Rajgi) since its inception, and there was no notion of a central government. (Khan, A. W. (2020), This region has been governed at various times—first under the Indian rulers (Dogras), and then under the British Raj, which subjected Gilgit-Baltistan to its rule. Even if we attempt to ground a hypothesis about nationhood, there was no social or political entity to speak of, and there is none today. The chronicles recount the deeds and tales of the rulers of Skardu, Ali Sher Khan Anchan, and of the chiefs of Yasin, Gilgit, and Astore; yet there is no compelling evidence that any of these former polities possessed a nation based territorial boundary that could be defined as such. Even if one were to succeed in delineating their geographic extents, it would not reveal that their mode of conduct was oriented toward national unity. Nor were these states exceedingly advanced or endowed with the sciences and arts of their times. It is true, to some extent, that they attained a measure of power and began to govern. Several writers claim authority about the capabilities or the nationalism of these rulers; however, such claims are weak and unsubstantiated. If we were to acknowledge their power and capabilities or to suggest that their program was rooted in national solidarity, the question then arises: why has no author or experienced observer in the broader world that is, outside this region taken the trouble to document their history? After all, it is widely known that civilizations such as Babylon, the pyramids of Egypt, Harappa, and other ancient, advanced cultures are described in clear terms. Some information about Ali Sher Khan Anchan's territorial reach in Skardu exists; it is said that Ali Sher Khan invaded Astore, Chiilas, and Gilgit, and extended his authority to Chitral. (Lakhnavi, M. H. K. 1991) Even if one were to accept the proposition that Ali Sher Khan succeeded in extending his territorial boundaries to Chitral, does this assertion prove that his conquests led to unity in Gilgit-Baltistan? Or did they, as a unit, merely come into view before the world? How can we regard rulers like these as symbols of unity when they did not themselves desire a national identity? When we examine both past history and the present situation, a researcher is compelled to say that the rulers of fragmented polities did not even seek to foster national unity to such an extent. On the contrary, in this compactly populated region, linguistic, religious, and nationalist tendencies often opposed to one another have been driven to their zenith. This prompts the question again: was there ever an element of nationhood in the Gilgit-Baltistan region? (By nationhood here I do not mean the distinction that has historically applied in areas where Shina is spoken, such as zones of Shina-speaking peoples like Seen, Yeshkun, Kamin, Dom where, in contemporary times, distinctions are typically drawn along religious lines into Shi'a, Sunni, Noorbakhshi and Ismaili communities.) Rather, I mean nationhood as it would exist within the present geographical configuration of Gilgit-Baltistan. If we look further back to the early twentieth century, the notion of national unity would be far-fetched; even villages separated by only a few miles had little to no contact with each other. It is not surprising that villages with populations of three or four hundred remained in a state of inert nationalism (Seen, Yeshkun, Kamin, Dom) into the 1950s, a pattern that persists in various forms and if one slightly widens village

borders, linguistic divisions reappear: Shina, Broshishki, Balti, Khawar, Wakhi, and other language-speaking communities even while outwardly professing that they do not believe in linguistic prejudice were inwardly afflicted by it, and today linguistic chauvinism remains on the rise. The thought itself is chilling: if we go a little further back than the twentieth century, there would be neither civilization nor nationhood nor any obvious link to the modern world. In the twenty-first century, as the world embraces ever-new technological conveniences, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan seem ready to lay down their lives in the name of religion and inert nationalism; yet whenever someone speaks of unity on the basis of geographical nationhood, they attempt to silence him with a barrage of accusations. As a researcher, I wish to state clearly here that, with regard to the denial of state matters, including separatism, I am not at all a supporter of any nationalist organizations, nor do I endorse their stance (separatism). Nevertheless, it is true that, knowingly or unknowingly, nationalist activists are becoming the basis of national unity and a symbol of eventual solidarity for the future, a support that future generations will undertake. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that the nationalist slogan rests on legitimate facts; however, because of the absence of a shared conception of national unity and a lack of capable leadership, their slogan is not being realized. Another point is whether national unity and identity can be enacted without some degree of state legal support being rejected outright. Regarding nationalism, their position is extremely rigid and unintelligible. The primary reason is that nationalist activists are politically ignorant. A politician, in pursuing a given goal, designs a single path, yet there are countless alternative avenues that can assist in providing options. Nationalist leaders, before entering the arena, often close off all possible routes. A player can succeed only once they step into the field. To dream of victory without entering the field or without playing is a childish act. This is precisely the situation of our nationalist leaders.

Since the 1980s, the efforts of nationalists whether aimed at national unity or the attainment of an independent state have continued. According to nationalist claims, our primordial identity has been the Balooristan nation. In this regard, they ground their argument in history and cite the existence of a formal state, encompassing present-day Gilgit-Baltistan, Kargil, Chitral, and Kohistan, as evidence of that state. (Dad, A. A. 2016) Despite a reasoning based on well-established facts, for more than three decades these nationalist organizations have succeeded in introducing the term “Balawaristan” to the local media (not to the general public); however, at the national level the name remains obscure. The Balawaristan Abdul Hamid Group claims that it has raised the issue of Gilgit-Baltistan before several international bodies, including the United Nations. In 2010, exiled chairman Abdul Hamid of Balawaristan met with a member of the European Parliament and the head of the Friends of Gilgit-Baltistan organization, Gerghan Kreutzman. During the discussion, the member of the European Parliament urged the Pakistani government to honor the wishes of the local people and withdraw its military forces and civilian personnel from the region to address the Gilgit-Baltistan issue. (Nawa-i-Waqt. 2010,

January 30) This claim, while not universal, can be linked in particular to a pursuit of a political solution. Gilgit-Baltistan is recognized not only in relation to controversial issues, but also internationally for its natural beauty. Each year, hundreds of foreign visitors come here to conduct research and engage in other activities. Therefore, asserting that the Gilgit-Baltistan region is exclusively defined by controversial issues would not align with the known facts. Moreover, if locally Pakistan is recognized as the homeland and the state, then demands or statements by any other party would neither be acceptable to the local population nor to the state of Pakistan. Directly pointing to a few issues by any individual or institution would constitute interference in the internal affairs of that state.

If a sound strategic approach had been adopted, this name could have become the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan just as Punjabi, Balochi, Sindhi, and Pashto are, and historically, “Balawaristan” would have added a beautiful strand to world history. From the outset, nationalist organizations have held a single, fixed view: separation. Beyond this, several avenues were open to them. Owing to a flawed strategy, a beautiful name like “Balawaristan” was buried beneath unpalatable epithets such as rebellion. Although the term Balawaristan could have served as a vehicle of national identity rather than as a symbol of rebellion. It would have been better if efforts toward national unity had focused on attaining internal rights rather than secession; perhaps many long-standing problems could have been resolved with greater ease. The scholar believes that rather than seeking separation, pursuing a provincial constitutional arrangement would yield more appropriate results. The current situation appears to be that the national media does not discuss Balawaristan in a favorable light. In particular, allegations of foreign agents are being used to cast Balawaristan in doubt, whereas ground realities are quite the opposite. The ordinary Gilgit-Baltistani’s patriotism is many times stronger than that of some of Pakistan’s senior politicians and their families, because in the eyes of an ordinary Gilgit-Baltistani, Pakistan’s accession is the result of their ancestors’ struggles. It is true that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan have long lived under subordination, and the effects of that are still evident; however, the emancipation they achieved was through their own struggle, and thus the people here do not require anyone’s endorsement to determine how much a “Balawaristani” loves their homeland. It is entirely unacceptable to suggest that Balawaristan’s activists are opposed to Pakistan or are colluding with foreign agencies to destabilize Pakistan. Some people here believe the issue stems from a sense of emotional deprivation; from the time of freedom until now, Gilgit-Baltistan has been viewed with a paternalistic gaze. In every aspect of life, we have been given a secondary status, even basic needs such as education have been kept distant from the people here. Even now, rather than appearing hopeful, the situation seems worrisome. Across the region, there are only two universities, and even those are not equipped with modern disciplines; they are grounded in traditional studies. From the 1960s to the present, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan have had only two sources of livelihood:

First: Employment in the Pakistan Army;

Second: Employment in government and semi-government institutions

To secure a government job (the bureaucracy), there is a need for credible educational institutions. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan have long awaited, like other regions of the country, the establishment of technical institutes and world-class educational institutions in their region. We observe that in a region with a population of nearly 2 million, no medical institutions have been established, no engineering colleges have been set up, and no public administration educational institutions have been created. In the absence of institutions offering useful sciences, it becomes impossible for a Gilgit-Baltistani student to compete on equal terms with students from other provinces. He or she is compelled to turn to educational institutions in other parts of the country for useful and constructive knowledge, an endeavor that proves costly and disadvantageous in every respect. Local politicians may extol the federation, but they cannot deny that, in certain matters, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan remain marginalized, as noted above. Education may be ubiquitous in name, but educational institutions are scarce. Nevertheless, the literacy rate in Gilgit-Baltistan remains comparatively better than in other regions (notably Sindh and Balochistan). Just as the tradition of not granting a separate provincial identity persists, a distinct share of resources has not yet been allocated to Gilgit-Baltistan. Several other issues can be identified as the “legitimate rights of Gilgit-Baltistan.” Nationalist movements have also raised the slogan of public rights. In their view, it was evident as clear as daylight that their rights lie on the shoulders of the rulers, and the retrieval of this debt could be pursued in two ways:

First: Through mutual understanding and dialogue, which can be described as a robust expression of political struggle and conscious effort, and is a practiced approach in a civilized world.

Second: Rebellion against the state and outright rejection of all the laws prevailing in the country, which would be the ultimate instrument for obtaining rights and could prove detrimental to the country and the nation.

It is a reality that even the state must acknowledge: thus far, nationalist movements have not undertaken any action that would constitute a practical challenge to the state or warrant the application of armed struggle. Rhetorical talk of separation does occur, but even such separation is conceived as something to be achieved through political struggle. It is also an established fact that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan consider accession with Pakistan as their political wisdom and prefer to remain connected with Pakistan. Therefore, the demands and aspirations of the nationalists should not be viewed in the frame of rebellion but rather interpreted as the result of continual political understanding and mature reasoning.

Since deprivation of rights for nationalists equates to a form of national demise, the demands would, in any case, entail rights being realized. In essence, the matter was different; it appeared in the form of demands and gradually evolved into something else. Thus, for nationalist movements, the idea of a separate state emerged. If the long struggle of the nationalists is viewed in a single framework, there are

many ups and downs. From provincial rights to the concept of a separate state, that progression proved the most challenging phase for the nationalists. However, overall, they faced failures for a variety of reasons that may be attributed to multiple factors.

Lack of capable leadership:

The leadership problem is not confined to nationalist organizations; according to some critics, it is a collective issue of all Gilgit-Baltistan. More than half a century has elapsed since Gilgit-Baltistan became acquainted with freedom, yet to date no figure has emerged here who could be justifiably regarded with pride. This is not a merely critical analysis but a fact-based claim that does not require any survey or in-depth research to substantiate. Some nationalist activists contend that the political leaders of Gilgit-Baltistan have access only to the capital, Gilgit, and then to Islamabad. A few commentators are even dissatisfied with the political vision of regional leaders. They appear to offer pointed criticism, arguing that these leaders neither guarantee the rights of the people nor sustain a spirit of national unity. (Ali, N., Azhar, M. M., Akhtar, S., Batool, S., & Akram, S. 2021)

Lack of devoted workers:

The zeal of emotionally driven individuals, devoid of scholarly measures, is episodic and futile. A few slogans, claims, and promises, and then the matter ends. It is as clear as day that, from the outset, Gilgit-Baltistan, including nationalist organizations, has faced this situation. The agenda of federationist political parties remains confined to their own party policies. Therefore, the sincerity of their political workers cannot be considered highly transparent. These are people who do what they receive directly from Islamabad in the form of “executive orders.” On the other hand, this malaise has also spread among nationalist organizations. One worker is affiliated with one organization today and with another organization tomorrow. Thus, such workers drift from being political leaders to the realm of “lootocracy,” and everyone knows how steadfast a person who is afflicted with lootocracy can be. In my meetings with nationalist activists from 2005 to 2012, each one appeared to extol the virtues of ethnicity. Some of these activists even seemed to believe that the only path for them lay in separation from Pakistan. Several advocates of a separate homeland and a distinct state, up to the time of writing, are employed in Pakistan’s subordinate institutions, and now their drive for nationality or patriotism has waned. They are loyal to Pakistan and view Pakistan as a state with a favorable regard.

Ignorance of national unity:

There has been no consensus to date on what constitutes the national identity of Gilgit-Baltistan. Is it Balti identity, Braishtaki identity, or something else? If one says that Gilgit-Baltistan’s identity is a recognition, then where would Balti-language speakers fall? Similarly, speakers of other languages would fall outside the scope of a unified national identity. Thus, rather than a national unity, the nation would move toward further fragmentation, with its inevitable consequence being repeated failures. So, what alternative exists beyond the term “Balawaristan”? Time does not wait; night and day, months and years, and centuries are all connected to the ongoing dynamism of humans. Therefore, the realization of a collective nation

hinges entirely on the unity and mutual solidarity of Gilgit-Baltistan. If the people of Gilgit-Baltistan come to understand that they are one nation and that all national interests are common, then that day will become the foremost emblem of the people's emergence. But if the people of Gilgit-Baltistan remain prudent yet fall prey to division and discord, a time will never come when the sun of national dignity rises.

CONCLUSION:

The strategy of Pakistani rulers should be not to placate the people of Gilgit-Baltistan with verbal assurances. The people here, while expressing national unity, wish to connect with a new civilized world. They cannot afford to cede their rights. Though not at present, in the near future the people of Gilgit-Baltistan will be conscious and will understand that eminent personalities stand in the way of their rights, and they do not want to see them steer development. These are the ground realities: the people of Gilgit-Baltistan are perhaps more loyal to Pakistan than anyone else's share of loyalty. They bear the front line in defending Pakistan and safeguarding its borders to an extent unmatched by the youth of any other nation. Just as jobs and employment opportunities are created for educated people in other provinces, similarly, it is essential to generate satisfactory employment opportunities and capacity for Gilgit-Baltistan's youth. All possible provisions for employment should be created so that enemies do not have an opportunity to sow hatred among the region's youth. Despite the lack of quality educational institutions, the educational standard in Gilgit-Baltistan is rising. People here undertake education without distinguishing between boys and girls, convinced that both sexes must pursue education. The educated class of Gilgit-Baltistan believes that their region is deprived of crucial elements such as quality education, industry and crafts, and a sound economy. People subsist on meager landholdings and a few government jobs. Yet the region's workers and knowledge-seekers deserve every life-sustaining facility. However, the ground realities are the exact opposite. Being in proximity to a developed state, Gilgit-Baltistan merits greater attention. It is the responsibility of the Government of Pakistan to introduce its people to modern civilization through concrete measures. These measures can be realized by establishing industrial and technical institutions, creating new employment opportunities, and, in particular, fostering a sense of nationalism that prioritizes patriotism over ethnicity among the youth, so that no external adversary gains a foothold to foment rebellion in the Gilgit-Baltistan region.

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