

Movement for Bahawalpur Province

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Abstract

Bahawalpur Division was the State of Bahawalpur, which had a history of 228 years of rule by the Abbasi Nawabs. The State, which was formed in 1727, ended in 1955 and the whole area of the State was made a division of Punjab Province. Bahawalpur region since last 300 years has faced a common historical experience. The people of Bahawalpur region are facing similar problems; these include underdevelopment, economic and political deprivations. The general masses feel that their region is being exploited and they are not being provided their due shares. These shared problems have brought the people of Bahawalpur region closer to each other towards the demand for a separate province for Bahawalpur region which has always been geographically distinct. Ever since the establishment of the State, Bahawalpur region has had an independent and separate identity.

Introduction

Bahawalpur region in one of the nine divisions of the Punjab province. Its total area 18,000 sq miles. Area wise it is the largest division of Punjab. As per 1998 census, the total population of the region is 7.518 million, which is 10.3% of the total population of the Punjab and 5.6% of the total population of the country. The average growth rate of the region is 5.0% per annum. It is one of the important regions from agricultural and defence point of view. The important

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agricultural crops of this region are cotton, wheat, sugarcane, oilseeds and pulses. The most important crops are cotton and wheat, which contribute 23% and 10% of the total production of the country respectively. From the defence point of view Bahawalpur has three hundred miles long border with India with the requirement of special defence tactics suited to desert warfare. This region is being represented by 15 MNA's in National Assembly and 31 MPA's in the Punjab Assembly.

Even though area wise it has been the largest division of Punjab yet it is also one of the most backward region. The region remains underdeveloped, in nearly all fields.

Bahawalpur as a State merged in 1955 and along with it was the end of the Abbasi Nawab's rule, but even today all the Nawab's are remembered by the people. This includes all sections of people, the leaders, ordinary masses, the educated all and sundry. The Nawabs are an important feature of the Bahawalpur region. People love and respect them as a symbol of their glorious past

The people of Bahawalpur have not forgotten the Nawabs, the family of Nawab is still highly respected in the region. Nawab Salahud-Din Abbasi the grand son of the last Nawab is one of the most important and the most respected political figure in the region. He has all the public support. The people still give him the same respect, which was given to the Nawabs.

The major reason for remembrance and respect for the Nawabs is that even though the Nawabs were autocratic rulers, who did not allow or give political freedom but they did a lot for the development of the State, which benefited the people. The first Nawab laid the foundation of the State in 1727, with only a small locality, very soon the latter

Nawabs started expanding the domain of the State. Not only they gained a lot of land, they also made it one of the richest states of sub-continent. A lot of development work was done in the State in all fields. Schools, Colleges and later on a University were opened. A number of scholarships were given to students even outside the State. Railway track was laid by the Nawabs in the State. Hospitals and dispensaries were established. Canals were dug and Sultej Valley Project was completed to provide water to the lands of Bahawalpur region. The State had its own administrative and judicial system.

It was but natural that as to retain their authority and control over the State, the Nawabs did not want political awareness amongst the people and thus did not allow any political activity or freedom in the State. But their contributions outweigh this drawback. Then, also after the merger of the State, the region has been comparatively neglected by successive governments, the region lacks development and is not given its due share in both economic and political matters. Due to the deteriorating condition of the region, the people remember the times of the Nawabs even more. The people of the region strongly feel that they were much better during the State than after the State was merged. The people were then assured that the earnings would be spent on the region, whereas, now the earnings of the region are spent elsewhere.

Political Movements in Bahawalpur

In recent times there have been two political movements in Bahawalpur region. One is the Saraiki Province Movement and the other is the Bahawalpur Province Movement.

These two movements have been active at different times in Bahawalpur region.

The Saraiki area comprises southern Punjab, which includes Bahawalpur region also. Saraiki Movement started in 1960's, initially not as a political movement but more of a cultural and linguistic movement. The movement gained momentum in early 70's after the Bahawalpur Province movement had fizzled out in 1971.

Saraiki Province Movement began when the Saraiki speaking areas of Punjab felt that in comparison with Punjabi speaking areas, there was less and slower development in Saraiki areas. Less access to power, and goods and services resulted in lack of development. There are number of grievances which have been put up by the various Saraiki political parties and organizations. One of the grievance is settlement of people from other areas. This began when in 1886-86 canals were dug by the British and new canal colonies of Southern Punjab Bahawalpur region were opened to settlers from outside. Then again after Sutlej Valley Project new settlers came into Bahawalpur region, which is still continuing much to the disapproval of Saraiki people. Another grievance is that the Saraiki area generates more income than what is spent on it. According to Saraiki activists, Saraiki area is economically exploited. It is believed that Bahawalpur being the major producer of cotton, the income earned from it is not being spent on Bahawalpur. A major demand of Saraiki activists is that the quota of employment for Saraiki's be raised.

The number of people in Bahawalpur who support Saraiki Suba Movement comprise only of few Saraiki speaking people. The urdu speaking and Punjabi speaking section of people are totally against the creation of a separate

Province on the basis of difference in the spoken languages as they then will be dominated by the Saraikis.

The Saraiki Suba Movement does not have many roots in Bahawalpur region. Not even once in all the elections, has any candidate of the Saraiki Party ever won a single seat in Bahawalpur, rather they always lost very badly in the elections.

It is not a popular movement in Bahawalpur region. The majority in Bahawalpur region still favours Bahawalpur Province upon Saraiki Province. The people feel that by supporting the creation of Saraiki Province they will be foregoing the demand for Bahawalpur Province. The other feeling toward Saraiki Province is that Multan will be the centre of power and the capital of Saraiki Province and the domination of other areas over Bahawalpur region will remain as such.

Being Saraiki, a limited section of people in Bahawalpur do have a soft corner for Saraiki Province, but in the last few elections no candidate of Saraiki Party has been able to get even a respectable number of votes. The people of Bahawalpur claim that they are not seeking the establishment of a new province but are demanding for the restoration of Bahawalpur Province, whereas the Saraiki Province demands the division of Punjab and creation of a new province.

At present, Bahawalpur Province Movement is again active as it has always been a deep rooted movement in Bahawalpur region. The movement is also known as “Bahawalpur Suba Movement” and “Movement for Restoration of Province of Bahawalpur”.

Bahawalpur Province Movement:

“On 30th April, 1951 the Pakistan Government and the Ruler of Bahawalpur entered into an important agreement which put the State on the same footing as provinces under the Government of India Act of 1935 in the matter of legislation and administration.”¹ The agreement technically described as the Supplementary Instrument of Accession, was signed by Ameer Sadiq Mohammad –V and was accepted by the Governor General of Pakistan Khawaja Nazim-ud-Din. Under the agreement the Ruler of Bahawalpur agreed to transfer to the Central Government all subjects mentioned in list one of the Government of India Act (1935) called central subjects i.e. defence, communications and foreign affairs administered by the centre. All subjects covered by list two of the Government of India Act, called provincial subjects, would continue to be administered by the State. Both the Federal and the State legislature in respect of subjects mentioned in the Concurrent List but the Federal Legislature will have precedence over the State legislature should there occur a conflict between the two.

The government also clarified that the pattern evolved for Bahawalpur State would not be applicable to all ten States in Pakistan, claiming that all were very different from one another. The State will in future be treated as a province in the matter of grants and loans.² Even after signing the document, the Ameer of Bahawalpur will remain as the State’s constitutional head.³

After the provincial status in 1951, elections were held in Bahawalpur to elect the legislative assembly. A forty-nine member legislative assembly was formed, which began functioning in 1952. This assembly remained along with other provincial assemblies till the promulgation of One

Unit. This assembly passed the resolution to join the West Pakistan like the other provinces.

It is a historic fact that before One Unit Bahawalpur had a provincial status, and Bahawalpur merged with a status of a province with West Pakistan at the time of One Unit.⁴ But when One Unit was broken on 30th March, 1970 Bahawalpur was made a part of Punjab Province. Even though at the time of merger, an understanding was given to the Ameer of Bahawalpur that whenever One Unit will be broken, Bahawalpur will be restored as a separate Province.⁵ This is from where the Bahawalpur Province Movement begins. Historically for nearly two and a half centuries since the State of Bahawalpur was established, it had retained its internal sovereignty.⁶ Never was it ruled or taken over by any other government, ruler or province. Even at the time when Sikhs took over whole of Punjab, Bahawalpur State remained out of their rule. Even after joining Pakistan till the time of merger into One Unit, Bahawalpur retained its sovereignty. The distinct and independent administrative identity, the deprivations & under development in Bahawalpur led to the emergence of Bahawalpur Suba Movement, which demanded that Bahawalpur should be made as the sixth province of Pakistan. The experience of One Unit turned out to be a bad one for the people of Bahawalpur, which led the region to consider utilizing its own resources towards its development.

The economic and political deprivations became the major causes leading towards the demand of a separate province. Bahawalpur State had always been a very rich State, it was a self sufficient region, which was able to fulfill its requirements itself and never remained dependent on any other outside source.⁷ On the opposite Bahawalpur State contributed financially first to the Britishers and then later

on to Pakistan government. At the time when Bahawalpur was a State not only was it economically sound but in other fields there was immense development, especially in the field of education, all over the State, students were given free education upto matric, even after that it was the responsibility of the state government to provide higher education. The higher education institutions were affiliated with Punjab University. Outstanding students were given stipends and were sent abroad for further studies. It was the duty of the State to provide jobs to them. The treasurer department of the State used to give huge aid to various institutions like Punjab University, Aligarh University, Jamia Anjuman Himayat Islam and other institutions of the sub-continent. There were fixed seats for students from Bahawalpur in Medical and Agriculture colleges. At the time of One Unit, this ended.

“Another grievance is that Bahawalpur’s prosperity mainly depended on the waters of River Sultej, which was given to India in the Indus Water Treaty, this adversely affected the economy of the region”.⁸ Earlier in Bahawalpur State judiciary and executive were separate, which also ended at time of One Unit. The State had its own legislature Assembly, Secretariat, High Court, Accountant General and Public Service Commission.

An important grievance is that Bahawalpur region is one of the major producers of cotton crop, the earnings of this cotton crop are not being spent on the region but elsewhere. Another major grievance is the share of government jobs for the region.⁹ This has been deeply felt in the region that both Provincial & Federal Government jobs quota is negligible. This includes lower scale as well as higher-grade jobs. Because of this the region feels left out from the mainstream of Punjab politics. There is not much

representation of Bahawalpur in various important government institutions like Public Service Commission, Board of Revenue, Industrial Development Corporation, Agricultural Development Corporation, WAPDA etc.

It is necessary to look into the previous Budget just before the merger of the Bahawalpur State and compare the same with the budget of the other Provinces of Pakistan. The budget note dated 25th March, 1955 presented by late Mr. A.B. Khan, Advisor to His Highness the Ameer of Bahawalpur. "The surplus of the Bahawalpur State budget after deducting the expenditure i.e. the net closing Balance was as under :-

1954-55 – Rs.4,09,20,612/- (Four Crore Ninety Lakh Twenty Thousand Six Hundred and Twelve).

From the above statement, that the surplus net closing balance, of the Bahawalpur State, for 1954-55, was much more than any Province of Pakistan including the East Pakistan and on the other hand it shows that the budget of the Province of Punjab, was in deficit, and Punjab was unable to maintain its budget. According to an economist, the aim for the establishment of West Pakistan was to feed one deficit region with the surplus of the other regions."¹⁰

"Bahawalpur had been able to balance its budget in the past and had also been a surplus and is now in a position to balance its budget over a reasonable time, and it has a capacity to increase its economic resources to meet higher level of development. Financial viability is to be regarded as an important criterion bearing on the creation of a new province and this consideration when weighed with other important factors like past history, population, culture and wishes of the people go long way to support the case of Bahawalpur for a separate province."¹¹

On 22 November 1969, the newspapers started giving news that the government will soon end One Unit and the previous provinces will be revived and it was revealed in the newspapers that Bahawalpur would not be given a separate identity. Immediately on 22nd November Allama Arshad called a joint session of various parties of Bahawalpur to stress upon the government to consider giving Bahawalpur a provincial status. These parties included Council League, Convention League, Democratic Party, National Awami Party, Jamiat Ulema Islam, Peoples Party, Chamber of Commerce, Bar Association and Jamat-e-Islami. The representatives of all these parties and pressure groups passed a unanimous resolution, declaring that at the break up of One Unit, Bahawalpur should be made a separate province, the other points in the resolution included the following:-¹²

- 1) In 1955 Bahawalpur decided to join the One Unit and not any province, therefore, when One Unit breaks upon then politically, legally and morally Bahawalpur's distinct identity should not be resisted by anyone.
- 2) The proper way at the time of break up of One Unit was to restore the original jurisdiction of earlier provinces and not to increase the jurisdiction of any province.
- 3) At the time when One Unit was established, Bahawalpur had a full status of a province, and like other provinces there was an assembly here, so when One Unit broke Bahawalpur's status should remain as a province not as a State.
- 4) Bahawalpur is not economically self sufficient, but it has been noticed from the provincial budget statistics that since last fifteen years the earnings from Bahawalpur have been spent on the development of other areas.

- 5) Bahawalpur decided to join One Unit with the feelings of nationhood and love for Pakistan, whereas in return it received deprivations and discontent, and this has been accepted in the statements given by provincial finance minister, Governors and President in which they accepted that in Bahawalpur region less is being spent on development than its earnings. So Bahawalpur cannot further experiment by joining any province, which will bring discontent.
- 6) The demand for the restoration of province of Bahawalpur is not only from the people of Bahawalpur region but it has been supported by various political parties, these include Democratic Party, Council Muslim League, Jamat-i-Islami, Thus the views of these political parties should not be ignored by the government.
- 7) If the opinion of people of Pakistans largest previous State and also of the various political parties is not looked upon, then it may also have negative consequences on the Kashmir issue, a hasty decision which favours the expansionist intentions of a province should be avoided.
- 8) In 1955 One Unit was established after the consent of major political parties, so at the time of break up of One Unit the consent of political parties and people should be taken into consideration.
- 9) Bahawalpur has larger population than Baluchistan and Bahawalpur had more earnings than Baluchistan and Frontier province. Therefore, it has the capacity and capability to fully survive as a separate province.
- 10) If at the break up of One Unit only provinces are to be made then there will be a need for redrawing them, so at

this time the government should not go against the peoples opinion and include Bahawalpur in any province.

Several groups were formed for the restoration of Bahawalpur province. The most effective group was the Bahawalpur United Front abbreviated as Mahaz. The important leaders of this Mahaz included Mian Nizam ud Din Haider, Sardar Mahmud Khan, Chaudhry Farzand Ali and Tahira Masood.

With the announcement of Pakistan government in March 1970 that One Unit is broken up into provinces of Punjab, Baluchistan, NWFP and Sindh. Bahawalpur was inducted into Punjab Province.¹³ This decision led to great resentment from all sections in Bahawalpur. All over Bahawalpur began processions, protests and meetings negating the governments decision to amalgamate Bahawalpur in Punjab. By end of March activists starting courting arrests.

On 24 April 1970 the police opened fire on a procession killing two persons and wounding many. Many protesters were arrested. Five processions were taken out in the Bahawalpur city to press the demand for separate provincial status for Bahawalpur. The processionists started brick-bating the police, upon this the police opened fire. The local administration called in the Army and curfew was imposed.¹⁴ Various political leaders were arrested, amongst them were Seth Ubaidur Rehman, Maulana Ghulam Mustafa, Altaf Qureshi, Allama Arshad, Syed Ahmad Nawaz Shah Gardezi. Begum Tahira Masood, was expelled from Bahawalpur for a period of one month.

For the restoration of Bahawalpur province, the women of the region also played an active role under the leadership of Tahira Masood, daughter of Mian Nizam ud Din, ex-Prime Minister of Bahawalpur. This was the first time that the women broke away the centuries old traditions and came out on roads. They would hold meetings and take out procession draped in white chaddars.

“All this suppressed emotion was expressed in the elections of 1970. Most seats went to the sympathizers of the Mahaz, whether they stood as independents or as candidates of a political party”.¹⁵ At the time of general elections of 1970, when the movement for a separate province of Bahawalpur was at its peak, the candidates who supported the cause received 80% votes. Out of total of 10 Lakh 30 thousand votes, 7 lakh 14 thousand votes went to the supporters of Bahawalpur Province Movement. The candidates who were not supporting this movement altogether received only 1 lakh votes.¹⁶ Once elected the leaders of Mahaz did not pursue the case of Bahawalpur forcefully, but they did issue declarations in support of a separate province, letters were addressed to Yahya Khan and Z.A. Bhutto. After 1971 when Pakistan lost East Pakistan, many in the Mahaz felt that it was unsuitable to pressurize for their demand at this time and along with it the Mahaz lost its unity and effectiveness.

Conclusion

When the first ever general elections were held in 1970, it was the time when the movement for Bahawalpur Province was at its peak. The popularity of this demand in Bahawalpur was clearly manifested in these elections. All the candidates who got elected were great supporters of a separate province of Bahawalpur. These elected

representatives from Bahawalpur comprised of few land lords and some were from the middle class. The question arises, once elected why these representatives did not strongly pursue the cause? It was because these representatives especially the one's from the middle class could not sustain the government pressures, few joined the government camp and some became inactive.

The other option for the people of Bahawalpur was to adopt aggressive attitude towards the movement but one of the quality of people of this region is that they are peace loving. Another reason for the weakening of the movement was the lack of leadership. Lack of strong leadership became and is still one of the major cause, leading to the hibernation of the movement for a separate province. To cap it all the separation of East Pakistan forced the exponents of restoration of Bahawalpur province to leave it in the lurk, lest they be misunderstood.

Then there is strong influence of major national political parties in Bahawalpur. Most of these parties do not support the movement as they claim to be national parties discouraging ethnic and logistic divisions. Pakistan Muslim League is taken to be the party of Punjab. Its strength lies in Punjab, Muslim League cannot afford to favour the division of Punjab Province. Pakistan Peoples Party, which is the next major national party in the region is taken as a party of Sindh Province. If Peoples Party supports the Bahawalpur Province Movement, then it will also have to ultimately make Karachi Division a province which will be dominated by MQM and as such will be unacceptable to Peoples Party. Jamaat-i-Islami contests elections in Bahawalpur region, but seldom its candidates win. At the time when the movement for restoration of Bahawalpur Province was active, Jamaat-i-Islami in its manifesto had

supported the establishment of a separate province for Bahawalpur. But when Mian Tufail became the Ameer of Jamat, this issue was removed from the party's manifesto, one of the reasons given for this was the pressure of Punjabis on the Ameer.

The separation of East Pakistan should be taken as a lesson for all times to come, where refusal by the West Pakistan to provide due share to East Pakistan led to separatist movement eventually leading to dismantling of Pakistan. Bahawalpur region should be provided with its due share in both economic and political fields. The government should try to remove the feelings of deprivation amongst the people of Bahawalpur region before these surface into a active movement, which will have a negative impact on the integration of Pakistan. Even though Bahawalpur Province Movement is not active at the moment but it has strong roots amongst the people of the region. The people strongly feel that the problems of Bahawalpur region can be solved if it is made a separate province rather than a part of Punjab. While comparing the level of development of Bahawalpur region with that of other areas of Punjab, the difference can be seen and felt immediately. The people of the region are not wrong in feeling left out of the mainstream. At the movement there is no political party on platform working towards the Bahawalpur Province demand but during national and provincial elections, the people only like to vote for those candidates who support the cause. In Bahawalpur region it is very difficult for a candidate to win no matter from which political party, if he does not support a separate province for Bahawalpur. The demand for a separate province is popular amongst all sections of people. The masses of the region seem to be very touchy on this issue, it is still very fresh in their minds that this region as a State was a flourishing one.

Bahawalpur State was one of the richest States of the sub-continent. It was fully capable of surviving without outside help, it was able to generate its resources as to fulfill its requirements, not only this Bahawalpur States annual budget used to be in surplus.

Bahawalpur State had its own separate administrative judicial and educational systems, which were efficient and provided prompt relief to the people. After the merger of the State, the systems prevailing in other parts of the country were established in Bahawalpur region, which did not come up to the expectations of the people of the region, as a result this further dissatisfied the people. If Bahawalpur region had developed more after the merger and if it had received its due share then maybe things could have been different. The general feeling in the region is that as long as the region was a State, it had a separate and distinct identity, which did not rely on others but was sovereign in all its internal matters.

If serious thoughts and steps are not adopted for the uplift of the region then the politics of regionalism in this region may become a very serious issue. The majority of masses of the region aspire for a separate province for Bahawalpur region, this strong feeling may turn into a political movement, if the grievances of the region are not seriously looked upon.

End Notes

1. *The Civil & Military Gazette* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1951), p.30.
2. *The Statesman*, Delhi: 2 May, 1951
3. *Dawn*, Karachi: 1 May, 1951.
4. Sahibzada Mohd. Qamar-ul-Zaman Abbasi, *Quaid-i-Azam Aur Riasat Bahawalpur* (Bahawalpur: Sahibzada Qamar Abbasi, 1999), p.188.
5. Ibid., p.204.
6. Chaudry Farzand Ali, Convener Mahaz, *Kianat*, Goli Number 3, July, 1974.
7. Qamar-ul-Zaman, *Quaid-i-Azam Aur Riasat Bahawalpur*, op.cit., p.230
8. Shahab, op.cit., p.406.
9. Qamar-ul-Zaman, *Quaid-i-Azam Aur Riasat Bahawalpur*, op.cit., p.280.
10. Riaz Hashmi, *Brief for Bahawalpur Province*, op-cit., p.100.
11. Ibid., p.103.
12. *Kianat*, Goli Number, Bahawalpur, 3rd July, 1974.
13. *Imroz*, Multan, 30th March, 1970.
14. *Dawn*, Karachi, 25th April, 1970
15. Tariq Rehman, *Language And Politics In Pakistan*, op.cit., p.182
16. Qamar-ul-Zaman, *Quaid-i-Azam Aur Riasat Bahawalpur*, op.cit., p.235.