

## REGIONALISM--- FACTS AND FEARS--- NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper will discuss the history and future of preservation of cultural regionalism in Pakistan. It will take into focus the facts and fears in order to get a more concrete understanding of the issues involved. Pakistan is a country which came into being on basis of an ideology. We have a long history of promoting ideological nationalism vs. regionalism. The apparent failure in imposing this on the majority population with diverse and deep rooted regional cultural affiliations over a prolonged period of time gave rise to a gradual change in thinking pattern of the Academia and decision makers. This change in attitude reflected in the slogan of “Unity in Diversity” which is slowly but firmly gaining roots in current thinking pattern of masses and elite. “Unity in Diversity” means Pakistan would not be a melting pot of different ethno-linguistic cultures and sub cultures into a single entity. Rather Pakistan would be house to a national culture alongside diverse regional cultures. “Diversity maintains Unity” will be the guiding principle and it could be the best tool to produce national integrity.*

**Keywords:** Culture, Regionalism Heritage, Preservation, Pakistan

### HISTORY OF DEBATE OVER PRESERVING REGIONAL CULTURES VS. PROMOTING A NATIONAL CULTURE

In a recent research done at COMSATS institute of Information technology, Abbottabad researchers conclude that:

“...Research findings show an existence of a cultural diversity among different provinces of Pakistan...The distinctive provincial culture of Pakistan, despite its similarities and differences across other provinces makes a unique national culture.” (Moshadi and Amjad 2011:331-344)

The picture is not as black and white as shown in this research. Regionalism is nothing new in archaeological and cultural context of Pakistan. The Indus Valley Civilization roughly comprising the map of Pakistan was a result of a loose unification of

different regional cultures and traditions and the unparalleled standardization policies of Harappan elite failed to melt the regionalism into a single culture. It is interesting to note that Etazaz Ahsan considers a Pakistani Citizen as an “Indus Person” (Ahsan:xv) while Ahmad Nabi Khan traced the roots of Pakistani culture in Potohar’s old Paleolithic (Khan 1993:1). Sir Mortimer Wheeler back in 1952 felt the importance of Pakistan’s cultural roots in past. He observed that Pakistan suddenly emerged as the biggest Muslim state but she is deeply rooted in its pre Muslim past. We ought to know these roots to understand what these roots produced (Wheeler 1956). William L. Hanaway and Wilma Heston noted that the study of popular culture of Pakistan has not developed as rapidly or as broadly among scholars (Hanaway and Heston 9). According to Donald N. Wilber one of the major features of Pakistan is the existence of a wide racial, linguistic and cultural diversity in the population and of a large number of distinctive traditional groups with strong group identity (Wilber 1964:53). Rounaq Jahan observed that language and cultural factors are often not supportive of the growth of a single nationalism (Jahan 1972) Mir Ghos Bakhsh bizenjo in his speech in National Assembly in 1973 stated that “...the culture of Pakistan has based on the culture of the four provinces of the country... he maintained that culture and art were based on the tradition and practice of the people and had little or nothing to do with other things (p.145 Pakistan Pictorial Two years of People’s rule 1973).

In the two days’ national conference on Pakistani culture, held in 2006 under NIHCR, Riaz Ahmad took the stance that “Pakistani culture” exemplifies the concept of “Unity in Diversity”. Likewise, Qasim Jan rejected a “total break from the past”. He maintained that the variety and diversity of Pakistani culture is not a problem but uniqueness. Moshadi in his article notes that people of Pakistan by and large are closely tied in cultural boundaries (Shah 2011:339). Qadeer in his book on Pakistani regionalism interprets regional as provincial and accepts the existence of provincial and sub provincial regional communities and sub cultures. He notes that a layer of national values, beliefs, sentiments and institutions envelops the otherwise distinctive and persistent regional social organizations and sub cultures. Yet this layer does not contradict social, cultural and linguistic distinctions...at the regional or district levels. He notes that historical beliefs and local traditions coalesce and collide with the juristic norms and universal symbols in an ongoing process of cultural fusion. (Qadeer: 3-4)

## **FEARS REGARDING PRESERVING REGIONAL CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

The fears expressed in the case of encouraging interpretation and preservation of cultural regions mainly sprang from the anti-fascist feelings which overtook Europe after 1945. Regionalism was seen generally as an ideological forerunner of Fascism. The dominant modernization theory assumed that the separate regional cultures were doomed to be swallowed up by the nation. It was only in 1970’s that the “region” received new attention. Scholars have shown that local and national identities were not necessarily conflicting and that provincial elites played active role in the nation-building process.

Eric Storm noted that a person can have multiple identities, like territorial, local, regional, national and supra national and all these supplement each other. Regional identities supplied the corresponding national identity with local roots.

In Pakistan the fear that promoting regional cultures will be a serious threat to national integrity was an intellectual hoax first introduced by intellectuals facing identity crises in a new country with diverse and deeply rooted local cultures. Jameel Jalbi presented this argument in his

### پاکستانی کلچر۔ قومی کلچر کی تشکیل کا مسئلہ

He wrote:

یہ سوال کہ پاکستانی کلچر کیا ہے بذاتِ خود اس بات کی علامت ہے کہ ہم اپنے قومی کلچر کی وہ نمایاں خصوصیات، محرکات اور عوامل دریافت کرنا چاہتے ہیں جو بحیثیتِ مجموعی ایک پاکستانی باشندے میں موجود ہیں اور جو ساتھ ساتھ دوسرے ملکوں کے باشندوں سے مختلف ہیں (جالبی: 46)۔۔۔ قومی سطح پر مشترک خصوصیات اس طور پر ہم میں مشترک نہیں ہیں جس طور پر ایک انگریز، ایک فرانسیسی، ایک جاپانی اور ایک چینی میں نظر آتی ہیں۔ لیکن اس کے برخلاف جب ہم علاقائی سطح پر ان خصوصیات کو تلاش کرتے ہیں تو ہمیں کلچر کی قومی مماثلت اور طرزِ فکر و عمل کے گہرے اشتراک کا احساس ہوتا ہے۔ ہمارے ہاں یہی وہ سطح ہے جہاں کلچر کا شدید احساس ہوتا ہے۔ اس اعتبار سے میں اگر پاکستانی کلچر کی وضاحت کرنا چاہوں تو اس کے معنی یہ ہوں گے کہ میں مختلف علاقوں کے لوگوں کے عادات، رسوم و رواج، لباس، فنون و ہنر اور تہذیبی ماحول کو بیان کر دوں اور ان سب کے الگ الگ بیان پر بحیثیتِ مجموعی پاکستانی کلچر کا لیبل لگا دوں۔ لیکن مجھے یقین ہے کہ اس طریقہ کار سے نہ آپ کو اطمینان حاصل ہو گا اور نہ مجھے۔ آپ اس بات سے یقیناً اتفاق کریں گے کہ ہمارے ہاں قومی سطح پر کوئی ایسا کلچر موجود نہیں ہے۔ ہمارے ہاں علاقائی کلچر تو موجود ہیں لیکن ایک ایسا قومی کلچر جو ان سب علاقائی کلچروں کو ایک گہرے روحانی رشتے میں منسلک کرتا ہے موجود نہیں ہے۔۔۔ (جالبی: 71-70)

It was this uneasiness in minds of the first policy makers which engaged them in an effort to invent a mono-cultural nationalism and to discourage cultural regionalism. Faiz Ahmad Faiz as first director of PNCA marked the difference between non-ideological components of culture like language, dress, cuisine, architecture, arts and crafts, non-religious customs and social observances and the ideological model of a national culture based on artificial elements (Faiz ed. Babree 1997: 24-25). He stated that all regional cultures are an organic part of the totality of our national culture...The confusion of thought which continues to plague this subject stems from one basic falling which seeks to counterpoise national and regional cultures as antagonistic rivals and thus postulates that one can or would develop only at the expense of the other...national culture is an aggregate of these regional cultures plus unifying bonds of faith and history. The development of national culture therefore presumes that every citizen of Pakistan must love, respect and creatively participate in the culture of his birth and upbringing and at the same time makes this activity embrace and coalesce with the collective national

creative process. He stated that this is possible only if “diversity” is not misinterpreted as disunity and the natural process of the growth of diverse elements is not perverted or stifled by an impatience for results. Faiz indicated that a failure in protecting regional cultures will leave us with no alternative but to borrow a national culture whole sell from some alien source—a process which is already piecemeal in progress... (27-28).

After 1971 the situation started changing and in today’s Pakistan Cultural regionalism is not only widely accepted by intellectuals and masses but also celebrated and enjoyed. It was only in 1983 with the collaboration of Lok Virsa, American scholars started a broad-based program to study different aspects of Pakistan’s folk culture. They proposed a programmatic, multidisciplinary effort to promote innovative research in relatively unstudied subjects and to help broaden the research potential of Lok Virsa. They observed that Pakistani folk culture, as any folk culture, can be approached from a broad range of humanistic disciplines (Hanaway and Heston 9). During the World Decade for Cultural Development from 1988 to 1997 the situation further improved.

HEC course of BS in archaeology, revised in year 2011 includes study of Provincial Cultural Heritage as course no.325. It states:

Every University will develop its own course for this paper. This course will include provincial archaeological heritage in different provinces of Pakistan. Each university will develop their respective course by concentrating on the respective provincial archaeological heritage and museums.

- Before 1947  
Vast Data collection on regional heritage
- From 1947 to 71  
Era of single national culture building efforts
- From 1972 to 1987  
Era of realization  
Unity in diversity
- From 1987 to 1997 and onwards  
World Decade for cultural development  
The promotion of regional cultures

## **NEED OF A RE-IDENTIFICATION OF CULTURAL REGIONS**

In this age of cultural globalization we are here to think about how to preserve regional cultural diversity and how to relate it with national integrity. Our journey towards regional self-awareness will start from the re-identification of sub cultures based on language, ethnicity and local identity. A cultural region has its own identity shaped by the age-long interaction between the local population and its natural environment. Only by being faithful to its own character could the region contribute to the welfare of the whole. (Storm: 6)

As the goal of this conference is to formulate the standards of interpretation and preservation of regionalism through the tangible and non-tangible heritage; this paper will take into consideration the standardization of the idea of empowering people of a single cultural region to study, preserve and elaborate their tangible and non-tangible cultural heritage.

Regionalism is rooted in Pakistan's manifold diversity of languages, cultures, and traditions. Socio culturally speaking, regions are distinct from one another. Take Punjab's example. Punjab the Pentapotamia of ancient Greeks could not be taken as a single cultural region. It's a Supra cultural region, merely formed on the bases of a mutually understandable language. As noted by Muhammad Suleiman (1899):

ڈیرہ تا چنبہ تھیں تائیں، جمنہ تھیں پیشاور  
بولن، سمجھن، لوک پنجابی سچا سخن ایہ میرا

In this supra region there are many cultural regions which closely follow the four major physical regions naming the Muree and Margala hills, the Potohar plateau, the Salt Range and the upper Indus plain. These cultural regions are further divided into sub-cultural units. These sub cultural units are shaped mainly in Punjab plain by rivers. The Upper Indus plain is further divided into Bahawalpur plain and areas between any two rivers called doabs while the central uplands of doabs called bars. Chaj doab has Kirana bar, Rachna has Sandal bar, Bari has Ganji bar and between Bias and Sutlej there is Nili bar (Abdul Rehman 1997:19).

Doabs are divided in upper and lower zones both forming independent cultural regions. Every cultural region thus formed has more than one sub-cultural or basic cultural unit. A sub-cultural unit has most in common, like dialect, cultural norms, dresses, cuisine, rituals, saints, tombs, folklore, music and arts. To remap the sub-cultural borders, we should have an accurate idea of the landscape and natural resources who in connection with the humans formed these distinctive cultural units. For instance, Abdul Rehman and James L. Wescoat identifies Gujrat as a functional region and as a cultural area. They consider the special position of Gujrat within Punjab and the distinctive cultural character where cultivation and pastoralism came together in diverse combinations and conjunction. (Rehman and Wescoat 1993:30)

## ROLE OF HUMANITIES IN PRESERVING REGIONALISM

With regard to role of humanities in preserving regionalism, we should keep in mind that various aspects of culture and its overall formation link with the society that has been formed in the territorial limits of that particular region. When it comes to preservation it requires multidisciplinary approach in which social, cultural, religious economical, artistic, architectural, historical and archaeological disciplines are included. This approach and understanding is ultimately integrated into each other and thus brings

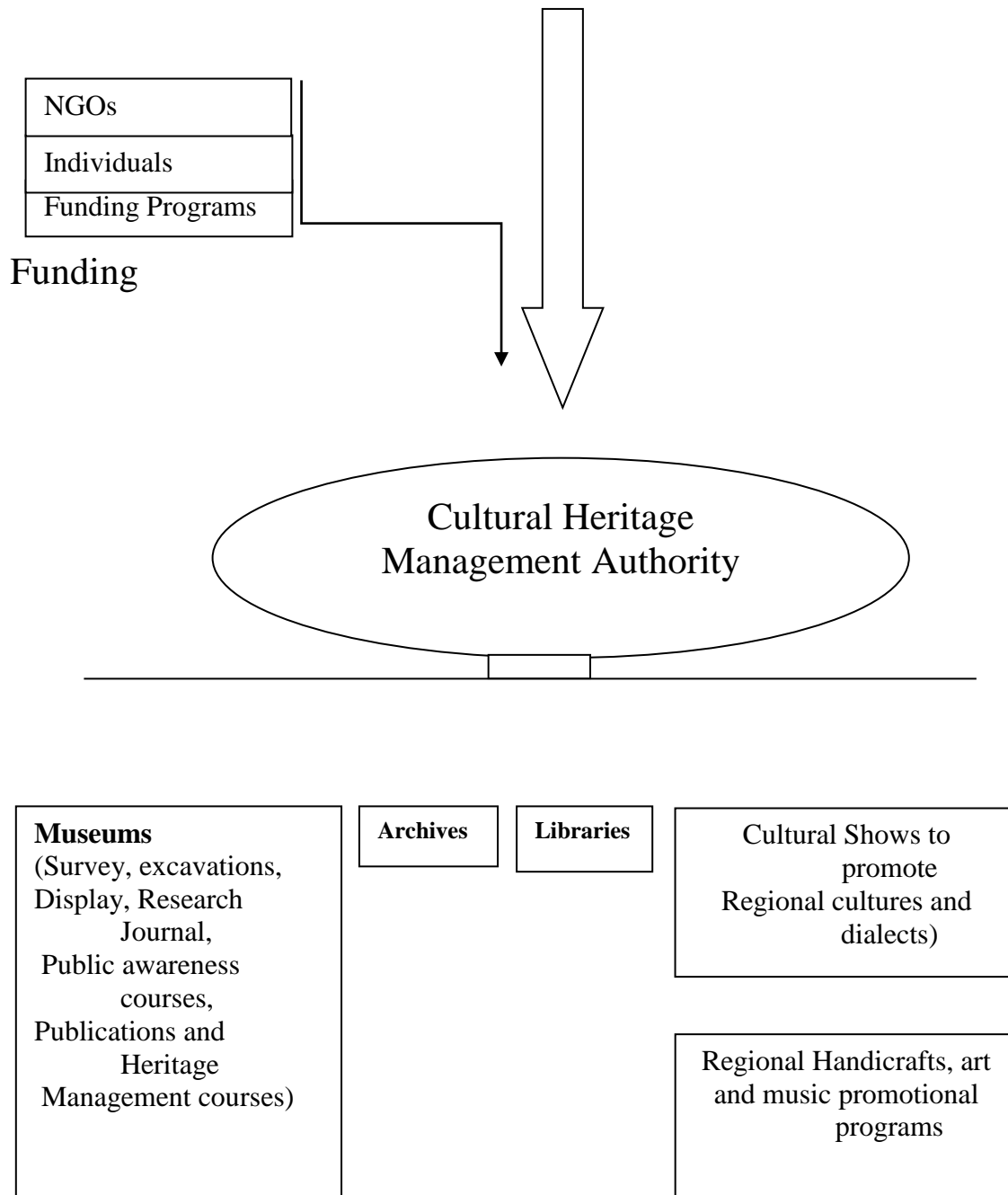
more useful results at regional levels. In short, use of applied as well as social sciences together for creating awareness and preserving cultural heritage is very much essential particularly in modern day research. Significance of humanities and social sciences is way beyond with everlasting impacts on our collective understanding of regionalism similarities, differences and development.

### **MODEL FOR REDISCOVERING PAKISTAN THROUGH CULTURAL REGIONALISM**

When we talk about cultural regionalism in Pakistan, we mostly have provinces in mind. This broader view does not represent the cultural diversity of Pakistan. There is a real need to remap “cultural-regional” boundaries of Pakistan as they don’t always fall inside the administrative units of sub tehsil, tehsil and district with much overlapping. The cultural mapping of regions mostly based on the traditional ethnic knowledge or ethno-linguistic homogeneity. There is a real need to adopt a model which outlines the features of a cultural-regional humanities oriented authority.

NEH (National Endowment for the humanities) in USA is running a very successful program of regional cultural studies. This could be worked as an model.

## DISTRICT GOVERNMENT



## **WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO INTERPRET REGIONAL CULTURAL HERITAGE?**

History of systematic cultural research in Pakistan mostly starts from British colonial period. The First and second generation of researchers were randomly collecting the evidence and interpreting it in likewise manner. With the development of regional cultural identity the local perspective will become equally important. Archaeologists in museums, provincial archaeology departments and universities are in contact with sincere locals warm heartedly inviting them for exploration, excavation and preservation of local heritage. Unfortunately funds are not available. The only other option is to invite Archaeological teams from abroad. But to catch their interest is a hard task. They are always interested in promising sites. The unavailability of funds and experts results in an open invitation to robbers, treasure hunters and enthusiasts to destroy tangible cultural heritage. Archaeological sites are heavily suffering from the curiosity based or antiquity hunting activities of non-professional individual or groups. Large collections of out of context artifacts are found with individuals not trained in archaeological interpreting methods. Sophisticated equipment like Gemini's metal detectors and ground penetrating radars which are not even affordable for archaeological institutions to purchase are found with these antiquity hunters. This situation requires immediate action from Provincial archaeology departments to protect heritage from illegal or non-professional in collaboration with the proposed authority.

## **WHAT TO PRESERVE AND INTERPRET?**

To promote the study and reinforcement of regional cultural identity, the major themes of the research will be historical, archaeological and geographical background of the region and its significance within the national context. Architecture, antiquity, ancient settlements, cuisine, dress, landscape, scenery, mystic and folk literature, saints and tombs will be in focus of the Cultural Heritage Management Authority.

## **EDUCATING TARGETED GROUPS**

Urban middle class, Middle class and popular class will be targeted for recreational activities by organizing excursions and festivals. Local museums will be established. These museums will work as the hubs. Task of the museums will be to display of antiquity, surveying the tangible and non-tangible, mapping the cultural boundaries, publishing regional cultural research, educating masses and organizing heritage management courses etc. A sense of shared identity based on archaeological, historical and living culture, like folklore, handicrafts and building traditions will be created (Storm:5).



**AREAS OF WORK**

1. Regional cultural associations
2. Historical preservation
3. Excursions
4. Environmental protection
5. Ethnographic study
6. Folklore
7. Popular art and painting styles
8. Regional mystic and folk literature
9. Music

**ROLES**

1. Heritage managers
2. Historical geographers
3. Cultural anthropologists
4. Archaeologists
5. Historians
6. Folklorists
7. Expert in regional religious trends and literature
8. Members of learned societies and associations
9. Local notables

**TOOLS FOR PROTECTING REGIONAL HERITAGE**

1. Regional museums
2. Folklore festivals
3. Plays in local dialects
4. Regional literature
5. Handicrafts
6. Preservation of typical natural scenery
7. Regional architecture
8. Regional Cultural periodicals
9. Popular arts
10. Local traditions
11. Popular culture
12. Local construction traditions
13. Preparation of lessons in regional history
14. Adoption of calendar events
15. Developing cultural diary of The cultural region
16. Tourism
17. Photographic exhibitions and albums
18. Travel guides

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- 19. Illustrated magazines
  - 20. Media coverage

### **LYALLPUR MUSEUM CONTRIBUTION**

In a short period of time, Lyallpur museum established itself as a role model for promoting regional cultural studies and preserving regional heritage.

### **CONCLUSION**

Dr. Dani once said that there is no break in human history. There is no break in the cultural continuity. Culture is a continuous affair of human life... (Dani in art and culture p.32-33). This is most true about our most ancient regional cultures still awaiting systematic exploration and scientific interpretation.

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