

Core-Periphery Relationship: The Post-1973 State of Pakistan and Nationalism in Gilgit-Baltistan

*Sajjad Ahmad**

Abstract

Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) is a mountainous northern region of Pakistan which got its independence from princely state of Kashmir as a result of a freedom struggle. The region is administered by the federal ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B). It has an ambiguous constitutional status and does not have parliamentary representation which hampers its economic and political development. Successive governments have tried to regulate the problems by introducing reforms but the real transfer of power from centre to G-B has not yet taken place. This situation is exploited by the nationalist parties which accuse Islamabad of meddling in the affairs of G-B. This paper analyzes nationalism in G-B in the light of Paul Brass and Michel Hechter's theories and examines G-B – Islamabad relationship in the post-1973 period.

Introduction

Pakistan came into existence on 14 August 1947. Besides massive bloodshed that followed, institution building, refugee settlement and formation of a viable political system became key concerns of the then leadership. In the initial years of independence the Government of India (GOI) Act of 1935 was adopted by the state of Pakistan as its basic law. This framework provided legal statute of governance to this new state till 1956 when Pakistan passed its first constitution. Under the GOI Act, parliamentary governments at the central and provincial levels were formed. This divided the power between governments at both levels and provided each the authority to collect taxes.¹

Before and during the British rule, India had several princely states ruled by different *rajās* and *nawābs*. The region of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) was part of Kashmir, one of the largest princely states of India. Kashmiri troops had occupied Gilgit in nineteenth century. The British also established their agency in Gilgit parallel to the Dogra rulers of

* Mr. Sajjad Ahmad, Senior Research Fellow, Area Study Centre for Europe, University of Karachi, Karachi.

¹ Stephen Philip Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard Books Pvt. Ltd., 2005), p. 41.

Kashmir. In 1935 the agency was leased by the British and, on 30 July 1947, two weeks before the independence of Pakistan, British transferred the administration of Gilgit to the Governor of Kashmir, Ghansara Singh.² The locals were, however, unwilling to live under the domination of Kashmir's Dogra rulers and favoured to join Pakistan. The Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir initially opted to join neither India nor Pakistan and sent its Governor, Ghansara Singh, to establish his control in Gilgit. In the following months, amid the fear of Muslim uprisings in Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh, on 27 October 1947, declared accession of Kashmir with India. The local leadership in Gilgit rejected this decision and revolted against Dogra rule. Ghansara Singh was arrested by Gilgit Scouts and the liberation fight spread to Baltistan. A new country 'Islamic Republic of Gilgit' was formed under an interim revolutionary government which lasted from November 1st – the official Independence Day – to 16 November 1947. A telegram, sent to the Government of Pakistan, requested to take over the administration of the region. After independence, Government of Pakistan in Karachi was unaware of the developments in this mountainous region. Upon receiving the telegram, Pakistan brought this region under its administrative control. To consolidate the control over this newly liberated region, Pakistan imposed a colonial law of Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) and sent a political agent Mohammad Alam to Gilgit. At the time of independence, FCR was also imposed in Federally Administrative Tribal Areas (FATA). According to this law all judicial and administrative powers are exercised by a civil servant. As a result of imposition of FCR the region was governed through political agents and no political process took place there. Moreover, in the anticipation of United Nations plebiscite in Kashmir, G-B was ironically associated with the Kashmir issue in subsequent years in order to gain the region's Muslim vote in a plebiscite. Various reforms during different governments were introduced in G-B to provide autonomy to the local population. The general neglect on Pakistan's part to provide liberties and self-rule to G-B became a pretext of nationalism. Local nationalist parties periodically raised their voices and demanded autonomy and even independence. In 2009 Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-governance Order was introduced to the region which increased the legislative powers of locally elected leadership. Though this presidential order have increased the

² Martin Sokefeld, 'From Colonialism to Postcolonial Colonialism: Changing Modes of Domination in the Northern Areas of Pakistan', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 64:4 (November 2005), p.944.

number of legislative subjects of local elected leaders but the population still seems unhappy and considers these measures as cosmetic.

This research paper aims to analyze nationalism in Gilgit-Baltistan, specially the causes that provided impetus to the demands of the nationalists. It examines the relationship of Gilgit-Baltistan and Islamabad in the post-1973 state of Pakistan and the neglect on the part of Pakistan. The paper also attempts to explore why the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-governance Order of 2009 and 18th Amendment have so far failed to transfer administrative and financial powers to the locals and what are the possible ways to deal with the nationalist demands in the current political context.

Politics in Gilgit-Baltistan – a historical appraisal

Gilgit-Baltistan is a mountainous northern region of Pakistan which borders with China, Afghanistan, Indian administered Kashmir, and Pakistani administered Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Gilgit-Baltistan covers a territory of 72,971 square kilometers and has an estimated population of 1.249 million.³ Its geographic position and mineral resources including fresh water reservoirs due to vast glaciers make G-B a valuable land.

During the nineteenth century the British and Dogra rulers of Kashmir both established their control and administration in this territory. To extend influence and prevent any uprising in adjacent areas of Gilgit, Britain created a paramilitary force of local troops. British political agent, Algernon Durand, took this initiative and, in 1892, developed a local military levies loyal to British. In 1913 these local recruits, trained by British, became Gilgit Scouts and their number was increased.⁴

When Britain leased the Gilgit Agency to Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh sent his Governor, Ghansara Singh, to establish his rule and administration in Gilgit. Officers of Gilgit Scouts, however, refused to obey his orders. When Pakistan got independence on 14 August of the same year, these officers decided to annex Gilgit Agency with Pakistan. On 27 October with the declaration of Kashmir's annexation with India, struggle for Gilgit's freedom from the Dogra rule started. Governor Ghansara Singh was arrested by the Scouts. The Sikh company of regular Jammu and Kashmir state forces fled into the mountains while the Muslim company joined Gilgit Scouts in its struggle. An interim

³ Geography and Demography of Gilgit-Baltistan. <http://www.gilgitbaltistanscouts.gov.pk/geodemo.htm>, accessed on 28 April 2015.

⁴ Martin Sokefeld, *op.cit.*, p.951.

revolutionary government was established on 1st November 1947 and a telegram was sent to the Pakistani government. Meanwhile Scouts took the lead to liberate Baltistan from Dogra forces and with the help of local population revolted against Kashmiri forces. Pakistan annexed Gilgit agency by sending a political agent on 16 November. When Pakistan took control of Gilgit, the state imposed FCR according to which a civil servant exercised all judicial and administrative powers.

This new law was in stark contrast of the system that was in place before independence of G-B. Under the rule of Kashmiri Dogras, G-B was a province of princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and had a representation in state assembly. Moreover, people had the right of appeal to the High Court and enjoyed the status of a province. When Pakistan implemented FCR all such liberties were abolished. Since FATA was administered through FCR and political agents due to the tribal system, G-B was also treated in the similar manner. Government of Pakistan also linked G-B with its former master in anticipation to gain more votes in a possible UN plebiscite for the resolution of Kashmir dispute. However, no such plebiscite took place and ironically G-B is still associated with Kashmir from which it has already gained independence.

During the Kashmiri rule, people of G-B were living under the burden of heavy taxation and *begar* (forced labor). Moreover, the local *rajās* and *mirs* were also allowed to rule their respective areas. When state of Pakistan annexed G-B, these exploitative measures were not abolished. The local *rajās* continued to rule and the practice of *begar* and taxation remained intact. Additionally, another law of FCR was imposed upon the population. Periodic voices for abolishment of this law were raised by the locals. The protests were however ‘silenced in the name of Islamic unity’.⁵

Since independence Pakistan placed a highly centralized system to govern the country. This policy was also reflected in G-B when a federal ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas (KANA) was established in 1950. KANA was made responsible to deal with the policy matters of the area and also its administration, development and law making.⁶ Financial matters of G-B are still managed by the ministry and bureaucracy. In 1957 a political party, ‘The Gilgit League’, against the

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.960.

⁶ International Crisis Group, ‘Discord in Pakistan’s Northern Areas’, *Asia Report*, 2 April 2007, p.9.

FCR was established.⁷ The founder of this party was Colonel Mirza Hassan Khan, an ex-officer of Kashmir's state army and one of the freedom heroes of Gilgit-Baltistan's war. The party demanded political freedom and democratic rights for the people. This was the first local political organization which was established as a result of resentment but was not registered under the constitution of Pakistan.⁸ During the martial law of General Ayub Khan, the Gilgit League was banned.

Since G-B's affiliation with Pakistan, its political status is highly ambiguous. It does not have representation in Pakistan's national parliament and is not constitutionally part of the country. Successive governments have tried to regulate the problem by introducing reforms but the question of parliamentary representation and autonomy is still unchanged. Transfer of administrative powers to the local leadership of G-B is the most popular demand. The federal ministry is still a major player in both administrative and financial sectors. Political alienation and economic dislocation of G-B have fed the voices of nationalist parties and in result their assertive nationalism is gaining strength.

Theoretical framework

In early days of independence, state of Pakistan placed a centralized and authoritarian system of governance. This centralization remained a key feature of Pakistan's polity till the state's national assembly passed 18th Amendment to the constitution in April 2010. After this amendment, process of devolution of powers to the provinces started. The monopoly of strong centre in administrative and financial matters of provinces gave birth to periodic voices of provincial autonomy and equal participation in administration. In Gilgit-Baltistan, administrative, judicial and financial matters are also exercised by the powerful federal ministry and bureaucracy.

The situation of G-B can be examined in Michael Hechter's approach of core-periphery relationship. Although Hechter's main argument of economic exploitation is based upon his study of Celt minority in the United Kingdom which is an advanced industrial state but this argument can also be used to examine the nature of political and economic exploitation between the federal government of Pakistan and

⁷ Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad, *Northern Areas of Pakistan-Facts, Problems and Recommendations*, Vol.1 No.1. <http://www.ips.org.pk/pakistan-and-its-neighbours/1118-northern-areas-of-pakistan-facts-problems-and-recommendations>, accessed 17 May 2015.

⁸ Altaf Hussain, 'The Gilgit-Baltistan Reforms 2009', December 2009. www.forumfed.org, accessed on 15 May 2015.

Gilgit-Baltistan. Hechter argues that the core which is more powerful than the periphery dominates the periphery politically and exploits it economically and that the economy of periphery, which is less powerful, is always dependent upon the core. Hechter cites that,

Peripheral industrialization, if it occurs at all, is highly specialized and geared for export. The peripheral economy is, therefore, relatively sensitive to price fluctuations in the international market. Decisions about investment, credit, and wages tend to be made in the core. As a consequence of economic dependence, wealth in the periphery lags behind the core.⁹

Though Hechter's primary study is on the Celt minority of United Kingdom and his emphasis is on the advanced industrial state but his argument can also be applied to the developing states of South Asia. In Pakistan, the centralization allows the centre to exercise a monopoly over the resources and economy of the provinces. This practice can be construed in the case of Gilgit-Baltistan. The continuous domination of Islamabad through KANA and bureaucracy in the political and economic affairs of G-B has developed a sense of marginalization among the local population which is exploited by the nationalist parties.

The continuous absence from political process of the state and long prevailing constitutional anomaly has created resentment among people and developed their political consciousness. Apart from the absence and neglect of political process at state's part, underdevelopment of this resource rich and strategically important region is also frustrating its inhabitants. Despite having much potential of natural and mineral resources, G-B lacks modern infrastructure and facilities. Moreover, the huge water reservoirs possessed by the region can be utilized to meet the growing energy demand of the country but no serious attempts have been made by any government so far.¹⁰

Another interpretation to study the political developments in G-B can be of Paul R. Brass. He projects the theory of 'Instrumentalism' which focuses on the instrumental nature of ethnicity and nationality. Brass argues that nationalism is not merely given but it is exploited by elites or leadership of centralized states and the elites of non-dominant groups to mobilize the masses in order to either defend or to achieve

⁹ Umut Ozkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism a Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2nd edition, p.80.

¹⁰ Sajjad Ahmad, 'GB: changing views', *Dawn*, 25 February 2014. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1089287/gb-changing-views>, accessed on 12 May 2015.

their larger interests. These interests include more political gains in a system, more representation in the existing political system or more economic advantage over other groups.¹¹ Brass contends that, 'The study of ethnicity and nationality is the study of the process by which elites and counter-elites within ethnic groups select aspects of the group's culture, attach new value and meaning to them, and use them as symbols to mobilize the group, to defend its interests and to compete with other groups'.¹²

This interpretation of Brass about nationalism is of considerable relevance in the current scenario of G-B. Nationalism in G-B is also driven more for economic and political gains. The process of reforms initiated by different governments in the past have failed to resolve the constitutional limbo of G-B. Non-representation in the national legislature makes G-B dependent upon the federal budget. The recent reform order of 2009 has transferred few powers to the locally elected members of G-B Legislative Assembly, but it remains unsuccessful to address the core issue of representation.

There is also a discontent among people who feel that their region is economically exploited by Islamabad primarily due to the abrogation of State Subjects Rule (SSR), promulgated in 1927 by the last Dogra Maharaja Hari Singh.¹³ SSR protected ethnic and religious demography and economic rights of the local population. According to the SSR, no non-local can be employed or buy land for residence in G-B. Though SSR is still intact in AJK, in the 1970s, during the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, this was abrogated in G-B.

The people of G-B live in one of the harshest and vulnerable environmental conditions in Pakistan in terms of weather and un-favorable terrain. Basic facilities such as electricity, drinking water and healthcare in most of the areas of the region are nonexistent. People mostly rely on Karakorum Highway for their essential food supplies and travelling which also frequently gets blocked due to land sliding mostly during winter and monsoon. The entire region does not have any kind of

¹¹ Sajjad Ahmad, 'The Instrumentalist Perspective on Nationalism: Case Study of Catalonia', *Journal of European Studies*, 29:1 (January 2013), p.73.

¹² Umut Ozkirimli, *op.cit.*, p.88.

¹³ Ambreen Agha, 'Pakistan: Murder Most Foul in Gilgit Baltistan-Analysis'. *Eurasia review*, 6 March 2012. <http://www.eurasiareview.com/06032012-pakistan-murder-most-foul-in-gilgit-baltistan-analysis/>, accessed on 18 May 2015.

industry. ‘Many people rely on tourism to earn their livelihoods. It does not only include tour operators but also drivers, porters, hotel owners, cooks, guides and many others. This industry has never been given importance. Due to the unavailability of modern infrastructure, dearth of facilities and by lack of interest of Government of Pakistan tourism in G-B was never flourished the way it could be’.¹⁴

G-B, despite having a potential of natural and mineral resources, lacks modern infrastructure and facilities. The socio-economic development is deficient and no modern industry is present to provide jobs, utilize the labor and accommodate the educated youths.¹⁵ The population mainly relies on agriculture and animal husbandry but no serious measures have ever been taken by the government to improve these two sectors. The traditional agricultural practices of farmers inhibit yield.¹⁶ Lack of job opportunities also adds poverty. The absence of road network and communication in many areas has made them inaccessible. The region has a potential to meet the growing energy demands of country due to its enormous water channels and water reservoirs. However no serious attempts have been made by any government to utilize this potential. Only industry at which the population relies is tourism. ‘The region has a distinctive feature of having three highest mountain ranges and five out of fourteen highest peaks of the world. Fresh water lakes, alpine valleys, biodiversity, trekking and mountaineering, distinctive and vibrant culture, hospitality and friendly nature of the population are the major sources of attraction for foreigners. Notwithstanding, this resource of tourism industry was never utilized in an appropriate way which could help the state to improve its economy. The governments of Pakistan never embarked to take any serious process of development and promotion of these areas’.¹⁷ Combined with the grievances related to political alienation, economic dislocation and deprivation the nationalist parties have started promulgating their nationalist ideas among masses.

¹⁴ The views are expressed by Hamid Hussain, tour operator, Mountain Travels Pakistan in an interview on 15 September 2012.

¹⁵ Alok Bansal, ‘Gilgit-Baltistan: The Roots of Political Alienation’, *Strategic Analysis*, 32:1, 27 February 2008, p.94.

¹⁶ Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, Baltistan, Semester report V, SEED project.

¹⁷ These views are expressed by Hamid Hussain, tour operator, on 15 September 2012.

According to Brass, the nationalist movements and their success rely upon certain political factors. These factors are: the existence of and the strategies pursued by nationalist political organizations, the nature of government response to ethnic group demands and the general political context.¹⁸ These three factors as projected by Brass assert that success of nationalist organizations depends upon the policies adopted by their leadership to achieve their goals and how structured these organizations are in order to put forward their demands and assert their agenda. Government's response to these demands is also of key importance. The response can be varied. A government may opt to suppress these demands through harsh measures and brutal tactics such as arresting the leadership or in worst cases eliminating the top leadership through violence. On the other hand, state can also be accommodative and pursue a path of reconciliation or by granting more liberties, autonomy and decentralization in response to the demands of the nationalist parties.

In the case of G-B, nationalist tendencies and demands for a separate state are still at the stage of infancy. People are reluctant to discuss the idea of an independent state of G-B which decreases the support to nationalist parties of the region. The nationalist parties are also divided and their agenda varies from autonomy and self-rule i.e. from remaining associated with the state of Pakistan to an independent state of Gilgit-Baltistan. Absence of a common agenda and mass support allows the state to intervene to exploit divisions within the nationalist parties. There is also a strict surveillance of intelligence agencies which do not allow the nationalist parties to propagate their aims and objectives freely among people.¹⁹

State's response to the nationalist call is also diverse. On the one hand, the response is severe: Many local nationalist leaders are arrested and imprisoned while leading protests and demonstrations for their political rights. On the other hand, the state has played an accommodative role by granting more legislative powers to the elected members of legislative assembly through recent reform order.

Post-1973 state of Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan – the political context

Decade of 1970 was momentous for the political landscape of Gilgit-Baltistan. When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto rose to power in Pakistan he carried out significant reforms in the region. Before Z. A. Bhutto's tenure the

¹⁸ Umut Ozkirimli, *op.cit.*, p.92.

¹⁹ These views are expressed by Shafqat Ali Inquillabi, in an interview on 04 July 2010.

first nationalist organization with the name of ‘Tanzeem-e-Millat’ was founded in G-B. In 1971 an incident (in which a headmistress, including other teachers of a girls’ school in Gilgit, were dismissed by the authorities) sparked protests in Gilgit which soon turned violent when a protestor, Rajab Ali, was shot dead and several others injured by the firing of authorities. Tanzeem-e-Millat took the lead in these protests. The top leadership of this organization, including the first lawyer of Gilgit-Baltistan advocate, Johar Ali, was arrested which further aggravated the situation. As a result, scores of people attacked the local jail and freed their leaders. However, many leaders were re-arrested and sent to Haripur jail in NWFP where after a speedy trial, they were sentenced to imprisonment.²⁰ During this disorder, when people stormed the police station and prison to free their leaders, non- local officers ordered to fire at the people, Gilgit Scouts disobeyed them.²¹

After coming into power, Bhutto released the arrested leaders of Tanzeem-e-Millat. He abolished FCR, status of political agency, *begar*, taxation and the *raja* rule. He also introduced judicial reforms in 1975 and set up a quota for the students of G-B in the universities of Pakistan.²² Though Bhutto’s reforms were widely appreciated by almost every segment of society which in return gave popularity to Bhutto’s Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) in G-B. However, no formal institution for administration during his time was setup. Unlike AJK, which during Bhutto’s term established its own institutions including legislative assembly, Supreme Court, High Court, President and Prime Minister’s offices and Public Service Commission,²³ G-B remained deprived of this democratic process. In sheer contrast with political developments in AJK, KANA stayed in complete control of G-B’s administration.

Apart from domination and meddling of the centre in the affairs of G-B, the abrogation of SSR in 1970s had disastrous consequences on the area. The SSR barred non-local from employment in G-B and buying any property or land. With an end of SSR, non-locals started settling in the region and consequently tensions arose between the local ethnic groups and the migrants. Sectarian tensions in Gilgit city were also flared up and, in 1975, an eminent clash between Shia and Sunni groups during

²⁰ Ghulam Rasool, *Azadi-e-Gilgit-o-Baltistan* (Rawalpindi: International publishers, 2004), p.291.

²¹ Martin Sokefeld, *op.cit.*, p.960.

²² Yousuf H. Abadi, *Tareekh-e-Baltistan* (Skardu: Baltistan printers and publishers, 2009), 2nd edition, p.299.

²³ International Crisis Group, *op.cit.*, p.9.

the holy month of *Moharram* was prevented at the last moment by Gilgit Scouts.

Martin Sokefeld, a German anthropologist carried out his anthropological fieldwork from the year 1991 to 1993 in Gilgit. In his research he narrated this incident in detail and argued that this conflict in Gilgit was allegedly a ploy and was originally instigated by the government to break the unity of people. Soon after the action of Gilgit Scouts which thwarted a potential religious war, the body was dissolved and a new troop with the name of 'Northern Light Infantry' (NLI) was installed. The difference between Gilgit Scouts and NLI was that Gilgit Scouts comprised of local soldiers under the command of non-local officers. The new NLI was a mix of local and non-local soldiers commanded by non-local officers. This was the first time since independence of Gilgit-Baltistan that a non-local military force was installed in the area. According to Sokefeld, many interviewees draw a connection between the alleged government's involvement in fueling sectarian tensions and the dissolution of Gilgit Scouts. They reaffirmed their opinion in the similar events that happened later in 1988 when armed Sunni groups attacked Shia villages in outskirts of Gilgit and were not stopped by the army. According to them had a local force like Gilgit Scouts been placed, the armed groups would have been stopped before reaching Gilgit as happened in 1975.²⁴

During General Zia's martial law, the process of reforms initiated by Bhutto came to an end. After Zia's death, Pakistan entered into a cycle of democratic governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif from 1988 to 1999. Both prime ministers improved the administrative setup through various reforms. During the regime of General Pervez Musharraf the previous Northern Areas Legislative Council was turned into Northern Areas Legislative Assembly. Despite the alteration and improvement in the administrative system, decision making powers were not transferred to the elected representatives.

Though the process of reforms was resumed after the end of General Zia's military regime, nationalist parties continued raising their voices against the unjust behavior of Islamabad. In frustration demands for self-rule and even independence were surfaced. The state harshly responded to these demands and, on several occasions arrested and mistreated the leaders of local nationalist parties. Due to a strict system of surveillance, the Pakistani government has routinely cracked down on nationalist groups in this region. Like similar movements elsewhere in

²⁴ Martin Sokefeld, *op.cit.*, pp.960-61.

Pakistan, these groups are constrained by the power of the central government.²⁵

In 1996, first politically motivated unrest was witnessed in Gilgit. The administration planned to recruit local young men for a new body of Northern Scouts. After hours of waiting a scuffle broke out between few applicants and Chitral Scouts who were placed in Gilgit. When the news of beating of applicants by Chitral Scouts spread, large number of people came out on streets and in protest the businesses were shut down. Several government office buildings were set on fire by the angry mob. A curfew was imposed and many activists were detained. In the following year, at the fiftieth anniversary of Pakistan's independence, nationalist parties planned a demonstration against the celebrations. The plan failed as several leaders were arrested, on thirteenth and fourteenth August, and were accused of treason.²⁶

Constitutional status and representation in national legislature are the core issues of G-B. Different committees were formed in different eras to resolve this matter. The first committee was formed in 1975 by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto followed by General Zia. The third one was constituted during previous presidency of Asif Ali Zardari. All three attempts have miserably failed. G-B since its independence is governed on ad-hoc basis from Islamabad. Recently the current Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, has also announced to form a committee to deal with the constitutional status and assured that the recommendations of the committee would be implemented.²⁷

Demography of Gilgit-Baltistan is also a matter of concern. The area has a high percentage of Shia and Ismaili Muslims unlike any other province. Pakistan has never tried to make this region a province because this would be the only Shia-majority province in the country. Instead, the governments in Islamabad have tried to increase the influence of Sunnis in this region.²⁸ The divisive policies of state are criticized by the local

²⁵ Stephen P. Cohen, *op.cit.*, pp.222-23.

²⁶ Martin Sokefeld, p.962.

²⁷ Sajjad Ahmad, 'Electoral hurdles', *Dawn*, 10 May 2015. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1181004>, accessed on 11 May 2015.

²⁸ Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2007), p.159.

* Gilgit-Baltistan Council consists of prime minister of Pakistan, governor of GB, six federal members chosen by prime minister, chief minister of GB, six members of GB legislative assembly and federal minister of KANA who is an ex officio member and In-charge of Council. Council headed by the prime minister has power to legislate on 55 subjects.

population and the nationalist party leaders blame Islamabad of turning their paradise into hell.

In an attempt to provide more liberties and to transfer decision-making powers to the local representatives, Government of Pakistan announced Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-governance Order in 2009. The package divided the administration into two bodies; Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative (GBLA) and the Gilgit-Baltistan Council.* G-B Council under this reform order is created at the similar pattern of AJK Council. The package provides a provincial set up with the creation of a post of chief minister. Though it seems that G-B is now on a path where autonomy and more liberties are likely to be granted but political analysts and nationalist parties are not satisfied. According to them most of the important subjects of legislation were not granted to the GBLA and remained with the Council. The GB Council has come under considerable criticism by the locals who consider it a powerful unelected body whose chairman is the prime minister of Pakistan.

According to Nayat Karim, a political analyst this self-governance order is less likely to create an impact upon the lives of people. 'All major administrative and financial powers (even worse than AJK) are still with the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan and with Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan, who is appointed by Islamabad'.²⁹ According to the package, the financial autonomy of the legislature remains highly ambiguous. It is not dealt by the government properly. It is clearly shown that powers would remain with the G-B Council and not with the GBLA. Assembly could only pass the budget whereas control over revenue and expenditure will be the task of the Council.³⁰

After the announcement of this presidential order, elections were held in G-B which provided a limited chance to the locals to govern their region. PPP formed the government in G-B after taking most of the seats. However, this first chance of self-governance was overshadowed by the accusations of nepotism and corruption. The government also faced serious challenges of natural calamities, violence against Shia inhabitants and resource dependency upon centre.³¹ Though the government

²⁹ Interview Nayat Karim, political analyst, 28 May 2010.

³⁰ Abbas Ali, 'A Powerless Legislature for Gilgit-Baltistan', *Dawn*, 13 September 2009. <http://www.cssforum.com.pk/general/news-articles/23870-dawn-encounter-7.html>, accessed on 19 May 2015.

³¹ Sajjad Ahmad, 'Changeover in GB', *Dawn*, 9 December 2014. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1149646/changeover-in-gb>, accessed on 16 May 2015.

successfully completed its term and the region has moved towards the next elections, meddling of federal bureaucracy in administrative matters is still evident.

Apart from local nationalist parties that accuse Islamabad of interfering in G-B's political and economic affairs including its electoral process, mainstream national parties have also leveled serious allegations against each other.³² PPP was accused by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) G-B chapter of turning the result of elections of 2009 in its favour by registering several thousand bogus votes. Before the elections of 2009, PPP leader and former Information Minister, Qamar Zaman Kaira, became the Governor of G-B and allegedly rigged the elections. Similar criticism is faced by the newly appointed PML-N leader Barjees Tahir as the Governor of G-B, before elections, he was the federal minister of Kashmir Affairs and G-B.³³

Conclusion

The state of Pakistan started the devolution of powers after its parliament passed 18th Amendment to the Constitution. The earlier centralized policies and the exploitation of provinces by the centre came to an end by this historic amendment. Despite the immediate problems and peculiarities about transfer of powers, the amendment is likely to have a long-term impact on the political landscape of Pakistan in terms of centre-province relationship.

This amendment will, however, be of no significant value for Gilgit-Baltistan until its constitutional anomaly is resolved and the region get representation in national legislature. The government has tried to provide the limited autonomy to the people of G-B through the G-B Empowerment and Self-governance Order but this presidential order has so far failed to transfer the real decision-making powers to the people fully. G-B remains dependent upon the federal budget as it is not part of National Finance Commission (NFC) Award which provides financial allocations to the provinces.

To address the problems of G-B it is imperative for the ruling elite of Pakistan to take a historical look at the freedom struggle of people. They liberated their region from Kashmir so that it could become an integral part of Pakistan but, since its annexation till today, it has not been given its due status. Instead, the region is ironically associated with

³² Sajjad Ahmad, 'Electoral hurdles', *Dawn*, 10 May 2015. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1181004>, accessed 11 May 2015.

³³ *The Express Tribune*. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/877594/tit-for-tat-gloves-off-between-pml-n-and-ppp-in-gilgit-baltistan/>, accessed on 18 May 2015.

its former master and no process of true democratization and self-governance has yet taken place. Before independence G-B enjoyed status of a full-fledged province in the state of Jammu and Kashmir during Maharaja Hari Singh's rule. The region had representation in the state assembly and had access to the Kashmir High Court. The SSR also protected the ethnic identity and demography as it barred the non-locals to permanently settle or get employment in the region. In the state of Pakistan, G-B is now deprived of its traditional political rights which it used to enjoy before independence. This situation is benefiting the nationalist parties which are now asserting their nationalist ideas among the educated youth of the region.

In the current complex situation of G-B an earnest approach of the state of Pakistan is required. Granting more autonomy to the local leadership will restore their faith towards the state. Restricting the federal ministry and bureaucracy's interference in the internal matters of G-B would also be a vital step to address the grievances of population. The government should also ensure free and fair elections in the region so that a smooth and satisfactory transition from one government to the other can take place and the results would be acceptable for the population.

A concrete and long-lasting measure to deal with the problems of G-B would be adaptation of a similar policy that was pursued in AJK by the state of Pakistan in 1974. Government institutions that were established in AJK by the Interim Constitution Act provided AJK its own constitution and self-rule. Similar approach should be taken in G-B where defence, foreign affairs and communication would be maintained by the state of Pakistan and the remaining subjects of legislation and decision-making powers should be transferred to the locally elected leaders. Such a move and democratic set-up can help to improve the relationship of Islamabad and Gilgit-Baltistan, defuse the secessionist calls and bring an end the mistrust of population towards the state of Pakistan.