

## DOES SALARIAT EXPLAIN ETHNICITY IN INDO-PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*Communal and ethnic politics in Indo-Pak subcontinent is a popular theme of research in the discipline of history, sociology and political science. Among influential studies on the theme, Hamza Alvi's study on the role of classes in social structure of India and Pakistan offers interesting interpretation of this phenomenon. His analysis provokes further investigation on the role of classes in colonial and post colonial subcontinent.*

*This study reexamines Alvi's terminology of 'Salariat' class which according to him played instrumental role in the uprisings in the subcontinent specially during independence struggle from the British empire. This study uses several examples and events that help to understand the issue from different perspectives. Using deductive logic, this study raises questions from the Alvi's arguments which perhaps need to be readdressed. Because the set of forces have been changed in post colonial period and some angles, this research finds, are missing in Alvi's Salariat class. For instance, Hamza Alvi did not explain the issue of ethnicity specially when ethnic communities claim to be sovereign in particular territory within the sovereign state and superseded state-nationalism.*

*This study offers a critique on Hamza Alvi's 'salariat' and presents other models for explaining the interplay of classes in inter and intra-ethnic environment and role of the state policies in shaping the events in colonial and post colonial subcontinent.*

The purpose of this study is to review Hamza Alvi's article " Politics of Ethnicity in India and Pakistan" with particular emphasis on his terminalogy<sup>1</sup>. Examining the role of classes, Alvi introduces a new formulation of "Salariat" which defines the particular class that played a central role, along with other classes, in most of the ethnic uprisings in India and Pakistan. According to him the Salariat class "was a product of the colonial transformation of Indian social system in the nineteenth century and it consists of those who have received an education that equips them for employment in the state apparatus, at various levels<sup>2</sup>."

Being a sociologist, Alvi examines the social roots of the ethnic politics in the region with emphasis on class construction. He explains the role of working class in the struggle for independence. Communal standpoints of the two communities of the subcontinent, that is, Muslims and Hindus, overwhelmed the existence of ethnic communities. This overly class-based arguments ignores the historical realities of various ethnic groups in India and Pakistan, perhaps because Alvi does not seem clear in defining the terms ethnic movements 'subnationalisms' and regional groups<sup>3</sup>. In developing his arguments he follows Ballard's views of social category and social group and believes that in Pakistan ethnic community is not a politically mobilized condition of a pre-existing group of people. However the factual situation is in some ways different.

Contrary to India, Pakistan has no ethnic units at its periphery. In Pakistan, ethnic identities are defined through complete federating units, that is, Sindhi in Sindh, Punbies in Punjab, Baluchis in Baluchistan and Pukhtoon in Khyber Pakhtoonkwah. All federating units are indispensable for the federation. With these ethnic identities Hamza Alvi confuses with the term ethnic communities, though they are deemed and claimed as

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nations by the representative nationalists (Bengalis, Pakhtoons, Sindhis, Baluchis and Punjabis) with particular cultures, languages and well demarcated geographical boundaries. These communities are not imagined in the due course of historical process<sup>4</sup>. These communities are characterized by forces of primordial nature. The proponents of this argument present ample sources from history to prove their identities as a nation. Hamza Alvi rightly describes that Pakistan did not face centre- peripheral tension as the neighboring country India did. His total negation of religion as an identity for Bengali Muslims during the Pakistan movement seems sound and it was proved later in 1971 (creation of Bangladesh). However, the role of religion can not be marginalized in keeping people apart of the same culture that is Bengali Hindu and Bengali Muslim during the Pakistan movement. The role of Salariat can also be traced in the religious impulse of Muslims of Bengal.

Alongside Alvi's formulation of Salariat does not reconcile with the Bengali nationalism that whether it was a ethnic community or a nation. Partition of Bengal in 1905 and its annihilation highlight variables in addition to the role of Salariat class in Bengal. A fair judgment is that the Salariat formulation does not explains Bengali nationalism particularly in ethnic terms<sup>5</sup>.

It is also arguable that the Salariat class shaped the early stage of Indian nationalism who was mainly interested in 'Indianization of government services'. Indian nationalism assumed its communal flavor when Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 and in response to this All India Muslim league was formed in 1906. These dates are considered as the beginning of communal nationalism in the subcontinent<sup>6</sup>. But this Salariat analogy confuses the arguments when Muslim nationalism converted into the demand of a separate homeland for Muslims of the subcontinent. Communal conflicts were erupted and in some case patronized. This communal discourse provides a framework for explaining riotous violence. This framework allows Indian citizens, particularly its dominant castes and classes to accept the persistence of such violence in their society as an instrument of advancing their political goals in pre-partition India<sup>7</sup>.

The demand for a separate homeland which was already perceived in the minds of Muslims of the sub-continent, raises a series of questions for the Muslims of minority provinces like UP, CP and Bihar; Did they not know their economic status would not be ensured in a newly independent state? Did they not realize they would not have cultural similarity with the people of provinces included in Pakistan? Did they fail to realize that for those Salariat who intended to stay in India after partition, their socio-political position would be too fragile in case of large-scale migration of Muslims to Pakistan? And had they not anticipated the lasting hostility between Hindus and Muslims after this demand? These questions displace the Salariat formulation as Alvi explains its working.

Answers to these questions require lot of space and can be given in an objective manner. To mention only few, Abul Klam Azad, Moulana Shabbir Ahmed Usmani, S. Wazir Hasan and others had visualized the future situation. The Salariat class was quite aware of the difficult situation in the new land. But it was too late to reverse the whole process. The Salariat class definitely did inject the idea of Muslim nationalism, but it could not control the course of events. The massive outflow of skilled human resources weakened the economic status of the Muslim community in India, reduced its political role and disrupted its social structure<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, the Salariat who shifted to Pakistan for better opportunities could not maintain their status and were quickly replaced by sons of

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the soil. It is, therefore, difficult to support the argument that the Salariat class was at the centre of the Pakistan movement<sup>9</sup>.

After the partition, the Salariat class played significant role in shaping ethnic movements and class struggle in India. In a quick and well grasped survey of various cases, Alvi examines Salariat's role especially in the Dalit movement(Scheduled cast movement). In his view, the increasing unemployment among the educated sections of less privileged classes creates restlessness in the masses. It is so that the Dalit movement remained free from ethnic emblem. The Salariat actively participate in the areas such as Telgu, Malayali and Kannada. However in these areas it initiated a targeted course of action against Brahmin domination. Comparing the two countries Pakistan and India, we see that the vast land of India and its heterogeneous masses provide a conducive environment for class struggle, while Pakistan has a distinct setup of four major ethnic nationalities in which the Salariat class seems less active in any attempt of launching movements after the partition of Indian sub-continent.

It would be gross misstatement if we call political movements as the class struggle in Pakistan. The notion of classes and their role has been examined by the scholars under Marxist framework. Classes do exist in Pakistan but perhaps Marxist model does not provide an accurate explanation of their involvement in various political movements in the country.

For instance, peasants of Sindh remained the most deprived and insecure segment of Pakistani society, but we hardly seen genuine Hari movement in Pakistan. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who was known as the leader of the deprived classes, served the military general for seven year, started a political movement in 1967aiming to reconstruct the Pakistani society. But there was no visible change in the life of the people and even no relief was given to Haries who continued serving to their feudal masters.

The recommendation of Sindh Tenancy Legislation Committee(1945) had remained unimplemented. In 1947 government's Hari Inquiry Committee failed to recommend security of tenure for the Haris(peasants) and only laid down regulations governing tenancy agreement<sup>10</sup>. But this class never rebelled against their feudal Lords. M. Masud's, a member of Hari Committee, comments provide perhaps the best explanation of the situation in Sindh. He wrote:

*“ The Hari, who has cultivated a piece of land for several generations, does not know how long he will be allowed to stay on it. Fear reigns supreme in the life of the Hari .... fear of imprisonment, fear of losing his land, wife or life.... He might have to leave his crop half ripe, his cattle might also be snatched and he might be beaten out of the village. He might suddenly find himself in the fetters of police under an esquire for theft, robbery or murder.... The Hari fears the Zamindar's punishment more than he fears the torture of hell....As soon as the Zamindar appears on the fields the Hari and his children of and bow before him till they touch his feet, then rise up to kiss his hand....A good- looking wife is a constant source of danger even to his life. The Hari is asked to surrender her and he is subjected to intimidation, threat or coercion. If he does not yield, the wife is kidnapped or he is sent behind the bars in a false criminal case and the wife left alone is compelled to live with the Zamindar sees no other hope of success”<sup>11</sup>.*

The same situation still prevails in Sindh and in South Punjab. The means of production, political participation, tenancy laws and electoral politics make such a complex web of society where Marxist model may have some analytical shortcomings. I think to evolve a theoretical framework to explain ethnic conditions in Pakistan would be misleading as long as we consider the various nationalities of Pakistan as an ethnic group. The four provinces with four distinct nationalities have particular cultures that have long history of commonalities. Their history provides them a potential source of identification that are the products of peculiar historical circumstances within which they have emerged. They supported the two nation theory not with the zeal of Muslim nationalism, rather seeing an historic opportunity to become liberated from the centre Delhi. They were seeing a chance, even within the new setup of Pakistan, to be autonomous. However this objective soon dissipated within few years of its existence. In a result of acute disparity and state oppressions, East Pakistan(Bengal) got rid of the yoke of West Pakistan's bureaucracy. Separatist tendencies surfaced time to time in North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan. These tendencies have never been eliminated completely till to date. It was very unfortunate for the federation of Pakistan that with the passage of time, it had become synonym of Punjab. After 1971, the federal policies, revenue and disbursement, development funds and distribution of natural resources made smaller provinces feel that they were being deprived from their due rights in the federation. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, as leader of masses, introduced centralization of Power. He dissolved assembly of NWFP and conducted operation in Baluchistan. Such highhandedness provoked ethnic sentiments of the people of NWFP and Baluchistan. Hamza Alvi's Salariat does not explain the role of federal policies in shaping the ethnic identities in the politics of Pakistan.

This research suggests that such complex and multi-ethnic situation of Pakistan can be best explained by Yinger's model of 'Internal Colonization' and 'Institutional Discrimination'. The term 'Internal Colonization' can be defined as a process by which a large cultural group subjugates a small group or groups in all spheres of state's life. Internal colonizer(large cultural group) defines nationalism in its most extreme forms, glorifies the state and in its Fascist manifestations, uses genocidal policies to eliminate ethnic diversity. It controls the means of production and on the basis of majority they plan demographic changes to gain socio-political and economic domination<sup>12</sup>.

In Pakistan social mobilization, instead of maintaining social cohesion, has unleashed forces of disintegration. Socio-political and economic dependency have forced different cultural groups together, into an acute recognition of their differences and their common, mutual experience of strangeness. However in the face of 'Internal Colonization' this delicate cohesion resulted in conflicts and destabilization. After the creation of Pakistan the province of Punjab was deemed as Internal Colonizer by the other smaller provinces (including East Pakistan). This perception was made because of the over-centralization of the federal bureaucracy which was mostly staffed by the people of Punjab. Strong feelings were precipitated among smaller provinces that their rights are encroached. Its policies of hegemonization provoked a sense of fear for the small provinces Sindh, NWFP and Baluchistan. The province of East Pakistan reacted in a decisive manner which resulted into break up between the two wings of Pakistan. The creation of Bangladesh poses serious question on the validity of two nation theory on the basis of religion. The separation of East Pakistan also provides a good case study to examine the role of Salariat class in the separation. Federation of Pakistan did not learn lessons from the debacle of East Pakistan. Instead of initiating a process of nation-building

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(Pakistanization), federal government's policies provoked ethnic sentiments and federating units were projected as ethnic units of the federation. After the separation of East Pakistan, sense of deprivation among the smaller provinces of left-over Pakistan was not over, it was further intensified.

Pakistani society is held together by the coercive power of the larger cultural group. In this system political power is exercised through control over the state machinery including the military. The state as the supreme coercive power and those who control the armed forces ultimately exercise sovereignty. These forces are normally required to protect the territorial boundaries of the state as well as protect that particular group from which they belong.

The ultimate power structure in Pakistan is dependent upon a closer relationship between the military and feudal elite of Punjab who also control the economic resources of the country. Smaller ethnic nationalities residing in the small units of the federation of Pakistan regard themselves as having been exploited in the interests of the dominant group that is Punjab. This is the situation that Yinger termed as '*Internal Colonialism*'<sup>13</sup>.

The idea of Internal Colonization emanates from a strong perception of being exploited and deprived. These perceptions are formed on the popular notions based on reality and propaganda both. Propaganda launches through community dialogues and patronize by print and electronic media. Another important feature of Pakistani society is the fundamental cause of the prevailing sense of deprivation that yinger termed as 'Institutional discrimination'. This discrimination is an articulation of a certain type of inherent inequality in the existing socio-political structure of Pakistan. Yinger posits that ethnic escalation is best seen as a response of Institutional discrimination forced by certain group or groups. Discrimination shows its ugly face through varied expressions. At its worst, discrimination takes away freedom and rights, destroys human dignity and in the end enslaves people<sup>14</sup>. In its milder form, discrimination is an unintentional byproduct of decision making. In Institutional Discrimination decisions are made intentionally. Under such arrangements equals are treated unequally. In other words we can say that the Institutional Discrimination is an antithesis of social justice<sup>15</sup>.

In Pakistan Institutional Discrimination is based upon a systematic way of policy making in wide range of public and private sectors. Social discrimination is difficult to root out since it based on deep-seated beliefs and customs. This discrimination takes the extreme form of preventing certain individuals or groups from engaging in social interaction. Under these arrangements racial prejudices is a way of life, sanctioned by custom and frequently enforceable by law<sup>16</sup>. For example Quota system in Sindh, though unjustly imposed, significantly hampered the assimilation between the two communities; Urdu speaking and Sindhis.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study suggests number of questions on the role of classes in colonial and post colonial subcontinent. Should we study classes in their respective identity enclaves that is ethnic, provincial, sectarian, tribal or caste? What factors were involved in the formation of classes in Indian subcontinent means of production, employment, ownership, education or how masses were treated by the law of the land? Should the role of state and its policies be considers in examining the interplay of different classes? The above discussion needs detailed scrutiny that can be conducted through ample sources.

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This study explains weaknesses in Marxist model for understanding territorial-based multi ethnic society of Pakistan. Pakistani society is divided in layers irrespective of economic classes. These classes remain within the ethnic enclave. Only the corporate class does not care about ethnic demarcations because of their corporate interests. But lower and middle and upper middle classes move within the ethnic identities.

This study includes factors that constitute social structure of Pakistan. Pakistani society has gone through a social stratification process which is different in so many ways from other countries of the region. This process has given birth to number of identities, ethnic, religious, sectarians, caste, clan and tribes and *bradries*. This process of social stratification blurred the line among classes in Pakistan. The emergence of middle class in Pakistan is difficult to place in the social strata. It is difficult whether this class is characterized by income levels or educational attainments or the nature of occupation. In Pakistan, occupational rotation and uncertainty has created fluid social structure. This fluidity poses challenges to the middle class emergence and its growth.

In the light of above discussion this study concludes that the role of *Salariat* class is trivial but not insignificant. However, other factors are also significant in the various movements in subcontinent. Pakistan's typical social structure left little room for Marxist model to explain the class activities in social movements in Pakistan.

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