

A Socio-Political Study of Gilgit Baltistan Province

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Abstract

Gilgit Baltistan region, which in its amazing history has been known by various names, has one of the unique geographical composition on the globe. Occupying an extraordinary varied and attractive landscape, Gilgit Baltistan becomes a meeting point of world's four famous high altitude mountain ranges i.e. Pamirs, Hindukush, Karakorum and Himalayas. This is also the region, which in the opinion of geologists, is the meeting ground of "continents in collision" as the Indo-Pak sub-continental mass emerges to integrate into Eurasian continent of the north-west, leaving behind two main "faults" along the area. Previously known as Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA), now Gilgit Baltistan province, is a vital factor in the country's fortunes. The mighty Indus, the longest and largest river and a major source of Pakistan's agricultural strength meanders through the newly constituted province of Gilgit Baltistan. With recent administrative changes in this part of the country, its strategic significance has increased more than ever. Bordering three neighbouring states, Gilgit Baltistan's communication set up is undergoing a considerable expansion and diversification for future trade and investment. Furthermore, from the age of monarchies to popular democracy, the social interaction and political culture of the inhabitants of the area has remained a model for contemporary territories. Therefore, a comprehensive socio-political study of Gilgit Baltistan is essential in an attempt to examine the factors responsible for its gradual evolution in the context of its history, ethno-cultural composition, geography, socialization, economic potential, strategic location and politics. This paper also deals with the future prospects by taking into consideration the political response of the federal government with the view to restructuring the new province on the basis of other federal units of Pakistan.

Keywords: Gilgit Baltistan; Rakaposhi; Marmot; Indus; Siachen

I. Introduction

The newly established province *Gilgit Baltistan* lies in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, with the border belts of **India**, **China** and **Afghanistan**. It ranges from *Hindukush* to the *Karakorum* in the North-East with the Western *Himalaya* in the South and the *Pamirs* in the extreme North. These important mountain ranges rendezvous with each other. With an expanse of about **27,188** square miles, *Gilgit Baltistan*, geographically, climatically and biologically presents primarily a land of *trans-Himalayan* character, where *cis-Himalayan* features, monsoon rains and seasons of the

plains are very rare (Dani, 2001). The land lies amidst towering mountains, snow-clad peaks and narrow valleys with heights varying between **3000** feet and **28750** feet above sea level. In the regional geographical set-up, the *Karakorum*, the *Hindukush*, and the N.W. *Himalaya* emanate from the *Pamir* mass lying on the north, from where the majority of the mountain ranges of *Central-Asia* branch off to east and west. The second highest peak of the world, *K2* or *Chogori* with an elevation of **8611mt** and the third highest peak, *Nanga Parbat* with an elevation of **8125mt** has always increased the eminence of this part of Pakistan in the world (Hussainabadi, 2003: 202-213). *Gilgit Baltistan* holds twelve out of thirty top peaks of the world with elevations over **7500mt**. Therefore, this region is considered to be the crown of Pakistan.

The geology of the rocky mountains of Northern Areas is very ancient, with some of the world's oldest rocks forming the highly stratified Precambrian peak groups such as *Gasherbrum*, *Mashabrum*, *Baltoro*, *Rakaposhi*, *Ultrar*, *Diran*, *Broadpeak*, *Muztagh towers*, *Trango Towers*, *Batura*, *Salto Kangri* and countless others (Trench, 1992: 31). The region also contains some of the largest **glaciers** outside the **polar** region. Almost **12** percent of the region is shaped by mightiest glaciers i.e., *Hispar 61 km long*, *Biafo – 62 km*, *Baltoro – 58 km*, *Gasherbrun – 38 km*, *Chogo Lungma – 38 km*, *Passu – 32 km*, *Batura – 58 km*, *Rupal 29 km*, *Nabandi – 32 km*, *Baraldu – 30 km*, *Snow lake sim glacier – 20 km*, *Siachen 62 km* alongwith hundreds of other glaciers (Stein, 1987: 74). An American study denotes that only *Karakorumis* are **23 – 25** percent under ice. It will not be out of place to mention that *Tirich Mir* located in *Chitral* with an elevation of **7736 mt**, the highest peak in the *Hindukush* system, is also adjacent to *Gilgit Baltistan* region (Watters, 1978: 71). The mountain ranges of the area form the headwaters of major rivers, including the mighty **Indus**. The **Shyok river** and the **Indus river** come through **occupied Kashmir** but inside Northern Areas, hundreds of their tributaries offer some of the finest spots for fishing, navigation and water sports. But except for rare places such as *Skardu* and *chilas*, living along the Indus banks, has so far been difficult for agricultural production and, therefore, people have stuck to smaller valleys and mountain slopes where glacial water is easy at hand for drinking and irrigation. However, it is only the *Indus* river and its tributaries that dominate the landscape of Northern Areas by running through the chain of famous mountain systems.

The physical conditions of the *Gilgit Baltistan* province can be understood from two different angles: the first is related to the passes and the routes that lead from outside into the region and open the land for outside interference; and the second is the internal break-up into smaller valleys, plateaus and hill girt sub-zones that have helped in the sustenance of human communication or the growth of economic activities by breaking the physical barriers. There are countless traditional passes opening routes from *Gilgit Baltistan* to **Afghanistan**, **China** and **India** on the one hand and to **Azad Kashmir**, **Hazara** and **Khyber Pukhtunkhaw's** high altitude mountain systems on the other (Map of Northern Area, 2008: 02). These are *Chulung la*, *Gyang la*, *Marpola*, *Burzil pass*, *Zoji la*, *Kamri la*, *Chorbat la*, *Gasherbrum la*, *Skyang la*, *Sovoia la*, *Muztagh la*, *Sarpolago la*, *Khunjerab pass*, *Mintika pass*, *Killik pass*, *Hapuchan pass*, *Irshad Uween*, *Khora Bhurt*, *Qalandar Uween*, *Karumbar An*, *Bashkaro An*, *Dadarilli An*, *Kheli Gali*, *Shrilli Gali*, *Jumagh gali*, *Kuba gali*, *Babusar pass*, *Shonthar pass* and *Fulway pass*. These passes or routes are considered to be strategic points as far as national security is concerned. The average elevation of these passes is about **16000** feet and during wartimes, they serve as the first line of defence. Besides mountains, this region is also famous for its amazing

plateaus such as *Deosai plateau*, a tract of land, almost uninhabited – Northwest from *Skardu* and adjacent to *Kargil sector of India*. The *Deosai plateau* which is of glacial origin, is the most frequented route between *Kashmir* and *Gilgit Baltistan* (Dani, 2001). As a whole, the territorial profile and geological setting of this area makes it a zone of high value concern.

II. Historical evolution of the Northern Areas

Archaeological evidence at present is not sufficient to give a complete account of the prehistoric culture of man in this region. Whatever little has been found relates to a late period and shows a stage of hunting and food collection in a manner that smacks of primitive life but not necessarily of great antiquity. The entire material, for the time, is limited to rock art which is inter-related and there is a continuity from early time right into the historic period. A detailed study on the rock carvings from *trans-pamir* area, *Hindukush*, *Karakorum* and *western Himalaya* denotes that the chronological history of the area from *Stone Age* through *Bronze Age* to historical times is similar to what we read about civilizational evolution of **Central Asia** and **East Europe**. The *Megalith Builders*, *Dardic people*, *Gandharans*, *Alexander's remnants*, *Sythians* and *Parthians*, *Great Kushans*, *Huns*, *Tibatens* of **China**, *Tarkhans*, the ruling elites of **Central Asia**, **Khurasan** and **India**, all of them contributed a great deal to cultural evolution of this multi-ethnic social composition (Robert, 2003: 87). The whole area fell to different invaders from surrounding territories time and again but the interaction of numerous social groups germinated a classical diversity for the times to come. It is pertinent to note that before the British invasion, the present northern area was divided into dozens of principalities, republics and small monarchies. These independent units were in a constant state of war and at logger heads with each other, but, there was an amazing factor which survived among them. They stood united against all “external” invasions!

The *Diamar* region minus *Bunji* and *Astore*, *Chilas*, *Thalichi*, *Thor* comprised half a dozen democratic republics and was ruled by **Jastero** (local elder) who was considered as the key to the system (Sanjeev, 2002, February 9). The *Gilgit* region i.e., *Hunza*, *Nagar*, *Greater Yasin* including *Koh Ghizer*, *Punial*, *Mastuj* and *Ishkoman* were ruled by *Mirs* and *Rajas* assisted by *Wazirs*. The *Baltistan* region was divided into eight principalities namely: *Rondeu*, *Astore*, *Skardu*, *Shigar*, *Kiris*, *Khaplu*, *Tolti* and *Kharmang*. **Makpon Amacha** and **Yabgo** were the ruling elites and **Raja** of *Skardu* was the actual ruler who held sway over others in external and internal affairs (ali, 2004, June 12). The Northern Area, owing to its geographical location and trade routes passing through it linking the subcontinent to **China** and **Central Asia**, had become lucrative to *Sikhs* of **Punjab** and *Dogras* of **Kashmir**. Therefore, the *Sikhs* and *Dogras* attacked and occupied a large part of northern area from **1840** to **1890**. The *Sikhs* conquered *Astore*, *Bunji* and *Gilgit*. However, later on the same were reconquered by *Dogras* alongwith *Yasin*, *Punial*, *Darel*, *Chilas*, *Rondu*, *Shigar*, *Skardu* and *Khaplu* (Jabir, 2001, November 21). In **1891-92**, after furious battles at *Nilt* and *Thol*, the **British Indian Army** conquered *Hunza*, *Nagar* and *Gilgit*, thus bringing the whole area under the *British Raj*. During the period **1890-1935**, the *British* by forming **Gilgit Agency** under single administration divided the region into four sub-units i.e., *Gilgit*, *Ladakh*, *Skardu* and *Kargil* (Lorimer, 1976: 226). It is worth mentioning that whereas, external affairs were controlled by the **British**, the internal administration was largely left to the *Kashmir Government*.

In 1935 under an agreement, the *Kashmir Government* leased out the region west of river *Indus* to the **British** for a period of **60** years. This lease was, however, terminated in July **1947** and an era of struggle for freedom began with the partition of the sub-continent (Miller, 1988: 129-131). The *Gilgit revolution* was a reaction to the centuries long tyranny of foreign rulers, the **British** and **Maharaja** of *Kashmir*. The revolution was a joint struggle of the patriotic officers of *Gilgit scouts*, the *Muslim officers group* of **6J&K Infantry Battalion** and the local inhabitants of different ethnic identities. However, at the time of cease-fire on **1st January 1949**, every person of Northern Area had become **Pakistani**. In November **1947**, Government of Pakistan appointed a *political agent* in response to the invitation by the provisional government setup in *Gilgit* after the successful revolution. In **1950**, Ministry of *Kashmir affairs* was established replacing the control of Government of *N.W.F.P* and a *political resident* as an agent of **Governor General** was directed to look after the affairs (Dani, 2001). In **1952**, the joint secretary, *Kashmir Affairs Division*, was entrusted with the additional charge of the post of *resident* and *chief advisor* for *Azad Kashmir*. From **1967** to **1974**, the administrative structure of the Northern Areas was reshaped and *Hunza* and *Nagar* were absorbed in Pakistan (Wallace, 1996: 117). The whole bureaucratic and administrative setup was designed on the pattern of the rest of the country. After **1985**, with the construction of *Karakorum Highway*, the Northern Areas were given five districts, viz. *Gilgit*, *Ghizer*, *Diamar*, *Skardu* and *Ghangche* (Ameer, 2002). During various successive civil and military governments, the local political and social representatives kept on raising voices for reforms and demanded developmental projects for the uplift of the region. However, the ruling elite of Pakistan always paid a little heed to their issues. Therefore a kind of regional feeling arose with the passage of time. But the frame of political activities, underwent major changes with the advent of General **Musharaf's** rule. The enforcement of the government's reforms package put the secessionist and sectarian stir at rest and the attention of the natives was diverted to healthy political activities. The holding of gradual elections of the *Northern Area Council* redirected the life of the inhabitants and a strong sense of participation in the local affairs spreaded throughout the area. With the emergence of **Pakistan Peoples Party** government, the people of Northern Areas demanded an equal status for their region. The new political government took definite steps which helped the locals to rebuild their economy. In the areas of Agro-based industries, food processing, health sector, educational development, water channels construction, mineral production, tourism and social welfare, the federal government continued to strengthen the Northern Areas. In **2009**, the Parliament of Pakistan gave approval of various fundamental and far-reaching reforms package by declaring the Federally Administered Northern Areas as the new province of *Gilgit Baltistan*. Thus, as a result, a complete provincial setup has been created.

The ethno-linguistic situation in the *Gilgit Baltistan province* shows a clear cut variation on language, sect and ethnic lines. *Ghizer* is dominated by *Ismailis* (**87** percent) who belong to *Brusho* tribe and speak *Shina*, *Khowar* and *Brushashki* (Ameer, 2002). *Gilgit* and *Hunza* have a heterogeneous population with *Imamia Isna Ashriya Shias* (**54** percent) having *Brusho*, *Shin* and *Yashkun* identities and they speak *Shina*, *Brushashki* and *Wakhi* languages. In *Gilgit* there is a mixing of culture due to migrations and economic pursuits. *Ismailis* (**27** percent) and *Ahle Sunnat wal Jamat* (**19** percent) also live in a sizeable position in *Gilgit*. *Diamar* and *Astore* are known for *Ahle Sunnat* (**90** percent) and Shia (**10** percent) of *Shin*, *Yashkun* and *Kohistani* population who speak *Shina* as their major language (Hilali, 1995: 87-89). In *Skardu*, *Imamia Shias* (**87** percent)

coexist with *Nurbakhshis* (10 percent) and *Sunnis* (3 percent) who belong to *Mongol* tribes in majority and *Mon*, *Brokpa*, *Hor* and *Pakhtuns* as minorities with *Balti* as a major language. While in *Ghangche*, *Nurbakhshis* (96 percent, a minority sect in Shias) by speaking only *Balti* language and also known for *Mongol*, *Mon* and *Hor* tribal identities disseminate the message of peace according to their religious teachings (Frembgen, 1964: 245). However, *Kashmiris*, *Kohistanis*, *Gujars*, *Pakhtuns*, *Punjabis*, *Hazaras* and *Afghanis* are also seen in small numbers in the whole region as migrants, labourers and businessmen. There is no denying the fact that *Gilgit Baltistan's* multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-sectional composition is a rare example of “unity in diversity.”

III. Economic Features

The economy of *Gilgit Baltistan* (Northern Areas) has undergone considerable expansion and diversification, much of it in the areas of trade, transportation, housing and construction, mineral resources and communication, etc. This region is a notable supplier to the country as well as the world of many important minerals. In the Southern part of the region, it has major deposits of *Nickle*, *Cobalt*, *Copper*, *Lead*, *Tin*, *Bismit*, *Mica*, *Quartz*, *Zircon*, *Coal* and *Actonolite* that are famous for their exceptionally good quality. It also has substantial resources of *Iron*, *Silver*, *Gold*, *Zinc*, *Marble*, *Granite*, *Sulpher*, *Calsite*, *Fluorite*, *Lime Stone*, *Arsenic*, *Spinel*, *Garmet*, *Epidot*, *Topaz*, *Moon Stone*, *Pargasite*, *Tourmoline*, *Aquamarin*, *Pyrite* and *feldspar* in the North-eastern, Northern and North-western parts of the area (Hussainabadi, 2003). It is also one of the country's largest producers of stone jewelry. *Gilgit Baltistan* has a broad small industrial base, producing manufactured goods for local and foreign markets. The production of beef and poultry is well developed and well known for its quality and taste.

With the improvement of infrastructure, considerable investment continues in export oriented items or products. On the other hand, the rapid growth of communication has given ample opportunity to foreign investors to flourish their deliveries. In recent years, the growth of hotel industry in the area has brought a new dynamism and prosperity to the common man. This seems befitting, since it was the scenic beauty of the *Gilgit Baltistan* that has convinced the local and non-local investors to develop tourism industry. It is tourism only that fills the new province's coffers. Although, the federal government allocates funds in the annual budget, yet, *Gilgit Baltistan* makes most of its assets from tourism and minerals. Besides, Northern Areas produce over 70 percent of dry fruits consumed inside the country and abroad. Another distinctive component of the region's economy is its capacity to become a hub of energy sector. There has been a slight improvement in the installation of high-tech and heavy industries than in the past in this largely rural society. However, it is hoped that after becoming a province, the government will pay more heed to reinvigorate the economy on modern lines. The future discoveries of rich minerals, oil and gas deposits will definitely help the government and the people to consolidate on the rapid transition towards building a strong industrial base.

IV. Flora and Fauna

Gilgit Baltistan's geographic location has produced a unique flora and fauna. Wild flowers turn the arid and savannah grassland areas into a carpet of colour after rains. Among the **agro-ecological** zones, *Barsat*, *Misghar*, *Hispar*, *Rondu*, *Fairy Meadow* and *Chapurson* are known for *wheat*, *millet*, *potato*, *peas*, *vegetable*, *alfala*, *pear*, *cherries*, *peach*, *apple*, *plum mulberry* and *long grass pastures* (Enderson, 1998: 39-40). In the

areas of *Babusar, Hopar, Tarishing, Phandar, Yasin, Karumbar, Shigar, Khaplu, Skardu, Dashkin* and *Sost* _____ the production of *maize, apricot, almond, grapes, white poplar, pomegranate, pulses, clover* and *chalgoza* has been found on a vast scale. Among the four ecological zones in the northern areas, the **alpine scrub zone** which is located at upper most reaches of the entire region, contains *Dawrf Juniper, Salix, Ephedra* with flexible, adopted to snow pressure, *Berberis* and *platable* grass forests. Almost in all upper reaches of the mountains and valleys of *Gilgit Baltistan*, the *Betula, Salix, Juniper, Bebris, Lonicera, Ephedra, Vibernum, Anthopogon Ribes* are found in the **sub Alpine forest zone** (Walter, 2006, April 27). The *upper Muskin, Astore valley, Nagar, Bagrot, Naltar* and *Haramosh* have *Deodar forest, chalgoza, Juniper, Ash, Hippophea, Artimesia, Blue pine, Sprucl* and *Rosa* in the **Montane temperate forest zone**. Along the main *Indus* river upto *Raikot* and *Bunji* which belongs to **Montane subtropical forest**, the *capris, spinosa, pistacha, Artimesia, Seceharum, Dodonia, Rosa muschata* and *Daphneolodes* are seen in bulk. These forests still abound with various animal species among which, *Snow Leopard, Lynx, Wolf, Brown Bear, Black Bear, Fox, Marmot, Ibex, Markhor, Urial, Marcopolo Sheep, Blue Sheep, Musk Deer, Chakor, Ram Chakor, Monal Pheasant* are the most popular (Ghazali, 2005, December 2). In *Deosai* and *Khunjerab*, there are *bears* and *marmot* which differ slightly from their counterparts in rest of the world and are unique. However, it is pertinent to note that these animals can be found upto **6400** meters but during gestation days, they come to low reaches in safe hideouts for cubbing. The variety of wildlife from northern area's freshwater swamps and hardwood forests is now protected for posterity.

V. Strategic Nuisance Value

Since the **Indian** threat has been the single most pervading factor that has dominated **Pakistan's** security landscape, the *Gilgit Baltistan's* geographical proximity with India has made it a sensitive zone and forward area. The issue of *Kashmir* has been the main factor that has kept India and Pakistan apart. It will not be out of place to mention that when the *Kashmir conflict* was created by partition of the Indian Sub-continent in **1947**, *Gilgit Baltistan* region was part of the State of *Kashmir*. Furthermore, during the Indo-Pak wars of **1947, 1965** and **1971** and since **1985** due to *Siachen Glacier Conflict*, this region remained as a major war front and on a number of occasions, as both the warring armies went for cross-border activities on the ceasefire line. In **1999**, the continued hostility between the two neighbours escalated the tension into an open clash, as a kind of limited war broke out in the area comprising *Baltistan* and the *Indian held Kashmir*. Although world's major powers, the USA in particular, reacted sharply to both the neighbours by suspending aid to them which resulted in another ceasefire. Nevertheless, both the *South-Asian* competitors keep heavy deployment on key forward positions for "possible future wars" in this region. Of course, the strategic nuisance value of *Gilgit Baltistan* can be viewed from the operational plans of Pakistan and Indian's defence organs.

The *Gilgit Baltistan*, bordered by **China, Afghanistan** and **India**, as mentioned earlier, is strategically very significant for **Pakistan** in the years to come. As the international body politic continues to fester with religious, linguistic, ethnic and class conflicts in **South-Asia**, the most pertinent threat to peace that will grow at a frightening speed and ferocity will take hold in the areas adjacent to *Gilgit Baltistan*. In other words, *West European* powers are trying to determine largely their future themes of a new world order in this part of the world by creating dissension and volatile campaigns. Therefore,

there is a much larger scope of action for counter-balancing such nefarious foreign designs and themes. Undoubtedly, the *Indo-American* nexus has more sinister implications than is commonly realized. India's immediate goal is to employ U.S. expertise to stamp out the *Kashmiri's* resistance the way USA had subdued the *Iraqi* reactionary groups; and the long term aim is to anchor a global drive to declare Pakistan a hub of terrorism. Common to both, **India** and **USA**, is to get an access to the Northern Areas of Pakistan to launch a joint offensive campaign against **China** as according to media reports, the U.S. Army in **Afghanistan's** province **Badakhshan** is on a move to setup sensitive military installations near the **Afghan-China** border which is adjacent to the *Gilgit Baltistan Province* (Rehman, 2005, July 11). American officials are also using their influence in Afghanistan following their support to the Muslim extremist outfits in **China's Sinkiang** province which shares a long border with *Gilgit Baltistan*. Therefore, the *Indo-U.S.* nexus poses an imminent threat to **China** as well as **Pakistan**. This needs to be addressed by launching an all out counter effort to set the house in order. Equally significant will be the role of **China** in the future developmental projects, which will definitely make them capable of redesigning the future course of action in the region.

VI. Political Dynamics

With the emergence of Pakistan in 1947, political activities began in the *Gilgit Baltistan* formerly known as northern areas of Pakistan. *Gilgit Baltistan united organization*, *Ladakh Baltistan united front*, *Gilgit Baltistan students federation*, *Central organization of students*, *Anjuman Tahafuz Haqooq-e-baltistan* and *Gilgit Baltistan Ulema Council* represented the inhabitants and their aspirations in the early years (Hussainabadi, 2003). However, political reforms during **Mr. Bhutto** tenure helped **Pakistan Peoples Party** to establish its stronghold in the area. A fourteen-member **Advisory Council** for Northern Areas was setup for the governance of the area which extended maximum cooperation to the Federal Government in abolishing FCR and feudal tyranny. During the *martial law* of 1977, district councils, municipal committees and union councils were expanded by minimizing the role of bureaucracy (Dani, 2001). In 1982, *Gilgit Baltistan* and *Diamar* were given a seat each in the **Majlis-e-Shura** because the *Northern Areas Council* (Former Advisory Council) was not functional due to ban on political activities (Malik, 2008: 136-138). It is pertinent to note that **Muslim League** was patronized with heavy support of the *martial law* government to counter the popularity and influence of **Pakistan Peoples Party**, which resulted in a majority of **Muslim League** and its allies in *Northern Areas Council* and local bodies. However, the popular hatred to *martial law* reflected in the elections during **Benazir Bhutto's Government** and **Pakistan Peoples Party** regained its lost position. From 1990 to this day, six nation wide parties i.e. *Pakistan Peoples Party*, *Pakistan Muslim League (N)*, *Pakistan Muslim League (Q)*, *Jamiat-Ulmai-Islam*, *Tehreek-i-Jafariya* and *Mutahida-Quami-Movement* have been representing *Gilgit Baltistan's* different parts in and outside the legislature either in power or in opposition.

Although *Gilgit Baltistan* has been suffering from sectarian strife of and on since 70's but as a whole, ethno-cultural assimilation in the area has contributed much to peace and harmony and the general political behaviour is very tolerant. This is exactly why all political shades of opinion in the area have a minimum consensus on the constitutional position of *Gilgit Baltistan*. Pursuing their goals of socio-economic progress in the area, the political parties and representative factions have agreed on major structural changes. Following the formation of *Gilgit Baltistan* province by the **Peoples Party Government**,

the people of the Northern Areas have given maximum support and mandate to the party and expect the same reformatory role it had played earlier in the 70's and 90's. While successful mobilization of the political process is on a full bloom in *Gilgit Baltistan*, the **Peoples Party Government's** accommodation of pluralistic aspirations and demands will raise the democratic participatory tendency, which in turn will grant legitimacy and further impetus to the political system of Pakistan. In a heterogeneous region like *Gilgit Baltistan*, ethno-political tensions are likely to exacerbate if the Central Government usurps the political and economic autonomy of its federal components. Therefore, the present and the successive governments will have to provide an effective and institutionalized mechanism for political development in the province.

VII. Conclusion

The world having stepped into the 21st century, the mountain dwellers of *Gilgit Baltistan* are likewise eager to join the age of globalization. For centuries they have led an undisturbed, unfettered life in the bliss of casual innocence. Their customs, beliefs, traditions and lifestyle are the same as they were ages ago, but they have come to realize that they belong to the present times in which mountain spirits cannot protect their valleys from natural disasters. Having roots in medieval mythology, the myth making process finds it difficult to survive in the wake of socio-economic transformation being brought about by the recent developments taking place in the communication systems and technology in *Gilgit Baltistan*. However, modern development is just the latest entrant on the glorious path, formerly trodden by the armies of *Alexander the Great*; where the early strands of *Buddism* flourished; and the ancient *silk route* introduced travellers to a world of proverbial wisdom and fabulous culture. The winding mountain pathways and the narrow valleys of *Gilgit Baltistan* are charming the countrymen to come and listen to the enhancing beat of the wilderness and echoes from ages gone by.

Rolling down from the soaring peaks, water flows down as rivulets and streams irrigating the terraced fields, fostering growth in the lush green valleys and pastures, sustaining life in all its various forms but sometimes it becomes such a monster which raises its ugly horrifying head causing large-scale land sliding, glacier sliding and heavy floods. Therefore, the top priority of the Federal and Provincial governments should be to construct big reservoirs to avert widespread national devastations of disastrous magnitude.

Governments policies in the new *Gilgit Baltistan* province must aim at making it a vantage point by developing an exemplary infrastructure highly conducive to a peaceful political atmosphere that could serve as a vanguard against all possible geo-political conspiracies of external forces. A correct and balanced linkage between the *Gilgit Baltistan Province* and rest of the Federal units will facilitate the formulation of decisions and policies designed to maximize the protection of our internal solidarity from external threats. For national security, it is incumbent to restructure the existing power equation in the region by giving it a new shape and dimension to our *inter-provincial relationship*.

Never before has Pakistan faced such serious threats to its integrity, as it is now being subjected to today. These can be off-set effectively only by empowering all its Federal Units, *Gilgit Baltistan* in particular.

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