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Chapter 8

FROM STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS TO ETHNIC PARTIES:
SINDHI NATIONALISM DURING ONE UNIT

Julien Levesque

Introduction

For us Sindhis with One Unit continuing, democracy, with its adult franchise or other things, has no meaning. Do away with this initial wrong first, and then talk of democracy and all the higher values. [...]

My crime throughout has been [to state the following demand]: Restore us our provincial autonomy. This innocent and right demand of ours is depicted by our gentlemen in authority as traitorous, that we mean to disintegrate Pakistan, that we are agents of Indian [*sic*], etc, etc. We are nobody's agents; we are agents of our own people, our common men, our workers and peasants, our poets and scientists.

I am next to none in my loyalty to my Pakistan and its people.¹

¹ Hyder Bakhsh Jatoi, press statement, 22 January 1969, republished in a collection of documents in March 1969. Hyder Bakhsh Jatoi was born in 1901 in a Baloch family in Bakhodero, in the district of Larkana, and attended the Sindh Madrassatul Islam in Karachi. Resolute communist, he resigned from his position as Deputy Collector in 1945 in order to take on the leadership of the Sindh Hari Committee, an organization for the promotion of peasants' rights.

In this public statement issued in January 1969, Hyder Bakhsh Jatoi (1901–1970), one of the main protagonists in Sindh’s left-wing and nationalist politics of the 1950s and 1960s, denounced the allegation that the democratic demand for provincial devolution of power followed a treacherous or seditious design. The accusations [p. 248] levelled against him led to his being jailed for fighting for what he saw as an ‘innocent and right demand of ours’—the provincial autonomy of Sindh. After being part of the Bombay presidency under the Raj (1847–1936), Sindh was given the status of province by the Government of India Act 1935 as a result of the mobilization of the Muslim political elite (Khuhro 1982a).² As they fought for a separate province, members of this elite laid the foundations of a nationalist discourse requiring ‘that the political and national unit should be congruent’ (Gellner 1983, 1).³ After Independence in 1947, Sindh became one of the four provinces of West Pakistan. However, the Establishment of West Pakistan Act, which was adopted by the Constituent Assembly in September 1955, merged all four provinces, including Sindh, into one provincial unit, West Pakistan. Pakistan at this stage comprised of two provincial bodies, West Pakistan and East Pakistan, while Sindh no more existed as a province. This merger was known as the One Unit scheme, which was enshrined in Pakistan’s first constitution adopted in February 1956. The One Unit project had mainly been pushed by the Punjabi elite of West Pakistan since 1953 with the aim of preventing politicians from East Pakistan from gaining power at the centre. Gaining consent to dissolve West Pakistan’s provinces (and other political units, such as the princely states of Khairpur, Kalat, Bahawalpur, and Swat) in an attempt to integrate them into the One Unit scheme of a single province required much political manoeuvring and machinations. In the Sindh Legislative Assembly, a non-binding resolution in favour of One Unit was adopted on 11 December 1954 at a session exceptionally held in a hall encircled by the police in Hyderabad. The opposition to the resolution had previously been intimidated into silence or impotency: the leader of the opposition in the assembly, G. M. Sayed (1904–1995),⁴ had been arrested and the publication of two Sindhi

² The Bombay Presidency was an administrative region established by the East India Company and maintained under the British Raj. At its greatest extent, it included parts of the present-day provinces and states of Sindh, Gujarat, Maharashtra. Although initially supported by both Hindu and Muslim politicians, the demand for the creation of a separate Sindh province was then backed mostly by the Muslim political elite. Sindh formally became a province on 1 April 1936.

³ This demand can be seen as the result of colonial policies, which standardized the Sindhi language and delineated fixed borders for the province.

⁴ Born on 17 January 1904 in Sann, Sayed Ghulam Murtaza Shah (1904–1995), more commonly known as G. M. Sayed, was one of Sindh’s most prominent and controversial politicians whose career spanned from the early 1920s to his death on 25 April 1995. Heir to the spiritual lineage of Sayed Haider Shah Sanai Kazmi, G. M. Sayed played a significant role in Sindhi elite politics and was at the forefront of the Pakistan movement in Sindh, but he left (and was expelled from) the Muslim League in 1946. From then on, he remained critical of the central authorities of Pakistan, which cost him years in prison and house arrest. In 1973, G. M. Sayed called for Sindh’s independence after having founded the Jiye Sindh Mahaz (Long Live Sindh Front), the forebear of about a dozen Sindhi nationalist parties that exist today. On G. M. Sayed’s life, see for instance Korejo 2000.

newspapers, *Al-Vahid* and *Karvan*, had been suspended by the government under Muhammad Ayub Khuhro (1954–1955).⁵ In short, the resolution in favour of One Unit was adopted by Sindhi politicians under duress, [p. 249] not keen on dismantling the institution that gave them power. The dissolution of the Sindh province sidelined the existing Sindhi political elite. Three years later, in October 1958, the imposition of martial rule initiated an era of military dictatorship that was to last until 1971, first under General Ayub Khan (1958–1969) and then under General Yahya Khan (1969–1971). Bereft of a Sindhi political arena and of a democratic space, Sindhi politicians were unable to articulate the grievances of the Sindhi people.⁶

This task was taken up by a generation of young Sindhis that first opposed the One Unit scheme outside the realm of representative politics and later eventually established ethnic political parties. When One Unit was implemented in the mid-1950s, efforts to build opposition parties—such as G. M. Sayed’s Sindhi Awami Mahaz or the Pakistan People’s Organization—had so far failed to turn into permanent structures. Yet there existed a generation of young Sindhi (mostly) men who had always known Sindh as a separate province and who had studied at a university without having to leave the province—unlike their predecessors who had to study in Bombay or farther.⁷ This was permitted by the educative measures adopted by the provincial government of Sindh in the 1940s and 1950s, which expanded the reach of educational institutions at all levels. This forward-looking educational policy was made possible in spite of the closure of numerous schools and a lack of qualified academics in the aftermath of Partition when many Sikhs and Hindus left for India (Siddiqui 1987, 325–26). In 1946, provincial authorities introduced a special tax designed to fund education for Muslims, called the *Sind Muslim Cess Act*. The following year, the Sindh Assembly passed a law for the advancement of primary education (*Sind Primary Education Act*) and the University of Sindh was also founded in Karachi.⁸ Scholarships were arranged for young Sindhis to study abroad. In addition to the multiplication of schools, the need for qualified labour opened up higher education to a wider social spectrum and lowered the entrance level of examinations in colleges. As a result of this policy, a generation [p. 250] of young educated Muslim men formed a new middle class that sought access

⁵ A prominent landlord from Larkana and former Chief Minister of Sindh, Khuhro had been brought back for a second tenure at the helm of provincial affairs with the aim of having One Unit passed.

⁶ On the adoption of One Unit in Pakistan, see Talbot 1998, 125–47. On Sindhi elite politics after Partition, see Ansari 2005; Tahir 2010.

⁷ G. M. Sayed related in the late 1940s that ‘establishing a university of Sindhi language’ had been discussed since 1945 in order to ‘get rid of the intellectual dominance of the Bombay University’ (cited in Rahman 1996, 108).

⁸ Founded on 3 April 1947, the University of Sindh initially only delivered diplomas, but actual teaching started in 1951, after the university had been shifted to Hyderabad. The construction of the present campus in Jamshoro started in the mid-1950s, but the university was not fully settled there until 1970 (Siddiqui 1987, 360–61).

to urban non-manual jobs mostly, but not exclusively, provided by the government. This group of people is well described by Hamza Alavi's term 'salarariat' and new professionals (Alavi 1988, 6–7). They were at the forefront of the movement against One Unit, led in particular by writers and students. Their engagement consolidated the Sindhi nationalist discourse, whose foundation had been laid during the movement for the separation of Sindh from the Bombay Presidency (Verkaaik 2010).

This chapter seeks to understand how the mobilization against One Unit and military rule in Sindh eventually led to the reorganization of political alignments in Sindh. I contend that the birth of Sindhi student organizations in the late 1960s planted the seeds for the future development of the Sindhi nationalist movement, or Jiye Sindh movement. Ethnic politics in Sindh is often reduced to the Sindhi-Mohajir conflict. While the progressive solidification of the Mohajir identity is rather well described in academic literature (Gayer 2014; Verkaaik 2004), this is not the case on the Sindhi side. A number of articles and books on ethno-nationalism in Pakistan (Ahmed 1999; A. Khan 2005; Siddiqi 2012) and specifically on Sindh (Kennedy 1991; A. Khan 2002; Rahman 1995) do provide some insights into the growth of nationalist feelings among Sindhis.⁹ However, few have sought to document in depth either the political groups and parties that have put forward ethnic demands or the content of the Sindhi nationalist discourse. This chapter thus examines the mobilization of the Sindhi middle class to provide an account of the shift from oppositional left-wing politics towards ethnic parties, which eventually led to separatist demands. Part of a broader nationalist process that entails the reinvention of cultural and political identity, this mobilization involved the creation of identity markers in which writers and students played a leading role. [p. 251]

Sindhi writers against dictatorship

From the moment One Unit was implemented, a series of measures giving preference to Urdu as a medium of education and an administrative language provoked Sindhi writers to rise against the marginalization of their language. As early as February 1948, Liaquat Ali Khan had declared Urdu the sole national language of Pakistan, sparking immediate protests in Bengal and Sindh. Sindhi lost the official status it had enjoyed since 1852. Although it retained its official role at the provincial level, the fact that it was challenged often made many feel that it was threatened, particularly in the

⁹ Determining what defines an ethnic 'Sindhi' has been debated in political circles in Sindh at least since the 1930s (Ansari 2005, 32–44). After Partition, the inflow of migrants from India resulted in pitting those who considered themselves indigenous to Sindh—including speakers of Balochi and Siraiki—against the newly-arrived Mohajirs (Mumtaz 1990, 233–34).

capital city of Karachi. At the University of Karachi, established after the University of Sindh was forced to move to Hyderabad in 1951, the status of the Sindhi language was indeed constantly questioned. For instance, in 1957–58, students who wished to choose Sindhi as the language in which to take their exams were prevented from doing so (Rahman 1995, 1009–10). Hyder Bakhsh Jatoi, whose words opened this chapter, strongly condemned the disadvantage imposed on native Sindhi speakers as a result of this decision: ‘It is obvious to anyone that a Sindhi-knowing student cannot answer papers in Urdu as ably and efficiently (other considerations being equal), as an Urdu-knowing student.’¹⁰ For Jatoi, this decision impeded the success of Sindhi students and was therefore, as he wrote in another pamphlet published in January 1957, ‘a clearly hostile act against Sindh and Sindhis’ (Jatoi 1995).

Jatoi was not the only one concerned: Sindhi writers in general feared for their language, as they made known in various petitions and publications. At the beginning of 1956, just before the promulgation of Pakistan’s first constitution, a call to make Sindhi an official language (Urd. & Sin. *sarkārī zabān*) was circulated, and the local cells of the Sindhi Adabi Sangat (Sindhi Literary Union) played a crucial role in spreading the word. The petition received great support as tens of thousands of signatures were gathered: an article published in the Sindhi weekly *‘Avām* in support of [p. 252] the petition enthusiastically reported that in both large cities and small villages, Sindhi youth showed such passion for the cause that some even signed with their own blood (‘*Awam* 1956).¹¹ In the same issue, which also included an editorial openly supporting the petition, the front page carried a couplet in large print stressing the importance of one’s mother tongue: ‘The language in which my mother sang lullabies / *Sashal!* May this language live on’ (*Jinhan meṇ ḍīnam lolī amar / Sāshal! Zabān zindah rahe*) (ibid.).

In the 1950s, the Sindhi Adabi Sangat followed in the footsteps of the All-India Progressive Writers’ Movement (Urd. *Anjuman Taraqqī Pasand Muṣannifīn-i Hind*). Launched in the 1930s, the AIPWM brought together ‘progressive writers’ who, inspired by Marxism, had abandoned classical canons and started to describe the harsh realities of village life in colonial India.¹² After Partition, the All-Pakistan Progressive Writers’ Association could only operate until 1958 because of its communist

¹⁰ Pamphlet by Hyder Baksh Jatoi, *Shall Sindhi Language Stay in Karachi or Not?*, Hyderabad: Sind Hari Committee, 1957, p.13, cited in Rahman 1995, 1009–10.

¹¹ But in spite of the support provided by various Sindhi organizations and political parties, the Sindh Muslim League refused to join the movement (Tahir 2010, 387). The long petition roll can now be seen at the library of the Institute of Sindhology in Jamshoro.

¹² The AIPWM notably included Munshi Premchand (1880–1936), Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911–1984) and Saadat Hasan Manto (1912–1955).

leanings.¹³ In Sindh, however, the main literary organization did not suffer the same fate: the Sindhi Adabi Sangat (Sindhi Literary Union) flourished as it united the writers and provided a platform for political mobilization. Born out of informal meetings in the months leading to Partition, the Sindhi Adabi Sangat stayed more or less defunct for several years. It was revived in 1952, but really only took shape in October 1956 when a number of local literary associations decided to merge.¹⁴

The stress laid on the attachment to one's mother tongue by the Sindhi Adabi Sangat in its 1956 campaign stood at odds with the ambition of the central state to blend Pakistan's population by imposing Urdu as West Pakistan's only official language. The 1959 Sharif Commission Report (commissioned by Ayub Khan) recommended the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction up to fifth grade. Beyond fifth grade, Sindhi, Bengali, Pashto, or Balochi were no longer mandatory courses at school and students were taught only in Urdu.¹⁵ This recommendation [p. 253] translated into the West Pakistan Primary Education Ordinance 1962 which ended the existing seven-year school system in Sindh (Siddiqui 1987, 318–21). When the report was made public in 1962, Sindhi literary and cultural organizations rose against this measure. They organised protests (such as a 'Sindhi Day' on 9 November 1962) and marches, distributed leaflets, and wrote to the authorities to oppose the replacement of Sindhi by Urdu from sixth grade onwards (Tahir 2010, 465). Numerous writers, intellectuals and politicians signed a petition in favour of education in one's mother tongue. As a result, President Ayub Khan repealed the decision, but this did not prevent the number of Sindhi primary schools from diminishing in the 1960s, particularly in Karachi (Rahman 1995, 1011).

Writers and intellectuals were conscious that the future of the Sindhi middle class was at stake due to linguistic and educational policies. Tariq Rahman has underlined the economic arguments put forward by the Sindhi Adabi Sangat:

¹³ The All-Pakistan Progressive Writers' Association was founded on 12 November 1949 in Lahore. Its communist leanings soon irked the Pakistani authorities, who declared it a political party in 1951. The organization managed to remain active in the following years but with difficulty and was banned in 1954, and its presses, which ensured revenue, were seized and sold by the government in 1958 (Malik 1967, 663–64).

¹⁴ Although several founding members are still alive, there remains a debate as to the exact origins of the Sindhi Adabi Sangat. See the short history of the organization written by its current president, Zulfiqar Seyal (Seyal 2007).

¹⁵ The Commission on National Education headed by S. M. Sharif was set up in 1958 by Ayub Khan in order to formulate an overall education policy for Pakistan. Among other recommendations, it suggested that Urdu be favoured as the language of communication across Pakistan and that the length of studies for a B.A. degree be extended from two to three years (four years in medical and engineering curricula). Although handed in in 1959, the report was only made public in 1962. Its publication sparked protests, in particular in East Pakistan, where police shooting at protesting students in Dhaka left one man dead on 17 September 1962.

If the intention is not to see five million Sindhi-speaking people handicapped and put at a disadvantage in the field of education, trade and commerce, and public services as against Urdu-knowing fellow citizens—then it [Sindhi] is [the] absolutely essential language at least for Sind and its adjoining Sindhi speaking areas.¹⁶

The context of the struggle against One Unit provided inspiration for Sindhi writers to develop a nationalist style of poetry that celebrated the greatness of Sindh and its culture (Schimmel 1974, 36). Hyder Bakhsh Jatoi was not only the communist leader of the peasant movement Sindh Hari Committee but also an acclaimed poet. His poetry—lengthy and repetitive with refrain-like verses—often sounds as if written to be sung. One such poem, entitled *Salām Sindh*, was written in 1954 (Jatoi 1988, 147–51): [p. 254]

Ae Sindh to mathān sadā ṣalāt ā salām ā!

*Bahārian ain barkatan jo mīnhan tote ām
ā!*

*‘Aẓīm tunhinjo shān ā sa’id tunhinjo nām
ā!*

*Sadā’īn khūsh rahīn ṣanam! Du ‘ā hī ṣubuh
shām ā!*

*Du ‘ā hī ṣubuh shām ā du ‘ā hī dīnhan rāt
ā!*

Ae Sindh to mathān sadā ṣalāt ā salām ā!

O Sindh, may prayers and peace
always be upon you!

May blessings rain upon you!

Great is your glory, majestic is your
name!

Beloved, may you always stay happy!

Here is my prayer, morning and
evening!

Here is my prayer, morning and
evening, here is my prayer, day and
night!

O Sindh, may prayers and peace
always be upon you!¹⁷

In this stanza and in the following verses, this poem brings together most of the symbols that acquired a new political meaning as identity markers in the 1950s and 1960s. Sindh is described as the cradle of civilization (an indirect reference to the Indus Valley civilization) and as a land of Sufis (*‘Hī*

¹⁶ Sindhi Adabi Sangat, *Declare Sindhi as an Official Language of West Pakistan*, Karachi, non-dated, cited in Rahman 1995, 1010.

¹⁷ All translations from Sindhi are mine. I thank Hidayat Hussain, Kamran Kumbhar, and Saba Sindhri for their help.

ṣūfiyan jo des ā). Various regions of Sindh are enumerated and the Indus river's 'pure juice' (*pāk ras*) is evoked as Sindh's lifeline. The poem also includes exhortations to collective awakening and mobilization (*Uṭho uṭho ae Sindhyo!*) particularly addressed to the youth. In a similar vein, Sindhi writers constructed, in their writing and activism, a set of symbols that *signified* Sindh. They revisited Sindh's history and praised heroes of resistance and the teachings of Sufi saints. They reinterpreted popular tales and highlighted the authenticity of Sindh's rural culture. At the same time, a scholarly endeavour paralleled this literary renewal: academic and cultural institutions, such as the Sindhi Adabi Board and later the Institute of Sindhology, also [p. 255] engaged in documenting what was perceived as Sindh's fast-fading traditional culture. As a result, invoking images of Mohenjo-Daro¹⁸ or Shah Abdul Latif¹⁹ became a way not only to conjure up Sindh but to make a statement that stressed one's attachment to a certain conception of Sindh as a cultural and political entity.

One of the most renowned publications distributing politicized writings in Sindh was *Rūḥ Rihān* (which literally means a communal or brotherly meeting and discussion), a literary monthly launched in 1960 by Hameed Sindhi.²⁰ Its political stance against One Unit led to the authorities banning the magazine from 1961 to 1963 and again in 1968. Central to the monthly's subversive reputation was its publishing of the poetry of Shaikh Ayaz (1923–1997) and other politically engaged writers. Now held by many as Sindh's most important poet of the twentieth century, Shaikh Ayaz joined the progressive writers early in his writing career, while he trained and later practised as a lawyer in Sukkur. Just like their Urdu-speaking counterparts, Sindhi writers identifying themselves as 'progressive' strove to revitalize Sindhi poetry and literature by introducing new forms of writing, such as novels and short stories. Their literary endeavour also entailed setting aside the prevalent Persian legacy, both stylistically and linguistically,²¹ to embrace new subjects in what could be termed a 'realist trope'. Ayaz' poetry, especially the verses written during Ayub Khan's regime, expressed

¹⁸ Mohenjo-Daro is one of the major archaeological sites of the Indus civilization, discovered in the 1920s. Since then, numerous claims have been made in the name of various political or ethnic groups who see the Indus civilization as the origin of their culture: the Aryan civilization for Hindutva ideologues or ancient Dravidian society for Tamil nationalists (Ramaswamy 2001). Because most of the remains lay in present-day Sindh, Sindhi nationalists have portrayed Sindhis as the heirs of the Indus civilization (Sayed 1991) and many histories of Sindh start from this period.

¹⁹ Shah Abdul Latif (1689–1752) was a major Sufi poet and preacher. The compilation of his verse, the *Shah jo Risalo*, has been regarded since the nineteenth century as the greatest literary achievement in Sindhi language. In the twentieth century, Shah Abdul Latif was refashioned as Sindh's 'national poet', notably by G. M. Sayed (Sayed 1996). See the introduction in Boivin 2015. On the debates about the place of Sufism in Sindhi culture, see Levesque 2016.

²⁰ Abdul Hamid Memon, better known as Hameed Sindhi, was born to a Memon family in 1939. He studied law in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but was also active as editor of the monthly *Rūḥ Rihān*. When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was in power in the 1970s, Hameed Sindhi started a career in civil service and became vice-chancellor of the Shah Abdul Latif University in Khairpur.

²¹ According to the poet and scholar Aftab Kazi, Shaikh Ayaz 'was able to successfully scrub and restore hundreds of the original Sindhi words that were no longer used in Sindhi vocabulary' (Kazi 2004).

the necessity to resist and defend Sindh:

Sahando ker mayār, o yār

Who would bear the blame, O friend

Sindhīrī'a khe sar ker nah dīndo

For not giving his head to Sindh

These verses, which conquered Sindh within a matter of days, made Ayaz famous as a figure of resistance against the state in the 1960s (Riaz 1986, 39ff). Another famous example of his nationalist stance can be found in a poem written during the 1965 war between Pakistan and India. While the military regime's propaganda was in full swing, Ayaz confessed, in this poem written in the first person, [p. 256] his inability to fire at the enemy—here none other than a Sindhi poet who had migrated to India:

Sāmhūn ā Nārā'in Shyām

Opposite stands Narayan Shyam

Hin jā munhinjā

He and I

Qaul bih saḡhyā

Share the same idioms

Ḃol bih saḡhyā [...]

The same speech [...]

Hānu bih saḡhyo

The same hopes

Hol bih saḡhyā

The same fears

Hin te kī'an bandūq khaṇān mān

How could I point a gun at him?

Hin khe golī kī'an haṇān mān

How could I shoot at him?

Ayaz was jailed immediately when the poem was published. Not only was it a pacifist statement that condemned war, it was also a nationalist expression of the primacy of ethnic bonds over religion or citizenship—and thus a refutation of the two-nation theory. For Ayaz, this was the first of his three sojourns in prison (1965, 1968, and 1970), caused by his increasingly explicit criticism of the military regime:

Tūn ca'in ma kuchān

You wish me not to speak

Tūn ca'in ma luchān

You wish me not to be tormented

Par tokhān hikrī ḡālh puchān

But let me ask you one thing

Tun kanhin kanhin khe khāmosh kande

How will you silence all those

Ayaz's shift—from praising Sindh's culture to condemning abuses of power by the authorities—exemplifies the change that took place in the literary production of politically engaged writers in the late 1960s. Over the years, this engagement turned into an open critique of Ayub Khan's regime. From 1967, opposition to Ayub Khan's regime gathered momentum throughout Pakistan and in various sections of the society, especially among workers and students. Sindhi writers not only spoke in favour of their language and culture but also denounced both the One Unit and military dictatorship. As a result, like Ayaz, they also faced repression from the state and many were arrested and jailed. In a memorandum distributed in January 1969, Rashid Bhatti, the leader of the Sindhi Adabi Sangat, and Hassan Hameedi, representative of the Awami Adabi Anjuman (Popular Literary Movement),²² demanded the liberation of writers and poets such as Shaikh Ayaz and Rasul Bakhsh Palijo that had been imprisoned. They also demanded the ban on the magazine *Rūh Rihān* to be lifted. Their statement praised writers and poets, who for ten years 'ha[d] been struggling for the rights of the common man', were 'opposing every kind of exploitation and injustice' and who had 'fearlessly championed the cause of truth and justice' (Bhatti and Hameedi 1969). The communiqué also condemned 'the suffocating atmosphere created by the Government during last eleven years by putting shackles on liberty of expression.' Such statements should not conceal the fact that for many Sindhis who were engaged in oppositional politics, the main objective in the late 1960s remained the dissolution of One Unit and the restoration of provinces. In fact, terminating the One Unit scheme was considered by many Sindhi activists as the primary objective, while reinstating a democratic regime came as a secondary demand. They argued that the restitution of democracy could not be fully achieved without the restoration of the province of Sindh (Tahir 2010, 487–93).

In the struggle to re-establish Sindh as a province, poetry provided slogans that galvanized protesters. Indeed, when a group of students in Jamshoro sought a name for the new organization [p. 258] they were creating, they turned to poetry and used one of Hyder Bakhsh Jatōi's famous lines that, according to a commentator, are 'so popular in Sind that people in towns and villages sing this poem in groups as a popular folk song' (Jiskani 1979, 94):

²² The Awami Adabi Anjuman, formed in 1967 under the leadership of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Ruknuddin Hassan, was meant as a revival of the banned Progressive Writers' Association. It brought together on the same platform left-oriented writers from the various languages of Pakistan, including Urdu-speaking poets like Hasan Hameedi and Sindhi writers like Shaikh Ayaz and Ibrahim Joyo (B. Ayaz 2012).

Sindh jo nām tho maṭjī kī’an?

How could Sindh’s name be erased?

Sindh jo nām tho ghaṭjī kī’an?

How could Sindh’s name be diminished?

Har dam Sindh jo zindah nām!

In every breath, Sindh’s name lives!

Jī’e Sindh! Jī’e Sindh!!

Long live Sindh! Long live Sindh!!

This slogan later came to designate the entire Sindhi nationalist movement—the Jiye Sindh movement. But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Sindhi students who joined the writers in their condemnation of the One Unit scheme were as yet only laying the foundations of Sindhi nationalist parties by establishing the first ethnic organizations.

The birth of Sindhi student organizations

The mobilization of the Sindhi middle class to defend their language resulted from the anguish caused by the central government’s measures that brought the official status of Sindhi to an end. Young Sindhis thus felt discriminated against in their access to administrative jobs because they now had to work in Urdu, while Mohajirs, whose native language is Urdu, were not required to learn Sindhi. Hence, the Sindhi Muslim middle class, who prior to Partition had hoped to gain greater access to jobs in the administrative services where Hindus were already over-represented, did not receive what they sought from the creation of Pakistan. As Claude Markovits writes, Partition ‘did not solve the basic problem of the Sindhi Muslim middle class of gaining access [p. 259] to government service’ (Markovits 2008, 51). In fact, Sindhi students started mobilizing as early as January 1948, when Karachi was separated from the Sindh province to become the capital of Pakistan. Sindhi students believed the separation of Karachi would make access to government institutions more difficult for them. The Sindh Muslim Student Federation took to the streets, shouting ‘We will take Karachi, no matter if we have to shed blood’ (Urd. *khūn se lenge Karācī*) (Tahir 2010, 177). As a symbol of protest, students hung a black flag outside their hostel, the Leslie Wilson Muslim Hostel, built specifically for facilitating Sindhi Muslims’ access to higher education, which stood right opposite Governor-General Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s residence (Khuhro 1998, 339).

Since Hyderabad in the 1960s housed the only university in Sindh as well as many of its affiliated colleges, it brought together students from various areas who shared a similar social trajectory. The cultural and political centre of Sindh, Hyderabad—and its satellite town Jamshoro, where the campus

of the University of Sindh was progressively shifted during the 1960s—seemed more accessible than Karachi to many young Sindhis, whose numbers in universities and colleges now surpassed that of the Mohajirs.²³ Most of these young Sindhi students came from villages and were the first in their families to get a higher education. Over the course of their studies, they lived among other students, mostly men, and being away from their families and the tight social control of their village, they enjoyed freedom and autonomy. They became familiar with an urban lifestyle and aspired to non-manual jobs, which would ensure they could maintain their newly acquired way of life. Nevertheless, they retained strong links to the countryside, as was pointed out by Mohammad Qadeer about Pakistan in general: ‘Educated migrants with steady careers keep village bases for family ties, supplementary incomes (rent from family land), vacations, and retirement’ (Qadeer 2006, 130). Indeed, in the case of Sindhi students, the possession of some land often provided agricultural rent that made it possible for them to live in the city and study; [p. 260] however, they frequently married in their villages.²⁴ Their social profile is well-described by Mohammad Qadeer:

Children of prosperous peasants pursued education, some qualifying as doctors, engineers, lawyers, and public officials. Yet unlike Western experiences, most of them have kept their links with villages and have even invested in land and houses. The rural-urban migration in Pakistan does not result in uprooting people from villages, once and for all. It results in rural families planting branches in cities while retaining a strong base in villages for the next two or three generations. (Qadeer 2006, 127)

In the 1950s and 1960s, the university campuses in Sindh were dominated by left-wing organizations. One of the most prominent among them was the Democratic Students Federation (DSF), established in 1951, which was closely linked to the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP).²⁵ Its demands initially concerned university matters (lower fees, better studying conditions, construction of libraries, etc.), but students increasingly also mobilized on issues related to Cold War politics, condemning for instance Pakistan’s alliance with the United States. Both DSF and CPP were therefore banned by the

²³ The impression that colleges and universities in Karachi are inaccessible to Sindhis persists to this day. In addition to the Liaquat Medical College and the Engineering College (then affiliated to the University of Sindh and now universities on their own), there were, in the 1960s, a growing number of intermediate colleges in ‘interior Sindh’ (*andrūn-i Sindh*), some of whose students also took part in protests.

²⁴ An in-depth study of social change in rural Sindh still needs to be conducted. The general social structure of Sindhi villages can be summed up in four broad categories: landlords (*zamīndār*), landowning farmers, landless peasants (*harī*), and artisan and service castes (*kasbī*). The nascent middle class that gained access to higher education from the 1950s onward stemmed in large part from families of small land-owning farmers.

²⁵ The Democratic Students Federation, affiliated with the CPP, was founded in Karachi on 13 January 1951 by students of the Dow Medical College. The organization notably instigated the Karachi protests of January 1953 during which the police killed seven students.

government in June 1954.²⁶ After the banning of these organizations, the government attempted to promote the National Students Federation (NSF) as an organization that would not contest its agenda, but these efforts failed. The new organization was soon infiltrated by sympathizers and former DSF members who took over its leadership. This eventually led to the outright suspension of student union elections by the government in January 1959 (Butt 2009, 156).

Although various authors have written on student mobilization in Pakistan (Butt 2008, 2009; Nasr 1992), accounts of student politics in Sindh have generally overlooked the situation outside Karachi and instead concentrated mainly on the former capital city, where the DSF and NSF had a strong base at the Dow Medical College and the D. J. Sindh Government Science College (Gayer [p. 261] 2014, 54–60). Nevertheless, beginning in the 1960s, the University of Sindh also witnessed lively student politics. Hyderabad and Jamshoro have remained centres of political agitation since then. A year and a half before widespread protests against the Ayub regime took place throughout Pakistan in 1968–1969, an instance of police abuse sparked regular protests at the University of Sindh. On 4 March 1967, several hundred students attended a protest meeting at the ‘New Campus’ in Jamshoro in order to contest the dismissal of the Vice-Chancellor Hasan Ali Abdur Rahman. On their way back to Hyderabad, the student buses were confronted by the police and about two hundred of them were beaten and arrested. Consequently, section 144 of the Criminal Code of Pakistan was enforced prohibiting all public gatherings (Tahir 2010, 525–29). Most students were released in the following days, but some student leaders were detained for several months. In reaction to what was perceived as a gross abuse of power by the police, students took to the streets at university campuses across Sindh.

The importance of this event, however, is to be found in the symbolic value it acquired over time. Compared to the scale of protest that took place from November 1968 to March 1969 in Pakistan, this attack on student buses may indeed seem minor as no deaths were reported.²⁷ However among Sindhi activists, this day is vividly remembered as a foundational moment: the entrance of Sindhis into a mass opposition against the regime. The poet Shaikh Ayaz later dubbed it ‘Sindh’s May Day’

²⁶ While India adopted a policy of non-alignment, Pakistan joined the Western camp by signing the Manila Pact (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) in September 1954 and the Baghdad Pact (Middle East Treaty Organization) in February 1955. Many left-wing sympathizers in Pakistan thought that the ban on the CPP and the DSF was put in place in response to the pressure exerted by the United States ahead of the signature by the Pakistani government of these international treaties. On the events that directly led to the ban on the CPP, see K. A. Ali 2015, 197–205.

²⁷ This may explain why it is not mentioned in many accounts of student politics in Pakistan, such as that by Iqbal Haider Butt. In contrast, several students were shot by the police in Rawalpindi on 7 and 9 November 1968 (Butt 2009, 40–41). On the 1968–69 movement, also see L. Khan 2009.

(Sin. *Sindh jo May Day*) in reference to the killing of workers in Chicago in 1886.²⁸ Ayaz' renaming of the 4 March event is symptomatic of the symbolic strength that it had gained. In the minds of Sindhi students and political activists with a left-wing or Sindhi nationalist leaning, it represented the oppression of Sindhis at the hands of a military regime and the Punjabi elite.²⁹ But most importantly, 4 March is remembered as the day when Sindhi students stopped tolerating injustice and decided to fight back for their 'national rights' (*qaumī haqan lā'e jidd o jahd*). Several books, often written [p. 262] by former participants, were dedicated to it³⁰ and Sindhi nationalist organizations have marked 4 March as the 'Historical day of Struggle by Nationalist Students' (*Sindh je qaumparast shāgirdan jī jidd o jahd jo dīnhan*) to be commemorated annually.³¹ The event of 4 March 1967 indicates the generalization of Sindhi nationalist discourse beyond small political elite circles, intellectuals, and writers. The cultural reinvention that was initiated in the 1930s with the struggle for separating Sindh from the Bombay Presidency (Khuhro 1982b; Verkaaik 2010) was later consolidated by Sindhi writers opposing the One Unit scheme. Such efforts now bore fruit among a wider public. Students repeated slogans that were clearly nationalist in tone, such as '*jī'e Sindh*' (Long live Sindh) or '*Sindhī bolī qaumī bolī*' (Sindhi language [is a] national language).

The fact that Sindhi students came to the forefront represented a profound shift. Until then, the left-wing organizations in which Sindhi students participated had a national agenda. These communist organizations in Sindh tended to be dominated by Mohajirs.³² In the late 1960s, however, some Sindhi student leaders asserted themselves and progressively broke away from the existing student organizations to create their own. In this context of growing polarization, the 4 March event acquired an ethnic tinge. According to Tanvir Ahmed Tahir,

²⁸ On 4 May 1886 at Haymarket Square in Chicago, at least four protesters and seven policemen were killed in violence that took place during a rally in support of striking workers demanding an eight-hour working day. In memory of this event known as the Haymarket Affair and in celebration of the achievements of the working classes in gaining better rights, trade unions, labour movements and left groups organize marches on 1 May. Known as Labour Day or May Day, 1 May is now a public holiday in many countries.

²⁹ The symbolic importance of this event can be grasped from the account made by Mir Thebo on a blog (Thebo 2011). The fifty-year anniversary of the event was recently celebrated on 4 March 2017. See Z. Ali 2017; Hussain 2017.

³⁰ In particular the small book that compiles articles by Shaikh Ayaz and three student leaders, Rasul Bakhsh Palijo, Yusuf Laghari, and Masud Nurani (S. Ayaz et al. 1978). Also see the collection of articles edited by another former student leader, Aijaz Qureshi (Qureshi 2003).

³¹ See the 'National days of Sindhudesh' listed by nationalist parties (<http://www.lchr.org/a/31/23/dayse.html>).

³² From its foundation in 1948, the Communist Party of Pakistan 'imported' its leadership from India, such as Sajjad Zaheer, who later moved back to India. Since Mohajirs were overall better educated and more urbanized than Sindhis, their presence was larger in factories where trade unions were active.

the students were divided in two camps: Urdu speaking students supporting the commissioner [who took the decision to sack Hasan Ali Abdur aehman] and Sindhi students wanting to retain the Sindhi vice chancellor. (Tahir 2010, 526)

Hasan Ali Abdur Rahman had indeed gained the Sindhi students' sympathy by implementing several measures in their favour, including admission quotas. The 4 March event thus reveals a tension that had been present in left-wing groups, especially in the National Awami Party, which from its beginnings in July 1957 had gathered representatives of the 'smaller provinces', such as [p. 263] G. M. Sayed (Sindh), Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (then NWFP), or Maulana Bhashani (Bengal). Kamran Asdar Ali notes these dissensions:

[...] in 1957–1958, [...] there already were debates on whether the NAP should dissolve because of disagreement as to whether the Party should incline towards class-based politics or whether it should favour a nationalist position representing smaller ethnic groups. (2015, 231)

At the time of 4 March 1967, Sindhi and Mohajir students at Sindh University pursued 'class-based politics' from a common platform, the Hyderabad Students Federation (HSF) founded in 1966. The HSF, however, was weakened when its president, Yusuf Laghari, and other Sindhi members quit the organization in order to join the Sindh Students Cultural Organization (SSCO). Yusuf Laghari, who represented the nationalist group within HSF, left over a disagreement with the General Secretary Jam Saqi, a convinced communist. While Yusuf Laghari preferred to restrict the struggle to Sindh, Jam Saqi wanted HSF to collaborate with the democratic movement across Pakistan. The SSCO was led by Rasul Bakhsh Palijo, who later became a major political leader as the founder of the Awami Tehrik. The SSCO had been established to work as a student wing of G. M. Sayed's cultural organization, the Bazm-i Sufia-i Sindh.³³ The preference given to the ethnic dimension by Sindhi students was expressed in the main objective of their struggle: many indeed thought that true democracy could not be possible without the dissolution of One Unit, while Mohajir students tended to see the abolition of dictatorship as the primary goal.

The tension between 'class-based politics' versus 'ethnicity-based politics' did also exist among Sindhi students. Yet in the years that followed 4 March 1967, they created several organizations that

³³ The 'founding father' of Sindhi nationalism, G. M. Sayed (1904–1995), had been under house arrest from 1958 to 1966. When freed, he announced that he would reorient his struggle for Sindh to the cultural front and consequently created an organization for the promotion of Sufism, the Bazm-i Sufia-i Sindh.

were meant to represent Sindhis and therefore included very few Mohajir students. This entirely changed the configuration of [p. 264] student groups in Hyderabad, as it eventually gave birth to the Jiye Sindh Students Federation (JSSF), the first Sindhi nationalist organization that would later embrace a separatist agenda. In the aftermath of the 4 March event, not only was HSF disbanded and SSCO reinforced, but the first student political organization that operated across the province of Sindh was founded. After the dissolution of HSF, the Sindh National Students Federation (SNSF) was established on 3 November 1968 to connect various branches of the National Students Federation that had been established at different campuses in Sindh.³⁴ This new structure made it possible for Sindhi student leaders to avoid working under the supervision of the Mohajir communist leadership. SNSF was a progressive organization that brought together ‘class-based politics’ and ‘nationalist politics’, as indicated by its slogan ‘*jī’e Sindh, jī’e porhiyat*’ (Long live Sindh, long live the peasantry). However, the reunion of communist students with nationalist students was not without tensions, especially ahead of the 1970 elections: the SNSF split between supporters of Wali Khan’s National Awami Party and those of G. M. Sayed’s Sindh Muttahida Mahaz (Sindh United Front). Students who supported the latter—and thus stressed the national question rather than the class dimension—left SNSF to form their own faction: the SNSF (Nationalist Group). In December 1970, they merged with another student group, the Jiye Sindh Naujawan Mahaz (Long Live Sindh Youth Front), to create the first student organization that brought together all the Sindhi nationalist students: the Jiye Sindh Students Federation (JSSF, Sin. *jasāf*).³⁵ Over the following years the JSSF gained tremendous influence at the University of Sindh, which became the bastion of Sindhi nationalists and the place where activists were to be trained during their studies. As we will see, the creation of the JSSF also announced the coming of G. M. Sayed’s ‘separatist turn’, when he publicly embraced the idea of an independent Sindh in 1973.

Thus, although the post-4 March period saw the formation of a united cultural and political front bringing together Sindhi [p. 265] students, writers, and political elites in their opposition to the One Unit, students in Hyderabad were divided along two major lines in the late 1960s. On the one hand, the distinction between Sindhis and Mohajirs grew politically relevant even among communist groups who professed the need for a united struggle against the dominant, capitalist class. This rift led to the creation of separate Sindhi student organizations. On the other hand, the divide between communists

³⁴ SNSF was first led by Jam Saqi, who later gained significant popularity in Sindh. In 1977, SNSF changed its name to DSF, adopting the name of the erstwhile Democratic Students Federation banned in 1954 (Odho 2010, 240).

³⁵ Interview with Khadim Hussain Soomro, founding member of Jiye Sindh Students Federation, Karachi, March 2011. While G. M. Sayed’s supporters first formed the SNSF (Nationalist) and later joined JSSF, SNSF pursued its activities separately. For more on SNSF, see Odho 2010, 141.

and nationalists (or ‘ethnicists’, Tahir 2010, 550) among Sindhi students made the latter form their own organization, which prefigured the birth of the Jiye Sindh Mahaz.³⁶

G. M. Sayed’s separatist turn

Between 1967 and 1973, major changes took place in Pakistan that radically transformed the country. After a countrywide protest movement, Ayub Khan was replaced by another military general, Yahya Khan, in March 1969. The One Unit was dismantled in November 1969 and the provinces of West Pakistan were restored.³⁷ The first general elections were organized in December 1970 and the non-recognition of Mujibur Rahman’s victory led to civil war and the eventual independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who had won the elections in West Pakistan, took over as president of the country in December 1971, and later as Prime Minister, after a new federal constitution was adopted in August 1973.

During the same period in Sindh, the opposition movement against One Unit followed by the reinstatement of electoral politics led to the creation of various new political organizations. With regard to the issue of Sindh’s identity and political destiny, three distinct alignments emerged, which were labelled by Charles Kennedy as ‘gradualist’, ‘autonomist’, and ‘separatist’ (Kennedy 1991, 947). In this new political spectrum (which can still be observed today), each line was borne by one or more new political parties. The [p. 266] ‘gradualist’ Pakistan People’s Party, founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on 30 November 1967 in Lahore, sought to secure Sindhis’ rights through elections and upheld the constitution of Pakistan. The ‘autonomist’ Awami Tehrik, launched on 5 March 1970 by Rasul Bakhsh Palijo, fought for ‘significant devolution of authority to Sindh Province’, while merging nationalist and communist (Maoist) rhetoric in a single struggle. It also contested the legitimacy of the constitution of Pakistan, arguing that its writing and adoption went against the 1940 Lahore Resolution. Finally, the ‘separatist’ Jiye Sindh Mahaz, established on 18 June 1972 by G. M. Sayed, became an advocate for Sindh’s independence.

The early 1970s were also a period of tension between Sindhis and Mohajirs that resulted in violent

³⁶ It may also be noted that communists were divided among themselves as well, the pro-Moscow group opposed the pro-Beijing group. In 1968, the National Awami Party broke into two: Wali Khan’s pro-Soviet faction in West Pakistan and Maulana Bhashani’s pro-China faction in Bengal.

³⁷ Restored and unified: princely states were now included in the new provinces. Sindh, as a result, not only reintegrated Karachi as its capital city, but also absorbed the former emirate of Khairpur.

conflict. In the aftermath of the dissolution of One Unit, Sindhi students and writers demanded the restoration of the official status of Sindhi. According to Tariq Rahman,

The Jeay Sind Naujawan Mahaz decided to contest the 1970 elections on a platform of full autonomy for Sind. In August 1970 the syndicate of the University of Sind decided that Sindhi would be adopted as the 'official language and language of internal correspondence'. Other voices were raised in support; in October, 108 Sindhi writers and intellectuals challenged the attempts of the ruling elite to make Urdu the dominant language of West Pakistan, and were supported by the Sindhi Adabi Sangat, which also demanded that the names of railway stations, parks, and gardens in Sind be written in Sindhi. A leading intellectual, Sheikh Ayaz, further demanded that Sindhi should be made the dominant language of the province and the [Sindhi Adabi] Sangat, among others, praised the university for making Sindhi its official language. (1995, 1012–13)

Mohajir leaders, for their part, also voiced increasingly strict demands, such as the creation of a separate Karachi province. With such polarization, according to Tariq Rahman, 'the seeds of today's Muhajir-Sindhi conflict were sown' (ibid. 1013). This context [p. 267] of heightened ethnic tension led to violence on two occasions, in January 1971 and July 1972, as the provincial government sought to pass a bill that would reintroduce Sindhi's official status (ibid. 1012–15).

In this context, G. M. Sayed first gave lukewarm support to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto before publicly embracing the cause of Sindh's independence. As a result of this shift, his political engagement is portrayed in monolithic terms depending on the commentator's own political leanings. To his detractors, he is nothing but a traitor who, after having been one of the most vocal proponents of the Pakistan project in the 1930s and 1940s, turned separatist, 'anti-Pakistan' and, to some, 'anti-Islam'. To his followers, he is the '*rahbar*', the guide or founder, eulogized as a man unfailingly striving for the rights of Sindh and as an intellectual who authored sixty books to help Sindhis gain greater consciousness of their own predicament. In contrast with such simplistic and teleological depictions of G. M. Sayed's persona, the latter part of his life, when he was most critical of the project of Pakistan, seems in fact full of doubts and hesitations, as he would sometimes seem ready to forego the cause of 'Sindhudesh', or independent Sindh. At the beginning of the 1970s, G. M. Sayed had already made several twists and turns in his political life, the most important of which being his separation from the Muslim League in late 1945.³⁸ From then on, he remained critical of Pakistan's

³⁸ G. M. Sayed parted ways with the Muslim League because of a disagreement over the nomination of candidates who

central authorities. While he led the opposition in the Sindh assembly in the early 1950s, he sought to create, with other leaders from ‘smaller provinces’ (such as Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Prince Abdul Karim), opposition parties to resist the centralizing policies of the state. Even though G. M. Sayed was made to spend eight years (1958–1966) under house arrest due to his political activities, he still publicly defended the project of Pakistan, provided its institutions be reformed to ensure Sindh’s rights would be secured.

His stance—critical yet constructive—was well expressed in a speech in November 1967. On the one hand, he dismissed the [p. 268] two-nation theory and the idea of Muslim nationalism. According to him, ‘belief in this theory has weakened and not established or strengthened the national fabric’ (Sayed 2005, 99). G. M. Sayed rejected the idea that Pakistan could be an ‘Islamic nation’, a conception incompatible with the actual existence of a community of Pakistani citizens living in a territory delimited by borders. Yet on the other hand he put forward various measures that would help unify the population of Pakistan into one nation. He argued that the existence of multiple ‘nationalities’ had to be acknowledged in order to be transformed into one single nation (Sayed 2005, 99). Hence, in order to ‘strengthen the national fabric [...] there should be a mutual understanding and agreement among local nationalities of various Provinces’ on a number of subjects: the right to provincial autonomy; the official recognition of provincial languages; the preferential access of locals to land, jobs in government services, commerce and industry; and the preservation of local cultures and traditions (Sayed 2005, 104). Thus, in the late 1960s, G. M. Sayed defended a decentralised conception of Pakistan but did not advocate separatism. He even strongly condemned the ‘extremist trend of nationalism [that] is growing among the Sindhi people’:

Alongside our effort to secure the right of the people of Sind, we have not to neglect the collective good of the Pakistani nation as a whole. [...] Besides, we have also to realize that by merely repeating the name of Sindhi nationality we are to gain nothing. [...] Under these circumstances, and without ensuring a more correct atmosphere for it, the assumption and claim on our part of the name and title of Sindhi nationality may to an extent be the same as calling a mob an organization. (ibid. 106–8)

Several years later, G. M. Sayed continued to defend a vision of Pakistan in which all provinces enjoyed maximum autonomy, as he made clear in his birthday speech on 17 January 1972. On that day, he addressed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, whom he saw as the last person who could ‘save Pakistan’,

would contest the January 1946 provincial elections (Tahir 2010, 131). For G. M. Sayed’s own account of this period, see Sayed 1949.

with a number of recommendations on [p. 269] this topic, in what he later described as ‘one last attempt at unity’ (Sayed 1995, 185).³⁹ As a response, he received a letter of warning from the Ministry of Presidential Affairs accusing him of refuting the two-nation theory in suggesting that Sindh was a separate nation, intending to launch an organization to train Sindhi youth in guerrilla warfare, and letting others make speeches in favour of Sindh’s independence. Sayed denied all such accusations:

I must state that this seems to be complete fabrication on the part of those who want to create trouble in the Province of Sind [...]. Nobody spoke of declaring independence of Sind or launch a guerilla war fare [*sic*] for the same nor did anybody talk of reddening the water of Indus with anybody’s blood.⁴⁰

However, a year and a half later, G. M. Sayed publicly called for Sindh’s independence and published books to support his vision, in particular *Sindhūdes̄h: cho ain chā lā’e?* [Sindhudesh: Why and What For? 1974], in which he defends the viability of a potential independent Sindhi state, ‘bound to reach a state of abundance and facility hardly to be equalled anywhere in the developing world of the present times’ (Sayed 2010, 99). What provoked G. M. Sayed’s ‘separatist turn’?

Although in 1966 G. M. Sayed had announced his departure from politics and his resolution to engage in cultural matters, when elections were announced in 1969 he returned to the arena by taking the leadership of the electoral alliance Sindh Muttahida Mahaz (also sometimes called by its English equivalent, Sindh United Front). But his efforts to reassert himself in electoral politics failed. During the campaign, G. M. Sayed was progressively sidelined as almost all his major supporters—landlords likely to win a vote—left him one after the other. Pir Pagaro and his group joined the Muslim League (Qayyum), while the Council Muslim League, which represented a majority in the alliance led by G. M. Sayed, saw no interest in remaining part of it. Just before the election, [p. 270] the secretary of the party, Ghulam Nabi Pathan of Shikarpur, also walked out. Due to these defections, the ambition of forming a collective front against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto failed. G. M. Sayed was left with two personalities who had discredited themselves because of their role in implementing One Unit in 1954–1955, Muhammad Ayub Khuhro and Pir Ali Muhammad Rashdi. Their support was a liability for G. M. Sayed, whose supporters had in large numbers strongly opposed One Unit. G. M. Sayed

³⁹ In his speech, G. M. Sayed stated that Bhutto’s election gave Sindhis a ‘final chance [...] to get the problems solved. Else the country will be divided into pieces.’

⁴⁰ G. M. Sayed’s speech of 17 January 1972 and the official letter are partially reproduced in the last book he wrote before his death (Sayed 1995, 179–85). The draft response by Sayed can be found at the IISH in Amsterdam: G. M. Sayed, Draft letter to M. Rahim, 14 February 1972, *G. M. Sayed Archive*, file no. 18, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

remained the only candidate fielded by the Sindh Muttahida Mahaz, but lost in his own constituency in Dadu (NW 125): in Sindh, his party won 10,592 votes, against 6,150,000 for the PPP.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's capacity to attract several politicians to his side and galvanize the enthusiasm of the Sindhi electorate pushed G. M. Sayed into isolation on the political scene. This worsened in the early 1970s, when Bhutto managed to win over many of Sindh's powerful landowners. The PPP initially did not include any major Sindhi landowners except for Makhdoom Muhammad Zaman and Bhutto himself. Bhutto's electoral success among the peasants in fact relied on the promise of distributing 18 acres of land to each landless peasant (Ahmad and Sultan 1977, 15). Such campaign statements were not taken well by landowners (or feudal lords, as they are often called in Pakistan), but they had to reckon with the PPP's position of strength. Eventually they too joined the bandwagon in the mid-1970s to secure their own interests. Because of Pakistan's electoral dynamics in which ties of patronage play a fundamental role, no major electoral victory can be achieved without the landowners' support. Conscious of this fact, G. M. Sayed, who was himself a landlord, often sought their allegiance, especially through his *sayyid* network.⁴¹ Therefore he was bitterly disappointed when Bhutto managed to rally them behind him over the course of the 1970s. In addition, Bhutto made efforts to defuse possible pockets of opposition in Sindh. The Sindhi middle class that had been at the forefront of political resistance in the late 1960s and adhered to G. M. Sayed's vision of Sindhi identity was deftly [p. 271] co-opted into public employment owing to administrative reforms and nationalizations. Potential demands coming from the workers were also (temporarily) contained thanks to the PPP's links with trade unions. In this context, Bhutto rather than G. M. Sayed appeared as the defender of Sindhis.

G. M. Sayed's isolation provided fertile ground for his 'separatist turn', as most of his supporters were now students whose political outlook was more radical and marked by Marxism and nationalist sentiments. In 1972 and 1973, the term 'Sindhudesh' made its way into his public speeches and acquired a new meaning: by late 1973, it now not only meant Sindh as a cultural, historical, and territorial entity, but expressed a political project, that of an independent Sindh. Logically, G. M. Sayed's support for a decentralized conception of Pakistan made him endorse Mujibur

⁴¹ *Sayyid* is the title given to people who claim descent from Prophet Muhammad. In South Asia, they form a social category that sits at the top of the *ashrafiyyah*—that is, Muslims who claim Arab, Persian, Turk, or Afghan ancestry, as opposed to Muslims who recently converted or whose forefathers converted to Islam from Hinduism. *Sayyid* descent confers prestige and respect, especially among Shias. It is also sometimes associated, especially in Sufi contexts, to a belief in the transmission of a divine substance (*nūr-i muḥammadī*). In Sindh, the two main lineages of *sayyid* (Matiari and Lakyari) are well organized—there is the Sindh Sayed Association—and possess rules and practices (such as hypergamy) akin to those of castes. For more on *sayyid* in general, see Morimoto 2012.

Rahman's struggle for an independent Bangladesh, as he stated in January 1972:

The first and foremost [*sic*] change is to forego the Two Nation Theory and to make and recognize Pakistan as a combination of five nations. In such events every nation reserves the right of self-determination and on this basis if people of Bengal want to live independently, their demand [should] be considered rightly and Bangla Desh be recognized.⁴²

Later, while commemorating the 4 March event, G. M. Sayed stressed the importance of this day in the history of 'Sindhudesh', using the term publicly for the first time in front of students at the University of Sindh. In another speech, on 14 May, he linked the Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif with not only Sindh but 'Sindhudesh': 'Latif is the flag-bearer of the five-thousand-year-old historical culture of Sindhudesh.'⁴³ G. M. Sayed had already interpreted Latif's poetry in a nationalist fashion in his book *Paighām-i Latīf* published in 1952 (Sayed 1996) but he now sought to convey the notion that Shah Abdul Latif conceived of Sindh as a political unit. [p. 272]

Yet while G. M. Sayed increasingly talked about 'Sindhudesh' in his speeches to the youth of Sindh, he still vested hope in the new constitutional effort initiated by Bhutto, expecting that it might benefit Sindh by granting provinces significant powers. An anecdote often repeated in Sindh among nationalist activists tells of G. M. Sayed lending help to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in gaining the support of Pakhtun and Baloch politicians for the new constitution. G. M. Sayed had a long association with many of these leaders since their attempts at creating political parties to represent 'smaller nationalities'—the People's Organization of Pakistan in May 1948—eventually led to the foundation of the National Awami Party in 1957. Thus, ironically, the 1973 constitution that was opposed by Sindhi nationalists from the outset was adopted in part thanks to help provided by G M. Sayed who for some time saw in Bhutto a young and bright Sindhi politician. Bhutto also made overtures to G. M. Sayed by offering him a seat as 'Special Envoy' on a diplomatic mission to negotiate the release of prisoners with the Indian government in the aftermath of the 1971 war. When Sayed discovered that he would in fact be part of a large delegation, he felt duped and decided not to join. This refusal to be co-opted into Bhutto's plan reveals G M. Sayed's disappointment with the direction the first Sindhi president of Pakistan was taking. G. M. Sayed now increasingly saw in Bhutto a power-hungry leader who was ready to work for the 'Punjabi establishment' and the 'Mohajir-Punjabi imperialism'

⁴² 'Speech of Mr G. M. Sayed on the Auspicious Occasion of his 66 years Birth-day Celebrations', 17 January 1972, typed speech, consulted in December 2013, G. M. Sayed family library, Jamshoro.

⁴³ G. M. Sayed, speech in Sindhi addressed to students on the occasion of the (Shah Abdul) Latif Day (*yaum-i latīf*), in Mirpur Bathoro (near Jhok Sharif, Thatta district), 14 May 1972, G. M. Sayed family library, Jamshoro.

(Tahir 2010, 688–91). On top of his political isolation, G. M. Sayed thus cultivated a personal rivalry with Bhutto, who had managed to rise to power in part due to the nationalist imaginary of Sindh constructed by G. M. Sayed, by intellectuals working in cultural institutions such as the Sindhi Adabi Board, and more broadly by writers and students who protested against the One Unit and the military dictatorship in the 1950s and 1960s. In short, G. M. Sayed felt that Bhutto was collecting the fruits of his labour but did not use them for the benefit of Sindh. [p. 273]

Indeed, the adoption of the 1973 constitution only confirmed G. M. Sayed's opinion of Bhutto, since the autonomy it brought to provinces within a federal set-up fell well short of what nationalists demanded. The powers of the central government and the army were not curtailed. Pakistan was still conceived on the basis of the two-nation theory and not as an amalgamation of provinces that had a right to secede. The rejection of the new constitution by Sindhi nationalists became visible through the hostility with which students welcomed Abdul Hafiz Pirzada, Minister for Law and the major architect of the constitution, who had come to the University of Sindh in April 1973 to receive an honorary doctorate. Students disturbed the ceremony, chanting slogans such as '*Na'ūn ā'īn, nah khape!*' (we don't want the new constitution). In an act of bravery that remained famous among Sindhi nationalists, a student leader that belonged to Jiye Sindh Students Federation (JSSF) even slapped the minister as he was walking towards his car.

By mid-1973, G. M. Sayed's separatist turn was thus complete and the JSSF acted as the main political organization that advocated independence. G. M. Sayed had already created a new party: on 18 June 1972, the Jiye Sindh Mahaz (JSM) was founded in Sann at a meeting that included nationalist activists, some of whom, such as Abdul Khaliq Junejo, would eventually lead the party. Initially, the JSM was a new name for a transformed Sindh Muttahida Mahaz and its manifesto was essentially the same. The inclusion of the slogan '*jī'e sindh*' in the name of the party—in line with the student organization JSSF which had appropriated the expression in December 1970—reveals its ethnic dimension. The foundation of the JSM thus needs to be understood as a continuation of the ethnic student organizations created in the late 1960s. The proximity in name also tells of the fact that students were by then G. M. Sayed's main supporters. Despite its nationalist orientation, the party was not yet separatist: the initial manifesto made no mention of 'Sindhudesh' and stated as political agenda the revision of Pakistan's federal organization to build a confederation granting 'maximum [p. 274] autonomy' to each 'state' (the term province was abandoned). Right after the 'language riots' of July 1972, G. M. Sayed went on a tour of Sindh, which led to his being under house arrest for eight months. As a result, the activities of the JSM were put on hold until it was revived in the autumn of

1977 and the JSSF *de facto* led the ‘national politics’ (*qaumī siyāsāt*) of the Jiye Sindh movement.

G. M. Sayed’s separatist turn was thus brought about by a number of causes. It resulted from political factors, the most important of which being the negation by central authorities and by Bhutto of the Bengali vote in the 1970 election, the successful secession of Bangladesh, and the adoption of a constitution that enshrined a strong central authority. These events made Sayed lose hope in the Pakistan project, but they also combined with personal factors, such as his political isolation and his bitterness towards an ungrateful Bhutto. Disappointed and bitter, G. M. Sayed lost hope of transforming Pakistan into a state that would benefit Sindh. The multiplicity of factors that led G. M. Sayed to demand Sindh’s independence indicates that it was not an obvious continuation of his previous political engagement. Neither was it a position he held firmly in the following decades—for instance, in 1988, he set aside the demand for ‘Sindhudesh’ in order to build an electoral alliance, the Sindh National Alliance.

This inconstancy in G. M. Sayed’s political positioning make him appear, in certain ways, as a ‘reluctant separatist’, which begs the question: to what extent did G. M. Sayed *choose* to embrace the separatist cause? Like all his political decisions, G. M. Sayed himself presented his separatist turn as an act that the context forced him to commit, implying that there was no other option left for the betterment of Sindh:

We were now despaired of getting our rights through constitutional means within the federation. Total despair gives birth to the desire for total change. It was in this state of total despair that we decided [p. 275] to prepare the people to work for the total independence of Sindh and the creation of Sindhu Desh (Sayed 1995, 192).

Several elements seem to indicate that G. M. Sayed agreed to champion a cause that was in fact borne by university students, especially at the University of Sindh. This interpretation differs from accounts of some activists themselves,⁴⁴ but would nonetheless be consistent with rumours in Sindh that some of G. M. Sayed’s books were written by his close friend Muhammad Ibrahim Joyo who, coming from a poor household, was more influenced by Marxism than his mentor.⁴⁵ And one certainly notices a

⁴⁴ Abdul Khaliq Junejo, who participated in the June 1972 meeting as a student, insisted in our discussions that the idea of independence came from G. M. Sayed himself.

⁴⁵ Muhammad Ibrahim Joyo (1915-2017) was one of the most prominent Sindhi intellectuals of the 20th century (Verkaaik 2004). Joyo notoriously wrote a book in 1946 called *Save Sindh: Save the Continent* (Joyo 2000). Joyo was much more Marxist in thinking than G. M. Sayed, although the latter had been close to left circles from the late-1940s onwards. CIA documents recently made public even reveal that he was elected chairman of the Pakistan-Soviet

change of tone in G. M. Sayed's books from the mid-1970s onwards. For example, in *Sindhūdes, cho ain chā lā'e?*, the multiple references to socialism seem more in line with the political environment of university students than with G. M. Sayed's own intellectual background, from the Theosophical Society⁴⁶ to his engagement with the Muslim League, to his eventual oppositional politics. G. M. Sayed may thus have extended his capacity of leadership to a group of student activists who sought the support of a major political figure. What is clear, however, is that by embracing such a radical cause, G. M. Sayed gave it a resonance that students would not have otherwise obtained.

Conclusion

Complementing existing 'alternative' narratives of Pakistani politics that often leave out Sindh (K. A. Ali 2015), this chapter shows the way Sindhi ethnic identity progressively crystallized in political movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Through its mobilization against One Unit and the Ayub regime, a generation of upwardly mobile young Sindhi men voiced its anguish not to be able to access non-manual jobs that their higher education trained them for. While writers put in words the desperation of many Sindhis and crafted an imaginary that became the standard way to conjure up Sindh, students involved themselves in political [p. 276] organizations and protested against the authorities, at the cost of being jailed and beaten by the police as on the landmark event of 4 March 1967.

The political mobilization of the emerging Sindhi middle-class needs to be placed in the historical continuity of Sindhi nationalism. Sindhi writers, students and political activists in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s inherited the groundwork of the Sindhi nationalist discourse first developed by the educated elite during the movement for the separation of Sindh from the Bombay presidency in the 1920s and 1930s. They built upon the set of characteristics of Sindh identified by their elders—from the Indus Valley civilization to Sufi mysticism—and gave them new political meaning as they protested against One Unit and against Ayub Khan's military rule. Such symbols became identity markers whose display expressed one's allegiance to a belief in the cultural and political unity of Sindh.

Cultural Association in October 1953.

⁴⁶ Beginning in the 1930s, G. M. Sayed was associated with the Theosophical Society of Karachi. Formed in New York in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky, the Theosophical Society brought together mystics in search of a universal truth beyond the existing religions. It moved its headquarters to Adyar in the Madras Presidency in 1882. The Theosophical Society's ecumenical message had significant appeal to educated Sindhis in the first half of the twentieth century. Many of them, such as Jethmal Parsram and G. M. Sayed, eventually wrote books about what they saw as Sindh's inclusive mysticism (Gulrajani 1979; Sayed 1986).

Ethnic organizations were established to fight for the rights that Sindhis, according to this nationalist perspective, were entitled to. The creation first of Sindhi student organizations born out of left-wing groups, and then of a Sindhi separatist party, also illustrates a larger phenomenon in Pakistan: the progressive demise of the Left and the rise of ethnic politics in the 1970s and 1980s. As the 'national question' now increasingly trumped the 'class question', these new organizations not only allowed Sindhi students to assert themselves, but also deepened the ethnic polarization within student organizations due to the strong Sindhi affiliation of its members. The Jiye Sindh Mahaz, the political party founded by G. M. Sayed in 1972, was a consequence of this ethnic polarization within left-wing student groups.

The Jiye Sindh Mahaz publicly embraced the separatist cause in late 1973, after a series of speeches by G. M. Sayed that increasingly stressed the need to struggle for the well-being of 'Sindhudesh'. This separatist turn is often reduced to a personal matter, but must be seen as a continuation of the ethnic crystallization initiated in [p. 277] the late 1960s within student groups that led to the foundation of Sindhi student organizations. G. M. Sayed's endorsement of the separatist cause thus comes *after* the radicalization of numerous Sindhi students, who needed a charismatic leader. In a context of heightened Sindhi-Mohajir tension, this radical turn was made possible by G. M. Sayed's isolation on the political stage and deep personal disappointment with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The conditions in which the Jiye Sindh Mahaz became a separatist party in part explain the recurring schism in the 1980s between G. M. Sayed's readiness to compromise and the bulk of the JSM activists' radical stance. Further contributions towards a historical sociology of Sindhi nationalism would help move beyond dichotomies that characterize G. M. Sayed and the Jiye Sindh movement as simply pro or anti-Pakistan.

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