

Historical Analysis of Gilgit Baltistan and Evaluation of Its Ethnic Diversity

Anees ur Rashid Hashmi¹, Sumaira Shafiq² and Shabnum Gul³

<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.2.81>

Abstract

Gilgit Baltistan is located at the junction of central and South Asia, at the essence of three mighty mountain ranges: the Hindukush, the Himalaya, and the Karakorum, with a wholesome number of glaciers and a worthwhile quantity of mighty hills. Besides the ancient language, Burushaski is one aspect of cultural variation. The glimpses of historical monuments, multiple ruins of archeological sites, and Buddhist relics narrate the splendid past of this region, which works multidimensionally in projecting the beauty of this land, promoting tourism, exploring the cultural diversity, encouraging the socio-economic status and infrastructure development. The land of Gilgit Baltistan is unique and has geographical, geological, racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity. These artistic, social, ethnic, and linguistic aspects make the foundation of regional identity, which is used in local and regional politics and later emerges in large-scale conflicts and disputes. This study explores the historical prospects of Gilgit Baltistan in a chronological manner in addition to its contemporary geostrategic significance. In the current scenario, the historical analysis of Gilgit Baltistan is contributing more after the advent of the Pakistan Economic Corridor, which refers to the increasing socio-economic development and decreasing cultural conflict.

Keywords: Gilgit Baltistan, Cultural Diversity, Traditions, CPEC, Geostrategic Conflicts.

Introduction

The land of Gilgit Baltistan is the land of resources, owning great potential for mineral deposits, water bodies for power generation and irrigation, tourism, horticulture opportunities, and great scope for trade and transit. This region also possesses the 2nd world's highest mountain, K-2, with 10 other world top-rank peaks, providing great opportunities for hill climbers. Located in the adjacent areas of ancient Silk and at the crossroads of CPEC, it also plans to construct mega hydropower projects to overcome the energy crisis. After the maturation of CPEC, Pakistan's further linkages with Central Asian states, which have ancient cultural, traditional, and racial linkages with this specific area, will open new horizons for the development and supremacy of this territory in the entire region. Although the ethnic diversity which makes it remarkable in the entire region, also carries many potential threats on sectarian, cultural, and lingual basis soon after the advent of the Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This study aims to highlight the historical background of these ethnic groups and their functions in society to enhance unity, social cohesion, and harmony.

¹Assistant Professor, Institute of Kashmir Studies, UAJ&K Muzaffarabad. Email: anees.rasheed@ajku.edu.pk

²Associate Professor, Institute of Kashmir Studies, UAJ&K Muzaffarabad. Email: sumi_raja@yahoo.com.ca

³Research Associate, Institute of Kashmir Studies, UAJ&K Muzaffarabad. Email: shabnumkhanzadi@gmail.com



Copyright: © This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

Compliance with ethical standards: There are no conflicts of interest (financial or non-financial). This study did not receive any funding.

Gilgit Baltistan is the extreme north of Pakistan, located on the gateway of two civilizations, Central Asia and South Asia. This land is used as a junction between ancient lands, and China's old Chinese silk route passes through this region, enhancing its historical vitality and cultural harmony. The migration from Central Asia to the subcontinent was mainly performed through this area, like Aryans, Jews, and Muslims. Chinese and other tourists used this route to visit Kashmir and the subcontinent, with the invention and discovery of old ruined relics and other monuments reflecting ancient Buddhist civilization in this area (Sen, 2015). However, four racial classifications following the Hinduist patterns are still present in classical towns of Gilgit Baltistan in a Muslim inhabitation, which argues for Hindu rule and Aryan culture. The cultural diversity somehow presents sects and languages and is very obvious in the current administrative division into ten districts, manifesting the cultural and sectarian uniqueness from one district to another. This region is rich in cultural prospects and historically significant because it has ancient languages Burushaski and Khowar. This is an attempt to explore the historical significance of this region in the prospect of its cultural fertility and richness.

Geodemographic Profile

Covering an area of 28174 square miles, the region of Gilgit Baltistan is counted among the world's most hilly terrains. Globe, situated at the head of Pakistan like a crown formally known as "Northern Areas" (Hinman, 2011), is the northwestern part of Kashmir and is counted in the disputed territory of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Its boundaries link with Chitral and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa at the south, Wakhan at the west, Chinese autonomous territory Xinjiang at its north, while the region of Kargil of Indian Administrated Kashmir and Neelum, the district of the State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, meet in the east. In the post-partition era, this area was under the administration of Pakistan (Weightman, 2005), and it was governed by the Karachi Agreement of 1949. The region of Gilgit Baltistan now a separate administrative unit in 1970 by amalgamating the Gilgit agency, Baltistan, Hunza, Nagar, (Bangash, 2010) Ponial, Diamar, and several small former princely States (Burki, 2015) until 2009, when this land was bestowed with self-rule to run the government in mode of autonomous territory by setting out its framework and power structure through "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self Governance Order of 2009" (Asim, 2024). Although the people of Gilgit Baltistan deeply desired to merge into Pakistan as its 5th province Pak, it rejected their call for merging in Pakistan because it would jeopardize its primary stance, demanding the right of self-determination in the whole State of Jammu and Kashmir under the United Nations Resolutions (Schofield, 2000).

Besides its geopolitical and geostrategic significance, the land of GB is also pivotal in terms of its historical importance because it is situated at the confluence of two mighty traditional regions. The movements of civilizations, traditions, cultures, religions, and ethnic migration were mostly carried out through this region by Aryans, Jews, and Muslims. Scholars traveled through this land and migrated from central Asia to Kashmir and the Subcontinent. There is a scarcity of valuable arguments for historical evidence as to when and why the first legendary man crossed mighty glaciers and huge ranges of mountains in GB land some researchers and social scientists described after hysterical attempts that it was known as Biloristan, which was covered almost current area of Gilgit Baltistan. At the same time, some argue that the early settlers in this region were Mongolians, and few believe that they were Tatars. Their race and ethnicity remained questionable, but they laid the foundation of separate administration, strong social contract, and cultural homogeneity.

Located in the neighborhoods of Samarqand, Bukhara, and Tashkent, this region has ancient ruins

and relics that indicate glorious history. Still, most interestingly, this land was used by Buddhist monks and ruins of their stupas and rock carving of Buddha as “Manthal Buddha Rock on the outskirts of Skardu city, Karga Budha and the remaining Hanzal Stupa” (Bloeria, 2021), including huge number in Passu village of the Hunza District indicated the inhabitation nearly 2000 BC which were migrated to Tibet, Kashmir valley, Gandhara civilization and Indus civilization. (Olivieri, 2021) The Sharda Path mentions this was the major religious route for the Buddhists to move from their central religious center to China and Central Asia from this land, which was working as a midway rest center. With the settlement of the people, this part of the hilly terrain became the home of Tibetans, which further renown as Balti people and later down as Baltistan. They may be settled in the top northern region towards Ladakh region, which shows the cultural resemblance with Tibet at present time also in prospects of culture and tradition.

Historical Evaluation

Some historians also argue about the Dard inhabitants in this region who were living in the northwestern side of this region in Hunza, Nagar, Gilgit, Diamir, and lower region of KPK in Chilas areas, which are still Burushaski and Khowar speakers in the current time. The Dardic race is still present in the pages of history as Herodotus, who presents gold-digging ants in Central Asia, also describes Dard as “twice a people called Dadikai, first as he along with the Gandariori and second in the catalog of King Xerxes’s army invading Greece,” Pliny who traveled through this region in the 1st century indicated the Dards were great gold producers. Ptolemy mentioned their homeland from Gilgit to the outskirts of the middle of KPK as “situates the Daradrai on the upper reaches of Indus,” and they were also listed in ancient Puranas of the old sub-continent. (Falk, 2023) The tradition of tourists who converted into Buddhist pilgrims started in Central Asia and China and moved towards Sharda and Kashmir (Gardezi, 2014). During the end of the 4th and start of the 5th century, this land was a paradise for travelers who traveled from the northern region to Kashmir and other areas. The most mentionable is Faxian or Fahian, who visited this land during 400-414 (Petech, 1977). Xuanzang, who was described in the history of Kashmir as Hayun Tsang, traveled through this region during the second decade of the 7th century and was also a Buddhist pilgrim. The Chinese Tang dynasty record manifests that this land was under the kingdom of Buddhists named Bolu, also known as Palola, Ptole, or Balur (Sammad, 2011).

Ancient Scripts

Twist (2007) claims that in the 600s, the Gilgit region was under the sovereignty of the Turkic Khaganate due to a Chinese military campaign in the reign of Tang, and soon after, the Tibetan Empire was also raised. The fastest spreading of Islam during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods when they reached Kallar Kahar, although the Raja of Kashmir asked the Chinese for help against the increasing role of Muslims in the subcontinent and to stop their further advancement towards Kashmir (Kalhana, 1835). According to Stein, in nearly 750, the King of Gilgit allied with the Tang dynasty's rulers to hold back Arabs with their help. Stein (1907) also mentioned another historical evidence through Chinese court archives that in 717 and 719, delegates from the ancient Baltistan, who named great Palola, written in Chinese scripts as “Su-fu-she-li-ji-li-ni,” went to Chinese imperial courts respectively (Stein, 2011). He further claims that Turkic tribes practicing Zoroastrianism reached Gilgit a few decades ago and founded the Trakhan dynasty in this region. With the advent of Turkic, a direct link was produced between this region and Central Asia, which was the center of innovation, education, and the latest versatile civilization. Counted the emerging influence of Muslims in central Asia, which was initiated from Transoxiana, latterly known as

Mawara al-Nahar, and soon prevailed in the whole region; the light of Islam gradually speeded in the region but did not loudly declare until the arrival of Shah Hamdan till 14th century when Islam was declared the official religion of the region along with Kashmir State. Mock describes that Islam came to this region during the 14th century (Mock, 2013), which is not acceptable because the Kashmiri traders who went to Bukhara, Kashgar, and Khotan for trade along with the silk route through Gilgit or Karakorum passage went in the shape of Karwans. These Karwans were mostly led by Muslims across both routes (Bamzai, 1980). This indication of Bamzai shows the presence of Muslims in this region. Later down, a few areas of this region came under the control of Sulatines of Kashmir, but most of the areas were ruled by the local rulers. Often, they ruled as independent and sovereign kings. They accepted the suzerainty of the other States like Kashmir or any other. The famous local ruler was Anchan in the area of Ali Sher Khan during the Mughal rule over Kashmir and the Subcontinent. They made their ruling area prosperous by developing art and following Mughal's legacy of architecture. Their milestone cultural legacy is the Polo game, which they introduced in that area in ancient times and sent multiple students to the subcontinent to learn music, which still counts in the rich literature of Baltistan. Like Anchans, Maqpoon of Skardu and Rajas of Hunza were also very popular and powerful in those days, amalgamated the Chitral, Hunza, Nagar, Diamir, and Gilgit and declared as an independent state in the first five decades of the 19th century.

Ethnic Diversity in Modern Age

During the Sikh rule in Kashmir, Ranjit Singh's leading advisor, Gulab Sing, sent the Sikh army to the far lands of Kashmir, as Gilgit, Leh, and Lahasa to Khotan. In this incursion, Sikh commander Zorawar Sing instituted attacks in this region during 1839-40 while he occupied the Skardu by arresting its ruler Ahmed Shah, and Bhagwan Sing was appointed as Thanadar of this region. (Francke, 1907) Another commander of the Gulab Sing force, Waris Lakhpat, occupied Baltistan a second time by arresting Haider Khan Shigar after he failed in revolt against Sikh and Dogra forces. At the same time, Gosaun was newly chosen and Thanadar till 1860 during Sikh and Dogra rule over Kashmir, respectively.

The golden era of exploration of significant contributions in geopolitics and geo-strategics was initiated during the 19th century. Major John Biddulph mentioned the British intelligence officers who were on the mission, Captain Sir Alexander Burnes, John Biddulph, and Edward Frederick Knight during the 19th century, along with a dozen high-ranked British Army traveled all over Kashmir. He also described the demographical aspects of the people of this region, mentioning the demographical features of this area before 1880, which is the cultural and ethnic study of this region, which does not mention the present scenario and current situation (Biddulph, 1880). The milestone for this region, which is in the history of the contemporary world, is the British-supervised "The Great Trigonometric Survey of India" launched in 1802-1900 A.D. (Dean, 2019). The British army knew its vitality, so the first spy went to discover the route to Russia was Captain Sir Alexander Burnes in 1802 (Murray, 2017). Willian Moorcroft 1824-25 passed through the Siachen glacier, and he died while returning to the subcontinent midway; his diary paper was published by George Trebeck (Moorcroft, 1841).

It took a long time for Gulab Sing to take control over the western land of northern areas, which was the unsubstantial grip of Srinagar. During the official visit of G. T. Vigne secured the confidence of tribal leaders and the local duke and received worthwhile implications by handing in a manuscript on that tour (Francke, *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, 1992). With the great influence of the British Indian government, Dogra ruler Ranbir Sing took nearly full control over Gilgit-

Baltistan in 1885, and after a few years, the creation of the Gilgit Agency was performed in 1889. With the formation of the Agency, most of the western part of the Northern Areas, “the Wakhan,” was cut down from this territory and merged into Kabul and declared a portion as a buffer zone in 1892 (Faizi, 1996). Walter Lawrence contributed much to upgrading roads and building new infrastructure from Gilgit Baltistan to other central parts until 1935 when Gilgit was taken on the lease of 60 years by the British Indian government (Bangash, 2010). Soon, they arranged Gilgit Scouts for internal security and cross-border monitoring under the supervision of William Alexander Brown till 1947. At the end of the demolition of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, these scouts fought the freedom war and got freedom on 1st November 1947. Mirza Hassan Khan played a prominent role in the freedom movement, and soon, this region's leadership asked Pakistan to intervene.

From 1947 to 1970, the Government of Pakistan established the Gilgit and Baltistan Agency until 1970 when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was legally named FANA (Federally Administrated Northern Areas). However, two regions gained direct access to Pakistan. On August 29, 2009, the Government of Pakistan promulgated the “Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment and Self-governing Order” signed by the President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari. Under this ordinance, its official name was Gilgit Baltistan, and the legislative assembly was formed with the title Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA), which was soon declared as the interim fifth province of Pakistan (Burki, 2015).

In light of the 2018 census, the total population of Gilgit Baltistan is about 1.8 million, comprising 14% urban and 86% rural inhabitants, while the sex ratio is 109 men/ 100 women. Due to the hilly terrain, this region has many isolated valleys and areas consisting of many diverse cultural aspects, sects, languages, and ethnic groups, and this versatility is reflected in lingual variation, which is a rich part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir which includes Khowar, Burushaski, Khowar, Balti, Kashgaris, Gilgiti, Pathan, Kohistani, Pamiris, Shinas, Yashkuns, Dardic, Uyghurs, etc. (Masica, 1993) but most interestingly Urdu is lingua franca as the entire region, and it is also the official language of the GB which is spoken and understood by the majority of inhabitants. The lingual statistics are very dynamic area-wise and sect-wise and vary from place to place, but some figures are Shina 38%, and Balti 28%. In comparison, Burushaski and Khowar touch almost 12% each, Wakhi touches 3%, and the rest of the languages, such as Punjabi, Gojri, Kashmiri, Pashtu, and Domaaki, are nearly 7% (Katy, 1999).

In these historical prospects, the region of Gilgit Baltistan has great ethnic diversity as well as different religious sects, which indicate their cultural and ethnic diversity in the entire hilly terrain. The major ethnic groups are “Baltis, Yashkunsm, Ladakhis, Turks, Kashmiris, Pathans, Mughals, and Sheens” (Butt, 2014). In this region, the Shia sect is dominant up to 39%, almost including some tribal ethnic origins (Snedden, 2015) and many Ismaili: the sect led by the Aga Khan and its heretics (Cohen, 2005), 24% and the second largest religious sect is Sunni which overwhelming 31% while Noor Bakhshis Shi'ism and Sufism also very popular and in a good amount in the region. In short, the northern and northeastern parts of this region look like Tibetans and are highly influenced by the Ladakh region in terms of their culture, customs, languages, and traditions. The western part is Ismaili-based inhabitants, and some Noor Bakhshis are also dominant in this part. In contrast, the southern part of this territory is much more diverse than all parts containing the majority population of the Muslim Sunni sect.

The significance of Gilgit Baltistan congregated during the French and Russian alliance against the British, which forced Britain to explore the strategic lands where they could restrain the Czars from advancing towards the Indian subcontinent. The British spy missions started earlier in the

19th century, which HWC David confessed in his presentation “The Great Game in Asia (1800-1840) termed for Anglo-Russian rivalry regarding the extension of their geographical and ideological boundaries around the globe (Yapp, 2000). This land, owing particular geostrategic and geo-militia significance, was very dear to the British, who allowed the Dogra rulers to encroach and infringe the region across the Central Asian linkages (Wakhan) to command over Gilgit Baltistan during the mid of 19th century. The foundation of Gilgit Scouts in this region and their preparation to blockade Russian advancement appeared when these scouts resisted in October 1947 against Dogra Rulers under the supervision of Major Alexander Brown to get rid of him and announced freedom on 1st November 1947. The regional identity factor powered these movements as the British did in other parts of the subcontinent, and this strategy was also seen when Russia occupied Afghanistan in 1979, and US President Reagan propagated Islamization and persuaded the Muslims towards Jihad as in the past. This model was also used in this specific region by the British against Russian Czars through the people of Gilgit Baltistan by taking advantage of their cultural and regional identity, which was earlier determined by John Biddulph in “Tribes of Hindoookush” (Biddulph, 1880).

In the last 75 years, these ethnic and cultural aspects are not worthfully used by various actors, which laid down division amongst the local community, but democracy has been showing its power and true realization in the region and the people after acquiring the right to choose the right person, showing their responsibilities in the socio-economic and regional development. After the advent of the Pakistan Economic Corridor, these cultural aspects were also considered a great potential threat to subjugate the game changer project of China and Pakistan (Aziz & Hashmi, 2021). These ethnic, cultural, and linguistic sub-identities also worked during all three elections, which always inclined towards the federal governing party. Still, the candidates from the leading families and tribes with more influence over the community won the contests. However, we have seen a couple of major upsets like Mehdi Shah (Chief Minister when the Pakistan People's Party had a government) and Hafiz Hafeez-ur-Rehman (Chief Minister when the Pakistan Muslim League N had a government) could not win their seats in the next elections. Besides this, the winning candidate greatly impacts linguistic, regional, cultural, sect, and ethnic linkages in the region. So, politics is mostly dependent upon all these factors, which could not be neglectable as like other parts of Kashmir in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Indian illegal occupied Kashmir as well as in different parts of Pakistan and India, the mode, model, manners, and practices in elections is always same by following these riots, routes, and routines.

Functions of Diversity

The ethnicity of Gilgit Baltistan has functioned in multiple ways since the pre-partition era of the subcontinent; the ethnically based identity has been working as a social class in most areas of this region. This ethnic identity influences multi-dimensions upon the lives of local inhabitants of the entire region as it sets class, language, customs, traditions, food, and dress preferences from individual to collectively on the societal level, which determine their marriages, deaths, prayer ceremonies, and annual ventures. This diversion has been impacting the last 67 years in the administrative setup, which is regularly changing with different arrangements that further appeared in regional and administrative divisions, which helped to rejuvenate the traditional region-wise identities. Hunza and Nagar both have the same geographical and cultural ethnicities, but when it was proposed in 2008 by President Pervaiz Musharraf as individual districts. Being of the same ethnic and linguistic community, a bit of difference in sectarian forced Hunza to be a separate entity with a district identity. During the election campaign in 2015, the Prime Minister of Pakistan,

Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, announced separate districts for Hunza and Nagar to address their demands (Kuszevska, 2022). Furthermore, the local administrative limits are often more significant than international borders, which dramatically changed GB into a cul-de-sac (Siddique, 2024).

These cultural identities are also different from those of adjacent areas of Kashmir and neighboring territories like Astore and Srinagar or Ghanchy and Kashgar. The socio-cultural complexity of this region is enhanced by cultural and ethnic rigidity, and complicated region-based sub-identity could be impacted by its geographic limitation, poor inter-region communication, and severe weather conditions. For instance, the prominent Wakhi community, due to their distinguished language, movement is only restricted to Pakistan due to the complex geography of the area and the severe intensity of the weather and considered periphery of the region. After the USSR dissolution, they gathered under the Wakhi Tajik Culture Association, Pakistan, and after the functioning of the Karakorum Highway (now CPEC), they connected with another part of the Wakhan Corridor. On the third dimension, Tajikistan also made interconnectivity after constructing Kulma Pass Road to interconnect them across the borders (Kreutzmann, 2015). Now, Wakhi is connected with Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, and Tajikistan.

The advent of the Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment Act of 2009 has enabled the forging of interconnectivity that produced a new arena wherein the local community can also transcend geobody boundaries embossed over geo-cultural aspects. The far western and far northern regions of Gilgit Baltistan had unique identity prospects that originated the ripples in existing cultural properties of Gilgit, Astore, and lower altitude regions because these high-altitude populations have strong interdependency and social relations with highly esteemed values. Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly often faced such region-based or ethnic-based conflict (Dad, 2016). Now the influence of modern communication, education, and inter and cross-border interconnectivity, there is a transitional transformation in modes, norms, and approaches producing tolerance, moderation, and collective identity.

It is the 3rd GB Legislative Assembly elected by an adult franchise vote system, where democracy contributed a lot to multi-aspect development, such as social, cultural, economic, religious, and infrastructural development. Due to its diverse nature, the demonstration of regional, cultural, sectarian, and linguistic identities would not be described in monolithic narrations. At the same time, the region could not afford the disengagement of multiple contradictory identities instead of an overall Gilgit Baltistan identity. To have a better future and true realization of dreams of prosperity, integrity, and development, I want to create a bright future after a long struggle for democracy and self-empowerment, besides spoiling in disintegration by focusing on needless administrative boundaries. It's time to find a niche to contribute to solidarity instead of regional, identity-based, and lingual-based politics. Neglecting the approaches of regional and linguistic groups tends to move rapidly towards meta-strategy for general identity (Ullah, 2021).

Cultural Diversity, CPEC and Threats

The land of Gilgit Baltistan after the advent of CPEC and strong economic ties with China is the land of survival and revival for Pakistan (Hashmi et al., 2021) in prospects of regional power-sharing, the balance of power with India, power paradigm-shifting, international geopolitics and creating new world order as well as producing full spectrum nuclear deterrence along with regional supremacy through achieving of the goal of balance of power. These aspects are wrapped with stronger economic ties, military alliance, and socio-economic linkages with China to show the rivals and opposition a strong Sino-Pakistan nexus for the foundation of unconquerable and

undefeatable Pakistan. For the sake of this holy ambition, the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region must be limited to a standard circle that ensures only cultural aspects as essential sub-identity for only personal, social, and regional development by avoiding conflict and disputes because the disputes based on culture, ethnicity, and sect always believed most destructive one.

The cultural and ethnic conflicts can be tackled through “a literate population, a solid start in development, huge resource potential, a responsive local government, a responsible civil society, and, hopefully, stable democracy in the country, the dream of turning this area into a stable, peaceful, and prosperous border economy will be closer than ever, benefiting everyone in the region” (Hunzai, 2009). According to geographical impact, the inhabitants of this region are nervous, and with time, their nervousness is increasing mode as they still assume the perils and menaces from their ethnic, sectarian, and cultural extremism returning in politics and religiously sponsored violence. They must initiate a strict transformation from a feudal and rigid past to attain fruitful outcomes from the current development. The bright trajectory towards their brilliant future will be at stake. If they do not take the necessary measures, then current minor conflicts and uncertainty will continue to darken their futures, and they will turn into pawns in the approach of destabilizing international powers and lose the golden opportunities of a bright future. As in a report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the consortium of investors for the Diamar-Bhasha Dam war pulled out by India (Kurita, 2022), while the World Bank already excused that it could not play a significant role in financing as well as some reports also common that there are some issues of funding in Bunji Hydropower project. The proposed Pak-Iran gas pipeline extending to China through this region also magnifies the significance of this land (Hassan, 2012).

Conclusion

GB is a junction between Pakistan and China and a crossroads between northern Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan, and towards Ladakh and Azad Kashmir on its eastern sides. It has marvelous scope and geographical distinctions in an idyllic circumstance for trade, commerce, and transit across all neighboring territories. However, the same geographical aspects and unresolved regional, local, and domestic issues could lead in different directions. The same circumstances will make conflicted zones even more complex and destabilize the region, particularly in prospects of sectarian issues. The people of Gilgit Baltistan should have their own choices, and these aspirations can convert this most significant land to prosperous and a destiny of everlasting glory. This debate shows that the history of Gilgit is one of the most dominant factors in understanding the ethnic linkages and early settlement in Kashmir, Gandhara, and Indus Civilizations. The passage from China and Central Asia not only makes it the pivotal land that signifies regional geopolitics and geostrategy but also the flow of civilization from Central Asia, as Aryans, Jews, and especially Muslims' advent made it very worthwhile.

This region's valuable ruins and relics prolong its cultural, religious, and sectarian fertility and richness. Exploring historical realities and understanding ethnic aspects is also helpful in reducing conflicts and misunderstandings to convert a passive and inactive socially isolated unit into unity, harmony, and mutual integrity. This region's complex geological structure and complicated geography forced the habitants into scattered populations in small valleys, in small plains, on the bank of rivers, and in a small group with their own special cultures and customs that vary from place to place. This often needs to be revised regarding social cohesion and unity, as well as the multiple sects and their branches, which trigger the conflict more. Current economically widespread projects could not afford such types of ethnic and cultural conflicts and issues in the region; if we avoid such challenges, then we should learn historical aspects and heartedly accept

and embrace the ethnicity and cultural diversity of each other in the entire region for the prosperous and united Gilgit Baltistan which is hope and dream of every inhabitant of this region.

References

- Asim, M. (2024). Strengthening Ties with Communities in Gilgit-Baltistan: A Case Study of Government-Community Engagement for Regional Development. *Insights of Pakistan, Iran and the Caucasus Studies*, 3(2), 21-32.
- Aziz, K. Z. & Hashmi, A. R. (2021). CPEC Issues and Threatening Cultural Diversity in Gilgit-Baltistan. *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society*, 24(1), 107-116.
- Bamzai, P. N. (1980). *Kashmir and Central Asia*. USA: Light & Life Publishers.
- Bangash, Y. K. (2010). Three Forgotten Accessions: Gilgit, Hunza and Nagar. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 38(1), 117-143.
- Biddulph, J. (1880). *Tribe of the Hindoo Koosh*. Delhi: Superintendent Office Govt. Printing, Calcutta.
- Bloeria, S. S. (2021). *Ladakh in the Twentieth Century*. Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt Ltd.
- Burki, S. J. (2015). *Historical Dictionary of Pakistan*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Butt, K. M. (2014). Ethnic Diversity and Collective Actions in Gilgit-Baltistan. *Journal of Political Science, G. C. University, Lahore*. 32, 27-43.
- Cohen, S. P. (2005). *The Idea of Pakistan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Dad, A. A. (2016). Boundaries and Identities: The Case of Gilgit-Baltistan. *Crossroads Asia Working Paper Series, No. 34*.
- Dean, R. (2019). *Mapping the Great Game: Explorers, Spies and Maps in 19th-century Asia*. UK: Casemate Publishers.
- Faizi, A. (1996). *Wakhan: A Window into Central Asia*. Pakistan: Al-Qalam Publishers.
- Falk, H. (2023). Faxian and Early Successors on their Route from Dunhuang to Peshawar: In Search of the “Suspended Crossing”. *The Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, 02=13.
- Francke, A. H. (1907). *A History of Western Tibet: One of the Unknown Empires*. Asian Educational Services.
- Francke, A. H. (1992). *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.
- Gardezi, S. S. (2014). *Ghair Mulki Sayhoon ki Siahat-e-Kashmir* (1st ed.). Lahore: Maktaba-e-Jamal.
- Hashmi, A. R. Aziz, K. Z., & Swati, N. I. (2021). Gilgit-baltistan: A Land of Survival & Revival for Pakistan. *Journal of Pakistan Vision*, 22 (1), 117-132.
- Hassan, Z. (2012, March 06). *PakTribune*. Retrieved from US Dirty Tricks & Pak-Iran Gas Pipeline: <http://paktribune.com/articles/US-Dirty-Tricks-percent5E-Pak-Iran-Gas-Pipeline-242879.html>.
- Hinman, B. (2011). *We Visit Pakistan*. Mitchell Lane Publishers, Inc. p. 41.
- Hunzai, M. (2009). Development as Transformational Politics: A Case of the Northern Areas. *summary reprinted in Kakakoram Knowledge Highways vol. 1, no. 2 (April-June 2009), article 6*. London: University of London.
- Kalhana, P. (1835). *The Raja Tarangini*. Delhi: The Baptist Mission Press.
- Katy, G. L. (1999). *Muslim Diversity: Local Islam in Global Contexts*. New York: Routledge.
- Kreutzmann, H. (2015). *Pamirian Crossroads Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia*. Verlag: Harrassowitz.

- Kurita, M. (2022). China's Kashmir policy since the mid-2010s: ramifications of CPEC and India's Kashmir reorganization. *Asian Security*, 18(1), 56-74.
- Kuszevska, A. (. (2022). Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan's policy. In *Kashmir in India and Pakistan Policies* (pp. 115-138). Routledge.
- Masica, C. P. (1993). *The Indo-Aryan Languages*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Mock, J. (2013). A Tibetan Toponym from Afghanistan. *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*, 5–9.
- Moorcroft, W. &. (1841). *Travels in the Himalayan provinces of Hindustan and the Panjab; in Ladakh and Kashmir; in Peshawar, Kabul, Kunduz, and Bokhara from 1819-1825*. London: John Murray.
- Murray, C. (2017). *Sikunder Burnes: Master of the Great Game*. UK: Berlin limited.
- Olivieri, L. M. (2021). Notes on the Problematical Sequence of Alexander's Itinerary in Swat a Geo-historical Approach. East and West. *Journal of Asian Civilizations*, 44 (1), 241-286.
- Petech, L. (1977). The Kingdom of Ladakh c. 950–1842 A.D. *Istituto Italiano per il media ed Estremo Oriente*.
- Samad, R. U. (2011). *The Grandeur of Gandhara: The Ancient Buddhist Civilization of the Swat, Peshawar, Kabul, and Indus Valleys*. New York: Algora Publishing.
- Schofield, V. (2000). *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan, and the Unending War*. I.B. Tauris.
- Sen, T. (2015). *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of India-China Relations, 600-1400*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Siddique, M. T. (2024). Risk from future climate change to Pakistan's protected area network: A composite analysis for hotspot identification. *Science of The Total Environment*, 916.
- Snedden, C. (2015). *Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris*. UK: C. Hurst and Co. Publishers.
- Stein, A. (2011). Archæological Notes form the Hindukush Region. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, 1-2, 5-24.
- Stein, M. A. (1907). *Ancient Khotan: Detailed Report of Archaeological Explorations in Chinese Turkestan* (Vol. 01). Oxford: UK: Clarendon Press.
- Twist, R. &. (2007). *Devotion and Politics: A Buddhological Study of the Patola Sahi Dynasty's Visual Record*. Ohio State University.
- Ullah, A. A. (2021). History Of Reforms In Gilgit-Baltistan And Struggle Of Its People For A Non-Kashmiri Separate Identity. *Webology*, 18(4).
- Weightman, B. (2005). *Dragons and Tigers: A Geography of South, East, and Southeast Asia* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Yapp, M. (2000). The Legend of the Great Game. *Proceedings of the British Academy: 2000 Lectures and Memoirs*, Oxford University Press, pp. 179–198.