

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN BALOCHISTAN

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Abstract

This article explores and delves cultural and demographic changes in Balochistan, an important province of Pakistan, in a historical perspective. Overall purpose of this article is to investigate and determine whether Balochistan undergoing through a phase of demographic and cultural change. This article tracks early history and nationalist movement of Balochistan in order to identify dominant cultural norms and lineages Balochistan. This article further analyses the influence of Partition, Pakistan's key strategic endeavours and growing influence of China on Balochistan's culture and demography. Finally, this article concludes that Pakistan's vested interest, growing insurgency and China's growing influence have contributed significantly towards the demographic and cultural change of Balochistan.

Key Words: Balochistan, Pakistan, Demography

Introduction

The government of Pakistan had to face an embarrassing moment when a lawmaker from Balochistan, Jehanzeb Jamaldini, levelled serious allegation that Pakistani government had secretly and intentionally brought demographic changes in many districts of Balochistan, a province of Pakistan. "The government settled four million people in various parts of Balochistan in the past three decades," stated senator Jehanzeb Jamaldini in a meeting of the Senate's Standing Committee on Interior. He further elaborated "With broader demographic changes in the province, the government is converting the majority into a minority." Senator's

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claim was based on latest statistics shared by the government of Pakistan which suggests that Balochistan province had witnessed the highest increase in population among all the provinces (Gishkori, 2015). This article delves to fathom on demographic and cultural change of Balochistan. This article tracks ethnic composition of Balochistan and examines if efforts are being made to distort ethnicity of Balochistan in order to establish a uniform culture in this province. Balochistan is the south-western province of Pakistan and this region is crucial for Pakistan from the perspective of both regional and international affairs. Recently, a vast field of natural gas and other valuable minerals have been discovered in Balochistan. Therefore, Pakistani government as well as investors have developed interest in this region. The terrain of Balochistan has also become focal point of development because this region connects Pakistan to Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia. Therefore, the government of Pakistan has initiated several roads, railroads and gas pipeline projects in this region. More importantly, Gwadar port has the potential to connect this region to rest of world. This envisages that Balochistan province has unique economic and strategic significance for Pakistan (Murtha, 2011). Sadly, the largest province of Pakistan has remained in the helm insurgency since its accession to Pakistan in 1948 (Singh, 2016). Volatile Balochistan is certainly not in the interest of Pakistan but Pakistani army has continued to crush separatist movement in this region for decades. More than 8,000 people were killed because of separatist movement in early 70s itself. Today, many mysterious mass graves are being discovered. Human right activists claim that more than 10,000 people have vanished in past one decade. More importantly, Pakistani security forces have been also accused for killing several Baloch leaders (Phippen, 2016). Current state of Balochistan evidently demonstrates that this region requires peace and stability. This article explores and evaluates Hanisation of Balochistan in context of its history, identity, culture and changing demographic composition.

Early history of Balochistan

The country Balochistan has been named after the place Baloch where mostly Sunni Muslims live and the language, they speak is Balochi. Balochi is classified as a north-western Iranian language, which is more related to Kurdish, rather than the eastern Iranian language like Pashto to its north or a south-western Iranian language like Persian to its west. It is interesting to know how the Baloch got to Balochistan.

Ancient Baloch had been the part of Achaemenid Persian Empire but later on it was ruled by many other Persian and Indian empires. It was also under some local kingdoms. The place is mostly inhabited by the people of Iranian and Indian origin. People of Balochistan followed mainly Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism. It is in this desert that the great Alexander, while returning to Babylon after his Indian campaign lost thousands of his soldiers. However, the rise of Islam occurred in 7th century, approximately 600 years after the founding of Christianity. By this time Balochistan, which was known as Makran(after the name of its coastal region), was under the rule of the Sassanid Persian empire. Facing the onslaught of the Arab, Balochistan passed on to the hands of the Rai Dynasty of Sindh. But the Rai dynasty could not have control over this region and the Arab conquered Makran in 644 in the Battle of Rasil. Makran was converted to Islam but the region remained a thinly populated area.

Furthermore, during the invasion of Persia by Seljuk Turks in the 11th century, many nomadic tribes (ancestors of today's Baloch) from central Iran and the area south of the Caspian Sea got the opportunity to migrate into the eastern part of Balochistan. These tribes initially were living in the arid region of Iran. Moving to even more arid region like Balochistan was not as difficult as facing and fighting the invaders whom they had faced before in Iran for the same pasture land. During the same period, the Brahui, the largest minority group of Balochistan had migrated from central India. They spoke the same Dravidian language that the people of South India spoke. They had formed a very cordial and mutually beneficial relationship with the local Baloch. During this period the Baloch were mostly passive and inactive, involved mainly in farming oases for their livelihood. They formed many small kingdoms or tribal groups that were sometimes independent or under the external empires.

In the year 1500, Balochistan had two zones of control – in the west was Safavid Persian Empire and in the east the Mughal Empire. This entire area today reflects the Iran-Pakistan border. Its frontier province, the Persia's Sistan province, was loosely controlled by its central government. People there had the leverage to show their loyalty to the Mughals, if they wished to do so. So, unlike most of the rest of the Iran, the province took the liberty to escape its central government's policy of implementing the Shia Islam. For Mughals Balochistan was not of much

importance. It was controlled directly from Multan in the Punjab (in today's Pakistan). The control was delegated to the local vassals who jointly formed the Khanate of Kalat in 1666, which was located in central Balochistan. Kalat, on behalf of Mughals, had control over the Vassals of the states like Las Bela, Kharan, and Makran which today make most of the Pakistani Balochistan. Suzerainty of the remaining part of Balochistan, the port of Gwadar, was handedover by the Khan of Kalat, in 1783, to a man who later became the Sultan of Oman and decided to keep it as part of his domains. This region was later bought back by Pakistan from Oman (Pillalamarri, 2016).

Baloch Nationalism movement

The movement for the national identity around Baloch identity began in early part of 20th century when this region was under the colonial rule of British. Many middle-class people educated in Britain initiated nationalist movement in Balochistan in 1920. This movement was referred as "The Young Baloch Movement" (Inayatullah,1987). However, this nationalist movement remained largely influenced by the Indian nationalist movement. Articles published in various newspapers during that time suggest that Baloch unity was major theme of Baloch national movement. Later on, a political party Anjuman-e-Ittehad-e-Balochistan was formed which is also referred as first political party of Balochistan. This political party fought for the basic demand of united and independent Balochistan (Inayatullah, 1987). In 1937, another political party Kalat National party was formed by Khan of Kalat. Kalat national party (KNP) also fought for an independent Balochistan. In the meantime, partition plan was introduced by the British administration and KNP decided neither to merge with India nor with Pakistan. Member of Kalat assembly also strongly opposed merger of Balochistan with Pakistan. Mir Ghous Bakhsh Bizenjo, a member of Kalat assembly said, "Pakistani officials are pressuring to join Pakistan, because Balochistan would not be able to sustain itself economically... we have minerals, we have petroleum and ports. The question is where would be Pakistan without us?" (Tahir, 1992, p.49).

The partition of India and Pakistan

Presently Balochistan is the southwest region of Pakistan which borders Afghanistan and Iran from the west and in the east is the Arabian Sea. For Pakistan it is the most thinly populated area, however, it accounts for half of the land mass of Pakistan. Unlike other provinces it is one

of the poorest regions of Pakistan, even though the region is highly rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, copper and gold. People of this region are living in a miserable condition, even without having the basic amenities like clean drinking water and electricity. Before the partition of India and Pakistan, Balochistan was divided into four princely states, namely Kalat, Lasbela, Kharan and Makran, directly under the British rule. Two of these princely states Lasbela and Kharan were kept under the control and trust of Khan of Kalat, by the British. Makran, being the district of Kalat, was obviously come under their domain. Muhammed Ali Jinnah, just three months before the formation of Pakistan, negotiated with the British to get freedom of Balochistan from Kalat. A series of meetings of negotiations was held between the British Viceroy, as the Crown's Representative, Jinnah and the Khan of Kalat. They discussed the future role and relationship of Kalat with Pakistan. And finally, on August 11, 1947, a joint statement was issued that included some interesting arguments: The Government of Pakistan agreed to give Kalat a status of independent sovereign state as per the treaty held between the British Government and Kalat but a status different from Indian states. Whether the agreements of leases will be inherited by the Pakistan Government will be the subject of judiciary. A standstill agreement between Pakistan and Kalat was made. Further discussions regarding Defence, External Affairs and Communications would be held between Pakistan and Kalat at Karachi at an early date. However, post- independence, by October 1947, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, changed his stance and denied to bestow on the Kalat the status of "Independent and a Sovereign State" and wanted the Khan to sign the form of instrument of accession as agreed by other states to join Pakistan. The Khan however agreed on the issue of defence, foreign affairs and communications but was unwilling to abandon the independent status and sign any treaty or an Instrument unless and until there is not a consensus reached on the leased areas. The fear was in the air that the other two provinces Las Bela and Kharan, would meet the same fate and would be forced by the officials of the Government of Pakistan to accept their de facto accession.

The fear came true and the Pakistan Army, on March 26, 1948, was ordered to move into the Baloch coastal regions of Pasni, Jiwani and Turbat. It was the first act of military aggression, even prior to the march to Kalat on April 1, 1948. Kalat surrendered before the Pakistan Army and an announcement was made public that the Khan of Kalat had accepted accession and agreed to join Pakistan which was done by Jinnah and his army under the gun. However, Balochistan Assembly had already rejected this accession because it was not approved by the parliament of

Balochistan and was the sheer violation of the agreement signed under the British rule, as the British Empire had granted independence of Balochistan under Kalat, before the independence of India. The sovereign state of Balochistan after the British withdrawal, lasted only for 27 days and during this time the flag of Balochistan, was flying in its embassy in Karachi, the capital of Pakistan, where its ambassador to Pakistan lived, just for a short while.

Changing demographics of Balochistan

Pakistan's 2011 census reveals that demography of Balochistan has changed significantly between 1998 and 2011. This census reveals that overall population of Pakistan grew by 46.9% for the period 1998-2011. Surprisingly, population of Balochistan grew by more than 139.3% during similar period (Lakdawalla, 2012). However, a more recent census data reveals that population of Balochistan has grown by more than 3.37% as compared national average of 2.4% in past 19 years. Interestingly, census data also reveals that there has been appreciable decline in Balochi speaking people in past 19 years as Balochi speaking people has declined from 61% in 1998 to 55.6% in 2017 (Khan, 2017). New census also provides a new perspective about the changing demography of Balochistan. Larger influx of Afghan refugees in this region has been also hailed as imperative reason for the changing demography in this region. Northern part of Balochistan has gradually become Pashtun dominant population. In fact, Pashtuns have migrated in large number in to Balochistan from Afghanistan. Balochistan shares its border with Afghanistan and large number of Afghan refugees has entered into Balochistan and Pakistan through this border. Unofficial estimates suggest that approximately 4 million Afghan refugees currently inhabit this province. According to The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), Afghan refugees form largest chunk of population in Balochistan which is even bigger than combined population of three indigenous ethnic groups of Balochistan such as Baloch, Brauhi and Pashtun. Importantly, Pakistani establishment also blames refugees for spread of drug uses and arm culture in this region. Some political parties also blame Islamabad for hatching conspiracy against the Baloch as they argue that Islamabad is actively pushing its agenda of marginalising the ethnic Baloch by converting them into a minority group in Balochistan. They maintain that Islamabad has done nothing to rehabilitate displaced people from key regions such as Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Naseerabad and Jaffarabad (Lakdawalla, 2012).

The Baloch society is presently undergoing through a deep social unrest. The existence of social unrest in Baloch society suggests that society has gradually transcended towards social polarization. Polarisation is characterised as a social phenomenon which results from unfulfilled gainful employment opportunities and socio-political aspirations of people (Qadir and Ahmed, 2014). According to Chakravarty (2009), polarisation of society results into internal conflict and social deprivations.

The role of Pakistani Army

Accusation is levelled against Pakistani establishment that it has deliberately kept Balochistan province underdeveloped in terms of economic opportunities, education and health care. Balochistan has also remained major centre of Pakistan's Army aggression (Dhaka Tribune, 2016). According to Dhaka Tribune (2016), more than 300,000 Baloch people have lost their lives because various operations launched by Pakistani Army. More importantly, 25,000 Baloch people are still missing. It is interesting to mention that increasing numbers of Balochi lands are being sold to colonisers of Punjab province. Balochi lands have been either sold or handed over to large numbers of Pakistani retired army. As a result, significant number of Punjabis and retired army personnel have settled in this insurgency marred region. Experts argue that these are deliberate strategy to change the demographic profile of Balochistan. Experts also maintain that policy of Pakistan for Balochistan is very much akin to China's policy for Tibet (Dhaka Tribune, 2016). Moreover, Tribune International (2016) report establishes similarity between Pakistan Army's strategy for Bangladesh, erstwhile Eastern Pakistan, and Balochistan. Pakistan Army has been involved in widespread genocide based on ethnicity in 1971. Many experts argue that Pakistan is following similar strategy for Balochistan. Pakistan Army has been also accused of selective killings of political leaders, educated sections and lawyers of this region who dared to raise voice against Pakistani occupation. Few years ago Pakistan Army and ISI backed Islamic Jihadist group killed more than 50 lawyers in Quetta. Pakistan Army has also made effort to wipe out political leadership who supported freedom struggle in Balochistan (Tribune International Desk, 2016).

Current Dynamics and State of Balochistan

Dynamics of Balochistan in more recent times has been shaped by two dominant forces i.e. freedom struggle around nationalistic ideology and jihadist ideology. Balochistan has witnessed at least five separate armed insurgencies in post-colonial era(Siddiqi, 2012). KhairBuxMarri, a tribal leader, says “Parliamentary politics is not an option for us so we’re forced to make politics with weapons,” BalaachMarri, led the Balochistan Liberation Army and initiated freedom movement in 2000 and this movement continued till he was assassinated in 2007. People of Balochistan strongly associate with BalaachMarri has his portrait wearing a Baloch cap and holding an assault rifle can be seen in shops and stalls across bazaars in Balochistan (Zurutuza, 2015)

Armed groups such as Balochistan Republican Army, Balochistan Liberation Front are active in Balochistan and they work for the freedom struggle of Balochistan. Interestingly, Pakistani political establishment recognises BRP (Balochistan Republican Party) as the political wing of BRA (Balochistan Republican Army). However, central spokesman of BRP, SherMohamadBugti told in an interview with a *The Diplomat* correspondent that “a political party working on the surface that has no relation of any kind with the BRA.” This envisages that Pakistan’s Army is sincerely trying to put different narratives on ground in order to weaken freedom struggle in Balochistan (Zurutuza, 2015). Balochistan has also witnessed divide in the ground of religion in more recent time. Conflict between Shia-Sunni has intensified in more recent time. American alleges that Quetta has become safe haven for Taliban leadership. Growing sectarian conflict, Shia-Sunni divide and rising tide for Baloch nationalism have become dominant characteristics of Balochistan in changing times (Siddiqi, 2012). According to Carnegie Endowment Report (2013), Pakistani security forces have repressed Baloch nationalist movement in a brutal manner by using force and it is responsible for fuelling sectarian and ethnic violence in Balochistan

Balochistan has gradually descended into a state of deep anarchy. NaveedHussain argues that “cauldron of ethnic, sectarian, secessionist and militant violence, threatening to boil over at any time” (Hussain, 2012). Importantly, Pakistani political and security establishment have also become successful in changing and destroying social structure of Baloch people. Pakistani establishment has intentionally promoted ethnic tension in this region to fulfil their vested interest. Sadly, growing insurgency in this region has started affecting lives of ordinary citizen

belonging to both Baloch and non-Baloch people. Effort has also made to promote Islamization of the province. However, this strategy has only contributed in promoting extremism and radicalism in this region. A Pakistani journalist, Imtiaz Gul argues “*Balochistan has clearly turned into a security and governance black hole where multiple political, financial and criminal interests either converge or play out against one another*” (Gul, 2012).

Interestingly, the Balochinsurgency has presently triggered a greater debate in Pakistani society. Pakistani society intends to find solution for insurgency and anarchy in the province. Majority of Baloch population favour the province should get greater autonomy not independence from Pakistan. According to a survey conducted in July 2012, only 37% of the Baloch favour independence and only 12% of Balochistan’s Pashtuns favor this option. Surprisingly, 67 percent of the total population supports the province should get greater autonomy.

It is important to consider that Pakistani society in general retain multi-cultural cultural characteristics. However, people of Balochistan have over years have evolved with strong nationalistic ideology. People belonging to different ethnicity dwell in this province. However, factors such as insurgency and counter insurgency operations, rise of extremism and little economic development on the ground have contributed in developing a feeling of alienation among Baloch people. It would not be exaggeration to infer that Baloch society has polarised a long with two axes. One section of society wants autonomy and independence whereas other section of society intends to align with economic progress of this region. They want better infrastructure, development, economic progress and jobs (Qadir and Ahmed, 2014)

China’s growing interest and influence in Balochistan

Balochistan is at the centre of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is China’s flagship investment project in Pakistan which is worth more than \$62 billion. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a series of projects that are expected to connect China to central Asia and Europe in the long run. CPEC will connect China’s largest province Xinjiang with Pakistan’s Gwadar port in Balochistan, the largest and the most impoverished province of Pakistan. The strategic Gwadar Port is being built by China in Balochistan province. The CPEC is supposed to enhance the strategic cooperation between Beijing and Islamabad which is

expected to open new avenues of economic development for the people of Balochistan. The CPEC will connect Pakistan from the Central Asia through the Eurasian Land Bridge, planned to be built under China's "Belt and Road" initiative. The port, at the mouth of Persian Gulf, provides China with the shortest route to the oil rich Middle East, Africa and most of the hemispheres. The attraction of Gwadar port is the main reason for China to accept and build 2000 km of road and rail infrastructure of worth \$10.63 million (Usman Shahid, 2016, Academic and Regional Policy Analyst, Lahore).

The project is expected to revive the economic profile of the region which has traditionally been considered an economic backwater (Pant, 2018). Through this project Pakistan is planning to make the central point of economic activities. Balochistan, being rich in mineral resources, is expected to play a role in the economic integration of the country and in turn, will get benefitted by this economic opportunity.

According to the media reports, it is expected that Pakistan may allow China to build its military base in Jiwani area which is close to the Gwadar port and it is also expected that 90 per cent of the revenue from Gwadar will go to China (The Economic Time, 2018). Pakistan leadership has also been realising that the project is more about China's economic and strategic interest. Out of total \$ 46 billion Balochistan is estimated to get only \$7.1 billion as initial investments through the CPEC. CPEC even if tilted in Beijing's favour, Pakistani government views it an opportunity to have a deeper economic relationship with China. It is in retaliation of US diplomatic and economic pressure to lend support to India - oriented militant organisations. But Beijing is more concerned with the threats posed to its national and regional security interests (World Economic Forum, 2018).

Because of these obvious reasons, there have reports of rising tension in the air of Balochistan. People of Balochistan think that China is exploiting the mineral wealth of the region and its occupation of Baloch territory is more for its economic benefits than that of the Baloch. They feel being cheated as the most of its projects are self-serving infrastructure and mining projects which aim to exploit the people of Balochistan and its natural resources. They feel the CPEC project fails the three key tests. First of all the project has been initiated without the approval of

Baloch people. Secondly it is not based on the accurate assessment of its impact on the fragile ecosystem of Balochistan. Thirdly the economic viability and environmental sustainability of the project from the Baloch perspective has been raised. Besides these issues it is also being questioned why schoolchildren in Balochistan's port city of Gwadar are being taught Chinese language till class VI. It signals the extent of China's resurgence in the cultural aspect of Balochistan. On the other hand the Baloch language, the mother tongue of most of the students of Balochistan is not taught even in local schools. The decision to teach Chinese language comes at a time when Chinese influence in the region is increasing (Chaudhury, 2018).

In recent years, the Baloch's sense of insecurity has increased many folds because of growing influence of China in Balochistan under the umbrella of Chinese-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The CPEC is facing stiff resistance from Baloch armed forces who attack and kill Chinese nationals. Balochs who have the horrific history of exploitation in the past fear that Pakistan with the collaboration of China are trying to marginalize them in the name of 'development' and they will live a life of a minority community in their own country. Because of the rising conflict in the region, thousands of Balochs are migrating to their neighbouring countries like Iran or Afghanistan.

AS Rahul Roy –Chaudhuri, senior fellow at International Institute for Strategic Studies concludes, "The Belt and Road Initiative is portrayed as an economic project to boost infrastructure and connectivity, but, interestingly, it has significant local and political and strategic dimensions."

Conclusion

History suggests that Balochistan has been ruled by many different rulers including rulers of Persian and Indian empires. However, Baloch people have retained their strong ethnic identity based on language, culture and ethnicity. Baloch people even fought for independence when this region remained under colonial rule of British. Importantly, Balochistan retained the status of sovereign state when British left the Indian subcontinent. It is also a fact that occupied Balochistan with force. People of Balochistan has fought long struggle of freedom and autonomy. However, developed and prosperous Balochistan is not in compatible to strategic

goals of Pakistan. Insurgency in Afghanistan has also contributed significantly in destroying peace and stability of this region. However, pertinent demographic trends reveal that Pakistani establishment and security force have made conscious effort to change the demography of this region. Large numbers of Punjabis and refugees from Afghanistan have settled in this province. Pakistani army and security force have also used force to suppress armed freedom movement in Balochistan. However, this has also resulted in mass killings of politically active group of people. It also appears that there is an ongoing conscious effort from Pakistani government and army to change the demography of this region. They intend to convert Baloch majority into minority because this will fulfil strategic interest of Pakistani establishment. Balochistan is rich in mineral resources and it also offers largest coastline for Pakistan. Converting Baloch into minority in Balochistan would provide easy excess to resources possessed by this province. Furthermore, strategy of promoting strong Islamic ideology has resulted into a major divide on Shia and Sunni ideology. Propagation of strong Islamic ideology has also contributed significantly in disturbing the peace and tranquillity of this province.

Of late tension created due to growing Chinese influence in the region of Balochistan province is another factor that is disturbing peace in the region. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the China's flagship investment project in Pakistan, is creating a sense of insecurity in the people of Balochistan. The strategic Gwadar Port, which is at the heart of Balochistan is being built by China. In addition, China is committing significantly high investment in this region. More importantly, Chinese culture is being imposed on Balochistan. The Baloch people consider it as a Chinese insurgence in the area and an attack on their culture and an exploitation of their mineral resources.

These factors have also contributed significantly in destroying the local culture and ethnicity of Balochistan. Therefore, it can be argued that a multiple factor including strategic intent of Pakistani establishment, insurgency and counter insurgency operations, rise of extremism in Afghanistan and other regions of Pakistan and propagation of strong Islamic culture have been contributing significantly towards destruction of local cultural and ethnic identity of Balochistan.

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