



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Ethnic Nationalism in Baluchistan: The Role of Government and Civil Society (2000-2022)**

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**ABSTRACT**

Baluchistan is crucial for Pakistan's progress and development both in terms of international projects and natural resources. Since the inception, Baluchistan is under ethnic nationalism which creates hurdles in the works. In this study the concept of ethnic nationalism and role of government and civil society will be addressed to comprehend the real issue in order to provide candid suggestions for the solution of the problem. The ethno-symbolist nationalism theory will be applied to comprehend the Baluchistan's ethnic nationalism and the role of government and civil society. Besides, secondary sources have been consulted to address the issue qualitatively. As a result, the Baluchistan's ethnic nationalism creates hurdles owing to the negligence of government in terms of unequal distribution of the resources and massive human rights violation in the province. Furthermore, the role of civil society and the elites of Baluchistan are also not up to the mark. Henceforth, these factors further contribute to exacerbate the crisis in the province. For the solution of the issue government needs to extirpate the above mentioned hurdles on the priority basis.

**KEYWORDS** Autonomy, Civil Society, Ethnic Nationalism, Ethnicity, National Integration

**Introduction**

It is crucial to get acquaintance of the term 'ethnicity' before moving ahead. Ethnicity is a group of masses which has common language, culture, ancestors, and sense of separate identity in the social set up. Besides, "the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition" (The Oxford dictionary, 1992). If the above criteria are applied over Baluchistan issue, then there are three ethnic groups exist in Baluchistan such as Pashtun, Baloch and Brahui. These ethnic groups have grievances from the state that they have been exploited and their basic rights have been violated by the state.

Such grievances are, by and large, figured out by the civil society. Unfortunately, the civil society is not plying its role as it requires because of the government hurdles. (Muzaffar, Karamat, Saeed, 2018) Notwithstanding, in the contemporary scenario it improves to some extent, but still there is a room for the effectiveness in order to address the demands of the masses. As per the civil society role there are a massive number of the civil society's members prevail inside the Baluchistan but they do not properly utilize of their potential to highlights the lacunas owing to the government's restrictions. "In the Baluch civil society organization is around 15000 to 18000" (changezi & Tareen, 2016-17). In spite of such huge number, the inability of civil society is also a major challenge.

Besides, some recent events have taken place in the context of ethnic nationalism which needs to be addressed on the priority bases.

Additionally, the fifth generation warfare is further exacerbating the ethnic conflict in the province. Their main aim is to keep the country destabilize in order to meet their objectives in that way. Because China Pakistan Economic corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project of One Built One Road (OBOR) initiative, which covers most of the Baluchistan's areas. "Especially, after the launch of CPEC in 2015, socio-political stability of Baluchistan has become crucial for political leadership and policy makers" (Saleem, 2017). New Delhi and Washington do not want to get the project accomplished owing to various factors. For instance, Gulboshen, the RAW agent, was arrested by the Pakistani authority who confessed that he was launched to destabilize the province. Henceforth, the ethnic conflict must be resolved as per the Baloch's interest if Pakistan wants to complete the project and defeats the artificial fifth generation warfare which has been created by the ruling elites of both sides.

Furthermore, civil society and social activists have played role to present and highlight the issues. However, it needs further improvement in order to address these issues effectively. The role of civil society is crucial to highlight the exploitations and fundamental rights violation. Henceforth, in this article the role of government and civil society will be critically analyzed in terms of ethnic conflict in the Baluchistan province.

In sum, Pakistan faces the identity crisis across the country. The society has been divided on all fronts but here the division is on the basis of ethnicity in Baluchistan which has been created by the ruling elites by ignoring the fundamental rights of the citizens.

### **Literature Review**

Pakistan underestimates the ethnic minorities' interest which is a serious threat to Islamabad. According to their assessment, they believe that East Pakistan was separated owing to the exploitation of interest of the Bengali ethnic group. Besides, they make recommendations that the government of Pakistan should make sure the provincial autonomy, provide equal participation, and equal distribution of resources. Thus the sense of deprivation can be minimized. Furthermore, they held Musharraf responsible for such situation because, in 2006, he killed Bugti which made the situation further complicated (Latif & Hamza, 2009).

The issue of Baluchistan, in his article, has historically elaborated. The researcher figures out some factors which keep Baluchistan like a fish out of water. The issue of greater Baluchistan, inter and intra tribal conflict, factional politics and the geostrategic position are the core points which need to be redefined. Besides, the researcher suggests that provincial autonomy, the issue of representations should be sorted out on the priority basis (Hashmi, 2015).

Furthermore, some factors which are responsible for the unrest in Baluchistan such as army's ideological hegemony, failure of politicians, murder of Bugti and Marri in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Additionally, the author quotes that Baloch Chief Minister Aslam Raisani says that, "the state's security agencies were directly involved in the kidnaping and murdering of the Baloch youth". Furthermore, the author figures out that the initiative should be taken as Pakistan People Party took which are 18<sup>th</sup> amendment and 'Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Baluchistan' in order to cope with the situation effectively (Akhtar, 2015).

Baloch is still not in the power structure and in the mainstream business of the state. Furthermore, almost all political parties are not taking interest to address the grievances of Baluch (Muzaffar, Khan, & Yaseen, 2021); Amir, 2017). Addition to it, Rahim changezi and Alam Tareen argued that all the flaws and misunderstanding can be minimized by the civil society. But unfortunately, the civil society position is fragile in the contemporary atmosphere. They have been managed by the powerful authority (changezi & Tareen, 2016-17).

### **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

In the theoretical framework, the ethno-symbolist nationalism theory of Anthony Smith is applied in which he believes that the nation is an updated version of pre modern sentiment. Besides, he argues that the modern people have double identity one is ethnic and the other is national but ultimately the ethnic identity prevails. Smith points out that the ethnic groups must have: collective identity, ethnic ancestry, common historical memories, same culture, specific territory and self-awareness (Smith, 2009). In the contemporary Baluchistan has all the above characteristics but their national identity is fragile. Besides, Smith identifies nationalism principles which are: ideology, movement, sentiments, and process of nation building, symbols and language of nationalism. The above principles are clearly common in the Baloch ethnic nationalist but the role of government and civil society require to address the misconception and built the national identity by addressing their basic and fundamental demands. Moreover, secondary sources have been consulted to collect data in order to understand the phenomena qualitatively. The primary sources have not been opted owing to the time and budget constraints.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Musharraf's regime and ethnicity in Baluchistan**

Prior to independent, Baluchistan was divided into four princely states which were: Bela, Kalat, Makran, and Kharaun. In 1947, Kalat remained independent the rest of the states were merged in Pakistan. However after the independence Muhammad Ali Jinnah wrote a letter to the khan of kalat for the accession in Pakistan. "Prince Abdul Karim approved the accession" (Laal, 2020). Unfortunately, the charismatic leaders of Pakistan were shortly passed away, the forthcoming leaders were self-centered and power seekers. They were failed to provide equal atmosphere to all of them. Owing to such attitude East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971. Again the ruling class did not get lesson from such embarrassment and they are constantly ignoring the Baluch province.

Baluchistan is a mineral rich province, in 1952, Sui gas was discovered in the province. The Sui gas of Baluchistan has been utilizing in across Pakistan but still the province of Baluchistan does not utilize it as it should be. Later on in the Musharraf regime the situation got further exacerbated when Musharraf killed Bugti.

#### **Bugti Assassination**

During Musharraf regime, Bugti and Marri tribes made alliance in order to protect rights of the province. Nevertheless, Musharraf announced that exploration of the oil and gas would be commenced soon. At the time of working government hired Punjabis labors instead of Baluch. Since that time both Bugti's tribe and government were in the state of conflict. Such conflict intensified and Bugti claimed that "I am fighting for my province" (Amir Hamza). The attacks were enhanced and even targeted the Lahore

gas line as well as rail ways lines. The military warned that foreign hands are involved in the attacks. As a result, in 2006, Musharraf killed Bugti. A new wave of ethnic conflict had been initiated. Massive number of attacks had taken place, owing to the assassination of Bugti the tranquility of Baluch was disturbed across the province. Ethno separatist groups came up and demanded for the independent Baluchistan. Ultimately, the ethnic conflict got impetus and still the situation is critical.

The civil society and the media groups are vulnerable to play its role in the progress of the state because both militants and indigenous masses do not want to interact with them. "Media and civil society cannot operate freely in the province due to security reasons and harassment by the militant and security agency" (Shams, 2012). Henceforth, the ethnic nationalism was in full swing. As Smith asserted that every individual has double identity when both confront the individual is preferred the ethnic one. Thus such kind of unrest creates ethno-symbolist nationalism.

In sum, whenever Musharraf killed Bugti, almost all political parties and civil society activists urged that negotiation should be made with the Baloch people. However, Musharraf refused to conduct any negotiation with the Baloch. At that time people had strong alacrity because right before Bugti was assassinated. Thus owing to Musharraf miscalculation, the ethnic nationalism came up. Such ethnic nationalism exploited by the foreign hands in order to get their objectives. As a result, tranquility of the Baluchistan did not remain intact owing to the fallacy of the ruling elites.

### **Pakistan People Party's Tenure 2008-2013**

In 2008, Pakistan People Party won the election; Asif Ali Zardari became president of Pakistan. In that time the president have the power to dissolve the assembly. Nonetheless, owing to the Musharraf fiascoes the Baloch ethnic conflict was a major challenge for the PPP's government. As earlier it has mentioned that the Baloch masses demand for the provincial autonomy. In 2010, the PPP's government passed the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment in order to strengthen the federation. Owing to the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment the provincial governments get more power than earlier. Thus to some extent the Baloch demand of the provincial autonomy was resolved but however they still want more autonomy. The 18<sup>th</sup> amendment of the PPP's government minimizes the Baloch conflict. The president regrets over the mishandling with Baloch thus he announced a significant program for the Baloch province. "As the gesture of good will the president has apologized for the mishandling and wrong doings with the people of Baluchistan. Thus major program, Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Baluchistan, had introduced" (Mujahid, 2012).

Furthermore, the civil society was not in the position to properly present the grievances of the Baloch people because of security concerns. However, the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment curbs the wrath of Baloch masses first time after Bugti assassination but it does not mean that all of their grievances were figured out. Besides, prior to the PPP government, the Baluch had the proper representation issue as well. When the PPP's government came through election, it was a good development because in the democracy everyone can ask for its rights. Thus in the PPP's government to some extent addressed the grievances of the vulnerable Baloch people. Besides, analysts believe that the PPP's leadership ignored the genuine reservation of the Baluch all the programs and provincial autonomy were for the political benefit. For instance, they asserted that PPP's leadership program in Baluchistan was just for the vote bank in Baluchistan, because in the PPP's tenure they did not make any visit in far-flung area where almost all effected and vulnerable people live. As far as, the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment is concerned, the commentators point out that the PPP's leadership knew that their performance was not in the proper direction. Moreover, the PPP's realized that in the future we would not be in the position

to gain maximum vote in the Punjab. It means that the forthcoming government in Sindh province would be the PPP while the central government may not. Henceforth, the PPP's government gives maximum autonomy to the provincial government through 18<sup>th</sup> amendment. As in 20013, 2018, 2024, elections the predictions were proved. However, the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment plays crucial role in the calming down the ethnic conflict in Baluchistan. Additionally, the amendment restructures the constitution of 1973. "The amendment includes 105 important articles and has made the 1973 constitution more democratic" (Hussain, 2019). Moreover, in the PTI's government had intention to bring changes in the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment. In response, the Baloch civil society and opposition moved against the PTI's government intention to bring change in the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment. "Baluchistan opposition vows to resist move against 18<sup>th</sup> amendment" (Shahid, 2020).

### **The PML-N's Government and Baluch Ethnicity from 2013 to 2018**

Throughout the history of Pakistan, the first civilian government successfully completed its tenure from 2008 to 2013. In 2013, election was held and Pakistan Muslim league Nawaz came up as a ruling party and made government. During PML-N government, Baluchistan issue was not properly addressed as the prior government did. The newly government tried to develop the province through CPEC but the genuine efforts were not shown. As usual the PPP's leaderships were criticized for not making any visit to the affected areas of Baluchistan, same was the case with PML-N such as: socio economic problems, megaproject CPEC was not in the functional position, state military operations, and insurgency. However, owing to the democratic government the situation of Baluchistan remained normal exception of few events like 2018 insurgency.

In the socio-economic problems, as it is quite clear that unfortunately the province of Baluchistan was being ignored by the leaders. Keeping the province as a back burner created hurdles in terms of socio-economic condition of the province. The socio-economic vulnerability enhances poverty, separatists, and demonstration in the province because they compare themselves with the rest of the provinces in which the position of Baluchistan is more vulnerable as compare to others. Even Sui gas was discovered in Baluchistan back in 1952 but still maximum areas of the Baluch masses do not utilize the Sui gas facilities. Such kind of unfair distribution of the state resources keep the situation further complicated. Besides, "more than five decades after the first Sui gas discovery, 70 percent of Baluchistan's provincial population remained deprived of this resource; 78 percent are without electricity" (Gattani, 2021). As a result, poverty and balance diet issues enhanced. For instance "two out of three households in Baluchistan cannot afford a proper meal and 83.4 percent children in the province are facing severe malnourishment". Thus the socio-economic position of the province is crucial to address. Besides, "socioeconomic disparities between Baluchistan and the developed parts of the country are far too wide to be reconciled" (socio-economic disparity between Balochistan, other provinces too wide, 2015).

Furthermore, the mega projects (such as the Gwadar International Port, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Saindak Copper-Gold Project, and Reko Diq) have not been properly operated. The above mega projects are also the major cause which triggers the ethnic conflict in the province. The people of the province are deliberately keeping far behind the benefit of the province natural resources. As in 2013, the Chief Minister of the province says that, "we have no idea how much gold and other minerals are being dug out by the Chinese company from the Saindak Project" (Devasher, 2019). It shows the vulnerability of the provincial administration that they have no power over the land and resources of the province which enhances the sense of deprivation thus the ethnic conflict and ethno nationalists come up. Henceforth, the tranquility of the province is not

prevailed in such kind of law and order situation. It can only boost the ethnic conflict rather than peace and stability.

Additionally, the China's flagship project BRI (Built and Road Initiative), under this project, the CPEC has been launching in Pakistan, which covers maximum areas in Baluchistan but unfortunately, owing to the mistrust of the Baluch separatists and federal government, stable and conducive atmosphere are not available to the workers to complete the projects. Besides, the Gwadar port 50% profit would be taken by federal government, 48% would be deducted by China government for forty years and only 2% are left for the province. Thus the grievances of the province over CPEC are genuine. Furthermore, IMF's restriction and Corona have also effected the Port activities as "the progress of CPEC has reportedly slowed down due to the economic downturn, restriction by the IMF's bail-out program and COVID-19 pandemic" (Chaudry, 2020). Therefore, the Civil Society and the government should play its role in order to maintain the serene in the province as well as provide due share to the province.

Moreover, the masses of the province accused that military is brutally suppressed the separatist groups which leads to further complication because when military takes ironic measures against them then they are commencing attacks over the major mega project and the security forces. Thus the tranquility of the province disturbs and the progressive works go down. Henceforth, the proper strategy should be adopted in order to keep the developmental works in progress. On the other hand civil society should make sure the awareness activities in order to highlight the issue effectively.

Besides, By now the people of Baluchistan organizing different gathering in order to highlights the brutality of the state towards them (Pakistan: The Worening conflict in Balochistan, 2006). For instance, the recent women March in Islamabad clearly pointed out that they have been exploited and marginalized.

## **Conclusion**

As we discussed all ins and outs of the Baluch province's ethnic conflict, civil society vulnerability and its role since 2000. Besides the Smith's theory ethno-symbolist nationalism has applied in order to comprehend the issue under theoretical framework. Both the government and the civil society have been failed to address the real challenges in the province. The role of a state must be like a mother while unfortunately the state's role in terms of Baluchistan issue is questionable which needs to be corrected. Hence the issue of human rights violation and unequal distribution of natural resources are the failure of the state.

Secondly, the civil society has also the responsibility to present the masses issues and the socialization of masses effectively. Unfortunately, the civil society position was remained ineffective owing to the security concerns. However, in the contemporary atmosphere the civil society's role improves to some extent. However, there is still room for the improvement in order to highlight the wrong doings in the province bravely and effectively.

In addition to it, military factor is also questionable and the people of the province deem that the state's agencies have been working to disappear people in the province which leads to extra judicial killings. Besides, foreign factor and separatists groups are also responsible to some extent while state is more responsible for such insecurity and destabilization in the province.

Additionally, the Musharraf's regime took destructive decisions which makes the situation worse, even the ethnic conflict got strength in the course of Musharraf's regime. Nonetheless, after the election during the PPP's tenure the Baluchistan ethnic conflict reduce to some extent, owing to 18<sup>th</sup> amendment and other social program. As far as the PML-N's tenure is concerned, the PML-N's leadership did not take interest to develop the province but however the PML-N government was better than the Musharraf regime.

Besides, Smith's theory of ethno-symbolist nationalism asserted that the individual has double nationality: one as a citizen and the second as an ethnic identity. When both confront the latter one prevailed. It means that ethnic nationality has natural attraction. If the state deprived a particular ethnic group from its rights, in response the ethnic nationalism will be promoted. In a state, the one identity and national integration are very much significant because in the heterogeneous society for the progress of the state one national identity is inevitable. Henceforth, the national integration should be promoted in the heterogeneous society by accepting and protecting all ethnic groups' rights. As far as, the Baluchistan ethnic conflict is concerned, the Smith's theory is perfectly covered the scenario of Baluchistan. For instance, the Baluch's masses rights have not been provided to them since independent. As a result, they compare the progress of their own province to other, and feel that we are deprived and vulnerable in the existence set up. Therefore, they try to promote the ethno nationalism in Baluch. They want to have a greater Baluchistan in which they fulfill their demands. Hence the government needs to adopt below recommendations in order to make sure peace and progress in the Baloch province.

### **Recommendations**

- The government must stop the enforced disappearance and extra judicial killings.
- Almost all the resources must be divided on the principle of equity in order to develop infrastructure of the province.
- Civil society must be freed to address their genuine issues so that they can send their point of views to the competent authorities in order to cope with the situation effectively.
- The government should accelerate the developmental works and negotiation should be commenced with the separatist elements.
- The government must thwart the hybrid warfare tactics of the outside countries. Additionally, the government of Pakistan should launch the awareness programs to address the fifth generation warfare.
- In the mainstream politics and other services special seats should be enhanced to the Baloch people. Thus the sense of deprivation can be minimized.
- The mainstream leadership must be in touch with the common people instead of elite class. Besides, mega projects must be commenced in order to develop the infrastructure and also quality education must be provided.

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