

Ethnicity in Afghanistan: Pakistani Factor

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ABSTRACT

The current study is conducted on the topic of “Ethnicity in Afghanistan: Pakistani Factor”. The nature of the study is not simple because the roots of ethnicity are historical. Ethnicity is not only the issue of Afghanistan rather it is the major concern for all of the countries in the world because there live so many different ethnic groups in every country. The ethnic problem is very concerning phenomenon of Afghanistan because there are so many ethnic groups in this country. Pashtuns and Tajiks are two major ethnic entities of Afghanistan. There is always a tussle between these ethnic groups to gain political and administrative power. This study is based on qualitative form research and the researchers have undertaken this study on secondary data only. This study reveals different factors of ethnicity in Afghanistan. Further the researchers also studied the Pakistani factor related to ethnicity in Afghanistan.

Introduction

Afghanistan is an important country of South Asia. It is recognized as a South Asian state in the last of all South Asian member states. It has a long political and ethnic history. It is basically Pashtun dominated region. The Pashtun ethnic group always dominated in the political and administrative matters. But it is also vivid that there came many ups and downs in its history. Currently, Afghanistan got fame in the international scenario due to the intervention of big powers. Firstly, the Soviet Union invasion in Afghanistan got attention of the whole of the world. US as the major opponent of Soviet Union did not allow her to remain there and to set up her political influence over the South Asian states. US came closer with many Muslim countries especially Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to sought help to oust Soviet Union from Afghanistan. This Soviet’s invasion gave somehow prominence to Afghanistan in international world.

On the other hand, after 9/11 attacks, once again, Afghanistan came into discussion across the globe because this time the situation was more critical then before. The 9/11 attacks shattered not only US but also it was like a shock for the whole world. The question rose that if the super power of the world is not safe than which state has the surety of her safety. This time, the situation continued to become worst that US decided to declare a war on terror in Afghanistan with

NATO forces. Since 2001, the NATO forces are there in Afghanistan to crush the wave of terrorism. There are different perspectives about the performance. One school of thought has the opinion that NATO forces are successful while the others hold that US has lost war in Afghanistan. But it is not the subject matter of this article to deal this matter. This article will explore the ethnic and political entity of Afghanistan.

Research Question

What are the internal and external factors of ethnicity in Afghanistan?

Statement of Problem

The issue of ethnicity in Afghanistan is deep rooted. It is not easy to understand the nature of the topic without the empirical traces of history. There are many motives behind the ethnicity of this country. There are so many ethnic groups in Afghanistan that have different social, cultural and linguistic identities. The problem of ethnicity is not concerned only with the internal factors of the country rather there are also so many external factors that helped to raise the issue of this ethnic problem. This study will explore the major motives behind the increasing trend of ethnicity in Afghanistan. It will help the students who are related with this area of study. Ethnicity has become the major concern of Afghanistan. It is very important for Afghanistan to overcome this problematic issue otherwise it will become the reason of political instability in this country.

Methodology

The current study is purely qualitative in nature as the researchers are intended only to explore the nature of the topic in qualitative form in which the researchers deal only with the different articles, books and research reports.

As the study is based on qualitative strand of research in which the researchers are concerned only with different books, journals and research reports so the nature of data is secondary because researchers are not collecting the primary data.

Ethnicity in Afghanistan

Ethnicity is not a problem of Afghanistan or regional issue rather it is a matter of international concern. Almost all of the countries are facing the ethnic issues. Afghanistan is also like the other countries facing this fact. This phenomenon further originates clashes among the people of different ethnic groups and the same story is with Afghanistan. The ethnic diversity led to civil wars in Afghanistan. Although there are also many others social problems that Afghan people are facing like extreme poverty, discrimination and deprivation. It is an important concern for Afghan government to deal it in a proper way.

Ethnicity in Afghanistan: Pakistani Factor

One of the important countries of South Asia, Afghanistan is based on different ethnic groups. There is a variation of the power and importance of these ethnic groups. The national Anthem of Afghanistan includes fourteen ethnic groups of the country (Pervaz, 2015). These ethnic groups are Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Balochi, Turkmens, Nooristanis, Pamiris, Arabs, Gujras, Baruhis, Qazilbash, Aimaq and Pashai. All of these ethnic groups are not indigenous. Some of these groups are indigenous while some of them are migrated from the other neighboring states. This is a major challenge for Afghan Government to create harmony among these ethnic groups. The political history of Afghanistan has long roots based on ethnicity (Siddique, 2012).

Afghanistan is a landlocked country that is surrounded by a few countries. It is full of wide range of ethnic groups that count almost fourteen. These ethnic groups have differentiated cultures and languages. All of the ethnic groups have a prominent identity in Afghanistan. The dominated ethnic group pashtun mostly resides in south and the east. The tajiks are numerous in upper east and west of Afghanistan. The hazaras reside in the middle of the country and Uzbeks and tajiks in the north west of Afghanistan (Pervaz, 2015).

All of the ethnic groups have great importance in country because all of the political and administrative matters are discussed in accordance to these ethnic groups. The ethnic representation is considered important to have cohesion among these smaller or larger groups. All of the ethnic groups are not of same size and population some of them are major while the others are minor. Out of all these ethnic groups, the Pashtun is the largest ethnic group of Afghanistan. The pashtuns have also strong ties with Pakistan because a large number of its population lives in Pakistan as Afghan Muhajireen. On the other hand, the Turkmens and the Uzbeks are numerous in the adjacent areas of Central Asian States (Conrad, 2004).

Ethnic Division of Afghanistan

Ethnic Group	Percentage of Total Population	Native Language
Pashtuns	38%	Pashto (Iranian)
Tajiks	25%	Dari (Iranian)
Hazara	19%	Dari (Iranian)
Uzbek	6%	Uzbek (Altaic)
Turkmen	12%	Uzbek (Altaic)
Aimaq		Dari (Iranian)
Baluchi		Dari (Iranian)
Others		Variety

Source: Prepared by the Researchers

It is obvious that Afghanistan is divided into different ethnic groups that are the great concern of Afghan foreign policy. Despite the division of population into many groups, there is great sense of nationalism in the whole population. All of these ethnic groups are living together although there are different opinions of differing groups but they do not compromise over their national identity.

The idea of ethnicity is basically based on the cultural entities. Ethnocentrism is a system in which one nation considers herself superior to the other. The basic comparison of this system is based on cultural values and ideas. An ethnic group

ranks itself to have better social and cultural ideas as compared to the others (Conrad, 2004). By the same token, if you investigate the phenomenon of ethnocentrism in Afghanistan, you would find it out that one group wants to win over the other one. For example, the Pashtun group is the largest group of this country and ranks itself as the most prominent ethnic group of Afghanistan. Some of the Pashtuns are Dari speaking people while some of them also speak their native language Pashto.

Historical Background

The ethnicity of Afghanistan is not a very recent phenomenon rather it has long roots of history. The numerous ethnic groups have been living together for more than five centuries. They are always together under one flag when there is concern of national identity. They have gathered against the empire of Britain and Soviet Union's invasion. Ethnicity is a factor that is unavoidable in Afghanistan (Pervaz, 2015). The strategic location of Afghanistan attracted the big powers to herself because it provides a way to Central Asian States and Middle East as well. The foreign big powers created different motives to raise the issue of ethnicity in this country because they want to gain their motives and they could be successful only when they got aid from the inhabitants of this land. The issue of ethnicity continued to rise with the involvement of the major powers in this area.

Due to the political instability, there has never been an authentic census conducted in Afghanistan so it is not possible to tell an accurate population. But estimation explores that Afghanistan's population is about 26 million. There is not a single ethnic group residing in Afghanistan rather there are numerous ethnic entities residing in this country. There is not only one ethnic group that ruled the whole country rather the political and administrative functions are performed by the collaboration of the prominent ethnic groups. Out of all these groups Pashtuns and Tajiks are two prominent groups that mostly performed the political and administrative tasks (Thomas, 2011).

The Pashtuns constitute the largest ethnic group of Afghanistan and they always had a critical role in the politics of this state. They dominated the administration of this country for centuries. Although there are also many ethnic groups but they have less importance in the comparison of this group. The Tajiks are the second largest and important ethnic group but this group is also not so prominent like the Pashtuns. The important thing is that they are more educated than the Pashtuns and linked with the Central Asian States. Despite the indigenous people, the Tajiks have never ruled Afghanistan. But today, these Tajiks are known as educators, bureaucrats, and successful merchants of Afghanistan (Ahady & Anwar-ul-Haq, 1995).

Internal and External Factors of Ethnic Conflicts

The ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan have been raised through different reasons. These reasons may be internal and external as well. The internal factors for the creation of contention are indigenous because their motives are from the country itself but it may not be so harmful like the external involvement. In the external involvement, the ethnic conflicts are boomed up by the actors playing their games from outside of the country. They have their concerns and benefits to gain something from this land while inspiring these ethnic people to quarrel among themselves. They use all of the possible tactics to achieve their goals. In the external factors there come two names US and Soviet Union. The invasion of Soviet Union was not possible without the assistance of the local people. It is always not possible for the external power to invade into the other territory without the help of its inhabitants. By the same token, there were some local motives behind the invasion of Soviet Union that provided the safe way and accurate time to Soviet Union to invade into the country. On the other hand, when US declared war on terror in Afghanistan, she first sought help from the natives and the even from the neighbor countries like Pakistan.

Ahmad Khaled Dastgir is a teacher at university of Kabul. He opines that the ethnic problem is not as much as it is shown by the media. He further explains that the major threat to the security of Afghanistan is from the external factors. During the civil war, the people of different ethnic groups helped one another to save their lives and even they provided the shelter. There was a unity among them during the civil war. This war was basically the war of elite who wanted to gain power. They inspired the citizens of different ethnic groups to fight against them. He further explains that there is always a unity among the individuals of different ethnic groups against the national interest. History shows that they are always united against the external threat to nation. They defeated the two big powers of their time Britain and Soviet Union. The external factors want accomplishment of their tasks by aiding the elite of the country and further these power elite inspired the people of varied ethnic groups to quarrel with one another that created ethnicity across the country and this ethnicity further created civil war (Eden, 1980).

Constitutionalism and Political Division

The constitution of 1964 allowed the formation of political parties and freedom of press. In the result there were set up different political parties like the Pro-Soviet Communist Party, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), it was pashtune dominant party but split to Parcham branch. Another major Maoist party, Shula-e-Jawaid was created in 1967 from the division of PDPA. Most of these parties were based on ethnic representation. Perhaps there was not a single party that could declare itself the representative of the whole country. All of the political parties further somehow boomed up the ethnicization across the country.

In 1973, the former Prime Minister Daud Khan again gained the power and set an authoritarian style in the political matters. This rule was overturned in a PDPA coup in 1978. PDPA announced to follow the same style as it was followed by Soviet Union about nationality Policy. It addressed the major four areas the government participation, newspaper, education and culture (Waheed, 2001).

With Soviet Union's invasion, the country saw another phase of ethnic and religious division. The pashtun the major ethnic group sought help from their supporting parties in Pakistan like Jama-i-Islami the pashtuns are basically Sunni representative religious thoughts so this group was supported by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia as well. On the other hand, Iran was the major supporter of the people residing in Hazara. In this way, despite the ethnic identity, the masses of Afghanistan were also divided on the basis of religious identity.

When PDPA came into power, it was announced that it will follow the Soviet's style of government but it was not practiced well due to the influence of Pashun culture in this party. But it was not for a long time that when in 1986, Najib took power as the president of Afghanistan, he introduced some reforms and different political approach. Najib's government was designed as the massive project. Secondly, the government also realized that the presence of Soviet military is about to an end. In the return, the ethnic groups were mobilized and exploited to establish the local military. The so-called Uzbek militia of General Dostum and the other one Ismaili militia of Sayyed Mansoor were developed into major military units.

Emergence of Taliban and Afghan Ethnicity

The emergence of Taliban created another tension for Afghanistan. The Taliban emerged in 1994 in the result of the conflict and lawlessness that prevailed in all over the country. The unlawfulness inspired the people to emerge under another organization and in the result the group of Taliban was created. At the initial stage, the Taliban were neutral with regard to the ethnic identity but with the passage of time this ideology was changed. This organization came under the great pressure of Sunni Pashtuns. They raised their slogans in the favor of pashtuns and went against the shia community that were backed by Iran. Later, the Taliban adopted a strict ethnic action against the other communities other than the pashtuns(Amin, 1998).

The constitution of 1964 provides the equality to all ethnic entities in Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement was undertaken in which it was clearly mentioned that all ethnic groups would be treated equally. The government would include 29 members that must represent all of the ethnic groups of Afghanistan. The Tajik members that represent the northern areas of the states will would a strong status in interim government, foreign affairs, and the ministry of defense and interiors matters.

Pakistan Factor: An Analysis

The Pashtuns have a prominent proportion in Pakistan and Afghanistan as well but they do not have their state. They are considered stateless. It is estimated that more than 35 million Pashtuns reside in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Pashtuns resid in Pakistan are divided into different groups like Khatak, Niazi, Tarin and Yousfzai. According to them, it is more important to belong to a nation than an ethnic group. They are also considered loyal to the state and have prestigious position in Pakistan and Afghanistan as well.

The Islamist pashtuns in Pakistan are largely used by country's military and intelligence. There are two political parties in Pakistan that are related to these Pashtuns in Pakistan based on Islamic identity. These are Jamat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulma-e- Pakistan. They have been used to work for Pashtuns in Pakistan and to apply the Pakistani Agenda in Afghanistan.

The Pashtuns in Pakistan are not only advocated by the Islamic political parties only rather there are also other political parties and personalities that advocate the stance of pashtuns in Pakistan. Some of these prominent personalities are Wali Khan's family in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Achkazai family in Baluchistan. Both of these two families have strong relations with not only Afghanistan but also with India.

Afghanistan never supported fully the Pashtun in Pakistan due to political instability. Afghanistan has only tender wishes for the pashtuns in Pakistan at psychological level as the pashtuns belong to Afghanistan. The pashtuns reside in Pakistan but yet they have soft feelings for Afghanistan. They give preference to Afghanistan as compared to Pakistan. They still cherish the glory of pashtun rule in Afghanistan.

Although the Pashtuns are considered the prominent ethnic group of Afghanistan but still it lacks their own government. The language of Pashtuns is also under the threat of Urdu English and Punjabi in Pakistan because Pashto has not any significance in Pakistan because it is not considered the ethnic language of Pakistan as it is the ethnic language of Afghanistan. The ethnic languages of Pakistan also do not have preferences in jobs but the pashtuns do not have proficiency in Urdu language.

The pashtuns are in great trouble whether they are Pakistan or in Afghanistan because they are not getting the required demands. The pashtuns in Karachi are with the conflict of Mohajirs over land and job opportunities. The mohajirs are migrated from India at the time of partition and the Pashtuns from Afghanistan but the Pashtuns consider themselves the inhabitants of this land so they have clash with them of supremacy. The Pashtuns in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are involved with the dispute of the Punjabi region, the dispute of water resources, the job opportunities, the educational facilities, political participation and so many other issues. The most bewildered thing is that in their own country Afghanistan, the Pashtuns are not out of conflicts. In Afghanistan, they are involved with the

different issues with not pashtun ethnic groups. The other ethnic groups like tajiks, hazaras and Uzbeks challenge the dominant position of pashtuns in Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan demand fair access to resources, political participation and justice and favor a pluralistic state able to provide their basic rights. The second rise of Taliban and Character of Hamid Karzai challenged pluralism in recent times. Many Afghans alienate themselves from Taliban as they believe their domination will lead to brutality towards certain ethnic groups, such as killing of tribal chiefs, lawlessness, and school closings in northern Afghanistan by the Taliban. There is no doubt that Afghans of all ethnic groups failed to share a common platform although they started for a common cause and stood together for that cause.

The rise of ethnic politics is result of Taliban fear for which prime example is division of communist People's Democratic Party along ethnic lines in 1960s-1980s and Junbish Milli Islami rise as Uzbek political party. General Dostum supported Karzai's Presidential elections (2009) and become a national figure but when the same ethnic Uzbek switched sides labelled as national traitor and separatist leader. The rise of other ethnic groups in politics reduces Pashtun Centric system. Almost all Hazara ethnic groups belong to Islamist Shia parties but they do not mention Shia or Hazara in their logos or names so their appeal is very limited and less influential in other parts of the countries.

National security concerns of the Iran force it to shape its national policy towards Afghanistan to help non-state actors for stable country. Iran used all tools (sectarian politics, cultural ties, trade, language and ethnicity) for promotion of personal interests rather than common good of people of whole region. Not only Iran, other South Asian neighbors are also responsible for the provocation of ethnic divide in Afghanistan. Some of them failed to get desired benefits but will try to acquire their benefits during reconciliations.

Ethnic division is prominent feature in Afghan politics. There is need of stable political system and democratic process of restoration for stable country. There is need to strengthen national identity to avoid tension between various ethnic groups. The patronage politics hinders the development and increases the security expenditures in Afghanistan. There must be fair distribution of natural resources and reconciliation based on pan-Afghan vision rather than narrow ethnic politics.

Conclusion

In the last, it is concluded that the ethnicity is Afghanistan has become the major concern for this country because the masses are divided on the basis of ethnic identities. The members of different ethnic groups are connected to their respective groups strictly that they do not allow any of their members to deviate from their cultural ties. There are internal and external factors for the creation of ethnicity in Afghanistan and the external factors are more critical than the internal.

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