

Causes of Separatist Movement in Balochistan

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Abstract

Balochistan is the biggest province of Pakistan. It is sandwiched between Afghanistan on the north and Iran on the west. Geostrategically, geopolitically and geoeconomically it is the most important place of Pakistan. It is well endowed by nature and very rich in natural resources. But unfortunately the development of Balochistan is least among the four provinces of Pakistan. The Balochistan have faced the five phases of insurgency from 1948 to till now. In the wave of insurgency many people have been killed and abducted by Pakistani security forces. Baloch freedom fighters are completely against the state and its machinery. Pakistan maintains control by disappearing, torturing and murdering the peoples and their leaders.

The root causes of movement are that Balochistan is lacking for basic facilities like education hospitals etc. The Pakistan government started many new policies against Balochi freedom fighters, they marginalised the Baloch in his own territory. The Government of Pakistan have never fulfilled the requirement of Baloch in politics, military etc. The Gwadar deep port and China Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC) is also the cause of movement in Balochistan. Baloch leaders feels that one day Balochistan will be Colony of China. So the separatist organisations like Balochistan Republican Party, Balochistan Liberation front etc. fight for the independence of Greater Balochistan.

Background

Balochistan is one of the four provinces of Islamic Republic of Pakistan the other three being Punjab, Sindh and Khyber pakhtunwa. Balochistan covers 3,47,190 sq.km area, about 43% of total area of the Pakistan. It is the largest of the four and least populous with barely 5% of the total Pakistani population. The province touches its border by Afghanistan to the north and Northwest, Iran to the south west, Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and federally administered tribal areas (FATA) to the north east and the south lies the Arabian Sea. While there has been a low level insurgency in Balochi area of Afghanistan and Iran. The situation in Pakistan has been considerably worst and the province has been mostly restive other than a few brief period of relative peace and quiet during several decades of Pakistan's existence. Due to the violence and human right violation in Balochistan it is one of the most disturbed places in the world. Balochistan is well endowed by nature. It has the countries longest coastline and largest natural gas reserve and contains a vast array of resources such as Coal, Oil, Copper, Gold, lead zinc.¹

¹ Singh Sunjoy, "China-Pak's Balochistan : Policy Devastating Impact" Lenin media publishers, New Delhi 2015,pp 123

Geostrategically and geopolitically Balochistan is the most important region of Pakistan. It also holds promise for the entire world by being in a position to provide access to the volatile energy rich regions of Central Asian countries. Topographically the province has mountain ranges in the middle and mid-Eastern region, hilly region in the West, plane in the coastal south and desert region in the Northwest. Climatically, it lies in the temperate zone with average annual rainfall of 3 to 12 inches but the some area of province do not get any rainfall for years. As a result only about 10% of the land is cultivated. A large number of populations are engaged in cattle rearing. Coastal South is rich in marine life and lends itself to fish harvesting.

There are many tribes in Balochistan, but the three major tribes are Baloch Brahvi and Pastoon.² And these three types are also subdivided into many tribes each tribe is led by a chief normally addressed as a sardar. Social organisation of the province continues to be based on tribal identity through their considerable harmony and Unity of purpose towards the common goal of getting their rightful duties and place from the Pakistan establishment.

History of Balochistan

Historically, Balochistan has witnessed violence for the control of land and power at different time in the history. The area of Balochistan has been under the control of Persian, Afghans, Iranians, Mughal, Sikhs, British and the also the locals Sardars of that region. It is generally believed that the traditional Balochi period came into existence in 12th century when the Baloch formed powerful tribal unions. After many attempts to organise the Baloch into one group, Khan of Kalat has proved to be the most successful and Kalat has been the centre of Baloch nationalism. A Brahvi Prince name as Ahmed Khan was the first one to exercise power over substantial portion of land inhabited by Balochis and Brahvis. In 1616 AD he declared himself Khan of Kalat and after acquiring the areas inhabited by neighbouring Baloch tribes he took the title of khan - I – Balochi.³

When Balochistan came under the British control the Bolan Pass (connecting Balochistan to Afghanistan) was guarded by a strong garrison above the pass at Quetta and neighbouring Baloch tribes were control through British subsidize to their chief.⁴ But the Britishers never really attempted to govern the Balochis directly. On 14 August 1947 the Pakistan was divided from India and the province of Balochistan is geographically fell in the part of Pakistan after the creation of Pakistan, Khan of Kalat declared his is state independent but this happiness of independence state is very short. On 27 march, 1948 the armed forces of Pakistan were mobilized to lunch an operation against the Khan of kalat and on 28 March, 1948 khan of kalat was captured by Pakistan. It is a bitter irony of fate that a man named as Mohammad Ali Jinnah who argued case against British authority for sovereignty of Kalat; he himself gave order to annexe the Kalat in Pakistan territory.

Factors affecting the separatist movement

The people of Balochistan are against the nation and its machinery. The movement has its objective to protect the interest of Baloch people including their cultural identity, customs and tradition of late economic interest and social emancipation of its deprived population. Since 27 March, 1948 when state was captured by Pakistani security forces, Balochistan has faced five waves of insurgency. The phases of insurgency were started in 1948, 1958, 1962, 1973, and 2004 respectively. But the current and the most prolonged phase starting in 2004 thousands and thousands of people were killed and abducted by Pakistani security forces from 1948 to till now.

² https://www.balochistan.gov.pk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=39&Itemid=785

³ Heathcote TA, "Balochistan The British and the Great Game –The Struggle for the Bolan pass, gateway to India", Pentagon press, New Delhi, 2017 pp 8.

⁴ Ibid., pp x

The representatives of Balochistan at the United Nation human right Commission (UNHRC) and European Union(EU) Mehran Marri started on 13th August 2016, “the situation in Balochistan is at Grave as ever. Pakistan military operation has been continuing unabated. The army chief and Prime minister and the stooge minister have agreed on a national action plan to further isolates Baloch activists..... (Through) certain other elimination process of genocide.”⁵ The above statement of Mehran Marri tells clearly the brutality of Pakistani security forces. There are many more causes of movement given below as follows-

Marginalisation of Baloch people

In a multi ethnic Society of Pakistan minority groups like Baloch suffer the most. There is a very less participation of people in politics, Bureaucracy, educational system, armed forces etc. There is a lack of school and colleges in Balochistan compared with other state of Pakistan. In Pakistan military there is a negligible participation of Baloch people and military is Pakistan most powerful entity. Punjabis who represent 40% of the population and constitutes 90% of the armed forces.⁶ In the textbook that are being used to teach in the subject of sociology in Pakistan the Baloch should have been described as uncivilized, illiterate and savage. So the Marginalisation of Baloch people laid the separatist movement.

Exploitation of resources

The Balochistan province is very rich in natural resources it has the country’s longest coastline and largest natural gas reserve and contains a large array of resources like coal, zinc, lead, Copper, Gold, oil etc. But its development is least in all the four provinces. The handing over the large part of land and mining contract to China has angered the Balochis. The one more big example of resource exploitation is that “if you go to sui gas fields in Dera bugti, you will see a cantonment protecting personal ensuring that they are supplied gas and electricity all day ,everyday but if you walk around outside the cantonment you will find Baloch people living without access to gas that’s two in an area that supplies gas to the entire country.”⁷

Gwadar Port

The Gwadar port holds great strategic and economic importance for Pakistan. It is a deep sea port located at cross junction of international sea shipping and oil trade routes. It was given to China for development in 2006. Over the period of last decade substantial development including housing, warehouses, Industrial and manufacturing complexes has taken place in Gwadar. But the locals are not benefited much from all this. Recently, we seen that local Baloch people have attacked on Chinese workers during working on their project and many have been killed also. It is because local Baloch look upon the Gwadar’s issue as a case of someone entering your home throwing you out and setting others instead. The respected Karachi based investigation magazine the Herald had published a cover story ‘The Great land robbery’ which alleged that the Gwadar Mega project has led to one of the biggest land scam in Pakistan’s history.⁸

Nisar baloch during interaction with Robert Kaplan remarked “we are oppressed nation there is no other choice but to fight. The whole world is now talking about the Gwadar. No matter how hard they try to run Gwadar into Dubai. I won’t work there will be resistance.”⁹ These cause grows the movement against Pakistan.

⁵ Balochistan Assessment-2017. Accessed at www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/Balochistan/index.html on 23 oct 2017.

⁶ www.huffingtonpost.com/michaelhughes/balkanizing-Pakistan. Accessed 5 January 2018

⁷ Ibid ., pp 164.

⁸ Ibid., pp 75

⁹ Ibid., pp 78

China Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC)

CPEC was proposed by China to connect Gwadar port to Chinese province of Xinxiang. The estimated cost of project is 46 billion-dollar this project was signed between Pakistan and China in April 2015. CPEC has now been subsumed within the larger and ambitious belt and Road initiative (BRI) of China and it includes several project of road, expressway, motorway, highway freight train service, energy projects, solar, windmill and hydropower, fibre optics, and infrastructure.

Balochi Nationalist have opposed the Chinese presence and investment project in Balochistan. Balochis are feared that wave of investment will bring demographic changes turning them into a minority groups in their own province. It is crystal clear that China has its own geostrategic and geo-economics interest in Pakistan so at any cost China want to succeed the CPEC project. But another hand in this multi billion dollar project the local Balochi people not got a profit as they expect so they oppose this project and killed the Chinese engineer and workers time to time. Out of 330 project of CPEC only 8 have been allocated to Balochistan. The main cause of the this project allocation is that at anyhow the road passes through Balochistan to reach the Gwadar deep port.

Mir Suleman Dawood Khan the current khan of Kalat observed that “Great game part II is being played we want our rights. If we do not get them we will be a major player in the Great game part 2. Give us our rights or we will fight.” The exiled leader and spokesperson of The Baloch national movement (BNM) calls CPEC as ‘China Pakistan economic exploitation corridor.’ CPEC looks like another sinister objective in Balochistan. Most of the infrastructure used in CPEC is Chinese and white collared jobs also gone to the non Baloch Pakistani people. only high risky jobs like outer corridor security and other has been left for the locals.

Baloch people and their leaders says that we are attacking the CPEC project everyday because it aimed to turn the Baloch population into a minority and Chinese looting, plundering and taking away resources so CPEC is also a main cause of separatist Movement in Balochistan.

Lack of development

Geostrategically the location of Balochistan is very important for Pakistan. And Balochistan is very rich in natural resources but the development is least here. Many Balochistan areas still face the lack of basic facilities like school, road, Hospital etc. because the system of Pakistan works here only for their political economic and strategic gains. They have not any concern for the Welfare of Baloch people.

According to Human Development Index (HDI) data of 2016 is that, Punjab with an HDI score of 0.55 tops the list, followed by Sindh with 0.51, Khyber Pakhtunwa with 0.48, Balochistan expectedly brings the rear with 0.41. Among the below 15 district 11 are from Balochistan, two each from Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunwa and none from Punjab. Top 15 districts falling in human development category including 12 from Punjab.¹⁰ The literacy rate of Balochistan in 2008 is 24.8 percent, figure comparable to poorest of the countries in the world.

The economy gained from Balochistan province is spent on mainly Punjab and also rest part of the country. Punjabis dominated Pakistani establishment has concerned most of the benefits for itself at the cost of other three provinces. Due to this, Bilawal Bhutto said in a rally in Balochistan that “never considering Balochistan more than our colony.”¹¹

¹⁰ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1293170/provinces-human-development/> dt 13 January 2017.

¹¹ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/270920-we-want-let-balochistan-people-suffer-any-more-bilwal> dt 20 January 2018, accessed on 21 January 2018

Demographic Reengineering

Balochistan has witnessed five major military operations. But after the death of Nawab Akbar bugti (An influential tribal chief cum politician); Baloch guerrillas are more organised and strong. Due to fear of insurgents not any investor has shown their interest at large amount of resources in Balochistan because they feared that Pakistan will not be able to give the security against Baloch insurgents.

To counter the Baloch insurgents the Pakistan government started demographic engineering. They started to prove that Balochis are minority in their own Homeland where as pro state Pastoons are in majority, To achieve their goals Pakistan government started importing Pastoons from Afghanistan to settle in Balochistan. Now a days many Afghan refugees have settled in Balochistan. And they do not consider themselves as a Refugee, they have Pakistani passport, and bought the property in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan.

Balochistan senator Jehanzeb Jamaldini in a meeting of the senates standing committee on 8 September 2015 stated that “the government settled 4 million people in various part of Balochistan in the part three decades with broader demographic changes in the province, the government is converting the majority into a minority.”

Emergence of different ideologies in separatist organisation

A large number of separatist organisations has covered the Anti Pakistan space in Balochistan they also have the different ideologies, some wants to fight for separation while other are fighting for Greater autonomy, different groups were led by different tribal leaders.

Balochistan Liberation front was founded by Jumma Khan Marri in 1964. But now days it is lead by Dr Allah Nazar Baloch (2009 - present). It is the most prominent organisation with large footprint and great popularity. And the reason of popularity is that this separatist organisation operates all activity from inside the country.

Balochi Liberation army (BLA) is also a Baloch militant organisation. It is led by Marie tribes. The BLA is listed as a terrorist organisation by Pakistan and UK. After 2004, they have started the armed struggle against Pakistan. They targeted the Pakistani security personnel. They fight for the independence of Greater Balochistan including Iranian and Afghan Balochis.

Balochi Republic party has been led by Brahamdagh bugti after the death of his grandfather Nawab Akbar Khan bugti. It also advocates the independence of Greater Balochistan. They have the militant group also known as Baloch Liberation Army, they raise their voices against Pakistan for the human right violation, killing and kidnapping of Baloch people.

Conclusion

The situation of the conflict in Balochistan is extremely Complex. Basically there are two factor of conflict one is historical and other is political. Historical factor includes the ethnicity problem while political factor includes lack of Representation at the decision making level, unusual distribution of resources, domination Baloch peoples. They are the important factor of separatist movement.

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