

Economic Basis of Baloch Grievances in Balochistan

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the economic based grievances of the sub nationalism of Baloch in Balochistan. It is found that Balochistan has been kept backward, illiterate and neglected due to ill-managed nexus of Islamabad and provincial political leaders. The lack of proper coordination between the successive provincial and federal governments put severe impact on the good governance of Balochistan. The power race between the central-backed Sardars and nationalist political parties never allowed a peaceful political environment to take place in Balochistan. Thus, paper finds that Sardars along with successive provincial and federal governments are equally responsible for the backwardness and negligence of Balochistan.

The paper is qualitative in nature which was analyzed on the basis of different historical events, facts and incidents that took place in the political history of Balochistan. The paper also addressed to investigate the question that unlike other provinces of Pakistan, why Balochistan could never establish its strong national level political parties which could represent the issues of Balochistan at federal level.

Keywords: Balochistan, Nationalism, Natural Resources, Federation and Sardars

Introduction

Balochistan, being the largest province of Pakistan in term of geography, finds its location at the most important region of the world. It does not only act as gateway for the Republics of Central Asian, China and Afghanistan to access the warm water of Indian Ocean, it also connects Iranian Plateau on West and Arabian Sea on the South which are the most important regions in term of international trade. Balochistan falls on the route-line where most of oil and other commercial trade is carried out throughout the year. Despite its geostrategic significance and richness in natural and mineral resources, Balochistan has been witnessing political unrest, foreign intervention and separatist movements since its merger with Pakistan in March, 1948 (Samad, 2014). Moreover, it is further disappointing to learn that the dictatorial approaches and rigid policies of the successive federal governments towards Balochistan have also added to the grievances of Baloch people. There is no denying the fact that Baloch ethnic group has been divided into many sub castes and sub-nationalism which have given birth to hatred and superiority complex against each other. What further disappoints Baloch ethnic group that Baloch ethnic groups have never been witnessed united and integration for the cause of Balochistan's prosperity and development. On the other hand, the political structure of Balochistan has been experimented with political engineering since 1948 (Khan et al., 2021). Initially, it was made the part of West Pakistan under the banner of One Unit Scheme (OUS) which greatly increased the grievances and sufferings of Balochistan into many folds (Jaffar et al., 2016). However, nationalistic resistances and political crisis in Balochistan forced the central government of Pakistan to discontinue One Unit Scheme and award Balochistan with the status of province in early 1970s (Jaffar et al., 2016). But unfortunately, after getting the status of province, the fate of Balochistan went on unchanged. The social defragmentation, poverty, illiteracy, backwardness and political instability continued to add the grievances of Baloch ethnic group in Balochistan.

Factually noting that Balochistan remained extremely unfocused and backward since its award of as province status in Pakistan in 1970. On the other hand, it has been really a worrying point to witness Baloch leadership including Sardars and Nawabs so much divided and isolated whose impacts have been seriously felt on the political structure and the good governance of Balochistan. As a result, Balochistan remained unable to flourish a strong nationalistic and public-oriented political party which could address the genuine issues of Balochistan from the grassroots. Due to lack of strong political parties, Balochistan has never been able to accomplish a political setup which could represent the people of Balochistan at national level in its true sense. Unlike Sindh, Khyber Paktoonistan and Punjab, the governments of Balochistan have always been formed by the successive federal governments of Pakistan which did not only add the grievances of the people of Balochistan, it also created alienation among the political figures of Balochistan. In hue to this, there has been observed a strong political resentment among the nationalist political figures of Balochistan, blaming the central governments of Pakistan for the exploitation of their provincial natural resources and interference in the general election processes of Balochistan (Akhtar, 2007). Moreover, Baloch nationalists have been raising serious reservations against the unjust distribution of national wealth (Javaid, 2010) via National Finance Commission (NFC) awards, exploitation of the natural resources, penetrated from Rako-Dak, Duddar Mine project and Sui Gas Plantation and most importantly, Baloch nationalists fear that the conclusion of China Pakistan Economic Corridor Project (CPEC) would change the demography of the Baloch ethnic group and convert them into minority on their own soil (Sial, 2007).

Instead of resolving and addressing their grievances and genuine issues, the successive governments of Pakistan opted coercive means to deal with them in past. As a result, insurgency and freedom movements took place in Balochistan which did not only create the security challenges for Pakistan in Balochistan (Javaid, 2010), it has also created a war-like situation in Balochistan for Baloch political figures where they feel risky to

carry out their political activities on the soil (Rizwan et al., 2014).

Historical Background of the Study

The roots of political unrest and backwardness of Balochistan are traced back in 1950s when Balochistan was made the part of West Pakistan under the umbrella of One Unit Scheme since the leadership of Balochistan feared that Balochistan would remain unable to get its due share in the national wealth (Jaffar et al., 2016). There is no denying the fact that Balochistan shares the largest seabed, a 770 km sea offshore from Iranian Plateau to India maritime belt (Leghari et al., 2014), covers the most important commercial belt of the world. In addition to this, Balochistan is also enriched with natural and mineral resources worth billions of dollars which includes Saindak, Reko Diq, Gwadar deep Sea Port and Duddar Mine projects (Sohail et al., 2013). Moreover, the nature-blessed Balochistan has been termed one of the most important geo-political and geo-economic strategic federating units of Pakistan which has not only boosted the geo-political significance of Pakistan globally, it has also attracted the regional and extra-regional actors to establish strong bilateral political and economic ties with Pakistan. However, on the other hand, the nationalistic figures of Balochistan maintain that after the passage of 70 years, Baloch people have never been awarded their due rights and equitable shares in the mega projects of Balochistan (Javaid, 2010). They have further claimed that the successive governments of Pakistan have failed to address the genuine grievances of Baloch people in Balochistan. The exploitation of natural resources and deprivation of their basic rights made Baloch nationalists believe that Islamabad supported the local sardars of their interests in Balochistan (Razvi, 2012).

The sense of deprivation and inappropriate policies of Islamabad towards Balochistan have created a political alienation among the Baloch ethnic group in Balochistan. Baloch political figures who were once the key mainstream national politicians, have denied to work within the constitutional framework of Pakistan since they believed that Islamabad has been exploiting the natural resources of Balochistan without taking Baloch into

confidence (Subhan & Kasi, 2018). The prime and notable example of economic basis of Baloch grievances is the limited access of Sui gas to the people of Balochistan while Punjab and Sindh provinces enjoy greater access to the said gas (Khan & Ullah, 2017). Sui gas was discovered in Sui, Balochistan in 1952, however, Sui town which is only four miles at the distance of gas plant, has remained deprived from its own field gas. Such deprivation does not only add the grievances of people of Balochistan, it is also the violation of article 158 of the Constitution of Pakistan which clearly states, “ The province in which a well-head of natural gas is situated shall have precedence over other parts of Pakistan in meeting the requirements from the well-head, subject to the commitments and obligations as on the commencing day” (Ghaus-Pasha, 2012) It explains the fact that the province which produces gas, would have the precedence over the other parts of the country to get the facility of gas at first. Unfortunately, Balochistan received gas supply for the first time in 1982.

History is replete with examples where Baloch have perceived themselves the victims of economic exploitation, social division and political alienation under the banner of the federation of Pakistan. Moreover, Baloch people further maintain that key mega projects in Balochistan which include Saindak project, Reko Diq project and Duddar Mine Plant, Sui Gas Plant and Gwadar Seaport project would not change the fate of Baloch people since they find rare involvement of Baloch people in these said projects (Jamali, 2013).

Literature Review

The blame on the successive federal governments over the exploitation of Balochistan’s natural resources has been a lame excuse of the nationalistic political parties of Balochistan since history produces solid evidences which validate the facts that the nationalist political parties along with the Sardars are themselves equally responsible for the backwardness, exploitation and negligence on the people of Balochistan. As Razvi, (2012) says that Sardars in Balochistan are responsible for keeping their own people in abject poverty through resistance to building basic communications, education and health care services

infrastructure in their respective areas. He further says that there are certain Sardars in Balochistan who facilitate the federal governments in Balochistan, are really accountable for the backwardness of their people in Balochistan. However, Iqbal, (2012) reads the issues of Balochistan quite differently. He believes that the ill-managed policies of provincial and federal government and continuous internal insurgency are responsible for the backwardness of Balochistan. In addition to this, Ahmed et al., (2020) give many reasons for the backwardness of Balochistan. They believe that provincial and federal weak role in political power distribution, economic related resource distribution, political misrepresentation are certain reasons for the backwardness of the people of Balochistan.

The Baloch nationalist political parties have also been witnessed in blaming Islamabad over the economic exploitation of Balochistan without benefitting the local people of Balochistan. Bansal, (2006) views in his paper that Balochistan believe that their mega projects and natural resources have been exploited with no benefits to the people of Balochistan. He gives the example of Sui Gas which was discovered in 1952 without giving its benefits to the local people until 1980s. Thus, he held Islamabad responsible for the backwardness of the people of Balochistan. However, these is no denying the fact that Balochistan is ranked much behind in education, health and other infrastructure development projects as compared with the other federating units of Pakistan, but one only cannot hold Islamabad accountable for the backwardness and illiteracy of Balochistan. The nationalist political parties along with central-backed Sardars in Balochistan have been in power in past who made no difference for the people of Balochistan, rather kept them more backward and illiterate so that the blind trust of the people on the nationalist parties and Sardars may continue. Mazhar et al., (2012) investigate in their paper that “Balochistan has always been under the tyrannical rules of Sardars (Tribal Chiefs) who have been a major factor in keeping Baloch people diffident, uneducated and underprivileged”.

Theoretical Framework

Two school of thoughts have been established to contextualize the socio-economic and political crisis of Balochistan.

Moreover, the blame-game theory has been fit-in to justify the arguments of both school of thoughts. Islamabad believes that Sardars and tribal setup of Balochistan have been the real hindrance in developing Balochistan politically and economically. Moreover, it is further claimed that due to the geographical proximity of Balochistan with Afghanistan, Iran and Indian Ocean, it has been extremely tough for Pakistan to contain the anti-Pakistani activities on Baloch soil since anti-Pakistani elements including certain Sardars and Nawab have been alleged to get financial and military support from some regional and extra-regional states (Akhtar, 2017). On the other hand, the nationalist figures of Balochistan hold the successive governments of Pakistan responsible over the exploitation and deprivation of Baloch people in Balochistan. The nationalists further believe that political engineering, economic exploitation of the natural resources of Balochistan and long-term military operation in Balochistan have further added the grievances of Baloch people in Balochistan.

In comparison between both school of thoughts, the federation of Pakistan needs to realize the fact that Balochistan which occupies 44% of the total territory of Pakistan (Faiz, 2015), is in state of war between Baloch and central government. Therefore, the central government needs to take the Balochistan's issue seriously in order to ensure confidence building measures and political engagement.

One of the Majors in US Army, Gregory Pipes investigates the Balochistan's issue by arguing that denying democracy to Baloch, the economic exploitation of Balochistan's nature sources, and military incursions are examples of state actions that have turned Baloch's against the establishment. He explains the crisis of Balochistan with empirical evidence to say that the actions of the state have a direct impact on insurgency in Balochistan; any reconciliatory move by the state results in a decline in insurgent attacks, whereas any state-backed hostility against Balochs correlates with a spike in insurgency.

Economic Basis of Baloch Grievances

Since 1948, the relations between Baloch people and the central government have witnessed ups and downs. The soil of Balochistan witnessed political engineering, military operations and independence movements from different phase of the history. History illustrates that the successive governments of Pakistan ruled Balochistan via handpicked Sardars and Nawab who never address the genuine grievances of the people living in Balochistan. It is rather safe to hold the Sardars and Nawabs accountable for the backwardness, deprivation, and grievances of the Baloch people in Balochistan. Even though, the soil is blessed with unlimited natural resources and unique strategic gateways, yet Balochistan was never brought at par with other federating units of Pakistan. The nationalistic figures of Balochistan have always alleged the central governments in the process of exploitation of their natural and coastal resources without taking them on board. Even though there is no empirical evidence to find the fact that the federal governments alone have been exploiting the natural resources of the province. The empirical evidences suggest that the successive central government always took the provincial governments on board while initiating any projects in Balochistan. However, the matter of fact is that the formation of provincial governments of Balochistan has a unique history which has always been formed with the same political parties and politicians who have formed the central governments of Pakistan. Therefore, the successive provincial governments of Balochistan functioned within the directions and orders of federal governments. Unlike other provinces of Pakistan, the provincial governments of Balochistan have never been witnessed in resisting the political intervention of federal governments within the subject matters of the province. As a result, Federal governments have been running the provincial mega projects without any political resistance (Sial, 2007). The political and economic intervention of the successive central governments in Balochistan have been criticized and resisted by the nationalist political parties in Balochistan since they believed that central sponsored political parties in Balochistan would not serve the people of Balochistan. Thus, a political gap has been witnessed in between central and

provincial units that has ultimately added political tensions and economic deprivation in Balochistan.

Pakistan is a federation where the powers and national wealth are to be distributed among the provinces equally. The most importantly, the provincial autonomy are to be ensured after the Eighteen Amendment (Qadir, 2021). Despite the fact the distribution of powers among the federating units and provincial autonomy have been serious matter of concerns for the nationalists figures of Balochistan . They have been found in raising serious reservations that even after the Eighteen Amendment, Balochistan has been denied to get its due share in the national wealth (Mustafa, 2011). Moreover, the nationalists of Balochistan further believe that the successive central governments of Pakistan have been involved in exploiting the natural resources of Balochistan without giving the due shares of Balochistan. The 1995 multi-billion dollar copper gold Saindak project, the 2002 Gwadar Port project and many other projects which are running in Balochistan, have been operated under the control of federal governments despite being the subjects of province (Javaid, 2010). Furthermore, the nationalists of Balochistan have also raised serious question over the production and distribution of gas in Balochistan. They believe that Balochistan being the 2nd largest gas producer after Sindh with the least consumption (Shohaz, 2019) is failed to get its due shares.

It is a unique phenomenal situation where state theory is fit-in to accuse Sardars and tribal leaders of Balochistan in the exploitation of Baloch's resources and putting them so backward, however, the nationalist political parties in Balochistan react in contrary to fact that and they accuse the federal government in supporting the Sardars in Balochistan(Akhtar, 2007). There is no doubt that Sardars have remained main instrumental blockade in stunting the economic and social development of Baloch people, especially in tribal areas of Balochistan, however, in the process of economic exploitation and creating sense of deprivation in Balochistan, Sardars of Balochistan cannot be held accountable alone. There are certain evidence which clearly indicate that the successive

federal governments of Pakistan have not only backed and supported Sardars and tribal chiefs of Balochistan in forming the provincial governments, they have also made them the Chief Ministers and Governors of Balochistan many times in past (Akhtar, 2007).

The nationalists of Balochistan further view that Balochistan is one of the most important federating units of Pakistan in term of geo-political and geo-economic and geo-strategic potentials and strengthen as it shares 705 km of coastal belt out of 1100 km of Pakistan's total coastal belt. Apart from this, it also falls at the juncture of Persian Gulf, Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Middle East, Gulf of Oman, Indian Ocean and Arabian Peninsula which is the most important region of the world in term of international trade. Balochistan also acts as a gateway for the Republics of Central Asia and Afghanistan to access warm water. Therefore, Balochistan, being one of the most important provinces of Pakistan, can be termed as the heart and future of Pakistan. Furthermore, the said province alone can act to strengthen and stabilize Pakistan economically and politically. Disappointedly, despite of having such a great geo-strategic significance in the region, Balochistan has failed to ensure the end of poverty, illiteracy and backwardness of its people. Thus, the nationalist figures of Balochistan put the entire blame on the successive central governments of Pakistan for their weak and lethargic interests in the province. They further believe that the unjust policies and lethargic approaches of the central governments have not only added to the economic and political basis of grievances of the people of Balochistan, they have also created sense of alienation and sense of deprivation among the general people of Balochistan.

Critical Analysis

There is no denying the fact that Balochistan has remained the most backward, the most neglected and the poverty-hit province of Pakistan, however, one cannot put the entire blame on the successive federal governments and the established tribal chiefs and Sardars of Balochistan. Unlike other provinces of Pakistan, the politics of Balochistan is much different since it revolves around many factors in Balochistan. The nationalist political

parties, the local Sardars and federally-motivated political figures as a whole have been involved in the political engineering of Balochistan. The nationalist political parties which include Balochistan National Party (Mangal) and National Party have always been witnessed in blaming the successive central governments of Pakistan for the exploitation of provincial natural resources, political engineering and weak role of political process in Balochistan. Factually analyzing, these two nationalist political parties have failed to end the political and economic basis of Baloch grievances of the people of Balochistan even during their tenures of political government in Balochistan. From Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri to Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch have either been the Chief Ministers of Balochistan or the Governors of Balochistan. Despite of having the executive positions in the province, the abovementioned so-called nationalists of Balochistan failed to ensure political enlightenment phase in Balochistan which could address the issues of the masses in general. During their political tenure in the province, they have focused more to entertain the work of their political workers and followers rather than tackling the issues of the masses as whole. Moreover, during their provincial government, they have been witnessed so much obliged and attached with the central political governments of Pakistan rather than pay better heed to the larger interests of the people of the province. However, right after their fall of provincial governments, they have been found in blaming the central governments for insufficient release of fund, weak attention on the province and political intervention in the provincial subjects matters of the province. No doubt, the baseless allegations of nationalist leaders of Balochistan on the successive federal governments over the exploitation of provincial natural resources and political intervention in the province have actually been made to prove their innocence and ensure their politically-motivated nationalism among the people of Balochistan.

Analyzing the above-mentioned factors, the people of Balochistan have to realize the fact that the nationalist political parties along with the local tribal chiefs and Sardars are equally to be held accountable for the misery circumstances and backwardness of the province with the successive federal

governments. People of Balochistan need to understand the fact that the slogan of exploitation of the provincial natural resources is a political slogan of nationalist political parties of Balochistan in order to gain the maximum support of masses in Balochistan.

There is no doubt that Balochistan never got its due share in the national wealth. In addition to this, there are certain validated evidence which prove that the successive central governments of Pakistan never granted the deserved and due share of the province in the benefits and revenue of the mega projects of Balochistan. But, on the other hand, no honest political figures or party have been found in Balochistan to work as a pressure group for the larger interest of Balochistan. Despite the fact, Sardars have been witnessed in putting pressure on the successive governments of Pakistan to increase in their personal share and incentive in the mega projects of the province, originated to their locality. Thus, it is safe to conclude that there is extremely a weak role of political parties of Balochistan in protecting the larger interest of the people of the province.

Recommendation

Balochistan is one of the most important provinces of Pakistan in term of revenue generation and enhancement of the national economy. The geo-strategic significance of Balochistan is another factor which have not only boosted the geographical importance of Balochistan, it has also become the key factor for the regional policies of Pakistan, especially in respect to China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Balochistan is the hub point of CPEC agreement between China and Pakistan which does not only provide a transit trade route to the regional and extra regional economic powers for trade activities, but it can also act as a gateway for the Republics of Central Asian to access warm water. Despite of having rich geo-strategic location and geo-economic corridor, Balochistan has remained the most neglected and the most backwardness federating units of Pakistan. The political engineering, the selected political authority, continuous Sardari system and undo interference of federation in the subject matters of the province are certain factors which have remained the main hindrances towards the development of the provinces.

Thus, the sense of exploitation, sense of alienation and the sense of deprivation have prevailed deeply in the province.

In order to bring the province on the track of development with the parallel of Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Paktoonistan, the mass-oriented roles of provincial political parties are inevitable. They need to ensure a peaceful political environment where free and fair elections are carried out. Most importantly, instead of blaming the federation in maneuvering the political system of Balochistan and exploitation of natural resources, the political parties of Balochistan need to strengthen their roots in public in general via public mobilization and political channelization. Political disharmony among the political parties of Balochistan has been another serious issue which has created political vacuums in the political structure of the province that have been ultimately filled by the undemocratic forces. The political parties of Balochistan especially the nationalist political parties need to bridge their political differences and ought to give preference to the national cause over their petty political gains. Another important point which has badly divided the political environment into different opposing camps, is the ethnic-based politics in the province. Political parties need to work as a whole for the largest interest of the province rather than entertaining their local and ethnic politics. The political parties of Balochistan are well-learned about the issues of Balochistan which are political in nature. Therefore, the political parties along with other democratic parties of Pakistan are to address the genuine issues of Balochistan with political dialogue.

Conclusion:

The economic basis grievances of Baloch people are no doubt genuine which need immediate based political dialogue. However, it is also the responsibility of the nationalist political parties of Balochistan to create mass mobilization and political awareness so that people from grassroots take part in general elections. Moreover, the federal government needs to limit its undue political and economic intervention in the subject matters of the province after the eight amendment so that a peaceful political environment takes place.

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