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## **Democracy and the Politics of Ethnicity and Language in Pakistan During the Bhutto Regime: A Case Study of Balochistan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The article studies the dynamics of ethnic conflict in Balochistan and its relation to the paradigm of democracy in Pakistan during the first elected government in the Bhutto Era. Like many third-world countries, the language controversies in Pakistan have provoked ethnic and political conflicts. Due to disagreements over the national language, the government was unable to develop a constitution for nearly 9 years after independence. Though the dispute was theoretically resolved in 1956, it continues to haunt the state. Although Bhutto was an elected leader, his rule was not immune to ethnic conflicts. Ethnic sentiments garnered attention in Balochistan, triggering confrontations and secessionist tendencies. An insurgency began in Balochistan, causing harm to both the Baloch and the state, and it still exists. The article affirms that in this context, ethnic conflicts have political objectives; the main causes of such conflicts are political, such as under-representation in state institutions, unequal distribution of resources, economic disparities, and, in many cases, the state elite's reluctance to recognise the identity of a particular ethnic minority.*

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### **Introduction**

Democracy is a kind of government centred on the consent of the governed, in which the masses are granted equal rights and representation (Kumar, 2012). The philosophy of democracy is based on the principles of fundamental freedoms. Although the majority has the right to dominate in a democracy, smaller groups such as ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities have the right to a fair share of power and opportunity, as per the Madisonian theory of democracy. (Bühlmann & Kriesi, 2013). All ethnic and linguistic groups are given a share in opportunities in proportion to their respective population. These considerations hold a paramount significance in federal democracies which have to be accommodative of diversity. The elected officials act on the basis of popular mandate within formal constraints designed to preserve the rights of minorities, individuals, and groups. (Rod, Martin & Shaun, 1998).

Acceptance of diversity is critical in shaping and organising a society's socio-political capital. Largely, disputes over language and ethnicity were caused by the absence of a constitutional framework after independence (Sayeed, 1980). Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's regime was the first popularly elected dispensation in the political history of Pakistan. Expectations were high for a democratic system to treat all ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups equally, regardless of affiliation or background. On contrary, in this era, the suppression and oppression of certain ethnic groups by the state machinery fuelled ethnic and linguistic tensions (Ziring, 1997).

However, few countries have ethnic homogeneity. Walker Connor opines that out of a totality of 132 states in 1972, 12 were seen as ethnically homogenous and some 25 states were composed of a main ethnic group which contributed to some 90 per cent of the entire population. Furthermore, in 31 countries the single largest ethnic group accounted for 50-74 per cent of the total population and in some 39 states no single group could account for even half of the population (Walker Connor, 1994).

Ethnicity is a sense of identity in which language and culture introduce internal cohesion and differentiate from other groups. Many times, it serves as an alternative means for social organization in class creation. According to Foltz, four features differentiate ethnic groups. The first attribute is biological, in which group members develop shared physical features based on a unique genetic pool. Language and culture are the other two qualities. These two characteristics give rise to a distinct language and value system. Finally, the ethnic group develops a structural identity based on certain joint relations that separate the group from others while organising their social roles (W.J Foltz, 1965).

Furthermore, ethnicity is defined by Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as 'the fact of belonging to a particular race' (Sally, 2005) (Harms et al., 2013). The term for the first time is reported to have been used in the English language in the 1950s (Thomas, 2010). In view of the above definition, Pakistan was inhabited by six major ethnic groups in its pre-disintegration period, before the separation of Bangladesh or East Pakistan from its western wing in December 1971. These six major ethnic entities were the Bengali-speaking people in the east and the Punjabi, Sindh, Urdu-speaking or Muhajir, Pashtu and Balochi-speaking communities in the west. But by the time Z.A. Bhutto ascended to the pedestal of power as president and later on as the prime minister of Pakistan, the Bengalis who had

## Democracy and the Politics of Ethnicity and Language in Pakistan During the Bhutto Regime: A Case Study of Balochistan

contributed to more than 50 per cent of our population, had seceded from us. After the annulment of the One Unit and the separation of Bangladesh only five core ethnic groups remained in the country: Punjabi, Sindhi, Mohajir/ Urdu speaking community, Pashtun and Baloch. More importantly, conflicts over language and ethnic differences persisted during the Z.A. Bhutto regime despite being an elected dispensation. Ethnocentrism (the emotional attitude that one's ethnic group, culture or nation is superior) (Victoria, 1991) gained firm ground in all provinces of Pakistan with greater intensity in Balochistan due to the wrong policies of the government at the centre.

### **2-Contributing Factors in Creating Ethno-linguistic Conflicts**

#### **2.1-The Element of Economic Disparity**

Karl Marx is not wrong to emphasise the importance of the economy in analysing the monopolization of political power by the economically dominant class. So, in a society devoid of economic balance, ethnic or linguistic disputes are more likely to insinuate. When the state fails to acknowledge the socioeconomic gaps that are prevalent in its society, marginalised people begin to believe that they are not owned by their state (Rahman, 1997). The case of the Baloch in Pakistan fits well in the given context. Against the will of its people and political leaders, Balochistan was amalgamated into Pakistan (Kuruk, 2020). The state is yet to seriously address the Baloch grievances; it is the richest province in terms of natural wealth but the poorest in terms of progress and development (Kaiser Bengali, 2018). This sense of deprivation has led the Baloch to ethno-nationalist movements many times in the history of the country, especially during the Z.A. Bhutto regime. Hence economic disparities lead marginalized groups to resort to the means of violence for redressing their grievances (Brown, 1996). Furthermore, discussing the phenomenon of economic injustice to the Baloch, Justice Khuda Bakhsh Marri writes that no one can deny the fact that the Baloch have never been given their proportional share as far as the resources of their rich motherland are concerned (Mir Khuda Bakhsh Bijarani Marri, 1985).

#### **2.2-The Elements of Culture and Language:**

Culture and language have a crucial role in the motivation or demotivation of the feeling of ethnocentrism. These factors are more obviously at play in the Third World heteronomous and illiberal societies (Zakaria, 1997). In the colonial era, the imperial powers exploited linguistic, ethnic and racial differences in their desired direction to perpetuate their rule. Even this policy of exploitation of ethnic differences continues in the post-colonial states including Pakistan. Ethnic, linguistic and religious conflicts are characteristic of the societies of these mentioned countries (Ashutosh, 2019).

However, the smaller ethnic and religious minorities perceive an existential threat from the dominant or majority ethnic group. Consequently, the neglected suppression of smaller communities' results in ethnic strife. In view of the rights of ethnic groups, the groups which consider themselves as the 'son of the soil', perhaps believe should have more rights comparatively.

### **2.3-The Element of Demography**

Demography is strategically important to the modern state. Not only economic and political factors but the demography factor may generate conflicts among different groups on the basis of language, ethnicity or religion. Inter-state and intra-state migrations, cause ethnic conflicts when a large number of members belonging to one ethnic group migrate to the area of another group. Conflicts occur between the emigrants and the indigenous or local population each trying to subvert or subdue the other (Thomas, 1993). In this way, the Muhajir-Sindhi conflicts in Pakistan are glaring examples. When the Muhajirs migrated from India to Pakistan after independence, this resulted in dangerous conflicts between the Muhajirs and Sindhis in Karachi and many other major cities of Sindh. During the Z.A. Bhutto regime, an intra-state ethnic conflict was observed in Balochistan. A Baloch-Panjabi conflict was constructed by the state elite in which the Panjabi settlers were forced to leave Balochistan. (Amin, 1988). The influx of settlers was a discernible concern of the Baloch. A large number of settlers from the other provinces moved to Balochistan capturing the fertile lands of Kacchi and Lasbela. This sent an alarming signal to the local Baloch population.

### **2.4-The Political Element**

In a federal system, political disturbance emerges when certain ethnic or linguistic groups feel the deprivation of a proportional share in representation. This provides the ethnic elites with an opportunity to unite members, use them for political purpose, and through the process they may reshape their very identity and form new ethnic or linguistic groups. Ethnic diversity sometimes results in ethnonational conflicts when concerns of aggrieved groups are not redressed by the state and states with assimilationist policies are more frequently plagued with ethnonational conflicts (Amin,1993). Because of assimilationist policies, language has become a serious threat to the political stability of Pakistan(Shah, 2019); a discernible issue in Pakistani internal conflicts.

### **2.5-The External Element**

Under international law, the state is a sovereign entity(Paul R. Viotti & Mark V. Kauppti, 2007). However, sometimes ethnic groups are provided ideological or financial support by external powers to create conflicts and instability (Harrop, 2013). History substantiates such examples of ethnic conflicts due to the interference of external forces in domestic affairs. The period between World War First and World War Second is riddled with such instances where one country intervened in the domestic matters of the other causing ethnic conflicts (Joseph S. Nye, 2005). Hitler intervened in Austria and Russia to claim to protect the people of German origin population causing conflict in these states. So, risky neighbourhood or surrounding is counted among the proximate category of causes of conflicts which creates political turbulence in the state (Raza, 2017). Considerably many regional, trans-regional and international conventions have been established to protect the rights of linguistic, ethnic and religious groups and save them from suppression and genocide(Upadhyay, 2013).

### **3-Discussion**

Keeping in view the vision of the founder of the state, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the country strived to opt for a federal form of state. The terminology of ‘federation’

## Democracy and the Politics of Ethnicity and Language in Pakistan During the Bhutto Regime: A Case Study of Balochistan

is derived from the word 'Foedus' which means a compromise or an agreement where the constituent units or the provinces surrender their sovereignty to the centre but retain identity and autonomy (Babbani, 2011). Federalism is adopted to give representation or due share of powers to different ethnic, linguistic and religious communities to live together with the philosophy of mutual coexistence. In other words, the federation is to be based on unity in diversity in the modern context of the term. But unfortunately, the state elite in Pakistan has always tried to suppress certain groups struggling for a due share in the power structure and natural resources of the provinces (Amin, 1988)

To Mosca, elites are minority groups who exert strong influence over majorities based on their organizational dexterity and superiority (Johan, 2008). Hence, Bhutto's government could not succeed in abolishing the unbridled dominance of the elite class on the power structure of Pakistan. The method used by the elite to undemocratically turn state decisions in their desired direction demonstrated consideration of class interests over public interests which is not a feature of democratic system. Such approaches of elites are a serious challenge for any democratic process to thrive and deliver (S.Akbar Zaidi, 2011).

Conflicts over language have intermittently been seen from the very early days of Pakistan as an independent state. To protect their interest and perpetuate dominance, the political elite attempted to interpret the population of the country as a single nation which perhaps misfits into the definition of 'nation' presented by experts of political science. Different groups dwelling in Pakistan were considered one nation with Urdu being the national language. Policy wise, it was quite mistaken to bring all the ethnolinguistic groups under the umbrella of one language, and it resulted in weakening the federation of Pakistan (Ziring, 1980). With the understanding of giving due importance to regional languages, many problems can be circumvented. Unfortunately, the issue of language in Pakistan has been in the hands of military establishment and politicians rather than linguists, sociologists and political scientists.

Globally, 'International Mother Language Day' is celebrated on 21st February every year, and the credit goes to Pakistan. In the early years of independence, the Bengalis of East Pakistan demanded that their language be also given the status of national language alongside Urdu. The state hesitated to give them this right, consequently, the students of Dhaka University resorted to agitation on 21st February 1952. Brute force was used against the protesters resulting in casualties. Thenceforth, to commemorate the sacrifice of those students for the promotion of their language, today the world celebrates 'International Mother Tongue/Language Day'. The Bengali demand was not acceptable to our leadership. Maulvi Abdul Haq, the Father of Urdu in Pakistan strongly denounced the claim of Bengalis in March 1952 (Mansoor). According to him, Bengali could not be given the status of national language under the following grounds:

1. Language should be indigenous, not exogenous.
2. It should not be limited to a specific sect or community.
3. It is more spoken, written and understood as compared to other languages of the different areas of the country.

4. It is attached to national civilization and traditions.
5. It is expressive of every kind of sentiment and thinking.
6. It can be the medium of instruction from primary to a higher level of education
7. It can cope with time and circumstances.

He presented the above conditions to deny Bengali the status of national language. He might not have known that there are not 7 conditions for a language to be considered a national language. There is only one condition: it should be the language of a nation (Shah Muhammad Marri, 2018). As a consequence of the obstinate stance taken by such leaders like Maulvi Abdul Haq, Pakistan lost its eastern wing in December 1971.

Ethno-nationalism gained firmer roots in the post-Cold War period as many states were created on the basis of ethnicity and language (Breseeg, 2004). This served as a motivation to various ethnic groups to struggle for the formation of their respective separate independent states. The factor of language and ethnicity contributed to a great deal in the Russian disintegration (Mateos, 2014). After the collapse of the former USSR (Soviet Socialist Republic) many groups on the basis of language and ethnicity established their independent states.

However, Bhutto ascended to power as president and later on as PM through the launching pad of the PPP and its populist movement. After the transitional phase he used certain tactics and policies which were prejudicial to public interest and fundamental freedoms causing strong sentiments of provincialism and separatist tendencies. He continued the legacy of his predecessors. The difference between him and general Ayub Khan was less advanced Bonapartism in Ayub and more advanced Bonapartism in Bhutto (Sayeed, 1980). The former derived his power from the strongest institution of Pakistan; the army while the latter from the strongest party of his time; the PPP. The point to be addressed here is to carefully investigate the status of democracy, especially in the context of the rights of different ethnic groups featuring the demographics of the country during Bhutto's regime.

Though Kaplan and Laswell, two prominent scholars of political development try to determine the association between power, conflict and authority. To them the relationship between the aforesaid elements has caused a permanent tension in current societies. (Gabriel A. Almond, G. Bringham, Russell j. Dalton, 2018). They also believe that political elites have a substantial role a shaping and reshaping the political system. Political elite function in two styles; either they formulate strong rules to close the venues for political contest or they come into competition with other groups (Mosca, 1939). The Bhutto dispensation is viewed in the first category, as it was intolerant to any competition or opposition.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government claimed to be a democratic socialist system but practically its each element was antithetical to the other. He combined Islam, democracy and socialism together which was a very uncomfortable combination, in which each principle had its own different direction. In democracy every one has equal right and opportunity to struggle for their benefit (Neal Riemer, 1983), but this privilege remained unavailable to the people during the Bhutto regime.

#### **4-The Case of Balochistan**

The word Balochistan means the abode of the Baloch. (Breseeg, 2004) The Baloch being an ancient race residing in the mountainous regions of Southwest Asia are an important minority group in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran (Gichki, 2015). They have been subject to invasion by empire-builders (Mongols, Turks, Arabs, and English). The Baloch have a distinctive culture, language, and shared common ancestry emerged in the 12th Century (Breseeg, 2004). The self-consciousness of the Baloch about his language, history, culture and geography resulted in the feeling of Baloch nationalism.

The land mass of the Province of Balochistan contributes to 43 per cent of the total territory of the federation of Pakistan (Kaiser Bengali, 2018). It shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan on the western and northern fronts. Some of its upper districts like Zohab, Loralai, Ziarat, Killa Saifullah, Pashin, Sherani, and Zhob are predominately populated by the Pashtu speaking community whereas the regions of Sarawan and Jahlawan are inhabited by Bravi speaking Baloch (Balochi is also spoken in these areas) and Mekran is predominantly Baloch in population which is composed of districts of Kech, Panjgur and Gwadar. The province has experienced ethnolinguistic conflicts many times but these differences or fault-lines gained vibrant momentum during the regime of Z.A. Bhutto with long-lasting repercussions. Mr Bhutto was not much different from his predecessor in suppressing sentiments of ethnolinguistic rights and provincial autonomy.

Ethnolinguistic conflicts in the capital of Balochistan, Quetta have occurred many times in history and have been resolved with the help of their leadership. Bhutto was astute enough and a believer in political expedience. For the sake of serving his regime's interest in general and his interest in particular he created a conflict based on ethnicity and language in Balochistan. The Jamote and Mengal tribes in the Lasbila district of Balochistan were pushed to the brink of confrontation and conflict. The federal government supported the jams and the provincial government favoured the Mengals as the then Chief Minister of the province was Sardar Attaullah Mengal, the tribal chief of the Mengal tribe. The provincial government and the National Awami Party (NAP) protested against the move of the central government regarding the Jam-mengal conflict. With the intervention of the federal government the provincial assembly of Balochistan was dismissed (Amin, 1988). Consequently, the provincial government in the former NWFP resigned as a protest against the oppressive policies of the central government. The NAP leaders of Balochistan Mir Ghos Bakhsh Bezingo, Sardar Attaullah Mengal and Khair Bakhsh Marri were arrested and put behind bars.

The NAP was criticized and tagged not only with anti-Pakistan but also an anti-Islam group (A.B.S Jafri, 1996). Soon an armed conflict started between the state and the Baloch and resulted in destructive consequences not only for the Baloch but for the state as well. However, the first Baloch uprising emerged when the state of Kalat was merged with Pakistan in 1948 (Khan & Muhammad, 2018). The second insurgency started from 1958- 1959 during which the tribesmen or the fighters were treated with military might. The third insurgency led by Sher Muhammad Murri started in 1962 and continued till 1969. The fourth wave of the Baloch uprising commenced in 1973 as a consequence of the dismissal of the NAP

government in Balochistan. But the Baloch nationalism could not be a vibrant force due to the strong prevalence of tribalism in Baloch society. In a tribal society, the individual owes allegiance to the tribal chief and attaches his identity to the tribe rather than the nation. But to underestimate the role of tribal dimension in this connection would be a mistaken policy. The tribal character remains an important factor for the survival and success of Baloch national identity (Shah Muhammad Marri, 2018).

Perhaps, the Bhutto government used high-handedness to suppress any group aimed to secure and protect fundamental freedoms which resultantly weakened the very roots of democracy in its nascent stage. Thence, a highly centralized government at the centre with a dictatorial leader at the top violated the constitutional provisions which would guarantee autonomy to the units in a federation (Sayeed, 1967).

In addition, regional sense of deprivation and disparity widened to a greater extent by the way the central government treated the two provinces of the North West Frontier Province and Balochistan. Hence the attitude of the government was authoritarian even under an elected socialist dispensation. The oppressive policies of the centre to resolve political issues through the use of force aggravated the situation which left a very bad impression of the central government to the smaller provinces of the federation of Pakistan.

### **5-Conclusion**

In ultimate analysis, since the very emergence of the modern state system, conflicts on the basis of language and ethnicity have characterized the state in one or the other way. The case of Pakistan is no exception in this regard. The country has so far experienced many ethnic conflicts one of which led the eastern part of Pakistan to the point of no return and finally the separation of Bangladesh from the western wing of the state in 1971. The shifting sands of discontentment, alienation and separatism continued its momentum even after the fall of Dhaka. Another conflict like that of Bangladesh based on the sense of deprivation commenced in Balochistan soon after Z.A.Bhutto took the reign of the state and the issue was dealt with force than with political acumen.

It is significant to grasp the dynamics; nature, causes and impact of the above discussed conflict in Balochistan on rational grounds. Ethno- linguistic conflicts around the globe mostly have a political tinge or orientation. In other words they have a political goal to achieve. This goal in view can be accomplished by autonomy, self-government, due share of resources, adequate representation in mainstream politics or in other important state institutions like army and bureaucracy in Pakistan. Demand for respect, dignity of ethnic identity is also a crucial factor in this regard. The conflict in Balochistan in 1973 has a good resemblance with this case. Such conflicts are not caused by differences of culture or language but by social and political systems based on inequality. (Daron & James, 2012) In a society where rights of smaller groups are violated conflicts are liable to emerge. The hypothesis of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto about the sardari system in Balochistan has been discarded by the authors of 'Why Nations Fail'. According to this book, the assumption that some communities lag behind in progress and development due to their culture is a wrong perception (Robinson 2021). To Bhutto the sardars and sardari nizam including the Baloch culture were



## Democracy and the Politics of Ethnicity and Language in Pakistan During the Bhutto Regime: A Case Study of Balochistan

responsible for poverty, hunger and underdevelopment of Balochistan. The sardari system in fact is a gift of the British. The British promoted this system to perpetuate its imperial power. Neither the Baloch, nor its culture has ever been against development or progress. But to subvert and subdue the Baloch in the name of development has not been an acceptable option.

More importantly conflicts are likely to arise in states where groups are under-represented. They have an inadequate representation in mainstream politics, judicial and bureaucratic mechanisms. Societies that considerably heed to pluralism, equality and inclusion are less likely to fall prey to such conflicts. Not only assimilationist but exclusionary policies are also harmful for the state. The stance of the federal government in general and that of Bhutto in particular to exclude the Baloch leadership from mainstream politics contributed the most in leading the latter to conflict and armed struggle with dangerous consequences. The Baloch leaders of NAP like Ghos Bakhsh Bizenjo, Khair Bakhsh Murri and Attaullah Mengal were very staunch advocates of parliamentary politics. They tried to achieve their political rights using the platform of NAP and Balochistan government which was unacceptable to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The reason was two-folded: Bhutto's fear to see the NAP as a party of national level like that of the PPP and the Pressure from the Shah of Iran whom Bhutto could not afford to avoid.

Researchers firmly believe that method of sharing of natural resources is another key cause of ethnic conflicts. This point has been a crucial concern of the Baloch from the very beginning which unfortunately has not been addressed with a good will. In this connection the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan stipulates that: "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" (Article 158) of the 1973 Constitution.

Despite constitutional emphasis of precedence of gas supply to the province where a well-head of gas is located, Balochistan was not given its due share and some like the same situation continues to persist even until today. The Sui Gas in Balochistan was discovered in early 1950s but was pipe lined to Punjab before the generating province started consuming it. In this condition grievances were inevitable to result in conflict. However, had the government been inclined to accept the Baloch and to find a political solution of the problem, the Baloch separatist movement had not resurged. The Baloch uprising in all its five phases has been motivated by political goals but they have failed to achieve autonomy. Political problems must be resolved politically. Force is not the solution of political problems. This issue will continue to persist until it is meted out with a politically matured treatment.

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Democracy and the Politics of Ethnicity and Language in Pakistan During the  
Bhutto Regime: A Case Study of Balochistan

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