

Historical Analysis of Baloch Ethnic Identity Formation in Baluchistan

Muhammad Hassan*, Amir Jan†

Abstract

This study explores the formation of Baloch ethnic identity which has been influenced by historical, cultural, political, and socioeconomic dynamics. The study aims to investigate the historical factors such as historical roots, cultural and linguistic trends, tribalism, political contours, and challenges confronted by Baloch groups. The study explores the reasons for migrations and different civilizations in context of Baluchistan. The study found that the governmental approaches in Baluchistan have greatly influenced the process of Baloch identity formation. The study further tried to address the questions of how Baloch identity formation has been a nationalistic feeling. The paper is qualitative in nature, with many historical facts evaluated to investigate historical events and situations that influenced the creation of Baloch ethnic identity in Baluchistan.

Keywords: Baloch, ethnic identity, formation, tribe, culture

Introduction

Baluchistan, the largest province of Pakistan due to its vast territory, is rich in mineral resources and natural beauty. Baluchistan is so vast geopolitically it borders Iran on the West, Afghanistan on the North and the Indian Ocean on the South. Therefore, the region is rich with unique customary laws that have a great influence on Baloch ethnic identity formation. (Khan, 2020). This study has been taken into account to explore the social, cultural and historical political dynamics to highlight on the issues of Baloch ethnic identification. The diversified Baluchistan is located at the juncture of South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East where most of oil rich countries are situated. The region is also rich in its traditional and historical civilizations and geographical migrations (Majeed, 2015).

* PhD, Senior Research Fellow, Associate Editor, Pakistan Journal of History and Culture (PJHC) National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research (NIHCR), Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: mhassan@qau.edu.pk

† PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Studies, Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences, Uthal, Lasbela, Baluchistan, Pakistan, Email: amirluawms@gmail.com

The study of Baloch ethnic identity formation is unique in nature and revolves around different historical stories of colonial rulers and emperors (Titus and Swidler, 2000). Baloch ethnic identity formation process has been influenced by external factors such as colonial rulers and outsider immigrants. Their language, culture and religions have greatly impacted the Baloch ethnic identity in past. Moreover, Baluchistan has been used as a trade route in past which also influenced the Baloch identity formation process (Majeed 2015). There is no doubt that Baluchistan is a fascinating land, touching oil-rich and natural resource countries of the world (Javaid and Jahangir, 2020). The history of Baloch culture has been influenced by its geographical significance. Therefore, this study is extremely important and significant. The study explores the historical cultural bounds and other aspects of Baloch ethnic identity formation to find out the causes and impacts of the Baloch ethnic identification process. The study further shows that the Balochi language has been the key factor in developing Baloch ethnic identity formation that has been a means of communication from one nation to another.

Historical Perspective of the Study

Baloch identity formation has been influenced by its history which started in the pre-Islamic period. In the past different periods of Persian, Turkic, and Arab cultures have passed throughout Baluchistan. The land of Baluchistan had witnessed resistance, occupation and colonial rule in the early phase of history. Baloch culture was merged with different cultures who came here for trade and occupation purposes (Jahani, 2014). History is replete with examples where Baloch cultures, lifestyles and traditions played a key role in preserving and developing Baloch ethnic identity formation (Khan et al., (2020).

The British rule in Baluchistan had also impacted and developed the Baloch ethnic identity formation. At the time of colonial rule in Baluchistan, irregular borders were established, and various administrative setups were formed which all aimed to divide Baloch and thus, certain tactics divided Baloch ethnic identity. Baloch were further divided by different languages, cultural affliction and social fiction (Mushtaq & Mirza, 2021). But all the plans for the division of Baloch failed as Baloch were strongly linked via tribal linkages, linguistic foundation and resistance movements. One has to accept the fact that Baluchistan has been used as a trade route for regional powers as a result, that impacted the Baloch ethnic identity process (Noraiee, 2020). Baluchistan had been connected with the Middle East in Past where it had the impact of Mesopotamian civilization effects.

Baloch people had a unique history of ethnic formation as they remained strong after so many invasions by the British colonial powers. They remained on their land for cultural preservation. The emergence of distinct tribal entities within the Baloch society comes to the forefront. This analysis will scrutinize the role of tribal structures, their internal dynamics, and the impact of external pressures in influencing the formation of ethnic identities. In the contemporary context, Baluchistan stands at a crossroads, grappling with the complexities of modern geopolitics, economic interests, and the persistent insurgency for a long time. Therefore, understanding the historical roots of Baloch identity is imperatively important in deciphering the challenges and aspirations of the present, as well as envisioning the trajectory of the future of the formation of Baloch ethnic identity in Baluchistan.

Moreover, this historical analysis aims to unravel the layers of time that envelope the ethnic identity formation in Baluchistan, shedding light on the interaction of historical forces that have shaped a people and a region. As it embarks on this journey through the annals of time to research the existing literature in the context of Baloch ethnic identity, it is important to seek to grasp not only the events that have unfolded but also the enduring spirit and resilience of a community whose identity is as diverse as the land they call home. The historical overlook of the study would create an impact in unravelling the historical layers of ethnic identity in Baluchistan.

Problem Statement

Baloch ethnic identity formation process has been the result of historical communication and cultural preservation. No doubt, it had geographical pressures, but it still remained no change. It has been studied that very little knowledge has been found in existing literature about the Baloch ethnic identity formation. The study has been taken into account to fill the existing literature gap. The study also focuses on essential social, cultural, political and geographical aspects that preserve the Baloch ethnic identity formation process.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess different historical events which helped the preservation of Baloch ethnic Identity formation.

This aims to explore and assess all those historical incidents and events in Baloch history which helped to preserve and maintain the Baloch identity formation

2. To explore the approaches of the country and how its policies helped the preservation of Baloch ethnic formation after colonial rule in Baluchistan.

The objective of the study highlights how the country supported and helped via its Baluchistan related policies in the preservation and formation of the policies of Baloch ethnic identity formation.

3. To explore how local and international politics helped the preservation of Baloch ethnic identity formation.

The objective of this study explores how the international political and local political norms supported the preservation of Baloch ethnic identity formation.

Theoretical Framework

Since the Baloch ethnic identity enhanced sociocultural integrity unity among Baloch ethnic groups, a theoretical foundation has been essential for the study to understand the Baloch ethnic identity formation process. The theoretical framework gives an insight into the study via which different social, cultural, political and geographical events and incidents are looked upon with the following relevant theoretical framework.

Ethnicity and Identity Construction

Ethnicity and Identity Construction theory, which has been introduced by Anthony D. Smith and Stuart Hall, has been used in this study. This theory emphasizes that ethnicity is a social formation which is established by historical incidents events and experiences. It further explains that language, culture, history and tradition influence the formation of ethnic identity formation. No doubt that the historical events during the colonial era, and the social contributions formed the Baloch ethnic identity.

Social Identity Theory

This theory explains that the dynamics of groups and social categorization form the individual identity. This theory further explains how identified relationships and differences with other ethnic groups influence the development of Baloch identity within the framework of the Baloch people. The theory explores historical incidents cultural norms social and political circumstances that formed Baloch ethnic identity formation within the framework of a constructivist perspective. This

theory was used to identify the process of awareness of Baloch ethnic groups with their ethnic identity and how their culture is influenced by external factors. By mixing the idea of these two theories, the internal Baloch ethnic factors have been taken into account for further study.

Furthermore, the scholars can get a comprehensive understanding of the past procedures, socio-political trends, and underlying features that push the development of ethnic identities in Baluchistan. The composite connections between ethnicity, state power, resource politics, and outside involvements in shaping the identity.

Research Design

Research design has been drawn up to identify the formation of Baluchistan ethnic identity in Baluchistan. The study is qualitative where different situations have been examined such as personal experiences, events and facts to find out the impacts of the Baloch ethnic identity formation process. The target population was taken into account for inquiring about different facts and events.

The selection of participants was taken from different tribal setup, geographical locations and social and economic backgrounds who have a proper understanding of the Baloch ethnic identity formation. In-depth interviews were held for the very study to get proper ideas from the informed people about the Baloch ethnic identity formation process.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data of the study, the thematic analysis method was used to bring authentic and validated knowledge to the study. The themes of primary and secondary data were compressed to bring the originality of the study to the surface. Different historical facts and incidents were thematized to bring validated information about the preservation of the Baloch ethnic formation process.

Results and Discussion

There is no doubt that Baluchistan has a rich and vast Balochi dialect and sociocultural background. Therefore, its ethnic identity has been based on its dialects and sociocultural background. The Balochi language which is spoken throughout Baluchistan, basically originated from the Iranian language. However, its regional dynamics changed its dialects (Spooner, 2012). The Balochi language and culture have strongly created a sense of unity and integrity among the Baloch people. The sense of oneness is further boosted by the practice of culture by Baloch people (Khan et al., 2020).

The historical information about this review established the long-lasting impacts of Baluchistani split and British imperialism on ethnic identity (Zeb, 2015). The collected knowledge that formulates the Baloch identity is influenced in part by the historical legacies (Ahmed, 2020). Struggle stories, which emphasize conflict and the maintenance of cultural variety, are essential elements of identity.

The Role of Tribalism in Baloch Ethnic Identity Formation

Traditionally, tribalism has been crucial to the change of Baloch identity (Ahmed, 2020). Over many times in past, tribal setup had developed each with its own socio-cultural structure and customs. With the Baloch identity formation, the tribal setup has a tremendous role they had been involved in the settlement of different problems and issues, giving a feeling of integrity and oneness among the Baloch community. The tribes which are decades old played an essential role in the formation of Baloch identity, bringing sociocultural and traditional norms within the borders.

On the other end, Baloch originate from different tribes who are currently inhabited in different parts of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Fortunately, all Baloch consider themselves one and practice similar sociocultural norms throughout Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. There is no doubt, that the Baloch identity is based on tribalism but it is divided into different families.

All Baloch have social communication and cultural affiliation and they have strong classified relations. It has to be noted that each tribe has a Sardar or Khan who had enormous powers within its tribe and they maintain their own system of justice and law and order. (Bashir et al., 2023). They called upon jirgas and Baloch Mead to resolve problems or implement a decision which cannot be challenged by the tribe men. Such jirgas are recognized by the Baloch community.

These all have paved the way to preserve Baloch society and Baloch ethnic identity formation. Apart from tribal setup, there have been certain customs which have been strongly influenced by Baloch social fabric. People from those tribes preserved their identity by practicing different cultural events. They wore jewellery and engaged themselves with different emblematic practices. No doubt, tribalism had some cruel history, but they also created a sense of integrity and unity within the Baloch community. Tribalism also brought problems, tension and disputes within Baloch society (Mushtaq & Mirza, 2021). Baloch have also worked to bring modification and enlightenment in their culture to meet the

modern trends and preserve their cultural values. Subsequently, it is rational to reveal that tribalism has shaped social formation, executive systems, and cultural motions throughout the past, operating as a primary module in the interpretation of Baloch identity. Tribalism has unique importance through which one can easily understand the effects and causes of Baloch ethnic identity formation in the current era. No doubt, Baloch have a rich history of culture and tradition, but still faces so many difficulties in preserving its cultural values due to its tribal and geographical setup.

The Role of Social Fabric in Baloch Ethnic Identity Formation

The social fabric plays a key role in ethnic-based national identity formation. As compared with Baloch ethnic identity formation, the social fabric has been unique and essential. Scholars like Gazdar et al. (2007), found that social fabric is a major factor in establishing the identity of the Baloch ethnic group. The social fabric includes families and tribal networks. Baloch has been integrated and united under the banner of the social fabric which has given the sense of unity and oneness. As a result, Baloch history is replete with examples where people have been united and integrated through the social fabric and it has formed Baloch ethnic identity formation. The reliability and sense of association that cultural organizations increased the bonds of Baloch identity. It has been discussed how the social fabric examined Baloch identity formation. It is worth noting that invasion, colonial approach and migrations of different ethnic groups in Baluchistan have helped and shaped Baloch ethnic identity formation (Siddiqi, 2012).

It is unique in the sense that Baloch people adopted the modern change and also preserved their social and cultural values. The language, lifestyle and sociocultural norms greatly shaped Baloch ethnic identity formation (Khan et al., 2019). Baloch ethnic identity formation has also been shaped by multidimensional and other regional entities. Classification within Baloch tribe has also helped Baloch to shape its ethnic formation. Likewise, new changes in the world no doubt affected Baloch dynamic forces (Shafqat & Shahid, 2017). It should be mentioned that contradictory narratives and past explanations often collide with political goals, making the growth of Baloch identity not without argument. The Baloch communities face significant problems in retaining and raising their identity, including demotion, prejudice, and abuses of their human rights. Thus, it is rational to obtain the conclusion that the social formation of Baloch ethnic identity growth is complex.

Economic Factor in the Baloch Ethnic Identity Formation

Many aspects impact the formation of Baloch ethnic identity, but one significant but regularly ignored reason is economic consequences. This crucial note stresses the consequences of economic underlying influences on the Baloch people and discovers the traces of how economic matters shape Baloch identity. The economy of Baluchistan is illustrated by the existence of modern businesses like mining, energy removal, and trade with conventional ones like agriculture, fishing, and pastoralism (Asif et al., 2017). The local ecosystem, topography, and earlier tendencies of resource division are complexly linked to economic activity. Baloch incomes are modelled by economic prospects and constraints, which also have an effect on immigration, resolution, and career preferences. For instance, social instability and economic elimination within Baloch communities may cause the downfall of conventional businesses brought on by ecological decline or opposition from present businesses. Accordingly, a large fraction of Baloch people is nomadic and determined by agriculture and seasonal crops (Shaheen, 2011).

The economic modifications that degenerate social imbalance in Baloch society and fuel class-based clashes and splits are another important position in this study. The growth of money and resources in the hands of a minor number of wealthy families or outside groups repeatedly pushes out neglected groups, increasing discontent and hardening social exclusionary outlines. As so, the benefited class might simply take benefits of them.

Thus, it is rational to draw the assumption that the economic module, which shapes incomes, wealth circulation, and designs of manipulation within the community, plays an important but often ignored role in the formation of Baloch ethnic identity. In order to advance social consistency and balanced development in Baluchistan, it is critical to encounter economic unfairness, as shown by a critical investigation of these economic developments.

Internal Diversity and Linguistic Variations on Baloch Ethnic Identity Formation:

Spans of ancient nature, cultural, and geographic impacts have resulted in a rich interior diversity and linguistic modifications that describe the Baloch ethnic identity. This essential study examines the ways in which these essentials affect the elaborate formation of Baloch identity and the impacts of linguistic diversity on the social fabric of Baluchistan.

Many ethnic groups, tribes, and smaller groups can be found in Baluchistan; each has its own exclusive cultural norms, social organizations, and historical descriptions (Khan, 2023). This internal

variety highlights the compound construction of Baloch society and encounters generalized portrayals of Baloch identity. With several languages and dialects spoken by Baloch people, linguistic variety is a key module of Baloch identity. The three main languages spoken in Baluchistan are Brahui, Pashto, and Balochi, each of which has exclusive linguistic traditions and historical inspirations. The Baloch cultural inheritance is enhanced by these language variances, but they also create problems for intergroup influences and communication (Khubchandani, 2003).

Periods of interactions with neighboring counties and cultures have influenced Baluchistan's linguistic and cultural variety, creating a fascinating cultural norm. Language adoptions from Persian, Arabic, and Indian languages, together with cultural practices shared with neighboring communities, demonstrate the flexibility and adaptability of Baloch identity.

Although linguistic and internal variety add to the liveliness of Baloch identity, they also create problems for political and social integrity. Tribal contentions, linguistic conflicts, and conflicting narratives can deepen divisions within Baloch society and hinder attempts at socioeconomic growth and group action.

Accordingly, it can be said that the linguistic and internal variety of the Baloch ethnic identity are vital essentials that symbolize the sophisticated interaction of social, cultural, and historical factors in Baluchistan. Social consistency and sustainable development among the Baloch people depend on embracing this variety and cultivating a feeling of shared identity and solidarity.

Recommendations for Future Research

Within Baluchistan, the study takes regional changes into account. Successive analyses may go deeper into these modifications to fully grasp the diversity of Baloch identities in various geographical contexts. The primary focus of the work is on more general identity trends. Further understanding of gender trends in the Baloch community may come from a closer look at how identity is experienced and characterized. Furthermore, drawing the development of Baloch identity over time through research may provide a better knowledge of the ongoing processes and changes within the community. The study adds to academic research and the creation of well-informed policies that recognize and respect the complications of Baluchistan's ethnic identity scene by offering an understanding of the historical, social, and political elements shaping Baloch identity.

Conclusion

The investigation of the formation of ethnic identities in Baluchistan has shown a complicated issue that is intertwined with social structures, political dynamics, historical legacies, language variances, and geopolitical influences. This critical analysis offers insightful information on the complicated mechanisms that the Baloch people use to negotiate their sense of identity in a territory characterized by complex historical traditions and modern difficulties. Additionally, the study highlights the long-lasting effects of historical legacies, including the British colonial era's influence on the Baloch ethnic group. In conclusion, this research on the development of ethnic identities in Baluchistan provides a prism through which academics and decision-makers can understand how social, political, and historical elements interact to shape the Baloch identity. A critical analysis of this process added to our understanding of the opportunities and difficulties encountered by the Baloch people and helped to clarify how ethnic identities are formed in a variety of intricate geopolitical circumstances.

Reference

- Ahmed, M. (2020). The dynamics of (ethno) nationalism and federalism in postcolonial Baluchistan, Pakistan. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 55(7), 979-1006.
- Asif, M., Baloch, D., Zafar, H., & Bashir, S. (2017). Poverty alleviation through agricultural development: A case study of date palm and vegetable farmers in Panjgoor District of Baluchistan. *Al-Burz*.
- Bashir, S., Khan, J., Danish, M., & Bashir, W. (2023). Governance and development challenges in Baluchistan: A comparative study with other provinces and way forward. *International Journal of Contemporary Issues in Social Sciences, ISSN (E) 2959-2461 (P) 2959-3808*, 2(4), 620-649.
- Gazdar, H., Budhani, S. J., Mallah, H. B., & Khan, N. M. I. (2007). Baluchistan Economic Report: Background Paper on Social Structures and Migration. *TA4757-Pak: Baluchistan Economic Report, Collective for Social Science Research 173-I Block*, 2.
- Hassan, M., & Jan, A. (2022). Economic Basis of Baloch Grievances in Baluchistan. *Journal of Historical Studies*, 124-38.
- Jahani, C. (2014). The Baloch as an Ethnic Group in the Persian Gulf Region., 267-297.
- Javaid, P. D. U., & Jahangir, J. (2020). Baluchistan: a key factor in global politics. *South Asian Studies*, 30(2).

- Khan, F., Malghani, M., & Ayaz, S. (2020). Construction of Baloch Ethnic Identity through Ethnolinguistic Awareness and Cultural Dynamics. *Global Regional*
- Khan, F. R., Zaidi, N., & Rauf, S. (2019). The Relationship Between Language and Ethnicity among Baloch people.
- Khan, S. (2023). *Baluchistan and the Mélange of Violence: Regional Context and External Factors*. Taylor & Francis.
- Khan, Z. A. (2020). Baluchistan factor in Pak-Iran relations: Opportunities and constraints. *South Asian Studies*, 27(1).
- Khubchandani, L. M. (2003). Chapter Fourteen. *When Languages Collide: Perspectives on Language Conflict, Language Competition, and Language Coexistence*, 296.
- Majeed, G. (2015). Land of Baluchistan: A Historical Perspective. *Journal of Political Studies*, 22, 153.
- Mushtaq, M., & Mirza, Z. (2021). Understanding the Nexus Between Horizontal Inequalities, Ethno-Political Conflict and Political Participation: A Case Study of Baluchistan. *Ethnopolitics*, 21, 221 - 237.
- Noraiee, H. (2020). The Baloch nationalism in Pakistan: Articulation of the ethnic separatism after the end of the Cold War. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 11, 72 - 85.
- Shafqat, D. S., & Shahid, S. (2017). Migration, Urbanization and Security: Challenges of Governance and Development in Baluchistan.
- Shaheen, A. (2011). Living on the margins: a socio-historical profile of the nomads in Pakistan. *Pakistan Perspectives*, 16(1), 41.
- Siddiqi, F. H. (2012). *The politics of ethnicity in Pakistan: The Baloch, Sindhi and Mohajir ethnic movements*. Routledge.
- Spooner, B. (2012). 10. Balochi: Towards a Biography of the Language. , 319-336.
- Titus, P., & Swidler, N. (2000). Knights, Not Pawns: Ethno-Nationalism and Regional Dynamics in Post-Colonial Baluchistan. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 32, 47 - 69.
- Zeb, R. (2015). *Pakistan's Other Problem: Narratives, Enduring Injustice and Ethnopolitical Conflict in Baluchistan* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Western Australia).