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Tribalism in the Pashtun Society of Balochistan:
A Threat to Social Cohesion and Peace

Dr. Mohammad Rahim[1]
Dr. Shakeel Ahmed[2]

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Tribalism in the Pashtun Society of Balochistan: A Threat to Social Cohesion and Peace

Dr. Mohammad Rahim	Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Balochistan, Quetta, rahimnasar83@gmail.com
Dr. Shakeel Ahmed	Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Balochistan, Quetta

Abstract

The history of tribalism in Pashtun society is very old. This feature was dealt with as a source of social cohesion and peace promotion traditionally; however, with time, its mood altered and proved dysfunctional. Tribalism was once considered a source of loyalty toward tribes, but now it is going to create disharmony and hatred among different tribes, which ultimately draws a line between "ours" and "theirs." Contextually, this paper assesses tribalism as a threat to social integration and constant peace. During the study, the data was collected from well-informed participants to get a deeper understanding of the problem. The study underscored that the tribal structure has sabotaged the inclusiveness and pluralism of society. It has created distances among the societal units. The people dislike and reject one another in the context of tribal backgrounds. The tribalism has spoiled political as well as educational system; and proving a serious threat to the smooth running of social progress.

Key words: Tribalism, Pashtuns, social cohesion, peace

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Tribe, in a general way, is the segment of society based upon the genealogical notion of societal configuration. The peoples usually have distinctive nomenclature for being descendants of the common ancestors (Glatzer, 2002; Tariq, Malik & Afridi, 2018). A tribe is like a form of society where the people recognize each other as being related to one another by birth or by marriage, coming closer to work together and control a territory and the resources, which they exploit for common interest. To secure their identity, the people collectively defend their territory and resources through armed forces (Inglehart & Ronald,1990; Rowland, 2009). A tribe is more or less similar to an ethnic group, having similarities in different respects. The peoples in tribes have close intimate relation which is often characterized by their genealogical scale (Smith, 2009). The word tribe is a classical concept signifies a social division found in the traditional societies consisting of families and communities integrated through the bonds of religion, economy and blood. The tribes have a common culture and a specific lingual dialect and having a recognized and declared leader (Tariq, Malik & Afridi, 2018), whereas, tribalism refers to the sense of belonging and trust among the folk to their tribe. It has individual and societal benefits, as well as costs. The people rely on and stay more loyal to their tribes to survive, which promotes the emotions of tribalism (Smith, 2009). The purpose of tribalism is to mobilize "their

people" through the identity issues and present them as the true representative of their tribes (Hartikainen & Szebeni, 2024).

Nevertheless, tribalism is a complex psychological phenomenon (Machery, 2016). In Jordan, the tribal system was established very long before the advent of Islam, even though it is said that it is older than Christianity. The history of tribalism in this society is traced back thousands of years ago. The system was established to organize the social life. This social system still exists and plays a significant role in the socio-political arena of the state (Rowland, 2009). However, contrary to this, it is not always a source of oneness and emotions, but sometimes it creates hatred and disrespect for the members of out-groups while violating the norms of their in-group (Machery, 2016). It is further contended that tribalism keeps negative consequences when some people or groups are sidelined and confiscate their rights, status, and independence. The competition most often fuels tribalism and subsequently leads to serious threats. This situation promotes fear, apprehension, and biases, which later on makes the people more vulnerable and tilt towards fake news, propaganda, and conflict (Smith, 2009).

Additionally, Kreko and Juhasz (2019) argued that tribalism is a structure that draws an antagonized line between the social sections. It is not like populism, which assembles people. Tribalism, in contrast, possesses a hegemonic character. Though tribalism has not been researched extensively, it has been assessed as posing a threat to pluralism and liberal democracy. Similarly, Hartikainen and Szebeni (2024) concludes that none of the author has worked on tribalism to provide a theoretical definition to tribalism and never applied it systematically as an analytical tool.

Tribalism is being used for religious purposes as well. Kaplan and Costa (2014), in their research work, argue that tribalism is used for religious gains. They have gone on to say that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) evolved a strategy to unite the people while consolidating a base of operations in Madinah to build a tribal coalition and finally prepare for ultimate victory in Mecca. Moreover, Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997) indicate that the two broad terms "Social exclusion" and "social inclusion" have been used widely in recent years by politicians, social scientists, and the general public alike. The term social inclusion came forth in French social policy in the 1970s (Benn & Hall, 2000) when state-sponsored republican traditions of solidarity were in practice (Luhman, 1990). On the contrary, the social exclusion concept was offered by the European Foundation, describing the opposite direction of the inclusion to 'full participation'. The fundamental purpose of social exclusion is to exclude individuals or groups from the full participation wholly or partially from the society where they live. (Mohapatra, 2011).

Tribalism is highly practiced in the south African countries. In Libya, like many other Arab countries, the identification of someone is attached to the family, tribe, religion, or area. In that society, the good or bad of an individual brings a good reputation or collective shame to the whole family and the tribe. In the same way, these characters influence the lives of individuals on a social, political, and economic basis (Lamma, 2017). It is further narrated that belonging to the primary community, whether that is ethnicity, caste, tribe, or region, is the central part of

the majority of Libyans' lives, and this was witnessed and demonstrated in the war of 2011. The tribe has a high value in resolving conflicts between individuals and groups by acting as a local referee and the negotiator.

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, in Jordan, the tribal system is practiced very commonly. The former Jordanian ambassador and deputy prime minister Marwan Muasher, in 1985, grieved upon the uncontrolled tribal monopoly and said, "I wish to see people proud because they are part of a professional organization, not because they are members of a big tribe. He further desired that I wish the people may feel proud of their personal achievements, not of their cousins and family, and above all, I wish the people proud no other surnames rather than the Jordanians only" (Emanuel, 1977; Frank, 1994; Rowland, 2009).

Pashtun, as an ethnic group, resides on both sides of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Ahmed, 2013; Siddique, 2014). In Pakistan, they live in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, as well as tribal areas alongside the Pak-afghan border (Yousaf, 2019). Pashtuns have the largest tribal system across the globe (Spain, 1963), which has definitely had a great impact on their abilities (Liebl, 2007). They are considered "the most tribe-centric folk in the world" living across the border in Afghanistan and Pakistan, having a particular lifestyle (Smith, 2009). This situation creates and provides easy access to the terrorist groups that frequently infiltrate and operate within the tribal settings like they are doing in Iraqi tribes or also in the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan when doing activities in Pakistan (Tariq, Malik & Afridi, 2018; Zaman, 2009).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study carries the following objectives
1.   To understand the causes promoting tribalism in the Pashtun of Balochistan
2.   To assess the social and political impacts of tribalism on the Pashtun society
3.   To know how tribalism is a threat to the social fabric of Pashtun society

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This research study is based upon the qualitative approach of social research, where data was collected on tribalism and its threat to social cohesion and peace within the Pashtun society of Balochistan. Tribalism is an established structure of the Pashtun ethnicity. Thus, in this way, an ethnographic study was carried out. The data was collected from the well-informed members of the Pashtun society to understand and explore the problem deeply. The study participants belonged to different districts of the Pashtun belt in Balochistan, i.e., Pashin, Loralai, Zhob, and Killa Saifullah. Moreover, the participants of the study consisted of intellectuals, professors, educationists, and tribal experts.

Furthermore, a purposive sampling technique was adopted to fetch the data. The sample size for the study was 15 key informants. Likewise, an interview guide was adopted as a tool for data collection to get data from the study participants. It consisted of open-ended questions to let them answer critically. The data was later analyzed on the basis of major and sub-themes to draw a conclusion.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

UNDERSTANDING OF THE PARTICIPANTS ABOUT TRIBALISM

Tribalism is prevailing in the research area. It is taken for granted, and every member of society is affected by it. Though it is sometimes argued as good for the smooth running of society, it is often denounced for creating antagonism and distance among the people.

The participants in this regard replied more or less in the same way. Tribalism is the most attachment and loyalty of individuals towards their own tribes and antagonized towards other tribes. Moreover, in tribal societies, the people signify their tribal status and underestimate the other tribes. However, a few of the informants contented further that usually, tribalism is the spirit of cohesion of one towards his ultimate group. However, in their society, besides excessive tendency towards their tribe, the people equally remain negative about the other tribes.

In the presence of a tribal mindset, the people unthoughtfully consider their tribe or group superior to the others. One of the participants astonishingly expressed that;

Tribal sentiments are so high in their society that if you ask someone whether they feel proud of their good degree or their caste, he will definitely reply with the answer of his caste. He added that people respect others through their castes or tribes rather than their status or academic achievements.

THE CAUSES OF TRIBALISM IN THE PASHTUN COMMUNITY

Tribalism is deeply rooted in the Pashtun society of Balochistan. Historically, it has played a significant role in social integration and peace promotion, which is why it is still in vogue with great strength; however, over time, it has altered and proven otherwise. The causes, besides the traditional ones, are some existential causes. Contextually, tribalism gives a sense of support at the time of need. A very well-versed participants argued that;

In their community, the people possess vast lands, whether cultivated or uncultivated. These lands are always vulnerable to confiscation by other aliens or powerful groups. Thus, the people usually tend towards their tribe in order to secure their land and property.

Like other societies in Pakistan, Pashtun society also faces scarce resources. Besides this, the sense of deprivation and the fear of being oppressed by powerful sections are fueling factors to the tribalism. Most participants argued that;

"Due to limited resources, government jobs, the fear of the land being grabbed by aliens, education, health, and other opportunities and facilities, more representation in political, power, and official structures, occupying large positions in government offices, and preventing settlers and non-locals from availing themselves of jobs, the people orient more towards tribalism."

THE IMPACTS OF TRIBALISM ON THE SOCIAL LIFE OF PEOPLE

Tribalism is prominently a social term. It was adopted and practiced for the positive purpose of attracting people to their tribe and securing them from other invaders. However, gradually, it was shaped in other ways, creating hatred among the tribes and threatening social peace. During data collection, the participants were found to be more desperate and complainant from the tribal mindset. The participants stated that;

"Tribalism is a cancer for society. It has divided the people on the basis of castes and different groups and subgroups. It has promoted intolerance among the community folks. The decent historical traditions and values of oneness are not practiced now. The people are skeptical about one another. Tribalism has created distances among the people. The people are more egoistically tribe-centric and illogically loyalist towards their tribe, even at the cost of other tribes' antagonism."

Tribalism is a broad social structure that molds, shapes, and regulates the behavior and attitudes of the people. The tribalism-based antagonized attitudes in the area have created frustration and aggression among the people of different tribes. A keen observer of tribalism argued that;

"Tribalism is a very old social structure. It has become obsolete in advanced and developed countries, but unfortunately, it still exists in their society. He maintained that in the modern era, people feel proud of their achievements and respect those who achieve some name or fame (achieved status), but in their society, people still feel proud of their tribes (ascribed status), which certainly leads society towards mutual conflicts rather than progress."

Tribal values, besides the above-mentioned, challenge social life and create hurdles for women's development. Most participants argued that;

"The tribal structure has kept female education, liberty, and jobs at stake. In many cases the girls are being barred to attend the schools, work in the offices and take part in the political activities. In other words, they are considered as a source of weakness rather than a strength."

THE ROLE OF TRIBALISM IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF A TRIBAL SOCIETY

Politics is part and parcel of any society. The community people resolve and highlight their issues through local and national politics. In this context, a strictly tribal setup does not spare politics of its influence. One of the participants shared his experience in these words;

"Politics across the globe revolve around ideologies. The political parties, their leaders, and their representatives carry out their agenda to promote national and collective causes. However, in their society, the people vote for the candidate who hails from their tribe without any competence, commitment, or work. This happens only in retaliation and rivalry of the other castes and ethnic groups."

Another participant argued that'

"In their community, politics is a tool to blackmail the unaware and apolitical folk emotionally through tribal cards during the election campaign and make them vote in their favor."

In Pakistan since a long time politics and political representation has switched to landlords and political elites from the political ideologies. Consequently, in the tribal societies, the tribal notables and elites have embodied their political program within the tribal structure and are showing themselves as the true representatives of the community. In this way, majority of the participants said that;

"During the election campaign, the candidates highlight their tribal card rather than their efficiency. They level allegations against the other castes and divide the community into "ours"

and "theirs." They cash in on joy ceremonies and death condolences for political gains and create antagonism among different tribes to gain votes. Most often, it has been found that if someone denies voting, the person contesting an election from his tribe has been annoyed for years for no rational or political reason but for having the same tribal affiliation."

TRIBALISM; A THREAT TO THE SOCIAL STABILITY AND PROGRESS

The tribal structure, which has been in vogue for a long time, must have some advantages. It has resolved many issues for the people. Even though it is working on some aspects of the social life of people, in tribal societies, the people largely oppose changes and follow the traditional patterns of life. However, they feel uneasy about the given system. The informants, in this regard, shared their knowledge and experiences in these words;

"The tribal system has created suffocation in their community. The individuals are assessed through the prism of tribal and caste affiliation. They are given importance and value through their tribal background. Quality and merit are discouraged."

They further argued that;

There are many cases in their community where very incompetent officials are posted on tribal bases rather than on merit. Moreover, the tribal mindset divides different groups in all fields of life, and they hate one another. The atmosphere of intolerance is observed almost everywhere and in each sphere of life."

THE WAYS TO REDUCE TRIBALISM

Tribalism is a social problem like other problems. It bars the smooth running of a society and creates hurdles in the path of progress. However, concrete efforts can minimize the intensity of tribalism. The participants mentioned that;

"Tribalism can be minimized when the people are given education and awareness about the drawbacks of negative impacts of tribalism. The atmosphere of competition is created, and merit is promoted. It is essential to highlight the stories of successful countries, discourage tribal mindsets, develop joint programs and sessions, and put stress upon humanity and nationalism. Moreover, highlighting the golden principles of Islam stressing upon collectiveness and brotherhood will also help to minimize the negative impacts of tribalism. The parents should socialize with their children to promote cohesion and mutual peace. The religious scholars should preach for collective social life rather than fragmentation."

Moreover, some of the participants stated that;

"Tribal notables can play the most important role in bringing people closer together. Political parties can also play a vital role in reducing tribalism and promoting a holistic approach rather than an individualistic one. "

DISCUSSION

Tribalism as a code of life usually practiced in traditional societies. Through tribalism, the people are attracted to their tribe. They are intimated to show loyalty towards their caste and tribe. However, gradually, it has transformed into an antagonized attitude towards the other castes and groups, which has dismantled the entire social fabric. The study found that tribalism has negatively affected the social life of the people. It has infiltrated all spheres of life. The most

important cause behind the tribalism is the fear of the people of their lands being confiscated by outsiders. Furthermore, resources are scarce, and the people do not want to let the other tribes take advantage of these resources. In the same way, government jobs and services are the other causes of distraction among the people, and every tribe desires and strives to grab these opportunities up to the maximum number.

Moreover, some tribes are comparatively small, feeling fear to be oppressed by the others and vanish their identity, are more exponents of the tribalism. They show more loyalty towards their tribes. The tribalism in the modern world has disturbed the social life in many ways. The trends of the contemporary era, like individualism, competition, merit, quality, and achievements, are completely negated, and familial and tribal status is given more importance. The people feel more proud of their caste than of a good degree.

Furthermore, Politics is embodied within the tribal traditions. The tribal attachment is more favored in terms of quality and standard. The political figures and candidates exploit the uneducated public for their self-interest. Moreover, religion is also dragged into tribalism. Resultantly, the tribalism has caused many challenges and threats to the social cohesion and peace. The people hate one another under the name of tribalism. This socially constructed approach has cost more than the benefit.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In the modern scientific era, it is quite incompatible to live traditional and tribal lives. The world is moving faster with modern technology and adopting new ways of life, but on the other side, some people still adhere to the conservative lifestyle. In the Pashtun society of Balochistan, the young cohort is advancing with modern education and international trends, but the old cohort is feeling well-suited to the traditional lifestyle. The tribal system is no more capable to provide ease to the people of the modern age. The historical nature of tribalism has changed and now it has transformed into an anti-social edge, where people find displeasure instead joy. The problems are becoming more complex rather than resolved. Distances between people are expanding rather than shrinking. The prejudice and hatred expanded their arms more widely. The system is supporting inborn status instead of hardworking and efficiency, which ultimately discouraging competence and commitment. The people favor their blood relatives over the most competent persons; however, their relatives are too blunt and ineffectual. This situation ultimately promotes intolerance among the social beings, which sabotages the entire system in society.

Some suggestions are given to mitigate the severity of tribalism.

- Educate people regarding social inclusiveness, promote tolerance among them, and discourage prejudices and biases.
- Socialize the new generation to respect hard work, commitment, and achieved status rather than inborn positions or ascribed status.
- Focus on humanity and national cause rather than the tribal ones.
- Arrange collective programs and deploy people from different castes and tribes in the same settings so that they may encourage and accept one another.

- Create a fair justice system in all spheres of life, especially in the government sectors, so that people do not turn to their tribes or concerned groups for unfair support.
- Create an atmosphere of competition among youths and encourage merit, quality, and achievements.

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