

Rajarshi Chakraborty*

*Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India
(E-mail: rajarshi.education@gmail.com)*

Ethnic Diversity and its impact on the Development in Afghanistan

Although the international community spent trillions of dollars, it could not constitute a stable government in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the so-called experts of international relations comprehended the ethnic diversity in the country but failed to predict its disastrous effect on the war on terror. In conflict zones, it is important to understand the local culture, ideology and governance system. However, in the case of Afghanistan, the international community dealt only through the central government and thus, the ethnic and tribal factors were ignored. This ignorance of the international community could not yield the expected results in the country. The objective of the paper is to find out the diverse nature of Afghan ethnicity and how it influenced the development in the country. The paper discusses about the main ethnic group under the current Taliban regime and how international recognition could affect them in the future. The paper also indicates that the current volatile situation in Afghanistan could deteriorate the refugee crisis in the whole world.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban, ethnicity, international community, security, economy, United Nations, Sharia law, GALLUP survey, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).

Background

Afghanistan is a diversified country and, irrespective of the nature of the government, the ethnic minorities always face some kind of hurdles in the country. Reports of targeted killings have been increased following the Taliban takeover in the country. The South Asian states have various ethnic groups. The main group is Pashtuns ethnic is nearly 42 % of total population and due to their majority in the country, it is also called the land of the Pashtuns. This main ethnic group can also be divided into various sub-ethnic groups such as Durrani, Ghilzali, Jaji, Safu, Wardak etc. Most of the groups speak Pashtun. Their culture is known as Pash-tunwali. Most of the Pashtuns are Muslims. Their daily life is hugely influenced by the Islamic customs. These people are very nomadic in nature, as one of the major occupations is pastoralism. The scold largest ethnic group is Tajik, which consist nearly 27 % [1] of total Afghan population. Most of them are Sunni Muslims and they are known for their elaborate embroideries on fabric. It is believed that they have Iranian connection and consider themselves as Farsi. The third largest group is Hazaras, who are based mainly in the central Afghanistan. It is believed that they are the descendants of Genghis Khan. Due to their foreign origin and Shia background, they are considered as outsiders of the country. This ethnic group faced persecutions in the hands of dominant ethnic groups in the country, and are known as ‘the traditional underclass of Afghan society’ [2].

The northern region is mainly populated by Uzbek. They speak Uzbek and most of them are Sunni Islamic sect. The other ethnic groups are Aimaq, Baloch, Turkmen and others. In Afghanistan, it is difficult to define one’s ethnic identities by cultural similarities. In general, the Pashtun community of the country speak Pashto but a good number of Dari speakers consider themselves Pashtuns [3].

In spite of spending trillions of dollars, the international community led by the United States has failed to constitute a centralized government in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, it was surprising to see the so-called experts of international relations comprehended the ethnic diversity in the country but has not able to to predict its disastrous effect on the war on terror. In conflict zones, it is significant to get an understanding of local culture, ideologies and governance system. In modern history, the international community did not take these factors into account and faced catastrophic failures in several countries such as Vietnam, Iraq, Syria, and now Afghanistan. The dynamics of ethnic identity are different in Afghanistan compared to the other ethnic groups in the world. The history of Afghanistan shows us how the entire country could not be colonized either by Britain or Soviet Russia due to the lack of local knowledge of Afghan communities. Although the colonial giants successfully extended their power in some parts of the country, they never colonised the whole country.

*Corresponding author email: rajarshi.education@gmail.com

The objective of this paper is to find out the international ignorance to the ethnic diversity of the country and how the ignorance affected the overall developmental goals in various sectors. It is evident from the writings of the international scholars that they were well aware of the fact that the country is composed of various ethnic groups and their hierarchy in the society restricted to form a national identity among the Afghans. Such narrow but strong sense of identity of Afghan citizens was overlooked by the donor communities as they dealt only through the central government. This top-down approach resulted a catastrophic failure in Afghanistan.

According to the Afghan constitution, all people living inside of Afghanistan are Afghans. But in reality, most of the Afghan tribes reject the western notion of the constitutional imposed concept of national identity. They identify themselves as Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turks, Hazaras, Baloch, Arabs, Kyrgyz, and so on. These people are mainly nomads and live in the inhabitable valleys and, no colonial powers could govern them in modern history. In Afghanistan, ethnicity is divisive and hard to deal with. Some tribes and groups have their own oral and customary laws because these laws are effective. Hence, the local people prefer the local justice system rather than going to the centralized justice system. There are mainly two reasons for people referring to the local justice system. Firstly, the centralized justice system was introduced by the international community. This system is totally alien to the local Afghan people. Secondly, the centralized power structure is highly corrupted. According to a 2019 GALLUP report [4], 91 % of Afghans believed the rampant nature of corruption inside the Afghan government. Both these two issues are against the Islamic Sharia law which is practised all over the country. Another GALLUP report indicates that 56 % of the Afghan population agreed that the main source of the Constitution should be Sharia law. Albeit in contemporary times, the Sharia law, interpreted by the Taliban leaders, had a detrimental effect on the lives of the Afghans [5]. Yet, the people favoured the role of religious leaders in making the constitution. In the same year, 51 % of Afghans thought that religious leaders should have an advisory role in the constitution-making. Although Islam has a significant role in the daily life of Afghans, it could not unite all the tribes and groups as a nation. Such a fragmented power structure made government presence extremely weak in the rural areas. The significance of each and every tribal and local community was not unknown to the international community. In the 2001 Bonn agreement, the international community understood the importance of ethnic balance in the country. After the conference, some leaders refused to sign the agreement as it failed to honour the sufficient representations of the Pashtun community. Despite such diversified tribal mentalities, the international community tried to penetrate through the concept of the nation-state and centralised governance in the hinterlands of Afghanistan.

The international community post 9/11, interpreted the Afghan rebuilding programme in a way that is familiar to them and alien to the Afghans. The country had never had a westernized democratic system but in 2003, the international community imposed a structural democracy. The centralised bureaucratic system has barely represented in the rural areas. The duty of a bureaucratic system, such as providing identity proof, birth certificates, death certificates, visas and other important government documents, was never fulfilled in many parts of the country. The international community also helped to conduct the parliamentary and presidential elections in the country. Many Afghans could not even cast their votes due to the lack of identity cards. In 2015, only 11 % of the Afghan population believed in the honesty of the election and the results were criticised by the international media as well. Nevertheless, the international community present on Afghan soil never paid heed to it. Thus, an international community-backed federal structure could not mitigate the political exclusion of local Afghan voices. This international move made the local population more antagonistic towards them. A trust deficit was also created among the Afghan citizens for the international community. In rural Afghanistan, the civilian casualties turned the women against the foreign occupation. Initially, the Afghan population favoured the international occupation. However, over the years, Afghan popularity for the local leaders increased and simultaneously, the popularity for the national leaders decreased. According to a GALLUP survey, 58 % of the Afghan population supported their local leaders whereas support for their national leaders was down to 30 %.

Even in the building of the security sector, the international community took a top-down approach. The three main countries involved in building, the Afghan security sector was the US, Japan and Germany. Proving security and bringing peace was the top priority of the US government to Afghanistan. After the fall of the Taliban government, the war-torn country had no army or police to protect its citizen from internal and external threats. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) report [6], the US has spent USD 65.4 billion for the security sector reform from 2002 to 2015. This includes the building of the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police and counter-narcotics programme. The US

government also helped to build the Afghan local police to serve the communities in Afghanistan. The government of Japan was involved in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programme (DDA). Under this programme, Afghan police personnel came to Japan to receive training from Japan's officials. Japan provided USD 319 million in the police reforms sector for the first ten years of the war on terror. Germany has done significant work in building the Afghan Police Forces. From European Union, Germany contributed the most in improving the Afghan Police Forces. In 2010, the German Police Project Team (GPPT) trained the highest number of Afghan Police Forces, nearly 4000 police personnel. Besides the training programme, it helped to build the National Police Academy in Kunduz, Faizabad and Mazar-e-Sharif. Other than the training programme, Germany helped to improve the border police force and traffic police. All these modern countries took the approach of security sector building in a centralised manner. Unlike the Soviet aided Najibullah government, all the security-related decisions were taken in the head offices of respective countries in Kabul. In the provincial areas, Najibullah allowed local powerful persons who would use his kinship, and associated groups to provide security where the central government did not have the capacity to reach. Although, without the Soviet support the Najibullah government could not sustain on its own but at least they had taken into consideration the role of regional actors in providing security. As of 2008, only 46 % of the Afghan population had confidence in the Afghan military and that approval rate is very low compared to other countries.

Economy

Afghanistan is mainly an agricultural country dominated by landlords, it also receives foreign remittances through the various transit routes providing for trade. However, severe droughts, famines and poor investment made the economy more miserable. It is true that international aid and investment improved the Afghan economy in a significant manner although it was not sustainable as was seen later.

In 2010, the annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth reached a two-digit number. In 2009, the GDP annual growth [7] rate was 18 % but in 2019, it was decreased to less than 2 %. Unfortunately, most of the foreign aid was not planned in building the indigenous Afghan economic sector but to improve the service sectors which were concentrated in the urban areas. Therefore, when the international community was gone, the economic benefits were also gone with them. Thus, the economic and developmental priorities of the local Afghan communities were ignored.

The international community misinterpreted the ethnic identity in the country as it does not follow any particular pattern and there is no simple way to identify it. Even after providing foreign aid, the international community could not stop the insurgency movements in the country. In the initial years, the international community had a huge success gained the Taliban and al-Qaida fighters but since 2005 the Taliban has started regaining their power in rural Afghanistan. Without the support of local Afghan people, this would not have been possible. Now, the whole country is under Taliban control except the Panjshir region. The failure of the international community proves that it has an abstract idea about the Afghan people and culture. The scholars of international relations need to pay more attention to local Afghan culture, Qams, beliefs, ideology, tribes, ethnicity, and other local factors to get a better understanding of this present situation. Unfortunately, sometimes even these factors are not enough to understand the political and social dynamics of the country when people are merely influenced by the local interests and not by ethnic factors. Generalization of the Afghan identity prejudiced the interpretation of the international community as cultural diversity can be found even inside a single ethnic group. It is true that there is less awareness of the significance of the state's authority within the popular imagination of the hinterlands. Whether that awareness is necessary for the people of Afghanistan is also hard to say.

Although following the Taliban takeover, most of the regional countries are trying to make a way of diplomatic relation with Afghanistan; Tajikistan openly expressed their view against the Taliban leaders. Tajikistan's support for the local Tajik resistance against the Taliban government can be found even during the 1990s. Surprisingly, that supports are still there, especially in the Panjshir valley, where a group of people are opposing and keeping their fighting alive against the Taliban regime. The citizens of Tajikistan provided a strong sense of support for the Tajiks living in Afghanistan. The government of Tajikistan said that they would never support a government in Afghanistan that does not represent all the sections of the society [8]. When big players like Beijing and Moscow are trying building a rapport with the current Taliban government, the role of the Islamic government of Tajikistan is commendable. The double game played by Russia is posing a political dilemma for the central Asian states. On the one hand, Russia with other Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) members conducted a joint military exercise in the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border [9], and on the other hand, it is helping Taliban for their international recognition.

The international withdrawal of the international community was expected to provide leverage to the Taliban leaders. The United States of America can be accused widely for this [10]. Now, the coming months are important for the fate of ethnic communities in Afghanistan. The Taliban has sought to make a country where all ethnic communities would live peacefully but it has been replaced by suspicion and mistrust towards the Taliban leaders. The ethnic tension is likely to continue in the country as the powerful ethnic groups such as Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek are contending for power. The rise of Taliban made the future of Shia Muslim community vague. The age old religious rivalry between Shia and Sunni might affect the former in the country [11]. The Taliban leaders interpret the religious practices of Shia Muslim group as Haram or forbidden. There are some other religious groups such as Hindu, Sikh, Christians who also live in the country. They are already facing threats from the Taliban leaders. Some Hindus came to India a few years ago, but most of them are second or third generation people and hence, they have no families or relatives outside their country where they could take shelter. The silence of international community for such groups is another example of abandonment of them. Other than these religious and ethnic minorities, the women of the Afghan society are also vulnerable under the Taliban regime. The Taliban leaders are determined to rule the government by Islamic Sharia law. Under this law, women are not allowed to be alone in the public place and outside the family they should always be accompanied by a male member of their family. They are also restricted to perform any work in public sphere. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) says that the first half of 2021 witnessed more women and children deaths and wounded in Afghanistan than any year since 2009 [12]. Following the taking over of various border posts, the Taliban declared a *Dikkat* which states that all imams and mullahs in captured areas should provide the Taliban with a list of girls above 15 and widows under 45 to be married to Taliban fighters. This barbaric rules and traditions are likely to be risen in the country in the upcoming years. The Taliban leaders are also hunting down those Afghan who helped the international community during the international presence in the country and worked for the various organizations. Now, those people are completely helpless and have nowhere to go. Public executions of former government officials by the current Taliban leaders were all over the news. Unfortunately, those brutal killings were unable to catch the attention of international humanitarian assistance for the country. Most of the countries evacuated their citizens on the emergency basis but the ethnic minorities have no places to go. Before the Taliban capture of Kabul international airport, many Afghans left the country forever. But most of the ethnic minorities in the country are so poor and they cannot afford to leave the country without any kind of external assistance to them. The country is also facing severe food crisis. The United Nations contacted the Taliban leaders to supply food in the interior region in the country but in reality, the assistance could not reach the provincial level. It has been estimated by the World Food Program that nearly 14 million Afghans are starving and the situation is declared as a humanitarian crisis by the United Nations [13]. However, the United Nation is trying to reach to the affected people through the Taliban government only. The biased and brutal nature of the Taliban government is unlikely to reach to the needy minority section in the country.

Conclusion

After capturing the government in the country, now, the main goal of Taliban leaders is to be recognised by the international community. The Taliban leaders claimed that they have completed the entire requirement for being recognised as a legitimate government [14] and asked for a seat in the United Nation. Nonetheless, in fact, they have barely demonstrated commitment towards the prerequisite of recognition put forward by the western democracies and some south Asian countries [15]. However, the United Nation is yet to provide international recognition to them as the government does not represent all the people of the country. Additionally, there are few ministers in current Afghan government who are UN sanctioned international terrorists. After getting no positive response from the United Nation, the Taliban is now trying to make diplomatic relations with the major world powers. Even after capturing the power in Kabul, the Taliban leaders visited China, where the Chinese leaders announced millions dollars of investment in Afghanistan. Recently, a meeting was organised by the government of Russia where the newly elected Taliban government was invited. However, the United States refused to attend the meeting. The European Union thinks that it is more of dealing with the Taliban rather recognising them as they win the war against the United States [16]. But the growing diplomatic ties with its neighbouring and other countries are likely to strengthen the Taliban power in the country and the ethnic minorities might face a more difficult scenario in future. The poor ethnic people have no opportunities to leave their country. Although countries such as Mexico, United Kingdom have opened their border for the Afghans, their border rules and regulations are unreachable for most of the tar-

geted ethnic people. During the international presence in the country, thousands of Afghans took shelter in European states. By following the Joint Way Forward agreement in 2016, the European nations stopped receiving Afghans as they believe the country is safe for its citizens. Even under the Taliban regime, the ethnic tension is limitless [17] and fragmented civil might be seen in near future.

References

- 1 World Atlas (2021). *The Ethnic Groups Of Afghanistan*. October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-of-afghanistan.html>
- 2 NEWS18. (2021). *What The Return Of Taliban Means For All The Ethnic Groups In Afghanistan*. Retrieved October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.news18.com/news/explainers/explained-what-the-return-of-taliban-means-for-ethnic-groups-in-afghanistan-4122524.html>
- 3 Siddique, A. (2012). *Sources of Tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan: A Regional Perspective Afghanistan's Ethnic Divides*. Barcelona Centre for International Affairs.
- 4 Gallup Report. (2019). *Inside Afghanistan: Stability in Institutions Remains Elusive*. Retrieved September 11, 2021. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/266252/inside-afghanistan-stability-institutions-remains-elusive.aspx>
- 5 Gallup Report. (2020). *Afghanistan: How Afghans Would Negotiate Their Own Peace*. Retrieved September 11, 2021. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/157040/afghanistan-afghans-negotiate-own-peace.aspx>
- 6 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (2015). *SUPPLEMENT TO SIGAR's JANUARY 2015 Quarterly Report to the United States CONGRESS*. Retrieved September 16, 2021. Retrieved from <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA615541.pdf>
- 7 The World Bank. (2020). *GDP per capita growth (annual %) – Afghanistan*. Accessed September 18, 2021. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG?end=2020&locations=AF&start=2003&view=chart>
- 8 Pannier, B. (2021). *Tajikistan: The Taliban's Toughest Critic*. Retrieved October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-taliban-relations/31458364.html>
- 9 Mikovic, N. (2021). *Russia's ally Tajikistan emerges as Taliban's new nemesis*. Retrieved October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.timesnownews.com/columns/article/russia-s-ally-tajikistan-emerges-as-taliban-s-new-nemesis/820133>
- 10 Reuters. (2021). *Fears abroad for fate of Hazara minority as Taliban take control*. Retrieved October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/fears-abroad-fate-hazara-minority-taliban-take-control-2021-08-17/>
- 11 Deccan, H. (2021). *What is the future of ethnic groups in Afghanistan now that Taliban is back in power?*. Retrieved October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.deccanherald.com/international/what-is-the-future-of-ethnic-groups-in-afghanistan-now-that-taliban-is-back-in-power-1025074.html>
- 12 Ispahani, F. (2021). *Afghan women and minorities must fight the Taliban or give in. They have no place to hide*. Retrieved October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://theprint.in/opinion/afghan-women-and-minorities-must-fight-the-taliban-or-give-in-they-have-no-place-to-hide/717501/>
- 13 The Los Angeles Times (2021). *Taliban killed 9 ethnic-minority men, report says, fuelling Afghans' fears*. Retrieved October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-08-20/report-taliban-killed-minorities-fueling-afghan-fears>
- 14 Batrawy, A. (2021). *UN and Afghanistan's Taliban, figuring out how to interact*. Retrieved October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-general-assembly-europe-middle-east-afghanistan-united-nations-cf0f0df6563f0b2641cdee6393dc2fe0>
- 15 United States Institute of Peace (2021). *Taliban Seek Recognition, But Offer Few Concessions to International Concerns*. Retrieved October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/09/taliban-seek-recognition-offer-few-concessions-international-concerns>
- 16 The Washington Post (2021). *U.S. allies and adversaries are holding off for now on recognizing, aiding the Taliban*. Retrieved October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/08/20/afghanistan-taliban-international-recognition-aid/>
- 17 The New York Times (2021). *Afghan Ethnic Tensions Rise in Media and Politics*. Retrieved October 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/19/world/asia/afghan-ethnic-tensions-rise-in-media-and-politics.html>

Ражарши Чакрабарты

Этникалық әртүрлілік және оның Ауғанстанның дамуына ықпалы

Триллиондаған доллардың жұмсалғанына қарамастан, халықаралық қауымдастық АҚШ басшысымен Ауғанстанда тұрақты үкімет қалыптастыра алған жоқ. Өкінішке орай, халықаралық қатынастар бойынша сарапшылар елдегі этникалық әртүрлілікті мойындады, бірақ, оның терроризммен күресу барысындағы салдарын болжай алған жоқ. Шилеленістер зонасында жергілікті мәдениетті, идеология-

ны және басқару жүйесін түсінудің маңызы жоғары. Бірақ, Ауғанстандағы жағдайда халықаралық қауымдастық тек қана орталық үкімет арқылы әрекет етті, сондықтан этникалық және тайпалық факторлар назардан тыс қалды. Осылардың ескерілмей қалуы оң нәтижеге алып келген жоқ. Мақаланың мақсаты — ауғандық этниканың қаншалықты маңызды екенін және оның елдің дамуына ықпалын анықтау. Сонымен қатар қазіргі талибтердің режимі кезіндегі негізгі этникалық тапқа талдау жасалған және болашақта халықаралық мойындаудың ықпалы қарастырылған. Автор Ауғанстандағы қазіргі тұрақсыз жағдай әлемдегі босқындар дағдарысын тереңдетуге мүмкіндік береді деген қорытынды жасаған.

Кілтсөздер: Ауғанстан, талибан, этникалық топ, халықаралық қауымдастық, қауіпсіздік, экономика, БҰҰ, шарият заңдары, GALLUP зерттеуі, Ауғанстанды қалпына келтіру жөніндегі арнайы бас инспектор (SIGAR).

Ражарши Чакработы

Этническое разнообразие и его влияние на развитие в Афганистане

Несмотря на траты триллионов долларов, международное сообщество во главе с США не смогло сформировать стабильное правительство в Афганистане. К сожалению, было удивительно, что так называемые эксперты по международным отношениям осознали этническое разнообразие в стране, но не смогли предсказать его катастрофические последствия для войны с террором. В зонах конфликтов очень важно понимать местную культуру, идеологию и систему управления. Но в случае с Афганистаном международное сообщество действовало только через центральное правительство, и поэтому этнические и племенные факторы игнорировались. Это незнание международного сообщества не могло дать ожидаемых результатов в стране. Цель статьи — выяснить, насколько разнообразна афганская этническая принадлежность, и как она повлияла на развитие страны. В статье обсуждены основная этническая группа при нынешнем режиме талибов и то, как международное признание может повлиять на них в будущем. Авторами сделан вывод о том, что нынешняя нестабильная ситуация в Афганистане может усугубить кризис беженцев во всем мире.

Ключевые слова: Афганистан, талибан, этническая принадлежность, международное сообщество, безопасность, экономика, ООН, законы шарията, исследование GALLUP, специальный генеральный инспектор по восстановлению Афганистана (SIGAR).