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Journal of Subcontinent Researches
University of Sistan and Baluchestan
Vol. 5, No.15, summer 2013
(pp.135-152)

Geocultural Inter-relations of Iranian and Pakistani Balochistan in the Globalization Era

Abstract

The province of Sistan and Balochistan shares a border of more than 1100 kilometers with Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Baloch living in Sistan and Balochistan (Iranian Balochistan) and Pakistani Balochistan have similar customs and traditions. Several factors account for interaction between the two populations. Socio-cultural and economic factors are the major source of interactions. Trade is the economic foundation of the border region. So, because of the vast boundaries, across the border, illegal trade is common among settlers of both sides. The study takes culture and modernity as the process of product and aims to provide a deeper insight and develop a better understanding of the influence of culture on modernity and globalization in general and its cultural tradition in Balochistan, particularly Iranian Balochistan. This paper is an attempt to examine the socio-economic and cultural inter-relations of Iranian and Pakistani Balochistan in the globalization era.

Key words: Baloch, border, Inter-relations, trade, smuggling.

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receipt: 5-7-2012

Acceptance: 15-4-2013

Introduction

Geocultural sociology is a multi-dimensional concept. It deals with people who belong to the same ethnicity, culture, language, life style, religions, and values, and on many occasions to the same family and kinship, but because of geopolitical reasons, they have been divided by international boundaries in different nations. So, their sub-nationality in a different sense is the same, but their nations are different. Cross-culturalism is based on the notion of culture, which in its broadest sense denotes speech, customs, traditions, morals, laws – in fact, every aspect of activity engaged in by members of human societies. It also involves the process of getting to know and understand, as well as relate to and benefit from, the social systems that contribute to the ongoing development of society.



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Geo-cultural sociology has to be considered an important conceptual approach in decoding certain aspects of some societies. Balochistan's society is the case here in this study. The study takes culture and modernity as the process of product and aims to provide a deeper insight and develop a better understanding of the influence of culture on modernity and globalization in general and its cultural tradition in Balochistan particularly Iranian Balochistan.

The Baloch living in Sistan and Balochistan (Iranian Balochistan) and Pakistani Balochistan have similar customs and traditions

(Harrison 1981:08, Baloch 1958:12). The major purpose of interaction between the two communities is the socio-cultural factors and economics. (Nematiniya, 2013: 06) The existence of the boundary normally reduces the contacts between the people living on either side. Cross-border issues here greatly influence the regional economics of the region. (Mojtahedzadeh, 2010: 10)

Research Methodology

Both primary and secondary sources have been utilized for the present paper. The overall methodological framework of the paper is qualitatively based on geo-cultural relationship between Baloch people of Iran and Pakistan.

The method used for collecting empirical data for the current paper includes: Qualitative Sociological research methods which include visual methods, narratives of Baloch people of both sides of the border, participant observation of the author as an insider, key informant and in-depth interviews, ethnography, social network, other qualitative inputs and secondary data. The method of analyzing data is descriptive.

The Baloch across the Border

The boundary between Iran and Pakistan is not very soft but it is not very restricted compared to the Iranian border linking Turkey, Iraq, Central Asian neighbors and even Afghanistan (Hughes 2004:119). However, the establishment of customs posts or other check posts tends to restrict and scrutinized the bona fides of arriving and departing passengers. There are regular and irregular entry points, the major one near Mirjaveh and Kuhak and Pishin in Iranian side. In Pakistani side there are a number of towns and villages where the houses penetrate both sides of the border (Baloch, 1975: 102), for example, the towns of Ridee and Balu in Turbat. There are five border districts predominantly inhabited by Baloch and Barhvi population. They are Panjgur, Chagai, Wasuk, Turbat and Gwadar. Previously, Kharan was an important and the largest district in the area wise, which bordered Iran. (Baloch, 1987: 103) The Baloch living across the border have dual nationality. The people from both sides of the boundary line frequently cross the border for various purposes which include the following:

-To see relatives, dependents and family members

-Social visits to friends, vacation, tourism, attending religious rituals

-Cultural visits, e.g. inviting Baloch musicians from Pakistani Balochistan, attendance of weddings, ceremonies, burial ceremonies, naming ceremonies

-Visit to seek employment (mostly from Pakistani side)

-Trade and business visits

-The social visits include sightseeing, meeting with friends, and spending vacations there. These visits are common among the family members. Friends of the family members often travel with them. Social visits are rampant in border towns in normal life affecting business, social and cultural relations. When the people of Iranian Balochistan and Pakistani Balochistan cross the border line for one reason, or the other, they do not feel that they are entering a foreign land.

Cultural visits are arranged for the very purposes namely burial ceremonies, participation in weddings, and attendance in festivals and feasts, etc. Invitations to attend these functions are sent to all the relatives depending upon the financial status of the family, irrespective of their place of residence. Here, the similarity of customs, traditions and rituals has a significant role in creating a sense of unity among the people of both sides (Keiani 2010:23). People not only take pains to travel even long distances to participate in the cultural meetings but also disapprove of people absenting themselves without any reasonable excuse. A gathering of people living in far off places but tied with blood, culture and history is an occasion of joy and merriment. These links bring about full impact on the people living across the border in the time of any cultural events such as 'Eid' (Siasar,2005:18)

Muslims of Pakistan, especially Shiites, tend to visit religious sites in Iran such as Qom and Mashhad in summer time. (Shah, 2007: 06) Typically, they stay in Zahedan for a few days during their trip. The volume of such visits has increased in the last years, and the Iranian government provides special facilities for such visitors. (Afrakhteh, 2008: 208) Baloch talibs (seminary students) usually do not go abroad to learn theology; they prefer to have their Sunni Islamic education at the local madresas in Balochistan itself. This was not the case in pre-Islamic Revolution era, because Sunni theological schools in

Balochistan were a handful and lacked wide recognition. In pre-Islamic Revolution Iran, the molavis were, to some extent, under the influence of tribal chiefs. This was due to economic and traditional dependency on the chieftainship. (Taheri, 2013: 4)

Inter-marriages are common among the Baloch. Some Baloch have dual citizenship of Iran and Pakistan, and some male Baloch have two wives, one in Iran and the other in Pakistan or Afghanistan. (Afrakhteh, 2008: 209) The system of inter-marriages has been in practice for centuries and is supported by two leading factors: first, the family bond which can be served and strengthened by finding match across the borders. It is more common in the case of arranged marriages with close family members living on both sides, and second, further opportunities of interaction by making a fresh relationship; a party from either side through a third party may come up with the proposal of marriage.

The student exchange across the borders is very limited in the case of two communities. There are more cases of students from Sistan and Balochistan in the schools and colleges of Pakistani Balochistan. The students' ratio is nonetheless very small; it should have been larger. Students studying across the border are exempted from restrictions. (Marri, 1974: 34, Harrison 1981:95).

Moreover, the Iranian Cultural Centre in Quetta has taken the responsibility for promoting and strengthening the cultural relations between the provinces of the two countries by establishing conferences, seminars and workshops. The Centre also holds social and educational gatherings for people of all walks of life, particularly scholars, intellectuals, and students. Beside this, the Centre runs courses in the Pakistani language and calligraphy in which a large number of students take interest. In addition, it provides facilities to scholars in their higher studies. These activities have generated a great deal of goodwill for the people and the government of Iran and Pakistan.

The cultural similarities between border lands of Baloch are largely of non-material nature though the material cannot be ruled out. (Matheson, 1999: 32) Socio-cultural and economic factors are the major sources of interaction. The boundary between Iran and Pakistan was softer in the past than it is now. There are regular and irregular

entry points (irregular entry points have been gradually fading away with the deployment of border troops and fencing on both sides, particularly the Iranian side). There are a number of towns/villages where houses occupy both sides of the border, e.g., the town of Rideeg/Bulu in Turbat.

Unlike the Mexico-U.S. border land there is no tension among the people of Baloch borderland. Two factors account for that: first, the good relationships between Iran and Pakistan under an enduring bilateralism without any border disputes, and second, the socio-cultural homogeneity of the borderland people speaking the same language.

Rahdari: an Important Evidence of Geoculturalism

'Rahdari' is a system under which a resident of the district is issued a passport, which is valid for fifteen days to visit Iran to see his relatives and friends. Rahdari is issued by District Administration. Reciprocally, the Iranian government issues Rahdari to the Baloch residents of Sistan and Balochistan to visit immediate area across the border. Unlike Iran, the one inside Pakistan is least restricted and can visit across the adjacent up to Quetta and even Karachi. The main purpose of Rahdari is to visit relatives but it can also be utilized for other purposes. On humanitarian ground, visiting hospitals for surgery or medical check-up can make one's eligibility (Kundi, 2009:07).

Many of the Baloch living on the borders have dual nationality and have access to Rahdari. The system was introduced in 1947 after the creation of Pakistan. Rahdari (border pass) is convenient for those who don't have passports and want to cross the border for shorter distances. Traveling deeper into Iran needs to travel on passports since the Rahdari facility is restricted to two border provinces of Iran only. There is no definite policy or rules for dual citizenship between Iran and Pakistan. People with dual passports also need Rahdari. One has to be a local inhabitant of the border districts and have relations or some small business or humanitarian reason on the other side to qualify for Rahdari which covers 60 miles/100kms from the border. Under the Rahdari system, a pass is issued which is valid for fifteen days to visit Iran. Legally, it is issued only twice a year. The basic qualification of the pursuit or Rahdari is that the person is local of the districts adjacent to the border and has either relatives or business across the borders

(ibid:08). However, residents with passport are issued visa without any difficulty. In other words, the Pakistani Baloch with passport can receive visa without any difficulty from the Iranian consulate in Quetta and similarly, the Iranian Baloch with passport from the Pakistani consulate in Zahedan. The people from both sides of the boundary line frequently cross the border for various purposes which include the following: some of Iranian Baloch who did not go for mandatory military service cross the border to get a Pakistani passport so that they can go for job to the Persian Gulf countries. Inter-marriages are common among the border Baloch. The system has been in practice for centuries as it helps strengthen tribal/family and ethnic bonds across the border while opening new opportunities of interaction by establishing new relationships.

Crossing the Border

The Baloch living across the border are predominantly Sunni. Many of Iranian Baloch go for jama'at tabligh (a non-governmental Sunni missionary movement that carries its message of simple religious piety door-to-door in many parts of the world) across the border to Panjgor and Raiwind, the second largest religious gathering of jama'at tabligh. There are numerous shrines of saints. The most important is that of Seyed Ghulam Rasool in Chababar. The other popular ones are those of Pir Shorab in Sastiyari, and Shazeni Pir and Rakal Shah in Chowkat. The Urs ceremonies continue for two to three days during which the pilgrims visit relatives, shop and do other errands.

There has been more economic and sustainable development in Iranian Baloch areas since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Major development work was undertaken during the long Iran-Iraq war which had a salutary effect on the situation in the border areas.

As Donnan and Wilson say, in many border areas and cultures "sport is perhaps one of the least offensive rituals and symbolic structures." Sporting activities are confined to football and cricket matches. (Kundi, 2009: 7) Baloch are good cricketers, but football is comparatively more popular in the area than other sports, especially in Iranian Balochistan. Most of the Iranian national cricket players are Baloch from Iranian southern Balochistan. There are football matches

between the border area teams which generate lots of enthusiasm and provide occasion for interaction.

The promotion of cross-border sports was mentioned in the Cultural Agreement signed in 1956, but no concrete steps were taken towards its promotion. The main cultural agreement between Pakistan and Iran known as Pakistan-Iran Cultural Agreement of March 9, 1956 did not focus on cultural interaction between the two Baloch communities, but under this agreement a number of cultural exchange programs were signed from time to time. Cricket is also popular on the Pakistani side but tent pegging which was more popular is declining in the border areas as more young people sport motorcycles instead of riding horses. Pick-ups serve as an important source of conveyance for cross border smuggling and transportation.

Exchanges across the Border

Borderlands are frontiers of economic dealings with opportunities for legal and illegal enterprise. Trade has been an integrating factor among the Baloch across the border. The people of the border area from ancient times have depended on cross-border commerce and business as the major source of livelihood. The land they possess is largely non-irrigated and uncultivated. In case of no rain or insufficient rain it faces the threat of drought. Therefore, trade across the border is a major occupation of the people. People traveling to Iran with or without Rahdari passport or without passport, legally or illegally, take and bring with them different items of merchandise to support their livelihood.

According to an estimate, the trade not covered under the regular customs regulations, including that of petroleum and its products, from Iran into Pakistan amounts to more than U.S. \$ 2 billion a year. It may be causing a loss to Pakistan revenue but provides a source of livelihood to the poor borderland Baloch. The major items smuggled include blankets, plastic goods, carpets, dried fruit, hosiery goods, fresh fruit (e.g., cherries) and tinned fruit. Stationery items and dairy products, in particular cheese, have become very popular in recent years. Balochistan is a major market for Iranian goods from where they are transported to other areas of Pakistan. From Pakistan, the major items of trade are rice, match boxes, tea, and cloth.

Smuggling of cattle, particularly cows and bulls, into Iran is a very lucrative business. Beef and mutton are expensive products in Iran. They are exported under license, but smuggling is common.

The train service is an important means of trade between Quetta and Taftan through Mirjaveh. The Nushki Extension Railway runs through Mirjaveh on the border to Zahedan in Iran. This line was constructed from Spezand Jn. near Quetta to Nushki in 1905. Extension work continued from 1917 to 1922 when the railway line reached Zahedan, covering 704kms (440 miles).

Sistan and Balochistan province enjoys huge potentialities in extraterritorial exchanges, as there are many ethnic and cultural relationships between the Baloch in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan and as this region is located on the route of the historic commercial Silk Road and in the vicinity of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Before the formation of urban centers and when the local government of "Sarhad" (border region) was under the control of the central government, production of dates, wheat, cotton, traditional fabrics and livestock products was common and evolving. The population was dispersed in animal husbandry sites and small agricultural units. Therefore, the demand for products was trivial and the commercial activities were inconsiderable. The commercial activities were controlled by the tribes, and they used to provide for their trading needs through Pakistan and thus provided for extraterritorial exchanges. (Bestor, 1979: 17–54)

This condition familiarized the local inhabitants with the potential for international trade. Iran is an oil-rich country, and the price of oil products in Iran is lower than in the neighboring countries and this facilitates oil exports. The people who live on both sides of the border enjoy common ethnic, social and cultural characteristics which facilitate their interaction and relationships and help the expansion of border trade. (Afrakhteh, 2008: 207)

The imposed border has separated the urban centres from their social and economic hinterlands. The demand for imported goods is thus high in the region and Zahedan acts as a transit point both to the domestic parts in Iran and to the neighboring countries (Khan 2005:40) nonetheless, this region suffers from a lack of proper job opportunities.

Therefore, the people who have no technical and educational skills are easily attracted to the trade of used commodities. The immigration of Afghan refugees and the Iran-Iraq War have aggravated this problem. Urban growth and expansion itself has also increased the demand for such consumer goods.

Unauthorized activities such as trafficking entail large profits for those involved, especially because these goods, after entry to Zahedan, can be easily transported to other parts of the province and other cities in Iran without the payment of customs duties. Due to this, many businessmen who trade tea, clothes and other goods cannot compete with the similar goods imported from the eastern border, which are mainly trafficked into Iran.

Iranian products are in high demand in Pakistan and Afghanistan so that the market of Zaranj City in Afghanistan is full of Iranian goods such as oil products, vegetables, and plastic products. In the border areas of Pakistan from Mirjaveh to some parts of Quetta, people use the vegetable oil imported from Iran. In the southern part near Rootak, people are freely involved in extraterritorial trade. The goods imported to Iran include rice, crystal, tea, clothes, fruits, sugar, new or used shoes, radios and audio-visual devices, cameras and mobile phones. While the goods exported from Iran include vegetable oil, plastic materials, chemical fertilizers and daily needs.

Entry of livestock into Iran is another example of informal trade in the border regions. The local inhabitants import animals, camels, cattle and goats from Pakistan and even from China, to Iran. During spring and summer, they bring their animals to the border areas from Gwadar in the South to Robat in the North on the pretext of grazing. The animals enter the border region in Iran where they are traded.

The exchange of goods is the initial basis of trade in the region which along with the lack of powerful productive institutions caused by the marginal position, climatic conditions, and settlement of nomadic tribes increased urban population, and the border situation has given the urban centers a commercial and business role.

Iranian Balochistan is economically more developed than Pakistani Balochistan, making it attractive for people from Pakistan who cross the border seeking job opportunities. Moreover, the ongoing war in

Afghanistan has also increased labour force migration to Iran. According to estimates, about 20,000 people enter Iran through the Mirjaveh check point every year while only about 17,000 pass in the opposite direction. Zahedan is a major destination for Pakistani and Afghani immigrants.

The students' interaction/exchange across borders is very limited. There are more cases of students from Sistan and Balochistan in Pakistani schools and colleges than vice versa because of Iranian tough competition of Iranian university entrance exam; also in order to learn English as an international language, some Iranian Baloch students are studying in India and Pakistan. The major reason is that schooling in Iran is more disciplined and curricula-oriented. Iranian colleges and schools require a high attendance rate; in Pakistani Balochistan attendance is no problem. Nonetheless, students studying across the borders face no restrictions. The medium of instruction also affects students' exchange. Had Persian or Balochi language been the common medium of instruction, there could have been more exchange of students.

Smuggling

Small-scale trade and smuggling are part of everyday life at many borders. Whenever prosperity along the border differs leading to considerable price differences in the adjacent countries, the border may be used as an economic resource by inhabitants living nearby. Therefore, trans-border small-scale trade and smuggling are possibilities to cope with stressful periods of biographic transition such as unemployment and poverty. (Bruns, 2012: 4) At the same time, transborder small-scale trade and smuggling are an everyday border phenomenon which is part of the normal routine at many borders.

Hasting Donnan and Thomas Wilson claim that: "one can hardly open a book about borders without finding at least passing reference to smuggling and the clandestine movement of people and goods from one side of the national boundary to the other" (Donnan:2010). To them, smuggling across international borders has historically functioned to subvert the economic and political order of states which share a border, while at the same time often building solidarity between

co-ethnics who are minorities in each of the states. Illegal fuel trade is most obvious on both sides of the border.

Illegal elements of a trans-border economic activity do not have to be automatically illegitimate. In the light of high unemployment and a high level of poverty, few decent paid working places or other alternatives, smuggling and small-scale trade are often highly legitimized among the population, although by state law labelled illegal and therefore forbidden. "Many transnational movements of people, commodities, and ideas are illegal because they defy the norms and rules of formal political authority," (Bruns, 2012: 4) as Abraham and van Schendel put it, "but they are quite acceptable, 'licit', in the eyes of participants in these transactions and flows." (ibid: 4) Legitimization does not necessarily derive from legality, but has its own sources.

The Iranian gasoline is a major item smuggled from Iran into Pakistan through the border. Recently a rationing system was set up whereby motorists receive a determined monthly allocation of subsidized fuel stored on their magnetic strip petrol cards. As this ration is not sufficient for many motorists, they have to cover their consumption partly from the illegal market. (Shah, 2007: 34) The reasons for fuel trading become abundantly clear when you have a look at petrol or diesel prices while approaching the border. In the vicinity of the Afghan or Pakistani frontier, prices rise considerably; therefore, unofficial trade even starts in Iranian territory at a certain distance from the border. (Boedeker, 2012: 51) It is mostly illegal in which a chain of mafia government officials, and local notables are involved. The petrol is sold all over Balochistan, right from inside the Pakistani border to lower down to Punjab and Sindh. The major route of smuggling is from Iran through a number of dirt routes along the RCD and Quetta/Taftan international trunk road. There are different methods of smuggling; it is carried in oil tankers by the private and commercial vehicles in containers and trucks with big tanks tucked underneath.

Smuggling of petrol is a source of interaction and a boon for those smuggling it. People living in the far-flung areas of Balochistan, particularly areas near the border depend on petrol smuggling as the source of livelihood. Rationing system and the smuggling of petrol

resumed with the visible change in the sale of Iranian petrol in border and non-border cities at a lower price.

Drug and Human Trafficking

Production of opium in Afghanistan has been rising constantly since the invasion of the Soviets in 1979 as it was important for financing different rebellious groups especially in the southern provinces of Afghanistan bordering the Baloch settlement area. (Boedeker, 2012: 48) The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimates that 83% of the opium exports from Afghanistan cross the border into the Islamic Republic of Iran either directly from Afghanistan or via Pakistan; it is true of the Baloch borderland, particularly in case of drug trafficking. Iran's border with Pakistan and Afghanistan has traditionally been known as the South Asian golden triangle for drug smuggling since 1979. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the largest portions of drugs enter Iran through the major routes across Golds mid's Line from Afghanistan and Pakistan (World Drug Report 2009). The report said all drugs which enter Iran from Sistan and Balochistan Province are primarily dispatched to outskirts of Bam City via Zahedan, the capital of Sistan and Balochistan Province.

A large percentage of the total amount of opium, heroin and morphine enters Iran from Sistan and Balochistan. Trafficking to the main stations in Iran usually takes place at night. Route Guides know all the roads and passages in the eastern part of Iran.

Pakistan and Iran have signed a number of Memorandums of Understanding for the control of smuggling and human trafficking supplemented by the actions of home departments and border towns' administrations. Similarly, the cases of human trafficking are common in the areas with the involvement of mafias and notables from the area to facilitate those who illegally cross the borders into Iran for their passage to Europe en route Turkey. According to a current UNHCR report (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Report 2010:2), there are about 930,000 registered Afghans living in Iran. Hardly does a month pass when there is not a major report of human trafficking in the media. Sistan and Balochistan is one of the gateways for illegal migration and there are frequent arrests of people illegally

entering Iran. The number of illegal entrants can exceed 100 in a day. The FIA sources claim that there is involvement of borderland mafias. Local actors also play an important role. They are mostly tribal notables.

Iran has been stricter on smuggling and trafficking activities. Compared to Pakistan, smuggling across the border in Iranian government's viewpoint is regarded as a secessionist activity which can jeopardize the nation's integrity.

In Sistan and Balochistan opiates smuggling has coincided with an escalation of more organised violence. Although the extent and complexity of the relationship between drug-trafficking and insurgency are not clear, the presence of both types of violence has created a situation which is at times referred to as "full-scale war" by Iranian officials and has recently led to Tehran's decision to transfer authority for the campaign against perpetrators of violence in Sistan and Balochistan to the IRGC. No matter borderlands have generally been areas of support and subversion of states, but the Baloch borderland is more supportive and less subversive.

According to Just Boedeker smuggling or trading, as it is seen from a Baloch perspective, is not an embarrassing and clandestine activity that enables participants to cope with poor living conditions. (Boedeker, 2012: 49)

The protagonists operating in this domain appreciate the (illegal) cross-border trade as a legitimate source of income and regard the counteractive measures of the Iranian state as a repression of the Baloch tribes (Hughes 2004:29). It is rather a prestigious profession preferred to manual work and the source of adventure stories attesting courage and manliness. This positive connotation of illegal cross-border trade results from different social and cultural-historic factors. He believes that Due to the Iranian official perspective of Baloch trading activities, which are perceived as smuggling and undermining the Iranian nation state, Baloch people are criminalized as a whole and excluded from any official posts for the main part (Boedeker, 2012: 50).

Conclusion

Baloch borderland being both the back and front yard of two countries with common hereditary, socio-cultural and historical bonds

is largely of an interdependent or coexistent nature. Several factors account for interaction between the two populations, but more interaction is needed for economic integration which will benefit both Iran and Pakistan.

The Goldsmith's Line does not stand in the way as the borderland Baloch show through their daily interaction. This borderland phenomenon of interdependence supported by historical, socio-cultural, economic and political ties is pregnant with possibilities of further integration.



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