

Issues of Shia Hazara Community of Quetta, Balochistan: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

The issue of Hazara community living in Quetta has become vulnerable in the contemporary era. It has been observed that a major number of people from Shia Hazara community have been killed in different suicide attacks, particularly in Quetta and generally in other areas of the province. The contribution of Hazara community has remained positive in the development of Balochistan particularly and overall in the development of country. They did contribute in Bureaucracy, military, education, health and in different other administrative departments. Economically this community is perceived as a prosperous community but during past many years they have faced different sectarian incidents which have created a negative impact on the development of this community. They have been facing different problems in the field of education, health and in earning their livelihood. In this article researcher will critically evaluate various problems of this community and provide recommendations to address their actual grievances.

Keywords: *vulnerable, Actual Grievances, Shia Hazara Community, Threat perception, Insecurity*

Introduction

Psychologically they are under certain threats and pressures. In Quetta city, many of these reside near Alamdar road and Hazara town. The Hazara people belong to Shia Muslim sect, and the community members believe that this is a major reason which is adversely affecting their social existence (retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/quettas-hazara-community-living-fear>). They are not free to move in different parts of Quetta; their movement is restricted in their own locality. Most of the people from Hazara community have this point of view that for the sake of their survival they should migrate in other parts of country or they should go abroad. Sectarian conflicts in Balochistan are result of involvement of some internal and external factors. Internal factors are those extremist elements who want to get government attention and make Hazara community as a soft target.

Government has to take serious action to punish such elements who are disturbing law and order situation on one hand and creating bad image of Pakistan as a insecure country at the regional level as well as global level. Involvement by the External

elements in sectarian conflicting situation cannot be rule out. In the presence of Kashmir issue Indian involvement to destabilize Pakistan cannot be ignored. Indian involvement in Balochistan has been proved. In sectarian conflicting situation the involvement of Iran and Saudi Arab cannot be ignored. Government hast to make efforts to decrease the existing trust deficit beteen Hazara community and government. Hazara community show great interest upon the military institution instead on civilian ruling authority.

The main responsibility of the government after ensuring the security of Shia Hazara community is to create sense of belongingness towards political system. Government has to make efforts to heal up the wounds of victims by providing them better facilities and particularly the provision of basic necessities of life. This is the need of the time to stop their migration in other countries of the world. They have potential to participate in the developmental process of country so this potential should not go in waste.

Problems of Shia Hazara Community of Quetta

There are various Social, economic and political problems of Shia Hazara community of Quetta which researcher has tried to evaluate in this research paper. Researcher has used descriptive research method to analyze the available knowledge.

Socio-Economic Problems Faced by Shia Hazara Community of Quetta

There are different issues which are being faced by the Shia hazara community of Quetta in their daily life. One of the major social problems is lack of job opportunities, and the Hazara community cites biasness as a reason for it. How the consequence of it can be so terrible is visible from the fact that in December 2011, 55 people from this community were killed when a boat taking almost 90 illegitimate settlers to Australia turned over off at the coast of Indonesia. After this incident the independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP, 2014) asked government to take strong measures on this matter; and pointed out that the continued persecution in Balochistan province is a critical factor forcing the young Hazara men to leave their homeland (retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/quettas-hazara-community-living-fear>).

Imagine the psychological stress the Hazara people are facing, as they are almost living an isolated life in cut off areas of Alamdar road and Hazara town. The contemporary world is experiencing an isolated lifestyle due to recent Covid-19 pandemic. However, it would be not wrong to say that the Hazara community from last so many years has been living like this. The children from this community are deprived of the normal growth which any child deserves, and indeed this social problem is enormously serious (Notezai, 2020).

The historical developments in this region are where this problem actually originated. In 1979, when Soviet Union attacked Afghanistan, it brought Jihadist groups from different parts of the world into Afghanistan to serve the interests of the USA. Similarly, in 1979, the Shia Mullahs in Iran came in mainstream power through a revolution that finished the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. The Iran after it wanted to shift this particular Shia revolution to Pakistan, and overall, these regional developments changed the dynamics of this whole area. Undoubtedly, the Quetta city in Pakistan became a severe victim of this change, by falling in the

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clutches of religious fundamentalism and extremism in terrorism shape. An alarming fact is that almost every family in the Hazara community has lost their loved ones in various terrorist attacks (Notezai, 2020).

The youth from Hazara are very energetic and passionate about acquiring education, but the gloomy circumstances related to their community have halted their educational progress. Many among them want to attain higher education, but are afraid of the dangerous security situation. There are many examples where young ones from this community have got great marks. However, the Balochistan University in Quetta is not ensuring their safety, and hence, they are left with no choice. This is an important reason why many young persons from Hazara have run away from Quetta to Australia and Europe for claiming refuge, and it is projected that 90% among them use illegal procedure for this purpose. It is a frightening aspect that the Quetta city has become hub of human trafficking industry, and many simple people are becoming victim of this menace (Azhar, 2013). They feel their survival is at stake in Quetta.

The participation of Hazara women for earning purpose is of great significance, and they have the liberty to choose their profession. It is a very positive sign since the educated women take the role of teachers, and those who are poor perform embroidery work quilt manufacturing or carpet weaving. Nevertheless, this crucial Hazara community situation has been very disturbing for the women as well, who are striving for a great livelihood (Afghan in Quetta Settlements, Livelihoods, Support Networks and Cross-Border Linkages, 2006). The role of Hazara women for economic wellbeing of their families is very significant.

Apart from all this, the Hazara community is rich in its traditions, music and history, which has been overshadowed by this extremism wave. Also, many among them have joined Pakistan army, and are performing their duties with great commitment and promise (Soomro, 2019). They have potential to participate in the development of country by joining different administrative departments. But sectarian attacks on that community had created psychological threat for their lives and this threat perception environment has undermined their constructive contribution.

The economic condition of Hazara Shia community throughout the history has remained stable. The major employment sectors include government jobs, trade and private businesses. Since early 2000 the economic conditions have deteriorated drastically. The shops rents have gone higher specifically for the Hazara Shias in Quetta. Moreover, the economic share in the markets on Quetta has shuffled in the favor of non Hazara business community. Another issue face by Hazara business community is the presence of middlemen as hazara businessmen avoid going out of their residential areas for security concerns and fall prey to the wishes of middlemen taking economic advantages. They prefer to perform different economic activities within the boundaries of their specific residential areas.

The job market for Hazara Shias of Quetta consisted of government jobs and private jobs. The insecurities to life have badly damaged the job market for the Hazaras as most of the private job openings do not entertain them because of their sectarian outlook and unique physical acquaintance to the Hazara Community. Moreover, Hazara Community's representation in the public sector, provincial and local government level has decreased drastically as Hazara community's constant fear for

their lives is a huge hindrance and they even leave permanent government jobs fearing their lives.

The constant fear for life has not only damaged the socio-economic fabric of the Hazara Shia Community of Quetta but has also created numerous physical and mental health issues. The access to hospitals is not safe and many health problems go unchecked by the professional doctors.

Educational Problems of Shia Hazara Community of Quetta

Education plays a vital role in the progress of a nation. A nation can't survive and thrive without education. Quality education is inevitable for the survival of a nation. Pakistan is currently facing a lot of social issues. Illiteracy is one of the major problems that create hurdles in the way of prosperous and progressive Pakistan. In particular, the Shia Hazara community of Quetta is facing many issues in terms of education. Several research studies have thrown light on this important aspect.

Changezi (2009) examined the effects of societal conflict on Hazara girls' education. This study collected data through in-depth interviews. The findings showed that poor economic situation and security issues create major problems for school going girls. Religious views and oppression had a minimal influence on girls. In another study, Changezi and Biseth (2011) claimed that education is an agent of social change for the Hazara community. By using the tool of education, the Hazara community can resolve the issue and fight for its fundamental rights.

Nawaz and Hassan (2015) ascertained that Hazara children were getting education in British run schools before independence. Hazara community was more educated and civilized. Faiz (2015) criticized state policies towards Baluchistan arguing that Pakistan doesn't want to educate Baloch due to fear of losing its control over this territory. Erum, Saeed, and Rehman(2019) disagreed with Faiz (2015) and proved that Baloch the sons of soil are getting education and new trends of social change are taking place due to education in Baluchistan.

In addition, Buzdar (2018) argued that an average Hazara individual is educated as compared to other ethnic groups in Baluchistan. However, there is a dire need to impart education for the socio-economic development of Baluchistan. Ashraf, Bashir, and Fatima (2020) highlighted that lack of training and basic facilities are major educational issues in Quetta. Researchers suggested improving the education standard in order to improve the existing situation.

To summarize, Shia Hazara community have to face a lot of issues especially when it comes to acquiring education (Changezi & Biseth, 2011). Prior to independence, Hazara community were highly educated (Nawaz & Hassan, 2015) but this community is presently facing a lot of issues due to state policies (Ashraf, Bashir, & Fatima, 2020; Faiz, 2015).

Political Discrimination Faced by the Shia Hazara Community of Quetta

If we look at Hazara community's political problems, a most important among them is the unconstructive part played by the political parties, keeping in view the Shia-Sunni difference. Likewise, the political parties with sectarian beliefs are extremely steadfast in this Shia-Sunni sectarian divide. The mullahs with sectarian ideology view the Shia Hazara from Iran's perspective. The Sunni sectarian holistically term Shia Hazaras as Iranian agents. The Sunni sectarian mullahs on numerous occasions

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through platform of sectarian political party have openly portrayed Shia having beliefs conflicting with Islam in community meetings in Quetta city.

However, it is Hazara community's precarious current position, which is not allowing them to exercise their basic human rights that include right to life, free movement, education and opportunities of earning and requirements of living. This is where it nearly becomes impossible for the Hazara community to exercise their political rights, since they are constantly striving for their life safety. The National Commission for Human Rights Pakistan report 'Understanding the agonies of ethnic Hazaras,' has perfectly explained this whole issue. This report nevertheless has unfolded another aspect of this important subject as many from Hazara community believe that there are being targeted not because of sectarianism; it is linked with the socio-economic success that they are enjoying. This argument can be supported through the example of Shia groups that are breathing peacefully in Dera Murad Jamali and Jafarabad in Balochistan, and it is evidence that these assassinations are not due to religion; instead it is related to a particular community. The success of Hazara can be taken from how they have successfully built markets, shop, shopping malls and structures in center of Quetta, and most importantly how they have taken lead in all life spheres, sports, education and trade in contrast to other local communities (NHCP Report, 2018).

Another major reason of Hazara community's political problems is the limited reporting of Hazara killings in the national print and electronic media, and it is believed that this deliberate carelessness is due to the intricacy from sectarian radical sets. What we find in media is the news about the figures of Hazara killings and murders. The insignificant coverage from the national media classifying the reasons and effects of this critical matter, is where this subject did not get the necessary attention that it required in terms of overall national security standpoint (NHCP Report, 2018).

The issue of integration in this regard is also very important, as it is perfectly explained by the American heritage dictionary "the bringing of people of different racial or ethnic groups into unrestricted and equal association, as in society or an organization". Integration in general can be categorized in four types: social, cultural, economic and political. It is also a reality that politically the Hazara community in Quetta has a strong standing. The community has Syed Mohammad Raza from Majlis Wahdat-ul-Muslemeen (MWM) in the 65-member provincial assembly. However, it is little communication with the Pashtun and Baloch groups that have not allowed Hazara community to politically progress. The consequences of it have led to the stereotyping of Hazara community, and it is perceived that they are monolithic and diehard Shia. Nonetheless, the Hazara community has their minority religious identity. In religious parties, MWM (Majlis Wahdat-ul-Muslemeen) is very renowned. The Pashtun khwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) has also established connection with the community, and in the 2013 general elections Agha Muhammad Ali from the Hazara community contested for PB 2 (Quetta 2) on PKMAP's platform (Kakar, 2014).

All in all, interaction is the way forward on which the Hazara community needs to work on. It will eventually allow understanding of each other that will lead to compassion. Apart from it, initiating discourse between different religious and ethnic groups will create harmony. In the time to come, social integration through

education needs to be prioritized for which introducing diversity and respecting each other in the curriculum is extremely imperative (Kakar, 2014).

Also, the point to understand is that it is the prime responsibility of a state to provide protection to its citizens, about which the policy makers must openly accept their failure along with the fact that they are mainly responsible too for this grave situation. It is high time that they should devise a concrete strategy for the betterment of their people, and the National Action Plan can provide impetus to it since it has been started with near consensus (Kakar, The News on Sunday (TNS), 2019)

Security Related Issues of Shia Hazara Community in Quetta

Most of Shia Hazara community in Quetta, Baluchistan is settled in two areas outside the main city of Quetta. These two areas namely Hazara Town and Mari Abad cater almost 90 percent of total population of Shia Hazara community living in Quetta. A deeply integrated socio economic system has evolved over the period of time, which provides to most on the needs of Shia Hazaras indigenously. However, Hazara community's engagement outside these two areas is also very high as many hazaras move out of the community areas to work in the civil service of Balochistan or many have established private businesses in Quetta particularly and in Balochistan Province in general (EASO:2015). There are roughly 300 shops in Quetta currently owned by the hazara community and most of their owners reside in Hazara town and Mari Abad localities (PT:2015).

Although the two main localities where Shia Hazara community resides, are protected by the high walls and gates but the residents of both these towns feel highly unsafe while traveling outside these localities (NCHR:2018). There are no specific routs which are secure to commute to local businesses or no secure shopping areas where Shia Hazara community can feel safe (HRCP:2014). The Hazara Community particularly feels unsafe while traveling outside the Hazara Town and Mari Abad due to their unique physical features as they are easily identifiable among the crowd thus, subject to target killing (Mahmood: 2014).

The insecurity caused by fear of movement has turned both of densely populated Shia Hazara Community of Quetta in slums engulfed with constant threat to their lives (USSD:2019). The travel insecurities of Shia Hazaras is not only limited to commuting outside of Quetta but they also feel insecure even to commute between the two localities where these communities are currently residing. The daily supplies providers who are also Hazaras risk their lives to bring the commodities of routine usage. The unsafe travel has a deep impact on socio-economic and psychological conditions of Shias living in Quetta (DFAT:2019). NCHR report of 2018 accounts for over 500 killings of Shia Hazaras living in Quetta is about eight years till 2018. More than 600 Shia Hazaras got injured in sectarian and terrorist attacks inside Quetta and almost all the casualties belonged to Shia Hazara Community living in heavily populated Hazara town and Mari Abad localities catering most of the Shia Population (NCHR:2018) (CRSS:2019).

Casualties related to traveling outside the Hazara Town and Mari Abad areas have questioned the security situation in identifies target killings. Since 1999 the target killing of Hazara Shias who travel in and outside Quetta have resulted in widespread fear for life. Car bombings, processions blasts and target killings of individuals,

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families, convoy of pilgrims have specifically targeted the Hazara Shia Community (NCHR:2018).

According to the Hazara Organization for Peace & Equality (HOPE) the road safety initiatives for Hazaras are not up to the mark and fear that the situation is getting worse for the travelers commuting all over Pakistan for the Hazara Shias. They particularly see safety measures taken for Hazara Shias commuting for pilgrimage not effective as no regular security escorts are provided for their community.

Security initiatives taken by the Government of Balochistan are seen inadequate in the eyes of Hazara community. However, it is necessary to take account of security initiatives taken by the government of Balochistan. According to the home department of government of Balochistan there are around nineteen platoons of Frontier Corps have been deployed to provide for the safe commute to and from Hazara Town and Mari Abad localities. Furthermore, the security checkpoints have been emplaced at the entry and exit points of these two areas as well. As per the claims of government of Balochistan, in order to provide the safe routes to all the Hazara Shia pilgrims from Taftan border to Quetta, around 1300 security personals from different law enforcement agencies have been deployed to keep this particular route safe from any terrorist attacks. Moreover, local travel inside Quetta for daily purchases is also guarded by the convoy security (HRCP:2014).

On the other hand, the main leadership of Hazara Shia Community expresses his reservations regarding the initiatives taken by the state as unsatisfactory as they see role of the government discriminatory. The community's main concern revolves around the first information reports being labeled to unidentified people in a situation where there is an open threat by some banded organizations involved in sectarian killings. Moreover, their concerns also relate to the unnecessary restrictions on the daily lives of community members going out and coming in to Hazara town and Mari Abad area resulting in harassment and discrimination (USSD:2019).

The continued travel restrictions on Hazara Shia community have not only jeopardized the living conditions of the community but have also indicated the laps in governmental control of the security situation in Balochistan. The fears of Hazara Shia community must be addressed as their socio economic wellbeing is the wellbeing of not only the Province of Balochistan but of Pakistan as well.

The Hazra Shia community of Quetta is extremely vulnerable to target killings and socio-economic persecution by the banned extremist sectarian organizations like Laskar e Jhangvi (LeJ). The continuous fear for life and fear of want has brought the community closer to economic down gradation. Community fleeing from the cursed neighborhood has many times ended up taking illegal measures such as human trafficking to European countries and subsequent drowning in the sea. The scarce job market and means of business are continually shrinking to the alarming level. Fear of movement inside and outside the city of Quetta has further exacerbated the insecurities and psychological problems of the community. The overall deteriorated security situation of the country in the last two decades brought Hazaras of Quetta greater misery. The recent development in the overall security of the country has somehow helped in reducing target killings of Hazaras. However, there are still plenty of areas where the presence of state is missing. The National Action Plan (NAP) adopted by the government of Pakistan curbed the sectarian outfits

responsible for Shia persecution in Quetta specifically. The need of the hour is to look at the socio-economic and psychological impact of past two decades and also look for the repair of damaged state-society trust. The degrading health infrastructure and economic persecution have made the whole community vulnerable to sever risks to decent livelihood of the people of Hazara Community in Quetta. The role of state is extremely important in mitigating the security risks that include all sectors of security. The decades long problems of Hazara community require a long term planning by the all the sectors of government as the persecution is real and its impacts are deep.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The major objective of this research article is to highlight the main problems of Shia Hazara community related to their survival as a specific religious identity. As it is apparent under the constitution of Pakistan that all religious minorities have right to spend their lives peacefully according to their specific belief system and government is also responsible to provide them protection. So this is legitimate right of Shia Hazara community to assert their basic human rights. This is the responsibility of government to implement the existing laws to maintain peace and harmony among various sectarian groups and where government feels there is need to enact new laws or there is need of new policies to minimize sectarian rift, government has to evolve mechanisms to curb the menace of sectarianism.

Shia Hazara community has certain reservations regarding existing justice system. Terrorists and extremists should be brought to justice who have been involved to initiate violent attacks against the Hazara community. Fair and speedy justice can be a significant tool to heal up their wounds and to restore their trust on government and system. Mutual understanding between Hazara community and government can defeat ill-planned intention of terrorists and religious extremists to disrupt the existing peace and security of the state.

Government has to initiate concrete policies to address the various issues including the issue of persecution of Shia Hazara community of Quetta on the long run basis. Government has to build an environment of trust among this community through addressing their actual grievances on top priority basis. Government has to take solid measures regarding implementation of existing laws to stop violence against individuals. This is the responsibility of government to punish those individuals according to law who are source of sectarian violence and becoming a source to destabilize the existing state

The role of media and educational institutions is very important to create inter and intra faith harmony among various religious communities. Electronic and print media can create awareness among individuals of different sects to tolerate each other's point of view and performance of rituals. Media can hold healthy discussion on different topics which have potential to create tolerance among different sects. Print media through publishing articles which can create harmony among different sects can play very constructive role in the society. Media has to promote the process of national integration and try to serve the national interests of the country. National integration can be promoted through mutual understanding among various segments of society and role of media is very crucial in this regards. Media should produce true image of the society and different segments of the society should be satisfied with the role of media. As far as Shia Hazara community of Quetta is concerned

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they show certain reservation regarding the role of Pakistani media regarding their issues.

Government had provided different financial compensation to those families who have suffered during various sectarian conflicts. Government hast to provide victim families proper health and education facilities because if they have lost their bread earner then it would become very difficult for rest of the family to bear the all expenditure related to various necessity needs. There is need of comprehensive policy to address such sensitive nature issues and heal up the wounds of victims

Government of Balochistan already had taken various measures to provide basic and higher education facilities. Shia Hazara community feels it difficult to go for the sake of education and for better health facilities in Quetta city. Government can establish different educational institutions and hospitals with best one facilities in those areas where majority of Hazara population is residing for example; Mari Abad, Hazara Town. Government can provide these facilities at their door step. This would be a major step for wellbeing of Hazara community of Quetta. The government has to devise a policy for grooming of Hazara youth. Technical institutions should also be established in their localities. By doing this their role can be more constructive in the development of the country.

Nongovernmental organizations can also play very effective role for promoting peace and harmony through conducting different seminars, workshops and seminars. Government should assist NGOs to perform positive activities for the wellbeing of society. NGOs can bring into lime light the actual issues of Shia Hazara community. NGOs can provide proper information regarding different economic opportunities to the individuals of this community.

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