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**THE ROLE OF ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION
IN AFGHANISTAN'S CIVIL WAR**

Afghanistan is a country with ethnic diversity like other hundred countries in the world. By abusing this diversity, ethnic discrimination has been one of the effective factors of civil war in Afghanistan. The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between ethnicity and continues civil war in Afghanistan. Ethnicity as an issue has been faced by all multi-ethnic societies. But it is a matter of great apprehensions and graver outcomes in those societies which are going through post-conflict reconstruction, like Afghanistan is today. This paper attempts to analyze the fact how social and political objectives of ethnic groups are liable to be accommodated in the new structure of Afghan State. It will also argue about the composition of ethnic groups, impact of war on ethnic communities, and why the ethnic fault lines may continue and under what circumstances, they fade away?

Key words: Ethnicity, Ethnic discrimination, civil war, multi – ethnic state, socio-economic exclusion.

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**Ауғанстандағы азаматтық соғыс кезіндегі
этникалық кемсітушілік орны**

Ауғанстан – бұл әлемнің басқа жүз елі сияқты этникалық әртүрлілігі бар ел. Осы алуан түрлілікті асыра пайдалана отырып, этникалық кемсітушілік Ауғанстандағы азаматтық соғыстың тиімді факторларының бірі болды. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – Ауғанстандағы азаматтық соғыс пен этникалық қатынастар арасындағы өзара байланысты зерттеу болып табылады. Этникалық тиістілік мәселе ретінде барлық көпэтникалық қоғамдардың алдында тұр. Бірақ бұл бүгінгі Ауғанстан сияқты постконфликттен кейінгі қалпына келтіруді бастан кешкен қоғамдардағы үлкен қауіптер мен елеулі нәтижелер мәселесі. Бұл мақалада этникалық топтардың әлеуметтік-саяси мақсаттары ауған мемлекетінің жаңа құрылымында ескерілуі мүмкін. Ол сондай-ақ этникалық топтардың құрамы, соғыстың этникалық қауымдарға әсері туралы дауға болады және неге этникалық сыну желілері жалғасуы мүмкін және олар қандай жағдайларда жоғалады?

Түйін сөздер: этникалық, этникалық дискриминация, азаматтық соғыс, көп ұлтты мемлекет, әлеуметтік-экономикалық ерекшелік.

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**Роль этнической дискриминации в Афганистане
во время Гражданской войны**

Афганистан – это страна с этническим разнообразием, как и другие сто стран мира. Злоупотребляя этим разнообразием, этническая дискриминация стала одним из эффективных факторов гражданской войны в Афганистане. Целью данного исследования является изучение взаимосвязи между этнической принадлежностью и продолжающейся гражданской войной в Афганистане. Этническая принадлежность как проблема стоит перед всеми многоэтническими обществами. Но это вопрос больших опасений и более серьезных результатов в тех обществах, которые переживают постконфликтное восстановление, как сегодня Афганистан. В данной статье предпринята попытка анализа того, как социально-политические цели этнических групп

могут быть учтены в новой структуре афганского государства. Он также будет спорить о составе этнических групп, влиянии войны на этнические общины, и почему этнические линии разлома могут продолжаться и при каких обстоятельствах они исчезают?

Ключевые слова: этничность, этническая дискриминация, гражданская война, многонациональное государство, социально-экономическая изоляция.

Introduction

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnicity country and society, its ethnic groups have lived together for more than 5000 years in this region and they gathered together many times against The Great Empire of Britain and Soviet Union and defeated them and have maintained their freedom. Due to Afghanistan's geo-strategic location, the powerful countries have tried to have a direct or an indirect influence in this country's political strategy. These foreign powers have always created problems among these ethnic groups for getting through their own interests. In this sense, the country's multi ethnicity has hampered its development as a nation.

By abusing this diversity, ethnic discrimination has been one of the effective factors of civil wars in Afghanistan. However, a war-exhausted nation confronts a raft of problems; extreme poverty, deprivation and discrimination have reinforced existing fault lines in society. Bridging these gaps requires a long-term investment in physical and social capital and the economy, if the relapse of conflict is to be avoided.

Experience from different countries emerging from ethnic conflicts has demonstrated that when a leadership sets up appropriate, transparent and accountable management systems and tools, and then applies them properly and equitably, the ethnic discrimination eventually come to an end, and it is the key components of sustainable peace and development will become more achievable.

Afghan politicians, however, reject ethnicity as a pressing issue. Rhetoric about ethnicity is in a sense taboo to speak about in public, but history says otherwise. Ethnic divisions have always played a significant role in the country ever since the inception of the modern state of Afghanistan. This issue was highlighted during the Bonn Conference of 2001 when the United Nations emphasized the importance of keeping the country multi-ethnic. The conference stressed the importance of safeguarding the political representation and interests of all ethnicities. The events that led to the Bonn Conference, however, are attached to a hazy and somewhat obscure ethnic history.

The issue of ethnic discrimination is one of the most critical issues in the context of peace and reconstruction of Afghanistan. Peace building as the most important part of reconstruction and rehabilitation is a multifaceted issue. We cannot reach to real peace without the consideration of ethnic discrimination issue, because it is the main cause of Afghan's civil wars. It involves all economic, political and social aspects. The strengthening stability of the foundations of a country pertains to sustainable peace and security. Since, the nature of war is destruction of existing mechanisms and segmentation of a nation in warring opposite groups, it is important to find out the ways of strengthening peace and security after bringing the ethnic discrimination to an end.

The foremost concern is to engage with theoretical reflections on questions of nation and ethnicity which is seminal for any serious and critical reflection on the evolution of identity discourse in Afghanistan. Specifically, the attempt is to engage with the following issues:

- 1- To highlight the roots and elements of ethnic discrimination in Afghanistan;
- 2- To examine the relationship between ethnic discrimination and civil war;
- 3- To identify challenges and opportunities for building sustainable peace in Afghanistan;
- 4- To provide practical solutions and recommendations for stopping ethnic discrimination.

Afghanistan's Ethnic Groups

Lying in the hearth of Asia, Afghanistan is the crossroads of the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. As its strategic location, a multitude of ethnicities dwell within its borders. This diversity, however, has undermined efforts at peacebuilding. With heightened ethnic tension and fluid ethnic boundaries, no policy, plan, or proposal can adequately address the need of any single group.

According to 2010 data from the US Department of State, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan is the Pashtun, comprising 42% of Afghans. The Tajiks are the second largest ethnic group, at 27% of the population, followed by the Hazaras 9%, Uzbeks 9%, Aimaq 4%, Turkmen 3%, Baluch 2% and other

groups that make up 4% (Youngerman & Wahab, 2007: 14).

This section will take a closer look at each of the main groups identified above, although the reader should note that other groupings may exist in the country as demographic data for Afghanistan tends not just to be unreliable and difficult to verify, but figures about the ethnic composition of the population are also disputed among ethnic groups.

When discussing ethnicity, it often proves difficult to draw clear distinctions between terms such as social, ethnic and minority groups. For the purposes of this paper I am using the term ethnic group, which is generally defined as a social group of a larger society that is bound together by common ties of race, language, nationality, culture or other common values.

At the dawn of modern times, the territory of what is now Afghanistan was inhabited by a variety of ethnic groups which apart from the Muslim faith, had little in common (Saikal, 2004:18). The ethnic groups in Afghanistan are «solid, cultural units which have been divided by boundaries and have been engaged in conflict since years, (Shahrani, 1986: 26-29). Ethnically Afghanistan is truly a very «diverse country that has been under the control of the Pashtun majority at the top level as all the kings (In the contemporary era since 1747) come from this group». However, ethnicity had never remained a very strong factor in Afghanistan's politics before the Sour Revolution (Rais, 1999). The war in Afghanistan has vastly changed the traditional balance of power among the ethnic groups. Non-Pashtun groups are more powerful today than they were 40 years back.

The population statistics for the major ethnic groups are highly controversial in the absence of an accurate official census.

Ethnic group	%
Pashtun	42
Tajik	27
Hazara	9
Uzbek	9
Aimak	4
Turkmen	3
Baluchi	2
Others	4

Source: Youngerman, Barry & Wahab, Shaista. (2007). A Brief History of Afghanistan. InfoBase Publishing, New York. P. 14.

The origins of various ethnic groups are subject of much speculation and legend (Wahab & Youngerman, 2007: 15). Afghanistan has been facing the political intricacies in «developing a coherent state on nationhood», owing to the complications of ethnic, religious and linguistic multiplicity of the country. Barfield (2010: 23) says that «Afghanistan consists of 5 major and dozens of minor ethnic groups and many of which have not been even studied well».

Pashtuns

Pashtuns comprise the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, they are the most politically influential ethnic group historically, and they are seen as the historic founders of the Afghan monarchy in 1747. They live primarily in the south and the eastern provinces of the country. The Pashtun social structure is based on the Pashtunwali code of honor and behavior (The most important principles for Pashtuns are hospitality, protection of guests, defense of property, family honor and the protection of female relatives).

Their main tribal confederations are Durrani and Ghilzai whose territorial domain extends to the South and East of the country. Both have enmity against each other. The other major tribes of Pashtuns are Mohmand, Afridi and Yusufzai (Wahab & Youngerman, 2007: 15). As a result of the war (Soviet invasion), and its accompanying political fragmentation among the tribes and empowerment of other ethnic groups, the role played by the Pashtuns in the Afghan society and the emerging power structure has somewhat declined (Newell, 1989: 1094).

Tajiks

Tajiks are the second largest group, they mainly concentrated in northern, north-eastern and western Afghanistan. Tajiks have no specific social structure and their loyalties tend to revolve around the village and family. They are better educated and skilled, they live in settled communities rather than leading a nomadic lifestyle. Rulers from the Tajik ethnic group led Afghanistan during two brief periods: for nine months in 1929 under Habibullah Khan and from 1992 to 1996 under President Burhanuddin Rabani. Since 2001, the situation of Tajiks has changed considerably according to the BBC. The Tajik resistance fighters were very influential in the so-called Northern Alliance that cooperated with US and coalition forces to oust the Taliban (Retrieved July 7, 2015).

Hazara

Hazaras are a Mongoloid people from central Afghanistan, they are unarguably the most persecuted and marginalized group in Afghanistan. Unlike most Afghans, they are Shia Muslim. Under Emir Abdulrahman Khan, their land was taken away and distributed to Pashtuns. They also had harsh taxes imposed on them. When the Hazaras revolted, the Amir brutally massacred them and sold the remaining population into slavery. Until 1919, the hazaras were legally slaves. They are the poorest and the most marginalized ethnic community of the country (Rais, 2008: 32).

Uzbeks and Turkmen

Uzbeks and Turkmen both live predominantly, though not exclusively, in the northern provinces of Afghanistan. Uzbeks and Turkmen are mostly grain and vegetable farmers, and they occupy the greatest share of Afghanistan's arable land in the North (Rais, 2008: 32). Many supplement their income by producing and selling crafts, animal by-products and, most importantly, carpets. Many Uzbeks are settled in towns where they are successful businessmen, silver and goldsmiths and leatherworkers. Due to their relative prosperity and small size compared to the overall population of Afghanistan, Uzbeks and Turkmen have not pursued political influence in the past to the same degree as other ethnic groups. Recently, Uzbeks have been striving for greater political participation in the central government and greater control over Uzbeks-majority areas (Smith et al; 1969: 75).

Political Instrumentalization of Ethnicity

The question comes to mind why ethnic groups rose to political relevance in Afghanistan. to answer this question one has to look back on history. The Afghanistan state was created by the rival colonial powers British India and Russia at the end of the 19th century. The ruling family of the Pashtun Durrani confederation enthroned by British India favored Pashtun elements in their concept of the nation-state. Besides the fact that the Pashtuns made up the royal family, the main reasons for the predominance of this Pashtun-biased nationalism were that the Pashtuns constituted the most numerous ethnic category.

Although the state policy meant to include the various regional leaders, tribal chiefs and notables by distributing resources in a clientelistic way (Barnett,

1992: 77-99), the state used ethnic patterns to regulate access to public goods and offices. Pashtuns were privileged in all areas and dominated the military. Tajiks were left with the economic sector and the educational institutions, whereas the Hazaras were marginalized in general. Hence, a resettlement and redistribution of land which took place during the 20th century generally advantaged the Pashtuns: the Pashtun settlers received the irrigated land in the oases of northern Afghanistan, and pastures in central Afghanistan were given to Pashtun nomads. The unequal treatment of the people came along with the forming of ethnic stereotypes: Pashtuns were considered 'bellicose', Tajiks were said to be 'thrifty', Uzbeks were known as 'brutal' and the Hazaras as 'illiterate' and 'poor'. Even though the politics of the nation-state thus created an ethnic hierarchy, ethnic conflicts demanding for a change of the state policy surprisingly emerged very rarely (Anderson and Strand, 1979: 26-34).

Politics in the capital Kabul were of little interest for the people in rural Afghanistan (Dupree, 2010: 248-251). Afghan's even recognized the nation-state as a hostile factor which intervened in their social life by force rather as a key to access to resources (such as offices or land rights) which they could take control of. Furthermore, the categorization of ethnic groups remained a blurred concept for the Afghan population and was not respected as the general framework for collective action. Accordingly, the ordinary Afghan's did not articulate a political will to overcome the ethnic hierarch stipulated by the state. However, this does not mean that ethnic harmony existed in pre-war Afghanistan. On the local ground conflicts especially on property rights of water and land, were occasionally defined in ethnic terms. However, the social context, the motives and the political alliances constituted the decisive factors for the labeling of the conflict. For example, conflicting parties in the Hazarajat sometimes defined the same conflict as an ethnic one between Hazaras and Pashtuns, sometimes as a sectarian one between Shiites and Sunnites and sometimes as a socioeconomic one between farmers and nomads. Thus, the situation defined which pattern of explanation was used.

The political movements used ethnicity as the main argument for the legitimacy of their political existence, because all other ideologies (Islamic as well as communist or royalist) lost ground as a basis for the mobilization of the masses and as an instrument for political demands. The leaders of the warring factions made their supporters aware of their social and economic deprivation on the

basis of their ethnic affiliation in past and present. They claimed that the survival of the 'own ethnic group' was endangered through the aggressive behavior of 'other ethnic groups. Nevertheless, by means of the ethnic argument the warring factions stirred up a collective anxiety as well as hate and jealousy. Ethnic affiliation also provided the basis for the parties' demands concerning economic and political resources of the state and society. All warring factions justified their political demands by referring to the size of their ethnic group and their territorial roots. Moreover, they used ethnicity to justify their military actions. Ethnic cleansing and ethnocide occurred frequently in Kabul between 1992 and 1994, in the Shomali plains between 1996 and 2001, in the Hazarajat between 1992 and 2001 and ... (Saikal, 2006: 527-540).

Civil Wars, Ethnic Discrimination and Ethnic Fragmentation

In the contemporary history of Afghanistan, it has dawned that civil war in the country have been the product of «ethnic discrimination» in the country as these ethnic groups believe themselves the contenders, for they aspire to attain power and control the country (http://www.intermedia.org.pk/pdf/pak_afghan.Naheed_Soleman_Ethnic_Discrimination_in_Afghanistan.pdf). Both internal and external factors have been involved in this. Wars, particularly long destructive civil wars among local groups, create or sharpen existing ethnic identities by an exasperating sense of loss among some groups, while inducing a real or imagined sense of empowerment among others. The wars in Afghanistan have drastically altered the balance of power and influence among the traditional social and political forces in the country. The ethnic and social forces of Afghans are more conscious of their separate identities today than any time in the history of the country.

The responses to the communist regime and the Soviet invasion were organized more or less on an ethnic and local basis. By ousting the communist state and its functionaries from their regions, they established a sort of self-government under their own ethnic leaders. Ethnic considerations subsequently caused political polarization among the Mujahiddeen groups, locking them into a bitter struggle for power after the fall of the Marxist regime (Rais, 2008: 17).

The multipolar confrontation acquired dangerous sectarian and regional dimensions and gradually transformed itself into an ethnic conflict

between the Pashtun, fearing loss of power, and the coalition of Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara groups from the north who had gained greater political influence in Kabul, which had been traditionally dominated by the Pashtun elite. In absence of democratic institutions, the Afghan factions were unable to resolve their differences peacefully or maintain stable coalitions, which undermined national unity. The differences between Pashtun and other ethnic groups on one hand, and the political rift between the parties professing traditional and revolutionary Islam on the other, widened the conflict within the resistance after the departure of common enemy, the Soviet Union from the scene.

The rise of Taliban movement, which sought reunification of the country through military conquest and established a highly centralized state apparatus run by a rigid theocratic line, also had Pashtun ethnic undertones. Their military offensive pushed the other ethnic groups to margins, causing the worst human rights violations. The post-Taliban political arrangements were titled in favor of the other ethnic groups from the northern parts of the country. With the new constitution and elections for the parliament and provincial councils, Afghanistan's political system is becoming more representative. The issue of ethnicity may get diffused with economic and political reconstruction. But the question of identity and regional interest will take a longer time to settle, depending on how the social groups of Afghanistan seek accommodation and live within a unified state like they had before the wars (Rais, 2008: 18).

Throughout the world, «ethnic tribal characteristic are similar in that kinship is a factor in establishing the group's identity». The ethnic groups have been significant factors in the history of Afghanistan when it is talked about «violence» (Hanley, 2011, April 8). The ethnic issues have great impact on the people of Afghanistan and «may lead to violence» in the society. Ethnic characteristics further exacerbate the division between Pashtun and Non-Pashtun tribes whose «insurgencies threaten Afghanistan». The «hostilities persistent conflict among ethnic groups over land and water rights has plagued the history of Afghanistan (Isby, 2010: 189).

Role of Ethnicity in Nation Building

The Pashtun groups that originated the Afghanistan state preliminary as a tribal confederation subjugated the superstructure of the state through its chaotic reality for more than two centuries (Rais, 2008: 35). The Afghan monarchs

who despite being Pashtun in the ethnic origin, were elated in taking up the social ethics, mores, and language other than Pashtu, the national language of the Pashtun. They espoused Persian, which in Afghanistan with local differences of dialect and intonation is known as Dari (Herzig, 2004: 511).

It is debatable whether the Afghan kings in the 20th century made any serious and deliberate attempt to construct an inclusive and composite national identity representative of the ethnic cultures, folklores, and modern literary expressions. Non-Pashtun intellectuals and sub nationalist rudiments have argued that the creation of a distinct national identity had a Pashtun social base as it hinges on Pashtunwali (Rais, 2008: 53).

For this reason, Pashtun groups have identified themselves with Afghan nationalism more than other ethnic groups. Mainly Pashtun ethnic symbols and cultural expressions in dance and music were assumed as national culture. Anderson (1974: 462-450) states that the «script of state and nationhood is inscribed by the prevailing ethnic groups in any authoritarian system because this kind of politics is by nature exclusionary». Afghanistan under the monarchy was no exception. As the institutions for «interest articulation or smoothing the progress of representation of diverse social groups in the power structure were missing from the scene, the monarch performing as the principle patriarch dogged «who got, what and why». In this type of political system, it is also easier to engender myths about national identity, nationalism, and nationhood, and maintain them in the absence of political participation» (Hobsbawn, 1990). While a brawny sense of Afghan national identity has existed within Afghanistan, as a minimum in the urban areas along with the educated classes. But this sense did not reach to the countryside society because the question of bigger identity remains «immaterial to their everyday reality, and their identification is with narrower communities of family, clan, sub-tribe, tribe, locality, and region» (Mousavi, 1998: 168-74).

Ethnicity and Political Reconstruction: Post Taliban

The United States in its war against the Taliban after the 9.11 tragedy, tried the time-tested strategy of courting the enemies of the enemy (Rais, 2008: 47). The Bonn Conference (December 2011) brought Hamid Karzai (a Pashtun), but it has not wiped out the feeling that power has been confined by the Tajik warlords maintained by the US as Karzai was just like a puppet. It might have carried some weight

in the beginning but with the passage of time things have transformed (haq, 1995: 990-1004).

Even today Taliban remain active and so is the case with terrorism. The U.S. policy in a similar vein started with the cooperation of the non-Pashtun ethnic groups, and at least for three years, paid greater attention to leaders of other ethnic groups than to the Pashtuns. The reasons for this tilt or choice were obvious. The other ethnics driven out of power by the Taliban militia were more open to welcoming and supporting the U.S. forces than the Pashtun community that provided a strong political and ethnic base to the Taliban. In every situation, like the post-Taliban conditions of Afghanistan, some of the tribal leaders and strong individuals with local and regional influence from Pashtun areas have sided with the central government and cooperated with the foreigner powers.

Conclusion

The process of defining Afghanistan's conflict as an ethnic one is a complex one. Ethnic consciousness can be traced as far back as the creation of Afghanistan when the Pashtuns were handed the reigns of leadership. Pashtun domination continued and was codified into an ethnic hierarchy under the rule of Emir Abdur Rahman. As time passed, calashes appeared to have died down until the Communist era. It was during this period that the rise of several Communist factions and Mujahideen groups, that Afghans began to align themselves with their own ethnicity. These divisions translated over to modern day where the 20th century Mujahideen and Communist groups rebranded themselves as political parties. The existence of such political groups is evidence that Afghan society is ethnically divided. Although political leaders deny ethnicity as the motivation of their organization, history has shown otherwise.

The «genocidal acts, ethnic cleansing, and violence» against one another have been common feature in the multi-ethnic society of Afghanistan. Yet Afghanistan has tainted very much in terms of ethnic balance due to civil war, foreign intervention, and state collapse. As rebuilding is the «overarching political topic in Afghanistan», conceivably its identity politics calls for reconstruction by identifying the «veracity of ethnic empowerment of non-Pashtuns groups and providing institutionalized balance and representation of all groups in the political, economic, and cultural life of the country». Afghanistan and its largest community, the Pashtuns, must recognize the political reason

of a reconstruction of identity as an amalgamated nationhood that would be «accommodative» and not «exclusionary». Respect of ethnicity and legality of the assertion of each group for liberty in all areas of national life will have affirmative and encouraging political repercussions about rights, representation, sovereignty, and value and right to contribute in the power arrangements of the country. With the increase in the power of the state, as reconstruction projects in different fields of national life follow-up optimistic political effects, the ethnic groups might uncover a new balance among themselves.

As for as the internal composition or social structure is concerned, none of the main ethnic groups is homogenous. But even then historically, the ethnic loyalties have been stronger than any other fidelity and have had anecdotal degrees of power among diverse social groups. Arnold (1985) states that the «regional and international environments

determine the geopolitical fix that can either obstruct or make possible the progress of national assimilation. Afghanistan, being landlocked, having a poor resources base, and being on the margins of world politics was not lucky enough to obtain enough economic or political support. The change of its role from a historical buffer to an aligned state of the former Soviet Union further alienated her from alternative centers of world power. The process of national consolidation gravely suffered with political instability, political polarization, and creeping influence of regional powers and internal confrontations that took both ideological as well as ethnic shapes». The violence can not solely be attributed to the ethnic groups. There are surely numerous other factors which have contributed to the fragmentation of Afghan in society and persistence violence. No doubt, ethnic differences are a fact, but not the sole factor in triggering Afghan violence.

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