

# Balochistan: Blend of Unique Culture and Unity in Diversity

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### **Executive Summary**

Balochistan's geostrategic location and cultural diversity makes the area an attractive cite for historians and anthropologists. The mountainous terrain has engravings of stone-age. Whilst traces of Paleolithic culture have also been discovered in the Province. Brahuis, the ancient inhabitants of the area belong to the Mehrgarh Civilization. Balochistan has also been home to Greek and Mongol settlers. With a diversified set of populace, the Baloch society can be visualized as colourful mosaic. It has the potential to transform its diversified character into strength, and hence requires concerted efforts from provincial and federal setups, accordingly. It is believed that given equal opportunities, the Baloch people can progress better.

### **Issue to be Analyzed**

Balochistan: Blend of Unique Culture and Unity in Diversity.

### **Recommendations**

- Balochistan's cultural heritage, including the historical and geographical significance is an integral part of Pakistan. The Province serves as a bridge to Central Asia, Iran and the Middle East. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that Balochistan remains peaceful and the rights of all ethnicities living in the province are protected.
- Balochistan's cultural heritage needs projection at appropriate regional and international platforms. This is essential to attract historians, anthropologists and tourists from the world. This will enhance people-to-people interaction and positively contribute towards Balochistan's image regionally and globally. It will shed-off the stigmas like insurgency, tribal conflicts, and extremism cited for Baloch people.
- Dramas showcasing Baloch culture should be aired. Besides, exhibitions of Baloch handicrafts for domestic and foreign audiences should be organized. In this regard, the media and Pakistan diplomatic community abroad should be in the lead role.
- The distinctive cultures of varied ethnic communities in Balochistan should not be disturbed. The Baloch tribes, Brahui, Pashtun, Hazara, Hindko speaking community and other ethnic groups living in Balochistan should be encouraged to practice their cultural norms. In schools, till grade 5, ethnic and provincial languages alongside the national language should be taught. In high schools, the students should be given the option to opt for language of their choice. In this way, no ethnic tribe will feel neglected.
- On the domestic front, the policy of just resource allocation needs to be adopted. The ethnic communities living in Balochistan should be provided with equal socio-economic opportunities. This is essential to minimize the negative competition between the ethnic tribes.
- Owing to Balochistan's desolate and underdeveloped status, it is proposed that it's interaction with other adjoining provinces be encouraged, especially Punjab, KPK and Sindh. Though student exchanges are there, the frequency and pattern of interaction is in need of being buoyed so that students can interact and learn more about ground realities in an organic way. This practice will open up Balochistan to a wider audience, and tourism will get a shot in the arm. It will also help the locals from not being swayed away with foreign and radical propaganda.

## Analysis

### Balochistan: Geographic and Historical Facts

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan. The Province has an area of 347,190 square kilometres (about 44 per cent of total geographical area of Pakistan). The province population is four per cent<sup>1</sup> (12.35 million)<sup>2</sup> of total population of the country. Geographically, Balochistan is strategically located, having Iran and Afghanistan on the West and Southwest; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab on the North and Northeast and Sindh, Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf along the South.<sup>3</sup> Balochistan is land-linked with all the three provinces and also has borders with Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> Regionally, Balochistan's geographic proximity with Iran and Afghanistan is a link for Pakistan to reach out to Central Asia and Middle East.<sup>5</sup>

Balochistan's topography is a combination of high mountains like Takatu, Suleman, Chiltan and Koh-Sultan, arid zones spread across Ketch, Lasbela, Kachhi and fertile plains of Naseerabad, and Jhal Magsi.<sup>6</sup> Balochi poetry depicts the diversified character of Baloch land. One stanza in this regard, *"the mountains are the Baloch's forts; the peaks are better than any army; the lofty heights are our comrades; the pathless gorges our friends. Our drink is from the flowing springs; our bed the thorny bushes; the ground we make our pillow."*<sup>7</sup> Balochistan's capital Quetta is surrounded by three huge Rocky Mountains: Zarghune, Chiltan and Kohe Muradar.<sup>8</sup>

Balochistan is also rich in mineral wealth. There is an estimated stock of 200 million tons of iron and 217 million tons of coal. The Saindak gold and copper mines contain reserves up to 412 million tons of copper and gold and the Reko Dik has 5.9 billion tons of copper and gold.<sup>9</sup>

There have been traces of primitive human race in Balochistan. The signs of Paleolithic culture have been discovered in Balochistan. Engravings of the stone-age have been found at Suleman range and other mountainous Balochistan region. The excavations at the site of Mehrgarh, near Bolan Pass indicate large settlements of agricultural communities.

<sup>1</sup> Ghulam Nabi Sajid and Dr. Abdul Haleem Sadiq, "Cultural Ethics in Life of Baloch," *Balochistan Review* XXXIV, no. 1 (2016): 66, accessed July 15, 2022, <http://web.uob.edu.pk/uob/Journals/Balochistan-Review/data/BR%2001%202016/6580%20Cultural%20Ethics%20in%20Life%20of%20Baloch,%20Ghulam%20Nabi%20Sajid.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Asadullah Raisani, "Demographic Changes in Balochistan: The Baloch Identity," *The Geopolitics*, January 12, 2022, accessed August 2, 2022, <https://thegeopolitics.com/demographic-changes-in-balochistan-the-baloch-identity/>.

<sup>3</sup> Sajid and Sadiq, "Cultural Ethics in Life of Baloch," 66.

<sup>4</sup> Amjad Nazeer, "Society and Culture of Balochistan," *South Asia Pakistan Partnership*, Lahore (2003): 3, accessed August 5, 2022, <file:///C:/Users/Amna%20IPRI/Desktop/Balochistan/Society%20and%20Culture%20of%20Balochistan,%20Pakistan.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Nazeer, "Society and Culture of Balochistan," 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Azhar Ahmad, "Gwadar Port Potential and Prospects," Research Paper, Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), <http://www.picss.net>.

Shah Mohammad Marri, a Baloch historian says “Mehrgarh is one of the ancient civilizations of the world, dating back to 11,000 years. It is older than the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations.”<sup>10</sup> Mehrgarh was a developed society;<sup>11</sup> the people of the area knew the use of fire and made statues, and ornaments.<sup>12</sup> Mehrgarh is also said to have trading links with Badakhshan, Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup>

In olden times, Balochistan had remained at the crossroads of civilizations between Central Asia, Mesopotamia and Indus regions in Asia. During 40 AD, Arabs captured Iran<sup>14</sup> and moved further towards Southeast (Seestan Balochistan).<sup>15</sup> Arabs established Daulat Mehdania Mekran and Daulat Mutaghaliba Tooran, present day Mekran and Kalat of Balochistan province.<sup>16</sup> The grave of Greek General Ourmaz at Ormarah (town in Gwadar district) indicates Greek invasion of Balochistan.<sup>17</sup>

In today’s era of geo-economics, Balochistan’s geostrategic location has assumed greater importance.<sup>18</sup> With the operationalization of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor-CPEC (corridor will commence from Gwadar, terminate at Kashgar and fan off to Central Asia),<sup>19</sup> Balochistan will be a trading hub for regional and international markets. In particular, Afghanistan and Central Asia will have an easy access to South Asia, East Asia and the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> The regional integration will also open Balochistan to foreign cultures.

### Baloch Culture and Society

Afghan writer Dost Muhammad Dost says that etymologically Baloch is made of two Sanskrit words “Bal” and “Och” meaning high or magnificent. The Baloch society is based on tribalism and has clan system. Some scholars have linked Baloch ancestry with Aryans, while there are others who believe that the Baloch people were nomads. Another idea links Baloch racial kinship with Arabs. This school of thought is based on the similarity between the nomadic life of Arabs and Baloch.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Akbar Notezai, “The Lost Civilization of Mehrgarh: A Treasure in Ruins,” *Dawn*, March 10, 2017, accessed August 5, 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1316715>.

<sup>11</sup> Notezai, “The Lost Civilization of Mehrgarh: A Treasure in Ruins.”

<sup>12</sup> Sajid and Sadiq, “Cultural Ethics in Life of Baloch,” 68.

<sup>13</sup> Notezai, “The Lost Civilization of Mehrgarh: A Treasure in Ruins.”

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Abdul Razzaq Sabir and Waheed Razzaq, “Multiculturalism: A Case Study of Balochistan,” *Balochistan Review* XXIII, no. 2 (2010): 20-24, accessed July 5, 2022, <http://web.uob.edu.pk/uob/Journals/Balochistan-Review/data/BR%2002%202010/1725%20MULTICULTURALISM%20A%20CASE%20STUDY%20OF%20BALOCHISTAN%20Dr.%20Abdul%20Razzaq%20Sabir.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Sajid and Sadiq, “Cultural Ethics in Life of Baloch,” 65.

<sup>16</sup> Sabir and Razzaq, “Multiculturalism: A Case Study of Balochistan,” 21.

<sup>17</sup> Sajid and Sadiq, “Cultural Ethics in Life of Baloch,” 65.

<sup>18</sup> “3 Varsities on CPEC Route to be Functional this Year: Ahsan”, *The News*, March 15, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer McKay, “The New Silk Road and the Sea,” *The News*, March 23 2016, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/107317-The-new-Silk-Road-and-the-Sea>.

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Zafar Khan, “Geopolitical and Geo-economic Significance of Balochistan,” *Express Tribune*, June 2, 2022, accessed July 26, 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2359629/geopolitical-geo-economic-significance-of-balochistan>

<sup>21</sup> Sajid and Sadiq, “Cultural Ethics in Life of Baloch,” 67-69.

Historically, there is no evidence of a legal institution in Baloch culture. However, the system largely depends on the tradition which serve the legal cannon of a Tribe or group of Tribes. Sardars and / or a group of elders serve as the linchpin of the Tribal legal system, who can decide about any dispute between the parties.<sup>22</sup>

On account of the dress style, in Baloch culture turban is a symbol of dignity, esteem and respect. Wearing turban is common to all the tribes of the area. Baloch women wear embroidered clothes with big “duppatas” (cloth covering body).<sup>23</sup>

### Baloch Tribes

*“Genealogically the Baloch nation originated from forty-four ancestral tribes ruled by an apical ancestor Jalal Khan in Southwestern Persia, classified into the two parent tribes of Rind and Lashar. Centuries later with the process of division and subdivision the Baloch nation now consists of around 500 large and small tribes. The large and small tribes settled in the Pakistani Balochistan can be organized into 17 major tribes each headed by a Sardar or Chief.”<sup>24</sup>*

The ethno-linguistic composition in Balochistan include the Brahuis, Baloch, Pashtun, Dehwars, Jadgals and Hazaras. Each ethnic group has its distinctive language and cultural background. For instance, both Baloch and Brahui are different in look, culture, traditions and language. When a Baloch meets a Brahui, he does not speak in Balochi and vice versa because they cannot understand each other’s language. Therefore, there lingua franca is other than their own language.<sup>25</sup> Brahuis are the ancient inhabitants of the area, their language is ‘Dravidian,’ spoken widely in Central Balochistan (from Quetta valley to Gizri Karachi).<sup>26</sup> There is a wide consensus between the Western and Asian scholars that the Brahuis are the indigenous tribe of Pakistani Balochistan. Meanwhile, Brahuis’ lingual and racial characteristics suggest their relationship with South Indian Tamil, Telgu and Marhata genus. One theoretical conjecturing suggests that the Brahuis are the remnants of the Northern Dravidian race who laid the foundations of Indus Valley civilizations while the other suggests that they arrived through a process of migration from the Indian peninsula.<sup>27</sup>

Brahui belong to the Mehrgarh civilization.<sup>28</sup> Brahui form about 15 percent of Balochistan population.<sup>29</sup> Their main tribes are Raisani, Muhammad Hasni / Mamasani of Chagai, Muhammad Hasni of Kharan, Muhammad Hasni of Jhawalwan, Mengal of Jhawlwan and

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Inam ur Rehman Jalbani, “A Glimpse at Baloch Culture Way Forward,” *Daily Balochistan Express Quetta*, June 2, 2022, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://bexpress.com.pk/2022/06/a-glimpse-at-baloch-culture-way-forward/>.

<sup>24</sup> Nazeer, “Society and Culture of Balochistan,” 6.

<sup>25</sup> Major General Muhammad Farooq, “Balochistan in Search of Whole Truth for Enduring Peace, Progress and Prosperity,” Address to Media, Karachi, April 15, 2012

<sup>26</sup> Sabir and Razzaq, “Multiculturalism: A Case Study of Balochistan,” 18, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Nazeer, “Society and Culture of Balochistan,” 7.

<sup>28</sup> Sajid and Sadiq, “Cultural Ethics in Life of Baloch,” 68.

<sup>29</sup> Farooq, “Balochistan in Search of Whole Truth for Enduring Peace, Progress and Prosperity.”

Nushki. All Brahui tribes are pro-federation and thus are at peace with the state. However, part of Mengals of Wad (Khuzdar district of Balochistan) are vocal against the government.<sup>30</sup>

The Baloch tribes include the Rakhsani (Nushki & Chagai), Nausherwani (Kharan-Kalat, Pajngur-Makran & Persian Balochistan), Rinds of Makran, Rinds of Sibi & Naseerabad, Magsi / Lashari (Jhal-foe of Rinds), Jamali (Dera Murad Jamali & Naseerabad), Domki (Lehri-Kaschhi), Bugti / Zarkani (Dera Bugti, Sui / Loti / Pirkoh gas fields-foes of Marri & Jamali) and Marri (Kohlu-foes of Bugtis). Baloch comprise over 30 percent of province's population. It is also pertinent to mention that more than twice the size of Balochistani, Baloch are living in Punjab and almost equal number living in Sindh. Baloch's living in Sindh and Punjab are well positioned and have served at highest tiers in government and Armed Forces.<sup>31</sup>

The other prominent ethnic group in Balochistan are the Pashtuns. Pashtun culture is rich in the Northern parts of Balochistan.<sup>32</sup> The native Pashtuns originally migrated from Afghanistan back in 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The significant Pashtun dominated areas are Chaman, Quetta, Zhob, Pishin, Qilla Abdullah, Qila Saifullah and partially the areas between Suleman ranges and the river Indus like Barkhan, Rakni and Loralai. Pashtuns have 13 main tribes namely Kakar, Sherani, Achackzai, Durrani, Tareen, Luni, Panni, Gilzai, Dumar, Isot, Kansi, Zarkun, Jaffar, Zamari<sup>33</sup> and Mahsud.<sup>34</sup> Pashtunwali is the major code of life of the Pashtuns. The main sections of this code are bravery, hospitality, patriotism, love of independence, to protect neighbours and to cooperate with each other. The Jirga (Tribal Assembly) is the ancient institution in Pashtun society.<sup>35</sup> Pashtuns claim to be 50 percent of the total population of Balochistan though remains unsubstantiated by the official census but safe estimate is minimum 40 percent. Pashtuns are a dominant community in terms of education, trade, share in government services and professional fields like teaching, medicine and engineering. Despite being educated and financially stable, Pashtuns feel neglected vis-à-vis the Baloch. Pashtun grievance is that the entire government focus is on appeasing the "so-called angry" Baloch people.<sup>36</sup>

On the whole, Pashtun and Baloch-Brahui constitute social identity of Balochistan. However, the question that who owns Balochistan, the Pashtun or the Baloch is often debated in the socio-political spheres of the province.<sup>37</sup>

Hazara community in Balochistan are mostly located in Quetta; their language is Hazargi, a variant of Persian and they claim to be from the Mongol origin. The Mekrani people in Balochistan reside along the coastal line near Arabian Sea. Mekrani people have their

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Sabir and Razzaq, "Multiculturalism: A Case Study of Balochistan," 19.

<sup>33</sup> Farooq, "Balochistan in Search of Whole Truth for Enduring Peace, Progress and Prosperity."

<sup>34</sup> Nazeer, "Society and Culture of Balochistan," 7.

<sup>35</sup> Sabir and Razzaq, "Multiculturalism: A Case Study of Balochistan," 19-23.

<sup>36</sup> Farooq, "Balochistan in Search of Whole Truth for Enduring Peace, Progress and Prosperity."

<sup>37</sup> Nazeer, "Society and Culture of Balochistan," 3.

distinctive customs and fishing is their prime source of livelihood.<sup>38</sup> Mekrani people have a different physical appearance, they are darker in complexion with resemblance to the African races. Some say that these people were brought to the region by Arab slave traders. These ethnic communities are Baloch by caste but carry different identities pertaining to their language. For instance, the Sirakies and Sindhis within and outside Balochistan are Baloch by caste but those living outside Balochistan cannot express in Balochi language.<sup>39</sup>

A reasonable number of Urdu speaking, Punjabi and Hindko also live in Balochistan.<sup>40</sup>

Balochi language is an Indo-Iranian language having three major dialects known as Western or Mekrani, Eastern or Sulaimani and in the Chagi, Kharan and Panjgur district known as Rakhshani Balochi. Balochi and Brahui music and folklore have been passed from generation to generation as a valuable art. Baloch handicrafts are world renowned.<sup>41</sup>

The versatile cultural landscape of Balochistan is apparent from the varied ethno-linguistic communities living in the province. The inter-racial marriages and people-to-people interaction have led to cultural cohesion. Baloch lively culture also includes festivals. The Sibi festival is held annually in Balochistan. The festival takes its roots from the civilization of Mehrgarh. Music, cultural dances, handicrafts and cattle show attract people from all over the province.<sup>42</sup>

The argument that Baloch people lack tolerance towards their tribal fellows and are ‘hell bent upon destruction’<sup>43</sup> is not correct. Likewise, associating Balochistan’s under-development with tribalism is also not correct. The prime reason for Balochistan’s backwardness is lack of opportunities for the locals to grow. The areas of Lasbela, Naseerabad and Sibi portray a sorry state of affairs. People there do not have clean drinking water and are forced to obtain water from resources where animals drink water.<sup>44</sup> In such circumstances, peoples anguish is justifiable. The question is what is the relevance between culture and politics? Are the cultural forms devoid of content? The common belief is that culture is not restricted to music and dance, and it is closely related to other areas of society. During the days of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the provincial elected government was dismissed and much of Balochistan slipped into insurgency. The Baloch were accused of playing in the hands of foreign elements. This was an annoying factor whose aftermath continues till today. They were singled out primarily because there is a feeling that the Baloch have never become part of the mainstream in the national life. Their resources and huge landmass have been exploited without proper representation in national politics and economy.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Sabir and Razzaq, “Multiculturalism: A Case Study of Balochistan,” 19 - 29.

<sup>39</sup> Nazeer, “Society and Culture of Balochistan,” 5-6.

<sup>40</sup> Sabir and Razzaq, “Multiculturalism: A Case Study of Balochistan,” 19.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 19-23

<sup>42</sup> Jalbani, “A Glimpse at Baloch Culture Way Forward.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Hassan Naqvi, “Entire Pakistan is Deprived of Rights,” Interview Sardar Akhtar Mengal, *BOL News*, December 19-25, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Sarwat Ali, “Colours of Diversity,” *The News*, March 7, 2021, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/799607-colours-of-diversity>.

### Recommendations

- Balochistan's cultural heritage, including the historical and geographical significance is an integral part of Pakistan. The Province serves as a bridge to Central Asia, Iran and the Middle East. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that Balochistan remains peaceful and the rights of all ethnicities living in the province are protected.
- Balochistan's cultural heritage needs projection at appropriate regional and international platforms. This is essential to attract historians, anthropologists and tourists from the world. This will enhance people-to-people interaction and positively contribute towards Balochistan's image regionally and globally. It will shed-off the stigmas like insurgency, tribal conflicts, and extremism cited for Baloch people.
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- Owing to Balochistan's desolate and underdeveloped status, it is proposed that its interaction with other adjoining provinces be encouraged, especially Punjab, KPK and Sindh. Though student exchanges are there, the frequency and pattern of interaction is in need of being buoyed so that students can interact and learn more about ground realities in an organic way. This practice will open up Balochistan to a wider audience, and tourism will get a shot in the arm. It will also help the locals from not being swayed away with foreign and radical propaganda.