

Torn Between the Lines of Border: The Pakhtuns of Pakistan and Afghanistan in Search of Identity

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Abstract : A globalized connected world, calling loud for a composite culture, was still not able to erase the pain of a desired nationalism based on cultural identity. In the South Asian region, the random drawing of the boundaries without taking the ethnic aspect into consideration have always challenged the very basis of the existence of certain groups. The urge to reunify with the fellow brothers on both sides of the border have always called for a chaos and schism in the countries of this region. Sometimes this became a tool to bargain with the state and find a favorable position in the power structure on the basis of cultural identity. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Pakhtuns who are divided across the border of the two countries, from the inception of creation of Pakistan have posed various challenges and hampered the growth of a consolidated nation. The Pakhtuns or Pashtuns of both Pakistan and Afghanistan have a strong cultural affinity which blurs their physical distancing and calls for a nationalism based on this ethnic affiliation. Both the sides wanted to create Pakhtunistan unifying all the Pakhtuns of the region. For long, this group have denied to accept the Durand line separating the two. This was an area of concern especially for the Pakhtuns of Pakistan torn between the decision either to join Afghanistan, create a nation of their own or be a part of Pakistan. This ethnic issue became a bone of contention between the two countries. Later, though well absorbed and recognized in the respective countries, they have fought for their identity and claimed for a dominant position in the politics of the nations. Because of the porous borders often influx of refugees was seen especially during Afghan Wars and later many extremists' groups were born from them especially the Taliban. In the recent string of events, when the Taliban, who are mostly Pakhtuns ethnically, came in power in Afghanistan, a wave of sympathy arose in Pakistan. This gave a strengthening position to the religious Pakhtuns across the border. It is to be noted here that a fragmented Pakhtun identity between the religious and seculars were clearly visible, voicing for their place in the political hierarchy of the country with a vision distinct from each other especially in Pakistan. In this context the paper tries to evaluate the reasons for this cultural turmoil between the countries and this ethnic group. It also aims to analyze the concept of how the identity politics still holds its relevance in the contemporary world. Additionally, the recent trend of fragmented identity points towards instrumentalization of this ethnic groups, who are engaged in the bargaining process with the state for a robust position in the power structure. In the end, the paper aims to deduct from the theoretical conditions of identity politics, whether this is a primordial or a situational tool to have a visibility in the power structure of the contemporary world.

Keywords : cultural identity, identity politics, instrumentalization of identity pakhtuns, power structure

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