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Pak-Afghan Border Fencing and its Impact on the Political Identity of the Shinwari Tribe

Abstract: *This study deals with the impacts of border fencing on the political identity of the Shinwari tribe, which strides the Torkham border. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are employed to investigate the potential impacts. The sampling for it was carried out on the basis of Disproportionate Stratified Random Sampling in quantitative methodology; and Subjective Sampling in the qualitative. It was known that fencing had affected the Shinwari tribe. The Shinwaris of Lwarrgai now find it difficult to meet their tribesmen in Afghanistan. Similarly, it has become difficult to maintain a single Shinwari identity as a tribal unit today. Moreover, it has been known that more than twenty-five per cent of the Shinwaris of Lwarrgai have relatives across the border. Add to this the lands which they own on the Afghanistan side of the border.*

Key Words: Pak-Afghan Border, Shinwari Tribe, Torkham Border, Lwarrgai, Afghanistan

Introduction

In 2018, the government of Pakistan began to fence about 1200 km of 2400 km of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. By the end of 2018, it was able to complete 900 km of fencing.

In January 2022, the then interior minister, Sheikh Rasheed, informed the press that fencing had been completed on the 2600 km of the border length, almost near completion. The project cost Rs. \$500 million. The border areas selected for fencing also include Torkham. Pakistan-Afghanistan border fencing in Torkham started in December 2017. The nine-foot wide chicken wire fence was erected on the Durand Line inside Pakistan's territory. Besides iron fencing, additional security checkposts were also established in the area. The fencing is dual and has been constructed along 30 km of border on

both sides of Torkham. The project cost Rs. 30 million as 1 km of fencing costs as much as Rs. 1 million. Moreover, a gate has been installed at the Torkham border, some 37 meters inside the Pakistani territory.

The chief reason for fencing the Pakistan-Afghanistan border is to ensure security. Pakistani authorities announced it as early as 2006 to fence and mine the border ([Masood, 2006](#)). DG ISPR, Major General Asif Ghafoor, in response to the question of why fencing was constructed by a private television channel anchor, replied: "When we were conducting military operations, the terrorist sanctuaries were present on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border. Now we have abolished the terrorist sanctuaries on our side. As the Afghan forces don't have enough capacity to deal with terrorists, we have constructed the fence to make sure no cross-

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border attacks are launched." He went on to say that both countries would benefit from the fence (Ghafoor, 2019).

Like all the tribes living on the Pak-Afghan border, the Shinwari tribe is also affected by the border fencing. This tribe lives on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border. The people of this tribe share the same ethnicity, values, norms, traditions and customs. For a very long time, the border remained porous. Similarly, in recent times, before fencing, the Afghans would also cross it without any control. The telecom companies of Pakistan and Afghanistan operated across the border. People for their regular businesses would cross the border without any hindrance. Many sub-tribes have their fellow tribesmen in Nangarhar, Afghanistan, with the same tribal names. The people living on both sides of the border are more compatible with each other than other neighbour communities in their concerned states. Now the fence is being erected; their political identity will be affected to a great extent.

The area chosen for this study is Lwarrgai, Landikotal. It is bordered to the west by Momandara, Door Baba and Goshta districts of Nangarhar province of Afghanistan; to the south by Khyber; and to the east and north by Kam Shalman and Loy Shalman, respectively. The tribe selected for this research is Shinwari. The terrain is mostly hilly and 3,517 feet above sea level. The population of the Shinwari tribe is 240, 712 according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. The sub-tribes of Shinwari are eight named Pero Khel, Ghani Khel, Mukhtar Khel, Ash Khel, Mirdad Khel, Shiekhmal Khel, Khuga Khel and Pased Khel.

This study explores the question: How is the political identity of the Shinwari tribe affected by border fencing and the installation of a gate at Torkham?

Research Method

This research study is based on both quantitative and qualitative methods. The researcher collected data in order to examine the relationship between border fencing and the political identity of the Shinwari tribe.

Quantitative Method

The researcher prepared a questionnaire on the Likert Scale model. Questions were designed in such a manner to lay bare the relationship between fencing and identity. Moreover, certain questions are also cross-tabulated in the study to specifically study relationships.

Sampling

The target population of my study is the Shinwari tribe living on the Pakistan side of the border. Its total population, according to the census 2017-18, is 240,712. The Shinwaris are further divided into eight sub-tribes living in the Lwargi area of Tehsil Landikotal of Khyber tribal district named Khugakhel, Shiekhmalkhel, Mukhtarkhel, Mirdadkhel, Perokhel, Ghanikhel, Ashkhel and Pasedkhel. The other two Tehsils, Jamrud and Bara, belong to the Afridi tribe.

The research sample will be based on Disproportionate Stratified Random Sampling within the probability sampling method. Respondents will be chosen on the basis of their sub-tribe, comparative numerical strength, proximity to the border and tribes impacted to a greater extent in terms of economy.

A separate list of the villages is made. Since some areas are situated on the immediate border, economic impacts are more upon some. Therefore, disproportionate sampling is employed. A total of 15 villages are studied. Five villages belonging exclusively to Pasedkhel (living on the immediate border), three villages are selected from Khugakhel based on their population. Moreover, from every other sub-tribe, 1 village is selected for sampling. The number of villages of a tribe is divided by a total number of 196 villages (excluding Pasedkhel), and disproportionately the number of respondents will be finalised. Starting from village no.1, every third village is selected from Pasedkhel; the first, middle and the last from Khugakhel, and the first will be selected from every other sub-tribe.

Qualitative Method

Gaps will be produced in data collected quantitatively. To complete it, data will be

collected qualitatively in order to develop a theory to study border fencing in Torkham and its impact on the political identity of the people of Lwarrgai.

Sampling

Sampling in Grounded Theory methodology, which constructs a theory through the analysis of data, and Subjective Sampling will be used for the purpose of developing a theoretical framework.

Purposive or Subjective Sampling

Purposive sampling, a non-probability sample, will be employed to collect the data. Respondents will be chosen on the basis of the judgement of the researcher. The researcher will focus more on the characteristics of the population, which the researcher considers important due to many reasons, e.g. from proximity to the border to the sub-tribe affected economically more by border fencing.

The Paradigm Shift and Borders

The bordering process creates the feeling of "us" versus "others". It is the religious, social or cultural identities with which people belong to affiliate themselves ([Morley, 1995](#)). The lines are now more flexible and aspatial ([Newman, 2003](#)). Paasi implies that borders are also institutions in contrast to the metaphor of simply "lines in the sand". And like all institutions, it has its own rules which govern its behaviour. ([Paasi, 1998](#))

The idea of modern borders emerged with the construction of the Berlin Wall by East Germany to accentuate its "socialist image" by separating itself from capitalist West Germany in 1961. (Callahan 2018) However, it was destroyed in 1989, which virtually marked the end of the Cold War. This was considered, so to speak, a triumph of neoliberalism and globalisation. It was then that Francis Fukuyama proposed his famous theory of End of History, which was, however, short-lived. After the Cold War, wall building ushered in which was not limited to a few countries. Indeed, countries of the European Union, Middle East, South Asia,

Africa and East started building walls or fences along borders.

The neoliberal doctrines, which focused on a free market and borderless world, were short-lived. On September 11, 1990, President G. W. Bush delivered a speech envisaging a free world. After exactly eleven years, the twin towers of the US were attacked in which hundreds died. Islamic terrorism ushered in and, to this day, serves as a dominant reason for strict borders across the world.

The border system, a hallmark of colonial legacy, is toughened more and more due to the security narrative. Whether it will become a safeguard of national sovereignty and territoriality or will they become a mere catharsis for the loss of the former is the unkind question of the future. The dominant challenge that it poses is how will the modern border state cope with the reality of globalisation. Are the inter-regional and international organisations not supposed to devise viable strategies?

The Artificial Separation of Pak-Afghan Borderland at Lwarrgai

Since the times of the British, the Pak-Afghan border has remained porous. Shinwari would regularly cross the border to meet their friends in Afghanistan; to participate in weddings and requiems; council of elders (Jirgas); and to earn their livelihood from day to day informal trading. As the infrastructure of Afghanistan has been damaged by the ongoing wave of terrorism, the Shinwari of Afghanistan would also cross the border without visas and passports to avail of the services of schools, colleges, and hospitals in Lwarrgai. However, the situation changed drastically after the Pakistan government started fencing the border. Besides, it has also toughened the bordering practice by demanding passports and visas from all the people entering or leaving Pakistan. This has made the cross-border movement for Shinwaris straddling the border very difficult.

Similarly, to a question of whether the Shinwaris straddling the border are the same people, a prominent social and political worker, Muhammad Amin Shinwari replied, "We are one and the same people having the same history,

norms and traditions. I was a young boy when I had gone to Afghanistan for business purposes, and not only once did I feel that I was living with different people" (Muhammad Amin Shinwari, personal communication, July 17, 2008). After fencing is done, it is now hard for the Shinwari tribe straddling the Torkham border to engage socially with each other.

In this regard, the researcher has also conducted a quantitative survey to find out how the tribe is impacted by the border fencing. The question put was whether people own land property across the border. The second question was about whether people have relatives across the border.

Then the social impacts of border fencing were found through the cross-tabulations of the variable of relatives and whether border fences divide the families; the variable of land property across the border, and whether border fences divide the families. In the last topic, the similarities between the Afghanistan Shinwaris and the Pakistan Shinwari will be found through the cross tabulation of variables of sub-tribes and relatives and the question that Shinwaris across the border have the same culture, history and language.

Dual Nationality

There are 9 people who have availed dual nationalities of Afghanistan and Pakistan while the respondents include 4 Afghans. 287 people have nationalities of Pakistan only.

Land Property across the Border

The Afghan city Jalalabad is only a two-hour drive away from the Torkham border. The distance from Jalalabad to Torkham is 74.5 km. Before the war, when Afghanistan was relatively peaceful, people would purchase lands in Afghanistan and build houses. Besides, the sub-tribes Pasedkhel and Khugakhel, which are nearer to the border, have lands located immediately to the border.

Also, in an interview with the political leader of the Awami National Party, Abid Meenawal Shinwari, it was known that the land of the Pasedkhel tribe had been left inaccessible

on the other side of the border due to fencing (Abid Meenawal Shinwari, personal communication, July 15, 2019). In another interview with a businessman belonging to the Khugakhel tribe, the researcher was informed that the Khugakhel tribe lays claim to the mountainous land on which border fencing is done. The tribe was told that it collectively owns the land, which is now under the control of the Frontier Constabulary (FC) (Tahir Shinwari, personal communication, July 19, 2010).

In order to ascertain the number of people who own land across the border, we put a question to them. We concluded that 75 different tribesmen of the 300 sampled own land across the border, which makes up for 24 per cent of the respondents. These statistics suggest that people have strong links with Afghanistan. These people have not decided yet whether they want to sell their lands or not.

Relatives across the Border

In order to find out how many people have relatives across the border, the researcher has put the question to the respondents. The relatives were specified as siblings, cousins etc. From the results, we can see that as many as 80 people out of 300 have their relatives across the border, which include siblings, cousins, in-laws and other relatives. This equals to more than 25 per cent of the respondents. The border fencing has divided families straddling the border, which will have dire effects on the local population of Shinwari.

Social Impact of Border Fencing

Border fencing has divided families and has resulted in the apparent loss of lands of the Shinwari tribe in Lwarrgai. In order to find out the social impacts of border fencing on the Shinwari tribe, we will conduct cross tabulation. The variable of sub-tribe is cross-tabulated with the question of whether families have been divided or not. The results are as follows: It can be seen that 208 respondents strongly or simply agree with the statement that border fencing has resulted in the division of families. The sub-tribes Pasedkhel and Khugakhel agree more strongly with the statement because they are

living on the immediate borderland. The ratio of disagreement is larger in Perokhel and Shiekhmalkhel. It is because they live relatively far from the areas where border fencing has been done.

Similarly, in another cross tabulation, people who have landed across the border in a very large number agree with the statement that border fencing has resulted in the division of families. 48 respondents who own land across the border strongly or simply agree with the question. The people who have no property across the border also have knowledge of the issue, and as many as 50 strongly agree with the statement, while 110 only agree with the statement. 225 people argued that families are not divided, while 75 agreed with the statement, which is a great number of people.

In last, we will try to find out the relationship between people who have relatives across the border and the fact that border fencing divides the families across the border. It can be tabled as follows.

The result showed that the respondents in large number agreed that families had been divided due to border fencing. 14 out of 17 people who have brothers or sisters on the other side of the border strongly or simply agree with the fact. Similarly, 19 out of 23 who have cousins strongly or simply agree with the fact. 5 out of 10 who have in-laws also believe that the families are divided. While 21 out of 30 who have relatives on the other side of the border also agree with the statement. Even respondents who have no relatives across the border agree that families have been divided in large numbers due to border fencing.

Similarities between Shinwaris Straddling the Border

The researcher put a question to the respondents of whether Shinwaris on both borders have the same history, culture and language. We will try to find out the response by a cross-tabulation with the variable of sub-tribe and relatives. The results are as follows.

It can be deduced from the graph that only 18 respondents disagreed with the statement that Shinwaris straddling the border have the same

culture, history and language. 116 respondents strongly agreed with the statement, while 161 simply agreed with the question. The ratio of the respondents, who are living near the border, i.e. from Pasedkhel and Khugakhel, is the highest because a lot of people have their relatives across the border.

To further elucidate the point, we set up another cross tabulation. The variables are relatives across the border and the oneness of culture, history and language. The table is as under.

Only one respondent who has cousins on the other side of the border does not agree with the statement that Shinwaris are one and the same people. All the rest who have relatives across the border strongly or simply agree with this fact. 16 out of 17 who have relatives agree. 21 out of 23 agree who cousins have, 10 out of 10 who have in-laws fully agree, while 30 out of 30 who have other relatives also fully agree with the statement. Even people who have no relatives agree to a great extent. To analyse the cultural impacts of border fencing, we have put a question to the respondents. The result is as under.

187 respondents strongly or simply agree with the statement that border fencing will affect the culture of Shinwaris in Lwarrgai. 89 respondents disagreed, while 24 went undecided. It is because the Afghan Shinwaris' culture is closely related to Shinwaris in Pakistan.

How Fencing Challenges Identities

Till 9/11, Shinwaris living on the Pakistan side of the border would associate themselves with both Afghanistan and Pakistan. As mentioned in chapter 4, the Ministry of Frontiers, Nationalities and Tribes had representatives of every Pakistani tribe. This is because of the irredentist claim of Afghanistan since the inception of Pakistan. The Afghan government had time and again objected to the agreement of the Durand Line. It claims that the agreement was valid only for 100 years and that the Afghan Ameer, Abdur Rehman, had signed the agreement in compulsion.

This claim was reflected by the tribes, especially the Shinwaris too. Whether or not they availed the Afghan nationality is not the point.

The question is how much the Shinwaris took part in the political affairs of both countries. In an interview with the shopkeeper in Pasedkhel, it was pointed out that Shinwaris had even voted in the last Afghan presidential elections (Murad Shinwari, personal communication, July 17, 2019). Similarly, the Shinwari Maliks would go to Afghanistan to participate in the Loya Jirga, the consultative body but still having much influence in the Afghan society. Last year, a video was shared by a page on the famous social media website Facebook named Shinwari Qaum, which featured Malik Gulab Shinwari coming back from the Loya Jirga of Afghanistan. The year of the video was not mentioned.

We have put some questions to the respondents in this regard. The first topic to be discussed is whether the respondents believe that the Afghan Shinwaris should go back to a war-torn country like Afghanistan. In the second topic, we discuss whether Shinwaris support the idea of strict borders or not. In the third part, we look at the question of whether it is difficult for the Pakistani Shinwari to avail themselves of the Afghan nationality. Then we will analyse the issue of passports and visas, and lastly, we will put the question of the Afghan Shinwaris' status after fencing the Pak-Afghan border.

Beyond National Identities

To know about the people's views on whether they object to the presence of the Afghan Shinwaris, we put a question to them. The results are as follows.

Half of the population does not agree with the statement that people object to the presence of the Afghan Shinwaris, while 51 go undecided. 20 respondents strongly agreed, while 79 simply agreed that people object to the presence of the Afghan Shinwaris in Lwarrgai. Thus it can be inferred that a good majority believes in the same tribal identity irrespective of the country they reside in.

Strong Sense of Tribal Identity

To find out the views of people regarding border toughness, we have cross-tabulated two variables: cross-border movement and the

statement that Shinwaris are against border fencing.

It can be noted that a large number of respondents, i.e. 204 respondents, strongly agreed with the fact that Shinwaris are against border fencing, while 79 simply agreed with the statement. The respondents who crossed it daily, weekly, monthly and yearly all outnumbered the options of disagreement.

Dual National Identity Affected

To highlight the challenges of getting the Afghan Qabail Card (an identity card issued to tribal people in Afghanistan, almost an equivalent of nationality) and nationality, we have cross-tabulated two variables; the sub-tribe and the statement that it has become difficult for Shinwari after fencing to get the nationality and Qabail Card.

It can be deduced that the majority of people from every sub-tribe strongly agree or simply agree with the statement that it is difficult for Shinwari of Pakistan to avail of the Afghan nationality and Qabail Card. 68 people strongly agreed, while 149 simply agreed that now it is difficult to avail nationality. Only 43 people disagree with the question.

The demand for Passport and Visas for Cross Border Movement

On our visit to the Pak-Afghan border in Pasedkhel, the researcher conducted an interview with a local who is a labourer in Torkham Bazar. The researcher asked the question of whether the Afghan authorities and the Pakistani authorities demand visas and passports at the Torkham border. The interviewee replied that in Afghanistan, it was still uncommon to return from Afghanistan, and the Pakistani authorities do demand a passport (Junaid Shinwari, personal communication, July 18, 2019).

The question mentioned in the questionnaire form was for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. We have cross-tabulated two variables, the cross-border movement and the statement about whether the two states demanded the passports. The results are as follows.

It is only through the proper documents that people can cross the border. 282 respondents strongly or simply agreed, while only 11 people disagreed with the question. The border fencing has adversely affected the political identity of the Shinwari tribe. It has become a challenge to maintain political participation in Afghanistan and also to retain the historical unity of the Shinwari tribe.

Status of the Afghan Shinwaris

When the USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1979, many Afghans became refugees in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, but a huge number of them settled in Pakistan. The Shinwaris owing to the fact that it was the nearest place and also had relatives in Lwarrgai, settled in it. The Shinwaris of Lwarrgai welcomed their fellow tribesmen and gave them their lands to live on temporarily.

However, the predicament of Afghanistan was rather not short-lived. The Mujahideen who had fought against the USSR forces indulged in the civil war among themselves. Subsequently, Najeeb Ullah was killed by the Taliban in 1996. Furthermore, the Americans attacked Afghanistan in search of Osama Bin Laden, prompting more unrest. Afghanistan, so to speak, was not favourable for living. Thus, the refugees who had immigrated to Pakistan chose under compulsion to live in Lwarrgai for a long time. They had for long acted as intermediaries between the Shinwaris of Afghanistan and the Shinwaris of Pakistan. Hence, the political identity of the Shinwari tribe is once again at stake.

Things have changed now. The Pakistan government has fenced the border and has ordered the Afghan nationals to leave Pakistan. We decided to observe the fate of the Afghan Shinwaris in Lwarrgai. The question of whether the Afghan citizens have left Pakistan is cross-tabulated, first with the variable of relatives and then with the level of education. The first table is as under:

The table tells us that the educated respondents who are aware of the development in the area also agree with the statement that Shinwaris have left Pakistan after the recent developments. The ratio of graduated and post-

graduates is, however, a bit less as compared to the people who have lower education levels.

Cross Border Movement Still Intact

We have put a question to the researchers whether they still go to Afghanistan for weddings, requiems and Jirgas etc. The variable of cross-border movement is cross-tabulated with the statement that people still go to Afghanistan for weddings etc. The results are as under:

We clearly saw that people who cross the border daily or weekly disagree that Pakistani Shinwari now crosses the border for social functions. 20 respondents who cross the border daily strongly or simply disagreed with the statement. Similarly, the ratio of disagreement with the people who cross it weekly is equal to that of agreement: 9 agree while 9 also disagree. People who cross it monthly and yearly believe otherwise. Probably the people crossing it yearly have not crossed the border after the fencing. Totally, 163 people agreed, while 119

strongly agreed that it is now difficult to cross the border. In the same manner, people who have never crossed it also believe people still go to social functions. But a lot of people mentioned in the questionnaire form that they have made passports to cross the border.

Conclusion

A greater number of Shinwaris have dual nationalities from both Pakistan and Afghanistan. As Pakistan and Afghanistan have no dual nationality agreement, people will cease to be the citizens of one or another state. The people selected for sampling were adamant about mentioning dual citizenship. Therefore, we posed an indirect question of whether people have acquired dual nationality to carry out illicit trade or not. Many people replied that they had acquired dual citizenship.

Also, a great deal of Shinwaris own land properties in Afghanistan and have relatives there. More than 25 per cent of Lwarrgai Shinwaris have their relatives on the other of the border. Therefore, a large number of families have been divided due to border fencing who would go to Afghanistan only with documents,

including passports and visas, through the Torkham Gate. People who have relatives and land properties across the border will not be able to meet their loved ones and lay claims to lands they had owned.

Similarly, border fencing will lessen the cultural ties once existent among the local tribesmen on both sides of the border. The Shinwaris participated in weddings, funerals and Jirgas across the border. The cross-border movement will become a challenge with the passage of time. People who cross it daily or weekly have especially pointed out that it is difficult without a visa to maintain the cultural ties which existed before.

The interesting point is that the Shinwaris of the Lwarrgai area do not object to the presence of the Afghan Shinwaris in Lwarrgai after fencing. The Afghan Shinwaris had fled Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion to settle

with their kinsmen on this side of the border. In like manner, the majority of Shinwaris are against the policy of border fencing because of their close affinity with their fellow tribesmen across the border. However, there has come a big change in the nature of the cross-border movement: demand for passports and visas. The Afghan government rarely demands passports while on the way back from Afghanistan, the Pakistani authorities do demand visas and passports. After fencing, it has become difficult for the people to get Afghan nationalities and Qabail Cards. Furthermore, a lot of the Afghan Shinwaris have left Lwarrgai after border fencing. It can be argued that the Shinwari identity of people will be challenged by the border fencing because a large number of Afghan Shinwaris have left Lwarrgai and because it requires a visa now to participate in Jirgas etc. with the fellow tribesmen in Afghanistan.

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