

# BIRADARI'S FUNCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF GENDER OPINIONS

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**ABSTRACT:** *Biradari is defined as “an association, attachment, emotional linkage and sharing common characteristics by an individual being a part of a particular group descended of the same ancestor”. The present study has been conducted in the Rawalpindi district while randomly selecting both male and female respondents to cultivate knowledge on the role, function and significance of biradari in the local and national politics of Pakistan. The present study has focused on the opinions of both male and female while explaining the relationship of biradari with local and national political culture. The biradari has been found as an important force in shaping up of local pressure groups as a primary political institution converting into political parties, hence creating a web of benefits, social cohesion, and protection within inter caste and a health competition between different castes.*

**Key Words:** Biradari, Local politics, Dispute and biradari, Parya, Panchayat

## INTRODUCTION

Biradari defined as “brotherhood” originated by the Persian word *Baradar* meaning “brother”. Among South Asian Muslims especially in Pakistan and India, a number of social classes are segregated on the basis of biradari. According to the author Anatol Lieven, in Pakistani society biradari plays the role of most important force, stronger and significant than religion, ethnic or any ideological causes. Political alliances and parties in Pakistan are normally based on biradari system not ideologies [1,2].

In Punjabi cultural scenario, biradari/qaum/zat is considered to be most important and strongest tie that is favored most of the time while making political alliances and loyalty of people within the same caste group [3]. If we consider the history of Indo-Pak, caste system has prevailed here from centuries. People usually belongs to a biradari that is supposed to be guiding them in their daily social lives by a set of rules and regulation or can be expressed as norms and values that relate to marriage patterns, work, enjoyment, recreation and many other social concerns [3-5]. Zekiye's work represent that all individuals are always tracing their association or relationship to a common ancestor, no problem how distant; people may belong to the same caste [6].

In the social system of Pakistan's Punjab province, the main characteristic is biradarism. Biradari system plays its role on both local and national level politics. Biradari vote for the same biradari that shows more significance determinant than party loyalty. The first trend is the caste, a major determinant of voting behavior [3, 7]

Biradari system played an important role in different times in Pakistan during local body elections. Most important and functional biradaris' in politics of Punjab are Gujjars, Jatts, Syeds, Araiens, Bloachs and Rajputs. District administration is normally selected from the key biradari of respective district. Rajputs are in northern Punjab, Jatts and Araiens are in central Punjab, Balochs in southern Punjab leading the political activities. The stratification of biradris into different areas of Punjab affects outcomes of overall Pakistan's political system. [8].

State's social organization is mainly according to the native culture. Concepts of nation grounded on the real-world characteristics of culture. Culture is an approach of life consisting standard universal norms, values and ideologies of a particular social group of people in a meticulous region. Multi culture social societies were the feature of sub-continent. Effects of Greece, Turk Muslims, Mongols, Arabs, Dravidians and Aryans and British cultures are appeared but the Aryan culture looks dominant. One of the most controversial topics of the social and cultural aspects of India and Pakistan is a strict caste system [9].

Castes are further distributed into sub-castes, (zat in Pakistan), which shows the more imperative feature of people's everyday life [8]. In Pakistan, functions and significance of biradari is widely accepted at all socio-cultural levels. No one can refuse to accept the importance of biradari e.g., between classes, rural & urban areas and as well as between the gender distribution of male and female both from educated and illiterate backgrounds of Pakistani community. In this research the focused area was to collect the opinion of both male and female participants about biradari/caste and its function and significance in the community, with special reference to its role in local politics.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

In order to collect the data for this research a sample comprising of 150 participants including 109 male and 41 females were randomly interviewed from the selected area of study in Rawalpindi. To gather the data on set objectives, a closed ended questionnaire was developed. Data was collected by trained enumerator under the supervision of lead researcher. Data was converted into codes before entering in EpiData and SPSS software(s) for further analysis and interpretation.

## RESULTS

**Table-1 Biradari System Played an Important Role at Local Level Politics**

| Responses         | Gender |        |
|-------------------|--------|--------|
|                   | Male   | Female |
| Strongly Agree    | 40.4%  | 26.8%  |
| Agree             | 41.3%  | 58.5%  |
| No Response       | 3.7%   | 7.3%   |
| Disagree          | 9.2%   | 7.3%   |
| Strongly Disagree | 5.5%   | 0.0%   |
| Total             | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Table 1 shows the difference of opinions regarding gender, Respondents were asked about the role of biradari system in local politics. Around 40.4% male and 26.8% female respondents were of the strong view that biradari plays an important role in local or gross root level political activities. Most of the respondents agree that the local politics is shaped by the biradari's impact in a respective community.

**Table-2 How Much Biradari System Influence Local Politics**

| Responses           | Gender |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
|                     | Male   | Female |
| Extremely Effective | 40.4%  | 14.6%  |
| Effective           | 38.5%  | 53.7%  |
| Somehow Effective   | 15.6%  | 26.8%  |
| No Response         | 5.5%   | 4.9%   |
| Total               | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Table 2 unveils that biradari system influence in an extremely effective manner to the local politics, it was found that around 40.4% male respondents and 14.6% female's respondents found the influence of biradari as an extremely effective process. Whereas, only 15.6% male respondents believe that is somehow effective. On the other hand around 26.8% females shared that biradari is only somehow effective in local politics.

**Table-3 Biradari System is How Much Effective to Solve the Disputes**

| Responses           | Gender |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
|                     | Male   | Female |
| Extremely Effective | 22.9%  | 12.2%  |
| Effective           | 38.5%  | 41.5%  |
| Somehow Effective   | 33.0%  | 39.0%  |
| No Response         | 5.5%   | 7.3%   |
| Total               | 100.0% | 100.0% |

It is important to document the opinion of people on the role of biradari/caste system and its effective role to solve the disputes of local communities. The results showed that majority of female respondents favored the question as compared to male respondents. Around 41.5% female participants of the study were of the view that biradari system effectively plays its role to the successful resolution

of community disputes and conflicts. On the other hand nearly 33% male respondents believe that it is somehow effective.

**Table-4 Biradari System as Primary Institution in our Political System**

| Responses | Gender |        |
|-----------|--------|--------|
|           | Male   | Female |
| Yes       | 53.2%  | 39.0%  |
| No        | 19.3%  | 14.6%  |
| May Be    | 27.5%  | 46.3%  |
| Total     | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The table 4 presents the role of biradari system as a primary institution in Pakistan's political system. A major chunk of the male respondents (53.2%) believe that the biradari system is indeed the primary institution in the development of national political system and political culture. On the other hand around 46.3% female respondents were of the view that it may or may not as influential as primary institute as compare to 39% of respondents who strongly holds the opinion of the role of biradari in shaping up of national politics.

**Table-5 Image Comes to Your Mind With Word Biradari?**

| Responses       | Gender |        |
|-----------------|--------|--------|
|                 | Male   | Female |
| Political Party | 22.9%  | 14.6%  |
| Pressure Group  | 61.5%  | 73.2%  |
| Others          | 15.6%  | 12.2%  |
| Total           | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The table 5 represents the opinion generated by the respondents regarding their respective perception for biradari, it was discovered that most of the male respondents (61.5%) believe that the biradari system acts like a pressure group as compare to the 22.9% male respondents who think that the biradari is not a pressure group rather a political party working in different communities based on castes.

**DISCUSSION**

Predominantly caste/zat/biradari is very influential in political system of Pakistan as well as in the neighboring country, in India where caste system is deeply rooted in political process, activities and even daily rituals. Existing studies shows that the concept of biradari-based political system and use of its getup for political purposes is a game coined and supported by the political parties for their political objectives. Local biradarries in Punjab played their role as a pressure group and have their influence on political parties [10].

Results of the present study depicts that role, functions and significance of biradari is not only point of consideration

among males of the society but surprisingly even females have a strong affiliation and emotions with the biradari and caste system with regards to the local and national political system and culture. It is worth mentioning that females shared and expressed their opinion in this study without any influence. Female respondents shared that in the scenario of Pakistani political system biradari/zat system is extremely effective and also playing its cultural role from community level to the national level politics.

Role/influence of biradari is commonly seen during general elections and also after election in political activities of their particular community. It is also observed that the elected candidates were seen in effort to do maximum for the benefits of their own biradari. Previous studies showed that the instinctive effects of biradari system were seen in the administration of organizations, new contracting and especially selection at any key important post [11]. Throughout general local elections, biradari sets became vigorously in motion and contributed in election as a representative of particular political parties and local ruling biradari [12].

Biradari system importantly to a large extent is the characteristics of rural settings even in the 21st century in Punjab province and all other areas having similar features. The significance and functions of biradari/caste is very much influential in socio-economic, political and cultural patterns of Punjab, especially in the absence of state provided social security and national benefits. Still there are active role of biradari in the form "parya" and "panchayat" that is very much operational and resolving issues in rural areas of Punjab as quoted by Ahmed et al., (2013). It was further argued that no matter if the area is urban or rural, biradari is effective at both ends, and level of operations of biradari may differ according to location. People belonging to different social status are also confident and feel proud to show their caste affiliation as it assists in numerous purposes ranging from marital agreements, resolution of inter-caste and intra-caste disputes, generating a bond of social relationships for encompassing the web of social contact and moreover as a point of identity and appealing a societal respect and honor enjoyed by a respective zat/caste in Punjabi culture [3].

## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to collect the difference of opinion from male and females of respective sampled community to know the significance and functions of biradari system as they perceived. Results unveiled that females along with male were emotionally attached with their respective caste

and were well equipped and aware about the participation of a biradari in community level local politics, and how it shapes the national level political activities. This shows both men and women are equally practicing the norms and values of their respective caste and feel proud to be the part of it no matter what is the gender stratification or social status.

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