

BIRADARISM AND RURAL CONFLICT AS A DETERMINANT OF POLITICAL BEHAVIOR: A CASE STUDY OF RURAL PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT: Arousal of conflicts is rooted in the clash of interests, struggle to access resources and persuasion of power. The game of power struggle is not played alone but is supported by factionalism which incase of South Asian countries corresponds majorly to Biradarism. The study highlights the role of rural conflicts among various factions in manipulating and altering political behavior. The data was collected from District Lodhran, village "1-Chak", Punjab province through a blend of qualitative and quantitative tools, from a sample of 153 respondents.

Key words: Factions, Conflict, Political behavior, Biradari, Caste system,

INTRODUCTION

Competition, conflict and faction formation are phenomenon all interlinked as, "living in a close proximity entails exploitation of common resources which creates conditions in which competition is likely" [1]. To desirability to join groups arises, "to meet physical, psychological, and social needs" and for "cohesiveness" a central property, that relates to "social influence and productivity" [2].

Alliances on the basis of *biradari* is the most noticeable characteristic of the cultural setup of the province of "Punjab" Pakistan, "caste (*qaum*)" is alleged as a "strong binder" preferred to form "group alliances"[3]. "*Biradari*" within the rural settings of Punjab is affirmed to be a "force, stronger than religion, ethnic or any ideological" institution [4,5]. "Loyalty", is on the basis of "*Biradari/Qaum/zat*" which thus influences the 'socio-economic, political and cultural patterns' of that area [3,4]. Submission is further amplified by "in-group glorification and loyalty side of ethnocentrism" [2] shaping individual behaviors.

Thus factional groups formed within the social setting of most of the South Asian countries are on the basis of "*biradari*". Faction is agglomeration, and coalition of people within a social setup with the purpose to "strengthen that group" and magnify their access to resources [6]. The aim of a factional group is aimed at eventually maximizing 'the power of the patron' consequently benefitting "every member of the faction" [6,7]. For this purpose, *biradari's* endeavor into the power struggle, *biradari's* influences are evident 'during and also after elections in political activities', in selection "at any important administrative post" [8]. Furthermore, *biradaris* are dynamically involved in campaigning "as representatives of specific political parties and local ruling *biradari*" [9]. The role of *biradari's* in the overall political system of Pakistan is quite evident, it acts as a criterion for selection "District administration is normally selected from the key *biradari* of respective district" [10].

The politics in Pakistan is influenced by various tools; like '*qaumism*' and 'religion used to manipulate the general public [6,11,12]. "*Biradari*-based political system" is merely a cover term coined to feed personal "political objectives" [6]. It has been affirmed that factional groups alter the voting behavior, and political preferences as stated that "Local *biradaris* in Punjab played their role as a pressure group and have their influence on political parties [4, 6].

Biradari an "analogous racial group", with which one develops "innate affiliation", leads to "reciprocity" however only within the group [13,14]. Power game is common among various castes/*biradaris*, when their aims differ leading to conflicts on "land and other social and material issues" with the "opponent caste" [13]. The role of "leadership" and "boundary role" is most apparent in case of an "intergroup conflict" [2]. The effectiveness of the leader thus decides the outcome of a conflict. As stated that "village politics" relies on "factional leaders" and "kinship ties" that "manipulate and structure politics at the local level" [15], thus in case of a conflict the role of factional leaders becomes functional.

METHODOLOGY

Present study was conducted in District Lodhran, village "1-Chak", Punjab province. The data was collected from a sample of 153 respondents, through random sampling. A blend of qualitative and quantitative tools were used ; in depth information regarding the role of conflicts in changing political behavior was gathered through structured interviews and participant-as-observer, while the data was analyzed through SPSS and further interpreted under the light of anthropological views.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

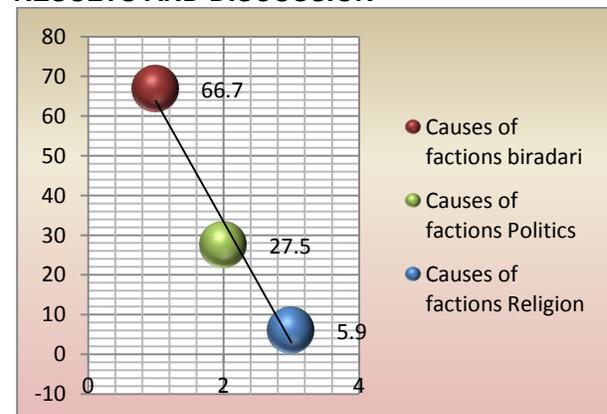


Figure: 1 Principal Causes of "Dhara" or Faction Formation. Percentile analysis indicated that the grounds for faction formation specifically in "*Duniya Pur, 1-chak*" were majorly '*biradari*', 'politics' and 'religion'. A majority of the

respondents, 66.7 % affirmed that factions were formed in their area mainly on the basis of 'Biradari' or caste. The "caste (*qaum*)" has been established to be a "strong binder" force that leads to "group alliances" and faction formation [3]. While, 27.5 % believed 'politics' as the root cause of coalition into factions, while 5.9 % held "religion" as an agent of faction formation.

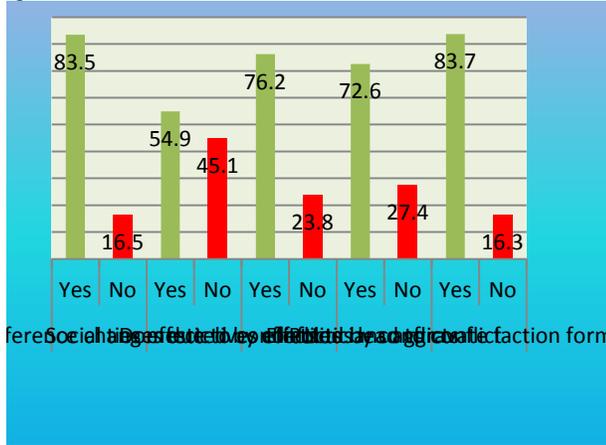


Figure: 2 Effect of Inter/ Intra Factional Conflicts on Political Scenario.

It was observed that *biradari* system had a strong hold over the power dynamics within the locale. The *biradari* in majority formed powerful alliances by venturing into the political scenario, which allows them to forge themselves into strong political factions. The data reflected that the majority of the respondents i.e. 55.2 % belonged to the 'Jatt' *biradari*, then 21.2 % were "Dogars", while 15.6 % were "Arrain", Gujjars were a minority with only 4 % respondents belonging to the caste. The *biradari* in majority the "jatts" were also constituent of the major political party in prevailing within the area. "Functional *biradaris*' in politics of Punjab are Gujjars, Jatts, Syeds, Araiens, Bloachs and Rajputs" [10] The table indicates the views of the respondents regarding the effect of inter and intra group conflicts on political behavior. The respondents when inquired if "political preferences change due to conflicts", a mounting majority of 83.5 % agreed, while 16.5 % disagreed. It was revealed that the candidate to be voted was chosen solely on the basis of the *biradari*/ caste. Since the process revolves around reciprocity, in case of a conflict within or among *biradari*'s led to people stepping back and voting an opponent party as reprisal. "Biradarism" is an "authoritative factor "affecting "the voting behavior" [16], and votes are casted to candidates "from their specific caste without analyzing the manifesto of relative candidate" [17]. It is further affirmed that "relationship with community factions" plays a vital role "in determining voting behavior in the south Asia" rather than "individual political affiliations" [13]. Additionally, research shows that "effectiveness" of a group depends upon the "leadership style", "autocratic, democratic or laissez-faire", in resolving "intergroup conflicts" [2]. Further, the views on "Are social ties affected by conflicts?"

were that 54.9 % agreed while 45.1% disagreed. The majority of the respondent agreed that social relationships were severely sundered due to conflicts on land, politics, water and honor. Conflict on any one of the issues led to severing of familial ties and social bonds. The respondents disagreeing included the elder persons of the community for whom the issues were not of grave importance, and were of the view that such petty fights are common and do not last long. It was observed that caste and kin based factions are of great importance within the social network of a rural society as they provide protection and social security, as stated that "the obligation of kinship ties and caste is very much essential in the socio-economic and politico-cultural life of rural masses" [13].

The respondents when inquired that, "Are domestic lives affected by conflicts", 76.2 % agreed and revealed that since the familial bonds are quite strong within the rural setup, and decision-making regarding various domestic and social issues was done collectively thus as a result of factional conflicts family members stopped interacting, the environment of the home was rigorously disturbed, leading to prevalence of psychological stress and depression. Factional groups "provide support and pressure group on various domestic and communal issues" [13], moreover as the members of the group are highly "sensitive to group norms", and their "self-concept or individual identity" is intertwined and defined by the "group identity" thus in case of a conflict "condemnation, rejection and expulsion" is faced which adversely effects the mental health and thus the domestic life [2].

The effect of elections was observed by asking if "Elections led to conflicts?" 72.6 % agreed while 27.4 % disagreed. It was established that before and during the elections the factions openly campaigned, supporting the political group belonging to their *biradari* which often led to conflicts with the "opponent caste in power" [13,14]. The *biradari* elites and politicians provoked the common members of the society to stimulate their social ties and gather votes for them. Since the aim of factional groups is to "maximize power of the patron" [7], and elections are the practical stage of that power struggle, creation of "conflict of interest" and "conflict of identity" is universally inevitable [6,18].

The role of politicians in faction formation was observed by asking if "Politicians aggravate faction formation", 83.7 % of the respondents agreed, while 16.3 % disagreed. The data reflects that a majority of the respondents accepted the chief role of political groups in intensification of the severity of factions. Every factional group was motivated to support the party led by their own caste/*biradari*. Furthermore, it was revealed that opponent political parties kept an eye on any new conflicts within *biradaris* and anticipated such conflicts to draw the votes of the group that is displeased by their own caste based political party. Biradarism is a more authoritative factor of voting behavior than party attachment, apart from when the two candidates belong to same *Biradari* [16].

CONCLUSION

Biradarism has a strong hold on the social network and is embedded overpoweringly in both rural and urban setup. The obligation to associate to caste/biradari/kin is imperative to access social resources. Conflicts among such factional groups are common to attain social security and political power. Factional conflicts condition the voting behaviors, preferences of political parties, domestic and social relations. It was affirmed that factions and conflicts simultaneously act as pressure groups altering the course of behaviors of the members of the group.

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