

CAUSES OF CONFLICT AMONG THE SWATIS OF HAZARA: SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

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This paper highlights the causes of conflict among the Swatis of Batagram in Hazara Division of the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan. Conflicts stem from clash in the interest, cultural values or desires of an individual or a group with another individual or a group in the society or otherwise. Culture, largely shaped by the given physical environment, usually, leads to conflict either due to lack, scarcity or uneven distribution of resources. It is under the inherent need or greed that man fights for the control of resources and manages the legitimacy of a conflict within the cultural norms. The causes of conflict may vary, because “war is a *cultural* phenomenon, that it is a form of institutionalized behaviour given definition by consensus, and that the definition varies from society to society” (Goldschmidt; Foster; Rubinstein; Silverberg 1986:12). Although any action violating the norms of the society results in the emergence of a conflict among the Swatis, yet the current research mainly focuses on the conflicts arising on the dispute of land property. Nevertheless, other basic reasons of conflict are related to various issues with respect to females and money matters. Since, woman, gold, and land property are observable indicators, and any untoward incident associated with them is considered a stigma on social survival of a man. Land, being the main source of livelihood, is a big cause of conflict, which is normally resolved through public meetings. Conflict over the honour and chastity of woman is resolved at the family level. While allegation of moral turpitude involving a male and a female is resolved by the near blood relatives including father and brothers. Traditionally, it is the father or brothers who normally kill the adulterer or fornicator.

Land as a Source of Conflict

According to the 1998 census, total population of Batagram District was 307 thousand, agricultural land 61340 acres and the mean household size 6.6 persons (GoP 1999). The number of households, therefore, was calculated to 46515, each family on average shared 1.31 acres of cultivable land insufficient to meet its needs. Apart from means of subsistence, land property is a status symbol and a source of authority. It not only makes the owner independent in terms of food and shelter but, also, in decision-making particularly in the domain of politics. Carrying social privileges, it has become one of the major causes of conflict among the people.

The Swatis conquered the present Batagram District in the 16th century and their descendants attained higher social status by inheriting a chunk of land from them. The non-Swatis, who sided with the Swatis in the war, also received share in the land and became *dotary*¹. However, those Swatis who did not participate in the war or who sold their hereditary land lost their decisive power in the clan. That is why selling of land was looked down on (see Barth 1965). Frequent land disputes has generated a proverb that ‘if a man becomes sick people slaughter animals for his recovery, but, when land becomes sick then human beings are slaughtered over it’.

Having strong attachment with the land, inherited landowners permanently settle at one place. They may temporarily leave their territory for some kind of business or making money, within the country or abroad but do return home after reasonable time intervals. Hence, they do not migrate permanently to settle somewhere else. The social organisation of inherited landowners is stronger as compared to that of the landless people, who are taken socially inferior because of having no

permanent settlement, usually depending on others and remain mobile. Traditionally, all inherited landowners are socially equal because their ancestors participated in the war of conquest, but those who purchased land later on are not. There is a strong relationship of the land ownership with socio-economic status, the phenomenon that has been noted in all small and large-scale societies across the world (see Gluckman 1955).

The worth of landholding in terms of socio-political status asserted by Barth is that “full citizenship is vested only in members of the landowning Pakhtun caste, and these serve as political patrons for all members of the lower castes” (1965: 3). In addition to this, the social status of a man is determined on his genealogical bond to one of the Swati sub-tribes. Land-ownership and genealogical link with any of the sub-tribe is connected with survival, because land provides economic independence, while high manpower of the lineage is earnestly desirable to ensure effective deterrence against the enemy when conflict over land property becomes inevitable. It is why land ownership and belonging to a Swati descent group are not mutually exclusive (see Barth 1965).

In the light of the above observations, the following types of conflicts normally arise as a result of disputes over land property in the Swati society of Hazara.

Distribution of Inherited Land among the Heirs

The sons inherit their father’s land, which is equally distributed among them. The father could however grant *pagrhai*² to one of his sons, in return of his services for the family. The daughters traditionally do not demand their share in land. The process of distribution of inherited land among collateral agnates is a time of acute tension and danger. During the division of land the heirs are suspicious of the unjust allotment of land. Therefore, all the brothers are grouped together against their cousins in order to get their due share. Principally every male inheritor is to get share in the legacy of land. Nevertheless, the weaker brother remains suspicious of the intention of stronger ones for snatching more land and number of houses built for the tenants. In such a situation the stronger one is that who has greater number of young sons for support in case of coercive self-help, which is often violent. However, the situation is not merely decided on the basis of greater number of sons. For example, if the only son of a weaker brother has leadership qualities and could organize rest of the affinal relatives in his own lineage, he can balance the situation. This is actually a show of force because the supporters of rival parties approach at the men houses in order to participate in an anticipated gunfight. If the weaker rival could successfully resist through a same show of force the situation become balance. Hence, third party particularly priest of the village interfere and organize a meeting between the rivals. This way the issue of land related dispute can be peacefully resolved (See Barth 1965 and Lindholm 1996).

It is evident from the above detail that land is one of the major root causes of conflict among *Swatis* and distribution of inherited land normally becomes a bone of contention. However, the distribution of land among agnates is regulated by the notion of social equality and every group is ready to snatch its due share if it is undermined. The actual source of conflict during land inheritance is the differential attitude of groups. If one of the groups perceived that the given group is superior because of holding numerical strength and initiated a conflict the later would retaliate in order to prove them as equal to the earlier.

Conflict over Forest Land and Trees

The forest and pastureland is normally communal property of the agnates. From the communal forest the members are allowed to collect fuel wood and even cut trees, when needed. For example, if any of the members plan to construct a house may cut trees for his personal use in the

construction of a house. However, if the trees are cut in a large number for sale the money received from the sale is divided among the owners in equal proportion.

Communally owned private forests are not properly managed because it is a communal property and nobody takes interest in plantation. However, the owners jealously protect naturally grown pine trees or trees planted by the Forest Department. A guard is kept for this purpose and he is paid for his services in kind. Nevertheless, those people having no trees of their own are allowed to take fuel woods from the forest. The fuel woods are dry tumbled branches of pine trees or shrubs. But they are not allowed to cut trees. In case anybody was found guilty of cutting trees the guard might impose penalty and the minimum penalty is to confiscate the contraband.

Conflict over Land Boundary

Every landowner remains very conscious of his land boundaries. The minute violation of land boundary may lead to a serious fight. Landowner normally obsessed with a fear that the adjoining landowner may encroach upon his land. Therefore, the landowner frequently visits his land to check the boundaries even if the owner is not self-cultivator.

The land is registered with the government and the revenue department has the detailed map and ownership records, which depicts minute detail in terms of ownership. Despite the registration of land with government, encroachment occurs which leads to serious fights. If the adjoining landowners were equally powerful then there would be lesser chance of boundary encroachment. The encroachment of land boundary is taken serious for two reasons. Firstly, the land is an important source of livelihood, therefore, if a little encroachment was not checked well in time the encroacher might capture a lot. Secondly, the owner of land is considered as weaker if he could not stop the encroachment of his land. In response to socio-economic survival, even a little encroachment of land is strongly resisted and the victim might resort to the use of force and violence ensues.

The landowners and their descendants take interest in knowing their land boundaries. Any member who is careless or does not know his land boundaries is considered *begherata*-without honour (see Barth 1965:).

Sale and Purchase of Land

It is considered pathetic to sell a piece of land except for a very good reason. It is thought ridiculous for two reasons: firstly because the land is a permanent source of livelihood, symbol of pride and identity; secondly, it is traditionally not acceptable to allow landless people to purchase land and mingle with the inherited landowners.

One could imagine its value from the emotional attachment of the Swatis, who consider land to be respected like a mother which gives them nourishment and sustainability. Because of socio-economic benefits associated with it, any damage even unnecessary lashing or beating of the earth is condemned. The sale of communal land when not handled properly becomes a cause of conflict. It is obligatory not to sell the land without attaining prior consent of all the shareholders. It is also against the norm to sell the land without the knowledge or permission of the adjoining landowners, more particularly so when they are relatives. In case the sale is decided then the first right is given to the nearest neighbour or kin and gradually to others if they are not interested in the purchase (see Barth 1956:). However, if the neighbours and kins are not informed, they may institute *haqq-e-shufaah*-the right of pre-emption. *Haqq-e-shufaah* is instituted for two purposes. Firstly, that the adjoining landowner is really interested to purchase the land. Secondly, *haqq-e-shufaah* is instituted not to buy the land but to intimidate the real purchaser to bribe the pretender and stop him from pre-emption. Instituting *haqq-e-shufaah* is relative to the social position of the purchaser. No one institutes *haqq-e-shufaah* if the purchaser is a powerful and influential person.

Haqq-e-shufaah leads to conflict among three parties i.e. the seller, the buyer and the party who institutes *haqq-e-shufaah*. A man who wants to purchase the land and among the neighboring landowners nobody has an objection over that transaction the land could be easily transferred to the purchaser. However, a man whose land is situated at a distance, hence cannot institute right of preemption, and he has an objection over that business may likely to convince one of the adjoining landowners to give him power of attorney for *haqq-e-shufaah*. It is actually a plan to intimidate the purchaser for some money.

Trespassing the Agricultural Fields

Trespassing the field by livestock result in conflict between the parties. It is normally the children between the age of 9 to 15 who take cattle for grazing to the pasture or for watering. Controlled grazing is preferred and the children are trained to take care of the cattle by preventing them of trespassing agricultural fields. However, if somebody's cattle enter other field may lead to squabble. If, unsupervised cattle are found frequently trespassing others fields, the field owner may take away the cattle to his home and the action may result in serious conflict between the cattle owner and the field's owner. Hence, squabbles over trespassing are frequently occurred.

Irrigation

Paddy crops are extensively irrigated. The water required for irrigation reach the fields through water channels. If a person tries to divert the water to his own fields without prior permission of the man for whom the water was due, may lead to conflict. Those people who are enemies may harm one another by diverting water, which may intensify the enmity. Irrigation water is important for the normal growth of crops particularly rice. Water for irrigation is drawn from natural stream. However, the supply of water is not abundant. Hence, the shortage of water is one of the causes of conflict in the study area (See Barth 1956)

Ravaging the Crops and Burning the Dry Grasses

The people who are not in good terms usually try to harm one another by using every possible mean. For example, they destroy the immature crops of the enemy. It is normally destroyed during night so as not to be caught red handed. This is particularly happened to destroy the paddy seedling. They also harm their enemy by burning dry grasses. Dry grass is basically fodder for livestock, which is stored to be used during the winter season. Subsistence crops and livestock play important role in the livelihood of people. Therefore, damage to crops and dry grasses lead to serious confrontation particularly when the culprits are exactly identified. Stealing of livestock is also another reason for conflict.

Lacking of Strength Leads to Conflict

The people who are dependants, tenants and members of occupational castes, do live under the political influence of their patrons. However, a change happened because of economic opportunities in the Gulf countries. The landless people and members of occupational castes who could earn cash money from abroad have bought small pieces of land and have constructed their own personal houses. Therefore, member from amongst the dependents who have constructed his own house and has bought a little bit land is in conflict with old adjoining landowner. Since, the construction of personal house and purchase of land is the tacit indicators towards the independence of the owner. The independence of new landowner is something nuisance for the old landowner. It is because his independence is not fully recognized; therefore, the old landowner attempts to bring the new small landowner under his political influence. Therefore, the powerlessness of such new landowner becomes a reason of conflict. Four different situations could create under such circumstances. Firstly, if the new landowner could strongly resist and establish his entity, the old landowner would stop teasing him. Secondly, if the new landowner could not resist he may accepts to live under the

political influence of the old landowner, instead of functioning as an independent decision-maker in the domain of politics. Thirdly, the new landowner may resell his assets to such a stronger and powerful man who could be a threat for the adjoining old landowner. Fourthly, if the land was bought from a stronger landowner it may be resold to him. This type of relationship between the stronger and the weaker is depicted in the research of Lindholm (1996: 20) that “In Pukhtun thought, there are only two types of individual—the weak and the strong. The strong survive, take power, and gain prestige; the weak are controlled and dominated by the strong”.

Woman as a Source of Conflict

Among *Swati* the social status of woman is relatively subservient as compared to man particularly in the domain of decision-making. The reason lies in the type of culture people live in. Competition for attaining high socio-political status is very tough because it involves the use of physical force. It is normal that for the maintenance of social status people resort to the use of force. Therefore, it is significantly important to note that natural resources are jealously guarded by the use of physical force, which is not possible for women. Hence, women cannot compete directly for their autonomous socio-political status. The social status of women is therefore attached with a man upon whom she depends as daughter, sister, wife, and mother. Attitude based on differentiation towards male and female starts just after birth. Because in the study area birth of a male baby is the occasion of congratulations while the birth of a female is the occasion of condolences (See Lindholm 1996).

This favoritism for male could be seen overall. The mother gives the best possible food to male. Lindholm in her study on the Pukhtuns of Swat has noted the same patterns of behavior toward male and female children. She explains her findings that “boys, of course, begin the favoured sex, tend to have a somewhat easier time of it in the home than girls, and while a girl will be punished for striking her brother, a boy may hit his sister with impunity” (1996: 23-24).

In the *Swati* society practicing hypergamy relatively increases the social status of woman but generally her social status is measured against the status of her patrilineals. Lindholm has noted that “because men and women alike are early instructed in the pride of their own patriline, there is an automatic hostility built in to the marriage relation, for each partner considers his own patriline superior to the other’s”. (1996: 18).

The female depends on male members. The male member defends the dependant position of woman. The woman is expected to function within the cultural framework of norms and traditions. However, in a joint family there is continuously squabble among the wives of brothers on account of defending the superiority of their respective patriline. They are also found accusing one another for *kodey* (magic). The lethargy, irritation, frustration and depression are often referred to as a result of magical spell. The ideal wife is one who is submissive and docile. It is a normal routine that a wife would praise in support of her patriline while the husband would admire his own. “The violence and strife which characterize the marriage relations is the result of the constant battle between two equally proud and determined opponents to achieve power over the other and avoid being dominated and controlled” (Lindholm 1996: 19).

The most important norm for a woman is to prevent herself from illicit sexual relationship because it led to serious conflict. According to the traditions the man and woman if found in illicit sexual relationship are killed by their respective patrilineals (father and brothers) (See Ahmed 1980).

As woman is not an independent decision-maker, therefore, she cannot marry according to her own wish. The parents and elder brothers arrange the marriage for a girl as well as for boy. After arrange marriage of a girl the post marital conflict can arise e.g. if the girl was beaten by the husband and broken her bone. This serious injury is taken as violence and it leads to serious conflict between the

girl parents and the boy. After getting injured the girl normally shifts to her parents' home. Reconciliation is made after a long process of mediation through neutral third party that is often comprised of relatives. Traditionally the father or brother (s) would kill a girl if she is found in illegitimate sex or extra-marital sexual relationship. The father or brother (s) would also kill the boy found in illegitimate sex.

Money Lending

If, some body would not return the borrowed money within the stipulated time it may lead to a conflict. If money is not returned for a long time, the man who lent money may seize something as *botha*³. However, the culture of given society is very flexible in the domain of lending money. This attitude is very much depicted in a proverb, which says 'no body has killed a borrower'.

Lending money is a common practice in village life. Lending and borrowing money is a part of local system, which is very effective. It is basically interest free loan. The villagers not always have cash money in hand; hence, monthly salaried workers purchase the items of daily use from grocer shops and pay the money at the end of every month. However, the farmers after harvesting the crops pay money to the grocer. Some of the farmers during winter season migrate to different cities in Pakistan in order to work as daily wagers. It is because during winter there is no work to do in the agricultural fields. Cash money earned during winter is utilized to pay debt of grocers.

In joint families it is a common practice between brothers that one brother stay in village to take care of the family and land. The rest of the brothers normally go abroad. They return to village after one or two years. From abroad they send money either to their father or elder brother to manage routine activities. Major part of cash income is consumed for purchasing items of daily use. However, it depends on the amount of money saved is utilized for the purchase of agricultural land as well as commercial plots.

Social Survival and Conflict

Dignity of social life is measured against the notion of *izzat* (honor). Keiser (1991: 53) has highlighted the term *izzat* as perceived among Kohistanis of Thull that (...) "*izzat* depends on personal accomplishments and defines the men of worth in community; it fluctuates with an individual's fortune. One measures *izzat* by the *adab* ('respect') accorded by others. Wealth, education, piety, and elected position all merit respect and thus confer *izzat*". Barth (1965: 81-82) has also explained the significance of *izzat* with that of leadership and political authority among Swat Pukhtuns. He is of the view that "thus the intangible factor of prestige or reputation becomes a major source of authority, an important means by which a political pretender rallies supporters. The qualities are evaluated in terms of the polar opposites *izat* honour, and *sharm*—shame... Honour, in this sense, is thus a matter of major concern to political pretenders—as indeed to every self-respecting man—and conflicts in defense of honour become tests of a man's honour is thus is as important as a threat to his possession of land. Pathans express this in terms of a 'pure case'—the defense of the honour of wives and sisters; hence the proverbial reference to women as a source of conflict. Actually any insult, any action or condition which 'shames' a Pathan, requires him to defend his honour, if he is not to suffer permanent loss of respect and status". In the domain of preserving honor *Peghore*⁴ plays an important role in the regulation of people's behaviour of the given society. Literally *peghore* means to use a derogatory terms for a man to provoke him for an action. Those derogatory terms are *begherata* (without honour), *dallah* (coward) *beizatta* (without prestige). Those terms are very hurtful for a man except when these are used in gossip and fun. Therefore, every one tries to take action before those ridiculing terms are used for him. Those terms are particularly troublesome when someone uses as a result of hostility. The use of those derogatory terms is seriously taken when addressed by a man who is socially coequal (*Aziz*). However, the use

of derogatory terms creates social control at family level. Hence, forces the members to live in conformity to the traditional patterns of behaviour so as to avoid listening ridiculing terms from their elders.

Deep analysis of the use of derogatory terms to provoke a man for action has an intimate relationship with survival. The man normally takes action if there is any threat to his ownership. But if some one was found reluctant is however provoked through *peghore* to take action. There are a number of things in relation to which the members are provoked by *peghore* to take action. One of these things is land. It is because land is one of the important means playing an important role in the subsistence economy. Therefore, the basic motivating force for taking care of land is a matter of economic survival. Culturally, land is a symbol of pride and increases one's social status. A man who could not retain the ownership of land is considered as weaker and he lost the status to be effective participant in decision-making regarding village affairs. Therefore, it is a matter of socio-political survival to be alert in retaining the control of land. Every member is expected to strongly retaliate in response to the encroachment upon his land.

The second thing upon which social control system forces the individual to strongly react is insult to any of his closer agnate. It is because numerical strength is a source of power. Therefore, if anybody insults a man, the closer agnates are socially expected to take revenge. The action of revenge increases cohesion among the agnates. Avenging the insult of agnates means winning the loyalties of one another. Anybody could face the adverse circumstances in his life. But he is traditionally supported by closer agnates. Showing *gherat* (boldness), in order to avenge his agnates, is a reciprocal system. Hence, every member is embedded in the network of reciprocity. The closer members support one another for the purpose of revenge.

The third factor for which *gherat* is provoked related with the honor of woman. Woman is dependent upon man. Therefore, traditionally the man is responsible to revenge any physical assault against her. He is also responsible to preserve the chastity of woman. Therefore, according to the social structure of society it is a matter of social survival to take care of woman. In case of failure a man will not be able to participate in public meetings as a result of fearing *peghore*.

Fourthly, it is the responsibility of landowner to ensure social security of his dependents. A patron will get revenge if other *Aziz* insulted his tenant. It is something related with political survival. It is because numerical strength of tenants is one of the sources of political authority. Furthermore, if any body that could not take care of his tenants the tenants would consequently shift to another place.

Conclusion

A thorough analysis of the causes of conflict among Swatis shows that those causes are intimately related with socio-politico and economic survival. The things which are essential for survival are connected with the notion of *izzat* and *gherat*. *Peghore* is an institution which is exercised to motivate the members for the safety of *gherat* and *izzat*. Therefore, any action, which can be a threat to the socio-political or economic survival of a man, he would in response manage to cope with the threat. There are facts related with the concept of *izzat*. The overall cultural environment shapes those facts. The *Swati* landowner is expected to be brave in order to face his enemies. He must be able to speak well before public meetings in order to defend his interests. He must be generous in order to increase his sphere of influence. He must be able to command and preserve the honour of his sisters and wife. He is expected to be caring for his dependent tenants. He is expected to respect the religion and the people associated with it. Those are the ideal facts related with the concept of *izzat* and make the man *izzatmen* (man of honor). Safeguarding *izzat* and *gherat* is a mean to an end which is to protect all things essential for survival with glory.

Notes:

- ¹ *Dotary* is the man who has the ownership right of inherited piece of land that was received by his ancestors as conqueror of the area.
- ² Literal meaning of *pagrhai* is turban. However, this term is also stand for a piece of land that is specifically granted by a father to one of his sons. *Pagrhai* is granted to a son for his leadership services he has performed for his family. This land is not subject to distribution.
- ³ *Botha* is the seizure of any thing of economic value belonging to the man who had borrowed money. It is only returned when the borrowed money is recovered. *Botha* creates high social pressure over the borrower to return borrowed money because in cultural context it is considered as ridiculous.
- ⁴ Literal meaning of *peghore* is verbally realizing a member of his/her inability of retaliating those actions, which are socially humiliating because a person who cannot equally retaliate is considered as weaker.

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