

Socio-Economic Impacts of Afghan Refugees on Pakistan after 1979

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This paper aims to explore the social and economic implications of Afghan refugees on Pakistan after the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979. The Afghan refugees have migrated to Pakistan in great number due to socio-cultural affiliation with the people of Pakistan. Moreover, the presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan has been perceived as a security and economic threat for Pakistan, however, Pakistan has been extremely generous to greet them warmly. The paper is qualitative in nature, which has been based on historical perspective of the study in order to find out the impact of the Afghan refugees on Pakistan. Most importantly, the paper aims to address the question, how Pakistan could afford to allow a large number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan for a longer period of time. In addition to this, the paper also aims to investigate the measures of Pakistan for repatriating Afghan refugees first.

Key words: *Afghan Refugees, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Taliban and Implication*



Introduction

Afghanistan has been witnessing political unrest, civil wars, foreign interventions, violent revolutions, violation of human rights and mass massacres since 1919. As a result, Afghanistan has never been able to establish a strong economic-political structure within Afghanistan, which could resist foreign intervention and would ensure the politico-economic independence of Afghanistan permanently. There is no doubt that it has been the weak political structure of Afghanistan that paved the way for Soviet forces to intervene in Afghanistan in 1979. It is appalling to learn that the 10-year Soviet presence in Afghanistan during the 1980s not only put the political independence of Afghanistan at risk, it also gave birth to civil war in Afghanistan. In addition to this, the civil war of Afghanistan converted the Afghanistan into a battleground where approximately 3 million Afghan refugees migrated to Pakistan (Kronenfeld, 2008) due to its geographical proximity. However it is interesting to note that Afghan refugees were easily accommodated in Pakistan without any political and social resistance since they had ethno-cultural affiliations and social attachments with the people of Pakistan in general and Pashtuns specifically (Waldek, 2018). Therefore, most of the Afghan refugees are witnessed in stationing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan since 1980s which are already the most backward provinces of Pakistan. In addition to this, the tragic incident of 9/11 created further politico-economic challenges for Pakistan since Pakistan was compelled to join the US-led coalition against the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan (Musharraf, 2006). The pro-US decision of Pakistan did not only allow the US forces to use the airbases of Dalbadeen, Pasni and Jacobabad (Khan, 2013), it also remained unable to halt the immigration of Afghan refugees into Pakistan. The flow of Afghan refugees in Pakistan after 9/11 further created political unrest in Pakistan since millions of Afghan refugees fled into Pakistan, including civilians, local Taliban and others whose relatives were living in Pakistan (Hussain & Latif, 2020). It is estimated that about one million refugees came to Pakistan by the end of 2001 (Schmeidl, 2002).

It is reported that until 2016, Pakistan was able to repatriate 4.3 million Afghan Refugees to Afghanistan with the help of UNHCR (Jianjun et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the government of Pakistan started to register Afghan refugees, allowing them to get “Proof of Registration” (PoR), a kind of card, like CNIC in order to register the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and avoid socio-ethnic differences. Moreover, in 2017 (Borthakur, 2017), it was reported by UNHCR that 1.3 million Afghan Refugees who registered themselves in Pakistan, were allowed to do business and get jobs in Pakistan (Borthakur, 2017).

Despite Pak-Afghan geo-political differences, Pakistan has been hosting millions of Afghan refugees since 1979 on the grounds of human rights. No doubt, the Afghan Refugees have emerged to be the greatest challenge for Pakistan for its internal security, political stability and national economy. However, due to geographical proximity and socio-cultural affiliation between the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Durand Line has been witnessing the



illegal movements of people on both sides of border. Therefore, the political instability in Afghanistan has had adverse effects on political, social and economic structures of Pakistan, since Pakistan has been termed to be the second home for Afghan refugees since 1979 (Grare & Maley, 2011). Disappointingly, most of Afghan refugees have been stationing in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which are the most backward and most disturbed provinces of Pakistan in term of economy, politics, internal security and social development. Thus, Afghan refugees have put serious impacts on the economic, political and social structures of Pakistan since 1979.

Despite the severe impacts of Afghan refugees on the internal security and domestic economy of Pakistan, they have not been properly settled, nor any government mechanism and arrangement has been designed for their proper and safe return. Ultimately, they had to manage their livelihood by themselves within Pakistan which has given birth to unemployment, terrorism, sectarianism and social defragmentation. Most importantly, it could cause a demographic change in Pakistan which would create uncertainty among the people in Pakistan since the demographic growth would put extra pressure on economic resources, create ethnic tension, and weaken security. Furthermore, the influx of Afghan refugees in Pakistan have badly disturbed the labour market where no doubt cheap labour has become more sufficient, however, it has created job security panic for the workers of Pakistan. Thus, unemployment and management of labour forces have become serious challenges for the consecutive governments to deal with since the current situation could cause poverty and corruption.

Historical Background of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

Due to geographical proximity, ethnic affiliation, common socio-cultural attachments from the both sides of the border, the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan have never faced any political and legal resistance to migrate from one country to another. Despite border disputes between Pakistan and Afghanistan since 1947, people from both sides have been maintaining close social contacts, earning their livelihood and continuing illegal trade across the border. Disappointingly, the political instability and social defragmentation in Afghanistan after the intervention of Soviet forces in Afghanistan in 1979 has been affecting Pakistan since the said period opened the chapter of migration of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. This happened because of shared ethno-linguistic groups of Pashtuns, Hazaras, and Gujjars who live on both sides of the border. The Durand Line which demarcates the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is 2400 km (Wagner & Khan, 2013) and was initially signed between Afghanistan and British India in 1893, during the British colonial era in the subcontinent in order to run the administrative matters of Afghanistan smoothly (Omran & Ledwidge, 2009). However, after the withdrawal of Britain from Subcontinent in 1947, the Durand Line remained to be a disputed border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. As a result, the relations of both states have been marred with political mistrust and disturbance.

The Afghan migration to Pakistan can be traced back to 1973 when the government of Zahir Shah was toppled by his cousin and military dictator, Dawood Khan via a military coup d'état. This occurred because the military regime of Dawood Khan was based on a socialist-inspired totalitarian government where the entire authorities and powers were vested in the center. Meanwhile, thousands of Afghans migrated to Pakistan. Moreover, soon later, the aggressive and centralised regime of Dawood Khan was met with resistance and was overthrown under the banner of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in the Saur Revolution in 1978 (M. H. Kakar, 1995). Unfortunately, the government of PDPA became more engaged in controlling the entire setup and power of the state, and became harsher to the previous governments of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the government of PDPA requested that the Soviet Union control and crash the resistance movement in Afghanistan in December, 1979 (Grau, 2007). On the arrival of Soviet forces in Afghanistan, a massive number of Afghans migrated into Pakistan. It is stated that during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, up to five million Afghans took refugees in Pakistan (Borthakur, 2017). Meanwhile, Afghan refugees were strongly welcomed and greeted in Pakistan for two important reasons.

- i. The people of Pakistan had socio-cultural and religious affiliation with the people of Afghanistan.
- ii. In order to enhance the political influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan needed to maintain close contacts with the people of Afghanistan.

The establishment of Pak-US strategic partnership in Afghanistan to oust Soviet forces from Afghanistan greatly opened the door for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. It was reported that by 1988, around 100,000 Afghan refugees were housed in Pakistan who stayed in approximately 340 refugee's camps (Borthakur, 2017). Most importantly, these Afghan refugees were later trained and equipped in Pakistan against Soviet forces in Afghanistan (Williams, 2011). However, the establishment of the Taliban's regime in Afghanistan's in the mid 1990s was greatly welcomed and recognised by Pakistan (Laub, 2016). Pakistan aimed to settle the Afghan refugees in Afghanistan so that peace might be ensured in Afghanistan and Pakistan could access the markets of Central Asian States via Afghanistan, but failed to do so since the Afghan Mujaheddin were so scattered in Pakistan and were settled in different cities of Pakistan.

It was a worry fact for Pakistan that a very small number among the Afghan refugees, had strong financial backgrounds while the rest of them were poor and illiterate who became an economic burden on Pakistan's economy. Moreover, around 60% of the Afghan refugees were ordinary people who arrived in Pakistan with no belongings and were largely dependent on Pakistan and international supports (Borthakur, 2017).

The Pak-Afghan cordial relations during the Taliban regime were short-lived and badly disturbed by the tragic incident of 9/11. Soon afterward, Pakistan once again witnessed the

increase of migration of Afghans into Pakistan (Noor, 2006). It ought to be remembered that this time, the Afghan refugees became more of a political risk and economic burden for Pakistan. The second phase of migration of Afghan refugees in Pakistan after 9/11 has been hurting Pakistan badly as Pakistan has been witnessing more terrorist attacks and bomb blasts. Reportedly, the Afghan diaspora in Pakistan after 9/11 has been reported to be the largest group of Afghans living outside the country.

No doubt, efforts have been made to repatriate Afghan Refugees. It was reported that as of 2016, around 4.3 million Afghan Refugees were repatriated to Afghanistan via the efforts of United Nations High Commission Refugees (UNHCR) (Khalid Hatam, 2019). Nevertheless millions of Afghan refugees live in Pakistan, even some of them have been permanently settled in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Pakistan has been extremely generous in respect to the accommodation and management of Afghan refugees since 1980s despite the political, social and economic impacts on Pakistan. Cross border movement has been an easy task for the both sides since a majority of the people share a common socio-cultural practice. However, the illegal border crossing movement has affected Pakistan badly especially as they have put national security at risk. Borthakur (2017) investigates that the presence of Afghan refugees is also perceived to have had a substantial impact on the domestic security environment of Pakistan. They are mostly held responsible for exacerbating insecurity in the country. In addition to this, at initial stages, the Afghan refugees were warmly welcomed by Pakistan and were supported politically and economically. However, right after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, the Afghan refugees turned to social ills. Schmeidl (2002) identifies the fact that the initial generosity of Pakistan came to an end in the late 1990s as Pakistan began to increasingly blame refugees 'for Peshawar's and other cities' growing social ills, including crime, the widespread availability of weapons, drug abuse, prostitution, and the decline in the Pakistan economy. A massive influx of Afghan refugees in Pakistan on the eve of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 has been marked as one of the major security and social risks for Pakistan. However, initially, they were generously, welcomed, but soon these strategic assets turned to be strategic threats for Pakistan. Bhatti (1987) finds that the political, ethnic, economic and social ramifications of the Afghan refugees on Pakistan are extremely serious which include a heavy burden on Pakistan's national security and a direct threat to Pakistan's internal security and political stability, which is made evident by numerous violations of Pakistan's western borders by the recent activities of the Taliban.

Economic Effects of Afghan Refugees on Pakistan

There is no doubt that Pakistan is an underdeveloped state in South Asia which hardly suffices the basic needs of its people. However, the arrival of Afghan refugees in Pakistan in 1980s

placed severe socioeconomic impacts on Pakistan since it has been extremely tough for Pakistan to accommodate the impoverished part of Afghan's population. Initially, it was a worrying fact for Pakistan to find a way forward for approximately 3 million Afghan refugees to settle in Pakistan since Afghanistan which was still a battleground. Thus, they continued to be an economic burden on Pakistan. The recognition of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan by Pakistan was basically intended to complete the settlement process of Afghan refugees in Afghanistan in late 1990s. Unfortunately, the tragic event of 9/11 badly shattered the efforts of Pakistan in Afghanistan as the US, along with the help international coalition started bombardment in Afghanistan, which did not only end the Taliban regime. (Hamid, 2014). However it ended the peace process of Pakistan in Afghanistan. In order to escape from the indiscriminate bombardment in Afghanistan, most Afghanistan's migrated to their adjoining neighboring countries. Due to sociocultural affiliation between the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan, a great number of Afghan people migrated to Pakistan. Unlike 1980s Afghan Mujaheddin, the post 9/11 period's Afghan refugees migrated to Pakistan with the intention to settle down permanently in Pakistan. At initial stages, different national and international humanitarian organisations were witnessed in raising funds for Afghan refugees. (Noor, 2006). However, over time, the Afghan refugees gradually mingled into the local population by taking part in local business activities.

There is no doubt that some research indicates that Afghan labour migration has proved economically beneficial to Pakistan in the form of labour, remittances and business (Grare & Maley, 2011). However, the presence of a great number of Afghan refugees created a larger demand for goods and supply which ultimately generated inflation in some parts of the country. Most importantly, the presence of Afghan refugees created more unemployment opportunities in labour markets of Pakistan as the refugees worked in low wage situations with maximum time (Grare & Maley, 2011).

Pakistan also paid an environmental price for being a generous host country (Grare & Maley, 2011). Refugees needed pastures for their animal flocks, leading sometimes to the degradation of local ecosystems. Overall, their presence put additional pressure on Pakistan's infrastructure, notably on education, schools, hospitals, and other social trusts.

Social Impacts on Pakistan

The presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan has been perceived to have substantial social and security impacts on Pakistan. They have been held responsible for worsening the security situation in the country (Schmeidl, 2002). Most importantly, it has been believed that due to the presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, terrorists get safe and easy station to carry out their terrorist activities in Pakistan (Grare & Maley, 2011). There is no denying the fact that the presence of Afghan refugees has greatly enhanced the sectarian violence in Pakistan. It is generally believed that the ramifications of Afghan refugees since 1980s include the

ideological conflict between Sunni and Shi'i organisations, ethnic strife, the Talibanisation of Pakistani society, the Islamisation in Pakistan and smuggling (Borthakur, 2017).

It is also believed that Kalashnikov/gun culture has been the most dangerous gift of Afghan refugees to the people of Pakistan. This has promoted criminal, smuggling and drug trafficking activities in Pakistan (Dupree, 1988). It is noted also that the number of drug addicts in Pakistan has greatly been increasing since 1980s as people in Pakistan obtained easy access to Afghan's drugs (Borthakur, 2017).

A good number of Pakhtuns of Pakistan who have close sociocultural ties with the people of Afghanistan, have been involved in illegal smuggling processes of vehicles, drugs, arms and other small goods from Afghanistan to Pakistan. This did not only affect the domestic product of Pakistan, it also made the country more vulnerable and prone toward military and illegal practices (Borthakur, 2017). These illegal activities have also been causing serious criminal acts such as kidnapping local businesses and educated people of Pakistan to Afghanistan for ransom money. For instance, Mushtaq Ghani, the ex-information Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa blamed about 80 percent of crimes in KP have been committed by Afghans (Roehrs, 2015). He further stated that the Afghans either murdered or kidnapped people in Pakistan for ransom and after the crime take easy shelter on Afghan soil (Roehrs, 2015). In addition to this, the attack on Army Public School in Peshawar on December 16th, 2014 which claimed 150 lives, was operated in Afghanistan with some possible supports within Pakistan (Borthakur, 2017). As a result, a Anti-Terrorism Action Plan was materialised and executed on December 25th, 2014, which included the repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan.

The incident of Bacha Khan University in KPK on January 20th, 2016 resulting in 20 lives lost, was also planned and operated from Afghanistan with the help of some Afghans in Pakistan (Qadeer, 2006). No doubt, there are certain Afghan people who have been supporting the terrorist activities in Pakistan; however, it is an injustice to generalise and colour every Afghan in Pakistan as a terrorist. One has to accept the fact that Afghan refugees in Pakistan have been traditionalistic followers of Islam, harsh in their beliefs and practices, does not mean that every Afghan refugee supports the criminal activities of the Taliban in Pakistan (Borthakur, 2017).

Apart from this, Afghan refugees have also been blamed for increasing ethnic violence in Pakistan from when they started migrating to the metropolitan cities of Pakistan. The great number of migration of Afghans in Quetta, Hyderabad and Karachi, created panic among the local people as they feared being ethnically marginalised. After the arrival of Afghans refugees in Karachi, the Pashtuns have greatly weighed in their favor politically and economically. Thus, the tug of ethnic dominancy in Karachi between Pashtun and Mohajir ethnic groups finally gave rise to ethnic violence that is often witnessed in different parts of Karachi since 2000 (Borthakur, 2017). Similar incidents have also been witnessed in Balochistan between Baloch and Pashtun especially in Quetta. The tragic event of Mastung in May, 2015 which claimed 20

lives (Kakar, 2015), all were found to be Pashtun, increasing the ethnic differences in the province between Baloch and Pashtuns.

The list of social and security impacts of Afghan refugees on Pakistan is so long and not only did it create social, political and security distance in Pakistan, they have also brought turmoil in the bilateral ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since the invasion of US on Afghanistan, both countries have witnessed numerous bomb attacks, sectarian violence and terrorist activities on their soils. Despite collective efforts, both countries have been blaming one another for interfering in the internal affairs and sponsoring the non-state actors.

Critical Analysis

Since 1980s, the Durand Line has never acted to stop the migration of the Afghan refugees because Pakistan has been perceived as the second home for Afghans. Most importantly, Pakistan has been so kind to Afghan refugees since it did not only provide them shelter in difficult times, it also helped them economically and socially to maintain their livelihoods. However, it has been extremely disappointing for Pakistan to find that Afghan refugees are being used as a disturbing factor for the national security of Pakistan. Islamabad has maintained that the Intelligence Agencies of India and Afghanistan have carried out political violence and terrorist activities in Pakistan via Afghan refugees. Therefore, Pakistan has always opposed the establishment of Indo-Afghan alliance after 9/11 in the region. Most importantly, Pakistan believes that Afghanistan needs to revisit its regional policies.

In addition to this, Pakistan has been in favor of the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan as Pakistan aims to repatriate Afghan refugees in Afghanistan in order to ensure peace in the region. Pakistan further believes that the US presence in Afghanistan does not only strengthen Indo-Afghan strategic partnership, it would also create problems for Pakistan in the process of repatriation of Afghan refugees in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, Pakistan has been trying to erase the perspective regarding the nexus between Pakistan and Taliban which most of regional players blame Pakistan that the Taliban are a strategic asset for Pakistan. However, one has to accept the fact that Pakistan has suffered the most in the region in the Afghan wars in the past, but despite the fact, the regional and international actors have always been suspicious of the role of Pakistan in Afghan's peace process.

Regional players need to acknowledge the fact that the Afghan refugee problem is a bilateral issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan which surely needs collective efforts and attention. In order to settle Afghan refugees, Pakistan and Afghanistan need to take the following measures urgently.

- i. Pakistan and Afghanistan need to materialise a mechanism which can address the economic and social issues of Afghan refugees and settle them permanently.
- ii. Both, Pakistan and Afghanistan need to pressurise the US to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan at the earliest.
- iii. Afghanistan needs to avoid involving India in respect to the Afghan refugees settlement process since it is a bilateral process between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- iv. Pakistan and Afghanistan need to formulate a border-cross-agreement that can stop the illegal movement over both sides of the border.

Conclusion

The Afghan refugees issue has increasingly become a serious threat for the national security of Pakistan since they are alleged to be involved in promoting sectarian violence, ethnic conflict and other economic and political insecurity in the country. Much of this has become the main cause of disturbance in the political ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In order to cope with refugees of a significant magnitude, the democratic forces along with military establishment need to formulate a national security plan which does not only ensure the repatriation of Afghan refugees to Afghanistan, but also takes measures to ensure the security of the Durand Line border. Afghan refugees have remained the main cause of cross-border terrorism in the Af-Pak region. No doubt, the presence of India and US in Afghanistan is a major obstacle in repatriating the Afghan refugees, but Pakistan is also well-aware that war-torn Afghanistan is not in a position to accommodate the millions of refugees on its soil all at once. On the other hand, Pakistan cannot afford to feed the impoverished population of Afghanistan who have been a serious threat not only for its national security, but also they have caused serious economic and political insecurity in Pakistan.



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