



PAKISTAN: The case of Pashtun genocide in the country

Contributors: Kahar Zalmay

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Kahar Zalmay

Pakistan is an interesting country and there are certain exciting things that only happen here. For instance, in our land of pure every now and then, a revolution is on its way, khakis keep on believing that this country is their constituency and keep on capturing it, Mullahs always find the religion in danger and the top judiciary wastes no time in taking sue motto notice against holding two bottles of whisky. As if all these are mundane the State grabs attention by seeking strategic depth into another sovereign state and it is our brave military that sub-contracts security to private militias', the Jihadis. The list of such stupidities seems endless. As was rightly pointed out once by the eminent Pakistani intellectual, I. A. Rehman, people here are not citizens but subjects. But ironically even all subjects are not equal but some are less equal than the others. One most apt example of exploitation by the state since its inception is the Pashtuns, the residents of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) who speak Pushtun language and reside in good numbers in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It is a known fact that the very existence of Pashtun is not tolerated in Pakistan. Our identity bothers the ruling elites and that is why it took them 60 years to give my people a name no matter how unrepresentative it may sound. I shall not be drawn into this argument that a Pashtun nationalist party is ruling the KP province when we all know that they are pawns in the game with no control. The nationalism of the Awami National Party (ANP), the former ruling party of KPK, is no more than a commercial enterprise.

In 1948, the U.N. approved its Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG), which defined genocide as any of a number of acts "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group".

Keeping in view the above definition of genocide, the situation of the Pashtuns meets the criteria very easily. Pashtun people on both sides are not only dying because of the Pakistan's security policy in the region but their culture, language, traditions and even identity is facing an onslaught in this country. The media, especially the Urdu media, has been very negative in its stereotyping. Its demonization and generalisation of the Pashtuns has left them at a loss for their identity and they are forced to ask whether they can call Pakistan home. A perception is created among the urbanite middle class of Pakistan that Pashtuns are cultural savages, backward and unable to assimilate into the mainstream culture. They are ridiculed in dramas, humour based shows and morning shows and their stigmatization is a routine occurrence on Pakistani TV channels and newspapers. Pashtuns have been alienated so much that they feel strangers in their own country. They feel disconnected in this connected world, despairing as they watch others build and realize their potential and curiosity.

In a recent interview with the Caravan, a Britain-based magazine, the Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Imran Khan said "These ears heard people saying: 'Small and dark. Kill them. Teach them a lesson'," he said. "I heard it with my own ears." He was referring to Bengalis who were once part of Pakistan. He added "It's exactly the same language which I hear this time," he said in the interview, adding that today it is Pashtuns who are ill-treated.

"In Pindi, in Lahore, in Karachi, they've been picked up and thrown into jail because they are Pashtun. This is a sad legacy."

To further explain my case I would give an example as to how they present Pashtuns on television screen. In a prime time drama scene a Pashtun is shown as security guard, a clown in fact. When he reports for duty at a house, the owner asks him to check if he has a brain before assigning him responsibility. If the other ethnicities had produced Einsteins, Russells, Newtons, then we won't mind but when they are as absurd and backward like the rest, then what actually makes them capable of demonizing the Pashtun race.

Pashtuns are not only psychologically reduced through mainstream media especially TV but they are being systematically eliminated physically as well. Right after the division of India when the ruler of Kashmir was making up his mind about the future of his state, the military sent tribesmen to capture Kashmir but were later blamed for lootings and wasting the opportunity. Thus the foundation stone was set for sub-contracting security to individual groups. It is needless to emphasize that security is the job of the State.

Dr. Farhat Taj, author of the Taliban and Anti-Taliban and member of the Totalitarian Research Network, University of Oslo says that 'On the Pakistani side of the Durand line Pashtun life and culture are systematically under attack for years. What was launched with the assassination of Farooq Wazir in 2003 as targeted killing of anti-Taliban Pashtun has now been turned in to indiscriminate killing of Pashtun from all walks of life, gender and age. Most victims of the terrorism and military operations in Pakistan are Pashtun, civilians, policemen and soldiers from both FCs (Frontier Constabulary and Frontier Corp). The Pashtun are simultaneously Arabized through attacks on symbols of Pashtun culture, Jirgas, dance, music and shrines of saints revered by Pashtun, such as Rahman Baba.'

The militant groups like Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams were used to wreak havoc on the unarmed Bengalis in the former East Pakistan that ultimately gained freedom to become Bangladesh. The military has this habit of not learning lessons and almost 20 years later, again private militias were launched and sent to Kashmir to stoke the fire of separatism. The recent phenomenon is the launching of Lashkars (collective tribal force) in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Frontier Regions and districts bordering the tribal belt to fight against the Taliban thus exposing the tribesmen to militants and creating chaos in a society that is already passing through difficult times. One wonders what the purpose is of holding a large military apparatus if the battles are being waged by Pashtun civilians.

It is no secret anymore that Pakistan supported the war in Afghanistan against the former Soviet Union funding and arming several Jihadi groups. After the withdrawal of Soviet Forces, the military establishment pitched one group against another that resulted into in-fighting costing thousands of Afghan lives. But Later, the Taliban, who were ethnically Pashtun, emerged on the scene and excelled their predecessors in inflicting destruction on Afghans for which cannon fodder was provided from Pakistan in shape of young madrassa students, mostly Pashtun male children.

Following 9/11, the rules of the game changed and multi-ethnic terrorists were brought by the Pakistani government headed by General Musharraf to FATA as the State guests. The tribal belt was then turned into a large guest house where these terrorists stayed, relaxed and left on their missions furthering the expansionist ideology of the Pakistan Army.

According to media reports, around 30 to 35 million Pashtuns living in Afghanistan and Pakistan have been the direct victims of the "war on terror" since 2001, when Pakistan became the partner of the USA in the "war on terror". The BBC has recently stated in special report that over 1000 tribal leaders were killed in FATA in different targeted incidents.

Heinrich Boll Stiftung in a report on December 19, 2011 says that the fight against Taliban militants has been focused in the Pashtun belt, but also carried out throughout the country in general. In this fight, a total of 38,000 civilians, of which roughly 70 per cent were Pashtun, have lost their lives in the last decade.

The horrifying video reported by Jane Perlez in an article of New York Times on September 29, 2010, showing Pakistan Army officers killing six innocent blind-folded teenagers some of them as young as 14 with their hands tied-back, shocked the world.

But despite so much annihilation and loss of Pashtun lives, the military did not desist from its dream of expanding its empire to Afghanistan with one or another excuse. One wonders that while the Pashtuns of Pakistan have been standing in the dock like suspects for the last 65 years, Pakistan wants a Pashtun dominated government in Afghanistan. Is it a trick or a tale?

The evidence implies that both the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan are accused of being sponsored by the military establishment. There is this strong perception in Pashtuns on both sides of the border that this whole drama of militancy was played to kill Pashtuns and pocket dollars coming in the shape of aid from the US and other Western countries. Numerous examples can be cited where Pashtuns were killed ruthlessly in FATA, FR Regions and Swat. The recent example is that of Bara, Khyber Agency, where 18 tribesmen were shot dead in broad day light in front of their houses. The whole Mehsud tribe was ripped up and thousands of tribal people from Bajaur and Mohmand agencies still live in camps. Jets, mortars, gunship helicopters are being used in FATA which are not used even by the Indian forces in Kashmir for the last 20 years where a full scale insurgency was going on.

Ismail Mehsud whose family was displaced like the rest of his Mehsud tribe said his entire tribe has been displaced from its homeland, South Waziristan for the last five years. "Half a million members of Mehsud tribe were displaced from its land. We lost our houses, our fields, our cattle but what we got in return; our tribesmen became suspects wherever they settled in Pakistan. If this is not genocide what is it?" The operation Rah-e-Nijat that is going on for the last five years could not give us freedom from Taliban but it surely deprived us from our land, he added.

Our ruling class (who rules this country? if anyone does not know then it is humbly suggested to try to find out the exact answer through this quote of Voltaire "To learn who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize". It needs bad guys to carry on their reign. The symbiotic relationship between the militancy in Pakistan and mercantile benefits are no longer in a closet.

Without celebrating victimhood let us take the risk to assert a truth that hundreds of thousands of Pashtuns have been killed on both sides of the Durand Line and consumed as cannon fodder elsewhere in the military's pursuit for expansion but it is the writing on the wall that the taciturn rage in Pashtuns would soon speak up this beautiful word: 'Enough'.

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About the Author:

Kahar Zalmay is investigative journalist and writer on the issues of Pushtuns, he can be contacted at zalmayk@gmail.com