

THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY AND KINSHIP-BASED PRACTICES ON SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF BARADARI SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The ways of Pakistan's society can be difficult to explain from a Western perspective. There are certain cultural influences that have implications on the society and it is pertinent to understand them. One of such cultural concepts is the Biradari system that is based on family and kinship-based practices. This paper discusses the significance of this system in social process and how it influences the Pakistani society. Why it is vital to examine family and kinships-based practices such as Baradari and how it is different from other concepts such as wasta and guanxi. Finally, this paper discusses the implications of Baradari system on social interventions in Pakistan. This paper concludes that it is fundamental for us to examine concepts such as Baradari for success of any social intervention. As this system is probably robust enough to prevent any attempt to change the society even if it is a positive development or reform.

Keywords: Culture, Biradari, Wasta, Guanxi, Social interventions

INTRODUCTION

The ways of Pakistan's society can be difficult to explain from a Western perspective. As Verhoeven and Lieven (2022) explain westerners believe that institutions like 'police' and 'the law' work as they are supposed to work in the West, according to procedures rather than negotiation. Lieven (2011) claims that the West suggests that corruption in Pakistan should have no place in their political system. He further asserts that the political system runs on kinship and patronage, and corruption is tangled with kinship and patronage. 'To cut it out would mean gutting Pakistani society like a fish' (Lieven, 2011:32). Due to this culture of patronage, negotiation, and corruption, the concept of democracy is distinctive in Pakistan (Verhoeven & Lieven and Lieven, 2011).

Western-styled democracy has become so associated with the past generation of human rights, wealth, progress and stability that to accept that a country cannot at present generate stable and fruitful forms of it is an admission so grating that both Westerners and educated Pakistanis naturally shy away from it; Westerners because it seems insulting and patronising, Pakistanis because it seems humiliating (Lieven, 2011:37).

After reading about Pakistani society, one may feel that the society is almost non-functional, but the interesting fact is that life still moves on (Verhoeven & Lieven 2022). There are certain cultural influences that have implications on the society and it is pertinent to understand them. One of such cultural concepts is the *Biradari* system that is based on family and kinship-based practices. This paper discusses how baradari system influences the Pakistani society and what can be its implications.

The Society of Pakistan

Pakistan was created as a nation of contradictions. Despite the secular foundation laid by the founder, the country has turned into a haven for fundamentalists (Ataullahjan, Vallianatos & Mumtaz, 2022). Since the inception of Pakistan resilience has been part of the narrative, clouded by the single-issue lens of extremism through which outsiders have lately viewed the nation (Lodhi, 2011). Attention has deflected away from the firmness and strength of its underlying social structure that has empowered the nation to endure numerous crises. The floods of 2008 in Pakistan exposed a paradox that is at the heart of the country's predicament today: a strong society and a weak state (Lodhi, 2011). When the government was unable to respond effectively to the situation, ordinary citizens, civil society, the business community and even the media, came out to help the flood victims.

Ever since its creation, Pakistan has pursued a well-orchestrated official nationalism in search of solace in the crisis. Concentrated media combined with a dysfunctional educational system has led

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to the diffusion of mistrust and misrepresentations (Kapur, 2006). The fabricated narrative by officials signifies the history of Pakistan echoing an unconvincing account of Islamic ideology. The intellect of the country is made subservient through bribes or fear (Jalal, 2011). The vast majority of literate Pakistani is forced to absorb the official truths and take comfort in scepticism, ignorance, and believe in conspiracy theories (Jalal, 2011). The habit of public denial coupled with self-glorification of an imagined past has pushed the country into a crisis, because of which Pakistan is under far more serious threat than it previously was (Ayza, 2013).

The country is facing enemies within and outside; the media attributes all its problems to invisible external hands while ignoring the historically precise causes of internal decline and decay (Kapur, 2006). There is a prevalent belief that America and Israel are in pursuit of breaking up the only Muslim nuclear force (Jalal, 2011). Any foreign entity is attributed to the external invisible hand that is working for its destruction (Kapur, 2006). International development agencies (IDAs) that are working on social issues and health projects are not exempted from such labelling (Ahmad, 2012). Under the fear of gloomy apprehensions, the society seeks refuge beneath the canopy of Islam. (Ataullahjan, Vallianatos & Mumtaz, 2022).

Pakistani society is overwhelmingly Muslim (97 per cent) despite being racially diverse (Qadeer, 2006). A middle class is developing but a limited section of elite families upholds exceptionally disproportionate control over the nation's wealth, and almost one-third of people live below the poverty line (Blood, 1996). Considered a male-dominated society in which social improvement has trailed significantly behind economic change, as revealed by critical indicators such as sanitation, literacy, and access to health care (Qadeer, 2006), Pakistan has an immense regional diversity. Baloch, Punjabis, Sindhis, and Pathans speak different languages and have disparate cultural traditions. National loyalties are often subjugated by ethnic, regional, and most importantly, family commitments (Qadeer, 2006). Punjabis, the dominant ethnic group, dominate the federal government and the army. Pathans, Sindhis, and Baloch find this dominance at odds with their targets for provincial autonomy (Blood, 1996). Ethnic mixing in every province further confuses social and political relations. Pakistan finds it hard to develop a national identity among its diverse population (Jalal, 2011). History is distorted for ideological and political gains; hence people cannot develop a historical consciousness (Jalal, 2011). The nation is striving to shape the outer and inner forms of its identity (Ayaz, 2013). There is just an emerging structural imbalance in the state due to centre-province tension, weak political parties and the suppressed media (Kapur, 2006). This has resulted in a centralised state with a federal form of government. There have been several attempts by the centre to resolve the tension, but all such attempts were no more than rhetoric (Bukhari, Roofi, & Bukhari, 2015).

In 2009 through a constitutional amendment, provincial autonomy was given to the provinces. After the passing of the bill, the provinces are still waiting for the delegation of power. Living in such an imbalanced society is difficult for the people of Pakistan, so they survive with the support of their *Biradari* (family and kinship connections) (Lieven, 2011).

The cultural dimensions of *Biradari*, *wasta* and *guanxi*

The consequences of culture on society need to be examined for the success of any campaign (Borisova *et al.*, 2017). Cultural dimensions justify the variation in public support for campaigns (Borisova *et al.*, 2017). Countries vary significantly in terms of cultural dimensions. The understanding of their cross-national variations is a precondition for the avoidance of intercultural miscommunication (Meeuwesen, Brink-Muinen, & Hofstede, 2009). An improved understanding of nations' cultural values and norms for communication can contribute to improved working of partners (Meeuwesen, Brink-Muinen, & Hofstede, 2009). The following section will discuss three such cultural dimensions of *Biradari*, *wasta* and *guanxi*. This paper will refer to these dimensions as family and kinship connections.

Biradari is the epicentre of Pakistani social life; even the highly educated and westernised families acknowledge its importance (Blood, 1996). It provides both protection and identity, and it is very rare and rebellious for an individual to live without the support of family and relatives (Farooqui *et al.*, 2022.).

Descent is reckoned patrilineally, so only those related through the male kin (the patrilineage) play a significant role in social relations. Its members neither hold moveable property in common nor share earnings, but the honour and shame of individual members affect the general standing of the *Biradari* within the community (Kadir, 2022). A common proverb expresses this view: 'one does not share the breed, but one shares the shame' (Blood, 1996:102).

Lieven (2011) explains that a person or group with the slightest power within the society will practise it to loot the state for nepotism and patronage. The disadvantages of the state are not limited to patronage for the endurance of governments. The *Biradari* system is the underlying reason for the weakness of state, but it also brings steadiness in the society (Kadir, 2022 and Lieven, 2011).

Latif (2022) claims that Pakistani political elites, particularly in the countryside, rely for their power not just on their fortune but their headship of clans or kinship networks. It plays a vital role in upholding the control of the elites. Chaudhary (1999) while asserting the influence of this system claims that it is so convincing that it can influence a father to kill a much-loved daughter or son for marrying outside the *Biradari* without permission. Discussing on similar lines, Lyon and Hassan (2022) further explain that defence of the interests and honour of the *Biradari* usually compensates for loyalty to the state, to a party or any code of ethics, and this is true not only of a common Pakistani but of most officials and politicians. It is essential to realise therefore that 'much Pakistani corruption is the result, not of lack of values (as it is usually seen in the West) but of the positive and ancient value of the loyalty to the family and clan' (Lieven, 2011:14). Chaudhary (1999) thinks this system is probably strong enough to prevent any attempt to change the society, may it be positive development and reform. He further explains that the system is responsible for the maintenance of the basic stability of society and even its existence, but it is also dangerous for the development of the country. Pakistan's society is influenced by ethnic, regional and family loyalties. The people find it difficult to develop a common identity other than their *Biradari* (Lieven, 2011). This kinship power is essential to the functioning of the society (Lieven, 2011). If the power of the people is neglected, it can be dreadful for the development of the country (Lyon & Hassan 2022). Hence the role of the people is key to bringing change in the society.

Barnett, Yandle and Naufal (2013) claim that family and kinship connections like *Biradari* are not something unique to Pakistani culture; they are also practised in other parts of the world with a few variations. The following section will highlight two such concepts known as *wasta* and *guanxi* that operate in the Arab world and China respectively.

Family and kinship-based practices in different cultures

Izraeli (1997) highlights that in Israel *protektzia* is similar to *wasta*. Sobel (1986) explains *protektzia* as 'preferential treatment', 'favouritism' and/or 'nepotism' but really what it means is having the correct links at the right time and the right place to get your work done. *Jeitinho* is practised in many segments of the Brazilian society. Smith *et al.* (2011) refer to it as creative ways to reach a short-term solution to problems. Unlike *wasta* or *guanxi*, the people working together may or may not be formerly acquainted.

The concept of *wasta*

Wasta is an Arabic word that means to obtain benefits through social connections that otherwise would not be provided (Mohamed & Hamday, 2008). It is an intervention of a patron to gain favour for a client from a third party. The use of *wasta* can be a noun (the patron) or a verb (the act of negotiation), and the degree of its use changes among Arab countries (Mohamed & Hamday, 2008). Loewe *et al.* (2011) claim that in Arab countries performing a simple task without it can become a frustrating exercise. Mohamed and Hamday (2008) further argue it plays a vital role in the promotion and hiring decisions in an Arab organisation. They claim that in extreme cases, a person with poor qualifications can get a job over a more qualified person with the help of a strong *wasta*. It is an extraordinary influence enjoyed by members of the same tribe or group (Loewe *et al.*, 2007). Barnett, Yandle and Naufal, (2013) refer to it as an implicit social contract enjoyed within a tribal group that obliges its members to provide favourable treatment. They suggest there is an unqualified obligation among the group members to assist and there is no obligation to provide any direct compensation for the help provided. With its help, people can gain favourable treatment in bureaucracy, business and government. They see it as a source of cronyism, nepotism, and corruption.

Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993) explain two types of *wasta*: intercessory and intermediary. Intergroup or interpersonal conflicts are resolved through intermediary *wasta* where it reinforces social norms and human relations. Intercessory *wasta* involves someone intervening on behalf of a client to overcome a barrier or obtain an advantage from authority. It has evolved in Arab societies and is viewed as a social construct that can provide better solutions to social problems (Barnett, Yandle, & Naufal, 2013). It can provide better alternatives than other institutional arrangements. Hutchings and Weir (2006) draw similarities between *wasta* and *guanxi*, a practice in China. The following section will discuss the idea of *guanxi*, followed by a comparison of both concepts.

The concept of *guanxi*

Guanxi is a term used in China for interpersonal connection. It is believed to be a vital factor in business transactions and could secure wide benefits (Gold & Guthrie, 2002). Fan (2002) regards it as a basic solution for most business problems while operating in China. In early research, *guanxi* was studied as a cultural phenomenon. In earlier studies, the focus was placed on the social and human effect of *guanxi* rather than its economic value (Fan, 2002). Gradually the focus was shifted to the business perspective spotlighting two main themes: possible links between *guanxi* and some Western concepts, such as networking, competitive advantage and relationship marketing; and business benefits and implications of the *guanxi* (Fan, 2002).

‘In everyday communication, *guanxi* has a pejorative connotation referring to the use of someone's authority to obtain political or economic benefits by unethical persons’ (Fan, 2002:546). In literature, the term *guanxi* is discussed as a relationship, a connection, exchange, a resource and a process to get work done (Fan, 2002; Gold & Guthrie, 2002). Fan (2002) summarises it as a process that primarily starts with two parties, the number of parties will rise gradually and it stops only when a resolution is discovered or the task is abandoned. It can be classified into three categories: ‘family’, ‘helper’ and ‘business’ but in reality, they are mixed or entwined, so it is hard to distinguish them (Fan, 2002).

A Comparison of *wasta* and *guanxi*

Wasta and *guanxi* are traditional modes of interpersonal connections and networks that operate in the Arab world and China respectively. Hutchings and Weir (2006) claim significant empirical and theoretical literature suggestion that *guanxi* is based on Confucian ethics, whereas the *wasta* connections are based on deeper infrastructures of belief, obligation, family, and kin. They suggest that in *guanxi* the relationship between two people is based on the ‘relationship network’ (*guanxi wang*) but it is not limited to their *guanxi wang*; they may tap into the networks of those with whom they have *guanxi*. On the other hand, the social networks of *wasta* are rooted in kinship and family ties. These relations work through their social and politico-business networks to exercise power and influence (Loewe *et al.*, 2011).

Mohamed and Hamday (2008) further compare them for the use of social networks to gain favours. They argue that while *wasta* violates the Muslim ethics that prescribe equity and justice, *guanxi* reinforces the Confucian ethics that focus on strengthening collective ties within the society. Researchers have attributed *guanxi* to benefit organisational performance and competitiveness, but no such claims are associated to *wasta* (Mohamed & Hamday, 2008). In fact, it is blamed for poor economic performance and the brain drain of the Arab world (Loewe *et al.*, 2011). It is also distinct from cronyism and nepotism, as it is not restricted to the hiring of relatives and friends; it may involve strangers (Mohamed & Hamday, 2008). We can say nepotism is only one aspect of it.

‘We are inclined to argue that *wasta*-like customs exist in every settled society to one degree or another and are rooted in the evolution of humans and their communities. Along these lines, we propose that *wasta*-influenced transactions gradually dissipate as tribe members become more engaged with the broader impersonal markets’ (Barnett, Yandle, & Naufal, 2013:6).

How *Biradari* is different from *wasta* and *guanxi*

The comparison between *wasta* and *guanxi* indicates that the concept of *wasta* has a closer resemblance to the *Biradari* system of Pakistan. Arab countries and Pakistan share the same religion of Islam; hence most of their cultural and social networks have a close resemblance to each other. It can be said that the concept of *Biradari* in Pakistan draws its inspiration from *wasta*, but the consequences of these two are different. Not following the system can get people killed, whereas in *wasta* or *guanxi* no such thing happens. *Wasta* or *guanxi* is mostly associated with economic transactions whereas the *Biradari* system runs the whole social life in Pakistan. *Wasta* and *guanxi* help in operating the economic system but *Biradari* helps in living a regular life in Pakistan (Lieven, 2011).

Implications of *Biradari* system on social interventions in Pakistan.

National culture infuses all features of life, and directs cultural perceptions and influences people's behaviour. The usage of national culture in earlier investigations indicates the significance of cultural differences while examining any social process. Culture is specifically significant when choosing how services should be offered to the foreign market. The argument is that the focus should be on cultural diversity because it is not feasible to transfer the entire concept, so certain modifications must be made

to the product or service based on cultural differences when entering a foreign host market such as Pakistan.

Pakistan has an immense regional diversity. Baloch, Punjabis, Sindhis, and Pathans speak different languages and have diverse cultural traditions. This ethnic mixture, in every province, further confuses social and political relations making it difficult for Pakistan to develop a cohesive national identity.

The *Biradari* system is the epicentre of Pakistani social life. It offers both protection and identity, and it is quite rare and difficult for an individual to live without its support. In Pakistan, it is a significant political fact that in its diverse forms the society is still stronger than the state. The fundamental reason for the weakness of the state is this system but it also brings steadiness in the society. This kinship loyalty is probably strong enough to prevent any attempt to change the society, may it be a positive development and reform. Pakistan's society is influenced by ethnic, regional and family loyalties. The people find it difficult to develop a common identity other than through the *Biradari* system. This kinship power is essential to the functioning of the society. If the power of people is neglected, it can be extremely harmful for the development of the country.

The *Biradari* system is not unique to the Pakistani culture as it is also practised in other parts of the world with a few variations. Practices like *wasta* and *guanxi* exist in other parts of the world and are still practised in many societies with a few variations. In Israel *protektzia* is similar to *wasta* and in Brazil *jeitinho* is practised in many segments of society. *Wasta* and *guanxi* are traditional modes of interpersonal connections and networks that operate in the Arab world and China respectively. The comparison between *wasta* and *guanxi* indicates that the concept of *wasta* has a closer resemblance to the *Biradari* system of Pakistan. Arab countries and Pakistan share the same religion of Islam; hence, most of their cultural and social networks have a close resemblance. It can be said that this system in Pakistan draws its inspiration from *wasta* but the consequences of these two are different. Not following the *Biradari* system can get people killed, whereas in *wasta* or *guanxi* no such thing happens. *Wasta* and *guanxi* are mostly associated with economic transactions whereas the *Biradari* system runs the whole social life in Pakistan.

Boydell and Rugkåsa (2007) and Newman (2001) suggest that community involvement is vital for any social intervention. For Pakistan, the access of people is fundamental for two reasons. Firstly, their involvement is essential for the development of trust and value creation. Secondly, in Pakistan, there is a common political fact that the society is significantly stronger than the state (Lodhi, 2011). The fundamental reason for the weakness of the state is the *Biradari* system that can also bring steadiness in the society (Lieven, 2011). This loyalty is probably robust enough to prevent any attempt to change the society even if it is a positive development or reform (Chaudhary, 1999). This implies that without the support of people it can be difficult to bring about a sustainable change in Pakistan (Koschmann, Kuhn, & Pfarrer, 2012; Le Ber & Branzei, 2010).

When Islamabad, Pakistan's federal capital, plans for the people of Balochistan; the name of the city is religious, but people living there are not religious in the perception of the people living in Balochistan. In Balochistan public believe that people living in Islamabad do not understand their religious values. Furthermore, the people living there are not tribal like the people of Balochistan (Lieven, 2011). They can be stratified on an ethnic basis but compared to tribalism it is a weaker bond (Lieven, 2011). Managers in the federal government plan for people who are religious-cum-tribal, so it can be hard for the planners to perceive the ground reality without interacting with them. People's involvement can provide a better understanding of the ground reality and co-create value for any social intervention (McHugh, Domegan, & Duane, 2018; French, Russell-Bennett, & Mulcahy, 2017).

Diversity among the people should be a motivation for their inclusion in the process to generate knowledge, not an excuse for their exclusion. Government in Pakistan is unconvinced about community involvement. They want to bring about a change and to do that they have to do things differently. However, they think that in Pakistan, nobody intends to involve the community and that they do not want to change that.

As argued by McHugh, Domegan and Duane (2018) and French, Russell-Bennett and Mulcahy (2017), value can be created with the help of learning gained through interaction with people. The knowledge acquired during the process can be implied to bring more value to the partnership. However, that learning from them is missing during the planning and decision-making stages of any social

intervention. This isolation of public has resulted in ineffective interventions that led to a decline rather than augmentation of a user's wellbeing, so value destruction has occurred (Leo & Zainuddin, 2017).

As a consequence of this perception, any social intervention for change is viewed as a conspiracy. For interventions to be more effective, the government have to create a relationship based on valuable exchange. The value can be co-created among the stakeholders (Wood, 2016); the exclusion of even a single stakeholder can result in value destruction (Leo & Zainuddin, 2017). The segregation between the public and the other stakeholders can create challenges compromising the value of any social intervention.

CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that national culture infuses all features of life, and directs cultural perceptions and influences people's behaviour. Pakistan has an immense regional diversity. Baloch, Punjabis, Sindhis, and Pathans speak different languages and have diverse cultural traditions. This ethnic mixture, in every province, further confuses social and political relations making it fundamental for us to examine concepts such as baradari systems for success of any social intervention. This system is probably robust enough to prevent any attempt to change the society even if it is a positive development or reform. This implies that without the support of people it can be difficult to bring about a sustainable change in Pakistan.

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Note: This research paper is extracted from the PhD thesis of the author.

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