

**Impacts of external linkages on economic development of Khaplu
(Gilgit-Baltistan)**

By

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Abstract

Gilgit-Baltistan, which is well-known for its fascinating past, possesses a geographical composition that is one of a kind. The breathtaking beauty of Gilgit-Baltistan is a result of the convergence of three well-known mountain ranges that are located at high altitudes: the Himalayas, the Hindu Kush, the Karakorum. Gilgit-Baltistan, a region of strategic importance in northern Pakistan, has witnessed significant socioeconomic transformations due to external linkages. The convergence of multiple geopolitical, economic, and infrastructural developments has reshaped the region's traditional socio-political structures. This study aims to analyze the impacts of external linkages on the region, particularly in Khaplu in terms of economic opportunities, cultural shifts, and infrastructural development. By examining the historical and contemporary dynamics of external influences, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how external connectivity has played a role in shaping the economic and social landscape of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Key Words

Gilgit-Baltistan, external linkages, socioeconomic development, Khaplu.

Introduction

Gilgit-Baltistan is a newly formed province in northern Pakistan that borders India, China, and Afghanistan. Starting from Hindu Kush and extending all the way to Karakorum in the north-eastern part of the country, the Western Himalaya is located in the south, while the Pamirs are located in the very north. Himalayas are mountains that rise from the Pamir massif in the north. Major of the mountain ranges in Central Asia divide here between east and west. K2, also known as Chogori, is the second-tallest peak in the world, measuring in at 8611 meters. Nanga Parbat, which is the third highest peak, has an elevation of 8125 meters. It is because of these remarkable

heights that this Pakistani region has become more prominent on a global scale.¹ Gilgit-Baltistan is home to twelve of the highest peaks in the world, all of which are higher than 7,500 meters. Outside of the Arctic, this region is home to some of the greatest glaciers in the world. About twelve percent of the region is comprised of large glaciers. Based on studies conducted in the United States, just 23–25 percent of the Karakorum are covered by ice. The mountain ranges in this area are the source of water for important rivers such as the Indus. Both the Shyok and the Indus rivers can be found in the northern regions of the occupied territory of Kashmir. Several of these rivers' tributaries provide opportunities for fishing, navigation, and other water-based activities in this region. Farming near the Indus River is challenging for most people, with the exception of Skardu and Chilas villages. As a result, people have gathered in mountain slopes and smaller valleys that are easily accessible to glacier water for the purposes of drinking and agriculture. The topography of the Northern Areas is dominated by the Indus River and its tributaries, which flow through well-known mountain ranges. To begin, the passes and roads that connect Gilgit-Baltistan to the rest of the globe make it possible for foreign influences to move through. Second, the internal division into small valleys, plateaus, and hill sub-zones has made it easier for people to communicate with one another and for economic development to occur by overcoming the fact that there are physical hurdles. Gilgit-Baltistan is connected to the high-altitude mountain ranges of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Afghanistan, China, India, Azad Kashmir, and Hazara by a number of historic mountain passes (Map of Northern Area, 2008). These roads are vital to national security. At an average elevation of 16,000 feet, these mountain routes serve as the first line of defence against hostile forces during times of conflict. In addition to consisting of mountains, this region is famous for its plateaus, one of which is called Deosai. The vast, desolate region that is situated to the north-northwest of Skardu and shares a border with Kargil, India. According to Dani, the Deosai plateau, which was formed by glaciers, serves as the primary crossing point between Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.² Due to its location and geology, this region presents a challenge.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative analyses to assess the impacts of external linkages on the socioeconomic development of Khaplu (Gilgit-Baltistan). The following methodological approaches were used; Primary data collection includes surveys and interviews; interviews were conducted with local government officials, business owners, and residents of Khaplu and Skardu to understand their perceptions of external influences on the region. Site visits were also conducted to document

¹ Hussainabadi, *Tareekh-e-Baltistan*, 202-213.

² Dani, *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan up to 2000 A.D.*, 21.

infrastructural changes and economic activities influenced by external linkages. Secondary data collection consists literature review of existing scholarly work, government reports, and historical documents to establish a background on external linkages in Gilgit-Baltistan to analyze the phenomenon.

Economic Attributes

The financial system of Northern Areas has expanded and become more varied, particularly in the areas of trade, transportation, housing and construction, mineral resources, and communication. This region is a significant source of essential minerals for both the nation and the rest of the world. A large quantity of natural resources may be found in the southern region. Significant quantities of iron, silver, gold, zinc, marble, granite, Sulphur, calcite, fluorite, limestone, arsenic, spinel, garnet, epidote, topaz, moonstone, pargasite, tourmaline, aquamarine, pyrite, and feldspar may be found in the region's north-eastern, northern, and north-western regions among other minerals. At the forefront of the stone jewelry industry in the country.³ These improvements in infrastructure continue to result in significant investments being made in items or products that are geared towards export. While on the other hand, the rapid rise of communication has provided international investors with several opportunities to improve their firms. Because of the expansion of the local hotel business, the economy has been revived and given a boost. This is appropriate given that the beauty of Gilgit-Baltistan has attracted both domestic and international investment to the tourism industry. To a large extent, the new province is dependent on tourism. Gilgit Baltistan is dependent on tourism and mineral resources, despite the fact that it receives subsidies from the federal government in the annual budget. The Northern Areas are responsible for producing approximately 70 percent of the dried fruits that are consumed both domestically and internationally. Another strength of its economy is the potential it possesses to become an energy hub.

Within this predominantly rural culture, there has been a small expansion of both advanced and heavy industry. It is anticipated that the administration would concentrate on modernizing the economy once it is elevated to the status of a province. The government and the people of Gilgit-Baltistan will be able to construct a robust economic base more swiftly if they are able to identify and explore major mineral, oil, and gas deposits.

Significance of Khaplu

The primary external factors that have shaped Khaplu throughout the course of time are given below. It was in Khaplu that the "Ybgo Dynasty" capital was located prior to Pakistan's abolishment of Raja in 1973. Despite the fact that the Dogras and the

³ Malik, Iftikhar. *Arz-e-Shumal Ka Manzar Nama.*, 2008.

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British ruled Jammu and Kashmir for a hundred years, Khaplu remained a sovereign princely kingdom. The Khaplu valley was designated as the seat of the Baltistan district sub-division tehsil in the year 1973. Khaplu served as the district Centre when the Ghanche district was established in 1976. In 1977, when martial law was in effect, it was discontinued. Since the year 1988, when it underwent renovations, Khaplu has served as the district headquarters. One of the seats in the Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly is provided by Surmu, together with Khaplu and a few villages in the Chorabat valley. Khaplu was a secluded valley that had no road connection to Baltistan or the rest of Pakistan when it was constructed more than half a century ago. In this valley, there was a highly joinable connection. Later on, their roads were reconstructed and made truck-accessible. Following some minor realignments, the same route was transformed into black top all-weather roads for all vehicles, which resulted in an increase in the movement of both people and products. There has been a seasonal, temporary, and long-term migration to Gilgit and Skardu as a result of increased accessibility and political link with Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan. Migratory movements for the purposes of employment, commerce, further education, and marriage. The connection between this region and Pakistan is growing stronger.⁴

The economic and cultural characteristics of this region have undergone significant transformations. This resulted in a changing link between the valley and its environment. In this paper, we will analyze the ways in which the expansion of external links has altered this connection. Mobility, communication, and connections with the political system all contribute to the growth of the local economy. Economic activities also have a similar role. Income can be increased by having access to developed cities such as Skardu.⁵ Both the availability and demand of commodities in everyday life are impacted by trade with surrounding regions. People are less reliant on merchandise that is produced locally as a result of the availability of daily products in markets. The development of transport infrastructures has also led to a rise in employment prospects in the local area. Additional opportunities are being made available to workers in the valley and the adjacent areas as a result of the expansion of commercial activity, transportation, commerce tourism, and government and private services. Therefore, the structure of occupations has changed from primary activities, such as agriculture and livestock husbandry, which are dependent on natural resources, to tertiary activities and in some cases secondary activities. There has been a reduction in the demand for local resources as a result of increased accessibility. As a result, the crop combination and

⁴ Dani, *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan up to 2000 A.D.*, 21.

⁵ Haq, Muneeb. "Modernization vs. Tradition in Khaplu.", 89-102.

crops have been modified. Following their importation from the plains, food grains are next prepared for sale. Neither wheat nor buck wheat must be grown in the immediate area. Tree fruits and other high-yield crops are increasingly being cultivated by them. Fruit trees can be seen in the lower areas of the valley. Field crops have relocated to higher elevations in the valley. Land values have increased as a result of the growing demand for land in "Yul" (lowland), which has resulted in the relocation of crops to Broq, which were formerly summer meadows.

The fact that Khaplu is the headquarters of the district Ghanche and the location of government facilities and staff has resulted in the development of a consumer market nearby. As the gateway to Siachen, Khaplu is a place where routinely mobilized soldiers demand items from Skardu to Khaplu because the local resources are unable to satisfy the needs of the military. Locals from nearby villages travel to Khaplu in search of better educational possibilities for their children, as well as opportunities for business and employment advancement. Here, there is a dearth of manufacturing. Local manufacturer of woolen clothes from a handcrafted perspective. Made of cloth and woolen furniture and daily items are still available in the region; however, supply goods from plains are replacing them, and young people are not interested in the third sector or other options that offer better earning potential. The local handcraft industry is seeing a rapid decline.⁶

Regional culture has been altered as a result of connections and interactions with the outside world. The migration and the media have both played a role. The population of Khaplu are rapidly altering their way of life as a result of the metropolitan influences, technological advancements, and accessibility that they are experiencing. To generate income, they now select houses along the side of the road and rent them out. Carpets have taken the place of charra, which are hand-woven carpets. Television, the internet, and mobile phones have all had a significant impact on society as well as housewifery. These new activities have resulted in a decrease in the number of social meetings that used to take place on a daily basis, even in the evening in every muhallah (grong).⁷ Access to power has also led to an increase in the utilization of electric appliances. Individualism has increased as a result of the usage of the internet, while social interaction has declined. Instead of wood and dung cakes, LPG and kerosene have become the fuel of choice. As a result of this modification, the kitchen and heating systems have undergone significant transformations. When it comes to residential utilities, it is increasingly more

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Endreson, R. T. History, Folklore and Culture of Gilgit Baltistan. Oxford University Press, London, 1998.*

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common for people to prefer gas or kerosene oil over wood. throughout the winter months, wood is mostly used for cooking and heating, whereas throughout the summer and winter months, it is used for other purposes. As a result of increased prices and demand for wood, people are turning to alternative energies.

Food used to be simple and dependent on local resources; however, interaction with other regions of Pakistan and the availability of food that is not indigenous have contributed to this development. Lowland patterns have influenced the evolution of daily food. As is the case in other parts of Pakistan, people like to eat rice and lentils. Rice and beef are the typical foods that are served at social functions, but in the past people would bring traditional foods. Additionally, this lowers the demand for local products. Buckwheat is on the verge of extinction. The Balti attire has been adopted by both men and women as the standard form of dress in Pakistan.⁸ In Khaplu, individuals from the surrounding areas use headgear and clothing that is part of the Balti culture. Those that are older typically dress in traditional garb. The fall in the production of locally made clothing made from local resources such as wool has been detrimental to the cottage industry, which includes the weaving of woolen cloth and the creation of garments. The indigenous silver jewelry has been replaced by gold from Pakistan.

As a result of improvements in transit infrastructure, non-indigenous building materials are now available, which has resulted in a change in the materials used for building construction. There has been an increase in the usage of tin, timber, and cement, while the use of native materials has decreased. People utilize their material despite the fact that it may not be suitable for the conditions of the local location. This is due to the cultural impact of economically dominant areas. The Mohalla (Grong) system is falling apart, and residents choose to construct dwellings further out from the core of the city. The architectural design of houses and other buildings is altering as a result of outside influences and demands. As opposed to cluster settlement, scattered or diffuse settlement is becoming increasingly prevalent in terms of population density. Moreover, this has an impact on the culture and society of the region. In the winter, it is impossible to hold many social meetings.

Migration is remarkable in Pakistan, particularly from rural to urban regions, which is rational and fits their expectations. This causes transformations in social connections. Enhanced employment prospects in economically disadvantaged regions and equitable migration to Skardu and Gilgit are two more important considerations. Seasonal migration takes place when the weather is unbearably cold and the expense of living increases, which in turn makes fuel more expensive. In search of better living conditions, residents of adjacent Khaplu villages migrate to the new location. A greater number of locals were able to rent their homes and earn

⁸ *Ibid.*

money as a result of this activity. Another factor that contributes to transient migration is the absence of adequate medical services.⁹

Results And Discussion

The research findings indicate that external linkages have played a crucial role in transforming the economy and culture of Gilgit-Baltistan. Key findings include:

1. Economic Growth and Trade

- The development of roads and trade routes, particularly the Karakoram Highway, has facilitated cross-border trade, leading to increased commercial activities in Skardu and Khaplu.
- The tourism industry has seen exponential growth, contributing to job creation and economic diversification.

2. Infrastructure and Connectivity

- Improved transportation infrastructure has enhanced access to markets and services, reducing regional isolation.
- The establishment of communication networks, including mobile and internet services, has integrated the region more closely with national and international markets.

3. Cultural and Social Transformations

- Increased connectivity has introduced modern educational and lifestyle influences, leading to shifts in traditional practices and livelihoods.
- External interactions have contributed to linguistic and social adaptations, with **greater exposure to national and global cultures.**

4. Challenges and Constraints

- Despite economic growth, dependence on external resources has also led to concerns about cultural erosion and socioeconomic disparities.
- Environmental degradation due to increased human activity and tourism poses a sustainability challenge.

⁹ Lorimer, D. L. *Notes on the Bloody Partition*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1976.

Conclusion

In the 21st century, the residents of Gilgit Baltistan, who live in the mountains, are also enthusiastic about being part of the globalized world. For ages, they have lived undisturbed, free from constraints, enjoying a blissful existence of carefree innocence. The traditions and culture have remained unchanged for centuries, but people now understand that they are part of the modern era, where mountain spirits are unable to shield their valleys from natural calamities. Rooted in mediaeval mythology, the process of myth-making has challenges in adapting to the socio-economic changes resulting from recent advancements in communication systems and technology in Gilgit Baltistan. Nevertheless, contemporary progress is merely the most recent addition to the illustrious journey previously taken by the troops of Alexander the Great, where the initial roots of Buddhism thrived, and the old silk road exposed travelers to a realm of proverbial wisdom and extraordinary culture. The meandering mountain trails and the tiny valleys of Gilgit Baltistan are enticing the citizens of the country to visit and experience the captivating rhythm of the wilderness and echoes from the past.

Descending from the towering summits, water cascades as small streams and rivulets, nourishing the stepped fields, promoting the flourishing of vegetation in the verdant valleys and meadows, supporting diverse forms of life. However, occasionally it transforms into a formidable force, unleashing devastating phenomena such as extensive landslides, glacier movements, and severe floods. Hence, it is imperative that the Federal and Provincial governments prioritise the construction of large reservoirs in order to prevent extensive national catastrophes of significant scale.

The government's policies in the new Gilgit Baltistan province should focus on creating a strategic location by establishing exceptional infrastructure that promotes a stable political environment. This would help safeguard against any potential geopolitical plots by external forces. An effective and equitable connection between the Gilgit Baltistan Province and the other Federal divisions will enable the development of choices and policies aimed at enhancing the safeguarding of our internal unity against external dangers. In order to ensure national security, it is necessary to reorganize the current balance of power in the region by transforming our inter-provincial relationship.

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