

## THE UYGHUR (A TROUBLED MINORITY OF CHINA)

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**ABSTRACT:** Human beings from cultural point of view are not same. In world, we can see different types of human beings with lot of difference in their styles of living. But one thing which is commonly observed that in culturally diverse countries majority population always tries to dominate the minority population. This tendency many times gives birth to a number of social and law and order problems. In the concerned paper, an analysis will be done on the plight of Uyghur, a minority Muslim population of China. They are suffering both from the hands of Han Chinese (ethnically majority population of China) as well as from Chinese government. It has resulted in ethnic unrest in this part of China.

**KEYWORDS:** Diverse, Dominate, Majority, Minority, Plight.

### INTRODUCTION

It is truly said by someone that human beings are biologically one but culturally many. This means as species we all are homosapians but when we talk about culture then it not so because from cultural point of view, there are numerous types of human being. It is so because lifestyle and way of living of people is not same everywhere rather it differs from one place to another in the world. Not to talk of the world but within a country it too differs even at smallest levels of administrative units. Large sized countries are the best ensample that show greater tendency of cultural, ethnic and religious variations among its population. The continent of Asia, the largest and most populated continent of the world, is the best example of these cultural, ethnic and religious variations among its populations. These variations often result in formation of a dominant and minority groups of population. Dominant or majority group always tries either to crush or to make the minority accept their forced assimilation with them. This fact cannot be denied.

In the present paper main discussion will be done on plight of Uyghur, an ethnic Muslim minority group of population living in 'Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region' in China, who are suffering from the hands of both the Chinese government's repressive policies and from the domination of Han Chinese (ethnically majority population group of China).

On the name of economic development, the communist government of China is forcefully trying to the end their culture and no country in the world especially the Islamic World has any courage to make China realize that what they are doing in Xinjiang with its Uyghur (Turkic Muslims) population is not right.

## TURKIC MUSLIMS OF CHINA



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### OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

No study and research work is complete without its objectives. Following are some of the objectives of the present paper:

1. To know the causes behind the problem of conflict between Uyghur and Chinese government.
2. To know, what could be the results of the repressive policies adopted by China towards its own people?

### METHODOLOGY

This paper has used information obtained from various sources including articles from newspapers, magazines, internet and numerous books & research papers.

### AREA OF STUDY

Uyghurs live in Xinjiang province situated in Northwest China. Therefore the area of study in the paper is, Xinjiang Province of Northwestern China where a large number of Uyghur population lives. See the map below:



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### MEANING OF SOME IMPORTANT TERMS

Before we start our detailed discussion regarding the historical & geographical background of Uyghur population, we must have a clear understanding of some following basic terms:

1. Ethnic:- The term ethnic has its origin from Greek language word 'ethnikos' which means 'Heathen' or 'Pagan' (in the sense of desperate 'nations' which did not yet participate in Christian Oikoumene). It is related to a group of population i.e. a subgroup (within a larger or dominant national or cultural group) with a common national or cultural tradition for example the ethnic Albanians living in Germany.
2. Ethnicity:- The fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition. For example the inter-relationship between gender, ethnicity and class.
3. Ethnic minority:- A group within a community which has different national or cultural traditions from the main population.
4. Ethno-archaeology:- It is the study of social organization and other ethnological features of present-day societies based on their material culture, in order to draw conclusions about past societies from their material remains.
5. Ethnography:- It is the scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits and mutual differences.

### HISTORICAL & GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF UYGHURS

The Uyghur people are the Turkic ethnic group, native to the Altai Mountains of central Asia. Throughout their 4000-year history, they have developed an advanced culture and played an important role in cultural exchanges along the Silk Road. During the 8<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Uyghur Empire was a dominant force in central Asia. The Manchu invasion in the 1800s, nationalist and communist forces from China and Russia have caused Uyghur culture to fall into decline.

They are predominantly Sunni Muslims. Historically, Islam came to their region in 10<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to Islam, they embraced Buddhism, Shamanism and Manichaeism.

Uyghurs now mostly live in their homeland, 'the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region' in China. Until recently, they made up the largest ethnic group in that region. Minority Uyghur population also lives in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and other neighboring countries.

The current territorial size of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region is 1.82 million km<sup>2</sup>. The area has grand desert, high mountains, beautiful rivers, grasslands and forests. According to latest census in 2010, the current population of this area is about 21.81 million including 8.75 million ethnic Han Chinese (40.1%) illegally settled here after 1949 A.D. The Uyghurs were about 10.2 million in 2000 census. However, official population of these people in 2010 has not yet been published. They are still in majority in this region. However, the expansionist policy of government of China is taking the balance of population in favour of Han Chinese population rapidly.



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### REASONS OF TENSIONS BETWEEN UYGHUR AND CHINESE GOVERNMENT

The XUAR i.e. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region was formerly known as 'East Turkestan.' It has enjoyed the intermittent periods of independence and domination. But after 1949, the region came under the cruel rule of Chinese government i.e. Communist Party of China (CPC) under the rule of 'Mao-Je-Dong'. Since then the region became nuclear testing ground of Chinese military. It is a home of large numbers of Chinese military and paramilitary units. The repressive policies of Chinese government towards its minorities are also creating ethnic and separatist movements in this part of China. Following are some reasons behind this tension, which are as follows:

1. **The Repression of Religious Freedom:-** Xinjiang region also known as East Turkistan has never been religiously free under modern Chinese rule. Since the establishment of People's Republic of China (PRC) under Mao-Tse-Tung in 1949 A.D., the Chinese government has adopted repressive religious policy that has aimed at forced assimilation of Uyghurs with Han migrants as well as Chinese authority. Studying religious texts, celebrating religious holidays and representing one's religion through personal appearance are strictly prohibited a state-run institution. The Chinese government even censors versions of Koran and regulates what Imams are allowed to preach. Authorities regularly conduct surveillance on mosques and any expression of frustration with government's policies is equated with 'Separatism', a state security crime punishable by death under Chinese law. They have even banned Uyghur language from the school. Recently, the Chinese government has enforced a kind of ban over fasting during the holy month of 'Ramadan' by giving the reason of occurring ill health.

These restrictions have provoked violent unrest amongst Uyghur factions and international Islamist groups.

2. **Anti-Terror Policy of China:-**After 9/11 terrorist attacks on U.S.A., Chinese military has used repressive policy against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang region. Government forces made many illegal, forced detentions, arrests and elopement of Uyghurs. However, shamefully to hide the deeds the Chinese government blamed to three evil forces of separatism, terrorism and religious extremism. However, the social media and You Tube footages of 2009 clashes that spread across the world shattered the PRC's (People Republic of China) claims that 'Jihadism' was the source of conflict. These footages provided ample evidences of police brutality, discrimination and lynching by Han Chinese population and revealed the social and economic roots of the conflict. Chinese government is adopting more strict policies to curtail any type of Uyghur uprising by blaming it religious extremism. This is also making these people agitated towards Chinese government.

3. **Forced Cultural Assimilation:**-Language, culture and religion of minorities are considered as a barrier for economic development. Advocated of this modern open market approach in China particularly the 'Hans' have this viewpoint. These people in government have molded the public viewpoint in such a way that many people in China today feel that languages & religions of minorities would die away in the process of urbanization, consumerism, literacy and communication. This new ethno-religious theory has created a situation where victims can be easily blamed (Zebeishouhaihe) for their ethnic attributes (Zhang 2006:4-7). The Chinese government has therefore imposed Mandarin language compulsory in all educational and official institutes. They instead of assimilating Uyghurs in mainstream of nationalism, Chinese government is forcefully imposing its decree on the residents of this region. This has created a massive rift among the government and the Uyghur minority because minorities in every country always have a tendency to protect their own culture.
4. **Economic Exploitation:**- We know that China is today one of most rapidly developing as well as expanding economy. But their 'rapist like attitude of natural resources' has made them a villain in many parts of the world. Similarly, in this oil rich and strategically important region, Chinese government is rapidly utilizing the natural resources available here but ignoring as well as crushing the sentiments of local population. Moreover, marginal or petty jobs are given to the locals while Han majority population enjoys higher ranks. This has led deep dissatisfaction among the locals. They consider that the government is exploiting the resources that belong to them by ignoring their own rights. But to crush any uprising of local Uyghurs China is planning to construct 'Silk Road Project' connecting China with central Asia, and then with Europe, also China's plan to create 'China-Pakistan Economic corridor' connecting Xinjiang with Gwadar Port of Pakistan. The indirect objective of these projects is to counter any uprising of Uyghurs in Xinjiang region. See the Silk road project of China on map:



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5. **Strict Control on Media Reporting:**- In modern day world mass media is the most important source of information for public. However, just like Tibet, China has banned any type of news reporting or entry of outside world's news correspondents to its restive Xinjiang region. Very few news related to Uyghurs, in which only Uyghurs are shown as culprits whereas government of China as angel, are released. What atrocities are going on Tibetans and Uyghurs generally remain unnoticed. Though Tibetans got attention because of presence of their powerful religious leader 'His Highness Dalai Lama' but Uyghurs do not have any powerful and charismatic leader like 'His highness Dalai Lama', therefore, not much attention has been paid to their problems. This had led to an increase in anti-Han and anti-government feeling in the hearts of Uyghurs. Moreover, Uyghur people are also angry because of Chinese state media's presentation of Islam

religion as 'Islamic threat' or danger to Chinese society and conservative Muslims are today primary targets of Chinese government.

**CONSEQUENCES OF UYGHUR-CHINESE GOVERNMENT CONFLICT**

Due to repressive policies of Chinese government, out of 56 recognized minority communities, Uyghurs are the worst sufferers. They are badly hurt. Following could be the consequences of this conflict:

1. If Chinese government continues its repressive policy in this region based on religion then these Uyghurs may get support from the Islamic terror groups working in neighboring Pakistan's terror camps.
2. The law and order problem may erupt not only in Xinjiang but also in other parts of China. For example, in 2014, a violent knife attack on passersbys in Kunming that left 29 people dead and 100 injured. A number of scholars see this incident as growing feeling of radicalization among Uyghurs.
3. If Uyghurs in near future join hands with terror groups of Pakistan and Taliban of Afghanistan or Islamic State in near future then it may lead to birth of more dangerous form of terrorism in China and Xinjiang may become 'Chechnya of China.' See the map of Chechnya:



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4. The policy of Chinese government to increase the number of Han population to dominate this area may further widen the gap between Hans and Uyghurs and there may be an increase in ethnic violence in near future.

**POSSIBLE REMEDIES TO THIS PROBLEM**

1. Chinese government should understand that minorities are also a part of their country. Their hearts must be won by winning their confidence rather than forcefully implementing government decisions on them.
2. Chinese government should involve Uyghurs in the developmental activities of Xinjiang region and in the resource management of that area also.

3. Employment should be given without any discrimination.
4. The Chinese government should respect the language religion and culture of the Uyghur people of Xinjiang province of China.

## CONCLUSION

In multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies, the dominance of one-majority group always creates a sense of insecurity among minority groups. It is a universal phenomenon. Majority can solve this problem only if there is a feeling of mutual respect of feeling of minority groups. The sufferings of Uyghurs in China are the result of China's planned policy of dominating its resource rich peripheral areas by settling its Han majority there and thereby wiping out the culture, languages and religion of minorities. This is a lesson for those countries, which are multi-ethnic, multi-religious & multi-cultural that peaceful and stable development is possible only when the governments of concerned countries will also consider the basic as well as legal rights of all its citizens whether they are in minority or in majority. Uyghurs are the worst sufferers in their own motherland. Therefore, international community should pursue China to pay attention to the plight of these people.

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