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PRIMARY EDUCATION IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RECENT INITIATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Recently, the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has taken many initiatives to improve the literacy rate and status of education by utilizing many resources including building new schools and implementing new policies, for instance ‘Every Child’s Rights to Education,’ ‘Compulsory Education’, constructing one thousand ‘Community Schools,’³ and introducing ‘Co-Education at Primary Level’. We can see that such kinds of steps and plans; like ‘No Child Left Behind’, ‘Early Head Starts’, ‘Community Schools’ etc. (America) are introduced in many countries around the globe. It is believed that no program can successful unless it aligns with cultural and religious beliefs of the target community. Sometimes, these programs look very attractive and beneficial but there are many questions on their success. The present study explores and critically analyzes the pros and cons of the KPK government’s recent initiative of introducing co-education at primary level in the province. This initiative is a result of a survey conducted in 2015-2016, which concludes that, “27 per cent girls went to the boys’ schools, while five per cent boys attended classes in the girls’ schools at the primary level.” The survey not only ignores the desire and need of the boys and girls who attend these schools but of also their parents’ cultural, social, economic and religious beliefs.

1. If given opportunity, do the 27% girls and 5% boys like to study in co-education?
2. Weather parents want to send their children in co-education institute happily or they are compelled to do so?

Key Words: *Central Punjabi Speakers, Punjabi Theatre, Diaspora, Urban Areas, Educated People.*

1. Introduction

The current study introduces the topic to the audience but also problematize it by contextualizing the primary education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, to present an updated and an appropriate picture of the scenario to the readers. It will also describe the various challenges, issues and factors, which require the government to apply or implement these initiatives.

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This research aims at exploring various factors in educational system in general and primary education specifically, which still hinder creating a community of literacy practice in a classroom and a literate nation. On the basis of the literature review it can be said that we are suffering from religious intolerance, discrimination or colonization of not only places but also mind and gender differences.

Minority groups and students from diverse cultures do not feel comfortable in majority areas or schools. This difference, discrimination or gap can be seen in educational institutions, job induction processes or even in classrooms. This is not only limited to the nationalist politicians but also the administrators, teachers and the students that show this discriminatory attitude towards others, specifically, towards people from different gender and culture. This attitude and behavior was the hallmark of colonizers in their colonies. There is dire need of revisiting the education system, syllabus and roles of teachers and curriculum designers to address these issues.

Problem Statement

Recently, the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has taken many initiatives to improve the literacy rate and status of education by utilizing many resources including building new schools and implementing new policies, for instance ‘Every Child’s Rights to Education,’ ‘Compulsory Education’, constructing one thousand ‘Community Schools,’ and introducing ‘Co-Education at Primary Level’. We can see that such kinds of steps and plans; like ‘No Child Left Behind’, ‘Early Head Starts’, ‘Community Schools’ etc. (America) are introduced in many countries around the globe. It is believed that no program can successful unless it aligns with cultural and religious beliefs of the target community. Sometimes, these programs look very attractive and beneficial but there are many questions on their success. The present study explores and critically analyzes the pros and cons of the KPK government’s recent initiative of introducing co-education at primary level in the province. This initiative is a result of a survey conducted in 2015-2016, which concludes that, “27 per cent girls went to the boys’ schools, while five per cent boys attended classes in the girls’ schools at the primary level.” The survey not only ignores the desire and need of the boys and girls who attend these schools but of also their parents’ cultural, social, economic and religious beliefs.

Research Questions

If given opportunity, do the 27% girls and 5% boys like to study in co-education?

Weather parents want to send their children in co-education institute happily or they are compelled to do so?

This is a theoretical research, which not only encompasses various aspects including the current educational system (in general) and primary education, in specific, in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but also explores the cultural, religious and sociopolitical beliefs of the people of the province and their relationship or differences with the current

education system and their influence with the new or recent initiatives in the primary education.

Significance of the Study

Since the emergence of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, we are trying to increase the status and level of literacy in our homeland but we are unable to get as satisfactory results as they are aimed or required. Pakistan has ignored education, which is the most vital element for the success and development of any nation; this has resulted in one of the lowest literacy rates in world: Pakistan's literacy rate is ranked 113 in a total of 120 countries (Reham. A, Jingdong. L, Hussein. I, 2015). We can see around the globe that there are many nations who got much better progress in the education system in a short period of time; Bangladesh is one of them. So, there is a dire need to investigate the hurdles, which we are facing, in uplifting the literacy rate in the country. This study sheds lights on the various factors and reasons, which should be taken into account when designing educational policies, curriculum and syllabus. It is hoped that findings of the study will help in aligning the current initiatives to the religious, cultural and sociopolitical beliefs of the people of the province.

Literature Review

The purpose of education is to make a society / man civilized by increasing the literacy of the members of that society. Literacy is not an isolated construct, which means having ability of reading and writing but it is tied with culture and context. Literacy when it is practiced in its real meaning and sense can harmonize the society. And we know that harmony in a society leads to establish peace in the world.

Literacy is not the 'ability to read and write' or 'having competence in specified area' but it is an ability to question the received knowledge to know the facts. It is the ability to read between the lines and analyze the situation critically. By practicing literacy in this spirit will help us in understanding others point of view by creating third space, which can result in getting along with others. The biggest problems of the world do not result from the people who cannot read but as we can see in the words of Banks (2004), "They (problems) result from people in the world—from different cultures, races, religions, and nations—being unable to get along and to work together to solve the world's intractable problems." (Banks, 2004, p.291)

It is truism that we, as teachers, are indoctrinated throughout our lives and become blinds to see beyond these limits. This statuesque lead us to a point where we are unable to differentiate between knowledge and facts, between understanding the text critically and just barking on the words by reading aloud. This "indoctrination process imposes a willful blindness that views facts and contradictions as irrelevant." (Macedo, 1993, p. 203) There is a dire need of bringing balance and peace in the world by diminishing discrimination of various kinds. Policy makers, administrator, parents and teachers have to "develop a

delicate balance of cultural, national, and global identifications and allegiances.” (Banks, 2004, p.294)

We have to understand students from their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Even we have to be knowledgeable of the language our students and their parents speak. Not only we (as bilingual teachers) have to understand the different scripts and phonological system of the target language we are teaching but also the students’ emotional, social, political, religious and historical affiliation with the language. For instance, Urdu-Hindi controversy (1867) in the subcontinent (India and Pakistan) was a starting point and a root cause of the separatist movement by the Muslims, which resulted in the emergence of Pakistan. So, Pakistani and Indian students have emotional, social, religious, historical and political affiliation with this language. We have to be very careful while we are in a multilingual classroom. Bhatia and Ritchie (2004) are of the view that sometimes language identities become more important than anything else. So knowledge of students’ cultures and identities can help teachers for creating a homogenous environment and community of literacy practice for learning and teaching in the classroom.

Lack of students’ cultural background and by not acknowledging their particular identities and difference make a teacher/administrator a source of racial or ethnic discrimination. Ellwood (2009) also observed this kind of behavior from a teacher in an Australian multicultural classroom. She says that “It is clear that an essentialized, and thus racialized, cultural representation of Japanese students as passive and noncommittal operated in the classrooms in my research despite a critical body of scholarship which has sought to counteract such representations.” (p. 114) I also believe that such kind of behavior from teacher’s part can aggravate the situation in the classroom. As Ellwood (2009) noted that, “even well-intentioned teachers can fall into understanding their students through cultural differentiation process which are racist in their effects.” (p. 114) It is necessary for a teacher to acknowledge the cultural diversity in the classroom and she/he should give due respect to each student. Teacher should create an atmosphere of harmony and understanding in the classroom. Only then she/he will be able to create a community of practice in the classroom. Perez (2004) noted, “Many teachers believe that by not noticing children’s differences they will be just and fair to everyone. Some teachers have been known to say or write that I do not notice who is Asian, or Black, or Latino. I just see children” (p. 310). Perez (2004) is of the opinion that children may perceive hidden messages in this stance of the teacher. Students may believe that the teacher is ignoring our differences or is not acknowledging our presence in the classroom.

Sometimes teachers bring controversial issues in the classroom. For instance, discussing Sunni, Shia etc. topics. Discussing these issues while ignoring students’ religious and cultural affiliation can cause harm to the meaningful teaching practices. I want to share an incident over here relating to such situation. Once I asked my colleague why she is upset and worried. She told me that today she asked her ESL students to write about the issue of

Hijab (Burqa) but one of her students became angry and said that she would not write on this topic. I shared with her that you should choose topics after knowing and acknowledging your students' beliefs and practices. The same situation is noted by Perez (2009) when he says, "lack of acknowledgment of the children's linguistics and cultural heritage denies the children's prior literacy experiences." (p. 310)

I believe that we can create a peaceful learning environment in the classroom by accepting and acknowledging their students' diverse cultural, social, religious and political background. A community in the classroom cannot be created unless we identify, acknowledge, accept and respect the diversity of our students. Otherwise, as described by Ellwood (2009), "These practices of differentiation by cultural background lead to exclusions and stereotypical attribution which produces the radicalized other as inferior." (p. 114).

We should have believed in and bring equality in the classroom. Tatum (2003) was right when she says that educators and students themselves need to explore racial stereotypes, beliefs, and perspectives if classrooms are to become places where equity is valued. Tatum points out the need to challenge the notion forcing biracial children to choose a mono-cultural identity. Instead, caring individuals should promote self-acceptance of a multiracial heritage. This is also essential for multiracial families, by way of adoption, where all the parents must be willing to experience their cultural and religious differences, and address the racism that their family will experience. Again more time could be spent looking at the complexities of multiracial families in relation to mono-cultural ones. In this sense, racism is one of the major reasons for unequal balance, less peaceful and less harmonize environment in the class.

Racism is the basic element or weapon, which the dominant forces (dominant community) use to subjugate the minority groups. Tatum (2003) focuses on how to embrace and continue cross-racial dialogue, which can result in a peaceful environment not only in the classroom but also in the whole society. To find the courage to have cross-racial conversations and promote social change begins with educating ourselves. Next we should recognize we could not fix everything, so concentrate on our (as educationist) sphere of influence. Additionally. The interruption of racism will be a long-term commitment; so honest conversation with children and parents in particular must had to engage with curiosity about race, cultural and religious moderation and differences. Remaining silent will not protect them or lead to colorblindness. Adults must not shy away from the question's children have about physical differences because children are forming biases whether we think they are or not. By dismissing their questions, because of our uneasiness, we are teaching that conversations on race are to be avoided. This inaction by adults only helps to fuel the segregated cafeterias seen in middle and high schools and even on college campuses. Gender differences and biases are formed early. However, by breaking the silence we can assist to adjust the views of children.

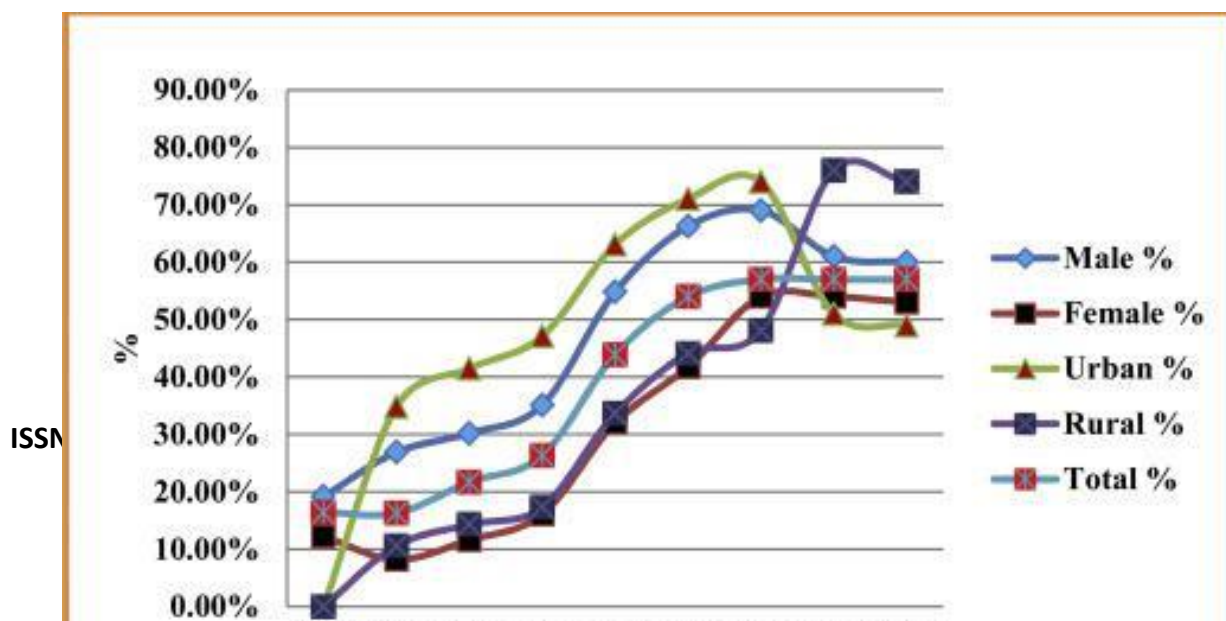
There is another issue in a co-education system. There is discrimination when a teacher believes that a male student is more intelligent than a female or females are more emotional than male where emotion is considered a negative behavior (Boler, 1999). In this contradictory situation, Boler (1999) offers a fresh point of view for mapping the emotions. She argues that emotions are epistemological, and are not, as Western philosophy maintains, opposed to reason; rather, emotions enable reason. Along with I.Q level we should consider emotional I.Q too. As a teacher we can turn the ‘outlaw emotion’ (Boler, 1999) that is anger, into positive emotion which enable reason. But the question is how can we harmonize a society when, as teachers, we believe in inequality and practice non-discriminatory or colonizer’s attitude in the classroom? From the above studies, it can be concluded that any educational policy cannot be succeeded until and unless it take into account, the racial, cultural, religious and sociopolitical beliefs of the people of the community. Any external (without consulting the locals) educational initiative cannot produce required results. All the policies need to be aligned with the system of belief of the people.

In the next session, I will describe current situation of the education in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and also examine and analyze the utility and impact of the recent initiatives in the primary education on peoples’ (students, teachers, parents, administrator) life.

Analysis of the Literacy Rate in Pakistan (in general) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

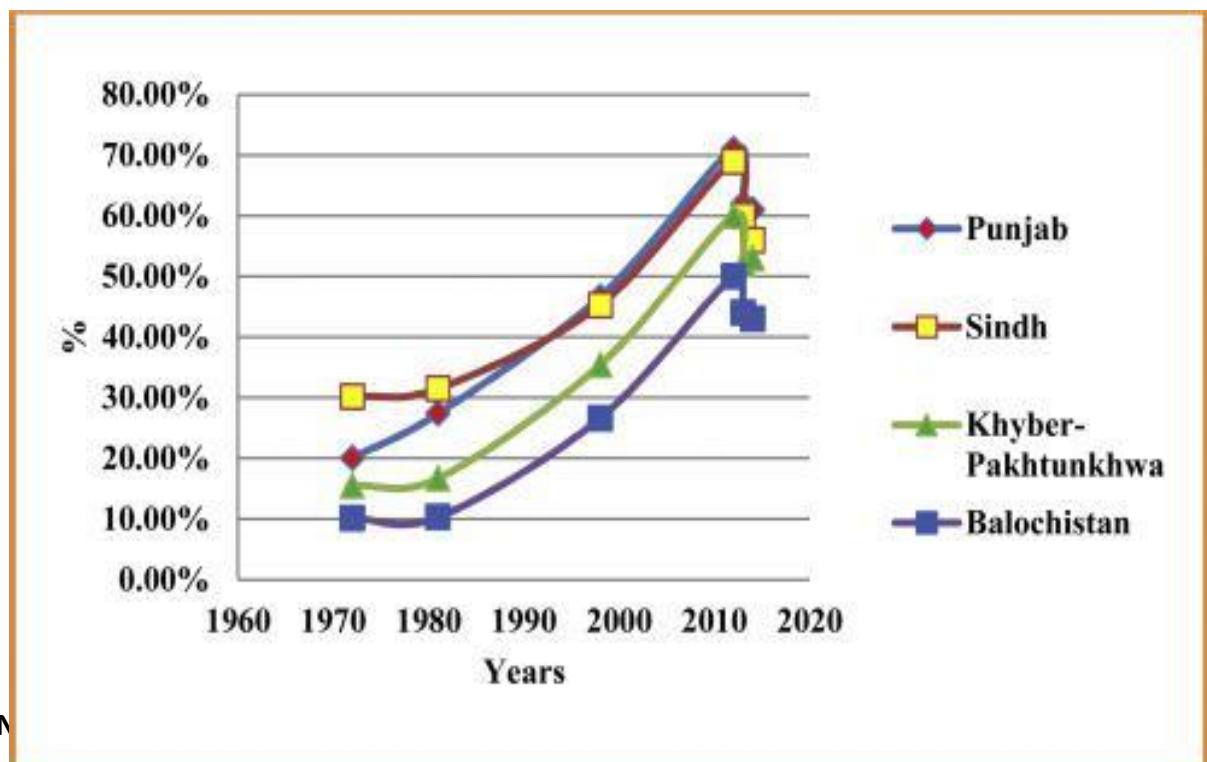
(Specifically)

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Pakistan’s literacy rate is 55%, which is one of the lowest literacy rates in the whole world, and it stands at 160th among nations. Many schools and colleges are entering the teaching profession, particularly in major cities, but those living in rural areas record a greater loss. Literacy rate of Pakistan from 1952 to 2014 in percentages is presented in the blew figure (Reham. A, Jingdong. L, Hussein. I, 2015).



The above figure is adopted from (Reham. A, Jingdong. L, Hussein. I, 2015)

The above analysis displays literacy rates in Pakistan. In 1950, the literacy rate was 16.40% and it was lowered to 16.30% in 1961. It saw an increase in 1972, with an overall rate of 21.70%, incorporating urban and rural areas. The rate was improved to 26.30% in 1981, where urban areas had 47.10% and rural areas had 17.30%. In 1998, the aggregate rate was 43.90%, with the rates of urban and rural areas of 63.08% and 33.64%. In 2004 and 2009, it was 54% and 57%, including urban and rural areas, and in 2012, it was 57%, the same as in 2014. The blue figure represents the province literacy rate.



The above figure is adopted from (Reham. A, Jingdong. L, Hussein. I, 2015)

Literacy rate is increasing in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) is increasing since 1960 but it is still low as compared to the Punjab. Punjab made progress in literacy by introducing many initiatives at elementary level. Same initiatives should be taken in KPK. The present provincial government has introduced and also, commencing Running Head: Primary Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa many other steps at primary level to achieve the higher literacy rate in the province.

Critical Analysis of the Recent Initiatives in Primary Education in KPK

In February 2017 the KPK government approves co-education in the province with the condition that only female teachers could teach in these schools, “The government will establish schools where boys and girls can study together,” (The Daily Dawn, February 07, 2017). This is a landmark step in the education sector in the history of the province. It is hoped that this initiative will make a difference in achieving high literacy rate. There are many advantages and disadvantages of co-education system, which cannot be ignored. For instance, the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, said that “Co-education creates a feeling of comradeship. He advocated teaching of both the male and female sexes in the same institution without showing any discrimination in imparting education.”

“A strong reason for co-education is that separating children for a number of years means they will not be mixing and learning about each other.” (*Professor Simon Baron-Cohen, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the University of Cambridge and Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge.*) ‘There are no overriding advantages for single-sex schools on educational grounds. Studies all over the world have failed to detect any major differences.’ (*Professor Alan Smithers, director of education and employment research at the University of Buckingham.*) Similarly, Cathedral School parents say, “Boys' boorishness is tamed by the civilizing influence of the girls; girls' cattiness is tamed by the more relaxed approach of the boys. It's a win-win situation.’ (Cathedral School parent) It's our experience that friendships develop in a very natural way in co-educational schools. This happens because there are so many activities, societies and clubs in the school in which girls and boys take part in a pleasant, well-supervised environment. Friendships develop naturally and genuinely because the mixing is a by-product of the event. This friendly atmosphere continues into the classroom allowing young people to express their views openly and assertively. For both girls and boys co-education provides a more realistic way of training young people to take their places naturally in the wider community of men and women. It helps to break down the misconceptions of each sex about the other and provides an excellent foundation for the development of realistic, meaningful and lasting relationships in later life. (<http://cathedral-school.co.uk/co-education.html>) A co-educational school is also appropriately successful in challenging sexist manners. Many

subjects / topics in secondary school permit for considerable classroom discussion and debate. “In a co-educational school both the female and male perspectives will be explored in such discussions and this is a very important learning experience for all. In so doing they learn that 'equality' does not mean 'sameness' - that men and women often have different perspectives on the same issues and that each approach has a great deal to offer the other.” (<http://cathedral-school.co.uk/co-education.html>)

Advocates of one-gender or single-sex schooling sometimes construct awkward assertions about the academic benefits of such schools, aiming to statistically substantial disparities in examination outcomes. In reality such dissimilarities are due to the socio-economic background of the students at the school or the discrimination of the intake. From the above studies it can be concluded that co-education could be beneficial for achieving desiring literacy goals but there is a need to align these educational policies with our provincial socioeconomic settings. There is a need to win the trust of the parents, teachers, administrators and students before implementing such policies. Language, culture, traditions and bent of mind of the KPK people are different from the other provinces.

Pashtuns are more religious and strongly attached to their traditions as compared to the other provinces. It is a male dominant society where women are given high respect and are considered sacred asset. Men and women do not mingle usually. Most of the women wear hijab or *Burqa*. Pashtuns are proud of their culture and traditions that is why they always go for freedom, racial and ethnic integrity and religious beliefs. They never compromise on these issues. For instance; in the words of John. H and et al. “Pashtun believe that their social code produces men, who are superior to those produced under the Western mode, they have no desire to have a new social system imposed on them by outsiders.” They always follow their code of conduct: Pashtunwali, which includes; Melmastia: (hospitality), Badal: (to seek justice or take revenge against wrongdoer), Nanwatai: (sanctuary) to seek refuge in the house of another seeking asylum against his enemies. A Pashtun at all times is expected to defend his land, family, women and property against invaders. They believe in ‘Tureh (bravery), Sabat (Loyalty), Imadari (righteousness), Gairat (courage/honor), Namus (sexual honor of women) and Nang (honor).

So, for a society, which gives importance to their tribal system and believes in their own traditions and is ready to die for their norms (Pashtunwali), it is difficult to transform into a most liberal one in days. Any policy in any field cannot be implemented until and unless it is according to the values of the people and accepted by everyone.

As it has been mentioned earlier that there are more advantages of co-education than disadvantages. It is hoped that the policy will bring fruitful results in achieving the higher literacy rate.

Recommendations

The following steps should be taken in order to implement the recent initiatives (co-education at primary level) in order to make this policy acceptable to the people of the province.

As it has been discussed in previous pages, that any kind of policy cannot be implemented until and unless it is according to the values and belief system of the target population. And in case of KPK, it becomes very important to know the point of view of all the stakeholders involved, related and influenced by this policy including parents, teachers, students and the administrators.

For this purpose, a research study should be conducted to know the feelings, emotions and consent of the people involved and affected. A survey should be conducted throughout the province by asking the following questions:

1. If given opportunity, do the 27% girls and 5% boys like to study in co-education?
2. Whether parents want to send their children in co-education institute happily or they are compelled to do so?
3. Do teachers think that this policy would be successful in future? If yes, what would be implications for it?
4. What kind of administrative issues will come up for implementing co-education in the province?

Participants

The above questions should be asked to parents, teachers, students and administrators to know their point of view. The participants can be selected by random selection from different schools and walks of life.

Conclusion

In the light of the above literature review it can be said that any kind of policy cannot be successful if it is not according to the values and belief system of the members of the target community. Any policy if implemented without the consent of the respective population results in fiasco. As, it can be learnt from Urdu-Hindi controversy, which resulted in the creation of two countries. In the current scenario the new policy (implementing new initiatives including co-education at primary level) should be aligned with needs and

requirements, cultural and religious beliefs, and norms and traditions of the people of the province.

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