

STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS OF STRUGGLE FOR POLITICAL POWER IN BALOCHISTAN: A HISTORICAL INQUIRY: 1749-1929

KASHIF IQBAL

Department of History, University of Sindh Jamshoro.

Email: kashif.jagirani@usindh.edu.pk

Abstract

Power as an objective of the political upspring in Balochistan has been dealt in the article. Presence of power and its use for holding personal authority has been highlighted. The focused period of the article is from the accession of Mir Nasir Khan I, as ruler of Kalat to the advent of nationalist politics of Balochistan. The present study inquires into the overview of structure and dynamics of political power. How the authoritarians of Balochistan misused power for their personal political objectives is the main question of the study. Further, from Nasir Khan I to the British invasion of Balochistan the political power-struggle hampered the progress of the political culture of Balochistan. The geneses of the power-struggle are still evident in the political culture of Balochistan. The downtrodden and politically victimized people of Balochistan are good examples of the cruel treatment of authoritarian rulers

Keywords: *Political Power, authoritarians, power-struggle, historical inquiry, political culture, political elite.*

1. Introduction

The British gave *sardars* and *nawabs* charge for internal affairs and the *sardars* and *nawabs* were in authority to rule over the people in whatever way they wanted. In this way, the *sardars* and *nawabs* became habitual of holding power. The British aims and objectives were simple. They wanted border security at any price (at any price refers to the loss of local people's lives and money not loss of British lives and money).

Border security in a sense that the end of 18th century and start of 19th century has been marked as the era of a “Great Game” between Britain, France and Russia¹. They all strived to step down in Central Asia and in the Persian Gulf. The British Empire’s borders were connected with Afghanistan and Iran through Balochistan. Thus, any volatile situation in Balochistan could be harmful to the British Empire of India. Moreover, the British were not concerned with the political, social and economic life of the common people of Balochistan.

2. Power: Understanding and Structural Presence in the Politics of Balochistan

After understanding power and its various forms, one can be able to understand what type of power and its structure prevailed in Balochistan. The following paragraphs highlight the Western concepts of power and its forms. It has been tried whether the broad concepts of power are suited to define the structure of power that existed in Balochistan.

The cause-effect perspective of power has been touched by Dennis Hume Wrong. He is of the view that power is “the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others”.² Further, the more compact and practical explanation has been presented by Linda D. Molm. she defines power in action-reaction form.³ For example, the miseries that people of Balochistan faced were the results of the political actors who were in authority over on the people of Balochistan. In reaction, people must have understood that political authoritarians did whatever they wanted and the political actors were aware of the nature of their acts and they knew the outcomes of their acts on people. Linda Molm wanted to say that those who enjoy power, they know the results and outcomes of the power. If people suffer from the power-holders, it means that power-holders bring sufferings intentionally on their subjects. On similar lines, power has been defined as an authority that compelled people to do something that common people by themselves would not do.⁴

Ilhan Niaz explains, “The basic problem with power is that its character does not change unless a conscious effort is made by the state and society to alter it”.⁵ The notable point is that the history of Balochistan indicates that the culture of power has not been changed. The political actors/elite/authoritarians did not try to change the dynamics of power in Balochistan.

3. Structure and Dynamics of Power, 1749-1839

It was in 1749 when Nasir Khan I acceded to the throne of Kalat. From Nasir Khan's I accession to the advent of the British, the structure and dynamics of power in Balochistan has been dealt in this section. The following paragraphs aim to comprehend whether the above-mentioned overview of power is justifiable in the context of Balochistan or not.

History presents evidence that Baloch⁶ were not mere people living in backwardness. Baloch was a force that fought hundreds of wars with kings and sultans. The vigour and enthusiasm of this race remained devoid of a leader who could unite and strengthen their power for future generations. The personal and personalized use of power enmeshed the Baloch within the warfare and inter-tribal conflicts. Khuda Bakhsh cites many references from *Shahnama* Firdausi in which there are clear examples of the race and fighting skills of Baloch. Firdausi writes, "Their back none in the world ever saw, nor was one of their fingers bare of armour".⁷ In this way, at various places, the historical records show the courage and fighting skills of Baloch. Baloch were the people who could fight and die for their cause. It should be understood that 'having power' and 'use of the power' these both are totally different concepts. Baloch as a nation possessed power. But the struggle to keep power as a personal property divided them into various tribes. The internal struggle for power ravaged them. It should be understood in this way that the tribal structure of Baloch was mainly focused on its tribal head and the head was not ready to accept the sovereignty of any other tribe. Thus, it created inter-tribal conflicts. Resultantly, there occurred divisions among tribes and this weakened their power to face foreign forces.

Balochistan became independent after "Treaty of Kalat" (1758).⁸ Ahmad Shah himself attacked Kalat fort and besieged it for forty days but when he realized that conquering Kalat fort was difficult, he signed a treaty in which independence of Kalat was accepted on some conditions. The first point of the treaty states "Khan-i-Baluch, Mir Nasir Khan shall not pay any tribute to the Shah (king) of the Afghan in future". The fourth point states "Shah-i-Afghanistan will not interfere in future in the internal affairs, disputes and other matters of Baluchistan" the complete treaty can be read in Inayatullah's book *The Problem of Greater Balochistan: A Study of Baloch Nationalism*.⁹ The autonomy of Balochistan ended with the agreement that Khan signed with the British in March 1839 which guaranteed British safe passage towards Kabul.¹⁰ Further, after the death of Nasir Khan I in 1795, his state disintegrated into various parts. Makran refused to pay taxes to the son of Mir Nasir Khan I and new ruler

of Kalat, Mahmud Khan. Various writers give various reasons for the disintegration of the control of new Khan of Kalat. Khuda Bux argues that the personal life and luxurious lifestyle of Mahmud Khan were responsible for the disintegration of Kalat state.¹¹

On the other hand, Taj Mohammad cites various writers to trace out the causes of the disintegration of Kalat state¹² but the main and structural cause was of the pattern of power that was prevalent. Rulers of that time wanted to rule not to govern Balochistan. Michael Foucault argues in a similar way, “In the old system, the body of the condemned man became the king’s property, on which the sovereign left his mark and brought down the effects of his power”.¹³ The lust to keep and monopolise power over people was one of the basic causes that paved the way for the entry of the British into Balochistan.

Further, Taj Mohammad Breseeg is of the view, “Nasir Khan I (the sixth Khan), the most popular, powerful and dynamic ruler of the Khanate (1749- 1795), claimed sovereignty over all lands where Baloches lived. He brought Karachi and most of western (Iranian) Balochistan under his administration”.¹⁴ The political role and unification was an important factor during Nasir Khan’s time. Nasir Khan I, established a confederacy in which Jhalawan and Sarawan regions were included. The chiefs of both regions had seats in the Darbar of the Khan of Kalat. Interestingly, the chiefs had absolute power in their internal affairs. The chiefs were elected (what kind of election was that is unknown) by the tribesmen of their respected areas. The final consensus was in the hands of Khan of Kalat.¹⁵ Here the interesting fact is that Khan of Kalat himself was not elected. He was a ruler by birth or by sword. The justification of the rule of Khan of Kalat was by birth not by worth. Khan of Kalat Nasir Khan I was a ruler who continued the rule of his forefathers. Critical inquiry into the continuation of the Khans suggests that the maximum decades of the reign of Khans were dependent whether on Afghanistan, Iran or on British.

The power of Nasir Khan I was based on his subjective authority. The final decision always remained in the hands of Nasir Khan I. For a short period of time, Nasir Khan I maintained unity of his confederacy but after his death, the process of disintegration of the confederacy began and took the shape of civil war. The civil war and internal conflicts provided the British a chance to intervene and control the major areas of Balochistan. The era of Nasir Khan shows that the structure of power-politics was based on power-struggle. The rulers preferred keeping power in their hands and they did not endeavour to institutionalize the political

structure of Balochistan as such there was a flaw in the selection of a new ruler. There was no clear guideline on how to select or elect a ruler.

4. British Advent: British Policy of Maintaining Power, 1839-1929

At first, British acquired strategic, economic, social as well as political information regarding Balochistan. The British sent its special investigators to collect information. After getting proper information regarding the routes and people of Balochistan, they prepared to attack. When the British attacked Kalat, Mir Mehrab Khan (r.1817-1839) was the ruler of the scattered state of Nasir Khan's Kalat. Kachi, Sarawan and Jhalawan were independent and the sardars of these areas were not in a mood to help Mir Mehrab Khan. On the other hand, Makran was also independent under the rule of Sardar Faqeer Mohammad Khan Bizinjo.¹⁶ The power vacuum and inter-tribal struggle to be a ruler of the center only gave a chance to British to terrorize Kalat state. Inayatullah Baloch is of the view, "The British had only one aim, to expand their empire and to extract immense profits from the exploitation of the peoples of Central Asia and South Asia, and, to achieve their goals, they sent their agents and entered into treaties with Iran and Sikh Punjab against Baluchistan and Afghanistan".¹⁷ After the death of Mir Mehrab Khan, the main objective of the British was to install a ruler who would comply with the wishes of the British.

Martin Axman said, "Kalat's internal conflicts combined with the movement of Russia into Central Asia led the British to intervene and initiate policies which in effect 'froze' the chiefdom".¹⁸ British knew the rival group of Mir Mehrab Khan. Thus, they brought Mir Shah Nawaz to the throne of Kalat. "They installed a teenager, Shahnawaz Khan, a distant relative of Mehrab Khan as the new ruler with Lt. Loveday as Regent and started the dismemberment of Balochistan by giving Quetta¹⁹ and Mastung to Shah Shuja and Kacchi to the rulers of Sindh".²⁰ Shah Nawaz's father, Ahmed Yar Khan, and his grandfather, Behram Khan, and even great-grandfather, Amir Haji Khan, fought for the throne of Kalat in their respective periods.²¹ On the other hand, Mir Mehrab Khan's son Nasir Khan II (r.1840-1857) revolted and tried to dethrone Shah Nawaz. In this way, civil disorder in Balochistan compelled the British to deal with Nasir Khan II. Nasir Khan II agreed to the demands of British that he would be a vassal of Shuja and accepted British supremacy.²² Mir Nasir Khan became Khan of Kalat by compromise.

The treaty that Nasir Khan signed with British (1854) clearly shows that he was a man of reduced power and remained subservient to

the British. Article III of the treaty holds: "Mir Nasir Khan binds himself, his heirs and successors, to oppose to the utmost all the enemies of the British Government, in all cases to act in subordinate co-operation with that Government, and to enter into no negotiation with other States without its consent, the usual friendly correspondence with neighbours being continued as before".²³ The text of the treaty how the British aimed to control Balochistan. This was a power-struggle to maximize their interests. After the death of Mir Nasir Khan II in 1858, the younger brother of Mir Nasir Khan II, Mir Khudadad Khan, became ruler of Kalat. This was also according to the wishes of the British. Afterward, the British conducted a policy to bring Balochistan under central authority so that it could be easy to rule it indirectly. Therefore, the British helped Mir Khudadad Khan to crush the rebellions of Sardar Azad Khan of Kharan, Jam of Bela, and Marri Sardars to consolidate power.

Power-struggle among the tribesmen and Khan of Kalat Nasir Khan I resulted in an easy way out to control the tribesmen for British. When Sir Robert G. Sandeman took the charge as a political officer of Dera Ghazi Khan in 1868, he bribed the chiefs of tribesmen and brought them under British control. During 1876 Robert Sandeman held the position as an agent to the Governor-General. This was the act which threw Quetta in the hands of the British.²⁴ Inayatullah Baloch writes, "His (Sandeman's) policy was very successful among the Baluch tribes of Derajat".²⁵ The tribal chiefs surrendered their sovereignty and violated Baloch tradition while accepting bribes.²⁶ The British policy in Balochistan was to use chiefs of tribes in favour of British cause. A.L.P Tucker writes, "Sandeman found their chiefs wanting in authority and means, and he gave them both".²⁷ Sandeman's other achievement was that he made people of their worth subordinate and gave them tasks to work with the British. One of them was Hitu Ram. Hitu Ram was a Hindu clerk and historian. He left a historical record of Balochistan. The other person in this regard was Diwan Gunpat Rai.²⁸ These types of people were used by Sandeman to search out the roots of power dynamics and structure of power in Balochistan to easily control the region. This was the reason why Sandeman became successful in dealing with tribesmen.

The success of British policy was not based only on bribery, they became successful because of the very sense of strong Baloch nationalism and loyalty was missing among the tribal chiefs. It can be understood in the light of Aasim Sajjad Akhtar's terminology. He defines authoritarian's power and condition of the voiceless people in the following words "coercion from above and consent from below".²⁹ This was due to the maintenance of power in a way that it became a norm that

whenever nominal central power weakens, the tribal areas announced their independence and internal strife began. It kept continuing from 1749. Power-struggle was the base that could not make Khan of Kalat Nasir Khan I able to draw a draft that could provide a sense of solidarity among the people of Balochistan.

The core difference between Khan of Kalat Nasir Khan's policy and British policy was that British bribed chiefs and made them dependent on external matters on British as well as British tried to solve the problems on diplomatic lines. On the other hand, Nasir Khan I ruled Balochistan in a way that tribal people were given some powers and there were some loose checks and balances on them. In a real sense, the tribal people were given powers. Thus, they were able to create hindrances against Mir Nasir Khan I but on the ideological front, he considered himself an absolute monarchy. His practical policies and ideological outlook differ from each other. On the contrary, on the practical side, the British had full control over chiefs and tribal leaders but on the ideological side, those who supported British were in an illusion that they had powers. In short, both Nasir Khan and the British fought for power. But the policies that they applied were different. Likewise, it can be said that the political culture of Balochistan is a continuation of the old age power-struggle.

It was during 1875 when Sandeman began his first mission to Kalat for settlement of disputes between Khan of Kalat and the tribesmen. The internal rivalry was at its peak. The power struggle among the Baloch leaders or tribal headmen reached at the point that Sandeman himself visited Kalat in 1875 to settle the disputes. The British interest into the settlement was due to their trade and "Forward Policy".³⁰ In the aftermath of the Treaty of Gandamak 1879, Pishin, Sibi, Harnai and Thal-Chotiali came under the control of the British. It was later known as British Balochistan. British Balochistan became highly centralized and defense oriented.

Abdul Quddus writes that during British period educational, political and social as well as economic development was not focused.³¹ The British policy in Balochistan was to protect herself from foreign threats. Thus, the tribal chiefs were given stipends to maintain these areas and take part in an emergency. These headmen of the tribes became subservient to the British interests and were happy in the illusion of power. It is evident that during the period of Khan of Kalat (Khudadad Khan 1857- 1893), on January 1, 1877, Khan himself and many sardars were invited to Delhi and they were assured that they were sovereign and

had power in Balochistan.³² This was British policy to make Khan and Sardar happy. The treaties signed with Khan are enough to shed light on the power of the Khan. They survived due to British support and the British were also providing money to the tribesmen for their services. In this way, the dynamics and structure of power remained in the hands of those who were under British control. British agents kept a close eye on Balochistan. Khan and Sardars in Balochistan acted according to the wishes of the British. Those families who were the centre of power during the British period, they remained the centre of power even after departure of the British. Abdul Quddus presents interesting arguments,

It will be of interest to know that the British had designed the administration of this area from a political angle. All efforts were made to keep the tribal system alive and this aim was achieved by giving stipends, privileges, pensions, and grants to tribal chiefs and making them directly responsible for the maintenance of law and order in their respective areas of influence.³³

The basic point that should be noted is that the British policies to control Balochistan were in favour of their own interests. Qazi Isa (founder of Muslim League in Balochistan) notes that till 1942 there was not even a college in Balochistan. Further, there were only four government high schools in the whole of the province.³⁴ British introduced some changes in the Jirga system. The system by itself was not against society but the people who were given charge of holding Jirga were against the interests of common people. Likewise, tribesmen were given privileges and power to rule over people.

Aslam Khwaja is of the view that in 1862 Sandeman made the system legal and the local sardars were given unquestionable authorities in their domain.³⁵ Thus, the system put detrimental impacts on the political culture of Balochistan. The subsequent political history of Balochistan clearly shows how the political authoritarians of Balochistan hijacked the political platform of the land. Mohammad Ali Jinnah said regarding the political settings of Balochistan, "You have got an ancient system, which perhaps I can describe as the feudal system, and which is full of defects. I say a word to Sardars, Nawabs and the Chiefs; you must realize that India is moving fast, the world is moving faster than you can cope with it".³⁶ The same system was brought forward by the British and the local authoritarians of Balochistan supported the British in this regard.

It was on 10th August 1880 that Baloch people of Marri tribe attacked British train passing from Kochali. One hundred and twenty-five

thousand rupees were robbed. Local sardar of Marri tribe, Mahrullah Khan, pointed out the names of the persons who were involved in the robbery and assured British that he would teach a lesson to the people. He also assured the British of his loyalty.³⁷ Shashi Tharoor cites Will Durant's lines regarding British rule in India. He said,

“The British conquest of India was the invasion and destruction of a high civilization by a trading company (the British East India Company) utterly without scruple or principle, careless of art and greedy of gain, over-running with fire and sword a country temporarily disordered and helpless, bribing and murdering, annexing and stealing, and beginning that career of illegal and ‘legal’ plunder which has now (1930) gone on ruthlessly for one hundred and seventy-three years”.³⁸

5. Conclusion

Nasir Khan I and his army divisions and other institutions were tools to maintain his power. He never devised any mechanism for his successors. Thus, the Khanate remained a hereditary institution. This means Khan was one and only master of his Khanate. All the subjects under his power were nothing other than mere subjects. They were not in any position to say anything against the orders of Khan.

The British advent in Balochistan was due to the strategic importance of the region. Without considering the traditional importance of the region, they divided Balochistan into parts. The areas where Baloch was in majority and historically these areas belonged to the Baloch, but the British broke all the norms and separated Baloch nation on various grounds. The separation was not merely a division of the people of the same nation, but it was a pre-planned agenda of the British to divide the people and create a rivalry between them to control them. The British did not provide any political consciousness to the people of Balochistan, rather they handed over the common people of Balochistan to the sardars and nawabs. Externally, the sardars and nawabs were under the strict control of the British. However, the *sardars* and *nawabs* were all in all in their internal affairs. They were free to do whatever pleased them. In this connection, the present study has collected historical facts and figures and proved that before and after the advent of the British, the very sense of power-struggle did not provide unity to the people of Balochistan.

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¹⁶ Nasir, *Tareekh-e-Balochistan* (Urdu), 138.

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¹⁹ The ancient name of Quetta was "Shal", which in the Brahui language means "gift" and whose roots, according to Rawlinson, date back to the 10th century. "Shal" derives from a legend which tells of the ceding of the city by Ahmad Shah Durrani to the mother of Nasir Khan I, Bib" Mariam, in return for services rendered to the Afghan king in the campaign against Persia in 1751. Quetta was named 'Kot', 'Kwatta', small fort, in the Pashtu language, a place name which referred to the original architecture of the 'citadel', that is, a fort surrounded by a slight mud crenated-wall. See:Riccardo Redaelli, "Quetta: History and Archives. Note of a Survey of the Archives of Quetta." *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 1994.

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