

A Brief History of Balochistan

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The Baloch

The waves of migrations, beginning from as early as 3500 BC and continued till the end of fourteenth century AD in the aftermath of devastating economic, political and religious events in the Caspian region, brought the Baloch tribes in the present semi-desert land of Balochistan. Baloch traces their history to the ancient Parthian family of Aryan tribes living in the Caspian Sea region. It is estimated that the present population of Baloch, is more than 20 million. One amongst the few state-less nations in contemporary world, majority of the Baloch are inhabited in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. A large number of them are living in Diaspora mainly in Arabian Gulf and some European countries.

Historically, settlement in to present day Balochistan by Baloch tribes began as early as 1200 years before the birth of Christ. Baloch folk tales and legends points out that major shift of Baloch population from Caspian Sea region to the present semi-desert land of Balochistan was brought about in three different times and different places. The first migration was of the Baloch tribes residing in the northern areas of what is now called Kurdistan. These Baloch are called Narui (Nara denoting north in archaic Balochi) and they settled in the areas now called Seistan, Zabol in present-day Iran, Helmand valley in present Afghanistan and Chagai plains in present Pakistani province of Balochistan. The second migration took place a few hundred years after the first migration. In this batch, the migrating Baloch tribes of Mount Elburz in the south of Caspian Sea settled in what is now called central Balochistan in Pakistan. The third and most important of all is the migration of the remaining Baloch tribes said to be living in Aleppo who first settled in Kerman, then Makuran and finally to the plains of Sibi and Kachchi in the Pakistani province of Balochistan. This occurred during 12th century AD.

Baloch society is organized on similar pattern as the ancient Aryan tribes. Balochi, the language spoken by the Baloch is a member of Indo-Aryan languages. The main dialects of Balochi language are termed as Western (Mekurani), Rakhshani and Eastern Balochi. In central Balochistan many Baloch tribes of Brahui origin speak a dialect, which is believed to be a compound of Balochi and a Dravidian language. In the Pakistani province of Punjab most of the Baloch have adopted Sarakai which also belong to the Aryan family of languages. The Balochi is closely related with Kurdish, Persian and Sanskrit languages but appears to be more archaic than these languages

Balochistan

Balochistan literally meaning the country of Baloch is strategically situated at the eastern flank of the Middle East, linking Central Asian States with Indian subcontinent and Indian Ocean. Presently the three parts of Balochistan are under the sovereignty of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Being one of the ancient inhabited lands with a 10000 years history of civilization, it is a land of contrast. Much of its landmass of 695,380 square km is a high barren plateau 1,000 to 1,500 meters (3,000 to 5,000 feet)

above sea level, enclosed by various mountain ranges; it has desert lands stretching hundreds of miles. In the proximity of a coastline of more than 1500 km in the south, lies one of the semi-deserts of Makuran, the ancient Gedrosia that nearly defeated Alexander the Great by thirst and hunger when he marched through it on his way back to Mesopotamia. In the west, the great Iranian salt desert, the Dasht-e Luth separates Balochistan from Persia proper. There is scanty rainfall, which ranges between 3 to 12 inches annually. Balochistan has hottest places where temperature shoots up to over 120 °F, as well as coldest towns where mercury falls down much below freezing point. In between the cheerless mountains and dry and wide deserts are beautiful fertile valleys. Wherever water is available the fertile fields produce various types of agricultural products like wheat, barley, rice, potato, sugar beet, and cotton. Dates, and various other fruits, flowers and medicinal plants are among the country's agricultural products. Beside the large natural gas reserves, which are providing almost all the gas requirements of Pakistan, it has also unexplored rich mineral resources of copper, aluminum, lead, chromium, iron and gold.

The archeological explorations include this land as one of the oldest inhabited areas of the earth. The area had commerce with the ancient civilizations of Babylon, India and Central Asia. It is presumed that the famous Indus civilization derived most of its material elements from Iran and beyond through the Baloch Borderland. There is a marked cultural similarity between ancient settlements in Balochistan and those of Indus valley civilization.

The archeological findings in different parts of central and northern Balochistan indicate that some 7 to 15 thousand years ago a fair number of people, familiar with agriculture and use of domesticated animals inhabited the region. The German and French excavations at Mehrgarh, Nausharo and Pirak in the Kachhi plain and Kech valley reveal a long cultural sequence from the Neolithic Period through the Iron Age. The sites indicate that development from villages to towns and then to camps, and from agriculture to migratory pastorals took place in ancient times. The people lived in clay-brick houses, and were familiar with stone ornaments and jewelry of precious seashells. The rising number of settlements from the beginning of settled life in the 6th millennium through the mid-third millennium BC witnesses the success of food production through farming and agriculture. The pattern is very similar during the later 3rd millennium during which the largest number of sites in southern Balochistan co-existed with the Indus Civilization. Enigmatically, after 1900/1800 BC, the Indus Civilization disintegrated into several regional cultural complexes some of which remain dormant till today. Inexplicably in the same period, the settlements and irrigation systems were abandoned and no human traces left in southeastern Balochistan.

Balochistan has been the meeting grounds of ancient civilizations and empires. The first recorded mass migration of a tribal people in the area is that of Aryans, which began after the disintegration of the Mesopotamian empires of Sumer and Akkad after the death of Emperor Hammurabi. Although some of the Achaemenian, Greek, Mauryan, Kushana, and Sassanian rulers and historians mention southern Balochistan in their records, nevertheless, significant archaeological finds that may correlate their presence are rare.

Various regions of Balochistan were known as Gedrosia, Drangia, Turan and Sajistan and Kermania Altera. The narration about these areas by Greek or other ancient historians are sketchy and no firm conclusion could be drawn about the inhabitants of these areas. The Greek historian Arian mentioned two distinct groups of people Ichthyophagi and Oreitai living in the region during Alexander's campaigns[1].

Balochistan changed hands frequently between the great empires of ancient epochs. Remaining the part of the Darius Empire in 5th century BC, it remained under Greek domination for some two decades. In 305 BC, Chandra Gupta defeated Alexander's successor Seleucus Nicator and the region came under the control of the Mauryan Empire. During Maurya reign Balochistan witnessed the incursions of white Huns. Another historical event of the era was the invasion of the Saka,

declaring the region as Sakastan, the country of the Saka, a name that has survived as the northwestern Balochistan being still called as Seistan. From 227 to 590 AD, Balochistan came under the Sassanians, with Ephthalite Turks controlling the central and northern areas. Later the area fell under the Sassanian Dynasty and remained under their control till the end of the 6th century[2]. Hindu rulers of Sindh also replaced the decaying Sassanians before the Arab conquests. Significant relics of Graeco-Bactrian rule and Buddhist settlements have been identified in northern and southern Balochistan.

Among the most important invasions of Balochistan was the Arab incursion in 7th century AD, bringing far reaching social, religious, economic and political changes in the region. In AD 644 an Arab army under the command of Hakam defeated the combined forces of Mekuran and Sindh. The Arabs established several fortified cities in southern Balochistan and during their rule, trade and commerce flourished in the area and the sea routes were extensively used for trade between Middle East and India. The period of Arab rule brought the religion of Islam in the area. The Baloch tribes gradually embraced Islam replacing their centuries old Zoroastrian religion. The Arab control of Balochistan lasted till 10th century.

The overthrowing of Sassanian yoke and lessening of the threats from Indian rulers enabled the Baloch tribes to establish their own semi-independent tribal confederacies, leading to the formation of a subsequent Baloch State. For the next seven centuries the region was under loose control of many dynasties of surrounding areas. Major parts of Balochistan were under Ghaznavi and Ghori rulers from Afghanistan, till the end of fifteenth century when the country fell into the hands of the Argons and subsequently the Mughuls. The defeat of Baloch forces at Khabis and Bumpur resulted in the complete victory of Ghaznavi dynasty over Balochistan. During most of the 12th century southern Balochistan was under the control of Seljuks, before the arrival of Mughuls. Towards the beginning of the 16th century the Portuguese captured several places along the Makuran coast.

The period from AD 1400 to 1948 can be distinguished for an era of declining grip of the surrounding powers on Balochistan and the rise of Baloch influence. The predominance of Baloch socio-political and cultural institutions is the characteristic of this period.

The early decades of the Baloch era was marked with the formation of loose tribal unions. One of the most important was the tribal union of Rind and Lashaar consisting of 40 bolok or tribes. Different Baloch tribes and tribal unions were linked economically through trade and agricultural and animal products. They interacted socially, cooperated politically and united militarily whenever faced with a common external threat. Bumpur, in the western Balochistan, Kech in the southern and Surab and later Kalat in central Balochistan were the center of Baloch power in the period of tribal unions of Baloch history. During this period Balochistan was not free of external threats or interventions but the combined strength of Baloch tribal unions were able to defend their territory against the Afghan or Persian invading forces on various occasions.

The Khanate: The Baloch Confederacy

During sixteenth century bonds between various tribes loosened due to internal feuds and constant infighting between various tribes. Subsequent period witnessed an era of anarchy and chaos throughout Baloch land. Such a state of affair continued till seventeenth century when in 1666 AD, Mir Ahmad, the leader of a Brahui tribal confederation founded the Ahmadzai Khanate of Kalat. The birth of Kalat State coincides with the decline and disintegration of Safavid, Mughul and Afghan Empires and the simultaneous rise of British colonial power in India. The Kalat State was the first and the last Baloch State headed by sovereign rulers, the Khan, who survived various attempts of different powers of the period to dominate the land till 1948.

At the peak of its power the Khanate of Kalat included the entire region of present day Pakistani

Balochistan, and most part of the Iranian and Afghani Balochistan. The Baloch landmass extended from Afghanistan's western district of Farah in the north to the Persian Gulf in the south. From west it stretches from the present Iranian province of Kerman and the Luth Desert to the Pakistani provinces of Punjab and Sindh in the east.

The Kalat State was the improved version of old tribal union prevailing in Balochistan. It did not bring any changes in the general tribal setup. The tribal alliance was broad-based, with tremendous powers allowed to tribal chiefs, who recognized the Khan as the paramount power and contributed revenue to him and a fixed contingent of armed men in time of war. Although the tribal chief was selected through the general consent of the clan headmen, the office of the Khan was hereditary, being a benevolent ruler of a loosely decentralized tribal confederacy. A council of advisors representing the major tribes and allied people assisted the Khan. The Khan was the head of the confederacy but he enjoyed no absolute power. The Council took major important decisions. The Khan had no standing army beyond a contingent of household servants and bodyguards. Militarily, every able-bodied Baloch was supposed to take-up arms in an emergency. The Khan was supplied with contingents of fighting men by the tribal heads according to their respective strength. The main sources of revenue of the State were the collection from port of Karachi and taxation from Bolan Pass. A nominal source of revenue was also from the Mekuran Coastal trade. Taxation on agricultural and affiliated products was fixed between one-tenth, one-third, and half of the produce depending upon distance and area concerned. The land was usually the property of the tribe with few exceptions. The land could be forfeited if the tribes failed to supply a specific number of men and material in times of war. The bureaucratic institutions were organized on the same pattern, as was vogue in the surrounding countries of the region during that period. The foreign policy of the Khanate was one of peaceful coexistence with all the neighboring states. The Khanate was a sort of buffer

between Persia, Afghanistan and Sindh or later the British India. Kalat State being the neighbors of powerful Persian Empire, the resurgent Afghanistan and powerful British Empire in India, the degree of sovereignty enjoyed by the Baloch State was not constant throughout. Khan Naseer Khan (1750-1795) in a bid to thwart the danger emanating from Persia extended nominal allegiance to Afghan ruler Ahmed Shah[3].

The fall of Baloch Confederacy

Baloch destinies changed drastically beginning from mid 19th century due to powerful historical happenings in Asia and Europe. In this period while Russia was pushing southward, the decayed Persian Empire was trying to gain its lost glories and England was struggling to consolidate its position in Europe and in colonized world. The Russian ambitions for warm waters, the resurgence of Persian nationalism and British efforts to ward off the Russian thrust southward were the factors causing collateral damages resulting in territorial division of Baloch land and subsequent destruction of the sovereign Baloch State. The French exploratory mission to Persia in 1807 for exploring the possibility of an overland invasion of India through Persia and Balochistan caused great alarm among British authorities in India. Appeasement of Persia to be neutral in the great game being played in central Asia, compelling Afghanistan to be a buffer between Russian and British areas of influences, were the causative factors of devastating Afghan wars and the extension of British proxy rule in Balochistan and its partition. From the military bases in Balochistan it was easier for Britain to secure the buffer status of Afghanistan and Iran vis-à-vis Russia and also to secure its communication links with Middle East and Europe.

After the Khanate of Kalat declined to be involved in foreign aggression against Afghanistan, occupation of Baloch State became necessary for England to safeguard the supply line for British invading army in Afghanistan. An English detachment attacked capital Kalat on 13 November 1839. Khan, Mir Mehrab Khan was killed in battle and a new Khan was appointed as nominal ruler of Baloch State with a British representative as the supreme authority, reducing Khan to mere vassals of British

Crown.

From 1839 onward the British had gradually consolidated their power in Balochistan through a series of wars and treaties imposed on Kalat State. These treaties gave the British the rights of safe passage through Kalat (1839), the right to stationing of troops (1854), the right to extend Indo-European telegraph line through Baloch Coast (1863) and various other agreements giving Britain some major economic and territorial concessions. The northern areas of Balochistan including Bolan Pass was leased out to Britain, which was later, named as British Balochistan. An important and consequential treaty was signed in 1876 between Khan, the tribal chiefs and British authorities in Delhi. Under the agreement, the Khan's authority was accepted over the region, but it was to be administered by the British in accordance with local customs.

The British occupation of Kalat was perhaps the greatest event in Baloch history. It weakened the authority of Khan, broke up the traditional system of governance giving extraordinary clouts to tribal chiefs and establishing a 'Shahi Jirga', a nominated council, having vast jurisdictional power, unprecedented in Baloch annals. After the fall of Kalat unto First World War, Baloch tribes fought unsuccessful battles against the mighty forces of British Empire. The Baloch resistance to British authority lasting nearly a century was acts of individual tribes and could not assume a form of a national struggle due to many factors. These including lack of communication between various tribes, superiority of enemy in all respects, lack of inspiration from the Khan, and lack of any political organization for channeling the resistance movement.

Partitioning Balochistan

Soon after the death of Khan, Naseer Khan, and later geo-strategic events that reduced Khanate to a subordinate position, the central control of Khanate on Baloch chieftains began to loosen. This coincided with Iranian encroachments on western Balochistan during the reign of Qajar King Nasir-al Din Shah (1848-1896). In 1849, an Iranian army defeated Baloch forces in Kerman and captured Bampur. The Iranian expansions increased after the extension of Indo-European telegraph line from Karachi to Gwadar and then up to Jask in western Balochistan in 1861. By the time of completion of that line in 1870, Iranian forces had advanced very far in Western Balochistan. It was the period when Britain was trying to neutralize Persia in order to prevent her with siding either with Napoleon or the Czar of Russia. To compensate the loss of Persian territory in the west to Ottoman Empire, Britain decided to grant a portion of Baloch land to Persia. In 1871, the British Government accepted an Iranian proposal and appointed Maj. General Goldsmid as Chief Commissioner of the joint Perso-Baloch Boundary Commission. In 1871 Persian and British Governments excluding the Khanate delegate from the final joint meeting that took the decision agreed upon a boundary line. This line dividing Western and Eastern Balochistan is called 'Goldsmid Line' forming the present international boundary between Pakistan and Iran. In 1893, a similar arbitrarily drawn line -The Durand Line- demarcating the Afghan and British Indian borders gave a large part of Baloch land in northern Baloch regions of Helmand and Nemroz into Afghan sovereignty.

Resisting Foreign Domination

The Baloch in Western Balochistan were in constant revolt against foreign domination of Persian dynasties. The revolt of Jask (1873), of Sarhad (1888), and the general uprising in 1889, resulted in the scorch earth policy to suppress Baloch rebellion by Iranian forces in 1889. A major uprising under Baloch chieftain Sardar Hussein Narui in 1896 prompted a joint Anglo-Persian expeditionary force to crush the rebellion. The rebellion was crushed after two years and Narui chief was arrested. With resultant weakening of Qajar dynasty in Iran after the death of Muzzafar-al Din Shah and the preoccupation of British authorities dealing with the Baloch uprisings in the Eastern Balochistan, the Baloch tribal chiefs in the west began consolidating their hold on their territories. In the beginning of twentieth century, Bahram Khan gained control of almost the entire central and southern region of

Western Balochistan ending the occupation of Iranian forces. In 1916, the British recognized him as the effective ruler of Western Balochistan. His nephew, Mir Dost Mohamed succeeded Mir Bahram Khan. Mir Dost Mohamed's attempts to consolidate his power coincided with the rise to power in Persia of Reza Khan in 1921. In 1928 an Iranian force began operation against Mir Dost Mohamed. The skirmishes continued for seven months and ended in the victory of Iranian forces over Baloch and eventual surrender of Mir Dost Mohamed, thereby Western Balochistan was finally annexed with Persian Empire.

Accession to Pakistan

Pakistan, a state which was created in 1947, has its ideological, theoretical and political foundation on the premises of the existence of a Muslim nation in the sub-continent distinct from other inhabitants of the country and as such they are entitled to achieve a sovereign status by carving out a new country putting together the areas of northern India and East Bengal as a Muslim country governed by Muslims. This fallacious political and ideological slogan was coined by the British rulers in India to divide the sub-continent and to have a foothold in the newfound country as a counter measure to rising Soviet Communist influence in the East. Balochistan, which was a sovereign and independent state, was amalgamated into the new state under the British new scheme of territorial changes in the sub-continent in the wake of partition. Firstly a considerable portion of Baloch land was merged with Pakistan under the pretext of a controversial referendum in June 1947 and then the state of Kalat was coerced to join the new state in March 1948.

The British authorities in India did always consider Balochistan as an independent and sovereign entity and never as part of the Indian subcontinent.[4] The 1854 and 1876 treaties between British government and the Khan of Kalat duly recognized Balochistan as a sovereign country outside India. In the partition plan of 3rd June 1947, both Pakistan and the British had accepted Kalat State's sovereignty. After the British withdrawal plan for India was announced the Viceroy of India entrusted the responsibility of deciding whether British Balochistan should join Pakistan, to the members of Shahi Jirga and members of Quetta Municipality. This decision was in contravention of all international laws, as the area called British Balochistan was leased out to British India by a treaty agreed upon by the sovereign Kalat State and Britain. And after British withdrawal, the area should have been handed over to Kalat State. On the objection of Khan of Kalat, the British agreed that the question of the sovereignty over the leased areas would be discussed between the representatives of Pakistan and Kalat. But with the overt assistance of British Assistant to Governor General in British Balochistan, a controversial and much manipulated referendum was held in Quetta in 29th of June 1947. It was announced that the British Balochistan has opted to join Pakistan[5].

On 4th August 1947, a tripartite agreement was signed between Pakistan, the British and Balochistan called 'The Standstill Agreement' in which the sovereign status of Balochistan was accepted. The article I of this agreement stated that: 'The Government of Pakistan recognizes the status of Kalat as a free and independent state which has bilateral relations with the British Government, and whose rank and position is different from that of other Indian states'.

The Khan declared Balochistan independent on 12th August 1947, two days before the independence of Pakistan. The Khan affirmed his intention to build Balochistan as a prosperous sovereign country in which Baloch could retain their identity and live in accordance with their traditions. It will establish relations through treaties of friendship with neighboring states of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan as well as with India and outside world. Soon after the independence elections were held in Balochistan bi-cameral legislature and a period of tranquility and peace ensured in the country.

In the mean time Pakistan began to pressurize the newly independent Kalat State to join Pakistan and an uneasy calm appeared in relations between Kalat and Pakistan. Talks between Pakistan and Kalat dragged on for fairly a long time. Pakistan continued to harass the Khan and Baloch State

machinery on various pretexts. Pakistan was engaged in conspiracies and underhand tactics to compel the Khan to join Pakistan. On 26th March 1948 Pakistan army was ordered to move into Baloch coastal region of Pasni, Jiwani, and Turbat. This was the first act of aggression prior to the march on Capital Kalat by Pakistani military detachment on 1st April 1948. The Khan capitulated and on 27th March and it was announced in Pakistani capital that Khan of Kalat has agreed to merge his State with Pakistan. Under the constitution of Kalat, the Khan was not authorized to take such a basic decision. The Balochistan assembly had already rejected any suggestion of forfeiting the independence of Balochistan on any pretext.

The forceful merger of Kalat State with Pakistan ended three hundred years of independent and semi-independent Baloch State from the map of the world. This was one of the epoch-making events in the history of the Baloch people and their country. The sovereign Baloch State after British withdrawal from India lasted only 227 days. The murder of Baloch State sent shock waves throughout Baloch world. A short-lived rebellion by the younger brother of the Khan was brutally crushed by Pakistan army and the leader of the uprising Prince Abdul Karim was imprisoned.

Baloch have never reconciled with the idea of their country being incorporated in the religious fundamentalist state of Pakistan. Since the merger of Kalat State into Pakistan, the Pakistani authorities have been treating Balochistan as an occupied land excluding Baloch people from all structures of state establishment. They are compelled to accept an alien language of northern India as the national language. The Baloch have been economically excluded causing majority of Baloch people to live below poverty line. The natural resources of the land are being exploited on an unprecedented scale. Several military operations to quell the Baloch national uprisings since the merger have widened the gulf between Pakistan and Baloch people. In the Iranian controlled part of Balochistan, Baloch are rapidly losing their identity. Previously Baloch dominated regions of Bandar Abbas, part of Kerman, Seistan and Zabol are the most affected areas of the assimilation efforts of Persian State. Now in all these areas Baloch are in minority, even the capital city of Zahidan does not look like a Baloch city. Baloch in Iran are completely excluded in the structures of political, social and economic powers of the country. Dissemination of Balochi culture and language is a declared act of treason against the Persian State and is dealt with brutal measures. Many army garrisons are permanently stationed in Baloch areas, Balochistan presenting a picture of army zone. Baloch areas in Pakistan are one of the federating units comprising Pakistan and named as the province of Balochistan with Quetta as the capital city. In Iran some of the Baloch areas such as western Makuran, Sarhad and Seistan were named as province of Seistan and Balochistan with Zahidan as the capital city. In Afghanistan the Baloch are concentrated in the southwestern districts of Nemroz, Farah and Helmand. In these three host countries Baloch people have been resisting the subjugating maneuvers of these countries from time to time with political and armed campaigns but never been succeeded. The factors for their failure to gain national independence included the division of Baloch land, the international power politics of Soviet Bloc and West and internal complexities of Baloch society and politics. Various Baloch political organizations presently striving for the right of self-determination for the Baloch nation have a united independent Balochistan as the ultimate aim of their political struggle.

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