



RESEARCH PAPER

Nineteenth Century Libertarian and Enlightened Social and Cultural Organization of Baloch Tribes of Dera Ghazi Khan

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ABSTRACT

In this article, it has been discussed that at the beginning of the nineteenth century in sub-continent, when the central government had almost lost all his authority and there was chaos in the country, in Dera Ghazi Khan, the Baloch tribes in their tribal organization had at that time maintained their social and cultural cohesiveness. The Baloch tribal society, even at that time which is generally considered as medieval period, was based on enlightened values. It had in its social organization, established enlightened and liberal cultural traits like egalitarianism and religious toleration, respect for women and children, justice in its social organization even in that times of medieval period of that region. So in this context, in this article it has been discussed that the modern values of individual rights, egalitarianism, liberty, enlightenment, toleration, respect for women and rule of law were present at that time in Baloch tribal society.

Introduction

Women Dera Ghazi Khan District is located in south-west Punjab. Its northern boundary touches to Dera Ismail Khan District. In the west, there is Balochistan. In the eastern side, the River Indus is natural boundary between Dera Ghazi Khan District and other regions of Punjab. While in the southern side, the Rajanpur District is located which was part of Dera Ghazi Khan District before 1981.

On the basis of its physiographic features, Dera Ghazi Khan District can be divided into three distinct regions. The western part of the district is mountainous region of Sulaiman Range which extends from the Gomal River to southward. The highest peak of the range in the district is Ek Bhai, which is 7,462 feet high. Sulaiman range separates Balochistan from the Punjab. The eastern part of the

district is plain area and consists of the west bank of the Indus River. The middle region of the district which lies between these two areas is generally level but sometimes rolling in sandy waves. It is arid and is known as *daman*.

In nineteenth century, the total area of the district was almost 1,436,796 acres. At that time, the Baloch tribes form 30% of the total population of the district, but they owned 66% of the land. (Fryer, 1876, p. 4). They were exclusively settled in mountains region, in majority in *daman* (plains) and mixed with other *quoms* in *bait* (river bank areas). At that time, the Baloch tribes form the most powerful population inhabited in Dera Ghazi Khan District. These tribes were from south to north, Mazari, Gurchani, Dreshak, Leghari, Khosa, Lund, Buzdar, Nutkani and Qaisrani. They were the major tribes of the district and had maintained their tribal cohesiveness and solidarity. There were some other Baloch tribes like Gurmanis, Ahmadanis, Chandias, Pitafis who had lost their tribal organization in the district.

The Baloch social organization of nineteenth century Dera Ghazi Khan was tribal like other adjacent tribes of Balochistan (Thorburn, 1886, p. 22). In Baloch tribal organization, the tribe was known as *tuman* and was presided over by a chief known as *tumandar*. It was hereditary post and was always held by a member of one family to one clan of the tribe. Each *tuman* was divided into several clans which were known as *parah* (section) which was lead by *Mukaddim*. These sections were again divided into sub-sections known as *phalli* (branch). The head of the *phalli* was presided over by *Wadera* (Dames, 1904, p. 3). In some cases the clans which formed the part of the *tuman* were not necessarily of the same blood. Like *Hadiani* section in Leghari *tuman*, Durkani and Lashari sections in Gurchani *tuman* and the *Ghulamani* section in Buzdar tribe. (Dames, 1904, p.6) These clans which became part of the tribe, had lost their original tribe because of either internal quarrels had been defeated and broken up or discontent with the chief was reason to leave the *tuman* (Dames, 1904, p. 5). As a rule, the nucleus of the *tuman* was of those clans which were of same blood. These clans were largely independent in their affairs not so obedient to the *tumandars* like the other clans of the same blood. The Baloch tribal organization of nineteenth century was democratic. The authority of the *tumandars* (tribal chiefs) was constrained by the authority of the *Mukaddams* (segmentary section chiefs). The authority of the latter was also constrained by *Wadera* (the elder) of the sections whom they represent. The *tumandars*, *Mukaddams*, *Wadera* and followers were bound by the ideology of reciprocal obligation (Fryer, 1876, p. 61). Fryer, in late nineteenth century, in first settlement report of the District writing about the Baloch tribal organization and the Baloch *tumandar* mentioned that "He was chief judge and the leader in war. He cannot declare war or peace without the advice of his council, but when war is declared, he is charged with the conduct of it. Every member of a Tuman is bound to render military service to his Tumandar." (Fryer, 1876, p. 61).

In nineteenth century, about the Baloch tribal society, as a security measure, carrying a sword for all men of grown age with shield made of leather and

studded with silver or brass was part of Baloch tribal culture. A knife was fixed in the case of the sword. Many Baloch also had matchlocks but they usually did carry with them (Fryer, 1876, p. 62). Even in late nineteenth century, when with the establishment of colonial government, much had come under government control, writing about the Baloch tribal culture of Dera Ghazi Khan, Fryer mentioned that 'The Bilochis are robust and manly, but until comparatively recent years they looked upon fighting as their trade, and despised agriculture and the arts of peace.' (Fryer, 1876, p. 66). Lieutenant Pottinger for colonial purposes, travelled in early nineteenth century through Balochistan and Sindh. He in his travelling account gave a clear description about the Baloch tribal social organization and culture that:

The Kohistan is exclusively peopled by Belooches, who are not intermixed with any other classes....the forms of government and the common laws of the society are equally unknown and disregarded by these people, as they both depend solely on the caprice and temper of the heads of various tribes composing the population; but that distinction being hereditary, and the sons being bred up with the prejudices and views of their fathers, they naturally imbibe all their principles and habits, so that, in the course of time, the system which was at first the effect of change, assume something like an air of regularity, that passes down from one generation to another. Viewed in this light, we find that the Kohistan comprises a number of petty republics, in which every member of the community feels that he has a right to revenge his own wrongs, and give his vote on all points relating to the common good; in fact, there is a most perfect equality as to sentiments and actions, from the highest to the lowest. (Pottinger, 1816, pp, 313-314)

In moral characteristics, the nineteenth century Baloch were truthful, trustworthy, honest and hospitable. In hospitality even the poorest among them share whatever they had at the time of meal with the other. In that culture, the chiefs were very lavish in entertaining the guests. The Baloch coming to the chief's village for any of their job were fed from the house of the chiefs (The Punjab Government, 1898, p. 60). They were moderate in their habits. They were bestowed with great quality of endurance. They had capacity of sustaining long fatigue on very small food. Writing about the individual characteristics of a Baloch of that time, Thorburn mentioned that "They are ... unbigoted, truthful, simple minded, tractable, and owing unfaltering allegiance to their tribal chiefs. Despising labour and loving sport, they are bad husbandmen, but good riders. To own a mare is the ambition of every true Biluch. His dry climate makes him a grazier rather than a grower of corn." (Thorburn, 1886, p. 22).

Political Liberty

In nineteenth century, the Baloch tribes of Dera Ghazi Khan although had been part of different governments of the time but to some extent they maintained

their partial independence. From the beginning of this century, in Punjab, Sikh power arose with the decay of Delhi Empire. It had dominated large part of the Punjab till 1806 A. D. But up to 1818, the Sikh power could not reach to trans-Indus districts. So in this way, these tribes remained beyond the influence of Sikh administration. With the murder of Fatih Khan, an able and talented *Wazir* of Afghan monarchy, Ranjit Singh got opportunity to advance towards trans-Indus areas and got the control of *Derajat* region evacuated by the Afgan Governor. In this way, the Baloch tribes of the District which were previously under the influence of Afghan Governor now came under the authority of Sikh administration. Raja Ranjit Singh in a deal with Nawab of Bahawalpur gave the control of the District to Nawab of Bahawalpur state (The Punjab Government, 1898, p. 6). The tribes of Khosa, Leghari and Nutkani initially resisted the authority of Nawab of Bahawalpur but later on they were subdued by the Nawab. In 1827, the Nawab of Bahawalpur annexed the area of Harand-Dajal which was under the influence of Khan of Kalat. In this way the Baloch tribes of Tibbi Lund, Gurchani and Dreshak came under the authority of Sikh government through Nawab of Bahawalpur. In 1830, the Sikh government got the direct control of the district Dera Ghazi Khan and in this way the Baloch tribes went directly under the control of Sikh administration through the Governor of Multan. In 1832, Dewan Sawan Mal became the governor of Multan. He after coming into power proceed against the Mazari tribe which had up till now not accepted the authority of the Sikh government. Even after the establishment of British rule, the Baloch tribes residing in Sulaiman hills to some extent maintained their independence; they were partially under the colonial administration. Till the time of First Settlement in of the District (Fryer, 1876, p. 18). So in nineteenth century, Baloch tribes of the region tried to maintain their political independence.

Religious Tolerance

The Baloch tribes of Dera Ghazi Khan District in nineteenth century were Muslims of mostly Sunni sect. They in their religious approaches were tolerant, broadminded and liberal. They were not strict in observation of religious injunctions. They in their common life used to give less importance to prayer, fasting, alms or pilgrimage. About the Baloch race, Dames mentioned that "in religious matters they are free from fanaticism, sensible and tolerant, and willing to discuss opinions with an open mind." (Dames, 1904, p. 9). Writing about the religious approaches of the nineteenth century Baloch tribes of Dera Ghazi Khan, a colonial official mentioned that "A Biloch once on being asked why he was not keeping the Ramazan fast, naively replied that there was no necessity for him to observe the fast as his chief was keeping for him." (The Punjab Government, 1898, p. 60) About nineteenth century Dera Ghazi Khan, Frayer mentioned that "There are many small shrines in the district, and rag trees, *i.e.* trees for some reasons or the other come into veneration and get covered with rags, are very common." (Fryer, 1876, p. 56). So like other Muslims of that time, the nineteenth century

Baloch were also followers of *pirs*. They had faith on their *karamat* (miracles) (The Punjab Government, 1898, p. 90).

The Baloch of nineteenth century were also tolerant in their approaches to followers of other religions. Like one of the major shrines of the district at that time was shrine of *Sakhi Sarwar*. It was known as "Lakhdata of Western Punjab." This shrine was located in the foot hills of Sulaiman mountains in the area of Leghari tribe. Like all the Muslims of the district, the people of the Baloch tribes also gave him enormous respect. This shrine was not only visited by the Muslims but equally venerated by the Hindu pilgrims also (The Punjab Government, 1898, p. 52). One of the known *pirs* of that time of the District was Mian Shah Nawaz Serai of Haji Pur. He was *pir* of many members of the Khosa tribe of the District. "The males of the family never cut their hair, and never shave their moustaches. This has led to a story that the founder of the Kalhora (Serai) family was a disciple of Baba Nanak." (Fryer, 1876, p. 29).

The one value of nineteenth century Baloch tribal society of the region was to give protection to even the families of the followers of other religion residing in their area. A British officer (as cited by Gilmartin) writing in 1860s about the code of the Baloch society of area mentioned that:

Amongst the Baloch the good treatment of Hindoo traders and their families ... is a point of honour.' This was so important that when the Mazari chief visited the Bugti chief at sehaf (the Bugti seat in the hills), and heard rumors that he had violated Hindu women, he responded that the Bugti chief must have gone mad and should be sent away for treatment. (Gilmartin, 2004, P. 377)

Status of Women

In treatment of women, the Baloch were more well-mannered as compare to other Muslim races of the area. If there broke any unrest in the hills between the Baloch residing in the plains and the hills, they send their women to the areas without any hesitation for any economic need like collection of Fuller's earth or getting the leafs of dwarf palm (The Punjab Government, 1898, p. 60). In Baloch tribal society of that period, one value was to spare women and children even in war with the enemies. Like in their attack of Mari tribe to Gurchani tribe on the fort of Lalgah in which forty men were there at that time, they killed all the men present but spare women and children (Griffin & Massy, 1909, p. 362).

The other role of women in nineteenth century Baloch tribal society was to temporarily stop even the collusion between the hostile tribes with the intervention of women at that hostile moment. Writing about this custom of the Baloch tribal society, in his travelogue, Charlse Mason mentioned that "... it is customary for women and sayads to interpose, and to seize the matchlocks of the combatants, when hostilities invariably cease, and temporary arrangements are made. The women and sayads, indeed, frequently prevent collusion." (Mason, 1844, p. 421).

One prominent example of Baloch tribal society of Dera Ghazi Khan was that in tribal fight between the Khosa and Nutkani tribe in which the earlier tribe was supported by Leghari, Gurchani tribal chiefs. The later tribe was supported by Nawab of Bahawalpur. In this fight the Khosa became victorious. Nawab of Bahawalpur considering it humiliation, took strong action against the Khosa tribe. On his success, he got marriage with the daughters of the Khosa, Leghari and Gurchani tribe to establish peace (Griffin & Massy, 1909, p. 354).

In Baloch tribes of Dera Ghazi Khan there was no concept of enforce widowhood, unlike the practice of Muslim tribes of eastern Punjab. As Harikishan Kaul mentioned, "A Muhammadan Jat or Rajput, Sheikh of Arabian descent or a Moghal, in the eastern Punjab will, for instance, not think of marrying a widow." (Kaul, 1912, p. 233). But in Baloch tribal society of nineteenth century the family system was so strong and intact. In case of death of husband, to give protection to the widow and the family, it was considered a great value to get married to the widow. One prominent example of this value was that Nawab Bahram Khan Mazari, the most venerated *tumandar* of his tribe and the region at that time, who was also elected as president of Punjab Chiefs Association and Punjab Legislative Council, got married to the widow of his brother Sobhdar Khan. (Griffin & Massy, 1909, p. 339). At that time even in some Baloch tribes of Dera Ghazi Khan, like, Nutkani tribe, they used to give right to adult woman to arrange her own marriage. In this context, they follow *sharia*.

The general practice of the Muslims of the western Punjab in nineteenth century regarding divorce was that a wife might be divorced for infidelity, disobedience, blasphemy or without assigned cause (Kaul, 1912, p. 292). Unlike this practice of the Muslims of western Punjab, in Baloch tribes of Dera Ghazi Khan, divorce was unknown. They had cherished the tradition of indissolubility of marriage. Because of the economic and social nature of Baloch organization, it was not possible for Baloch women to maintain *pardah* (seclusion). However, the women of chief families considered it necessary to remain isolate from the male other than their family members. These women of chief families had considerable influence over their men (Fryer, 1876, p. 63).

On the other hand in their treatment of women, deception was severely punished. A woman found guilty in adultery was severely punished and was made to hang herself. The Baloch living in the hill area and the members of Gurchani tribe in *daman* area used to allow a man to get married an unmarried girl whom he had enticed. In its lieu he would have to give another girl or land to the relatives of his wife. Up till 20th century, divorce was unknown in the Baloch tribal society of Dera Ghazi Khan (The Punjab Government, 1898, p. 42). In their social life, the women of common Baloch families due to their responsibilities did not observe *purda* or seclusion. Only the women of Baloch chief families because of their socio-economic position could maintain *purda* (seclusion) (The Punjab Government, 1898, p. 60).

Justice System

In nineteenth century, to be a just was a high value of Baloch tribal organization of Dera Ghazi Khan. Writing about the justice system of Kalat state, Pottinger in his travelogue about the justice system of Baloch tribes mentioned that:

Petty quarrels, theft, and, in short, disputed points of every description, among the inhabitants of a Kheil or society, are adjusted by the Sirdar; and, from him, the parties may appeal to the chief of the tribe to which the Kheil appertains. Should it be of considerable importance, a third appeal lies to the Khan at Kelat; but, as he seldom finds it necessary to reverse the first sentence, and both time and trouble are required to obtain a hearing, very few think it advise able to make the attempt. It is this voluntary feeling that throws a great part of the jurisprudence of the country into the hands of Sirdars and chiefs.... (Pottinger, 1816, p. 293)

So as is mentioned by Pottinger in his account, in Baloch tribal organization, the quality of being for the tribal chief was a mandatory trait. In this context, a big name was earned by Sardar Imam Bakhsh Khan Mazari *Tumandar* of the Mazari tribe. A colonial official writing about the justice system in Mazari tribe established by the Mazari *tumandar* was mentioned in these words that:

He never allowed self-interest, or partisanship stand in the way of justice; and the general recognition of his integrity gave him enormous influence, not only with Baluches generally, but among all classes of the population, Musalman and Hindu.... Crime was severely dealt with, and good order enforced; his word being law to his people, who had entire faith in his justice. (Griffin & Massy, 1909, p. 338)

The next *tumandar* of Mazari tribe, Nawab Bahram Khan Mazari, who had won a respectable place in British administration of the Punjab and was once elected as president of Punjab Chiefs Association, was also venerated by his quality of being just (Singh, 1911, p.80). A Colonial administrator wrote about him that "Bahram Khan has won a prestige in his *Tuman* and in the neighbouring districts in no degree inferior to that which his father enjoyed. His services are sought outside his *Tuman* and in other districts in the settlement of tribal and intertribal disputes; the Jacobabad authorities regularly invite him to attend their *jirgas* twice a year." (Singh, 1911, p. 339).

Conclusion

In sub-continent, during nineteenth century, the Mughal rule was crumbling. The central government had almost lost its control over different regions. This was a period of emergence of different fiefdoms in Sub-continent. In this period, the Colonial forces started getting control of the sub-continent on the name of enlightenment through the philosophy of 'White man's burden'. They presented them as torch bearer of the new liberal and enlightened philosophies.

They were presenting the local people as barbarians. This article throws light that before the advent of British rule in India, the local people even in this tribal society were not as they were presented by the colonial rulers. They even at that time were socially and culturally enlightened and liberal in their values.

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