

Balochistan through Ages: Historical and Cultural Journey from Palaeolithic Age to Present Times

History

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Abstract

The present piece of work is actually a brief survey of the history of Balochistan and has been endeavored that the historical and cultural developments in Balochistan throughout the ages have been surmised in few pages. The topic under discussion is too vast that is why it has been taken care of that no major cultural or historical development would be escaped rather only a brief discussion about all important developments has been discussed. Balochistan is one of the most important regions in world in general and in South Asia particular because of its rich cultural heritage. The most important feature of this part of the South Asia is that it has always been occupied by human beings starting from last Ice Age to Contemporary period. The material/date in the present work has been used is multifaceted i.e. archaeological, literary and historical. The period of present work starts from Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) to emergence of Pakistan and creation of province of Balochistan after dissolution of one unit.

Key words: Paleolithic, Neolithic, Protohistory, Prehistory, Cultural transition, Archeological sites of Northern, Southern and Central Balochistan, Medieval Balochistan, British Raj.

Introduction

Human history on this planet spreads over millions of years and throughout the epoch primary issues for archaeologists and historians have been to investigate the precise chronology of cultural evolution. Different schools of thought trace a different route to the human history and its cultural evolution but so far no vision has earned an enough consensus among scholars to dominate the rest. There are two significant and commonly agreed schools of thought who gave their own doctrines for the birth and evolution of human

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cultures and these are: diffusionists and non-diffusionists (Fagan 1991). The first school believes that human culture born at one place and embarked upon the journey of evolution from the same place and spread its wing through the ages to rest of the world. The second school (non-diffusionist) is of opinion that human culture has evolved separately and this is the reason that we find so much diversity in cultures and civilizations. This school holds that all human beings faced the similar challenges posed by nature but different group of individuals have responded in their own way to these common challenges and hence found different means for the solution of similar problems. Diffusionism was very much popular during the early and first half of twentieth century but with the improvement in archaeology as scientific discipline and discovery of new archaeological sites around the globe, there emerged a new school and it would find roots for civilizations in its local geographical areas and study the cultural changes taking place in the same vicinity over long period of time. This regional evolution of cultures and civilizations opened new perspectives of research for studying geological, cultural, technological, spiritual and historical development of a particular culture or civilization and its causes of rise and decline.

South Asia has been one of the attractive places for conquerors, traders, pilgrims and scholars throughout history but it got much attention during colonial and post-colonial period because it provided a very diverse culture and history to the scholars. It was during colonial period when Indus Valley was discovered and soon its cultural evolution became a debate among scholars. At early times, Indus Valley Civilization was assigned to cultural diffusionists' school but in the latter times by the help of more advance research, it was discovered that Indus Civilization has its own roots. The discovery of Mehrgarh cultural site by the French Archaeological Mission (1974-86) changed the whole hypothesis of diffusionists school and it provided the whole sequence of cultural evolution from Neolithic to Mature civilization of Indus Valley as regional process instead of migration (either ideas or population) from Near East. As the studies widened its scope, it was further found that cultural activities were more remote and these cultural activities were scattered throughout northern South Asia but since the present study is focused on Balochistan so here just a historical overview of Balochistan is given.

Balochistan has gone through a long history, starting from Jurassic period until present. There are fossil evidences found in the Suleiman Ranges where fossils of plants and animals suggest the presence of Jurassic period. "Balochi Theorem" was established by finding huge skeletons of animals in the Dera Bugti region of Balochistan. The cultural activities in Balochistan started during the Paleolithic (Old Stone Age 35000-1000) period and there are evidences of such cultural activities being practiced in the several settlements

in Balochistan. In Loralai region at Musakhel district of North-eastern Balochistan, the Department of Archaeology under the supervision of Dr. F.D Kakar has discovered nine caves which have a number of engravings and fresco paintings, depicted at the adornments while using natural pigments from earth. These paintings and engravings depict several elements, different zoomorphic figures in a two-dimensional method and these depictions have been found in close similarity with cave art of Altamira paintings of Spain, which are dated 22000 PB to 12000 BP (Qazi 1998). During Old Stone Age, the cultural activities were also in practice at different regions of Balochistan including Kot Mondai, Marri areas of Eastern Balochistan, Khokar Kore, Lesbella region in the Southern Balochistan and rock-shelters and cave paintings in the Zhob district and Suleiman ranges in the North-eastern Balochistan have been discovered and documented as Paleolithic settlements (Kenoyer 1998). The evidence for next cultural period i.e. Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) is very much limited and the evidence for this period is found only in Zhob district, where engravings of Magdalenian people were found in rock-shelter (Kenoyer 1998). The reason for limited settlements of this period can be the lack of proper survey, as there are mighty mountains in Balochistan and there have been limited surveys, mostly carried out by the foreign missions. If extensive and systematic surveys are carried out then there are bright chances that several other sites of Mesolithic period can be discovered.

The next cultural sequence is emergence of Neolithic (New Stone Age) period and this period is famous for a cultural change from hunting-gatherer society to sedentary and semi-sedentary cultures. This period saw the domestication of animals and plants along with birth of pottery at a later stage. Pottery at first stage was basket marked, then came handmade and at the final stage, it became wheel thrown with zoomorphic, geometrical and other symbolic motives. Stone was still in use and it was used as a more polished and sophisticated tools. Neolithic culture in Balochistan emerged in the Kahchi plain and so far it is the oldest Neolithic culture of South Asia (Kenoyer 1998). The chronology of this period goes back to circa 7000 BCE to 5500 BCE (C.Jarrige 1995) and there are cultural sites in Mehrgarh (Kahchi/Bolan) and Kili Gul Muhammad (Quetta Valley). These sites have a number of cultural phases. Water A. Fairservis have excavated Kili Gul Muhammad partially, on the other hand, Mehrgarh have been excavated thoroughly and its cultural sequences, chronology and cultural traditions have been studied and well documented by the French Archaeological Mission headed by J.F Jarrige who has worked on the site from 1974 to 1986 and then again resumed its work from 1997 to 2003. The mission has published its reports in 1995 and it has revealed that there was a complete cultural sequences i.e. Neolithic and Chalcolithic and emergence of mature Indus culture and its decline, with VIII

stages starting from c 7000 BCE to 1500 BCE (C. J. Jarrige 1995). The Neolithic/Chalcolithic sites are scattered in number of sites throughout Balochistan including Mehrgarh, Nushero (Kahchi), K.G Muhammad, Damb Sadat, Kechi Beg, Faiz Muhammad (Quetta Valley), Rana Ghundai, Sur Jangal (Loralai Valley), Mughal Ghundai, Periano Ghundai (Zhob Valley), Anjira, Tagua, Siah Damb (Khuzdar region), Nal, Kuli, Mahe (Lesbella region) and Miri Kalat, Shahi Tomp, Sutkagai Doar and Sutkagai Koh (Kech Region) (Shaffer 1978).

Mature Harappan phase (2600-1900 BCE) or Bronze Age is also found in Balochistan at a number of places and these can be found in Nal, Kuli, Mahe (Lesbella region) and Quetta Valley, Mehrgarh, Nausharo (Jarrige 1993). This period has seen the development of number of cultural and advanced technological growth and there was a long distance trade conducted by the people of Indus Valley and one finds these sites of Balochistan, mostly on the trade routes towards Helmand (Central Asian regions) and Iranian Plateau (Middle Eastern region) (Kenoyer 1998). Bronze Age came to an end in the second millennium BCE over a long period of time spreading from 1900 BCE to 1300 BCE and there are number of environmental causes for its decline rather than foreign attacks as new research reveals (Kenoyer 1998). During this period of late Harappan or Bronze Age, the cultural activities in Balochistan were in practice in Pirak but there was no more long distance trade, few advanced techniques of art and crafts were practiced, exotic materials import declined and this period had clear signs of Localization of Culture or Localization Era (Kenoyer, 1998).

Historic period in Balochistan emerged when for the first time, the name of a part of Balochistan appeared in Avesta, "the Vara Pishin-anha" and it is generally agreed that its present day "Pishin Valley" which is near Quetta and similarly "Shahnama" of Ferdosi has the account which deals with conquest of Makran by Kai Khusru (Cyrus) but Achaemenians empire reached its zenith with the Darius Hystaspes's conquest of entire Gedrosia (Balochistan 1908). The foreign accounts of Balochistan appear more clearly and specifically in Greek's writings when Alexander the Great was retreating from Sub-continent. The forces of Alexander were divided into three groups when they were crossing Balochistan and Alexander himself was leading that group which crossed Les Bella and Makran, while second division of his army was led by "Crateros" who passed *Mula Pass* in Kalat and third part of this army was led by Greek general "Neachus" and this division of army was travelling along the coastal belt of Balochistan (Balochistan 1908). After Alexander retreat, Balochistan fell into the hands of Greco-Bactrian rulers of Afghanistan and Punjab and then appeared next rulers called Sakas (Scythians) who ruled from 130 to 140 BCE and its same time when Sakas's were ruling

northern sub-continent (Axmann 2008) (Encyclopedia Britanica 1974). The rule of Sassanians in Balochistan came with Nausherwan (529-577 AD) who conquered present day Balochistan and Persian rule resumed after a long period of time when Achaemenians rule in Balochistan was suspended by Alexander the Great defeat to Persians (Balochistan 1908) (Axmann 2008: 18).

The dawn of Muslim rule in Balochistan begin with the rise of Islam and Islam reached coastal areas and Makran during Caliphate Hazrat Usman period and Arab forces were planning to attack Kirman in 23 AH under the leadership of Suhail bin Adhi who was joined by Abdulah bin Utbha and their joint forces were able to defeat people of Kirman and Makran after tough battles because local people were receiving help from Al Qufs (Al-Tabari 1967). The Arab expansion in Balochistan halted for period and then it resumed during Umayyad Period as the entire region under Muslim rule came in 711-12 AD, when Muhammad bin Qasim defeated and replaced Brahman ruler of Sindh called Raja Dahair of Chach family and this established Umayyad and Abbasids rule that constantly faced guerilla uprisings (Encyclopedia Britanica 1974). The rule in Balochistan, early and during Sultanate period was a time of frequent political and ruler's changing, as this area was under constant attack of Mongols and Sultans of Delhi were unable to give a crashing defeat to Mongols. (Encyclopedia Britanica 1974) (Balochistan 1908).

Balochi folk literature depicts an oral tradition of Baloch ruler of 15th century known as Mir Chakar Rind and his war with Mir Ghuram Lashari. The Rind-Lashar rulers had established their own principalities, as Rind founded the principality of Sibi with its capital at Fatehpur and capital of Lashar principality was at Gandhawa (Baloch 1974) (Encyclopedia Britanica 1974). During this period, Balochistan was politically influenced by Herat and Delhi rulers and in "30 years epic war" (one of the most celebrated Balochi folk history event) which was fought between Rind and Lasher, the governor of north-eastern Balochistan called Mir Zunnun Beg, who was an appointee of Sultan Hussain Mirza of Herat, played key role and this war shattered the Baloch rule and forced Rind rulers to migrate to present-day Punjab and Lashars to Sindh (Encyclopedia Britanica 1974) (Naseer 1982). The next historical dynasty in Balochistan came with Ahmadzai rulers commonly called as Khanate of Kalat. The Khanate emerged during the 17th century AD and their power grew with the passage of time. In the beginning, the Khanate of Kalat was dependent, politically and militarily, upon either Nadir Shah Afshar or Mughal rulers but with the decline of Mughals, the Khanate of Kalat gained more power and gradually become independent of external influence and the name "Ahmadzai" came with the ruler Mir Ahmed who ruled from 1666-7 to 1694 CE, hence he is considered to be the founding father of Khanate of Kalat

(Axmann 2008). The Ahmadzai rule of Kalat remained throughout the period up to decolonization of Subcontinent. The Ahmadzai rule is a story of conquests, consolidation and revolts. This period is also punctuated with frequent interference of British Raj. The golden age of Khanate is considered to be of Mir Nasir Khan (1750 to 1793) and he is considered to be a hero of Ahmadzai history because of his conquests, well organized administration and religious attitude towards Islam (Axmann 2008) (Balochistan 1908).

The importance of Balochistan as an administrative unit for British came in limelight in 1800s when there was global change in politics. As there were reports that French influence in Iran was becoming threat to British India along with an expected expansion of Czarist Russia in Afghanistan and this was perceived as serious threat by Britishers and this led British government to adopt a policy of friendly government in Iran and Afghanistan along with a permanent station of British troops in Balochistan so that any expansionist policy of Czarist Russia can be checked (Axmann 2008). This British policy gave them footsteps in Balochistan and it bought two Anglo-Afghan Wars. The first Anglo-Afghan War broke out in 1839 and there were continuous interruptions on the line of military communication of British troops by the local attacks. At the end of War, British government was force to seriously think to adopt a policy of safe communication line from Quetta to Kandahar and this task was assigned to one of the most celebrated British official called Sir Robert Sandeman and his policy is called "Sandeman Policy". This policy was based upon a bilateral interest of British Raj and Khanate of Kalat. British government had recognized the internal sovereignty of Khanate and Khanate had agreed to provide arms and men if need by British Raj, besides Sandeman also created a levies system and all tribes were given share in it and safety of line of communication was made mandatory to all tribes (Axmann 2008) (Balochistan 1908).

The second Anglo-Afghan War (1878) proved to be the success story of Sandeman Policy as troops were moving safely from Quetta to Kandahar and a line of communication was opened between Pishin and Dera Ghazi Khan. During Anglo-Afghan War II, all was not going well in Balochistan as there happened few small level skirmishes took place and this gave British government a chance to increase its direct rule in Balochistan by concluding *The Treaty of Gnadamak* in 1879 with Mir Yakub Khan and by virtue of this treaty, Sibi, Harnai, Thal Chotali and Pishin districts were taken over by British Raj while in return Yakub Khan was supposed to be given the surplus revenue generated from these districts (Balochistan 1908).

After 1882, the administration of Balochistan was divided into two parts i.e. Khanate of Kalat and British Balochistan. Khanate was comprised of Jhalawan, Sarawan, Makran and Les Bella while remaining Balochistan was

part of British Balochistan including Quetta city. Khanate of Kalat was free internally for its administration but it had to provide a force to British government in case of war or if British government had demanded. This system of administration (Khanate of Kalat and British Balochistan) remained up to decolonization of India and after independence in 1947 both administrative units were merged into Pakistan. After the desolation of One Unit System in 1970, Balochistan became the fourth province of Pakistan.

Conclusion

The cultural heritage of Balochistan is the earliest in South Asia as it provides the evidences of the first settlement in this part of the world. This settlement emerged in the Kahchi/Bolan area at the archaeological site of Mehrgarh. The collaborated dating of the site proves it that this area was occupied around c.7000 BEC and it makes this site contemporary to the Near Eastern sites of Jericho, Catal Huyuk and Abu Hureya. The historical development in Balochistan has provided it a range of cultural diversity which adds in to the mosaic of cultural heritage of the province. The geographical location of the Balochistan has been one of the main reasons for attraction of people hovering around and settling down in this place. The historical march of the area makes it clear that Balochistan has witnessed the birth of cultures i.e. Paleolithic, Neolithic, Bronze cultures grew here during prehistoric and protohistoric periods on one hand and the historic period has witnessed emergence of several indigenous and foreign cultures, states and religions on the other hand. Balochistan has been the arena of cultures, economies and ideologies throughout its history. The irony has been that Balochistan's vast history has not been studied in its context rather it has always been studied as border area between Iranian Plateau and South Asia. This is one of the main reasons that the history of Balochistan and its long, diverse culture has always been associated either with Persia or Indus Valley civilization rather than studying it independently. The present piece of research has actually been intended to shed light on the history of Balochistan in a very brief manner as otherwise the long history of Balochistan requires number of volumes of books rather than few pages only. One hopes that the cultural heritage of this region will get its due share in the academic works of eminent scholars at national and international level.

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