

## Mir Gul Khan Naseer: An Evaluation of his Contributions to the Baloch Cause

History

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### Abstract

*The resistance literature is considered as an important factor in the development of political consciousness among subjugated people. This phenomenon exhibited not only the resentment and the foiling of Mir Gul Khan Naseer (Hereafter Gul Khan), and other Baloch critics against colonialism but also identified social and economic problems of Balochistan. Education for boys and girls, end of the sardari system, political and economic reforms were some of its most frequently emphasized subjects. Therefore, Balochi resistance literature generally and Naseer's lyrics against the authorities specially merit evaluation. Even a cursory glance at the history of Balochi literature, manifests the pride and dignity that Baloch poets and epic writers have shown for their heroes. This literature also demonstrates anger and resentment against the intruders and ridicule alongside traitors. Notwithstanding historical accuracy, the Baloch self-perception as the guardian of noble values is perpetuated in their literature. They trace their origin from Arabia and show their presence in almost every great battle, which was fought for the glory of Islam or for the veneration of Baloch culture. Gul Khan, the legend under special study has also extensively written on these features. In the coming pages we will attempt to appraise Naseer's contributions in this respect particularly through his lyrics.*

**Key Words:** Baloch, Balochistan, British, Gul Khan Naseer,

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## **Introduction**

Although Gul Khan had started writing during his school day in Urdu at a tender age of 8 and continued it through his study days at Lahore which was at that time the hub of Muslim press, catering the needs of the Muslims of Balochistan particularly. After graduating from the University of the Punjab, he returned to Kalat and joined the Kalat State National Party (KSNP), which was the successor to the now-defunct Anjuman-i-Watan. The area of British Balochistan was under direct British rule while the Balochistan States were indirectly controlled by the British through the Tribal Chiefs (Sardars), whom they had subscribed. In this situation the rulers of Balochistan were in no hurry to make the state progress and better the lives of its inhabitants. Because of these conditions, Naseer stepped into politics in order to join the other like-minded associates who were belligerent to liberate the people of Balochistan from the Imperialist clouts.

Long before the British occupation of Balochistan, the Baloch poets had condemned the high-handedness of the Portuguese and eulogized the bravery of a Baloch leader, Mir Hamal Junaid, who was arrested by the Portuguese and was taken to Portugal. (Mari, 1994) It does not mean that they were critical of only the Europeans but other invaders like the Mongols and the Arghuns also received the same treatment. However, in view of the scope of the present gathering, we will confine ourselves only to literature, the poetry shaped by Naseer. According to him there were clear and distinct four phases of the Baloch resistance literature. In one of his books, *Balochi Razmiyyah Sha'iri*, (Naseer, 1979) he divides the Balochi resistance literature into four phases. In the first phase, he looks at the pioneers, beginning with Mir Chakar Rind and Mir Gawahram Lashari and ending with the writers in the middle of the sixteenth century. This poetry is mostly in the shape of ballads and epics, dwelling on the achievements of great Baloch leaders. The second phase covers the writings after the migration of Mir Chakar Rind and Mir Gowahram Lashari from Balochistan covering the period between the middle of the sixteenth century to the advent of the British rule in Balochistan. The third phase covers the British period up to 1930.

The last phase, according to Gul Khan Naseer, is the phase of 'National' poetry. During 1930-47, the Baloch employed different methods and techniques to pursue their struggle for freedom from the British. There were not many battles fought and not many physical confrontations during this era. Rather, they worked through constitutional and peaceful methods, principally through literature inspired by the political struggle of the Muslims in other parts of India against the colonial rule.

Naseer's poetry<sup>1</sup> is filled with revolutionary and anti-imperialist themes and it reflects his progressive nature and ideals. In 20<sup>th</sup> century he is regarded as the pioneer of the Baloch national movement. Due to his enormous contribution to the Baloch cause he is titled as *Malik-ul-Shuaara*. He was sternly against the class differences that prevailed at that time, and still do. His rhymes exhibit his dislike for the prejudiced arrogance of the rich towards the poor. His writings are usually in Urdu, Balochi, Brahui and Persian. Most of his couplets are in Balochi language.<sup>2</sup> A famous quatrain of his goes as follows: "Had Mir Gul Khan Nasir been born in Punjab he would have become Faiz Ahmad Faiz and if Faiz had been brought up in Balochistan, he would have become Gul Khan Nasir."<sup>3</sup>

During the last decade of the British Raj, 1937-47, Naseer, in particular, emerged as a political activist being a poet and writer of extensive impact. During the period under review, he wrote mostly in Balochi/Urdu. His works have been published in nine volumes during his lifetime but a couple of works were published after he passed away. A critical assessment of his verses reveal that he was a nationalist Baloch, deady opposed to the Imperialism, Theocracy and sardari system and critical of the slackness and indifference of his fellow countrymen towards the oppressive policies of the British. In one of his early Balochi poem, *Bayu-o-Baloch*, he assumed:

Come O Baloch; Come O Baloch  
I tell (you) something today  
Come O homeless Baloch, you have lost your way  
A gang of robbers has attacked your land  
They have set afire your houses  
They have carried away your possessions  
But you are not aware  
Overpowered by a heavy sleep you have become unaware  
Yours hands and tongue have ceased to function  
It has fettered the manly lion. (Titus, 1996, pp. 115-16)

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<sup>1</sup> He selected the pen name of Naseer being impressed by the celebrated Baloch leader Mir Naseer Khan I.

<sup>2</sup> He was good friend of Faiz\_Ahmed\_Faiz. Once Faiz offered to translate Mir Gul Khan's poems in Urdu but Mir Gul Khan turned down the offer. Most of Mir Gul Khan Naseer's Urdu poetry was written between 1933-1950 and there has been almost no publication of his Urdu poetry to this date.

<sup>3</sup> Jones Elfenbien, *Unofficial and Official Efforts to Promote Balochi in Roman Script*. Elfenbien has edited several of Gul Khan Naseer's published and unpublished poems, most of which carry political, social and nationalistic messages, entitled as: *An Anthology of Classical and Modern Balochi Literature*, 2 vols., (Wiesbaden, Otto, Harrassowitz, 1990).

In another poem, *Faryad*, he invokes the memories of the Baloch pride and instigates his compatriots to rise and fight against the British usurpers. He marked:

Where are the skilled Mughal riders today?  
Where are the brave (and) famous ones today?  
Where are the heroes and Indian tigers?  
Where are the fighters with Afghan daggers?  
Where are the green scimitars of the Baloch?  
Where are the Turks and the swift Tartars?  
Let them come today to the fatherland,  
For the name and sign of the Mughals, have been lost;  
The bitter infidels have taken our pure land,  
Let them come, let them see, let them be ashamed. (Titus, 1996, pp.116-117)

Similarly in *Swagat*, he complains that the Baloch have lost their former glory. He asks them to stand up for their fatherland, as other Muslim nations had done.

Stand up, stand up, young man, stand up!  
How long will you sleep drunk on the bedding?  
You see the Turks with curled moustaches,  
They have tied swords and guns to their bodies,  
And are going forward for dignity and fame,  
On the other side, the Arabs with cloaks and turbans,  
The soldiers of the holy war have taken up weapons,  
The state of Iran is in dust-storm,  
See what the glory of Iran is like,  
The sleeping Afghans are now alert,  
They are sitting ready with girded loins. (Titus, 1996, Pp.117-18)

In another poem called *Grand*, he gives full expression to his feelings of patriotism and revolutionary zeal. He glorified Balochistan, but at the same time, poses the question; “Is it a crime to be born as a Baloch?” He continues: “I uproar. I drive away oppression; I make the motherland a new bride; I make it free, I am a rebel! I am a rebel! I am a rebel.” He ended his poem anticipating a revolution. (Titus, 1996.p.122)

In *Nawjawan Gon*, he urges the young and brave Baloch freedom fighters to bring the old sardari system to an end. “Throw a heavy stone on the

sardari system.” He calls for driving out the foreign oppressors and says, “Deliver the people from the foreign rule and in this way save the Baloch honour and dignity.” (Titus, 1996, p.118)

In another poem, *Balot-a-Sair*, Gul Khan saw it as his duty to make the Baloch aware of their slavery: “Your plain and open fields are subjugated; The barren plains and deserts are enslaved; Your hearts and your souls are in chains. You are worse than slaves. (Titus, 1996, p.119) However; Gul Khan was hopeful that the brave and heroic Baloch will be able to shake off the yoke of slavery of the foreign masters and that of their oppressive sardars.

In *Dil Mazan Kan*, again, he paints an optimistic picture of future when he says: “The oppressive government of the infidels will come to an end, suffering and trouble and affliction will come to an end. Light will come and darkness will come to an end.” (Titus, 1996,p.119)

Gul Khan was extremely unhappy with the way the British had ruled over Balochistan. But, in the end, he blamed the sardari system for the slavery of the Baloch. In a poem entitled *Faryad (Prayer)*, he says:

O my Creator! Give me courage to awaken  
The Baloch from their deep slumber  
The sardars have darkened the faces of the Baloch people  
Let me put them one by one on the gallows. (Naseer,1984, p.2)

Addressing the tribal leaders in 1940 in his poem, *Qabā'ili Sardārōn Say*, he not only warned them but predicted, being a vigilant politician and an analyst of the political scenario, he had sensed the impact of the famous Lahore Resolution and the subsequent impact on the future of Muslim politics in general:

Look at the horizon: Look at the thunderstorm,  
The lightening has struck your boat,  
Now you will reap the harvest of what you had sown,  
Remember the old saying that you receive what you give,  
The Raj that you have served is now going to be over,  
Your sustainer had sailed from thousands of miles,  
His ship is sunk and anchor is lost,  
Your lord, Your master, Whom you served,  
Is leaving now and you better accompany him,  
Don't lure us into new cobwebs of your words,  
We are fed up with your presence,

Listen carefully; the British Sarkar is doomed for good,  
It will never return, now the people will rule; Before you fool,  
No leader, no ruler, no chief, we will allow,  
None will starve; none will remain in fetters,  
No capitalist will you see now,  
This pure land will be ruled by the people,  
None to prostrate, none to take the throne,  
The lightning strikes again,  
Do you hear the thunder, worry not,  
You sowed the poison Ivy, now taste its fruit. (Naseer,1984,p.48)

In another poem, Gul Khan attacked the sardars and the sardari system for all its excesses in these words:

I am chained without any fault,  
Imprisoned without any conviction,  
But listen sardar! I am a son of Islam and,  
I will burn to ashes your mansions and your soft and gilded chairs,  
I am intoxicated by the message of Islam and *Shari'ah*,  
I will not rest until I implement the true spirit of Islam,  
What amazing system you have given us,  
You sodomize, you rape, but no blemish on you,  
You hide all the crimes under the title of sardar. (Naseer,1984,p.42)

The institution of 'Jirga' was strengthened by the British and was used in collaboration with the Sardars to punish the freedom fighters and those who refused to tow the British line. In one of his poems called *Jirga*, Gul Khan criticizes the system in such strong words:

The irony of fate with the Baloch,  
Because of *Jirga*, eliminate the Baloch,  
Strengthen *Jirga*, "*Allah-o-Akhar*,"  
Has no place in sardari system,  
Disbelief and paganism shows its face in *Jirga*,  
Patriotism and love for land becomes a crime,  
Heads of these lovers roll through the sword of *Jirga*,  
If we stop, the hammer of sardar crushes us,  
Escape one cannot; We are chained by *Jirga*,  
Those who want the flowers to blossom in our desert,  
Their hearts are pierced by the arrows of *Jirga*,  
It is nothing but the enemy of laws, principles and *Shari'ah* for us.

Straight from the Hell has come the penal code; That is *Jirga*,  
Naseer! Worry not; it is bound to be eliminated,  
Absurd, absurd, those who say that; God has decreed  
*Jirga*. (Naseer, 1984, p.43)

Both the breadth as well as the depth of Gul Khan's poetry is amazing. He addresses his people in the form of a prayer, inspires his listeners through history and the dynamic spirit of Islam. At times, he uses Altaf Husain Hali's verses from the *Musaddas*. (*Mado Jazar-i-Islam*), Likewise, in many of his poems, Iqbal's ideas are also clearly obvious. Iqbal's concept of "*Mard-i-Momin*" is evident in many of Naseer's poems. One of his poems, *The Sleeping Youth of My Country*, (Naseer, 1984, Pp.44-45) is written on the pattern of Hali's epic and begins with a verse of Hali with the same style and same tone. For the most part, however, Gul Khan remains preoccupied with the plight of the Baloch and the cruel treatment meted out to them by the sardars and the sardari system. For example, in one of his poems, *Raj Karay Sardar*, specifically addressed to the sardars, he declares:

The children cry of hunger: The old men are homeless,  
The mothers weep in hidden corners,  
There is nobody even to borrow money from,  
But sardar is our ruler: There is no end to cries of infants,  
Lovers go to bed without food,  
The beloved are selling even their beauties but,  
O brother! The Capitalist is still hungry: And my sardar rules over us,  
Without food, without clothes are the miserable people,  
Wailing and crying is heard from every house,  
But sardar wants work without wages: Be it a Gardner or a Bijjar,  
Our sardar rules us: Cuts throat picks pockets, sucks blood,  
Leachy creature: Bones of ribs and skulls are his victims,  
O brother! Through the instrument of *Jirga*,  
Our sardar rules us: He creates feuds, banishes brotherhood,  
Puts brother against brother:  
And with both hands sweeps wealth through bribery,  
O brother! He is our lord: Amazing are the ways of my beloved land,  
The people go hungry and naked:  
But the jingle of money makes those parasites dance,  
O brother! sardar rules over us: Our lords, these darlings of Crown.  
Intoxicated with their power and wealth: Why should they listen to our  
cries?

O brother! They are gods of this earth: These sardars rule us. (Naseer, 1984, Pp.54-55)

Exactly similar strong words he reserved against his aversions like, Feudals, Waderas, Khans especially Peers and Mullahs, are worth-mentioning:

The Mullah getting ready to deliver his sermon: Stroke his beard proudly:  
And started preaching: One is a Master, One is a Mir, One is a Ruler, One is Peer:

Without doubt it is God's Will: It is written in the Righteous Book,

So you should accept this as a Fate.

He further advises the Mullah; Evenings of begging have left you blind: The devil has over-powered you....Men and Women, both are equal,

Finally he warns; May you are smitten O Mullah: Don't lie so much...  
These Mirs, Masters, Sardars, Peers, Clerics and Zardars are the real roots of Evil.

In another poem he asserts: Thieving pigs desire to be compared to Friends of the Prophet (PBUH):

The wolf yearns to be made the shepherd of the sheep:  
The cat dreams of getting pieces of fresh meat: The mouse is craving for flour: The jackal is impatient to get its hands on the hen.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Five notebooks of the Gul Khan Nasir's Balochi poetry in his own hand are held by SOAS Archives, London University, UK. (MS 380635).



## Conclusion

If we look at the growth of the resistance literature in Balochistan, we realize that the written words went a long way in bringing the grievances of Balochistan not only amongst a few educated inhabitants of this area but in larger subcontinent as a whole. Going through the above deliberations one is convinced that Naseer's main concerns had been about the sardars, the sardari system, the distress for the underprivileged, the Baloch pride, the freedom of expression, feelings of patriotism, glorification of Balochistan, revolutionary zeal (I uproar. I drive away oppression; I make the motherland a new bride; I make it free, I am a rebel! I am a rebel! I am a rebel), and implementation of Sharia (Although the Baloch nationalist writers and political leaders are painted to be less Muslims and mainly secular but especially going through Naseer's writings, one is struck the way *Sharia* has become such an important part of Baloch glory. The Baloch had always shown pride in their identity as Muslims). However, the extensive usage of Islam was a strong reaction to the Missionary activities in Balochistan.<sup>1</sup> Gul Khan expressed his emotions and anger in many ways:

I am a son of Islam and,  
I will burn to ashes your mansions and your soft and gilded chairs.  
I am intoxicated by the message of Islam and *Shari'ah*.  
I will not rest until I implement the true spirit of Islam.

Finally being optimistic he prophesized "A better age will dawn on us: When no one will be worried for food: And there won't be wars for money: Mullah! It is time you wake up and smell the air: Because in this new world: Your obsolete won't work: There won't be any doubt in your heart: Then you ought to be taught a lesson.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1917, the Bible Society of the Punjab translated Bible into Balochi and Brahui languages in order to extend the Missionary undertakings to Balochistan. The Christian Missionaries started visiting different areas of Balochistan to convert the people to Christianity. To counter the situation the Quran was also translated into Balochi and Brahui languages by the indigenous Muslim clerics of Balochistan.

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