

The Tribal System in Balochistan: Its Administrative Organization and Modern Democracy

Political Science

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Abstract

The political and social life in Balochistan in general and Baloch in particular have been tribal for centuries. The concept of individual ownership was very much alien to the tribal life. With the passage of time, the tribal system had transformed from complete nomadic life to agrarian economy. The tribal system does not negate democracy but keeps the democratic values in perfect sprits. Every member of the tribe is important and participate in the decision making process. The Sardar in the tribal system plays an important role in the tribe and is responsible for the economic, social and political affairs of his people. The tribal chief or Sardar is not all in all regarding the settlement of any matter but the members of the tribe have also given the right to give their views on the issue. Though Sardar is much powerful in the tribe but without the love of his people he is not powerful. Like the modern democratic state, the tribal system of Baloch does not have parliament but instead it has a system of Jirga which consists of experienced and notable figures of the tribe. The Sardars settle the disputes or issues with the help of the tribal Jirga in quite democratic way. The Jirga acts as Sardar's Majlis-e-Shoora in Baloch's tribal system and its role is as much important and vital as that of parliament in the democratic country. The decision on the issue is taken by majority votes of the members of Jirga.

Key Words: Administrative Organization, Balochistan, Baloch Tribal System, Democracy, Jirga System, Parliament, Sardar,

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Introduction

Balochistan is the largest but the thinly and populated and least developed province of Pakistan. Balochistan received the provincial status on 1st July 1970 when former president of Pakistan, Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan, dissolved the one unit and created the current arrangement of four separate provinces. (Saeed, 1980:113). Balochistan is the western of the most of the four provinces of Pakistan. Geographically, it starts from the coast of the Arabian Sea and stretches North wards, the coast line itself being about 470 miles long and entirely arid. Col. Sir Thomas Holditch the great geographer and author of the 'Gates of India' describe it as a Brozen coast washed by a Molten Sea. (Awan, 1985:16) Balochistan cover an area of 134050 square miles, 347188 square kilo meters. (Iqbal, 1992:19) The characteristic division of the country are four i.e. the upper highland, the lower highlands, the plains and the deserts. The upper highlands locally known as Khorasan occupy the central and east-central portion of the country, the mountains reach an elevation of 12000 feet while the valleys lie about 5000 feet above the sea level. The lower high lands include the slopes of the Suleman ranges. On the East and the Pab and Khirthar range on the South and the ranges of the Makran, Kharan and Chaghi on the West. The Plains include the area known as Kachhi and Lasbella and the valley of the Dash river. The Desert are situated on the north western part. They consist on open level plains covered with black gravel or board expenses of deep sand-hills which sometimes assume the proportions of formidable sand mountains. (Shah, 1994:4)

Balochistan is a place of nomadic and settled tribes. The nomadic tribes migrate from one place to another having homes on their backs. Their villages are merely a collection of mud and stones huts. They raise camels, sheep and goats and engage in carpet making and embroidery; now settled agriculture is becoming common. Agricultural methods are primitive and also limited due to the shortage of water, power, lack of technical knowledge and inadequate transportation facilities. The geographical features of Balochistan are mostly determined by the British rule in the region as it was extended to Balochistan by imposing the treaties of 1841, 1854, 1879 on rulers of Kalat and Kabul and its boundaries demarcated. (Iqbal, 1992:80-88)

People, Race and Tribes

The Baloch, the Meds and the Jats appear to have been the oldest inhabitants of Balochistan. The Pashtoos are also among the old arrivals. The Meds now, as then live on the coasts. The Pashtoos cluster around their homes at the back of Takht-e-Suleman. The Jats still compose the cultivating classes of Lasbella and Kachhi. (Haughas, 1977:31)

Baloch is a major group and Balochi language is a common spoken by 36.3% of population in Balochistan. (Census Report of Balochistan, 1981:10). As far as the racial origin of this group is concerned, historians have different opinions of the origin of Baloch. Haitu Ram says that the Balochs belong to the descendents of Hazrat Amir Hamza of the Quresh tribe. (Haitu Ram, 1973:10). But the history rejects this legend because Amir Hamza died unmarried. Another historian, Gul Khan Naseer, opines that Balochs are related with Namrud historically, spiritually and racially. (Naseer, 1984:286) Jan Muhammad, who himself is a Baloch propounded the proposition that Balochs belong to Aryan racial tribe. (Muhammad, 1982:7-10) On the other hand, the national school of Baloch historians link Balochs ethnically with ruler Babylonia. (Baloch, 1977:18-22) Mir Khuda Baksh Marri connected them with Aryan tribes originating from Asia Minor. (Marri, 1974:12-14)

As mentioned above, the Baloch are the people who mainly live in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. But it is necessary to mention here that they not only live in Balochistan but they also live in large number in Iran, in Dera Ghazi Khan which is the in the province of Punjab and in Jacob Abad and Sukkur of province Sindh. Thus, if we study and analyze the races of Sindh then we will come to the conclusion that large number of Balochs live there and have been living there since ancient times. It is not a correct impression that Balochs only live a tribal life. The Balochs are basically divided into: Makrani Baloch, Rakshani Baloch and Sulemani Baloch. The Makrani and Rakshani Balochs live in the north western part of Balochistan and they belong to different Baloch tribes but they do not have strong tribal system. But on the other hand, Sulemani tribes live in the South Eastern part of Balochistan and speak both Balochi and Brahvi language. Contrary to the Makrani and Rakshani tribes, they have a strong tribal system and also have well irrigated fertile land. Though one may find many educated and learned people in Sulemani Balochs but they still like tribal life and believe in tribalism. They find it in their best interest because it protect their life, honor and property. They love to stick to their tribal tradition and show much love for their tribal life and respect for their tribal chief. They are by temperament more conservative as compared to Makrani and Rakshani tribes.

The Administrative Organization of the Baloch Tribe

In Balochi language, the tribe is known as 'Tuman' and the tribal chief is known as 'Tumandar'. (Dames, 1961:14). Every Tuman had various sections known as 'Paras'. The section and Para from where the Tumandar is chosen is known as 'Phagh Loogh' which means "the Royal Section". Here it should be noted that the word 'Tuman' is not a traditional word but the ancient word for tribe is 'Boolak'. (Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1984:29)

Traditionally, Baloch had been living a nomadic life (Khan, 1988:127) but with the passage of time they changed their life style with the agrarian development. They got settled wherever they found life easy and feasible for themselves. But still we can find large number of tribesmen who live the nomadic life. They have their cattle (sheep, goats, camels etc) upon which their living depends. Here it is important to note that though they live a totally nomadic life but yet they have their own formal institution, a well organized system of elections for their Tumandar, administrative network, Judicial system and Jirga.

The Role of Sardar as Decision Maker

Sardar in the tribe plays an important role and thus he is responsible for the economic, social and political life of his people. Though he performs his duties in consultation with the members of the Jirga but his opinion and suggestions are taken very seriously and are carrying much weight and importance in the Jirga. Here it is important to mention that the tribal system does not negate democracy but keep the democratic spirit in perfect beauty, for example, the Sardar or the tribal chief put the issue in front of the Jirga for general consideration. Any member of the Jirga can put forward an idea and point for consideration. The Jirga discusses the issue thoroughly and then every member of the Jirga including the Sardar has one vote each to cast for the settlement of the issue. Thus we can say that it is quite a democratic way of settling the issue. (Muhammad, 1982:157) Besides, the common man is also given the right to appear before the Jirga and presented a matter concerning him or the tribe as a whole. Even the sectional head, which is called as 'Takari' are also allowed to present a proposal to Jirga for consideration. In case of disagreement among the members of the Jirga over the matter, the tribal leader or Sardar can adjourn the meeting and after consultation with the members of the Jirga, reconvene the meeting again.

Just like in parliamentary system, the Prime Minister as the leader of the house guides the members in the matter of legislation, same is the case apply to the Sardar of tribal chief who has the prerogative powers to issue and pass commands at its own will. As the head of the tribe, he can also guides the entire Jirga for the settlement of the issue. The decision of the Jirga is taken by the majority votes of the Jirga but regarding the external affairs, the decision of the Sardar carries much importance and thus, his decision is taken for granted. As regard the internal issues of the tribe particularly related to various Paras or sections of the tribe, the Jirga is required to do more careful judicial settlement and consultation because any wrong decision by the Jirga and the Sardar or head the tribe may estrange the important section or Para of the tribe which as a result leave that area and join another tribe by losing its former identity. (Dames, 1961:17) But such type of situation occurs very rarely, as the

Sardar or the tribal chief tries his level best to keep his tribe together and united because they are the main strength of tribal chief or Sardar.

So we can draw a conclusion from the above discussion that the tribal society is democratic in its nature, every member of the tribe is important and participates in the decision making process. We can also conclude here that it is wrong to say that in tribal system of Balochistan, the tribal chief or Sardar is all in all and the individuals have no say in any matter. No doubt Sardar is powerful in the tribe but his power lies in the tribe, as without the love of the tribe he is not powerful. Thus, almost all Baloch tribal leaders settle the issue in a democratic manner with the help of the Jirga, which is his Majlis-e-Shoora. Sardar is supposed to be a man of higher and good qualities as he is the prism of the tribal society. (Khan, 1988:132) He performs too many important duties such as executive and judicial functions. Besides, he also possesses higher military and moral qualities. Therefore, the tribal leader or Sardar is not only the leader of the social life of his tribe but he is also the head of the political and military elite.

The tribal chief or Sardar is supposed to be Judicious and marshal. Besides, his area of functions are also very vast therefore, he is also supposed to have a multi-dimensional personality. Following are the qualities which the tribal chief or Sardar must possess:

1) He must be Muslim, 2) he must be male, 3) he must be mentally sound, healthy and energetic for the settlement of tribal issues or disputes, 4) he must belong to an important section of the tribe, 5) he must be kind and caring to his people, 6) he must be fair, honest and judicial minded and these should be the supreme features of his personality, (Khan, 1988:135) and 7) he must be brave and a man of courage as only brave tribal chief can protect the life and property of his people.

If we look at the quality No.4 which is mentioned above we can say that generally that generally the eldest son the tribal leader becomes his successor otherwise, it will be very difficult to choose a man for this important and prestigious position.

As mentioned above, the eldest son of the tribal chief or Sardar becomes his successor and thus it is hereditary in nature. (Dames, 1961:16) But sometimes, the election of Sardar becomes controversial when the eldest son is of the inferior social status from his mother side, thus his election at this situation becomes point of dispute. This is because of the reason the Baloch take the purity of blood and race very essential condition for the election of Sardar and will never compromise or agreed on a tribal chief of inferior social status from his mother side. For example, it is reported about Mir Chakar Khan that he was appointed Sardar of his tribe before the death of his father because he feared that after the death of his father he would face problem for

his election because from his mother side he did not have a royal blood. (Muhammad, 1982:160) Thus we can come to the conclusion that if the eldest son of Sardar fulfills all the necessary conditions or requirements then he is elected the tribal chief without any opposition otherwise if there is an issue in the election of Sardar then that problem is settled by the majority voted of Takkaris. (Khan, 1988:130) If the Sardar dies without any son then in that case a suitable man is elected as a Sardar who is close relative of the deceased former Sardar and thus the tribal life goes smoothly and peacefully.

The ceremonies are generally held after election of Sardar is completed. The ceremonies are simple and are performed in the Grand Jirga in which important religious personalities are also invited. Those ceremonies are simple because of the reason that the death of the previous tribal leader has made the entire tribe unhappy and sad. (Muhammad, 1982:161) In the ceremonies the turban or Pag is put on the head of the new Sardar which formally declared him the new tribal chief.

Functions and Duties of the Tribal Chief or Sardar

As mentioned above, Sardar occupies an important and significant position in his tribe. Therefore, he is responsible for the protection of social, political and economic life of his people. No social life of the tribe is possible in his absence. In the past, the marriage functions in the tribe were considered impossible without Sardar. Nowadays the situation has changed, the marriage parties can now be held without the presence of Sardar.

We can divide the powers of Sardars into Legislative powers, Executive powers and Judicial powers. Those powers are discussed briefly as under:

Legislative Power

Every tribe has its own rules and laws. Like the modern democratic society, it does not have any parliament but instead it has Jirga system which consists of notable figures of the tribe. Every important law is made in Jirga, thus we can say that it is an important law-making body of the tribe which deals with the administrative, judicial and other important matters of the tribal life. The proceedings of the Jirga are dominated by the Sardar in which his opinion and suggestions carries much weight. In case the Jirga is not in session, then the matter is brought before the Sardar for the settlement. The Sardar may himself resolve the issue or he may refer it to the Jirga.

Executive Powers and Judicial functions of Sardar

Due to the simple nature of tribal life, the Sardar while presiding the Kachery settles all the matters covering all aspects of life. (Khan, 1988:132) When the matter is brought before the Sardar then he calls both the conflicting

parties and hear their pleas. After hearing both the parties he fixed the time and date for his final decision regarding the settlement of dispute. On the fixed day and time, he gives his verdict on the issue by using his judicious mind.

The disputes or matters of not very serious nature are resolved by the heads of the clans of tribe. But if the parties are not satisfied with their decision then the parties have the option to refer the case to the Sardar who in this situation is the final court of appeal in the tribal life. The decision of Sardar at this stage is final and is therefore, binding on the conflicting parties.

The Jirga: It's Election and Composition

The role of Jirga in tribal system is as much important as that of parliament in a democratic country. Though both the Jirga and the parliament have different elections and composition but they have more or less same functions. Thus we can say that Jirga system is the ancient form of modern parliament.

As discussed above, the elections of the Jirga members are not the same as that of the elections for the members of modern parliament. As an ancient tribal democratic institution, the process of formation of Jirga is very simple. The people from different clan of a tribe choose their heads and these heads later on compose a Jirga.

As far as the heads of the clans of the tribes are concerned, they are both elected or selected unanimously, in which their character, behavior, services to their people, family background etc counts a lot. The people of the clan usually choose that person as their head who can represent them in the Jirga, which is an important institution of the tribe.

The Jirga is usually summoned whenever the tribe faces any problem. The Jirga is called to settle that problem or issue. (Khan, 1988:135) Minor issues are settled by the head of the clans who are called as 'Takkari or Malik'. The matters which are of great importance or significance are resolved by the Sardar which was then sent to the Jirga for its consent.

The Jirga can be summoned on the request of Sardar. During the proceedings of the Jirga, the information may be given to the members of Jirga by the Sardar. After that the Jirga discusses the issue in which the most important issues are discussed first followed by other matters. The decisions on the matters are made unanimously which is a remarkable tribal tradition.

The views and judgments of the Sardar are always taken very important during the proceeding of Jirga. Though the views of Sardar are given respect and are generally obeyed by the members of the Jirga but Jirga also has the freedom to make decision which according to them is fair and just.

Revenge is an important feature of tribal life. Though the Jirga or Mei'rh (a group of elderly and noble people of the tribe) plays an important

and significant role in the settlement of tribal and inter-tribal disputes (Imperial Gazetteer of India, Balochistan, 1984:64) but still the revenge prevails and Baloch takes revenge as his first right. Eye for an eye, hand for hand, tooth for tooth and blood for blood only satisfy the affected members of the tribe. Sometimes, these revenges turn into a decades long bloody animosity between the tribes and are very difficult to be settled by the Jirga.

Thus we can conclude from the above discussion that Jirga is an important and significant democratic institution of tribal life. It performs legislative, executive and judicial functions and tribesmen enjoy them in their day to day life.

Conclusion

Pakistan, as a nation, is the combination of marshal races like Pashtoon, Sindhi, Panjabi and of course Baloch. Like other races of Pakistan, Baloch race is also very famous for its remarkable history of bravery. They like the tribal life which is simple and just. Baloch have the tradition of democracy and their tribal institutions of Sadari and Jirga system possesses the spirit of democracy. Thus, from the above study we can observe that 1) Baloch, as a race, is traditional and conservative, 2) Democracy is the key feature of Baloch tribal life, 3) Sardar or tribal chief is their self-chosen elite, 4) Though Sardar is powerful figure of tribe and his opinions are given much importance, yet he has to take decisions according to tribal customs and traditions, 5) Jirga is an old version of the modern parliament and 6) The Jirga dispense quick and cheap justice.

It is also believed that the tribal system in Makran belt of Balochistan is weak. This is because of the reason that the people are comparatively more educated and therefore, more democratic. The election results in those areas proved that the middle class always won the elections.

On the other hand, there are some areas in Balochistan, like Jhalawan and Sarawan, where the tribal system is in its crude form and therefore, Sardars in these areas dominated the population and win the elections very easily. If we compare the education level of Makran belt with that of Jhalawan and Sarawan then we can come to the conclusion that the literacy rate of Makran is higher than the other two mentioned above.

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