

# The British Colonialism and Resistance in Balochistan

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## **Abstract:**

*Resistance has been a part and parcel of the Baloch nation against the despotic rulers throughout the history for the protection of their lives, land, honor and disgrace. The objective of this paper is to show the resistance of the Baloch nation against the British Colonial rule in different areas of Balochistan and the subjugation of Khanates of Kalat. The battle of Gokprosh, a clear chapter of resistance against the British Raj, fought between the British army and Mir Baloch Khan Noshirwani, will also be focused.*

Balochistan enjoys an important strategic position in the world map and it is one of the most charming regions of Pakistan. It is bounded on to south by the Arabian Sea, in the north by Afghanistan (1178km, border line) on the North West by North West Frontier Province in the East by Sind, in the North East with Punjab and in the West with Iran (838 km, Iranian Balochistan Border line)(1)

Balochistan had provided a channel of communication between Persia and the subcontinent and served as a trade link between the Middle East and the central Asian Countries. The existence of the Famous Tehran-Mashad route through Yazd, Kirman and Makkuran (Mekran) linking Mesopotamia, Iran and Bacteria ever before the Aryan invasion. The Mekran coast has been used as the nucleus of trade and communication between India and the Middle East and Central Asia, Goods were sent through Camel caravans from various point of Balochistan to Kandhar, Gazni, and Kabul and also Kasarkand and Chahbar, another track existed through Kirman and Helmand. (2)

The importance of its location in Perso-oman Gulf with a 700 miles sea coast, the area has been important to the trade of the west.

In this article, I will try to mention the British imperial objectives in Balochistan, their tactics to occupy the area and the resistance made by the tribal chiefs as well as the people of Balochistan.

With the rise of the British colonial rule over India, they needed the mostly of South Asia. In pursuit of their aims, the British policy towards Balochistan started in 18<sup>th</sup> Century to counter the French threats, and their first step towards the first phase of British policy towards Balochistan started from 1795 was known as spying and diplomatic intrigues and collection of authentic information's. The most information's collected by the British were trade routes and military strength of the rules of Balochistan and especially the Khanate. The British claims these mission

were sent to counter the Russian threats to India and the British only used the: “Threat” as a pretext. The British had only one aim that was to expand their empire. (3)

Before the invasion of Afghanistan Burns was sent to Kalat as an envoy of the British, Who because of his illness, sent his deputy, L T, Leach, to Mir Mehrab Khan, the ruler of Balochistan to arrange terms for the passage of the British army on their way of Khandhar. Mehrab Khan the ruler of Balochistan made the following demands.

1. The British will support the Baloch claims the los territories, Derajat and Dajal-Harrand occupied, by the Punjab Sikhs.
2. Returning of Karachi port, occupied by the Amirs of Sindh.

Beside these demands Mehrab Khan refused to the British demand that he accepts a vassal status under Afghanistan and that the Baloch helped Shuja in internal conflict of Afghanistan. Ultimately Burns did secure a treaty with Mehrab Khan for the safe passage of the supplies after offering an annual subsidy of Rs.150000. Nevertheless, the relations between Mehrab Khan and the British Government become strained, when the camp of Burns was attacked.

During the first Anglo-Afghan war of 1839-1841, the Baloch tribesmen often ambushed British convoys of troops and supplies on their way to Afghanistan. They suffered losses in men and materials while passing through hilly areas of Baloch territory. The British authorities regarded Mir Merhrab Khan the ruler of Balochistan, responsible for such attacks, Moreover, the British wanted to subjugate Balochistan as a first step towards their designees in the area. After occupying Afghanistan, to implement the foreign policy objective enunciated in the so called forward policy, vis-à-vis Russia territorial containment in central Asia. For his part the Khan did not discourage those raids on British troops, because he considered the conquest of Afghanistan as the ultimate downfall of his rule. He had also rejected an earlier British proposal to meet shah shaja. The Khan thought that such a meeting could have been interpreted as recognizing Shah Suja’s claim as the Afghan Khan. As the Khan was treaty bound not to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. He refused to meet the Shah which further antagonized the British authorities. (4)

Another allegation was Mehrab Khan commandeered stocks food grains in and around Kalat to deny them to the British, but Charles Mason says that the accumulation of food grains in Kalat had no connection with the arrival of the British force. It had been done on the advice of Dewan Bach, the Khan’s Hindu agent, who had recommended it as a finical measure and the operation had commenced three years before the arrival of the British. The Khan merely collected that grain which normally went to his tenants as their share and paid cash for it. (5)

If we look at other tribes who had their heyday, plundering and murdering and otherwise harassing the British troops as they passed through the Bolan Pass in the spring of 1839. Amongst the tribes who caused the most trouble along the lines of communication were the Marris, Bugtis, Dumbkis and Jhakrains and Bibrak. Chief of the Bugtis and Bijar, Chief of the Dumbkis, Were the most will know of the leaders who led these plundering expeditions. It was therefore decided to take action against them, the Jhakarins and the Dumbkis. Lieutenant John Jacob took the field against them on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1839. (6)

Due to the intense heat one officer and fifteen men all struck dead and Jacob survived and the expedition never went beyond Shikarpur. Another detachment went out in October, Weary and disgusted, with the fruitless search, on evening it appeared at the each springs. Scarcely, however, had the horses had time to drink, when, as if by magic, suddenly appear not half a mile off, opposite to an opening in the hills, two noted Baloch Chiefs, Janee and Rahmat and a hundred Baloch horse drawn up in regular line. Instantly the men were in their saddles, and riding in suddenly every horse of the British detachment sank into the earth. The Balochis lured their enemies into an extensive Quicksand. One officer however, John Jacob, being splendidly mounted, struggled out on the further side. Alone on his way utterly jaded animal, he advanced against the Balochis. Though Jacob was utterly at his mercy, Janee generously returned at speed into the hills. (7)

Nevertheless, the British was in search of a pretext, which provided by the Wazir (Prime Minister) of Mehrab Khan Mulla Muhammad Hassan his father Fateh Muhammad had been killed by the order of Mehrab Khan in 1833 and Mulla Muhammad Hassan now saw his opportunity for revenge. He visited Macanghaten as the envoy of the Khan and informed him that he himself was the friend of British and a loyal supporter of Shuja, and that it was the Khan who was hostile to them. On his return to Kalat he told his master, Meharab Khan that the British and Shuja were united to ruin him and his country. Later on him of fixed the royal seal to army as, it passed through Balochistan. Some of these Liters left into British hands, who saw these as a sing of the Khan's enmity. The attack in the camp of Burns and other hotel acts, however, were the results of Mulla Muhammad Hassan's conspiracy. He had also convinced the Khan that if he visited Shuja and Macanghaten he would be arrested, by the British. However, the British held the Khan responsible and decided to punish him after the conquest of Afghanistan by Shuja, Who was also in agreement with the British that Mehrab khan and his state should be destroyed. (8)

General Wiltshire, who was commanding the Bombay column, on his return from Afghanistan, was ordered to proceed to Kalat from Quetta on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1839, with approximately 1200 men and six guns and

attacked kalat on 13<sup>th</sup> 1839. An aide decamps of the general described the day. Thus, it was truly an imposing sight. Some small hills in front were crowned with masses of soldiers and the towering citadel which frowned above them in their near was completely cluttered over with human beings, chiefly ladies of the harem, who had assembled to witness the discomfiture of the “Feringhess” and the prowess of their lords all of whom, with the Khan at their head, had preciously marched out to the heights, where they awaited is in battle array.” (9)

There was a sharp artillery duel after which the Khan and his men withdrew into the fort. After another artillery barrage, the fort was stormed and capture. A desperate resistance was made by the chief Mehrab khan. Who fell sword in hand with most of his principal nobles at the entrance to the citadel before nightfall merely two thousand prisoners had been removed from the front hundreds of the garrison is computed to have fallen. (10)

Before the attack on kalat Mehrab Khan had sent his son Mir Nasir Khan II to Noshki, from where he ultimately took refuge with Azad Khan (the ruler of Kharan) Meanwhile the British placed shah Nawaz on the throne. Shah Nawaz belong to another branch on the family and had been a pretender to the throne.

The British left one officer at kalat and annexed parts of Sarawan, Karachi, and Gandawa to Kabul. Shah Nawaz was highly unpopular and soon there was an insurrection of the chiefs to restore Mehrab khan’s son. After some skirmishing, Nasir khan II was ultimately installed at kalat as the Khan in October 1841 and a treaty was signed with him which left considerable powers in the British hands.

After Merhab Khan was stained lighting the British tried to extend their authority throughout Balochistan and the Shah of Iran captured western Balochistan. The Baloch era was coming to an end it was in this milieu that many tribes stood in revolt against the alien forces. Balochistan never submitted completely and continued to resist, on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1847, seven hundred Bughties were blocked in a battle on the border of Sindh against Lieutenant Mereweather, commanding the famous Sindh Horse, none of them surrendered to the British. All fought till the last man was killed except two who avoided capture. (11)

On 26<sup>th</sup> January 1867, the 1200 strong combined force of Bughtis, Murrees and their allied tribe Kethran, fought an important battle in the chachar valley near the border of Dera Ghazi khan. Mir Ghulam Hussain Massori Bugti led the Baloch troops in the battle which was lost by the Baloch forces. On the 4<sup>th</sup> October 1896, a religious group of the Murree, called Ghazis, headed by Haji Kala Khan, commonly known as “Mast Faqir” attacked the British railway and telegraphs line. The Gazi movement, however, could not last long. The British soon defeated them,

and Mast Faqir with five other Ghazis was executed in Sibi on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1896. (12)

The political status of Balochistan was completely changed and the British resident becomes the supreme authority of the state. Kalat's regular army was abolished and a new levy system was introduced under British army officers. The British rule also brought injustices and poverty to Balochistan, nevertheless the Baloch tribes continued their struggle against the British to liberate Balochistan. (13)

The increased British interference in the affairs of Balochistan also resulted in a general uprising in Mekran, under the leadership of Mir Mehrab Khan Gichki, who coveted authority in Kech valley, detained the British Nazim (agent) and the finance affairs manager, a Hindu Diwan Udho Das on the January 1898. (14)

This infuriated the British, who ordered or attacked on Mekran from Karachi to assert their authority. Resistance was organized by Mehrab Khan Ghichki and Mir Baloch Khan Nusherwani an eminent tribal chief from Kolwah of Mekran. A large number of Lashkar (Tribale force) gathered at Gokprosh, a few miles from Turbat, on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1898 to fight the advancing British troops. The British force however defeated the Baloch Lashkar, Killing all 250 of them including Mir Baloch Khan. It is said that Mir Mehrab Khan Gichki who was the prime mover in the revolt sought refuges in western Baluchistan... (15)

During the First World War, there was a proposal to recruit personals from Balochistan, was put forward in January 1917. The Baloch tribal chiefs not only opposed the idea but also revolted against it. Two decisive battle were fought at Gunbuz and Hadab in which the Murrees were defeated. It is said that seven hundreds of them were killed and five hundred received injuries in the battle of Gumbuz. The rebel chief minister Khan Baloch field to the Soviet Union and formed the delegation to the Banki Congress of the people of the East.” (16)

When the First World War started (1914-1918), the sultan of Turkey who was considered to be the caliph of the entire Muslim world, joined the war against British. The Baloch tribes were approached by German agents directed by Niedermayer and Zugmay Arras were distributed among the Baloch Tribes of western Balochistan and the tribes of Mekarn, Jahlawan, Marris and Khetran. The Baloch tribes fought until 1919 in the fervor of the Ottoman Caliph and his ally Germany. But all force. At the same time as the Baloch tribes were in revolt, the Hijrat Movement started by the Muslim Ulemas calling for migration on British Indian Muslim to Afghanistan and Muslim Central Asia in order to put pressure on the British. The religious minded people from Derajat, Jacobabad, Nushki, and Quetta migrated to Afghanistan. (17)

The resistance in Balochistan against the British authorities continued for more than a century. These were undoubtedly the acts of individual tribal chiefs of a collection of them who resisted an alien occupation of them and struggled for their emancipation. The early resistance could not assume the form of a national struggle. The lack of communication among the Baloch tribes and contact with Indian people, except the (Khaialfat Movement). The enemy being superior in arms and resources and the lack of a proper political organization until 1920, Mir Abdul Aziz Kurd initiated a political organization in the name of “Young Baloch” which remained underground until 1929 to mobilize the masses for a proper political struggle. But in spite of these drawback, the Baloch continued their resistance in their traditional way, throughout the British period. However the Baloch look upon these battle as evidence of their valorous warlike traditions. The Baloch poets of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century glorified the leaders of the spring and composed songs of patriotism condemning the Pro-British elements and declaring them traitors. (18)

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