

## **British Attack on Balochistan and its Causes:**

By

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### **Abstract:**

*Pakistan has four provinces and Area wise Balochistan is the biggest from other three provinces. This region has got a great importance in history because of its geo-political, strategic and geographical significance and the British administration built a large interest in the region because of its strategic importance. The British authorities wanted to safeguard a line of communication to Afghanistan through Balochistan. Mir Mehrab Khan was a sovereign and independent ruler. And without mentioning Khan Mehrab Khan the history of Balochistan holds hollow status, and he was the only and last independent ruler of Balochs, and he refused to accept the Afghan supremacy and never bowed before the British too. The purpose of this research study is to find out the Causes of British attack on Balochistan, their interests in the region and highlight the Consequences of this attack that brought huge changes in socio- Political and Economic institutions.*

**Keywords:** Causes, British, Balochistan, Attack etc.

### **Introduction:**

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of area but smallest in population which makes only 5%. Today the Baloch land is divided into three countries Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. The total area of Balochistan the area which is part of Pakistan is around 347190 sqm. This is forming 43 % of the state's land and containing most of its mineral resources. It is bounded in the south by Arabian Sea, in the west by Iran, in the north by Afghanistan and in the east the mountains and desert that separates it from

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rest of Pakistan. The Balochistan state was ruled under Baloch khans of Kalat but in 1839 when Balochistan came under British control, the Bolan was guarded by a strong garrison above the pass at Quetta and The Baloch tribes were controlled by subsidies. The invasion of Kalat started on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1839. It resulted in bombardment of the palace and death of some 300 people, Mehrab khan the ruler of Kalat was killed. However, with the passage of time the British involvement in Balochistan increased. They gradually strengthened their control in Balochistan through treaties, military expeditions and intrigues.

**Ameer Mehrab Khan Holds Reign:**

Amir Mehmood Khan I died on 28th March 1817 and left two sons. Ameer Mehrab Khan was the eldest so the Balochistan consultative assembly chose him for the throne on 28th March 1817. Ameer Mehrab Khan was remarkably and impressively a warrior with a ferocious temper and had a simmering behavior (Nasir Khan, 1995).

Due to his apparent harsh behavior the Ameer had a number of enemies in his royal court, and that's why he had to keep always an eye on his royal court constantly. Meanwhile, his mischief-makers tend to stir him up against the noble chieftains, British Raj, and Shah of Afghanistan. Moreover, the mischievous people went to the same three mentioned powers to topple the Ameer. On the other hand, those people who were against the Ameer were actually at ill-eased towards each other (Parvez Ahmed, 2017).

The British entered the subcontinent around 16-17th centuries. Until the mid-18th century, they were only relying on trade which they were relishing well. Subsequently, until the mid-18th century, the British had started playing the divide and rule policy between landlords and different state rulers, and in many instances, they were giving a hefty price for taking control of states. The 1757 Forward Policy helped the British imperialists to successfully take control of Urrisa, Bihar and Bengal from Delhi King Hakim Shah Alam and then bringing these states under the direct control of East India Company (Shah Muhammad, 2010).

By 1799, Maisoor had fallen in Britain army hands and half of South-East was under East India Company. During 1803-1805 battles of Marathas with the British army, most of their states had been annexed with the British Indian states. Till so far, only in the north west of India, Sindh and Punjab states had not been under the East India Company control. So, when the British had planned to clinch Punjab and Sindh, they had already planned

and strategized to attack Afghanistan and Iran, and the British had also envisioned the geostrategic importance of Balochistan especially North Balochistan from where it easily connects with Afghanistan, Iran and then Central Asian countries (Shah Muhammad, 2010).

The English invaders had already had their stronghold over the south Balochistan's Bay of Persia shores and had massive control over Indian Ocean waters from where the passages stretched from Europe to Hindustan and Hindustan to Iran. Even, East India Company had until the 18th century's sevent decade, signed an agreement with the Iranian King about the British businesses privileges. And by that agreement, the British had successfully got legitimate rights of shorelands, and by those shore lands they had built business villages and anchorage in Port Abbas 1761 and Boo Shafer 1853 (Evanof, 1952).

The British by 1810 had sought Balochistan for their expansionist plans, and Henry Pottinger was sent as a visitor to Balochistan by East India Company, who met Khan Mehmood Khan, and subsequently, he provided important information to the English (Shah Muhammad, 2010).

In 1814, the English and Iran had an agreement which was against Russia. And through that agreement, the English further got a strong hold over the Persian Gulf Bay shores. In 1820, the English imposed an agreement with the Sheikh of Oman, that agreement and its spirit emboldened the British naval forces to get a hold on waters of Persian Gulf. Later, the Sheikh of Bahrain also joined the agreement which resulted in favour of British to take control of islands in Bahrain, and not only this now the British had literal control upon the waters, which potentially gave them an unprecedented authority on Iran and Balochistan (Evanof, 1952).

And during this time, the British had started intervening with active political maneuverings in Afghan homeland which shared borders with Hindustan and Central Asian countries (M.K Pekoline, 2006).

The East India Company was finding lame excuses to stop so called attacks by the French on India and was also working to sabotage the growing alliance of Iran and France. Even, in 1809 Infestestine represented the British in Afghanistan to convince the Ameer for an alliance with Britishers, but that move proved futile. After that, the English openly started planning to occupy Afghanistan and Punjab territories. For finding means and ways the English had devised a survey. And the paths going towards Kandahar, the English made such strides to supply food to army and grain for their animals, such steps were strategized. In Sindh and Balochistan spies were sent (M.K. Pekoline, 2006).

In 1831, the famous English spy Alexander Burns was sent to the Sikh State for negotiations so that an alliance could made against Afghanistan.

Alexander Burns played pivotal role mustering support for English businesses swift carrying in Sindh and Balochistan (Carl Marx, 1947). Got the support of Ameers. In 1832, on the ground of this support, Lord William signed a proper deal (Parvez Ahmed, 2017).

From 1836 to 1837, the agents who were sent to Sindh for negotiations were as; Pottinger to Hyderabad, Leech to Shikarpur and Mayson to Khairpur (Pervez Ahmed, 2017). Meanwhile, when Leech was returning back from Khairpur, he was sent to Khan Mehrab Khan to muster support for the English army, paving the way and supplying food for the artillery (Pervez Ahmed, 2017). But Leech wasn't successful in his attempt to persuade the Khan (despite Dawood Muhammad and Muhammad Hassan's) strongest disapproval the English couldn't seal a deal with Khan Mehrab Khan (M.K. Pekoline, 2006).

Whereas, Gul Khan Naseer, in his book History of Balochistan, mentions this incident as such:

“Leech received a warm welcome in Kalat by Khan Mehrab Khan. But Leech was pathetically undiplomatic and did not well versed with the affairs of state but was an obdurate army man. In fact, the warm greetings and sheer Asian rituals and customs gave him much confidence that his western mindset rose in pride. Despite all, he Khan Mehrab Khan behaved well with him. However, no formal deal was reached with Khan Mehrab Khan, later, Khan Kalat wholeheartedly provided food for animals and passage to the English army.” (Gul Khan Naseer, 1982).

### **The Allegations against Mir Mehrab Khan:**

Mir Ahmed Yar Khan son of Shah Nawaz Khan, was a contender to the throne of Kalat, was in Kacchi with Fateh Khan. Aakhund Muhammad Siddique with his traitor was serving Barakzai Sardars in Mastung. He then reached Shikarpur and in a court of Shujah ul Mulk convinced them that the real contender to the throne of Kalat was Shah Nawaz Khan and the government of Khan Mehrab Khan was illegitimate. Leech, with the prior approval of Khan Mehrab Khan, ordered businessmen of Kachhi to buy and preserve grain for English army. Not so then the news came to Leech who was in Shikarpur, that the grain collected for his army was plundered and looted by the personnels of Khan Mehrab Khan. Hearing this Burns got enraged and he wrote a fulminating letter to Khan, in fact, the letter was originally written by Shah Shujah, who was in the custody of the British. It was written in the letter that if Khan Mehrab Khan would not bow down before the English demands he would be dethroned and Mir Shah Nawaz would be elevated to the throne of Kalat state (Gul Khan Naseer, 1982).

Mulla Muhammad Hassan, after reaching Kalat, told Khan Mehrab

Khan about the dangerous situation. Because the English had become blood thirsty of Mir Mehrab Khan. And they want to assassinate you and wanted to bring Mir Shah Nawaz in power. Mullah Muhammad Hassan pretended Khan that he did his best to reconcile the English and Mir Mehrab Khan, but McNanton was not ready to accept any such offer of friendship. Then Mulla Muhammad Hassan suggested that to barricade the areas near Bolan Pass and the people of Kachhi should be ordered to loot and plunder the Britishers, and with such maneuvers the English army could be kept from attacking Kalat. But Mir Mehrab Khan had no effect of these suggestions because Mir Mehrab Khan knew that all rebellious Sardars were against him and an ingrate in the shape of Mulla Muhammad Hassan is present in Darbar in these circumstances it is impossible to combat English army. Moreover, Mulla Muhammad Hassan, wrote royal decrees and put Royal stamps on them and sent to all the Sardars ordering them to retaliate the English army from his own, later those decrees were found with the British, which even Khan Mehrab was not aware of (Gul Khan Naseer, 1982).

Thereupon, in 1838, the English forces with the help of Shah Shujah en-routed towards Afghanistan by using Bolan Pass. During this, a huge resistance was shown by some Marri tribesmen because Balochs did not want to see the notorious foot print of the Britishers in their area and fell under their nefarious domination (Gul Khan Naseer, 1982).

Moreover, the Baloch people did not want their afghan brothers' sovereignty usurped by the English, and that's why the Balochs used each and every method to harm and damage the British (Khuda Bakhsh, 1980)

### **Anglo-Baloch Agreement of 1838:**

Mc Natin reached Shalkot for the first time and he wanted to deal the matter with utmost discretion but fools like Burns befooled him. Mc Natin sent an agreement with Burns to Khan Mehrab Khan, for the approval and safe passage of English forces from Bolan Pass, with Burns, despite knowing that Burns had no good intentions for Khan Mehrab Khan. Burns intentionally chose to select Syed Muhammad Sharif and Munshi Mohan Lal, to enrage Khan Mehrab Khan, because these two were disloyal to Khan and were confidant of Muhammad Shareef. But, Mir Mehrab Khan showed true valour of Baloch, and on Shah Shujah's behalf seconded the desires of Britishers and an agreement was signed between them (Gul Khan Naseer, 1982).

1. The English will use the Bolan Pass while going to Afghanistan. The Khan takes responsibility for English's safety of their movement and goods.

2. The Khan Kalat will provide animals and food to the English army.

3. The Khan will welcome Shah Shuja in Shalkot and will accept his orders.

4. By accepting above services the East India Company will recognise Khan Kalat as the ruler of Balochistan and will provide him with all help.

5. East India Company and the government of Shah Shujah will grant 1.5 lac rupees in subsidy to Khan Kalat per annum.

By signing off such agreement Burns presented 20 thousand to Mir Mehrab Khan for meeting Shah Shujah in Shalkot and left behind Munshi Mohan Lal in Kalat (Israr Zehri, 2010).

This agreement with the English was against the expectations of Syed Muhammad Sharif and Aakhund Mulla Muhammad. Because they thought it would further damage their vested interests and they couldn't play havoc against Mir Mehrab Khan. Then, Syed Muhammad Sharif and Mulla Aakhund Siddique were bent to spew venom against Mir Mehrab Khan in ears of Burns, that Mir Mehrab Khan is backing away from the agreement and Khan had planned to tear away the agreement, which could result in highway devastation of the English. Burns believed on these nefarious designs of Syed Muhammad Sharif and handed him some two thousand along with the copy of the agreement. Syed Sharif won in his ploy and Burns then left with his few friends to Shalkot and Syed Sharif was left behind in the camp (Gul Khan Naseer, 1982). From Kalat Mulla Muhammad was following his own lethal ideas by sending Syed Muhammad's nephew to the camp to loot and plunder Burn's camp especially the box which contained the specimen of agreement. Soon after this incident Syed Muhammad then reached Quetta and narrated the whole story to Burns. Burns upon hearing this news flared up in rage and not any fact-check he threw all the allegations on Mir Mehrab Khan (Israr Zehri, 2010)

### **The Severance of Relations with Ameer Mehrab Khan:**

Mir Mehrab Khan was unaware of the slyness of Syed Muhammad Sharif and Aakhund Siddique, and he was also amazed that why Burns had presented a hefty amount of 20 thousand to him for a little favor. Muhammad Hassan deftly saw the perturb on Mir Mehrab Khan's face and told him that the English were fond of money and were trying to buy him by giving him such money. So if he went to Quetta the English would arrest him and subsequently send him to Calcutta jail. Mir Mehrab Khan later got a letter from the English that he may not come to Quetta.

After plundering the English army by Syed Muhammad's men, the English thought Ameer Mehrab Khan as an enemy and severed all relations with him and were bent upon to teach him a lesson once for all (Nasir Khan 1995).

### **Causes of Attacking Kalat State:**

The venture of attacking the Afghans by Shah Shujah the English were too busy, and from Kalat, the English well aware of the ongoing situations with the help of letters being sent by Aakhund Fateh Muhammad. Aakhund Muhammad Hassan, meanwhile, ordered the people of Kachhi to loot and plunder the English caravans at Bolan Pass, and also he kept sending wrong messages to the English who became outrageous against Khan Mehrab Khan.

Mir Mehrab Khan was like drowning alone in the tides (Gul Khan, 182). But, the English had firmly planned to attack Kalat (Israr Zehri, 2010).

After clinching victory in Afghanistan the remaining English army came back to Quetta. Meantime, the English army force had received the orders from Governor Auckland of attacking Kalat and devastating Mir Mehrab Khan's empire (Aziz Bugti, 1994).

An English army battalion was sent under the command of Brigadier Wilshire towards Kalat. Consequently, the English threatened Mir Mehrab Khan to surrender before the sovereignty of Briton government and Shah of Afghanistan. Because they were well abreast of the dwindling situation of the royal court in Kalat. And they were quite sure that Khan had no other option but to accept theirs. But Khan didn't surrender and fought courageously (Aziz Bugti, 1996). It was tried that Khan should surrender or run away but he refused to do so and opted to go for the battle (Hittoo Ram, 2001).

Mir Mehrab Khan wrote to the English that if they came an inch ahead of Quetta and did try to attack Kalat, so he wouldn't surrender and defend Kalat until the last drop of blood (Gul Khan Naseer, 1982).

Aakhund Muhammad Siddique associated with the royal court of Khan Mehrab Khan, had written a history of Khanates in Persian, he was of the view that it was impossible to face such a humungous English army, and for that time being it was the need of the hour to delay the battle with the English. To which the Khan responded as such:

“I know the English are the masters of London and the whole Hindustan. Now they have also conquered Kabul and Kandahar as well. And I know the force they have had I cannot withstand it but from this motherland where else I can go, my forefathers had lived and ruled here.” (Aziz Bhugti, 1994).

“Alhamdulillah by the grace of Almighty Allah, I am fighting for Allah’s cause. I am thankful to Allah that in my entire life I never bowed before anyone. I struggled to get this throne of Kalat and never accepted anyone’s sovereignty. Why I should not sacrifice my life now and be proud of the pages of history. I am hoping that I will attain the highest reward of martyrdom and Allah will provide me with this opportunity (Mir Ahmed Yar khan, 2010)

When Mir Mehrab Khan heard about the unexpected English attack, he called upon the Sardars of Sarawan and Jhalawan for immediate help. For the sanctity of homeland and Baloch traditions, he called upon the Sardars to help. He even called them for taking part in religious war (Jihad), but those hearts of Sardars had been rusted like iron, these calls didn’t fall on their ears. In fact, all Baloch Sardars thought that this was the last cowardly call of Khan Mehrab Khan, even Khan Mehrab Khan sent his daughter Allah Deeni to Sardar Rasheed Khan Zehri to take part in the battle but he also refused to oblige. Alas! From nowhere Khan Mehrab Khan got help. He sent his Mir Naseer Khan along with Gul Muhammad to Sardar Fazul Khan Mengal for organizing people, but not so many hundred people gathered near Iskalkoo, Nichara and Mangochar areas who were waiting for the English army to shed their blood for this homeland (Gul Khan Naseer, 1982).

The British authorities for keeping their vested interests in Hindustan and Iran wanted to preserve this part of the land of Balochistan, mainly for its geostrategic location and importance. It had 600 miles’ coastline of warm waters. Which was a pivotal passage for trade and military expeditions? And all those forces whoever sought to attack the British from Afghanistan and Iran could be counterattacked from the mainland of Balochistan. So, taking control of Balochistan was the prime objective of the British. From eastern Balochistan, where much of the frequent active passages were going were Shalkot, Mastung, Jhalawan, Kech, Gandhawa, Makran and Lasbella states were of prime importance (A.W Hews, 2002).

“It is hard to say that how much Balochs had made trade progress in those days because much of the trade monopoly was with the Hindu traders



at that time, but as of Kalat, it can be said that trade had made quite a progress here.” Pervez Ahmed, 2017.

In Kalat 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the houses were of Hindu traders from Shikarpur and Multan. And they had their shops in main Kalat Khani bazaar.” (Hennery Pottinger, 1976).

### **Fall of Kalat November 1839:**

The English forces were making strides towards Kalat under the command of General Wilshire; the Sardars of Sarawan were unfazed and even wholeheartedly welcomed them and helped them as well. The Sardars of Sarawan, in fact, sat down in their homes and were spectators watching the crumbling of Baloch Empire by the notorious English commanders (Aziz Bugti, 1996).

Khan Mehrab Khan was unaware that this state of Kalat was not the one which was during the times of Khan Naseer Khan. That was truly an epochal era when on one call of Khan Naseer Khan hundred and thousands of people would come and lay their lives for this homeland, and now not more than 300 were present. On the other hand, the English forces had 7000 men armed with lethal armoury and such (Shaheen Qaisrani, 1994).

Then the English force under the command of General Wilshire, on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1839, reached Kalat. Khan and his aides were in the fort and were prepared to safeguard the motherland from the brutal onslaught of enemy (Aziz Bugti, 1996).

The battle began early in the morning which lasted till evening. It was, in fact, a battle of arms and spirits. The Balochs safeguarded the fort unless one cannon shell hit one of the main gates of forte, then the English forces entered the fort but yet Balochs showed great resistance. When the enemy entered Khan’s ‘Meeri’, so there was he in person ready to engage with them (Aziz Bugti, 1996).

Khan Baloch, the gallant, took his sword and entered into enemy lines, but in this battle more of powdered arms were being used instead of conventional swords, the Khan sustained 13 wounds on his body. While engaging with an English officer the Khan was shot by another officer and that very moment he succumbed to death. There was no place uninjured on his body. He himself killed two soldiers. This gallantry of Khan Mehrab Khan imprinted in the pages of history till date. Apart from the martyrdom of Khan, many of his selfless unrelenting warriors got martyred. Moreover,

some 25 females were martyred according to their will so that the British could not even see or touch the women after the martyrdom of their men (Ahmed Yar Khan 2010).

If we look through the pages of imperial Britain history, we rarely see such historic heroism occurrence likes of Khan Mehrab Khan in South-East-West Asia. He was a great nationalist, freedom fighter and torch-bearer of all such attributes (Shaheen Qaisarani, 1994).

With the martyrdom of Khan Mehrab Khan, the expansionist pursuits of imperial British got pace in leaps and bounds. In his own words of General Wilshire, he wrote a letter to Governor-General narrating the fall of Kalat, his words were:

“The enemy was fighting to preserve the sanctity of motherland with a great frame of mind and fervor. Afterwards, the English forces accessed the inner gates of the fort (Meeri), where Mir Mehrab Khan was leading his soldiers and after some resistance the Khan with his warriors showed great fierce resistance and was killed having to hold the sword in his hands. And from adjoining areas, we were rained with bullets and then we announced a common pardon for all, but not until evening we could not control the situation”.

As compared to Ghazni at this fort we had much resistance from the enemy. It is stated with great regret that we sustained potential loss as compared to the enemy” (Aziz Bugti 1994).

According to Major Wilshire report, the English forces lost 4 captains, 2 lieutenants, one flag bearer, one adjoint and other soldiers total 138 persons were killed and injured (Parvez Ahmed,2017)

J.K. writes, that such amount of brutish force has never been witnessed anywhere, but, it was witnessed in case of Kalat state and a massive number of people were killed.

Professor Ashraf Shaheen Qaiserani writes, although Mir Mehrab Khan was a great person but he wasn't a coherent ruler, he had sycophants in his royal court or he was unaware of their notorious interests. No matter what causes he had to face he was not a true ruler that in 23 years span of ruling he couldn't discern those disloyal court sycophants. Nevertheless, his entire political life was grappled with conspirators, tribal dissidents and overall a chaotic period. In fact, his epoch ended in 1839 took away his and some warriors lives, and Balochistan lost its independent sovereign status with

this loss, and the imperial expansionists deemed Balochistan an obstruction in their way that too ended (Shaheen Qaisarani, 1994).

Whereas, Aziz Bugti is of the view that Mir Mehrab Khan was a sovereign and independent ruler. And without mentioning Khan Mehrab Khan the history of Balochistan holds hollow status, and he was the only and last independent ruler of Balochs, and he refused to accept the Afghan supremacy and never bowed before the British too (Aziz Bugti, 1996).

In South-East Asia, after Tipu Sultan, Mir Mehrab Khan was the only ruler who sacrificed his own life for motherland. Mir Mehrab Khan, like Tipu Sultan, had to face the enemy from three sides. Nonetheless, Tipu Sultan, when fighting the British, had verbal support from the powerful French government, but Mir Mehrab Khan had no such foreign support. Mir Mehrab Khan despite knowing that his own Sardars are not going to help him and with those paltry warriors he would not win the battle but without any fear he fought gallantly till his last breath and indelible imprints on the pages of history. He fought for an independent nation whose ruler was self-sovereign and gave his life for the sanctity of motherland but did not bow before the enemy (Aziz Bugti, 1996).

We can ascertain the level of profound fondness for the motherland from these facts that in Punjab his relations with ruler Ranjit Singh were disturbing, and Shah Shujah's return back to Afghanistan throne and becoming his enemy. The English bribed his royal court members and Sardars turned their backs against him. Mir Mehrab Khan was well aware of these facts and he faced everyone who tried to baffle him. He hugged death in independently instead of living a life of a slave in Balochistan (Aziz Bugti, 1996).

The fall of Kalat not only ended self-sovereignty in Balochistan, rather, a center of strong resistance against British in the whole region has expired. (Shaheen Qaisarani, 1994).

### **Conclusion:**

Balochistan has been remained as unlucky territory throughout its history. This region had been a gate way for foreign invaders and Traders. Many Conquerors, Merchants and Travelers passed through it. British had got great power in sub continent till 19<sup>th</sup> century but they were always afraid for their Indian territories as Russia was always there as a serious threat for them. That's why British adopted forward policy to keep Russia away from their Indian territories, there for they planned to occupy Afghanistan and

Balochistan in 1839. Mir Mehrab khan was martyred and Balochistan became under British rule and very soon they had a great control over Balochistan. Amir Mehrab Khan Shaheed, despite massive rebellions, internal strife and conspiracies, ruled for 22 years in Balochistan. When he was martyred he was only 38 years old on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1839, by defending his motherland, while fighting the English forces. This attack has brought great hatred in Baloch people against British and their policies that's why they faced huge resistance from Baloch tribal people and faced losses. In consequence this attack awakened the people of Balochistan and they became united.

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