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Sindh-Iran Relations, during the Talpur period

Abstract

Sindh's relations with Iran go deep down in history to the Indus valley civilization era. It has been established that close economic and cultural connections existed between the two highly cultured people. Historians have conclusively proved that before and after the advent of Islam, Sindh and Iran enjoyed intimate neighborly relations which had its effects on almost all spheres of human activity.

During the period from 1783 AD to 1843 AD, Sindh was ruled by the Talpur Mirs and in the same period Qachar dynasty held sway in Iran. The present study provides an accurate list of the rulers of both these dynasties and throws ample light on the political and diplomatic ties between Sindh and Iran during this period. The changes and challenges which were taking place on the international scene have also been highlighted.

A thorough discussion encompassing social, economic, political and cultural aspects has been made in the light of available historical and literary sources. This is the first serious research study on the subject which is congregated with very useful historical material for further research and enquiry.

Key words: Iran; Talpur Rulers; Sindh; Qajar Dynesty

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Introduction

The year 1197A.H / 1783AD. witnessed the downfall of the Kalhora dynasty and ascendancy of Talpur family to power in Sindh. Talpurs were Baloch but according to their own version “We, the Amirs of Sindh, are Biluchis - not of the tribe known in Persia as the Kach Biluchis, for our origin is Arab, and we trace our descent from Amir Hamzah, the son of Hasham the son of Abdul-Munaf, though some say that Amir Hamzah was the son of Hazart Ali.” (Eastwick 1989:305). Talpurs came in Sindh at a time when the great Mughal empire was at its fag end. They successfully acquired many jagirs from the Mughals and increased their power and influence alongwith affluence and wealth (Mulai Shedai 1958: 591- 592). During the Kalhora period they were given important military posts which further strengthened their position. Talpur Mirs played a very significant and important role in bringing about the downfall of Kalhoras and captured power. Although they waged a combined war to dislodge the Kalhora rulers but after inflicting convincing defeat on them, they fell apart and succumbed to Internal dissensions. It was against this background that Sindh was divided into three parts, each ruled independently by its own Talpur Amir (Mulai Shedai 1958: 591- 592). Mir Suhrab Khan got power in Khairpur whereas Mir Tharo ruled over Mirpur, leaving the main and important seat of power at Hyderabad under the effective control of very influential and prominent Talpur family. Historically, Khairpur and Mirpur enjoyed but secondary status as against the Talpur Government at Hyderabad which assumed important position in the new arrangement. The following Amirs ruled over the Hyderabad kingdom.

1. Mir Fateh Ali Khan (1783 - 1802 AD)
2. Mir Ghulam Ali Khan (1802 - 1811 AD)
3. Mir Karam Ali Khan (1811 - 1828 AD)
4. Mir Murad Ali Khan (1828 - 1832 AD)
5. Mir Nur Muhammad Khan (1832 - 1840 AD)
6. Mir Muhammad Nasir Khan (1840 - 1843 AD)

(Mulai Shedai 1958: 577)

The Talpurs thus ruled over Sindh for about sixty years. During this period they developed close and cordial relations with Iran, a neighbour Muslim country.

Iranian Rulers During Talpurs

Let's have a look at the list of names of Iranian Kings at the corresponding time.

1. Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar (1796 - 1797 AD)
2. Fateh Ali Shah Qajar (1797 - 1834 AD)
3. Muhammad Shah Qajar (1834 - 1848 AD)
(Badakhshani, 1971)

Muhammad Shah was followed by Nasiruddin Shah (1848-1896 AD), Muzaffaruddin Shah (1896-1907 AD), Muhammad Ali Shah (1907-1909 AD) and Ahmed Ali Shah (1909-1924 AD), who proved to be the last King of Qajar dynasty in Iran. It will be noted that these last four Qajar Kings were not the contemporaries of Talpur family hence this article excludes their period and concentrates upon the times of the first three Qajar Kings of Iran while discussing Sindh's relations with Iran.

Relationships with Iran

Externally, the Talpurs of Sindh were confronted with, more or less the similar hard and arduous circumstances which the Qajar dynasty of Iran had to face. By the close of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the entire region between Central Asia and South Asia bore out a disturbing situation of confusion, unrest, disunity and helplessness. In 1757 AD, the British in the guise of East India Company, occupied Bengal and laid the foundation of English power in the sub-continent. Slowly and gradually, employing force, fraud and fear, they captured and controlled many states and territories in India. They effectively and treacherously put to use the policy of 'divide and rule' and enhanced their power. Frightening the local states of Russian, French and Afghan aggression, they posed themselves as their friends to be allowed free hand in their affairs as a quid pro quo for security and protection. Sindh too was entrapped in such vicious move. Nathan Crow, Smith, Pottinger, James Burnes, Alexander Burnes and Outram on different occasions visited Sindh and passing through links, political pacts and agreements, they reached the point of conquering Sindh and displacing their erstwhile patterns, friends and benefactors (Mulai Shedai 1958: 608).

Iran too had to face more or less the similar situation. The first Qajar ruler Agha Muhammad Khan had to encounter internal problems besides confronting the Georgian problem with the active role of the Russians. During that period many Georgian citizens were brought as prisoners in Iran. After the murder of Agha Muhammad Khan (1797 AD), Fateh Ali Qajar became the Shah of Iran. He was nephew of Muhammad Khan. He ruled Iran for thirty seven years. He had to suppress local uprisings and face the Russian aggression. As the Afghans proved a constant headache for Sindh, similarly was Afghan ruler Zaman Khan a permanent trouble for Iran. Afghan Amir demanded Khurasan from Iran which created ill will and strained their relations. East India Company was too keen to utilize this tense situation to its advantage and enter Iran. John Malcolm succeeded in finalizing a friendship with the Shah of Iran. Subsequently, Napoleon Bonaparte also tried to enter into an agreement with Iran. French offered help to Iran in the event of Russian attack and sought Iran's acquiescence for a passage to launch attack on India. Fateh Ali Shah Qajar did not agree to the French proposal. Afterwards in view of the impending Russian threat, Shah of Iran reluctantly accepted Napoleon's terms. John Malcolm visited Iran for the second time and insisted upon the annulment of French treaty. But Fateh Ali Shah Qajar refused to oblige the English emissary. The Russo-French pact somewhat eased the tension but Iranian interests were altogether neglected in the peace terms. Against this backdrop, the British grasped opportunity to enter the Iranian stage. In the beginning of the new move Sir Harford Jones visited Iran, followed by John Malcolm's third successful visit who accomplished the job assigned to him. Muhammad Shah Qajar (1834-1848 AD) had also to face the similar situation. The British increased their influence in Iran on the pretext of Afghan and Russian interference and meddling into the affairs of the country. The British thus tried to increase their influence in Iran on the pretext of Afghan and Russian intentions in the region. Later on in view of the increasing Russian influence in Iran, the Shah showed cold shoulder to the East India Company officers who thought it fit to leave Iran for the sub-continent (Badakhshani, 1971).

Historical Sources

The basic sources on the history of Sindh provide but scanty material on the relations between Sindh and Iran. However the contemporary literary works throw more light on the subject. Talpur Mirs came into power in Sindh in the year 1783 AD. The literature of that time shows that during the rule of the first Talpur Amir, Mir Fateh Ali Khan there was exchange

of emissaries between Sindh and Iran. One such emissary reached the Iranian court, received befitting welcome and honour and returned to Sindh alongwith an Iranian agent Mirza Muhammad Ali. Mir "Maail" was the court poet of Talpurs. On this occasion, he composed a couplet:

به بزم شهبان باد وی سرخرو ز "مائل" بحق این دعا آمده

(Abbasi and Rushdi 1959: 303)

The East India Company watched the increasing Iranian influence in Sindh with cautious concern. The Viceroy of India Lord Wellesley forewarned the governor of Bombay Jonathan Duncan about the repercussions of the serving situation in Sindh and wrote: "Talpur Mirs of Sindh have grown sick of Afghan overlordship. It would be worthwhile to establish a business factory in Sindh to keep an eye on the activities of Afghans, Iranians, Russians and the French in the region." (Mulai Shedai 1958: 610).



(Sindh River)

It was against this background that Jonathan Duncan, sent Agha Abul Hasan an Iranian British agent to the court of Talpurs in Sindh. Abul Hasan stayed as guest of Syed Ibrahim Shah of Hyderabad with whose influence he got audience in the Sindh court and successfully achieved his purpose (Mulai Shedai 1958: 610). In this way official link was established between the English and the rulers of Sindh. In 1799 AD Nathan Crow, an English agent arrived at Hyderabad. As a result of successful talks, Hyderabad Government allowed the company to set up its factory in Sindh. Reciprocating the English move, the Sindh rulers thought it worthwhile to

send Agha Muhammad Beg as an emissary to Bombay (Mulai Shedai 1958: 612).

The Relations between Sindh and Iran were getting closer and stronger with every passing day. As mentioned earlier East India Company was ever watchful and monitored the situation with grave concern. The choice of an Iranian as its emissary, in preference to a local Sindhi, contained much stuff for the British to evaluate the nature and strenght of the relations between Sindh and Iran. In the year 1799 AD when Nathan Crow visited Sindh (Hyderabad), he found Iranian emissary Mir Muhammad Ismail already in the capital city with a dilomatic assignment. Mir. "Maail", the persian poet of Sindh has recorded the event in these words:

سال تشریف شریفش زآن مکان در ملک سند چون ز دل جستم بگفتا "میرزا خوش آمده"

(Abbasi and Rushdi 1959:372)

[The underlined words indicate year 1214 A.H which corresponds to 1799 AD. At that time Mir Fateh Ali Khan was the ruler of Sindh]

Mir Fateh Ali Khan died in 1802 AD (1217 AH) and was succeeded by Mir Ghulam Ali Khan who was fully aware of the quickly changing political climate in the region and carefully watched the activities of English agents in Kabul and Iran (Mulai Shedai 1958: 624). Despite diplomatic activity of the English emissaries in the area, Sindh-Iran relations grew stronger. During this period, Mirza Ismail visited Sindh for the second time as an Iranian dilomat. Syed Sabit Ali Shah wrote a poem in praise of the distinguished Iranian visitor (Abbas Ali Beg 1984: 61-62). On the recommendation of Mir Karam Ali Khan, Syed Sabit Ali Shah was deputed to the Iranian Court. He returned to Sindh after successful mission in 1804 AD (1219 AH). Mir Ghulam Ali "Maail" recorded this event as under:

سال قدو مش به سند هائف غیبم سحر گفت "به مجد و علا آمده ثابت علی"

(Abbasi and Rushdi 1959: 375)

[The underlined words indicate the year 1219 AH which corresponds to 1804 AD]

Sabit Ali Shah presented gifts from the Amirs of Sindh for the Shah of Iran. He also recited an eulogy in praise of Fateh Ali Shah Kajar. In his second audience before the Shah, he read yet another qasida which was received well. Thus Sabit Ali Shah achieved the diplomatic success which such missions are motivated for. When Sabit Ali Shah paid a departing visit to the Iranian Court, he received many presents for the Amirs of Sindh and also much presents for him (Abbas Ali Beg 1984: 62-63, 499-502).

During the days of Mir Ghulam Ali Khan Talpur another important event took place which throw sufficient light on the relations between Sindh and Iran. This event took place in the year 1805 AD (1220 AH). Mir Karam Ali Khan who succeeded Mir Ghulam Ali Khan had four wives but none bore him a child. Therefore, he fondly cherished the idea of adopting a boy of noble blood as his son. We have already mentioned about the wars between Georgia and Iran. Heracleus, the Georgian ruler was engaged in war against Iran which was continued by his son Gurgin Khan. These wars caused immense loss of life and property to both combatants. But the Iranian captured thousands of Georgians as prisoners who were sold as slaves in the bazars of Iranian towns and cities. These slaves included two sons of Gurgin Khan - Mirza Khusro, aged 7 years and his elder brother (Mirza Humayun), aged 9 years who soon fell ill and died of fever. Mirza Khusro Beg was brought up by an Iranian Minister Haji Ibrahim who gave the boy good education and training. At that time, the emissary of Sindh rulers, Akhund Muhammad Ismail (Mullah Muhammad Ismail) was staying as guest with the Iranian Minister, who saw Mirza Khusro and impressed by the boy, asked the minister to hand him over to him to present him (Mirza Khusro) to Mir Karam Ali Khan. Mirza Khusro at the age of 15 reached the court of Talpurs in Sindh. Mir Karam Ali Khan adopted him as his son and made special arrangement for his education and upbringing. Afterwards Khusro Beg ably performed many diplomatic duties and proved himself to be an efficient and capable nobleman particularly during the time of Mir Karam Ali Khan who died in 1828 AD. After the death of his mentor and godfather, Khusro Beg kept himself away from all official duties/ function (Mirza Qlich Beg 1982: 293-295). Mostly this event is shown in the time of Mir Karam Ali which is not correct.

Meheraforze Mirza Habib describing this event writes that:“The Shah of Iran, Fateh Ali Shah Kajar gave some gifts and presents for the Amirs of Sindh which included a large size protrait of the Shah. The Talpurs when learnt about the return of the emissary,sent sardars for welcome.The portrait was presented in the Sindh court where a large number of dignitaries had assembled.Seeing Khusro Beg,Mir Karam Ali became exceedingly happy,embraced the young boy and declared that Khusro Beg henceforth be treated as a member of his family”(Mirza Habib2005:48-49).



(Sindh)

Exchange of emissaries and visits of diplomatic missions became a normal practice. When the English agent Captian Davidson visited the Talpur court of Sindh in 1808 AD, he found an Iranian emissary among the guests (Mulai Shedai 1958: 624). This provides ample evidence to prove that the most cordial relations existed between the two countries.

Mir Ghulam Ali Khan died in 1811 A.D (1227 AH) and was succeeded by Mir Karam Ali Khan. Shams-ul-Ulema Mirza Kalich Beg writes: “Mir Karam Ali Khan was a very just and wise ruler. His reign was a peaceful

reign in which no war took place. Consequently he had ample time to devote to the promotion of art and science and to the encouragement of commerce. Being a literary man himself, his court was crowded with poets and learned men. He contracted friendship with Fateh Ali Shah Kajar, the then King of Persia, and consequently envoys used to come and go between the two rulers, exchanging presents. As the Mir was fond of swords, rich and beautiful swords were imported from different countries and many good sword makers, as well as good writers, painters, besides men of art and science, came from Persia and Khurasan to live in the town of Haidarabad” (Mirza Qlich Beg 1982: 212-213).

Contemporary historical and literary sources do not reveal much about the exchange of diplomatic missions during the rule of Mir Karam Ali Khan. Meherafroze Mirza Habib says: “During his time, Syed Muhammad Ali Shah (a relative of Syed Muhammad Ismail) led a deputation of four to Iran alongwith many gifts and presents including elephants for the Shah of Iran. There were separate gifts for th Iranian ministers” (Mirza Habib 2005: 50-51).

Mir Karam Ali Khan died in 1828 A.D (1244 AH) and was succeeded by Mir Murad Ali Khan. Mirza Kalich Beg writes: “This Mir behaved so wisely and justly that all the Mirs of Khairpur and Mirpur and other Baloch chiefs remained attached to him by ties of affection. His reign was a peaceful reign, in which cultivators and traders lived very happily. At Kabul there was anarchy about this time and so, in fact, the Mir had become an independent ruler. His friendship with Fateh Ali Shah, the king of Persia, grew to intimacy, so much so that the king was inclined to give a daughter of his to the Mir in marriage, but the latter declined the honour gracefully owing to the long distance and his old age” (Mirza Qlich Beg 1982: 220).

Mir Murad Ali Khan died in 1833 AD (1249 AH), and the Sindh throne was occupied by Mir Nur Muhammad Khan. A year later (1834 AD) Fateh Ali Shah Kajar also died. He was succeeded by Muhammad Shah Kajar. Mir Nur Muhammad died in 1840 AD (1255 AH). Mir Muhammad Nasir Khan became the new ruler of Sindh. There appears no movement of emissaries or exchange of dilomats between Sindh and Iran during the rule of last two Amirs of Sindh. In 1843 AD, the English forces under the command of Charles Napier, defeated Talpurs and captured Sindh.

Discuss

The Talpur Mirs of Sindh had very close and cordial relations with the rulers of Iran. Exchange of emissaries and gifts took place on regular basis with the result that the Talpur court of Sindh visibly displayed deep Iranian impact. Besides, heretic influence considerably biased their religious beliefs on the side of that sect. Many were manifestly inclined towards heresy (Quarterly Mehran, 1955). James Burnes in 1827 AD visited the court of Amirs of Sindh and stayed in Sindh for couple of month. About the religious beliefs of Talpurs he writes: "The Talpoors were originally Soonnees, like the Baloches and Sindian in general; but their connection with Persia has infected the court with the heresies of that Kingdom; and, with the exception of Mourad Ali and Sobdar, who are still attached to the orthodox doctrines, they have become Sheahs or followers of Ali" (Burnes 1831:81).

Architecture in Sindh was greatly influenced by the Iran-Sindh contact. The renowned scholar of Sindh Pir Hussamuddin Rashdi writes: The daily life of the people of Sindh and their buildings showed prominently the Persian influence. One such relic bearing great resemblance still stands in a dilapidated condition in the Hyderabad fort which is a perfect copy of the "Ali Qapu" of Isfahan (Lakho 2002: 316).

Persian was the court language of Sindh during the Talpur period which received generous patronage. According to Burnes: Mir Fateh Ali Khan encouraged the writing of Futteh Nameh on the pattern of Shah Nameh... The Futteh Nameh is rehearsed in durbar, and many of the countries mark their adulation, by committing the most fulsome passages to memory" (Burnes 1831: 47). Talpur Amirs patronized the Persian poets and writers who were given cash awards and prizes. Many Talpur rulers and princes produced Persian literature of considerable merit which find due mention in the books of the time.

Knowing that the Talpur Amirs were great patrons of art and literature, many poets, writers, painters and calligraphers converged on Hyderabad the captial of the Sindh. They covered long distance and suffered the troubles of journey in the hope of better rewards and financial benefits from the Amirs. They were shown great respect and offered many facilities. The chroniclers of that time have recorded the names of many such poets, calligraphers and men of letters.

Conclusion

The study of Sindh-Iran relations during the Talpur period established that there were close fraternal links between the two Islamic states which were sadly snapped after the British conquest of Sindh in 1843.

In 1947, Sindh became an important federating unit of the newly formed state of Pakistan. Since the Sindh-Iran relations have assumed a new character in the changed political and historical scenario, establishing more emphasis on the cultural side, advancing cooperation in literature and knowledge. Scholars and intellectuals from Sindh and Iran have endeavored hard to see that the relations between the two people grow strong, and stronger with every passing day.

The name of Pir Hussamuddin Rashdi and his efforts for promoting cultural relations shall long be remembered with respect in Iran and Pakistan. Infact it was in 1974 that he was elusively conferred the honorary Doctoral Degree by the University of Tehran in recognition of his meritorious services.

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