

Khan-e`-Baluch-VI : Mir Nasir Khan (1749-1817)

from Inside Baluchistan

Autobiography: The Khan of Kalat

Mir Nasir Khan (also known as Nasir Khan Noori and Nasir Khan the Great) is considered to be a unique ruler in the history of the Baluches by virtues of sterling and extraordinary qualities of head and heart. Born with a sharp intellect and philosophic bend of mind, he utilized his nine years of imposed 'captivity' under Nadir Shah in studying the history of nations; their rise and falls; their concepts and ideologies; and the role of religion in the shaping of individuals and states. Such was his bearing even as a child that Nadir Shah could not help observing: *"This Baluch Prince is destined to become a great king in the future."*

Mir Nasir Khan was a multi-natured personality of his time. He combined in himself the qualities of being religious without being a fanatic; a dashing reformer without being despotic; an able general with rare military foresight; and a firm statesman. In short, he represented a fairly true picture of the ideal 'philosopher-king' whom Plato has defined in his Republic.

He was the first ruler of the region who brought about healthy friendly relations with nations, and knit the tribal organization of the Baluches into one Baluch entity. He established a Baluch parliament to function on a workable constitution based on Islamic *Sharia* (Laws) and congenial Baluch traditions. His devotion to Islam was so deep, and his pity so unshakable that people came to append the word *Wali*, meaning 'a saint', to his name. Mosques were constructed all over the State, and arrangements were made on Government level to collect *Zakat* (pool tax incumbent upon all Financially sound Muslims); and laws militating against Islamic concepts were repealed. Through a special decree he made *Purdah* (veil) compulsory for all Muslim women irrespective of their age. In short, he rooted out all social evils and established a truly Islamic social order in Baluchistan. 'Turan' -the original name of the land-was changed to 'Baluchistan'.

Another significant achievement of Mir Nasir Khan was the rooting out of the Zikri sect, the doctrines of which negated the basic teachings of Islam. The Caliph in Turkey was so much impressed by his courageous services in the cause of Islam that he conferred upon him the distinguished titles of *Ghazi-e-Deen* (Hero of Islam) and *Nasir-e-Millat-e-Mohammadiya* (the supporter of the followers of Prophet Mohammad, PBUH).

the outlawing of the Zikri sect was seized by the ambitious Ahmed Shah Abdali of Afghanistan as a serious issue; and using this incident as a pretext, he advanced towards Kalat in 1758 with his army. The Baluches put up a tenacious defense and fought fiercely. So sustained and stubborn was the Baluch Resistance that their long siege tired the Afghan army, which finally had to enter into an agreement with Mir Nasir Khan. This agreement which is known as the 'Agreement of Kalat', provided that *"henceforth Baluch forces, under the command of Khan-e`-Baluch would have their due share in all the future conquests of Ahmed Shah Abdali"*. Thus, what commenced as a bloody war ended as a happy union, which eventually proved to be a great source of strength to the Afghans.

Consequently, Mir Nasir Khan and the Army of Baluches participated with Ahmed Shah Abdali in several expeditions; and in some expeditions Nasir Khan was himself in command of the joint forces. His bold and victorious steering of the Battle of Meshed against the Persians, in particular, so greatly impressed the Afghan King that the latter gave him the title of *Brather-e`-Wafadar* (the faithful brother), and made a present of the Shal Region (now Quetta) to his mother, Bibi Maryam.

Similarly, it was Mir Nasir Khan again who, with his army of twenty five thousand Baluches, came to the help of Ahmed Shah Abdali at the famous Third Battle of Panipat in 1761. It was this combination of outstanding military valor and fighting skill which crushed once and for all the rising Marhatta menace in Northern India.

Victory Against the Sikhs

The Sikhs had formed themselves into a force to be reckoned with as early as 1710, when they made their first incursions into the Upper Doab under Banda-a nondescript follower of Guru Govind Singh. They had sacked Sharanpur, Ambehtan and Nanavath in the Upper Doab; but moved no further till after the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761, when they once again resumed their infiltrations deeper into the region, finally capturing Lahore in 1764, where they established their short-lived Khalsa State extending from Jhelum to the banks of Jamuna.

It was then that they rose against the Muslims, whose condition was getting progressively weaker due to the onset of the general decline of the Moghul Empire. Sensing danger to the cause of Islam, Shah Waliullah of Delhi wrote to Ahmed Shah Abdali and Mir Nasir Khan asking them to help their brethren-in-faith. This was an open call for *Jehad*(religious war); and Abdali and the Khan-e`-Baluch-VI, Mir Nasir Khan, responded readily to it, the latter's contribution being a contingent of twelve thousand warriors headed by himself in the front.

Thus it was that a combined Muslim Army of Afghans and Baluches marched into India to meet their common foe in 1765. As always, Nasir Khan was in the forefront; but in this particular engagement, he was more enthusiastic and reckless than ever, for if he fell on the battlefield, it would mean *Shahadat*(martyrdom)-a Divine distinction which every true Muslim must live for.

And so it happened that while Mir Nasir Khan was piercing his way on his horse through the Sikh ranks in a furious outburst near Lahore, he fell off his steed; and as he fell to the ground, the turban he was wearing got loose. As a result, his long hair popped out from beneath his head-wear. One of the Sikh combatants noticing the fall rushed out at him with the sword to secure what could have been his 'prize-kill'. But as fate would have it, another Sikh hastily halted his comrade's blow in the nick of time, saying that the man(i.e. Nasir Khan) was a Khalsa(Sikh)!

The Sikh had naturally mistaken the turban-less Nasir Khan for a Sikh! For, his long hair and unmistakably communal resemblance.

However, by the time the Sikhs became aware of their self-deception, Nasir Khan was once again on his feet; and the other Baluch Swordsmen, too, charged and drove back the Sikhs, who eventually suffered a crushing defeat and retreated in haste.

On returning to his camp after the encounter, Mir Nasir Khan immediately sent for a barber and got his long hair and beard cropped short in strict accordance with requirements of *Sharia*(Islamic code of conduct).

For a long time after this, he regretted to have missed the enviable attainment of martyrdom in the cause of Islam on account his resemblance to a *kafir*(infidel) just because of his misleading long hair and flowing beard.

The Baluches under their Khan had fought so gallantly and successfully against the Sikhs that Ahmed Shah Abdali was delighted to express his appreciation and gratitude in these words:

“Khan! You once helped us, the Afghans, to become free from the slavery of the Persians by giving them a crushing defeat; and now once again, on the battlefield of Panjab, you have earned our gratitude for the selfless and gallant fight against the Sikhs, for which we are proud of you. ”

Military Organization under Nasir Khan

I must here assert that the Baluches are inherently a militant group of tribes. This statement is further substantiated (not that the fact needs any confirmation) by Firdausi in his famous *Shahnama* in these words:

Thus, we see the Baluches depicted as: “People with a warlike spirit, wearing exalted plumes, like the cock's comb, on their turbans. ”

Baluch Society, since ancient times has been military oriented. The annals of Baluch history bear testimony to the fact that even its women-folk and children were remarkably skilled in marksmanship and horse-riding. In fact, every male in the tribe who wore a *shalwar* was a perfect soldier. The Baluches, therefore never needed to maintain a 'regular army' as understood in the modern sense of the word. Martial spirit and pursuits were an integral part of their lives. As such, one can almost say that every Baluch home was an epitome of an army by itself. Thus, though there was no 'recruited' army, every young and able-bodied man in the tribes held himself in readiness for action whenever his Sardar made the call.

However, with the passage of time and evolution of tribal Chieftaincy through the ages, the concept of war-craft underwent a steady transformation, till eventually it assumed the form of a collective fighting force comprising of baggage-men, footmen, infantrymen, cavalrymen and other essential personnel.

Mir Nasir Khan, himself an accomplished fighter and commander-who had tackled Indian insurgent elements like the Marhattas and Sikhs, and had watched the Afghan and Persian techniques of warfare-realized the necessity of maintaining a well-organized army for his Khandom. Accordingly, he chose and stationed a permanent army unit, called *Dasta-e`-Darbar* (Palace Regiment) in his capital, numbering twelve hundred men. In emergencies, three additional Divisions used to be raised from among the tribes. These reinforcement units were called *Dasta-e`-Khas* (Special Division); *Dasta-e`-Doem* (Second Division) or the 'Sarawan Lashkar'; and *Dasta-e`-Soem* (Third Division) or the 'Jhalawan Lashkar'. The Khan-e`-Baluch, Mir Nasir Khan, was the Supreme Commander of this whole body of the State Army.

With each *Dasta* or Division went a long retinue of *Loris* (artisans), poets, *Hakeems* (physicians), and surgeons accompanied by adequate personnel and non combatants to man supplies, transport and communications. The *Loris* formed, as it were, a 'mobile workshop' during war time, repairing damaged arms, spears, swords, saddles, horseshoes, tents and other military wares at the base camps not far off from the scene of action. Their services were thus indispensable to the fighting units.

The *Raizwars* or poets and ballad-singers, too, played an important role during military engagements, inspiring the warriors and maintaining their morale with their moving verses and melodious eulogies of the warriors' bravery on the battlefield. These poets and bards were, in fact the chroniclers, of dates and events past as well as contemporary history, who preserved the age-long traditions of the Baluches and their fearless performances of valor and chivalry, both on and off the field.

The *Hakeems* or physicians and surgeons came from the venerable class of Muslims, known as *Saadats*. Well-versed in religion as well as in medicine and surgery, they played a dual role, treating the wounded and the sick, and leading the congregational prayers and preaching the temporal and spiritual values of *Jehad* (religious war). Belonging to the genealogical lineage of the Holy Prophet, they commanded a high place and reverence in the esteem of all.

The *Dehwars*, *Jamotes*, *Jats*, and *Hindus* were in charge of supplies and transport and other executive works of the war machinery. The *Hindus* dealt mainly with supply of rations to the units.

Thus, the entire tribal community contributed its might in an apportioned manner during military engagements, with each single Baluch actively involved in his respective operation on the field and at the base.

A word about the army formations and their mode of deployment will not be amiss here. I have already mentioned that the State Army comprised of three main Divisions, namely *Dasta-e`-Khas* (the Special Division), *Dasta-e`-Doem* (the Sarawan Division), and *Dasta-e`-Soem* (the Jhalawan Division). The constituents and strength of each of these Divisions were as under:

The Special Division

This ten thousand one hundred and twenty-strong Division (*Dasta-e`-Khas*) was in the personal command of the Khan-e`-Azam and placed as the central formation, flanked by the Sarawan Lashkar on the right, and the Jhalawan Lashkar on the left. The tribe wise breakup of the force was:

1. Zagar Mengal	1000
2. Lasi	1000
3. Kharani	1000
4. Sanjrani	1000
5. Marri	1000
6. Bugti	1000
7. Derajati	2000
8. Makrani	1000
9. Mirwani	100
10. Qumbarani	50
11. Altazai	50
12. Gurnari	100
13. Qalandarani	100
14. Samalani	200
15. Mroduni	200
16. Dehwar	60
17. Dehwar of Mastung	60
18. Jamali	200

Total : 10,120

The Sarawan Division

This Division (*Dasta-e`-Doem*) numbering five thousand and eight hundred comprised of tribes settled in Sarawan, and was commanded by the Sardar of the Raisani tribe. Its tribe-wise constituents were:

1. Raisani	300
2. Shahwani	800
3. Bangulzai	500
4. Kurd	500
5. Mohammad Shahi	300
6. Sarprah	300
7. Lahri	300
8. Rind	800
9. Lango	500
10. Parkari	150
11. Dehwar of Kalat	50
12. Various Tribes from Kachi	300
13. Tribes from Khangarh (Jacobabad)	500
14. Tribes from Nasirabad	500

Total: 5,800

The Jhalawan Division

Numbering four thousand and five hundred, this Jahlawani Lashkar (*Dasta-e`-Soem*) was under the command of the Sardar of the Zarakzai Clan of Zahri Tribe, and comprised of the following other tribes:

1. Zahri	800
2. Mohammad Hasani	800
3. Bizenjo	300
4. Mengal	1000
5. Magsi	800
6. Sasoli	300
7. Khadrani	100
8. Nichari	100
9. Jatak	100
10. Bajoi	100
11. Sajdi	100

Total: 4,500

Military Intelligence

Obtaining of intelligence has always been the most important and integral aspect of warfare since time immemorial. Termed as *Chari* in the Baluchi Language, this unit or -Dasta-, functioned as the Intelligence Corps of the Khan-e`-Azam's Armed Forces, it's a primary purpose gathering information of military value. This unit of picked intelligence men was charged with the mission of supplying information upon which the plan of action would be chalked out. These men would move out as -Charis- or scouts, from the base camp and penetrate as far deep into the No-man's land as safely possible in order to reconnoiter the field and observe the enemy positions, assess their strength and number of cattle and the possible mode of deployment. The news these scouts brought back would determine the plan and technique of action. If the information they gathered warranted a surprise night attack, the commander and the ranks would plan their moves accordingly. This move was called *Pasara*. If on the other hand, the scouts reported the enemy positions as poised for forward advance at any moment, the situation then called for another technique, called *Maidan*, i.e. frontal engagement in the open.

If we examine this ancient technique of *Pasara*, it will be seen that the modern Guerrilla Warfare is but a developed manifestation of these techniques employed by the Baluches in their raids centuries back.

The modus operandi of -Pasara-, or night attack was that, based on the intelligence report of the -Charis-, or scouts, the army would move forward under the cover of night; and getting as close to the enemy positions as they could without raising any suspicion, they would entrench themselves at a convenient striking distance. This halt, or *tamb* as it was called, was virtually a lull before a storm. The men, breathing watchfully in grim silence, would wait while whispered orders were passed around, specifying the place they should meet at on the morrow with their spoils. An agreed timing of attack would be fixed at a precise moment of the darkest hour nearest the dawn. The men would then wait resolutely, perhaps making mental calculation of the 'prizes' that would fall to them a few hours hence.

And then, with the arrival of the crucial zero-hour, the horsemen would spring out simultaneously like a cavalcade of untamed fury, followed in the rear by footmen with their swords and spears; and the enemy taken unaware, would thus find it wiser to do something other than being chopped like a ripe harvest.

Likewise, if a *Pasara*, or night attack, was not feasible, and the *Charis*, or intelligence men had reported a possible surprise initiative by the enemy, the army would accordingly prepare to meet the situation. For this, men were posted in a chain at suitable distances around the camp, each person being replaced in turn by another fresh sentinel during the watch round the clock. If the enemy launched a full scale attack, the combatants of the State Army would ensconce themselves in the crevices on the hill slopes nearby, and roll down heavy boulders upon the advancing hordes. But more often than not, they would issue forth into the open field the moment they espied the onrush of the enemy. Usually, all three Divisions joined battle as one co-ordinated force with two flanks and one center.

Weapons

Baluch traditional weapons of war numbered six, as per lullaby which Baluch mothers even today sing emotionally to the babies at their breasts or in the cradle. This is how a mother wishes to see her son in his manhood:

“May Alam Din(the son) grow into a white-clothed youth and bind on his person the six weapons: shield,gun and dagger,and carry his own quiver full of arrows and the Shirazi Sword of the Rinds. May he ride a swift mare.”

Thus a Baluch mother not only suckles her son with her divine lacteal fluid, but also at the same time instills a martial spirit in her infant through her maternal secretions, longing to see him grow into a fearless youth.

However during the times of Mir Nasir Khan, Baluch Military hardware consisted mostly of matchlocks,pistols(*durhani*),swords,daggers,shields and bags(*kisag*) containing gunpowder. Matchlocks and pistols were used for making a target of the enemy at a distance; but when the fighting became a hand-to-hand affair, the traditional weapons like swords,shields and the daggers would come into their full play. These light and handy weapons were home-made; for practically every Baluch was a competent armorer during his leisure time. Mending and making these implements of war was a pastime of the ever-vigilant youths of the Baluch tribal society. Nevertheless, it was also always an appealing pursuit of the tribesmen to snatch weapons from their enemies and preserve them as cherished souvenirs, which changed hands from father to son as valuable articles of family inheritances.

Development of Artillery

Artillery had yet not made its appearance in Baluch engagements on the front. The honor of introducing artillery in this part of the Indian subcontinent goes to Khan-e`-Azam Mir Nasir Khan, who did so when he returned victoriously after humbling the Marhattas at the famous Third Battle of Panipat in 1761, in co-ordination with Ahmed Shah Abdali of Afghanistan.

In the initial stages, the entire artillery strength comprised of only four cannons manned by a hundred men, who formed a regular unit of the State Army. However, by the time of Mir Khudadad Khan, the Khan-e`-Baluch-X(1857-93), the artillery unit grew to three hundred artillerymen with twelve standard sized and several small-sized cannons, all of which were of British make.

It was an established policy of my grandfather, Mir Khudadad Khan, to place each of his sons in full command of one of his Regiments. These princes would perform the regular duties of a Commandant on parade grounds during peace-time, as well as during actual army engagements on the battlefield. I have seen my father, Mir Azam Jan, the Khan-e`-Baluch-XII, in the position and role of a Commandant of the Artillery Regiment of the State Army.

Apart from other Divisions,my grandfather maintained a regular Reserve Force of five hundred men,excluding the three hundred strong artillery unit. This group was called *Amala*. Similarly, he had a cavalry unit of another five hundred men, called *Risala*. All these various units and Divisions functioned with an auxiliary force of one thousand, who supplemented the total Army as the Transport Unit.

Transport

There were one thousand sound-bred camels for transport purposes which were used during campaigns and long marches. One man was in charge of four camels. One hundred horses and camels of the finest pedigree were reserved for the transport of Court Nobles, State Officials, Elder-men, Saadats and other high ranking persons.

Whenever the Khan-e`-Azam used to travel between Kalat and Kachi, s retinue of one thousand camels would accompany him, alternating with another one thousand camels which rested for future occasions.

Donkeys, too, had their due share in civil as well as military activities, these domesticated animals being used mainly by lower cadres like *Loris*, cooks and other such personnel.

This, then, is a brief account of achievements during the period of Mir Nasir Khan's Life which eventually ended in 1817, leaving his loving and beloved people in a state of long lasting anguished mourning. The *Shahinshah*(emperor) of Iran, Mubarak Hussain Safvi, was deeply moved and sent a special message of condolence to the Baluch people.

May Allah rest the soul of this great patriotic son of the soil in perpetual peace. *Ameen* .

“All those regions where the Baluches are settled are part and parcel of our State.”

Mir Nasir Khan ,the Khan-e`-Baluch VI



His Majesty Mir Nasir Khan Baluch is the Father of Baluchistan, he brought together the Baluch as one nation under God, a nation state stretching from Bandar Abbas in the west to Kulachi (Karachi) in the east ,and from Gawader in the south to Harand-Dajal (Dera Ismail Khan) in the north. The Baluch are engaged in fighting the Pakistani and Iranian occupation for over six decades now.