

The Role of Press in the Baloch Resistance Movement of 1920s and 1930s

**Zakir Hussain¹, Dr. Seemi Naghmana Tahir²
Dr. Abdul Haleem Sadiq³ & Muhammad Fahim Baloch⁴**

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to highlight the role of journalism during the Baloch resistance movement in late 1920s and early 1930s. The paper discusses the journalistic and political contributions of Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi, Abdul Aziz Kurd and Muhammad Hussain Unqa. These leaders realized the potential and power of press. Along with their political movement against the British rule, they also practiced journalism initiated various newspapers, including Al-Baloch, Trajuman-e-Baloch, Azad, Itehad-e-Balochaan and Balochistan Jadeed. Pamphlets and articles like Shams Gardi and Faryad-e-Balochistan were produced criticizing the policies of the British. The British arrested and detained the leaders who published newspapers and wrote against them. The British banned seventeen newspapers of Muhammad Hussain Unqa and imprisoned him for twenty years, four months and eleven days. The findings of the study will contribute to the role played by local press in Baloch resistant movements of that era.

Key Words: Baloch Resistance Movement, Press, the Anjuman leaders

Introduction:

At least three thousand years ago, some tribes left their abodes in Central Asia and moved toward west, south, and southeast directions which were called Aryans. A section of Aryans later known as Indo-Iranian settled in northwestern Iranian region of Balashakan and were known at that time as Balashchik. After wandering and sufferings of many centuries, these pastoral nomads finally settled in the south and eastern borders of Iranian plateau. Here they were given the name Baloch from being the Balashchik, and the region

¹ Lecturer, Department of Media Studies, University of Balochistan, Quetta.

² Chairperson, Department of Mass Communication, University of Karachi.

³ Director, Balochistan Study Center, University of Balochistan, Quetta.

⁴ Chairperson, Department of Media Studies, University of Balochistan, Quetta

where they finally settled later known as Balochistan “the country of the Baloch”. Imposing their language and culture, they created a nation-state which had independent or semi-independent status for nearly three hundred years (Dashti, 2012, p.1)

Dashti (2012) divides the history of Baloch into different periods, the first part of the Baloch history begins with their migration into Iranian plateau and settlement into Balashakan or Balashagan. The second period begins when the Balashchik of Balashagan as wandering pastoral nomads, moved in Kerman, Sistan, Makuran, and Turan, having a new identity as the Baloch. The third part of the Baloch history is termed as their golden age. In this period the Baloch created their nation-state. The British while strengthening their position in Central Asia against Russia attacked and occupied the Baloch state in AD 1839. Thus the golden age of the Baloch ended. The fourth part of the Baloch history is the period of Baloch resistance against the occupation of Balochistan. In this period a general insurrection began against the British (pp.8-9).

The Baloch Resistance Movement

“Nationalism has never been without rivals” (Janmahmad, 1988, p. 51). The question of Baloch national sovereignty started in 19th century, from the day of British hegemony (p.163). After the occupation of the Baloch State, the British ruled here through proxy using Khan of Baloch as a puppet ruler (Dashti, 2012, p. 246). The Baloch resistance against the British lasted for more than century. (Munir, 2009) According to Prof. Dr. Munir Ahmed Baloch (2009):

There were undoubtedly the acts of individual tribal chiefs of a collection of them who resisted an alien occupation....the early resistance could not assume the form of a national struggle. There was a lack of communication among the Baloch tribes and contact with Indian people, except the *Khilafat Movement*. The enemy being superior in arms and resources and the lack of 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.

According to Surrat Khan Marri (2014), “the Baloch never compromised with British rule. There were always organized or spontaneous insurgencies including political movements for Baloch independence.” Mir Afzal leading a delegation went to Moscow in 1870s to ask Russian support for the independence of Balochistan. In 1920, another political delegation in supervision of Mir Misri Khan went to Soviet Union and joined the Baku 1920 Conference of National Liberation Movement (p.18). Surat Khan Marri writes,

“Along with armed struggle well known political movements for Baloch independence were also launched in Balochistan around 1920 under the leadership of Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi and Abdul Aziz Kurd” (p.19).

The leaders of Anjuman and their Journalism

The Anjuman leaders organized conferences such as “All India Baloch Conference”, held in Jacobabad on 27th, 28th and 29th December, 1932. Earlier than the conference they issued a statement published in daily *Zamindar* in Lahore, which said: It has been decided to convene the All India Baloch Conference at Jacobabad in the month of December, 1932. The Baloch are properly acquainted with democratic principles but our nation is being tremendously affected by external influences. Consequently, we have no choice but to organize ourselves by establishing bonds of unity and alliance. (p. 153)

Political expressions were curbed in Balochistan till late nineteen twenties. There were no newspapers to publish the political views of the Baloch leaders; they went for the newspapers in other parts of the subcontinent, such as Delhi, Lahore and Karachi, to propagate their political expressions. In 1927 Abdul Aziz Kurd along with Nasim Talvi initiated a newspaper from Delhi, entitled “*Balochistan*” (Baloch & Shah, 1999). The Anjuman leaders wrote in “*Daily Zamindar*” of Mualana Zafar Ali Khan which one time had a circulation of 30,000 (Waheed, 1998, p.113).

Faryad-i-Balochistan (Plight of Balochistan)

On 17th November 1929, Mir Yousaf Ali Khan Aziz Magsi wrote an article, “*Faryad-i-Balochistan*” (Plight of Balochistan) in weekly *Hamdard* which was being published from Lahore (Bugti, 1996, p.84). He wrote, “whole the world is developing and the people of Balochistan seems to be asleep... for God’s sake don’t let people laugh on you...put an end to the mutual jealousy and rivalry, and prove be the bravest nation” (as cited in Naseer, 2010, p.448).

It was a time when the conditions were miserable and writing against the British in a newspaper was considered the biggest crime. In his article, Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi criticized the British policies in Balochistan and demanded constitutional reforms. He was arrested and imprisoned in Mastung in June 1930. He was fined Rs.12900 and sentenced for a year imprisonment (Naseer, 2010, p.449).

According to Farhan Hanif Siddiqui, “In that article, Magsi called upon the Baloch to let go of their petty conflicts and to unite as one nation. Magsi was arrested on the charge of provoking ‘rebellion in the Kalat State’ in June 1930” (Siddiqui, 2012, p.57). On 17th July 1930, a *Jirga* (An assembly of tribal elders)

was held in Kalat and it did not only punish him but also criticized the writing and declared Magsi a victim of the thoughts of the errant people. He was detained in his uncle's (Sardar Rasool Bakhsh) house for a year (Marri, 2014, pp. 30-33).

Shams Gardi (Tyranny of Shams)

A pamphlet was produced by the *Anjuman* with the name of "*Shams Gardi*" (Tyranny of Shams) against the Prime Minister, Sir Shams Shah which brought an end to his power. (Baloch & Shah, 1999) it was published on 20th November 1931 consisting 64 pages (Marri, 2014, p.32).

In *Shams Gardi* the demand for the rights of compulsory education, rights of women, labors and farmers was made. It also demanded political reforms and unveiled the corruption of the Sir Shams Shah. The pamphlet proved to be so effective which eventually led to the resignations of the Prime Minister, Sir Shams Shah.

Balochistan Ki Awaz (The voice of Balochistan)

Balochistan Ki Awaz was pamphlet brought out by Magsi. Its aim was apprising the British Parliament of the socio-political conditions in Balochistan (Janmahmad, 1988, p.168).

Aziz Magsi also sponsored "*Azad*" a newspaper published from Lahore and its editorship was given to Mir Abdul Aziz Kurd (Baloch & Shah, 1999). When Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi was released from prison in 1931, he formed the first organized political party, "*Anjuman-e-Itehad-e-Baloch-wa-Balochistan* (Organization for the Unity of Baloch and Balochistan). Many prominent Baloch personalities joined the party including, Mir Abdul Aziz Kurd, Muhammad Hussian Unqa, Abdul Kareem Shorish, Malik Faiz Muhammad Yousafzai, Mir Muhammad Azam Shahwani, Nasim Talvi and others (Dashti, 2012, p. 303).

In 1931, Mir Abdul Aziz Kurd was arrested and imprisoned for three years but the activities of the newly established party continued. The party published documents, pamphlets and newspapers under the leadership of Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi (p.303).

Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi wanted to get the rights of Baloch through political and democratic struggle. He knew how much important is attached to a newspaper for a political movement so he sponsored many newspapers during his struggle against the British rule *i.e.*, *Al-Baloch*, *Tarjuman-e-Baloch*, *Azad* and *Itehad-e-Balochaan*. He sent Naseem Talvi, who was a school teacher, to Karachi for initiating a newspaper from there and with the support of

Muhammad Hussain Unqa they started a newspaper called “*Balochistan Jadeed*”. (Marri, 2014)

According to Khan Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai, “My dear friend Nawabzada Yousaf Ali Khan Magsi was affluent and sympathetic to his nation at the same time. He spent a lot on party activities and social work and also sponsored the newspapers of Punjab, including *Zamindar* and *Inqilab*. Nawab Magsi spent lot of money to support these newspaper as these were carrying voice of Baloch people throughout India which otherwise was almost impossible at that time. Then he started another newspaper, “*Azad*” from Lahore in the supervision of Maulana Abdul Baqi” (Marri, 2014, p. 41).

Abdul Aziz Kurd started writing political write-ups regularly for daily *Azad* Lahore. These articles criticized the policies of the British and wanted to reflect dawn of freedom to the people of Balochistan. In his articles Kurd appealed the nation to stand up for their rights, and raised the voice for the need of having elected members for the assembly in Kalat State (Marri, 2014, pp.41-42)

His writings and diction was so inspiring and moving that it is said that after reading one of his article, Jawahir Lal Nehru, “Does anybody know, from which University Mir Abdul Aziz Kurd graduated?” (Marri, 2014, p. 94) and he was amazed to learn that Aziz Kurd could not attained education beyond primary school.

On September 1932 Mir Abdul Aziz Kurd General Secretary of *Anjuman-e-Ittehad-e- Balochan* in an interview with *Zamindar* said, “I asked for free Balochistan apart from India and this happened not today but before twelve years in 1920. I told that we want a free constitutional government in Balochistan.” Because of his both journalistic and political activities, Mir Abdul Aziz Kurd was arrested in January 1934 and imprisoned for three years (94).

Muhammad Hussain Unqa was another leader and journalist who was against the British and struggled for the freedom of Balochistan through politics and journalism. He published a Balochi poem ‘*Kadi Kayant Sharen Roch par maa*’ (When will come our good days) and also appealed the Baloch to write in their mother tongue. He wrote:

True education can only be achieved through Zuban (mother tongue). It is important for this reason to publish and promote Balochi literature...we hope that other Baloch poets will deliver their Balochi poems to meet this important need. (as cited in Baluch, 1987, p.67)

Unqa spent 54 years of his life in politics from which ten years were of exile and twenty were of imprisonment. When he was out of prison he published

many newspapers. His seventeen newspapers were banned by the British government (Naghmana Tahir, 2006, p.178). When '*Al-Baloch*' was banned he started '*Balochistan Jadeed*', when it was banned he initiated 'Young Balochistan' after the ban of 'Young Balochistan' he published '*Haqeeqat-e-Aftab*', '*Kalamat ul Haq*' and then '*Nijat*'. According to Dr. Shah Muhammad Marri, (2014) from 1933 to 1937, within a short span of four years, his nine newspapers were banned.

Balochistan Jadeed's first issue appeared on 1st March 1934 from Karachi as a weekly. Peer Bakhsh Naseem was its editor and M. Hussain Unqa was the assistant editor. It was the national newspaper of the Balochistan for which the Baloch awaited long. In its first editorial it thanked the Indian press for publishing the political opinions of Balochistan (Naseem & Unqa, 1934, March). Soon after *Balochistan Jadeed* became the voice of the Baloch.

Conclusion

The Baloch intellectuals right from the day first of their political struggle against the British rule realize day first the power of press even in late 1920s. They started various newspapers to voice the demands of the Baloch and work for an independent Balochistan (Janmahmad, 1989, p. 179). Whenever a newspaper was banned or closed down by the British government it was replaced by another. Abdul Aziz Kurd's seventeen newspapers and Mir Yousaf Aziz Magsi' not only supported newspapers but also kept patronizing all such efforts. These leaders and journalists were arrested and detained but when were released, they started publishing newspapers and wrote against the British domination. "*Shams Gardi*" (Tyranny of Shams) pamphlet by Yousaf Aziz Magsi and Abdul Aziz Kurd, against the Prime Minister, Sir Shams Shah brought an end to his power. Thus the press played an important role in Baloch Resistance Movement against the British in nineteen twenties and thirties.

References

- Baloch, Prof. Dr. Munir Ahmed & Shah, Syed Abdul Wahab. (1999). *A brief History of National Awakening in Balochistan before partian of 1947: Balochistan Review, Bi-annual Research Journal of BSC, UOB, Quetta, Vol-II.III, 1999, p.57*
- Bughti, Prof. Aziz Muhammad. (1996). *Tareekh-e- Balochistan*. Quetta: Spincers Printers Pvt Ltd.
- Dashti, Naseer. (2012). *The Baloch and Balochistan*. America: Trafford Publishing.
- Janmahmad. (1989). *Essays on Baloch National Struggle in Pakistan, Emergence Dimensions Repercussions*. Quetta: Gosha-e- Adab.
- Marri, Surat Khan. (2014). *The Serviles: Baloch Resistance*. Quetta: Gosha-e-Adab.
- Marri, Dr. Shah Muhammad. (2014) *Ushaq Ky Qafiley: MirYousaf Aziz Magsi (2nd Print)*. Quetta: Gosha-e-Adab.
- NaghmanaTahir, Prof. Dr. Seemi. (2006). *Balochistan Mein Ablagh-e-Ama, Aghaz Wa Irtaqa*. Islamabad: National Language Authority.
- Naseer, Gul Khan. (2010). *Tareekh-e-Balochistan (5th Ed)*. Quetta: Kalat Publishers.
- Nasim, P.B & Unqa M.H (1934, 1st March). Editorial. *Balochistan Jadeed*. 1(1). p.3.
- Prof. Dr. Munir Ahmed Baloch. (2009). *The British Colonilaism and Resistance in Balochistan*. Hanken, Annual Research Journal of Department of Balochi, UOB, Quetta. Vol-1-2009. p.81
- Siddiqi, Farhan Hanif. (2012). *The Politics of Ethnicity in Pakistan: The Baloch, Sindhi and Mohajir Ethnic Movements*. Routlegde.
- Waheed, Suhail. (1998), *Sahafati Zuban*. Lahore: Nigarishat