



RESEARCH PAPER

Reconstructing the Past: The Medieval and Pre-Medieval Makran

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ABSTRACT

Makran, the gateway of Balochistan, is an ancient land and the only part of Balochistan that has been recorded in numerous chronicles of different times. The region has witnessed several invasions, starting with the Greeks and Persians, and continuing with the Arabs. Interestingly, it has been interpreted differently by historians of different powers. The medieval and pre-medieval Makran are highly connected in terms of discourse. Medieval writings not only sketch a wide picture of the contemporary realm but also connect it to the pre-medieval Makran in terms of socio-economic and political developments. A qualitative-based approach was used to analyze the literature developed on Makran in medieval and pre-medieval times. For the analysis of the extracted data, a conceptual analysis was used. The geo strategic and socio-economic realities of current Makran cannot be fully understood unless medieval and pre-medieval chronologies are critically evaluated.

KEYWORDS Balochistan, Makran, Medieval, Pre-Medieval

Introduction

The region of Makran has always been a geo-strategically important region for different powers at different span of time. Makran's historical significance can be inferred from the fact that it has been mentioned in numerous ancient writings, alongside distinguished geographical names such as Kirman, Turan, Khurasan, and China. The region was under the influence of several powers, including the Achaemenids, Sassanids, local Brahmans, Umayyads, Abbasids, and Turkic rulers of India at various times (Muzaffar, et. al., 2018). The Greeks decision to use this geographical landmass as a route from India to Macedonia brought Makran into the historical records of the Hellenistic period. The medieval writings and sources on Makran not only provide information about the socio-political history of Makran in contemporary contexts, but they also offer an outstanding literature on pre-Medieval Makran. Apart from praising the local people and the resistance they showed against the Greeks and the Persians, historians and travelers have also attempted to critique their living standards. The work aims to identify the differences and similarities in the writings of medieval travelers and historians. Some travelers presented the geography of Makran from unfamiliar perspectives, while another writer sketches a different picture of the same region with a different interpretation. The pre-medieval Makran can never be understood until medieval Makran is studied comprehensively.

Literature review

Historical writing has always been a challenge in nomadic and tribal cultures worldwide, as these cultures often lack formal written records of their past. Oral traditions comprise poetry, folk stories, and genealogies that have been passed down through generations and were used for family customs and tribal codes. Balochistan has historically been a tribal society, so the majority of local historical traditions have been passed down through oral traditions. This gap has led foreigners, such as Greeks, Arabs, Persians, and English travelers, geographers, and historians, to write extensively on Balochistan and Makran. However, the emergence of the Khanate of Kalat restructured things, as local narratives in written form began to emerge, but at a very minor level.

Herodotus (2013), in his writing, *History of Histories*, translated by George Rawlinson, discussed the region as part of different Persian powers. He used various names for the area, very similar to the word "Makran". Arrain (1884), *Anabasis of Alexander*, translated by Chinook, narrates the events of Greek interaction with the people of (Gedrosia) Makran. Meanwhile, a clear picture of Makran's geographical and socio-political realities in pre-medieval times can be gleaned from his writings. Firdousi (2007), in *Shahnama*, translated by Dick Davis, sheds light on the rivalry of the Baloch tribes of Makran and Turan with the Kayanian empire of Persia in a historical context. Masudi (1841) and Ibn Haukal (1800) sketch a picture of Medieval Makran by discussing the political, social and economic conditions of the people. Moreover, indigenous people were generally declared as primitive in these writings. Local narrative about Makran and adjacent localities like Turan and Khurasan are available in the writings Kalat court historians like Saleh (1990) and Ganjabvi (1995).

Material and Methods

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining analytical and explanatory methods, and has endeavored to analyze all sources critically. Since the sources of the present study range from primary to secondary, the qualitative method is applied to explain facts and draw themes. It is an attempt to connect the pre-medieval and Medieval Makran, utilizing available medieval and local sources. The primary information on Makran has mainly focused on the assistance provided by their translations. Secondary sources are also used by consulting books written by both English and indigenous writers on this topic.

Results and Discussion

The region of Makran is divided between the Pakistani province of Balochistan and the Iranian province of Sistan and Balochistan. The coastal belt of Makran stretches from Karachi to the Strait of Hormuz, spanning approximately 1,100 km. The region of Makran is renowned for many distinct features like the geostrategic coastal belt, date valleys, and the beautiful Princess of Hope, a wonderful statues formed through the natural process of stone formation. (Baloch, 2009; Muzaffar, et. al., 2021). Makran has witnessed numerous invasions from outsiders at various times, starting from the ancient Medes to the British occupation in 1871, when British India, along with the Persians, demarcated Makran into two sections in their famous Goldsmith Boundary Commission headed by Sir Henry Goldsmith (Baloch, 2009). Being the gateway towards South Asia through the Middle East, Makran's priority in the past had always been on the lists of the foreign powers from the very early period, which was further developed in the medieval times when Arabs started invading this region in 23 AH during the caliphate of the second Caliph Hazrat Umar (Baladhuri, 1962).

The Medes established their rule in Persia in 678 BCE, and their southeastern region (Makran) was also part of this vast empire. Herodotus has used several names for the southeast side of the Median kingdom, including "Maga", "Maka", "Makaan", and "Maykan" (Herodotus, 2013). The names given by him have a close dialectical connection with the word "Medes". Herodotus discusses the rule of Deioces, the most powerful ruler of the Medes (727 to 625 BCE), and his relationship with the southeastern (Makranian) tribes, by stating that: "*Deioces collected a huge army of southern tribes like Budis, Pretecanis, Magis, and Arzantis and conquered major part of the north*"

Along with these names, Herodotus presents another interesting view on the famous "Cyrus Expedition to India" and the difficulties faced by his army in the region of (Gidrosia) Makran when he was left with some of his 1500 soldiers and had to flee back to his capital. Firdausi, in his book "Shahnama", also discusses the Kayanian Dynasty of the Medes. Unlike Herodotus, Firdousi uses "Makran" rather using words like "Maga", "Meka",

and "Mayakan". Firdousi sheds light on the rule of Kay Khusro, who, in his revenge against the ruler of Turan, collects an army comprised of Makranian tribes. Firdousi frequently used the words of "Makran," "Kirman," "China," and "Khurasan" with imaginary details on several occasions (Firdousi, 2007).

The famous Greek ruler of Macedonia, Alexander, after his decisive battle with King Porus in the well-known Battle of Hydaspes in 326 BC, all these events of Alexander for Makran have been comprehensively discussed and enumerated by Arrain in his famous book "The Anabasis of Alexander". Arrain used the word "Gidrosia" for Mekran and describes the picture of the Greek army staying in Gidrosia for an extended period.

According to Arrain (1884), *"Alexander march to Gidrosia was full of many problems starting from its harsh climate to scarcity of water along with the Gidrosian perpetual attacks. The Gidrosian army mostly used to stay on the passages with Oritains but mostly used to flee away from the Greeks"*.

Similar to medieval writers and travelers, Arrain, while describing Makran, focuses more on the geographical harshness of Makran rather than recounting the life stories of the Makranian people and their living structures. Interestingly, Firdousi is silent on Alexander's historical journey, still he discusses extensively the Sassanid kings and their relationship with the people of Makran, primarily focusing on Ardashir I and Noshervan-e Adil, commonly known as Khusrow Parvez. Ardashir, the first and founder ruler of Sassanids, sent a letter in 521 AD to the ruler of Makran for allegiance, which was accepted with full grace and dignity. Tabari (2004) writes *"Ardashir was fully aware of the Arabian sea's importance and its attachment with the Indian ocean. So he sent Letters to the ruler of Kirman, Khurasan and Makran. Meanwhile, he was ready to use force to have a meaningful influence on all these areas"*.

Firdousi's prime focus was on Khusro Pervez and his relationship with the Makranian Baloch tribes. According to him, Khusro Pervez grew tired of their constant rebellious tactics and sought to eliminate them once and for all. Firdousi, along with castigating the Baloch tribes, praises the efforts of Khusrow in the Shahnama. He declares Baloch as robbers and uncivilized with an absence of moral dignity, like Arabs (Firdousi, 2007). Interestingly, he often described Baloch, along with Koch, which different writers have diversely interpreted. Some local writers associate it with the Brahuis, a subgroup within the Baloch people.

Makran's relationship with Sindh, in terms of trade and cultural interaction, is ancient and fascinating, marked by an interesting rivalry between the two regions. However, the Chachian Dynasty's ascendancy over Makran before the dawn of Islam is debated chiefly and is associated with contradictions. It is also stated that Makran had a Hindu Brahman, "Raja Raisal." However, Chachnama presents a different picture, suggesting that Makran was independent, as Raja Dahir had already lost the powerful border region of Makran, which served as a buffer for Sindh against Persian invaders (Kalichbeg, 1900). Chach, during his rule, focused his entire attention on Mekran, Tahafutal Kiram writer Sher Ali Tattvi also agrees that Mekran, Kaikan, Turan, and Kohe-e-Sulyman were all part of the Chachian dynasty (Tattvi, 2006).

Chach demarcated a boundary using date palms, and most importantly, he played an outstanding role in the agricultural development of Makran by introducing Sindhi methods, initiating water explorations, and cultivating crops based on the knowledge of Makran. The Makranian Baloch tribes, on the other hand, began visiting Sindh and transformed the date culture in the Sindh region (Baloch, 2009).

The Umayyad-Abbasid rivalry and the disintegration of the Umayyad central authority at the Battle of Zab in 1258 led to the emergence of an independent principality.

Hussain Bayhqai, in his famous book *Tareekh-e-Baqai*, discusses the Banu Maidan and its connections with the Ghaznavid and Ghorid dynasties. Ghaznavi's verdict on the succession was always considered the most authentic among the decision makers of Banu Maidan (Bayhqai, 1996).

Some famous Muslim writers, such as Mubarak Atapuri, declare the Banu Maidan to be an Arab tribe. At the same time, local Baloch historians, including Abdul Rehman Brahui, Farooq Baloch, and Gul Khan Naseer, have claimed that the Banu Maidan dynasty is a pure indigenous group. Mekran remained a nominal subject during the Ghaznavid period, as the Ghaznavids paid little attention to the political upheavals of Mekran, which were not a significant concern for their rule. At that time, there was no substantial threat from the Arabian Sea. Eventually, the local rulers were allowed to have their rulings with nominal allegiance to the central authority in Delhi. This concept of nominal authority remained constant during the period of the Ghuris, Slave dynasty, and Khilji, among others. However, a new chapter begins in the history of Makran when Arab and Persian travelers started visiting Makran and recorded their accounts of its culture. Ibn Haukal was the first Arab traveler to travel through Makran and record its people, geography, and natural dynamics. In his famous book *"Surat ul Ard"* 977 A.D he discusses the region in a great detail. According to Haukal (1800), *"On the border of Sistan there is a region called Mekran inhabited by the Baloch people who are robbers on the road and do not have sense to live a standard life, a mountain on the southern west part of Mekran with the name of Mara'an is also situated there which is very cold and snow falls there mostly in winter."*

Koh-e Mahraan is a mountainous region located in the Kalat region, but it is not part of the Makran. Perhaps Ibn-e-Haukal is referring to another mountain; though, there are possibilities that he is talking about the same mountain, as indicated by Ibn-Haukal. Ibn Hauqal further says that during the Abbasids, some of the parts that had never been exposed to Islam previously accepted Islam as their core religion. Ibn Haukal also interestingly discusses the Makrani language. He may be referring here to the Balochi language, but he called it a Makrani language, which is different from Persian and Arabic. However, it's an accepted fact that Ibn-Hauqal, like other Arab historians, did not let any stone unturned to reprimand local people. Words like savage, barbaric and uncivilized can be found in many parts of his writing.

The next name after Ibn Hauqal, who made a comprehensive tour of Makran, was Al-Masudi. Masudi was also known as the Arab Herodotus for his work on a valuable combination of history and Geography. Meanwhile, he was not only a historian but also a polymath, possessing a profound understanding of philosophy and science. Masudi briefly discusses Makran and the Makranian people, but his views on the Makranian people were highly controversial. According to Masudi (1841), *"The country of Makran is mainly inhabited by Khuwarijis and from this region onwards east, sindh gets starts where Daiaabl is situated."*

Similar to Ibn-e-Hauqal, Istakhris' primary focus remains on the geography of Makran. He also discusses the supreme date production in the region and mentions "Kis" Kech city and "Quzzdar" for Khuzdar. He also differentiates Makran from Kirman and Turan and calls Khurasan the adjacent area of Makran.

Makran has been accorded tremendous value in the local epic folklore of the 15th and 16th centuries, following the migration of the famous Baloch tribes, Rind and Lashar, from the west to the central and eastern parts of Balochistan. Many historians have highlighted various reasons behind this migration, with the majority holding the view that scarcity of water, along with harsh geographical realities, forced the Baloch tribes to migrate from the valleys of Makran and settle in the fertile lands of Sibbi and Kachhi. One of the translations of the folklore which demonstrates the contemporary Makran is as follows: *"Come, let us leave this barren land; let us spy out the running streams and sweet*

waters, and distribute them among us; let us take no hood of tribe or chief.” and “Come ye down from your castles, bring out your beds and wrappings, carpets and red blankets, pillows and striped rugs, cups cast in the mould, and drinking-vessels of Makran; for Chakur will no longer abide here, but seeks a far land (Dames, 1904).

The court historians of the Khanate of Kalat have repeatedly shed light on the history and importance of Makran in their writings. Akhund Muhammad Saleh wrote *Kurdeganmak* in 1659, while serving as the court historian of the then Khan of Kalat, Mir Ahmed I. He repeatedly shed light on the geographical importance of Makran, along with Turan, at various points in his book. Meanwhile, the book revolves around a central theme: Baloch and Kurds shared a similar ancestral lineage and settled in different places together in Turan, Zabulistan, and Makran. According to Saleh (1995), “*Ordagani, and Brahkhui Kurds uninterruptedly ruled areas of Makran and Turan for an extended period until Alexander's invasion in this region*”.

The book presents a detailed local narrative of Baloch resistance against the Macedonian invasions in Makran. The purpose was not just to stop such a vast army, but to show resistance at least at some level, even in the most challenging geographical locations, which could help locals launch counter-attacks. Saleh (1995) further writes, “*When the Baloch sardars of Turan and Makran learned about Alexander's march towards Persia through their land, it was collectively decided that the Greeks would not be allowed to proceed without interruption, So, a fierce battle took place at the Mangoor*.”

Naseer Khan's biographer, Qazi Noor Ahmed Ghanjabvi, in his famous book *Tahfatul Naseer*, highlighted Makran and its significance in a local narrative. The book recounts the events of Ahmed Shah Abdali's 1764-65 attack on Punjab, along with Naseer Khan Noori, against the Sikhs; however, a significant portion of the book discusses the origin of the Baloch people with a specific focus on Makran. The writer traces the origin of the Baloch to Aleppo, from where they migrated and first settled in Zaghram, and then in Makran.

Conclusion

The pre-medieval and Medieval Makran are interdependent. One can never fully comprehend or understand the medieval Makran without an understanding pre-medieval historical developments in the region. Makran has been defined from different angles by various writers and travelers, each according to their perspective. It's an accepted fact that it has always been an important region for powers. Apart from having a crucial strategic landscape, its proximity to the Arabian Sea within the Indian Ocean makes it a significant geostrategic region in terms of trade and connectivity. The historical facts of Medieval Makran suggest that the region in the pre-medieval era was neither isolated nor backward. Socioeconomic and tribal realities had long existed. The writings of the pre-medieval and medieval periods had far-reaching effects on the people of Makran and Turan, as the Baloch people began to be considered remote and unfit for the major armies of the Mughals and Persians. This led them to develop their oral history of origin.

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