

The Development of the Kalat Khanate*

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SOUTHWEST ASIA is an area of great ecological and ethnic diversity, and great historical depth. The types of political organization found in the area are many; the centralized bureaucratic state, the extended empire, the kin-based tribe headed by an autocratic chief, the tribal confederacy and segmentary acephalous structures are all represented. Along with the diversity of political structures, frequency of contact between societies at different levels of integration, and the related lack of stable, clearly defined boundaries are characteristic. These factors have produced political systems in which two basic principles are combined in various ways. One is tribal, based on personal loyalties expressed in a genealogical idiom; the other is bureaucratic, based on territorial administration through a hierarchy of officials. Both principles have been operative in Southwest Asia for centuries; kings, emperors and tribal chiefs have met throughout history, and ruling elites have always been aware of alternative political forms.

The confederacy level of political integration in the tribally organized societies of Southwest Asia has received relatively little attention from anthropologists. Such structures are not uncommon in the area, and they frequently embrace large numbers of people. Limited as they often are, to military activities, tribal confederations are both flexible and fragile. Their fragility is attested to by the ease and frequency of defections on the part of constituent units. Their flexibility is demonstrated by their ability to persist, albeit in altered form, through colonial periods and even within the framework of modern national states.

There is a tendency to treat confederacy integration as a superstructure, separated from tribal substructure and local groups by a "structural gap" (Sahlins, 1968: 46). The development of confederacy organization has also been viewed as a response to factors, usually political, originating outside the system (Barth, 1961: 86). In this paper we shall analyze one such confederacy, the Kalat Khanate (called the Brahui Confederacy by the British) in some detail, focusing on the genesis of confederation and the management of resources at the Khanate level. We suggest that confederacy structure developed in Kalat as a response to the ecological requirements of pastoral nomadic adaptation. The institutional development of the office of the paramount chief or khan was based on a specialized agricultural estate, the resources of which, prior to the rise of the Khanate, were not systematically integrated into the Kalat economy.

The territory of Kalat is presently wholly within the boundaries of West Pakistan, where it has the status of an administrative district. It is an area of

some 30,000 square miles and is traditionally divided into the two mountainous regions of Sarawan and Jhalawan, and the lowland Kachhi plain. The landscape of Sarawan and Jhalawan is arid and austere, consisting of numerous parallel mountain ranges which enclose upland plateaus whose elevation is 5,000 feet or more. Some of these valleys are extensive, with a sizeable center of alluvial soil. Rainfall is scanty and erratic, rarely exceeding 10 inches a year, and often considerably less.

Kachhi forms the easternmost part of Kalat. It is a flat, triangular plain, a desert inlet from the Indus Valley. Its main characteristics are its levelness, excessive summer heat and periodic severe scarcity of water. There are a few rivers whose seasonal floodwaters are caught and used for cultivation. The annual rainfall averages about 3 inches, most of it falling in July and August.

The population inhabiting Kalat is ethnically and economically complex, consisting of both tribally organized people and peasant villagers. There are a number of economic adaptations, ranging from fully settled villages with large scale irrigation works, through transhumant groups who cultivate rainfall fields when possible and maintain flocks, to, finally, fully nomadic people. The tribal segment of the population is predominately Brahui speaking, with a minority of Baluch. Tribesmen are mainly pastoral nomads and transhumant cultivators. The non-tribal groups engaged in settled cultivation are the Dehwars in the uplands and the Jats in the Kachhi plain. The Dehwars are a local segment of the long established cultivating population of the Iranian Plateau, often called Tadziks in other areas. The Jats migrated to Kachhi from the Punjab sometime prior to the 6th century.

This complex ethno-ecological mosaic developed quite early in time. Fairservis has pointed out that permanent settlements with systems of water control and irrigation existed in the highlands prior to the rise of the Indus Civilization (Fairservis, 1967: 23). From the time of the Arab invasion in the 8th century, the Kalat region was subject to periodic upheavals as successive waves of raiders and conquerors moved from Southwest Asia to India. The area was subject to a variety of foreign powers who exacted tribute on an irregular basis. Between the 10th and the 15th centuries, Sarawan, Jhalawan, and Kachhi were frequently controlled by different suzerains, with the towns and villages bearing the brunt of tributary obligations.

It is probable that the uplands served as a refuge area during these turbulent centuries, with small groups of people whose lives were disrupted drifting into the hills, where a few agricultural villages were already established. Subject to pressures from raiders, and perhaps from the settled population as well, the coalescence of small, often unrelated, groups around successful leaders would have been adaptively advantageous within this environment.

The composite structure of the Brahui tribes supports this view. The two basic criteria of Brahui tribal affiliation are patrilineal descent and political allegiance, and the two are not necessarily congruent. There is no Brahui tribe with a coherent genealogy. Each tribe is conceived of as having been founded by a man, usually an emigrant to the Kalat area, from whom the group derives

its name. Some primary sections (*takkars*) are seen as descending from his sons, others from founders unrelated to the tribal progenitor. It is the allegiance to the authoritarian chief (*sardar*) which produces internal coherence, not the genealogical charter.

Thus, the development of the Kalat Khanate is viewed as a response to the transhumant patterns of adaptation which require successive use of the highlands and the plain. Given the technology, the uplands could support many more people at one time of the year than at another. Large groups of people were forced to seek lowland pasturage in the winter to maintain their animals. The tribal population would not have been predisposed to conquer and settle in Kachhi because the severe summers on the plain would have adversely affected their animals and necessitated fundamental economic adjustments. Seasonal access to winter pasturage, not territorial expansion was the adaptive requirement. Prior to the 15th century, access to the plain does not appear to have been a problem. The permanent population of Kachhi was small and dependent on river irrigated cultivation. Large areas were uninhabited save for the seasonal presence of nomads seeking winter pastures. However, during the 15th century, there was a movement of nomadic Baluch from Southwest Persia into Kachhi. The presence of this new population disrupted the prior adaptational balance between the highlands and the plain, and the Brahui had a new competitor in its own niche.

Traditional history relates a long series of battles from the 15th to the 17th centuries, as groups of Baluch and Brahui competed for control of the highland town of Kalat and for various parts of Kachhi. The earlier development of Kalat town under various foreign administrators provided a natural geographical locus for consolidation of tribal power. The principle of a paramount chief appears to have been established during this period, but no institutionalized apparatus supporting and stabilizing the office had yet developed. The immigrant Baluch succeeded in seizing Kalat town several times, but they were never politically unified and were unable to establish a permanent presence there. The competitive pressure on the ecological resources of the nomadic niche was alleviated when the Baluch fragmented, with the majority settling down as sedentary landlords in lower Kachhi, the remainder joining with the Brahui tribes. A by-product of Baluch sedentarization and the competition for access to lowland pastures was the division of the rest of Kachhi among participant tribes. Thus, the Brahui tribes also became overlords to Jat cultivators, but they did not settle down in Kachhi.

With access to winter pasturage reasonably secure, the alliance of Brahui tribes seems to have lapsed for a time. Succession to the office of the khan was apparently weakly developed, and legendary material suggests that the throne was occasionally unoccupied for several years after the death of an incumbent. In the early 16th century, the Mughuls succeeded in establishing suzerainty, placing a governor in Kalat.

By the late 16th or early 17th century, a lineage, the Ahmadzais, succeeded in establishing a dynasty which endured until Partition in 1947. The details of

the Ahmadzai rise to a position of pre-eminence among the tribes are obscure. However, certain ecological and political factors suggest that an alliance between the Ahmadzais and the Dehwari cultivators was crucial at the early stages. Most of the long settled irrigated land, especially in Sarawan, was crown land, and it was cultivated primarily by Dehwars. According to legend, it was the Dehwars, in combination with a few tribes, who backed the Ahmadzais in the maneuvering for control of Kalat town. The Ahmadzais then had agricultural resources and allegiances that other tribal chiefs lacked. Thus, the office of the khan in its next phase became a specialized mechanism for the collection and coordination of fighting men and the resources necessary to maintain a court. The importance of the Dehwars is attested to by the fact that the khan's chief minister was always a Dehwar. No other group had such rights to office in the khan's court.

Up to this point, we've said the first two stages in the development of the Kalat Khanate were responses to niche competition between two tribal nomadic populations and the incorporation of an agricultural minority. The final stage of development which underlies the stabilization of the throne and the elaboration of the central bureaucratic apparatus was territorial expansion into the southeast portion of Kachhi previously under the control of Sind. The great battle between the forces of the Khan and those of the Kalora rulers of Sind was militarily inconclusive, but it allowed the khan to restructure land rights in Kachhi. The most productive areas were retained by the throne, while the tribes who participated in the battle were rewarded with new tracts or had their traditional rights reconfirmed.

Now the great increase in the Khan's estate allowed the throne to maintain a more lavish court with a proliferation of court officials. The court became the setting for elite interaction, with an elaborate protocol based on tribal ranking. The bureaucracy which administered the royal estate also increased. Hindu shopkeepers and money lenders came into the area, making it possible for Kalat to participate in a regional network of trade and finance. The Khanate developed its own systems of coinage and weights and measures. Thus, the Khanate as a supratribal level of organization served to standardize and integrate a number of economic activities which benefited the territory as a whole.

Even though the Ahmadzais consolidated a new order of structure, they did not integrate Kalat into one uniformly administered territory. Although a central bureaucracy developed, the khan never succeeded in incorporating the tribes economically. No revenues of any kind were exacted from them. Each tribal constituent of the Khanate was internally and territorially autonomous. The khan had no access to the tribes except through the chiefs. The Ahmadzais never succeeded in placing princes of the royal house in the chiefly aristocracy, although they did marry with the chiefly lineages.

The autonomy of tribal constituents in the Khanate is based on the authority of the *sardar*, which is largely a result of Brahui tribal structure. Brahui tribal organization is characterized by informal leadership at the residential level, and formal office at the section (*takkar*) level. However, common tribesmen

derive their basic political rights by virtue of membership in the tribe itself, not by aligning themselves with a subtribal leader. The *sardar* influences the distribution of power within the tribe by forming special relationships with lower level leaders. Leaders do not compete with each other for followers; instead they compete for favored relationships with the chief.

The internal power structure of a Brahui tribe is all but invisible to the outsider. It is only partially known to the participating subtribal leaders, each of whom is aware only of the situation in his own locality. The *sardar* maintains his central position by forming a number of independent special relationships with lower level leaders. The development of power centers independent of the chief is hampered because 1) no structure relates the leaders in mutual interaction and 2) the *sardar* can disarm potential competition by incorporation or infiltration. There are no limits on the number of men he acknowledges, and he can repudiate the favored relationship at will.

An examination of the organization of caravan trade in Kalat is illuminating with regard to the relationship between the khan and the *sardars*. The khan attempted to set uniform tax rates and a fixed number of collection points within Kalat. The money collected at those locations falling within tribal territory went to the *sardars*, and those in crown territory went to the khan. The khan, however, found it difficult and at times impossible to enforce the schedule of rates and stations. Additionally, from time to time raiding parties of Eastern Baluch (Marris and Bugtis), and sometimes even disaffected Brahui raiders, attacked caravans. The khan's only sanction in such cases was to claim inability to protect the route and inform traders to use alternate trails. Such prohibitions were often used punitively with regard to the tribes, and as they involved a loss of revenue for uncooperative chiefs, they were often effective.

Political systems which combine a centralized office that controls the bulk of the agricultural wealth of the area with nomadic tribes that supply warriors to maintain territorial integrity are not uncommon in Southwest Asia. What makes Kalat interesting is the relatively stable balance of power between the khan and the *sardars*. The tribal aristocracy was never vassalized, as it was, for instance, in many Central Asian khanates and in the Jaf Confederacy in Kurdistan (Barth, 1953: 44; Hudson, 1964: 93).

A brief comparison of Kalat with other confederacy structures in Southwest and Central Asia is useful in suggesting some of the critical variables underlying structural differences at the confederacy level. Differences at the maximal level of integration are especially interesting in view of the fact that the structural possibilities of tribal organizations based on pastoral nomadism would seem to be fairly limited on the lower levels of integration. In most cases, ecological pressures mitigate against the emergence of formal corporate groups on the residential level. The adaptive advantage in permitting an easy flow of people in shifting camp groups tends to inhibit the development of a hierarchical chain of authority which penetrates the community level. The Jaf tribes of Kurdistan and the Basseri of southern Iran, as well as the Brahui all function through personal, dyadic ties of a superior-subordinate nature. The formal table of

organization is similar in all three cases (Barth, 1953: Chap. II; Barth, 1961: Chaps. IV, V).

The Persian Khamseh Confederacy incorporates only the nomadic segment of the regional population. The resources supporting the ruling dynasty come from outside the confederacy itself, and the balance of power lies with the territorial state. The Jaf Confederacy developed in an area where feudal patterns of land tenure and central government control have co-existed for centuries. The presence of several different land codes, plus the unstable extension of central government control to parts of the area resulted in the paramount dynasty obtaining title to all settled lands within the confederacy, and the tenant-landlord bond short circuited the tribesman-chief-khan links upon which the Kalat Khanate was built.

The Kalat Khanate is most reminiscent of the tribal confederations of Central Asian nomads. In Central Asia, however, rapid and extensive territorial expansion under the Genghisids and the proximity of the Chinese civilization led to an emphasis on territorial administration with princes of the ruling house frequently assuming control of tribal units.

It is clear that the term, tribal confederacy, has been used to characterize a variety of phenomena, ranging from organizations like the Khamseh, whose head was totally unrelated to the tribal constituents, and which functioned with a minimum of institutional structure, to organizations like Kalat, which approaches a primitive state. Comparative data is rather scanty at present, but it suggests that the structural differences found at this level reflect the interplay between three related factors: 1) the genesis of confederacy integration, 2) the incorporation of all the resources within the territory, and 3) the level of political integration of impinging societies. The fact that the Kalat Khanate was more elaborately structured and better stabilized than the Khamseh and Jaf Confederacies is related to the fact that the Ahmadzais did not invade the system from outside. Rather, as we said before, they attained a stable control of the throne because political integration at this level was ecologically advantageous for the tribal population as a whole. Furthermore, the Kalat Khanate developed and maintained itself in a larger environment in which the neighboring political systems were also tribally based. Although states and empires may have, from time to time, enforced a tributary relationship with Kalat, they did not attempt to incorporate the Khanate into a larger, territorially based political structure.

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