ON BALUCHI SEPARATISM

VAHE BOYAJIAN
Yerevan

0.1. Amongst the Iranian peoples and ethnic formations a highly important place is occupied by the Baluchis, due to their ancient and specific culture, rich historical background and because of their political weight in the ethnic mosaic of the region. In spite of that the Baluchis have always been an integral part of the continuum of peoples inhabiting Iran, and from the earliest times have played an important role in the creation and consolidation of the Iranian state; though, from the other side, the ideas of separatism and ambitions of creating their own state have never been alien to them. However, the lack of a clearly formed national ideology and national consolidation, along with a number of other factors, have always been an obstacle in the way of the realization of these ideas. In any case, the Baluchis (around 6 million) are the largest Iranian ethnicity after the Persians, Kurds and Afghans.

1.1. In the XVII century by the efforts of the Brahui and Baluchi tribes, as a result of struggle against the Great Moguls, the Khanate of Qelat was founded. This historical period is not thoroughly studied and now it is difficult to say who played the main role in the foundation of the Khanate: Baluchis or Brahuis? However, the period of the Khanate of Qelat is considered as a part of Baluchistan's history. The rulers of Qelat, during many years, fought either with the Kalhurs of Sind, or with the Gilzais of Afghanistan, and the Khanate's borders were continuously changing, including in certain historic periods the regions of Quetta-Pishin, Qachchi, Sibi, etc. The rulers of the Khanate were often subject to the influence of either the rulers of Iran (Nadir-shah, for instance), or the Afghans of Qandahar, up to the period of Nasir Khan's reign - the most authoritative leader of Qelat. Nasir Khan managed to bring all the local sardars under his jurisdiction and enlarged the territory of the Khanate approximately up to the borders of the modern Pakistani province of Baluchistan. With the penetration of the Dutch, and afterwards the British into the Persian Gulf, the value of the Khanate of Qelat and Baluchi territories began to increase gradually. The foreigners considered Baluchistan as a foothold for their expansion in the directions of India, Iran and Afghanistan. According to an agreement between the British Mission and Qelat signed in 1839, the Baluchis were to guarantee the safety of British power and transportation to the Afghan border, in return, they were given guarantees of the preservation of their sovereignty and the borders of the Baluchi territories. From that time Baluchistan gradually began to lose its influence in the region.

1.2. As a result of the over enhancing spread of the Great Britain's influence further to the West, Persia also remembered its vital interests. In order to protect their own interests, the Persians began intensive interference in Baluchistan. During the reigns of Nasereeddin-shah and Reza-shah they actively tried to subject the Baluchi tribes to the central government. A considerable part of Baluchistan up to 1947 was considered the territory of the British Empire. It is necessary to note that the division of Baluchi lands took place at the end of the XIX century, due to an agreement between Iran, Afghanistan and Britain, leading to a formal demarcation line through the enormous Baluchi tribal massive and the emergence of the Iranian, or Western,
The Baluchi question, as such, for the time being is not traceable in Iran, in spite of the efforts of foreign powers to destabilize the situation in the areas inhabited by the Baluchis. The Iranian government completely controls the Baluchi territories and does not allow the rise of an undesirable development there. In general, it should be noted that the Islamic government, unlike the Shah’s regime, as was stated above, has developed a more constructive and realistic national policy. We do not mean, of course, only the advancement of religion as a unifying factor, but also their kin attitude towards the Iranian national unity based on the understanding of the character of the ethnic processes in the country. Instead of plain slogans about Iranian unity, and the greatness of Ancient Iran, etc., the Islamic rulers of Iran concentrate more on lifting of the economic status, creating social infrastructures, broadening the educational network (including universities) in national provinces, which brings the minorities into common social-political and national processes, promotes their integration into the Iranian society. Herewith, one can not see the tendency of the artificial unification of the ethno-demographic picture of the country: a phenomenon, which dominated during the Shah’s period. On the contrary, considerable work is being put into the propaganda of local cultures, their role in the shaping of an all-Iranian culture and national unity. Only about Kurds, for instance, in recent years, more than 100 voluminous works - albums, dictionaries, monographs, etc. - were published. The same can be said concerning the Talishis, Baluchis and other ethnic units.

However, the anti-Iranian circles are very active in dissemination of separatistic ideas in the national regions of the country. The main activities in this direction lie upon the Islamic organizations Mojaheddin-e Khalq and Fedayyan-e Khalq, which, according to some sources, are financed by Western circles and Saudi Arabia. In one of the recent issues of the official organ of the Fedayyan-e Khalq organization “Kar” (Spring, 1998), the Baluchis in Iran are subjected to cruel repressions and even deportation, and for the suppression of the Baluchi movement even heavy artillery is being used. The majority of these facts, of course, are far from reality. Misinformation, by the way, is the main “weapon” of the anti-Iran groups for the destabilization of the national situation in Iran. If we trust, for instance, the pamphlets and various publications issued abroad by the Azerbaidjani and Turkish intelligence organizations, a single day does not pass in Tabriz without street demonstrations, murders, persecutions, trials, anti-governmental pickets, etc. Meantime Tabriz is one of the calmest cities of Iran, a true stronghold of the Iranian state and religious system.

2.2. A Completely different situation is presented in Eastern Baluchistan, where at present approximately 4 million Baluchis live. After the creation of Pakistan as a state in 1947, Qelat proclaimed its independence, but a year later, as the result of negotiations, the founder of Pakistan Mohammad Ali Djinnah managed to include Baluchistan into the new state. However, the identity of all the ethnic units living in Pakistan, including the Baluchis, is on a quite high level. As a proof of it, during 1952-55 the Alliance of Baluchi Provinces within Pakistan was founded. But the Baluchi movement against the Pakistani government continued until the 70-s having reached its peak in 1974-s. In the rebellion more than 55.000 Baluchis took part, and the number of the Pakistani troops, leading military actions against the Baluchis, reached 77.000. Even the Shah of Iran, being worried about Baluchi separatism, sent several helicopters to Pakistan. Though the revolt was suppressed, it had a positive