

Book Review Series :DS Paragraph No 1. 2017

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'DS Paragraph' is an academic activity in which students, researchers and faculty are encouraged to write critical reviews of books based on the Development discourse. The topical range may include academic debates on issues such as poverty, inequality, gender, conflict and human security. The topic of the book reviewed in first DS Paragraph is '**Remotely Colonial: History and Politics in Balochistan**' authored by Nina Swidler. The book is reviewed by Mr. Aziz Khan.

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Remotely Colonial: History and Politics in Balochistan

Author: Nina Swidler

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Remotely Colonial is a treatise written by American Anthropologist Nina Swidler. She has employed a blend of ethnographic methodology and political commentary to write this book. The term 'remotely colonial' alludes to Kalat which is a historic place in Balochistan. This place was important in terms of geostrategic interest and of little significance to the British as far as economic interest was concerned as it was situated in far region of Western India, more than thousand miles away from Kolkata and Mumbai. The book is divided into 10 chapters. In the following text are critically reviewed the minor and major arguments of each chapter of the book.

The first and second chapters titled 'Introduction' and 'Kalat before the British' respectively deal with the history of Kalat area. Kalat, historically situated in the distant reaches of the Persian and Indian empire, was sporadically attached to one or the other empire. The various conquerors, from Darius and Alexander to the Portuguese and the British, who were seeking the riches of South Asia have marched through it. However, down the historic memory lane, the first formal contact between the British and Mehrab Khan (Khan of Kalat) happened in 1837, when the British wanted to seek cooperation against an invasion of Afghanistan. The Khan reluctantly signed a safe-passage agreement. Sardars despite being loyal to Kandahar attacked the British convoys. In retribution, The British killed Mehrab Khan (The Khan of Kalat). Afterwards the British Empire adopted a 'close borders policy'. This policy is mainly attributed to the efforts of Lawrence (a British colonial officer), who designed the policy of respecting the sovereignty of Kalat, while at the same time they set in motion steps for a long term standardisation of customary law making which were amenable to British imperial practices.

The third chapter titled 'The Birth of the Balochistan Agency' deals with the strategic divide pertaining to the relations of British and Afghanistan to the Kalat state. Loyalties in Kalat used to be influenced by Kandahar-Kabul relations, afterwards similar patterns developed after the policy divide between Calcutta and Bombay. Calcutta (Capital) favored security imperatives and minimum intervention, while Bombay favored manipulating tribal fault lines and forward policy. The field colonial officials dealt border and tribal issues on ad hoc basis using expedient ways, both the customary tribal practices and FCR as situation would demand. However, there was radical disjuncture between the British notion of institutionalised rule, and local ground realities in which power was gained and held by means of tribal affiliations. The theme that is most visible in this chapter is the issues of the *Subjects* and *Borders*. Being subjects of Kalat had no meaning for locals who were accustomed to moving freely across the newly established international borders that bisected cultural-linguistic groups. Although the concept of a national status as either a Kalat or a Persian was meaningless on both side of the border, the British, for their own convenience in administration, needed to assign a specific nationality to everybody in order to distinguish internal and external subjects. Being pastoral nomadic people, the nature of people had been molded to adapt themselves to every territory of that region across borders. The borders of Kalat were dependent on aristocratic relations and shifted dramatically from time to time. The British

administration dealt with the problems (which were the result of Khan's personal politics) in an ad hoc yet pragmatic way.

The Sardars-Khan interests pushed the state of Kalat into even further remoteness. After establishing Quetta (Shalkot) as a military headquarter after capturing it from Afghan in 2nd Anglo-Afghan war in the late 19th century, Kalat was characterised by yet – a more new remoteness as Quetta became politically equivalent to Kalat. Secondly, the concerns and interplay of interests between the Khan of Kalat and Sardars is also responsible for this remoteness. For the Sardars, their interest was in not giving the Khan more space for power accumulation, while at the same time, interestingly, making him respected by the Empire because he symbolised tribal customary practices. For the Khan, his major concern and interest was to enlarge its revenues and control of sardars using the British influence as leverage. For the British, their major concern was, using sardars for law and order maintenance, influencing power, quasi independence and stability of Kalat state.

The fourth and fifth chapters titled 'The Politics of Space' and 'The Politics of Culture' focus on the institutions of social and political control in Kalat. Jirga as an institution of social control was standardised in order to bring it in greater conformity with the British concept of Justice. The British officials too, learned to respect customary ways for its encompassing and adaptive nature. However, the British officials from the very start till the days of partition were unable to name or define what system existed in Balochistan.

The sixth and seventh chapters titled 'The Space of Politics' and 'The Averted Gaze' are about the Baloch Tribes and their relation to the empire in general. The British thought of tribes as belonging to one of the three racial-linguistic groups: Pashtuns, Brahui, and the Baloch. The Tribal society of Balochistan, like the case with other tribal systems, was egalitarian. There is a male, kin-based autonomy at base of most tribal formations. Tribes are orderly but without formal leader which became to be seen as 'others' by the bureaucratic colonial state. The word 'tribe' signals an irony: tribe has served as signifier of a stable past persisting in a dynamic present, and in the post-colonial moments, 'tribe' critiques the colonial construction of the past.

The eighth chapter of the book titled 'Seeking the Imaginary Balance' reflects that the Baloch tribes were historically inclusive, incorporating peoples of Pashtun, Sindhi, Punjabi, and Persian backgrounds. The author asserts about the assimilative capacity of Baloch tribal formations with exclusionary practices of the neighboring Pashtun groups. Although Baloch and Brahui were the predominant tribal languages, language was not a critical signifier of identity. The ninth and tenth chapters titled 'The Politics of Change' and 'The Afterlife of Paramountcy' depict the capriciousness of political dynamics and re-conceptualisation of Kalat as a geostrategic political entity. Kalat was occupied by Pakistani military in 1948. However, Kalat kept running in a guise of a state. In an effort to establish parity between the wings, the provinces of the West Pakistan was merged into a single province under the one unit scheme in 1955 and this marked the end of the Kalat polity. While in the contemporary times, Pakistan tries to bring the Baloch to mainstream. However, the projects like Sui and Gawadar have been imposed without the input and advice of Baloches—which makes it a central economic issue. However, Pakistan expediently attributes any resistance to their projects as 'outdated tribal sardars interests'. Still ironically, Pakistani officials rely on Jirga-levies system for its administration.

Historically, the interest and tactics of the four parties: the Khan, the Sardars, the Nationalists, and the British, converged and diverged in fluid, unstable ways. The local parties had a common interest in opposing colonial rule, but had very different ideas about what should replace it. The

nationalists envisioned some form of representative government, while the khan sorted to regain powers appropriated by the British. The Sardars were not unified and they tended to play opportunistic politics, some align with the khan, some with the nationalist, and some with the British, often shifting their allegiances.

The book implicitly raises the question of tribal culture at the crossroads of modernisation and the challenge for both to adjust and accommodate each other. The author refrains to elaborate on it and leaves this irony to the imagination of the readers. Furthermore, the author has not escaped her Western academic worldview of looking at social relations and politics. While trying hard to cling to the soul of ethnographic vintage-point, she fails to recognise that the tribal sardars as nationalist in their outward behaviour had been protecting their customary laws and the Kalat state for centuries. Thus using this term Nationalist only for the young educated class is being exclusive. The tribal sardars have been protective of their customs and land in a very organic way while inadvertently, being more nationalistic.

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