

DARYARO PLATEAU: EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Khirthar mountains on the western flank of Sindh has several distinct topographical features. Among them little is known about Daryaro plateau, therefore, this small-scale study is carried out as an exploratory-cum-descriptive research to decide if it is worth carrying out a detailed investigation. This paper attempts to unravel various anecdotes related to the highest peak Kutte Jee Qabar. The main purpose of this study is to investigate what is prevalent with respect to the mode of life of various settlements in this isolated region on Khirthar. On the basis of assessment made during this exploratory study, full-scale study may eventuate.

INTRODUCTION

Sindh has several natural features which make it a distinct regional entity. It has the Khirthar mountains in the west and a desert region in the east. The Khirthar [meaning milk cream in Sindhi language] range is appended just beyond the north-west corner of Sindh at about 27° 55' North latitude running southwards along the western frontier of the province, to about 26° 15', where they turn a little to the eastward and terminate in the Kohistan Mahal at about 25° 43'. The total length of the range is 150 miles and its general height West of Larkana happens to be between 4000 ft. and 5000 ft. above sea level but isolated peaks rise to nearly 7000 ft. (Aitken, 1986:2).

The landscape Khirthar Mountains of Sindh is treeless and brown in colour. These rise at about 80 km. north of Karachi and stretch northward in an unbroken chain of desolate peaks and barren valleys. For 400 km. in length they merge with the higher ranges of Central Brahui Range of Balochistan. In these desiccated valleys water can only be found in isolated spots. Here, only the needle-leafed tamarisk and thorny Kundi trees can be seen at lower altitudes, but in the higher reaches, wild olive and sanatha add to the stark beauty of the dry slopes.

In the Khirthar range, there is Daryaro plateau at an elevation of about 6,000 in the West of Larkana. It has alluvial to sandy soils with nearly 6,500 acres of cultivable land dependent on barani irrigation, of which 650 acres lie in Sindh (Rahman, 1993:31). Daryaro Plateau experiences a mean summer temperature of 84⁰ F and a rainfall of about 6 inches (*Ibid*). Its ground is cut by watercourses running down to the east into deep and long ravine. The soil is yellowish red marl, washed from the heights, while the rock is red sandstone inter-bedded with Nummulitic limestone. The well known Kutte-ji-Qabar (dog's grave) is a junction on the eastern spur of Daryaro with the main range of Khirthar hills 3000 to 7000 feet high on its borders, so much so that the plateau is protected from all sides by hillocks. Given the exceptionally distinct features of the region and very insignificant literature on this section of Khirthar, the authors have personally visited for verification of various accounts and auxiliary primary information.

In the second half of nineteenth century, Daryaro Plateau was proposed as a possible site for a sanatorium by four British officers, Dr. Lalor, Captain McDonald, Commissioner Mereweather and Commissioner Lucas, who visited the plateau to explore the feasibility (Rahman, 1993:31). However, the proposal could not materialize.

There are two tales about the name of plateau common in the residents of this hill region. According to one account, the plateau is named after a person 'Daryaro' who lies buried with his wife in the graveyard of Daryaro Chhutto near the remains of rest houses of British period. They perhaps belong to a mountainous Chhutta tribe of Balochistan and Sindh speaking Sindhi language. To others, Daryaro being a word in Sindhi language meaning 'with beard', therefore, the name Daryaro is attributed to the abundance of trees and bushes in this part in contrast to the barrenness of rest of the mountain. Given the singular characteristic of countryside, the later description sounds convincing.

PHYSICAL DIVISIONS OF THE PALTEAU

Daryaro Plateau is divided into two parts: Western Kachho and Eastern Kachho (Kachho is Sindhi word for part). A brief description of both parts is given below:

Western Kachho

This part of Daryaro extends from north to south. The sandy soil resembling the colour of limestone is fertile and cultivable. However, in this part of Daryaro neither trees except some bushy plants locally called Kaho and Hanjeer, nor any signs of human habitation were found by the authors. Perhaps due to lack of water people are constrained to shift to either in the eastern part of Daryaro or in a village Kande Jee Gurree located at the base of mountain. This village is connected with the highland through a pass Ghate Soar, which according to elders of the village was so narrow in the past that even a lamb could hardly cross it but now at the time of observation camels were seen easily crossing it.

Eastern Kachho

This part of Daryaro is not as high as the western part of Daryaro, however it encompasses comparably a larger area, which is amply covered with natural vegetation and trees with local names Hanjeer, Toot and Loheero, and is mainly inhabited by mountaneous tribe of Sindh-Balochistan Chhutta who speak Sindhi language. The well-known Kutte Jee Qabar lies in the southern section, while Phoondal Jo Phoar is located in the north. Pleasantly situated, the rest houses were established here near a water spring during the British period (Pithawala, 1976: 28). In farther east of this water spring, there is another bigger water spring with the name of Maindar. In one of stories, the villagers told that in this mushroom shaped pool the maiden Hayar of the Chandio tribe had downed herself when, in a long ago battle, the farmer mistakenly beat out the tattoo for retreat. According to them, fearing her side was over thrown and averse to being prisoner, Hayar flung herself into it out of utter despair. At some distance of Maindar is Beelo, named after her sister who had acted in the same style. The spirits of both sisters, they say, still live at the bottom of their respective ponds. Also, in this part of Daryaro, near the village of Sita ji Dath comes the sweets springs of Pinari. Gushing out of three clefts in the limestone wall, these springs provide the flow that goes on to villages at the base of mountain. Beyond these springs, fresh water is rare because after the springs the river Sita flows only after sufficient rainfall. However, water can only be had from stagnant pools storing rain water. Of many settlements, this part is marked

with villages of Kukker and Ungor, a collection of some huts which is summer home of a family of the Chhutta tribe of Balochistan. Every year as the spring rains begin, small parties come up to plough every bit of the flat land near Ungor, sow their wheat and flee again to the warmth of their valley. Then, as the month of March draws to an end, they come up again with their families to spend the next six months on the cool heights and fatten their herds on the profuse grasses of the high Khirthar.

AGRICULTURE OF THE PALTEAU

Since the climate of Daryaro is arid, special wild fruit locally named Kunar is planted. It may be mentioned that the seed of Kunar is used to make beads of rosary in Balochistan. The whole population of the plateau depends on the waters of a spring, which is permanent and fulfills the needs of water of entire area of Daryaro. In some pockets of the plateau, however, wheat is cultivated from the waters of the spring, but the crop takes 9 months from sowing to reaping. Also, at the base of mountain, Chandia and Gaincha tribesman in the villages Rahu Jo Aithyo, Sita Jee Dath, grow intoxicants herbs like Bhang and Dodi. In particular, the village Sita Jee Dath (Sita's premolar of mythical queen Sita), situated at the mouth of the River Sita, the fields are wholly dotted with trees, grass and fruits watered by small irrigation channels. The village conceivably owes its very existence to the river whose flow comprises of the waters of springs and rainfall. However, geological records show that it was a veritable river until the end of the last Ice Age (*Ibid.*). If rains are plentiful, there is plenty of water in the ponds and ample fodder is harvested. Thus, life at the plateau is solely dependent on benevolence of nature.

KUTTE JEE QABAR

Kutte Jee Qabar (dog's grave) is the highest peak in the Khirthar with an elevation of 6,878 feet above sea level or about 1,000 feet above the adjoining plains. In Brahui language, which is spoken by some of the tribes living on the Daryaro plateau, Kutte Jee Qabar [Sindhi] is known as *Kuchak na Qabar*.

Kutte-ji- Qabar is very steep and to scale this peak one has to turn to the west from Larkana by road up to the Rahu Jo Aithyo via Kambar and Ghaibi Dero. After village Rahu-jo-Aithyo, riding

southward on either camel or donkey traverses desiccated stream to reach Daryaro Plateau and then access to Kutte-ji-Qabar.

On its flat, wind-scoured summit there sits a pile of limestone nodules in the shape of a grave under which, so they say, lie the remains of the Brahui's dog. Stanley Napier Raikes, records the story on this grave in his memoirs *Folk Tales of Scinde and Guzerat* (circa 1855). The villagers relate different fables connected with the name of this grave. Describing the dog, the villagers told the authors that it was a clever and devoted animal that lived with a Brahui hill man. According to them, the man in need of money, one day consigned his dog to a *bania* in town. As he was leaving with the loan, the Brahui instructed his dog to serve its new master with unstinting loyalty until he reclaimed him by making good the debt. Now, one night as everyone slept, some thieves broke into the *bania's* home and decamped with everything the man owned. The morning after, having discovered the robbery, as the man was beating his chest, the dog came around to lead him and his family to a place outside town where the thieves had secreted the loot. Very much pleased with the dog, the *bania* wrote out a slip of paper to tell the Brahui that his debt was redeemed. Tying the slip around the dog's neck, he told it to go to its master. Meanwhile, even as the dog delightedly raced homeward, the Brahui had come into some money and was on his way down to the *bania's*. Master and pet met somewhere on the Khirthar slopes. The dog has deserted the *bania*, thought the Brahui. It had brought dishonour to him. Overcome with disgust, the Brahui abused the dog with unfilthy language and the dog viewing the unkindness of master fell down. In fit of rage, Brahui killed the dog with a heavy blow of his stick. As the Brahui came up to the corpse he saw the slip of paper. There was no end to his grief when he discovered that his dog had done more for him than he had asked and that his unthinking abuse and rage had killed the proud animal. The Brahui, according to villagers, carried his dog to the highest peak in the area and there buried it to be celebrated forever more for its dignity. This is a tale which perhaps might have been crafted by poor but dignified Brahui hill shepherds in celebration of their own sense of honour and of condemning wrong even when committed by their own. This version of story although authenticated by the writer of *Lub-e-Tareekh-e-Sindh* (Khan, 1989:212) with small

variations but is also rejected by many local people. They claim that in the 19th century, there was a heliograph system with many stations along this hilly region of Khirthar (Ansari, 2009:35). Starting with a terminal of the system at Cape Monze, west of Karachi, it went along the Kirthar range from peak to peak. One of those stations was at Kutte Jee Qabar in Larkana district. According to them, a British officer posted there had a dog whom he was very fond of. When the dog died, he might have buried it nearby and the locals, unused to such behaviour, perhaps began to call the peak by that name. This story appears credible to the extent that the remains of the house and office of the likely heliographic station still exist nearby.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Daryaro plateau is one of the possible locations for setting up a hill station in the province of Sindh,
- Keeping in view of the various water springs and small rivers in the plateau, their waters can be utilized to develop agriculture of the plateau on the pattern practiced in Quetta on Balochistan plateau,
- A detailed full-scale survey of this part of Khirthar may be carried out to exploit the potential and scenic view of the plateau.

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