

Sindhi culture through history

photo
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THERE are two important factors that caused nations to suffer in the past: internal crises that led to civil wars and rebellions in which powerful groups or individuals tried to dominate politically, by challenging central authority. Consequently, these conflicts either ended up in establishing a strong central government after subduing warlords and rebel groups, or led to disintegration and partition of a country.

Civil wars always caused immense economic and social problems to common people when different warring factions plundered, robbed and looted their belongings, and left them in a state of chaos and confusion. The insecurity that prevailed as a result of



chaos forced them to migrate to safer places, further weakening the social structure of society and disturbing the daily routine of life.

The other factor that had a great impact politically, economically and socially was invasions of foreign powers. In case of their military victory and occupation of a country, the first task of the occupying power was to change the whole structure of state. All important and key posts were assigned to their followers, and the local administrators and office holders were pushed into the background. Only those who collaborated with them were given some share. The result was that collaboration promoted opportunism. Those who changed their loyalties took care of their own persons, rather than the country or nation. In such a structure that was dominated by foreigners and invaders, a

Dynasty (854-55 to 1010), its relations with the Arab world came to an end. In the mediaeval period, when North India was ruled by the Sultans and the Mughals, the history of Sindh was interpreted from the angle of Delhi. Though there were two local dynasties — Summa and Soomro — there is such paucity of material that it is difficult for historians to write a comprehensive history of these dynasties. In the 18th century, the Kalhora (1700-1782) came to power, but failed to maintain the independence of Sindh and were forced to pay tribute to the Afghan king. The Talpur rule (1759-1843) ended as a result of British conquest and Sindh became a part of Bombay presidency and hence lost its independent status.

It is a phenomenon of history that ruling dynasties have constructed history according to their own perspectives. The same tradition was followed by the ruling dynasties in Sindh. For example, when the Arghuns and Turkhan (1520-1592) came to power after defeating the Samma dynasty; they made an attempt to leave no trace of the past rulers. When, on their turn, the Mughals defeated the Turkhan, they disappeared in oblivion and history was re-written from the Mughal point-of-view. The defeat of the Kalhoras and ascendancy of the Talpurs again changed the perspective and the Kalhoras were condemned as intriguers and despots, who treated the Talpurs badly that caused their collapse. The British viewed the Talpurs as inefficient and barbarians who wasted their resources on their hobbies and took no steps to improve the life and condition of their people.

Another significant aspect of the history of Sindh is that though it was ruled up to 1010-11 A.D. by Arabs, Sindh resisted adopting Arabic culture and language. When the Muslim ruling dynasties came to power in North India, Sindh followed their tradition and adopted Persian culture, with Persian becoming the

those who collaborated with them were given some share. The result was that collaboration promoted opportunism. Those who changed their loyalties took care of their own persons, rather than the country or nation. In such a structure that was dominated by foreigners and invaders, a gap was created between rulers and the local people. Therefore, to keep people under control, coercive and despotic methods were adopted and all oppositions and rebellions were crushed with an iron hand.

Moreover, there was cultural and social impact of the foreign rule. Invaders brought their own culture and traditions along with them. As a result, the integration of foreign and local elements created a new culture that was patronized by the ruling classes. In this case, the local culture receded to rural areas and was saved there by peasants and nomads.

It divided the country politically as well as culturally.

Keeping in view of this background, we find that Sindh experienced both problems: the internecine wars and foreign invasions. Both contributed to change its political, social and cultural structure. As a result of it, its identity shaped and reshaped, that ultimately weakened its social values and cultural roots.

As long as Sindh remained a part of the Arab Empire, it remained neglected in Arabic historical narratives. With the end of the Habari

aspect of the history of Sindh is that though it was ruled up to 1010-11 A.D. by Arabs, Sindh resisted adopting Arabic culture and language. When the Muslim ruling dynasties came to power in North India, Sindh followed their tradition and adopted Persian culture, with Persian becoming the court language. The immigrants from Central Asia and Iran strengthened the culture of the ruling classes. However, in spite of domination of Persian culture, common people retained their local cultural traditions and continued to speak Sindhi.

The reason for resisting foreign cultural influence was that the population of Sindh was divided in different tribes and scattered in desert and rural areas. They had rare contacts with the rulers and their courts. The tribes who were nomads were more or less beyond the reach of administration. They did not bother of governments' laws and retained their independence and kept their local customs and practices. Those areas where there was cultivation, the rulers settled tax matters through local intermediaries and zamindars.

This isolation immuned them from any impact of court and its culture. Thus, they preserved their identity by protecting local culture and traditions. In fact, the people of rural areas kept Sindhi language and culture alive, while the inhabitants of cities integrated them with foreign culture. ■

— Mubarak Ali