

Ecology

Bakhtiari country is almost entirely mountainous. It is a region of spectacular and wild mountain ranges with intervening valleys in which the nomads graze their flocks of sheep and goats. The nomads practice a form of long range nomadism, moving between winter and summer pastures in spring and autumn. This form of ecological adaptation allows for the exploitation of grasslands of an area ~~which could not sustain a settled population, and the maintenance of greater numbers of sheep and of goats.~~

which can not easily sustain a ^{permanently} settled population of animal pastoralists.

The winter quarters of the Bakhtiari lie in the foothills of Khuzistan in the western part of the Zagros mountain ranges. This region consists of a series of fertile plateaux and mountain valleys between 2,000 and 6,000 ft. high, in which hundreds of small villages and hamlets are situated. Extensive cultivation of wheat and barley, with some fruit and vegetables ~~grad-~~ is carried out on the valley floors, and many, though by no means all of these hamlets are now permanently inhabited. Large flocks are no longer kept by those who stay permanently in this region. The upper slopes of the foothills provide grass for the herds, and it is on these upper slopes that the more nomadic members of the Bakhtiari live throughout the winter months in their black goat hair tents (chader or bohun)

Camps

There are many types of settlement in the winter pastures. Camp groups of four to ten tents, the size is determined by a number of factors such as well, size of herding units or herds in the camp. Too many sheep can not be effectively grazed or watered together, so camps tend to consist of a number of related families whose joint flocks stay within a reasonable number. ~~It is common~~

The composition of camp groups is very flexible and varies throughout the year. Typically it consists of a number of close relatives, brothers and their families or patrilineal cousins. Membership varies from year to year as well but people always live with kinsmen, either patrilineal relatives or with people linked by marriage ties (clumsy). Very wealthy nomads, such as the tent of a Kalantar, tend to have very small camps consisting of their shepherd and his family and less wealthy members of the tribal section. The size of camp group in the past particularly was affected by the prevailing political conditions. In times of tribal unrest and insecurity camp groups tend to be larger for purposes of protection. When ~~security is~~ conditions are peaceful, then the need to protect animals is less pressing and the nomads can spread thinner on the ground. It is not uncommon to see single tents.

Flock size is a crucial variable in determining camp size. The more animals one has, the more labour is required to look after, graze, water and milk the animals. A camp group usually approximates

in size and in the composition of its personnel a sufficient number of people, male and female, young and mature to carry out the necessary labour in looking after animals. Different seasons of the year require different labour inputs. For example in the spring when the lambs and kids are born, the young animals are herded separately from the mature ewes. This task of looking after the herd of lambs and kids is the responsibility of the young girls of the camp - between 7 and 10 years of age. Milking is done by the women of the camp, each milking her husband's flock and she requires help in controlling the milking flock, a job usually given to a child or the shepherd. After the milking is done the lambs and kids are allowed to suckle.

Donkeys, mules, horses and cows are used as pack or riding animals. Their grazing and herding requirements are different - usually the task of the men and young boys of the camp.

There is therefore a balance between numbers and types of animals, herds and pack animals, and the numbers and composition of personnel in a camp. A typical camp would be one with one or two tent-families with sizable herds - up to approximately 200 sheep, and several less well off relatives with fewer animals. The core of a camp is relatively stable, brothers, of father and married independent sons who habitually herd and live together, around whom there are a few other tents temporarily camping with them, possibly working for the wealthier families.

The essence of nomadic life is flexibility. Nomads have to be responsive to very varied climatic conditions, one of the major reasons for movement in the first place. All of their institutions reflect this prime need for flexibility, none more so than their basic residential units, which must of necessity be ~~able-to-vary~~ sufficiently flexible to split and come together when necessary or possible.

The migrating camp groups tend to reflect the need to coordinate the daily round of pastoral activities plus the necessity to move, people, belongings and animals over the severe mountain ranges that separate summer from winter pastures. People ~~do~~ do not always migrate with those they have spent the winter with, but may prefer to join up with other relatives for the duration of the move. Such decisions depend on many personal factors. How people get on together, the development of friction between camp members, disagreement with the daily decisions as to when and how far to move. There is a small but steady ~~hiving off~~ hiving off of personnel throughout a migration. Camps split up and come together, people camp at greater distances from each other until tempers have cooled. One moves to a camp of male agnatic relatives or to a group with whom one has some sort of affinal or marriage link, or some social link through a woman.'

It is important for the women of a camp to get on well with each other and although the over structure of a camp is most commonly that of an agnatic group of relatives, on analysis one finds that those agnates who actually live with each other are united by marriage links as well.

The women of a camp are also often related to each other in some way. For example sisters or are cousins of each other.

The residential camps therefore exhibit a dense network of kinship ties - agnatic, matrilineal, affinal. In many instances the members of a camp are related to every other member of a camp in several different ways. This feature makes also for flexibility because different kinship links, either of descent or marriage carry with them different types of obligations, on which the individuals concerned can call, as circumstances dictate. Vis a vis other camp groups therefore a camp can present a complex and solidary front if necessary, concealing at the same time the sorts of tensions and conflicts inherent in this system. People united in multiple types of social ties may find that these ties conflict with each other.

A camp therefore exhibits a balance between opposed tendencies which have the potential for both uniting and dividing the group. A balance also between the individuals and the group camp group or (MAL) When individual interests are overridden by the benefits from cooperation within the camp as members of the camp group then camp cohesion will continue. However the Bakhtiari are, like most nomads a highly individualistic people and if they feel their individual interests are being swamped by others then they will leave and join another camp of relatives where they may feel they can serve their own interests more effectively

Balance of multiple forces is a keynote in this culture. The successful nomad is the one who can balance or orchestrate, manage

his life as effectively as possible. He can not survive alone. He lives always as a member of a variable group comprised always of kin towards whom he has obligations and rights.

His identity as a person comes from membership of such a group. The actual composition of the group he lives with varies throughout his life, so an important component in the Bakhtiari personality is that he is defined as an individual in competition with other Bakhtiari. He has to be an aggressive and self assertive person to survive at all.

Many aspects of Bakhtiari cultural life extol the virtues of this self assertiveness. Their heroes are Bakhtiari who have lived honourable, successful and independent lives. Men who have in their persons fulfilled the realises in their lives those values of freedom, independence, aggressive self assertiveness. Brave men, good fighters, unafraid of violence - men of honour - POR RUH- full of face. Such tribal heroes are sung about, and there are many ballad songs singing of tribal fights and the famous men who fought either other tribal sections or often fought against various governments of Iran. Many such men lost, and died in battle but they died with honour, as a Bakhtiari warrior should. Such idealised songs epitomise the prime values of Bakhtiari society. A man real Bakhtiari is to be found in the public sphere, visiting other tents, politicking, maintaining his prestige and standing in the community through constant participation in camp and tribal activities.