

Ja'far Qoli Rus tami : Kalantar of the Babadi.

For a Bakhtiari, Ja'far Qoli is a tall man. Like many of them, he is lean, with a fine featured face, deeply bronzed by constant exposure to the sun and the rain. His face has deep lines running on either side of his mouth, with a maze of smile crinkles around his eyes. His shoulders stoop a little. In unguarded moments Jafar Qoli, can look rather like a bird, possibly a vane. He has an elegance, a lithness which is enhanced by the flowing costume, which he wears with style. As a Kalantar must, he has a self aware presence, which he uses to effect.

He is a man who keeps himself private, detached. There is a watchfulness, come from many years of experience in the mountains, which without effort establishes a distance, a separation. Ja'far Qoli is a man surrounded by his people, but a man alone, alone from choice.

He is one of the People of the Wind - a nomad, truly at home with freedom, at home in the silence of the mountains. He carries within himself a stillness, a control. He moves as one with the wind in the mountains, fitting harmoniously with the snow, and with the rivers. He is a laconic man, not given to unnecessary noise. He moves with a rhythmic economy.

He has an empathy with nature, with his flocks and his camp. He is most at home in his mountains, looking out at the expanse of the territory through which he moves with such sureness and empathy.

He knows the harsh realities of the nomadic life from a lifetime experience. Such knowledge, even wisdom is not easily come by.

Jaf'ar Qoli grew up in these B^{ak}ht^{ar}iari mountains at a time when the tribes knew great hardship, imposed by a hostile government, forcing them to built make shift homes, forbidding the migrations. He was a young man when the government began de~~p~~iberately to crush and transform tribal life. Such extenral antagonism inevitably produces a self awareness, an awareness of identity forged through the threat of distruction. He has lived through an era which forced many Bakhtiari against their will to move into the oil fileds for work, settle in i poverished shantytype conditions , a people dominated by others.

He becasem a Kalantar, on the death of his father at a time when the central government was weak, the old Shah, Reza Shah had been deposed and the new young Shah Mohammad Reza was not in a position to continue his pathers punitive tribal policy. The tribes revolted, destoryed the homes they despised, brought out the tents they had been secretly weaving and restarted thier traditional migrations. The tribes went "yaghi", became rebels, outlaws.

It was an exciting time for the young, a chance to right the wrongs inflicted on them by the soldiers of the Shah, and many Bakhtiar took sweet revenge on their oppressors. ^A number of wild fights, took place with the Bakhtiari attacking in their traditional way - Shabi Khun - the attack by nihgt. These tribesmen know how to mingle with the rocks in the twilight and the darkness so as to be virtually invisible. Their bkack and white costume is perfect for this. A few indiividuals strategically placed can hold off while regiments with little trouble.

Ja'far readily took the opportunities presented at this time, and laid the foundations of his reputation, on which he has steadily built for the past thirty years.

Nowadays, in his mature years, with several wives, he is a man of many and very varied responsibilities. He looks at the past with an amused sort of nostalgia, knowing that such days are now probably gone for good, days which he does not regret.. The dangers , hardships and political uncertainties of his youth were an education in being a Bakhtiari which no longer exists. His straight and experience were enhanced by his younger successes. He has applied the lessons he learned then, tempered with greater caution with a growing expertise. In the face of much opposition and competition for others he has over the last ten years emerged probably as the most powerful and certainly the most respected of all the Babadi Kalantars.

This profound respect he has earned in the mountains themselves, where he is obviously so much in tune with the nomadic way of life. He is a very successful herder, and success only comes from knowledge. To succeed as a pastoralist in these mountainous conditions, is to dominate or overcome the capricious climate, which strikes at the expert and the inexperienced alike. Rains, snow, intense heat. Much experience is essential to survive, let alone to prosper.

The essence of nomadic life is adaptability, and Ja'far has proved to be very adaptable indeed. Considerable mental agility, speedy decision making, and expert management is essential.