

Tribes and Nomads of Iran

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Abstract:

In some historical manuscript of Iran, tribe means a not settled and nomadic community. Fasaee distinguishes the terms tribe and clan. He considers that, tribe includes a group of people who live in black tents and are displaced from warm to cold areas; and clan includes the people who do not migrate and live in black tents or villages; but, Hemo believes that, some migrant groups such as Bahaeddini in Sisakan region and Sadat Mirsalar in Bahmaei region located in Kohkilouye are considered clan. It is good to be mentioned that, Iranian historian after the Safavi period sometimes have used clan instead of tribe to introduce the migrant society.

Key words: Tribes, nomads, Iran

Introduction

In the past, there was no difference between terms tribe and nomads, and those were synonym and were used to introduce a nomad group of people. But nowadays, two different concepts are used for tribe and nomads in anthropology and sociology.

Some anthropologists of Iran have proposed some criteria to distinguish tribes and some other societies; including: existence of tribal structure, classification of family and clan and others; belief of the tribe' members to be belonged to one of classes of this structure, and having a same land with certain area.

Another French anthropologist has considered these criteria to diagnose tribal society: 1. Coherent and strong kinship system based on which problems of the tribe are resolved within the tribe. 2. pyramid-shaped social and administrative organization based on kinship system. 3. A specific livelihood which is mostly based on lovesick keeping (cultivation in tribal society is at the second order and handicraft production is the side job of the tribal people). 4. A specific lifestyle which reveals as migration and

semi-migration forms. Some others consider seasonal migration and moving from a home to another in a certain territory and living based on lovesick keeping as important indices of tribal society, and has used the word tribe for the group of tribes which has been migrant and then were settled in a constant place, and has changed their job from livestock keeping to agriculture while preserving tribal union.

Some others, have considered tribe as a sociopolitical unit composed by a number of clans including a number of units. Some people also, have mentioned that, tribe of which foundations are hidden in nomadic life and social structure, generates a specific structure of strength, they also stated the political aspect of nomadic society and clans in a specific organization named tribal organization. Tribe also has been defined as an independent sociocultural organization of which social structure is tribal, lifestyle is migration and its livelihood is mostly by lovesick keeping. Social structure of tribe is formed by nomadic system that id based on the union of a number of nomads.

According mentioned contents above, it can be said that, social and political structure is the most important factor that gives identity to the tribal society. Tribe may be a nomadic or rural and farmer society. Hence, shepherd migrant societies and farmer settled societies are considered as tribe as long as they maintain their sociopolitical structure.

Lifestyle and livelihood forms

In terms of lifestyle and livelihood, Iranian tribal societies are into two categories: migrant societies and non-migrant or settled societies. Migration includes some forms of full migration nomadism to semi-migration and semi-nomadism; it means that, they have a lifestyle between full migration and nomadism.

Tribal people of Iran are aware about lifestyle and livelihood of the groups and units dependent to their tribe and can diagnose migration and permanent settling and knows each one by a specific term. For instance, quarterstaff Turkmen call the migrant group as Charwa and non-migrant group as Chamour; and Baluch and nomads of Fars call the migrants as Windy and the non-migrants as earthen.

Shepherd nomadic tribes migrate from a place to another one during the year and spend their life time by nomadism. This group of migrants live under a tent and when migrating, they take their tents and other instruments by cattle, and pass the long way of plain to find water and pasture for their livestock. Nomadic migrants have a single-base economy based on livestock keeping.

Migration and nomadism have a long history in Iran. Currently also, a number of tribes and clans have migrating and livestock keeping life and live in tents and have no constant and permanent residence.

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Seasonal migrant tribes have summer and winter migration. These tribes move in the spring to countryside and spend a part of spring and summer there. In the autumn, they return from countryside to winter quarter and spend a part of autumn and winter there. Some tribes have clay or stone houses in countryside and winter quarter. Another portion live in tents especially in countryside.

Economy of the seasonal migrant tribes and clans is based on livestock keeping mixed by light and weak agriculture economy. A large group of Iranian tribes such as Bakhtiari tribes in Khuzestan and Charmahal, Qashqai tribe in Fars and Ilsavan in Azerbaijan live by seasonal migration. Baseri tribe in Fars migrated till 1951 and lived in tents and migrated in the mountains of south, east and north of Shiraz in Fars Province. The settled tribes, left migrating and nomadic life and stayed in clay and mud houses of the village with keeping their traditional sociopolitical structure.

Economy of this group of tribal societies is first based on agricultural production and then, livestock keeping. The ranchers of tribes give their herds to the shepherds to graze them in the pastures belonged to their clan, their village and mountains around. Inanlou tribe and Baharlou that are from Turk tribes of Khamseh Fars union, are good instances of permanently settled rural tribes. Although this group of tribes have left shepherding and turned to agriculture and village, they have kept their tribal system and have no difference to the migrant nomadic shepherd tribes.

Kinship system

In tribal societies of Iran, kinship system is based on consanguineous groups. In this structure, the children reach social situation by inking to the father. The father has a great authority in the family and their sons are the main heir and owner of their properties. All of these consanguineous units are permitted to utilize water, land and pasture in countryside and winter quarter of the tribe territory. The embers of greater branches of the tribe such as family and clan, believe a same ideal ancestor who has generated the family, clan or tribe. Sometimes the name of tribe or clan is called by the name of this ideal common ancestor. For instance, Bahmaei tribe of Kohgilouye consider themselves from a common ancestor named Bahman and quote a myth for generation and formation of Bahmaei tribe.

Kinship system in tribal society has a very important role and duty in the union of tribal branches and their stability and durability, and guarantees the integration of social structure of the tribe and its continuity. Active productive units in the tribe are mostly formed and work based on the union among the relatives.

Marriage: among tribal societies of Iran, marriage is occurred mostly among cousins. Also, marriage is happened among the people of tribes' leaders due to political and economic considerations. In the tribes in which social position of the people was determined based on social classification, the marriages we occurred mostly within the social class. For instance, khans and magistrates of Qashqai tribe were the superior social class. Marriage among performer, locksmith and barbers who were considered as the lowest social class, was occurred within the group and the other groups did not give them their girls and did not get as well. Custom of multi-wife was common among Kurd tribes and nomads as well as

masters, great and rich ranchers of the other tribes of Iran. The author of Sharafnameh writes about multi-wife custom among Kurd people: the Kurd people got married to four women according to prophetic tradition, and if they had power, they added four wives more to increase their children and family members.

In Baseri tribe, rich ranchers often got a number of wives since, they were able to supply the expense of life for more wives easily.

Tribal girls, left their father family and joined their husband's family after getting married. Barth writes: in Baseri tribe, the girl joined her husband after getting married, and after living in a separate tent, she joined her husband's family and lived in their tent. This period was short and they were separated from the husband's family and lived in another tent and formed an independent family when their child was born.

Divorce: divorce is considered as shame. Divorce is occurred rarely in tribal-nomadic society of Iran, unless for some specific cases that have been accepted by tribal culture. Divorce was not permitted in Turkmen of Iran and this culture had been left by the culture of Turk people. Prohibition of divorce was not applied about marriage of a Turkmen man and non-Turkmen woman.

Family: is the smallest social unit of tribal community. Family structure is based on the relationship of wife and husband, father and mother and children. Family creation is a necessary task in tribes. But, its necessity is not a requirement or traditional; but also, it is related to sharing works between man and woman and disability of the man to continue his life without the woman's cooperation.

Barth considers family in Baseri tribe as fundamental unit of the society and production and consumption. He writes: the family has right about all properties and even can act sometimes as an independent unit for political purposes. Theory of being production for the family has been promoted to all tribes of Iran. In Iran, there are various form of family including core simple or compound family or extended discrete or incomplete family. For instance, in Baseri tribe and tribal groups of southern Iran, the family was core and small. Men got their livestock portion from their father and created an independent family; while, among Turkmen and Shahsavan people, the family was large and extended and the men were not separated from their family after marriage as long as they found an independent job.

In conflict to the others, Afshar Naderi believes that, the family in tribal society is not a production and consumption unit and also is not wide and extended. He considers the extended form of family dedicated to khans and leaders class.

Social structure

Social structure of tribe is based on a traditional classification system, and there is a kind of functional relation based on kinship and economic links and ecosystem traits. Family is the smallest branch in tribe structure. The number of branches which create the tribe is various in different tribes and varies from 4 to 6 branches.

Clan is an intellectual unit in the tribe. The role and function of clan in tribe is to coordinate tribal policy at its lower level. Sociopolitical and economic-political role also has been considered for clan. The clan members have kinship relation together. Among (DOI: [dx.doi.org/14.9831/1444-8939.2014/2-4/MAGNT.102](https://doi.org/10.29253/1444-8939.2014/2-4/MAGNT.102))

Shahsavan, tribe was a political union between the clans and was a term to introduce a mass of nomads.

Social classification

In the past, there were some classes in tribal society which were placed in equal, greater or lower hierarchy than each other in different social situations. The amount of share from natural resources, land ownership, water and pasture, status of activity in production and giving service, number of hers and livestock, amount and type of incomes and membership in dynasty had an important role in separating the social classes of tribal communities, and determined the social status of the people and their economic and social rights and political power in tribal societies.

Three general classifications have been diagnosed among nomadic tribal societies of Iran including:

A) Tribes without classification (including small societies of tribes and clans): in this type of tribal communities, there was no burgomaster and the members of tribes had a same social status with dynasts and leaders, and decisions were made in an assembly composed by the tribe and clan members. Tribe “Gushehi” and tribe Sadat Hayat Qayb” were instances of these tribes.

B) Tribes with weak classification (including a group of big tribes with numerous families): in these tribes, family is considered as central core of tribe or clan and led the tribe or clan. Fertile agricultural lands were dominated by the regnant family. But, the other families also are permitted to utilize them. Leadership power is for some members of the regnant family and they led the tribe or clan collectively. The members of regnant family were the top class of the tribal society. Tribes “Mir”,

“Qalavad” and “Baharvand” are instances of the mentioned tribes. In this group of tribes, there were three more classes except the top class: 1. Neighbor class which included the members of other families of the tribe. 2. Performers class: which was the lowest class of the tribe, and marriage between them and the other classes was prohibited. 3. Sayeds class that were respected by the others.

C) Tribes with advanced classification (including the tribes composed by a collection of clans and families): this group of tribes such as Bakhtiari and Qashqai have five separate classes:

1. Regnant class of which the members maintained villages, agricultural lands, pastures, springs and large herds of sheep. The members of this class had reached power and wealth by receiving benefit from villages and tax from the tribe people. Its dynasts and leaders lived usually in the cities and maintained a number of servants and fusiliers. Social position of these people was hereditary and they were called by some titles including Ilkhan, Khan and Khanzadeh for men and Bibi for women. Marriage was interior in this class, and sometimes the dynasts got married to the leaders of other tribes for political purposes.

2. Sheriffs or tribes leader class: social position of the sheriffs was hereditary. They were the owners of land, pastures, large herds of sheep and had always a group of obedient fusiliers. The members of this class were the greatest reference of decision making about tribal tasks. Their marriage also was interior.

3. Kadhoda (chief) class: the position of Kadhoda (chief) was hereditary. But, they had to draw the pleasure of their family members to achieve this position. They also spent their life through livestock keeping and agriculture, and made decisions and

acted on behalf of the chiefs and the sheriff and by consultation with their family members.

4- General nomads class: that was the main productive group of tribal society and spent their life through livestock keeping and agriculture. Their life was better than the rural farmers who were dominated by the owners. Their marriage was interior; but, they gave girls to chiefs and leaders. Sometimes, leaders and sheriffs got married to a girl from this class. These wives were considered second order in terms of social situation and worked like a bondswoman in the leaders; house.

5- Semi-outcast class: was the lowest class of tribal society. The people of this class, did not considered as the tribe members, they did not have land and herd, and had various jobs such as locksmith, hairdresser and musician. They also, had no role in political and social tasks.

Parviz Varjavand distinguishes three classes in social compound of tribal society: first, the class of leaders and sheriffs who were considered as nobles group of the tribe. The people of this class, had much cattle and wide agricultural lands in the tribe territory and had real states in the big cities. They were in touch with local and governmental positions and some of them had political and administrative position. In the big tribes such as Bakhtia and Qashqai, the members of this class had extended organizations. They also had military forces and security guards while migrating. In the leader system, an organization was responsible to provide procedures such as pantry, kitchen and barn maintenance. Second, chiefs and elders class and a number of moderate class of tribal society who had cattle and spent their life by livestock keeping and selling animal products. These people worked for themselves and were not the

leaders' labor. Third, the class of tribal family without livestock who were shepherd and labor in the tribe, or seasonal labor in the villages and cities. Some people of them also were the rural people who had joined the tribe and worked as labor for the tribe.

The researchers have also presented other forms of social classification in tribal societies. Afshar Naderi in Bahaei tribe monograph have identified three classes. He wrote that, the leaders were not involved directly in production; while, the chiefs and public people were involved in all productive activities. The leaders of tribe and clan went to hunting for their clans and others. Hence, classification of tribal society did not cause to generate social classes.

Qaffari mentions to seven classes in tribal society of Boyer Ahmad: 1. Khans who were from Ardeshiri family and top class of the society and considered a person named Malek as their great ancestor. 2. Deans who were after Khans and were separated from the others by some titles such as Mir (in Sadat family) and Kay (in Kaygivi family). 3. Mirza who was the Khans' conductor of and gathered their benefits. 4. Scholars, who were the literate teachers of tribe "Shah Qasemi" and had knowledge about juridical affairs and sentences. In addition to legal judgment and marriage contract performance, they were the advisors of Khans in some political and economic affairs. 5. Servants who were the executors of Khans and were divided into a number of groups. 6. Serfs who were livestock keepers and the actual producing of the tribal society and formed a big branch of kin groups in tribe. In this class, three layers were detectable:

A) Families that only had animal and crop production

B) Families that were dependent on the others' work and assistance in addition to productive activities.

C) Families that had to work for the others in addition to cropping and livestock keeping.

7- Lateral class that formed native greats, elders and blacksmiths in Boyer Ahmad society.

In the compound of social classification of Qashqai tribe, there were four groups including Ilkhan, sheriff, chief and elders who had greater social position respectively. After these groups, ranchers or ordinary people, labors (the group without land, pasture and livestock, such as shepherds and servants who worked mostly for khans, sheriffs and chiefs) and craftsmen (barbers, performers, etc.) were respectively Qashqai social classes. In social classification of rural and nomadic Baluch society, six classes in rural society and five classes in nomadic society have been determined including: khan (the governing group and their relatives), chief (land owners or major owners), lords (minor owners), masters (artisans, including goldsmith, blacksmith, carpenter) and servants in rural Baluch society had a greater social position respectively.

Economic structure

Tribal economy in migrant tribes in Iran, was based on livestock keeping and production of animal products, and agricultural activities had a secondary role. Livestock was the major capital of the tribe specially shepherd migrants, and each family had to preserve this public capital. Handcrafts production was also a part of daily duties of the nomadic family, particularly the women.

In geographical territory of tribe, each family had common pasture and certain agricultural lands for cropping and herd grazing. Families of each child were permitted to use the pastures and lands due to consanguineous relations. People of the tribe' clans were not permitted to graze their livestock in the other clans or families.

When migration, consanguineous groups of the tribe moved together and camped separately in their pastures in their family territory. Each camp included a collection of a few tents or families which had a special position in social classification. These groups were recognized in various tribes of Iran with names, Maal, Avadi (Abadi), Bileh, Zumeh, etc. The members of these groups formed economic-productive unit of the tribal society and the smallest branch of cooperative livestock keeping in tribe migration system of Iran. The number of families or tents of these units was not same and constant. By decrease and increase of sheep and goats, the volume of Maal was decrease and increased or was probably eliminated and its families joined the other Maals. Some people consider the number of Maal families related to the tendency of migrants, pastures extension, agricultural activities and the necessity of defending the migration, livestock and pasture. In Bakhtiari tribe, Maal included 3 to 12 tents or families who participated in migration and common pastures defending the collective benefits. The families' heads were responsible for Decision making in this level of classification.

Each Maal had a supervisor who was responsible for migration and activities related to herd and grazing. The Maal supervisor was called Sarmal or Rospil among Lors and Kurds, Aq Saqol among Qashqaees, and Yashoul among Turkmens. The Maal supervisors

were in touch with chiefs, sheriffs of clans and settled down the affairs under their supervision. Sometimes, Maal was named by its supervisor's name. The relationship between the Maal members and Sarmal depended on his situation and kinship with the Maal members, and his moral characteristics.

Land and climate diversity and type of the animals of migrant tribes have a direct relationship. Sheep and goat were the main livestock in most of Iran land. Sheep were more in the most suitable regions and goats were more in arid regions. Another diversity was for the animals used for transportation such as camel, donkey and horse. In the past, the tribal people used horses for military purposes; afterward, they maintained them in unsuitable conditions for their personal validity and by accepting a high cost. Production had two important and fundamental roles in tribal society: first, to provide required materials within the tribe, and second, to exchange surplus of their productions with the materials produced out of their society in villages and cities. Tribal society's people produce cheese, butter and oil by milk. They make black tent, carpet, silk carpets, bags, felt, hat, wool socks, rope and waterskin using sheep wool, goat hair, camel hairs and their skin. They sell their products and provide their required work and life instruments and some edibles such as sugar, tea, rice, salt, textiles, clothing and footwear.

Until recently, the trading correspondents with tribes were mobile vendors, and retailers in urban and rural markets. Exchange between them was conducted as barter or cash or both forms. In the spring when milk and dairy products of tribe were abundant, usually the farmers went to their camps and bought milk and their other products. In the summer, the tribal people went to the grain owners and bought their required grains.

The tribal people food mostly included dairies, field and mountain vegetables and local rice. The tribal people and specially producers consumed meat very little. The meat was mostly ceremonial foods and were provided when parties and wedding ceremonies.

When seasonal migrations, the tribal people who grazed their livestock in the harvested pastures of rural people, paid grazing right to them. Some farmers also allowed the tribal people to graze their livestock freely in order to used their animals manure as fertilizer and to improve the farms soil, and demanded nothing.

Political structure

Political structure or system of tribal society is resulted from the type of relationships among united nomadic groups. Hence, tribe is a political unit from nomadic population which has been organized under supervision of a group of tribe leaders based on functional relations among correlated clans and families. Some people also believe that, the political units are talented to make a particular structure of power of which material basics are hidden in nomadic life and tribal social structure. The role and function of the strong political system of tribe was to gather military force and arrangement of combat troops to defend the territory, pasture, livestock and life of the tribe people against invasions of neighbors and the government, judgment in the conflicts within the tribe, participating in discussions and economic and political exchanges with the neighbor tribes and the government. In this way, the tribe leadership provided the integration, discipline and social, economic and political safety in the tribe.

Fredric Barth considers political system of the tribal society based on a collection of rules, organizational rights, public regulations and common benefits which included defending the community, common pastures rights, providing the required facilities to facilitate the migrations and to lead and guide big seasonal migrations. In this definition, ecosystem factors and livelihood style have been considered effective in formation of political system of nomadic migrant groups; while, some other social factors such as kinship system, social safety and the relationship of tribal groups to the governments have affected the political system formation of tribal society.

Some anthropologists believe that, political structures of tribal societies of Iran are not related to the environmental conditions and migration style. Richard Taper considers big tribes and clans as some components of leadership that are generated by the tribes' leaders or governments and rulers. These systems were a kind of political organization with a complicated economic basis in which the shepherd migrants played an important role as producers of surplus products and military sources.

Garthoit analyzed the role of tribe and clan in Bahtiari tribe and said: the difference of these concepts is the function of each one. He writes that, the role of tribe is to unite the clans for administrative purposes in a governmental system, and to equip them for expanding the tribe and defending against neighbor government, tribes and clans. Also, at an idealistic level, tribe links the clans in a greater cultural system. Despite clan, tribe is less dependent on the tribe members in terms of economic, social and political activities or achieving the people loyalty. Tribe may be considered as an exploitative factor or a structure of which goals are opposite to

the clan's goals; but, the clan function forms the tribe function and arranges it. While, the clans' leaders fundamentally rely on the support of tribal society. The tribe leader is supported by the government, land, and the leaders and groups out of the tribe.

There were two leadership systems in political structure of these societies in Iran: the tribes in which there was a chief who commanded by an absolute power; and another system included the tribes which were managed and led by a council composed by a number of clans and families leaders.. The most common type of political structure of tribal society was the first one. In these tribes, usually the political organization amplified the chief's power and a military group was under command. Baseri tribe in Fars province is an instance for traditional political organization commanded by a powerful khan, and Papi tribe in Lorestan province is an instance for traditional political organization commanded by khans' council.

It is so long that, traditional political system of Baseri tribe and Papi tribe has been broken, and these tribes have no role and function as a political unit. Currently, each family has become a unit which handles its tasks. Chiefs, khans and sheriffs have lost their power but, some of them have an appropriate financial status.

In Bahmaei tribe, although the political structure was related to kinship system and geographical area, there was a chief at the top of leadership system who managed the tribe. At the top of Maal (economic unit of Bahmaei nomads), there was an elder who has been given this position due to his more sheep and goats than the others. Each decade had an elder or supervisor who was the closest person to the decade ancestor in relative hierarchy. He had a great social (DOI: [dx.doi.org/14.9831/1444-8939.2014/2-4/MAGNT.102](https://doi.org/10.21863/MAGNT.102))

dignity and was the reference of conflicts and resolved the problems; but, he had no important role in governmental and political hierarchy. Clan had a chief whose position was hereditary and was responsible to the khan or general chief of the tribe.

Tribe's khan had divided the clans' supervision among his cousins and he was the general chief of the tribe. The closest relatives lived in a same geographic area chaired by a khan.

Tribal union or big tribe such as Bakhtiari and Qashqai tribal union was generated by the union of a number of big tribes and clans that acted like a small government in terms of population, land area and leadership system. Leadership system of the big tribe was as hierarchical so that, a strong leader was at the top of pyramid. Ilkhan and Ilbeig were the head of political organization or tribal union, and khans and chiefs and elders were respectively the head of smaller political units of tribal union. Ilkhan and Ilbeig positions were hereditary. Ilkhan was the greatest decision making reference and Ilbeig did his duties as the deputy and both of them had absolute power. The origin of their power was their close relatives, the clan dependent on the leadership system (servants and mercenaries) and the government' support. In the power pyramid of political organization of tribal union, khans and sheriffs had the supervision of clans and their position was hereditary. Khans and sheriffs were the intermediary of the tribe head and Ilkhan and Ilbeigi. In leadership system of tribal union, only elders were selected by their family members. The chiefs attempted to achieve the elders' support. Nowadays, traditional political system of tribal unions also has been broken due to various reasons including direct interference of the governments and social, expansion of economic

and political changes in tribal unions of Iran. By changing the political structure of tribe system, khan element and his correspondents have been eliminated from traditional power hierarchy in political structure of the tribe.

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