

Bakhtiari territorial and political divisions

The Bakhtiari political structure has varied over the past several hundred years, emerging last century and the beginning of the twentieth century, from a loose federation of tribes to a highly centralised single political unit, a confederation led by a paramount chief - of Ilkhan, a man who fought many intertribal battles with rivals for power and for recognition as paramount chief by the central government of the time. (See later of the details). A complex and elaborate political superstructure developed to fulfill both government and administrative roles. A hierarchy of leaders developed to a degree not seen before within the tribal organisation, culminating in the autocratic rule of the Ilkhan. Later internal strife among the sons and grandsons of the Ilkhan prevented this autocratic position from being effectively consolidated. Eventually in the 1920's Reza Shah Pahlavi destroyed the power of these Khans - dynastic families either removing from office, imprisoning or killing the most powerful ones.

The traditional tribal organisation persists, though it reveals the results of this political superstructure still, particularly in the partitions of the Kalantars, some of whom were closely allied and involved with the Khans in the past and show the economic and political rewards of this past association with the Khan's government..

The Bakhtiari are divided into two major divisions, with broad territorial associations. The Chahr Lang and the Haft Lang.

The Chahr Lang themselves are split into two areas, one on the south particularly round Izeh area, and one in the north - Sardasht

Their summer pastures are in the north of Chahr Mahal, in a very fertile region called Fereidan. The northern based Chahr Lang migrate along the roughest and most difficult route in the north of the territory, while those Chahr Lang whose winterpastures are in the south, have to cross to the northeast to their summer pastures, passing through Haft Lang territory. This often leads to trouble.

The Haft lang inhabit the central band of Bakhtāari territory. The Haft Lang are made up of 4 main groups or tribes. - IL.

The Duraki ; Bakhtiarwand ; Babādi Bab ; Dinaruni ; Janaki Sardsir ; and Aurek Bab..

In turn this Il or tribes are divided into many sub groups called TAIFEH - plural TAYAEF. These taifeh groups are of variable size, the largest of which may number 10,000 people. Some are much smaller with populations of less than 1000. These groups are named, and form discrete territorial units.

Each taifeh has its own summer and winter quarters. The Zaraswand, the Osiwand, the Qandali are taifehs of the Duraki. The Babadi are a large taifeh of the Babadi Bab group Il. The term Il, or tribe is often used to describe these Taifeh groups, especially the larger and more powerful ones such as the Babadi, the Zarraswand, the Qandali.

Each taifeh is further subdivided into lineages - called Tireh', which in turn are divided into smaller lineages called tash. or Korboh. These groups are all agnatic relatives, related to each other through males to an ancestor 5 generations distant. They are all cousins

Bakhtiari identify themselves primarily at the Taifeh level. He is an Osiwand, or a Babadi or a Qandali etc. This is the maximum social unit for most Bakhtiari. They live, either in tents or in settled hamlets within the territory of the Taifeh. Rights to grazing which is communal come through membership in the group and this comes only by birth, as does individual ownership of land for agriculture or settlement. Only the powerful and political leaders have much contact, social or otherwise outside this group. By far the majority of marriages takes place within the group. The taifeh is conceived of as a descent group - all members being descended from a distant ancestor. This may be entirely fictitious, as it is explicitly for some taifehs, each of whose tirehs or sub divisions claim different ancestry.

The Taifeh is primarily a political unit, controlling specific territory with its own leaders - Kalantars. Lower levels also have their own leaders and territories.

For many, the tireh is the major social unit within which they live, interact and marry. The preferred form of marriage is to marry a close cousin, ideally the patrilineal parallel cousin - the father's brother's daughter. The next most favoured marriage is with a cross cousin - a mother's brother's daughter. Neighbours are therefore close relatives.

Everyone within the tireh group can trace their relationship with each other member in multiple ways as a result of this intermarrying. These tirehs have their own specific territory within the territory of the Taifeh.



Taifehs with adjacent territory in the summer quarters do not always have the same neighbouring Taifehs in winter quarters. This therefore means that contact is made and sometimes on the borders is unavoidable between a wider number of Taifehs than would be the case if the territories of all taifehs were the neighbours in both summer and winter areas.

This style of pastoral nomadism means that the Bakhtiari nomads move between specific areas, from the winter to summer Taifeh territories. The entire Bakhtiari area is then divided up into the territory of all the taifehs. There are approximately 170 taifehs in all, united in a variable number and type of larger order political units. Some taifehs have summer pastures of better quality than their winter pastures and some groups have far better winter than summer pastures. This qualitative difference is seen in the different rates of settlement in different places for different Taifehs. Again the key note within the Bakhtiari is variability. Within this variable region, many different variants on a migratory theme occur. Some groups whose summer pastures are very distant may have to migrate as much as 250 miles. Others as little as 100 miles. Yet others in the less mountainous southern regions may only journey for a few days, with winter and summer pastures almost contiguous. In the central region of the mountains, live the Mowri taifeh. They are a very large Taifeh with very many subdivisions. Their summer and winter pastures are contiguous, so the movement of this Mowri people is not so long but importantly their territory is very

Mowri

mountainous, they do not have to pass through the territory of any other Taifeh like the majority of Bakhtair groups. On the contrary one of the major migrating routes through the mountains runs right through their territory. The Mowri have to guard their wheat fields against abuse by the thousands of passing Bakhtiari. This is an area where there is much fighting, trouble, and mutual theft. The Mowri are a very isolated group and they never come into contact with non Bakhtiari. Their territory is entirely within Bakhtiari territory. Their only neighbours are other Bakhtiari Taifeh.

Other groups such as the Osiwands, Zarraswands, Bakhtariwand, Babadi, come into contact with non Bakhtiaris in either summer or winter pastures or in both. These are the groups with different constraints and different opportunities open to them. Typically it is these groups who are the wealthiest, who have taken the economic opportunities of trade, agriculture and interaction with the peasant and town populations. These are the groups that have provided the really powerful Khans of the past. These are the groups with the possibility of broadening their economic basis, spreading the risks and earning the rewards. These groups show a more stratified political structure with more developed and stable leadership positions.

The more isolated groups exhibit a more classic lineage type organization with minimally developed leadership roles, much more economic and political equality where no one man or family or lineage can dominate any other for any length of time. These are the groups whose political life is dominated by the feud, by violence or the threat of violence.



General outline of variations

The economic, political, ecological circumstances of these Taifeh units like so many features of Bakhtiari life reveal immense variations. The themes which emerge are that of movement of variable length over routes of varying difficulty, in changeable and unpredictable weather conditions between summer and winter pastures, the quality of which is different, and both subject to unpredictable climatic problems, leading to crop failure or grazing disasters. No two taifehs are faced with the same combination of problems, successes and failures. No two taifehs have the same combination of social and political ties, each exhibiting the unique and specific conditions under which they live; some unable to establish useful and sometimes necessary links with the non pastoral economy, some being unable to avoid the encroachment of increasing government encroachment interference or aggression. Some have very broadly based economies, with ties to the major cities of the nation, others have no such ties at all.

KALANTARS This is particularly seen in the widening network of ties established by the Kalantars, who intermarry within their own taifehs, intermarry with the families of other Kalantars, and marry into the neighbouring non Bakhtiari peasant, town and even urban society, depending on how wide they have managed to spread their network. Each Kalantar has a unique set of socio political networks which depend on his own effectiveness, manager, manipulator etc.

Jafar Qoli Kalantar of the Babadi has just such diverse interests as a modern nomad.