



## BAHMANBEYGI, MOHAMMAD

**BAHMANBEYGI, MOHAMMAD** (Moḥammad Bahmanbeygi, b. Čāh-kāzemeh, near Firuzābād of Fārs, 26 Bahman 1300 Š./15 February 1922; d. Shiraz, 11 Ordibehešt 1389 Š./1 May 2010), educator, writer, and founder of tribal education in Iran ([Figure 1](#), [Figure 2](#), [Figure 3](#)). He was born in the Bahmanbeyglu clan, a branch of the *Qašqā'i* confederacy's 'Amala tribe, and spent his childhood among the nomads. "I was born ... in a tent with guns and neighing of horses... and until the age of ten did not spend even one night in a town and a house" (Bahmanbeygi, 1989, p. 9).

His father, Maḥmud Khan, was *kalāntar* of the clan. Exiled along with twenty other tribal chiefs to Tehran in around 1930, he lived in poverty and under constant police surveillance until the fall of Reza Shah Pahlavi in September 1941. Mohammad began his education at the 'Elmiyeh primary school and continued at Irānšahr high school. He graduated from the University of Tehran's [Faculty of Law and Political Sciences](#) in 1943. His short-lived employment in the Ministry of Justice was followed by a period of cooperation with the National Bank of Iran (*Bānk-e melli-e Irān*; see [BANKING](#)).

Nevertheless, he never found himself at ease with the conditions of life in the city, and a letter from his brother caused him to leave his professional aspirations behind and return to the tribal life. "Dear brother, the snow hasn't melted yet, you cannot touch the spring's water, we cut yogurt with a knife, the sheep's wool is colored by plants and flowers, and the partridge chicks are gaining color ... come back while the air is still fresh. Mother is waiting for you" (Bahmanbeygi, 1989, p. 19). The letter, as he recalls later, did to him



“what Rudaki’s poem and harp did to the Samanid king. The [Jayhun’s](#) water receded. The pebbles of the [Amu Darya](#) turned silky. The scent of the Muliān became euphoric. The next day ... I opened my wings toward [Bukhara](#). My Bukhara was my tribe” (ibid.).

Living with the nomads and sharing the conviction of the heads of Qašqā’i tribes that the nomads’ route to salvation was not through rebellion or armed struggle against the government, but rather through literacy (Razmju’i, p. 77), motivated Bahmanbeygi to launch a plan for training local teachers and establishing nomadic classes. He sought help from any state or private organization he could. He also reached out to the prosperous tribal families and requested that each pay the salary of one teacher. The appointment of ‘Ali Šāyegān, Bahmanbeygi’s former professor in the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, as the minister of education in the government of Moḥammad Mošaddeq, provided Bahmanbeygi with the opportunity to obtain permission in 1952 to create itinerant primary schools (Manjazi and Kāviāni, p. 27).

The classes were held in a white tent, which were distinguished from the nomads’ black tents, and were furnished with a blackboard and couple of rugs, instead of chairs and tables. He would visit the families in their tents to encourage them to send their children to school. He would address the teachers: “I am now inviting you to a sacred uprising ... uprising to bring literacy to the nomadic people” (Bahmanbeygi, 1995, p. 201).

The election of Nāṣer Khan Qašqā’i to the Senate and Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Khan and Qosrow Khan Qašqā’i to the Parliament after the [coup d’état of 1332Š./1953](#), along with the cooperation of Bahmanbeygi with Truman’s Point Four Program of Technical Assistance to Developing Countries in Iran (Manjazi and Kākiāni, p. 29), offered new venues for the realization of his projects. The number of mobile schools increased and soon reached 70 with over 1,400 enrolled students (see [EDUCATION xii. RURAL AND TRIBAL SCHOOLS](#)).

Following the approval of Bahmanbeygi’s tribal education project by the Ministry of Education in 1953, he was charged with the task of selecting the teachers (Razmju’i, p. 81). Karim Fāṭemi, the new Director General of the Department of Education in Fārs, came to his aid and provided 40 graduates of Shiraz Teachers Training School. However, these teachers did not acclimatize to tribal life easily, and they did not exhibit the same passion as did the tribal teachers who lived with their own families within the tribes.



The establishment, in 1955, of the Bureau of Tribal Education (Edāre-ye āmuzeš-e ‘ašāyeri) in Shiraz, was followed by the founding of the Tribal Teachers Training Schools in Reżā’iyeh, Šāhābād-e ġarb, Zāhedān, [Gonbad-e Kāvus](#), Šahrekord, Dašt-e Mišān, and [Behbahān](#) (Razmju’i, p. 105). The Shiraz Tribal Training School, which also provided food and lodging, began its work with 60 students at the same year (Nāderiān, p. 119). The candidates were trained for one year and would first study humanities, primary school textbooks, teaching methods, comparative education, and such classical texts as the *Golestān of Sa’di*, as well as a selection of modern literary texts. During the last month, they were sent to primary schools in Shiraz to practice teaching. The Shiraz School of Tribal Education admitted 60 tribal and non-tribal students in the first year and ultimately trained 1,400 teachers through 1978 (Yusofi, pp. 119, 166).

On horseback or on foot, Bahmanbeygi traveled through the mountains and valleys to visit the tribal schools and oversee the training skills of the teachers. “Once I refused to visit a school, because I found out that the people had not sent their daughters to school. My show of disappointment was effective. They reacted by sending their daughters to school, encouraging me to visit” (Bahmanbeygi, 1989, pp. 325-26). Many of the female students became tribal teachers themselves, and about a thousand of them were sent to other nomadic regions in the country. In 1962, Bahmanbeygi established a teachers training boarding school for women in Shiraz managed by his own daughter, who was a tribal teacher herself. In this school, young women, in addition to all the subjects taught in the men’s school, also studied home economics, family education, child rearing, cooking, and sewing (Razmju’i, p. 149). From 1968, weeklong cultural and educational camps would be organized annually in one of the most scenic, nomadic regions, where the most talented students and teachers would participate (Yusofi, p. 49).

In 1967 Bahmanbeygi created a boarding high school for the talented and economically underprivileged tribal students in Shiraz. It was called the “Forty Persons,” since it started with 40 students. In order to be admitted and study under qualified teachers, fifth-grade students would face a challenging entrance examination. Bahmanbeygi would also get help from the faculty of the Shiraz University to fill the teaching positions. Many universities did not have the laboratories and facilities that existed in this high school. In addition to the standard curriculum, the students would learn such vocations as auto repair, photography, arts and theater, and sports. The school was closed



following Bahmanbeygi's forced retirement in 1978 (Kākiāni, p. 206).

The establishment of the Directorate General of Tribal Education in Shiraz in 1970, with Bahmanbeygi as its director, extended the coverage of the project to other provinces with nomadic tribes. Educational advisors, who were selected from among the most outstanding tribal teachers, would visit the schools once a month and report their findings to Bahmanbeygi. He would personally visit the schools every six months. Each year, starting in 1970, the Directorate General of Tribal Education would select 70 young nomadic women to learn about textiles, dyeing, and rug knitting, so that, on their return to their tribes, they would become economically independent by teaching others. The office was dissolved in 1983, and its function was integrated with the Fars Department of Education, a decision that led to the clear decline of tribal education (Yusofi, p. 22).

Bahmanbeygi also endeavored in 1973 to introduce the educated young nomadic women, as well as illiterate tribal midwives, to the Ministry of Health to learn about midwifery and return to their tribes. Starting in 1974, vocational centers were also created in Shiraz, where those tribal youth who did not have facilities for farming were trained as electricians, mechanics, builders, and carpenters. With the help of the Fars government and the Plan and Budget Organization, he created 15 mobile stores to combat the peddlers who would routinely overcharge the nomads for their essential needs (Nāderi Darrehšū'i, pp. 176-77). Further, in collaboration with the [Kānun-e parvaraš-e fekri-e kudakān o nowjavānān](#), he established itinerant libraries and movie theaters.

Starting in 1975, with help from the Royal Organization for Social Services and the University of Shiraz, selected graduates were able to study medicine and veterinary medicine. The Center for Education of Country Doctors and Veterinarians was first established in Marvdašt and later moved to Kavār. Additionally, the Office of Tribal Education, with a budget from the Plan and Budget Organization, built a stadium in Āb-e bārik (Razmjū'i, p. 178).

Bahmanbeygi went through difficult years following the 1979 revolution and was mistreated several times as a result of unsubstantiated charges (Farhādi, p. 118). Right after the outbreak of the revolution, an anonymous group broke into his residence, but the nearby nomadic community came to his aid, and the invaders were forced to flee. Shortly thereafter Bahmanbeygi left for Tehran (Razmjū'i, p. 222). Throughout his years in Tehran, he penned the tale



of his turbulent, yet fabulous, life in two books. Mohammad Bahmanbeygi died in Shiraz on 1 May 2010. His stately funeral on 6 May 2010 will remain a memorable event in the contemporary history of Shiraz.

Bahmanbeygi's tireless efforts to educate tribal youth earned him international recognition. Groups from other countries came frequently to Shiraz to visit and observe the mobile tribal schools. He attended several educational conferences in the Soviet Union and other European countries (Razmjū'i, pp. 173, 201) and was the recipient of UNESCO's Nadezhda Krupskaya International Award, in 1973, for his lifetime achievements in eradication of illiteracy in the tribal regions (Naşiri, p. 19).

*Works.* Bahmanbeygi's *Orf o 'ādat dar 'ašāyer-e Fārs* was published in 1945 and was recognized as a unique document in raising awareness about the nomads' life (Keşāvarz, p. 293). *Boḳārā-ye man, il-e man* (Tehran, 1969, [Figure 4](#)), Bahmanbeygi's passionate depiction of the tribal life in elegant prose and with a delightful sense of humor provides a wealth of anthropological information on the tribal customs and rituals, marriage, funeral, prayers, rain festivals, food, games, dances, songs, and lullabies, as well as on socio-economic structure and the natural beauty of Fars (Behmand, p. 239).

The publication of the book earned Bahmanbeygi instant fame. He was praised as a "first rate humanist," whose eyewitness accounts of the tribal life are flavored with a poetical overtone (Golestān, pp. 151-52), and as an author who mesmerizes the readers with his romantic depiction of a shepherd's life, while deliberately avoiding melodramatic exaggeration (Meskub, p. 237). Not all critics, however, agreed with Bahmanbeygi in his idealization of nomadic life—a depiction that, as they held, does not even criticize the khans for their centuries-long cruelties (Parhām, p. 82).

The stories of Bahmanbeygi's *Agar Qaraqāj nabud* (Tehran, 1995, [Figure 4](#)) revolve around the lives of nomads along the Qaraqāj, a river in Lārestān in the Fārs province. He published his last book *Be ojāq-at qasam* in 2000 in Tehran ([Figure 5](#)). The two books, which are generally regarded as Bahmanbeygi's memoirs, detail the lengthy path he had taken to pioneer changes in the traditional structure of tribal communities. Although notable as they are in documenting the difficulties of the task and the joys of its occasional realization, they nevertheless fail to conjure the poetical language and elegant style of *Boḳārā-ye man, il-e man* (Mir'ābedini, pp. 860-61).



Bahmanbeigi's delightful and elegantly crafted books, written in simple, easily accessible, and yet poetical prose, earned him the recognition of Iraj Afšār as a writer with a lovely pen who has composed the 'Šāh-nāmeḥ of nomadic tribes' (Afšār, p. 113).

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