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BAḴTĪĀRĪ TRIBE I. ETHNOGRAPHY

Territory and way of life. The Baḵtīārī tribe (*īl*) is one of the two biggest in Iran, the other being the Qašqāʾī. In the 1970s, the Baḵtīārīs numbered in all approximately 600,000, and about one third of them were nomadic. They are Twelver Shiʿites and speak a Lori dialect. Sedentarized Baḵtīārīs live in towns and in many villages in Čahār Maḥāl, in the Farīdan district down to Isfahan, and in Ḵūzestān (Khuzistan) down to Ahvāz. The nomads and some sedentary people live in the tribal territory, called the "Baḵtīārī country" (*ḵāk-e īl-e baḵtīārī*), an area of roughly 75,000 km^2 stretching from the Dez river, Šūštar, and Rām Hormoz on the west to Dārān and the outskirts of Šahr-e Kord on the east (see Figure 14).

The traditional Baḵtīārī way of life is typical of the long-distance nomadism which evolved in the Zagros highlands from the thirteenth century onward, at first under the impact of the Mongol invasions, and probably attained its present form during the eighteenth century, in a defensive reaction against increasing fiscal and administrative pressures experienced under successive Iranian régimes.

The Baḵtīārī nomads move between a summer abode (*yeylāq*) in the high mountains (summit, Zardakūh 4,548 m) and a winter abode (*garmsīr*) in the western foothills adjoining the Ḵūzestān plain. The ecological boundary between the two zones coincides roughly with the course of the Āb-e Bāzoft.

Thus the Baḵtīārī country falls into two different administrative provinces: Čahār Maḥāl, where the summer quarters lie, and Ḵūzestān, in which the winter quarters are included. The seasonal migrations (called *bār*) made by different sections of the tribe vary in length and can reach 300 km. The migration into the mountains takes place in springtime when the weather and the vegetation are at their best; it lasts longer (15 to 45 days) than the reverse migration (8 to 30 days). The migration routes are seldom, if ever, changed, because in this region there are only five or at best seven cols over which the Zagros ranges can be crossed; they lead to campsites (*javārgāh*) which are likewise almost always the same, being fixed by longstanding conventions. As is well known, these routes are extremely arduous. The nomads suffer frequent accidents and losses of livestock when they clamber over snow-covered cols and through rock-encumbered gorges and when they either swim or float on rafts held up with inflated goatskins across the Kārūn and other raging rivers at the time of the snow-melt. Despite all these difficulties, seasonal migration is necessary because of the prevalence of cold and snow in the *yeylāq* from October to April and heat and drought in the *garmsīr* from May to September, and often also the exhaustion of the pastures after several months of intensive use. Other possible ways to solve the problem have been suggested, for example to combine sheep folding with fodder crop cultivation and short-range transhumance; but for the time being, in the absence of any satisfactory alternative, nomadism remains the only feasible technique for efficient pursuit of livestock raising in this region.

Economy and material culture. The tribe's main economic activities are determined by the migration cycle. The Baḵtīārī are primarily breeders of sheep and goats, which provide most of their cash income (from sale of lambs for slaughter and to a lesser extent clarified butter), much of their food (milk and milk products and on rare occasions meat), and raw materials (wool, goat-hair, and leather) for their handicrafts. The lambs and kids are born in or around February in the *garmsīr* and sold in the autumn after being fattened on highland pastures. The ewes, after the lambing, are milked for human consumption until June. Shearing is done in the spring, soon after the migration. The Baḵtīārī also breed asses, mules, and a small number of cattle for load-carrying, riding, and draft purposes (ploughing and threshing). Some groups belonging to the tribe who are of Arab descent (the ʿArab-Kamarī) specialize in the breeding of buffalos; now sedentarized, they formerly took these animals on the treks for sale to Armenian villagers in Čahār Maḥāl and Farīdan, who used them for agricultural tasks. The only camels to be seen in

the Baḵtīārī country are dromedaries belonging to Turkish groups, not affiliated to the tribe, who practice transhumance into the Zagros from Čahār Maḥāl (Larakīs from around Gandomān) and even from the Isfahan area (villagers from Čālšotor, Rīz, Ḡolāmḵᵛāst). Many Baḵtīārīs now cultivate wheat, which in the form of bread is their staple diet, and barley, which in poor seasons can be used as supplementary fodder for livestock. Their farming system, like their pastoral system, is tied to the migration cycle. In the *yeylāq*, the nomads sow at the beginning of September, shortly before their autumn trek, and reap and thresh in July of the following year after their return. In the *garmsīr*, they sow at the end of October and complete the harvesting at the end of their stay, the crops being precocious cereals which reach maturity in five months.

Supplementary items are obtained by hunting (gazelles in the *garmsīr*, ibexes in the *yeylāq*, partridges, pheasants, etc.) and by gathering wild plants and vegetable substances such as berries and mushrooms for food and others for use as dyestuffs and craft materials; some of them, e.g., manna (*gaz*) and gum tragacanth (*zīdī*) are in commercial demand. The Baḵtīārīs are passionately fond of hunting. For each of these activities there is a proper time and place in the migration cycle. Taken as a whole, they show how well the Baḵtīārī community has adapted its way of life to the peculiar environmental conditions of the Central Zagros.

The principal handicraft of the Baḵtīārīs is weaving, on horizontal looms with single rows of warp-threads or on looms with perforated cards. The wool and hair which they use come from their own sheep and goats. This activity, which is pursued solely by the women, produces a wide range of goods of high quality as regards both robustness and artistic merit: ropes, straps, sacks, saddle-bags (*ḵoržīn*, *ḵorjīn*) for carriage and storage of belongings, and tunics (*čūqā*) in natural white wool with vertical indigo stripes which, together with the tall skull-cap (*kolāh-e ḵosravī*) and wide, black trousers (*tombūn*, *tonbān*), form the typical male attire of the Baḵtīārīs. Another product is the black goat-skin sheet used for making the shed-like tents (*bohon*) which are the ordinary homes of the nomads, though some also have stone houses (*līr*), mud or mud-brick houses (*tū*), or brushwood huts (*kapar*, *lowka*). The Baḵtīārī carpets, famous under the trade name Bībībāf, were woven by ladies (*bībī*) of the tribal aristocracy until production ceased in the 1930s as a result of political upheavals (see below); it has now been resumed, though at a less high standard of quality, in certain villages near Isfahan such as Ḡolāmḵᵛāst.

All other goods and services which the Baḵtīārīs require are supplied by shopkeepers (*dokondār*, *dokkāndār*) from nearby villages and towns, such as Ardal, Čehelgert, Īḏa, Lālī, Gotvand, Masjed-e Solaymān, or by craft specialists, who do not belong to the tribe but move to its different locations, such as shoemakers (*gīvakaš*), felt makers (*nemetmāl*, *namadmāl*), blacksmiths (*āhangar*), joiners (*taḵtkaš*), "gypsies" (*kowlī*) who make sieves, carding combs, spindles, etc., and may perhaps really be of Indian origin, musicians (*tūšmāl*), barber-circumcisers (*dallāk*), tailors (*ḵayyāṭ*). All these tradespeople, and in particular the *kowlī*s, are held in low esteem by the Baḵtīārīs, who describe them generically as *ḡorbatī* (homeless people).

Social organization. One of the peculiarities of Baḵtīārī social organization is the existence of numerous interlocked social units within the tribe, reflecting an exceptionally high degree of lineal segmentation at different levels. Each tent is the home of a nuclear family (*ḵānvāda*). An encampment (*māl*), comprising three to twelve tents, corresponds to the extended family (*tāš* or *awlād*). During the treks, kindred encampments join together in migration units (*tīra*) with strengths of the order of one hundred persons. The *tīra*s themselves are combined in clans (*ṭāʾefa*), the biggest of which (the Mowrī, Bābādī, Gandalī) run to 25,000 persons, and the *ṭāʾefa*s in sections (*bāb* or *bolūk*). Finally these sections belong to one or the other of the two parts (*baḵš* or *qesmat*), namely the Haft Lang and the Čār (Čahār) Lang, which make up the Baḵtīārī tribe (*īl*).

It is often supposed that this elaborate structure rests wholly on patrilineal descent. In the tribe's actual functioning, however, the groups corresponding to these different levels of segmentation do not all play equally important roles. The basic social units are the kin groups, from the tent to the *tīra*, which may be described as "joint families" because membership in them is determined by three main principles: (1) a rule of patrilineal descent, whereby membership is transmitted in the male line or, in other words, a person must belong to the same group as his father and to that group alone; (2) a preference for marriage between patrilineal cousins begotten by two brothers, i.e., marriage of a man to his father's brother's daughter (*tātazā*), though actual implementation of this preference was found to range from 18 percent to 43 percent in different Baḵtīārī groups; (3) a rule of residence, whereby the wife is required to move after marriage from her father's home to her husband's home (virilocality) or to her husband's father's home (patrilocality). The so-defined social units are the settings within which real solidarity is

maintained, not only in cases of conflict with other groups but also in the daily tasks of productive work. Flock tending, sowing, and reaping are done jointly by the agnate members of each encampment or, during the treks, by those of each *tīra*. At this level, "joint families" and "corporate groups" wholly coincide. In short, the encampments and the *tīra*s are autonomous units living in different places. This dispersion, which enables the Baḵtīārīs to avoid overcrowding at watering places and overgrazing of pastures, is essential for their survival as a community.

The large units, from the *ṭāʾefa* to the *īl*, have in some respects the opposite role. Kinship figures prominently in their definition but is not directly relevant to their function. At these levels of segmentation the genealogies are fictitious, reflecting the concern of the Baḵtīārīs to justify past facts such as adoptions, regroupings, and political alliances by explaining them in terms of filial relationship. These large units only act as solidarity groups in very exceptional circumstances, for example in the event of a serious conflict when a special relationship between two or more of them imposes an obligation of mutual support. (The term for such a relationship is *hīn-čū*, "blood on the stick," which refers to the Lorī saying *hīn ze čū pöy nīemon* "the blood never comes off the stick," Digard, 1987.) On the other hand, the large units have a permanent importance insofar as they integrate the basic units, most often on territorial lines. The autonomy and dispersion of the encampments and *tīra*s must in practice be coupled with the flexibility which becomes necessary when pasture lands or migration routes have to be changed on account of overgrazing or overcrowding. This flexibility is attainable thanks to the existence of large social units with authority over wide areas, which are held collectively or indivisibly while the rights of use are apportioned among the several kin groups.

Political organization. Another peculiarity of the Baḵtīārī tribal organization is the political power structure, which shows a degree of hierarchic centralization generally thought to be unusual in kinship-based systems. Until the 1950s, authority was concentrated in the hands of an *īl-ḵān* (supreme head of the tribe) and an *īl-beg* (his assistant) and then apportioned, at different levels of the pyramid of segmentation, among the *kalāntar*s (headmen) of the *ṭāʾefa*s, *kadḵodā*s (masters) of the *tīra*s, and *rīš-safīd*s (elders) of the *tāš* or *awlād*. These functionaries maintained order, administered justice, and acted as intermediaries between the tribes-folk and the outside world; but their most important task, as regards impact on the ordinary life of the Baḵtīārīs,

was that of coordinating migrations and settling disputes about overused pasturelands and watering places. Originally a service rendered to the tribespeople, this function became a source of economic and social privilege (access to the best pastures, ability to attract clienteles, etc.). The result was the emergence of a class of chiefs (khans) sharply marked off from the simple nomads (*lor*s—a term not to be confused with the same word used as the name of the tribes of Lorestān). In like manner the tribe's top political leadership went beyond its original coordinating function and gradually assumed an exploitative and authoritarian role, imposing taxes, levying troops, and mustering political factions (*basta*) to work for the interests of the khans.

Factors extraneous to the tribe also favored the evolution of the Baḵtīārī political leadership on these lines. One of the most important was the grant of crown (*ḵāleṣa*) lands to individual khans in reward for military or other services—a practice dating from the Middle Ages. Such lands, unlike those in the tribal territory proper, became private property and could therefore be cultivated. This undoubtedly explains why the leading khans for a long time held a near-monopoly of agricultural production, on which many of the nomads were dependent, sometimes even for essential food. The economic grip on the tribe given to the khans by their ownership of agricultural estates was reinforced by the demographic factor which from time to time compels a nomadic society to get rid of surplus manpower. Shepherds forced by ruinous losses to accept exile and sedentarization could in the last resort find employment on these estates, while landowning khans could obtain in this way ample numbers of inexpensive and more than usually docile agricultural laborers (*raʿīyat*, i.e., subjects or peasants, as opposed to *lor* in the sense of nomads). These sedentary people are the poor relations of the nomads—victims of a process which is a necessary requirement for the viability of the nomadic pastoral system.

A second factor which helped to make the Baḵtīārī leadership all-powerful and unaccountable was the direct intervention by Iranian governments in appointments and dismissals of tribal chiefs. This began in the eighteenth century and became a regular practice under the Qajars, who sought to control the tribes and the neighboring areas through a system of indirect rule based mainly on the tribal chiefs. The authority of the khans was officially recognized and enhanced with new powers to maintain order in their areas, collect taxes, mobilize troops on behalf of the shah, and the like. Loyalty to the shah was profusely rewarded with honors and titles, but the slightest lapse

was ruthlessly punished. After such an incident the last great Čār Lang (Čahār Lang) chief, ʿAlī Mardān Khan, was declared an outlaw (*yāḡī*) and taken prisoner in 1841, and the way was opened for his Haft Lang rivals. Ḥosaynqolī Khan Haft Lang was appointed superintendent (*nāẓem*) of the Baḵtīārīs by the shah in 1862 and head of the tribe (*īlḵān*) in 1867. He was the first recipient of this title, and in the tribe he became known by the surname Īlḵānī. In 1882 the shah caused him to be murdered and replaced by his brother Emāmqolī Khan, surnamed Ḥājī Īlḵānī. From then almost without interruption until the abolition of the title khan in 1956, the successive heads of the tribe were descendants of one or the other of the two brothers. As a result of the murder, the Baḵtīārīs were divided into partisans (*bastagān*) of the Īlḵānīs and of the Ḥājī Īlḵānīs, but it would be more correct to interpret this division as a means to preserve the tribe's unity in the face of the central government's machinations. In reality the composition of these factions was determined by agreements reached between the two branches of the family of the khans in 1894 and 1912, whereby their respective strengths were periodically reviewed to ensure that no imbalance should arise and their members were not organized as two opposing sides but were recruited equally from within each line. In short the *basta* factions served a double purpose: to keep power in the family of the "great khans" (*ḵawānīn-e bozorg*), and to prevent either branch of the family from prevailing over the other. This peculiar type of factionalism is certainly one of the oddest aspects of Baḵtīārī social organization. Nothing quite equivalent to it has been observed in any other community in the world.

A third and more recent factor which further strengthened the power of the Baḵtīārī khans was the presence of British firms in Ḵūzestān from the end of the nineteenth century onward. The opening of the Lynch road through the south of the Baḵtīārī country via Īḏa and Ardal in 1897 was followed by the discovery and extraction of petroleum at Masjed-e Solaymān and later at other places in the tribe's *garmsīr*. These developments deprived several thousand nomads of traditional pastures but brought a bonanza to the *ḵawānīn-e bozorg*. For their undertaking to maintain the security of the oil installations, these khans were rewarded with 5 percent of the shares of the First Exploration Company, and as a result became entitled to part of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's profits for twenty-five years and to substantial compensation after the company's withdrawal. Being beholden to the British for these economic benefits, the Baḵtīārī chiefs could occasionally be manipulated against the central government in case of need.

Thanks to this double legitimization by external authorities and to the privileges and gains accruing therefrom, the Baḵtīārī khans were in a position both to tighten their grip on the tribe and to acquire a foothold in the central government apparatus. If trouble with the shah should arise, they controlled a formidable body of troops which they were ready to throw into action, as they did in 1909 during the struggle for constitutional government. Military ventures enhanced the prestige of the khans among the tribesmen and at the same time gave them chances to appropriate further lands at the expense of neighboring peasant communities. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the Baḵtīārīs were indeed a state within the state (see Table 15 for he principal subdivisions of the Baḵtīārī tribe).

Recent changes. The first attempt to deal with the situation which has just been described was made by Reżā Shah in the 1930s. Against the tribes, particularly the Baḵtīārīs, whose organization, power, and way of life he considered incompatible with national modernization on Western lines, the new ruler unrelentingly pursued a threefold policy of: (1) forcible sedentarization of the nomads, both in Ḵūzestān and in Čahār Maḥāl, through posting of troops on the migration routes to prevent access; (2) detribalization, through detention and execution or expropriation of the leading khans and replacement of these khans with army officers, who were put in charge of the tribe's affairs and the territorial administration; (3) deculturation by various means, including vexatious measures such as the prohibition of beards and obligation to wear Western-style suits and the Pahlavī hat (képi) instead of the traditional costume, to which the Baḵtīārīs are deeply attached. On balance this policy proved unsuccessful (from the viewpoint of its promoters), because the events of the World War II disrupted the Iranian state apparatus, and the majority of the Baḵtīārīs then resumed their traditional migrations and way of life. Nevertheless Reżā Shah's policy had lasting consequences insofar as it polarized social antagonisms within the tribe. The removal of power from the hands of the *ḵawānīn-e bozorg* only cut off the top of the social pyramid, leaving intact an intermediate layer of *kalāntar*s and *kadḵodā*s whose number ran to several hundred. These men were appointees of the khans and may be said to have constituted the tribe's officer corps. Being unsure of their position after the sudden disappearance of their superiors, they were reluctant to act in any way that might involve risk of harsh repression. Moreover, their traditional functions such as administration of justice had been taken from them and given to government officials or army officers. For all these reasons, the *kalāntar*s and *kadḵodā*s tended to lose interest in tribal affairs and to

concern themselves solely with managing their own properties. This was hardly surprising, because the khans had always treated them well in order to make sure of their loyalty and had been particularly generous in granting them agricultural lands. At the other pole, the rank and file of the nomads, who owned no land but only possessed livestock, were hit much harder by the compulsory sedentarization imposed on the tribe for ten years. Their losses of livestock in the period have been estimated at 60 percent. The few foreign travelers who saw the Baḵtīārīs at that time speak only of their distress and impoverishment.

In Moḥammad Reżā Shah's reign, no radical decision on policy toward nomadism appears to have been taken until about 1339 Š./1960. After the war and in the 1950s, the tribes, including the Baḵtīārīs, were still politically powerful and active, as they showed during the premiership of Moḥammad Moṣaddeq. Being unable to ignore them, the successive cabinets wavered between cooperation and repression. Among the conciliatory measures were the restitution of properties to the khans in 1945, the Koenig mission and plan in 1947-48, the conference of the tribes in September, 1948, and the establishment of a civilian High Council of the Tribes in 1953. For the Baḵtīārīs, the shah's marriage in February, 1951, to Ṯorayyā Esfandīārī, a great-granddaughter of an Īlḵānī, was a sign of favor. In 1957 compensation was paid to the Baḵtīārī khans for their losses due to oil nationalization. Among the repressive measures were the exiling of the family of the Qašqāʾī khans in 1954, the establishment of a branch of the General Staff and a corps of specially trained officers to handle tribal affairs in 1956, the abolition of the title khan in the same year, and the decision, taken in 1957, that all the tribes should be disarmed. Ultimately the unfavorable attitude prevailed.

After the long period in which the Iranian authorities had alternately warred and bargained with the tribes, the new policy was to feign ignorance of their existence. This was made manifest in the Land Reform law of January, 1962, and the additional clauses of January, 1963, neither of which contains any mention of nomads or tribes. Only after the new laws had been enforced did their repercussions become apparent. The limitation on large landownership evidently affected some of the nomadic tribal areas more than others; it made little difference to the Baḵtīārīs because most of the big estates owned by the khans lay outside the tribal territory. Much more momentous was the law for the nationalization of pasturelands, which in the case of the Baḵtīārīs had the following practical results: (1) uncultivated lands were confiscated and

registered as state property; (2) such lands could not be exploited or used in any way without official graziers' permits (*javāz-e ʿalafčar*), which were granted to individuals; (3) each permit conferred on a grazier the right to use a measured lot of pastureland, the area of which was calculated, after weighting for the quality of the natural vegetation, on the basis of either the size of the recipient's flock if less than the equivalent of 100 head of "small cattle" (i.e., sheep and goats), or maximum of 100 head no matter how much his flock exceeded that limit; (4) graziers who obtained such permits and thus became the sole authorized users of such pasturelands were required to pay for the privilege by contributing an annual tax of 15 rials per head of sheep, 30 rials per head of bovine cattle, and no less than 150 rials per goat.

The first consequence of these measures was a substantial reduction of the area in pastoral use. The total area fell because, as soon as the rules were announced, many of the Baḵtīārī nomads hastened to plow up whole tracts in order to place them beyond the scope of the law. The areas used by individuals showed a decline because they were calculated from incorrect figures based on the assumed maximum holding of 100 animals per grazier. The degree of this underestimation of the Baḵtīārī flocks became evident when the authorities permitted certain large breeders in Kermān province to send their animals to graze in the Baḵtīārī tribal territory. Although the proclaimed purpose of the nationalization law was to protect the vegetational cover, its implementation led to worse overgrazing in several areas than under the traditional system. At the same time the grant of the grazing rights to individuals swept away some of the tribe's best institutions, particularly those conducive to collective management of natural resources. Last but not least, the freezing of flock ownership by individuals, at either the number held on the date of the law's enforcement or 100 in the case of previously larger holdings, frustrated the natural ambition of every animal-breeder to increase his stock and therewith his wealth. By the mid-1970s, these measures had made many Baḵtīārīs lose heart and had also caused the tribe to lose a considerable number of members—those overtaken by the nationalization law before they could increase their flock to a viable minimum (around 60 sheep).

Seemingly a technical measure, the pasturelands nationalization law had much wider repercussions than could have been anticipated. It contributed to the profound transformation of production systems and social relationships then in progress in Iran. In the case of the Baḵtīārīs, it quickened an exodus of poorer tribesmen into low-grade jobs in the petroleum and agro-industrial

sectors in Ḵūzestān and the steelworks at Āryāšahr near Isfahan. Not all the Baḵtīārīs, however, were equally affected. Some of them, particularly *kalāntar*s and *kadḵodā*s untouched by the successive forays against their superiors, the khans, fared rather well in the changing circumstances. The prestige and authority of these intermediate chiefs were put to use in the new system, and alternatives to stockbreeding were opened to them. Some became labor supply contractors—a lucrative business, as they were the initial recipients of the wages of the laborers whom they recruited. Their zeal in this role served the interests of large companies and state agencies but endangered the stockbreeding and the very existence of their own tribe.

The events of 1979 did not kindle any real revolutionary fervor among the Baḵtīārīs but gave opportunities to settle old scores. The freedom prevailing in the months immediately after the insurrection, together with a strong demand for meat in local markets deprived of imported supplies, prompted a resurgence of nomadic pastoralism, but this did not last long. At the instigation of the revolutionary guards (*pāsdārān*), tribal councils (*šūrā-ye ʿašāʾerī*) took shape in every *tīra*, giving the *lor*s and above all the youths scope to perform roles and turn the tables on their former tribal superiors. The *kalāntar*s and *kadḵodā*s were not removed, but ceased to be heeded and withdrew more than ever into their own shells. Before long, men of the "construction crusade" (*jehād-e sāzandagī*) arrived in all parts of the Baḵtīārī country and began to build roads, bridges, silos, schools, and houses, to bring electricity and telephone lines to villages, and to set up a network of producer and consumer cooperatives. For the first time the Baḵtīārī nomads were offered incentives for voluntary sedentarization on relatively favorable terms. Many actually took the plunge, finally acknowledging that "the plow and the ewe are in the same place" (*kīš o mīš yek jāʾst*).

Thus the conditions in which the Baḵtīārīs live appear to have changed more in the first six years of the Islamic Republic than in the half century of the Pahlavī regime. Is this remarkable turn irreversible? Are the Baḵtīārīs going to acquire the mentality of public assistance recipients? Is their stockbreeding bound to decline and their tribal identity to disappear? The future will answer these questions.

For a music sample, see Alimardan Khān.

For a music sample, see Baḵtīārī karnā.

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