Kalantars

The position as tribal leaders varies enormously throughout the Bakhtiari taifehs, and is to a great extend , as previously explained , a result of the past political history of the internal fighting for pwoer within the Bakhtiari. Those groups who lost the battle for pwoer last century were pushed out of the more lucrative grazing and agricultural areas. Agriculture was of course difficult to practise during the many internal wars of the lat 18th and 19th centuries.There is planty of evidence to suggest that nomadism in its present day form, the movement of long range migrations between distant summer and winter pastures is not much more than 200 years old. While the Bakhtiari have always been tribal people, during times of stability on a national level, there was much more settlement than appears to be the case now. WIth the movement of animals being more transhumantic, and with far fewer animals. The larger flocks found nowadays have at least been in part due to the insecure conditions within the mountains with the distruction of agriculture a common feature.

The practice of nomadism has also been dependent on poltical conditions within Iran as a whole, with bothe the Mongol and Afghan invasions, bringing destruction with them. The Bazuft area high in the Bakhtiari mountains is a perfect ecample with the ruins of hundreds of old settlements still in evidence.

While much of the past history of the Bakhtiari perhaps remains conjectural to a degree, awaiting the work of archaologists, the past two hundred yeasr has seen the instability of the Afshar ruler Nader Sahah, who moved thousands of Bakhtiari families to Khorasan and other border countries, resulting in thr- neglect of agriculture, the decay of irrigation works - much in evidence, thus leaving the area open to a move towrads increasing reliance on animals and pastoralsim.

The existence of Safavid Farmans, granting title deeds to land, both agricultural and pastoral to such groups as the Chahr Lang, The Aurej, the Diaruni, the Babadi and the Bakhtiarwand attest to considerable settlement and security in the region. The splitting of the Chahr Lang' by the Haft lang into the area in the south round Qaleh Tol, moving to Fereidun in the summers - a fertile agricultural area, and the Chahr Lang tribes in the very rugged north bordering on Papi Lur territory again points to a shift in population to the advantage of the Haft Lang. The Kalantars of these northern Chahr Lang sections, show none of the sophistication and diverse economic interests of these Kalantars, who control more advantagiously placed pasture and territory.

There is then a kind of gradation, from those most reliant on animals, practising little agriculture, or agriculture of low yield. living high in the mountains, isolated from roads, and market towns, from the world of Iran, to those who participate in both pastoral and agricultural regimes, with a close interaction with the encroaching state, living in the towns on the edges of the moutnains, base with a diversified economic basis. Still Bakhtiari and tribal in outlook and roots, but looking more and more towards the modern world of Iran, in which tribalism is destined to paly a radically diminshing role. Such Kalantars, tend to look on the others are anachronisms, as primitives in effect knowing no better.

There is therfore an enormous individual variation, with some Kalantars regarding themselves more as townsmen, witha combination of agricultural and pastoral business interests with possibly increasing business interests sucj as trucking, building, or in agricultural machinery, renting out tractors for example - all of which brings in various incomes. The families of such a Bakhtiari Kalantar will invariably be urban or village oriented, learning little of pastoral Bakhtiari life. Educational facilities offered by the government in village

schools are increasing, and recently among the Bakhtiari their has been the successful introduction of tribal schools travelling on the tribal migrations(not sure about that) in tents in areas where as yet their is little settlement. Such tribal schools have long been successfully introduced among teh turkish speaking Qashqa'i tribe in Fars, south of the Bakhtiari.

It is in the education of the children that the major changes in Bakhtiari tribal life will occur. School education is a prerequisite for successful or even minimal participation in the modern state of iran. With the increasing economic changes brought about by the land reform programme started in the 1960s, more and more tribesmen are settling permanently and are increasingly oriented to a non pastoral way of life. Not just schools, but medical services, much lacking in the mountains roads, marketing possibilities, easier transport, electiricity and many of the modern technological possibilties taken fro granted in the towns are all increasingly available and they make attractive alternatives to waht can be an axceedingly tough mode of life moving through the mountains

Many Bakhtiari send their children to stay with settled relatives toallow them the opportunities of education. The result can be unfortunate in personal terms, since a young Bkahtiari educated to modern values has little in common with his nomadic, pastoral oriented father. The young incorporate many of the moral judgements commonly levied against tribal people like the Bakhtiari further separating the yoiunger generatio from their nomadic parents.

Many Bakhtiari totally deplore this change, seeing their own traditions and way of life with its own value system and its own pride being eroded in favour of unsure urban attitudes. In reaction to this such tribal parents often insist that their children, while teenagers or younger travel with them on the migration and laugh at the "softness" of their settled learning.

For the successful Bakhtiari, the wealthy and for the Kalantars' families increased participation in Iranian context, as oppossed to the tradtional Bakhtiari mountain context can be accomplished with the benefits of wealth and local prestige, with education and a ready made network of social contacts.

For the impoverished illiterate Bakhtiari, whose children have no or scarcely any education and even less job oportunity, settled life has little to recommend itself. Young Bakhtiari from a low social and income level work as shepherds, for their wealthier relatives and other Bakhtiari Many live deep in the mountains and live entirely within a Bakhtiari sphere, with no contact with non Bakhtiari settled people. They have no option but to act as shepherds, unless they move out of the mountains to work as agricultural labourers. Once this move is done, it is virtually impossible to return to the pastoral shepherding work, since expertise is at a premium in the mountains. And expertise comes through time only. A good shepherd is highly valued and can have a secure livelihood, contracting himself and his family out to better off nomads with larger flocks who require help. A variety of contracts between shepherd and flock owner exist in the mountains, where the shepherd is fed and clothed and gets a share of the increase in flock under his care. He also gets a small proportion of wool, oil, and ghee from the animals he looks after. He has the right to live off the milk, made into yogurt from the animals he looks after. The rewards of success over a number of years is for an efficient shepherd, with luck to slowly build up a flock of his own, which he herds with the owners animals. A shepherd with a reputation can easily get emplyed - he may stay for years with a single owner or work for a number of brothers or cousins over the years, until he is sufficiently independent to stick off on his own. Such shepherd always wo work for non relatives usually in a taifeh different from his own. The relationship then is strictly contractual, though with the latitude of

friendship if the shepherd has worked for many years. It is thought somewhat shameful to employ kinsmen, with whom one has also certain kinshi obligations of a reciprocal nature which would put a strain on the status difference involved in working fro someone.

With increasing settlement, then their is greater competition for really good shepherds with a reputation for knowledge of the mountains and responsibility towards the animals. The life of a shepherd is hard and often brutally impoverished. For those whose territories lies close to non tribal areas, then the oportunities for different types of employment are increasing and the younger men, who might otherwise have been shepherd drift to the towns in search of a more comfortable way of life than shepherding. Consequently the bulk of the nomadic shepherds, herding the la larger flocks of welathier Bakhtiari tend to be either the middle aged experienced shepherd with a family of his own, whose sons no longer want to follow the shepherd life style, with assistants from the more isolated and more 'backward' taifehs from high in the mountians.

It would perhaps be stretching the analysis to talk of a class struc-u structure developing, cross cutting the tribal organisation, but their are definitely status differences between taifehs, reflected broadly in th their economic situation, in turn a function of the location of territory close or far from settled agricultural areas . Such groups as the Orpanoi, the Asteraki, the Zalaqi, the Mowri all of th Duraki are such low status groups, with a reputation fro wildness and for poverty, for ignorance and theft. These contrast generally with such groups as the Zarraswand, some of the Babadi, the more settled tribal groups such as the Raki. Those groups of high status are invariably those who have actively participated in the tribal struggles of the past and nowawdays equally actively participate in the modern world which means not limited to the confined of the mountains but in the 2oth centruy world of Iran.

The latter is above all the sphere of the Khans and the Kalantars, who through their success in the dual economy of the Bakhtiari, controlling wealth in agriculture and animals, came to the top of the tribal world and could in the past interact with their non tribal neighbours from a position of wealth and power.

Earlier this centruy as we have seen, the Duraki Khans did participate in both local provincial and national terms from a position of considerabl strength and power where they could dictate to a degree the nature of this interaction with their neighbours and even with the State. While this lasted many Bakhtiaris made a fortune at the expense of their less owerful neighbiurs. Many a sum of money has been made by ordinary Bakhtiari tribesmen extorted from villager and townsmen as part of the aemed retinue of the Khans when they were at the height of their power.

The day of the tribal Khans however is past, and the interaction betwee the tribal people and the Satate is on the terms dictated by the State. Until very recently the attitude of the State to the Bakhtiari has been hostile in view of the reputation, often earned by the Bakhtiari for rapacious lawlessness. The relationship between the Bakhtiari and the Stat has been dictated by the balance of power between the two, and this political attitude of mutual distryst dies hard.

Reza Shah was determined to develope a modern nation, anf he saw this as only possible with the settlement and destruction of the semi independa -ent tribal groups within the borders of Iran.

This attittude of hostility and the opinion that the tribal populatic are little better than the-donkeys and mules they use-to as pack animals is still common among many of the petty officials, gendarmes and local beaurocracy. The ordinary tribesmen is now at a distinct disadvantage in his dealings with such members of the government. Corruption is common, and in any dispute or any complaint taken to local law courts the Bakhtiari expect little in the way of justice.

The traditional tribal leaders, the Kalantars are still preferred to the local courts ,where they exist.

The Kalantar is expected to mediate and judge disputes, quarrels, fights theft, destruction of crops.In the absence of the Khans, many Kalantars find that they now have nothing to back up their authority other than their personal standing as Kalantar - a position he holds now by birth as well as the concensus of his taifeh. In the past his position was ratif ratified by the Khans, and the exercise of his power was also controlled by the Khans. Tribesmen disastified with their Kalantars, could and often did take their complaints to the Khan's courts where their complaints might or might not be heard.

In some areas of the mountains, in particular amongst the large Mowri, there are many Kalantars, but few now exercise any real power and control over the tribesmen. This area is notoriaous for its unrest its feading, and in particular for its theft. It is the most isoalted and the least accessible part of the mountains, so the area as yet has not been penetrated by the stablising forces of the central government. In the pst even the Khans had difficulty in controlling this area.

The Mowri exhibit today much of what the Bakhtiari generally were like before the development of the Khan;s autocratic control. No lea leader able to maintain authority for any length of time and over no more than his own Taifeh. The other Taifehs of the Bakhtiari who come' into contact with the Mowri laugh at them saying everyone of them wants to be his own Kalantar. They accept the authority of no one.

There are about 4 traditional Kalantars, who were ratified in their position by the Duraki Khans. They are now oldish men, with one exception and they still have considerable authority over their own sections of the Mowri. They tend increasingly however to ignore the problems of their tribesmen and use their position as leaders with a netowrk of contacts outside their area, with other Kalantars to augment their personal

wealth. They control most of the links with the outside world, and can take advantage of their connections. Unlike the bulk of the Mowri they are literate, they control the trading in the area and therfore control prices of everything other than animals and animal products.

They are less directly affected and controlled or inhibited by the "law" of Iran, than those Kalantars closer to government institutions. However, they are not able to participate in the economic or poltical areana of provincial Iran like the other Kalantars. They are the in a sense the most tribal of the Kalantars left in the mountains.

The Kalantars of these various isolated groups have little in common with the sophisticated modern Kalantars of groups like the Zarraswand the Babadi, the Aurek and many others, ; they could perhaps be graded on a scale stretching from striclty traditional and tribal all the way to the town dwelling urbainte, more Persian than Bakhtiari. If one included the members of the Khans who moved into the national orbit, then many of these Bakhtiaris can scarcely be called tribal, knowing nothing of their past, and never having been near let alone lived in the mountains.Their links with their tribal past completely broken, and totally irrelevant beyond the name.

Less extreme ~~but~~ economically motivated are those members of the Bakhtiari who have worked for and been educated by the Oil Company. Many of these have travelled abroad and hold positions of authroity in the oil company. Some such also maintain active links with their relatives in the mountains, owning land and animals, looked after and worked by their relatives.Others again, travel to Kuwait, to earn larger wages on the building sites of Kuwait, and return after many years to get married to one of their female relatives. Such earnings are a crucial and often determining factor in the lives of many Baktiaris, who use this wealth to increase their position and status in the mountinas.

Drawing boundaries of any descrpition round the Bakhtiari, the people of the wind leads to many misunderstandings. There are many Bakhtiari living outside the confines of the aBakhtiari mountains, but who would include themselves within the boundaries of the Bakhtiari. They have relatives and often economic interests still within the mountains. This is undoubdedlty changing and once the style of life and the location is removed from the mountains, then the succeeding generation has little contact left/

The world in which the Bakhtiari tribesmen live is therefor one of many varied possibilities and the successful Bakhtiari is one who capitalises on these opportunities. Some have a wider range than others. A shpeherd has littee choice other than that presented by the unpreidctabl world of pastoralism. Through no fault of his own the flocks he looks after may be decimated by diesease or by climatic factors, inspite of his expertise. He will not be blamed for such disasters, though careless-mess and inefficiency will lead to instant dismissal. To be orphned is to be maimed. A young man without a father has little chance of success, seen also in the many tribal battles of young sons dispossessed by their dead fathers elder relatives. Struggle for political power over such reasons are legion in tribal history.

High status is no guarantee for success either. Success itself inevitable attracts enemies whether one's envious relatives in this intensely competitive life with restircted access to all resources as well as attracting the emnity of a threatened state. The murder of the most successful and powerful Bakhtiari leaders of th past. by the State is the hallmark of Bakhtiari tribal politics. The bloody struggle for power between the Duraki and the Bakhtiarwand last centruy are typical of tribal life. The wiping out of close relatives, one's closest competitors for power - which can not be divided is yet another typical feature of Bakhtiari history.

The chronic disunity of the Duraki Khans after the murder of the Ilkahni in 1882, where brother fought with brother, cousin with cousin, indiviuals belonging to the same dynastic family unable to overcome the divisive indivudualist tendencies inheent in the system. Inspite of the increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of eldest sons, rather than following the norm of Islamic law which enjoins equal shares on all sons, this brought about coalitions of disgruntled brothers against this attempt to consolidate and centralise power and wealth in the hands of an over all leader.

Perhaps an apochraphal story, but one which rings typical if not true concerns the Samsam as Sultaneh at the height of Bakhtiari Power in Tehran, when he was aksed if he did not want to establish a Bakhtiari Dynasty. His thoughtful reply to this was supposed to have been that if he did have such aspirations fro absoulte power it could only be acomplished over the dead bodies of his brothers and cousins. He is also, however reputed to have been blocked in just these aspitar-ions by h his brothers when it was discovere d that Samsam had had a number of gold collars and chains made, each bearing the name, inscribed of the brothers and cousinsfhe would have had to kill. Success is deemed only to come at the expense of others. Hence no stable leadership emerges from within the tribal system itself

Only with a transference of wealth into land, which is more stable and less subject to total disaster than flocks of sheep and goats, can wealth be accumulated and the rise of differnet groups, monopoising resources of differential quality begins. This would appear to be the basis of the Bakhtiari system before and up till the 18th century when a more balanced dual economy appeared to prevail. With the destructi on of irrigation, and settlement by the Afghans and as a result of interna conflict exacerbated by the inseciruty during Nader Shah's time in the 18th century, a steady shidt towards larger herds and long range nomadism

became established. With it came the breakdown of the settled dynasty of the Atabak,over a long period of time,the emergence of many different groups each having a say at the court of the ruling dynasty of th day. The many royal decrees confriming power in the hands of many different groups but no single group is common. It was in this situation, that the emergence of single rapacious tribal leaders, renowned for their r raiding, looting. nomadic chiefs emerges. Assad Khan of the Bakhtiarwand and later his don, the infamous Jafar Qoli. Mohamad Taqi Khan ~~Morteza Qoli Khan~~ of the Chahr Lang who came to power by murdering many of his relatives to revenge his own fathers murder, the emrgence of Mohamad ~~Morteza~~ as a leader over the Chahr Lang, increased stability, spread of agriculture as a result, more wealth and finally atracting the eye of an indecure cnertal government and his captue and murder by the state.

This was floowed by years of tribal fighting culminating in the emergence of the Haft Lang Duraki Husain Quli Khan, given the title of Ilkhani as a result of his destruction and subjugation of all likely rivals from all the other tribes of the Bakhtiari.His control of the fertile Chagha Khor area, and then extended as a result of his rule until his grwoing power and control of hundreds of villages with an enormous income from these villages, brought him into competiion with the other great landowner of Isfahan, the Shah's eldest son the Zill es Sultan The murder of Husain was follwoed by the perennial internal divisions between the two faction, a division which weakened the Bakhtiari as a political unit, exascerbated and fomented deliberately by the central government of the day.

The history of the Bakhtiri Khans, the Duraki Khans becomes a combination of typical tribal infighting amongst the lineage vieing for the supreme position with its enormous economic and political rewards, financed and made possible by the discovery of oil in the region, its

exploitation by the British, and the flow of wealth from the Oil, gave the Bakhtiari a secure and broad base from which to launch their emergence on to the national and international scene. The venue is no longer tribal in scope althoug- the Khans never managed to escape from the limitations of their tribal origins. They failed to develope stable froms of institutionalised leadership, indpite of attempts by the British to do just this for their own economic interests. The leadership of the Bakhtiari remained what it alwasy wasy - highly individualistic and personal, changing constantly between the elder members of the two factions, but no singel individual every developing the capacity to rule alone, commanding the support of the whole group. They had no monopoloy over the means of coercion, instead having a seried of strictly private armies - Basrtagan whose alegiance they nought and was always suspect.

With their arrival on the national political secene they became even mo-e subject to external interfernece, which finally brought them down. At the very height of their pwoer they carried unavoidabley the seed of their own destruction, but they only maintained their position as leaders becasue of the support they had from the British. The only times in the 2oth centruy when a single man could by Ilkhani for any length of time and both times were when the British bought the support of one man and through their weight behind him. During the first world war, they tribe with Sardar Jang of the Ilkahni faction, with short success only and in the second world war in the face of opposition from everyone in Iran as well as the Khans themselves they managed to install Morteza Qoli Khan, the leading scion of the Ilkhani faction in the 1940s to act as I Ilkhan. The opportunities and constraints on the Duraki Khans were the broadest at any time in Bakhtiari history and mnay of them made full use of them as far as they could. Many paid with their lives during Reza Shahs period of rule. Others survidived to life in Tehran, and by the fifties, temporarily the fortunes of those Khans permanently in Tehra improved with the marriage of Mohammad Reza Shah to Soraya Bakhtiar.

This position at court in the late 1950s, disappeared however withthe Divorce of Queen Soraya by the Shah. At this time the Secret Police known in iran as S.A.V.A.K. was esaablised under the control of General Bakhtiar, a member of the Khawanin family. After a considerable period of pwoer, General Taimur was exiled, reputed to have defied the Sahah, and thought to have had designes on the throne himeslf. General Taimur had no personal follwing among the tribes of much importance, although many tribesmen and Kalantars hitched themselves to his star. He bought much land from the other Khans in the areas of traditional administration and built himself a "palace" in Izeh. For a number of years Taimur's name ws linked with attempts on the Shahs life and the Bakhtisri along with the other tribes were placed under Martial law in 1963 when their was a concer-ted attempt to depose the Shah. Finally jn ealyry 1970 Taimur Khan was killed in East Africa on a Safari in conditoins which some thought suspicious.

The world of the Duraki Khans had definitely moved outside of the orbit of the Bakhtiari mountains. With land reform the once numerous villages still remaining to the Khans were taken from them and their power as traditional tribal leaders finally and realistically extinguished.

Those of the Duraki family, who were dispossed by the Ilkhani's family have had different if less spectacular fortunes.It will be seen fro these khnas that their world has been more circumscribed that the successful Duraki, but unlike them, many of these Khans have survived still in the mountains. Content, or perhaps constrained to live out a life more in keeping with their pastoral origins in the mountians with a differnet set of constraints and possibilities. Again success as in the nomadic situation generally goes to the one who makes his own chances, through participation in the vried possibilities open to him - including pastoralism, raiding, looting, turning rebel against the State working for the Khans and so on.