

DANCE

This aspect of Bakhtiari values is perhaps seen at its most evocative in the "CHUB BAZI" -stick dance, done by the men. The dance is not exclusively Bakhtiari . It is found in various forms among the other tribal groups in the Zagros mountains.

The stick dance can be considered as the expression of how Bakhtiari nomadic experience is conceptualized. In the dance the very nature of Bakhtiari experience of the world and how to operate in that world is symbolised. *realised.* It is in effect a variant, the Bakhtiari version of the dance of life. *It incorporates is the complete Bakhtiari* A complete description and *It puts up. ties together "man & life"* analysis of all the dances is necessary to reveal the depth of meanings to be found in the dances. For the moment the male stick dance will be concentrated on, which distills what it means to be a Bakhtiari man. The dance is in effect a metaphor of becoming and being Bakhtiari. The dance style has changed somewhat this century and it is possible to correlate the change in style to changes in the political and social experinee of the Bakhtiaris.

The Stick dance is danced by two men, opponents or protagaonists. One dances carries a long heavy stick up to 4 or 5 feet lang.- he is the defender. The other carries a shorter, flexible stick, called "tarki" which means stick or branch. With this stick he attacks his opponent. The object of the attack is to strick^s the opponent below the level of the knee. The only permissable defence is by leaping up in the air, or from side to side, since the major rule is that the long stick must be planted on the ground and not moved.

The dance is dramatic, punctuated with wild yells as the attacker dances round the defendent. He signals his attack with a high yell, accompanied with encouraging shouts ~~of encouragement~~ and jeers by the surrounding audience, all of whom are anxious to participate.

The dance is accompanied by drum and Korna or Saz, both of which are horn instruments. The pulsating rhythm of the music on the ^{drum} horns is punctuated by the ^{beating} banging of the drum. The ^{dance} drum consists of the two participants dancing in wide circles, the long stick usually held aloft, while the dancer with the shorter stick held in both hands twirls the stick above his head. Many different styles are seen in the particular movements of the stick. While circling in an anti clockwise direction, the two dancers totally ignore each other. They dance alone preoccupied with their own individual style. The movement is basically a series of hopping motions with the leg lifted very high in a backward movement, bent at the knee, with a double bounce of the ankle. They dance for some time as isolated, distinct and separated individuals in a wide circle and then the attacker gives a loud warning yell, the signal that he is about to attack. His opponent plants his long stick on the ground and prepares to defend himself. For the first time the dancers face each other separated by the long stick which is now used as a prop whereby the defender can leap sideways or upwards to avoid being struck a painful blow on the lower leg or feet. They are now directly oriented

towards each other in an inescapable social relationship defined in terms of ~~mu~~ self assertiveness, a competitive relationship with a specific outcome - either a blow successfully struck, or a blow effectively thwarted.

The attacker then proceeds to dance backwards and forwards in front of the defender, grimacing ferociously, letting loose intimidating shouts. Making mock attacks, dancing right up to his opponent and glaring fiercely straight into his face. He feigns from side to side, in threatening motions.

The attacking weapon-the stick-is held in three basic positions from which the final assault can be launched. The stick can be held horizontally touching the forehead on the front of the face.

It can be held on top of the head, bisecting the head as it were, and the dancer dances up to his opponent weaving the stick in small circles holding it firm, horizontally on the head. Or the stick may be held horizontally again, behind the back, by both hands. In this position, unlike the other two, where the entire stick is visible, the stick is almost completely hidden behind the body of the dancer. This is the most devious style since it is difficult to judge from which side of the body the attack will come. Striking is done either from the right or left hands and is done in a flash.

There is much bluffing in the dance and the real experts are those with distinctive styles and the ability to deceive their opponent into jumping the wrong way.

The essence of the dance is that to succeed whether in defence or attack the dancers have to deceive, bluff and move very quickly indeed. They have to outmanoeuvre their opponent, and the only way to do this is to directly face one's opponent and try to read the intention of the other through the deceptive clues of body movement, expression on the face etc. Each has to see behind the face the persona presented to him, while at the same time trying to disguise his own intentions. The truth, the reality is kept hidden as best as possible. The real self in other words is deeply and carefully hidden, a feature of much of Bakhtiari culture which exhibits a controlled public face with the private, domestic, or real face carefully disguised, hidden or in cases veiled.

The attack, when successful inflicts severe and painful blows, producing bruising and often lacerations. Again the pain of the blows is not allowed to register on the faces of the victims. They do not let it be known if they are in pain, disguising therefor, the effect of the attack ^{which} is quite literally having one's feet knocked from under one. To have oneself immobilised is a graphic image from people whose life style is one in which movement ~~is~~ forms a central role. To be made lame, or to be maimed, diminished one's capacity to act effectively as a nomad, *as a person.*

The dance therefore acts out a major premise of pastoral nomadic life-
self definition
self assertiveness, and preventing one's opponents, other social beings with whom one inevitably comes in contacts from overcoming one.

interp.

The dance is a summation of the Bakhtiari mode of definition of self and the other. Here the other means primarily other Bakhtiaris but by extension means all A 'Others', . The dance expresses a conceptualisation of the individual's relationship to society, and to other individuals. For the Bakhtiari this "individualism" is one that is realised only by participating actively in a world that is essentially aggressive and competitive, where externals, the social world are deceptive, if not illusory and that reality is something hidden, veiled, private and to be protected. To reveal the self is to invite the potentially dangerous intrusion of the outside social world, with its potential therefore of dominance. To avoid being dominated by the "other" is achieved by a process of constant assertive dissimulation - impression management as Goffman might say is crucial in this sort of way of life. The intrusion of an outside always defined or seen as potentially a threat to one's own integrity or even survival is symbolised by the attacking stick which can be deflected by the long stick, which symbolises the social world of kin, possibly and is bound by rules. The stick perhaps symbolises the tree of life, the summation of experience which can not be uprooted - in the dance the rule is that once planted the long stick must not be moved or lifted.

Man is bound by his accumulated experience, the way in which he fulfills the values of his culture and is therefore a victim of his own limitations, his own knowledge. He is bound always by social rules

rules and cultural conventions, he is a social being as well as a unique individual. He is bound by his own understanding of his social and cultural situation. The good dancer therefore is one who lives acknowledging the rules of his society (the big stick) yet can manipulate them, is not only defined by them, but is defined within them and therefore defines his self, by active participation and manipulation of the rules, rather than being passively defined by the rules himself. A true Bakhtiari, through living, creates and lives out the flexible rules of nomadic life, rather than being dominated or crushed by a capricious ecology or a hostile state - Iran. He draws the conceptual boundaries of his world.

The dance encapsulates the defining values, or essence of being a Bakhtiari, and only through dancing do Bakhtiari learn the rules of this particular game. Like many dances and games, the stick dance is a training for life, ^{a preparation for survival} analogous to a ritual of initiation, where the secrets of a culture are revealed to youths being grown into men. In this manner, the dance, with its blows - literally, teaches young Bakhtiari the value of deception, of participation in life which is insecure, often unknowable, hostile and where the individual to survive must interact socially with others.

Each dancer has three chances to attack and then the positions are reversed, with three turns at defence, before other dancers take over. This is done by someone grabbing the short attacking stick and when his turn to take to the defence position comes, the defender drops out and someone else takes the short attacking stick.

In this way each dancer learns the principles both of attack and defence. He learns ^{the} value of both for survival. There is no absolute winner or loser to this game. The cycle of life continues, though new personell down the generations take up the sticks of attack and defence and dance out the dance of ^{and} life or experience. What is learned essentially is the principles whereby life- both individual and socail is conducted. The meaning of the dance is essentially abstract. It actually constructs the rules rather than ^{being} a particular representation of actualisation of the rules. *They dance out a structured mandala*

The basic ~~taets~~ of Bakhtiari life are revealed in the dance - ^{outward appearance} how to live ones life - balancing outward looking, with inward ^{inner being} knowing, the self and others, dancing the dance of the self in a social world. It epitomises the active, public world of men, where interaxtion with others is unavoidable, so that being a Bakhtiari is to interact with others in this ^{way} more - free, individualistic to a degree, subject to social rules, but above all assertive. Not to interect with others is to invite domination. Not to ^{actual intention} carefully hide or disguise ones "real? circumstances is to invite the effective intrusion of others - again domination.

A major change in the style of dancing would appear to have taken place this century. The Bakhtiari say that they used to dance with two short sticks each, instead of the one long and one short as they do nowadays. Otherwise the circling hopping remains the saem as do the basic rules. They explain this change as making

it possible to hit harder. This style of dance can be seen in the film GRASS made in 1924. The older style of dance then could possibly be explained as reflecting a more isolated or secure general political situation where neither attack nor defence was so aggressive; as it is now. All four sticks were visible in the traditional style and also there is more room for manoeuvre with four short sticks. Not so easy to be taken by surprise, since both hands have sticks for attack or defence.

style change

The modern dance is not only more aggressive, it is more deceptive especially as with only one stick to attack with, it is not so easy for the defender to block the attack from the right or the left. Also the long stick is now planted firmly on the ground. Not nearly so much room to manoeuvre. The long stick could possibly represent the change in political fortunes of the Bakhtiari, where they come under severe political pressure by Reza Shah after 1925, and the Bakhtiari are now very much on the defensive.

The dance is now very suggestive of a culture under threat from a punitive outside force - a truly violent other, and the long stick is a metaphor for ~~the~~ Bakhtiari cultural survival. There are many levels on which this dance can be interpreted, but the one I like best and would seem to fit the changed circumstances of the tribe is that to survive in a more differentiated world which is increasingly defined not by the Bakhtiari themselves but by the external, non-Bakhtiari Iranian Nation State, greater deception, dissimulation

and defensiveness is essential for continued cultural survival.

The balance between internal and external forces has now swung very much in favour of the Iranian State and the Bakhtiari are in danger of being assimilated into the wider Persian culture. They are a culture under attack as a whole - symbolised by the long stick. The aggressive outsider exists and has to be interacted with

The actual form of the dance at its most abstract clearly represents the constant need to balance the world. The Bakhtiari never have been a completely isolated people. They have always interacted with non Bakhtiari. They have always been interdependent with their agricultural and urban neighbours. OVER THE CENTURIES the nature of this relationship has changed. AT TIMES THE Bakhtiari have been dominant, at others a relative status quo or mutual tolerations and non interference has persisted, and at others, particularly in the second half of the 20th century, the balance has swung to the State. These are the perennial conditions of tribal existence and they are well adapted to survive such temporal changes. Adaptability is built into the system. In spite of many centuries of facing a sometimes punitive outside force the Bakhtiari as a tribal group have survived

The secrets of their culture, the principles for survival are to be found in their dance

a'far. Kalantars do not dance. That is for the younger men. Kalantars have lived out what the young men dance out and therefore learn. Jafar Qoli, the Kalantar of the Bakhtiari was undoubtedly a good dancer when he was a young man.

The dance is a key metaphor, a symbol distilled to its most abstract form and therefore applicable to every walk of ^{life} ~~wife~~, to all circumstances no matter how varied or different, or unpredictable, where the self, the individual interacts with an "other" with an outside which by definition ^{is} ~~is~~ hostile, ^{and} ~~and~~ potentially destructive. Jafar Qoli, ~~which~~ in his experience on many many migrations, also symbolised by the dance where the "other" here is nature itself, a "wild" other, rather than a social other, plus living out this particular dance, is like other Kalantars, equipped for survival, albeit in somewhat different style in a world increasingly dominated by a non pastoral life style and encroached steadily by a state, with National institutions, constituted somewhat differently.

For Bakhtiari like Jafar they have a life times experience coping with a hostile unpredictable and insecure world. Ja'far, like all good Bakhtiaris has many faces, none of which are the True Ja'far.

This book, represents an attempt to see beneath the public face, an exercise that can only ever be partly successful. Much of the essential Jafar will remain inviolate, unpenetrated by the film crew or the anthropologist. He is a man who remains detached, an observer and protector of his own integrity, of his own identity. Such a man can with confidence expose himself to the selective eye of the outsider and retain his self intact, and only partially discovered. He continues to live in these mountains with the new world of Iran, remaining in spite of many apparent changes

in his life, what he learned to be over many years, a Kalantar, a Babadi and a Bakhtiari.

The years of learning to identify oneself from within make for the retention of an identity which was forged in the mountains, and the rivers, the snow storms of the migration. A man free but bound by time and place. A man truly in place, centred within himself, facing a world that he can only very partially control, but one that will not diminish the man. The Bakhtiari carry their world within them as they move, with their homes and possessions through the mountains, the world they live in. The western preoccupation for finding a self which too easily is defined by circumstances is alien to this way of life, where the self defines the circumstance.

This way of looking at the world from within is also expressed throughout their culture in many different ways. The use of reflecting surfaces, such as pools, mirrors, moonlight, recurring images in their songs and poems and rituals explicitly states the illusory nature of the phenomenal world. The real world lies within the self. Wisdom is of the soul, and out of wisdom, that special knowledge stem the values of this nomadic society.

The image of wind, which moves free in the world, untamable by man, an entity of nature is a metaphor often used to describe the nomads. In opposition to the peasants, people of the earth or of the door, the Bakhtiari are called Badi - people of the wind, who like the wind move through the world, free, perennial. The Bakhtiari are true to the element of the air, known by the effect of its presence.