

## A Cultural Anthropology of Baluchis

The Baluchis are the ancient genuine Iranians who have their exclusive and special celebrations and feats.

Basluchis first moved to the region in the twelfth century. During the Moghul period, this territory became known as "Baluchistan."

Their name, "Baluch/Baloch," is shrouded in controversy. Some say it means "nomad," while others claim that it is an Aryan (Old Persian) word meaning "the cock's crest."

Balochi language is spoken in Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, the Persian Gulf Arab-States, Turkmenistan and East Africa. It is classified as a member of the Iranian group of the Indo-European language family which includes Kurdish, Persian, Pashto, Dari, Tajik, Ossetian. Baluchi is closely related to Kurdish and Persian.

There are two main dialects: Eastern and Western. It is difficult to estimate the total number of Baluchi speakers, but there are probably around six million, most of whom speak Western Baluchi, which is also the dialect that has been most widely used in Baluchi literature. Within the Western dialect are two further dialects, Rakhshani (in the northern areas) and Makrani (in the south). The areas where Eastern Baluchi dialects are spoken (the north-eastern areas of Pakistani Baluchistan, Punjab and Sindh) are in many ways less developed, especially when it comes to education, which accounts for why it is little used in the written form.

For a curious visitor who arrives in ancient province of Sakestan, or today Sistan va Baluchistan, the first interesting issue that attracts the attention most is the way Baluchis are dressed up. Baluchis have preserved their way of clothing with a slight change.

Men wear long shirts, loose pants resembling Partho-Sasanid outfits, added by a turban around their heads while women put on loose dress and pants with needle works that are special of the people of the area and is not common in other parts of the country.

The upper part of the dress and sleeves are decorated with needle works, an artistic work that is specific of the clothing of the women Baluchis. They cover their hair with a scarf that is called 'Sarig' in the local dialect.

Baluchi women usually put on gold ornaments such as necklace and bracelet but their special jewelry is 'Dorr' or heavy earrings that are fastened to the head with gold chains so that their heavy weight will not cause the tearing of the ear. They usually wear a gold brooch called 'Tasni' that are made by local jewelers in various shapes and are used to fasten the two parts of the dress over the chest.

Apart from the dressing style of the Baluchis, there are interesting points in the way they live and in their traditions and customs that this article tries to illustrate in parts. Indigenous and local traditions and customs were of greater importance to the Baluchis in the past as apparently up to about half a century ago when the central and provincial government of the chieftains were imposed as the individual dictatorships.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there were no formulated laws and regulations in order to regulate social behaviors. Under such circumstances, traditions and customs in fact filled the vacuum caused by the absence of laws which were used in the regulation of many social relations and therefore enjoyed special credit among the Baluchi tribal people.

Abdolghaffar Nadim in his book `Gashin' that is written in Baluchi language says: "The Baluchi folklore is being inspired by the Baluchi way of life and, therefore, could have addressed many needs of the tribal people who were forced to settle their disputes on the basis of their traditions and customs in the absence of a powerful central government."

Here, it is only enough to review the Baluchi traditions within the two categories of cooperation and feasts:

## **A. COOPERATION**

**1. Beggari:** This is a custom specific of the time when the Baluchi youth reaches the age of marriage but apparently his family cannot afford the marriage expenses due to their economic condition. Under such circumstances, the youth would go to his relatives and friends and would discuss with them his decision about marriage and would ask for their `Beggari', or in other words, their contribution.

Such a tradition is so strongly respected that even the poorest member of the family cannot remain indifferent towards such a demand and feels obliged to pay a certain amount of money in cash or offer material aid. Lack of participation in such a benevolent affair will cause humiliation and disgrace. Therefore, although Beggari is a voluntary contribution, however, a social compulsion can be traced in it somehow. Even in the case of those who have no children and cannot benefit from the advantages of Beggari in future, participation in this benevolent act guarantees further social credit. As a result of this, marriage is being made more easily among Baluchis as the community is meeting the cost.

**2. Hashar:** This is a custom that is applied when an individual cannot perform a task alone and needs help of the others.

Traditionally, working for money is not customary, and those who need help would go to their relatives and friends and would inform them of their decision to do a special job on a specific day and for that purpose they need a certain number of work force. Under such circumstances, as many volunteers may join the collective work without being paid.

If the work is accomplished within a day, the only thing that the employer has to do is to prepare lunch and dinner for the workers by usually slaughtering a sheep for making the required food. If the work takes longer, more preparations will be made and new volunteers will substitute the previous ones.

However, there would be enough volunteers to complete the work through collective cooperation, as it is not

customary to give a negative response to the call for contribution.

Such a habit is mostly customary in rural areas where people are mainly engaged in agriculture where Hashar is being practiced in various stages of the work from cultivation to harvest. It is also widely practiced in building rural houses and bridges and in collecting dates. Such a habit is still practiced given its positive social effects despite the fact that paid work is gradually established.

**3. Bagi:** This custom was widely practiced in the past while these days it is losing importance in areas going through the trend of urbanization.

In the practice of such a tradition, people are used to cook extra food and would distribute it among needy people in their neighborhood. Those who were well off and could have better nutrition would carefully observe this.

The positive social impact of such a tradition has removed the negative feeling of humiliation as receiving Bagi is not tantamount to receiving donations but rather is some sort of contribution among neighbors and is not limited to a specific person or a specific family.

Bagi is not merely confined to consumption but is performed in a wider dimension that forges greater convergence among neighbors and minimizes probable disputes. At the meantime, it helps fair distribution of limited facilities.

**4. Divan:** Settlement of disputes in their everyday life is of great importance. In order to solve problems, people would gather in a place and while studying various aspects of disputes, they try to find the best possible solution in an effort to secure satisfaction of the parties involved. The place in the local dialect is called 'Divan' and is normally a house that belongs to the eldest member of the community.

Of course Divan is not merely exclusive for the settlement of disputes but is also used for exchange of information and consultations for the coordination of affairs. However, the significance of Divan at the time of the settlement of disputes lies in the fact that although decision-making at Divan is not legally valid, however, it is applicable and is rarely ignored by the parties to the dispute.

The reason is that presence of the gathering at the place is to some extent the executive and moral guarantee for the parties to the dispute and if one party for any reason ignores the agreement reached at Divan, in fact it would damage its own social credibility. If Divan fails to settle the dispute, the case will be solved on the basis of the rules of the religion.

The tradition of Divan is being gradually forgotten in both rural and urban areas but it is still being enforced among some tribes. A unified Judicial system in fact have substituted traditional Divan and the elderly people are still settling regulations in rural and urban areas but not completely as in primary stages attempts are made to resolve the disputes through local traditions and at the Divans of the elderly.

**5. Mayar:** The habit is inspired by a social reality and need for the support of the oppressed against the oppressor. When a powerful individual is oppressing a powerless person for any reason, the former can seek help from a stronger person who has enough power to defend his right. Given the undertakings that the host feels towards the person who seeks help as 'Mayar', he is free either to accept the demand or deny it.

But, as soon as he accepts, the social tradition puts the responsibility of the Mayar's defense on the shoulder of the host. Of course, the importance of the tradition becomes further evident when the person who seeks help is not guilty and whose rights have been trampled upon. However, when the person seeks help according to the tradition of Mayar, he becomes a member of the family and tribe of the host and can enjoy his support until his problem is solved.

Sometimes the situation will remain unchanged forever and the person who seeks help will remain in the new condition. Therefore, it will become part of the responsibility of the host to find a job for the person who seeks help and puts enough capital at his disposal. This will help enable the powerless people to defend themselves against the oppressors.

**6. Karch-va-Kapon:** This tradition is practiced when a person for any reason kills someone else, either intentionally or unintentionally. Under such circumstances an unreasonable feeling of revenge will afflict the Baluchi tribes to the extent that no matter to what tribe the murderer belonged, if he is out of reach, a member of his family or one of his relatives can be killed in his place or, in other words, take revenge.

Under these circumstances many innocent people will become victim of such a revenge merely for belonging to a certain family or tribe. At this moment, in an effort to prevent further bloodshed, the elderly members of the family resort to the custom of 'shroud and knife.' They send the murderer together with a knife and a piece of white cloth to the family of the person who has been killed and they are free either to punish him or forgive him.

However, punishment of the murderer is not a proven act from social and scientific points of view while forgiveness is the manifestation of generosity.

For this reason, the murderer will be forgiven and returned to his family.

Sometimes it may happen that in order to remove all the hostilities and misunderstandings, the two families prepare marriages as a means to put aside differences. Of course, sometimes ransom would be demanded. In that case the family of the murderer or the tribe to which he belongs will pay the money.

Although prosecution of the murderer falls within the authority of the law, however, there are still evidences indicating that tribal people are willing to safeguard the tradition of 'shroud and knife'.

**7. Patardeyag:** This tradition is practiced when there is a quarrel between two or more members of a tribe. The side that is guilty of fomenting the quarrel accepts to apologize but not verbally rather through a mediator who is usually an elderly of the tribe. No matter how deep the difference, the other party usually accepts the apology, as its rejection will cause criticism of others.

Following the acceptance of the apology, the side that had fomented the quarrel will invite the other party to a dinner party through the mediator and a sheep is slaughtered on the occasion. There is no need for verbal apology and normally no word would be said about issues causing the dispute. Holding the Patardeyag ceremony implies acceptance of the apology and removal of all differences.

## **B. FEATS**

**1. Mangir:** The important Baluchi traditions are mainly in connection with their ceremonies and feats.

The marriage ceremony stands prominently among such festivities as it goes through different stages starting from engagement to the wedding ceremony. Public participation in the wedding ceremony is normal as in other parts of the country but with slight differences. But there is one exclusive difference in the wedding ceremony and that is the Mangir ceremony.

It seems that the ceremony is a custom acquired by the Baluchi tribes from other customs. Mangir is the ceremony for the simultaneous mass marriage of several couples for various reasons, notably economic considerations.

What further supports the idea is the holding of mass wedding ceremony among lower class people of the society. This would not only reduce the costs but would also economize in time as in the past wedding ceremonies used to last for seven days.

**2. Sepat:** Festivities that are held in Baluchistan at the time of the birth of new babies are called Sepat. Some parts of the ceremonies are influenced by superstitious presumptions believing that both the baby and the mother are threatened by a genie called Aal as it awaits the opportunity to seize and swallow the liver of the baby and the mother.

Therefore, in order to prevent such a happening the relatives of the mother and the baby stay awake for several nights and pray to God and seek His help in order to protect the mother and the baby against the genie.

However, there are good and bad customs among the Baluchi tribes that demand more research works and studies.

The Baluchis same as other Iranians are known for their cultural specifications such as hospitality, bravery, generosity, faithfulness, and moral commitment and mostly Iranian nationalism.

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