

The Southern Baluch of Pakistan

The Southern Baluch of Pakistan are part of the larger Baluch community which consists of approximately 8 million people. Their homeland lies in the southern areas of the Baluchistan and Sind Provinces. These provinces are located in the southeastern portion of the country. In addition to Pakistan, Baluch can be found in Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates as well as other countries. The various Baluch groups speak different languages, each with distinguishing characteristics. These languages have been divided into three groups: Eastern, Western, and Southern Baluchi.

Their name, "Baluch," is shrouded in controversy. Some say it means "nomad," while others claim that it is an old Persian word meaning "the cock's crest." Their history is just as mysterious. Some have traced their origins to Nimrod, son of Cush (Noah's grandson). But while some things are uncertain, we do know that they first moved to the region in the twelfth century. During the Moghul period, this territory became known as "Baluchistan."

What Are Their Lives Like?

According to historians, this high and arid region was once a thickly populated area watered by many perennial rivers. Today, it is a desolate, infertile area of rocky mountains, dry river valleys, and semi-desert plains. Rainfall is low, unreliable, and the hills have few trees. However, when rain comes or the snow melts, the dry river beds become raging torrents and the brown, arid landscape turns green once again.

The Baluch traditionally earn their living by a combination of farming and semi-nomadic shepherding. They usually raise sheep, cattle, or goats. Agriculture is limited because of the harsh climate; nevertheless, it plays a large role in the economy. The chief crop is wheat. To aid in the household economy, some farmers raise chickens. They also depend on wild fruits and vegetables. One wild plant, called the "dwarf palm," is used as a dietary supplement. The meat of the palm is eaten, and the leaves are used to make ropes, shoes, mats, and tents. Though their survival techniques may vary, each community tries to keep a wide variety of animals and grow many different crops. If the local economy does not provide adequate job opportunities, the young men often move to the cities in search of work.

Village settlements are clusters of mud houses, loosely organized around the home of the local chief. They live in these permanent mountain and valley settlements in the summertime. However, in winter, they migrate to the plains and coastal areas, seeking green grass for their livestock. During this time, they live in tents, and move freely across the landscape as weather conditions dictate. These temporary settlements are smaller, consisting of closely related kin.

Within the family, the entire household is responsible for tending the family's herd. Women work in groups, threshing and separating the harvest; while plowing and planting are done by the men. Traditionally, land is not privately owned but belongs to the whole tribe.

What are their beliefs?

The Baluch are Sunni Muslims. Their religious practices remain private, and there is no concept of a "state

religion." All forms of secular authority are separated from the spiritual authority held by religious leaders.

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