

## Pastoral Nomadism & Migration Routes in Iran

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Nomads are different from village in terms of having their own cultures, beliefs and economies, mostly known as nomadic society. Nomadic society has certain criteria such as:

- Constituted of tribal structure (clans, race, descent, etc.)
- Common land (with specific pastures and defined geographical boundaries)
- People's knowledge of their specific tribal membership (which clan, race and descent they belong to)

Given the seasonal movements required by climate changes and the need for pasture, Nomads were regularly moving in traditional way. In fact, mobility for nomads is a natural phenomenon that happens due to geographical and climatic changes and not by social motives or demands. In identifying tribes and clans, it is important to distinguish three essential factors:

1. Tribalism as the social organization of tribes and clans
2. Nomadism as livelihood
3. Pastoralism as the subsistence method

### Nomadic Mobile Community

Along with the urban and rural communities, Tribes and clans form the third community in Iran with distinct social, cultural and economic features. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nomads constituted 25 % of Iran's population and they played significant role in the social life of the country. In modern era, due to the acceleration of the process of Westernization and the collapse of the traditional society, the nomadic community of Iran faced comprehensive and significant crisis, resulted in the dramatic decline of its population from 25% to 14% in less than fifty years in 1976. In general, the nomadic tribes of Iran are made of different ethnic groups including Kurds, Turks, Arabs, Baluch, Lors, Laks and Barahuis. In fact, by distinguishing three main factors mentioned above, the following definition is provided: Tribe is a society constituted of tribal social organization, which follows its nomadic lifestyle (Full mobility, semi-mobilized, horizontal and vertical movements) and its main livelihood income is through livestock, which facilitate the formation of Nomad as an independent social and cultural unit. There are three main patterns of movement in the tribes and clans that include:

1. **Horizontal Movement:** Some of the tribes and clans live in cold climate regions in the summer and move to moderate climate regions by the fall of summer and by doing so,

they always follow certain pass in their seasonal movements. Once the tropical pastures are intolerable during summer, they once again move toward winter pasture.

2. **Circular movement:** Some of the tribes, such as the tribes based in Baluchistan province, do not suffer from dramatic weather changes during the year and therefore they move in wilderness in circular, because moving from one place to the other maximumly takes several days. The main objective behind circular movement of these tribes is to take advantage of the available natural pastures.
3. **Vertical movement:** this pattern of movement is common in most part of Iran, especially between the clans residing in the Zagros area. These livestock breeders reside in the moderate foothills, mostly in villages, and in spring they move their animals to the heights and in the summer, they settle in the colder mountain peaks in their tents which are made of pure goat hairs.

Therefore, it could be argued that a community which has accepted this system and follows a traditional livestock to use natural forage is called the “nomadic society”. The dominant economic income of the nomadic society is based on Livestock, animal husbandry and their related products. In line with the circulation of earth, these communities move regularly and spend winters in the valley area called “tropical or Kishlak” and they spend summer in mountainous area called “cool area or Yaylag”. They always follow the same roads to reach to tropical area from colder areas and vice versa. Since the duration of the movement to reach to destination usually varies from a few kilometers to several hundred kilometers, which can not be taken in a single day, therefore, nomads start to move very early in the morning to have enough time to find shelter for spending the night and keep on the way next morning. These places are usually called residing area where they can set their tents.

According to what was said, movements of nomads is due to the relative difference in the height of two geographic regions, one located in high and mountainous area and the other in valley and plain area. Therefore, transition in its traditional form, is a geographical force mainly concerned with the livestock and providing them with enough forge, which requires living in two places, having pastures in two areas as well as having lands in two areas.

The distribution of tribes and clans is neither equal in all areas of Iran, nor the same over the history; there were areas that used to have high tribal population in the past that has lost its population significantly due to the rapid growth of urbanization or those areas were turned into industrial, agricultural settings. However, there are still some regions in which nomadic tribes and clans pass through or settle, especially in the Zagros Mountains and vast areas of the Central Zagros. Accordingly, based on the main areas of the movements and settlements, the Iranian nomadic tribes and clans are categorized as followings:

### **1. Nomadic tribes located in the West and South of Iran**

This area mostly includes the western and southern parts of Iran surrounded by the Zagros mountains, which has humid climate and relatively rich pastures, over 10 million hectares of oak forest, almond and wild pistachio. The existence of natural desirable situation in this area has attracted numerous tribes. This area includes Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Ilam, Isfahan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari., Lorestan, Kohgoliyeh, Fars and Khuzestan provinces.

**Kurd Nomads:** Since the early years, Kurd Nomads were scattered in the northeast of Zagros, West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam. Currently, some of this population are either in the valleys and foothills of the region, turned into semi-mobilized animal husbandry Nomads or they are following the Nomadic lifestyle by being fully in transition.

**Lorestan Nomads:** Lorestan's tribal nomads are divided in two groups of Lak and Lor, in respect to their dialect, traditions, customs and some religious differences. Lak tribal nomads are located in North and Northwest of the province and the Lors are settled in a wider areas in Lorestan province and some parts of Ilam, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Khuzestan, Markazi, Kohgiluyeh, Fars and Bushehr. In past, Lor Nomads were divided in two groups of Small Lor and Big Lor.

Bakhtiari tribe, which is distributed in Chaharmahal, Khuzestan and neighboring provinces, is one of the largest nomadic moving tribes in Iran.

**Qashqai and Khamseh Nomads :** Beside accommodating Lor moving tribes, Fars province shelters two great and famous tribes of Qashqai and Khamseh. The Qashqai nomads are the most well-known tribe in Iran, who had been moving from Isfahan to the Persian Gulf, but they were forced to be settled in one place due to political pressures since Qajar period.

In the southwest of this region, mostly in Khuzestan province, Arab nomads are located and their famous clans include Bani Kaab and Bani Taraf.

## 2. Nomadic tribes located in Northwest of Iran

The Nomadic tribes that are settled in the northwest of Iran includes the nomads of Turkish area ( East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Ardebil and Zanjan ) as well as a part of Gilan, that provides Nomads with prosperous pastures due to its mountainous nature. Forests, rich pastures and meadows are the main features of this area that has provided its nomads with prosperous life.

## 3. Nomadic tribes located in the Northeast

Given the large scale of the northeastern region of Iran and the accessibility of diverse climates, this region has forest in its northwestern part and pastures in other parts. Northeast nomadic tribes include nomads based in the provinces of Khorasan, Semnan as well as parts of Mazandaran and Gulestan. From anthropological point of view, Kurd and Arab Nomadic tribes are settled in this area .

## 4. Nomadic tribes of the Eastern and Southeast regions

The eastern and the southeastern parts, include Khorasan region, Sistan, Kerman and Hormozgan provinces, mostly dominated by hot and dry climate. This area is featured by extreme climate changes and in general is considered as an area with low water and low rainfall with hot desert climate and drastic temperature differences in day and night. Baluch, Afshar, Bechaghchi, and Jabal Barazi nomads are the most important tribes located in the southeast of Iran.

The particular lifestyle of Baluch Nomads, their kinship relations, social ties, intratribal social-economic status, recognition of the privileges based on the hierarchical system, leadership of

tribe, along with specific customs, are the attractions of this Baluch tribe, which is located in the southeast of Iran. The natural challenges, limited resources of nature, as well as intense climate are the main factors that have distinguished Baluch nomad from others.

## **5. Nomadic tribes located in the central region**

The central region of Iran includes Zanjan, Hamedan, Semnan, Markazi, Yazd and Tehran provinces as well as some parts of Mazandaran. The main feature of this area is its closeness to the capital that has distinguished nomads of this area from others, in terms of their distinct social, economic and psychological characteristics. In the Alborz's southern hillsides, northern area of Semnan and the Northwest of Tehran, a great variety of clans with different ethnic and tribal backgrounds are living, and by considering the ethnical diversity of this region some researchers have addressed this area as an album that include the images of all nomadic tribes of the country.

### **Current Population:**

According to the last census of the Statistical Center of Iran in 2008, there has been 212,660 nomadic families in Iran, making a population of 1,186,830. The three largest nomadic tribes respectively are Bahktiari, Qashqai and Ilson tribes ( Shahsawan). Based on this report, 28 % of the country's livestock belong to nomadic tribes that makes animal husbandry as their main source of income by contributing to the wool production and providing the need of country for lamb and goat meats.

### **Government Policy towards settlement**

Over the past three decades, the policy of the Iranian government has been based on the permanent settlement of nomads, and therefore the priority of the government has been in providing the welfare and financial support for the nomadic tribes' settlement in one location. The implementation of this policy has settled 90,000 nomadic tribal families. Despite the claim of the officials that the permanent settlement can be considered as a new chapter in the economic activities of nomadic tribes, but the implementation of this plan has caused numerous problems in the social, political and economic identities of these tribes and clans that includes high population density, increase in unemployment, plus relative decline in the interest of nomads for animal husbandry once they are settled, who had significant contribution in supplying the needed meat of the country earlier, and on the political side it has caused disagreement over territorial divisions that belonged to each tribe and clan. In any case, it may seem that the mentioned problems are the natural and inevitable consequences of the permanent settlements of nomads, but is crucial to bear in mind that it is the protected ecosystem of the nomadic life in Iran which is endangered.