

The Role of Marriage in Social Relations in Bakhtiari Tribe

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of marriage in social relations in Bakhtiari tribe of Iran. Marriage and types of marriage ceremonies in Bakhtiari tribe, apart from being a religious tradition for preserving the generation, are considered as a means of creating, broadening and maintaining social relations among families and individuals in the Bakhtiari tribe. For the purpose of this research about Bakhtiari tribe, Khuzestan province was chosen as the sample. Ethnographic and qualitative research techniques and interviews were used for data collection. The results showed that not only do common types of marriage between Bakhtiari people help them broaden their families, but also each type is held with a particular perspective to social relations and is of a great help in the formation and maintenance of relationships as well as avoiding any kind of crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Bakhtiari tribe¹ lives in Iran's central plateau and along the central Zagros Mountains. This area includes the provinces of Khuzestan, Chahar Mahal Bakhtiari, Isfahan and Lorestan. "Although People who live in these areas are in different provincial divisions, they have many common features in terms of behavior, knowledge and norms" (Sarлак 2006).

"In nomadic society, most activities associated with production and many other tasks are done by the women. Therefore, Bakhtiari people's lives are not possible without women. Hence, a nomadic man cannot keep his flock without his wife and may not be able to continue the traditional nomadic life" (Khosravi 1989). For nomadic men, getting married or living in a previously formed family is essential; and given the importance of women's role in the lives of Bakhtiari people, men whose spouse has died remarry much earlier than what is normally done between the urbanites.

In Bakhtiari tribe, when girls want to get married, it is customary that parents determine everything themselves without consulting their girls who then confirm their parents' decision with their silence and get married with the suitor. This respect for parents' decisions is the reason for the lowest divorce rate in this tribe compared to urban communities. Moreover, as divorce is derided in the tribe, the families are stronger and more durable. In this study, the most common types of marriage and marriage ceremonies in Bakhtiari tribe and their effects on durability and quality of family life are investigated.

The overall purpose of the study is to investigate various types of marriages and marriage ceremonies in Bakhtiari tribe.

Objectives

- 1- A search for different kinds of marriages such as Nafboroon, Gabegah, Family, Hambari and finally Xinbas.
- 2- Tracing the stability of social relationship resulted from the aforementioned marriages.
- 3- Recognizing the impact of these marriages among the families living in the Bakhtyari tribes.

RESEARCH METHOD

Field research, direct observation and interview have been used in this study. Library research using resources relied upon by scholars is another means of study used by the researcher. However, the research findings presented in the study are the results of field research.

Theoretical Framework

Radcliffe Brown (1931) is the founder of Structural-Functionalist theory. He pays special attention to the functions of social institutions including family. "He believes that various institutions of society reinforce each other, create stability and solidarity among community members and help ensure continuity and survival. He believes that every social system has a functional unity. For example, marriage and mourn-

ing ceremonies and rituals play an important role in maintaining the social structure. According to him these kinds of social activities are done on a regular basis because they contribute to the whole social life and help maintenance and durability of society. He believes that investigating family structure and relationships is the best and most reliable way to understand different societies, because it represents how people relate to each other in a community, and thus shows its legal system “ (Naraghi 1986).

“Among functionalists, Malinowski (1922) believes that marriage and family are formed by parents who have gotten married through a legal contract and are surrounded by the religious rituals that makes family a moral unit. Communities put some controls and restrictions in this process of survival and make physical, biological and social bonds among couples. Marriage is complex and is not just sexual relationships. It includes relationships between children and parents as well as economical cooperation. Marriage is a legal agreement that is usually associated with religious rituals. Malinowski agrees that some features of family and marriage undergo transformation but believes that they do not change and focus on the preservation of marriage and family characteristics “ (Farbod 2004).

In her socio-cultural evolution theory, Leslie White (1949) states that the most important factor in the formation of marriage and its durability is creation of social institutions and organizations.”According to White, factors such as livelihoods, assistance, protection against dangers (safety), and institutions are important in the formation of social organization. She believes that marriage and family are made up under the influence of other factors such as biological ones. To her, the most important function of marriage and family is that of formation of group cooperation and unity of various tribal parts to increase security against the dangers” (Farbod 2004).

To Iranians marriage is one of the most admirable events that happen in adolescence. “Islam and particularly religious traditions of the great Muslim Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)emphasize the importance of marriage inasmuch as marriage has been introduced as a means of preserving half of one’s religion “ (Motahari 2003). Due to this importance and social and religious roles of marriage, Iranian

people especially those in tribes like Bakhtiari get married at a young age to perform a religious duty and carry out social functions.

RESULTS

Marriage in the Bakhtiari tribe (*duvati*)²

Rituals and marriage ceremonies may vary in different countries. In Bakhtiari tribe marriage is done based on social conditions and relations in five forms.

A) Types of Marriage

- 1- Nafboroon³
- 2 - Gabega⁴
- 3 - Family Marriage⁵
- 4 - Hambari⁶
- 5 - Xinbas⁷

1- Nafburoon: This has been a tradition among the Bakhtiari tribe where whenever a girl and a boy are born close together in time; parents decide to engage them to each other. That is, to use their own terms, when the girl’s umbilical cord is cut (at the time of birth), she is named to marry a boy who is usually older than her in future. Thus, parents determine their children’s fate and the children come to the belief that they belong to each other.

2 – Gabega: *Gabega* marriage, that is when the sister of one’s son-in-law marries one’s son, was common among Bakhtiari people. Of course, this is done based on their own wish.

3 - Family Marriage: Family Marriage was one of the most popular types of marriage in Bakhtiari tribe inasmuch as boys did not have the right to suit a girl from other tribes if there were some unmarried girls in his close relatives’ families such as uncles, aunts, or other close relatives. If he ignored the rule it was considered insulting to the girls’ family. Therefore, when young boys were going to marry, first they had to woo a girl from his close relatives. If their request were not accepted, then they had the right to woo non-relative girls. “That was because they believed that via family marriage, family ties became stronger and gaps are covered. Moreover, children of such relationships would be at the same rank as the tribe in terms of genetic, physical and social class and the future generations would not become weaker” (Madadi 2007). This kind of marriage, regardless of some minor changes to the convention,

has remained established and respected by many families.

4 - Hambari Marriage: In Hambari marriage, if a person was working for another family from childhood or adolescence, the family accepted him as a partner (*Hambar*), so that he had a share in all the family's properties as other children. When the person suited the landlord's daughter, the landlord would accept without requesting for *Shirbaha*⁸ (a gift to the bride's mother for having nursed her). The reason is that the bride and groom accept each other as comrades and partners.

5 - Xinbas: Because of their beliefs and temperaments, Bakhtiari people did not tolerate tyranny and oppression. Therefore little conflicts could lead to revenge and big fights between tribes. In the meantime, if someone was killed in this battle, the victim's tribe tried to revenge back. In these situations, just the elder's mediation could prevent bloodshed and bring about peace. After negotiations between the two tribes leading to an agreement, the elders tried to create a relationship between them via marriage to prevent any further bloodshed. If the victim's family forgave the killer, the sister or daughter of a close relative of the killer had to marry the brother or another man of the victim's family; thereby further tensions and conflicts were prevented.

B) The Stages of Marriage in Bakhtiari Tribe

After courtship and engagement, the boy's family, in order to honor her family, goes through the marriage process according to social circumstances and their beliefs. The process include the following stages:

1 - Zun guhsun⁹: *Zun guhsun* or "saying yes" (accepting the start of marriage negotiations) includes giving some gifts to the girl's father by the groom's relatives. This means that her father has accepted to talk about his daughter's marriage to the groom. Such a gift is usually a mule or a gun or something like that, which is finally presented to the daughter after the wedding (*bavig*)¹⁰.

2 - Dasbesun¹¹: After the groom's family is allowed to talk to the girl's family about the marriage, they make an appointment with the bride's family. On the due day the groom along with his parents and a group of important per-

sons of his family go to the bride's house while playing *Karna and Dohol*¹². The groom has the responsibility to prepare some sheep and other catering equipments and send them to the bride's house in advance. On their way to the bride's house, the groom's family and companions ride horses, shoot and sing a happy song called *dolali*¹³. This is sometimes accompanied by *Kel* and *Galeh*¹⁴. After they get close to the house of the bride's father, they are welcomed by the bride's parents. After some complements the groom's father begins negotiating with the bride's about *Shirbaha* (*Hagh Shir*) and the Deed (portion)¹⁵. With the elders' mediation these material amounts are determined. *Shirbaha* usually includes sheep, mules, horses and cattle. In addition to cash, deeds (portion) can include land and gardens as well. The amount of deed is eventually determined based on the requirements of the time and usually is minimal. However, the amount of *Shirbaha* depends on whether the two families are close relatives or not. If both sides are of the same tribe, the agreed amount of cash or number of sheep or animals determined as *Shirbaha* is considerable. After the final agreement is reached, the people present at the session kiss the hand of the bride's father. That is why this ceremony has been called *Dasbesun* (kissing the hands).

3 - The Wedding Preparations: After the groom is prepared and the necessary negotiations and coordination are done with the bride's family, to arrange for holding a fairly large wedding, the groom or his brother go to the clans who are somehow affiliated with them to collect *Buruzi* (wedding gift)¹⁶ which includes sheep, goats etc.. These animals will be used for preparing the wedding dinner, which is sometimes much more than needed. This helps the groom and bride avoid financial burdens at the beginning of their family life. Thus it can be considered as one of the rare, good traditions remained in the tribe life and is part of their social and cultural activities.

After these preparations, family members and other relatives gather together on the wedding day. Men and women, riding and walking, playing *Saz* and *Dohol* instruments, go to the house of the bride's father, while the sheep and other gifts collected as *Buruzi* are carried by young people.

4-Wedding Ceremony: Bakhtiari people, do different types of traditional dances on the wed-

ding night whose form and performance has many unique aesthetic features. These types of dance include:

*Dasmal Buzi*¹⁷: In this type of dance, women, girls and men form a circle performing beautiful dance movements using their feet and two cloth napkins to a specific type of music and song. Men and women dance in the same group, because their participation in one dance group is allowed in the wedding ceremony and they can join hand in hand with other dancers to the music of *Saz* and *Dohol*. Women's dance in this way is very spectacular, because of their colorful clothing, ornaments and handkerchief. They take two handkerchiefs in their hands and move hands and feet back and forth in an imaginary circle, while audiences encircle them and cheer up those who dance better than others.

Slow Dance: In this dance, dancers take three steps forward and two steps back rhythmically. These movements are so set that the dancers do not get out of a circle. The rhythm of this kind of dance is slower than other dances in Bakhtiari tribe.

Quick Dance: In this type of dance, the movements of feet are like those of Slow dance, with the difference that the rhythm is stronger. Performers move handkerchiefs around their heads quickly and put them on their shoulders. The steps are taken forward quickly, but dancers do not take steps backward then.

Statue Dance: This dance is performed to the music of *Saz*. "When the music stops, dancers freeze at the state they are at that moment and do not move until the music restarts. Skilled dancers are those who stop and move at the correct moments" (Poureh 2002).

Horse Riding: On the way back to the groom's house, *Saz* and *Dohol* is played, women sing a specific kind of song called *Dovally* and men ride horses and shoot. At this time the groom riding a quick horse picks the bride's *Ray burqa* (scarf) and rides the horse away. The rest of the horse riders follow him to take over the handkerchief. When someone is able to take the handkerchief from the groom, the others will follow him and the circle continues to the groom's house.

Spear Game: Men gather in a field with their stout horses each carrying a spear. A number of even-sized wet boards are put in front of the men so that every rider be able to hit one of them with the spear and take it with himself.

The rider who can collect the highest number of boards is the winner. During the game spectators especially women cheer them up. Initially, before the race, riders perform individual movements to show their horse riding skills. During the game, a special piece of music for the Spear game is played by *Dohol* which adds to the beauty of the game.

*Choo Bazi or Tarke bazi*¹⁸: *Choo bazi*, which is performed by two men, is a symbol of bravery and shows that there are courageous men who are ready to protect the tribe's territory. It gives a sense of security to the tribe members and prevents the possible invasions to the tribe by external enemies.

For *Choo bazi*, two pieces of wooden sticks named *Tarke* and *Darak* are used. *Tarke* is a thin wooded stick cut from pomegranate, willow or mulberry branches which are put into water to make it more flexible. *Darak* is a hard, tall stick of oak wood used to defend against the attacker who uses *Tarke* to hit the defender's feet. The *Saz* player plays the instrument, and all young people form a circle and cheer the players up with chanting and clapping. Then, *Dohol* is played to accompany the *Saz* and the two volunteers begin the game. The attacker takes *Tarke* and the defender takes *Darak* in their hands. First, both took these sticks of wood over their heads and sometimes on their shoulders and dance in the circle. The feet's movement in this game is similar to that of *Dasmal Buzi*. The attacker begins with a "*Hoo*"¹⁹ sound to attack the defender and hit his ankle and the defender defends with a "*Beyo*"²⁰ sound. This is the climax of the dance. In any case whether the attacker is successful or not, they exchange *Tarke* and *Darak* and the role of attacker and defender are reversed. Other people can enter the game and replace the defender in order for the game to continue with new players.

5 - Arusbarun²¹: After the ceremony is finished and food is served, the groom gets ready to take the bride to his home. At this moment, the bride's brother fastens a piece of sugarplum wrapped in a piece of white cloth to the bride's waist. This is the symbol of sweetness of life²². Then the bride wears a white Chador and covers his head and face with a silk *Burqa*²³ (Scarf). She rides a mule with a little boy²⁴ sitting in her lap and moves to the groom's house. "On her way, the shepherds take their flock rams and stay in front of the bride's mule. The groom and

his relatives present them a gift in cash. When the distance is long, this may be repeated several times” (Ahmadi Orak Bakhtiari 1998).

6 - *Ger zanon*²⁵: When the bride arrives at the groom’s house she does not enter the house until she receives a gift from the groom or his father. This is called *Ger zanon*. After receiving the gift and entering the house, a sheep is slayed (sacrificed) for the bride. The sheep’s blood is then poured on bride’s shoes to increase blessings in their life.

7 - *Rogoshon*²⁶: After dinner and the reception, guests present some gifts to the bride according to their tradition and their financial ability. (In Bakhtiari tribe, this gift is called *yuzi*²⁷). In return, the bride presents a pair of socks and a handkerchief to men and socks and scarves to women.

8 - *Dom bord goni*²⁸: After *Zafaf* (the wedding night)²⁹ the bride’s family prepare a special food called *Dom bord goni* and take it to the groom’s house.

9 - *Pagushun*³⁰: A few days after the wedding, the bride and groom are invited to lunch or dinner by their relatives and are given some gifts according to the financial ability of the hosts. This is called *Pagushun*.

DISCUSSION

Marriage is the most important factor in durability of Bakhtiari tribe resulting in the emergence of institutions and social organizations. Factors such as livelihood, assistance, and protection against enemies are among important and effective factors created by biological and economic issues of marriage and family economy. Believing in the importance of marriage at a young age and paying attention to religious beliefs in this regard, Bakhtiari people marry via a legal process which accompanies religious and traditional rituals. Creation of better relationships and social conditions coupled with peace are among the functions of marriage. In this process, the Bakhtiari people try to better use their relatives’ forces to boost good living conditions and alongside extending family life, strengthen their friendship bonds. Furthermore, in case of inter-ethnic hostility or turbidity, marriage is used as a means of making peace and restoring law and order. In all circumstances, they try to retain their solidarity and cooperation and to prevent whatever event which

can create gaps in the society. As various institutions of a society strengthen each other, and result in stability and solidarity among community members, marriage, as a social and legal contract, ensures the continuity and survival of this unity and solidarity and makes the relationships between couples legitimate. Through marriage, Bakhtiari people help survival of the generation and create physical, biological and social relationships between the couples. The most important functions of family formation or marriage include creating group cooperation and unity between the various tribal pieces as well as protection against the hazards.

Folk dance and music is an inseparable part of Bakhtiari marriage ceremony so that no celebration is held without these kinds of music and dance. In Bakhtiari tribe, folk dance is a sign of solidarity, unity and affection. All dance hand in hand alongside each other. In case of individual dance, like *Choo bazi*, the purpose is to show one’s power alongside a music which reminds us of war. In Bakhtiari dance sessions, women sing poems and songs with their warm and haunting voice to complement the music. Men respond with pleasant and exciting poems and incite audience’s enthusiasm depending on the ceremony. Dance is a symbol of emotional independence, unity, and harmony for the tribe members. The tribe members’ group dance shows that all members are unified against any foreign attack and are determined and unanimous to preserve their cultural assets.” The presence of men and women in dancing together confirms the role of women in the tribe and the men’s respect for them. These symbolic dances show that men are aware of the role and value of women in social activities” (Mahmoudi Bakhtiari 2008).

CONCLUSION

Marriage is one of the most important ways to live well together and if it is done with the purpose of creating friendship and using criteria to improve social relations, it will be more durable, and supports participation and cooperation in the society. Investigating the current loose marriage ties that last less than previous marriages, we come to the conclusion that we should better understand intimate relations and their effects on communities to come to a rational model for marriage and better life. Marriages

arising from social thinking and friendship helps couple have a more durable life and have a positive impact on other sectors of society as well. Behind conventional marriage in the Bakhtiari tribe there are ideas with emotional, economic, social and religious support which increase synergistic functions of marriage in general and ultimately strengthen family and tribal ties. Traditional marriage rituals and ceremonies mentioned among Bakhtiari people suggest high status of this divine tradition among these people.

NOTES

1. Bakhtiari tribe is of the largest Iranian tribes who live on the edge of the Zagros Mountains of Iran.
2. The wedding ceremony.
3. This means that at the time of baby's birth and removal of the placenta, the girl is named to marry another baby boy in the future.
4. Give and take.
5. Meaning within the family.
6. A person who is one's partner in his properties.
7. To stop fighting, killing and bloodshed.
8. Money, sheep or cattle which is presented to the bride's parents by the groom to thank the bride's family.
9. A gift presented to the bride by the groom to encourage her to marry him.
10. The bride.
11. It means kissing hands (a sign of respect), which is the first attempt in suiting the girl from her family.
12. Musical instruments common in the Bakhtiari tribe which are used in weddings and funerals. Karna is like trumpet which is played by blowing. Dohol is an instrument which is made of skin stretched over a circular frame and is played by hitting with a stick.
13. Happy chants which are sung by women in chorus in the wedding ceremony.
14. A loud voice made while twisting the tongue in the mouth during the wedding ceremony.
15. The amount of money or property specified as a dowry for the bride.
16. A gift presented by the groom's family to the bride's tribe to hold the ceremony.
17. A dance during which handkerchiefs in different colors are shaken with hands.
18. A game played by two men with two sticks.
19. The sound which is meant to show that one is prepared for attack.
20. The sound which is meant to show one is prepared for defense.
21. The process of taking the bride to the groom's house.
22. Bakhtiari people believe that fastening sugar or sugarplum to the bride's waist brings about blessing and benediction in her life.
23. A scarf on the bride's head.
24. Bakhtiari people believe that in the wedding, if the bride put a baby boy on her lap, her first child will be a boy and vice versa.
25. It is a gift the bride receives from the groom or his father at the time of her arrival at the groom's house.
26. When a bride takes her headscarf away her face for the first time in front of the groom's house, she is given a gift.
27. Giving gifts to the bride and groom by guests.
28. A kind of potage or soup made by wheat for the bride and groom.
29. The first night at the bride and groom's house.
30. The party held by the families and relatives to receive the bride and groom for the first time.

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