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The Structure of Tribes and Problems of Nomadic Pastoralism in Iran

Introduction

Iran's nomads, a significant fraction of the population, have played a very important role in the development of the country. A glance of Iran's history shows that most of the dynasties of Iran have originated from tribal groupings. For example, the Safavid dynasty (1500–1735 AD) swept to power upon a wave of Turcoman tribes from the Azarbayjan region and consolidated its power only after internal tribal wars. Another tribal confederation from Khurasan supplanted the Safavids. The latter part of the 18th century saw constant wars between the tribal groupings until the Qajars, originally another northern tribe, gained ascendancy after 1773. Qajar primacy was undermined in 1906 when the large and powerful Bakhtyari tribe intervened during the constitutional crisis of 1905.¹

The importance of tribes manifests not only in the political development of the country, but also in the economic and social spheres, because these groups are the main suppliers of raw materials (wool) to the country's most important non-petroleum industry, the carpet industry, or meat to food industry.

Pastoral nomadism has its own spatial organizations and regional structures stemming from ecological conditions imposed on their production activities. The interactions and relations between nomadic regions, the areas of agreement and conflict between migratory tribes and settled villagers, are also very important in order to present tribalism in Iran, and its structure.²

The emergence of the political hierarchies within the tribes could not be predicted only by external stimulus, but also internal factors contributed to the emergence of hierarchical

¹ A.K.S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia; A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration*, London 1953.

² H. Golabian, *An Analysis of the Underdeveloped Rural and Nomadic Areas in Iran*, Stockholm 1977, p. 229.

political institutions, and the dynamic interaction between internal and external factors best explains political development in the steppe. The setting in which the interaction occurs introduces factors that mediate between the population and external powers. The context in which the trade route is opened, a commercial relation is developed, or a foreign power is involved may restructure the interaction between a population and external power, to the point that institutionalized political structures develop within the population.³

The following factors are relevant in the modern development of political hierarchies and confederacies among nomadic pastoralists: ecological setting, geographical and strategic location, resource base, economic production and exchange, socio-economic stratification, trade (regional, national, international), trade routes, capitalist penetration, foreign involvement, proximity of cities, competing groups and classes, warfare, ties with institutionalized religion, and minority (or ethnic) status. They can change in importance through time, and each is dynamically connected with others.⁴

The purpose of this paper is to present the importance of ecological settings, route of migration, and general outlook on the inner structure of the tribes in Iran, including very interesting theoretical discourse about the role of external stimulus in the development of nomadic pastoralism including the hypothesis of Gene Garthwaite, and counter arguments of Jean-Pierre Digard.

The Ecology of Pastoral Nomadism

Nomadic pastoralism in Iran in contrast to mixed pastoralism and farming, established itself by mastering the ecological problems of the steppe life in an economy involving particular species of animals, a spatially delimited pattern of movement and tent dwelling. Because of the ecological factors involved, nomadic pastoralism is a highly specialized way of life, and once given the domestication of animals, perhaps in the 5th millennium BC., took three to four millennia in the evolution of its characteristic form. The nomadic round is meant by mastery of steppe and desert ecology: seasonal depletion of resources and annual returns, allowing for a period of replenishment.⁵

Herding, too, involves a symbiosis. The livestock supply the food and fuel (dung) of the herdsman, his clothing (wool, felts, hides, and skins), his housing (tents of felt), means of transport, and his goods for trade. The herdsman, for his part, affords his herds protection against predatory beasts and men; he digs wells, builds windbreaks against winter blizzards, and supplies obstetric intervention for the herds, including every post-natal care in feeding. The herdsman and the herds are thus mutually dependent, and they live in symbiosis.⁶

³ L. Beck, *L. Iran and the Qashqai Tribal Confederacy*, in: R. Tapper (ed.), *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, New York & London 1983, p. 285.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁵ Golabian, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

⁶ *Ibid.*

However, both men and herds are dependent on the grass, which the herds consume without replenishment. The dung which might fertilize the grass is carefully collected as fuel by the herders, therefore the consumption of the grass in an area is reason enough for the nomadic round. Transhuman nomadism is both a valid form of survival, and fully rational and expedient form of land utilization in a critical environment where freedom of movement means survival.⁷

The Nomads of Iran in Overview

There are very few historical documents about the origins of Iran's different nomadic groups, but there is much historical evidence to prove the hypothesis that different nomadic groups gradually penetrated and migrated toward the Iranian plateau from the peripheral regions. Some of these tribes became gradually assimilated into the settled rural population, and were converted from pastoralists into agriculturalists, but others continued their pastoral nomadism and consolidated their geographical localities, continuing until the present time. The population of the country has always consisted of two component factions: nomadic and settled.⁸

The general features of nomadism throughout the steppes and deserts involved recognized group rights to pasturage and movement in a fixed seasonal round from winter camp to summer pasture and back to winter camp again. There are sometimes spring and fall pastures as well. Nomadism is not an indiscriminate wandering: pastures and routes from pasture are matters of rights which are defended. Although the steppe and desert are thinly populated, they are covered by nomadic occupants in their all parts.⁹

There are six nomadic groupings in Iran based on the criterion of language: Turcoman, Kurds, Turks, Arabs, Lurs, and Baluches, but such a definition of the nomadic population on a single criterion is quite abstract, or theoretical, and the structural groupings are much more complicated. There are essentially about 230 000 nomadic households, varying in structure, in Iran within 50 tribes and nomadic groupings divided into 420 clans.¹⁰ Ernest Gellner considers that the most significant trait of these groups is the simultaneous coexistence of diverse groups at different levels of size. This is a familiar, but non-the-less extremely important theme in the discussion of 'segmentary' societies: the tribe resembles the tribal 'confederation' of which is a part, but also resembles the 'clans' into which it is divided, and so forth. This concept of segmentation derives from the classical work of Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer and on the Bedouin of Cyrenaica, and his adaptation of Durkheim's concept of segmentarity, by his stress on the vertical

⁷ Ibid., pp. 231-233.

⁸ I. Afshar, *Ashayir ve Tavaif-i Sistan va Beluchistan*, Tehran 1380, p. 155.

⁹ Afshar, op. cit., p. 150.

¹⁰ Golabian, op. cit., p. 234.

similarity of nested groups, as well as the lateral resemblance of co-ordinate groups stressed by Durkheim.¹¹

Tribal social forms in Iran would appear to be remarkably resilient, capable of responding to external state intrusions in flexible way, while retaining continuity throughout economical and political transformations. This continuity of basic form within tribal organization itself is precisely one of the features of tribal society that requires explanation, and for this, a diachronic perspective is essential. Tribal structures exist not only in time, but through the passage of time, the differentiating effects of which, while everywhere inescapable, are at least partially annulled by the dynamic inherent in tribal organization, its lineage based structure.¹²

Recent hypotheses concerning political development among pastoral nomads focus on their interactions with states, state organized economies, and external stimuli. Irons suggests that: "Among pastoral nomadic societies, hierarchical political institutions are generated only by external political relations with state societies, and never develop purely as a result of the internal dynamic of such societies [...] in the absence of relatively intensive political interactions with sedentary society, pastoral nomads will be organized into small, autonomous groups, or segmentary lineage systems. Chiefly office with real authority will be generated only by interaction with sedentary, state-organized society."¹³

Beck states, that since all pastoral nomadic societies interact politically with sedentary state-organized societies, the 'internal dynamics' of the former cannot be seen apart from their contact with the latter, also a determination of the time when interaction between the two societies becomes intense is problematic.¹⁴

Tapper explains two ideal types of tribal leaders – 'brigands' and 'chiefs' – in terms of the relative weakness or strength of the central government,¹⁵ while Garthwaite suggests that 'the potential for tribal confederation is directly proportional to the strength of an external stimulus', a hypothesis generally and broadly applicable by some, and vigorously criticized by others like Jean-Pierre Digard, whose very successful counterarguments will be exposed in this paper.

The Organizational Structure of the Tribes in Iran

The nomadic population is organized in a hierarchic order, the smallest component unit of these socio-economic and political organisms is a tent, or a nomadic extended household. A combination of several tents or households constitutes one *mal*, or camp, several camps

¹¹ E. Gellener, E., *The Tribal Society and its Enemies*, in: R. Tapper (ed.), op. cit., p. 439.

¹² D. Brooks, D., *The Enemy Within: Limitations on Leadership in the Bakhtyari*, in: R. Tapper (ed.), op. cit., p. 344.

¹³ W. Irons, *Political Stratification among Pastoral Nomads*, in: PPS, pp. 362–372.

¹⁴ Beck, op. cit., p. 287.

¹⁵ N. Tapper, N., *Abd al-Rahman's North-West Frontier: The Pashtun Colonization of Afghan Turkistan*, in: idem (ed.), op. cit., p. 254.

make a *tire* or a sect, several sects constitute one *tayefe* or clan, and the combination of several *tayefe* constitutes one *eyel* – tribe.¹⁶ “Tribe”, “confederation”, and “state” are protean notions, encompassing a whole matrices of alliances and as analytical categories, resist agreed definitions. As heuristic models each may be conceived as a continuum.¹⁷

In the case of the Bakhtyari, tribal continuum begins with the family and ends with the *tayefe* – tribe, and the family’s ultimate extension – which defines the limit of primary economic, social, and political activity, organization and identity. The form of the *tayefe* has been more persistent than the confederation and less affected by external developments, for their function derives from basic pastoral and agricultural structures.¹⁸ The family provides the conceptual basis for the process of group information at all levels, endures ideological role, gives rise to most demands and conflicts, and forms the basis for the everyday activity. The nuclear family, which owns the flocks and works together in the agricultural cycle, constitutes the key economic unit, because the flocks and land is largely utilized for family consumption; similarly, marketing is a family concern.¹⁹

The Bakhtyari families come together as an *oulad* or *tash*, approximating a descent group, which functions as a camp – *mal*. The heads of family are decision makers, and the sect – *tire*, is represented by a *kadhuda*, and later headed by a *kalantar*, appointed from among the group by *khans*. Each *tayefe* belongs to one of eight *bab*; which has a dominant lineage from which *khans* are chosen, and *babs* are grouped into the two moieties *eyel* or *il*, and then led to confederation – also *il*.²⁰ The *khans* are usually selected from the chiefly families of *bab*, but there is a lot of rivalry amongst the *khans* who are half brothers and these particular antagonisms should not be surprising considering polygyny and the notion, contradicted in inheritance practice, of the equality of all sons.²¹ This is the direct connection with old theory of heavenly mandate – *qut*, which guaranteed to all the sons equal rights to the leadership in a tribe.²² According to David Brooks, Bakhtyari political organization carries the imprint of a long and particularly complex history of interaction with the state, during which they developed a hierarchy of centralized, institutionalized leadership under a paramount leader, the *ilkhani*.²³ Digard states, however, that in case of the political affiliations, in terms of descent, other institutions exist among the Bakhtyari that make use of and cut horizontally across the lineage segmentation, and should be interpreted not as a divisive factors, but as factors of the unity of the tribe,²⁴

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ G. Garthwaite, *Tribes, Confederation and State: A Historical Overview of the Bakhtyari in Iran*, in: R. Tapper (ed.), p. 316.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 316–317.

²¹ Ibid., 17, p. 317.

²² P.E. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, Wiesbaden 1992.

²³ Brooks, op. cit., p. 345.

²⁴ J.P. Digard, *On the Bakhtyari: Comments on ‘Tribes, Confederation, and the State’*, in: R. Tapper (ed.), op. cit., p. 334.

which sounds like a better explanation, and good contradiction to Garthwaite and Brooks.

Confederations also emerged through the process of amalgamation, when a leader forged successively larger and more effective units, relying on variety of leadership skills and symbols of manipulating the basic kin structure to achieve goals beyond those associated with smaller groups. Over a period of time corporate interests would be identified with the confederation, but would be weaker in comparison with the corporate interests of smaller units, as in the case of Qashqai tribe, a Turkic speaking minority which by itself is a stimulating factor, but internal and external opposition and rivalries caused most of the leaders to fail.²⁵

Garthwaite states in his theory, or rather hypothesis, that the nature of tribal socio-economic organization, like in this case of the Bakhtyari, militates against a *sui generis* formation of tribal confederation. In tribal areas not under the control of an organized state, or when no state structure exists, confederations form only in response to an external stimulus – typically, a need for common defense or an opportunity for expansion or conquest. The confederation's strength is proportional to the stimulus, and the confederation does not outlast the existence of the stimulus. In tribal areas under the control of an organized state – the imposed control of a bureaucracy and army with a supporting ideology – the state itself is the 'external' stimulus. Therefore the hypothesis is: the potential for tribal confederations is directly proportional to the strength of an external stimulus.²⁶

Jean-Pierre Digard criticized this hypothesis of Garthwaite that if zones of tribal population are under the control of a central state, it is this state that plays the role of external stimulus, and the tendency to confederation is inversely proportional to the degree of bureaucratic centralization. Digard believes that the degree of centralization can constitute a useful index for evaluating a number or the intensity of interactions between tribes and the state, but he strongly doubts the value of this notion for explaining the transformations that result from these interactions, as much for the tribes, as for the state.²⁷ Digard argues that if the Pahlavi bureaucracy worked unceasingly at destroying pastoral nomadism and the tribes, it was not because it was strongly centralized, but because the dominant system of production, whose instrument it was, was in contradiction with the traditional system of production of the nomadic tribes. The system of production was tied mainly to oil revenues and only secondarily to land revenues. Inversely, if the tendency for the great tribal concentrations endowed with strongly structured political apparatus was reinforced in the Qajar period, it was not because the state was weakly centralized, but because its politics evidently served the interests of the class from which it came itself, that is the tribal aristocracies.²⁸

²⁵ Garthwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

²⁷ Digard, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

Digard also maintains, that Garthwaite seems to be on quite the wrong track when he justifies putting the emphasis on this external stimulus by the fact that according to his hypothesis, Bakhtyari social organization is inherently constrained from forming a proper confederation, that is for Garthwaite, a tribal structure endowed with a more or less centralized and hierarchical apparatus. Digard showed several years ago, that this was not the case and this myth has to be abandoned, which has to be decidedly tenacious since *The Nuer*,²⁹ that segmentary systems are necessarily acephalous. How can it be maintained that a segmentary structure is inherently contradictory with a class structure, when these two forms of organization coexist and function simultaneously in all the nomadic tribes of Iran, and the Great Khans would always make use of the lineage structure of tribal society so as to make it serve the interest of the dominant class which they represented.³⁰ The similar case would apply to almost all nomadic confederations of the Iranian plateau.

The Basseri tribe, like the Bakhtyari, consists of *tire* sects, each *tire* is divided into units called *awlad* – descendants, and each *awlad* consists of several households, which are further organized in several groups called *ordu* – camp, or *mal*.³¹ This hierarchical organization pattern is a necessary condition for the survival of these tribes, as it prevents any anarchy in production and keeps the ecological balance of the nomadic areas. Anarchy in production and imbalance of ecological conditions are imminent dangers rising from the nomads' perpetual mobility over large regions. The allocation of pastures both in time and place among different nomadic groups must be strictly regulated, and this is done by institutionalization of certain internal and external relations, respected by all members of the nomadic groups. These relations are further strengthened by kinship and family relations. All members are quite conscious of the hierarchical organization of their tribe and their position in it. In discussion with a member of another tribe, a tribesman first of all belongs to his tribe; in discussion with a member of another sect of his own tribe, he first of all belongs to his sect, and so on. The last unit of all the above mentioned hierarchical organization that he belongs to is his family. This hierarchic order dominates every sphere of tribal life: economy, politics, and so forth.³²

On the other hand, the extension and sophistication of tribal organization is directly dependant on the ecological and natural conditions, within which nomadic groups live. Greater geographical extent of migration, greater eco-climatological changes, or harder ecological constraint, imposed upon them always lead to more sophisticated and more complicated organization of nomadic groups. For example, in Baluchistan, the nomadic groups are semi-settled; their migration takes place within rather small area, therefore, the highest level of organization among them is only *tayefe* – clan, or *tire* – sect. On the other hand, in the central regions of Iran, especially in the Zagros mountains, in order to master natural and climatic fluctuations and ecological constraints, the very highest

²⁹ E. Evans-Pritchard, E., *The Nuer*, Oxford 1940.

³⁰ Digard, op. cit., p. 332.

³¹ F. Barth, F., *The Land Use Pattern of Migratory Tribes of South Persia*, Oslo 1959.

³² Golabian, op. cit., pp. 236–238.

level of organization is necessary, and in this area, a federation of different tribes has been formed.³³ The highest level of organization and pasture exploitation may even give the small semi-autonomous social units on the lower levels of segmentation (*oulad, tash, tire*) the scope for manoeuvre that is indispensable for the spatial readjustments necessitated periodically by variations in the size of flocks, and in the state of the vegetation.³⁴

Eyel Rah – The Spatial Pattern of Migration

The economic foundation of nomads is their animal stock: the number of sheep, cows, goats per person, and the existence of animal stock is in turn dependent on the area and herbaceous intensity of the natural pastures at their disposal. Dependent on natural resources, the nomads and their animals have no choice but to follow them from highland pastures to lowland pastures and back every year. One might say, that to move in harmony with nature and as directed by ecological constraints means survival and wealth; while to stay means death and famine for nomads and their animals.³⁵

Pastoral nomadism is nothing else but the continual struggle for conformity of nomadic production, both in time and space, with perpetually changing natural resources. This struggle has been going on for years and each nomadic group is quite set in respective natural and geographical spaces. Every nomadic group knows very well the pattern of seasonal and ecological changes of its area, and has carefully adapted its migration pattern to it. This migration pattern which every nomadic group follows is called *eyel rah*. The understanding of the structure of nomadic regions depends on the recognition and understanding of the *eyel rah*; how it is developed, how it functions, and how it is regulated and administered.³⁶

In general every nomadic group has one area called *yeylaq*, where it stays during the summer months, and a winter area is called *qishlaq*. The *yeylaq* is usually a mountainous highland and the tribe stays there according to natural and ecological conditions 2 to 4 months. When snow begins to fall in the highlands they leave to their *qishlaq*, where they remain the whole winter. In *qishlaq* they come in contact with the settled rural population, and the length of stay is about 2 to 4 months, varying on the prevailing conditions in each area. The remaining 4 to 8 months of the year the nomadic groups are in movement, either on their way from *yeylaq* to *qishlaq*, or vice versa.³⁷

The spatial dispersion of the nomadic population continually changes. Since the vegetation density of pastures in *yeylaq* is usually higher than that of *qishlaq*, the nomadic population can live in larger groupings and closer to each other than they can do in

³³ Ibid., p. 240.

³⁴ Digard, op. cit., p. 333.

³⁵ Golabian, op. cit., p. 239.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 239.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 239.

qishlaq, but the pattern continually changes during migration. The speed of movement is another problem that nomadic groups have to solve. A tribe or a nomadic group travelling in its *eyel rah* – migration route, is thus subject to series of pressures.³⁸ Ahead of it are pastures of certain kinds slowly coming into maturity, behind then the pastures are being burned by sun and drought, or frozen by the advancing winter. Also pressing them from behind are other nomad tribes or groups, following in their wake, and on the side many times they are hedged in by tribes or groups travelling parallel to them, sometimes behind the mountain ridges, and they are kept from pressing on by other tribes and groups ahead of them, blocking their course. As we can see, all activities of nomadic groups must necessarily be carefully planned to avoid any anarchy.³⁹

Since the number of animals, natural conditions and many other factors change every year, planning is an annual affair for tribal leaders. The migration route and time schedule for each tribe, its clans, sects, and even family units, or tents, must be planned to avoid collision and disputes. Any over-concentration of animals at the pasture or a water source must be avoided, too many animals arriving simultaneously at a small spring may not be supplied with water in a short time, therefore many animals could die causing great inter-tribal or inter-clan disputes, often bloody ones. Poor planning of migration pattern can also cause famine, if the animal population is out of proportion to the grazing capacity of the pastures which they are passing through.⁴⁰

The pattern of spatial dispersion and concentration of nomadic groups during migration is very important. The length of *eyel rah* – migration route, for different tribes and even for different clans of each tribe varies significantly, depending on the topography and other natural characteristics of each one's area. The Shahsavan tribes in the northwest of the country, for example, have a very short *eyel rah*. Their *yeylaq* in the Sabalan mountains is about 100 kilometers from their *qishlaq* in the Mogan Plain.⁴¹ The Qashqai tribe, on the other hand, because of the great distance between their *yeylaq* and *qishlaq* is in the state of movement nearly all the time. Spatial pattern of daily migration is a function of pastures, water resources and other natural conditions available on the migration route, and not at all a spontaneous movement. When it is necessary to pass through a rather arid area with poor pastures, the length of migration time per day can be more than 8 hours. In normal cases, however, the capacity of herds to endure hunger and thirst does not allow a migration period of more than 2 to 4 hours per day. When they migrate, herds go first and family members follow with their belongings loaded onto horses and asses.⁴²

In practice, the only unit that under any circumstances keeps its internal integrity is the household or tent. The size of the next higher organizational unit, the *ordu* or camp,

³⁸ Afshar, op. cit., p. 184.

³⁹ A. Miriniya, *Pizuhishi dar Shinakht-i Ilha va Tayifahay-i 'Ashayiri Khurasan*, Tehran 1369, p. 147.

⁴⁰ Golabian, op. cit., p. 240.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 245.

⁴² Afshar, op. cit., p. 158.

varies frequently during the course of migration. Sometimes it consists of 2 to 3 tents – tribal households, and sometimes it consists of more than 20 tents. From the macro-ecological point of view, nomadic groups have developed a very complicated pattern of seasonal movement, both in time and place. This seasonal movement pattern enables them to exploit the available pastoral resources in an optimal way.⁴³

The Economics of The Tribal Sector and Sedentarization of Nomadic Tribes

The economics of the nomadic sector and neighbouring rural areas are complementary in many ways. The exchange of agricultural products for animal products is one of the most common activities in these areas. The main part of these activities takes place in large villages or towns which are spread over *yeylaq* and *qishlaq* or on the way between.⁴⁴ When I was in Iran in summer 1996 I observed the passing of the Sagvand tribe, one of the Lur tribes, through the Khorramabad town on their way from *yeylaq* to *qishlaq*, a movement that took several days. The part of the town through which the tribe was passing was full of merchants from all over the area. They sold their agricultural and industrial commodities and purchased nomadic products such as butter, wool, and hides. Khorramabad is only a very temporary barter and exchange station; there are towns and villages which are of a more permanent characters. Such towns and villages are usually situated in the *yeylaq* and *qishlaq* regions, where nomadic groups stay for longer periods. Therefore, the activity level in these centers is seasonal and fluctuates according to the presence or absence of nomadic groups, and so does the number of inhabitants. When nomads come to their peripheral regions, many merchants and artisans rush to them and establish their shops and workshops, leaving the town or village when nomads begin to leave the area.

One of the best examples of such villages would be Ghelard village near Isfahan, which is situated in the *yeylaq* – summer pasture land of the Bakhtyari tribe.⁴⁵ The main buildings of the village consist of many shops and *caravanserays* – inns. The original and permanent inhabitants are not more than 80 households. From the middle of spring, when parts of the Bakhtyari tribe begin to arrive from their *qishlaq* in the south, villagers begin to evacuate their houses and set up tents outside the village. They rent their houses to the merchants and artisans who come from the region's towns. From the end of the spring until the middle of autumn, when nomads begin to leave the area, Ghelard is converted into a very active commercial center. From the middle of autumn, villagers begin to come back to their houses to stay there until the next spring. Most of these merchants and pedlars are from Isfahan and Chahal-mahal, but some of them are attached

⁴³ Golabian, op. cit., p. 245.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 240.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 243.

to the nomadic group, and follow it from its *yeylaq* to its *qishlaq*, and establish their shops and workshops in the commercial towns and villages.⁴⁶

These centers have in fact dual characters, and Ghelard is a commercial center for 4 to 5 months a year, and normal agricultural village for the rest of the year. These commercial centers function as links between the urban economy and the nomadic economy, and the capital of many of the small merchants and pedlars stationed in Ghelard is provided by rich and powerful commission agents living in big cities like Isfahan. They provide the local shopmen and merchants with those commodities that nomads are to purchase. As payment of debts, they accept animal products such as wool, butter-oil, and cheese. The main function of these centers is the accumulation of surplus products of nomadic areas for later consumption in urban areas or possible export.⁴⁷

The relation between the urban market and the nomadic economy in the Tabriz region are also a perfect example of coexistence between the rural and nomadic economies. The groups migrating to the Shahand mountains near Tabriz in the North-west corner of Iran, are of semi-nomadic character. They usually live in the villages of the Miyane region; from the middle of spring, they begin to migrate to the Shahand mountains, staying there the whole summer and using pastures of these mountains.⁴⁸ When they arrive in the mountains, they organize themselves in groups of 3 to 5 households, locally called *obe*, each using the pastures of one valley or mountain slope. The dairy merchants of the city of Tabriz make contacts with these *obe* annually, and set up a big tent near each *obe*'s tents for protection of their dairy machines against rain. They buy the milk directly on the spot and with their dairy machines convert it into butter-oil or white cheese, and transport the product by draft animals to the city.

These examples are a spectacular cases explaining how the nomadic sector could improve and develop the local economy by mutual contribution. Unfortunately, the tribal sector has always been regarded as a problem by local authorities or governments. There have always been attempts to settle them and prevent their movement, and there has never been an economic, scientific, and responsible approach to this mode of life and production, in which 10 to 25 percent of the country's population is engaged. The nomadic structure can be linked to numerous circles, internally fluid constructions framed within the structure of rural and urban regional settlements. In spite of all obstructions, disputes, disturbances, and attempts to subordinate them, these nomadic structures persist; tribes still continue to migrate and the nomadic mode of production is still fruitful. This gives support to the idea that the nomadic sector is based on strong socio-economic and ecological foundations.⁴⁹

The migration patterns of nomads stem directly from the basis of their mode of production. There are two opposite poles between which the main production factors

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 243.

⁴⁷ Afshar, op. cit., p. 156.

⁴⁸ Golabian, op. cit., p. 242.

⁴⁹ A.M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, Cambridge 1984.

shift seasonally. In order to continue production, the nomads and their means of production have to swing between these two poles: *yeylaq* and *qishlaq*. The continual movement of tribal groups creates a special regional structure, that is why it is difficult to implement any kind of the conventional development projects such as schools, hospitals, and housing. The fluid structure of nomadic regions guarantees the exploitation of seasonal pastures, and any unplanned and unscientific settling of nomads can only mean demise of many herds and the parasitization of this important part of the country's economy. During history there have been many attempts to sedentarize nomadic groups, uprooting them from their traditional areas not for social and economic reasons, but for political and military ones. One of the latest attempts began in the middle of the 1920's and went on until the beginning of the Second World War, and the last one was conducted in 1980's by the Khomeyni's government also unsuccessfully, therefore, the problem of nomads remains unfortunately unresolved for the time being.