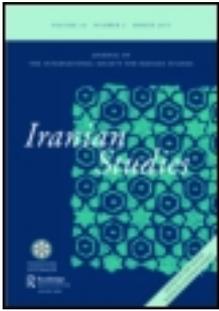


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Ahmad Reza Taheri

The Sociopolitical Culture of Iranian Baloch Elites

The paper consists of six parts. The first part discusses the major reasons for the presence of a conventional sociopolitical Baloch culture in Iran. The second part presents a profile of the Iranian Baloch elites, dividing them into four major groups: the Sunni clerics or molavis, tribal chiefs, the educated, and the wealthy. The third discusses the challenging relationship which exists among the Baloch elites. The fourth describes the elites' attitudes towards the Baloch society's norms. The fifth determines the elites' orientation towards state and politics. And finally the paper ends with conclusions.

Introduction

Balochestan is a vast region populated mainly by the Baloch,¹ who number 15 million, mostly dispersed in Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.² The land is situated in southwestern Afghanistan, southeastern Iran, and western Pakistan. In Iran, it is called the province of Sistan va Balochestan, the country's biggest province (an area of 181,785 km), comprising over 11 percent of Iran. Sistan is located in the north and Balochestan in the south. Balochestan itself is divided in two parts: Makoran in the south and Sarhad in the north.

From the perspective of public urban utilities, Chabahar, Iranshahr, Saravan, Khash, and Zahedan (the capital) are the relatively better developed cities of Iranian Balochestan. In infrastructure, Iranian Balochestan is far more developed than Pakistan's or Afghanistan's Balochestan. The differences are obvious in better public services, better sanitation policies, improved power and water supplies, and superior transportation networks. In spite of that, the province is falling behind the

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¹There are two different spellings of the word: "Baloch" and "Baluch." Both are used interchangeably in the literature.

²According to official estimations of Pakistan and Afghan governments, close to 7 million Baloch live in Pakistan, and around 600,000 live in Afghanistan. Besides, many Baloch live in the Gulf States, in some parts of Africa like Kenya and Tanzania, and several communities of Baloch also live in India, Europe, and North America.

rest of Iran. Government reports themselves testify to this fact.³ The area is the poorest of Iran's regions.

Balochestan is a *mullah*-dominated society,⁴ home to Baloch Sunni Muslims who make up around 3–4 million of Iran's population.⁵ The majority of the Baloch lack standard academic education; many are unemployed; some work in private or quasi-public corporations; and only a few enjoy senior positions in government. This has resulted mainly from unfair treatment in public employment or discrimination between the "Sunni Baloch" and the "non-Baloch Shia."⁶

The sociopolitical behavior of the Baloch, as will be dealt with in the coming sections, has peculiar characteristics and specific features. Before proceeding, however, it is advisable to briefly review the history of Iranian Baloch, a background that has largely shaped the contemporary sociopolitical culture of the Iranian Baloch elites.

Iranian Baloch Background: A Review

Historical records show that Balochestan, like many other neighboring lands such as Afghanistan, had attracted the attention of Western colonizers. Because of its strategic location, bordering India, this land had been entangled in political turmoil incited mainly by the British. For example, throughout the 1850s, Britain expanded its authority in Balochestan, which provoked many Baloch to revolt against the British forces.⁷ Accounts of battles with the British have a special place in Baloch folklore. The Baloch poets of the late nineteenth century, such as Rahm Ali Marri, glorified the leaders of the uprising and composed patriotic songs condemning the pro-British Baloch tribal chiefs.⁸

³All major government sources believe that Balochestan is the most undeveloped part of Iran. The following Persian references of the Sazman-e Modiriati va Barnameh-rizi (Management and Planning Organization) are only a few instances to be noted: *Barasi-ye Siasatha va Barnameha-ye Tosuse'eh-ye Sistan va Balochestan* (no. 78, 1988–97); *Barnameha-ye Bolandmodat-e Touse'eh-ye Sistan va Balochestan* (no. 64, 1997); *Bank-e-Etelaati-ye Sistan va Balochestan* (2004); *Arzyabi-ye Barnameh-ye Sevom-e Touse'eh-ye Sistan va Balochestan* (no. 120, 2004).

⁴The culture of the Baloch society is dominated by the teachings of Sunni clerics (*molavis* or *mullahs*). They favor a situation that would return the society to a former value system that long ago existed at the time of Prophet Mohammad. They reject claims to human equality and notions of sociopolitical progress in the contexts defined in modern or contemporary liberal philosophy.

⁵A recent study, *Iran and Its Nationalities: The Case of Baloch Nationalism* (Karachi, 2000) by Mohammad Hassan Hoseinbor, discusses that the Iranian Baloch population could be between 3 and 4 million.

⁶Unfair treatment in public employment or discrimination between "Sunni Baloch" and "non-Baloch Shia" is acknowledged even by many government officials. But some high ranking government authorities (names withheld for security reasons) whom I interviewed (August 2011, Ministry of Science & Technology, Tehran) believe that the issue of "Baloch's unfair treatment in public employment" has nothing to do with central government's policies, rather "the narrow minded local provincial authorities themselves are behind the discriminations."

⁷Charles Reynolds Williams, *The Defence of Kahun* (London, 1886), 77.

⁸Mir Mitta Khan Marri, "Rahm All Marri" (Quetta, 1978), 25–44.

Apart from the foreign involvement, domestic aggression was also common, especially before the Pahlavi era. The aggressive policies adopted by the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736) were followed by the Qajar dynasty (1794–1925). It seemed as if the Qajar looked upon Balochistan as an annexation which could merely provide some economic interest in the form of tax to the central government. As a result of both foreign and domestic impact, for a long time the status quo had been kept intact in Baloch society.

Balochistan was a traditional society governed by tribal chiefs who normally secured a system of hereditary rule.⁹ The power of tribal chiefs over the territory came to encompass the social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. Under the Pahlavi monarchy (1925–79) Iran was transformed into a centralized system in 1928. The new system restricted the influence and power of tribal chiefs over Baloch society, meaning that the “traditional federal” rule of Baloch tribal chiefs was replaced by the modern government of Reza Shah and Baloch tribal chiefs were allowed to act only as government representatives in Baloch society. Despite this restriction, tribal authority dominated Baloch society throughout the Pahlavi reign. Till the last decade of the Pahlavi monarchy, Baloch society lacked educational, social, and political institutions such as schools, parties, non-governmental and even many proper governmental organizations.

Subsequently, under the Islamic Republic, tribal authority faded away, but religious authority replaced it. The Islamization of the state caused ideological problems, highlighting the religious differences,¹⁰ leading to religious arguments and at times to religious disputes which have not been confined only to religious institutions but have also extended to educational institutions such as universities.¹¹ This state of affairs did not exist in pre-Revolution times. Mahmood Zand Moghadam, an Iranian expert in the affairs of Balochistan, has said that:

⁹To cite few instances, Chakar Khan Rind ruled Balochistan in the fifteenth century, Bahram Khan Barakzahi gained control of Balochistan in the twentieth century, and Doost Mohammad Khan Barakzahi succeeded his uncle Bahram Khan in 1920, proclaiming himself King of Balochistan. He was toppled by Reza Shah's forces in 1928.

¹⁰A few of the main differences are highlighted here. (1) The succession after Prophet Mohammad: the Shia believe that it had been his cousin and son-in-law Ali's right to succeed Mohammad directly and that the three caliphs preceding Ali had been usurpers, while the Sunni reject this idea. (2) *Ashura* (an annual mourning service that falls on the traditional date of Imam Hossain's martyrdom, the tenth day of the Islamic month of *moharram*, the most important of the many religious occasions for the Shia. Both the Sunni and the Shia condemn the massacre in Karbala, in which Imam Hossain was killed. However, the event is particularly mourned by the Shia on *Ashura*. In this ceremony, the Shia sometimes express their grief by cutting their own bodies with razors or whip themselves to emulate Hossain's bloody wounds. The Baloch Sunni do not mourn the way the Shia do. (3) The pro-*Imam* banners and billboards, displayed at public places such as educational institutions and shopping malls in Iran, including Balochistan, are unacceptable to the Sunni Baloch. The Sunni faith gives priority to Allah and then to Prophet Mohammad, rather than to *Imams*.

¹¹In Iran, discussing and promoting Shia Islam is a compulsory practice in the universities. This practice has caused arguments, quarrels, and, at times, exchange of insults between Shia and Sunni students or professors in Balochistan. It has remained a major problem, especially for the Sunni Baloch social science professors.

The religious sensitivity in Balochistan has been intensified further after the Islamic Revolution. For example, the Shia, after the Revolution, began to construct more and more modern-designed mosques. This led to a reaction on the side of *molavis*,¹² who wanted to build an equal number of mosques for the Baloch in Balochistan. These religious maneuvers were not common in the pre-Revolution era. Before the Revolution, Sunni mosques were simple and small and there was no difference between a Sunni mosque and a Shia mosque in that both Shia and Sunni used to say their prayers in each other's mosques without sensitivity.¹³

Today, Islamic symbols, slogans, views, and institutions are the prominent features of the society. The Shia have dominated the provincial government of Balochistan, whereas the Sunni have dominated Baloch society. This situation has resulted from religious rivalry. To counterbalance Shiism in Balochistan, the *molavis* have risen in size and scope to promote Sunnism. As a result, regardless of being Shia or Sunni, conventional Islamic principles to a great extent prevail in the affairs of Balochistan. So, in Baloch society, the culture is overshadowed by orthodox Islamic principles.¹⁴ In turn, these religious developments have had an impact on the political culture of the Iranian Baloch. The practice of modern politics, for example, in the true sense of the term, is naive and unsophisticated.

The aforementioned developments can be held responsible for the conventional sociopolitical culture of the Iranian Baloch. Before discussing the conventional role of the Iranian Baloch elites in society and politics, two issues must be dealt with: a profile of the Iranian Baloch elites and their challenging relationships with each other.

Baloch Elites: A Profile

In this context, the term "elite" refers to those Baloch who enjoy the following privileges: chieftaincy and religious (Sunni) leadership, local mass support and good social standing, high academic qualifications and senior government positions, and holding large amounts of property or other types of wealth. The bases of such privileges are tradition, religion, education, and wealth. Hence, according to this definition of the term, the Iranian Baloch elites can be divided into four classes. The tribal masters

¹²In Islamic literature the term *molavi* or *maulavi* has multiple usages. For example, it can refer to noted Muslim poets, jurists, theologians, and Sufis. However, in Balochistan the term commonly refers to any Baloch Sunni cleric, irrespective of his religious educational rank.

¹³Zand Moghadam Mahmood, "Balochistan of Iran," in *Iran: Hoviyaat, Meliyat, Qomiyat*, ed. Ahmadi Hamid (Tehran, 2004), 319.

¹⁴The majority of the traditional Baloch hold conventional attitudes towards the society. The following are just few examples which are clearly noticeable within the Baloch society of Iran: (1) lack of criticism—generally, Baloch do not tolerate any kind of criticism of the Sunni principles; (2) no religious conversion—converts can be threatened with death; (3) Compulsory prayers—the *molavis*, the ruling elite of Baloch society, emphasize the strict regard for *namaz*, the Muslim prayers five times a day; (4) strict *hijab*—in principle, the *molavis* prefer that women fully cover themselves with *burka*, as is the case with women under the rule of the Taliban or in Saudi Arabia; although such *fatwa* is resisted in today's Balochistan, some sections of the society abide by these norms.

and chiefs who constitute the chieftaincy; the *molavis* or *mullahs* who form the Sunni clergy group; politicians, state employees, managers, doctors, professors, teachers, and the intelligentsia who form the educated section; and the expensive property holders or the influential wealthy class. These four groups influence, lead, and direct the Baloch in Iran, each group in its own way.

Tribal chiefs. Before the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Baloch society was tribal. The Baloch tribal chiefs in Iran used to supervise their respective tribes. The tribes had unquestioning loyalty towards their chiefs. Under such a tribal system, the Baloch usually followed custom rather than state law; they respected their traditions and implemented them with zeal.¹⁵ Under the Pahlavi administration, for instance, family disputes, tribal disputes, crimes, and punishments would be settled by the tribal chiefs themselves without government intervention. The power of tribal chiefs was based on two major sources: government support and privileges that were established by tradition among the isolated and largely illiterate Baloch communities.

Due to the unavailability of modern communications, lack of technological advancement, absence of facilities, and inaccessibility, different central governments depended heavily on the tribal chiefs for the exercise of authority over Balochistan. However, this dependency on the state side was not voluntary. The regime of Reza Shah, for example, had no option but to rely on the tribal chiefs. Reza Shah, in fact, once tried to eliminate the role of tribal chiefs in Balochistan, but failed. He had planned to establish modern governmental institutions in Balochistan. The policy was to cut off the mediation and influence of chieftaincy and substitute modern institutions such as courts of law, army, and police.¹⁶

Realizing this threat, however, in order to win over the shah, influential tribal chiefs tried to show a better face to the regime, to prove their loyalty to the Shah of Iran. On the other hand, Balochistan's typical geographical situation along with its complex social set-up soon made the regime understand that the presence of government institutions would not be enough to tackle the security problems in Balochistan.¹⁷

Reza Shah, therefore, accepted the fact that without the support of tribal chiefs, governing Balochistan would be a tough mission. Thus, under compelling circumstances, Reza Shah tended to rely on tribal chiefs. The policy of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was the same. Among the Baloch elites (tribal chiefs, *molavis*, the educated group) of the time, the tribal chiefs had enjoyed the support of the regime in the Baloch society.

The reason for government support to Baloch tribal chiefs was the good social standing of the tribal chiefs, who could maintain the security of Balochistan. On

¹⁵Of course, the law of the state has never interfered with the local customs and traditions of the Baloch unless such traditions were to have political repercussions. This has been a characteristic of both the Pahlavi and the Islamic establishments.

¹⁶Ghasem Siasar, *Monasebat-e Sardaran, Olama va Tabsilkardegan-e Baloch ba Dolat-e Modern: 1285-1357*, (Zahedan, 2005), pp.16-19.

¹⁷Mohammad Reza Taheri, "Khaterat-e Ejetema'i va Siasi-ye Man" (unpublished ms, Zahedan, 2007).

the other hand, what was important for Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was to secure the area from the threats of Baloch nationalists and foreign influence. So, the link could serve the purpose for both (tribal chiefs and central government). Benefiting from the experience of his father, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had come to the conclusion that only the tribal chiefs could take care of Balochestan's security. For the same reason, loyal tribal chiefs were welcomed by the central government. In this respect, Amir Assadollah Alam, the minister of the court and a leading member of Mohammad Reza Shah's administration, maintained good connections with the chieftaincy. During that period, Baloch tribal chiefs used to represent Balochestan in parliament. Amir Assadollah Alam was behind this policy and had the final say on the appointment of such Baloch to parliament.¹⁸

In brief, the Pahlavi regime took the Baloch tribal chiefs seriously in mediating and solving the security and political matters of Balochestan. The most important incident, for example, was the case of Dadshah (1950s) who was brought down by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's government with full support from a few influential tribal chiefs. Due to some local disputes, Dadshah rose against local tribal chiefs. His name was spread nationwide, especially in March 1957 when Dadshah and his men killed three Americans—US aid official Kevin Carroll, his wife Anita Carroll, and Kevin Carroll's aide, Brewster Wilson—and their Iranian driver and interpreter. Dadshah escaped many Iranian attacks. The US government pressurized Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to arrest the notorious Baloch. Disappointed over the arrest of Dadshah, the government summoned several influential tribal chiefs, including Mohim Khan Mirlashari and Issa Khan Mobareki, to demand their cooperation. At last, on 3 April 1957, the Baloch chiefs set up a plan to deceive and trap Dadshah by calling him to a place already surrounded by combined government forces and Baloch men for a so-called sincere negotiation. Once he realized he had been trapped, Dadshah resisted, but was finally killed in a gun battle.¹⁹

The association between the government and tribal chiefs did not last beyond the Pahlavi monarchy. The role of the tribal chiefs began declining soon after the overthrow of Mohammad Reza Shah in 1979. In this regard, Ghasem Siasar, an Iranian author, writes that since tribal chiefs were in favor of the regime, the clerics rose against them. However, from 1963 to 1978, the clerics did not openly criticize the tribal chiefs. But at the time of the Revolution, in a firm and straightforward manner, they strongly opposed the tribal chiefs and labeled them as "faithful to the oppressors."²⁰ It was then that the tribal chiefs' base was threatened for the first time in the history of the land, and began to decline. The decline was, of course,

¹⁸Interview (by the author) with Gholam Mohammad Khanzai, an Iranian Baloch political expert, who represented Chabahar city in parliament in Tehran for few months during the last year of Pahlavi's rule in 1979 (Karachi, January 9, 2003).

¹⁹Many Baloch regard Dadshah as a hero, while others consider him a bandit. Dadshah's story has also entered the Persian and Balochi literatures; poems, articles, books, films, have been made in his name. The first work on Dadshah was published by Azim Shahbakhsh, *Maajera-ye Dadshah: Pazboheshi dar Tarikh-e Moaser-e Balochestan* (Shiraz, 1994).

²⁰Ghasem Siasar, no. 16, 76–8.

gradual. Today, the tribal chiefs are neither active in politics, nor enjoying popular support; they have been politically neutralized. This is particularly true with the tribal chiefs of Makoran region.²¹

The molavis. Ideologically, Balochestan of Iran is a Deobandian dominated society. Deoband is a city in India, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, best known for its Islamic seminary, the Dar ol-Olum. Ghulam Hossain Jahantigh, an Iranian expert in the affairs of the Sunni branch of Islam, writes that:

Some controversial issues such as determining land boundaries, product distribution, and inheritance rights were widespread in parts of Balochestan. Dahan village, a part of Bent, was one of these places. Those who used to administer such problems were known as *mullah* or *ghazi* who belonged to the senior section of the society. But they lacked sufficient knowledge to resolve such matters satisfactorily. This insufficiency perhaps resulted in a need for the right people to tackle problems appropriately. So, nearly eighty years ago, for the sake of religious education, several enthusiastic Baloch youth went to the Deoband *Dar ol-Olum* in India, a prominent Sunni Islamic school. This could best serve the purpose of these interested Baloch. They spent approximately fifteen to eighteen years gaining Sunni education. After graduation, they returned to Balochestan and presented the society with a religious movement. They brought with them the knowledge that was taught to them by the well-known Sunni *Hanafi* scholars of Deoband; they began to indoctrinate and promote the Shah Wali-o-llah Dehlavi's thoughts in Balochestan.²²

Since then religious education has been the most important part of life in Baloch society.

Hence, *molavis* gradually began to stabilize their hold on the society, although they never performed a direct role in politics. Nor did they enter politics under the Pahlavi regime. The regime of Mohammad Reza Shah made the *molavis* less motivated and confident in politics. But this was not the policy of the Islamic Republic. Rather, it was under the Islamic Republic that the *molavis* strengthened their position in society. Actually, the Islamicized atmosphere of Balochestan, particularly under the Islamic Republic of Iran, owes its progress to the efforts of the *molavis*. Ironically, the main reason for such a favorable situation for the *molavis* can be found in the nature of the Islamic Republic itself. There has been an ideological competition between the Shia and the Sunni in Balochestan. This rivalry has stimulated thousands

²¹The cities which are located in Makoran, the southern part of Iranian Balochestan, include Saravan, Iranshahar, Sarbaz, Nikshahr, and Chabahar. In the Sarhad region, several tribal chiefs are still organized, such as Rigi, Narooie, and Shahbakhsh chiefs. These tribal masters whenever required play a part in supporting the government agencies with local security.

²²Ghulam Hossain Jahantigh, *Barrasi-ye Mazahab va Makateb-e Ostan-e Sistan va Balochestan: Maktab-e Deoband* (Zahedan, 2000), 297–8.

of Baloch to stand behind the *molavis*, a reaction to the government's policy of promoting Shiism in the Sunni-populated Balochestan. Consequently, this has enhanced the *molavis*' popular bases in Balochestan.

In order to consolidate their positions, the *molavis* founded several major *madresas* (seminaries) and worked seriously on training missionaries to teach and propagate the Sunni guidelines in Balochestan. As a result, today, Baloch *talibs* (seminary students) usually do not go abroad to learn theology; they prefer to have their Sunni Islamic education at the local *madresas* in Balochestan itself. This was not the case in pre-Islamic Revolution era, because Sunni theological schools in Balochestan were a handful and lacked wide recognition. In pre-Islamic Revolution Iran, the *molavis* were, to some extent, under the influence of tribal chiefs. This was due to economic and traditional dependency on the chieftainship.

Under the Islamic Republic, from the very beginning, the *molavis* struggled to take the lead. And finally they succeeded. This success is striking. For example, at the beginning of the Revolution, the Muslim Unity Party led by a few influential *molavis* emerged as the only acceptable institution to articulate the demands of the Baloch in the capital. Furthermore, in the first decade of the Islamic Republic (1979–89) the *molavis* represented Balochestan in parliament. Currently, influential *molavis* are behind the electoral politics of the Baloch. This is obvious in city-council, parliamentary, and presidential elections.²³

Yet there are divisions within the ranks of the *molavis*. In this respect, Pir Mohammad Mollazahi, a Baloch political expert, has classified the *molavis* into three major groups: the independents, the opposition, and the partisan. The independent group is in the majority. Although this group does not agree with the ruling Shia ideology, it is passive. In cases of revolt or revolution, this group may seize an opportunity to unleash its anger against the Islamic Republic. The opposition group stays outside Iran; those who are inside the country usually do not disclose their hostile feelings. It cannot be assessed clearly to what extent they enjoy Baloch popular support, but evidence shows that the majority of the Baloch privately support this group. With reference to the partisan group, a few *molavis* openly support the Islamic Republic.²⁴

Of course, such support may not be sincere, but based on personal interests. The few *molavis* who are working closely with the Islamic Republic enjoy senior formal positions, meaning that they work for the government but do not have effective influence on the relationship between the Baloch and the central government, in order to be able to benefit the Baloch. Since these government-appointed *molavis* belong to the Sunni sect, they never discuss their religious differences with the ruling clerics. On the

²³In the parliamentary elections, whoever enjoys support from the influential *molavis* may win the elections. Examples can be given of Baloch parliamentarians elected in 2004, 2008, and 2012 who enjoyed full support of the *molavis*. In the presidential elections of 1997, Khatami enjoyed full support from the Baloch. The *molavis* had asked the Baloch to cast their votes for Khatami because of his reformist views. In 2005, presidential candidate Mostafa Moein who did not win the elections had total support from the Baloch. The votes collected for him from Balochestan were remarkable.

²⁴Interview (by the author) with Pir Mohammad Mollazai, an Iranian Baloch political expert at Iran's state television (Tehran, April 9, 2010).

other hand, since the Revolution of 1979, Balochistan has been witnessing an ideological war between Shia and Sunni. As a result, these *molavis* do not totally agree with the Islamic Republic. The central government too is fully aware of this situation, but it has to maintain an appearance, because for the government these state-sponsored *molavis* are taken as Baloch representatives. However, these *molavis* do not enjoy Baloch popular support because the Baloch public believes that they are supported by a government which discriminates against the Baloch. Nonetheless, these three groups share one feature: religious differences with the Shia clerics. At the top of the *molavis* class, the most influential factions are those affiliated with the Makki institution in Zahedan; they have been regarded as the leading elite of Baloch society.²⁵

The educated. The term “educated Baloch” refers to those having a university education, such as professors or academicians, teachers, politicians, state employees, and the intelligentsia. They began to develop in the 1970s, during the last decade of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s rule, and can be regarded as a flourishing force. Indeed, this new group was devoid of any remarkable status, both socially and politically. Unlike the tribal chiefs who enjoyed social status and were relied upon by central governments or the *molavis* who have been enjoying popular support, the educated Baloch have been deprived of such advantages.

As pointed out earlier, tradition and religion play a vital role in the daily life of Baloch society. Lack of educational institutions over the decades has been very clear and destructive to the society, especially in the pre-Islamic Revolution period. As a result, in comparison with other educated Iranians, the educated Baloch appeared very late. The intelligentsia or academicians, few in numbers, had been mainly engaged in academic activities rather than dealing with the society’s real problems. Therefore, time and conditions did not favor them. Hence, they failed to play a prominent role in society and politics.

In one way or another, it can be claimed that the educated Baloch are the product of the Islamic Republic. Prior to the Islamic Revolution, the number of Baloch professors was limited to approximately ten individuals. Compared with other ethnic groups such as the Iranian Kurds, the number of Baloch professors is still insignificant. But, so far as the entire group of the educated Baloch is concerned, in comparison with Balochistan of pre-1979, their number has increased remarkably. In 2011, the overall number of the educated Iranian Baloch, including professors, teachers, state

²⁵The Islamic Republic of Iran officially does not regard the leadership of the Makki institution as representing Baloch society. By contrast, the institution’s leadership does enjoy tremendous Baloch mass support. This support increased further in the immediate aftermath of the Revolutionary Guard attack on the Makki mosque in Zahedan in the second decade of the Islamic Republic. Since then *molavi* Abdol Hamid Ismaelzahi has turned into a hero for the overwhelming majority of Baloch. The Makki establishment has been expanding its activities: it helps the poor *talibs* and students financially; provides almost free accommodation to over 1,000 *talibs*; organizes annual seminars inviting thousands of students and scholars; and systematically broadcasts its activities and news on the Internet and in print in several languages—English, Persian, Arabic, and Urdu.

employees, managers, politicians, and postgraduate fellows, was estimated to be between 10,000 and 12,000.²⁶

Today, many educated Baloch such as state employees and politicians have good contacts with government agencies. But such relationships do not represent the demands of the common Baloch in the central government; rather they are mainly restricted to the settlement of personal or family affairs. As a group, the educated class is disorganized and under the influence of the *molavis*. This is mainly because the foundation of the educated class has not been established firmly. The families of the overwhelming majority of the educated Baloch lack secular education. They are mentally attached to the *molavis*. This attachment, in general, has affected the mindset of the educated Baloch too.

The wealthy. This group too has a recent history, more recent than the educated class. The majority of the rich Baloch lack standard education. The rich have been very helpful in supporting local religious activities. For example, they financially contribute to construction, reconstruction, and development of Sunni mosques and *madresas*. At the time of this writing, there are more than 4,000 Sunni mosques in Balochistan,²⁷ all funded by wealthy Baloch. Most notable among the religious institutions that have benefited financially from the wealthy Baloch, is the Makki foundation, known to be the most important Sunni establishment in Iran. In size and scope, no Shia mosque in Balochistan surpasses the Makki mosque. Many officials hold that the Makki institution receives financial assistance from other countries such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. However, this claim has not been substantiated. There is also a belief that most of the wealthy Baloch who contribute to the society's religious affairs are involved in illegal business. This view too has not been authenticated.

Thus, far more than the educated group, the wealthy class follows the *molavis*. The rich Baloch consider the *molavis* as the spiritual leaders of Baloch society. This is due to the fact that the family background of this group too is strictly religious. Because of their economic status, many of them have also good links with the government. For the wealthy class, this kind of association, however, promises a continuation of business.

Power and Society: Baloch Elites' Rivalry

The Baloch of earlier times depended on chieftaincy and were indifferent towards the central government's policies. What was important for the tribal chiefs was to maintain their links with Iran's central government. On the other hand, the central govern-

²⁶The Baloch Student Union at the University of Sistan va Balochistan which operates informally arranges annual Baloch graduation parties for the Baloch students. The Union updates itself about the number of the educated Iranian Baloch. In this regard, interviews were conducted by the author with union members and members of the faculty or academicians at different universities in Balochistan (Zahedan, January and February 2011).

²⁷"Fa'alayat-ha-ye Mazhabi," *Ruznameh-ye Zahedan* (no. 1948, February 2011), 2.

ment's priority was to preserve the security of the region, which was guaranteed by the Baloch tribal chiefs. Thus, the tribal chiefs had dominated Baloch society. Government support and local traditions were the major sources of power for the tribal chiefs. But the basic needs of the common Baloch were not taken care of by the governments, or by the tribal chiefs.

However, these contacts between the tribal chiefs and the central government had not always been in the interests of the tribal chiefs. Sporadic confrontations had arisen between the tribal chiefs and different central governments of Iran, at times assuming the scale of armed conflicts, such as the Baloch–Qajar wars in 1873, 1889, 1891, and 1896,²⁸ mainly because central authorities used to decide on issues unilaterally. Similar circumstances, more or less, extended into much of the Pahlavi era (1925–70). Nevertheless, Baloch tribal chiefs were leading the society. To survive under the central authority and to strengthen themselves in society were the main goals of the chieftaincy.

Although the *molavis* emerged much earlier than the educated group, politically they had not been welcomed by the Pahlavi regime. Nonetheless, the influence of the *molavis* could not be denied. To be precise, although Baloch society was represented by tribal chiefs, the *molavis* were spiritually influential as well. In other words, the tribal chiefs were in contact with government officials on local public issues, but the *molavis*' mission was to religiously educate the Baloch.

The educated Baloch entered politics in the 1970s and gradually became oriented to the central authority rather than the tribal authority. Thus, they challenged the authority of the tribal chiefs in Balochistan, creating a rivalry for power between the tribal chiefs and the small educated group, though the educated Baloch could never undermine the role of the tribal chiefs in Baloch society under the Pahlavi monarchy. This rivalry, however, continued during the 1979 Revolution, which was a blow to the Baloch tribal chiefs, ultimately giving the upper hand to the educated Baloch. In principle, the Islamic Republic was not happy with the role of the tribal chiefs in Baloch society. To the ruling clerics, the tribal chiefs had been associated with the regime of the shah and could not be trusted.

Yet the inexperienced educated group had to compete with another new rival, the *molavis*, whom the educated class could never overtake. Although under the Islamic Republic the tribal chiefs gradually lost their base, this did not happen to the *molavis*. Under the new system, religious authority gained momentum and replaced tribal authority. But, like tribal chiefs, the *molavis* too failed to reform the society, culturally or socially. What they brought in was nothing but the expansion of an orthodox Sunni ideology which till today dominates the society.

The *molavis*' power base has been Baloch popular support, which has resulted from the nature of the ideological regime. Circumstances such as the lack of a strong base for the educated class and a lack of harmony among them pushed the educated Baloch to the margins of society. The wealthy Baloch, on the other hand, had always been

²⁸About the Baloch–Qajar wars in 1873, 1888, 1889, 1891, and 1896, see Percy M. Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia or Eight Years in Iran* (London, 1902); M.H. Hoseinbor, *Iran and Its Nationalities: The Case of Baloch Nationalism* (Karachi, 2000).

attached to the *molavis* group, contributing more to the religious cause than to the educational cause of the Baloch. In this case, one can hardly find any schools funded by the rich Baloch, whereas there are plenty of examples of rich Baloch's financial contributions to mosques and *madresas* in Balochistan.

Strictly speaking, no Baloch elite can presently challenge the position of the *molavis* in society. Although a few recent incidents, allegedly supported by secret government agencies, attempted to reduce the influence of *molavis* in Baloch society, none of them have been effective. In this respect, it has been opined by unofficial local sources that some agencies affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards Corps or the Ministry of Intelligence have been applying the theory of "divide and rule," revitalizing the tribal chiefs to maintain the security of Balochistan and contain the influence of the Makki leadership over the Baloch. Allegedly, several tribal chiefs of both Sarhad and Makoran regions are being employed for this purpose by the Edareh-ye Ettela'at (Provincial Intelligence Bureau).²⁹

Such a maneuver, however, is unlikely to succeed, for two reasons. First, Baloch society is no longer the same old tribal society. The presence of religious and educational institutions, exchange of modern cultures through the migration of other Iranians into the Baloch society, and the effects of global communication such as satellite broadcasting and the Internet, have nearly pushed tribalism to its end. Second, most of the earlier tribal chiefs have either passed away or become socially dysfunctional. The new generation of the tribal chiefs is joining the educated class. Besides, this generation does not have any popular support. Thus, the atmosphere guarantees no rivalry against the *molavis* in the Baloch society. Several interrelated developments could be responsible for the *molavis*' favorable situation.

First, as noted earlier, ideological rivalry after the 1979 Revolution between Baloch (Sunni) and non-Baloch (Shia) provided an opportunity for the *molavis* to take the lead on the part of the Baloch.

Second, the government's policy of promoting Shiism in Sunni-populated Balochistan has pushed the Baloch public more than ever towards the *molavis*.

Third, the only forum which allows the Baloch to meet en masse are the mosques, where no elite except for the *molavis* can address them. This belief is derived from the fact that mosques are places of worship and not for politics or nonreligious affairs. These holy places, the *molavis* maintain, must be preserved and supervised by them because they are qualified to represent Islam through such institutions. As a matter of fact, under the administration of President Khatami, the issue was discussed

²⁹Interview (by the author) with a leading member (identity withheld for security reasons) of Gamshadzahi tribe in Saravan (June 2007). However, this view was first disclosed openly by Jundollah's head Abdol Malek Rigi in 2009 immediately after the deadly suicide attack on an official gathering (October 18, 2009) of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGCs) and some Baloch tribal chiefs at Pishin of Balochistan where close to forty-five people, including several notable IRGC figures and tribal chiefs, were killed. According to Jundollah, the "IRGC has been planning to divide the Baloch and rule over them by undermining the influence of the leading *molavis* in Balochistan by supporting and empowering some tribal chiefs. The meeting at Pishin was a major step which was nullified by our attack." (jonbeshmardom.blogspot.com/jondollah.blogspot.com).

between several Baloch professors and leading *molavis*. It was under the relatively open environment of Khatami's presidency that the elites found a chance to confront each other by freely discussing sociopolitical issues. In this respect, a number of meetings were held at the residences of several notable Baloch figures. A few professors had asked the *molavis* to let them occasionally use the Makki mosque in Zahedan to address thousands of Baloch who regularly visit the mosque for prayer. The attempt on the side of intelligentsia was to discuss and share with the Baloch public the major social and cultural issues of Balochistan. However, the proposal was strongly rejected by the *molavis*.³⁰ The intelligentsia's plan could have gradually made the Baloch public understand sociopolitical issues in a modern way.

Fourth, the *molavis* have also succeeded in convincing the Baloch that the mosques and *madresas* are the only forums for them to articulate and express themselves. In this case, the idea of effective parties (centralized political parties) and civil institutions, promoted by President Khatami, turned out to be controversial. The intelligentsia, including a number of academicians and professors, were actually attracted by Khatami's discourse. For them the establishment of civil institutions such as NGOs, which was part of Khatami's plan, could benefit the Baloch. They looked upon such institutions as "ladders of progress." However, the *molavis* could hardly tolerate the idea of independent modern institutions in Baloch society. Hence, the question was posed several times under the administrations of both Khatami and Ahmadinejad. For example, in a session held in Zahedan in 2008, Abdol Hamid Ismaelzahi, the religious leader of the Sunni Baloch in Iran, asserted that:

Social and political associations are good, but in Iran such associations have failed. They have failed to work on peace and justice. Although in Iran we talk of freedom, we do not enjoy full freedom. Therefore, for the Baloch, the best option would be to meet and discuss with each other under the aegis of religious institutions.³¹

This statement, in fact, conveys the message of the *molavis'* dislike of modern institutions in Balochistan.

However, the administration of President Khatami failed to bring about the promised reforms. Had Khatami succeeded in his policy, the *molavis'* popular base would have been challenged. Although the promised reforms of President Khatami such as social and political liberties could have allowed the *molavis* to expand their religious

³⁰In one of these meetings (the author was also present) held in March 2002, Mohammad Reza Taheri, a Baloch professor, representing a group of the educated Baloch, discussed the question with the representatives (Ahmad Narooie and M. Ghasemi) of Abdol Hamid Ismaelzahi, the religious leader of Baloch in Balochistan of Iran. The meeting, attended by a group of Baloch, including postgraduate students, *molavis*, and academicians, was held at the home of a former Baloch professor at Sistan va Balochistan University, Azim Shirani, at the Teachers' Residence, Zahedan.

³¹In 2008, *molavi* Abdol Hamid Ismaelzahi addressed a large group of Iranian Sunnis including teachers, academicians, and religious and university students, at the Fourth Annual Seminar of the Iranian Sunni Students "Chaharomin Hamayesh-e Salaneh-ye Daneshjuyan-e Ahl-e Sunat-e Iran" (Zahedan: Makki mosque, May 13, 2008).

activities further, the same reforms could also have empowered the educated class to reach the Baloch public. In turn, such development, in the course of time, could have undermined the standing of the *molavis* in Balochistan, which was why these modern approaches were never welcomed by the *molavis*.

Society's Norms, Elites' Attitude

In present-day Balochistan, it is mainly the intelligentsia who look at the status quo critically. They do not appreciate the historical role of the traditional elites. The intelligentsia believe that throughout the history of Balochistan two groups (the tribal chiefs and the *molavis*) have always exploited the common Baloch. A few records imply that in order to consolidate their positions, both often used to justify each other's role. In this regard, two developments can be noted.

First, under the Pahlavi monarchy, the tribal chiefs maintained good ties with the regime of Mohammad Reza Shah through intermediaries such as Amir Assadollah Alam. This association was taken for granted by the Baloch, thus no one could challenge the link; challenging the tribal chiefs would have meant challenging the credibility of the shah's regime. In this respect, the earlier *mullahs* often would clarify and justify this connection to the common Baloch.³²

Second, the *mullahs* would consider themselves entitled to preach religious and moral guidelines to the Baloch. Taking the religiosity of the Baloch into account, the tribal chiefs regarded the *mullahs* as the right people for that purpose. In this context, Atta Mohammad Taheri, the first Head of the City Council of Saravan under the rule of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, has commented that:

Long before the Revolution, in the 1960s for instance, the tribal chiefs were the ones in contact with Iran's central government. In a way, they were considered representatives of government in the Baloch society. Thus, the Baloch, including the *mullahs*, were required to be obedient to the tribal chiefs in political affairs. On the other hand, since the *mullahs* were involved in religious affairs, they were treated with respect by the Baloch. In turn, the trend demanded tribal chiefs to respect the *mullahs* and obey them in religious affairs. For example, at the time of *namaz* (prayers) it was up to the *molavis*, not the tribal chiefs, to lead the prayers.³³

Put differently, the above scenario had somehow guaranteed "checks and balances" on the role of tribal chiefs and *molavis* over Baloch society, bringing to mind "Gelasius's two-sword theory."

However, the critics (intelligentsia) have failed to propose alternatives or prescriptions to reform the society's conventional norms and values. In order to understand these values, the Baloch's main societal norms and practices are now discussed.

³²Interview (by the author) with Mohammad Reza Taheri, an Iranian Baloch Professor at Sistan va Balochistan University (Zahedan, June 8, 2007).

³³ Atta Mohammad Taheri, "Khaterat-e Roozaneh-ye Man" (unpublished ms, Saravan, 1993).

Marriage. Marriage, throughout the history of the land, has been mainly specified by tradition. But the influence of tradition has decreased from generation to generation. Before the Pahlavi reign and during much of the Pahlavi monarchy, both parents and the senior tribal members had a major role in choosing marriage partners for their youth. Marriage had been regarded as an alliance between two tribes, rather than between two families, or between two individuals.

The most extreme form of tribal or family influence was arranged marriage in which the groom and particularly the bride had no voice in the decision and would meet for the first time on their wedding day. This was because any meeting before marriage was considered immoral under the Balochi tradition.

In most marriages of earlier times, female children usually between nine and twelve years of age used to get married without having any choice in the matter. In other forms of arranged marriage, families used matchmaking. There have also been many examples of preferential marriage, a system in which bride or groom is supposed to marry a particular kind of person such as a cousin.

Before the spiritual influence of the *molavis*, in the 1950s and 1960s, marriage celebrations were followed by traditional dancing and music. With the growing influence of the *molavis* over the society, particularly in the last decade of the Pahlavi regime and under the Islamic Republic, traditional dancing and music in marriage celebrations have been criticized by the *molavis*. They believe that singing and dancing are forbidden in Islam and therefore not to be allowed.

Since marriage is regarded as a local matter, state law has had no control over the practice. Consequently, most marriages have not been officially registered, implying no official protection for the female Baloch. A 2008 report shows that more than 40 percent of the newly born children of Balochestan belong to unregistered marriages.³⁴

Even today, significant sections of the Baloch still prefer the *molavis*' intervention in marital issues such as disputes and divorce. In spite of that, modern Baloch families are leaning more towards legal agencies such as courts of law to deal with their marital problems. Unlike the past, however, many Baloch, especially the youth, are in contact with the non-Baloch. Since 2000, they have begun to access the worldwide networks of communication. They are adopting progressive attitudes which gradually undermine the parochial Baloch culture. As a result, marriages are becoming unconventional, marrying non-Baloch is becoming common, and despite the *fatwa* of the *molavis*, wedding celebrations are followed not only by traditional dancing and music, but also by modern dancing and music. Examples can be given of almost every tribe, from both Sarhad and Makoran regions.

Polygamy. This practice has its roots in religion. In Islam, polygamy is allowed for men with the specific limitation that they can only have up to four wives at any one time. In this regard, Quran in *Sura Nisa* (Women) says that:

³⁴Eissa Poor Yazdan, "Barresi-ye Padideh-ye Chand Hamsari va Sabt Nashodan-e Ezdevaj-ha-ye Zojeyn dar Ostan-e Sistan va Balochestan," *Nashr-e Aftab* (Zahedan, no. 71, August 2, 2008): 5.

And if you be apprehensive that you will not be able to do justice to the orphans, you may marry two or three or four women whom you choose. But, if you apprehend that you might not be able to do justice to them, then marry only one wife, or marry those who have fallen in your possession.³⁵

Women, on the other hand, are allowed to have only one husband, though they are allowed to remarry after divorce. The verse is ambiguous, allowing contradictory interpretations. Yet the content is a concrete source of inspiration for the practice of polygamy, which has been common in Balochistan, particularly among the moneyed, religious people.

Apart from the Islamic factor, other minor factors which encourage polygamy in Balochistan are known to be maintenance of larger families and sexual desire. Although polygamy is still retained, certain elements challenge it. Many educated Baloch of today, particularly the youth, strongly criticize polygamy. This can be sensed at the various informal meetings arranged among the educated Baloch, or from the modern liberal views and analysis being presented on the Internet.³⁶

Zeal. Despite considering themselves Iranian, the Baloch also identify themselves as Baloch. This is taken by most outside observers as implying a belief in a sense of racial uniqueness. Lord Curzon, for instance, has stated that the Baloch “are apt to round off every period with the swaggering assertion that I’m a Baloch.”³⁷ According to Mohammad Hassan Hoseinbor, an Iranian Baloch writer:

Many European and non-European travelers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Pottinger and Hughes, have taken note of this popular national sentiment. It is, however, more an emphasis of the Baloch distinct ethnic identity than a belief in a sense of racial uniqueness.³⁸

The Baloch are deeply committed to maintaining honor and generous hospitality to guests, and giving protection to those who seek it from them. These are among the most visible characteristics of the Baloch. In this respect, many British colonial officials, authors, as well as Iranians who have traveled and visited Balochistan have testified in their records to Baloch hospitality and generosity. Their food and costume are simple and so are their demands. “Obedience,” “hospitality,” “tenacity,” “bravery,” and “endurance” are their supreme virtues.³⁹

For the Baloch, conduct that invokes the death penalty or banishment is “adultery” and “treason.” In some cases, mere suspicion of a female can be sufficient for her to be

³⁵Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, *The Meaning of the Qur’an* (Lahor, 1972), 1:305.

³⁶From 2000 on, Iranian Baloch youth began their activities on the Internet. Today, Baloch hold close to 700 blogs/sites, publishing online notes and articles related to sociopolitical affairs.

³⁷G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (London, 1966), 2: 259.

³⁸Mohammad Hassan Hoseinbor, *Iran and Its Nationalities: The Case of Baloch Nationalism* (Karachi, 2000), 68.

³⁹Mohammad Sardar Khan Baloch, *History of the Baloch Race and Balochistan* (Karachi, 1958), 169.

put to death. A female can be targeted by male individuals within her own family for a variety of reasons such as friendship with “forbidden” men or as a result of any non-Islamic behavior. The culture of “honor killing” is still alive in Baloch society. Many cases of “honor killing” have been reported in Balochistan. Although a number of such incidents have been disclosed by the state media, many other events have been carefully concealed by the Baloch. The stories would not be revealed because the common mentality would see them as disgraceful and shameful. Similarly, an act of “betrayal” or “disloyalty” cannot be tolerated by the Baloch.

Faith. Equally important for the Baloch is the Islamic faith and culture to which they adhere. The overwhelming majority of the Baloch belong to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. There are also some Karamatis, Zikris, and Shia, but their number is insignificant.

The majority of the Baloch think highly of their *molavis* who propagate Islam and its teachings in the society. The Baloch religiosity, in fact, is the most striking cultural feature that pervades all aspects of life. For example, in cases of conflict between two families or between two tribes, matters usually would be referred to the *molavis*. The parties still prefer to approach traditional institutions rather than modern institutions such as courts and judicial departments.

Even in cases where government authorities cannot resolve sensitive issues or fail to pacify the local crisis, they approach the influential *molavis* to sort out problems such as kidnapping foreign tourists or government authorities by Baloch insurgents. In these cases, insurgents would quite often obey the religious (Sunni) leadership by releasing the captives. More significant instances are local unrests such as street demonstrations. In 2008, for example, a street clash took place between some Baloch and the Basij (“or mobilization”, a paramilitary force associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps) in Zahedan. The conflict broke out as a result of an attack on the Sunnis’ beliefs. Several Basiji denounced caliph Omar, which angered the Baloch. The issue, however, was resolved through influential *molavis*. These are just a few examples, whereas many such events occur periodically throughout Balochistan.

In a nutshell, the conventional attitudes towards society’s norms stem from orthodox religious institutions, biased social traditions, local customs, and an immature political culture. Yet, despite what has been noted above, the near future promises reforms; globalization and modernity are gently pushing back the conventional aspects of tradition and religion. Signs of socio-cultural reforms can be observed particularly from the third decade of the Islamic Republic (1999–2009) onwards. Due to developments in technology and communications, and favorable educational policies of the Islamic Republic which have also benefited Balochistan,⁴⁰ Baloch youth, including girls, are rushing to educational institutions. They are gradually adopting modern

⁴⁰The number of universities in Iran increased under the Islamic Republic. There are more than twenty-four higher educational institutions and universities in Balochistan of Iran (2012). There are at least six universities in Zahedan, four in Iranshahr, four in Chabahar, three in Saravan, three in Khash, two in Nikshahr, one in Sarbaz, and one in Sooran. Besides, in present-day Iran, the university entrance test is a “formality” and has become easier for both graduate and postgraduate education.

views, a process that somewhat challenges the traditional authority of the *molavis*. It has pushed back the religious mentors to willy-nilly accept a few basic changes, including women driving openly, working outside the home, choosing Persian rather than Arabic or Islamic names for their newly born children (which has become a fashion), and decorating Balochi women's clothes with colorful and modern designs.

State and Politics: Elites' Orientation

Under the Pahlavi monarchy the Baloch approach towards politics was parochial. They had no notion of modern concepts such as liberty and equality. The Baloch were restricted to localized beliefs and were indifferent towards the central government's authority. The 1979 Revolution, however, pushed the Baloch towards a subject form of politics.⁴¹ That is to say a notable number of the Baloch elites such as the educated and the *molavis* gradually became oriented to central authority rather than tribal authority.

In the early months of the Revolution, the Muslim Unity Party (MUP) mainly led by influential *molavis*, appeared out of chaos as a major forum for presenting Baloch demands for religious, cultural, and administrative autonomy for Balochestan during the process initiated for drafting a new constitution for the Islamic Republic.⁴² But subsequent developments did not meet the expectations of MUP and other Baloch factions. The two main issues which caused the wrath of MUP leaders, for instance, were: (1) establishing Jafari Ithna Ashari, or "Twelver" Shiism, as the country's official religion; (2) Persian as the only official language. demonstrations resulted, but the unrest was pacified. It took the Islamic Republic almost two years to gain full control over the crisis in Balochestan.

In the first decade of the Islamic Republic, there were no well-established channels of political communication between the Baloch elites and the central government. This was due to the fact that the Islamic Republic was a new actor in the politics of Balochestan. The Iranian state was in a dilemma: how to deal with security and political matters of Balochestan in the aftermath of the Revolution.

The central government had realized that without the presence of a strong local link, it would not be able to tackle the security matters of Balochestan. Tribal chiefs who had had a sense of belonging to the Shah's regime could not be trusted by the ruling clerics. Therefore, the regime's attention turned to the educated Baloch and the *molavis*. Initially, it was expected that both could fill the power vacuum. However, both were suffering from major weaknesses, most notably the Islamic Republic clerics' ideological

⁴¹The terms (parochial, subject, and participant political cultures) initially discussed by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in *The Civic Culture* (Boston, 1963) are still applicable in some underdeveloped and developing societies as a way of understanding the political culture of the people. This formula can be applied to Baloch society as well. In 1996, for example, a study entitled "Impact of Political Culture on Political Development of Balochestan in Pakistan" (PhD thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Karachi) was carried out by Rahmat Ibad Khan, applying the theories of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba.

⁴²M. Hassan Hoseinbor, no. 38, 165–6.

differences with the *molavis* and the secular tendency among the educated Baloch. Yet, at times, it seemed that the Islamic Republic had deliberately overlooked these weaknesses or had pardoned these types of Baloch. Of course, many Baloch who criticized or fought the policies of the Islamic Republic were either tried in revolutionary courts and executed or escaped Iran and sought asylum in Europe and America. Eventually, however, the educated Baloch failed to take the lead, whereas the *molavis* succeeded in securing public representation. This favorable situation for *molavis* extended into the second and third decades of the Islamic Republic. The main reason behind this was the popular Baloch support for the *molavis*, a factor that the educated group was lacking. The parliamentary representation by the *molavis* in the first decade of the Islamic Republic,⁴³ and the 1997 presidential elections (when the overwhelming majority of the Baloch led by the *molavis* cast their votes for the cleric Khatami) are prime examples to demonstrate the status of the *molavis* in Baloch society.

Under the administration of President Khatami, the political face of Iran changed remarkably. It can be claimed that from the beginning of Khatami's administration the elites entered into a new shifting process from subject to participant orientation, meaning that the elites, particularly the *molavis* and the educated group, on the one hand developed an activist tendency and participated in politics, but, on the other hand, some elements continued to hold passive orientations. The Baloch developed an awareness of the system's institutions but continued passively accepting the state's decisions. Under the administration of President Khatami, several educated Baloch associated themselves with some centralized political parties such as Jebheye Mosharekate Iran-e Eslaami (the Islamic Iran Participation Front). Through different structures, elites have often raised major demands, for example, the right to participate in the administration of Balochestan or to play a definite role in the administration of the country. Such demands are being discussed and assessed at the Makki institution in Zahedan where parliamentarians, state employees, and the *molavis* gather to discuss social and political matters of concern. These demands are then articulated by parliamentarians or distinguished state employees. Of course, the government's response has not always been favorable. Demands with political orientations have not been fulfilled. The demand of having a Sunni mosque for Friday prayers in Tehran is one such example which has not so far been accepted by the central government.⁴⁴

⁴³In the first few years (1980–84) of the Islamic Republic, mostly *molavis* represented the Baloch at the Islamic Consultative Assembly (parliament). For example, *molavi* Hamed Dameni represented the people of Khash; *molavi* Nazar Ahmad Didgah represented the people of Iranshahr; and *molavi* Mohammad Is-haaq Madani represented the people of Saravan.

⁴⁴A number of leading *molavis* have repeatedly asked the central government to allow them to build mosques for Friday prayers in Tehran. But the indifference of the government towards the issue raised a tumult of protest among the Baloch elites. The government's concern seems to be that because Friday prayers are institutionalized weekly public prayers at which religious leaders follow communal prayers often with political speech, this may encourage the Sunnis of Iran to gather en masse in Tehran. This ultimately may result in the creation of a powerful Sunni bloc in the capital. Such a bloc would have the potential of political manipulation against the ruling Shia. The regime has already experienced such a threat in Balochestan. Today, the Makki mosque of Zahedan, for example, acts like a powerful bloc within Balochestan.

However, with the coming of President Ahmadinejad to power (2005), the semi-active role of the Baloch declined. Baloch academicians have been asked not to hold sociopolitical meetings.⁴⁵ Some Baloch journalists have been warned not to answer calls from the Iranian foreign-based media such as BBC Persian, VOA Persian, and Radio Farda.⁴⁶ The *molavis* came across restrictions from the central government. They had to confront the policy of the government on the question of *madresas*; the issue of reform programs which, according to officials, would reform the *madresas* in Balochistan.⁴⁷ The central government intended to redefine the syllabuses of the *madresas*, to stop the *madresas* from taking foreign *talibs*, and to offer financial support to the *madresas*.⁴⁸ The attempt was not welcomed by the *molavis*. In 2010 and 2011, the *molavis* and the Sunni parliamentarians communicated with Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic, and his representative in Sistan va Balochistan to stop the plan. They thanked the government for offering them financial support, but declared that they would not accept such offer, for they would like to maintain their religious independence.⁴⁹ Moreover, the *molavis* considered the plan interference, proclaiming that the Sunnis' religious freedom is constitutionally protected,⁵⁰ and therefore must not be violated.⁵¹

⁴⁵In the early months of Ahmadinejad's (first) administration, several Baloch professors of Sistan va Balochistan university (Zahedan) received telephone calls from the intelligence units, requesting them not to attend any sociopolitical meeting with the *molavis* at the Makki mosque in Zahedan. In fact, the Baloch's sociopolitical meetings were routine during the administration of President Khatami.

⁴⁶The issue was revealed (during a discussion with the author) by Mahmood Berahooynejad, a Baloch journalist who was threatened by the security agents not to accept any further interview from the Iranian foreign-based media (Zahedan, March 2009).

⁴⁷The policy is known as "Tarh-e Samandehi-ye Madares-e Dini-ye Ahl-e Sonnat-e Iran" (Plan to organize the religious schools of the Sunni sect in Iran).

⁴⁸The major target of the government has been the Makki institution in Zahedan where *talibs* from Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have been receiving Sunni education.

⁴⁹In this case, several letters were sent to Ayatollah Khamenei, requesting him to stop this policy. The following are just two examples: "Nameh-ye Nemayandegan-e Ahl-e Sonnat-e Majles (Dowreh-ye Hashshom) beh Rahbar-e Enqhelab," Dabirkhaneh-ye Daftar-e Nemayandegan-e Majles-e Shora-ye Easlami (no. 12495, December 19, 2011); "Nemayandeh-ye Mohtaram-e Maqam-e Mo'azzam-e Rahbari dar Omur-e Ahl-e Sonnat-e Sistan va Balochistan," Nameh-ye Modiran-e Madares-e Dini dar Sistan va Balochistan (December 17, 2011).

⁵⁰Referring to Article 12 of the Constitution where it says that, "The official religion of Iran shall be Islam and faith Jafari Ithna Ashari, and this article shall be eternal and immutable. But, other Islamic faiths such as the Hanafi, Shafei, Maleki, Hanbali, and Zaidi, shall enjoy full respect. The followers of these faiths are free to carry out their religious rites according to their own religious jurisprudence. Their religious education and training, personal status (marriage, divorce, inheritance, and will) and lawsuits related thereto shall be officially recognized by courts of law."

⁵¹The issue was discussed several times in different meetings among the Baloch elites. It was also presented to the thousands of Baloch during prayer times in Makki mosque, by Abdol Hamid Ismaelzahi, the leading *molavi* of the Iranian Baloch. At times, he strongly criticized the central government on the issue of Sunnis' religious freedom, asserting that "we will defend our rights at any cost." These developments are also available at the official website of the Makki Sunni School (News archive, 2009–11), <http://www.sunnionline.net>.

For the time being, apparently, the harsh reaction of the leading *molavis* and the Islamic Republic's engagement with the United States of America over the nuclear issue has either forced or distracted the government to distance itself from a possible Baloch confrontation. At the time of writing, however, the controversy has not been resolved.

Besides, a number of events like beating, torturing, and killing of several Baloch youth who were called "criminals" by the Iranian police led to clashes between the Baloch and the police. It was then that a new Baloch insurgent group called Jundollah appeared on the scene.⁵² Today, the group is engaged in sabotage activities in Balochistan against the Islamic Republic. The main agenda of this highly organized group, as claimed by its leaders, is political freedom. It believes that violent methods can be more useful than non-violent methods in making government accept the demands of the Baloch.⁵³ According to Iranian authorities, Jundollah is a terrorist group backed by American and Israel intelligence. The claims of foreign backing for Jundollah have been supported by independent sources outside Iran.⁵⁴

Therefore, these developments (under the administration of President Ahmadinejad, since 2005) have disrupted the usual course of the shifting process of orientations from subject to participant. In brief, though modern government exists in Balochistan, the elites' orientation towards politics never became a modern one. Similarly, the orientation towards state never emerged as participatory.

Conclusion

The impact of foreign and domestic exploitation has been destructive to Baloch society. In 1928, Reza Shah eliminated the "traditional federal authority" of tribal chiefs in Balochistan. So, modern government was introduced and the tribal chiefs were bound to abide by the Pahlavis' (Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah) central policies. Under the Pahlavi monarchy (1925–79), the Baloch were treated as an ethnic or national minority. After the 1979 Revolution, the Baloch were made a religious minority too. The central government's discriminatory policies have made the Baloch dissatisfied with the Islamic Republic of Iran. This has not only discouraged sociopolitical participation on the part of the Baloch, but recently has also led to Baloch religio-political insurgency against the Islamic Republic.

Except for compelling or pressing circumstances, such as personal or family affairs involving government intervention, the dispersed educated Baloch, the uneducated

⁵²For more information about Jundollah, see its blog, jonbeshmardomiran.blogspot.com. The Iranian Baloch insurgent group with fundamentalist Sunni beliefs emerged in 2004 in Iranian Balochistan. A number of Western scholars believe that the members of Jundollah are basically from Pakistan. This view, however, is wrong. The main members or majority of them hail from Iranian Balochistan.

⁵³The statement has been aired by Abdol Malek Rigi in most of his interviews, which are now available on YouTube and at jonbeshmardomiran.blogspot.com.

⁵⁴The disclosure was first made in 2008 by ABC News Analysis in the US. It was immediately republished by others, including *The Times of India*, April 5, 2007, 16. See also Bill Beeman, "Will the U.S. Support Terrorists to Destabilize Iran?," Online: *New America Media*, News Analysis, July 7, 2008, at http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=0a3f42cca536140506e6a708b367b98.

wealthy, and the socially dysfunctional tribal chiefs prefer not to be very much involved in government business. Interestingly, although the *molavis* have never been effectively absorbed into the Iranian Islamic political system, they have been skillfully exercising their influence through other elites such as distinguished state employees and parliamentarians to articulate issues of concern to government authorities. However, this method has not on the whole changed the scenario to benefit the Baloch.

Apart from the discriminatory policies of Iran's central government, Baloch society has been kept backward by the Baloch themselves who have been influenced by conventional factors, earlier by tribal chiefs and presently by the *molavis*.

The present-day Baloch society gives the impression that neither other Baloch elites nor the Shia government can challenge the position of the *molavis*. There are, however, a number of reasons for this, including: (1) the ideological nature of the Islamic Republic itself, discussed earlier; (2) the highly traditional and religious socio-cultural background of the Baloch; (3) lack of proper secular education on the side of the Baloch; (4) lack of ideological forces among other Baloch elites; (5) ideational differences among the educated group and weak team work.

No doubt the ethno-religious developments referred to above have left their impact on the sociopolitical culture of the Iranian Baloch. Consequently, the society's norms and values have been predominately parochial. The elites' orientation towards politics never became modern and the orientation towards the state has never been as participant. Today, a subject form of orientation is being exercised by the Iranian Baloch elites.