

[The Bakhtiari Alphabet](#): An Educational Documentary by Cima Sedigh

[David N. Rahni](#) New York November 2009

The educational documentary movie, *The Bakhtiari Alphabet*, closely follows the harmonic and sustainable journey of life as practiced daily by one of the still major migratory tribes in south/southwest Iran, [the Bakhtiaris](#). The lifestyle of hunter-gatherer-herders, as practiced by our common human ancestry throughout most our history, is now practiced by a sporadic number of tribes in the world and as typified by the *Bakhtiari* and [Qashqaj](#) tribes of [Iran](#).

Integrated with appropriate Persian classical and folkloric music that resonates exhilaratingly with the natural picturesque scenery of the Iranian plateau, the everyday lives of the indigenous Bakhtiaris, their challenges and ominous moments of simplicity and interconnectedness with mother nature are documented in this film after seven years of painstaking research and production. The Bakhtiaris' lives follow the pattern of [sustainability](#) as anchored in its three principles of social, environmental and economical paradigms. The Bakhtiaris are by and large the practitioners of the concept of [sustainability](#) by safeguarding the natural resources with minimum impact on them, having borrowed such resources from future generations and not the sole exploiting proprietors of it and by claiming to have inherited it from the past generations. Their lack of attachment to land *per se* makes them content by enjoying the bounties of mother earth rather than claiming it exclusively as landlords to the deprivation of others. As the last half of this documentary film takes a more scientific approach to discerning the root causes of educational challenges for the Bakhtiari's, there is indeed merit in teaching modern Persian in the context of the tribe's own natural and daily lives rather than following the rigid approach of *one shoe fits all* by teaching the language using urban Tehran examples (tall buildings, modern dress codes, subways, etc.) infrastructures and norms that the rural indigenous Iranians have no perception of.

The original hunter-gatherer-herder way of life worldwide led to the emergence of ethnic identities within the past millennium or so; this in turn became the rationale for national patriotic identities that integrate common inter-tribal and inter-ethnic cultural, geo-historical and/or religious values into one seemingly united country. Iran, with her highly diverse ethno-religious and cultural sub-stocks of the Aryans and others, is not excluded from such anthropological metamorphism. That said, however, and while a nation such as Iran possesses a set of commonalities, celebrations and rituals and a modern standard Persian language embraced by all her citizen, it should, nonetheless, recognize that there are richly settled divergent or complementary rituals that are unique to each of the ethnicities in the nation as observed by the Bakhtiaris and others. One, as the documentarily rightly eludes to it, could then argue that the national norms and rituals are the "synthesis" of those initially observed by

all ethnicities within the nation. That means that the linguistic dialect and local rituals must be well integrated into a contextual general education that each region or tribe could relate to and empathize with.

All in all, I found *the Bakhtiari Alphabet* documentary mind provoking, nostalgic and fascinating and as such recommend it to expatriate Iranians and their second and third generation children as well as those westerners who are academically or scholastically interested in indigenous education. The producer, Professor [Cima Sedigh](#) at Sacred Heart University in Connecticut, could be approached for the forthcoming show schedules or to arrange for a showing at your institution.