

ETHNIC IDENTITY OF THE BALOCH PEOPLE

Pavla KOKAISLOVÁ

*D.Sc. (Ethnology),
Research Fellow, Faculty of Philosophy,
the Institute of Ethnology at the Charles University
(Prague, the Czech Republic)*

Petr KOKAISL

*D.Sc. (Cultural and Social Anthropology),
Assistant Professor,
Faculty of Economics,
Department of Psychology and Cultural Studies,
the Czech University of Life Sciences
(Prague, the Czech Republic)*

Introduction

The national self-awareness of the Balochis, who live in several countries and have no statehood, is very specific in many ways. The problem of their identity can be better understood in the context of certain parallels between them and European peoples (ethnic groups), since their ethnogenesis displays certain common features. We should bear in mind, however, that the formation and development of the Balochis differed in many respects from those of the European peoples.

The Balochis of Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan are not absolutely identical, in this respect they differ greatly from the Europeans.

We treat the Balochis as one people with local distinctions and specifics, including, among other things, their linguistic diversity. In Europe, they would have composed a single linguistic group consisting of several subgroups using several more or less different dialects (which at a later stage would have become ethnic groups).

Elements Typical of Ethnic Groups and National Minorities

A minority as a group of people is identified (or can be identified) on the strength of certain specific features that distinguish it from its ethnic environment. The key and most obvious features that make ethnic groups (and hence minorities) different are their *language, culture, and historical*

consciousness; we can also add racial identity, slight physiognomic specifics, original settlement areas, etc.

Language

This is one of the most specific features of the majority of ethnic groups, even if it is not official (codified). Slight linguistic nuances may point to origins (including geographic origins) within the same ethnic group.

The Balochi Language

The Balochis speak the Balochi language, which belongs to the northwestern group of Iranian languages and is similar to the Kurdish language.

There are three large groups among Balochis who speak their native language:

- Eastern Balochis (1.8 million), who live in Pakistan (Balochistan, the northwestern part of the Sindh Province and southwestern Punjab); about 800 Balochis live in India (Uttar-Pradesh);
- Western Balochis (1.8 million): 1.1 million live in Pakistan (northwestern Balochistan); 0.4 million in Iran (northern Sistan); 0.2 million in Afghanistan; and about 30 thousand in Turkmenistan;
- Southern Balochis (3.4 million): 2.77 million live in Pakistan (mainly southern Balochistan); 0.4 million in Iran (southern Sistan); 0.13 million in Oman; and 0.1 million in the UAE.

The attempts made in the latter half of the 19th century to codify the Balochi language and its grammar failed; this means that until around the 1940s this language had no written form: fairy tales and heroic eposes survived in oral form and were transferred from one generation to another by word of mouth. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Balochis used the Persian language as the written form of their native tongue; in the latter half of the 20th century, they switched to Urdu. In the Soviet Union in the 1930s, textbooks in the Balochi language based on the Latin script and newspapers in Balochi were published in Ashgabad and Mary, respectively. In the 1940s, the first literary Balochi works were published in Arabic in Pakistan.

There are three Balochi groups in Pakistan that use different dialects of the same (Balochi) language. They live mainly in Balochistan, Punjab, and Sindh, the Brahuīs separating the eastern and western language groups.

The Pakistani Balochis do not form compact ethnic groups; they live among other peoples: the Afghans (Pashtoons,) Punjabies, Brahuīs, Lases, and Sindhis. Despite Pakistan's ethnic diversity and the fact that Balochis are scattered across the country and live among other peoples, they have preserved their identity and language, while their neighbors have borrowed certain elements of the Balochi culture and language (some of the Brahuīs, in fact, use the Balochi language).

The Linguistic Situation in Turkmenistan

The Turkmen Balochis use the Rashkhani language (dialect), which differs greatly from the dialects used in Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan.

According to Ivan Zarubin, to whom Edit Gafferberg refers in her fundamental work *Beludzhi Turkmenskoy SSR. Ocherki khozyaystva, materialnoy kultury i byta* (The Balochis of the Turkmen SSR. Essays in the Economy, Material Culture, and Everyday Life),¹ the languages of the Balochis of Khorasan and Turkmenistan are close to the dialect used by the western group, albeit with certain phonetic specifics.

The dialects of the Turkmen and Pakistani Balochis are very different (sometimes they even cannot understand each other). Turkmen and Iranian Balochis use more or less similar dialects.

The Brahuis of Turkmenistan also use the Balochi language; they arrived there together with Balochi nomads from Iran and Afghanistan and became completely assimilated in the 1960s. They regarded themselves as Balochis of the Brahui clan, even though members of the older generation still used their native language,² which belonged to the North Dravidian branch. In Turkmenistan, the Brahuis³ belong to the same level as members of the Balochi clans with whom they intermarry.⁴ The Balochis polled in the village of Turbin, however, remain convinced that “darker skin is worse than lighter” (Brahuis are dark-skinned).

As mentioned above, a short-lived attempt to create a written language of the Turkmen Balochis based on the Latin script was made in the early 1930s; it ended in 1938 after producing several textbooks and political leaflets.⁵ Until the end of the 1980s, the Turkmen Balochis spoke their native language, which had no written form, and, therefore, there were no newspapers or books.

Political liberalization of the 1980s gave the Balochis a chance to acquire their own education system and their own written language based on Cyrillic. In independent Turkmenistan, which abolished Cyrillic in favor of the Latin script, textbooks in Cyrillic proved useless.

Historical Self-Identity

Cultural memory does not reflect history; instead it presents it through defeats, treachery, wise rulers, the Golden Age, victims, embellishments, etc. In some cases, cultural memory can be considerably distorted or based on inventions. This gives rise to folk legends that simplify and embellish the past; sometimes history is adapted to current reality.

Ancestors of the Turkmen Balochis

There are any number of theories that look for the ethnic roots of the Balochis in the Arab regions, India, or Iran. According to one of the legends, the roots of the Balochis are found in Aleppo in

¹ See: E.G. Gafferberg, *Beludzhi Turkmenskoy SSR*, ed. by S.M. Abramzon, Nauka Publishers, Leningrad, 1969, p. 4, footnote 5 (I.I. Zarubin, *K izucheniu beludzhsogo yazyka i folkloru. Zapiski Kollegii vostokovedov*, Vol. 5, Leningrad, 1930).

² See: E.G. Gafferberg, op. cit., p. 16.

³ In Turkmenistan, the Brahui are divided into smaller groups—Aydozi, Raatzi, Iagesi, Chaynal, Keran, Mirkhanzi, Sorabzi, Sasoli, and Zerkali.

⁴ See: E.G. Gafferberg, op. cit., p. 9.

⁵ See: “Izdan pervy perevod Evangelia ot Luki na beludzhskiy yazyk,” *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov. Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazey*, 22 August, 2005, available at [<http://www.mospat.ru/archive/10105.html>].

Syria and go back to the time of Caliph Ali (a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad). His uncle moved to the region of Makran where he married a fairy who appeared before him. Their son was the ancestor of all the Balochis.⁶

According to Veluroza Frolova,⁷ the "Iranian" version is much more probable: it says that in the 5th-8th centuries, the Balochis moved from the southern Caspian to Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, where they live today.

The ballads and heroic epos of the Balochis, which recount the events of the 15th-16th centuries, call clans *bolaks*; there were 44 bolaks (40 of them were Balochi proper, while four were considered to be vassal). Throughout the centuries, the bolaks have undergone many changes because of their nomadic lifestyle and intermixing. Not infrequently people escaped from their clans to set up a new clan, either because of marriage or because of blood feuds.

Wars and poor living conditions caused by inept khans or foreign invasions changed the structure of the Balochi clans.

Mikhail Pikulin⁸ wrote that some of the Balochi bolaks disappeared to give way to smaller groups. In Afghanistan and Iran, they are known as *tayfa*; in Balochistan as *tuman*. They were based on political rather than clan principles and on submission to one of the khans.

The first nomadic Balochi tribes came to southern Turkestan (the Saraghs settlement and the town of Bayramali in the territory of Turkmenistan) at the turn of the 20th century; they arrived from Afghanistan and Iran on camels and donkeys. Edit Gafferberg⁹ wrote that their presence in this region was confirmed, among other things, by the lists of volunteers to the Red Army compiled in 1919 in Saraghs and kept in the State Archives of the Turkmen S.S.R. (now the State Central Archives of Turkmenistan), where Balochis were registered together with Turkmens.

The Balochis were driven away from Afghanistan and Iran by lack of pastures, feudal suppression of land tillers, and the inroads of alien clans.

The Balochis and their State: A Look into the Past

In antiquity, the territory of Balochistan served as a bridge of sorts between Mesopotamia, on the one hand, and the Iranian Plateau and Indo-Gangetic Plain, on the other. The old maps dated to antiquity use the name Gedrosia for Iranian and Pakistani Balochistan; it can be found on the map showing the route across the deserts of Balochistan Alexander the Great chose for his army in 325 B.C., which returned from India. After his death and the disintegration of his empire, Gedrosia became part of the Parthian Empire (3rd century B.C.-A.D. 3rd century) and the Persian Sassanid Dynasty (from the first half of the A.D. 3rd century). The local Balochis were first mentioned in the 10th century.

In the 7th century, when Arabs came to Persia and spread Islam in it and the neighboring territories, the geographic term Makran appeared (an arid deserted strip along the Arabian Sea known as Gedrosia in antiquity).

⁶ See: L. Rzehak, W.A. Prischepowa, *Nomadenalltag vor den Toren von Merw. Belutschen, Hazara, Dschamschedi*, Dresden, 1994, p. 5, footnote 23 (Muhammad Sardar Khan Baluch, *History of Baluch Race and Baluchistan*, Karachi, 1958, pp. 1, 191).

⁷ See: V.A. Frolova, *Beluzhskiy yazyk*, Nauka, Eastern Literature Publishers, Moscow, 1960, p. 7.

⁸ Quoted from: E.G. Gafferberg, *op. cit.*

⁹ See: E.G. Gafferberg, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

In the 12th century, the Balochis found themselves in the Khwarazm Empire; in the 13th-14th centuries contemporary northern Balochistan was part of the domain of Genghis Khan and later Tamerlane.

According to M.K.B.M. Baloch (a Balochi author¹⁰) in the 15th century, Mir Chakar, one of the Balochi leaders, managed to unite the tribes to set up an empire in southeastern Persia, southern Afghanistan and, what is today, Pakistani Balochistan (by that time the Balochis had obviously spread across these territories); the empire, however, did not outlive its founder.

Other authors, too, mentioned this state. Tajik philosopher and Orientalist Mukhamed Asimov and British historian Clifford Edmund Bosworth wrote that in the latter half of the 15th century Mir Chakar from the Balochi Rind tribe founded the state of Balochi, in which members of the Balochi Lashari tribe lived side-by-side with the Rind tribe. The state disappeared because of a civil war between them. The Lashari were headed by Mir Goran Khan Lashari. After the war, known as the Thirty Years' War, both tribes spread to Sindh and Punjab.¹¹ In the 17th century, Brahui and Balochi tribes rebelled against the Great Mogul rule and set up the Kalat Khanate. Fred Scholz supplied detailed information probably retrieved from Baluch, another Balochi author.¹²

It is impossible to find out whether Balochis or Brahuis played the first fiddle; what we know is that the history of the Kalat Khanate is part of the history of Balochistan (even if many of the Balochi tribes did not belong to it).

The Khanate was not a centralized state; during the wars with Sindh, its neighbor, and Afghanistan, its borders were constantly changing. Throughout its history it remained under the strong influence of the rulers of either Iran or Kandahar.

Everything changed when Mir Nasir Khan came to power; he subjugated all the local rulers and extended the territory approximately to the borders of today's Balochistan.

When the Dutch and later the British reached the Persian Gulf, the Kalat Khanate and the Balochi-populated territories around it acquired strategic importance as a toehold of Britain's imperialist expansion to India, Iran, and Afghanistan.

In 1839, the consulate of Britain and the khanate signed an agreement under which Kalat had to guarantee the British troops safe passage to the borders of Afghanistan. Britain, in turn, pledged to guarantee sovereignty of the khanate and safety of the borders of the Balochi-populated territories (so-called Balochistan), which, however, lost some of their importance once the agreement had been signed.

The Persians, equally interested in this territory, tried even harder to conquer it and subjugate the Balochi tribes.

Late in the 19th century, Persia, Afghanistan, and the United Kingdom signed an agreement under which the territory of Balochistan was divided into Western (Persian) and Eastern (British) Balochistan.

Early in the 20th century, the term Balochistan came to be applied to four different units:

- (1) The Kalat Khanate often called Balochistan;
- (2) Persian Balochistan ruled by Kerman;

¹⁰ See: F. Scholz, *Belutschistan (Pakistan)*, Verlag Erich Goltze, Göttingen, 1974, S. 33 (M.K.B.M. Baloch, *The Balochis through Centuries*, Quetta, 1964).

¹¹ See: M.S. Asimov, C.E. Bosworth, *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: The Historical, Social and Economic Setting*, Motilal Banarsidass Publ, Delhi, 1999, pp. 304-305.

¹² See: F. Scholz, op. cit., S. 33 (Muhammad Sardar Khan Baluch, *History of Baluch Race and Baluchistan*, Karachi, 1958).

- (3) British Balochistan;
- (4) the Balochi-populated territories in British India (the Punjab and Sindh provinces).

All the Balochi-populated territories, with the exception of Persian Balochistan (initially part of the Kalat Khanate and later part of the Persian Empire),¹³ belonged to Great Britain, even though the form of British rule differed from one territory to another.

- (I) British Balochistan covered former Afghan territory (Shahrigh, Saba, Duki, Peshin, Chaman, and Shorarud).
- (II) The territories ruled by Agent to the Governor General were divided into:
 - (a) territories under direct rule (they earlier belonged to the Kalat Khanate, or were tribal territories, or the areas Great Britain had acquired by changing the Afghan borders);
 - (b) formerly independent countries (the Kalat Khanate and the Lasbela and Charan principalities). At that time, the khan was the head of the Brahui tribe Qambarani and the highest representative of the confederation of the Balochi and other, subjugated, tribes.
 - (c) tribal territories of the Marri and Bugti ruled by their chief without Kalat interference.¹⁴

Nationalism of the Balochis

In 1947, British India was divided into Hindu India (the Dominion of India) and Muslim Pakistan (the Dominion of Pakistan); until 1971, the latter consisted of Eastern Pakistan (later the independent state of Bangladesh) and Western Pakistan (today's Pakistan) separated from Eastern Pakistan by 1,500 km.

The same year, the U.K. recognized the independence of Balochistan, which soon thereafter signed an agreement with Pakistan under which Pakistan recognized Balochistan's independence and the Khan of Kalat as its representative. Very soon, however, Pakistan occupied Balochistan and in March 1948 declared it its fifth province.

Both dominions set up on the strength of the Indian Independence Act of 1947 remained dominions until they passed their own constitutions.

The Constitution of India enacted on 26 January, 1950 proclaimed it a republic.

The first Constitution of Afghanistan enacted on 23 March, 1956 proclaimed the Islamic republic; until that time the country formally remained a monarchy with the last Governor General of the Dominion of Pakistan Iskander Mirza becoming the first president of the Islamic Republic.

Throughout the 20th century numerous attempts of different intensity were made in Iran and Pakistan to set up an independent Balochistan.

In the 1950s, a union of Balochi provinces was established in Pakistan; in 1974, the simmering separatist sentiments developed into an armed clash between tens of thousands of Balochis and the Pakistani army. The uprising was suppressed, but the Balochi language became one of the offi-

¹³ The borders established by the Anglo-Persian Boundary Commission in 1870-1872 were finally confirmed in 1895-1896.

¹⁴ See: M.Th. Houtsma, A.J.E.J. Wensinck, *Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam 1913-1936* (reprint Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993).

cial languages and institutions appeared that studied the culture and languages of the Balochis and Brahuis.

The Balochis, who have not accepted their dependent position in Pakistan, crave for independence, their nationalist feelings fed by the fact that their natural riches (gas, coal, uranium, gold, and oil) of Sui on the eastern borders of Balochistan enrich Islamabad, while the living standards of the Balochis remains low: many of their settlements have no running water or electricity.¹⁵

Enkelab, one of the locals, described the sad state of affairs in his village: "In my village there is no gas, electricity, or running water. Our people fetch water from the gas station in Sui under fear of punishment, torture, or even imprisonment."

This gas station is one of Pakistan's most important facilities and, to a great extent, a source of the Balochi protest sentiments.

Young Balochis determined to fight the government of Pakistan join rebel structures of the Lashkar-e-Balochistan type; enraged, they want to know why they have to sacrifice their right to freedom and their federation, in which one people dominates.

In Iran, likewise, the rights of the Balochis are infringed upon, in particular, in the province of Sistan and Baluchestan with sizable Balochi populations. The identity cards of the Balochis state that they belong to one of the clans (Esesi, Nautani, Kalbeli, etc.) rather than their common nationality. This places clans higher than the nationality, which keeps the ethnic group disunited and distorts demographic statistics.

We all know that the people in power tend to ignore the interests of small ethnic groups; it is much easier to deny them education in their native language.

The Balochis as an Ethnic Minority

The territory that since the time of British colonial rule has been called Balochistan according to the name of the Balochis, its local population, is today divided between three countries with a total area of 647 thousand sq km, the bigger chunk of it (347,190 sq km) is occupied by Pakistani Balochistan; 200 thousand sq km belong to the Iranian province Sistan and Baluchestan (Sistan and Baluchestan became a single administrative unit in 1959), and less than 100 thousand sq km stretch along the Helmand in Afghanistan.

In many places, Balochis live alongside former nomadic tribes, the largest of them being the Brahuis, Pashtoons, Lases, and Sindhs. They live close enough for intermixing and cultural exchange.

With no compact settlements, the Balochis of Sistan rapidly assimilated the languages and traditions of their neighbors. The territory of Baluchestan, on the other hand, is the only place where Balochis live in compact groups and where, therefore, there is no assimilation.

Veluroza Frolova¹⁶ discussed this back in the 1960s and pointed to the main distinctive features between the Balochi settlements in Pakistan and Iranian Baluchestan (with practically no other ethnic groups), on the one hand, and in Iranian Sistan, on the other:

¹⁵ See: K. Zurutuza, *Den v poušti s balúčskými povstalci* (A Day in the Desert with Balochi Insurgents), Překlad, Albert Friess, *Vice Magazine*, 21.2.2012, available at [<http://www.viceland.com/blogs/cs/2010/02/26/den-v-pousti-s-balucskymi-povstalci/>].

¹⁶ See: V.A. Frolova, op. cit., p. 9.

Region	Compact settlements	Assimilation
Pakistan (Balochistan)	No	No ¹⁷
Pakistan (Sindh and Punjab)	No	No
Iran (Sistan)	No	Yes
Iran (Baluchestan)	Yes	No

The Shi'a in the village of Baluch Khan to the west of the Iranian town of Mashhad (not far from the city of Sabzevar) are one of the smaller Balochi groups that have preserved what was left of their specifics. The village is relatively hard to reach; unlike the Balochis of Sistan and Baluchestan, its population adopted Shi'a Islam, but preserved their language, colorful dress (Iranian women wear black yasmaks), decorated homes, and national self-identity and are engaged in growing almonds.

There are Balochi settlements along the Iranian-Turkmen border, in which people (all of them Shi'a) preserve their semi-nomadic lifestyle. In the summer, several families leave their homes to graze cattle; they live in tents, or *gedans*, and form a self-supporting community.

The Balochis who live on the southern shores of the Caspian (the original homeland of all Balochis, according to Frolova) in the Mazandaran Province of Iran not far from the city of Gorgan are Sunni Muslims (like most of the Balochis). They have preserved their language and elements of traditional culture—clothes and some customs.

The Baluchis who live in big cities Mashhad (Northern Iran), Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan), Quetta (Pakistan), and Muscat (Oman) can be described as assimilated Balochis, even though they themselves and the relatives who visit them insist that they have not lost their sense of belonging to their ethnic group; they use the Balochi language, wear Balochi dress, and, on the whole, follow the Balochi lifestyle. These ethnic elements, however, differ to a great extent from the traditional Balochi.

Turkmen Balochis

Early in the 20th century, the Balochis driven away by lack of pasture lands, floods, high taxes, etc. moved from Afghanistan to Iran. After a while, some of them returned; others moved further on to the territory of contemporary Turkmenistan (the Merv area) where they worked on cotton plantations that belonged to the local feudal lords (*bays*), built irrigation structures, or remained semi-nomad cattle breeders.

In her fundamental work quoted above, Edit Gafferberg¹⁸ wrote that the Balochis found it hard to adjust to Soviet power and described the changes that it introduced into their lifestyle. Her monograph is based on data she gathered during her long field seasons in 1926-1929 and 1958-1961 when she lived among the Turkmen Balochis. She pointed out that while Soviet power greatly improved the living conditions, it strove to disrupt the Balochi clan ties at any price and reduce the Balochi cattle breeders' dependence on their khans.

According to a Balochi mullah, Kerim Khan was one of the strongest and the most influential leaders in Turkmenistan. The head of a large Balochi group in the Iolotan District, he, together with

¹⁷ The closest neighbors, mainly the Brahuis, adopt the Balochi language and traditions.

¹⁸ See: E.G. Gafferberg, op. cit.

his men, helped Turkmens imprisoned for anti-Soviet activities to escape; the people asked him for advice or practical help.

Later outlawed as a basmach,¹⁹ he fled to Afghanistan with a large group of Balochis (women, old people, and children among them). At one point, when camping in the desert, they were attacked by a Soviet plane.

Today, there are about 30 thousand Balochis in Turkmenistan, all of them Sunni Muslims; they live in villages in one-story houses; according to the tradition they inherited from their nomadic and clan past, parents and married sons live together forming extended families. They share a courtyard, a kitchen with a special place for cooking, and an elevated place on which they sleep in the open air (*tapchan*); not infrequently there are *tandyrs* (clay stoves in the open where they bake bread). They use gas; the government plans to organize water supply.

Post-Soviet Historical Constructions

In the 1990s, the Soviet Union disappeared leaving an ideological void behind to be filled with a new identity model. The key role in the process belongs to the state or, rather, the ruling group, which should refer to the old traditions and go back to its ethnic roots.

The regime of late President of Turkmenistan Saparmurad Niyazov, better known as Turkmenbashi, moved further than any others toward new historical constructions. The state ordered a new history designed to prove that the Turkmens were the world's oldest and in all respects exceptional nation.

The president was determined to replace the old (everything that reminded of the Soviet past) with a totally new ideology related to the old traditions of the Turkmens. He instituted new holidays and created new national heroes; Cyrillic was abandoned together with the old names of the months and days of the week.

Balochis in Contemporary Turkmenistan and their Cultural Memory

It should be said that President Niyazov did not like the Balochis who lived in his country; he concentrated on the Turkmens and their history. There are any number of eyewitness accounts of how Balochi musicians turned over their musical instruments to the state. The people who had already lived through the trying period of adaptation to Soviet power in the 1930s found themselves in another no less trying situation.

So far, the leaders of Turkmenistan have not bothered themselves with preserving the Balochi traditions, language, or ethnic identity.

At home, the Balochis use their native language; however, the younger generation, exposed to the new social reality, is gradually losing interest in it. At schools, the Turkmen language prevails; children can barely read Latin script, to say nothing about English, which is part of the school curriculum; the teaching of Russian has recently considerably deteriorated.

In the Soviet Union, Balochi textbooks were based on Cyrillic; in independent Turkmenistan with its strong nationalist sentiments, teaching of the Balochi language based on Cyrillic stands no chance.

¹⁹ A member of the anti-Soviet movement in Central Asia.

Old people, mullahs, and educated Balochis spare no effort to pass the history of the Balochis, their clans and traditions (related to marriages and the way the national dress should be worn), on to the younger generation by word of mouth. In an effort to preserve the language, they write poems about the people and its history to be read at marriage ceremonies.

The folk tales Ivan Zarubin wrote down at one time serve as a valuable source about the everyday life and culture of the Balochis of Turkmenistan and their spiritual culture and moral traditions.

Heroes of the Balochis

Kerim Khan mentioned above is one of the main heroes of the Turkmen Balochis: he helped them during the times of trial when they moved to Turkmenistan and even freed Turkmen arrested by the Soviet government from prison.²⁰

Mir Chakar, who united Balochi tribes and set up the first state of the Balochis, is a hero of the Balochis of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran; he is the central figure of the Balochi epic ballad *Hani and Sheh Murid*, which is to the Balochis what *Romeo and Juliet* are to the Europeans: symbols of a pure and tragic love.

Balochi Self-Awareness and Information about the Balochis

In the 20th century, several monographs appeared about the Balochis; Fred Scholz, one of the authors, concentrated on the period of British colonial domination; very much like many other authors who discussed manifestations of Balochi nationalism, he limited himself to the territory of contemporary Pakistan.

In the 1930s, expeditions of the Soviet Academy of Sciences studied the Balochis of Turkmenistan. Edit Gafferberg published a fundamental work in which she described the lifestyle, customs, and traditions of the local Balochis and the problems they had to cope with while integrating into the Soviet Union.

In post-Soviet times, Turkmen Balochis attracted attention and caused a lot of amazement among the Balochis of Pakistan: witness the article "Turkmenistan: The Country of Fifty Thousand Balochis" by Pakistani journalist from Quetta Yar Mohammad Badini.

Lutz Rzehak and his two Balochi colleagues compiled a Balochi, Pashto, Dari, and English dictionary; published in 2007, it was the first dictionary of West Iranian languages used by about 10 million.

The same people initiated a Balochi Academy in Zaranchi in the Afghan province of Nimroz. It started functioning in 2010 as a center of academic cooperation and information exchange among the Pakistani, Iranian, and Afghan Balochis. Together with the Academy in Quetta, it is expected to promote cultural development and more profound study of ethnic traditions. The fact that Balochis took an active part in setting up the academy and building it by funding the project and working on it has added to the Academy's importance.²¹

²⁰ See: E.G. Gafferberg, op. cit., p. 23.

²¹ See: "Die Balutschi-Akademie in Zarandsch — Ein Kurzportrait," 10 February, 2011 // Tethys. Central asia Everyday, 8 March, 2012, available at [<http://www.tethys.caoss.org/index.php/2011/02/10/die-balutschi-akademie-in-zarandsch-ein-kurzportrait/>].

Those who promote these projects strive to inform the world and the Balochis scattered across several countries about the history of the Balochis and their culture in order to show the world that the Balochis are not dangerous nationalists who only cause trouble in the countries they live.

Conclusion

A larger number of Balochis live in Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan; fewer are found in Oman, UAR, and Turkmenistan; their assimilation can be partly explained by the fact they live in compact settlements, but this does not always mean they are more resistant to alien influences. In Pakistan, for example, the Balochis scattered across the country are less assimilated than many other Balochi groups. Not infrequently, in Pakistan, the ethnicities living alongside the Balochis borrow their customs and language.

The Balochis of Oman (in Muscat) and Iran (Mashhad) have become completely assimilated and integrated with the local population.

Compared with other national groups, the Balochis of Turkmenistan are resistant to assimilation, although they have borrowed some of the Turkmen everyday customs and family ceremonies.

The most progressive Balochis do not spare any effort to disprove what the media write about their people as nationalists and rioters; on the other hand, the Balochis should revive and preserve their traditions and their history.

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Editorial Office:
CA&CC Press AB
Hubertusstigen 9. 97455 Luleå
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