

## Demographic Analysis of Exchange and Gift in Galesh People Living in Northern Iran

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is the demographic analysis of exchange and gifts in Galesh people living in northern Iran. Statistical population of the study consists of Galesh people living on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Because the researcher is a member of this tribe, he used qualitative research methods and techniques like interview and direct observation to gather information. Results of the study showed that traditions such as the exchange and donation or gift are an inseparable part of Galesh people's life, which have personal, social, moral, religious, familial, economic, competitive and psychological functions.

**KEYWORDS:** Iran, culture, Galesh people, rituals and ceremonies.

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### INTRODUCTION

Since all cultures are influenced and changed by external factors such as foreign cultures as well as changes in technology, behaviors and cultural values over time, the study of each tribe's life and the introduction of its ethnic and tribal rituals and customs can be effective in the preservation of national values and traditions of the current and future generations.

Galesh is one of the most genuine people on the Caspian Sea coast whose members have lived a pastor life from the distant past. They were the first inhabitants of eastern Gilan and western Mazandaran and were described as slim people with shapely breasts, narrow wrists and white and black face "(Sartippour, 1975, & Asgari Khanqah, 1993), who carried out research in Qasim Abad, who carried out research in Qasim Abad, Gilan with a group of French researchers, states that "Galesh people are mostly shepherds and live in the countryside. These groups usually do not have agricultural lands in villages or lend it to other villagers if they have any. Galesh people often live in forests. "Rabinou (1951) writes:" Galesh people consist of the shepherds and cowherds of the mountains of Gilan. Ranchmen living in plains of Gilan employ these people to take care of their cattle and other livestock during summer. They live in the mountains. Their race is different from that of Gilaks who are thin because of living in a wetland area. Galesh people give a part of livestock products to the owners of the herds and keep the remainder for their own use. They also receive money and sometimes rice in return for their work." The ethnic origins of these people go back to the Gile, Glay, Mard and Kass tribes. Galsh people are scattered in different centers in northern Iran. This type of life begins from Talesh in Gilan province and continues to Torkman Port in Golestan and includes the three provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran and Golestan. The most genuine habitat of these people who are distinguishable by a particular Galeshi accent is the central Alborz, i.e. Amlash to Roudsar in Gilan to Chalus, Noshahr and in particular Ramsar in Mazandaran. Gilaki language is spoken by people in these areas. Galesh means cattleman which is taken from Gao-raks, a word of Sanskrit origin. Gao means cow and raks means to monitor and guard. In Gilan and Mazandaran, the herdsmen are called Galesh. Some Galesh people of Ramsar believe that the term consists of Ga which means cattle, Le meaning herds and Sh meaning breeder.

One of the customs of these primitive and traditional societies like Galesh people is the tradition of giving gifts to each other and exchange of these gifts in different ceremonies. According to the traditional system of Galesh people, this tradition is of great reputation among them. This study intends to examine the traditions of exchange and gift and its role and function in life of Galesh people.

### METHOD

As the researcher is a member of the tribe, he used methods of qualitative research and ethnographic field research. Also, direct observation techniques and interviews were used to gather information. Library research using resources relied upon by scholars is another means of study used by the researcher. However, the research findings presented in the study are the results of field research done by the researcher from 2003 to 2011.

#### Research Purposes:

##### The overall goal:

The investigation of traditions of exchange and gift and their role and function in life of Galesh people

### Sub-goals

Investigating types of exchange and their function in the lives of Galesh people

Investigating types of gifts and donations common among Galesh people

Comparing exchange and gift traditions in Galesh people with the traditions of Kula people in Trobriand Islands

### Theoretical foundations

Exchange is the operation through which a person or group gives a service or commodity to another person or group and receives something else, especially of the same kind, in return. Each side has a benefit, in that he would think that the commodity he had received is of higher value for him than what he had given. Exchange is the foundation of life in society. Each unit or any part of the society uses the goods and services provided by others (Alain Birou, trans. by Sarookhani, 2000). According to Malinowski (1922) exchange refers to trading of non-material and material objects and is the foundation of social system. Claude Levi-Strauss (1950), who advocates the Marcel Mauss's social exchange theory, believes that exchange cannot be understood in terms of individual motivation because exchange relationships reflect patterns of social organization which exist independently and apart from individual needs. Like in institutions, distribution of resources in the community is based on norms and values (Hiss 1979). Marcel Mauss (1925), in his book *The Gift*, talks about exchange of gifts and reciprocal exchanges in primitive tribes. He notes that exchange of gifts has a social function and is meant to relieve emotions and tensions between the tribes and to strengthen their social relationships. The purpose of exchanging gifts was not just economical, but religious, moral, and emotional. In other words, it has an important and humane primitive function. . The Kula gift exchange (1) in Trobriand people represents courage and risk-taking (Yousefizadeh, 2003). The exchange of Kula and valuable objects shows the family status of the owner and the need to respect the individual's position in the mutual obligations. Therefore, the customs and traditions can serve as the true source of moral patterns. Objects exchanged in Kula tradition around the islands, each had a special custom and considered as an aboriginal heritage. Therefore, these people use them to prove their dignity and to show off to others. The gifts used in these ceremonial exchanges include such products like red and white clam bracelets that are made on the outskirts of Trobriand Islands and circulated among the members of the island. The circulation of objects among the island inhabitants who participate in Kula exchange took 3 to 10 years (Hiss, 1979). According to Malinowski (1922) the need to respect the customs and mutual obligations was the main source of Trobriand society's moral code. In Malinowski's (1922) view, Kula is not just a material network of economic exchange, but it does have some institutional aspects and includes a network of social relations. He states that the relations do not end with the termination of a deal in Kula. That is, according to rule, being in the Kula once requires one to remain always there. The basic function of Kula is to meet their basic needs and enhance participation, friendship, forgiveness and social dependencies and linkages. Kula exchange causes people to satisfy their psychological needs and strengthens unity and social cohesion (Ansari and Adibi, 2000).

Marcel Mauss (1925) believes that the purpose of donation is to show one's superiority and rights over the receiver. In fact accepting a gift without compensation and retaliation with something better, indicates acceptance of being a servant and being inferior to the other. Witchcraft rituals in Kula are known as Mvasila and include symbols according to which the purpose of any transaction is primarily gaining benefit in terms of social superiority (Hiss, 1979).

## RESULTS

### A - Traditional exchanges among Galesh people

#### Exchange marriage (Zan be Zan):

Basically, marriage and kinship system among Galesh people is based on endogamy (2). According to Galesh customs and beliefs, to maintain the family foundation and preserve the racial aspects, inter-ethnic marriages are a must. This type of marriage is common in the modern days just as before. In Galesh literature, this type of marriage is called "Zan-be-Zan" which involves an arranged and reciprocal exchange of spouses between two groups or families. That is, whenever a marriage is arranged between a daughter from family A and a son from family B, a marriage between a daughter from family B and a son from family A is also arranged. This exchange appears to have economic and moral functions and is meant to maintain a family foundation and ethnic origin. The presence of sisters in the two families also brings relationships to a balance and guarantees the strength of family and prevents divorce. In this type of marriage all costs and expenditure related to marriage even Shirbaha is the same for both families to avoid any feeling of superiority. The marriage takes place between the Galesh families who are at the same social and financial status. According to Amanollahi (1981), who has done research on Iranian Nomads, sometimes if a Galesh man who has suited a girl of his relatives, does not afford the costs of marriage, he has to take care of the livestock of the bride's father for a period before marriage. This is also called "free groom" (Farbod, 2004). It should be noted that this type of exchange marriage is observed in Iranian nomads whose economic basis for their livelihood is animal husbandry. In a comparative study, Strauss (1925) provides a comprehensive review of different marriage ceremonies which include exchange marriage as a simple and primitive tribal ritual. In this marriage type a

group exchange one of their girls with a girl from the other groups. The object of exchange is not so important; but the exchange itself is considered as playing an essential social function (Hiss, 1979).

#### **Shirbaha in Galesh people**

Shirbaha is the amount of money, property or gift presented to the bride's mother for having nursed her. In the past Shirbaha in Galesh people mostly included livestock (cattle and sheep) because their livelihood was based on farms and animal husbandry. This gift is given by the groom and his family and is chosen based on their financial power. Currently, for Galesh people living in north of Iran, Shirbaha includes livestock, money and gold coins.

#### **Ternemari**

It is a contract common among Galesh people in northern Iran, where a herdsman employs a man to take care of a number of his cattle instead of using their livestock products. The products are divided between the owner and the person taking care of the cattle. The contract remains valid as long as the cows provide milk.

#### **Demesmari**

It is a contract between the Galesh people where a person gives some of his calves (Demes) to another one who takes care of it for the next three years. The contract can then be continued or abolished. When the contract period is ended, the calves are divided into equal parts between the owner and the Galesh person. For example if the number of calves is 10 each receives 5 calves.

#### **Salmard**

It is a contract between landlord (Arbab) and a Galesh person where the person must take care of landlord's cattle and sheep for a year in return for a certain amount of money or some cattle or sheep. Moreover, landlord shares the products of the related cattle or sheep with the person for a three-year period and provides him with his daily expenditure and clothing for a year. This contract is mostly signed between the landlord and those who do not have livestock but who have the ability to take care of livestock and are accustomed to nomadic life. If an animal is wasted during the year, is liable for compensation. If the cause is something out of the Galesh's control, like disease, he would not be liable.

#### **Maleshah**

This is a contract in the farming system between a major owner of sheep and another Galesh person in the form of mortgage. The person takes care of the sheep in return for lambs of these sheep. The person is also liable for the death of livestock which should be compensated by him. The sheep's dairy products and wool belongs to the owner or the landlord.

#### **Racbaverdan**

This is a contract between two Galesh persons who would buy a cow or two with equal shares. One of the two persons is responsible for the cows. They will share the cattle's products equally. The person who is responsible for the cows will receive 25% of the calves. The remaining 75 percent is also equally divided between them. The keeper gives one Dazeh (4) of the butter to his partner which is called Hasel baverdan.

#### **Siyah gales (5)**

Sadeq Hedayat (1933) is the first one who mentions Siyah gales in northern Iran in his scientific research. Siyah gales refers to a semi-wild herdsman who is the owner of wild cattle, sheep, deer, antelope and livestock (Hedayat, 1933). Siyah gales takes care of Galesh people's flocks and livestock. He is blessing and benevolent and provides comfort for the livestock to increase herds of cattle and their dairy products. In return for guarding and taking care of herds of domesticated animals, Siyah gales is presented with a bull called Varza (6) which is heavily favored by him. In fact, Siyah gales' forgiveness is not one-sided and he is rewarded in return for what he does.

#### **Sirvare**

It is a contract between the Galesh people of one Sera (7) which is done in the summer areas. Because in these areas and in certain seasons of the year, the amount of cow's Milk is low, this contract is established between a few Galesh families where all borrow their Milk to one family for a week. The family who receives the milk produces dairy products. A scaled stick (8) and a special container are used to measure the amount of milk each family gives. On a day- usually Wednesday- which according to Galesh calendar (9) is good and blessing, all these Galesh people gather together around a spring in the area and calculate their shares of the products.

#### **Types of gifts in Galesh people**

##### **Kharjebar**

Normally after the courtship and after the dowry and Shirbaha are determined, an issue to consider in the wedding ceremony of Galesh people is that of Kharjebar which is a gift presented to the bride's family a day before the wedding. It includes some dairy products such as butter and oil; livestock like cattle or sheep; or other commodities like firewood, sugar and rice. Kharjebar is determined according to financial ability of the families and provision of these goods by the groom's family will facilitate the wedding ceremony for the bride's family.

##### **Wedding Day gift among the Galesh people**

A wedding gift is common among the Galesh people. After or before serving lunch or dinner on the wedding day, the invitees give some money to the groom according to custom, their financial status and the degree of competitiveness. Sometimes the gift is up to the age of the invitees. That is, first the elderly relatives present their gifts and other guests will then proceed to present an amount close to their gifts. In Galesh terms this is to respect the elderly's decision. This gift is deemed to be an exchange and should be returned by the groom and his family later on the wedding day of the invitees' children. If they refuse to do so it may cause tensions among them. In some areas of Gilan, in this case, Galesh people try to take the amount of gift back, which may result in disconnection of relationships between them. These gifts are a good financial backing for the newlyweds and help them get their supplies during the first year of their lives. They can use them to find a job or even to buy livestock. This is psychologically encouraging for young couples. In fact, this kind of exchange in the form of cash is called Potlatch (10) which has economic and competition aspects.

#### **Aflaci**

The farmers who are acquaintances of the groom present him with a gift called Aflaci which includes cattle and sheep and even sometimes roosters. These animals are to be used to provide the meat needed for the wedding meal. This custom is common among the Kurds of Kajoor and Kelardasht (11) and Galesh people. In the past, on the wedding night (Hanabndan), the rooster was thrown into the crowd. After a spectacular competition among youths, the cooked rooster was torn apart and eaten by persons present there.

#### **Shouti:**

Shouti is also a gift including cattle and sheep on the part of wealthy Galesh farmers to the bride and groom who are poor. The meat of these livestock is to be used in the wedding for reception of guests. Sometimes Shouti is presented to poor people, whose life has become difficult because of events such as famine, poverty, and destruction of their livestock. In this way they can continue their livelihood. In fact, this tradition in traditional societies, including the Galesh people, suggests a sense of cooperation and altruism done without asking for compensation.

#### **Benavaz:**

It is a kind of gift exchange presented by a wealthy farmer to other poor farmers or Galesh people without livestock. It usually includes one or more cattle or sheep. The receiver takes care of the gift livestock and use their dairy products until the time he is willing to terminate the partnership. At this time the livestock are divided equally between the owner and the keeper. This contract has no time limitation and can continue even a few years after the death of the donor and recipient of Benavaz among their children. This type of gift exchange is a kind of cooperation and has noteworthy economic and psychological aspects. This type of cooperation is established for maintaining livelihood systems and the spirit of social solidarity. In traditional societies of Galesh people it is a fair contract which continues to be used based on fairness to use Marcel Mauss's terms.

#### **Exchange of valuable objects and ornaments, and guns in the Galesh people:**

A Kula system of gift exchange practiced in the islands of Trobriand studied by Malinowski, has been observed in Galesh people. However, there are some differences between the two types of exchange.

In a private session, ornamental and non-ornamental objects and jewelry are delivered by the tribe's head to one of children or other family or tribe members, whoever is desired. These objects include amber rosary, silver ornaments in various forms, snake nut, family tree and etc. From among these objects, jewelry is presented to the bride's family as it suggests some form of greeting and her acceptance to the family. Eventually, the snake nut is presented to the oldest son of the family to help him in solving problems and creating opportunities. Galesh people believe that anyone who has a snake nut can achieve whatever he wishes. This is in close conformity with a legendary storytelling and imagination of these people. These objects are not entitled to any girl in the family. One of the important objects among Galesh foresters is gun because it is necessary for protecting the family and the herds against enemies and wild animals. The gun is awarded to the eldest male who keeps it as a keepsake and a tool to defend the family and livestock. The value of these objects for the Galesh people is like that of Kula. These gifts in Galesh people do not worth as much as Kula does in Trobriand people. But this is a symbolic ritual whose most important function is transition of psychological and social strength to the next generation and even from one tribe to another. The period for transfer of objects between the Galesh people is unknown and it is from one generation to the next. But in Trobriand Islands, this period takes from 2 to 10 years. In any case, this transaction causes mental and psychological strength in the family.

#### **Presenting land and property as appropriative (12):**

This custom of Galesh people has a purely religious origin and includes donation of land and property with home appliances to the immaculate Imams especially Imam Hussein (AS) or Hazrat Abolfazl (AS). The receiver does not have the right of selling the land or building in it. He can just use them in favor of the infallible Imams. In the past these lands were given to reliable persons of every tribe and remained for years; but now they are under the Administration of Religious Affairs. It should be noted that this type of donation was formed after the arrival of Islam in Iran.

#### **Payhaso:**

It is a gift presented to the bride by her father and includes cattle, sheep or land. If the father is not alive the bride's brother or the eldest daughter of the family presents the gift. It is worth mentioning that this gift is not part of the girl's inheritance. Its purpose is to enhance the foundation and strength of family and satisfaction of personal needs. It also has positive psychological function for the married girl.

#### **Henishtak**

It is a gift from the groom's father to the bride on the wedding day. When the bride enters the groom father's yard and sits on a chair, the gift is presented as a welcome to her. This includes land, livestock, or beehives and has an important psychological dimension which has remained common among Galesh people.

### **DISCUSSION**

Given the variety of gifts and exchanges, and their intended purpose, it can be said that exchanges among the Galesh people have family, economic and psychological functions which guarantee the survival of family and of the vitality of Galesh people's traditional society. Gifts like Kharjebar helps the family and are mostly used to facilitate the wedding process. They can improve the solidarity of the traditional society of the Galesh people. Wedding Day gifts, while maintaining the traditions of the past which are signs of sustainable communities, has financial benefits for marriage. Giving these gifts is done based on social obligations. Aflacy creates a competitive spirit and a sense of courage and bravery. Unfortunately, sometimes it leads to conflicts. Shouti is presented to help facilitate marriage and improve social stability. The function of Benavaz is like that of Shouti. Presenting objects as in Kula traditions is meant to boost the family strength and joy. It is a welcome to the new bride and transfers spiritual power of the donor to the receiver. In this way, the traditions and as a result Galesh society is protected. Siyah gales, in accordance with the views of Marcel Mauss (1925), presents blessing and causes an increase in the Galesh products and protects their livestock from various kinds of harms. A give and take system is implemented among Galesh people and is meant to help them in solving natural problems. These gifts and exchange system have maintained the husbandry system in Gilan and Mazandaran for years.

Appropriative lands have religious, individual and social functions in these traditional societies. The dedication of these kinds of gifts to religious leaders and Imams is a sign of strong belief in Islam among the people. Following Payhaso and Henishtak are effective in boosting the family solidarity and unity.

Exchanges such as exchange marriage have economic function, i.e. decreasing the costs of marriage ceremonies, and moral function, i.e. executing mutual obligations between the two families. Therefore it helps strengthen the foundation of family and ethnic origin which is rooted in the aristocratic ruling system of Iran in the past. This kind of marriage will also cause a sharp decline in divorce and strengthen the institution of family. Exchanges like Ternemari, Salmard, Malesah, Rachbaverdan and Shirvare all have economic and cooperative functions that facilitate economic relations, strengthen livelihood system and increase these traditional societies that are economically self-sufficient.

Presenting gifts in Trobriand Islands of Guinea are done through a procedure named Kula where red and white shell bracelets and Kula Rings are transferred from one person to the other in a circulation process which may take about 2 to 10 years. As long as it is owned by a family or a tribe, this gift which is their historical heritage increases their spiritual power and individuation power. Forgiveness and the transfer of material and spiritual things among the Galesh people from one generation to another is a valuable tradition. It includes gold and silver objects and some other valuable objects like snake nut presented by the tribe's head to his favored persons who will deliver it to the oldest girl or a newlywed bride in the family. Like Kula, this tradition of giving gifts by Galesh people helps strengthen the family stability and increase the holder's material and spiritual power. The nature and function of both traditions are the same. The difference is that of the period over which the gifts are held by the receiver.

### **Conclusion**

Exchange and donation among Galesh people strengthens their traditional institutions and protects them against the dangers of being removed or weakened. The objects of these exchanges are objects, animals, land and home appliances and social products. Sometimes the sense of individualism and personal competitiveness and sometimes social obligations are the causes of these exchanges. If these traditions are ignored by someone, he or she will be rejected by the society as a punishment. For example if someone refuses from presenting a wedding gift, it will be demanded by the family or tribe's head and the person should be held accountable. Some of the gifts increase the co-operative - economic relationships between wealthy landlords and poor people. Poor farmers take care of the lord's livestock and divide the products and calves or lambs based on their agreement. In this way they earn livelihood which in turn strengthens the institution of family and prevents unemployment in the Galesh community. Sometimes the marriage of first-degree relatives has financial and economic functions as well. Basically, endogamy is implemented to strengthen family relations and kinship and to keep the family

race pure in primitive societies. Endogamy, like that between cousins, serves to preserve the nobility of the family and also reduce the marriage costs. This facilitates marriage for poor people. Presenting gifts in various events, as mentioned above, are effective to maintain social and family relations. Sometimes these exchanges have a downside. For example, the landlords may try to misuse these contracts and employ others by low salaries. This weakens their livelihood and causes different problems. However, many of these exchanges which are done fairly strengthen the social structures and components and increase their stability. They facilitate the traditional and social processes of Galesh people. They also solve many social problems and issues like unemployment, economic stagnation, and ethical issues. In fact, this is a powerful function of exchanges and gifts effective in the strength of traditional social structure of society.

Table 1. The exchange of gifts and functions of each among Galesh people in northern Iran:

Name	name and the time of the related ceremony	The object of exchange	transaction type	exchange function	Period of exchange	Shares
Aflachy	Wedding	cattle, sheep, roosters	direct and indirect	economic, social and psychological	The period between two Wedding ceremonies	equal
Maleshah	Any time	sheep	Direct and wealth-sharing	Economic-cooperative	1-3 years	equal
Recbevariden	Any time	cattle	Direct and wealth-sharing	Economic-cooperative	1-5 years	25:75
Ternemari	Cows' lactating time	Cows' dairy	Direct	Economic-cooperative	1 year	50:50
Demesmari	at any time	calves	direct	Economic-wealth sharing	3 years	50:50
Salmard	at any time	cows and calves	employment	economic - journeywork	1 year	depending on the number of livestock
Shouti	Wedding	Cattle and sheep	direct	Cooperative-Sponsorship	Wedding Day	optional
Benavaz	at any time	Cattle and sheep	direct	economic - cooperative	1 to 10 years	50:50
Shyrvare	Summer	Livestock products	direct and mutual	economic - cooperative	a season	Equal to livestock products
Kharjebar	wedding	sugar, wood, butter	One-way	Family-cooperative	a few days before the wedding	Optional
Money Gift	Wedding	cash	Direct, One-way	competitive - economic	Wedding day	Optional
Shyrbaha	Wedding	Gold coins and cash	direct and indirect	Strengthening the family	The time of death or divorce	Required
Transfer of valuable objects	During the father's life or after his death	Guns and ornaments	direct and indirect	social – emotional and psychological	30-year generation	optional
Appropriation of land and properties	Owner's death	Land and home appliances	direct and indirect	religious	unlimited	Optional
Payhaso	wedding day	cattle, sheep, land	Direct	Traditional-economic	A generation	optional
Henishtak	wedding day	Land, livestock, Beehive	Direct	Traditional-economic	A generation	optional
Siyah gales	Blessing	cattle, sheep, deer,	Direct and indirect	Psychological	Unlimited	Mandatory

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