

THE IDENTITY AND ANCESTRY OF THE
INDIGENOUS KHUZESTANI (AHWAZI)
ARABS OF IRAN:
A NATION OR AN ETHNIC GROUP?

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Reproduced from Ahwaz Studies Center by the British Ahwazi Friendship Society, 2005

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Preface

In recent times, the cultural, political, and social awareness among Iranian ethnic groups has increased. As a result, the national question has been the subject of debate and discussions among the political and cultural organizations both within and outside Iran. Supporters of the rights of indigenous and ethnic groups both welcome and celebrate this development.

Before posting this speech, it is necessary to correct two mistakes that were made by the following web-sites: ethnologue.com and the Washington Post internet site both have declared that Arabs of Khuzestan are one million and two hundred thousands, and 3% of Iran population, respectively. This is incorrect and I will demonstrate that the actual number is much bigger than that.

Also after delivering this speech I found new sources that prove that the indigenous Arabs of Khuzestan used to live in the area before the coming of the Aryans to the Iranian plateau. These sources include "A Pause and Reflection on History of Iran- 12 Centuries of Silence" by historian Nasser Pourpirar and "The Complete History of the Pre-Islamic Arabs" by Professor Javad Ali. Two volumes of the 10 volumes of the latter work have been translated into Farsi by the late Dr.Mohammad Hussien Rohani.

In this speech, I will show that the Arabs of Khuzestan are neither a collection of tribes nor an immigrant national minority but rather a native ethnic group, which has roots in the history and geography of this country and is part of that bigger society that is the Iranian peoples. The original speech was delivered in 1999. I have since update it with recently obtained information.

1. Introduction

Greetings, sisters and brothers, professors and faculty members of the Industrial University of Isfahan.

I am very happy to be speaking to you, dear students of Isfahan. Isfahan, a city of culture, science, religion and the arts.

It is not the first time that Isfahan is a place for dialogue of civilizations; this actually started when Abu-Faraj Al-Isfahani wrote the biggest Arabic-Islamic encyclopedia. So it is not surprising that today both Isfahan and the Industrial University of Isfahan have initiated this type of programs.

More than a hundred years ago, the Iranian people started their struggle against despotism and dictatorship. Beginning with the constitutional revolution to the present, the Iranian people, Ahwazi Arabs and Tabrizi Turks, Isfahani Persians and Mahabad Kurds ... shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand have struggled against despotism and dictatorship. Gradually, we are seeing the result of this struggle.

Arabs of Khuzestan, as a nation or an ethnic group (or whatever you like to call it), are inseparable parts of the Iranian nation. But despite the fact that we are part of the Iranian nation, we do have our own identity that is somewhat different from the rest of the Iranian peoples. I will elaborate on this little later.

First, let us examine what is Identity? Identity is the essence of an individual cultural, moral and spiritual being.

Each individual in the first place has an individualistic identity, which consists of his/her mental, spiritual, and psychological make-up. Next comes a person's ethnic or (national) identity i.e. Arabic, Persian or Turkish followed by a country identity as in Iranian, Iraqi, Indian or Swiss. Further, a person is characterized by his/her religious identity and lastly we all have a universal identity.

The individual characteristic of the Khuzestani Arab has 3 or 4 main dimensions: Religious, tribal, ethnic and national. Of course, the priority of each dimension is different in each social stratum.

As far as most people are concerned, the deciding factor for their individual, political and social behavior is determined -

1. By their religious dimension

2. Then their tribal relations
3. Followed by their ethnic identity (eg: Arabic)
4. Their national affiliations (e.g.: Iranian).

After the revolution and with coming to power of the clergy in Iran the 1st and 4th dimensions have been consolidated or transposed. But in recent years, because of the changes in the Iranian political arena, these two dimensions are unraveling and becoming more distinct among wide strata of the people. We can see that quite clearly among the intellectuals, university students and even high school students.

So much so that the identical dimensions of the mentioned social groups now consist of the ethnic (Arabic) dimension, then religious dimension (Islam) then national dimension (Iranian). The tribal dimension in these groups is weakening fast and is becoming unacceptable. Arab intellectuals see the tribal traditions as the main reason for the backwardness of their people, and one that has always been manipulated by the central government to create divisions and backwardness among the people.

Now let me speak of the social and historical status of the Arabs of Khuzestan to prove that these people are not a minority in Khuzestan but a majority.

From a sociological point of view, we can use the scientific term 'Khuzestan Arab people' or 'Ahwaz Arab people' to describe this discrete ethnic group. As we have mentioned, Ahwaz in this instance is not just the city of Ahwaz but it is used to mean the whole area of Khuzestan. In addition, some use the term 'Khuzestani Arab ethnicity' or 'nationality'. We don't object to these terms.

As far as the science of sociology is concerned a nation or an ethnic group has 4 main components. In other words a group of humans or a social group must have 4 components so that it can be called a nation:

1. A common land or geography
2. A common language.
3. A collective history
4. A common culture.

In other words a nationality or an ethnicity has 4 common traits:

- 1- Geographical,
- 2- Linguistic,
- 3- Historical
- 4- Cultural-psychological.

The Arabs of Khuzestan's historical ancestry goes back to 6 main tribes. They consider themselves to have sprung from a common ancestry and we see this in the "Aalam al-Insab". This is quite common among all Arabs.

At any rate the nationhood of the Khuzestani Arabs materialized when the Arabs became aware of their ethnic self and this is a process that occurred in the last 70-80 years.

2. Common language

Language is the most important component of the unity and cohesion of a nation or ethnicity. The Arabic language, which is the language of the Arab people of Khuzestan, is one of the most complete languages of the world. I don't think I need to explain this fact here, as most of you are aware of it.

The Arabic language, language of the Koran, Hadith, the imams, Amraa al-Ghis, al-Motanabi, al-Moaaary, Abu-Nwas al-Ahwazi, Najib Mahfouz and in a way even the language of Saadi, Hafiz and Nasser Khossrow. And it is, according to the constitution, the second language of our country of Iran.

The fact that the Arabic language is the 2nd language of our country has no bearing on the political and historical demands of the Arabs of Khuzestan. As it is mentioned in the constitution it has been named so because of the closeness of the Persian and Arabic languages, in the areas of culture, religion and literature.

In the Shah' era, although Arabic was not named in the constitution, it still had a special place. It also was taught in high school. Universities also offered courses in Arabic language and literature. This, despite the fact that the shah was not at all fond of Khuzestani Arabs, denied their existence and at times even called them gypsies.

Although the naming of the Arabic language, as a 2nd language of Iran after the Islamic Revolution was welcomed by the Khuzestani Arabs. But they demand the teaching of Arabic in elementary schools, and for it to become the official language in Khuzestani courts and local ministries alongside Farsi or the Persian language.

I must remind everyone that the Arab people of Khuzestani are not Arabic-speakers. By that I mean they were not Persian, Kurd or Lurs who changed their language to Arabic and are now referred to as Arab-speakers. The proper way is to call native Arabs of Khuzestan is 'Arab-Iranian', 'Arab-Khuzestani' or 'Arab-Ahwazi'.

Why do I say Ahwaz? Because this region before being called Arabestan or Khuzestan used to be called 'Aghlim al-Ahwaz'. I will speak about this later in some detail.

Arabs of Khuzestan have been part of the Persian Empire for a long period of time, although at times they have been independent (such as during the feudal times between the 15th and 18th centuries or, Moshaashaian times, in the late 17th and early 18th centuries).

Common Land

The land of the Khuzestani Arabs joins the Iranian Plateau and the Arabian Peninsula, which

makes it not only the cultural junction of the rich Persian and Arabic culture and literature but also a geographical meeting point.

The geographical area of the Arabs of Khuzestan reaches from Dezful in the north to Ghosbeh (Arvand-Kinar) in the south, from Soverah and Handijan in the east to Howeizieh and Mosian in the west.

3. Population of the Arab people

There has never been a proper census of the number of Iran's ethnic groups. In the national census of 1986 there was a box asking people about the language spoken at home. But later, the officials changed their mind and asked people not to check that box.

Consequently, most of the figures and statistics that appear about the ethnic population of Iran are estimates and approximation.

But now it seems it is necessary to have a census to find out the number of Turks, Kurds, Baluchis, Persian, Arab and Turkmen in order to determine accurately Iran's ethnic diversity. The figures I will present to you are based on the official census conducted by the National Census Bureau; the percentages however are my own opinion.

In a previous speech I gave in 1979 in Abadan's Petroleum University, I presented an analysis of the make-up of the population of the Arabs of Khuzestan as of a quarter of a century ago. (That report was later published in booklet form.) Since then we have witnessed a significant change in population. A change, that was partly due to the Iran Iraq war. During the war, many of the non-natives and even some Arab natives moved out of the area, but the number of Arab returnees has been larger than that of non-Arabs. This has been obvious in the city of Abadan. Not to mention that a great number of villagers from the war-stricken town of Dasht-Azadagan (Khafajiah) have immigrated to Ahwaz and have settled there.

At any rate, I will be presenting some census figures that were released in 1997 but I must explain a few points before I get to that:

FIRST: with the exception of the villages in the north of Dezful, Masjed-Soleyman and Iezah, the majority of the villages to the south of these cities are Arabs. And so it is from this geographical point that the ratio of Arab villages reaches to 100%.

In other words 100% of the villages of the cities of Ahwaz, Abadan, Khorramshahr (Mohammarah), Shadegan (Fallahieah), Dasht-Azadagan (Khafajiah) are Arabs.

These ratios reach 90% in Susa, 70-60% in Ramhormoz, and 50% in Shoshtar and Dezful.

SECOND: the official census provided by the Center for Iran Census is based on Shahrestan (county) as a unit. This means the city itself, the small towns and the villages surrounding it are all wrapped together as a single unit. Naturally the ratio of Arab to non-Arab is different in a Shahrestan (county) as opposed to the city itself.

In this census, the Center itself has separated sections of Omedia (part of Ramhormoz) and Bagh-Malik (part of Ilezah) from the Shahrestan that they belong to.

Table: Iran Population Census 1997			
Name of Shahrestan	Total Population	Proportion Arab	Arab Population
Abadan	252,047	70%	176,433
Omedia	80,533	60%	48,320
Andimashk	155,594	20%	31,119
Ahwaz	1,110,539	80%	888,425
Izah	172,027	5%	8,601
Bgh-malik	90,106	5%	4,505
Bndar-mahshahr*	230,696	65%	149,052
Bahbahan	163,032	15%	24,455
Khorramshahr	1,293,460	95%	1,228,779
Dezful	351,942	35%	123,180
Dasht-Azadagan +	125,825	100%	125,825
Ramhormoz	158,542	35%	55,490
Shadegan	121,000	100%	121,000
Susa	173,232	85-90%	155,909
Shostar	210,108	35%	73,538
Masjid Soliman #	222,211	20%	44,422
<p>* <i>Kaparha, Mashur-ghadim, Sarbandar and Hendijan</i> + <i>Khafajiah, Hoizeh and Bastan</i> # <i>includes Khamsa, Raghivah and South Haft Kail</i></p> <p>Source: Centre for Iran Studies</p>			

Added to this is an average annual population growth of 3.5% in total population in last six years, including a 4.6% growth in the Arab population, plus the Arabs of Faka, Movcian and DehIran (Ilyam province) and Diylam port - which are not part of Khuzestan but are attached to it. The total population of Arabs of Khuzestan (former Arabestan) is therefore 3,048,240.

Thus in the year 2000 the ratio of the Arabs of Khuzestan to the total population of the province (excluding Ilyam province or Diylam port) is $2,748,240/4,533,594 = 60.6\%$.

We did not include the 1.5 million Arabs in adjacent provinces such as the cities of Ginaveh, Asslvea, Bushehr, Khark Island, southern ports and the southern Persian Gulf islands who are Sunni-Muslims and speak gulf dialect of Arabic in our calculation. We did not include them with Arabs of Khuzestan because these cities are not part of the Province of Khuzestan. Arabs of Khuzestan speak an Iraqi dialect of Arabic and the majority is Shia Muslims. Though these two fellow Arab-Iranian compatriots have a shared history during some periods (and there was a treaty between Sheikh Salman Al-Kabbi, the leader of Arabestan, and Mir Mahna, the ruler of Langeh port), there is currently not much ethnic cohesion or homogeneity between the two communities due to the geographical distance and religious dissimilarities.

Notwithstanding this, the population of Arabs in southwestern Iran is 4,548,240. And the ratio to Iran's total population is: $4,548,240/65,000,000 = 6.997\%$.

The average population growth in Khuzestan is between 4.4 and 4.6%. There is no doubt that the rate is higher among the Arabs, since the rate among the non-Arabs, who are well-to-do, is no more than 3.5%. It is because of this high birth rate that the Islamic Republic in recent years started a massive effort to render Arab women of the area infertile, a procedure that Arab man is not willing to undergo. Many Arab intellectuals believe that the real motive for this program is political.

According to the 1997 national census, 62.5% of the people of Khuzestan were city and 31.5% were village dwellers.

I must mention the ratio of city dweller vs. village dweller provided by the Khuzestan Center for Census is slightly different from figures mentioned earlier.

The 1998-1999 census gives the percentage of city dwellers as follows: 63% of Khuzestanis are city dwellers and 37% village dwellers. The ratio of city dwellers is higher in industrial and port cities.

Abadan 84.0%

Khorramshahr (Mohammarah) 81.0%

Ahwaz 75.0%

Mahshahr (Maashor) 72.5%

Omedia 66.0%

Dasht-Azadagan (Bani-Touraff & Howeizieh) 48.0%

Ramhormoz 47.5%

Shadegan (Fallahieah) 34.5%

Susa 30.0%

However, Mehdi Kamrani, deputy of Development of Khuzestan, said in a 2002 interview with the local paper Hamsaieaha (published in Ahwaz) that 48% of the Khuzestani are village dwellers, in which case we will have a slightly different situation.

According to the official census, there are 5800 villages in Khuzestan of which 3700 are Arab. In other words 64% of Khuzestan villages are inhabited by Arabs.

According to Mr. Kamrani, there were 1,392,720 Arab villagers in the year 1381.

$(4533594 \times 48\% \times 64\% = 1,392,720)$

Unfortunately, because I don't have the census of Khuzestan's city population (as opposed to Shahrestan), I am not able to calculate the figures on that basis of cities as well as

Shahrestan.

I estimate that the population of the Khuzestani Shia Arabs plus the Shia Arab population of neighboring provinces is between 3 to 3.5 million.

If, on the other hand, we add the 1.5 million Arabs of the islands and ports of the Persian Gulf, the 500,000 Arabs of Fars, Khorasn, Kerman, Yazd and Baluchestan as well as the Khuzestani-Arab war refugees now residing in Karaj Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad and other parts of Iran we will end up with 5,048,240 as the total number of the Arabs of Iran. In reality then, one could say that 7.7% of Iran's population is Arab. We did not include in our calculation the Iraqi Arab exiles or the Iraqi's of Iranian descent (the Maaowadin), who also live in Iran.

There has been a change in the ethnic make up of the population since the 1920-ies, when the last Arab ruler, Sheikh Khazaal, ruled the area. After the discovery of oil and the establishment of Abadan's petroleum refinery, there has been a flood of immigrants from neighboring and far provinces to the area.

Back then, except for a few Behbahanis and Baluchs (less than 5% of the population), all the inhabitants of the cities of Mohammarah (today's Khorramshahr) and Abadan were Arab. To paraphrase the late Jalal al-Ahmad: 'Before you know it the colonialist will pour one nation into another nation's mould'. Every time I read the valuable travelogue book by Madam Div La Foua, I remember this saying of that brave and fair-minded Iranian writer that so aptly describes events over the last 80 years.

This cultured French lady, who had visited Mohammarah after the death of Sheikh Jabir al-Kabbi and at the coming of Sheikh Mazzaal, paints a picture of the city with men wearing Arabic clothing - the Dishdasha, Koffieh, and Aghal - walking the city streets. If one is to compare the present day clothing of the population of Khorramshahr (Mohammarah) with what was back then, we get the real meaning of what al-Ahmad was saying. We don't see as many men wearing Arabic clothes in that city now-a-days. But despite all their efforts, neither the British colonialist nor the Shah regime could change the language spoken by the people as they did with their clothing.

I don't think there was as much opposition to Kurdish clothing in Kurdistan or Baluchis clothing in Baluchestan or Ghashghai clothing in Fars.

The ugly sickness of anti-Arab racism was aimed against all aspects of Arab identity, culture and way of life. This sickness, unfortunately, has not yet been cured.

During the reign of Reza Shah, the Khuzestani Arabs were suffering from their backward tribal society and government policies that impeded progress and chauvinistic intellectuals and thinkers such as Foroghi, Mahmood Afshar, Farahvashi, Saddagh Kia, Zabih Behrooz were planning to suppress the identity of Iran's ethnics groups. Khuzestani Arabs was the group they wanted to suppress the most.

Other anti-Arab nationalist writers also wrote many racist anti-Arab books. Writers and poets such as Zarin-Koob, Saadeh Heydaiat, Bozerg-eAlavi, Said Nafisi, Morteza Rawandi, and Akhwan Salis in one form or other vented their venom at the defenseless Arabs of Khuzestan. An informal poll has shown that 80-90% of contemporary Iranian writers and historians are infected with the virus of anti-Arab racism. And unfortunately no relief is in sight.

But I must also mention that there are exceptions such as most women writers (e.g.: Forogh Farokhzad and Simin Daneshvar) and some male writers such as Jalal al-Ahmad, Gholam Hussein Saaedi, Samad Behrangi, Mohammad Jaafar Pajohandeh, and Nassim Khaksar. Somehow the vicious virus of ethnic hate did not affect these writers.

It can be said that intentional and unintentional immigration of non-natives has done a lot of damage to the Arabs of Khuzestan. It has meant that 0.5 to 1.0 Million Arabs may no longer be able to speak their mother tongue.

The policy of Persianization (forced assimilation), if continued, will inflict more linguistic, cultural and social damage to the body of the Khuzestani Arab society. I am not opposed to the immigration of Iranian citizens from other parts of Iran to Khuzestan, but in order to protect the Arabic culture of the Arabs of Khuzestan from extinction, I want to see the teaching of Arabic in elementary level for the Arabs of Khuzestan. This is already provided for in the constitution to safeguard the Arabic culture from further erosion by the immigration of non-natives.

I like to present two main and important reference books, which support my argument that the majority of the people of Khuzestan are indeed Arabs: one is Dehkhodas Loghatnameh (Dehkhodas dictionary) and the other is Encyclopedia Britannica, both of which emphasize the fact that more than half the population of Khuzestan is Arab.

There are many more references to prove that point but these two books are known for their accuracy and honesty. And it is for this reason that I will not refer to Iranica Encyclopedia, which follows the monarchist-nationalistic ideology. It is supervised by Ahsan Yarshater and his Iranian and American colleges and because of domination of the nationalist discourse on that work it is both full of error, one-sided and has no scientific value.

4. Common Culture and Psychological Traits

The Arab people of Khuzestan have their own traditions, customs, literature, art and clothing; which is quite different from the rest of the Iranian people. For example the Arabs of Khuzestan have their own treasure of literary history, theology and culture, the post-Islamic part of which is available to us in written form. This valuable body of work reached its pinnacle during the Mashaashid era in the late 17th century and throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. I will speak more about that later.

Abu Nwas al-Ahwazi, ibin-Maatovgh, Ali ibn Khalaf Mashaashai, Mula Fadhel al-Sokrani and Dr. Abbas Abbasi are just some examples of the poets that this nation has produced. The traditional clothing of the Khuzestan (Ahwazi) Arabs is the Dishdasha, Kaffieh, Aghal and Beshit for men; and Nefnof, Thoub, Shila and Aosaba and Aabaya for women.

These and the jewelry are particular to the Arab women of Khuzestan. No other ethnic group in Iran wears the same clothing or jewelry including the neighboring Bakhtiari women. Wedding and mourning receptions and customs are also different from other parts of Iran. For example Hoossa or Yazla are performed by men and at times even women. Hoossa or Yazla is a form of dance that is accomplished by foot stamping accompanied by chants of poetry. It is performed both at weddings and funeral processions, however with different chants. It is only seen in Khuzestan Arab society and no other part of Iran.

The Arab women have a very sad form of song called Na'avi which they only use for the mourning of their loved ones.

The musical instruments of the Arabs of Khuzestan except for Ghanon and Kasor are the same as the rest of the Iranian people. Of course we should not forget the Robaba (Robab in Farsi), which is a traditional musical instrument of the Khuzestani Arabs. Also the musical Magham Dastgah of Khuzestani Arabs which is almost the same as the Iraqi Magham Dastgah, both of which have similarities with the Persian (Iranian) music.

For example in our local Arab music we follow Isfahan, Nahavand and se-Ghah Dastgah musical systems. But we also have our own Dastgah, which is the Howeizieh Dastgah, and although the origin of the last mentioned Dastgah is from our own Howeizieh (city in Khuzestan) now-a-days it is more popular in Iraq. This is, of course, a legacy of the time when the Mashaashaid dynasty ruled Arabestan and Arabic music was blossoming.

Both the Rifi music (Arabic country music) and the Bedouin music are common among the Arabs of Khuzestan. This kind of music is similar to that of the Rifi music in southern Iraq and

is similar to that of the Bedouin music in neighboring countries.

During a funeral all members of the tribe take an active part. Shaving the face and presenting a piece of new cloth is part of the rituals. Each tribe has its own flag or banner and each comes to the funeral with their own Hoossa. The tribe will never have a Hoossa for a deceased woman no matter how high her position in society.

The Arabs of Khuzestan have their own wedding customs, their own games, and their own tradition for celebrating the event of circumcision of their young males. Rarely, if ever, have non-Arab Iranians described these customs with a non-chauvinistic attitude.

I have covered the Fasal (a sort of tribal justice) in my books and speeches. Here I am going to give you another example on a custom called Dakhil. According to this custom, if a person (pursued by some hostile party) enters a house and asks for protection, then he becomes the Dakhil of that household and no one can touch him or her.

The Arabs of Khuzestan consider Eid al-Afttar their main festival and value it both as a religious and national holiday. They look at No-Rooz (Iran's main festival) as just a celebration of nature. In Eid al-Afttar children wear new clothing and receive gifts. People visit each other and some family disputes get resolved as a way of honoring the special occasion. Eid al-Afttar is also highly regarded among the Sunni Kurds, western Azerbaijan, Turkmen-Sahra, Khorassan and Iran's southern coastal ports, but because of nationalistic prejudice of the dominant ethnic group about 15 million Iranians only have one day to celebrate their biggest national-religious holiday. Often, because of the late sighting of the moon, that day becomes half a day, whereas the ruling ethnicity has 15 days for its holiday (No-Rooz).

As far as psychological traits go, Khuzestani Arabs can have an aggressive manner or a sense of revenge. Also, when it comes to their womenfolk, they have a strong sense of protecting their household, particularly the women part of the household. Some of this behavior could be due to the hot and dry climate of the land, and also the tribal customs and it is certainly due to the constant discrimination and humiliation they are subjected to.

The racist Pahlavi regime basically believed in the superiority of the Aryan people or race. Muhammad Reza shah's title was Arya-Mehr (lover of the Aryans). Anti-Arabism was a product of his racist ideology. He and his regime perceived the fact that Iran is a multi ethnic country as a threat to national security. It was the Shah's official policy to Persianize the Iranian society by denying and assaulting the culture of non-Persians.

The Shah had a warm and close relation with Israel, which enforced his hate of the Arabs. Mossad (Israel's secret service) was very active in all aspects of Khuzestan province during

his rein.

To the Shah regime the Arabs of Khuzestan were the weak link of the ethnic groups of Iran. Not only was he against and hostile to the language, but also the folklore, culture, music and even the clothing (Koffieh, Dishdasha, Aghal and Aabba) of the Arabs of Khuzestan as he viewed these as strong manifestation of the Arab identity. Of course we still see that hostility under the current regime as well, although somewhat less than what it use to be and it is not ideologically based.

As I mentioned, Islam and Shiaism is a part of the Khuzestani Arab ethnic identity and culture. But the negative consequences of decolorizing religion has also influenced the Arabs of Khuzestan, especially the youth, just as it has other parts of Iran.

5. Religion

The Khuzestani Arabs are 12 imam Shia Muslims. In fact, Khuzestan was one of the entry points of both Islam and Shiaism into Iran. There is also an old Sunni community and sects such as Akhbari, and Sheikhe, which have been in Khorramshahr (Mohammarah) for a long time.

The Sabeans are an Arab religious minority; they are mentioned in the Koran as people of the book. They also live in Kuwait, Iraq and, more recently, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). They are 35,000 to 50,000 in number. Some Christian families also live in Ahwaz and Abadan, and there are Christian churches, some of which are old.

There is also an Arab (Iranian) Jewish minority, but since the revolution their number has diminishing. Collective History About 5000 years ago, long before the Achaemenid left Russia and headed toward the Iranian plateau, a Semitic nation by the name of Elamite lived in Khuzestan. They have left us signs of their blooming civilization in Susa, Ghagharzanbill and other parts of Khuzestan, Lurestan and Fars. The Olds Testament mentions their name for the first time.

Ahmad Aghtedari, the Iranian researcher, in his book "The historical ruins and buildings of Khuzestan" writes:

From what has been discovered in the city of Susa, one can say that within these hills, there are traces of Elamite civilization which belongs to the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Arab era, and there are many signs of those eras in this place.

Ahmad Kasravi, (a well known Iranian historian and writer) in his book "The Forgotten Kings" writes:

The Arabs immigration to Iran postdates that of to Syria and Iraq, what is certain and there is proof for, is that the date of that immigration is centuries before Islam, and from the early days of the Sassanid. In the Parthian era the gates of Iran were open to the Arabs...

Kasravi then adds:

but it is certain and there is proof for it that during the Parthian era Arab tribes were living in provinces of Kerman, Khuzestan, Bahrain and Fars.

One of those tribes was the Bani-Aam tribe, which might be the first Arab tribe to immigrate to Iran. Ahmad Kasravi refers to the Tabari history book, the first Muslim historian whose work is still universally accepted and writes

Aam is the same as Merah Ibn Zidan Tammim, it seems these are the same well known tribes of Bani-Tammim who today reside in Khuzestan and their ancestor is Merah Ibn Malik, who lived in the era of Ardeshir Babakan the first Sassanid king, and

helped that king in his war against the Parthian Ardawan...

Thus, according to Kasravi, the Arabs have lived in Khuzestan and other parts of southern Iran, since the Parthian era, but he does not rule out pre-Parthian occupation, its just he is unaware of it. Tabari history says this about the conquest of Ahwaz:

the conquest of Ahwaz was in the 18th year, when Omar (2nd caliph) entered Syria. The cities of Ahwaz were overcome and the king of Ahwaz was Hormozan, a great man, the kingdom of Ahwaz was his and his family's. There were seventy cities in Ahwaz. And Hormozan was the king of all those cities. There were people in Ahwaz of Kalib Ibn Vael and there was enmity between them and Hormozan due to land and village disputes. Hormozan went to the main of the cities that was in the center of the country; the name of the city was "Sough al-Ahwaz" and took refuge in that city which was fortified. And through that city was a river by the name of Dojil and underneath it is a bridge. (Tabari's history)

What does this mean? It means during the Sassanid era, Iran had many kingdoms, of which Aghlim al-Ahwaz was one. The king of all those kingdoms was Shah-a-Shahan or Shah-an-Shah (king of the kings). This was the same situation as in the Qajar era when Iran was made up of autonomous, independent or semi-independent regions called Mamalek-e-Mahrooseh (protected Countries). Each region/country was ruled by a Valli (governor), in a federated or a confederated arrangement. It was called Mamalik Mahrossa Iran (the protected countries of Iran). In the Pahlavi era the name changed to Keshvar Shah-n-Shahi Iran (the kingdom of Iran). There is a similarity between the Sassanid era and the Pahlavi era in that in both cases the king or governor was an outsider, a non-native imposed on the natives. Like the Hormozan of the Sassanid era, the governor-general Safari of the Pahlavi era, or Admiral Madani, the first governor-general of the Islamic Republic in the first days of the Islamic Republic.

It is obvious from the problems between Hormozan and Kalib Ibn Vail, that the Arabs of Khuzestan were already suffering racial discrimination in those days.

Mohammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari tells us that Khuzestan had seventy cities, and the name of the province was Ahwaz not Khuzestan, and the capital was Sough al-Ahwaz, an Arabic name. We will also show you later that Ahwaz itself is an Arabic name.

At the time, the Karoon River was called Dojil, which means little Dijlah (little Tigris).

The Islamic era Arab poet Jarir has this poem about the Ahwazi Arabs:

Tribes of bano-el-aam, you're moving in-and around al-Ahwaz, it's your rightful home
...and next to Tairi-River, that is how your are known to Arabs

This poet was a contemporary of the prophet Mohammad and it is obvious from his poem that Arabs lived in Ahwaz and Tiery River (Bani Turoof and present day Howiezah), and somehow were isolated from fellow Arabs, the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula.

Christiansen, the German ancient-Iranian history scholar believes that, Arabs in the Solkin era did live in Dasht Missan (present day Bani Turoof and Howiezah), under a particular form of autonomy. Post-Islamic scope of Aghlim al-Ahwaz history: Eghlim al-Ahwaz, as the area was known by that era's historians, was a part of the Islamic empire. The Islamic empire covered Iran, the Indian subcontinent, the Arab world, east and central Asia and Turkey.

Khuzestan was one of the centers of revolutionary movements during the early centuries of the Islamic era, the Ghramitta , Zanzan and the Araziogha (a Kharijites sect) all had bases in Khuzestan.

In the early years of the Abbasid rule the Bani Assad tribe, which still lives in Khuzestan, was ruling Ahwaz and surrounds. Al-Buea ruled Iran in the 4th and 5th centuries (Islamic era) and they also ruled Khuzestan.

A certain person by the name of Shomla of the Turkish-Iranian Afshar tribe was appointed by the Seljuk's, Malk-Shah, to rule Khuzestan, the Atabakan of Lurestan and Fars in the 6th century.

The Khorazimids ruled the area in the 7th century. Al-Mozafer and Al-Jalaier ruled in the 8th century. The Timurids ruled in the first half of the 9th century. In the 2nd half of the 9th century (15th century A.D.) Muhammad Ibn Faalah Mashaashai started his rule in Howiezah and surrounds. Later, he and his son Ali ibn-Muhammad Mashaashai expanded their rule to all of Khuzestan, Lurestan, Kahgolia, Kerman Shah, Bahrain and southern Iraq. It was from this era onward that the area came to be known as Arabestan, signifying its Arab character as well as its Arab inhabitants.

For more detail on this subject you may refer to "500 years history of Khuzestan", by Ahmad Kasravi, or my own book the "Arab tribes of Khuzestan".

According to Kasravi, the Mashaashaid designated Arabic as their official language and ruled independently for 70 years. Later on they became subjects of the Iranian governments but did maintain an autonomous status for 500 years.

The majority of the Mashaashaid rulers were poets, scholars or promoters of the Shia Islam. By the end of the 18th century, the Bani Kaab tribe replaced the now weak Mashaashaid as

the new rulers of Khuzestan.

In the 2nd half of the 19th century Nasser al-Din Shah (king of Iran) ordered Sheikh Jabir al-Kabbi the father of sheikh Khazaal and sheikh Mazaal, and the governor of al-Mohammarah to fight the British troops on his behalf.

The British wanted to capture al-Mohammarah; Sheikh Jabir complied with the king's order and fought the British. You may read about this episode in the book 'The Iran- British war in Mohammarah (Khorramshahr)' by Ahmad Kasravi.

Now we must also mention Sheikh Jabir who also kept Mohammarah for Iran when he fought and drove off the Ottoman forces who wanted to snatch the city for their own empire. During the Iran-Iraq war out of the 16,000 Khuzestani casualties of war, fallen in defense of Iran against the aggressor Iraqi army 12,000 were Arab. (It not clear whether these were conscripts or volunteers).

Sheikh Mazaal succeeded his father, Sheikh Jabir, in becoming the ruler of the area; he strengthened his political and commercial ties with Tehran and was a partner of the elite of the Qajr court, especially Atabak in the profitable Karoon river shipping trade. Sheikh Khazaal succeeded his brother and extended his rule to include the eastern part of Khuzestan and added Shoshtar and Dezful to his domain. Although never officially negating his allegiance to the Tehran government, he did rule with complete autonomy.

He was removed from power in 1925 by Reza Shah. He was the last Arab ruler of the area. It has been established by independent Iranian historians that, Reza Shah came to power with the full help, support and the blessing of the British Empire. Ever since the coming to power of the Pahlavi regime, racist historians have tried to falsify the history of Khuzestan. These historians have completely ignored the pre-1925 history of the region. They write history as though not a single Arab person lived or had ever lived in Khuzestan, nor the fact of the previous Arab rule.

Reza Shah and his son-successor pursued a policy of forced assimilation (Persianization) of all ethnic groups of Iran. Of all the ethnic groups of Iran they were most hostile to the Arabs of Khuzestan.

The Pahlavis were dictators and oppressed every one in Iran, for sure, but the non-Persians suffered double oppression, culturally as well as politically. They were denied their own culture, they were denied the right to study, or have radio stations, TV, magazines and books in their mother tongue. Wearing their ethnic clothing was prohibited and so on.

In that era, racist ideology (Persian superiority) was not only the monopoly of the ruling elite, but that of a vast number of the so-called opposition, be it writers, poets and historians. There were many revolts by the Arabs of Khuzestan against Reza Shah and his son, analysis of which would require much more time. All the revolts were savagely suppressed and did not yield any fruit.

Arabs of Khuzestan took an active role in the 1979 revolution. Teachers, clerics, students, intellectuals, and oil worker all participated in the struggle against the Shah. Many of them were killed in that struggle. No fair-minded historian could deny that. Alas sometimes, some people who are completely ignorant of the geography, history and the number of Arabs of Khuzestan, write things against the Arabs that are both astonishing and cause for anguish. I have given a concise history of the Arabs of Khuzestan, using reputable sources. In addition to Tabari's history book, and books of Ahmad Kasravi, I mention other books here that are a good source of Khuzestan Arabs' history, culture, language and way of life:

- 1 al-Boldan by Ahmad bin abi Yaaghobi
- 2 Sorat al-Aredh by ibn Haghoh
- 3 Misalik va Mamalik by Estakhri
- 4 Nasser Khssrow travelogue by Nasser Khssrow
- 5 Farsnameh ibn Balkhi
- 6 Ahsan-el Taghalim fi Maarafat al Aghalim by al-Kamil
- 7 Ibin Athir
- 8 Bin Batota travels book
- 9 Habib al-Sair
- 10 Khondmier
- 11 Aalam Araie Safavie
- 12 Tazkareah Shoshtar
- 13 Ghadhi Nourallah Shoshtari
- 14 Aalam Araie Abbasi
- 15 Askendar Beg
- 16 Aalam Araie Naderi (Safvids & Zandeh eras)
- 17 Farsnameah Nasser
- 18 Safernameh Arabestan (Arabestan travelogue) by Najm al Molik Ghafari
- 19 Safernameh Arabestan-Lourestan by Baron David
- 20 Niebur travelogue
- 21 Layard travelogue
- 22 Loremar travelogue
- 23 Diva Lofa travelogue
- 24 Mardom Shinasi Iran by Henry Field
- 25 History of Iran by Sir Percy Cox

26 Sheikh Khazaal and the kingship of Reza shah by Sir Percy Loren

27 Persia and the Persian question- by lord Corson

All the above travelogues have been translated in to Persian.

In addition to the "500 year history of Khuzestan", Kasravi has another book titled "The Forgotten Kings", parts of which cover Khuzestan Arabs ancient history. Other books that may be of help to you in this field are:

1 The Arab tribes of Khuzestan by myself (Yossef Azizi)

2 The booklet, "About the Arabs of Khuzestan" also by me.

3 The Geographical History of the Arabs of Khuzestan by Mousa Seadat

4 History of Khuzestan from Afsharids till the present time by Mousa Seadat

5 The Historical Ruins and Buildings of Khuzestan by Ahmad Aghtedari

6 The Geographical History of Khuzestan by Muhammad Ali Imam Shoshtari

7 A History of Khuzestan by Mustafa Ansari. University of Chicago, 1971

8 Study of British Imperialism in Southwestern Iran and the Municipality of Arabestan, by William Strunk, University of Indiana, 1976.

9 The Images of Arabs in Modern Persian Literature, by Joya Blondel Saad, University of Texas, Saint Antonio, 1996 (also recently translated into English in Tehran).

Also books and articles by the following:

1 Kazem Kazempour

2 Hamid Tourfai

3 Kazem Ali Nejad.

As I mentioned earlier, the historical and reputable book of Professor Javad Ali, 'The complete history of the pre-Islam Arabs' does say that the Arabs lived in southwest and south east Iran (Khuzestan, Kerman, Fars and Bahrain). They were present in Iran before the Aryans set their foot in Iran

Two volumes of the 10 volumes of the above books have been translated into Farsi. As I mentioned earlier, Tabari also mentions the presence of the Arabs in the above areas before the arrival of the Aryans.

6. The historical course of the make-up of the Khuzestani Arabs

I made use of Tabari's history and his writing about the presence of the Arabs in Khuzestan in the pre-Islamic era. After the fall of the Sassanid class-based society at the hand of the Arab Muslim conquerors (during the time of caliph Omar), some Arab tribes migrated not only to Khuzestan but also to other regions of Iran, in particular to Quam, Kerman, Khorasn, Yazd and Kashan.

In Islamic 4th century (11th century A.D.) Ibin Haghol in his book *Soreat al Eardh* writes:

The people of Khuzestan beside Arabic and Persian speak in Khozi as well. Which is neither Hebrew or Syranic, nor Persian.

In the Islamic 3rd century (10th century A.D.) Astakhri in his *Massalik va Mamalik* writes:

Most people in Khuzestan speak Arabic and know Persian as well. They also know Khozi very well.

These historical sources tell us that until the 4th century of the Islamic calendar (11th century A.D) there was another language, named Khozi, which also was spoken in the area beside Arabic and Persian. This language was later extinct and by the time the 9th century arrived (16th century A.D.). The now ruling Mashaashaid proclaimed Arabic as the official language of the land. It enjoyed some growth and the Persian language was marginalized. By that I mean it was only spoken in the cities of Dezful and Shoshtar and the northern part of the province. This situation continued till the fall of sheikh Khazaal in 1925.

Due to the racist nature of the Reza Shah regime, his government implemented chauvinistic policies to change the demography of the region to the detriment of the Arab population. Reza Shah encouraged natural immigration and but also introduced forced resettlements.

Obviously, there can be no opposition to natural immigration. However, with the recommendation by an agent of the British Empire, Shaper-j an Indian Parsi, who was known for his anti-Arab chauvinism, unnatural immigration was encouraged. Old folks in Khuzestan speak of trucks full of outsiders use to come to Khuzestan, passengers were then disembarked, and many such trips took place so that the demography of the area changes. As I said before I am not against natural immigration, especially since Arabs also can immigrate to other parts of Iran. But the massive immigration of non-Arabs has been to the detriment of the local Arab population. If the Arabs of Khuzestan are not allowed to study in their mother tongue and have their own newspapers and magazines, the result will be identity crisis, the weakening of their culture and eventually melting in the culture of the ruling ethnicity. The ruling ethnic group, which controls all the tools of power in Iran, needs to allow the Arabs of Khuzestan to exercise their culture rights. Historical course of naming the province and its cities: According to Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari and other historians, Khuzestan in the pre-Islamic era was called al-Ahwaz, in other words Ahwaz was the name of the province. Its capital was Sough al-Ahwaz. Until the 4th Islamic century (11th century A.D.)

and the Buea era the name remained al-Ahwaz. The name Khuzestan appears in the book 'Hodood al-Aalam min al-Mishrag ala al al-Maghrib' (Borders of the world east to west). Though the author of this book is unknown we do know it was written in the Islamic year 372 (11th century A.D.). It includes the following statement:

The source of the Khuzestani, Mesraghan or Karoon river is in Shoshtar and then goes to Ahwaz.

Despite the fact that Ahmad Kasravi espoused Persian nationalist tendencies, his book 'The 500 years history of Khuzestan', like his other historical writing about the area is a reliable and important source. He writes in his book:

In the eras of Shah Ismael and Shah Tahmasib the western part of Khuzestan, which was ruled by the Mashaashaid, was called Arabestan. So that it could be distinguished from its eastern part, Shoshtar and Ramhormoz, which were ruled by the Safvids appointees.

This means after the fall of the Sassanid, there was an increase in the Arab population of the region so that in the Mongol era an Arab dynasty not only ruled all of Khuzestan but also Kahkoliwia, Boeir-Ahmad, Kermanshah and parts of Iraq. This large country came to be known as Arabestan, which is a Persian word and means 'The land of the Arabs'. The name is similar to Gilan, Mazandran, Chahar Mahal Bakhtiari, Lurestan, Baluchestan, Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, which are the residing places of the Gilaks, Mazandarans, Bakhtiari, Lurs, Baluchis, Kurds, and Turkish Azeris, respectively. Kasravi in his book 'The 500 years history of Khuzestan' writes:

We see this name (Arabestan) for the first time in Ghazi Nourallah Shoshtari's book, a book which he started writing during the lifetime of Shah Tahmasib and finished it after his death.

From the 9th Islamic century (16th century A.D.) which is time when the Mashaashaid dynasty was established in Howiezah, until the end of the Safvids, the northern and eastern part of the region was called Khuzestan whereas the southern and western parts were named Arabestan. At that time the two cities of Shoshtar and Dezful were part of Khuzestan. Later, from Nader Shah's reign and through the Afsharids, Zandeh and Qajr period, the whole region of present day Khuzestan was called Arabestan.

Following the fall of sheikh Khazaal in 1925, Reza Shah, after consulting with Shapour-J and his other chauvinistic advisers, disallowed the use of the name Arabestan and started using the name Khuzestan.

Note that no other province of Iran had its name changed except that of Arabestan. Lurestan, Chahar-Mahal Backstairs, Kurdistan, Azerbaijan Baluchestan, Gilan, and Mazandaran are all names to signify the presence of Lurs, Bakhtiari, Kurds, Azeris, Baluchis, Gilaks and

Mazandarani. But the anti-Arab racists, because of their hate of the word Arab, decided to remove it from the Iranian map. It was not all they wanted to remove, however. Their real aim was ethnic cleansing. Their objective was to remove the Arab identity, culture and presence. Changing the name Arabestan to Khuzestan was just a start. With chauvinists such as Zabih Behrooz and Saddagh Kia as its directors, the first Iranian Farhangestan (cultural academy) continued the racist policies of Shapour-J.

The Farhangestan changed many names of the cities in Khuzestan in the years 1934-1935 and the policy of replacing Arab names with Persian names continues to this day. The aim is simple: the removal of all Arabic traces from Khuzestan and to cleanse the area of anything Arabic no doubt has racist/chauvinist objectives.

The following table is merely a small sample of names have been changed so far.

Table: Town and city name changes	
New name	Original name
Dasht Bani-Turoof	Howeizieh
Sosangerd	Khafajiah
Hoviezah	Howeizieh
Arwand Rod	Shat al-Arab
Abadan	Aabadan
Khoramshahr	Mohammarah
Omideah	Aamidia
Agha jari	Sied jari
Shadegan	Fallahieah
Ramshir	Khalfia-Khalaf Abad
Mahshahr	Maashor
Sar-bandar	Ras al-mina
Bander shapour	Mina khor mossa
Andimashk	Saleh Abad

** It was changed to Dasht-Azadagan after the revolution*

The Pahlavi era Farhangestan changed the county of Howiezah to Hooazegan, which is very offensive in Arabic. The mini-county Rafieaa was changed to Kavian. The Islamic regime has, however, restored those two to their original name.

Today most of the Khuzestani cities have double names. In Persian and official business people use the Persian name but when Arabs of Khuzestan speak among themselves they use the Arabic name. For example if you ask an Arab who wants to go to Khorramshahr, where he is going, he will replay to Mohammarah, not Khorramshahr.

In other words peoples' historical-cultural memory has not forgotten the native Arabic names. One can see this duality (formal/popular) of names in all aspects of people's life.

All these historical Arabic names can be seen in all the historical Persian books of the Qajr, Afsharid, Zandeh, Safavids (and even earlier) eras. They can also be seen in Khuzestan's birth certificate, official documents of the foreign ministries and other official government documents.

You will find these names in Dehkhoda's 'Loghatnameh', the Encyclopedia Britannica, foreign ministry documents as well as in the books of Ahmad Kasravi, Hussein Maki and Malik al-Shora Bahar (well known Iranian historical-writers). In short, this province was called Arabestan for five hundred years from shah Tahmasb's days until the early Pahlavi era.

When Bakhtiaris, who live next door to us, want to travel to our area they still say they are going to Arabestan rather than to Khuzestan. In the later years of the Pahlavi reign, the regime and the anti-Arab intellectuals of the day tampered with historical books. Each time a book containing the word Arabestan was to be published they changed that name to Khuzestan.

For example Hajj Ghafar Najm al-Molk, who was a minister in the Nasser shah era, had published a book called 'Travel to Arabestan' during his lifetime. The book was re-published in the Pahlavi era under the supervision of Mr. Muhammad Dabir Siaghi, a university lecturer, but the title was changed to 'Travel to Khuzestan'.

Whenever the word Arabestan was mentioned it was changed to Khuzestan. Maybe that's intellectual honesty, Iranian- chauvinist style. Its no wonder that a few years ago that Dabir Siaghi was honored by the ultra-nationalists who are presiding over Iranian national society of the notables (Anjoman Mafakher Meli Iran).

As we can see, the names Mohammarah, Arabestan, Fallahieah, and Khafajiah are not the work of my imagination nor are they cooked up by a present or past leader of any Arab or foreign country. Using these names should not be considered as a sign of being a separatist. These are homegrown, historical Arab Iranian names.

I say Iranian because Iran is not just Persian and not all Iranians are all Persians. This fact (that all Iran is not Persian) has even been recognized by the constitution of the Islamic republic.

I ask you, is it not time to restore those historical names?

The Islamic republic parliament and the region's city councils need to pass laws to restore those historical names that were changed by the fascistic Pahlavi regime and thereby satisfy one of the demands of the Arabs of Khuzestan. Since the Islamic republic has rescinded many of the changes instigated by the Pahlavi regime, is it not time to allow the Arab people of Khuzestan to wear their traditional clothing and not only in their leisure time, but at courts, offices and schools?

7. The influence of the oil industry on the life of the Arabs of Khuzestan

Prior to the discovery of oil in well number one in Masjed Soleyman, by William Knox Darcy, tribal tradition and customs were the dominant ways of life among the Arabs of Khuzestan. The city of Mohammarah (present day Khorramshahr) was the only city noted for its political and commercial activities.

The British, having secured the right to build an oil refinery from Nasser al-din Shah, went ahead and bought the land for that refinery from sheikh Khazaal. The British commenced building the refinery in 1910.

British colonialism was not the only colonial power the Arabs of Khuzestan had experienced. Prior to the British; there were the Portuguese colonists. Sheikh Salman al-Kabbi, a capable ruler of the region, fought the Portuguese on many occasions, defeating them in a naval battle at one time.

Commercial ties between Mohammarah and outsiders resulted in the growth of commerce and capitalism. Prior to the discovery of oil, crop production was the main industry of the region. Mustafa Ansari in his book 'History of Khuzestan' (translated into Farsi by Muhammad Ali Javaher Kalam) writes: In the era of Sheikh Mazaal's rule, Khuzestan was exporting wheat to London'.

The first factory in Iran was built in Tabriz, the next in Tehran. Later on, the establishment of the oil refinery of Abadan laid the foundation stone for the oil industry in Iran. Apart from the native Arabs, only a minority of our Shoshtari and Dezful compatriots as well as a hand full of Behbahani compatriots, who were active in the Ahwaz market, lived there during that period. (Sheikh Khazaal, himself was married to several Behbahani women.) Abadan was a very small town, whose mayor was appointed by sheikh Khazaal. All its inhabitants were of the Arab tribes of Kaab, Adris and Nassar. The Arab sayeeds, whose ancestor sayeed Mohammed al-Tafakh is still buried in Abadan's central area occupied the center of Abadan. (Sayeed is a descendent of the prophet Mohammed; this term also has the same meaning in several surrounding Arab countries, in other Arab countries the word Sheerif is used instead.)

The establishment of the Abadan oil refinery resulted in a shift within the population make-up. A flood of immigrants from southern ports, particularly Bushehr, as well as from cities such as Tangistan, Isfahan, Chahar Mahal and Shahr-e-Kurd rushed to the area seeking jobs. While during sheikh Khazaal's rule Abadan was 95% Arabs and 5% non-Arab, the ratio reached 60% Arab to 40% non-Arab by the start of the Iran Iraq war.

A lot of people, who are called Abadani, are only first, or at best second generation residents. Ahmad Kasravi speaks of electric lights in Abadan at the start of the 20th century.

In the forties, the English built TV and radio stations in Abadan, the first in Iran.

In Abadan we see two faces of the British colonialism: On one hand, for their own self-interest, they turned the small town of Abadan to a model modern city; on the other hand they plundered our national riches.

Y Abrahamian in his book 'Iran between two revolutions', speaks of 3 different classes of employees in the oil refinery of Abadan:

- 1 Engineers and high level managers who were British
- 2 Skilled technicians and workers who were non-Arabs
- 3 The masses of un-skilled workers, who were native Arabs.

It seems that the attitude of Shapour-J, who was an ally of both the British and the Reza Shah regime and acted as their go-between, had a lot to do with this division of labor.

Overall, Khuzestan is a working class province, with an Arab majority. These two issues, being a working class province, and the ethnicity of the population (ie: Arabic) were a major factor in the contemporary history of Iran. It had always been problematic for all the different political systems that ruled in Iran.

In the past, depending on the prevalent political views of the ruler of the day, one or the other of these two issues was given greater prominence.

For instance, in the fifties, due to the prevalence of anti-colonialism, it was the issue of labor movement. Then, since the 1979 revolution, because of the anti-monarchist discourse, both Arab nationalism as well as the labor issue became relevant. But since the 2nd of Khordad events and talk of reform and democracy, the rights of the Arabs of Khuzestan have become the prominent issue.

The Iran-Iraq war had a fundamental impact on the city of Abadan. The population of the city dwindled from a million people to 250,000. The majority of residents returning after the war were the native Arabs.

The war caused great damage to the oil refinery, industrial factories and people's houses. According to members of parliament, representing Abadan and Khorramshahr, only 20-30% of these cities have been rebuilt. It seems there is no political will for restoring those cities to their pre-war prosperity. The excuse was that 'We are at a no war no peace status' with Iraq.

Overall in the cities of Khuzestan, and particularly in Abadan, we are witnessing an uneven and unbalanced development and we see gaps in the cultural, social and ethnic levels:

- 1 The gap between Arabs (poor majority) and non-Arabs (rich minority)
- 2 The gap between locations with an active oil industry verses areas where there is no oil.
- 3 The gap between urban and non-urban areas
- 4 The gap between all the above and the margin-settlers of Ahwaz (the marsh land population, all of whom are Arab)

All these economic, social, and cultural contradictions are fundamental. They were shaped during the past 80-90 years and no political system has been successful in solving them.

I like to give you an example so you can visualize the contradictions: If, lets say, an Arab of the Marshland in Hoizeh has pneumonia; his simple illness may turn chronic due to lack of medical facilities. At best, he will be taken to the 50 bed hospital in Sosangerd, where, in most probability, he will end up dead because of the poor standard of the hospital.

For a resident of Shadegan, Khorramshahr or Sosangerd suffering from a skin, heart, respiratory or kidney disease due to the pollution caused by the war, the best case scenario is that he will be taken to some provisional hospital. Again, because of a lack of funding, he will end up dead.

In comparison, people working for the oil industry in low-middle management positions, (who most probably aren't indigenous Arabs) not only have access to local, well-equipped hospitals, but will be taken to Tehran to receive good medical care if necessary.

As far as their high level managers go, the oil company has contract arrangements with top notch hospitals in the U.K. and the patients will be flown to England for treatment.

Now I am not trying to evaluate the system here and, of course, I am not saying people working for the oil industry shouldn't have good facilities for medical care. But what I am saying is that it is not right for people who do not work in the oil industry to die from simple diseases.

It seems that the only thing these people are good for is that a few hundred years after they die their bones will turn to oil, so the people residing in northern Tehran and few other select favorite cities can get rich from the sale of that oil.

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