

REVIEW:

The role of testimonies in Iranian folk epistemology

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Abstract

Testimonies are the most social source of knowledge, entirely dependent on local cultural elements. Iran is in a transitional state with its contemporary culture including both traditional elements and symptoms of modernity. Testimonies still have a significant influence in Iran in accordance with its cultural peculiarities. This paper adapts an interdisciplinary approach based on social epistemology and sets out to investigate the testimony instances which on the one hand, somehow play major roles in shaping the Iranian culture, and on the other hand, demonstrate the transition and the uncertainty between traditions and modernity. Religious testimonies are still of unquestionable credibility for most Iranians. However, their views of Western testimonies have controversial aspects to them, just as there seem to be controversies in their views of common law and the testimonies resulting from it. The significance and status of the testimonies of the old and the wise has been declining, while the testimonies of the women have acquired a higher status and reputability. Spiritual guides are still favored by a sector of society; however, they have witnessed some changes in the contemporary approach. Cultural diversity in Iran has heated the debates over historical, nationalistic, and even mystical testimonies, which still remain as challenging hot topics.

Keywords: Episteme, Iranian culture, modernity, social epistemology, testimony.

Introduction

The new age we live in is vastly different from the past with regard to the value ascribed to knowledge. That is why sociology and anthropology both study knowledge as a basic component of human social life. Epistemology, a branch of modern analytical philosophy, explores knowledge and cognition from a philosophical perspective. In recent decades some epistemologists focus on the social aspect of knowledge, which has instigated rich studies and explorations on the subject, the result of which has come to be known as ‘social epistemology’, roughly equivalent to ‘sociology of knowledge’. Social epistemology is concerned with social components which have a role in the generation of knowledge.

In social epistemology, folk epistemology is a very important item. In every culture, there are certain epistemic elements and mechanisms that may be employed as legitimate instruments to acquire knowledge, known as ‘folk epistemology’. In other words, epistemic folkways are epistemic concepts and norms based on common sense, i.e. principles which people hold concerning knowledge. In fact, some cultural differences are due to differing epistemic folkways. In the early years of the emergence of a systematic study of epistemology, epistemologists generally belittled the subject and ascribed little epistemological value to it. In the last few decades, however, some distinguished epistemologists (Bishop 2005) have reconsidered the significance of folk epistemology, referring to it as the starting point of human epistemic, from which a lot can be learned. According to Alvin Goldman, ordinary epistemic concepts and principles play important roles in epistemology, and epistemology should be based on epistemic folk ways, and that is why there is no other starting point for epistemology (Goldman 1992).

Therefore, every culture can have a folk epistemology, bearing the mark of that culture. Folk

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epistemology itself is composed of elements, mechanisms and methods, an important one of which is the testimony. Although, in contemporary epistemology, the epistemic status of testimony as an epistemological resource is controversial (Audi 2002), at least a part of folk epistemology is largely based on testimonies. Therefore, one may acquire knowledge on folk epistemology by exploring testimonies.

Testimonies as a source of knowledge are constructed by the epistemological system of every person and every nation; we know about our birth date, identity, history of our family and nation, our heroes and myths, religious propositions, reliability of commodities and foods, etc. on the basis of testimonies. Thus, every belief we hold because of the sayings of other people, is a case of testimony (Audi 2005: 129).

The Iranian culture, like other cultures, is strongly linked to its folk epistemology based on testimonies and there are some items in its testimonies that have unique characteristics peculiar to Iranian culture. In this paper we want to explain the role and mechanism of testimonies and their peculiar characteristics in contemporary Iranian culture. Some subcultural differences about testimony will also be explored. There are superfluous testimonies and thus we will only explore the most important ones.

Methodology

The research methodology follows a combination of fieldwork, naturalistic observations, and literature review. The approach used in the fieldwork was based on conducting interviews with a group of citizens in the Iranian capital, Tehran, as well as with the local people of diverse Iranian subcultures such as the Azeri, Kurd, Baloch, etc.

The research also included a large number of participant observations as well as a register of the authors' own data and information based on the experiences of life in Iran. The literature review was focused on anthropological and socio-religious books and academic papers discussing Iranian folk culture as well as ethno-scientific articles. We shall provide the collected testimonies in categories that are analyzed and discussed in their context.

Findings and Discussion

The various categories of analyzed testimonies in contemporary Iranian culture and subcultures can be presented as follows:

Religious testimonies: In societies that most people are strongly affiliated with a religion, religious testimonies become an important source of knowledge. Different versions of religion lead to different religious testimonies. Iran is the largest society of people believing in *Shia* in the world and therefore Iranians generally view *Shia* as the true religious source for testimonies. It is a branch of Islam that regards Ali as the legitimate successor to Prophet Mohammed and considers the traditions of the twelve Imams as well as the Prophet Mohammad and his daughter *Fatima* to be true and the most reliable religious proof for Muslims. The twelve Imams were spiritual and temporal leaders regarded by *Shia* as descendants of Mohammad and divinely appointed to guide Muslims after his death. In many fields, these testimonies suggest the way of life for *Shia*. There are popular religious books in Iran in which one can find many testimonies about how to eat, how to behave with family and children, how to sleep, how to judge, how to trade, etc. (Majlesi 1987). Religious testimonies can be formulated as follows:

“Everything said by Prophet Mohammad or Imams and documented as such, is a proof for the *Shia* and if there is a contradiction between religion and other sources such as science, the priority will be with the religious testimony.”

Iranian scholars, who believe in *Shia*, commonly cite ‘scientific’ testimonies in Holy Quran as miracles. In Quran, about 300 verses are cited as ‘miraculously’ describing the essence of certain scientific phenomena such as gravity, the sun, parity, etc. (Guessoum 2008; Shaker 2004:392-396). Mahdi Bazargan, a famous Iranian politician and religious scholar (Jahanbakhsh 2001), greatly extended the studies on the agreement and compatibility of religion and science in Iran. He would appeal to mathematical, chemical and physical rules and formulas in order to establish the truth and benefits of certain religious commands such as *Ghusl* (Islamic ablution ritual washing entire body) as well as other Islamic laws and/or instructions concerning spiritual purity (Bazargan 1943: 81-90).

Because of the great confidence in religious testimonies, when *Shia* encounter contradictions between religious testimonies and scientific ones, they may opt for religious testimonies and take the wisdom of divine commands as sacred wisdom unknown to humans, and then consider the contradiction to have resulted from human imperfection and the limitations of science. Science is considered imperfect as it can potentially be falsified, while religious laws issued through divine knowledge should be true and thus must be followed. For example, for *Shia*, the promised Imam *Mahdi* is considered to be alive since 1,200 years ago and observing the world affairs waiting for the time when God allows him to appear and realize justice in the world. This belief is a central belief for *Shia* in Iran.

In *Shia*, although the jurisprudential aspect of religion is dominant, religious authorities or clerics pay attention to scientific knowledge too and therefore when issuing a decree, they may consider what science would say on the subject. In other words, scientific testimonies have some influence on jurisprudential testimonies, though this influence is prone to some exceptions. For example, according to Shi’ites, in every lunar year, the beginning and the end of the month of *Ramadan*, the time of fasting for Muslims, could be determined only by seeing the moon by naked eyes, whether by a person himself, or by two just witnesses. Religious authorities generally don’t approve of seeing the moon by astronomical instruments and don’t grant permission for that. Thus, in this case, the scientific testimony has no influence on religious testimony.

Another religious judgment among Muslims is the order to Jihad, which is a holy war to defend Islam as a sacred duty under certain conditions (Mohammad 1985; Najafi 1981: 322). Based on this judgment, it was required of all Iranians to join the defense against Iraqi army forces that waged a war against Iran in 1981. This type of Jihad would be obligatory for every Muslim (Mansouriye Larijani 1998: 25-31). After Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-1989), the Iranian leader at the time, asserted this, many people joined the combat forces and would not doubt in accepting his testimony. His testimony had a strong influence on many Iranians and thus they fought bravely, based on their belief in Islam and Khomeini’s testimony concerning Jihad. He had said:

“Iranian people, being independent, are religiously obliged to defend their sovereignty upon the order of their own logic and nous even if clergies do not order it, while in fact they are ordering it too.” (Ayatollah Khomeini 1996: 216).

Historically, clergies have had a strong influence on large masses of people and in certain cases their testimonies led to important events in Iran’s history. For example, when Grand Ayatollah Mirzaye Shirazi (1815-1894) banned the usage of tobacco, to protest a contract between a British company and the

government of Iran, people obeyed his religious decree (Teymouri 1982: 27; Mirbagheri 2004) and followed his verdict as a true testimony and divine command:

“Today the usage of tobacco, whatever the method of usage, is as war with promised Mahdi”
(Karbalaiee 1965: 117-118)

Because of his authority, Iran’s king at the time, Naser-al-din Shah Qajar, was forced to cancel the contract (Etemadosaltaneh 1971: 117-118). This historical case shows that religious testimonies, especially those issued by well-known religious authorities could dominate other testimonies in Iran.

Testimonies of common law: The Iranian society has preserved many of its old traditional customs and individualism is not as strong as in Western societies. Therefore, Iranian people try to behave more and more in accordance with the common law, although there are certain complicated cases that may be regarded as exceptions. In Iranian culture, the manners of wearing clothes and men’s hairstyle form a testimony and could be considered as a manifestation of a person’s beliefs and ideology (Koutlaki 2010). For instance, if a man has extraordinary dressing or long hair, he may be condemned by most people, especially older generations. Common law may be contradictory in some cases and thus lead to contradictory testimonies. For example, common sense is not fixed on manners of wearing jeans and therefore the following contradictory statements: “wearing jeans is not suitable for a man” and “jeans are stylish and fashionable clothes for a man” are both ‘common law’ testimonies.

Also, to select a field of study or a job is a matter of common law testimonies rather than a matter of person’s desires and tastes; common law decrees that technical as well as medical disciplines are the best ones and humanities are the worst. Therefore, the young may not necessarily prioritize the field of study of their choice according to their own individual desire. For example, a study has reported that 76% of students in the field of library science had chosen their major as their 20th choice in the annual universities entrance exams. Besides, 70% of students said that family, relatives and friends had influenced their choices. Furthermore, 60% of the students of psychology believed that they had little hope of getting a good job through studying psychology (Bigdeli, Abam 2003). But in recent years, especially in major cities, common law is changing and people’s personal desires are beginning to surface and exert influence on choosing a field of study and career. A gradual change in common law has resulted in a situation where humanities and arts are recently being selected by more students in universities.

Broad social and economic conditions have also had an influence on common law testimonies. For example, during the war with Iraq, many Iranians praised a simple life away from formalities, but today the common law testimonies are very different.

Western testimonies: The attitude of Iranians towards Western testimonies is contradictory, composed of admirations and condemnations. This may be because Iranians accept what comes from the West passively and sometimes, there is a kind of suspicion about the intentions of the West. For example, a common law may ascribe good quality and reliability to a Western product. Even counterfeit commodities are commonly offered in the market with English labels and brand names. Recently, the government is attempting to improve the purchase and use of domestic products and goods through the use of mass media to promote testimonies such as: “Iranian made products! Buy Iranian merchandise”.

Iranians have always admired the lifestyle, discipline and orderly administration and accountability observed in the West. During the interviews, we encountered exaggerated accounts of security and

prosperity about life in European and American societies and realized that many Iranians living in the West commonly exaggerate on such aspects.

However, moving from the realm of the goods to the realm of sociopolitical thoughts, suspicion arises. Many Iranians consider the colonization by the West, especially by Great Britain, as evidence for suspicion; their belief in a spirit of paganism among Western intellectuals may also intensify this suspicion. It's not only the Iranian masses who think of the West as atheistic; even influential intellectuals, such as the Western educated philosopher, Ahmad Fardid (1909-1994), ascribed to this view in his thinking. His school of thought trained many disciples who consider the West as a place of destruction of humanity and morality and religion (Boroujerdi 1996). He founded a school in which everything coming from the West would be viewed with suspicion. For Fardid, humanism, human rights and modern reason had a sense of decadence to them that could lead mankind to absurdity. He believed that the modern picture of the world and its derivatives would eventually lead to the destruction and decline of humanity and morality (Boroujerdi 1996: 4-63).

Nevertheless, Fardid managed to create a powerful movement in contemporary Iran, where lots of elites and thinkers have an unwavering belief in the above mentioned ideas and notions, which in turn has been very influential in the evolution of Iranian society by constructing powerful testimonies. But other social groups present a relatively moderate conception of the West. Their main thesis is that:

“The West is a combination of good and evil and, therefore, Iranians must select the good and drop the evils.”

Such suspicions might epistemologically be justifiable, as there are contradictions and contrasts between the fundamental principles of Iranian *Shia* and the modern and relatively secular West which has been influenced more by Christianity.

Moreover, the history of Western colonialism in the form of negative historical testimonies is commonly referred to by Iranians and plays a large role in the formation of such suspicions. For example, the role of the United States in a coup in Iran in 1953 and the role of Great Britain in the institution and survival of Pahlavi's dynasty may be mentioned (Amanat, Vejdani, 2012).

Testimonies of the elderly and the wise: Iranian culture considers that a person's vision evolves over time and such a vision might be incomprehensible for the young. The proverb: “*what the old see in brick, the young don't see in the mirror*” confirms this judgment. So, in Iranian tradition and culture, age alone may guarantee the validity of a testimony. Even the term ‘old’ brings along connotations of great value, and ‘old’ and ‘wise’ could be considered as synonymous. The Iranian culture thus implies surrender to the testimonies of the old.

However, this may be linked to an important component of Eastern culture, i.e. Eastern patriarchy (Inhorn 1996: 30). Because of the unique status given to the aged and their testimonies, Iran's Judiciary has successfully used it to settle minor disputes and disagreements through establishing Dispute Resolution Councils which operate on the basis of the judgment of the old (and thus trusted members) with a good reputation.

Testimonies of spiritual guides (Sheikh): The term ‘old’ is also well recognized in the rich mystical tradition of Sufism in Iran. One of the immutable principles of Sufism is an absolute fellowship and respect to the commands and sayings of the old and wise, also called a ‘*Sheikh*’ (spiritual guide) (Renard 1996:

186). *Hafiz*, the most famous Persian poet says: “Do not traverse alone, without a spiritual guide.” Such testimonies are taken seriously by Iranians.

Although modernization has somehow suppressed mystical manifestations of culture, it has such deep roots in Iranian culture that still today many people find Sufism of great appeal and many such fellowships are still found in Iran. An interesting feature is that many of the highly educated people in modern science are also attracted to such groups and may passively yield to anything said by *Sheikh*, though they are supposed to follow strong reason and evidence. This loyalty has a psychological cause; in the modern age, with few sacred things and the domination of science, floating on the Sufism’s river may give a pure and unique pleasure. This is similar to the growing interest in the West to old traditions such as Buddhism, Yoga and other traditions (Radha, 2011).

In Iran, mysticism has two forms: traditional and modern. *Dervish* is a Sufi Muslim that follows austerity on the ascetic path. Traditional forms, such as Gonabadi *Dervishes* and Kermanshahi *Dervishes*, insist on discipline and austerity, while the modern forms, such as “mysticism of link” use modern and academic methods with less emphasis on adherence to *Sheikh*. In the latter form, the importance and the centrality of *Sheikh* and his testimonies are diminished.

Testimonies of women: The relation between men and women in Iranian culture is complex and the common law dictates certain rules in this regard. Traditionally, women’s testimonies were generally regarded as suspicious. Wrong interpretations of verses in the holy text may have also resulted in a religious testimony, e.g. based on the verse in Quran which says: “truly, their (women’s) trickery and deceits are very great”. Some religious authorities have been trying to change this wrong conception by highlighting the historical context of the verse.

But the status of the testimonies of women has improved over time. Women’s education and economic independence have been increasing over time, which has led to the enhancement of their position. In other words, their enhanced social position has elevated the validity and dependability of their testimonies. Jurgen Habermas (1929 -) a German sociologist and philosopher, emphasizes on the importance of the role of Iranian women in cultural promotion and development (Kayhan newspaper, No. 20,117, dated 2012/08/01, page 8).

However, one may discover the paradoxical aspects of women’s testimonies in Iran which could inspire both praise and contempt. In fact, two different views of women manifest themselves in two different approaches to women’s testimonies. The first approach is purely traditional and the second one belongs to the new generation and results from the dialogue between common law and modernization.

Testimonies of physicians: Doctors everywhere have credibility and authority, and their authority is mostly valid only in the field of medicine. But in Iran, physicians have occupied the highest position so that the scope of their authority exceeds the boundaries of medicine. For this reason, physicians, in general, tend to act bossy, giving commands and orders and making demands as if they were political leaders. Only rarely they bother to provide explanations concerning their diagnosis and when they don’t disdain to provide such accounts, they may frown and make faces.

There are also physicians who take advantage of their titles and social positions in virtually every field, from investment in real estate to shopping at a supermarket. That’s why many Iranians like to use the title of ‘doctor’. Their lifestyle, political attitudes, and prestige, as a testimony, are favorable to people so that sometimes they are highly regarded with awe and their actions serve as examples in every field.

Common law maintains that “physicians are some of the most knowledgeable people and everything that they do and say must be correct.” But this case, too, has some paradoxical aspects to it. Loss of ethics and professional commitment among physicians, which in certain cases has led to major medical blunders (Iranian News Website Tabnak in Persian <http://www.tabnak.ir/>) has seriously undermined the doctors’ validity and credibility. Therefore, in recent years these testimonies have grown to be also common: “Do not listen too much to what doctors say”, “Doctors are just looking to make money”, etc. For this reason, there are doubts about the validity of the physicians’ medical testimonies. Nowadays, because of this paradoxical position, some people are gradually returning to traditional medicine.

Testimonies concerning Iranian calendar: The Iranian culture marks certain dates on the calendar based on various sources, including Islamic events, events in ancient times before Islam, and the local history of its subcultures. Sometimes there are inconsistencies between several sources of a date. For example, the Iranian calendar involves 365 days in every year, known as *Jalali* Calendar. However, the Islamic lunar calendar (AH) includes 354 days. When two historical events or ceremonies in these two calendars overlap, many times the result is two inconsistent historical testimonies which originate from different calendars.

According to *Jalali* calendar, the Iranian New Year starts on April 21 and therefore celebration is expected around this time of the year. But sometimes, it coincides with the *Moharram* month in AH calendar which for Shi’ite is the month of mourning because of the martyrdom of Imam *Hossein*. The result is that in some years, late April days are a time for both carnival and mourning.

Another example is that Iranians celebrate ‘Women’s Day’ according to the AH calendar based on the birthday of Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Mohammad; rarely does someone celebrate March 8 which is the International Women’s Day. However, the Labor Day is celebrated in Iran following the international date on May 1st.

Nationalistic testimonies: What ones’ predecessors say about the world, their nation, language, religion, etc. constructs a major part of one’s identity. Geographical and cultural parameters too help determine nationalistic attitudes. The Middle East includes people from many different ethnicities, and in Iran every ethnic group makes a subculture. Thus, we see different nationalistic testimonies that belong to different subcultures. For example, most people brought up in *Kurdish* ethnicity learn to fight discrimination as the first and foremost duty in their lives. This duty is the most important testimony of the Kurdish subculture.

Our observations and interviews confirmed that many Iranians hold stereotypical views about various cities, regions and ethnic groups; even educated people ascribe to this and therefore citizens of certain cities may be known as stingy, lazy, valorous, etc. These ascriptions are not merely a joke, but many people hold them as important testimonies. Therefore, we came to a general rule concerning testimonies of subcultures as the following:

“If I belong to the a certain ethnic group in Iran, then values and customs of that ethnicity and its testimonies concerning history, language, politics, etc. would be respectable; what is inscribed in its texts would be reliable testimonies for me and any opposing testimonies coming from other subcultures and ethnicities will, thus, be suspicious.”

Ethnic nationalism in Iran cannot be fundamentally different from that observed in other cultures. What sticks out in the Iranian culture, however, is the dispersion of views and interpretations regarding a single phenomenon or historical event. Thus the polarity of subcultures may result in a variety of inconsistent historical testimonies. There are many contradictory historical testimonies on Persian civilization and its

history. That's why its history becomes controversial; for example "Persepolis" as an ancient masterpiece of architecture represents the ancient Persian culture and history, but today some scholars claim that "Persepolis" was never really completed and thus essentially ancient Persian civilization is a fiction (Iranian News Website Tabnak in Persian <http://www.tabnak.ir/>).

Mythical testimonies and modern changes: The 21th century has been the age of returning to myths. Iranians are generally known to be pretty emotional and can get carried away easily and negligent characters are not so favored among them. Every subculture has its own myths. For example, *Aryo Barzan* is the symbol of resistance and justice for the 'Larry' subculture, but 'Azeri' subculture admires *Koroghlu* as a symbol of bravery, justice and fight against tyranny. Also, *Kaave*, the blacksmith is such a symbol for the Persian subculture.

Not only do Iranians live by ancient myths, but also they show deep dependence on their contemporary heroes. Some of the heroes that are said to have had a great deal of influence on Iranians subconscious are: Sadegh Hedayat, Dr. Shariati, Mahdi Bazargan, Professor Hesabi, Allameh Tabatabaie, Sattar Khan, etc.

What these heroes and myths say and do, are likely to be taken as a confident testimony for people. This makes the testimonies of a hero reliable and valuable even in the fields over which he may have little expertise. In recent years, Prof. Majid Samii (1937-) who is one of the world's greatest brain surgeons is considered as a hero by many Iranians especially the educated and the middle class. But it seems many people want to make him an absolute hero in all fields, far from the operating room, and consider him a wise man in all fields. We can see signs of this new attitude. (Iranian News Website Khabar Online in Persian <http://khabaronline.ir/>).

Of course everywhere in the world people might tend to look up to celebrities, especially to actors and football players. Nonetheless, with Iranians the situation looks markedly different; Iranians actually want to create a hero to set an example for the masses, with everyone trying to follow up and match their lives with the hero's life, rather than doing anything in opposition or venturing to mark their own paths. For Iranians, fundamental changes and reforms may not be possible, unless initiated by the heroes and champions. Even for the young and new generation, such testimonies seem to be very important. If one takes a glance at most of Iranians' Facebook pages, it seems like most of them are philosophers or at least a young wise man. But this might be more of a habit than love for wisdom, because to recite and excessively repeat the famous quotations might actually take away from their effectiveness.

Conclusion

A gradual change in the validity and reliability of testimony resources and creation of new ones: Iranian society is continuously changing approaches and criteria regarding the reputability of various epistemological sources, including the credibility of testimonies; the testimonies which used to have high reputability are now losing ground and status. On the contrary, new testimonies are becoming reputable.

On the other hand, the confusion and suspicion usually associated with Western testimonies seem to have spread to traditional testimonies as well. A case in point might be traditional medicine the testimonies of which are treated with caution. The testimonies of fortune tellers and magicians seem to be evoking similar reactions. While people usually scoff at such testimonies, deep down, they do give some credit to them to some degree; yet, there are also shreds of doubt.

But the most controversial case is the uncertainty surrounding testimonies of tradition vs. modern science. Such uncertainty is common in many developing countries. For instance, today the position and status of testimonies of the wise and the elders has decreased and they may themselves admit that the educated must be referred to for counseling and advice. There has been a gradual change in arranged marriages, and pre-marriage acquaintance is becoming popular; the girls have more freedom in choosing their spouses. These are all examples indicative of common law testimonies losing ground.

Although testimonies of religion are assumed to be the deepest ones, capable of causing considerable social and political changes in critical times, it seems that religion and common law today are still consistent and co-existent. As an instance, consider the pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) which is one of the important religious duties for every Muslim. Religious texts emphasize on staying away from luxury in *Hajj*. Therefore, when Muslims circulate around the shrine of *Ka'abe* during *Hajj*, they must quite simply wear a white dress regardless of class, color and ethnicity. In principle, simple life is an important religious virtue. But after returning home, pilgrims commonly get caught up in the pomp and show of a celebrity. Another example is the funeral ceremony that has also become a luxurious one.

On the one hand, according to religious instructions, people maintain that “simplicity is beauty”, yet on the other hand common law implicitly testifies that “your social status depends on your clothing and its brand”. The brand clothing market is hot, especially in the capital city of Tehran (Iranian News Website in Persian <http://www.vivannews.com>).

In recent years, even in small towns and villages, the young wear fashionable clothes, though this was quite rare in the past. But in certain subcultures, such as *Kurdish* and *Balochi* (living in *Balochestan* of Iran) traditional clothing is still of appeal and continues to hold value. In those areas, having a high social class and economic status does not normally lead to different clothing.

Subcultural differences and testimony: As it was said before, Iran is a vast land with a variety of subcultures. What we said above does not apply to all subcultures equally. For example, the status of old testimonies in *Balochi* subculture is higher than its status in Tehran and other large cities. Sunni subcultures, because of their small population, consider religious rituals as a means to maintain their identity. Among *Balochi* and *Larry* subcultures which follow tribal livelihoods, common law and testimonies of the elderly, the wise, are prevalent and dominant. In *Balochistan*, there are some tribes with more than 5,000 members all of whom have the same last name. In *Kurdish* areas, women have better status compared with other subcultures and are very active and influential in social life.

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