

A woman barber who is also a ("māmâ") midwife, also works in the village. She also knows how to perform "hajâmat" and "bâdkesh".<sup>3</sup> The woman barber's responsibilities which are shaving and cutting the hair of women and some medical practices, have similarities to those of the male barber. But because of being a woman and having fewer customers, her responsibilities are not as diverse as those of the barber.

The barber's other activities that gradually have become part of tradition are: to invite, and entertain; to see to people in wedding and funeral ceremonies; to accompany the bridegroom to the baths; and to over-see and act as an accountant in weddings. In the past, and perhaps even today, people used to visit the barber for treatment and the pulling out of teeth. Washing people in baths is also another of the barber's activities. By using tools named "mile" and "qamish", he circumcises small boys. In traditional medicine, belief in the existence of harmless winds in the

body has a special place. "Bâdkesh" (see footnote 3) used for the removal of these winds, and "hajâmat" or blood-letting are performed by the barber. People also go to him for treatment of wounds. Apart from his medical activities, the barber also performs other work including sharpening hammers and knives and sometimes washing the dead.

The barber's tools in the past were as follows: a wooden comb; a pair of scissors; "qol qolak" a flask-like container for holding water; "sollab" a leather band for sharpening razors; a "photeh" or cloth; a mirror, a leather handbag; and a metallic razor without a handle.

Tools used in other traditional activities are as follows: a horn for "hajâmat"; "kalbatâin" for tooth-pulling; lance for wounds; "mile" "qamish" and a razor for circumcision; and a belt wheel for knife sharpening.

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3. "Hajâmat" and "bâdkesh" are two traditional methods of medical treatment. In the case of the first, an animal horn open at both ends is placed at one end on the back near the shoulder of the patient and is sucked at the other end; so that the vaccum created causes swelling on the skin. This act is repeated several times on spots near one another till a large swelling appears on the skin. Then the swelling is cut at several places by a razor to release the blood collected under the swelling. This treatment is used when, in popular language, one's blood gets infected. "Bâdkesh" is a similar method in which instead of a horn, a cup is used. The vaccum inside the cup is created by burning a piece of cotton wool which is removed and a lid put on). No cutting or bleeding is involved here. This treatment is used for the cure of muscle and bone aches.

# The Barber and his Social Role in the Village of Velyân.\*

by: Mohammad MIRSHOKRAI

Velyân is a village within the district<sup>1</sup> of Savejbolagh in Karaj province and is situated approximately 30 kilometers north-west of the city of Karaj. The major productive activities here are horticulture, animal husbandry and farming. Horticulturists, livestock breeders and farmers respectively, constitute Velyân's main top social strata. Some members of each of these strata are also shopkeepers. One should also add to the above three strata a fourth stratum, the workers who have no ownership of any means of production.

Among the latter stratum, people like barbers, bathkeepers and shepherds who because of the nature of their occupation have more contacts with the people, have a special position. These people, who in the local terminology are referred to as tradesmen ("Kâsebkâr"), are always chosen through communal deliberations from among candidates who have little means and generally have no orchards or animals (or if they possess anything, it is nominal).

Among members of this group, the barber who has closer interactions with people and their families has a larger role than an ordinary tradesman. Until 18-20 years ago, village barbers were not stationed in a shop but in order to conduct their work, visited people's homes. Today still, those of high esteem and respect and/or those unable to visit the barber, have barbers attending their homes. Two of Velyân's current barbers are step-brothers (of separate mothers) who have received their occu-

pation from three family generations back.

The barber in Velyân, like in most other Iranian villages, also has traditional medical responsibilities. In this way, he is similar to those village old women who perform traditional medical practices. The barber has also a particular intimate relationship with people and their families. A Velyâny old man once said: "The barber is the keeper of all our secrets. For instance if my wife wanted a tooth pulled, who else would do the job?" But another Velyâny once said; "The barber is nosey and gossips and therefore people discuss little of their personal affairs with him." Although these viewpoints are contradictory, they nevertheless indicate the barber's close and deep interaction with people.

Till a few years ago, on one of the Nowruz days or the thirteenth day of every Nowruz<sup>2</sup> village tradesmen used to be chosen in a carnival-like ceremony, with music and the like. barbers' wage is in cash or in kind and is paid on a yearly basis.

The barber's cash customers are more shopkeepers, salary and wage earners; in general, those who have more dealings with money.

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\* Summary of an article written by Mr. Mohammad Mirshokrâi.

1. District here refers to "bakhsh" which in Iran is used to denote a county division.
2. Nowruz is the Iranian New Year which begins on the 21st of March.