

Reasons of Decline of Naseri Period from the British Travelers View

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Abstract: This study talks about the reasons of decline in the Naseri period from the perspective of British travelers. They mentioned reasons of decline and retardation of Iran. Politically, these travelers pointed to despotism, inefficiency of governments, incomplete legal structure, individualism, expansion of bribes and corruption in organizations and bureaucratic orders. In economic aspect, lack of proper roads, reduction in the volume of trades, increase in the costs and expensive goods, and the problem of water and jungle were the main reasons in retarding Iran. One important responsibility of governments is provision of water and jungle for people, an issue which was not considered in Naseri period. Socially, British travelers talked about religious biases, superstitious and education. The method of study is descriptive-analytic. After describing data, they would be analyzed.

Keywords: Decline, Retardation, Iran, Naseri period, Travelers.

Introduction

One basic plan of Great Britain government in Iran was to weaken this country in order to both keep its benefits in India and also prevent the intervention of Iran and Russia. For this, in 19th century, Britain's travelers and political agents were sent to Iran. They had to write their observations in the form travelogues to transfer their experiences to next generations. But, there are differences between political agents and travelers in the way of defining societies because they write travelogue based on their own point of view about people, life style, religions and opinions. An ambassador plays crucial role in political relations and delivers policy and opinions of his country to other governments. But, traveler is not just a political representative, rather he or she is an ordinary person representing cultures and principles of his or her own society. Another advantage of travelogues is that they contain information concerning social affairs and traditions of ordinary people. These issues are absorbing for travelers and are not considered that much in Iranian resources. These people sometimes talk about reasons of Iran's retardation and decline and also offer some methods and solutions to remove these harsh problems. It should be noted that some solutions are influenced by national biases of the writers. Ordinary people are in direct contact with travelers, so travelers transfer cultures and traditions of both nations. Travelogues are the first factor of connecting nations and cultures to each other.

They include information regarding people's life and their daily connections, and even sometimes, point to dark facts of the source nation. However, it is possible that travelogues change the truth for the benefits of some parties. Some points in travelogues are not important for the source nations but catch the eyes of the writers. The

geopolitical position of Iran led to make this country as a center for conflicts of two contemporary world super powers, i.e. Russia and Britain. These two countries sent some representatives to Iran in order to grasp thorough information about strategic positions, roads, social and economical status, and transfer their observations and experiences by travelogues to the next generations.

Political status of Iran in Naseri period

Although among kings of Qajar, Naser al-Din Shah had a rather good political intelligence, and through travelling to other countries collected enough information regarding different ways of governance, he didn't implement fundamental political and social reforms. A king should allocate power in a way that every part of organizational pyramid benefits, and also, people related to the main government gains the power which is similar to the King's and not lead to wrath of Russia and Britain (Dolat Abad, 1992).

King used a variety of ways to capture power, including threat, bribes, deceive, pretend to nationalism and avoidance from foreigners. Naser al-Din Shah utilized the policy of "Divide and Conquer" to hold power. The most intelligent plan of Shah was to divide and create a rift between every pier of government pyramid in a way that they just pay attention to their conflicts with colleagues and associates. This was the harshest catastrophic situation among officials influencing all country. Therefore, there was no need for detailed bureaucracy, and the most important medium of centralized power of Qajar's kings was the so called "divine origin". People believed that Shah is the representative of Allah on earth; therefore, it legalized his government (Azghandi, 1997).

In political tribe-based governments in Iran, there was no mediating force for political power of Shah, and corrupted governments were ready to be demolished with any foreign brutal force. This was common in all Iranian dynasties (Reza Gholi, 1994).

Role of government

"Lady Sheil", wife of Colonel Justine Sheil who was British Prime minister in Iran, lived with her husband in Iran during reign of Naser al-Din Shah. She was in the heart of all governmental decisions. In her diaries, Lady Sheil described Iran as a hegemonic order in which there was no room for democracy (Lady Sheil, 1989). Lord Curzon, British orientalist, defined Iran's government a hegemonic structure in which Shah is the center of everything and he decides about all issues of the country. He believed that government of Iran is just a pyramid of powers whose benefits are only for people who are in the top positions, from Shah to leader of a village (Curzon, 1983). Curzon reasoned that dictatorship in Iran was the result of deficit constitution of laws, in one hand, and the widespread expansion of oriental traditions and rituals, on the other hand. In fact, Iran's government is just sheer application of autocracy by a league of differentiated dictators (Curzon, 1983).

Curzon, although believed in power of Shah, didn't consider it as having the required tool to implement orders of Shah; that is, a power with no permanent army and appropriate bureaucracy. He considered army a group of Shah's relatives, and governmental bureaucracy a group of people who inherited power (Curzon, 1983). Mackenzie talked about the huge number of corrupted and inefficient Qajar's princesses, who were infamous and just relied on the life of Naser al-Din Shah (Mackenzie, 1980).

Lord Curzon believed that "in a country with imperfect laws and organizational structures, centrality of Shah is highly important. People themselves are the barriers in front of progress. Officials around Shah are afraid of not satisfying him, and Shah scares from critiques of foreign press" (Curzon, 1983).

One important factor in preventing development is inefficiency of governments. Qajar experienced this phenomenon completely. Social disorders, conspiracy of officials, expansion of bribery and corruption in bureaucratic organizations led to decrease in efficiency of government and proper implementation of rules. Corruption and bribery made people to lose their trust to Shah (Beiro, Alan (1987). Curzon pointed to servants of every official in Iran who were drowned in bribes and corruption, in a way that insert huge losses to national capitals (Beiro, Alan (1987).

Colonel McGregor in his book "travelogue of Khorasan province", introduced himself as an ordinary people, but in fact, he had the responsibility of collecting information from southwest and northeast borders of Iran. He frequently notified British government regarding vast benefits of Iran, and introduced west civilization as the best people in the world. He wrote about the process of ordering Iran:

"Iranian people need oppression. Oppression should be used in proper place. Officials have to approve that Iranian people can't live without oppression" (McGregor, 1985).

Role of economy

Commercial significance of a country depends on some points. First it needs productive soils. It should be located near to moderate areas and sea. Second, it is required to have productive lands, laborious people, and different kinds of mines. Iran has all of them" (Jamalzadeh, 2005). Iran is capable of having proper economical growth, with productive fields and mines. The only problem is inappropriate usage of industrial tools, which leads to using only one fifth of fields. Coal mines are not used properly and some factories in Tehran were

closed. Wrong transportation leads to decay of many fruits. Rivers and streams are frequently located everywhere, but fields are arid and unusable. Soil of Iran is capable of producing half of wheat required by people of Britain. Sometimes half of people died because of famine. Many of people immigrate to other countries to run from death. If Britain had any route to Iran, the customs of cotton were higher than our taxes. Baron David writes in his travelogue:

"Land roads are so hard to be travelled because there was no proper coach, train or steam bouts" (Baron, 1988). Lack of them not only leads to reduction in trades, but also to increase in costs and harder lives for people. Lady Sheil considers Iranian people so strange because they all have debts to others, from Shah, who put country under heavy debts to Russia emperor, to an ordinary farmer. All are moaning from their debts (Lady Sheil, 1995). In his travel to Iran, Sir Percy Sox considered lack of water and jungle as the main barriers in front of development of Iran (Sox, 1984).

Gertrude Bell talked about outbreak of plague in Mashhad and Tehran and also in Samarkand. He wrote about polluted fruits and trashes in the streets, from polluted water. People left cities and went towards mountains. In deserts, people have to live. In villages, disease was prevalent (Bell, 1984).

Lambton described the nomadic affairs in Iran:

"Prevalence of nomadic affairs in Iran has always been a problem in this country, in a way that governing all nomads was transferred to their boss. One aspect of Iran's history has been conflict between nomadic and non-nomadic issues. This was extended till now. Different dynasties of Iran reached power by support of nomadic people. In fact in all cases, nomadic bases made a fluctuated country" (Lambton, 1954).

Wilson wrote in his book that Iran and its people are the lowest country in the world. There is no law and jurisdiction, and people are divided to wolves and sheep. Wilson believed no change would occur in Iran unless foreign people govern it. Iran is unchangeable. Iran is like a muddy wall between Britain and Russia. So, we have to repair it in the case of destruction (Wilson, 1984).

Role of society

People in Naseri period were poor and had no healthcares. Diseases like plague and cholera were so prevalent. British travelers considered method of burying bodies, polluted fruits and water as the reasons of bad quality of societies. In some cities, people fight for bread and rich people do not pay attention to the poor (Sox, 1987).

Baron De Bode, a British orientalist and historian, believed that people of Lorestan, due to far distance from the central government and their wild nature, always were a problem for the stability of Shah's power (De Bode, 1992).

Mackenzie wrote in his book "Travelogue to North of Iran" that "in Guilan, there is a huge amount of fever. Other diseases like urine infection, paralysis and hernia are much, and some diseases like heart attack, cold and cancer are in lower amount. In summer, diarrhea is widespread. People of Mazandaran and Astar Abad are of unhealthy foods and don't exercise. Foods include rice, fish, melon, fig, peach and etc. Water is polluted. Nine out of ten use opium. Religious biases and lack of doctors make people to not use European treatments. Hygiene is in a regrettable status and people of Rasht, Astara and Mashhad are in risk of death (Mackenzie, 1982).

Sox considered Iran a desert in which we can find some villages whose people live in hard situations. If there be lacks of water, people have to immigrate to the other places. Immigration of people means creation of arid lands and deserts. Sox talked about hoarding bread in distance between Yazd and Kerman, and no attention of rich people to the poor families. He described the regrettable lives of people in Shiraz (Sox, 1982).

Discussion and Conclusion

Naseri period is one of the most important periods in Iran in which many substantial events were happened. Britain was in the center of governing Iran and sent many representatives to different regions of Iran. British travelogues play a significant role in describing positive and negative points of society of Iran. They talked about advantages and disadvantages of people's lives. They considered lack of water and jungle as the main problems of country for which no efforts were done by the central government. Factors like a dictator Shah, lack of laws, poverty and diseases, social discrimination, lack of hygiene, superstitious and religious biases were some problems in Qajar era. Some of problems were just exaggerated. These travelogues described prevalent opinions and superstitious among people and also strong and weak points of Iranian culture. They envisaged Naseri period as a regrettable time in Iran and talked about decline of Iran by Qajar kings.

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