



The Idea of Returning to the Village and the Construction of a Revolutionary Ideology in the Thought of Samad Behrangi and Jalal Al-e Ahmad

Majid Ostovar ^{*1}

^{1*} Department of Political Science, Ra. C., Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran. ostovar@iau.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

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During the 1960s and 1970s, Iranian society underwent significant transformations, among which the Pahlavi regime's modernization program played a central role. This top-down modernization led to the expansion of urbanization and a marked increase in rural-to-urban migration. The idea of "returning to the village," which emerged in the fictional literature of this period, can be understood as a critical response to the pervasive and technocratic nature of this modernization process. The present study seeks to address a fundamental question: how did Iranian intellectuals such as Samad Behrangi and Jalal Al-e Ahmad contribute to the construction of a revolutionary ideology? Employing the theoretical framework of social construction proposed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, this research explores the hypothesis that, for Behrangi and Al-e Ahmad, a return to cultural roots—particularly the village—served as a strategy for confronting the identity crisis and existential alienation produced by the Pahlavi state's modernization efforts. The findings indicate that the notion of "returning to the village," as articulated in the thought of these two influential Iranian writers, functioned as a symbolically constructed intellectual response to the Western-oriented civilizational apparatus of the Pahlavi regime. It offered a conceptual alternative to the disorientation and estrangement brought about by state-led modernization. Through its impact on the intellectual discourse of the 1970s, this idea indirectly contributed to the cultural groundwork that made the Islamic Revolution possible. The methodology adopted in this study is descriptive-analytical.

Keywords: Return to the Village, Revolutionary Ideology, Iranian Intellectuals, Modernization, Urbanization.

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Introduction

The modernization of Iranian society during the 1960s and 1970s (1340s and 1350s SH) under the Pahlavi regime provided the structural foundation for the rapid social changes of those years. Land reform, the expansion of education, industrialization policies, and the emergence of diverse living opportunities led to increased social mobility and new waves of migration from rural areas to urban centers. Within this transformative context, Tehran, as the political and economic capital, attained an extensive dominance over the everyday lives of Iranians. Consequently, the growing power and population of the capital found reflection in the perceptions of both elites and the masses, producing various reactions in the works of several Iranian writers and intellectuals.

The concentration of educational, administrative, political, and healthcare resources in Tehran - and the choice of the city as a preferred place of residence by many elites - led to the perception of urban settlement in the capital as a privilege and a form of domination over peripheral regions. The imprint of this new urban experience became evident in the literary, artistic, and cinematic productions of the period. Among the intellectual constructs of this era was the notion of a “return to the village,” which emerged as one of the foundational concepts in Iranian intellectual discourse in the decades leading to the Islamic Revolution. This idea was articulated as a response to the crises of accelerated modernity, unstable urbanization, and Westernization. It was particularly prominent in the works of *Samad Behrangi* and *Jalal Al-e Ahmad*, who treated it as a solution to the disintegration of cultural identity and the social problems of the time. In this way, the idea played an important role in shaping the revolutionary ideology that would eventually mobilize broad segments of society.

The central question of the present study is how Iranian intellectuals such as *Samad Behrangi* and *Jalal Al-e Ahmad* contributed to the construction of a revolutionary ideology. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann’s theory of social construction, the study examines how the idea of a “return to the village” was able to generate social solidarity and facilitate political mobilization through its critique of inequality and the Pahlavi modernization project. By analyzing selected works of these authors, the research seeks to explore the ways in which the idea shaped the mindset of Iranian intellectuals, and how, through language and symbols, it became internalized within Iranian society, contributing to the formation of collective identity and shared belief.

Materials & Method

This study is a qualitative research with a descriptive-analytical approach, conducted with the aim of examining how the idea of “return to the village” contributed to the construction of a revolutionary mindset by two Iranian intellectuals, Samad Behrangi and Jalal Al-e Ahmad. The theoretical framework of the research is based on the social construction of reality proposed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, which emphasizes the role of language, symbols, and cognitive actions in the production and reproduction of social reality. Accordingly, the works of these writers are analyzed not merely as literary texts but as symbolic instruments for generating meaning and shaping collective consciousness.

Discussion

During the 1960s and 1970s, Iranian society witnessed rapid transformations across economic, cultural, and social domains. The land reform programs, the expansion of public education, and the developmental policies of the Pahlavi regime reshaped traditional social structures but failed to provide cultural cohesion and social justice. In response to this form of modernization, Al-e Ahmad and Behrangi, from two distinct perspectives, sought to confront its consequences.

For Jalal Al-e Ahmad, the valorization of rural life constituted a reaction to the alienation produced by Westernization. He regarded the village not merely as a geographical space but as a symbol of self-reliance, tradition, and authentic Iranian culture. Although his perspective on rural life was critical, he viewed the village - particularly in works such as *Nefrin-e Zamin* (The Curse of the Land) - as an emblem of an Iranian cultural essence threatened by dependent modernization. For him, the call to “return to the village” was less a structural reform project and more a symbolic return to cultural roots and identity.

In contrast, Samad Behrangi interpreted the village not as a cultural refuge but as a site marked by poverty, exploitation, and inequality. Consequently, the idea of “returning to the village” for him meant “returning to struggle” and raising awareness. From Behrangi’s perspective, the educational system and textbooks -modeled after American curricula - were entirely alien to indigenous culture. By emphasizing rural life and simple traditional living, he advocated resistance to Western influence and promoted educational nativism in Iran. Critiquing school textbooks, he accused their authors of neglecting rural children and serving the interests of urban students, presenting rural and local ways of life as the most authentic forms of social existence. In his

writings, rural life and its hardships are depicted in a manner that transforms the village into a symbol of justice-seeking, simplicity, and cultural resistance. Through his portrayal of rural conditions, Behrangi contributed to the construction and reconstruction of a social reality in which rural values are not only alive but central to social and cultural transformation.

Results and Conclusion

Overall, the idea of “return to the village” in the works of Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Samad Behrangi, although presented through two distinct cultural and revolutionary approaches, constitutes in both cases a response to the identity crisis, social deprivation, and cultural dependency that Iranian society faced. For Al-e Ahmad, the “return to the village” aimed at reconstructing a form of cultural selfhood and tracing indigenous identity, whereas Behrangi envisioned the village as a space for class consciousness, structural struggle, and mass mobilization. Despite their differences, these two approaches converge on a shared foundation: the absence of justice, educational inequality, the dominance of urban power structures, and the inefficiencies of the Pahlavi regime’s imitative modernization.

In this context, the village is not merely a geographical location but a symbol of the “forgotten Other” within the structure of urban and colonial development - a place that must either be restored or serve as the origin of revolutionary change. In the perspectives of both Al-e Ahmad and Behrangi, this dual and sometimes complementary conception of the village - whether as the “cradle of authentic culture” or the “arena of class struggle” - gave rise to a revolutionary discourse, which in the 1970s manifested in the works of intellectuals, clerics, and both leftist and Islamic groups. From this discourse emerged a revolutionary ideology that, emphasizing social justice, return to the people, and the recovery of indigenous-Islamic identity, laid the cultural groundwork for the revolutionary movements of 1979.

Thus, the “return to the village” was not merely a literary or cultural choice, but part of a broader project of rethinking the condition of the Iranian individual and the political-social order in the contemporary period—a project to which intellectuals such as Al-e Ahmad and Behrangi each contributed in their own ways. Accordingly, this idea became one of the symbolic constructs of Iranian intellectuals, mobilized against the Pahlavi regime’s civilizational and Westernizing apparatus, and served as an alternative to the alienation and disorientation of modernization. Although this idea cannot be considered a direct cause of the Islamic Revolution, it was part of a larger constellation of

thought that fostered the discourse of returning to authenticity, critiquing dependent development, emphasizing indigenous and religious values, and confronting oppression. Through its influence on religious and social intellectuals of the 1970s, it indirectly shaped the cultural foundations of the Islamic Revolution.

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