



## The Problems of Silk Farmers in Gilan during the First Decade of Reza Shah's Rule: A Study Based on the Petitions of Silk Farmers from Langarud and Lahijan

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### ABSTRACT

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The livelihood and occupation of the villagers in Langarud and Lahijan, located in eastern Gilan, have long been rooted in sericulture. This study, by reviewing the background of silk production and trade in these two regions and based on nine historical documents obtained from petitions submitted to the National Consultative Assembly (Majles), examines the problems faced by rural silk farmers of Langarud and Lahijan during the first decade of Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign. Given the long-standing tradition of silk production and commerce in these areas, the article seeks to answer the question of what economic hardships the silk farmers encountered during this period and what outcomes their petitions and appeals ultimately produced. Employing the historical research method and following a documentary-library approach within a descriptive-analytical framework, the study reveals that the silk farmers of Lahijan and Langarud suffered heavy financial losses—and consequently fell into poverty—due to the sale of spoiled silkworm eggs by the Frenchman *Monsieur de Bourdeux*, the *Filaturi Company*, and *Mo'in-ol-Tojjar of Bushehr*. In response, they submitted petitions to the National Consultative Assembly, lodging complaints and requesting both tax exemption and the establishment of an agricultural school to facilitate the proper development of silk production and trade. The outcome of these demands was the establishment of the *General Directorate of Sericulture* in 1935 (1314 SH), which, under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior, began operating with the aim of producing and distributing silkworm eggs and purchasing cocoons.

**Keywords:** Pahlavi-era Gilan, Rural Sericulture, Peasants' Petitions, Langarud and Lahijan.

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## **Introduction**

Before the Safavid rule, Guilan was governed by local rulers in two political geographies, Beh-Pish and Beh-Pas. Lahijan and Langarud were under the supervision of the ruler of Rankuh, the center of Beh-Pish in eastern Gilan. Therefore, the developments and development of these two cities are historically intertwined. Due to the attention of the Safavid rulers to the Iranian silk industry, the silk-growing geography of Guilan also attracted the attention of the rulers of this historical period. Shah Abbas' economic development policies proceeded on this basis, and he sent Armenians and Georgians to this geography to develop the mulberry garden and cultivate silk, and the two cities of Lahijan and Lanagrud in eastern Guilan welcomed this group of immigrants. With the increase in demand for silk in the world market, Guilan became the supplier of a large part of the product demanded by the Iranian silk market. For this reason, the Caspian Sea coast developed as the most important silk trade route with Europe to the extent that during the Afsharid period, by inviting John Elton, they sought to enhance the pivotal role of this geography in the economic and military development of Iran-Guilan by developing a navy in northern Iran-the city of Langarud. Although the Russian consulate prevented the implementation and consolidation of this policy by inciting local forces by destroying Elton's first ship in Langarud, the economic circulation of silk did not stop and many merchants and companies invested in this geography. The livelihood of the people of Lahijan and Langarud depended on silk, to the extent that silk has also affected the culture, literature and place names of this region. The name of Lahijan and neighborhoods such as Sher-Bafan is due to the homogenization of the silk industry with the lives of the people. At the end of the Qajar period, silk in Guilan declined for several reasons. Therefore, the livelihood of the silk farmers, who constituted a large part of the population of Guilan, suffered. However, at the beginning of Reza Shah's reign, silk factories in Lahijan and Langarud were still active. This article, based on petitions submitted to the National Assembly by silk farming of the villages of Lahijan and Langarud, seeks to answer the question of what problems silk farming faced during this period and what was the outcome of their petitions?

## **Materials & Method**

The following article, considering the history of silk production and trade in Langarud and Lahijan, seeks to use the method of historical research, document-library study, descriptive-analytical compilation and writing, and examine the petitions of the silk farming in the archives of the National Assembly.

## Discussion

From the petitions of the silk farmers of Langarud and Lahijan in the first decade of Reza Shah's rule to the National Assembly, it appears that a group of merchants distributed a significant amount of rotten silk eggs among the silk farmers of these regions in order to gain profits, which caused great damage to the silk farmers. The silk farmers have blamed the French distribution agents for this, and a document states:

"Regarding the spoilage of silk eggs, if it is proven that Monsieur Deberdey, the French inspector of the silk department, has committed a great fraud on Guilani and caused us two crores of tomans in losses in silk eggs, he should compensate for this loss. To prove his deception, we have presented a box of two bags of the beloved homeland's silk eggs, Monsieur Dubredo, which is from France, with the seal and seal of the French administration, by His Excellency Dr. Mossadegh, a representative of the parliament, in the presence of the honorable representatives. Finally, please request the nougat expert that out of the two hundred thousand boxes of nougat that arrived this year, which you yourself said you audited, there were not five thousand rotten boxes that he rejected. To Scott's heart, you say that I have rejected the silk eggs of the heart, because the damage of this year's silk eggs cannot be hidden in the Guilan environment. Despite this, the announcement of the guarantee of the Republic of Turkey by the Iranian newspaper, which indicates the spoilage of this year's silk eggs, Mr. Miso Dobrdo, what will be the answer? We ask you, the supporters of the nation, to look into the oppressed petitions and not let our rights be trampled upon. Foreign trading houses were among the main causes of this misery. "Foreign traders, especially the Filaturi Press Office, have brought spoiled silk eggs to Guilan and given them to us, the farmers, for each chapter they received one man of cocoon as a document" (document number 13675).

In another petition, it is stated that Hajj Moin al-Tojar Bushehri has bought silk eggs from the Dobr for eight qarans and has traded them to the silk farmers for one man of cocoon per chapter. His demand has not been met and he has been pressuring the poor and the peasants day and night (document number 15367). In addition to local merchants, there was additional pressure from the owners of the Tutistans on the silk farmers. After the mid-Qajar reforms, with the decree of Mozaffar al-Din Shah on reforms in the land tenure system and the transfer of land plots to private owners and investors, the Monjambashi family found the opportunity to increase its wealth by purchasing and occupying residential, agricultural and commercial lands. Haji Agha Bozorg Monjambashi, one of the elders of the family, over the years purchased agricultural lands located in Gol Kasra in Rudsar (document number 20033/296), some land in the village of Rankoh in Amlash (document number

19174/290) from the kadhodayan and farmers, and became one of the major landowners in Guilan.

The severity of the economic damage of the silk farmer subjects caused the representative of the people of Lahijan, Mahmoud Reza, to submit a petition to the parliament for consideration of the petition of the farmers of Astana Chorkuchan-Bil Bijar-Kohhardal from the readers of Lahijan and to request a reduction or remission of taxes (document number 13676).

The silk farmers of Langarud and Lahijan considered the cause of the events to be their ignorance, so in a petition they requested that their children be educated in agricultural schools so that they might not suffer the punishment of their fathers by learning the exact ways and customs of agriculture (document number 6978). In 1935, the General Administration of silk was established under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior with the aim of providing and distributing silk eggs and purchasing cocoons, and laws related to buying, selling, and training in silk farming were approved (silk Development Studies Fund, 1988: 18).

## **Results and Conclusion**

In this article, while examining the historical situation of silk production and trade in Langarud and Lahijan, the documents and petitions of the villagers of silk in these regions at the beginning of Reza Shah's reign were examined.

In reviewing and examining the petitions of the rural silk farmers of Lahijan and Langarud, it became clear that two documents were related to Mahmoud Reza, a representative of the people of Lahijan, regarding the demands of the silk farmers to the National Assembly. The contents of the petitions show that the documents were prepared based on complaints and have legal force. It is clear from the contents of the petitions that the sale of rotten silk eggs by Monsieur Douberdo of France and the filature Company as well as Moin al-Tojar of Bushehri to the silk farmers resulted in the silk crop being unproductive. Therefore, the silk farmers have not been able to pay their debts to the silk seed brokers, and on the other hand, the silk value-added tax, which has been doubled on their debts based on the laws approved in 1306.

Due to the aforementioned problems, the livelihood of the rural people of Lahijan and Langarud, who, according to their petitions to the National Assembly, were dependent on the silk industry, was shaken and they were all plunged into poverty and misery. Their petitions to the Assembly pursued two legal aspects: 1. Complaining against the people who had caused the decline

in silk production. 2. Appealing for tax exemption, which had compounded their problems.

The last document is the request to establish a school of agriculture, which was submitted to the Assembly by local silkworm owners so that they could develop silk production and trade in the right direction. The result of their petition was the establishment of the "General Silkworm Administration" in 1314 AH, with the aim of providing and distributing silkworm eggs and purchasing cocoons under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior.

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