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The Confrontation between Pro- and Anti-Peasant Movement Associations in Gilan during the Constitutional Era

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ABSTRACT

During the Constitutional Era, numerous associations were established in various regions of Iran, including Gilan. These organizations can be categorized into two groups: formal and informal. The Constitutionalist associations of Gilan possessed extensive political and social functions and played a pivotal role in the formation and advancement of the region's peasant movement. Peasants across Gilan revolted against the landowners (Arbab), and the National Associations of Rasht and Abbas, in support of them, organized numerous rural branches. Conversely, associations such as "Landlords" (*Mālekin*), "Safaiyeh," and "Khayrieh," established by landowners and proponents of despotism, engaged in confrontation with the peasants. The primary goal of this research is to elucidate the role of these two spectrums of associations in the various stages of the Gilan peasant movement. This research was conducted relying on the historical method and a descriptive-analytical approach, utilizing library resources and national and local newspapers published during the Constitutional Era. The results demonstrated that the pro-peasant associations, despite their limitations, held a fundamental role in the leadership, support, and expansion of the movement across Gilan. On the other hand, the opposing associations, benefiting from governmental and parliamentary support, ultimately succeeded in suppressing the movement and re-establishing the landlord-tenant system. Although the Gilan peasant movement was ultimately suppressed, this movement left an indelible mark on the history of social transformations in Iran, standing as the first organized rural movement in contemporary Iranian history. This movement clearly showed that the rural society possessed a high capacity for political mobilization and participation, successfully elevating the issue of land and landlord-tenant relations into a national discourse. The experience of forming rural associations also exhibited a pioneering model of popular self-organization.

Keywords: Peasant movement, Role of associations, Gilan, Constitutional Era.

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Introduction

Associations of the Constitutional Era in Gilan were established by various groups and factions with guild, political, and religious origins. These associations operated in both official and unofficial forms and played a significant role in the region's political and social developments. One of the most important issues in Gilan during the Constitutional Era was the peasant movement, which affected the entire region in the first two years of the Constitution. This movement began in response to the widespread oppression by landlords and received support from various groups and parties. The stance of Gilan's Constitutional Era associations towards the peasant movement can be divided into supportive and opposing categories. The main research question is: What role did the associations of the Constitutional Era in Gilan play in the peasant movement of this region?

Materials & Method

This research was conducted using the historical method with a descriptive-analytical approach. Required data were collected through the study of library resources, including specialized books, scholarly articles, and national and local newspapers published during the Constitutional Era. Important sources used include newspapers such as *Majles*, *Habl al-Matin*, *Sāhel-e Najāt*, *Kheir al-Kalām*, *Gilan*, and *Sobh-e Sādeq*. Works by researchers such as Rabino, Adamiyat, Ettehadiyeh, Fakhrāei, and Shakeri were also utilized. The analysis method is based on a comparative examination of the performance of supportive and opposing associations at different stages of Gilan's peasant movement.

Discussion

Associations supporting the peasants, such as the Abbasi Association, the National Association of Rasht, and the Provincial Association (*Anjoman-e Velāyati*) of Gilan, played a key role in initiating and expanding the movement by publishing peasant demands in newspapers, submitting petitions to the parliament, forming rural associations, and providing intellectual and practical leadership (Rabino, 1368/1989: 17; Yazdāni, 1392/2013: 237). In contrast, opposing associations included the Landowners Association (*Anjoman-e Mālekin*), the Safa Association, and Charity Associations, which, with the support of landowners, the parliament, and the central government, confronted the movement (*Majles Newspaper*, No. 119, 1325/1907; *Habl al-Matin Newspaper*, No. 33, 1326/1908). These associations, using political influence and military support, succeeded in suppressing the movement (Afary, 1385/2006: 22). The rift between radical and moderate constitutionalists was also a factor in weakening the movement (Kharābi, 1379/2000: 72). Although

the Provincial Association of Gilan initially supported the peasants, it ultimately, due to pressure from the central government and fear of foreign intervention, ordered the cessation of local association activities and the payment of rent (Adamiyat, 1387/2008: 475).

Results and Conclusion

The research results indicate that associations supporting the peasants played an essential role in mobilizing, organizing, and leading the movement and were able to transform the issue of land and landlord-peasant relations into a national discourse. However, opposing associations, benefiting from the support of power institutions, financial resources, and influence networks, succeeded in suppressing the movement. Additionally, the lack of support from the First Parliament for the peasant movement, widespread peasant illiteracy, fragmented leadership, and internal conflicts among supportive associations were among the main reasons for the movement's failure. Ultimately, the landlord-peasant system was restored, and rural associations were dissolved. Although the peasant movement of Gilan was ultimately suppressed, it left a lasting legacy in the history of Iran's social transformations as the first organized rural movement in the contemporary period. This movement demonstrated that rural society possesses the capacity for mobilization and political participation and can challenge structural issues such as land relations. The experience of forming rural associations also provided a progressive model of popular self-organization. The movement's failure was largely due to the lack of unity among constitutionalist forces, the support of power institutions for landowners, and the structural weaknesses of the movement. Nevertheless, this movement laid the groundwork for class consciousness and subsequent resistance against landlord oppression and inspired later social movements in Iran.

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