



Factors Affecting Iran's Population Decline in the 12th Century

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Abstract

One of the event-filled periods in the history of Iran is the 12th century. Described as the era of political, economic and social weakness and degeneration of Iran, this century comprises a period of time that starts with the collapse of the Safavid dynasty until the rise of the Qajar dynasty. During most part of this period, Afaghaneh and Afsharid rule and the resumption of civil wars following the death of Karim Khan during the Zand period resulted in a century of chaos and instability, which had no consequences but the decline of production and economic infrastructure, the stagnation of agriculture and trade, population decline and immigration for the Iranian society and at the end, everything was collapsed. In this period, one of the main problems of Iranian society was population decline. For this purpose, the following article, relying on the descriptive and explanatory approach, examines the factors affecting the decline of Iran's population in the 12th Lunar-Hijri century.

Historical studies show that the chaotic political and social situation of Iran in this period led to the stagnation and decadence of country's political, social and economic life, especially in the urban and rural areas. Throughout this century, the society was involved in internal and external wars, leading to destruction of physical infrastructure and loss of human resources of the country. In the meantime, villages and cities, as important centers of population and wealth, were subjected to looting, murder and slaughter by invaders and power claimants and suffered irreparable damage, and affected by this situation, the rural and urban areas of Iran lost most of their population.

For example, the Afghan government's seven-year period of relative dominance over Iran caused unfortunate and negative consequences for Iranian society and incurred irreparable damage to the country. During this period, the collapse of the central government, and Russian and Ottoman occupation of the country paved the way for insecurity, murders and looting, riots and internal and external wars. The Afghan rulers, Mahmud and Ashraf, not only failed to govern the states under their control, but they also had no plans or plots to govern Iran. Therefore, the conventional tax system was replaced by a kind of policy of plunder and looting in cities and towns, whose consequence was the drastic destruction of towns and cities, with the country left on the brink of collapse. The cities generally plagued by famine and looting. Under these conditions, the country's active population decreased significantly due to hunger, homelessness, migration, deaths from massacres and disease.



During Afsharid period, conditions remained the same as the past. Following the expulsion of Afghans and the recovery of the occupied lands in the northwest, west and north of the country from the Ottomans and Russia by Nadir Shah Afshar, who reestablished relative security and peace in the country, the country's situation worsened under the influence of Nader's military approach. His reign involved conquests and wars accompanied by plunder and looting. Budget of his constant campaigns was provided with heavy taxes and large ransoms. The policy of militarism incurred a heavy price on the country and played a significant role in impoverishing Iranians; in a way that the merchants and villagers got fed up with paying backbreaking taxes and providing fighting force to Nadir.

This caused many riots in Iran. The consequence of these riots was even more destruction for the country, as it led to more and more murder, looting and destruction of the country's infrastructure. The continuity of situation, along with factors such as the spread of epidemics, forced migrations, and the departure of many people and businessmen to the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and India, caused Iran's population to decline.

With Nadir's murder in 1160 AH the condition in Iran became more tense and political collapse came about quickly. After Nadir Shah Iran witnessed wars, rebellions and conflicts between different tribes, hosts and clans. Thereafter, new tribal powers emerged on the military and political scene. Over a short period, the political condition in Iran shifted in a way that marked by the spread of instability, chaos, the establishment of feudalism and clan system, and ruin and destruction throughout the country. Meanwhile, the main threat was towards territorial integrity, and the different regions and cities of Iran became the scene for conquests and campaigns of power claimants. The result was nothing but looting and murder of people and, consequently, the destruction of the country's infrastructure.

As the tribal wars and fights abated and Karim Khan Zand rose to power, a more than one-decade civil war ended, and relative calmness established in Iran. Karim Khan's measures to improve the country's situation bear witness to this claim. However, Karim Khan's death in the last decade of the 12th century ended the relative peace during his reign. Domestic and tribal wars began, on the one hand, between the members of Zand dynasty, and on the other hand, between rival tribal forces, and a situation emerged that might be called Iranshahr of one thousand aldermen. As in the past, the result was instability, disorder and deterioration of the country's conditions.

In a general assessment, it is said that the 12th AH century in the history of Iran was a century of widespread catastrophe and reverse transformation. The most part of it was a transition from Safavid to Qajar - Afghan rule, Nadir Shah world domination, the resumption of civil wars and the bloody rise of the Qajar dynasty - followed by seventy-five years of chaos and instability, which resulted in nothing but the decline of production and economic infrastructure, the stagnation of agriculture and trade, population decline, and immigration for Iranian society (Foran, 2007: 127-126). Therefore, it is said that due to insecurity and political instability, destruction of urban and rural infrastructure, famine, homelessness, migration, deaths caused by massacres



and the spread of epidemics, Iran's population decreased significantly.

Keywords: Iran, 12th Century AH, Population, Socio-Political Status, Urban Society, Rural Society.

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