

ROLE OF ECONOMIC GROWTH OF ACHAEMENIDS DYNASTY IN EVOLUTION OF THE FAMILY INSTITUTION OF IRAN

Mostafa Nadim

Associate professor of History, Shiraz University.

ABSTRACT: *In the pre-history era and the Stone Age human societies lived in groups because of the lack of economic growth and the strong need for each other to obtain food. In this era families were very big. With the growth of agriculture, the notion of family almost evolved into its present form, but evolution of families was not as quick as other west Asian countries. The shortage of water was the main cause of impeded economic growth and urbanism in most parts of Iran before the entrance of Aryans. As a result, families were bigger and related to meet their needs. Entrance of Aryans was accompanied by political evolutions in the region. The powerful Assyrian government was ending, native Iranian folks were tired of fighting this cruel enemy in the western areas, and thus Aryans were enabled to gain power. The Medians were often at war and they progressed in terms of military power. As the Achaemenids gained power, a new era of progress and growth started for west Asian civilizations. The Achaemenids properly learned from civilizations of adjacent tribes and actualized the Iranian culture and civilization with their innate wit and wisdom. The factor that considerably contributed to evolution of the institution of family in Iran in the Achaemenid era, especially with the reign of Darius I, was economic measures taken by Darius. These measures increased the government wealth as well as the body of Iranian society (to a lesser extent). Prevalence of coin on the macro level, creation of new jobs, and growth of wages were accompanied by financial independence of the nation. As a result, people were allowed to form families without the need for large families, and thus families transformed from extended families to nuclear families.*

KEYWORDS: Achaemenids, Darius, family, Coin, Liquidity

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Family, from its simplest ancient form to its modern form, has played an important role in evolutions of societies. Family is categorized from different aspects and in one classification it is categorized into the groups of extended and nuclear families.

In “family sociology” there are certain definitions for these two types of family. Giddens defines an extended family as a combination of three generations (or more) who live in one house or near each other. This type of family may include grandfathers, grandmothers, siblings and their spouses, aunts, uncles, nephews, and nieces. On the other hand, a nuclear family is a simple and compressed combination of parents and children (Sarukhani, 1996, 142).

Family type depends on the way of living of family and members of a small or large society, economic status, and solidarity formed on the basis of economic needs. Generally, family solidarity is stronger in simple farming and relatively developed communities (Nolan and Lenski, 2001, 253-236). In simple farming communities in inclement weather or farmland

conditions, ethnic solidarity and family solidarity are stronger. One of the best examples of such families is the Zadroga family in the former Yugoslavia (see Sarukhani, 1996, 142; Engels, 2001, 84).

Iran has been in such conditions, and it is not possible to precisely date the beginning of farming in Iran, especially in the Central Plateau. The resulting evidence suggests that in regions such as Ali Kosh and Sabz hill sites the inhabitants were farmers from approximately ten thousand years ago to six thousand years ago. However, it is evident that Iran's weather conditions reduced the speed of agricultural growth (Malek Shahmirzadi, 1999, 165-187).

At the same time with entrance of Aryans, Iran habitants had achieved relative success in farming, but the farming tools had not developed completely and there was also shortage of water.

As a result, human societies were very scattered and small in most parts of Iran. However, in these small societies, families were extended due to the shared jobs and means of sustenance, being farming, and the need for group collaborations.

As the Achaemenids gained power and started their governance, a new chapter began in the life of Iranians from the economic and social points of view. These resulted in many evolutions one of which was the evolution of the family institution. Economic growth in different areas especially farming tools along with better utilization and supply of water and increased liquidity allow for the transition from extended families to nuclear families.

In this paper, after presenting a brief review of economic growth in the Achaemenids era the role of these advancements in the evolution of family was discussed.

Research Rationale

The research subject is important because no study has been carried out on families in the Achaemenids era and the relationship between family evolutions and economic advancement. However, it is known that in the pre-Islamic era, the reign of Achaemenids brought about civilization growth and cultural prosperity in different areas to Iranians.

Research Objectives

The primary research goal was to study the economic status of Iran in the Achaemenids era and its effect on the Iranian society, especially Iranian families.

Research Background

No independent study has been carried out on this topic so far. In fact, there is information on the Achaemenids era in plenty of papers and books, but this information is mostly about the political history of this period due to the existence of numerous documents of this period. Concerning culture, studies have discussed areas such as training, education and difference sciences, but social issues have the smallest share of these discussions.

In this regard, in some monographs there are references to social issues. For instance, Maria Brosius titled her book "Ancient Iranian Women". She mainly discusses Achaemenid women, and thus the gifted translator of this paper translated the title into "Achaemenid Women". The author used adequate documents to examined status of court women, royal marriages, and relationship of women with economic problems. However, in this monograph the relationship

of women with Iranian families is overlooked and this area was not included in her research (Brosius, 2002).

The only study that has been exclusively conducted on the notion of families is the precious research by Ali Akbar Mazaheri, the professor of Sorbonne University, titled “Iranian Family in the Pre-Islamic Era”.

The main subject of the book by Mr. Mazaheri is the status of families in the Sassanid era and it slightly discusses the notion of family in the Achaemenids era. The very few pages on this topic are substantially important but since most of the information on the status of families in ancient Iran comes from the Sassanid era (which can be published in a book), his book (which is his Ph.D. thesis) includes the Sassanid era (Mazaheri, 1994). Other than this book, there are references to ancient Iran, especially the Sassanid era in the books of some western researchers, the best example of which is “Iran in Sassanid Era” by Arthur Christensen (Christensen, 1988, 346-359).

In this section, first a brief summary is presented and then to study Iranian human societies before the Achaemenids era. Afterwards, status of families in the Achaemenids era is discussed.

Human Societies in Pre-Islamic Era

Throughout the human history, evolution of families has been accompanied by socioeconomic evolutions in societies. Archaeological evidence reveals that the tribal community formed from the late Paleolithic period to the early Mesolithic era based on socioeconomic, kinship and conformity (Eskandari, 1998, 83).¹ Although this form of life and family differs from the subsequent periods, the core of formation of families dates back to this period. With human’s advancements, especially in making tools, the trend of growth of families continued. Development of tools such as arch and other hunting devices contributed to the transition of very large families (groups) into smaller families, because it was then possible to supply food as one of the most important concerns of the time with fewer communities. These small groups were more coherent than the past. The coherence and solidarity of these communities increased following invention of production tools.

Pre-Historic West Asia and Iran

The Neolithic element led to deep and extensive economic and social evolutions in west Asia and Iran. Domestication of animals, little knowledge of agriculture, production of better tools for supply of food, development of residence, and higher solidarity of generations led to a decrease in the power of matrilineal families. Society grew down in size or big families moved toward patriarchy (Eskandari, 1998, 85). Although it is not possible to stress the beliefs of the past generation of sociologists and historians, especially Marxist historians, about matrilineal and patriarchal families, it is known that with growth of farming the role of men was increased in houses and they gained more power. More important, from the economic point of view, by

¹ For more information on the pre-history era see the work of Gordon Childe, the famous English archaeologist. Some of his best books include *What Happened in History* (1979) and *Man Makes Himself* (1955).

domesticating animals and using milk and animals to improve nutrition, solidarity and population growth increased and importance of women decreased automatically.

The metal element was continuation of human's economic growth. West Asian nations were pioneer in using metals and north European societies learned this industry several centuries later (Linton, 1999, 304). In west Asia use of metals was accompanied by human's further growth in agriculture. Commerce became more prevalent and house building increased. Finally, with increased prevalence of urbanism, creation of large cities, and cultural, artistic, and architectural progress the best great civilizations formed (Childe, 1979, 190-239).

Geographical position has immensely contributed to the formation of these civilizations. Existence of the Nile River in Egypt and Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia was vital to the growth of these alluvial civilizations (Toynbee, 1983, 61-76). However, it was completely different in the Iranian plateau. In Iran, especially Central Iran, there was no big river. As a result, human communities lived near small rivers and streams.

From the second millennium BC inhabitants of this region became familiar with metals even iron. Inhabitants of the western areas of Iran progressed in making bronze tools especially jewelry but due to the shortage of water, discovery of iron did not change the status of farming (Ghirshman, 2004, 5-83). In that time, human societies were small and scattered, and although urbanism had emerged in some cities, the dominant culture was the rural culture in these areas (Malek Shahmirzadi, 1999).

Elam, Urartur, and Economic Progress

In this regard, there were also exceptions. In the southwest of Iran, the presence of rivers and flat and fertile lands in Elam and socioeconomic relationships with people of Mesopotamia made people of Elam to start urbanism and urban development in the second millennium BC (Majidzadeh, 1991).

Except for Elam that progressed considerably and influenced the civilization and culture of Iranians following entrance of Aryans, some inventions and advancements in the northwest of Iran (the land of Urarturs) changed the future of Iran. Urarturs were wise and inventive people. Their social and economic connections to ancient and recent civilizations and tribes led to their further progress. At the same time, i.e. the last second millennium BC and the early first millennium, Urarturs offered an innovation, which was harvest of groundwater resources using aqueducts, which considerably affected the future of Iran (Ghirshman, 2004, 92; Frye, 1989, 110). This innovation was in the early stages of its development that Urarturs were eradicated by Assyrians.

At the same type, a group of Aryans entered the Iranian plateau. This group, the western Aryans, entered Iran from the northwest Iran. One of the very first habitats of Aryans was the lands of Urarturs. Aryans were nomads and warriors and their military force was needed or at least feared by Urarturs and Assyrians. The fight between Urarturs and Assyrians provided Aryans with the chance to establish their place in the region and dominate the south (southwest) of Iran gradually (Frye, 1989, 114).

Aryans, Settlement in Iran, and Medians

Aryans cannot be introduced as people untouched by civilization. During their residence in Central Asia, they became familiar with civilization. The existing evidence suggests that

Aryans became very well familiar with civilization and culture of native Iranians as they moved from northwest to the southwest (i.e. Elam).

From the political point of view, the biggest chance of Aryans was the constant fight between Assyrians and Iranians. One of the reasons for the reign of Medians and superiority of Medians over native folks was their fight with Assyrians.

Medians spent most of their time fighting their enemies, and thus they progress in military areas (Diakonoff, 1978, 269-290). During the reign of Astyages there was relative peace between great governments, but Astyages did not use this peace to improve material and spiritual conditions and as a result of dissatisfaction of chieftains the scene was set for the reign of the young Persians. Therefore, another family of Aryans, the Persians, gained political dominance in a part of Iran (Diakonoff, 1978, 383-391).

Achaemenids and Economic Progress

The Achaemenid era must be known as the peak of prosperity and socioeconomic evolution of Iranian societies by then. The early economic policies of Achaemenid rulers, especially Darius, led to greatest extensive social evolutions, one of the most important of which was evolution of Iranian families.

Pre-Achaemenid Economy and Family

The sustenance of Iranians before governance of Achaemenids was based on underdeveloped agriculture and dairy farming techniques. Archaeological evidence, especially from hillsides, suggests that nomadic life was vertical in these regions. Small human communities would move livestock from highlands during cold seasons to valleys and lowlands, and after the weather was warm, they would move to highlands again (Aman Allahi, 1991, 26-30). The lifestyle of this population called for group activities, social life, and large families. Consequently, extended families were formed. An extended family is a family in which the good man is considered the head, and all family members (i.e. children, siblings and their families, and nieces and nephews) live together. Livestock belongs to all family members and thus all members play an equal role in protecting family assets as well as family dignity and fame.

Following the entrance of Aryans and increased prevalence of horizontal migration (as compared to vertical migration) the social context governing families was based on kinship. However, with the increase in assets and number of livestock, the number of family members decreased and instead nephews and second-degree relatives formed separate families. In this lifestyle still families were very coherent and one at times of crisis such as during wars.

The same applied to the early farming families. There was no advanced farming tool, and farming would meet economic needs and increase the capital of a small community only if the number of farmlands was high. Since the third millennium BC farmers have tried to solve a big farming problem, being that with death of the good man the farmland area will decrease and farming will lose its profitability after the inherited land is divided between the heirs who eventually depart. Iranian farmers are currently challenged with this problem because following the death of fathers some children are not willing to continue doing the job and lands become dry lands.

Economy, Family, and Elamites

Elamites have found a great solution to this problem. Elamite farmers would not leave their families to the possible extent and lands would not be divided after the death of the goodman. During their evolution Elamites made another innovation and started to swear brotherhood oaths. To increase farmlands under cultivation they even would swear oaths with strangers. In a document, it is indicated that an Elamite man swear brotherhood oath with a woman to secure coherence of assets (farmlands under cultivation) (Eskandari, 1998).

The result of this lifestyle was emergence of extended families. Other than Elamites, other Iranian families had also started farming especially in the west and center of Iran. They had to accept this lifestyle, peaceful symbiosis, and shared economic interests because their water and land conditions were not better than Elamites.

Economy, Family, and Achaemenids

When Achaemenids gained power, ancient eastern civilizations started a new phase of growth accompanied by numerous socioeconomic evolutions and advancements. From the political point of view, it must be stated that during the reign of Medians in west Asia, as one of the most important centers of civilization of the time, three powers existed. In Mesopotamia, the Chaldean ruler of Babylon claimed global power because of Babylon's economic status and wealth. In Asia Minor the minor but wealthy Lydia government was another power, and there was another power claiming world power on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea in North Africa. However, this power was not a major concern because it was distanced from the centers of danger. In addition to these three powers, the Medians became a prominent economic power because of their strong military force and the wealth they inherited from Assyrians. In fact, the main three rivals were Medians, Babylonians, and Lydians, and especially following destruction of Assyria the conflict escalated. This conflict led to fruitless wars as a result of which all of the three powers decided to accept the situation and reach agreement. However, the agreements and equations were ruined when Cyrus gained power.

Cyrus was very well aware of the political situation of the region. He knew that fighting the other two powers was inevitable. Therefore, he first invaded Lydia and then Babylon. In fact, if he had not invaded the two regions their governments would have invaded them because Cyrus had been informed of their readiness to fight (Dandamayev, 2002, 43-57 and 67-97).

The era of Cyrus must be known as the era of victories. Cyrus founded the Achaemenids dynasty, but the real architect of this empire was Darius and thus his era must be considered the era of establishment of Achaemenids Empire.

Economic Plans of Darius I and Family

The most important measure taken by Darius to establish his governance was to create and conduct military, political, and economic reforms. Darius' economic actions and reforms are within the scope of this paper.²

What were Darius' economic actions and how did he affect social evolutions and family transformation? As stated, Iranian made living mainly through farming and dairy farming. Wealth was defined as possession of larger herds and farmlands. Governance of Medians did not significantly contribute to the transformation of livelihood of Iranian societies. Medians

² For more information on Darius' economic reforms see Morteza Ehtesham, 1976, 101-123.

built cities and they made attempts under the influence of adjacent tribes to establish coherent administrative and political formations. However, their governance was ruled by the tribal model of governance. No attempt was made to achieve agricultural growth or the scene was not set. The story of Persians and their reign completely differed from that of Medians. The interval between commencement of empowerment of Persians and their reign was over one century, during which Persians became familiar with governments, culture and civilization of Urarturs, Mannaeans,³ and especially Elamites. Actions subsequently taken by Persians showed that they were clever and wise people who learned civilization lessons properly. These characteristics continued to shine after they gained power and following their conquests. The conquest of Lydia and Babylon was not solely a military conquest. Persians, or better to say Iranians, properly took advantage of these conquests and brought the success to Iranians. Darius actualized these civilization lessons in the form of reforms with the aid of his wit and subjective creativity.

Coin, Liquidity, and Its Effect on Family Changes

Here the economic evolutions of Lydia matters. The king of Lydia, Croesus used gold coin for the first time for economic exchanges. Before that time coins were commonly used but his coins had two distinctive characteristics. Firstly, he used gold which had not been prevalent by then, and secondly before that period governments used coins for exchanges only in their own lands, but Croesus' coins were also worthy in other countries. Darius took advantage of this economic trend and properly utilized in his governance. Darius was aware that he would not be capable of running the government and this land, which stretched from Indus to the Mediterranean Sea, unless he could establish a coherent formation in his territory. His political measures regarding division of states, creation of straps, and supervision of inhabitants of satraps were to this end. Formation of a robust army and different military divisions reinforced his governance, but all of these actions required wealth and asset and simple measures were not enough for establishment of global empires.

To this end, Darius first repaired roads and constructed new roads. He then ensured security of roads, which led to the growth of domestic and foreign trade and business (Briant, 1998, vol. 1, 751-808,). Reforms made to collection of taxes were part of another plan that led to increased wealth and power of the government. However, the factor with the biggest role in socioeconomic evolutions and advancements was prevalence of coin in the Achaemenids territory. By Darius' order gold and silver coins of equal sizes and shapes were coined (Ehtesham, 1976, 118-121).

As a result of attempts made by Darius for coinage of coins of equal sizes and shapes Persian daric coins of Darius easily took the place of Croesus among Iranian and foreign merchants and statesmen. With the growth of trade and shipment of commodities from Iran to distant areas and the security and worthiness of coins, the assets and wealth of Achaemenids escalated to the point that the treasury was filled with gold ingots and other valuable commodities.

In addition to these measures, Darius greatly valued bureaucracy and numerous secretaries with mastery of language and different areas properly served his formation and fulfilled the tasks. From the foreign affairs point of view, this wealth brought about credit to the newly emergent Achaemenids government, but from the domestic affairs point of view these actions led to

³ For more information about the Manna Union see History of Medians by Diakonoff, pages 139 to 149.

emergence of coherent formations and administrations which did not comply with the livelihood and social context of Iranian society during the reign of Medians. Therefore, these achievements considerably influenced the Iranian society and families.⁴

From the political point of view, Darius was trying to control the power of tribes. In his inscriptions, Darius takes about the gift of governance bestowed upon him by Ahouramazda and never refers to tribes and chieftains. Darius was properly aware that to create a coherent and strong formation, advanced administrative organization, and a powerful and centralized government, the power of chieftains was an important preventive factor. As a result, even in his inscriptions when he talks about a person he says “the boy” or “the Persian man” and never refers to the family, which has been unprecedented.

These measures considerably reduced the power of tribes, chieftains, and fathers who acted as the leaders of large families. The economic progress and prevalence of coin were, however, more important.

Prevalence of coin and money did not directly influence the lives of people, because they were exchanging in traditional ways and it affected them with employment of workers by the administration and for construction of Achaemenids buildings. These workers were mainly paid in commodity. In addition, with the development of experience assets of most people changed along with large residents. Therefore, assets were not limited to lands and herds as wages of workers, secretaries, and different state agents of different areas (military, political, and economic) created a new form of asset which was money to some extent.

With the increase in liquidity the issue of heritage was solved. With the aid of liquidity, family economy would not be damaged following the father's death and division of lands because financial independence of people allowed them to form families or separate from their families. As a result, the extended form of family transformed into nuclear family with fewer members.

Evidently, this evolution never covered the Iranian society and was the main source of income in small farm lands and dairy farms. The extended form of family also continued its existence, but these economic evolutions paved the way for other evolutions and transition of extended families into nuclear families. Fathers were no longer as powerful as before, because with creation of new jobs and financial independence of family members economic dependence and social dependence subsided. Consequently, several-member families turned into small families.

Agricultural Growth and Its Role in Transition of Families

The other important economic achievement during the Achaemenids era especially since Darius' reign was the great agricultural evolution. Of different factors including water, land, tools, and human force water was the most important in the course of history especially in that period. As stated, Iran lacks water and is relatively arid. However, in spite of the shortage of running water sources, Iran's groundwater resources are adequate. Moreover, Urarturs had

⁴ For more information on coherent administrative formations of Achaemenids see the following books:

Toynbee, 1983 and Koch, 2000.

learned the technique of using groundwater resources, but destruction of their government by Assyrians hindered the use of this technique for a while.

Archeological evidence shows that one of the most important innovations of Achaemenids was their concern for aqueducts, and some researchers attribute invention of aqueducts to Achaemenids. The truth is that Achaemenids did not invent aqueducts, but they contributed to the progress of this technique to the point that attributing its invention to Achaemenids following a several-year pause is not unrealistic.

Drilling of aqueducts of several kilometers in different parts of Iran and acquisition of water via aqueducts contributed considerably to the growth of farming. More lands were cultivated over time and products were more than before. This progress reduced coherence of families as compared to the past. It was possible to cultivate lands with fewer forces, and thus the socioeconomic function of extended families decreased and these families were replaced by nuclear families.

With regard to sociology of agriculture it is known that development of farming and technological evolutions endanger survival of family farming (Lahsaii zadeh, 1996, 24). Although this theory covers the contemporary era, but it can be compared to the Achaemenids era, when agricultural progress definitely played a role in independence of families, downscaling of families, and transformation of extended families into nuclear families.

CONCLUSION

Economic evolution in every society and period influence the social status and context of that society. In Iran, before the Achaemenids era, inactivity was dominating families and their forms for centuries. However, as Achaemenids gained power and took economic actions, the Iranian society was faced with drastic changes in different aspects including social status and families.

It is known that one of the biggest problems of ancient human societies was preparation and production of food. Hence, every tribe and nation that progressed more in irrigation and farming achieved this goal in a shorter period of time. On the other hand, the difficulty of acquisition of water for people of arid lands (with low precipitation) or lands without large rivers led to increased solidarity of families and their union for making public efforts to obtain water. The result of this trend was formation of extended families. In ancient Iran, before the Achaemenids era agricultural means and methods were not advanced, but economic and agricultural measures taken by Achaemenids kings resulted in improvement of agriculture. On the other hand, with the prevalence of coin and its use in exchanging and with the decrease in barter trades the attitude of human societies to possession of assets changed. These evolutions were followed by changes of family status and currently in all parts of Iran and in some cities the extended family is replaced by nuclear form of family. Later on, with spread of urbanism during the Sassanid era and governance of Zoroastrianism this change became more evident and prevalent.

Conflict of Interest

The authors confirm that this article content has no conflict of interest.

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