
Investigation of Sociocultural Changes in the Rural Areas of Iran

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates sociocultural changes in the rural areas of Iran. A major political and social topic of Iran in terms of sociology is the investigation of sociocultural changes process. Findings show that, various changes have occurred in sociocultural relations and tendency to the values and new and modern facilities in the rural areas resulted from human resource development, demographic changes, reforming the land and mode of production, changing consumption patterns, changes in decision-making system, enhanced social and media communications, measures in rural development and increase of public awareness in recent decades. Consequently, investigation of these changes is very important and strategic to understand sociocultural structures and relations as well as to make the strategies and processes of rural development planning. The research method is descriptive and the required data have been gathered from library and archives references.

Key words: Culture, Cultural change, Social change, Rural development, Human development.

Introduction

Investigation of sociocultural changes in different societies is much important since, by investigating these changes, the direction and pace of changes and the type of new social and cultural relations on the societies are determined proportionate with which the decisions and strategy and processes of development planning are thought and performed. Culture that has been defined as values, norms and manufactured goods (Gidnez, 1996) and changes by various factors, should be

investigated. When it is spoken about social sciences topics, the thinkers such as Comte, Spencer, Marx, Durkheim and Weber mentioned the divided, dual and contradictory world as "traditional world", "modern", "Agricultural and industrial age" capitalist world ", "socialist world "and etc. this matter has been as the first springboard for many sociologists about social and cultural changes. These experts have begun their discussion about human society on understanding of the differences

between the two worlds (dual at least) (Ghafari & Lovie, 2010). Ritters *et al.* believe that, social change bodes on change in the people, organizations, culture and communities relationships over the time. Although, separating of social and cultural changes is difficult due to their affiliation, the social change is observer on change in the structures, and cultural change is observer on change in the wisdom systems. Ingehart argues that, reality is a social, economic, cultural and political task. Cultural change takes place in the economic and human context which results in political changes (Ingehart, 1994). Society of Iran has experienced deep changes in social, economic and cultural aspects in recent decades. These transformations encompass a wide range of fundamental changes, behavioral patterns, political culture, social communications and so on. Rural areas also consist of these changes. Now this question is debated: which level is the cultural and social changes process in villages in? which parts have major sociocultural changes? How is the relationship between these changes and rural development? This research seeks to answer these question based on available data and references.

Theoretical basics (operational definition of the concepts)

Culture

The word "culture" in has been used in Persian literature with various concepts such as knowledge, science and wisdom. In Arabic language, Althafeh originally means victory, intelligence and skill and then, it has been applied as acquisition talent, industries and literature (Salehi & Mohammadi, 2010). In France, cultura means fertilizing (land), an activity to produce, fertilizing and planting. In

German language it means animal breeding, planting and tending the land, and finally in Russian language it has been applied as determination of human impact on the nature, determining the achievements and their operating forces (Jafari, 2000). The concept of culture has long been subject to diverse interpretations: culture is the quality or worthy manner for those human material and spiritual activities which are documented to the intellection way and their sublimated passions in evolutionary reasonable life. Edward Burnett Taylor; 19th century English anthropologist writes in definition of culture: a complex including knowledge, beliefs, arts, craft, techniques, ethics, laws, traditions and all the habits and behaviors, and provisions which human as a society member learns from the society, and is responsible about that society (Babaei, 2005).

Cultural changes

Culture also like other tasks, is composed by several elements. Subsequently change and stability of this complex issue is related to the development of the cultural elements. The elements of culture are divided into two parts including fixed or slow variables or continuity factors and variable elements or fast variables. In the part of fixed elements, customs, beliefs, value systems and social norms, family, legal, moral, spiritual and lifestyles can be mentioned in which the change takes place is very slowly. In the part of variable elements, needs and desires of the people, knowledge and technology innovations can be mentioned in which the change takes place rapidly (Salehi & Mohammadi, 2010). It should be noted that, the culture has also a systematic

organization; it means that, it has been composed by components which have an interaction with the structure. Cultural structure generally is composed by cultural element (the smallest object that is capable to be defined and distinguished), cultural composition (a number of consistent elements) and the cultural sphere (cultural compositions in an area with a distinctive shape and area) (Rooholamini, 1989). Since change of the culture changes the people manner over the time, looking at the change way in the people can help us to understand this matter. Four change levels in the people include: change in knowledge, change in attitude, change in individual manner and change in the group manner (Rezaei, 2004). The factors affecting the culture enter from political, economic social relations and requirements changes. With the arrival of each element, a substantive change takes place in the cultural elements. Any kind of changes in the elements causes to change in the norms, values and the manner way which is called changes of the culture. The cultural change patterns can be classified as evolutionary, dissemination and culture making. The main factors of social and cultural changes are the human sources (Salehi & Mohammadi, 2010).

Social changes

Social change is defined as conversions and transformations which occur in the principals of a society and a nation life during the history. These changes are created from thousands of internal and external factors and the forces that give the group internal or external conditions. Wilbert Moore defines the social change as changes in behavior patterns and culture that include norms and values (Ghafari & Ebrahimi, 2010).

Social changes are divided into two categories: total and partial. Partial change takes place in a part of system such as change in private ownership or welfare reform in low-income people; but, total change refers to the changes that are taking place in the overall social system such as revolution (Gyroche: 1997).

Social change features

A phenomenon is considered as a social change when has the following features:

- Social change is a collective phenomenon and includes the society or an important part of the society necessarily.
- Social change must be created in total or some parts of social organization.
- The change is determined over the time; it means that, the changes between two or more time intervals can be determined.
- Social change must be persistent and proportionate and must not be superficial and fleeting. According to what was mentioned, the social change affects the society in a course of history.

Necessity of cultural change

The world today passes rapidly the changes in various social structures. Because of social communications development, the culture interfacing technologies of the societies have also changed. It is clear that if the cultural structures of a society change proportionate with the social and economic changes, it leads to development and social solidarity and if cultural structures of a society are not proportionate with its changes, the society will face with a kind of conflicts and cultural delays and backwardness (Habibi, 2000).

Rural development

Village is a habitat for human in which agriculture is the main activity of the residents. The population and facilities of life is less than city (Taghavi, 2008). Rural society traits include peasant economy, livelihood and self-sufficient economy, underdevelopment of industry and services sectors, agricultural ownership, primary division of labor, extended family, living simply, collaboration and cooperation, social surveillance, homology of social identity, cultural homogeneity, cultural unity and traditional culture, etc. it is good to be mentioned that, these definitions and characteristics of the rural communities change with variation in the level of development and cultural and social relations in the recent years. These variations can be seen in development of social relationships, developing the human resources, increase of facilities and service levels, etc. in the rural areas of Iran. Rural development is a process with aim to encourage and promoting the rural studies to plan for progress and growth of these societies in order to improve the human environment and social conditions and making it suitable for living. Rural development planning is divided into two sections including theoretical (research) and operational (planning) which encourages the rural people to participate in conducting the programs in order to planning tasks progression. Rural development is emphasized and considered as the goal of development or the strategy to achieve it, has an important role in the economy of many countries and particularly developing countries in which a major part of the population live in villages. Rural development programs must be planned and performed in order to increase production, improve

efficiency, expand employment opportunities, and technology development, development of human resource and training, strengthening of social and protective organizations, strengthening of community participation and improvement of cultural level (Rezvani, 2002).

Human development

Human development means: expansion of the people selection process. The concept of human development explains that, the main purpose of development is to impart the human, it means improvement of the human life quality. Human development puts the people at the center of development patterns rather than on the periphery (Abbasinezhad & Rfiei, 2006). The human right to appropriate and creative life in a rich environment and in a democratic civil society is the final goal of development. Primary capacities of the people for participation and playing the role in the society, form the base of fundamental political aspects and human development index. These capacities and capabilities include: life expectancy, knowledge and science learning ability, the ability to access resources and needed facilities to have a proper cultural and life level. The importance of the human development index in the growth and development is completely evident by investigating its sub-indexes such as the impact of education on social welfare, life expectancy, the effect of education and cultural promotion on life expectancy, the relationship between the people ability and efficiency (Lotfi, 2008). Variations of cultural and social relations in Iran have had a significant impact on approach, choice, relationships, social structures, values,

knowledge and education level, etc. during five decades ago, especially in the 80s and this matter is also palpable in rural areas of Iran and has led to variations in different sociocultural aspects. It is attempted to analyze and investigate some of these patterns and changes.

Human development index

According to UNPD annual report named HDR, mean human development index for the rural areas of Iran in 1986 was 0.375 which has reached 0.469 in 1996 with a mean annual increase by 2.8%. With regard to the value of human development index in 1986, it is concluded that, all the rural areas of Iran has low human development. With regard to the growth of human development index in 1996, only the rural areas of 7 provinces (including Tehran, Gilan, Fars, Isfahan, Boushehr, Yazd and Mazandaran) out of 24 provinces of Iran have moderate human development and the remaining rural areas has still low human development. Rural areas of the provinces Sistan-o-Baloochestan, Kordestan, Western Azarbaijan, Kermanshah, Ilam, Khorasan and Zanjan have the lowest value of human resources development index. Difference between the center and periphery in the rural areas of Iran is very much in terms of development index. Since rural areas in border provinces are the closest residential areas to the neighbor countries, lack of attention to this matter can be a factor for being affected by the neighbor countries in terms of cultural and economic. Also, it can be effective in increased migration and unusual geographical movements to the large cities (Abbasinezhad and Rafiei Emam, 2006). Although the human

development index has increased for being more homogeneous during the last decade but, it needs being more noted to achieve appropriate human resources development.

Changes in population

According to the census in 1956, population of Iran was 18945704 people that a little more than 6000000 people were in urban communities and a little more than 12000000 people were in rural communities. Base on this statistics, 32% of the population was urban and 68% was rural.

In 1966, total population of Iran was more than 25700000 people that, 38% was in urban areas and 64% was in rural areas or as non-resident and nomadic.

In 1976, the portion of rural population decreased to 53% and urban population increased by 47%. Total population was about 33709000 people in this year.

In 1976, a few years after the policy of raising children with aim to increase the population, the population of Iran reached 49445000 people. Accordingly, the usual growth by 7 to 8 million people per decade suddenly increased to 16 million people per decade. Interestingly, population growth by applying the new policy in the cities was 2 times of rural areas.

In statistics of 1976, living in rural communities becomes less than living in cities for the first decade. Therefore, about 46% of the population live in villages and 54% live in the cities. This process led to perform the reverse policy of promoting the children reduction in the country.

In 1996 that means 10 years later, the population of Iran reached 60000000 people with an increase by 11000000

people of which 61% was in urban and 39% was in rural areas.

Ultimately, in the national census in 2006, the population was announced by 70472846 people of whom 68% was in urban and 32% lived in rural areas (retrieved from Iran Statistics Center).

Accordingly, it can be mentioned that, the rate of rural population reduction in recent 5 years has been three times compared with the average of last 30 years.

Another instance of demographic and population changes is the marriage issue. Statistics show that, the average age of marriage has increased since 1345 onwards; so that, the average age of marriage for girls, specially rural people has been increasing and has reached from 18.4 years in 1966 to 22.4 years in 1996, and the average age of marriage for boys after a tangible decrease at the beginning of Islamic Revolution, it has been increasing since 1986 onward. Totally, increase of marriage age for girls has been higher than for boys. Also, the average of marriage age of the girls and boys in rural areas has been always less than urban areas but, in 1996, there was a significant increase of the average age of marriage especially among rural girls. The difference of average age in the first marriage in 1966-1976 has dramatically decreased and has reached from 6.6 years in 1966 to 4.4 years in 1976 and then, it has continued its decline slowly and gradually has reached 3.8 years in 1986 and 3.7 years in 1991 and 3 years in 1996. But totally, its intensity in rural areas is higher. Therefore, there is an increase of the marriage age even among the rural people particularly among rural girls (Razavi *et al.* 2002). According to the census of 1996, the mean age of marriage in Iran for boys is

almost 26 years and for girls is almost 23 years. In fact, there are at least 10 years between puberty and the age of marriage for boys and girls and premature marriage or marriage before 20 years old for the girls has decreased from 41% to 18% during the last 40 years. The variations above show progressive delayed marriage and increases of distance between puberty and marriage (Goldoost Arefi, 2003). Investigation of the mean marriage growth rate in a broader time interval or the recent 20 years states that, this rate is not always constant and its graph is V shaped. Mean marriage growth rate in 1986-1996 has decreased compared with the last decade so that, in 1976-1986 the marriage growth rate was 7.33% and in decade of 1986-1996 was 3.5%. The reduction of marriage growth rate in rural areas has been 4.75% and in urban areas has been 3.31% (which is probably because of migration of the rural men). After that, until 1380, the marriage rate has had an increasing trend (increase of 2.52 % in the whole country), especially in the rural areas.

Stratification and social movements in rural

Social class includes people who have same and similar situation in a social class. There are different criteria to stratify rural people including: income and wealth, respect and social prestige, knowledge, education, etc. previously, subsistence practices and social and occupational position of the head of family in rural areas was the most important criterion for stratification that primarily are divided into two classes of landowner and landless. Among landowners, owner or master classes, capitalists and peasant petty land owners can be seen and in the

landless group, colonizer, traders and service personnel can be mentioned (Taghavi, 2008). Accordingly, before the land reform in Iran, major owners, manager and chief among the people, the elders, rural yeomanry and rich renter farmers were among the middle classes and subjects farmers, also workers and colonizers among the lower classes of the rural communication.

In recent years, the criteria such as pasture and livestock ownership, ownership of the means of production, trade and financial capital, social influence and communication, technical expertise and academic literacy, etc. have become the rural stratification criteria. Accordingly, before the land reform in Iran, the village council and elders can be considered as high classes of the villages. Rich rural people such as capital owners, technical and service staff and business owners, landowners, educated voters can be considered among moderate classes and poor rural people such as workers, destitute small landowners and other colonizers are considered among low classes of rural society. It is good to be mentioned that, since 50s onward, social and occupational movements, knowledge and expertise have become more rapid and the changes move toward the boost of moderate class of the society.

Consumption pattern

Consumption pattern is very helpful in identification of cultural situation and variations. Any kind of variations in thought and social system are appeared in consumption pattern and also, consumption pattern can affect thought patterns and social systems of the people in time and space (Armaki & Askari, 2001). In fact, the issue is that, if the people consume a commodity (for

instance, the type of coverage, news, etc.), how and with what thinking is the commodity consumed? How are the consumers? A kind of social compulsion forces the people to follow the new consumption culture. Hence, the cultural system of goods consumption is formed when we know that, what is consumed, where, how and how much? This matter leads to create value regulations and normative system of consumption. Considering the structure and system of consumption in countries and particularly in villages in which traditional and same criteria about clothing, use of diverse models and the world fashion, use of various kinds of music along traditional music, use of satellite channels beside local radio and television to get news and watching movie, etc. it is approved that, cultural change in the villages from the traditional stage to the new stage has occurred. This trend less means conflict in cultural system but also, announces the occurrence of a new task (biological, cultural, economic, social, etc).

Cultural multi-oriented

One of the major influences of new conditions is the possibility of the rate and diversity of the change in cultural relations which has affected cultural and social system. Since, the relationship of the societies and cultures with the expansion of communicative means, has made it possible to propose the subject of manipulation of cultures. Various relationships between the civilized and modern societies have caused to compose diverse cultures and consequently, the societies are made from a culture to multi-culture. Full autonomy of the cultures has been endangered in the new age and cultural multi-oriented has been formed through

the integration and interaction between cultures (Augburn & Nimkov, 1996). Although family, religious and cooperation values have preserved their position in rural areas, but some changes have occurred in forms and the type of facing with these issues. The changes include: formation of the core family instead of expanded family, social and economic communication with the cities, more presence of the rural youth and particularly the girls in higher level of education and universities compared with the last decade, independence of the children in the life decision making, etc.

Development of social communications and information technology

In recent years, expansion of global media and the ease of receiving the messages from these media have affected the quality and lifestyle in villages. In the technology age, much attention is focused on sustainable development which is based on being wise. By entering the information technology to the rural areas, traditional methods of production, communication and etc. have been replaced by modern approaches and have been effective in increase of income, awareness and skills of the rural people. Also, expansion of radio and telephone communications, internet and satellite puts down the conventional and traditional boundaries of access to information and facilities and connects the rural areas with the world directly and easily (Abedi & Okhovat, 2003).

Change in decision-making system and public participation

In the past, decision-making in rural areas was based on elders and chiefs and also, the family system was responsible for education, teaching the skills, health and employment of the children but, gradually and by establishment of some institutions such as schools and health, the responsibilities were given supportive institutes. A part of tasks and the economy of families were moved in the form of cooperatives of production and distribution. Establishment of the city or village council in 1999 led to change in decision-making system and villages development from traditional style to the new selective structure, and the conduct and supervision of the affairs were given from the village elders to the people representatives that means rural councils and a part of decision-makings about planning and progress of the rural development were given them proportionate with the environmental potentials and social and cultural requirements. The findings show that, various changes have occurred in sociocultural relations and tendency to the values and new and modern facilities in rural areas due to development of human resources, population changes, change of consumption pattern, social movements, expansion of media and social communications, developing measures in villages and increase of public awareness in recent decades. Development of the human resources and literacy level and the people awareness, change in consumption pattern, cultural multi-oriented, extension of social communications and information technology, change in stratification system, change in decision-making system and mass participation, change in cultural and

family values, etc. are the sociocultural changes which have occurred in the rural areas in recent years.

Strategies:

- Extension of cultural and educational measures in the villages including enhancing the level of literacy and ability of the rural people.
- Holding the cultural, arts and sports festivals in villages proportionate with cultural and native values to enhance the awareness and cultural level of the rural people.
- Formation of cultural and civil groups and associations and civil for the integrity and people participation in cultural and civil development of the villages.
- Extension of new technologies, coverage of internal media and internet in the rural areas.
- luster investments, job creation and other similar actions in villages to reform and improve the production methods and consumption pattern.
- Socioeconomic empowering of the rural people by modification of the working conditions and life standards, development of sustainable occupations and the per capita income for rural residents.
- Extension of research and study measures about the villages' issues, needs evaluation, the occurred changes, idea production and program to help appropriate and comprehensive planning of the rural development.

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