

STUDYING THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ROLE AND FUNCTION OF ARMENIAN VILLAGES IN FEREYDAN, ISFAHAN PROVINCE DURING THE QAJAR PERIOD (CASE STUDY OF THE VILLAGES OF KHOYGAN ALI AND SOFLA, HEZARJERIB, AND ZARNEH)

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Abstract: The Armenian villages of Fereydan in Isfahan Province were known as an important social and economic institution in the region during the Qajar period. These villages not only served as centers of agriculture and handicrafts, but also played an important role in cultural and economic exchange due to the presence of the Armenian community. The Armenian communities, while maintaining their customs and traditions, increased cultural diversity in these areas while boosting the region's economy. The study of the Armenian villages of Feridan shows how social and economic interactions can contribute to the sustainable development of local communities in a sustainable coexistence between the Christian and Muslim communities. This research seeks to answer these questions with a descriptive-analytical approach: 1- What role did the Armenian villages of Feridan play in the economic and social development of the Isfahan region during the Qajar period? 2- How did the culture and customs of the Armenian community affect the social and economic life of the villages of Feridan? The findings of the study indicate that the Armenian villages of Feridan during the Qajar period contributed significantly to the economic prosperity of the region with their agricultural products and handicrafts. The presence of the Armenian community and the preservation of their customs and traditions led to cultural and social diversity in the villages of Feridan and a positive impact on the coexistence between different ethnic groups.

Keywords: Armenian villages, social and economic, Feridan, Isfahan Province, Qajar.

1. Introduction

The Armenian villages of Feridan (Upper and Lower Khoysan, Hezarjerib, and Zarneh villages) in Isfahan Province, as one of the important gathering points of Armenians in Iran, played a key role in the social and economic developments of this region during the Qajar period, especially in the 19th century. By entering these areas, Armenians gradually became an inseparable part of the social and economic structure of Feridan. This community, with its own cultural and religious characteristics, was able to contribute to the economic and cultural prosperity of the region by preserving its national and religious identity. The presence of Armenians in Feridan is notable not only because of their economic capabilities, but also because of their positive interactions with other ethnic groups and social groups. They had significant activities in the fields of agriculture and handicrafts. The diverse products produced by Armenians included fruits, grains, and handicrafts, which helped to boost local markets and increase family income. In addition to economic aspects, Armenians also played a significant role in creating cultural and social diversity. Their specific customs and traditions added to the cultural richness of the region and strengthened peaceful coexistence between different ethnic groups. These cultural interactions not only helped to improve the social life of the people, but also paved the way for closer ties between different ethnic groups. The importance and necessity of this research topic on the role of Armenians in Feridan not only helps to understand the social and economic history of Iran, but also sheds light on the patterns of cultural coexistence. Examining this topic can help analyze contemporary cultural and economic interactions between different ethnic groups in Iran and show how cultural diversity can lead to strengthening social and economic solidarity.

2. Background

So far, no independent and documented research has been written on the social and economic role and function of the Armenian villages of Fereydan, Isfahan Province, during the Qajar period, and case studies have been conducted on the role of Armenians in different historical periods in Isfahan, including: Christine Gostikian (2021), Volume 5 of Faramin Farsi Matenadaran (1798-1829); Leon Minassian (2008), Thirty-Year History of the Armenian Hospital of Fereydan (1972-1942); Leon Minassian (1998), Folk Culture of the Armenians of Fereydan; Lotfollah Ehteshami (2005), Historical Geography of Fereydan; Akbar Shahmandi and Shahab Shahidani (2018), Enduring Roles: A Walk through the Arrangements of Armenian Graves in Iran; Ahmad Seif (2001), Despotism, Ownership, and Capital Accumulation in Iran; Charles Issavi (1389) Iranian Economy in the Qajar Period; Abdollahyev (1361) The Growth of Commercial Agriculture from Noshirvani and Rural Life in the Qajar Period; Saleh-Nejad et al. (1391) "Kadkhoda in the Qajar Period"; Shahab Shahidani (1403) Christian Missionaries in Iran (from Safavid to Qajar); The Armenian villages of Feridan in Isfahan Province, especially the villages of Khoysan Ali and Sofla, Hezarjerib and Zarneh, have played a key role in the social and economic history of Iran as prominent examples of cultural and economic interactions between different ethnic groups in the Qajar period. These villages have played a key role in the social and economic history of Iran not only as centers of residence for the Armenian community, but also as points of intersection of cultures and traditions, paving the way for social and economic developments in the region. Studying these villages can help to

better understand the cultural and economic diversity of Iran during the Qajar period and also shed light on the effects of migrations and population movements during this period. The aim of this research is to examine the social and economic role and function of the Armenian villages of Feridan during the Qajar period. This research analyzes the cultural, social and economic effects of these villages on regional development as well as relations between different communities. Also, by studying the villages of Khoysan Ali and Sofla, Hezarjerib and Zarneh, an attempt is made to examine how these communities interacted socially and economically with each other and with other ethnic groups living in the region.

3. Armenians from ancient times to the Qajar period

Armenians tell their history according to ancient stories and legends: Armenia was once the center of the world and four great rivers flowed through this country: Euphrates - Tigris - Aras and Kur. This paradise on earth became the second cradle of mankind after the flood. Armenians trace their lineage to a person named Hayka and say that he was the son of the same person who was called Tairme in the Torah (Book of Genesis, Chapter 10). Therefore, Armenians call themselves Hayka and Armenia Hayistan (Pirnia, 1375:3/2267). Darius I named Armenia "Armina" in the inscriptions of Bistoun, Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam and considered Armenia one of the provinces of his government (ibid, 2270). The conquest of Armenia took place during the reign of Ardashir Babakan and the king of Armenia was also named Khosrow the Great. Although much discussion and research has been conducted on this issue, there is still no certainty as it should be. Most researchers now believe that Armenia was conquered during the reign of Shapur I and that the king of Armenia was also named Tirdad. (Sarkisian, 2005:68). We do not know the fate of the Armenians who were moved to the central regions of Iran in the 11th to 14th centuries AD, but the existence of Armenian communities in the northern regions of Iran such as Tabriz, Soltaniyeh, Salmas, Urmia, Maragha, Rasht and Rey in the 14th to 16th centuries AD has been mentioned by Western travelers (Hakobyan, 1932, PP, 313). During the time of Shah Abbas, in a campaign against Georgia after expelling the Ottomans from northwestern Iran, in 1024 AH, the Armenians living in the region of Kars to Jolfa and Yerevan were moved to Iran. The number of these immigrants has been written as 50,000 to 350,000 people, some of whom drowned while crossing the Aras River.

This group was settled in Jolfa, Isfahan and Farahabad, Mazandaran (Ma'toufi, 1387: 1231). After Shah Abbas learned of the movement of Ottoman soldiers into Iranian and Armenian soil, he decided to destroy the populated cities of Armenia, leaving nothing of grain and provisions, and to move all the people of those areas to Iranian soil so that the lack of means of living would hinder the progress of the Turks, but this created many hardships and problems for the Armenians. A large number of Armenians were not willing to leave their homeland (Ravandi, 1354: 2/407). Jolfa was founded by Shah Abbas the Great. The motivation of this brave, wise and enlightened king in this work was that since the Ottoman Turks invaded Iran every year and especially stayed in Armenia, he once went there with a large army and, with the intention of emptying that land of people, he moved all the inhabitants of the cities of Yerevan, Nakhchivan and Jolfa located on the banks of the Aras River, and other cities of Upper Armenia to his capital. In the eyes of Shah Abbas the Great, the Armenians were a talented people for the prosperity of trade, and suitable for trade with the Ottomans and Christians. Because they were not as hated by the Ottomans as the Iranians, and they were of the same religion as the Christians. In those days, the Armenian king named the new city Jolfa in

memory of Jolfa located on the banks of the Aras River, which was their old residence (Sharden, 1372:4/1572). The wars between Iran and Russia during the reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar (1211-1446 AH / 1797-1834 AD) ended with the signing of the two treaties of Golestan and Turkmanchai. (Maftun Danbali, 1389:582-583). Abbas Mirza had lost half of his forces in the Battle of Aslanduz on 5th Dhu al-Hijjah 1227 AH near Yerevan, crossed Aras and retreated to Tabriz. Russian forces captured Yerevan and Lankaran at the end of the year. In the meantime, the British ambassador intervened and prepared the ground for a peace treaty between Iran and Russia. Peace negotiations lasted for a while, and finally a treaty was written in Golestan, a part of Karabakh, in 11 chapters and an introduction, and it was signed on 29 Shawwal 1228 AH, corresponding to 12 October 1813 AD, in the presence of the British ambassador, through Mirza Abul-Hasan Khan Shirazi, the representative of Iran, and Nicholas, the extraordinary representative of the Russian Tsar and General.

The provisions of the Golestan Treaty, except for the part related to the extraction of part of the Caucasus from Iranian soil, were later annulled by the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic government. (Shamim, 2008:84). In the third chapter of the Golestan Treaty, the King of Iran, in order to express his friendship and agreement towards the Russian Emperor, considers all the provinces of Karabakh, Ganja, the Khanate of Mushki, Shirvan, Qaba, Darband, Baku, and every part of the provinces of Talysh that are actually under the control of the Russian government, as well as all of Dagestan and Georgia up to the Caspian Sea, as special and belonging to the Russian Imperial government (ibid.: 85). In the third and fourth chapters of the Turkmenchay Treaty, concessions were also given to the Russian government, and Iran's sphere of influence in the Caucasus region was lost forever. The Shah of Iran, on behalf of himself and his successors, ceded the Khanate of Yerevan, which is located on both sides of the Aras River, as well as the Khanates of Nakhchivan and Yerevan to the Russian government.

To prove his sincere friendship towards the Russian Emperor, he clearly and publicly acknowledges, on behalf of his heirs and successors, that the lands and islands between the demarcation line of the last chapter and the tip of the Caucasus Mountains of the Caspian Sea, as well as the primitive peoples and others, belong to the Russian state (Madani, 1387: 1/95-96). In these wars, Armenian soldiers fought in both the Iranian and Russian armies; But “the number of Armenian soldiers serving in the Iranian army was significantly higher than their number in the Russian army” (in Ohanian, 1379:103). During the Qajar period (1174 AH to 1304 AH), Armenians, as one of the important and influential ethnic groups in Iran, played a key role in various economic, commercial, artistic and industrial fields. Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar (1210-1211 AH/1795-1797 AD), sent the Armenian Khan Satvot as his first ambassador to the London court (Ohanian, 1379:15). Fath Ali Shah looked upon the Armenians with favor (ibid.: 304). The reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar was accompanied by relative peace with the Iranian Armenians, especially the residents of Jolfa. The Armenians benefited from this peace and gained new life. Ismail Rayin has described the situation of the Armenians well in his book during the time of Fath Ali Shah Qajar (Rayin, 1356: 38). In Ohanian, an Armenian historian of the Qajar period, he writes that Fath Ali Shah Qajar had great trust in the Armenians (Ohanian, 1379: 304).

4. Frieden's Historical Geography

Feridan is the historical name of a region in the west of Isfahan province, which today

comprises the counties of Feridan, Boyin Miandasht, Chadegan, and Feridun Shahr. During the Safavid period, this region was one of the centers of settlement for Caucasian immigrants to Iran. The history of settlement in this region dates back to the Median period. In the early Islamic centuries, it was also one of the villages of Isfahan. It was apparently undeveloped for several centuries, and then, it was mentioned again in Safavid sources as the Feridan countryside. At this time, Georgians and Armenians were its main and main inhabitants, yesterday's neighbors who were destined to witness the passage of time together once again and form a linguistic island land in the heart of Iran (Rafei, 2015:65). The name of Feridan is mentioned in the statistics of the provinces of the Achaemenid period. "The tenth province - Hamadan and other parts of Media and the people of Perican and Artakrebant - 400 talan. Herodotus' Perican is the same old Perican, which corresponds to the province of Isfahan, and a part of it is now called Feridan" (Pirnia, 1375: 2/1473). In the northeast of Bakhtiari we come across an area called Feridan, which is a reminder of the Mede Perican tribe (Edmonds, 1362: 17). "After Shah Abbas I moved the Armenians to Isfahan, they often fell ill and died. Shah Abbas wanted to send them to a place with a good climate; therefore he settled them in Charmahal and Feridan" (Sardar Asad, B.I., 516).

These villages, which are mostly Armenian-populated, were purchased by Mohammad Taqi Khan and some by his father, Ali Khan. In Feridan, the Bakhtiari Ilkhanate succeeded in colonizing a number of tribes and encouraging them to live as villagers and engage in agricultural activities. This action, in turn, was opposed by the government. A number of these villages were invaded and plundered by the intrigues and plots of government officials. The Armenian and Muslim inhabitants of these villages were united against the invasion and threat of the Bakhtiari tribes. A number of the people of Feridan and a large group of the people of Golpayegan formed a group. At that time, the ruler, Feridan Agha Faraj, was the uncle of Mohammad Taqi Khan. The villages of Feridan gradually came under the control of the government (Ehtashami, 2005:38). The Armenian villages of Feridan, which were established by the Armenians' migration, exceeded 40 villages. The Armenian Caliphate in Isfahan confirmed the existence of 24 Armenian villages with a population of about 18 to 20 thousand people before World War II. Armenian researcher Elton Minasyan estimates the number of villages devoid of Armenian population at 33 villages. The number of villages devoid of Armenians, where Lors, Turks and Georgians settled, is 9 villages. In the years 1345 to 1350, there were 13 Armenian villages with a small population remaining in the Feridan region. Among these villages, whose population reaches 700 people, we can mention Zarneh Khoygan, Namagard, Qorghon, Savaran, Hadan Qala, Malek Singard and Hezar Jerib. The village of Zarneh is completely inhabited by Armenians and in 1375, it had 37 households with a population of about (91) people, (49) men and 42 women (Shafaghi, 2002: 574-575).

As with determining the number of Armenian immigrants and residents in Feridan, it is also difficult to provide statistics on the number of Armenian villages. The Caliphate of Isfahan confirms 24 villages with a population of eighteen to twenty thousand before World War II. While Leon Minassian mentions the number of Armenian villages without Armenian inhabitants as 33. In the years 1345-1350, there were only thirteen Armenian villages in the Feridan region (Ehteshami, 2005: 38). Therefore, Minassian's statistics are believed to be slightly exaggerated. An examination of the total number of villages in the Feridan region and the etymology of the names shows that there could not have been 33 Armenian villages in this region. Especially since the Armenians did not enter the residential centers and established

their own villages. Even if we take into account the change of location of the villages over time, meaning the existence of several villages, the number 33 is still not justified. Of course, one must be cautious in rejecting this statement because Minasyan was a renowned and accurate researcher. The villages of Khoygan Ali and Sofla, Hezarjerib, Zarneh, Hadan, Dazhgan, Gharqan, Savaran, Sangbaran, Milagard, Namagard, Shabulaq, Qaleh Malek, Bijgerd, Kheng, Dehsur, Margh Deraz, and Chavash Abad were among the Armenian-populated areas, of which only Khoygan and Zarneh remain today. Zarneh is entirely Armenian-populated, and several Armenian families also live in Khoygan. Now, these two villages must be the heirs of that history, which is difficult to find in today's world. Of course, the Armenian heritage can also be seen in the lives of other residents of the villages in this region, and its most valuable form is in architecture. Many of the houses in this region were built by Armenian builders and with Armenian architecture. (Rafei, 2015:70).

5. Social and economic functions, problems and limitations

According to one hypothesis, the Aryans settled in Iran around the second millennium BC and throughout history, they mixed with various ethnic groups and tribes, such as Arabs, Turks, etc., and the current Iranian race is the result of that mixing. In Iran, in addition to Kurds, Lors, and Bakhtiari, there are also Turkish, Turkmen, Arab, Baluchi, and Armenian, Assyrian, Georgian, and other minorities (Ravandi, 1975: 3/2). Feridan has always been very rich in terms of water resources. The abundance of water was compatible with the nature of the Armenians, who had productive power and were skilled in agricultural work. The author of Half the World says: "Mufaddal ibn Sa'd Mafarukhi, while discussing Isfahan, writes: The water of the Zayandeh River does not dominate and flow throughout this area, but some of its blocks and areas are watered by the Qanat Ab and Cheshme Sar, and its water comes from them, and some receive water from both the river and the Qanat. The rainfall in this area is moderate. Nowhere in this area is there dry farming except for "Freidan" (ibid., 251). The village of Khoygan is very important for Armenians from a religious point of view because it houses three churches. This plurality of churches, on the one hand, indicates the importance of religion and religious rituals for its inhabitants, and on the other hand, indicates internal differences among Armenians.

The village included three neighborhoods with separate churches and cemeteries. This feature distinguishes Khoygan from other villages in the region and even the villages of the country. The Church of the Holy Virgin Mary, the Church of the Holy Virgin Mary, and the Church of the Holy Virgin Mary are the three churches of Khoygan. (Rafei, 2015:73). In addition to the contributions of the Armenians of the region and the Caliphate, it is interesting to note the gifts received from the Armenians of India. These gifts were presented every seven years. Among the relics left in Faridan is the bell of the Church of the Holy Virgin Mary, on which there is an inscription in Armenian and Hindi. On the one hand, these gifts indicate the better conditions of the Armenians of India and on the other hand, they indicate the religious importance of the churches of Faridan. Especially since the gifts were ornamental and valuable in some cases. (Rafei, 2015:74). Despite the coexistence and extensive relations between Armenians and Muslims, the independent cultural and religious life of the Armenians continued. Although religion and culture operate in conjunction with each other, the influence of religion on culture is more noticeable. Armenian Christianity has caused them to be less absorbed by Iranian culture over the centuries and to preserve their cultural characteristics more. The existence of theaters in most Armenian villages and the performance of plays - as a report on one of these

performances in the village of Namagard shows - indicates the existence of cultural life in this region. Of course, these plays were not unrelated to the propaganda of the Soviet government in Iran at that time (National Archives and Library of Iran, document ID 290/3410, document number 290003410). The celebration of culture and art in Feridan, which was accompanied by dancing and singing by Armenian female students in elementary school (National Archives and Library of Iran, document number 25-9503). In addition to the Armenians, Georgians also lived in Feridan, whom Shah Abbas had sent here. "My food was buttermilk, yogurt, and cheese, sometimes fruit. Now we are in Feridan. A large part of this province belongs to Muhammad Taqi Khan. We stopped for the night in a village called the village of Muhammad Taqi Khan, which had 150 families. The people of this village were Georgians whom Shah Abbas had brought from Georgia and settled in Faridan. The Christians had abandoned their language and religion. This village is full of trees and its people are wealthy. Their women do not wear veils and are beautiful. A lot of water flows from the mountains and the valleys. They had planted a lot of melons and were carrying them to Isfahan and other places. We entered it in the dark of night, which was the place of the Armenians. They did not welcome us and we had difficulty getting a room from them" (Sardar Asad, Bi Ta, 231). One of the issues that the Qajar considered to support the Armenians of the villages of Khoygan Ali and Sofla, Hezar Jerib, and Zarneh was the issue of taxes: "He granted tax relief to the Armenians living in Jolfa and the Feridan block of Isfahan" (Etemad al-Saltanah, 1363:3/1760).

During the reign of Shah Sultan Hussein, who was a weak-minded man, from 1694 to 1722, unfortunate events occurred in Iran and the situation changed completely, and as a result, the Armenians were caught in misfortune and misery. Government officials took action against them, and the mullahs also harassed and tormented them, and in addition to seizing their property under various pretexts, they did not refrain from humiliating and harassing them. Shah Sultan Hussein, at the request of the mullahs, issued a decree that if a Muslim killed an Armenian, the murderer should not be punished, but should be forced to give a loaf of bread to the victim's family (Alman, 1335, 961). Under Shah Sultan Hussein the Safavid, they suffered greatly and suffered hardships, and Julfa fell into decline (Ibid., 963). One of the most important problems of the Armenian villagers of Rakhvigan, Upper and Lower, Hazara Jerib, and Zarneh was to invite them to Islam. In that year, the wise Humayun, who is the founder of religion and state and the strengthener of the pillars of the kingdom and nation, required that a group of Armenians and Christians who, according to the order, reside and cultivate in Faridan and Sarhad, near the Bakhtiari, should be invited to Islam.

Out of an abundance of compassion and sorrow, since the world is a place of accidents and a place of weakness, lest at the time of an accident and the king's intransigence, the neighboring tribes, who are the tribe's followers and the people of the Dhimma, be caught in the trap of giving women and boys as slaves, a group of that class accepted Humayun's invitation with great gratitude and accepted the order willingly or unwillingly. The main purpose was that in the places where they settled, the temple they had built would become famous as a mosque, and the call to prayer from it would be heard. It seems that the Muslim slogan has emerged, and may their future be blessed with good health and happiness. His Eminence, the protector of Amir Abu al-Ma'ali Natanzi, the scribe of Humayun's court, who is one of the old retainers of this dynasty of governors, and who has been raised under the royal tutelage of Humayun since his childhood, has been distinguished by his closeness and exalted status, complete trust, and complete exclusion from infidels. He has been assigned to this service of increasing happiness.

He, in accordance with the command of the Most High, realized this good deed and went to the midst of that group. Some of them were successful in becoming companions, and were guided willingly and willingly. A group of people who found it difficult to leave the Christian nation through the seduction and incitement of monks and priests, and who considered changing the Christian religion to be abhorrent to them, were discouraged from leaving by the slightest threat they made to the priests and monks. They had no choice but to submit. They forced their feet into the Muslim circle, and most of the women and boys were in joy and delight. They came to each other, and they were talking about monotheism, abandoning the Christian nation, and accepting the clear religion and the white law.” (Iskander Munshi, 1314:3/676). The conversion of Armenians to Islam was done with fear and terror of the oppression that could be inflicted on them. In such a way that the government supported Muslims, so that from non-Muslim subjects “after the affair of Sayyid Rashid, they demanded Sayyid Mansur, who was in Astarabad; he was entrusted with the Hawiza and Hussein Khan of Lor and Ali Sultan, the ruler of Shushtar, were assigned to assist him. In this year, Imam Qoli Khan noticed the conquest of Jerun and the seizure of that kingdom from the Franks. And he invited the Armenian governors of Faridan and Sarhad to Islam, and the implementation of that order was referred to Amir Abu al-Ma’ali, the scribe, and five thousand of them became Muslims” (Vahid Qazvini, 1383:202).

The Qajar government's policy towards religious minorities was similar to previous policies, and even in periods such as Abbas Mirza and Amir Kabir, religious tolerance, freedom of worship, and equal social rights were established. Armenians in Iran always had freedoms from the kings of the time to perform their religious ceremonies. In such a way that, considering their economic, commercial, and loyalty functions to the land and water in which they grew and lived, this gave the governments of the time double attention to granting them freedom to perform rituals. “The Armenians have three other holidays throughout the year, and these three are the Ascension and the Annunciation, and it is the day when Gabriel (peace be upon him) announced the incarnation of the Spirit to Mary (peace be upon her). The Armenians practiced extraordinary worship and asceticism, some did not eat anything for three days and some for five consecutive days” (Tavernieh, 1369: 4/431). During the reign of Mohammad Shah Qajar, Christian Armenians were treated with compassion and intellectual perspective. The result of tolerance and tolerance during this period was greater rapprochement between Christian Armenians and the Muslim people in the geographical area of Iran. Mohammad Shah Qajar reminded the French ambassador of some points regarding cooperation with Christian Armenians and their freedom: “There are 30,000 Christian families living in my territory, who are also good people. You are aware that I treat them and the rest of my subjects with kindness. I have the same thing and this is something that I have been promoting for a long time. They never dared to do such a thing in the Ottoman Empire. I have mixed Christians and Muslims in the Iranian army. Now Christian officers, brigadiers, and colonels are in charge of the command of the Muslims, and you know them yourself, don’t you?” (Nateq, 1378:248).

The Qajar government decrees emphasized that regarding Armenian religious ceremonies, which included ringing bells, beating boards, shouting, and carrying out the dead, no Muslim should prevent or interfere with them from carrying out their religious law. The Qajar government supported the performance of Armenian religious ceremonies in such a way that it made exceptions for them. Another important decree from Fath Ali Shah Qajar addressed to the Archbishop of Echmiadzin is at hand, in which the following items were emphasized:

exemption from taxes and duties; obliging Muslim tenants to pay rent to Armenians, burying the dead without difficulty, ringing bells, and entering the church without any prohibition; prohibiting the harassment of priests; prohibiting the forced conversion of Armenians; exempting Armenians from paying road tolls for pilgrimages from the Ottoman Empire; Free use of the Karhi and Ushakat rivers (Bournoutian, 2003:55) “On the occasion of the Armenian religious ceremony held annually in mourning and condoling the murder of Jesus Christ, the trustees of the Armenian prayer houses in Tehran asked the military government in Tehran, since Armenians were supposed to go to the “prayer house” on Friday night (May 21, 1300) for three hours from the previous night until almost dawn, and perform their religious rituals, that the military government agents not prevent the movement of Armenians that night so that Armenians could freely go to the “prayer houses” at Darvaze Qazvin and Darvaze Shah Abdol Azim that night and perform their religious rituals. The trustees of the Armenian prayer houses in Tehran also asked the military government in Tehran to allow them to publish an announcement in Armenian on this matter” (Farahani, 2006:3/11).

A review of historical developments and documents clearly proves that the principled policy of the Qajar Muslim government was serious and continuous support for its Christian subjects, especially the Armenians. In fact, they issued important decrees regarding the non-compulsion of Armenians to convert to Islam by Muslims and the non-infringement of their religious customs and rituals. “It was decreed by Humayun that His Highness the Caliph Dawud, the Caliph of the Awjaq, should consider that if any of the Muslim community has a claim, he should not make a claim without the command of the world, and the Muslim community is not authorized and permitted to bring Armenians into the fold of Islam by force and coercion. It is decreed that His Highness the Amir al-Amra, the great Beglarbey, Chakhor Saad, and other Beglarbeys, and the rulers of the Sultan’s protected provinces, as prescribed, shall not violate or deviate from the meaning of the firm royal decree. As it has been decreed, each one considers normality and aggression to be a matter of the royal policy, and they intend to respect His Highness the Masharaliyya from each other, and they are bound by the decree of not deviating.” (Gostikian, 2021:5/8).

The Qajar government always had great respect for the protection of the Armenians living in its territory, and had ordered all the rulers of the provinces and regions not to forcefully bring any Armenian to the honor of Islam. The issuance of such decrees further paved the way for the coexistence of the two Muslim and Christian peoples living in the territory of Iran. “It was decreed that His Highness, the High Place of Honor, the Place of Inheritance, the Place of Glory, the Place of Favor, the Place of Refuge, the Place of Sincerity, and the Place of the Greatest Christian and the Most High of the Christian Caliphs, the Caliph of the Caliph David, the Caliph of the Church, with the consideration of the mercy of the explanations of the High and Honorable, should know that since according to the decree of the decree of the King of Humayun, it is ordered and decreed that if any of the people of Islam has a claim, they should not submit their claims without the order of the world, obey the King, and not force any of the Armenians to accept the honor of Islam, so that in reality, they should consolidate and organize their affairs and be independent in the affairs assigned to them, so that none of them can do anything about the affairs of the Caliphate of the Christian nation, so that no violation or aggression is permissible” (Gostikian, 2021:5/13).

During the Qajar period, Armenians had freedom in their clothing and the government did not

force them to wear the type of clothing that the government wanted. Armenian women chose their own clothing. In 1309 AH, Nasser al-Din Shah traveled to Persia. On this trip, Dr. Gerard Fourier, a French court physician who had been appointed to this position since 1306 AH, was one of his companions. The story of the Shah and the court physician about the type of clothing that Armenian women chose of their own free will and the Qajar government did not impose any obligation on them is somewhat new. The important point of this story is that Armenian women are very close to Iranian women in terms of clothing. In fact, due to their adherence to Christianity and their deep religious belief in the sanctity of clothing, they were very careful about the sanctity of clothing. The first story about freedom in clothing is quoted from Dr. Fourier: "18 Dhu al-Qa'dah 1309 AH / June 14: We passed a large town whose inhabitants are Armenians and their priests came to welcome us.

The women of this town wear tall cylindrical hats wrapped in red cloth and hide their pale faces with a white, flowered scarf tied around their mouths. No one forces these Christian women to wear this veil; they themselves have chosen to observe this Islamic custom" (Fourieh, 2006: 371). Like Fourieh, Nasser al-Din Shah is also seeing this covering for the first time and is equally astonished. "Then we reached the village of Kalav, which was located under the left-hand mountain, that is, at the very mouth that leads to Astana, and is the property of Mohammad Taqi Khan, son of Haji Reza Qoli Khan. The subjects of Kalav are mostly Armenians. When we arrived here, we saw all the people of the village standing on the road. Strangely, the Armenian women had all covered their heads with shawls and hats, covering their chins and mouths. They also had a priest who wore a robe, and their attire and appearance were not without spectacle" (Qajar, 2008: 70).

6. Conclusion

An examination of the social and economic role and function of the Armenian villages of Feridan during the Qajar period shows that these villages served as important cultural and economic centers in the region. The villages of Khoysan Ali and Sofla, Hezarjerib, and Zarneh not only helped preserve the cultural identity of the Armenians, but were also known as centers of agricultural production and handicrafts. The role of these villages in meeting the economic needs of the region, especially in the fields of agriculture and animal husbandry, was very vital. The Armenians were able to produce a variety of products that were supplied to local and even distant markets. This led to economic prosperity in the region and increased trade interactions with other ethnicities. On the other hand, the Armenian villages were also known as cultural centers. Holding religious and cultural ceremonies, preserving the Armenian language and literature, and promoting handicrafts were among the activities carried out in these villages. These activities not only helped strengthen the Armenian national identity, but also added to the cultural richness of the region. Finally, the Armenian villages of Feridan (the villages of Khoysan Ali and Sofla, Hezarjerib, and Zarneh) during the Qajar period were an example of peaceful coexistence of ethnicities that were able to contribute to the social and economic development of the region by preserving their identity.

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