Evaluation of Left-wing Historiography Characteristics in Contemporary Iran

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Abstract

The historiography of the Left Party of Iran, as an influential party in the contemporary history from its early years to its fall, has been evaluated by many domestic and foreign writers and historians. Historic context includes books, articles and memoirs some of which were written by people connected to the "People" party from the special perspective of the party. Therefore, recognition of the fundamental principles of left historiography as a main party in the Iranian contemporary historiography is very important.

Their historiography focuses on the role of left forces in contemporary political and social movements and the Islamic revolution in 1978 with an ideological strategy by giving value to history and producing novel concepts in the political literature and historiography of contemporary Iran.

This study will seek to answer the question whether the Iranian left historiography can be distinguished due to some special features from other parties in the Iranian contemporary historiography.

Keywords: historiography, left-wing party, "Tudeh" Party, contemporary history.
Introduction

After the "People" party was officially founded in 1941, their historiography began, too. Newspapers of that party would analyze political and ideological issues about the history of the foundation of the Tudeh Party and they have written for four decades from the beginning of that idea in the field of politics during the last years of Qajar to the events after the Islamic revolution in 1978.

Gradually, the content of papers published by the Party about politics, leadership by the people and fighting with some connections to history besides memoirs by members and leaders of the Party formed the party's historiography. Although that routine has had ups and downs in different periods, the main wave of Iranian left historiography goes back to the 70's and 80's and particularly the atmosphere of the years after the revolution.

During the 80's and 90's at the same time with Iranian historiography development and creation of new styles in historiography such as oral social historiography, the left party's historiography was presented in Iran and outside of Iran by Hamid Ahmad, and Hamid Shokat in the form of active interviews with the party's leaders such as Khan Baba Tehrani, Mohsen Rezvani and Iraj Kashkooli. However, the main form of the party's historiography, especially inside Iran during the 80's, was memoirs. A view on the left movement from the inside by Hamid Shokat, memoirs by Noor-Al-Din Kianoori, Iraj Eskandari's memoirs, the pain of the era by Mohammad Ali Amooie, Kajraheh by Ehsan Tabari, and our legend by Forootan are of the books written by members and leaders of the left party of Iran during the 60's and 70's.

Stages of Iranian left party's historiography

As mentioned above, the first point in time when the Iranian left party was formed officially was in 1941 after the events in the summer of that year and the occupation of Iran by the axis during the World War II and elimination of Reza Shah's dictatorship and the open political atmosphere during that time. That went on until 1947.

In historiography, the first party newspapers and magazines are the beginning point for the Iranian left party's historiography. Failure of politics with Abbas Eskandari as the responsible administrator was published as the Tudeh Party's official magazine; letter of people which belonged to Reza Radmanesh besides politics, leader and fight were of issues of the left party during that period.

During the first six years of official activity by the Tudeh Party, in spite of the direct and indirect dependence of their leaders on the Soviet Union, some members of the Party opposed to dependence to foreigners. They created a separate branch after disagreeing with the leaders.
Khalil Molki and Anvar Khameie were the leaders of that branch and Jalal Al Ahmad was among them, too. That was the beginning of the second era of left Iranian historiography with two approaches: dependent and independent.

Concurrent to nationalizing the oil industry with the leadership of Mohammad Mosaddegh, the prime minister in that time, the vague policy of the Tudeh Party and their indecisive performance regarding his government, another period of the Tudeh Party's historiography began. Apart from the branch leaded by Khalil Molki, other groups that were loyal to the Party were pro the party's policy. After the 1953 coup by domestic elements and with the help of foreign powers specially the united states and the elimination of Mosaddegh's government and the silent political atmosphere and prohibition of activities of political parties, even the Tudeh Party that played a passive role during the coup was announced illegal by the government and many of their members and leaders were imprisoned or had to flee the country. The left party's magazines were also isolated during that period and their historiography which was their main tool in propaganda lost its power.

From 1938-1977, activities of the Party entered into another stage. Concurrent to the transfer of the left party's location abroad from Moscow to Leipzig in eastern Germany, new branches of the Party were formed in Europe and Iran. They extended their activities by criticizing Mohammadreza Shah and supporting the movement in 1963 with the leadership of Imam Khomeini. The struggle of the Iranian revolution in 1977 and its victory in 1978 and the events after that gave the members and leaders of the Iranian left party an opportunity to write and publish historic books. That was carried out in order to acquire shares in the revolution and defend the performance of the Tudeh Party in the events.

The years after the Islamic revolution up until 1983 were the period of officially publishing the magazines of the left party which were prohibited during the time of dictatorship. They were published with the same titles they had before the revolution such as fight, letter of people and the world in order to acquire new members in competition with other parties during the decade after the revolution.

The book "documents and views of 40 years of the Iranian Tudeh Party" which was published in 1981 was a relatively complete collection of the history of Iranian left party and labor movement.

In 1983, the Islamic republic announced the Iranian left party prohibited and their members and leaders were captured and they confessed on TV. Consequently, a wave of memoirs and oral narrations in the form of an extensive part of the left party's historiography was formed in the 80's which became the last stage of historiography by the party, and the Party continued their activities outside of the country which is beyond our discussion.
Characteristics of the Iranian left historiography

The Tudeh Party's historiography was narrated with the special approach and purposes of the party. A look at the historiographical content by the Party can help us find the characteristics of the Tudeh Party's historiography which is written partly in Persian.

History creation

In the left party's books, the first signs of their activities go back to the constitutional era. Referral to the first left parties such as justice, effort, and the communist party of Iran during the time of Ahmad Shah Qajar is introduced as the groundwork for the formation of the Iranian left party.

The activities of the group of Taghi Arani during the time of Reza Shah Pahlavi are introduced as a coherent and pioneering communist group. Later, the main core of the left and the Tudeh Party which was founded in 1941 were of the remaining members of that group. That effort by the Tudeh Party's in order to create a long history was carried out in order to legitimize their movement politically and socially so that they could get people's recognition.

According to that view, in order to legitimize itself historically and link itself to social movements and previous political groups, the Party attempted to present a role beyond the reality for left parties in the past and increase its credit and make believe that the Party came from the political and social history of the country, and make its history longer.

Character-orientation

On the other hand, the left consider the left heroes as the basis of historiography in order to legitimize themselves politically and socially, and in writing historic books and the story of the Tudeh Party and other communist parties, they refer to the positive role of their members and leaders in the victory of social movements in the recent decades. Although Noor-Al-Din Kianoori, the first secretary of the Iranian Tudeh Party, played a role in many significant events, his role in those events has been subject to exaggeration by the Tudeh Party's historiography. The left movement have attempted to make heroes out of their leaders in magazines and articles by celebrating leaders such as Asadollah Ghaffarzadeh, Mohammad Amin Rasoolollah, Heidarkhan Amooaghi, Aaghi Arani, the rise of officers and soldiers of the Tudeh Party in the summer of 1945 with the leadership of major Eskandarani who was the head of the Tudeh Party's officers in Khorasan, and battle inside the army against the central government.
Exaggeration

Exaggeration of the Tudeh Party's role in the contemporary historic events and political and social changes of Iran is another basis in the left Iranian historiography.

Use of words such as "we" and "our party" and "the Tudeh Party" prepared the groundwork for getting shares of other groups' battles against dictatorship. Another aspect of their exaggeration is rooted in the key characters of the party's leaders. Their notes and memoirs indicate that every one of them attempted to relate all programs to them and make other groups' involvement look less significant, and attributed mistakes to other people. They only praised their own success.

Formation of new concepts in the political literature and historiography

All that has been published by the Tudeh Party is full of expressions about left values and ideologies such as Marxism, socialism, Leninism and Stalinism, and the effects of the global revolution of communism can be seen clearly in their behavior and political performance and books. Terms such as feudal, colonialism, abuse, imperialism, people and backwardness are used in their written content which has led to the formation of new expressions and concepts in the left political historiographical culture. The phrase "people's democracy" was a concept that was used numerously for the Azerbaijan issue and Azerbaijan’s autonomous government. Those terms are used in the Iranian political and social vocabulary even as of today. On the other hand, examining some titles of left magazines and newspapers such as on to the future, riot, freedom party, nation's fight, fire, battle, whale, fight and siren, we can clearly see the culture of battle and political aggressiveness in the left party's concepts.

Ideological thinking and foreignism

Every reader of the Iranian contemporary history knows that the Tudeh Party’s historiography and content are ideological. Following the eastern and communist views blindly, predilection, ideological positioning and the Iranian left party’s ideological dependence to the Soviet Union is obvious in books and other written content published by the Party members. That is mostly rooted in the mental poverty of writers and historians of the left party. In those books, sometimes the reality is sacrificed for ideological interests, the history is changed, and the mind of the historian is controlled by the tradition of left historians who analyze events and influential forces within unchanging Marxist and communist standards.

There is content about the political and ideological dependence of the Iranian left party to the Soviet Union. The party’s performance in Iran during four decades included spy activities for the Soviet Union, supporting the Soviet Union’s in issues such as the Azerbaijan issue and the
northern oil concessions were of the indicators of the party’s foreignism which typically originated from the total ideological dependence of the Iranian left party to the Soviet Union. The Party considered the Soviet Union as the main international defender of labor classes, and considered it necessary to support its goals and interests.

That belief remained so strong inside the minds of some of the members and leaders of the Party that they could not believe the fall of the eastern power even decades after it happened and considered it immortal.

Opportunism

Most of the Tudeh Party’s historiography consisted of their positioning and views regarding the domestic events and issues of the time. Events such as the summer of 1941, happenings in the 40’s, the 1953 coup, the oil consortium, Shah’s white revolution, the 1963 riot, events leading to the Islamic revolution in 1978, relationship with the united states and the occupation of the American embassy are discussed in the party’s historiography. The party’s positive role in all events is suggested in all that content with a biased positioning. The main trait of that content is the attempt to efficiently use the opportunity to get legitimization and public recognition the way the party’s writers tried to ride the political and social waves.

Scandal and accusation

The accusation of political opponents in historiography has a history in the Tudeh Party of Iran. The lack of a pattern and practice of democracy and experience in political cooperation and mental adolescence has always caused disagreement and social disorder for parties in Iran. That situation is reflected in content published by those groups and parties including the Tudeh Party. The claims by the Party through their years of historiography were particularly accusing other movements. The Party would seek popularity by calling them enemies. During the historic periods of the Tudeh Party, opposing against the national and religious party and sometimes even other left groups can be seen clearly. Confessions by members before and after the revolution and their notes and memoirs reflect that. It is worth noting that their positioning was not rational, documented and based on ethical principles, and were even hateful and contained various accusations and sometimes along with rude and unethical expressions. The accusation of relationship with the west and imperialism was an accusation by the left party on their opponents, and the hardest of those accusations were made on the national movement. The beginning of that goes back to the 14th parliament and Mosaddegh’s negative equilibrium bill. The representatives of the Tudeh Party viewed the bill skeptically and negatively, and used it in order to accuse nationalists. The hardest accusation on the nationalists which is still expressed by former members of the Tudeh Party is the accusation of letting Americans in the country and giving them shares of its oil interests.
Party cleansing, personal exoneration

That is seen clearly in the performance and memoirs of members of the left party. After the Tudeh Party was announced illegal in 1988 by the Islamic republic, their propaganda against the regime and attempts to exonerate themselves of accusations began. After the confessions of the party’s leaders on TV which led to the elimination of the political positioning and remains of the Tudeh Party in Iran, the foreign committee of the Party sent a message to its members and fans in which they dismissed the captured leaders. That was clearly in conflict with their authority. Other memoirs by the Party leaders during that time were typically a reaction and positioning against accusations by the regime’s newspapers. Memoirs by Ehsan Tabari, Noor-Al-Din Kianoorni and Fereidoon Keshavarz are among them. Each of those people tried to self-exonerate and claimed to have been unaware of wrong decisions by the Party during the period of activities.

Conclusion

Most of the Iranian Tudeh Party’s historiography consists of memoirs or domestic historiography. It began in the form of issues and newspapers shortly after the official foundation of the party. And the form and content of the party’s historiography changed at critical point in time such as the first branch separation in 1994, the issue of Azerbaijan’s independency from 1945 to 1946, the unsuccessful murder of Mohammadreza Shah Pahlavi in 1948, the movement of nationalizing the Iranian oil industry in 1951, the 1953 coup and its rebirth and breakup.

Party publications, documents, official and unofficial history books, memoirs and chronicles of the party’s leaders constitute most of the historiography of the Party. The lack of party activity history and team work in the political and social framework of the country, the lack of historical and political legitimacy, the party’s ideological estrangement with the Iranian society affected the function of the Tudeh Party of Iran and relations with other political forces and distinguished its self-written chronicles. Repetition, insisting and overemphasis on the Tudeh Party’s history, historical background building, and the attempt to gain legitimacy and to exaggerate the role of the Tudeh Party in Iran’s contemporary history, character-orientation and making heroes out of the members and leaders of the Party at critical points in the history originate from the nature of the left movement.

The party left an enduring legacy in the Iranian political literature in the Iranian contemporary historiography style by producing new political concepts and vocabulary. During the first days after the Islamic revolution, they added other features such as accusation and self-exoneration to their historiographical characteristics in a re-narration of their political history and in defending their political performance. Those features are still present.
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