6. CONCLUSION

It must be reiterated here that this work was not purported to be a detailed study of any particular Iranian social movement or movements. The main objective was to see as to what extent geographical and historical factors were responsible to create situations that encourage emergence of social movements in Iran. In other words, the place is made a constant factor and the time variable. So the attempt was made to gain a wider perspective about some of those social movements which emerged within a limited geographical area namely Iran, but in different periods. Consequently we were able to arrive at broader classification of Iranian movements and also identify the common features of Iranian movements which were largely chiliastic.

Our case study of the Ahl-e Haqq movement provided us a vivid picture of the internal organization, ritual and symbolism of such millenarian movements. In addition to these, with the help of available historical evidences we tried to follow the course of development and decline of Iranian movements. Now in the following pages, we would like to present a short theoretical debate about the emergence and decline of Iranian movements.

A main hypothesis of this study is based on the assumption that at the ultimate root of Iranian social movements stands the great historical conflict between two different modes of production namely pastural and agricultural.
The existence of these two modes of production, and the concentration of each mode in a separate region can be attributed to the regional differences in the climatic and geographical conditions of Iran as well as to the Iranian Plateau and Central Asia.

Coser defines social conflict as "a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflict groups are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals."¹

Although this definition may not be able to cover all kinds of social conflicts, it serves our purpose because it refers to a cause which is largely responsible for the social conflict in Iran namely conflict over scarce resources. The general definition of social conflict by Weber as actions oriented "intentionally to carrying out the actor's own will against the resistance of the other party or parties",² makes conflict a normal and institutionalized process, and does not include this crucial factor namely struggle over scarce resources. As said earlier there has been perennial competition between nomadic and agricultural populations over the land which was scarce. Weber rightly emphasizes the intentional aspect. However he can be blamed for neglect a fact that a social actor may also be compelled to resort to action under pressing fundamental needs.

The negative attitude of the nomadic tribes towards the private ownership of land emanates from their belief that all the land collectively belongs to the tribe and they do not have the concept of private land ownership which is so important among agricultural people. They explicitly showed their dislike and even aggressive reactions against even a sign of agricultural life. ¹ The scarcity of land in this part of the world is defined by natural conditions.

However the nature allowed both these modes of production not only to persist but also made a continuous transformation of one mode to another possible. ² However only some of the nomadic tribes gained the domination over large areas as was the case of the already mentioned tribes of Arabia and Central Asia. ³

Comparatively speaking only those tribes, which were successful in the mobilization of their available resources, could reach the level of having that kind of political domination. We can discuss here the example of Kurdish nomads to substantiate our argument. For instance the Kurdish nomads, despite their large population, barring a few cases such as that of Saladin (dominabatur 1169-1193) and Karim Khan (dominabatur 1750-1779) could not play an important role in the history of the Middle East, because they could not mobilize their resources. Barth relates

¹See p. 49 ff.
²See p. 49.
³See p. 44 ff.
this failure, to a considerable extent, to the features of the political organization in this region. Barth points out that the Kurdish social organization is based on an endogamous close family marriage under which "no supralineage political authority is developed, and no interaction between a lineage and other groups is necessary, except for a certain minimum of trade."\(^1\) But the Kurdish political organization is based on territory rather than lineage.\(^2\) One may also consider the difference in the geographical conditions of Kurdistan and Central Asia, as well as climatic peculiarities in each region. It should be added that, the natural conditions do influence the emergence and persistence of certain social organizations. For example: It has been observed that polyandry in Cis-Himalayan tribes was due to scarcity (much more than in Kurdistan) of land in order to prevent further division of it. In addition, Kurdish nomads were always subject to external control due to the nearness to the center of the great empires. Therefore the Kurdish nomads could not stretch their conflicts with Kurdish peasants beyond limit and had to content themselves by submission of the Kurdish peasants, and at the same time these tribes became the instruments of social control for one another through inter-tribal wass. This was less due to the particular effect of their social organization, than due to political disintegration and division encouraged and used by the neighbouring empires.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Barth: *Principles of Social Organization...*, p. 139.

\(^2\) See p. 194.

\(^3\) As Fried writes: "Long before recent European colonialism, not to say neo-colonialism, the Roman, the Chinese and other expanding state societies had grasped the essentials of divide and rule... These have been examples in which 'tribes' have been consciously synthesized to advance a scheme of external political control." (Horton H. Fried: On the Concept of "Tribe" and "Tribal Society". In: June Helm (Ed.): *Essays on the Problem of Tribe. Proceedings of the 1967 Annual Spring Meeting of American Ethnological Society, Seattle/London, 1968*, p. 18).
The conflict between the sedentary and nomadic people whether on a smaller or larger scale was the main feature of Iranian history over centuries.

We have already mentioned that in these struggles the nomads always turned out to be victorious. This can be explained in terms of the relative success of the nomads in mobilizing the resources, which were also advantageous for military campaign,¹ as compared to that of sedentary population.

There occurred variations in the strength of nomads from time to time due to certain factors.² However their general effectiveness should be attributed to a combination of a number of factors depending on historical circumstances. For example: The existence of a powerful military empire of the sedentary people which could curb the nomadic intrusion. But at other times when the army of the sedentary people was weak, different nomadic tribes came together and formed a confederacy with the view to increase their strength and invade the sedentary areas. In some other occasions a certain tribe was able to defeat other tribes and bring them under one single leadership. Even if a powerful leadership of one tribe subordinated one or two other tribes, many other tribes would voluntarily accept to join them. Therefore the development of several tribes into a larger tribe confederacy or concentration of the political power should not be attributed to the evolutionary process as it is assumed about some tribal areas of

¹See pp. 46 - 47.
²For example whether at the time, a powerful empire was established in the region or not.
Despite this, kinship seems to have played a crucial role in facilitating the uniting of certain tribes and not others. Godelier states that "in an archaic society kinship relations function as relation of production, just as they function as political relations." Therefore in such societies, accordingly, kinship relations are "both infrastructure and superstructure." He also adds: "To the extent that kinship in this kind of society really functions as relations of production, the determinant role of the economy does not contradict the dominant role of kinship, but is expressed through it."  

Due to existing fertile vallies in the mountains of Kurdistan especially in the south, a considerable size of agricultural activity is made possible. The orientation of the exodus was generally from north Kurdistan towards the south where natural conditions permit the co-existence of both these modes of production. However the economic and ecological factors could well force several tribes to unite against the sedentary population instead of struggling against one another for the possession of the scarce pastoral lands, as in Central Asia.

In the conflicts between the nomadic and sedentary population the latter which was largely consisted of peasants, were mostly defeated mainly due to their military weakness. Similarly the weakness of the peasantry has also been attributed to their social organization.

According to Parsons:

"There seem to be certain elements of inherent instability in societies where the overwhelming bulk of the population is organized on the basis of peasant village communities. One of the reasons for this is the fact that the village community as a primary focus of solidarity can only within very narrow limits be an effective unit for the organization of the use of force. It is, in the face of any more extensive organization, not a defendable unit. Hence there must always be a 'superstructure' over a peasant society, which, among other things, organizes and stabilizes the use of force. The question is how far such a superstructure is, as it were, 'organically' integrated with the self-contained village communities and often the level of integration is not high."¹

Different types of loyalties, similar to what Alavi calls "primordial" loyalty² (which still exist in the Kurdish society)³ and which prevent the peasants from uniting, must have always existed among Iranian peasantry. Certainly these were among the important factors weakening the peasants and forcing them to submit to the possessors of force. But at the same time it should be remembered that in such an area, with a minimum of communication possibilities, with very small and scattered settlements (completely conditioned by natural forces), social organization on the basis of village community has been the most effective organization for the survival of the peasant communities. Although this at the same time was one of the important reasons, in addition to that already mentioned (such as their immobility etc.), which prevented them from an effective use of force.⁴

³Briannes: Agha, Shaikh and State..., p. 9ff.
⁴See pp. 46 - 47.
But as explained in the earlier chapter that the hegemony of nomads oppressed the defeated sedentary population by squeezing out of them whatever surplus they had produced. As stated earlier the monarchies established by nomads had to go through the process of decadence and soon they became too weak to defend themselves against the incoming nomads. And thus there were invasions one after the other causing socio-economic stagnation. This argument can be seen as a critique of both the theories of Asiatic Mode of Production,¹ and Oriental Despotism,² and also of Weber's theory about the role of Protestant ethic in the rise of Capitalism.³

As a matter of fact we should remember that in many important cases these nomadic invasions and domination caused not only stagnation but also regression. Barth brings to our attention the process of the nomadization of the peasantry. "In times of peace and strong administration, the flow towards the village increases, while in times of economic stress and chaos, such as Persia has experienced at regular intervals throughout her history till today, villagers and even whole sedentary communities may assume nomadic life."⁴

¹See p. 70 ff.
²See p. 93 ff.
⁴Barth: Nomads of South Persia..., p. 118.
The economic stagnation at the same time brought about increase in exploitation and led to suppressive policies against the population, when the dominant group had then established a centralized rule. And it is just here that the situation for the development of social movements is prepared.

One can trace a close connection between social movements and socio-economic conflicts. This, first of all, is to suggest that there was no relation between these movements and the deprivation of the participants, as is suggested by Aberle in his Relative Deprivation Theory.\(^1\)

Generally those scholars who make psychology of the participants as a main concern of their studies are all victims of reductionistic tendencies or of intellectual past time games. To treat the neurosis of the participants of the Millenarian movements or their leaders (as in the case of Sierksma)\(^2\) using the terminology of clinical psychology or searching for some exceptional cases or careers of the leaders (as in the case of Cohn)\(^3\) can be considered as a conscious attempt to give a secondary importance to socio-economic factors. There is not one moment in human life which is not subject to some psychological process, although simultaneously people act rationally and according to their interests as they envisage and understand them.

A look into the philosophical and ideological basis of the Millenarian movements (which played such an important role in development of Iranian social movements), their

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1See pp. 6 - 7, also see: Nash: p. 21.
2Zvi Nersiowsky: A New Heaven..., p. 166.
sophisticated organizations, and their persistence during a long period of time, etc., all go together to counter the classical concept of social movement presented by Le Bon and others about the irrational reaction of the masses, or the one put forth by Gabriel Tarde who believed that a crowd or sect has no ideas other than those which it is exposed to.\(^1\)

It is actually impossible to speak of mass reactions in the situation like that of Iran, where the followings of social movement were scattered over large areas with very little fast communication facilities. However, it can be said that the psychological factors may be the cause of spontaneous revolts but not such mature movements.

We can once more pinpoint the relation between force and intention. It is true that the situational factors forced the individual to resort to some actions. But it is the individuals themselves who make a choice of actions from amongst the available alternatives. Here the peasants and the artisans chose to revolt and not to withdraw or submit. Of course, their success or failure was determined by a combination of several factors, beside the peculiar historical circumstances.

While analysing various Iranian movements, we could notice that the movements of the peasants at different points of time showed similar trends. Similarly, the movements of the artisans or nomads, land nobility or urban poor also showed general similar orientations. Therefore

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\(^1\)Gabriel Tarde: Foules et Sectes au Point de vue Criminel. In: Revue des Deux Mondes (Nov. 15), 1893, p. 353.
it can be said that firstly, each of these groups initiated their particular movements. The tendencies, forms and strategies of these movements were determined by the class background of their followers rather than by irrational (or neurotic), spontaneous mob reaction. Secondly, each group consciously made use of the resources it had at its disposal.

Their nativistic and nationalistic tendencies, although they did not play an important role in the movements of one peasants and artisans were guided by their self interest, as suggested in utilitarian approach of Olson. In the field of nativism too the Relative Deprivation Theory proves to be inadequate. Nationalism, which was supported by the land nobilities, secretaries and the men of letters, was a very well-shaped ideological "superstructure" of this elite class in Iranian society, through which they were trying to retain their status against their Arab rivals. The Arabs also evolved their own ethnic nationalism which they used to strengthen their in-group feeling as well as to legitimize their discrimination against the Iranians. In their case this kind of nationalism was a development of their ancient tribal Asabieh (Asabiya), which after their achievement of domination of other people, was transformed into the wider term of "Arab" as against "Ajam."
The Arab aristocracy was not prepared to share their power with the non-Arabs whose abilities in different fields seemed to be threatening to them. Both Arabs and non-Arabs indulged in a propaganda war, each claiming ethnic superiority over the other and disclaiming that of other. It is

2 See p. 10.
3 "Asabiya" can be described as in-group feelings shared by the members of an Arab nomadic tribe which were strengthened by kinship relations. Each tribe was considered as an independent entity and was strictly endogamous. If one of the members of the tribe was killed it was the duty of each member to take the revenge. For more information about "Asabiya" in the history of Arabia. See Ibn Khaldun: The Muqaddimah, New York, 1958.
true that nationalism developed among both dominant and dominated groups as Linton puts it.\(^1\) But it should immediately be added that it was at the same time the conflict between the elite groups of both Arab and non-Arab societies, who were fighting to protect and promote their interests or achieve and retain power. It can be said that what the secretary class or the men of letters, belonging to the Iranian society, did against the Arabs was not motivated purely by the nationalistic considerations. What was at the basis of their activities was their own class interests. For example: The members of the same Iranian secretary class or the men of letters showed readiness to serve the later invaders and to join them in further suppression of their own people. At that particular point in time they did not revolt or protest against the foreign invaders. They perpetuated the situation of "inequality" in Linton's words. The Sho'ubiyyeh nationalistic movement existed exactly at the same time when the millenarian movements, which had some nativistic tendencies were going on.\(^2\) It leads us to conclude that Mahdism as a kind of nativistic movement should not be considered as an inevitable forerunner of nationalism, as suggested by Muhlmann.

Nativism in the sense of "in-group" feelings was a natural part of the Iranian millenarian movements whose main aim was to achieve a Utopian society and put an end to the supressive rule (of those who were at the same time of alien

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\(^1\) Linton: See pp. 18 - 19.

\(^2\) See pp. 109 ff and 180 ff.
culture), through revolutionary actions. But at the same
time certain members of the alien culture who were thought
to have been on their side against the oppressors, were
admired and loved. They were made legendary heroes, the
martyrs of the suppressed people (as Imam Hosayn is called).
The people preserved and perpetuated the memories of their
revolutionary actions through annual ceremonies, with the
view to perpetuate the sentiment of revolution and of the
fight against oppression. Therefore it can be broadly said
that nationalistic movements had their supporters among the
class of land nobility and secretary in the Iranian society,
whereas the nativistic millenarian tendencies were the
characteristic features of those movements which mainly
represented the interests of the artisans. At the same time
the movements which were incarnationist-militaristic in
nature were the movements of the nomads and those incarna-
tionist mystic-millenarian were that of peasantry.

Rituals and social organizations of the movements, with
their functions (not much less important than it is in struc-
tural-functionalist concept) were the creations and adopta-
tions of the ideologists and strategists of these movements,
particularly that of the artisans. They also systematically

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1 A wish to achieve a Utopian society from the view point of
the individual participant may be a result of several motives,
each becoming prominent, depending on the time and differing
from case to case and individual to individual. This set of
motives includes self-interest (in Olson's utilitarian term,
but milder) collective good (solidarity and principles as
envisaged by Fireman and Gamson), primordial loyalties and
above all the desire of a large number of participants to
get rid of the intolerable state of affaire (Cf. Bruce Fireman
and William A. Gamson: Utilitarian Logic in the Resource
Mobilization Perspective. In: Mayer N. Zald and John D.
McCarthy: The Dynamics of Social Movements; Resource Mobili-
ization, Social Control, and Tactics. Cambridge/Mass, 1979,
p. 21 ff.).

2 See p. 170 ff.

3 See p. 221 ff and 234 ff.
armed the peasants and farmers\(^1\), and created efficient military organizations and units to train guerilla for political assassination.

Therefore we find that as in the case of modern Western social movements\(^2\) the resource mobilization has had a crucial significance for the development and sustenance of the Iranian millenarian movements. For that the availability of the resources was also equally important.

Another significant observation which can be made here is that the extent of militancy changes of a movement when its class following changes.\(^3\) Similarly it also changes with its transfer from one community, dominated by one mode of production to another community with another dominant mode of production, as in the case of nomads and peasants.

A nomadic society has a better organization, military ability and material culture which can be efficiently utilized for the use of force (agression) as compared to the peasant society. It is despite the fact that both these two communities (or societies and not classes) had internal socio-economic stratification, and both were subject to the coercive rule of ruling classes. Moreover it should be remembered that violence is used more by the ruling classes to defuse opposition. The extent of radicalization of the movement among the peasants and certain strata of the urban

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\(^1\)Hasan Juri proceeded to create an organization of armed artisans and tradesmen who were obedient to a discipline that was probably derived from the 'futuwa' and devoted to a religious mission." (Smith: The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty..., p. 112). Several other Iranian movements created similar military organizations.


societies depends on the coercive character of the methods applied by ruling classes through their military and police force.¹

Therefore it was natural that in some of the Iranian movements, peasants and artisans were able to create an effective military force to be able to counter the military power of the ruling classes. They had to utilize planned military and political organization which the nomadic armies already possessed. Thus a movement opposing the exploitative domination of a ruling class came to be radically violent if the rulers increased the use of force and violence to curb and oppress it. The members of ruling classes used their force to protect their privileged positions, whereas the exploited peasants and artisans struggled to bring about a change in the status quo and achieve a state characterized by egalitarianism and harmony, "where even wild animals are peaceful"!

It has been already observed in different parts of the world that the peasant community is generally egalitarian. In normal situations they try to ensure that all members are guaranteed minimum livelihood and create institutions to level out the wealth and social differences and to moderate individual ambitions.²

In case of the artisans, the guilds also played the role in insuring some security to their members. The ordinary members of artisan and peasant classes believe that one can not become more powerful or domineering than others in the normal situations or by normal ways. One needs to be


crafty to be so. In that case it is necessary to ensure security and safety of the weak members against the crafty designs of such people. And that is why in these two classes institutional order is created which offers security even to the marginal members.

It is necessary here to refer to the concept of legitimation. In the circumstances in which the ruling classes do not appear as the aggressors but rather they are seen as protectors, the level of opposition considerably declines. Otherwise their domination and privileged position are seen as illegitimate. In the view of underprivileged masses a more egalitarian socio-economic structure is a legitimate one. So when the pressure reaches an unbearable limit they start oppositional movements through which they hope to achieve what they think is their right. They have on the one hand no reason to remain quiet and on the other hand nothing to lose.

The rank and file of the nomadic community has similar perspectives, as compared to the peasants. But their world view is defined by their mode of production. They do not have the concept of private ownership of land and they also in general enjoy more right and freedom. For them the occupation of all lands for the pasture of their flocks is their natural right. This becomes the start-point of conflict for scarce resources between them and sedentary population. But this conflict does not exhaust or coincide with the conflicts between the ruling classes of the nomadic and peasant communities. These ruling classes want the existing socio-political structure to persist and at the same time they are expansionists, because expansion brings them more privileges and larger power. So one notices that the nomadic ruling families come invariably in conflict with the ruling classes of the sedentary population, which results in wars between the
armies of sedentary people and the members of nomadic tribes. But to reach to this stage the ruling classes have to utilize, exploit, and manipulate the already existing conflicts between nomadic and sedentary populations. In Iran although the nomads were more successful in these conflicts, however the instances of their suppression by powerful empires (especially in ancient times) is not rare.

In general the ideological backgrounds of both these ruling strata was marked by orthodoxy, expansionism, and some mysticism, whereas the ideology of the underprivileged people were characterized by heterodoxy, millenarism and egalitarianism.