



GĀVBAND

GĀVBAND, the owner of the oxen (*gāv*) in the traditional farming system of Persia. The owner of the oxen or other animal power was a major element in the sharecropping arrangement for cultivation of wheat and barley in the arid and semi arid regions of the country. The sharecropping was based on five factors of production: land, labor, oxen, water, and seed; each with one-fifth share of the crops. The sharecropping agreement was made between the landowner and the peasant. Oxen could be provided either by the landowner or by the sharecropper or by a third party. Seed could be provided either by landowner or sharecropper. Water was a factor of production only in irrigated farming, but not in rain-fed farming. When a sharecropper provided labor and oxen, he was granted the right of use (*ḥaqq-e gāvbandī*) over a specific plot (s) of land (MacLachlan, pp. 108-28; Lambton, 1953, p. 302; Şafī-nežad, p. 90).

The emergence and development of the *gāvband* and of *gāvbandī* in Persian agriculture has not yet been investigated in any detail. The available literature shows that two major categories of *gāvband* developed in the traditional farming system of Persia: (1) the cultivator *gāvband*; and (2) the intermediary and rentier *gāvband*.

Cultivator gāvband. The cultivator *gāvband* performed his function as a sharecropper attached to the plough-land (*joft*). He provided the oxen and was helped by one or more peasants, working the land together. For example, in Jahrom where the *gāvband* owned oxen and was helped by two men, his share of the crop, which was known as *gāv-bahra*, was half of what remained after the landowner's share had been deducted, while the remaining half was



divided between the other two men (Lambton 1953, pp. 369-70). This category of *gāvband* was widely found in different parts of the country.

The intermediary and rentier gāvband. There are two variations of this category of *gāvband*: (1) as intermediary, and (2) as rentier. In the former case, practiced in the form of (*bona-ye gāvbandī*), the *gāvband* was a third party who acted in an intermediary position between the landowner and the sharecroppers. He provided the draft animals and often seeds and organized the sharecroppers under *bona* system and acted as manager of the *bona* (*sar-bona*). Based on the number of production factors provided by the *gāvband*, he was entitled to a given share of the crops. As an illustration, in the villages near Tehran the winter crops (*šatwī*) was generally divided equally between the landowner and the *gāvband* who would then distribute half of his crop share to the sharecroppers working in the *bona*. The *gāvband*'s share of the summer crops (*sayfī*) was 10% and the remaining was divided equally between the landowner and the sharecroppers (Şafī-nežād, pp. 99-105). *Bona-ye gāvbandī* was not, however, widely found in all areas of Persia, except in some districts near Tehran (Lambton, 1969, pp. 24-25).

In the latter case the *gāvband* acted as the rentier, and provided the draft animals to the peasant who could not afford to own and/or maintain an ox. He would generally collect from the peasant one fifth of the total harvest from the area plowed by the oxen. This situation contributed to the economic dominance of the *gāvband* in certain areas of the country. For example, in Kermānšāh, sharecropping agreements were mostly between the landlord and the *gāvband* rather than between the landlord and the peasants. The *gāvband* recruited peasants to do all the work associated with cultivation, giving them a portion of the harvest retained by him after the landlord was given his share (Hooglund, 1982, p. 156).

Land reform and gāvbandī. A segment of *gāvbands* who were registered as prosperous sharecroppers managed to receive a share of cultivated lands in the course of the 1960s land reform and evolved into relatively well to do commercial farmers. This development led some observers to take up the view that the land reform replaced the traditional landlord-peasant relation with a capitalist class system in rural Persia (e.g., Halliday, p. 103). However, an examination of the practice of *gāvbandī* shows that only a small number of intermediary and rentier *gāvbands* who were not cultivating sharecroppers received land in the course of land reform (MacLachlan, pp. 108-28).



The decline of gāvbandī. In recent years the transformation of traditional agrarian relations of *arbāb-ra ʿiyatī* under the land reform program of 1960s and the increasing use of the tractor in Persian agriculture from the 1950s onward have led to a gradual decline of the *gāvbands* and of *gāvbandī*. While in the early phases of introduction of the tractor, the *gāvbands* mostly continued their traditional mode of production through adoption and use of the tractor in lieu of oxen (Safī-nežād, pp. 138-39). The rapid developments in commercialization and mechanization of Persian agriculture and the increasing integration of the rural economy into the urban sectors have led to the gradual disappearance of the *gāvbands*. As an illustration, a village in the Dašt-e Qazvīn, where in 1954 the existing eighteen sharecroppers were *gāvbands* and where all the plowing was done by oxen, was totally changed to mechanization by 1980 and the sharecroppers transformed to owner-operators with no oxen existing in the village (Mahdawī, pp. 52-62).

See also AGRICULTURE; FARMING.

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