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# THE ESTABLISHMENT OF VILLAGE INSTITUTES AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

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## Introduction

This question can only be answered by examining the evolution of Turkish society. The characteristics of our evolution: It is now possible to establish quite definite principles as a result of research published in the liberal environment after 1960 on the characteristics of the historical development of Turkish society, its social and economic structures, and changes and developments in these structures. What is the main direction of this historical development? What are the social and economic structures of Turkish society in Anatolia? From where did the society start? In what direction is the society developing? Which level of development has this process reached? Unless these questions are answered, even if briefly, it is not possible to understand the main reasons that required those who held power from 1923 to 1935 to undertake large-scale educational initiatives. Before the bourgeoisie in Europe developed and established its impact on Ottoman society, the Ottoman Empire had a feudal order in terms of the main features of its social structure. Despite arguments to the contrary, this fact should be accepted as the main elements of a feudal order were present within the Ottoman order: The main asset was the land. The economy was based on agriculture. The main income was rent from the land. The main element as the power of production was the serf, who cultivated the land and was an agricultural laborer with limited freedom. The following characteristics separate the Ottoman social order from the feudal order in Western societies: land ownership was managed differently than in western feudalism, which means a large part of the land was owned by the government; the government earned income from this property by giving the right of actual disposition and usufruct of the land (manor, fief, etc.) to the people in varying ways and making them mediators, some of the rights of the agricultural laborer were secured by the government, by not allowing these mediators to mismanage the laborers, to be unfair to them or to exploit them. These characteristics have misled some researchers over a long period of time, leading them to incorrect conclusions that the direction of the Ottoman order and development did not include the main sociological rules, and that it exhibited a special characteristic that did not comply with those rules. However, the evolution of Turkish society did comply with the main rules; but there are certain characteristics in the details. Considering that this evolution is anomalous, and trying to establish new rules to explain this evolution means pursuing a direction that is very misleading and full of failures in terms of action. The characteristics present in the details of the Ottoman feudal structure provided many advantages to this structure

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in an age when the West was in the feudal phase. In short, it can be stated that Ottoman feudalism was the most humane and least oppressive of the feudal orders. Of course, to the extent that a feudal order allows! These characteristics of Ottoman feudalism established the foundation of an empire that was not able to be demolished for centuries, which made it more robust than contemporary societies of the time and which allowed its citizens to live a somewhat less unhappy life, but these were also the characteristics that delayed its evolution and prevented its progression. The fact that this feudal order was more robust, somewhat humane, and less exploitative than western forms caused this order to hold on much longer and led to the failure of Ottoman society to move from the feudal period to the bourgeoisie period. However, this suspensive effect is not because, as supporters of the «Asian Mode of Production» suggest, this order is not fit for evolution at all, even more so than feudalism; but like any feudal order, of course, there are evolutionary elements hidden within this order. But the fact that this order remained feudal for a much longer period than in the West was a demonstration of the robustness of its characteristics, in a sense, rather than of its primitiveness. In the 15th and 16th centuries, a process of professional differentiation in Turkish villages and cities, that could be considered as advanced and well organized relative to that era, was developing rapidly. In addition to uniform feudal farming in villages, small handicrafts were developed. The strengthening of the merchant class in the cities and the organization of small handicraft trades (such as guild organizations) were the first indications that a bourgeoisie could emerge. Why did this order, which still exhibited a complete feudal structure in terms of its general characteristics, fail to make progress towards the bourgeoisie period? Here, it is necessary to mention the external effects and conditions that made this development difficult, stopped it, and caused us to be unhappy today (Tonguç, 1970).

Turkey has 160 years of history in teacher training in the scientific sense. In this process, it has been observed that different mindsets and opinions have been put into practice from time to time in teacher training. The first of these was the “Teacher’s Training School for Junior High School Education” which was opened in 1848 and aimed to train teachers for Ottoman junior high schools. This was followed by the “Teacher’s Training School for Primary Education” (1868) and the “Teachers’ Training School for Girls” (1870) (Şeren, 2008). With the “Provisional Primary Education Law”, which was enacted in 1913, and the “Law on Provincial Public and Private Administration”, which took effect during the Constitutional Monarchy period, teachers’ training schools began to be opened in every province. During the Constitutional Monarchy period, the number increased to 65 (Koçer, 1974). İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu stated that these schools were not adequate in many ways, although more sophisticated approaches for primary schools, village schools and teacher training for village schools emerged during the Second Constitutionalist period and in the years that followed (Akyüz, 1978).

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The Turkish National Education system covers core activities in terms of making the Turkish nation stronger, more prosperous, happier, and ensuring an understanding and implementation of Kemalism as a whole, as well as understanding and explaining the national purposes and ideology of the Turkish state and passing them down from generation to generation. Even in the early years of the War of Independence, when the foundations of the new Turkish state began to be laid, Atatürk began searching for National Education systems and institutions that would bring the country to the level of contemporary civilization. The meeting of the Education Congress (National Education Council) in Ankara on July 16, 1921, during the most depressing days of the National War of Independence, proves this fact. In his opening speech at the abovementioned congress, Atatürk, who described education as a tool that elevates nations to civilization and would help to lead the Turkish state to its dynamic goal, continued his speech with the following statements (Aysal, 2005):

*“... There is no doubt that we should not spare the greatest effort to heal the wounds caused by centuries of deep governmental neglect within the state in the field of education... I believe that the teaching methods followed so far are an important factor in the decline of our nation. For this reason, when I speak of a National Education Program, I mean a culture that is completely free from the superstitions of olden times and foreign ideas that have nothing to do with our natural characteristics, free from all influences that may come from the east and the west, and a culture compatible with our national character and history. Because the full development of our national genius can only be achieved with such a culture. Any foreign culture may cause destructive consequences again, which have been caused by foreign cultures followed so far. Intellectual culture complies with the environment. That environment is the character of the nation...”*

During the revolutions made to elevate the Turkish nation to the level of contemporary civilization, with the adoption of the new Turkish alphabet on November 1, 1928, feverish activity was initiated throughout the country. As everyone wanted to learn to read and write, national schools were opened through the efforts of President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In these schools, which were opened during the period when Mustafa Necati was the minister for National Education, the aim was to teach literate people how to read and write with the new alphabet (Sakaoğlu, 1993). It can also be observed that this war against ignorance gained momentum in 1932 with the establishment of “Community Centers”. The purpose of their establishment was not only to improve the literacy skills and basic knowledge of the people, but also to improve their knowledge in the fields of culture, social and fine arts, to process and enrich national values by contemporary methods, and to spread and encourage Atatürk’s reforms and principles to take root. Atatürk deemed it necessary to establish a cultural and educational center to provide education to the Turkish nation as a whole without differentiating between men

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and women, and rich and poor. On February 19, 1932, he established the community centers, which involved the Turkish Hearths and teacher's unions, in 14 city centers (Gediklioğlu, 1991).

At the beginning of the 1940s, 78% of the primary school age population in Anatolia was illiterate, and this percentage reached 90% in villages. There was a great need for people living in the villages to be enlightened about health, agriculture, and handicrafts and to develop socially and culturally. In addition to the education of village children, it was also necessary to focus on the education of the adults and to provide them with the knowledge and skills, which would offer them a better living and working environment. In order to do this, a type of teacher who would meet the educational needs of children living in rural areas at the primary level and contribute to the social and economic development of people was needed. However, this new type of teacher was expected to be able to easily adapt to the conditions of village life and be able to afford to work in the village to which he/she would be appointed for a long period of time and to not become a burden on the government budget. Such a teacher would naturally have to be trained in an educational institution whose purpose, curriculum, working order, and physical features were different from the norm. Thus, it was concluded that it would be appropriate to establish a new institution called the "Village Institute" by also taking advantage of previous experiences in village teacher training. Teachers who would gladly accept working in villages, who were constructive, creative, productive, skilled in handicrafts, prone to agricultural labor, and also determined, devoted, and idealistic were going to be trained in such institutes (Kartal, 2008).

### **Why Were the Village Institutes Established**

The Village Institutes were established in accordance with Law No. 3803, adopted on April 17, 1940. The purpose of the establishment of the Village Institutes was to battle against the widespread ignorance in the villages and to improve the economic and social structure of the villages through education (Akyüz, 1978). Village Institutes were similar to previous attempts made in terms of teacher training for villages, but they differed in terms of location, educational and training activities, and the purpose of the establishments. This situation reveals the unique character of these institutions. In addition to teacher training, the aim was also to train other professional experts who would lead the development of the villages (Kartal, 2008). The objective of the Village Institutes was not only to train teachers for the villages. However, the aspect of teacher training was considered more important. Considering the peasant children who were brought up at the Village Institutes, it has been observed that the desire was to create a type of teacher who could adapt to village conditions. The purpose of the establishment of the Village Institutes depended on the fact that the educational problems and needs of the village could not have been solved until that time. Although some previous practices

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had yielded positive results, the desired level had not yet been achieved. For example, Article 1 of Law No. 3238 on Village Instructors, which was adopted on June 1, 1937, stated that village instructors were to be employed to guide the villagers to carry out agricultural labor in a professional way, and to provide education and training for the villages whose populations were too small to warrant the appointment of teachers.

The main objective of the Village Institutes was to develop the rural area, to educate the villagers and to make the villagers and teachers productive as the literacy rate in our country was almost nonexistent in the years during which the Republic was founded. Especially amongst women and in villages, the literacy rate was quite low. At this stage, Atatürk and his friends initiated an educational revolution movement that would convey the spirit and idea of the new regime also to the village. The Village Institute movement, which was truly revolutionary, was aimed not only at the financial development of the village but more importantly, at the raising the awareness of the people in the village and helping them to meet a modern rural lifestyle that no force could exploit (Kartal, 2008).

Reading rooms which were established on the basis of this modern understanding, as teaching only how to read and write was not sufficient and as it was also considered important to preserve the knowledge that had been obtained, were considered as one of the means of leading people to modernity by saving them from the coffeehouses. In 1935, the number of schools in villages where eighty percent of the country's population lived was very limited. In addition, the few teachers who were sent to these schools from the cities were unable to adapt to the village lifestyle and, thus, were not successful. The educational needs of the village people were not limited to literacy; they were also unable to fight infectious diseases, and production was undertaken by primitive methods. The villagers, who suffered the heavy burden of the National War of Independence, had not yet achieved the character of republican citizens who would keep democracy alive. More importantly, it was very difficult to bring services to the villages between the years of 1930-1940. The efforts to bring services to the villages after the establishment of the republic were left half finished either because they did not meet the expectations of the villagers or things could not get done as expected. To succeed, a new type of intellectual who could understand the villagers was required (Kaplukan, 2012).

### **Where Were the Village Institutes Established**

(Gedikoğlu, 1971) Village Institutes were generally established outside of the cities and towns, near the railways or highways; in, next to, or in the middle of the villages. In their establishment, the following principles were generally considered:

1. Having arable lands owned by the government,
2. The land being very fertile, easy to cultivate and enriched with cultivated

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vineyards and orchards,

3. The selected location being suitable to become a regional center for 2-3 provinces and appropriate for healthy conditions in terms of air and water.

These demands were quite important and difficult to attain according to the conditions during that period. The main problem in the establishment of the institutes was the land (field) problem. Some problems were experienced in finding land which could allow the proper practice of village life. This problem was not experienced much in places with appropriate public land. However, in places where no such public land was available, the land was taken from the villagers by necessity. In fact, the institutes were never intended to take lands from the villagers. But the geographical characteristics of each institute were not the same. This made it difficult to establish institutes in appropriate places. The expropriation of the villagers' land was also a new burden for the government budget which was not financially stable. However, the government found a solution to this. Most of the land taken from the villagers were kind of infertile lands that were not being cultivated by the villagers much. Therefore, some institutions had to be established on land that seemed infertile. However, in a very short time, great progress was made on these lands, which had not previously attracted anyone's attention. The best example of this situation related to the Kepirtepe Village Institute. This institute was built on very arid land. However, in a short time, revitalization was achieved on these lands (Toprak, 2008).

### **What Was the Founding Philosophy of Village Institutes**

The main pillar of the Village Institutes was activity. In these institutes, there was no place for bookish methods and abstract concepts. Every thought, every piece of work was ultimately based on the land (Ertuğrul, 2002). The objective of the Village Institutes was not to educate intellectuals. It was to raise the peasant youth as individuals of peasant development. Thus, the underlying idea of the Village Institute model was to create a movement of change throughout the country. In the functioning of the Village Institutes, developing productive and intellectual abilities and establishing the values of the republic and democracy were balanced against each other (Toprak, 2008). The primary aim was to shape the personality of the student with all these factors. Therefore, students were given a chance to improve their personalities. It can be said that this is why the Village Institutes were called "institutes". The then existing teacher training system was accused of training teachers who provided theoretical education, who only taught how to read-write and provided information only from books, who did not want to go and stay in the village, and who did not have proper influence on the villagers (Akyüz, 1999). In line with these developments, teachers who came from the village, who could really be helpful to the village and use tools such as pickaxes, shovels, anchors, hedge



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shears, and adzes used in agricultural activities, should have been educated rather than the ones who could only use pencils and books.

### **The Closure of the Village Institutes**

Tevfik İleri was appointed as the minister of National Education, aside from a short-term period of duty of Avni Başman from the Democrat Party. The minister of National Education closed down the Village Institutes for good with a law enacted on January 27, 1954, by combining Village Institutes with Teachers' Training Schools because of the following reasons:

It was claimed that the difference between the villagers and the urbanites had increased very much and that a class distinction had emerged as only the village students were enrolled in the Village Institutes to be trained as village teachers, and that this was also contrary to the constitutional principle of populism.

It was also claimed that the Village Institutes providing not only theoretical but also practical education, and educating students through projects led to an extra financial burden for the state, and that a kind of education that was reminiscent of leftist, communist ideology was being provided at the institutes, and that this was in contradiction to the principle of nationalism, that the administrators of the institutes were left-oriented and Marxist people, that employing students in different jobs under the name of job training resembled Soviet Russia and communism, and even that female students were wearing trousers and jackets in the fashion of communism. It was also argued that co-education provided in the boarding institutes, which meant the education of students of both sexes together, was against the Turkish family and moral values, that too much moral and material support was expected from the villagers for the Village Institutes, and that the villagers were constantly complaining,

that the villagers were asked to help in the construction of institute buildings, and the fact that the villagers had to provide land for the teachers of the Village Institutes caused conflicts between the villagers as they did not want to share their land. In addition, it was claimed that while the Village Institutes were being built with the cooperation of villagers and teachers, it was contrary to the principle of equality in the constitution that the schools in the cities were being built only by the government (Akyüz, 1999).

### **Conclusion**

The modernization of education and training in Turkey mainly started with the Tanzimat reform era; however, the transition to the modern education system in the real sense was manifested in the Republican period. In the light of the revolutions in the field of education, the Republican period displayed a different and more radical character.

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According to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, education is the most important institution in trying to help the nation reach a level of contemporary civilization as an important tool of socialization. With the reforms made in the field of education during the Republican period, he aimed to eliminate the disruptions caused by the Ottoman Empire and to catch up with developments in the West (Toprak, 2008).

After the proclamation of the Republic, it is observed that education and training were given great importance. It is understood that the governments of the Republic, who grasped the importance of the issue, made a significant effort to find a solution to the problem. The leaders, who considered education as an important requirement of community development, believed it was necessary to give particular importance to teachers' training. Atatürk was a great statesman who saw this fact. He emphasized the importance of education and teachers in many of his speeches. One of the important problems of the newly founded Turkish Republic was related to teachers. In the first years of the republic, teacher training institutions could not meet the needs either quantitatively or qualitatively. Since the majority of the population lived in villages during those years, it seems inevitable that education during this period was focused on the villages. In addition to numerical insufficiency of teachers during this period, it is also understood that the teachers working in the villages faced adaptation problems because they were not trained to meet village conditions (Çoban, 2011).

The fact that Atatürk considered education to be a great driving-factor for raising the Turkish nation to the level of civilized nations paved the way for the establishment of an entire education mobilization movement, and the Village Institutes became one of the most important cornerstones of this movement as a result of its aim to achieve economic and social development all together and to eliminate the ignorance of Turkish villagers. As with any illiterate society, it was not possible to reach the level of contemporary civilization, which was the objective of the Village Institutes. This was the deficiency which the Village Institutes tried to eliminate. The Village Institutes were first transformed into teachers' training schools where a conventional education system based on rote-learning began to be followed instead of the system at the beginning in which creativity came to the fore, and finally they were closed in 1954.

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