

Socio-Religious Developments in Iran (1925-1979)

Prof. G.N Khaki¹ & Ashaq Hussain²

Abstract

Iran saw many socio-religious reforms and transition in the modern period starting from early Safavids, Qajar's, and Pahlavi's till the present Islamic Republic. The religious sphere saw two kinds of revivalism. One was under the fold of mainstream *Shi'i Ithna 'Ashari* School and other was clearly out of the pale of mainstream Islam taken together. In the 19th century *Usuli* School overwhelmed over the *Akhbari* School. Other revivalism which was considered as apostasy by the *Ulama* was the Babi-Baha'i movement. Sayyid Ali Muhammad Bab in 1844/1260 claimed *Mahdi* and created a new '*Ummah*' by abrogating the *Shar'iah* of Prophet (S.A.W) and also he prophesized the advent of a greater being which later on was claimed by Mirza Hussain Ali (Baha'u'llah). In the year 1858 first telegraph was started in the Qajar period. Russian and British influence became prominent and they invested in many small scale industries in Iran. *Ulama* organized themselves to herald a new kind of revolutionary attitudes which culminated in the final victory of *Ulama* in the establishment of Islamic Republic of Iran. The objective of this article is to give the reader a detailed socio-religious transition in Iran from 1925-1979. It is in this context the present paper has been analyzed.

Keywords: - Qajars, Pahlavi's, Islamic Republic, Khomeini, 'ulama

Introduction

Iran is an ancient land that, for millennia, was known as Persia. [1] Iran is situated in Southwestern Asia, on the north-eastern coast of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, vital maritime pathways for crude oil transport. It borders Iraq and Turkey to the west, Azerbaijan, Armenia, the Caspian Sea and Turkmenistan to the north, and Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east.

¹ University of Kashmir, India.

² Ph.D Scholar, Centre of Central Asian Studies/ University of Kashmir, India.

Email Id: khakign@gmail.com, aashiquislamQgmail.com

Iran encompasses around 1,531,595 square kilometers, much larger than that of any Western European country, though much of its territory is desert. Iran's terrain incorporates a rugged, mountainous rim, a high central basin with deserts and mountains, and small discontinuous plains along both its Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea coasts. Iran's location also became of political and strategic significance with the rise at the end of the eighteenth century of two new powers in the region, Britain and Russia.

The principal religious identity of the majority of Iranians, before, during and since the Qajar period, has consisted of a devotion (of varying intensity in different elements of the population) to Twelver (*Ithna Ashari*) *Shi'ism*. This was the legacy of the Safavid adoption of Twelver *Shi'ism* as the state religion, and the slow, but widespread adoption of this belief system by most of the population under Safavid control during the subsequent centuries. There are a number of issues which deserve attention in an examination of the relationship between Twelver *Shi'ism* and the state.

Reza Khan came to power with a vision to make Iran strong. He did not adhere to any particular political ideology, and in the course of his rise to power was to collaborate with both socialist and conservative parties and the clerics in accordance with the dictates of pragmatism. He had, nevertheless, his own utopia, which comprised a strong, unified state, free from internal and particularly ethnic and tribal divisions; free also from foreign interference and the manipulation of Iran's diversity. His dream was of a secular state, and like his contemporary Atatürk, he perceived religion as retrogressive and the *'ulama* as backward-looking obstacles to progress. He identified national strength with modernization and industrialization, which in turn required increasing the level of trade and commerce.

Significantly, Reza Khan's ambitions coincided with the system of modern and comparatively centralized states that the British and French established in the Middle East in the wake of the First World War. This in turn was shaped by a new international order finding its principal representation in the League of Nations.

The great powers were primarily concerned with protecting their strategic and commercial interests, and the mandate system set up in the former Ottoman Empire was intended to serve this purpose. In Iran, however, the British perceived that Reza Khan's goal of a strong centralized state would achieve their objectives as well as containing the Soviets. Having received assurance of Reza Khan's independence, the Soviets also permitted him control of the country.

Though Reza Khan did not rise to power through outside intervention, his interests and objectives ran in tandem with those of the great powers.

In 1961 Iran reached a turning point. There was an economic crisis resulting from overspending on an ambitious seven-year plan and the army. Deficit financing was exacerbated by a bad harvest, and produced serious inflation. The shah turned to the International Monetary Fund and the USA for financial assistance; the Kennedy administration promised \$85 million if the shah brought in land reform and a liberal cabinet. In May 1961 the shah dissolved the assembly and started to rule by decree. In 1962 he embarked on a major reform programme, which he styled the White Revolution. One of the shah's own stated objectives was to create a loyal base for the state among the middle peasantry, who stood most to gain from the reforms. A further goal was the modernization of agriculture to increase production and create, through wealth distribution, a larger internal market for Iran's industrial products. The reform succeeded in breaking the influence of the great landowners in the countryside, though many, through investing their compensation payments, remained part of Iran's wealthy elite. The principal beneficiaries of the reform were apparently those peasantry possessing cultivation rights, but the smallholdings they acquired were uneconomic, and many were gradually compelled to sell their land to agri-businesses and join the landless laborers in the drift to the cities.

The White Revolution was faced by opposition from landowners, tribal leaders and the National Front, briefly revived but suppressed again in 1963. The most vehement opposition, however, came not from the clergy as a whole but from the traditional urban middle class and the urban poor. There were extensive demonstrations in Iranian cities in the spring of 1963, especially in Tehran under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. Hundreds were killed after the Minister of Court, Amir Asadullah 'Alam, ordered the army to fire on the crowd.

Khomeini was arrested following a series of incendiary speeches in Qum, in which he articulated a range of grievances. He was imprisoned in Tehran but was released after some months at the intercession of other ayatollahs, notably the moderate Shari'atmadari, and returned to Qum. It has been asserted that the principal reason for 'ulama opposition was the loss of endowed land and its large income as well as the introduction of votes for women, perceived as contrary to Islam.

Qajar Era

Iran became predominately *Shi'i* under the Safavid dynasty (1501-1736). This dynasty was followed by two short-lived dynasties and then by the Qajar dynasty, which lasted into the twentieth century (1779/1994-1925). Qajar control was over the whole country, however, was tenuous at best and tribal chiefs and other local leaders were often virtually independent.

The Qajar made only limited efforts at the sort of centralizing and modernizing reforms undertaken by the *Tanzimat* in the Ottoman Empire and Muhammad 'Ali and his successors in Egypt. They did not, for example, create a unified army under their control. In the second half of the century there was increasing Western economic penetration and political meddling, especially by Russia and Great Britain, until in 1907 the country was formally divided into Russian and British spheres of influence. There was sufficient reform and Westernization to create a small class of modernizing intelligentsia, calling themselves "enlightened thinkers".

Iran encountered modernity during the Qajar period, but also some of its territories to the Russians. The Qajar's, however, managed to strike a balance and kept Iran independent between the British and Russian powers, who aimed to control the country economically and politically. On the other hand, the longest-ruling Qajar king, Naser al -Din Shah along with Amir Kabir, attempted to build the construction for a modern state at his capital, Tehran. Travels to Europe and fascination with the modern world began the process of modernization and the transformation of new ideas into the country. [2] From gas lit and then electricity-lit streets to a new bureaucratic apparatus to newspapers, all were introduced to the populace. During these innovations and changes, despotic and monarchic absolutism remained unshaken until the population, led by *Shi'i* Clergy and secular leaders, brought about the Constitutional Revolution in 1906.

The King was forced to sign the Constitution and a parliament was established, along with elections where people were able to have to say in the decision making. The Iranian Constitution was one of the earliest constitutions approved by a people in the Middle East, and it attempted to curtail the power of the ruler and give voice to the people.

The position of the clergy in the Qajar period was strong, and was further reinforced by the *Shi'i* doctrine of legitimacy on the subject of the state.

According to this theory the rightful ruler is the 12th Imam, a descendant of the Prophet through his son-in-law, 'Ali; the Imam is held to have gone into hiding, his place having been seized by usurpers. In his absence, all actual rulers are accounted illegitimate. The only legitimate authorities are the '*ulama* in their capacity as executors of the *Shar'iah*, which is based on long years of study. According to this, the classical *Shi'i* theory, however, the '*ulama* do not have the right to govern. In practice they varied in their approach to the established power. Some were open allies of the shah, and benefited from royal and court patronage. Others sought accommodation with the state while maintaining an independent stance. Still more withdrew into scholarship, religious duties and quietism, and avoided contact with the ruler. The general view, however, was in practice to treat the shah as legitimate; that is to say the clergy recognized the benefit to *Shi'ism* of living in an orderly state, and one with a *Shi'i* rather than a *Sunni* or infidel ruler. The '*ulama* therefore cooperated with the Qajars, and received in return royal protection for their religion and patronage of religious institutions.

Religion and state united to suppress sedition and heresy, particularly in the form of the *Babi* revolt of the 1840s. But the clergy were not dependent on the state, in contrast with their position in *Sunni* countries, where the leading '*ulama* owe much too state support. The clergy derived their income from a number of sources, which varied according to area and individual. Some income came from their duties with regard to the law, particularly matters of personal law, such as marriage, divorce and inheritance. Other income came from a variety of activities in education, such as their role as teachers in the religious seminaries or simply being the most literate section of the population. Additionally, they received income from religious endowments, some of which, like the wealthy Shrine of Imam Reza at Mashhad, were under the supervision of the shah, but others of which were supervised by clerics, the office of supervisor passing down in families.

Further sources of funding were the canonical taxes, *khums* and *zakat*, which were disbursed both to the poor and to members of the religious body. According to *Shi'i* Islam, the ordinary believer must emulate a senior member of the '*ulama*, styled *Mujtahid*. It takes long years of study to reach the level of *Mujtahid*, and to gain thereby the entitlement to exercise independent judgment, or *ijtihad*, in the interpretation of the law.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were only six *Mujtabids* in Iran, but by the end of the century the number had grown, there being around a dozen in Tehran alone. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the outstanding *Mujtabid* came to be styled 'ayatollah'. *Mujtabids* varied in their expertise and objectives, some being teachers in seminaries, others being occupied mainly with legal duties, aspiring to political influence, or being outright politicians. To be politically influential in such a pre-modern society required the exertion of patronage, which in turn required the encouragement of donations from the faithful. This demanded sensitivity to the interests and problems of the faithful, and the ability to represent their views successfully to the state. A powerful *Mujtabid* was thus a source of religious emulation, highly trained, particularly in legal matters, widely read, at least in the Islamic tradition, politically aware, and in many cases often dependent on pleasing his followers for the larger portion of his income. He thus had to be attuned to the interests of the community, and in particular to the influential merchants and guilds of the bazaar, the commercial heart of Iran. [3]

A major source of authority for the '*ulama* was the role of the *Shar'iah* in Qajar state and society. In theory the *Shar'iah* is omniscient, infallible and eternal. In practice it is mostly preoccupied with personal law, and has little specific to say on, for example, matters of government administration or commerce. With regard to criminal law, there are prescribed penalties, the *budud*, but they were not necessarily enforced, the state having its own penal system. There was thus a variety of legal practice in addition to the *Shar'iah*, for example, customary law, tribal law, merchant regulation through consultation, and especially government rules though these last were arbitrary. Indeed, none was codified or rationalized, and only the *Shar'iah* was looked upon as a legitimate system, particularly by the '*ulama*.

It was government according to the *Shar'iah* which conferred legitimacy on the shah and the state, so the shah was not in the true sense an absolute monarch. Government according to the *Shar'iah* ensured protection and respect for Muslims and Islam, and, so it followed, for the '*ulama* who interpreted it.

The bond established between the Qajar state and the clergy began to crumble in the latter part of the nineteenth century as a result of pressure from the West. The Qajars had firstly to contend with constant interference in the politics of Iran by Britain and Russia as they sought both to extend their own influence and to prevent each other from doing so.

They manipulated the tribes – for example, the Russians among the Turcoman in the north-east and the British among the Bakhtiari in the south – and as a consequence some of the tribes were better equipped than the government troops. The fear of foreign incursion, and the demands of the foreign interests on the bureaucracy, induced Nasir al- Din Shah (1848–1896), particularly from the 1870s onwards, to attempt a modest measure of reform and development, though he tended to retain the duties of the prime minister in his own hands. Measures to control the *Shar'iah* courts in the 1850s and 1870s were consistently resisted by the *'ulama* and therefore failed. Amongst the outstanding patriots who quickly grasped the implications of the new situation were prince 'Abbas Mirza, the eldest son of Fateh 'Ali Shah, and Mirza Taqi Khan Amir i-Kabir or Amir i-Nizam, the Prime Minister of Nasir al-Din Shah (1265/1848-1314/1896).

Prince 'Abbas Mirza, whom Watson describes as 'the noblest of the Qajar race,' not played the chief role in the organization of the Iranian army on Western lines, but was also amongst the first to realize the need for sending Iranian students to European countries for higher education. He sent many students to England to study science at his own expense. He was first to introduce typography in Iran, which was a forerunner of the printing press. Again, it was at his instance that a number of Russian and French books on military science were translated into Persian. Amir i-Kabir was an extra-ordinary statesman produced Iran in the thirteenth/nineteenth century. During the short period of three years that he was the Prime Minister, he set himself to put his country on the road to progress and stability and arrest the political and social decline by the introduction of administrative, legal, and educational reforms of far-reaching importance. He also tried to retrieve the honor of his country in the comity of nations by a vigorous foreign policy. His brilliant career, however, was cut short by court intrigues. His exit from Iranian politics was a calamity of great magnitude. Perhaps, his greatest reform was the foundation of the *Dar al-Fanun* in 1268/1851, which became the centre of the growing educational and cultural activities in Iran. This college, started on modern lines, had, besides Iranians, several Austrian professors on its staff.

Along with the educational efforts of the state the Western Christian missions too had been active in opening schools in Iran. The French Lazarite mission was the first to start a school at Tabriz in 1256/1840.

The American Presbyterian also established in Tehran two schools, one in 1289/1872 for boys and another in 1314/1896 for girls. The British Church Missionary Society founded the Steward Memorial College at Isfahan in 1322/1904. [4]

Another important reform of this period was the publishing of newspapers and the first newspaper was published in Tehran in 1253/1837 by Mirza Saleh Shirzai who was incidentally, a member of the first batch of students sent to England in 1225/1810. The next newspaper *Ruznameh i-Waqayi' Ithifaqiyah* appeared in 1267/1850. The second half of the thirteenth/nineteenth century witnessed remarkable activity in the field of journalism. In the meantime, newspapers gradually became more outspoken in their comments. Amongst the modernizing influences in Iran one cannot ignore the part played by the telegraph line. The British government was interested in the extension of telegraph lines in Iran because it lay on the direct route between Europe and India and formed a vital link in the new international telegraphic network. Three conventions were, therefore, signed between Iran and Great Britain between 1280/1863 and 1290/1873 for the extension and improvement of telegraph lines between Europe and India. [5]

A greater danger to the *'ulama* came from the three 'heterodox' movements, the Shaykhis, the Babis and the Baha'is. The first was founded by Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i (1753-1826), whose most controversial claim was that the occulted Twelfth Imam is not located in the material world but in an intermediate spiritual realm called *burquhya* (this is also the realm where resurrection), between heaven and hell take place) and he communicates with the world through inspiration to one representative a 'perfect *Shi'i* or the 'Gate (Bab)' to the Imam. There is always one such person in the world. He is not publicly announced but Shaykh Ahsa'i's followers were convinced that he and his successors were this figure. This represented a clear challenge to the authority of the *'ulama*, who persecuted the Shaykhis. The movement exists in small numbers to the present but has modified its doctrine in an orthodox direction.

The year 1844 marked the 1,000th anniversary of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam and many expected his return. In this year a member of the Shaykhi movement, Sayyid Ali Muhammad Shirazi (1819-1850), claimed to be the Bab (Gate of the *Imam*) and gained a number of followers.

Later he claimed to be the Twelfth *Imam* (more precisely human figure corresponding to the archetypal *Imam* in *hurqulya*) and announced the abrogation of the Islamic *Shari'ah* and the beginning of a new dispensation, which would among other things not have *'ulama* and grant a higher place to women. He raised a revolt against the shah's government but was defeated and in 1850 was executed. The Bab had promised the advent of another figure, *'Him whom God shall make manifest'*, and in 1863 Mirza Husayn Ali (1817-1892) claimed to be this figure and took the title Baha'u'llah (splendor of God) and was followed by the majority of the Babis. He came to be seen as a new prophet following in the line of Buddha, Zarathustra, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (S.A.W) so that Baha'ism came to be a separate religion. Baha'ism has spread worldwide and become westernized in its expression and for these reasons Baha'is have often been persecuted in Iran. [6] The remaining *Babis* came to be known as *Azalis* and some of these became active in later reform movements.

In the later half of the nineteenth century, Nasir al Din Shah extensively travelled to Europe. When his reckless handling of the exchequer precipitated a financial crisis, he launched upon a policy of granting concessions to foreign countries as a convenient source of revenue. In return the European imperialist powers began to involve Iran in huge financial commitments which had far-reaching political and economic consequences. In the word of William Hass, "Tehran became a meeting place for concession hunters of European nations. Many were adventurers and crooks..." [7] This created a sense of frustration not only in the people but Shah felt himself who is said to have remarked once: "I wish that no European had ever set his foot on my country's soil, for then we would have been spared all these tribulations. But since the foreigners have unfortunately penetrated into our country, we shall at least, make the best possible use of them". But in 1308/1890 shah granted a concession to a British company for a monopoly over the production, sale and export of tobacco. The result was a growing number of protests on the part growers, merchants and city mobs, led or at least fronted by the *'ulama*. Allied to them were modernizing reformers such as Jamal al-Din Asadabadi (Afghani), many of whom put secular ideas into traditional religious language to appeal to the people.

Opposition was based not only on economic concern but also resentment against Western influence and a fear that non-Muslims handling tobacco would make it ritually impure.

The protests came to a head when a *fatwa* banning the use of tobacco was solicited and gained from Ayatollah Mirza Hasan Shirazi, who was the sole *marja'* of the time (the second one, after Ansari) and resident in Samarra, in Iraq, beyond the reach of the shah. The response was so overwhelming that the shah was forced to cancel the concession. This was the first nationwide protest of this sort. It strengthened the position of the *'ulama* and forged an alliance between them and the modernizing intelligentsia. It is worth noting that the success was made possible by a modern invention, the telegraph, used to communicate with Ayatollah Shirazi. Unfortunately, the Persian government went into debt for the first time to pay the indemnity to the concessionaire. This was followed by other borrowing and by 1900 most of the country's resources were mortgaged to British and Russian creditors.

The tobacco was a forerunner of the constitutional Revolution that began in 1905 and plunged the country into civil war for several years. Protests by some *'ulama*, merchants and intelligentsia forced the shah in 1906 to call a *Majlis* (parliament) and accept a constitution modeled after that of Belgium. The *'ulama* appear not to have understood at first the difference between the secular constitution desired by the modernists (*mashruteh*) and government by the *Shar'iah* (*mashru'eh*). When this became clear many *'ulama* turned against the constitution, although a supplementary law added the next year provided for a committee of five *Mujtahids* that could veto bills that contravened the *Shar'iah*. The constitution in fact sought to combine the Islamic and the secular. Twelver *Shi'ism* was declared the religion of state and sovereignty was described as a "trust, confided, by the grace of God, to the person of the shah, by the nation". Elsewhere it says that "the powers of the state are derived from the nation" and grants equal right to all inhabitants. The continuing civil war followed by the occupation of Iran during World War one by the British and Russians meant that the constitution had little chance to operate at that time, but it remained on the books until 1979. The committee of *Mujtahids* was never actually established.

The combination of state weakness, economic problems, popular discontent and elite disgruntlement produced the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11. The revolution began as a protest movement organized by the *bazaaris* and the *'ulama* against the custom reforms, but the initiative was seized by members of the intelligentsia who worked tirelessly to persuade the clergy to ask for wider reforms.

As a result, in 1906 the shah granted a constitutional assembly, and then in 1907 a constitution based on the Belgian one, acknowledging sovereignty of the people, ministerial responsibility to parliament, and financial accountability in the form of a budget.

It also, however, recognized Twelver *Shi'ism* as the state religion, and in Article 2, initially the idea of Shaikh Fazlullah Nuri, provided for a Council of Guardians consisting of five *mujtahids* with the duty of monitoring legislation to ensure that it conformed to the *Shar'iah*. In 1908 there was a reaction when Muhammad Ali Shah (1907–1909) bombarded the assembly building and returned to absolutist rule. Two movements, one of revolutionaries from Rasht and the Caucasus, and the other of Bakhtiari tribesmen led by their khans, marched on Tehran in 1909 and restored the constitution, replacing Muhammad Ali by his son, Ahmad Shah (1909–1925).

As a result of the revolution, new groups began to emerge, especially the secular intelligentsia through the lively press, members of the lower bureaucracy, the merchants and guilds, and revolutionary socialists, particularly from Rasht and Tabriz. Their views emerged in the programme of the Democratic Party in the second assembly, which included separation of religion and politics, free education for all, including women, two years' military service, and state control of religious endowments, industrialization, land reform, railway construction, centralization and national unification. The revolution introduced new institutions, and by forcing the shah, many members of the Qajar family, the court and the notables into exile, effected a partial change in the ruling elite.

The clergy played an important part in the revolution, but were not united, in effect representing the divisions in society. Some, such as Tabataba'i, were responsive to Western ideas on reform and sought a path of moderate change in conformity with the *Shar'iah*. Others, such as Bihbihani, played the role of a politician, representing in particular the interests of the merchants and guilds in the new political order. The presence of these two had originally contributed to the legitimacy of the constitutional movement in a country still overwhelmingly Islamic. A third view was represented by Shaikh Fazlallah Nuri, allied to the court, who perceived the conflict between the *Shar'iah*, a law based on the divine will, and parliamentary law, based on the will of the people. As a whole the clergy sought to protect and strengthen Islam, and resisted the encroachments of secularism, the reform of the Ministry of Justice, the codification of the *Shar'iah* and equality before the law.

Meanwhile, in 1907 the British and Russians, seeking to resolve their differences in the light of the growing rivalry in Europe and the possibility of impending war, concluded an agreement designed to settle their differences in Iran, Afghanistan and Tibet. The agreement provided for Iran to be divided into spheres of influence, whereby Russia was recognized as having priority of interest in the north and Britain in the south.

By 1911 the financial crisis had so weakened the central government that its authority had crumbled in many areas, affecting the commercial and strategic interests of Britain and Russia. An attempt to reform the finances by a newly appointed American expert, Morgan Shuster, antagonized the Russians, who issued an ultimatum demanding his dismissal.

When the assembly refused, it was suppressed, and Britain and Russia more or less occupied the country on the lines of the 1907 agreement.

The country remained under foreign occupation for the period of the First World War, during which time it suffered a sense of ignominy and much deprivation. In 1915 the Russian-Ottoman front devastated the villages in the west. Brigandage became prevalent, the country was ravaged by famine, and typhoid and influenza epidemics killed thousands.

The north was controlled by the Jangali movement of peasants and workers led by communists. In the south the Bakhtiari dominated, having made deals with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, founded after the discovery of oil in Khuzestan in 1908. The south was held by the British-controlled South Persian Rifles. A weak central government was propped up by British subsidies, intent on defending it against centrifugal forces.

In 1917 the Russians withdrew following the Bolshevik Revolution. Curzon sought to consolidate subsequent British dominance by the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919. The most effective measure taken by the British was to reorganize the Cossack Brigade, which had virtually disintegrated by 1920, and replace its White Russian officers by Iranians.

The proposed extension of British influence brought a renewed Soviet involvement, and Britain had not the finances to support further imperialist ventures.

Both powers began to withdraw, leaving as the single most effective, united and well-placed force 2200 men from the Cossack Brigade, based in Qazvin and under the command of a British-appointed colonel, Reza Khan. In 1921 a series of maneuvers between Iranian politicians, the British military and Reza Khan himself brought him to power in alliance with Sayyid Ziya Tabataba'i, a journalist.

The Qajars have been blamed for much that took place. They were particularly criticized during the Pahlavi period; in fact, it was politically incorrect to defend them. However, since the Islamic Revolution, great numbers of documents, official and private, have come to light and many diaries have been published, and modern research has opened new perspectives that in time will no doubt lead to a revision of this very controversial period of Iran's and torturous history.

Pahlavi Era

In 1921, an Iranian Cossack officer named Reza Khan came to power through coup d'état and was crowned the first Pahlavi ruler in 1925. Iran now moved faster towards secularization and modernization, leaving the *Shi'i* clerical establishment and much of Iran's traditional past behind. The reforms of Naser al-Din Shah became much more pronounced and institutionalized under Reza Shah and his son. The discovery of oil in the early twentieth century propelled Iran into building the country's infrastructure and educating the populace, while also the state changed the calendar system and forcing women to remove their traditional *Hijab*. [8]

Reza Shah Pahlavi wanted to change Iran in its ancient nationalist glory. It was Shah who formally asked the international community to call the country by its native name, Iran. Once Amanullah ex-Amir of Afghanistan had visited Tehran and Reza Shah in consultation with him had planned certain changes in society and religion. But the Afghans were infuriated at the haste with which Amanullah was introducing Western reforms into the country: a furious popular revolt broke out and Amanullah was dethroned in 1929. This was an eye-opener to Reza Shah who thought it wise to proceed with slowly and steady steps.

Still within a short span of time he was able to affect a social revolution hardly affected on the same scale by any other ruler, and that was largely due to his undoubted capacity, perseverance, iron revolution and his awe-inspiring personality.

Reza Shah established an authoritarian government that valued nationalism, militarism, secularism and anti-communism combined with strict censorship and state propaganda. [9] Reza Shah Pahlavi wanted to follow the foot steps of Kamal Ataturk of Turkey in the modernization, nationalization and secularization. However, his attempts of modernization have been criticized for being "too fast" and "superficial" and his reign a time of "oppression, corruption, taxation, lack of authenticity" with "security typical of police states. [10]

Reza Shah made a radical change in the laws of his country, and gave precedence to the "*Qanoon I'urf*" (civil law) over the "*Qanoon i Shar'iah*" (religious law). He had never himself benefitted from university but he wanted the diffusion of education in the country. In Tehran co-education among children shows the advancement in education. One of the social changes which Reza Shah brought was the suppression of *Mullas* who were against all reforms in the name of religion. The famous poet Iraj Mirza observes:-

*"Dar Iran ta buvad mulla o mufti,
Baruz I badtar az in ham bayufti"*

(So long as Iran is swayed by *Mullas* and *Muftis*, we are sure to fall on worse days than these)³. Reza Shah encouraged a policy of secularization, and showed his defiance of religious tradition in such matters as education and the emancipation of women. During the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi due to the growing nationalism in Iran, the Shah gave control over certain religious affairs to the clergy of the country. This resulted in a campaign of persecution against the Baha'is. An approved and coordinated anti-Baha'i campaign (to incite public passion against the Baha'is) started in 1955 and included the spreading of anti-Baha'i propaganda on national radio stations and in official newspapers. In the late 1970s the Shah's regime consistently lost legitimacy due to criticism that he was pro-Western. As the anti-Shah movement gained ground and support, revolutionary propaganda was spread that some of the Shah's advisors were Baha'is.

Baha'is' were portrayed as economic threats, supporters of Israel and the West, and societal hostility for the Baha'is increased. He clashed with Iran's clergy and devout Muslims. His laws and regulations required mosques to use chairs; all Iranian except qualifying *Shi'i* jurist consults to wear western clothes including a hat with a brim, encouraged women to discard *Hijab*, allowed mixing of sexes.

In 1935 wide protests rose up against Shah at the Imam Reza Shrine at Mashhad, chanting slogans such as “The Shah is a new Yazid”. Dozens were killed and hundreds were injured when troops finally quelled the unrest. [11] Iran was ruled as an autocracy under the Pahlavi regime which can be clearly seen in the excessive interference of America until the revolution.

The power and influence of the clergy was also undermined by the rapid growth of a state education system, one of Reza Shah’s greatest achievements. State spending on education rose 20 times between 1919 and 1940. In 1919 there were about 300 schools with 23,000 pupils; by 1941 there were over 8000 schools catering for half a million pupils. Thirty-six colleges had been founded by 1941, most notably the amalgamation of a number of existing colleges to create Tehran University in 1934. In 1936 the university acquired a faculty of theology, in part a measure to secularize control of religious education. The numbers being educated in religious schools also increased in the years up to 1936, but those in the seminaries declined sharply.

The influence of religion was further attacked in the disregard of the ancient right of sanctuary in shrines, and the outlawing and restriction of some aspects of religious ceremonies, particularly the '*Ashura* processions. In 1934 an endowment law extended state control over religious endowments, in which the '*ulama* had hitherto played an important part. Restrictions were placed on pilgrimages; human dissection in medical training became permissible. A series of laws enforced the wearing of Western dress, beginning with the 1928 hat law, which required the abandonment of traditional headgear and also placed on the '*ulama* the burden of proving that they were genuine clerics. Further laws on headgear in 1935 and unveiling in 1936 followed. Reza Shah’s intention was to use dress to instill in Iranians solidarity in a modern and uniform sense of identity, to accompany loyalty to the new-style state. Ethnic and religious differences were to be eradicated.

This somewhat dictatorial and simple-minded approach to identity-building, unaccompanied as it was by allowing time for attitudes to change through education and economic and social development, resulted in riots in Mashhad in 1935; these were harshly suppressed, leaving several hundred dead and many more wounded. Many Iranian women, angered at what appeared to them as an attack on their decency, reverted to their traditional garb in 1941.

But with men, for whom the cultural and religious barriers were less significant, the new dress struck a chord of modernity, and perhaps of convenience, which they perceived as in keeping with the times, and the wearing of Western dress became customary in most parts of Iran.

Mohammad Reza Shah replaced his father on the throne on September 16, 1941, he wanted to continue the reform policies of his father, but a contest for control of the government soon erupted between the shah and an older professional politician, the nationalistic Mohammad Mossadeq. The shah's regime suppressed and marginalized its opponents with the help of Iran's security and intelligence organization, the SAVAK. Relying on oil revenues, which sharply increased in late 1973, the Shah pursued his goal of developing Iran as a mighty regional power dedicated to social reform and economic development. Yet he continually sidestepped democratic arrangements, remaining unresponsive to public opinion and refused to allow meaningful political liberties. The reforms, such as the emancipation of women, the right to divorce, land reforms, and the secularization of the courts, angered many clerics, including Ayatollah Khomeini, who in 1963 rebuked Mohammad Reza Shah and his increasing dependence on the West and westernization of Iran. [12]

In addition to the notables, who filled the majority of cabinet posts and were determined to ensure that he was as powerless as possible, the shah faced opposition from new ideological parties. The most significant was the Tudeh, the communist party, founded in 1941, with a sizeable following among the intelligentsia and professional groups and a membership of 50,000. Most parties and factions had a distinct nationalist character, an example being the Iran Party, composed of both religious and secular-minded liberal intellectuals. The bazaar, or old middle class, under the leadership of Ayatollah Kashani, remained determined to resist state control; their opposition was expressed particularly in the form of the radical Islamist movement, the *Fada'iyan-i Islam*.

In the last years of his rule Mohammad Reza Shah was attempting to be less dependent on the United States and the West and more independent, exerting his own power in the region. He was indeed a nationalist, but he had kept in power through the efforts of the United States and Iran own secret police and military. Thus the leftists, liberals, and Islamists came together in 1978 to bring down the Pahlavi dynasty. The Shah's attempts at appeasing the populace by appointing a more liberal government were too little, too late. He left the country, and in February 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini returned.

In a matter of months, the Islamic Republic of Iran was established. [13] This uprising is considered the last great revolution of the twentieth century, and it changed the political makeup of the Middle East. In many ways, it was the beginning of Islamic movements, resistance, and conflict against the West in the Muslim world. *'Ulama* started revolutionizing Iran in Islamic pattern. Dr. Ali Shari'ati preached the Islamic socialism which inspired many people against the capitalistic tendencies of Pahlavi regime. Besides Dr. Ali Shari'ati, the mainstream *'ulama* like Ayatollah Burjardi, Ayatollah Khomeini, Murtaza Muthari inspired many people to stand up to establish the Orthodox Islam in Iran. Finally Pahlavi regime was overthrown by the Islamist forces.

Iranian Revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini

The 1979 Islamic Revolution ushered in a new way of constructing the Iranian nation-state. The state as no longer defined in terms of its connections to its ancient empires and monarchical past; rather the new regime sought to define Iran as a national community united under *Shi'i* Islamic principles. In this new national construction, Ayatollah Khomeini and the leading clerics' understanding of *Shi'ism* were incorporated within a new government structure to form the Islamic Republic of Iran and establish Islam as the state's official religion. While the vast majority (89%) of Iran's population is *Shi'i*, the institutionalization of Islam has significantly affected Iran's religious minority communities. The Iranian constitution recognizes Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism as the only protected minority religions, but the experiences of the Baha'i and Jewish communities have been especially unique considering their relationships to the Islamic state. Although there is significant scholarship about the impact of the Islamic Revolution on Iranian women, far less prominent work focuses on the Revolution's effects on Iranian religious minority groups. Meanwhile, the persecution these groups face only intensifies.

The discrimination faced by these specific groups is best understood in terms of the challenges that they pose to the authenticity of the Islamic state and its vision of the Islamic Iranian nation-state. [14]

The ideology of revolutionary government was populist, nationalist and most of all *Shi'i* Islamic. Though strict Islamic laws were established in Iran after the success of the Islamic revolution in 1979.

Iran's rapidly modernizing, capitalist economy was replaced by populist and Islamic economic and cultural policies. Much industry was nationalized laws and schools Islamized, and Western influences banned. But the modernizations in the technological and agricultural field are being carried forward. The nationalization of oil was established and the American and Israel interference was stopped. The Islamic revolution also created great impact around the world. In the non-Muslim world it has changed the image of Islam, generating much interest in the politics and spirituality of Islam. [15]

In 1978 Khomeini had two objectives. The first was to overthrow the shah's regime, which he designated as *taghut*, illegitimate, and thereby to eject foreign influence from Iran; the second was to create an Islamic state. In order to maintain particularly the first objective, his main priority was to sustain the unity of his support.

In pursuit of his goal of maintaining unity until the regime had been toppled and the structures of a new order were in place, Khomeini's principal tactic was not to be too specific. As Bakhtiar observed, in order to implement his policies Khomeini did not divulge his goals initially, so very few people understood the realities of his intentions. In this way many people aggrieved at the Pahlavi regime's economic and foreign policies, and its repression, found themselves drawn into the creation of an Islamic state when their own preferences were for a secular, liberal or socialist one. By the same token Khomeini spoke of an Islamic state, not an Islamic republic, until the autumn of 1978, thus avoiding a term which was associated with secularism in the minds of some of religious society, and opening his following to charges of sedition before they were ready to meet them. Whilst allowing that the clerics should be activist and play an influential role, Khomeini did not dwell upon the concept of the government of the jurist and cleric dominance, as it would have antagonized not only the liberals and the left but also conservative groups such as the *Hujjat'iyya*, which deplored any suggestion often croachment on the rights of the absent Imam. [16]

Khomeini came to power and began to implement the Islamic revolutionary ideology developed over the past decade or more. He proposed a revival of the *Shi'i* legal doctrine of *Velayat al-Faqih* (the guardianship of the Jurist). This doctrine placed aspects of temporal control of the *Shi'i* community in the hands of the 'jurist' (*faqih*, a scholar). In the past, the doctrine of *Velayat al-Faqih* had been employed to provide guardianship for orphans and other dispossessed persons. It had also been used in *Shi'i* legal texts to refer to the delegation of some of the powers of the *Imam* (who according to Twelver *Shi'i* belief) was now hiding to the jurist.

Khomeini expanded the role of the jurist to include not merely matters of religious import, but also political issues. The jurist was, under Khomeini's theory, to be the supreme interpreter and enforcer of the *Shar'iah*, and hence the one who controls the workings of society until the return of the *Imam*. Khomeini argued that if a scholar jurist was able to establish himself in power it was obligatory on all other jurists to support and follow him, even if he was not actually the most senior and learned of the scholarly class (*'ulama*). This development was paradoxically, both innovative and traditional. It was innovative in that it expanded the remit of the scholar-jurist to include political matters. It was traditional in that it employed an established (though perhaps neglected) element of *Shi'i* jurisprudence. In the internal battles between elements of the revolutionary movement which emerged after the overthrow of the Shah. Khomeini managed to control the drafting and implementation of the new constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, such that the doctrine of *Velayat-e-Faqih* was enshrined as the ruling principle of governance. [17]

The constitution of the Islamic Republic which was accepted by popular vote in 1979 is a strange document which includes not only Khomeini's doctrine of the supreme authority of the jurist, but also elements of election (in the form of the *Majlis* or parliament). The document, to an extent, reflects the competing elements of the revolutionary movement. Mahdi Bazargan (a long-time Islamic activist who had been implemented by the Shah's regime) and Ayatollah Taliqani (a cleric with reformist leanings) both argued that a solidly democratic constitution was the most effective way of preserving the Islamic nature of both the Revolution and Iranian society generally. On the other hand, the *Mujtahidin i-Khalq* styled themselves as 'Islamic Marxists', with the call 'Marxism is our ideology. Islam is our creed'. Using the rhetoric of Revolution and a classless society they had established a network of cells across Iran during the 1960s, and played an important role in the revolutionary movement.

Whilst not directly linked to the *Mujahidin*, the sociologist 'Ali Shari'ati (who died in 1977, a year and a half before the revolution) was also an important figure. He did not found a political party, but did provide a large section of the middle classes with a relatively sophisticated Islamic ideology through which could channel their criticism of the Shah. Indeed, Shari'ati, it could be said, was crucial to the success of the Revolution, since it was only when the middle classes began to oppose the Shah that the Pahlavi regime began to crumble.

Without Shar'iat's teaching, preaching and publishing, they may not have agreed to such a prominent role for Islam in the new post-shah political order.

In the end, however, it was Khomeini's version of revolutionary Islam which was implemented politically, and it was Khomeini who succeeded in establishing himself as the 'just jurist' who oversaw the whole political process. The reasons for Khomeini's success over the other Islamist groups lie in his personal charisma, his refusal to compromise with the Shah, and his skillful manipulation of the media from exile. His face best known of the clerics, and his fiery speeches were heard in Iran through tape cassettes smuggled into Iran and distributed around the country. He established a loyal band of supporters in Iran who prepared the way for his acceptance as leader on his return. In short, Khomeini was better organized than any other Islamist revolutionary figure and, hence, his well-prepared and comprehensive ideology of *velayat e-faqeh* was the natural ideological mainstay of the revolution. Throughout the long history of Iran, Iran has always maintained its political identity and developed as a distinct political and cultural entity.

Conclusion

While concluding it can be said that 'Abbas Mirza, introduced a modernization programme of which the principal feature was reform of the army to combat the Russian threat. The reforms made some progress, but were much hindered by lack of money. However, by this time the British presence in India was making itself felt in Iran and Afghanistan, and the principal British preoccupation was defense of the country's Indian territories against Russian encroachment, in which regard Iran featured as a useful buffer state. The Qajars in turn came to recognize that more was to be gained in terms of defense by playing off the British against the Russians than by pursuing expensive and demanding military reforms that were unlikely to win them victory. This remained in essence their policy throughout the nineteenth century, and the opportunity for military-driven reform was thus lost.

The Iranian state was minimal, or decentralized. Such states were common in pre-modern societies, but the Iranian state had diminished in influence in relation to its powerful elites in the disorders of the eighteenth century, when many areas were essentially left to regulate themselves. The tribes, in particular, amounting to about one-third of the population, presented a challenge to the government. They inhabited the less accessible mountain areas, differed ethnically and linguistically from the Persian centre, and were largely answerable to their powerful khans.

Large sections of the countryside were under the control of great landholders, whose influence over agricultural development tended to grow with the advance of the world economy in the course of the century. In the towns, affairs were regulated by the 'ulama (clergy), merchants and guilds. The leading clergy, being regarded as part of the elite, acted as intermediaries between other groups and the government. Merchants and guilds also had their own organizations and leading representatives who negotiated their affairs with the local governor.

The position of the clergy in the Qajar period was strong, and was further reinforced by the Shi'i doctrine of legitimacy on the subject of the state. In practice they varied in their approach to the established power. Some were open allies of the shah, and benefited from royal and court patronage. Others sought accommodation with the state while maintaining an independent stance. Still more withdrew into scholarship, religious duties and quietism, and avoided contact with the ruler.

The general view, however, was in practice to treat the shah as legitimate; that is to say the clergy recognized the benefit to Shi'ism of living in an orderly state, and one with a Shi'i rather than a Sunni or infidel ruler. The 'ulama therefore cooperated with the Qajars, and received in return royal protection for their religion and patronage of religious institutions. Religion and state united to suppress sedition and heresy, particularly in the form of the Babi revolt of the 1840s. But the clergy were not dependent on the state, in contrast with their position in Sunni countries, where the leading 'ulama owe much to state support.

Reza Shah tried to modernize Iran by following the foot steps of Kamal Ata Turk of Turkey. The modernization of Iranian life was indeed one of Reza Shah's dominating ambitions. He wanted his people to think of themselves as in no way inferior to the people of the West, and he wanted foreigners to be aware of respect the good qualities of Iranians.

Reza Shah's most spectacular modernizing reform was the abolition of the Islamic veil in 1936, the first step on the long road to the complete emancipation of women. Thereafter women were encouraged to acquire education, to enter the profession, business and industry.

Reza Shah's foreign policy aimed at securing Iran's independence and in particular eliminating the influence of the great powers whose rivalries had for so long plagued the country. He hoped to achieve this by encouraging and participating in international organizations like the League of Nations, by adhering to treaties like Kellong Pact for the outlawing of war, and at the same time by co-operating with Iran's immediate neighbors.

In general the outlook of Iran became increasingly international. The Shah himself embarked on the series of journeys abroad that marked all the subsequent years of his reign, and showed himself willing and able to meet and talk with foreign journalists as well as officials and politicians. At the beginning of 1963 the Shah launched what has come to be known as the White Revolution, or the Revolution of the Shah and the people. They included reform of the landownership system, sharing in industry, measures against profiteering and corruption, a national insurance scheme, the extension of literacy, health and development to the rural areas, electoral reform (which meant in particular votes for women), local courts in rural areas for the settlement of minor disputes, educational reforms and the provision of free education. The successful inauguration of the White Revolution brought with it changes in the political system. These measures to give the general population a greater share in the evolution of government policy did not disguise the fact that the driving force behind all these reforms continued to be the Shah himself. Though Iran had seen many vicissitudes of fortune since that time, yet the celebration was a legitimate recognition of the fact that Iran had never been conquered spiritually, and had always in the end absorbed her conquerors while retaining her own integrity.

Khomeini's objective was a state governed by the *Shar'iah* and permeated by Islam in such a way that it functioned like an ideology, a concept already present in *The Revealing of Secrets*, though not fully worked out in the fashion of Sayyid Qutb. In such a state, divinely guided by the *Shar'iah*, the individual Muslim could lead a moral life in a good community.

In his thought over the period from the writing of *The Revealing of Secrets* to 1978, the most notable development is the gradual increase in the role of the 'ulama in the state from one where it should be supervisory to one of actual government. The possibility of government by the 'ulama is, however, already present in *The Revealing of Secrets*.

Despite the cogency of the arguments for clerical rule in Islamic Government, Khomeini referred only occasionally to it in his other writings and speeches, with the result that it was little understood by the laity in the period just before the revolution.

Khomeini retained flexibility in his vision of the Islamic state partly to maintain the unity of his popular support and partly to protect his movement from regime suppression. He saw the state in different ways, as being embodied in a person, as being a strong state to protect Islam, as a juristic administration ensuring and protecting all the prerequisites of a good and moral community, and possibly as having a consultative element. He did not oppose the idea of an elected assembly, but he had doubts about a constitutional assembly and elected representatives. These doubts were partly theoretical – how could they be reconciled with the sovereignty of God? – and partly practical, arising from the concern that elections could be manipulated in the interests of particular individuals or groups, especially those inimical to the interests of Islam.

On economic policies he was equally vague. When it came to class, Khomeini avoided demonstrating a preference for one class and attacking another, and confined his invective to the Pahlavi elite. In this manner he was able to draw a larger number of social and political groups into his movement.

References and Notes

The term “Persia” comes from the word “Pars,” which is the name of the southwestern province of Iran along the Persian Gulf. The Arabs, with no “p” in their phonetics, referred to the country as Fars. The term “Farsi,” which is the name for the ancient language of Persia, comes from this Arabic term. Local people called their country Iran meaning the “land of the Aryans” for millennia before it became the official name for the country in 1935.

In 1856, during the Anglo-Persian war Britain prevented Persia from reasserting control over Heart. The city had been part of Persia in Safavid times, but Heart had been under non-Persian rule since the mid-18th century. Mean while, by 1881, Russia had completed its conquest of present –day Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, bringing Russia’s frontier to Persia’s northeastern borders and severing historic Persian ties to the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand. Several trade concessions by the Persian government put economic affairs largely under British control. By the late 19th century, many Persians believed that their rulers were beholden to foreign interests. There was a brief constitutional revolution in 1905-11 in which progressive religious and liberal forces rebelled against theocratic rulers in government who were also associated with European colonization and their interests in the new Anglo-Persian oil company. The secularist efforts ultimately succeeded in the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979 A.D). the Pahlavi’s came to power after Ahmad Shah Qajar, the last ruler of the Qajar dynasty, proved unable to stop British and Soviet encroachment on Iranian sovereignty, and was consequently overthrown in a military coup, abdicated and ultimately exiled to France. The national assembly, known as Majlis, convening as a constituent assembly on 12th December 1925, deposed the young Ahmad Shah Qajar, and declared Reza Shah the new monarch of the Imperial State of Persia.

John A. Boyle, *Persia History and Heritage*, Henry Melland, London, 1978, p.44

M.M Sharief, Ed., *History of Muslim Philosophy*, Vol. II, Low Price Publications, Delhi, 1961, p.1525

Ibid, p.1526

Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850*, Ithaca, 1989

Hass, Iran, p.35

Abrahamian Ervand, *History of modern Iran*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.143

Michael P. Zirinsky, “Imperial Power and Dictatorship: Britain and the Rise of Reza Shah, 1921-1926”.

Ervand Abrahamian, *History of modern Iran*, (2008), p.91

Shaul Bakhash, *Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*, Basic Books, 1984, p.22

Shaul Bakhash, *Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*, Basic Books, c 1984, p.22

Iran’s rapidly modernizing; capitalist economy was replaced by populist and Islamic economic and cultural policies. Much industry was nationalized laws and schools Islamized, and western influences banned. But the modernizations in the technological and agricultural fields are being carried forward. The nationalization of oil was established and the American and Israel interference was stopped.

William Shawcross, *The Shah’s Last Ride*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1989, p.110

William Shawcross, *The Shah’s Last Ride* (1988), p.110

Hamid Algar, *Khomeini*, p.42

Khomeini, *Kashf*, pp.186-