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## **Literary and socio-political transformations: Impacts on the Iranian revolution 1979**

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### **Abstract**

The role of Iran's Socio-Political and Cultural issues has always been discussed and brought into the academic discourse in central East Asia. During the Reza Shah Pahlavi Iran had to struggle a lot to get basic rights like freedom and penetrate the democracy. The opposition against Reza shah was at large because of his secret policy to implement savak to control the country. The opposition was mainly led by Khomeini himself, who was exiled to Iraq later on France. The progressive writers and the activists also supported the idea of free Iran from Shah. In January 1979 Shah left Iran and handed the country's command to Shapour Bakhtiar, who failed to manage the worst situation in Iran, and finally civil war took place. In month of April 1979 national referendum took place, and Ayatollah Khomeini declared an Islamic republic with a new constitution reflecting his ideals of Islamic government. Literatures (Modern Writing) style's contribution cannot be forgotten.

**Keywords:** Literary, socio-political and Iranian revolution 1979

### **Introduction**

Iran has always been a conspicuous case to discuss and bring into the academic discourse in central Asia. If someone has to understand Iran's history as well as the literary contribution specially during 1906 to 1979, the contextual socio-political set up of Iran becomes fundamental to understanding. At the time when Iran was at its peak of revolution, Reza Shah Pahlavi (the king) was boycotted by their own people and it was being widely debated whether Iran should remain a monarchy as it is or become either an Islamic Republic or democracy <sup>[1]</sup>. This was the period which determined the development and progression of Iran as a nation state.

Before the revolution, the pre-dominant clergy class enjoyed a lot of authority not only at the cultural unleashed a series of forces which have transformed and reshaped the face of Iranian society in every aspect imaginable. These changes have rocked not only the political and economic spheres of Iran, but even more fundamentally, culture and society. These changes have negatively affected people's social, political and economic status in Iran.

Indeed, the clerical revolutionaries at the outset of the revolution suggested that their goals were not aimed at economic transformation, but rather the maintenance and continuation of the law of God, as interpreted by the clerics. With the Islamists in power, the new clerical elite came back to an earlier time in the seventh century, where in their view; society in Arabia was at its zenith under the rule of the Koran. Consequently, the Islamic fundamentalists became the "architects" to inject the same Islamic fundamentalist values and norms into the modern twentieth century Iran <sup>[2]</sup>. None of the policies implemented by the Islamic government after the revolution has been as backward looking and misguided at both the personal and a broader societal and cultural level than what has been the regime's stance on issues concerning their people. The social and political emancipation of people were only one reason behind the clerical revolt against the monarchy. The Pahlavi Shahs made a conscious and systematic effort to exclude clerical control of Iranian society <sup>[3]</sup>. For example, the clergy were excluded from their traditional spheres of control in such areas as the judiciary and education. The Islamic Revolution at its core was nothing more than a reactionary attempt by a threatened class (namely the clergy) fearing a loss of material, legal,

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1. Yahya Aryanpur, *Az Sabat Nima* (2), Tehran 1372.

2. Iran: State of Terror, Parliamentary Human Rights Group, 1996.

3. Ibid.

and moral influence, successfully reasserting itself in order to prevent the transfer of power to a newly created modern bureaucratic state system. If one examines this paradigm and applies it to the eighteen years since the Islamists came to power, one can see that the policies were adopted and implemented not so much on the basis of ideology, but rather for the purpose of continuation and survival of the existing Islamic fundamentalist state <sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, the idea of making Iran as a Islamic republic of Iran was also boycotted by some of the people who thought of implementing full-fledged democracy rather than imposing Islam or Islamic State on Iran, and since then there have been many agitations by different societal and economic elements within society, proposing reforms for reform in the Islamic Republic.

Amid 1900s the best way to spare the nation from government defilement and outside control were to make a composed code of laws. This sentiment caused the Constitutional Revolution. There had been a series of ongoing covert and overt activities against Naser o-Din Shah's despotic rule, for which many had lost their lives. The effort of flexibility contenders at long last proved to be fruitful amid the rule of Mozafar o-Din Shah Shah. Mozafar o-Din Shah Shah rose to the honored position in June 1896. In the wake of the determined endeavors of flexibility contenders, Mozafar o-Din Shah of Qajar line was compelled to issue the declaration of the constitution and the making of a chose parliament (the Majlis) on August 5, 1906. The imperial power constrained and a parliamentary framework built up.

During the Shah the economic growth was good at its best. But the opposition against Reza shah was at large because of his secret policy to implement Savak to control the country. The opposition was mainly led by Khomeini himself, who was exiled to Iraq later on France. In January 1979 Shah left Iran and handed the country's command to Shapour Bakhtiar, who failed to manage the worst situation of that country and finally civil war took place. During the month of April 1979 national referendum too place and Ayatollah Khomeini declared an Islamic republic with a new Constitution reflecting his ideals of Islamic government <sup>[5]</sup>.



4. ALATTOTF. KAMRANT, the Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature, (Syracuse University Press, 2000). Pp. 264.

5. History of Iran, Constitutional Revolution 1906-1911, Iran Chamber Society.



Protesters around shahyad tower (later Azadi Tower), Tehran, 1979. (Courtesy: Reuters Image)

### Phases which talks about the writing regime

The literature (Modern Persian literature) or the literary activities and Socio-political Transformations pertains to the writings from the twentieth century. As that century drew to a close and the present one commenced, critics have begun to show a lively interest in the literature of that period. Major new studies from markedly different points of view have been published. Kamran Talattof has proposed a new and innovative approach to the understanding of Modern Persian literature. This he calls "episodic literary movement" <sup>[6]</sup> a theory that brings political and social conditions into sharp focus. Briefly, he argues that political and social conditions at any given time produce a pertinent "ideology of representation and that this ideology helps to shape, and is shaped by, a cluster of "aesthetically significant literary texts" that constitute a "literary episode." Ideology is related to literature through a shared set of metaphors. The history of Persian literature is conventionally viewed as an integrated continuum. Because of the impact of ideology on the production of literature, the author defines the literary history of the modern period as a "series of distinct episodes distinguishable by their ideology of representation". Thus the literary history of this period moves by "episodes" and these constitute, in effect, a new form of periodization.

As far as the social content per se is concerned, there are roughly six major themes of them are particularly pertinent to this analysis of the social impact of the modernist literary trend:

1. Opposition to the Pahlavi government.
2. Rejection of aspects of Shii institutions and practices
3. Concern with alleged economic and social backwardness in Iran
4. Criticism of sternization
5. Expression of a sense of culture specific alienation or loss of Iranian roots
6. Communication of a strong sense of cultural nationalism <sup>[7]</sup>

### Understanding Technicalities during Reza Shah

Traditionally Persian prose writing was a medium for dispensing historical, philosophical and scientific knowledge, sometimes in the guise of autobiographies. The novels and short stories were rarely used, and it was chiefly in poetry that emotional expressions were found. During the sixteenth to eighteenth century, Persian prose style was both

6. Ibid.

7. Iranian Studies (1968-1985).

obscure and flowery in nature, and it reflected the formalized society of which the writers were a part. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, increased cultural contact with Europe and social mobility created a desire for prose. This was strengthened by political movements, which later culminated in the Constitution of 1906<sup>[8]</sup>. However, the forerunners of modern prose writers recognized the clumsiness of the existing prose forms. Thus, their first effort was a stylistic reform, which sought to introduce a simple way of expression. The factors, which contributed to this movement, were:

- Travel books about Europe written by kings, princes, businessmen, and scholars.
- Newspapers and journals.
- Translations of works of such European writers as Moliere and Dumas<sup>[9]</sup>.

These literary events were responsible for the further development of prose along three lines: conservative realism, social realism, and social individualism.

The Conservative realism has resulted from the ideological influence of the Western Europe. Social realism has been inspired from the modern Soviet thinking, and finally social individualism is product of the rich Persian classics and humanistic values. A good representative of conservative realism is M. Hijazi who wrote his first novel *Homa* in 1929, later *Parichir* in 1930, *Andishe* in 1940, and *Ayene* ("Mirror") in 1954.

Another writer of this group of conservative realists is Jamalzadeh who is the founder of the short story writing in modern Iran. His first book *Yaki Bud, Yaki Nabud* ("Once There Was, Once There Was Not" also known as *Once upon a time*) was written and published in Berlin in 1921 and is a collection of six short stories. The first one titled "Persian is Sweet," presents the conflict of Western educated individuals who use foreign words in their everyday spoken language, the clergy who use Arabic, and the ordinary Persian who is lost between the two. It finally concludes that the sweetness of the Persian language has some claim on both the traditional Arabic oriented speech of the clergy and the modernist tendency to employ foreign words<sup>[10]</sup>. Ali Dashti belongs to the same literary school. More than any other modern writer, he desires to give a picture of modern Persian women. He selects his characters from the upper class, usually western oriented wealthy and attractive persons. His women are frequently the product of two cultures and he presents them as creatures wanting social equality without accepting social responsibility.

A writer who can be thought of as a link between conservative and social realism is the well-known critic Sa'aid Nafisi<sup>[11]</sup>. He is one of the first contributors to the modern prose in Iran and has translated quite a number of French writings. He is equally at home in almost all literary media: press, short stories, historical and social novels.

A representative of the literary school of social realism is Bozorg 'Alavi who wrote his first work in 1934. Influenced by Freud, he tries to interpret his characters in terms of Freudian psychology. Jalal-Al Ahmad is another writer of

the social realist school. He takes his characters from the devoutly religious lower class and describes them sympathetically so as to reveal their mode of thinking. Sadiq Chubak is another social writer whose book '*Khayme Shab bazi*' contains eleven sections, each one being a real picture of daily life. Undoubtedly the cultural contact of the Iranian elites with both the Western Europe and Russia has contributed somewhat to these writings. A good representative of this group is Sadiq Hedayat, who is, perhaps, the greatest short story writer of the modern Persian literature. His list of writings begins with "*Zindeh-Bigur*" ("Half Dead") in 1902 followed by many others, including "*Sag-e-Virgird*" ("Street Dog") and "*Bufe Kur*" ("The Blind Owl"). The philosophies of humanism and nationalism inspired him to investigate and describe various social groups. His kind heart drew his attention to the life of the lower class although he did not ignore other groups. He selected his characters and subjects with mastery and revealed their mode of life and mindset with great perceptive depth. This thorough understanding of the minds and emotions of people plus his own deep sensitivity gave him good reason to write. His works show both vertical and horizontal dimensions. He takes his readers to near and distant places at various times and introduces them to many groups of people who make up the world. He does not always write of the present, but takes one to the wonders of the past, describes the adventures of early man and shows the rationality above all. In the same vein, Dehkoda, a writer in the early twentieth century, was a skilful satirist, as was Sadiq Hedayat.

This brief analysis discloses that the progress of modern Persian prose has been more a result of political writing than of pure literary activity<sup>[12]</sup>. Political unrest and a new evaluation of the place of man in society brought about special newspapers whose chief purpose was to awaken the people. It was necessary for writers to employ a simple style and direct their ideas toward public and national problems. Historians, translators and literary men were all involved in this movement. Inspiration came from European countries and Persian culture itself. As a result, three literary movements emerged, as we have seen.

## Conclusion

The further theory which was developed by Reza Shah was the total transformation of Iranian economy into a semi-industrialized and commercialized system. The extension of the power of the central government over all sections of society with the purpose of centralization and unification would help in achieving this particular goal. In the process of achieving these two basic attempts, the government attempted to eliminate traditional social forces and ideologies and substitute them with ideologies and attitudes seen to be more compatible with its 'modern' aims. In this way it had left significant effect on religion and religious foundations. Reza Shah's first and most critical undertaking was to develop an army and disarm potential separatists, particularly migrant clans. Later he found a way to curb the power of the Olama and spread an official belief system of patriotism, drawing upon Iran's pre-Islamic past and criticizing Arabs and the advice from Islam. His rule may be depicted as 'autocratic secular nationalism'. The social,

8. History of Iran, Constitutional Revolution 1906-1911, Iran Chamber Society.

9. Ibid.

10. Kamshad. H, Modern Persian Prose Literature, Pp 122.

11. Yaqub Azand, Tarikh-i-Adabiyat Navin Iran, Tehran 1266.

12. RYPKA, JAN, History of Iranian Literature, D. Reided Publishing Company Dordrecht- Holland 1068.

financial and political changes in this period were unparalleled in Iranian history.

Amid the Reza Shah's period there was an expansion in central government intervention in the monetary sphere which created new social groups. Their political orientation and economic viewpoints were in sharp contrast to the traditional middle class. A new social elite was formed around the government and the throne, whose main aim was to gain recognition and power to create a 'modern' society. The term 'modern' is regularly utilized as belonging to the standard view of history which takes industrialist innovation as an unavoidable result or even natural law. Modernity occurs during the evolutionary process leading from early forms of exchange and social structure forced by the 'irrational forces' of tradition to the economic and social rationality of the middle class. This specific comprehension of modernity belongs to a view of history that cuts across the great divide between industrialist and non-industrialized societies. It treats industrial laws of motion as if they were the universal laws of history. It is important to point out that even anti-modernism can have a similar effect on naturalizing capitalism, as can be seen in the sociological speculations. It has been seen that modern history has a long process of rationalization. The rationalization of the state in governmental organization and the rationalization of the economy in industrial capitalism were two major aspects of modernization in Europe. The impact of this procedure, the progress of reason and freedom most often associated with the enlightenment, has been to allowed humanity from traditional restraints. But at the same time rationalization produces and disguises new oppression, this view of history makes capitalism inevitable and at the very least naturalizes it. Equating capitalism with modernity disguises the specificity of not only capitalism but modernity as well. It is commonly agreed that the reform policies of Reza Shah 'modernized' and fundamentally changed the living style of Iranian society. Though, the extent to which the formation of the Pahlavi State can be viewed in terms of a continuity of a set of historical processes or a state with complete law and order by Reza Shah.

With respect to the above descriptions, two sets of argument are generally made. The primary perspective is the emergence of the political system between the second half the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth in terms of an important change that resulted in a significant break with the past. The Reza Shah period is seen as the start of the process of transformation of Iran from pre-capitalism to capitalism, where the focus was to decentralize the power and modernize its centers. The second model of argument sees the stated period in terms of an underlying historical continuity. Within this perspective the Pahlavi regime is viewed as a neo-patrimonial state, a historical continuation of the patrimonial (Asiatic despotism) rule of the Qajars. Most of the research agreed on Reza Shah's period that it has been affected by one of these hypothetical models. The Reza Shah period has been considered either in terms of a historic continuity of patrimonial or Asiatic authoritarianism, re-emerging under modern conditions as neopatrimonialism.

There have been some theoretical problems with both representations. The social essentialists display and propose that the events of the past determine and limit the possibilities of future development. One winning argument as far as the Middle East is that the Islamic 'substance' is

responsible for the shortcoming or formative 'disappointment' of the region. Despotism is viewed as very idea of Islam and political conduct restricted by crippling Islamic social structures. The Islamic legacy is seen as a hindrance to all consequent advancement. Additionally, this theory frustrates to take global and peripheral forces into account.

As far as it matters, the main model neglects to represent the specificity of Iranian political and social procedures. The basic constraints of the hypothesis disregard the particular qualities of the Iranian case. The later structural account sees Iran in terms of the dependence of the 'peripheral' state on the world order that maintains it as an agent. It is 'external' to the social relations and institutions over which it governs. Iran's condition seems to be always in dilemma due to the nature of that country either Islamic or Secular.

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