

Revolutionary Iran

Civil Society and State in the Modernization Process

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intended to rationalize the patrimonial bureaucracy and reduce the involvement of the shah in political matters. In particular, Amir reduced the cost of the court and changed the patrimonial system of choosing provincial governors and other state authorities from a basis of personal bonds to that of bureaucratic and political ability. These reforms evoked strong opposition, mainly from former governors, traditional state officials, and the majority of the royal family including Mahd U'lya, the mother of the king.

In addition, the reign of Amir Kabir coincided with the imperialistic expansion of the influence of England and Russia. Amir's economic reforms limited the interest of many English and Russian traders in favor of their Iranian counterparts. This tendency of the reign of Amir was reinforced by changing the 'Russophile' and 'Anglophile' governors and state officials. Russian provocation through the occupation of several islands in the Caspian sea in order to control the northern Iranian trade, and England's political (the affair of 'slave trade in Persian Gulf') and economic pressures (such as military control of the trade in the Persian Gulf) exemplify the negative standing Amir had with respect to these nations.⁸³

The third source of opposition to Amir came from the ulama. The position of the ulama during the reign of Amir and their reaction to his reforms is of great importance for understanding the conditions and events that led to the ulama's participation in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-9. In dealing with the modernization of Iran, the reign of Amir Kabir is usually considered the most important period in the process of modernization of Iran and reinforcing the authority of the state.⁸⁴ As mentioned earlier, Amir stood in good favor with the ulama because of his challenge to and defeat of the rival religious sect, Bahatism. As Weber pointed out, in the history of the West, the Christian church always reinforced its bonds with the state because of the fear of losing control and power in favor of other secular centers of power, and consequently of monopolization of power in the hands of the state (Weber, 1968, pp. 1173-76). In Iran too, the Shi'ite ulama had to reinforce their bonds with the state, but for other reasons. The prominent position of the Shi'ite ulama of Iran was partly threatened by the surrounding Sunni state of the Ottomans, partly by the impact of the West; and partly by internal rivalry with religious groups such as Sufism, Shaykhism, and Bahatism. Accordingly, the Shi'ite ulama needed the state to protect their position in Iran. Therefore, as long as the reforms would reinforce the state authority

against the external threats of the West and the Sunni states, the ulama were not negative to them. Such was the case with Abbas Mirza's 'Nezame-jadid', and with Amir Kabir's political reforms. But, if the reforms were intended to reduce the authority of the ulama in favor of the state, they did not accept them and actively reacted against them. This was the case when Amir intended to reduce the influence of the ulama by abolishing the institution of *bast* and *ta'ziyeh*. Amir's retreat from his claims to abolish such institutions neutralized the opposition of the ulama.

Accordingly, Russia and England in alliance with the royal families and their traditional allies made up the core of the opposition to Amir. This reactionary alliance continued to hinder the attempts at political and economic modernization initiated by other governmental officials such as grand *vazirs* Mirza Husayn Khan Sepahsalar and Amin al-Sultan. The opposition of the ulama to the changes that intervened and influenced the traditional economic hegemony of bazaar and the social authority of the ulama continued during the nineteenth century and appeared in the organization of social movements against the state. One of the most typical examples of the ulama's reaction to the intervention of the West and the state in civil society of Iran is *junbesh-e tanbako* (the Tobacco Movement), which is of great importance in understanding the coherence of the sociopolitical leadership of ulama.

The Tobacco Movement

The Qajars' foreign policy was based on continued concessions to foreign companies. The limited income of such concessions used to pay Nasir al-Din Shah's journeys to Europe. In one of the Shah's visits to England in 1889, preliminary negotiations about the 'tobacco concession' to an English company, Imperial Tobacco Corporation, were completed (Mustaufi, 1942, p. 420).

According to the concession, all rights concerning the sale and distribution of Iranian tobacco inside Iran and in export were given to the English company, which, in return, was to pay the Iranian government: £ 15,000 a year (Kasravi, 1951, p. 15). From the spring of 1891 on, the employees of the company arrived in Iran and began to work. Many governors were paid by the company to make its establishment and success possible (Malekzadeh, 1949, p. 127). The bazaris and, in particular, the merchants of the bazaars, whose economic activities were influenced

into a *vaqf* for the Fourteen Immaculate Ones (the Twelve Imams, Muhammad and Fatima), and vested the *tawliyat*, the office of *mutavalli*, or administrator of these *auqaf*, in himself, and thereafter in his successors. (Banani Amin, 1967, p. 18).

See also Bryan S. Turner, *Weber and Islam*.

Cf. Weber, (1968, p. 1160).

Weber (1968, p. 1164) considers 'office charisma' of the church as a result of construction of its sovereignty based on: 1) the rise of a professional priesthood; 2) claims to universal domination; 3) rationalization of dogma and rites (*kultus*); and 4) all of these features must occur in some kind of compulsory organization. The fourth feature, organization as a bureaucratic body, is lost in the case of Islamic priesthood and therefore we cannot call that hierocracy.

Atabat is the name for holy Shi'ite shrines situated in the eastern area of the former Ottoman Empire. After the foundation of Iraq, they were situated in the main Shi'ite cities of Iraq: Najaf, Karbala, and Kazemayn.

Ability to interpret and exert the preliminary sources of Islamic law which are: *Qur'an*, *hadith* (the saying of the Prophet), and *Sunna* (the deeds of the Prophet).

A Mujtahids who is the most learned alem and his decrees are guidance and binding example for *muqalleds* (other Muslims who are unable to exert independent judgment in religious laws).

One example of the individual charisma of Shi'ite ulama is the role of Muhammad Ansari (d. 1864) the leader of Iranian Muslim community and the vacuum arising for almost a decade after his death.

Cf. Hamid Algar (1969) *Religion and State in Iran 1785-1906*; Said Amir Arjomand (1988) *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*; Abbas Amanat (1988) 'In Between the Madrasah and the Marketplace'.

For conflicts that occurred between some Mujtahids because of religious endowments, see Ahmad Kasravi (1330/1951) *Tarikh-e enqelab-e mashrotiyyat-e Iran* (The History of Constitutional Revolution of Iran), and Kermani, Nazem al-Islam (1362/1983) *Tarikh-e bidari- ye Iranian* (The History of Iranians' Uprising).

For example, see Abbas Amanat 'In Between the Madrasah and the Marketplace', in Arjomand *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, 1988.

Arjomand, in his article in 'European Journal of Sociology', 1979, expresses some doubt about the aim of that letter. He says that that letter was not addressed to Shah Abbas.

For example, Safavids were supported by Turkman tribes, Qezelbash inhabiting eastern Anatolia, northern Syria and the Armenian highlands,

Afshars by Afshar tribe inhabiting north eastern Iran, and Qajars by Qajar tribe inhabiting northwestern Iran.

Khutba was a socio-political declaration reading by Imam jom'a prior to the Friday prayers in the congregational mosques. In the *khotba* Imam jom'a used to read the accepted political leader's name.

Two Perso-Russian wars of eighteenth century are examples of the ulama's role in mobilization of people in an army by declaration of jihad (holy war) against Russia.

Ann K. S. Lambton (1988) in her book *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia* presents examples of the state's economic dependency on the bazaar.

In 1747, the great shah of Afshars, Nader shah was assassinated. After him a few of the Nader's descendants tried to rule the country but they never succeeded, and therefore it is more significant to use the death of the Nader Shah as the end of the Afshar dynasty. Even the death of the great *vakil* (regent) of the Zands, Karim Khan, in 1779 must be regarded as the end of the Zands dynasty, even if in 1789 a grandson of Karim Khan came to power. His power was limited to the southern areas. He was defeated by Agha Muhammad Khan, the first shah and founder of the Qajars, who established the center of his reign in Tehran and ruled Iran from 1779.

Oliver, 1802, in Algar, 1969, p. 44.

Imam Husayn is the Third Shi'ite Imam who was killed in Karbala in the month of Muharram. In this month the Shi'ites used to hold mourning ceremonies commemorating this tragedy.

Cf. Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785-1906*, p. 53.

Nezam-e jadid is translated both the 'New Army' (Algar), and the 'New Order' (Abrahamian). Although both translations are linguistically correct, the former is more accurate in the Iranian context.

Adamiyyat, *Amir Kabir va Iran*, in Charles Issawi (1971), *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914*, p. 294.

For further information about the opposition of Russia and England to Amir, see Fereydon Adamiyyat, *Amir Kabir va Iran*.

See, for example, Adamiyyat (1971) *Amir Kabir va Iran* (Amir Kabir and Iran); A. Eqbal (1951) *Tarikh-e mofassal-e Iran* (The Detailed History of Iran); Algar (1969) *State and Religion in Iran*.

Mulkara, 'On tactless behavior by the agents of the Régie', cited in Algar 1969 p. 209

Two traditional instruments for smoking tobacco in Iran.

Mulkara, cited in Algar, 1969 p. 215.

Also a letter printed in A. Kasravi (1951, pp. 17-18) which shows the characteristic and line of propaganda of the ulama in the movement.

It should be mentioned that Shaykh Fazl Allah Nori, because of his connections with some groups of guilds and merchants of the bazaar of