

RENAISSANCE IN IRAN
GENERAL

In early thirteenth/nineteenth century, Iran presented a gloomy picture of political and social decline. After the collapse of the Ṣafawid power (907/1501–1135/1722) it was never able to regain its old glory. The military achievements and political consolidation under Nādir Shāh (1149/1736–1160/1747) were short-lived, and the admirable efforts of Karīm Khān Zand (1164/1750–1193/1779), to restore the country's old prestige did not produce lasting results. A new dynasty was founded in 1211/1796 by Āqa Muḥammad Qājār, a great despot and a sadist of the worst type. It was under this new dynasty that Iran was reduced to a mere shadow of its past. The disaster came through internal disorder and foreign interference. During this period the Anglo-French rivalry in Europe and Napoleon's grandiose plans to conquer India in early thirteenth/nineteenth century dragged Iran into the orbit of international diplomacy. Again, the new Western influences awakened the people to their miserable plight and led them to the assertion of their basic rights.

An offensive and defensive alliance was concluded between Iran and France in 1222/1807, mainly by the efforts of General Gardanne, which put Great Britain on the alert. By this time her stakes in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent had become so vital that any threat to her interests there was bound to have repercussions in Europe. Consequently, Iran was wooed with equal vigour by both France and England and was, thus, dragged into international politics in sinister circumstances. The story of Iran had touched the history of Europe at many points right from Darius and Xerxes in the sixth century B.C. to brisk diplomatic contacts between European Powers and the Ṣafawids in the tenth/sixteenth century, but never before had Iran played the minor role. In the new set-up it had primarily to play the part of a victim. A political era was now initiated in which Iran had much to suffer and learn.

After the downfall of Napoleon, the Anglo-French rivalry in Iran was substituted by the expansionist policy of the Czarist Russia. This led to disastrous and prolonged military campaigns which ended in the treaties of Gulistān and Turkmanchay in 1228/1813 and 1244/1828 respectively. These compelled Iran to part with some of the richest territories in the north. Then started the sordid story of the Anglo-Russian intrigues and encroachments and a race by these powers for extorting economic and political concessions which at times deprived the country of nearly all its resources.¹

The tale of internal administration is no less sombre. The Shāh of Iran was absolute and his decisions were unquestionable. "The taxes were collected,

¹ L. P. Elwell-Sutton, *Modern Iran*, p. 60.

concessions were granted, and presents were offered, all for the benefit of the Shāh and his courtiers, whose extravagance kept Persia poor."² Power was abused in strange ways as Court decisions were sold and robbers were licensed.³ Public offices were monopolized by a host of princes—Fateḥ 'Alī Shāh (1212/1797–1250/1834) alone had one hundred and fifty-nine children⁴—who in the absence of a strong and efficient central government plundered the helpless peasants with impunity.

Out of the ashes of an almost ruined society, however, emerged a national movement the goal of which was to resurrect a new and independent Iran.

The Russian campaigns had proved the vulnerability of the Iranian army to the new scientific methods of warfare and awakened the Iranians to their woeful backwardness and to the compelling need of Western education. Amongst the outstanding patriots who quickly grasped the implications of the new situation were Prince 'Abbās Mirza, the eldest son of Fateḥ 'Alī Shāh, and Mirza Taqī Khān Amīr-i Kabīr or Amīr-i Nizām, the Prime Minister of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (1265/1848–1314/1896). Prince 'Abbās Mirza, whom Watson describes as "the noblest of the Qajar race,"⁵ not only 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 the 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. Mirza Taqī Khān Amīr-i Kabīr was an extraordinary statesman produced by 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 honour 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.⁶ Perhaps his greatest reform was the foundation of the *Dār al-Funūn* 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. The presence of foreigners facilitated the introduction of new teaching methods. The college looked after the education of the boys

² P. Sykes, *A History of Persia*, Vol. II, p. 382.

³ V. Sheean, *The New Persia*, p. 10.

⁴ R. G. Watson, *A History of Persia*, p. 269.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Some authors have paid great tributes to him: see E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. IV, p. 152; Robert Curzon, *Armenia*, p. 55; R. G. Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 264; Bahār, *Sabk Shīnāsī*, Vol. III, p. 401.

of upper classes and provided the Government with diplomats, administrators, and military officers. To begin with, it had one hundred students on its rolls and its curriculum included courses on infantry, cavalry, and artillery tactics, medicine, geometry, engineering, chemistry, pharmacy, geology, French, English, and Russian. Music and painting were added later. The year 1272/1855 witnessed the formation of the Ministry of Education. Forty-two students were sent to Europe in 1275/1858 in spite of the opposition of the *Shāh*, who had once remarked that an ideal Persian was one who did not know whether Brussels was a city or a cabbage.⁷ In 1289/1872, a school of languages known as *Maktab-i Mashiriyeh* was opened under the supervision of Muḥammad Ḥasan Khān I'timād al-Sultāneh. In addition to languages, it provided facilities for the teaching of different subjects in arts and sciences. A college was inaugurated in Tabriz in 1293/1876 with both Iranian and European teachers on its staff. This was followed by military colleges in Teheran and Isfahān in 1301/1883 and 1304/1886 respectively. The first school for girls was opened in Chālās near Kirmān in 1315/1897. The next year a society was founded for the express purpose of co-ordinating the working of various schools as well as for the unification of educational standards. A school of political science was founded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1317/1899. This was followed by a school of agriculture in 1318/1900. That is how Iran was slowly struggling ahead in the field of education.

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. In co-operation with les Filles de la Charite, the Lazarites established, during the next three quarters of a century, a chain of seventy-six schools for boys and girls in various towns. These schools played a substantial part in making the Government decide in 1319/1901 to recognize schools in the country run after the French model. The American Presbyterian Mission also established in Teheran 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 Isfahān in 1322/1904. Amongst the non-missionary foreign schools may be included those founded by the Alliance Francaise and the Alliance Israelite Universelle. The Germans established a technical college in Teheran, and the Russians opened a commercial school in 1330/1911. This was followed by more Russian schools at Tabriz and other towns in northern Iran.

Amongst the educative influences the role of the Press cannot be over-estimated. It admirably discharged the vital function of formulating public opinion in the country and finally bringing about a revolutionary change in people's attitude towards national problems. It accentuated and revitalized the patriotic feeling which had never died down in the country, thanks to the immense influence and unique popularity of the national epic, namely,

⁷ V. Sheean, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

Firdausi's *Shāhnāmeḥ*, as well as the lively sense of nearness which the nation has always had with its mighty past.

The first ever newspaper was published in Teheran in 1253/1837 by Mirza Šāleh Shirāzi⁸ who was, incidentally, a member of the first batch of students sent to England in 1225/1810. The next newspaper *Rūznāmeḥ-i Waqāyi'i Ittiḥāqiyah* appeared in 1267/1850. The second half of the thirteenth/nineteenth century witnessed remarkable activity in the field of journalism. The newspapers gradually became more outspoken in their comments. The despotic and corrupt government in the country could hardly tolerate independent criticism of its short-sighted policies, with the result that some patriots started independent Persian newspapers outside the country. Important amongst those which helped bring about a new political and social consciousness in Iran were the *Akhtar*, published in Istanbul in 1292/1875, the *Qānūn*, founded in London in 1307/1889,⁹ the *Hikmat*, printed in Cairo in 1310/1892, and the *Habl al-Matin*, started in Calcutta in 1311/1893. Their entry into Iran was prohibited from time to time and yet they were smuggled into the country enclosed in envelopes or books¹⁰ and commanded an ardent readership. By the turn of the century the tone of the Iranian newspapers had grown more bitter, even fierce. Some of these were suppressed. One of the editors of the *Šūr-i Isrāfil*, Mirza Jahāngir Khān Shirāzi, was put to death. The Press played a vital role in conducting the campaign for constitutional government. So much so that the jelly-graph publications known as *Shab Nāmeḥ* used to circulate from hand to hand in those days of official terrorism. Undoubtedly, the Iranian Press brought the dream of renaissance nearer realization.

Amongst the modernizing influences in Iran one cannot ignore the part played by the telegraph line. The Iranian Government, conscious of the role of telegraph in modern communications, built the first line in 1275/1858 between Teheran and Sultāniyeh. This was later extended to Tabriz and Julfa. 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. According to one of these signed, in 1287/1870, the Indo-European Telegraph Company completed a line between Teheran and London *via* Tabriz, Tiflis, Warsaw, and Berlin. By the end of

⁸ Bahār, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 344.

⁹ This paper was started by Mirza Malkom Khān who had been dismissed from the office of the Iranian Ambassador in London on account of his pronouncedly patriotic stand on the issue of tobacco concessions. His newspaper turned out to be the best contemporary Persian journal for its splendid expression. See E. G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, p. 19.

¹⁰ E. G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, p. 17.

the last century Iran had built up a system of telegraphic communications which connected most of her important towns.¹¹

In the later half of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh thrice voyaged extravagantly 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 words of William Hass, "Teheran became a meeting place for concession hunters of European nations. Many were adventurers and crooks. ..."¹² This created a sense of frustration not only in the people but also in the Shāh 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." Unfortunately, he did not. While concessions were being abused, public opinion began to ferment. In 1289/1872 he had to withdraw the concessions granted to Baron Julius de Reuter. But in 1308/1890 he granted a concession to one Major Talbot bargaining away the tobacco industry for fifty years throughout the country. This caused violent riots and country-wide agitation and led to a national movement against the despotic regime. The political unrest increased till it culminated in a revolution in 1324/1906.

Amongst those who now stepped in with a determination to fight against foreign influences was Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn, popularly known as Afghānī.¹³ A born revolutionary, he flashed about the Muslim world exhorting its people to rise against the despotic rule of their kings, and put their house in order against the inroads of Western imperialism. He had a dynamic personality. A peerless orator, he swept the masses off their feet with his impassioned speech. He cut across the frontiers of nations, and revolutions followed in his footsteps. Iran, Egypt, and Turkey felt the full impact of his personality. The Young Turk Movement of 1326/1908 owed most of its dynamism to the overwhelming influence of his teachings during his stay at Istanbul. The Egyptian national movement and to no less a degree the intellectual awakening represented by Shaikh Muḥammad 'Abduh were the direct outcomes of his

¹¹ According to G. N. Curzon, the influence of the telegraph on Iran has been enormous. "I am disposed to attribute to it," he says, "more than to any other cause or agency, the change that has passed over Persia during the last thirty years . . ." It is an exaggerated statement, yet it cannot be gainsaid that the telegraph played a substantial part in indirectly enlightening the Iranian mind.

¹² W. S. Haas, *Iran*, p. 35.

¹³ The Iranian writers like Mirza Luṭf Allah, the author of *Sharḥ-i Hāl-o Āthār-i Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn*, and Mirza Shifāt Allah, the editor of *Maqālāt-i Jamālīyyah*, claim Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn, who was born at Asadābād in 1254/1838, to be of Iranian origin. Mirza Luṭf Allah describes himself as the son of the Sayyid's sister.

creative genius. Most of the future leaders of the Iranian revolution in its early phase were inspired by him. Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn's eloquent sermons created amongst the Iranians a devotional attachment to him. He awakened them to a sense of dignity and freedom and to the dangers of internal despotism and foreign exploitation. Even when he was treacherously expelled from the country, people still continued to receive guidance from him from London where he had started a newspaper called *Diā' al-Khāfiqain* with the help of Mirza Malkom Khān. In his newspaper Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn wrote his historic letter to the Iranian 'ulamā'. In this letter he appealed to the divines to rise to a man to save the independence of their country. The effect was miraculous. The famous tobacco riots followed and shook royal absolutism. The real success of this revolutionary figure lay in winning over the 'ulamā' who wielded immense influence on the masses. The seeds of revolution were thus sown. The political discontent which found its first open expression in the tobacco riots of 1309/1891 culminated in the revolution of 1324/1906.

Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh was assassinated in 1313/1896 by Mirza Reza Kirmānī and was succeeded by Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shāh (1313/1896-1324/1906). At this time Iran presented a sordid picture of heartless exploitation by Western nations. The new Shāh had a paradoxical character. He was sympathetic to the peoples' political aspirations but he was weak and fickle-minded and played in the hands of corrupt and ambitious ministers who dissipated revenues and mortgaged national resources for foreign loans. The Russian influence had now reached its peak. Russia advanced loans to Iran, established a bank in Teheran as a rival institution to the British Imperial Bank, while marked increase was registered in Russian trade with the country. By 1324/1906 Iran owed seven and a half million pounds sterling to Russia, mainly spent on the Shāh's travels to Europe and on his corrupt ministers. In return for the Russian and British-Indian loans almost the entire customs revenues of the country had been mortgaged to the two powers. The financial chaos had been accompanied by administrative crisis which drove people to organize an anti-government movement in the country. A secret society was formed by the name of *Iṣlāh Ṭalabān*¹⁴ or "the reformists" under the leadership of Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'i, which rendered considerable service to the cause of freedom. Along with Ṭabāṭabā'i the other most prominent religious leader was Sayyid 'Abd Allah Bahbahānī.¹⁵ The orators like Malik al-Mutakallim and Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Wā'iẓ Isfahānī tried to awaken people by fiery speeches.¹⁶ At this time an originally minor incident took place which was to touch off a big national movement aiming at the constitutional government.

Encouraged by the policy of the Prime Minister 'Ain al-Daulah to terrorize

¹⁴ 'Abd Allah Rāzi, *Tārīkh-i Mujaṣṣal-i Irān*, p. 532.

¹⁵ Habib Allah Mukhtārī, *Tārīkh-i Bidārī-i Irān*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁶ Both of them lost their lives after the bombardment of the Parliament in 1326/1908; see 'Abd Allah Rāzi, *op. cit.*, p. 521.

the divines and merchants who were in the vanguard of the movement, the Governor of Teheran found a pretext to bastinado a well-known merchant. This provided the people with an excuse to intensify the political movement. The market was closed down and a stormy meeting was held in the Masjid-i Shāh. The same night the 'ulamā' decided to lodge the customary form of protest, that is, to take "bast" in the sanctuary of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīm in the outskirts of Teheran. The scheme to launch a revolutionary movement was almost complete. This incident hastened its implementation by three months. It was Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'i who had prevailed upon the 'ulamā' to start immediately the movement which, according to an earlier decision, was to be launched three months hence.¹⁷

About two thousand persons now took refuge in the above-mentioned sanctuary to condemn the high-handedness of the Governor. This move had the desired effect. The Shāh agreed to dismiss the Governor of Teheran as well as the Belgian head of the Customs¹⁸ Department and to institute the 'Adālat Khāneh aimed at restricting the powers of the government officials and the nobility. The promise was not kept and the purposes were not fulfilled and as a consequence the agitation gained momentum. Meanwhile, reports had been pouring into Teheran about the repressive measures adopted by the Governors of Fārs and Khurāsān and the consequent riot at Meshed and the closing down of the bazaar at Shirāz for one full month. One can have an idea of the financial crisis in the country and of the blatant disregard of human rights by the government officials from an incident revealed by Āqa Ṭabāṭabā'i in one of his public speeches. When, due to abject poverty, the people of a certain locality failed to pay wheat-tax the local officer forcibly rounded up three hundred girls and sold them off to Turkomans for thirty-six kilograms of wheat per head.¹⁹ Such inhuman conditions drove the people to desperation. It was the arrest of one of the divines, viz., Shaikh Muḥammad Wā'iz, and the consequent mass agitation and shooting by the army which led some 'ulama' and merchants to take refuge in the Jāmi' Masjid and to demand the dismissal of the Governor of Teheran. Not content with this form of protest, the 'ulamā' led a mass migration movement known as *hijrat-i kubra* to the holy city of Qūm, about a hundred miles south of the capital. This further gave rise to a movement amongst the divines, merchants, and representatives of other classes in the town to seek refuge in the British embassy, a move helped by the political tussle between England and Russia. The Russian influence had become paramount through the granting of the loans, the foundation of a Russian bank, and the winning over of the Prime Minister.

¹⁷ 'Abd Allah Rāzi, *op. cit.*, p. 509.

¹⁸ During the thirteenth/nineteenth century, when the capitalist financial ideas of the British and Russian imperialists dominated the history of Iran, certain small European nations also came forward to share the grab-scrabble, so that Belgium succeeded in taking over the management of the Customs in 1316/1898.

¹⁹ 'Abd Allah Rāzi, *op. cit.*, p. 512.

It suited the British Government to help patriots in dislodging the Premier and fighting the Russian influence. Hence the British embassy offered all facilities to the political refugees whose number had swelled to nearly fourteen thousand. They refused to leave until the constitution was granted. Their original stand for the dismissal of the local Governor now culminated in the demand for a constitutional government and the dismissal of the Prime Minister. The Shāh had to concede to the irresistible popular demand. The Governor had to go. The 'ulamā' made a triumphant return from Qūm and on Jamādi al-Thāni 14, 1324/August 5, 1906, the Shāh issued orders for the establishment of the National Parliament. The nation succeeded in attaining its goal after a relatively short struggle. Elections were soon held and the Shāh inaugurated the *Majlis* (Parliament) in Sha'bān/October of the same year. It did not take long to draw up and ratify the constitution. Thus, the Iranians won the unique distinction of becoming the first nation in the East to attain the parliamentary form of government.²⁰ A nation which had been devoted for about two thousand and five hundred years to the theory of the divine right of kings, under the impact of the new democratic urge, threw away the yoke of monarchic absolutism. The process, however, was not so smooth as it promised to be at first. Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shāh died within five months of the granting of the constitution and his successor Muḥammad 'Ali Shāh, himself an ambitious despot, was persuaded by the Russians to overthrow the constitution. He bombed the Parliament building in 1326/1908 and set upon a policy of repression. But the nationalists rose in revolt in Ādharbaijān and Isfahān, and ultimately the Bakhtiārī tribes from Isfahān marched in Teheran under the leadership of Sardār-i As'ad. This victory in Jamādi al-Thāni 1327/July 1909 sealed the fate of Muḥammad 'Ali Shāh who had to abdicate in favour of his twelve-year old son Aḥmad Shāh, destined to be the last of the Qājārs, while he himself took refuge at Odessa in Russia. He struggled to stage a come-back in 1329/1911, but failed.

Muḥammad 'Ali Shāh's abdication brought an end to what is known as *Istibdād-i Ṣaghīr* or the smaller tyranny in Iranian history. But Iran was not destined to reap the benefits of constitutional freedom for many years. As early as 1325/1907 it had been divided into spheres of influence by the Russian and British Governments under an agreement which was the direct result of the Triple Entente concluded in Europe on the one hand and of the growing confidence of Iranians in an independent, democratic form of government on the other. The Parliament could not work with freedom, as was amply proved by the resignation in 1329/1911 of Morgan Shuster, the American financial adviser, who had been engaged by the Iranian Government to reorganize the finances of the country. The riots which followed and the demonstration of three hundred women in front of the Parliament building in which they brandished revolvers out of their veils and threatened to kill

²⁰ E. Groseclose, *Introduction to Iran*, p. 61.

their husbands and sons if they yielded to pressure and compromised with the national honour,²¹ showed that Iran was now pulsating with a new spirit and a new urge for freedom. The First World War which came soon after, however, stifled the new aspirations. Iran was overwhelmed by the sweep of international events. It was occupied by the Russians in the north and the British in the south. Ādharbaijān had to suffer the havoc of war on a large scale.²²

After the October Revolution of 1917/1336, however, the Russian policy completely changed. The Russian forces withdrew from Iran and the new government gave up all territorial claims and all economic concessions except fishery rights in the Caspian Sea. The vacuum created by the departure of the Russian troops was immediately filled up by the British army. In 1338/1919 the British concluded an agreement with the Iranian Government headed by Wuthūq al-Dauleh, which virtually meant the complete political and economic domination of Iran by Great Britain. The Parliament, however, refused to ratify the agreement and be a party to surrendering the sovereign rights of the nation. This shows that the national will for survival had triumphed even in the worst hour of political crisis. The proposed agreement aroused strong feeling in foreign countries and even amongst the British people, especially in view of the scandalous circumstances in which it had been negotiated.²³ The world opinion stirred up against the British deal, the withdrawal of the Russian forces, the offer to Iran of a pact of friendship by the Soviet Government, and the lack of enthusiasm amongst the war-weary British people to undertake new imperialistic ventures—all contributed to the cause of Iranian freedom. The most determining factor in the situation was the people themselves who jealously safeguarded the spirit of freedom even in their darkest hour of trial—another evidence of the historical truth that Iran has always survived the greatest political crises, owing to the virile national spirit of the people which never completely died down and which had by now found a symbol, however weak, in the resistance put up by the Iranian Parliament.

It was at this stage that Reza Khān, a colonel in the Cossak Brigade,²⁴ appeared on the scene. In collaboration with Sayyid Diā' al-Dīn Ṭabāṭabā'i, editor of the Teheran newspaper *Ra'd*, Reza Khān, staged a *coup d'état* on

²¹ 'Abd Allah Rāzi, *op. cit.*, p. 532.

²² "The sovereignty of Iran was violated with less compunction than that of Belgium, and with probably greater loss of life and property and greater disorganization of society" (E. Groseclose, *op. cit.*, p. 72).

²³ "To bring the agreement to a conclusion the British had to resort to bribery on a large scale. Three cabinet members, one of them the Prime Minister, were paid handsomely" (W. S. Haas, *op. cit.*, p. 140). "The British negotiators (Sir Percy Cox and Lord Curzon, presumably) . . . paid 750,000 *tomans* to the three Persian statesmen" (V. Shecan, *op. cit.*, p. 23).

²⁴ "It had been created in 1296/1878 as a brigade. Russian officers traditionally held key positions in this unit, and during the period of Russian political ascendancy the brigade served as an additional safeguard to Russian interests in Iran" (George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs*, p. 157).

April 21, 1921. He arrested members of the Cabinet and formed a new Government of which Sayyid Diā' al-Dīn was selected the Prime Minister. Reza Khān himself took over as the Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief of the army. Five days later, the Parliament rejected the Anglo-Persian Agreement which it had so long resisted. To provide an element of dramatic surprise the new Iranian Government signed on the same day a pact of friendship with Soviet Russia, by which the Soviet Government revoked all the concessions which had been granted earlier to the Czarist Government. "All debts were cancelled and the Russian bank, railways, roads, and posts were handed back to Iran; Russian rights under the capitulations were also abolished."²⁵ After this pact with the Russians the Iranian Government became bold. Now that it had rejected the agreement it ordered the British officers and advisers out of the country.

In the new set-up the British troops which had occupied parts of the country so long had to withdraw. This withdrawal was effected in stages so that the last outpost in the south-eastern desert was evacuated in 1343/1924. Soon after, the last of the Soviet troops, still stationed in Gilān, also left the country. For the first time in about twenty years the Iranian soil was now free from the presence of foreign troops.

A new wave of national resurgence now swept the whole country, which, although still licking the wounds of the many inglorious years of misery and humiliation, yet aspired to conquer hunger, disease, governmental inefficiency, and the large-scale devastation wrought by World War I. It must be repeated that even in their darkest hour of frustration the people of Iran never abandoned the democratic ideals of the revolution of 1324/1906, and even in the face of the heaviest odds, and perhaps because of these, the national spirit continued to gather force and momentum.

Reza Khān was the first Asian dictator of the post-war world. As the Commander-in-Chief of the army and the Minister of War, he became the virtual ruler of the country. He was born in 1296/1878 at Alasht in Sawād Kūh in the Caspian province of Māzandarān. He inherited the military profession from his father, Major 'Abbās 'Alī Khān, and joined in 1318/1900 the Cossak Brigade in which he served with distinction and attracted the attention of some of the British officers who had replaced the Russians after the October Revolution. To be able to exercise greater independence in his new position, he got certain sources of revenue transferred from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of War. Sayyid Diā' al-Dīn, who was a known Anglophile, soon came to realize who the real power in the Cabinet was and had to go within a hundred days of his installation as the first Prime Minister after the coup. He was followed by a number of premiers, all overshadowed by the dominant and fierce personality of Reza Khān, who eventually stepped into the office of the Prime Minister in 1342/1923. Shortly afterwards Ahmad Shāh, who

²⁵ *Modern Iran*, p. 69.

was destined to be the last Qājār ruler, left for France never to come back to his country.

Immediately after the coup, Reza Khān set out to re-establish law and order with an iron hand and to unify the country under a strong central government. He first proceeded against Mirza Kūchik Khān, who had established an independent republic in Gilān, and defeated him in 1340/1921. In 1342/1923 he liquidated the power of the Kurd leader Ismā'il Āqa Simitqo, who was planning to establish himself in Ādharbaijān and had become dangerously strong for the central government. Next, he turned his attention to Shaikh Khaza'l of Mohammereh, who posed the greatest threat in the oil-rich region of the south-west. Very soon he was able to bring the Shaikh into complete submission. Different turbulent tribes including the Bakhtiāris and the Lurs were also pacified by 1344/1925.

These successful military campaigns and the consequent establishment of law and order in the strife-torn country won the Sardār-i Sipāh, as Reza Khān was known in those days, immense popularity, which was further enhanced by the ability he showed in unifying and reorganizing the army. He absorbed the South Persia Rifles, a force raised by the British during World War I, and the *gendarmierie* created by Morgan Shuster into the Cossak Brigade and formed a compact national army. Adequate resources were diverted to re-equip and modernize it.

Reza Khān, the dictator, was now faced with the question of the future constitution. In spite of 2,500 years of its monarchic traditions, the Iranian nation, or at least a section of it, was now seriously advocating the establishment of a republic. After World War I the ideas of political democracy swept the whole world and the Iranians who had won constitutional government much earlier were now thrilled at the prospect of a republican form of government. Ahmad Shāh had made an exit. The example of Turkey, where the Caliphate had been abolished in 1343/1924, gave great impetus to this idea. But at this moment opposition came from the most unexpected quarters. The Iranian divines who had played a highly important role in the constitutional struggle were alarmed at the extinction of the religious authority of the 'ulamā' in Turkey. The apprehension that in a republic they would fare no better led them to oppose the new demand. In April 1924, Reza Khān forbade any discussion on the republican form of government.²⁶ In February 1925, he was officially given dictatorial powers; on October 31, Ahmad Shāh was deposed and on December 12 Reza Shāh was chosen the Shāh of Iran by a majority vote in the Parliament. On April 25, 1926, the coronation of the new Shāh took place amidst scenes of pomp and festivity. He now became the founder of the new royal dynasty of the Pahlawis.

²⁶ E. Groseclose, *op. cit.*, p. 124. In the words of William S. Haas, "It is at least doubtful whether Reza Khan was ever attracted to republicanism, despite the example of Mustafa Kemal. Reza's ambition and idea of power fitted better with a monarchy" (*Iran*, p. 142).

The word "Pahlawi" has great historical associations. It is not only the name of the language which was spoken in western Iran during the Sāsānian period, as has been pointed out by so many writers, but it is also the name of the brave tribe known as the Parthians,²⁷ long misunderstood by the Iranians as a foreign element but actually being of the purest Iranian stock. The Parthians had driven out Greeks from Iran in 250 B.C. and during their long rule of nearly five hundred years (250 B.C.-227 A.D.) they had vanquished many a foe on the field of battle. The word "Pahlawi" was, thus, bound to conjure up in Reza Shāh's mind the visions of a glorious past from which he could derive boundless inspiration like his countrymen. The past became a symbol of power and glory which stirred up the national spirit, as it had never done before. This spirit now touched new heights. Indeed, the national spirit was exhibited in many countries after World War I with exaggerated enthusiasm. Iran was no exception. A process of revivalism was set in motion which enveloped the entire national life.

Love of the old found expression in the minute study of ancient Iranian languages and literature in a desperate and even futile attempt to purify the Persian language of foreign influences and in an effort to harmonize in the stately buildings in Teheran the old Achaemenian architectural designs found in the buildings of Persepolis and Susa with the latest motifs in German architecture. The Government took keen interest in archaeological excavations and built a huge museum in the capital to project the glory that was Iran. Even the word "Persia" long in vogue in the whole world was officially changed for "Iran", the old name of the country. This exuberant love of the past was also exhibited in the commemoration of anniversaries of great literary figures and thinkers. Thus the thousandth anniversary of Firdausi's birth was celebrated officially on a lavish scale in 1353/1934 to which Orientalists were invited from all over the world. This tradition has been carried into the regime of the present Shāh and the memory of the philosophers ibn Sina and Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī and the poet Rūdaki has been similarly honoured in recent years. A society known as the "Anjuman-i Āthār-i Milli"²⁸ was formed in 1345/1926 to look after the mausoleums of eminent writers, poets, and philosophers. It has so far repaired or reconstructed the mausoleums of Firdausi, ibn Sina, Khayyām, and a few others. A tribute has also been paid to poets and scholars by associating the broad modern avenues of Teheran with some of the immortal names in Persian literature. Thus, we come across Hāfiz Avenue, Sa'di Avenue, Firdausi Avenue, etc., which happen to be amongst the finest in the city.

While the anxiety of the new regime to attain material progress was reflected in the improvement of communications by building a network of roads to

²⁷ It derives its root from the word "Parthawa" which evolved itself into various forms, to wit, *Parhawa*, *Palhawa*, *Palhaw* and *Pahlaw*. Apart from *Pahlawi*, the word *Pahlawan* is also derived from *Pahlaw* and means brave and heroic like the members of the *Pahlaw* (Parthian) tribe.

²⁸ *Rāhnumā-i Irān*, pp. 85-87.

link all important towns with Teheran and by constructing a spectacular railway line which connected the Caspian Sea with the Persian Gulf in 1356/1937 at a cost of £30,000,000, and while it implemented many industrial and financial projects, it was never forgetful of the all-important question of education. Extensive reforms were carried out in this field. The number of elementary and secondary schools was still very limited. After the revolution in 1324/1906, an effort was made to reorganize the educational system of the country. For the first time interest was taken by the Government in women's education. To foster an independent national outlook in children, the employment of foreign teachers was forbidden in elementary schools. The progress, however, was still very slow. It was left to Reza Shāh's Government to make a fundamental departure from the old system both in its organization and scope. In 1340/1921 there were only two colleges in Teheran, both run by foreign missions. Reza Shāh set out to make amends for the deficiencies of the past, first by unifying the sporadic activities into a national system of education and then by gradually expanding its scope. Modern educational methods were adopted. Elementary education was made free and compulsory. Separate secondary schools for boys and girls were established. The buildings of these schools in Teheran are very impressive and symbolic of the new spirit of progress and development. Rightly enough, some of these schools have been named after great Persian poets. Secondary education is not compulsory in the country but tuition fees are low. The secondary school certificate is treated as equal to matriculation by the German, French, and some British and American universities.²⁹ These schools generally branch off into liberal arts and sciences after three years. There is a number of technical, vocational, industrial, agricultural, medical, and other schools which prepare students for higher university education as well as for specific occupations. To give an idea of progress in the spread of education it would suffice to say that the number of elementary and secondary schools, which at the end of World War I was nearly three hundred, was raised to five thousand in the next decade and a half. Ever since it has made rapid strides forward. In 1376/1957, there were 7,301 elementary and 842 secondary schools in the country with 910,000 and 163,000 students respectively.³⁰ The stress now is on village schools and on manual and technical training.³¹

A special Act was passed by the Parliament in 1347/1928 according to which one hundred students were sent to Europe annually for higher studies by the Ministry of Education at State expense. This was particularly welcome as no university existed in the country. Besides, the Ministries of War, Posts and Telegraphs, and the Departments of Agriculture, Justice, Finance, and Industries also sent abroad a number of students to ensure the supply of

²⁹ *Modern Iran*, p. 136.

³⁰ D. N. Wilber, *Iran, Past and Present*, p. 204.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

trained personnel. To have an idea of expansion in higher education, it may be noted that the number of students studying abroad in 1376/1957 was about four thousand.³²

During the new regime education was practically brought under State control. After 1351/1932 no foreign school was permitted to admit students of Iranian nationality. In 1360/1941 the Government took over all foreign schools.

The Teheran University Act was passed on May 3, 1934. The foundation-stone of the University campus was laid by the Shāh on February 5, 1935. Soon elegant and spacious buildings began to rise with Mount Alburz in the background. The University had five faculties to begin with, namely, Arts, Science, Law, Medicine, and Engineering. The faculties of Fine Arts and Divinity were added afterwards. The campus of Teheran University enjoys a site of great natural beauty. Although new universities have been founded at Tabriz, Isfahān, Shirāz, and Meshed during recent years, they are as yet in their infancy. Teheran University has come to enjoy a unique position in the intellectual life of the country. It can now accommodate hundreds of students who would otherwise go to Western universities for higher studies. It runs post-graduate classes in Persian literature and affords facilities for the doctor's degree. The names of most of the eminent Iranian scholars are associated with the University academic staff. The literary output of the academic staff is by no means inconsiderable. Persian being the medium of instruction, the task of rendering important works of arts and sciences from Western languages into Persian engaged immediate attention. Several hundred books have been translated or originally written by the University professors. In order to popularize the Persian language and literature and to familiarize the foreign students of Persian with the latest trends in the language, the University runs a special class for scholars from foreign countries.

Technical education comes within the purview of the Ministry of Industries, which maintains a college for mining, metallurgy, chemistry, etc. Besides, there is a chain of art and craft schools where pure and utilitarian arts are taught including those traditionally associated with Iran like miniature painting, book illumination, enamel-work, and carpet-making. Above these there is the Teheran College of Arts. Other Ministries also run their own colleges. The Ministry of Agriculture has an agricultural college at Karaj and a college of animal husbandry in Teheran; the Ministry of Education administers the Academy of Music. Some other Ministries like those of Posts and Telegraphs, Transport, and the Interior also have colleges to meet their own requirements. Scientific education is encouraged. Library facilities have been extended throughout the country. The Parliament Library and the National Library enjoy a pride of place in this rather elaborate network.

There is co-education in elementary schools and at the university stage. The doors of all the colleges have been flung open to girl students and today

³² *Ibid.*, p. 205.

there is a large number of girls studying in various colleges, especially in the departments of Medicine and Fine Arts.

As the curricula of educational institutions would suggest, the main object of Iranian education is to produce good citizens imbued with a profound sense of patriotism. All possible means are explored to strengthen the national spirit and the national outlook.

Adult education is not ignored. In a country where the overwhelming majority of people is illiterate, the importance of adult education cannot be over-emphasized. In 1355/1936, steps were taken to establish adult education centres in the country. The response was so spontaneous that within two months seven hundred and fifty centres were opened with more than fifty-six thousand adults on rolls.³³ The demand increased so rapidly that the Ministry of Education had to allocate increasingly large sums for adult education every year.

With all the admirable progress made in the field of education one would say that in view of the population and vast area of the country much work still remains to be done to justify the possibility of a scientific and technical revolution which is the dream of every educated citizen.

In the thirteenth/nineteenth century few facilities existed for the maintenance and improvement of public health. The British General Mission Board and the American Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, were running hospitals in a few cities by the middle of the century. The earliest to be built by the Iranian Government, however, dates back to 1294/1877. Conscious of the deplorable lack of medical facilities in the country, the new regime devoted full attention to this vital problem so that now every big town has a well-equipped hospital. There are several large hospitals each with the capacity of five hundred beds. In addition to this, there is a large number of dispensaries throughout the country. Apart from the spacious and magnificent medical college in Teheran there is a number of medical institutions in the country. There is no prejudice against nursing, and various colleges exist in Teheran for the training of nurses. Teheran has all kinds of medical specialists, while there are numerous clinics run by Iranian doctors who have qualified from abroad or from the University of Teheran.

One of the fundamental changes in the Iranian society in recent history has been the emancipation of women, who had for long been deprived of their legitimate legal and social rights accorded to them by Islam. The late *Shāh*, inspired by the example set by *Muṣṭafa Kemāl*, whom he looked upon as his model and whom he visited in 1353/1934, introduced far-reaching social changes. The *Shāh* had been gradually encouraging the fair sex to come out and discard the veil. By 1354/1935 a favourable atmosphere had been created for a big change. On January 8, 1936, the *Shāh* provided a dramatic touch to his policy of emancipating women when, accompanied by the Queen and his

two grown-up daughters, all the three unveiled, he appeared in the Teachers' Training School in Teheran to present diplomas for the year. This was a signal for the abolition of the veil. In his speech the *Shāh* advised the women of Iran to serve their country with talent and ability. He could not imagine, he said, that one-half of the country's working power should be idle. From this day women assumed a new role in society. Legislation had already come to their help. Although *muta'h* (temporary marriage) and polygamy were still in vogue, woman was given the right to sue for divorce if the husband married without her consent, or if he had concealed the fact of an earlier marriage. Women now came out to work as typists, clerks, and secretaries in banks and commercial firms and, with the further progress in education, also as doctors, artists, lawyers, and even pilots. After the abdication of Reza *Shāh* in 1360/1941 the force of law behind the abolition of veil was gone, with the result that the majority of women who had not yet got accustomed to the new change went back to *chādūr* (veil).³⁴ Iranian women still lack some other fundamental rights like those of suffrage and appointments to high offices, yet the movement to win the rights enjoyed by their sisters in some other Islamic countries, say Pakistan, exists in the country and is gradually gaining force.

The impact of the West and the far-reaching changes in the political and social life of the country were bound to reflect themselves in modern Persian literature. Till the middle of the thirteenth/nineteenth century poets and writers pursued old themes without showing any awareness of the new change. The later half of the century was marked by great social and political upheavals. The Press created a new political and social consciousness amongst the people. By the end of the century, the Persian poets and writers had become increasingly conscious of their role in society. They gave expression to these new feelings in their works. Some poets, *Kamālī* being foremost amongst them, advocated the cause of pan-Islamism. The chief interest of the poets, however, lay in the future of their own country and in its suffering masses, and its despotic masters.

They put new vigour into the constitutional movement. We find a rare phenomenon of patriotic poetry in the early fourteenth/twentieth century. It reflected the common urge of the people and was imbued with an unparalleled emotional sincerity. The changing fortunes of Iran's political history continued to find an echo in the contemporary literature, and the poets violently reacted to the inroads of Western imperialism during World War I and the immediate post-war years. It was, however, after long years of suffering that stability and freedom of the country were restored under Reza *Shāh*. The literature of this period has a tinge of roseate optimism and the poet and the writer seem to have regained the lost self-confidence. With interest in the reconstruction of the new society, they responded to the new social urges. They advocated the cause of education, women's rights, political

³³ 'Abd Allah Rāzi, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

³⁴ A veil or mantle used by Iranian women to cover their body.

stability, reassertion of the national spirit, and revival of the ancient glory of the country. There was a passionate desire to purify the Iranian society of its weaknesses and vices and to usher in an era of social justice and economic prosperity. Literature which till then was looked upon as a privilege of the few became a vehicle for the dissemination of social and moral values amongst the people at large. It showed a marked trend towards simplicity of style and expression to attain the widest appeal. The writers conveyed new aims and ideals through fiction and drama, and though Persian literature had no traditions in novel and short story in the modern sense, yet the writers made great efforts to catch up with Western literature.

The new Iranian writers and scholars have made rapid progress in the production of original literary works. Yet the output of translations far exceeds creative writing. As the Iranians, like many other peoples in the East, made a late start after a long time of intellectual sloth and social degeneration, it was but natural for them to learn through translations the phenomenal advances which the West had made both in the field of arts and humanities and in natural sciences and technology. In order to understand Western thought the knowledge of one of the European languages was considered to be indispensable. Hence the Iranian schools made it compulsory for students to learn English, French, or German. Since the medium of instruction in Iranian schools and universities is Persian, it is imperative to write in and translate monumental works of arts and sciences into Persian. That is why translation of books has achieved singular importance in Iran.

The work of translation started in the later half of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, and it had proceeded apace till it gained further impetus after 1340/1921. To begin with, this venture started in a rather haphazard manner and translations were rendered indiscriminately. Now, the University of Teheran is mainly responsible for the translation of works of classical importance. On the individual level, however, this work continues to be purely a matter of personal taste. Fiction and books of popular interest command the first position. Another organization called the Institute for Translation and Publication established under the Crown patronage in 1375/1955³⁵ has been accelerating the process of translation with special attention to the quality and importance of the books to be translated. The Institute specializes in the translation of Western classics.

As a result of these attempts hundreds of European books have been rendered into Persian. These books have been translated mainly from French which was, till the end of the last war, the second language of the country. This deep interest in the work of translation is a sign of sincere efforts to render into Persian what is regarded as valuable and fascinating in Western thought. There is a genuine desire to learn and derive benefit, and a stage is bound to come when creative approach to problems will take the place of

translation. Besides those who are deeply interested in Western learning, some scholars have been trying to recapture the philosophical thought of their forefathers. The most important name in this second category is that of Mulla Hādi Sabziwāri an account of whose philosophy is given in the next chapter.

During the last half century serious attention has been paid to problems of research in the literary field. The Iranians, till recently, were dependent on research carried out in the West to understand the currents and cross-currents of their own literary history. That stage of dependence is happily over. Numerous scholars have made distinct contributions in the field of research. Unpublished classical works have been and are being edited and published at a very fast rate. If for nothing else, the modern Iranian scholarship should command respect for the interest it has evinced in the republication of numerous unpublished works of literature, some of them after minute research.

New trends in literature have synchronized with a new approach in other Fine Arts like painting and architecture. In the latter, as mentioned earlier, the modern architectural trends have been harmonized with the ancient designs found in the ruins of palaces at Persepolis and Susa. The classical traditions of miniature painting have been renewed with skill and imagination, while there is a visible attempt to understand or assimilate new movements in painting the world over.

There are three museums in Teheran which reflect the cavalcade of Iranian history and culture. These include the archaeological and ethnographical museums and the Gulistān Palace Museum. The last contains a treasure of crown jewels and rare specimens of art.

Various arts and crafts like miniature painting, enamel and inlay work, carpet-weaving and designing, tile-work, mosaic, and pottery are not only taught in the College of Arts, and industrial and arts schools but have also become widely popular in the country.

The new movement has not yet spent itself. There is much to be planned and done. The progress in modern Iranian society still lacks harmony and proportion. Modernization in the early twenties came abruptly and violently, and behind it was the force of dictatorship. The country was not fully prepared for the desired change. The edifice of the traditional Iranian society crumbled as a new way of life was grafted on it. Consequently, the progress made was rather uneven and lopsided. The policy of modernization maintained itself after World War II, but since the reform movement had come like a storm and tried to destroy all that was old without creating a harmony and balance between the traditional and the modern, it could not achieve its objective fully and set a chain of reactions instead. In fact, creative activity alone can generate and sustain an original cultural movement. The people of Iran have given repeated proofs of the remarkable assimilation of new and alien movements and of the institution of new sciences and philosophy. The present

³⁵ Naficy, *A General Survey of the Existing Situation in Persian Literature*, p. 2.

conflict between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, is bound to solve itself as the people of Iran recover from the first great impact of Western civilization. They have learnt through trial and error, and the time is not far when they will have resolved all their present conflicts, assimilated the best of Western thought, and upheld their own cultural and national individuality as a people of great gifts.

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