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Alinejad, M.

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Chapter Six

From the Crisis of Modernisation to a Religious Revolution

Introduction

In Iran of the early twentieth century, the imposing force of modernity gave rise to new requirements for survival as a political community. These requirements generated the desire and hope for a revolution that would bring Iran as a dignified political community into the modern world. Such a revolution would protect the indigenous cultural values while trying to overcome the forces that feared any significant change as a threat to traditions. The constitutional movement of 1905-1911 could be conceived as the first major attempt at revolutionary transformation of Iran into a modern nation-State. It reflected both, the desire for modern political and economic advancement and the hope for the protection of the indigenous culture. With the failure of the constitutional movement in achieving its goals, the pursuit of political, economic and cultural aspirations continued in new forms.

Throughout the twentieth century, the convergence of three fundamental needs contributed to the making of an environment favourable to a religious revolution, an environment that peaked in the 1960s and 1970s. The first of these needs was the need for a distinct collective identity, which was a natural consequence of the increasing interaction of Iran with the Western modernity. The need for such an identity entailed the desire for recognition by others as a valuable and dignified order of being; particularly, by those whose recognition was worthy of having. This was an urgent need due to the fact that Iran had become a subsidiary of the capitalist world economy, and needed to assert itself as a modern nation-State against the advanced capitalist States of the West.

The second need was that of Shi'ism as the paramount religious belief of Iranians to play a deserving part in the assertion of this new identity. The solidification of the Usuli Shi'ism as a rationally coherent and well-entrenched religious establishment, which had risen to the status of a State religion, created an impetus for Shi'ism to become the cornerstone of a new political culture that would sustain this new identity structure. This political culture was in turn to be shaped around the political ideology of a modern religious nationalism on the basis of new interpretations of the Shi'i traditions.

The third need was the need for hope in a precarious global situation for success in the struggle for recognition. The activation since around the 1960s and 1970s of messianic aspirations and religious zeal, particularly in the large urban centres, was a motivational force that mobilised enough energy and power for the creation of a religious revolutionary ideology and a utopian hope for an alternative, better world. The convergence of these needs came about in a specific historical conjuncture, and created a social movement with effective organisation, strong leadership and devoted followers, which was a recipe for a successful political revolution.

The struggle for the fulfilment of these needs contributed to the formation of a social consciousness or a perception of reality, which was shared by a large portion of the population. It led to the formation of a collective imaginary and a political discourse, which inspired revolutionary action against the Pahlavi regime. It created such intense emotions that – when directed by a strong leadership – were capable of transforming the resentments of certain clerical, intellectual and economic groups.
with Western influence into an all-encompassing mass movement of huge proportions. The perception was that the normative disorder, social dislocation, and economic malaise were caused by the abandonment of pure Islam, the penetration of Western values into the society, and the arrogance of the infidels. The activation of the Islamic collective *imaginary* meant that only through a religious revival and restoration of the “pure Muhammadan Islam (Eslam-e nab-e Muhammadi)” could Iran resume its rightful position in the world.

In time, the age-old Shi’i perception that Islam was subverted shortly after the death of the Prophet from its original course by the *monafeqin* (hypocrites) was reinvigorated and innovated to become meaningful in the context of modern socio-economic and socio-political developments. The ruling Islamic States and the native religious groups, which would not submit to the revolutionary Islamic discourse, were seen as present-day *monafeqin* in Islamic guise. They were thus accused of being the allies of the anti-Islamic forces of the West and the East (the United States and the Soviet Union) which were about to destroy Islam in its entirety.

In this chapter, I shall continue to trace the making of the Islamic revolutionary ideology in the context of the significant political, economic and religious developments, which followed the Constitutional Revolution, and continued unabated until the emergence of the Islamic revolutionary power in Iran in 1979. Of particular significance was the rise of the modern Pahlavi State in the 1920s, which despite its modernising nature created the ground for the development of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution.

**The Dying Days of the Constitutional Government**

In 1911, with the heightening of the “Shuster affair” the constitutional government collapsed. Desperate to organise its finances and in order to find an alternative to Iran’s growing political and economic dependence on Russia and Britain, the *Majlis* had approved the employment of an American team headed by Morgan Shuster as financial advisor to the government. Backed by the radical elements in the *Majlis*, Shuster set up an armed force to collect taxes. Shuster’s rigorous measures in tax collection, and his emphasis on curbing “bogus expenditures”, provided financial succour for the constitutional campaigns to fend off the counter-revolution, and could further Iran’s national interests by strengthening the constitutional government were it not aborted by domestic and foreign intervention. As such, it posed a political quandary for the government.

Clearly, building a strong central government with genuine desire to end the political and economic stagnation, which had pervaded the Iranian State and society, required maximum utilisation of the meagre financial resources, which existed at the time. Given that the government still had to finance the unproductive indulgence of the royal court and the traditional elite, and given that it had to pay large sums to the tribal leaders ostensibly to maintain their gunmen, the government had to be the first to cut its expenditures. The government also had to break the pattern of the old order, which could be summed up in terms of a brutal exploitative relationship between the royal

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1 *Monafeqin* was originally referred to the *Kharijites* as well as the *Umayyad* and *Abbasid* Caliphates, which were believed to have distorted Islam in the name of Islam.

2 The widespread corruption among modern Iranian Statesmen of the post-constitutional period, which was based on the connection of these officials to foreign powers (particularly Britain and Russia), had created a deep mistrust and suspicion of those who could be shown to have foreign connections. Since the 1950s, affiliation with the United States and the Soviet Union became a sign of the lack of political credibility.
court, the traditional elite and the tribal leaders on the one hand, and the vast majority of
the population on the other. But this was a particularly difficult task because the royal
court, the traditional elite and the tribal leaders had joined the revolution.

The quandary that belied the constitutional efforts to create a modern State and a
civil society originated from its inability to overcome the deep-rooted social inequity
that had divided the society into a tiny minority of wealthy and powerful, and a
desperate and destitute majority. The problem was that the opulent courtiers, princes,
landowners, tribal khans and local governors were determined to use the semblance of
constitutionalism to safeguard their own privileges. Thus the declining social forces of
the past tried to keep the rising forces of the future at bay, while giving lip service to the
Constitution and the Parliament. But the besieged religious establishment, the emerging
national bourgeoisie, the growing working class and the vast population of the poor
peasants were also determined to defy the old power relations. The constitutional
government was caught between these opposing forces.

If the constitutional government were to fulfil its ideals and live up to its image
as a national State, it had to pose as the microcosmic representation of the nation, and
hence represent the will of the majority of the people, who were suffering under
political oppression and economic exploitation. Therefore, the financial reforms of the
constitutional government were destined to antagonise the vested interests of the old
elite, who wished to maintain the status quo.

The problems of the constitutional government were not only domestic. A
tighter control of the national government on Iran's resources, if realised, would run
sharply against the overriding interests of the imperialist powers in Iran. And here, the
constitutional government was to receive the strongest blow. As it happened, in the last
months of 1911, the Russian troops occupied northern Iran and demanded Shuster's
dismissal. The Majlis rejected this demand and Shuster refused to resign.¹ But some
tribal leaders, resentful of the attempts of the constitutional government to curb their
privileges and revenues, staged a coup d'état, which naturally enjoyed the support of
the old elite. The Majlis was dissolved in December 1911, and Shuster was dismissed.²
As a result, the constitutional reforms together with the effort to build a strong national
State came to a halt.

As the Majlis dissolved, the ardent proponents of constitutionalism came under
pressure and many went into exile. The central government came under the control of
tribal chieftains with a nominal Qajar monarch, the young Ahmad Shah, at its head.
Meanwhile, the northern and southern parts of Iran came under virtual occupation by
the Russian and British forces. As if the disasters were not enough, "World War I
brought new problems and devastation to Iran."³ Despite its declared neutrality, Iran
was used as a battlefield for the powers at war. Central authority declined; and local
landowners and tribal chieftains reasserted their independence and rebuilt their power.
Also a severe famine broke out in 1918-19, which is estimated to have killed as much as
one quarter of the population in the north.⁴

Iran's international relations, effectively under British and Russian control since
the nineteenth century, were radically altered after World War I with the victory of the
Russian Revolution and the removal of Tsarist imperialism and the disposition of
Britain toward the creation of a strong State in Iran.⁵ Yahya Dawlatabadi attributed the

¹ Yapp. M. E. 1977, p. 15
² McDaniel, R. The Shuster Mission and the Persian Constitutional Revolution, Biblioteca Islamic, Minneapolis, 1974, pp. 197-198
³ Keddie, N.R. 1982, pp. 79-80
⁴ Balfour, J. M. Recent Happenings in Persia, Blackwood, London, 1922, p. 23
⁵ Arjomand, S. A. 1988, p. 59
British interest in the formation of a strong government in Iran to the goals of preventing "the penetration of the Bolshevik creed." indeed, the Russian revolution inspired anti-government rebellions in the provinces neighbouring Russia, particularly in Gilan, Mazandaran and Azarbaijan. It also supported the agitation of Iranian communists for a revolution on the Bolshevik model. It was around the same time that an Azarbaijani activist, named Heidar Amughlu, founded the Communist Party of Iran.

The coincidence of developments in Russia and Iran, both undergoing similar transformations toward the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was not accidental. The events in Iran were directly affected by what was happening in Russia largely because of the enormous economic and political presence of Russia in Iran at the time. The Russian Revolution was an attempt to resist the hegemony of the core powers of the capitalist world economy over the Tsarist Russia. This was reflected almost entirely in the weakening of the Tsarist hegemony in Iran and the intensification of the resistance of Iranian bourgeoisie against the alliance of the Tsarist Russia, the Iranian State elite and the large landowners.

Reza Shah and The Rise of the Modern State in Iran

Early in 1921 a coup d'état was staged by Reza Khan, a colonel of what was called the Cossack Brigade, and Seyyed Zia ad-Din Tabataba'i, an anglophile influential journalist. The effective driving force of the coup d'état came from the military power of the Cossack Brigade, a modern military regiment, which constituted a power base for the new government and particularly for Reza Khan. The mastermind of the coup was of course Seyyed Zia, who was trusted and supported by the British. The Coup d'état, at least in its first phase, preserved the Qajar King Ahmad Shah as the nominal sovereign, with Seyyed Zia as Prime Minister. But, real power increasingly resided with Reza Khan who initially became the Minister of War and later in 1923 took the position of Prime Minister from Seyyed Zia. In 1925, after his disposition to form a Kemalist republic on the Turkish model was objected to by the conservative ulama, the traditional elite and even some of the reformist forces, Reza Khan deposed Ahmad Shah and had himself enthroned as the founder of a new dynasty, Pahlavi.

Ironically, the ascent of Reza Khan to the throne was ratified by the Majlis, which had reconvened, but lacked its initial vigour. It was the Majlis that abolished the Qajar dynasty and voted Reza Khan to become the king. Muhammad Reza, the second Pahlavi, referring to the intention of his father to institute a republic wrote: "The high-up Shi'i clergy, together with most politicians and traders, were opposed to a republic. They thought that a sovereign was needed to make and preserve unity."

The Pahlavi reign thus began in 1925 with military power, as was the case for all previous ruling dynasties in the Iranian history. However, one major break occurred with previous modes of administration. In this era the task of building a modern bureaucratic State on the Western model was accomplished, however incoherently. The Constitutional Revolution did not succeed in setting up a strong modern State but asserted the necessity of creation of such a State by enshrining the modern ideas of State and society in the Fundamental Law. As for the components of the modern State, the Constitutional government failed to establish a standing army and a modern bureaucracy to effectively address the security, administrative and fiscal problems. The

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1 Dowlatabadi, Y. Hayat-e Yahya (The Life of Yahya), Vol. 4, Ibn-Sina, Tehran, p. 224
2 The most serious of these was the Jangal movement in the northern province of Gilan, which set up the break-away Republic of Gilan in 1920 and lasted for almost a year until it was suppressed by Reza Khan.
Pahlavi era was marked by the establishment of these two important components of the modern State, but failed to provide for other concerns of the Constitutional Revolution, namely, political democracy and an autonomous national economy. The lack of political democracy and national economy can be largely attributed to the strength of mainly traditional and occasionally modern power structures with divergent interests, which resisted the central authority.

One of the foremost traditional power structures was that of the ulama, who as an establishment stood in sharp contrast to the structure of the modern nation-State. The traditional relevance of the ulama was derived from two sources, both of which stood to suffer from the realisation of a modern State in the Western style. The doctrinal source of the ulama power, which had generated their legitimising role, could be denied by a modern democratic State. The State could claim the loyalty of the nation and disregard the religious and sectarian differences in a truly liberal democracy. The functional basis of the ulama relevancy, derived from their role in shaping the educational and judicial orientations of the society, was also threatened by the modern liberal democratic disciplines.

Meanwhile, the ulama were developing new political visions that went beyond their traditional role. But the modern tendencies within the ulama ranks were fledgling, and the modernist ulama were still sorting out their position with respect to a modern State in Iran. They were clearly against a modernisation of the type of the Qajar period. But they were also suspicious of the new Pahlavi monarchy, and were yet to regroup against the modern nationalist and liberalist tendencies.

During the Constitutional Revolution, liberal constitutionalism had perhaps its best chance to establish itself in Iran as the ideology of the modern State. But the absence of a long experience of parliamentary democracy may explain why liberal constitutionalism did not produce experienced, unwavering and responsible political leaders in Iran. The endemic tendency of Iranian secular intellectuals to be obsessed by philosophical notions of liberty and egalitarianism, and their contempt for rudimentary socio-political issues, did not allow for the emergence of much needed popular politicians with authority and concern for democracy. Nor had the religious establishment yet produced a clear theory of State, and certainly not any strong political leader.

At this critical point in Iran’s history, powerful political leaders had to emerge from the ranks of those who had command over the guns - tribal leaders and men disciplined in the Western-style modern military establishment. Powerful tribal leaders like Sapahdar Azam Tonekaboni and Samsam Bakhtiyari assumed a position of real authority in the constitutional government, but their tribal loyalties produced a lack of concern for national leadership. By contrast, men like Reza Khan with rural origins, without any serious bonds with the religious establishment and the aristocracy, unaffected by intellectual debates, with meagre education, but gifted with military talent, nationalist zeal and power-seeking instincts, were the “right” men at the “right” time in Iran’s political scene of the 1920’s.

Reza Shah’s Nationalist Ideology

Reza Shah’s rise to power did not involve the formulation of a well-defined ideological framework. However, after the seizure of political power, he became convinced of the political merits of a nationalist ideology. Regrettably, serious attention to Reza Shah’s nationalist heritage is missing in the writings and speeches of his critics, who prefer to portray him as an agent of the British interests in Iran. In his analysis of
Reza Shah’s nationalism, Amin Banani has offered a rare glimpse into the basic elements of the nationalist ideals that inspired social changes in Iran between 1925 and 1941. He has identified in Reza Shah’s nationalism “a complete dedication to the cult of nationalism-Statism, a desire to assert this nationalism by a rapid adoption of the material advances of the West, and a breakdown of the traditional power of religion and a growing tendency towards secularism.”

Reza Shah attempted to resolve the historic dilemma of modernisation in Iran not through “abstract contemplation of Western ideologies”, but through an emphasis on the adoption of “the technology and other material achievements of the West.” Reza Shah’s predicament demonstrated the chasm dividing the “powerful” modern West and the “decrepit” Islamic East. This great divide had created a deep sense of inferiority among Iranians, who still boasted to their pre-Islamic and Islamic glory.

The one-sided flow of knowledge and power from the West to the East had created a social reaction in Iran as in other Islamic countries. With the decline in confidence in the superiority of religion among the Iranian modernists following the failure of the Constitutional Revolution, nationalism, originally a Western intellectual legacy, was asserted in Iranian terms by idolisation of the glorious pre-Islamic past. Reza Shah’s military power and State bureaucracy became the machinery for implementation of this new nationalism.

Reza Shah’s Dictatorship: Nostalgia for a Strong State

The military character of Reza Shah’s rule can be cited as a factor contributing to the anti-democratic nature of the State policies. His rule “remained closely associated with rule by the new elite of army officers: the uniform, the military boot, and the officer’s club.” Reza Shah consolidated his political power through building a new army. However, the army was not the only source of his power.

Ironically, Reza Shah’s dictatorship was founded on the basis of a broad political support. As I noted earlier, his political support came from a wide cross-section of the urban political society. “Most of the old constitutional elite supported him as did the younger generation of politicians associated with the reformist and radical political parties of the fourth and fifth Majlis.” A considerable number of the pro-constitution Shi‘i ulama also supported him. The broad-based support for Reza Shah among the intellectuals can be attributed to “an aroused spirit of nationalism” and the desire for a strong centralised State.

Weber’s characterisation of the modern State as an entity seeking to appropriate and monopolise the means of legitimate coercion seems appropriate for analysing Reza Shah’s domestic military endeavours. Reza Shah’s foremost military undertaking was the creation of a standing army, an enterprise attempted but failed by the Qajar rulers and the constitutional government. Relying on his army, Reza Shah carried out the task of the creation of a strong centralised State by disarming the tribes at the periphery. In this sense, Reza Shah successfully realised some of the goals of the Constitutional Revolution, presenting a degree of similarity to Napoleon’s realisation of the nationalist aspirations of the French Revolution. This policy also caused social disorientation and a cultural gap as it debased the traditional lifestyle

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1 Banani, A. The Modernisation of Iran, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1961, p. 45
2 Ibid, p. 46 and p. 148
3 Arjomand, S. A. 1988, p. 2
4 Abrahamian, E. 1982, pp. 120-132
5 Arjomand, S. A. 1988, p. 63
6 Banani, A. 1961, p. 147
and administrative structure of tribal fabric of the Iranian society. Here, contrary to Napoleon, Reza Shah caused the decline of the provincial and rural life by destroying local sources of prestige and power and small agricultural holdings.

Reza Shah passed a law through the Majlis, which put tribal constituencies under the administration of the central government. He appointed military governors for tribes and banned traditional modes of clothing. With the decline in the power of the Majlis as a regulatory institution to check the power of the ruler, the episodic weakness of the religious authority, and the reliance of the king on the tradition of despotic political structure, under Reza Shah a coercive political dictatorship gradually took shape.

In sharp contrast to liberal bourgeois States in the West where a well-established parliamentary system held the ruler in check, the fledgling Iranian Parliament soon gave in to the modern dictatorship of Reza Shah. Reza Shah did not abolish the Parliament but began to virtually appoint the deputies and made a rubber stamp out of the Majlis. Reza Shah had set out to “unify, modernise, and industrialise Iran”, but not, as liberal intellectuals wished, through a democratic procedure. He increasingly relied on brute force to deal with his opponents. He was notorious for being blatantly cruel. In one well-known instance, he ordered the killing of the radical poet Mir Zadeh Eshqui. In another occasion, he ordered the arrest of a group of Marxists and had their leader, Taqi Erani, killed in captivity. He was also responsible for the killing Ayatollah Modarres, a vocal clerical member of the Parliament.

Reza Shah’s Reforms

Despite the rapid degradation of democratic values in the polity, a high degree of social stability was achieved under Reza Shah, and the standard of living generally improved. By the employment of Arthur Millspaugh, an American financial expert, Reza Shah also initiated a reorganisation of Iran’s finances. An important aspect of Reza Shah’s centralising efforts was the creation of a centralised bureaucracy, which would regulate the civil service and organise a centralised hierarchy to control the country’s administration from the capital.

Reza Shah also established a centralised judiciary on the Western model, an action in direct challenge to the authority of the traditional legal system, which was under clerical control and had been recognised by the Supplementary Fundamental Law of 1907 and the First Civil Code of 1911. Reza Shah thus violated the power of the religious courts, which in a de facto dual structure of the judiciary, existed independent of the State courts. “The old ministry of justice was dissolved early in 1927 and on April 27 of the same year, new personnel, many of whom had received European education took over the administration of the new ministry of justice from the former clerical officials.” The civil code of 1928, modelled after the French civil code, was an additional blow to the authority of the religious law. It was, in effect, an attempt at the secularisation of the Shari’at.

In 1932, there was yet another blow inflicted upon the legal powers of the ulama. A law was enacted, which gave the authority of registration of documents and properties to secular State courts. This authority was previously a monopoly of the

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3 Arjomand, S. A. 1988, p. 66
4 Banani, A. 1961, p. 70
5 Ibid. p. 71
6 Ibid. p. 72
religious courts. In 1936, another law was passed by the Majlis, which required the judges to hold a degree from the newly formed Faculty of Law of the University of Tehran, or from a foreign University. Muhammad Reza Pahlavi acknowledged that the introduction of a Western-inspired judiciary system by his father in 1926-1927 suppressed the legal powers of the ulama.\(^1\)

Reza Shah also laid the foundation of a universal modernised schooling system, and innovatively encouraged girls to be educated. He founded the University of Tehran in 1935, and at the same time sent a number of students to the European countries for higher education. “By 1940, 500 graduates had returned from abroad.”\(^2\) Reza Shah’s educational reform had two significant repercussions. Firstly, it successfully made a deep inroad into an important sphere of clerical social influence. Despite modernisation attempts under the Qajars, prior to this reform, the traditional Qura’nic schools (maktabs) governed by the ulama, controlled almost entirely the small but significant system of schooling, and dominated the intellectual life of the society. More importantly this system was still operating independent of the government and was funded by charitable funds controlled by the ulama. It also was a source of income for the lower mullas who taught in the maktabs. Secondly, the new education system created a new educated middle class, which was bound to have a momentous impact on the modernisation of the Iranian society in the forthcoming decades.

In this vein, under Reza Shah, a nationalist secular culture with a narrow social base was formed, which entailed significant cultural ramifications, particularly when the new secular ideology was promoted by the education system. Banani has characterised the ideological spirit of the new educational system developed in Iran between 1921 and 1941: “Free, rapid, and unquestioning borrowing of Western methods, all mobilised for a feverish assertion of nationalism, glorification of the past, Statism, and autocratic centralism; defensive sensitivity in the face of criticism by foreigners; growing xenophobia too often springing from a feeling of inferiority, and an unhealthy air of superiority over neighbouring countries.”\(^3\) However, the xenophobic tendencies were not expressed “in open conflict with the West, but rather in suspicion and resentment.”\(^4\) The suspicion and resentment toward the West survived as an underlying political factor and was later activated by the more explicit anti-Western propaganda of the religious revivalist movements, which began to assert themselves from the 1950’s onward. The xenophobic tendencies, motivated by the legacy of Reza Shah’s nationalism, are still strong even among some contemporary Iranian nationalists.

The State-sponsored nationalist ideology of the Reza Shah period was further promoted by the introduction of numerous elements of national integration, such as national conscription, national railway, and national radio. Reza Shah’s reforms also involved industrial development, resulting in serious social consequences. Indeed technological borrowing and industrialisation were the “most apparent aspects of the Westernisation of Iran” under Reza Shah, as his “national philosophy dictated that the cultural spirit and the ancient virtues of Iran were superior to anything that West had to offer.”\(^5\) However, the technological borrowing from the West could not be absolutely devoid of cultural weight. Reza Shah’s lack of appreciation of this issue initially created tension even among some modernist circles, arising from the absence of knowledge about the social and spiritual background of the Western industrial development. In time, with the display of the Western preponderance in what Iranians had only begun to

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\(^2\) Abrahamian, E. 1982, pp. 144-145

\(^3\) Banani, A. 1961, pp. 108-109

\(^4\) Ibid, p. 3

\(^5\) Ibid, p. 112
achieve, and with the manifestation of economic exploitation and political domination exerted by the Western powers, the initial tension was transformed into either xenophobia or feelings of inferiority.

In this manner, an uneven capitalist development began to spread in Iran whose economic, political and cultural implications diverged from the European experience. From an economic viewpoint, the foreign domination of the oil industry and the State domination of other major industries were a significant feature of early capitalist development in Iran. Apart from the role of foreign capital, the State intervention was a main reason inhibiting the formation of a powerful national bourgeoisie in Iran. State intervention also affected domestic and foreign trade. Reza Shah’s determination to extend State control over trade practices brought him into conflict with the bazaar merchants, but at the same time it generated a large income for the government, which was invested in infra-structural developments.

Another important aspect of uneven capitalist development under Reza Shah was the solidification of a newly emerging class of landowners closely connected to the Pahlavi dynasty, and known as “the Thousand Families”. A series of regulations in favour of these new landowners “converted a variety of conditional, de facto and tribal holdings into unconditionally held private property”. A large part of this new wave of land ownership was based on confiscation of the lands previously held by the tribal leaders. Reza Shah himself became the biggest landlord in the country. The new landlords also obtained a considerable share of political power by occupying seats in the Majlis mainly through appointment by the Shah.

The Unpopularity of the Reforms

For all his achievements, Reza Shah failed to attract support from a significant portion of the population. One reason for Reza Shah’s endemic unpopularity was the widespread perception that he was a British agent. After all Reza Shah’s ascendance to power became possible with a British-sponsored coup d’état. The conclusion was “the unquestioned assumption that the British picked Reza Khan as the potential strong man and then guided him towards the absolute control.” This conclusion, although derived from some correct assumptions, was too simplistic.

It is true that Reza Shah rose to power with British backing, but he felt no special devotion to Britain after he consolidated his nationalistic-autocratic rule. One clear example of Reza Shah’s turn- about was his association with Nazi Germany in the late 1930’s. His nationalist propaganda, which included frequent references to the Aryan origin of the Iranian race, inspired a chauvinistic intellectual environment that resulted in a degree of patriotism and the assertion of a national spirit.

Reza Shah’s nationalism, however, suffered from a debilitating weakness due to the weakness of its industrial base; and as such, it revealed an inherent contradiction. It inspired a desire to turn Iran into “a truly sovereign and consequential power”; but in practice, it resulted in an almost “indiscriminate imitation of the surface gloss of Western societies.” This nationalism also displayed a measure of contempt for the practised religion of the majority of the population, hence alienating the ulama and the traditional urban population. It also alienated the peasantry by expressing itself in terms of Statism rather than Shi ‘ism, and of course by destroying the prospect of the progress and prosperity in the rural life.

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1 Arjomand, 1988, p. 70
2 Cottam, R. 1964, p. 193
3 Banani, A. pp. 147-148
Reza Shah’s unpopularity was also caused by the fact that he failed to live up to the image of the just king in the eyes of Iranians; and thus he relived the memory of the hated tyrant of the Iranian history. His common origin, his insatiable zeal for power and wealth, his vulgarity and most importantly his turning against Shi‘ism distanced him from the population. According to Abrahamian: “despite impressive institutions, (he) had no viable class base, no sound social prop, and was thus without firm civilian foundation.”

Judging by results, Reza Shah’s modernising endeavours exemplified the inimical implications of the desire for Westernisation in an ancient, but presently backward society. The problem was exacerbated because the intent of modernisation in Iran from the beginning was not to constitute an economic and political rationale for efficiency and responsiveness, but to reactivate a zeal for revitalisation of a lost prestige and glory. As a result, much of the old socio-political and socio-economic structure was expunged without adequately being replaced by meaningful new patterns.

The arbitrary nature of changes introduced under Reza Shah led to the adoption of Western industrialisation or modernisation without providing for commensurate social, spiritual, and cultural foundations, which would make these changes meaningful for the general public. His revolutionary measures to modernise Iran was imposed almost entirely from above with the power of a strong State; and as such, they paved the way for tyranny and the rampant pattern of irresponsible power in Iran’s social and political structures. Reza Shah’s pro-German tendencies at the beginning of World War II cost him the throne when the Allies invaded Iran in 1941. He was forced to give up the throne and go into exile ironically by his former ally Britain with almost no public outcry. He died in the solitude of exile in the island of Mauritius.

Muhammad Reza Shah: An Accidental Dictator

From 1941 to 1946, the Pahlavi State sluggishly continued to operate under Muhammad Reza, a young and politically inexperienced monarch. The early years of the Shah’s rule coincided with the occupation of Iran by the Allies, the loosening of the grip of central government on the country and, interestingly, the rise of a semi-anarchic political openness caused by the collapse of Reza Shah’s personal dictatorship. Political prisoners were released and numerous political parties and newspapers mushroomed.

The dominant politico-economic issue in the early 1950’s was the issue of the nationalisation of oil industry, which was provoked by post-war economic privation and the resurgence of the power of the Majlis. In the absence of dictatorship, the Majlis regained some of the importance of the constitutional period. One of the more vigorous and committed activists who revived the militancy of the Majlis was Muhammad Mossadeq, a liberal representative of aristocratic descent with strong nationalist views. This period also witnessed the resurgence of another radical tendency, that of the Marxist activists. Inspired by the then popular Stalinist version of communism, the Tudeh party formed a well organised and disciplined network and rapidly gained popularity primarily among intellectuals and professionals, and less significantly among industrial workers.

The rise of the United States on the international scene, as the leading Western power to challenge communist expansion after World War II, was decisive in Iran’s forthcoming social orientations. The United States also championed the cause of rebuilding the war-stricken countries, and as such appealed to the non-Marxist nationalist forces in Iran. Consequently, Iran - traditionally a scene of British and

1 Abrahamian, E. 1982, p. 149
Russian rivalry - became a battlefield of the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union. The CIA-sponsored coup d’etat in 1953, which led to the fall of Mossadeq, and the strengthening of the Shah’s position, made the United States the single most trusted ally of the Pahlavi monarchy.

As already noted, in the period of the 1940’s, there was not much left of the authoritarian rule of Reza Shah. The social institutions he had helped to establish were in place, but his tyrannical measures were weakened by his absence. Absolutist monarchy had come to the brink of complete disintegration with the rise of Mossadeq, the prodigy of Iranian nationalism. Ironically the Shah, apparently taken by Mossadeq’s popularity, appointed him Prime Minister in 1951 after the Majlis voted in his favour.

With Mossadeq and his broadly based political platform, Jebhe-ye Melli (the National Front), a nationalist fervour filled Iran’s political atmosphere and liberal ideology found a strong Statesman. Mossadeq sought to introduce political reforms, which would restrict the powers of the monarch and turn him into a “ceremonial figurehead” of a constitutional monarchy. He also sought to find an economic basis for his political scheme by nationalising the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which was effectively under British control. For a short time, there appeared to be every chance for the realisation of Mossadeq’s dream. He attracted the support of the bazaar and the new middle class, and there was broad support from the general public for his undertakings. Even the religious leaders lent him support in the beginning.

Despite all this, the situation was surprisingly overturned. The strongest challenge to Mossadeq came from Britain, which imposed an oil embargo on Iran, and effectively paralysed Iran’s economy. His attempt to attract American support also proved unsuccessful as the United States was an ally of Britain and had become apprehensive of Mossadeq’s tolerance for the Tudeh Party. The departure of the Shah from Iran also contributed to political pressure on Mossadeq. The army too was apprehensive of Mossadeq’s power and Mossadeq did not make any serious attempt to attract the support of the army. The ulama also lost their confidence in Mossadeq because of his lack of concern for religious authority, and because of the growth of communism under him. To make everything worse, the Tudeh party also turned against Mossadeq, ostensibly arguing that as the leader of bourgeoisie he was not capable of enhancing the movement to the level of a proletarian revolution.

The endgame came in August 1953. “With the support of the United States and involvement of CIA, and the backing of some of the influential clerics of Tehran” a coup d’etat was carried out against Mossadeq. General Zahedi and a number of other army officers, loyal to the Shah, along with a group of thugs paid by the CIA, carried out the coup d’etat, deposed Mossadeq and returned the Shah to the throne. Mossadeq was put on trial and then under house arrest for the rest of his life. Many of the active members of the National Front were imprisoned and a few including Hussein Fatemi, one of Mossadeq’s ministers, were executed. But the Tudeh Party suffered the heaviest losses, particularly after it was revealed that it had penetrated deeply into the armed forces. Many the army officers who were found to be members of the Party were executed including the famous hero of the Tudeh Party, Khosrow Ruzbeh. A large number of the non-military members of the Party were given heavy prison terms. Martial law was put into effect from 1953 to 1957, political parties were pronounced illegal, censorship was imposed on the press and a dreadful secret police, the SAVAK, was created in 1957 with the assistance of the CIA and the Mossad to keep the activities of the opposition in check.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Arjomand, S. A. 1988, p. 72
\(^2\) Amjad, M. 1989, p. 65
As for the economy, the resumption of the flow of oil, foreign loans and top-down government intervention made some economic development possible in the mid-1950’s only to end up in recession by the end of the decade. Amjad has attributed the economic bust of the late 1950’s to “wasteful spending, corruption, mismanagement and the vast import of unnecessary goods”, which resulted in the expansion of the “foreign trade sector at the expense of the bazaaris and the national bourgeoisie.”\textsuperscript{1}

As such, the young monarch, who was raised mostly in the atmosphere of European private colleges, took his ski holidays in Switzerland, and later revealed to be extremely sensitive and fragile, was turned into a brutal dictator. The image of the Shah as a cruel dictator was probably much larger than his real character, which proved to be inherently timid and indecisive. Both, in his book \textit{Ma’muriyyat baray-e Vatanam} (Mission for My Country), which he wrote as a young monarch, and in his writings and interviews after he was deposed, the Shah revealed his timidity and fragility. His image as a strong and ruthless dictator was more a product of the imagination of the Iranian revolutionaries than the reality. However, it increasingly captured the mind of the public, particularly because the Shah himself was deceived by this invented image and tried to live up to the role of a dictator. He thus appeared as a military commander with megalomaniac ambitions, wearing a cape and a sword, or piloting a fighter plane, who had mercy on no one. However, his timid and isolated days in the boarding colleges in Europe and his underdog position before the 1953 \textit{coup d’etat} belied a different reality. Perhaps, his nervous acknowledgement of the popular call to revolution in 1978, his sad departure from Iran on the eve of the revolution, and his humiliated soul-searching in exile (reflected in his book \textit{Answer to the History}) were a resurgence of his original insecurities, which were in sharp contrast with his dictatorial image between 1953 and 1979.

\textbf{The White Revolution: A Programme for Rapid Modernisation}

In 1961, the Shah took heed of the change of American policy under the Kennedy administration and after an initial hesitation launched a reform programme known as the “White Revolution”. Through the “White Revolution”, the Shah set out to do whatever was required of him to modernise Iran on the Western model. But the \textit{imaginary} that he harboured of this model was not anything close to the real developments that had led to the rise of the Western capitalism. Rather, his \textit{imaginary} was based on the information and ideas that he received from the U.S. administration and the modernisation theorists about Iran. He thus embarked on a massive plan of social engineering to make Iran in the image of the latest modernisation prescriptions. And for a while, he seemed to be doing it too. Maybe, if instead of the \textit{imaginaries} of the modernisation theories, he had read Christopher Hill’s and E.P. Thompson’s interpretation of the English history, he would have gained a better picture of the real processes that had made the West.

In 1963, in a national referendum, he claimed that the people had overwhelmingly embraced his initially six-point reform. The most important of the six points was land reform, which, although incomprehensive in its redistributive effects, all but destroyed the traditional landlord-peasant relationship, and liquidated the big landlords as a class. Amjad has summarised the structural effects of the land reform: “Land reform provided the conditions for rapid capitalist development in Iran. Breaking up the old tenure system, the penetration of capital in the countryside, the circulation of money in rural areas, the creation of rural bourgeoisie, and the establishment of agricultural banks and

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid, p. 69
mechanised agriculture and agribusinesses in the rural areas were determinant factors that broke the structure of the economy and changed the social relations of production in the village.  

Muhammad Reza Shah’s reform programme placed an emphasis on industrialisation and infra-structural development. The private sector with State sponsorship founded new industries such as steel, copper and automobile plants. The main source of funding of the industrialisation programme came from the oil revenue. This process created a new class of wealthy industrialists with close ties to the imperial court. The substantial increases in the oil price, imposed by OPEC in 1973, created a massive growth in GNP (49 percent in 1973 and 71.5 percent in 1974). The dominant role of oil in Iran’s rapid development and its being monopolised by the State naturally entailed the domination of the industry, commerce, finance, and agriculture by the State. According to Missaq Parsa: “An important characteristic of Iranian economic development was the extraordinary role of the State, as opposed to market forces, in promoting industrial development.”2 Also, the dependence of industrialisation on the oil revenue made it contingent upon the fluctuations in the demand for oil in the world markets. “The oil sector expanded primarily in response to the world market rather than to domestic demands. As a result, the State and the entire economy became dependent on international economic forces.”

As for political rights, the Shah’s basic approach to opposition groups was brute force and reliance on the police, secret police, army and the gendarmerie. Ironically, the Shah learned the modern techniques for systematic political suppression from the West, although he was also assisted by the local traditions of brutal despotism. After all, the army, the police and the notorious secret police SAVAK were all created on the advice and close supervision of the West. The American-trained secret police used modern techniques to inflict ancient cruelties on the opponents of the regime. The West seemingly had little interest in pressing the Shah to build a civil society, tolerate the freedom of expression of alternative political views, tolerate civil disobedience, and create a suitable condition for social and political pluralism, the rule of law and the development of the institutions of democratic politics.

Nonetheless, the Shah was apt to use the Western media to portray himself as a freedom lover. In fact until 1975, he was still successful to give the impression to the world that Iran was a multi-party democracy. His trick, also advised by his Western counsels, was in founding court-sponsored political parties, while suppressing the independent political movements. Iran-e-Novin (New Iran) and Mardom (people) were two of these parties. Like his father, he did not abolish the Parliament, but packed it with loyal local elite. He muzzled the independent press, but did not ban them all together. He also learned to use the national media effectively for his propaganda. He even “extended government control over such organisations as labour unions and trade guilds.”4 But he and, amazingly, his advisors were proved to be blind, or impervious, to the natural result of these developments, which was to push elements of the opposition toward an increasingly radical position. The Shah thus modernised and systematised political repression from the early 1960’s onwards employing modern propaganda techniques, strategies for divide and rule and coercive measures to deal with political opposition.

In 1975, the Shah at last dropped his democratic pretensions, dissolved the Iran-e-Novin and Mardom Parties, founded the so-called Rastakhiz (Resurrection) party, and stupidly moved to make its membership compulsory. Throughout 1977 and well into

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1 Ibid, p. 86
3 Ibid, p. 62
1978, the Shah clung to his new creation, the hated symbol of his political intolerance, and pressed further for political unanimity in support of his regime. His repressive policies stifled demands for political participation, which could have facilitated social mobilisation and economic development. In 1980, the Shah, while in exile, admitted that his move to form a single party system was wrong.  

Although in some Asian countries like South Korea and Taiwan economic modernisation under repressive regimes had been sustained, in Iran the vastness of land, the ethnic and lingual multiplicity, the strong politico-religious resistance of the religious establishment, the bazaar and the community of believers, as well as the radical leftist movement, did not permit such a process. The Shah’s attempt to modernise the economy and social life could not have flowered in the absence of substantive political reforms. Modernisation in Iran required modern political institutions, which would have the function of increasing social mobility and political participation; such institutions although they began to form nominally under the Shah, were effectively nullified by his counter measures.

The Shah’s repressive measures made some progress in the period of consolidation of his power in the 1960’s. But his determination to maintain effective personal control over every sphere of social and political activity thereafter led him to weaken the State institutions in order to decrease the danger of opposition and emergence of alternative leadership. Benard and Khalilzad have pointed to those of the Shah’s counter-measures that aborted the changes and institutions he was introducing: “He wanted to industrialise but at the same time he feared political consequences of a growing body of industrial workers. His political power system including the Prime Minister’s Office, the Majlis, the political parties, the provincial governments and the press were matched by a set of covert counter-institutions designed to make sure that democratisation did not go so far as to threaten the Shah’s personal rule.”

Like his father, Muhammad Reza Shah failed to find wide popularity among the population. He too suffered from not being recognised by the people as a just and trustworthy king. He was considered as a subservient agent of the foreigners. As Gary Sick has indicated, the memory of 1953 had created a “popular image of the Shah as a pliant creature of the United States.”  

Modernisation and the Ulama: Disappointments with the State

Despite the differences, the ulama alienation from the regime may not have led to a political confrontation of the sort that actually happened. In fact until the late 1950s, there were still lines of association and co-operation between the ulama and the Pahlavi State that could continue. A pragmatic approach to the State authority had also been experienced by the ulama in the Qajar period. Later on in the wake of the Constitutional Revolution, the Shi’i ulama were again inclined to support the monarchy

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1 Pahlavi, M. R. 1980, p. 154-155
2 The vastness of the land and the multicultural fabric of the population were also important in failing the strategy of repressive development in Iran.
3 Benard, G. and Khalilzad, Z. 1984, p. 55
4 Sick, G. All Fall Down: America’s Tragic Encounter with Iran. Random House, New York, 1985, p. 7

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in principle, as long as the status of Shi'ism and its guardians were recognised by the State. The ulama distrust with the social influence of the secular intellectuals following the Constitutional Revolution, and their apprehension of the leftist radicals inspired by the Marxist ideology, initially far outweighed their resentment of the monarchy.

In 1925, Reza Khan had practically assumed absolute power and it was only a matter of time before he ended the ceremonial existence of the Qajar dynasty. Reza Shah might have relished the idea of ascending the throne, but there were many factors tainting his ambition. He was not related to the royal family, nor was he of noble descent. Moreover, some liberal representatives of the Majlis were heatedly advocating republicanism. Even Reza Khan himself expressed preference for a Kemalist style republic. At this juncture, it was the ulama who encouraged Reza Khan to opt for monarchy, the traditional form of political rule in Iran.

They did so because they saw monarchy as a form, albeit a resented form, of continuity of the traditional social structures in contrast to the "alien" concept republicanism, advocated by the modern intelligentsia. At the time, republicanism still seemed to the ulama as a symbol of anarchy and Westernism. True, Shi'ism does not declare a clear predisposition for monarchy because of its incompatibility with the doctrine of Occultation. Yet, as Shahroug Akhavi has noted: "the seeds of doubt as to what republicanism held out for the future of religion in Iran were too firmly embedded in the clerical consciousness to permit a cool-headed appraisal of its merits." But Reza Shah never rewarded the ulama support. Instead, he set out to rout their very existence.

Although their contribution to Reza Shah's enthronement was not rewarded, the ulama again threw their support behind the Pahlavi dynasty in 1953. Threatened by the liberal Mossadeq and the communist Tudeh Party during the oil nationalisation movement, Muhammad Reza Shah was all but dethroned. The support of powerful clerics like Ayatollah Abol-Qasem Kashani was decisive in expediting the return to power of Muhammad Reza Shah in 1953. For the second time around, subsequent events led to the disappointment of the ulama with the Pahlavi State.

The Pahlavis thus remained cordial to the ulama only as it suited them. Their vigour in the modernisation of Iran's social, political and economic life put the ulama in a desperate situation. The Shah's reforms used more effective techniques than those available to his father in destroying the traditional division of authority between the State and the ulama, which had been fought for by the ulama for centuries, and thus made a more serious threat to their ecclesiastical and social existence.

The Pahlavi Atrocities against the Ulama

Apart from the introduction of secular educational and judiciary systems, which eroded much of the social importance and functions of the ulama, Reza Shah launched an unbridled suppression of the ulama leaving them no choice other than active resistance or acceptance of humiliation. Reza Shah took things to the extremes and confronted the traditions menacingly. In his forcible prohibition of wearing turbans and the adoption of the European style Pahlavi hat, he is reported to have ordered the hats to be nailed on the heads of some of those who refused to wear it. He also ordered the forcible conscription of the tullab (seminarians) overriding the sanctity of religious

1 Akhavi, S. 1980, p. 29
2 Ibid, p. 74
He violated the institution of sanctuary by personally beating a high-ranking cleric in the sacred shrine of Qom.\(^2\)

The ulama were also outraged by Reza Shah's move to outlaw the veil, a move they compared to the wholesale denigration of Islamic values. "The upheavals of 1935-1936 were sparked by the unveiling of women."\(^3\) In 1935, a demonstration of protest against the unveiling of women was brutally suppressed in the Mosque of Gawharshad in the city of Mashhad. The laws passed in 1928 and 1932, which transferred the function of authentication and registration of deeds from the ulama to the State notaries, and the endowments' law of 1934, which established the State control over religious endowments throughout Iran, targeted the economic base of the ulama existence. "The ulama capacity for active protest against Reza Shah's efforts was confined to the behaviour of Ayatollah Hassan Modarres in the Majlis. But, even he was silenced when he was arrested in the fall of 1928 and exiled to eastern Iran."\(^4\) Later on, he was killed by suffocation in what was believed to be a political assassination under the orders of Reza Shah.

Under Muhammad Reza Shah, the lines of conflict between the State and the ulama were sharpened after an initial period of mutual accommodation. In 1941, the new Shah needed support in the face of the economic devastation brought on by the Second World War, and the ulama sought to recover their institutions so severely shaken in the Reza Shah period. The early signs of the ulama attempt to revive their social position in the 1940s were manifested in a reassessment of what Akhavi has termed "a Shi'i public morality or culture".\(^5\) This was reflected in demands for the lifting of the ban that Reza Shah had placed on public religious rituals, such as Ashura processions and ta'ziyeh (passion plays), which were being held since the Safavid period in the month of Muharram to mourn the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. Also, there was a spontaneous return to wearing chador (veil) among women who had been forcefully unveiled under a Reza Shah decree.

However, the blows that the ulama had suffered under Reza Shah were too severe to allow a smooth recovery. In the first half of the 1940s, the ulama social and political dispositions were still confused. The religious establishment in Qom had not yet given up the general principle of abstention from politics. This orientation, however, was increasingly vulnerable in the face of the social developments, which had begun by Reza Shah's policies of modernisation. Signs of serious divergence of opinion about involvement in politics appeared in the late 1940s and continued into the 1950s.

There were a number of critical socio-political, socio-economic and socio-religious issues that could not be easily dismissed by the ulama establishment. In the political sphere, there was the question of the ulama right to vote, the growing influence of atheism and a mounting pressure from within the clerical ranks to join in direct political activity by forming or joining political parties. On the economic level, there were growing concerns about the situation of the oil industry, and about the way it should be controlled. Particularly, with the spread of liberal and socialist ideas, this economic issue was increasingly politicised and turned into a basis for a renewed national sense of patriotism. The unfair balance of economic relations of Iran, as a "peripheral" State of the "world-economy", with the core countries like Britain added to the heat of the issue of oil nationalisation.

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\(^1\) For more information see Hedayat Mokhber-al-Saltaneh, *Khaterat va Khatarat*, Zavvar, Tehran, 1965/1344, pp. 377-383

\(^2\) Ibid, p. 322

\(^3\) Abrahamian, E. 1982, p. 152

\(^4\) Akhavi, S. 1980, p. 59

\(^5\) Ibid, p. 61
In the religious domain too there were interesting developments. There appeared a trend of factionalism among the ulama and within the community of believers in terms of how to deal with political and economic issues. This trend led gradually to the resurgence of traditionalist, radical and reform tendencies within the ulama ranks. Also on the public level, there were signs of large-scale politicisation of the ordinary believers around grass-root religious organisations.

In the early 1950’s, the issue of the nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company gave rise to new tensions that marked the heightening of politicisation of the ulama. The increased involvement of the ulama in political disputes originated from the ranks of more radical and younger ulama. As for the high ranking ulama, “the traditional scholasticism of the religious leadership characterised the behaviour of the sole marja-e taqlid of the time,” Ayatollah Muhammad-Hussein Borujerdi. Ayatollah Borujerdi was firmly opposed to the direct participation of the ulama in political struggles. Ayatollah Kashani, a radical middle-ranking cleric who at the beginning supported Mossadeq in demanding the nationalisation of the oil industry, was the principal advocate of the ulama politicisation. Ayatollah Kashani, however, was not a marja-e taqlid and as Yann Richard indicates “his political concerns overshadowed his leadership in religious matters.”

To put the matter in perspective, I shall look more closely at the political orientations within the religious institution in the 1940s and 1950s.

**Politicism of Religion in the 1940s & 1950s**

Until the late 1940s and early 1950s, the scholastic establishment of Qom was dominated by senior clerics who are referred to as Ayatollah-ul-Uzma (the grand Ayatollahs). These men, all in their old age, had formed the Shi'i religious elite due to their social prestige and religious knowledge. The basic source of their social influence was their religious knowledge and their role as the guardians of the faith. Therefore, the number of students they could attract to their lectures and the amount of allegiance they could wield from their students and followers were a measure of their prominence within the establishment and in the community at large. Also as was mentioned earlier, the position of the high-ranking ulama as marja-e taqlid (source of emulation) added to their prestige. Obviously, the larger the number of their followers, the higher their social influence and the stronger their financial resources. By and large, the ulama elite were characterised by traditionalism, conservatism, pacifism, scholasticism and dogmatism. Also as norm-givers to the traditional society, they were distrustful of new political orientations such as republicanism.

In the late 40s and early 50s, there began a radical shift away from the traditional and conservative practice of the grand Ayatollahs. But the shift that began away from the religious establishment had few resources to sustain itself independent of the establishment both in terms of prestige and in financial terms. The precursors of this shift consisted of the younger and thus junior clerics, who could neither claim high scholastic recognition, nor qualify for religious taxes in their own right. Besides, the older generation of the ulama elite had tightened their ranks through intermarriage; younger clerics, even if, they achieved high scholarship, were unlikely to enter the ranks of the elite unless they were accepted to marry into their families. Clearly in this situation, the younger clerics who had set out to question the preponderance of the

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1. Ibid, p. 60
2. Richard, Y. "Ayatollah Kashani, Precursor of the Islamic Republic", in Keddie, N. R. ed. 1983, p.120
political views of the traditional elite had either to find brave mavericks within the elite, or search for alternative sources of power outside the establishment.

There were two main lines of divergence from the political views of the traditional religious elite, inherited from the constitutional and post-constitutional period. One was a reformist-modernist tendency and the other a radical-fundamentalist trend, which broadly followed the lines of division in the ulama ranks in the constitutional period. Both of these groups chose to involve in politics as a means of attracting social support, and hence influence and prestige, outside the Qom establishment among the community of believers. Yet, by recognising the jurisprudential and theological significance of the establishment, they forestalled the threat of excommunication and liable of apostasy. Of course the proponents of mysticism and speculative philosophy also remained vocal, but did not give rise to any strong independent tendency. Rather, these trends were variously appropriated by the modernist radical and reform-minded ulama.

The reform-mined ulama adopted a somewhat liberal attitude in their political activities, stood for election to the Majlis, and expressed a degree of tolerance toward modernisation. With the rise of nationalist sentiments, these ulama even joined the existing moderate political parties. Their stance was more or less consistent with the constitutionalist ulama of the early twentieth century. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, there was “an eight-member contingent” of these ulama in the Majlis, which supported Mossadeq. By contrast, the more radically oriented ulama demanded a fundamental change in Iran’s political and economic relations, the implementation of the Shari‘at and a return to the purity of the early Islam. As such, this trend in the ulama politicisation in the 1940s and 1950s broadly followed Nuri’s stance in the constitutional period. The radical ulama also advocated revolutionary and at times extremist movements by encouraging and establishing links with grass-root religious networks. Ayatollah Kashani was a leading figure of this trend whose sponsorship for some time enhanced the position of the fundamentalist group Fada‘iyan-e Eslam (The Devotees of Islam).

In 1949, the Qom establishment under the leadership of Ayatollah Borujerdi reacted to moves toward political activism by organising a 2000-member conference of the clergy in Qom. The conference, as indicated by Akhavi: “adopted a firm non-interventionist position, which prohibited all members of the clergy from joining parties and trafficking in politics.” 1 Ayatollah Kashani’s refusal to follow the resolution of this conference strained his relationship with Ayatollah Borujerdi and other senior clerics. The resentment of the ulama elite with Kashani was intensified by his close association with the Fada‘iyan-e Eslam, whose extremist policies included assassination of their opponents. Fada‘iyan were also inclined toward the undisciplined religion of the common masses, and made direct references to the Prophet and the Imams, which in effect questioned the ulama guardianship over religious affairs. To quote Akhavi: “the ulama felt that the Fada‘iyan were undisciplined agitators whose behaviour had brought the reputation and prestige of the religious institution into disrepute.” 2

Another cause of the ulama-Fada‘iyan difficult relationship was probably the humble origins of the Fada‘iyan, which in the eyes of the ulama elite, did not qualify them to make high claims to religious authority. Although it was difficult for the ulama to object to certain demands of the Fada‘iyan, such as the application of the Shari‘at, they resented their demands for the revival of the early Islam, which would threaten the

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1 Akhavi, S. 1980, pp. 63-64
2 Ibid, p. 66
raison d'être of the ulama social relevance.¹ The ulama dislike of the Fada'iyan may also be attributed to their emotional influence on the oppressed masses. People identified themselves with the Fada'iyan leaders, such as Navab Safavi, who were predominantly from lower class origins.

Ayatollah Kashani’s appetite for militant politics was most probably inspired by the anti-British struggles of his father in Iraq from 1914 to 1920, which resulted in his death. According to Akhavi, Kashani’s hatred for the British colonialism and his background in professional religion made him a “quintessential political activist and agitator, who ... saw his role as a guardian of national and Shi'i interests against British imperialism.”² Kashani’s significance for the Fada'iyan was perhaps due to his capacity as a middle-ranking mujtahid to bridge the gap between them and the high-up clergy. In reality, however, Kashani was able to influence the lower ranking and more radical ulama.

In time, Fada'iyan’s fundamentalist zeal and millenarian aspirations proved too strong even for Kashani. The support lent to Mossadeq’s oil nationalisation movement by Kashani was probably the main cause of rift between him and the Fada'iyan in 1951, particularly because Mossadeq had made himself known as “primarily a modernist too heavily influenced by Western ideas especially the leftist currents.”³ Nor did Kashani’s support for Mossadeq last for long. Mossadeq’s demand for extraordinary powers from the Majlis sparked a fierce opposition from Kashani, who was at the time the Speaker of the Parliament. Ironically, other clerical members of the Majlis distanced themselves from Kashani by continuing to support Mossadeq. The divergence of Ayatollah Kashani from the cause of Mossadeq and his support for the Shah was crucial to restoration of power of the monarch in 1953.

Ayatollah Kashani’s position in 1953 has been seen by most of the leftist and liberal analysts as bordering on treason. The sympathetic religious analysts have tried to define Kashani’s moves as part of an attempt to initiate an Islamic movement independent of the 1950s mainstream politics. This latter interpretation is significant because of the light it sheds on the movement initiated within the religious establishment by Ayatollah Khomeini. In fact, Kashani’s politicisation of religious tenets and their usage in promotion of anti-colonial struggles inspired a strong spirit of militant political activism, which spilled into the 1960s.

However, the period 1953-1958 also saw a massive suppression of oppositional political activities by the reinstated monarch. And the renewed political activism of the 1940s was gradually lost to the rising dictatorship of the Shah before it gathered momentum again in the 1960s. The immediate consequence of the failure of political activism of the early 1950s was the strengthening of the positions of the pacifist grand Ayatollahs and a temporary period of retirement from active politics by the radical ulama.

The Ulama Political Activism in the 1960s

Although in the 1953-1958 period, the ulama, under the leadership of Ayatollah Borujerdi retired to the seclusion of their mosques and madrasas ostensibly to pursue their theological scholarship, the land reform Bill drafted by the government in 1959 provoked unrest among them. This time around, the quietest Ayatollah Borujerdi, the

¹ Ibid, p. 68
² Ibid, pp. 60-61
³ Ibid, p. 69
most eminent Shi’i theologian, raised the ulama concern himself. In 1960, he declared that the Bill was “ill-advised and against the Shari’at.”

Ayatollah Borujerdi had established himself as a national religious leader for the Shi’i believers, who comprised almost the whole population of Iran. This concentration of leadership had come about through a relatively democratic process of reform within the religious establishment led by Borujerdi himself. Ayatollah Borujerdi had acquired a’alamiyat (superior knowledge in the matters of law) over his colleagues and in the tradition of Sheikh Mutaza Ansari and Mirza Muhammad-Hassan Shirazi in the nineteenth century, was recognised as the highest or supreme marja-e taqlid. Akhavi has noted that although there were a number of distinguished mujtahids in Iran at the time, none could replace Borujerdi immediately.

Borujerdi’s objection to the land reform Bill signalled a serious break in the uneasy but stabilised relationship between the ulama and the State. The land reform not only threatened the wealthy ulama - who owned private land - but also targeted the lands in the custody of the ulama as vaqf. The revenues of the vaqf lands were vital to the ulama and the religious establishment as they were used to maintain “the mosques, madrasas, ceremonials, and the ulama and religious student salaries, stipends, emoluments and pensions.” But beyond economic concerns, the ulama were alarmed by the huge structural changes that this reform could bring about in the society, and particularly in the patterns of cultural and religious life.

The objections to the Bill held it in abeyance until the death of Ayatollah Borujerdi in 1961. Using the disarray in the ulama ranks caused by Borujerdi’s death, and benefiting from the lapse in the continuity of the ulama leadership, the Shah implemented the Land Reform Bill in 1962. This new tension with the Shah put the newly found unity of the religious institution to test in the absence of the author of this unity. (In the next chapter, I shall provide a more detailed discussion of the religious reforms within the ulama ranks in the 1960s.) At any rate, following Borujerdi’s death, the ulama increasingly realised that the Shah’s reform movement was clearly meant to be independent of the influence of the religious establishment. The alarm of the ulama at the pace and proportion of the reform, which was going on beyond their influence, thus gave by default a strong impetus to the reunification of many of the ulama and the active believers after the demise of Ayatollah Borujerdi. This reunification was achieved, after an initial hesitation, around the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

As I have noted earlier, up until the early 1960s, the State-religious symbiosis was basically expressed in the form of passive resistance of the ulama to undesirable measures taken by the State, without openly questioning the legitimacy of the kingship. By contrast, there occurred an active rejection and open defiance of the State after 1963 when a radical faction, led by Ayatollah Khomeini and some other radical clerics, took shape within the religious establishment, and tried to forge stronger ties with the public at large. Clearly, the emergence of the radical faction was due to the recognition by the modernist ulama of the need to fill the vacuum of leadership after Ayatollah Borujerdi’s death as quickly as possible by finding a solid social base for the legitimacy of this leadership outside the establishment. These ulama did not advocate an outright break with the establishment, but recognised that the very survival of the religious establishment could be endangered if it were not to tune itself to the outside developments.
Akhavi has recognised four factions within the ulama at this time: the radicals, the social reformers, the conservatives and the courtiers. Among the radicals, Khomeini was prominent because he was a marja-e taqlid. Nevertheless, he was still considered to be a junior colleague, partly because at sixty years of age he was still considered relatively young. The conservative Ayatollahs were also hesitant about the rise of Khomeini to highest religious rank because of his radical political views in addressing the socio-political and socio-economic issues. In contrast with the tradition of the religious establishment not to express direct political opinions, Ayatollah Khomeini criticised tyranny, sympathised with the “impoverished masses” and condemned what he considered to be “government’s over-commitment to urbanisation, industrialisation and over-reliance on foreign investment.”

Another reason for the initial hesitation of the grand Ayatollah’s in giving full support to Khomeini’s leadership was his special interest, besides jurisprudence, in philosophy and mysticism, which was “regarded with misgivings among the basically conservative senior teachers of the madrasas.” It should be noted that even some modernist Muslims regarded philosophy and mysticism with misgivings. To them, these subjects represented “a retreat from reality ... as if they were merely abstract matters that had no real connection with the existing problems of Muslims.”

The second faction of the ulama, the social reformers, were “less openly political in (their) activities, concentrating more on social and educational problems of the clerical institution.” The third faction, the conservative ulama, included practically all the grand mujtahids. And as I just noted, the conservative ulama - following the Borujerdi tradition - did not tend to involve themselves directly in the public policy arena. The fourth faction of the ulama, which consisted of a handful of people, co­operated with the royal court and supported the State measures and received favourable rewards.

One important outcome of the Shah’s reforms, particularhy his heavy handed approach to the radical clerics like Khomeini, was that some of the conservative ulama were pressed by the public opinion, which was sympathetic to Khomeini, to openly come out in his support. The grand Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, for example, expressed this support after the arrest of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1963 in his official protest against this arrest, which prompted the Shah to sent Khomeini into exile.

Another consequence of the reforms was that the religious institutions became independent of land and strengthened their ties with the urban centres. As the administration of waqf lands was handed over to the Endowment Organisation, the ulama were totally alienated from the State. Their independence was sustained by the one source of income inevitably immune from State encroachment; the voluntary payment of religious taxes (Sahm-e Emam) to the mujtahids as the vicegerents of the Concealed Imam, Mahdi. With the economic prosperity of the 1960’s and 1970’s, this revenue increased considerably. It was paid mostly by the urban practising believers, many of whom were well-off merchants of the bazaar.

The reaction of the ulama against the reforms of the early 1960s was not only concerned with land. The Shah’s six-point programme of reform, which the Shah launched under the banner of the “White Revolution”, also included the enfranchisement of women, and the creation of a Literacy Corps (Sepah-e Danesh) to which he later added other points. “The women’s rights and suffrage was seen by the ulama

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1 Akhavi, S. 1980, p. 101
2 Ibid, pp. 100-101
3 Algar, H. 1980, p. 20
4 Akhavi, S. 1980, 101
as a violation of the Shari‘at’, and naturally sparked an open protest.¹ The Literacy Corp threatened the spiritual influence of the ulama in the rural areas, as it would replace the elementary religious schools (maktabs), which were “the source of education for many villages up until the sixties.”² All this led to economic and political disengagement of the ulama from the State and increased the hostility between the State and religious establishment.

The economic and political disengagement of the ulama from the Pahlavi regime was complemented by their social disengagement. Fischer notes: “the upper echelons of the ulama formed a highly endogamous quasi caste, the entry into which was almost invariably accompanied by marriage of the young clerics to daughters of their teachers.”³ By contrast, intermarriage between the ulama and the political elite greatly reduced. At the same time the ulama became more homogeneous than in the constitutional period and much more distinct from the secular intellectuals and professionals produced by the modern educational system.

The Significance of the 1963 Uprising

Although the traditional religious establishment as a whole was apprehensive at the Shah’s reform programme, the open objection to it came from the radical faction under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini and quickly grew to the level of a mass uprising. This could be seen as the foundation of Khomeini’s popularity and his heightened religious prestige among the ordinary masses despite his juniority in religious ranking. The conflict began when the Shah put to a referendum his six-point reform programme in January 1963. Rejecting the referendum as unconstitutional, Khomeini said in an immediate reaction: “The ulama register the danger to the Quran and our religion. It seems that this referendum aims to lay the basis for the removal of the clauses in the Constitution linked to religion.”⁴

In time, Khomeini continued his agitation against the reforms, and intensified his criticisms of the government. In his speeches, he stressed “corruption, constitutional violations and Westoxication (Ghabzadegi)”; a term that was used to portray what was conceived as obsessive imitation of the West.⁵ However, a significant contribution to the anti-government agitation came from the unscrupulous move by the United States to have diplomatic immunity accorded to American non-diplomats resident in Iran. This move revived the memories of Russian and British extraterritorial rights in Iran in the colonial period, and was perceived by Khomeini and his followers as a new mode of capitulation.

Continued agitation by Ayatollah Khomeini and his radical followers resulted in repeated raids by the security forces on the Qom Seminary, and ultimately in the arrest of Khomeini in June 1963. The news of his arrest sparked a mass uprising in Tehran, which was quelled only by the use of army troops. Amazingly this significant event, as Gary Sick has acknowledged, went unnoticed in the United States. “During this period the U.S. government and media devoted their attention almost exclusively to the Shah’s six-point program.”⁶ Even some American academics, aware of the Shah’s harsh measures in

¹ Tabari, A. in Keddie, N. R. 1983, p. 47
² Akhavi, S. 1980, p. 98
³ Fischer, M. M. 1980, pp. 89-94
⁵ Sick, G. 1985, p. 10
⁶ Ibid, p. 11
dealing with opposition forces, considered them necessary “to break the hold of reactionary elements standing in the way of social progress.”

The 1963 uprising was taken seriously in political analysis only after its parallels were seen in the 1978-79 revolution. This uprising was significant because it was initiated by the clerics and gathered under its command not only the radical clerics, but also broad sectors of the community, such as the merchants, the shopkeepers, and the university students. Even some socialists and secular nationalists turned to Khomeini as the most “viable symbol of opposition.” The socialist and secular nationalist leaders had not yet recovered from the suppression of the Tudeh party and the National Front after the 1953 coup. And in this new political environment, religious agitators won the hearts and minds of many of the young political activists, who might have otherwise sided with the secular forces.

The 1963 uprising can be perceived as the dress rehearsal of the 1979 revolution in terms of its leadership, the composition of its participants and its rhetoric. As Azar Tabari has noted: “With socialism and secular nationalism in disarray Islam came forward to fill the political vacuum, offering itself as the radical alternative to the Shah’s tyranny.” Although this uprising was suppressed, its significant legacy continued to flower in conjunction with the intellectual developments in the 1960’s and 1970’s.

These intellectual developments were in turn exacerbated by the rapid socio-economic change in the same period, which I shall discuss in the following sections. I shall discuss the demographic as well as cultural and symbolic changes in the 1960’s and 1970’s as a result of rapid economic modernisation, and their destabilising effect on the traditional social structures. One result of these developments was a sharp increase in religious vitality.

The Changing Face of Iran: Modernisation Theories

Rapid socio-economic change in Iran in the twentieth century entailed significant social and political ramifications. The process of transformation of Iran from a collection of traditional communal structures to a modern nation-State exhibited parallels to and differences from modern Western history. From a politico-economic standpoint, as Fischer has indicated: “the parallels lie in the changes in social consciousness encouraged by modern education and a new class structure or division of interest groups. The differences result from the suppression of the Constitutional Revolution along with its bourgeois-democratic aspirations at the turn of the century and a return from 1925 to 1978 to an authoritarian albeit modernising monarchy, and from a still very underdeveloped industrial economy and a demographic explosion.”

Moreover, in the West the process of transition from traditional to modern society was determined predominantly by the cultural interaction of domestic social forces, whereas Iran was faced with an already existing external modern force, namely the West, seeking to affect almost every aspect of its national and international life. This difference, as Benard and Khalilzad suggest, transformed the “constellations of factors, values, and sequences” in modernisation, giving the process a new dynamic and a largely different outcome.
Further problems arose when the modern West, in its colonialist expansion, involved itself in modelling the underdeveloped world on the basis of the mainly cultural and religious *imaginary* of the Western process of development, comprising such notions as the "white man’s burden", "the civilising mission", "the eventual unity of mankind." All these were components of a worldview that accommodated colonialism, imperialism, the occupation and administration of other societies through military and bureaucratic means, and at times the destruction of the religious and cultural values of other groups.¹

This worldview in its more recent form was expressed in terms of the theories of development or modernisation in the 1950’s and the early 1960’s. Despite their diversity, these theories shared certain assumptions about political stability in the so-called Oriental societies. Based on a dichotomous division of the world into *modern* and *traditional*, the *imaginary* of progress and modernisation gave rise to the perception that the process of transition from tradition to modernity demanded the dissemination of Western technology and ideas in the Orient.²

The success of the Marshall Plan in rebuilding the Western European countries after World War II, the modernisation theorists thought, was a proof that rapid economic growth was a catalyst for political stability and an impediment to communist expansion. They therefore concluded by analogy that similar plans should be effected in the so-called developing countries.³ It was also speculated that modernisation in the developing world, as in the West, would promote the secularisation of laws and the decline of the omnipotent religion.⁴

W. W. Rostow, one of the foremost proponents of such theories, formulated a theory of stages of economic growth. Accordingly, the process of social change comprised certain stages through which every country would be going on its path to modernisation. These stages were theoretically constructed on the basis of an evolutionary model, which had established that the path to progress was directed toward the modern industrial world. Rostow’s successful test case was Great Britain whose path to industrialisation and constitutionalism was to be followed by other newly emerging States.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, some of these assumptions were criticised. For instance, Samuel Huntington questioned the direct reciprocation of economic growth and stability.⁵ It was argued that there was no guarantee that political stability would follow economic development at the same pace, and that when economic growth outpaced the political process of institution building undertaken by the modernising regimes, there would be more chance of political instability. Huntington argued that social mobilisation is accelerated by economic development, and as such development would increase the rate of literacy and exposure to new ideas, hence increasing demands for political participation.⁶

One conclusion that was drawn from this proposition and put into practice in countries like Iran was regressive in essence. It was perceived that the autocratic measures of modernising States could be condoned as long as they helped sustain

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¹ Ibid, p. 3
⁶ Huntington, S. *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 1973, p. 4
political stability and building institutions. In practice, however, genuine participatory social and political institutions and meaningful political organisations could not develop under the absolutist monarchy of the Shah, which left the agitated social groups and individuals frustrated and turned their immature political demands to aspirations for a violent revolution.

According to Immanuel Wallerstein, the modernisation theories were under the heavy influence of the eighteenth century Enlightenment and most of the nineteenth century systems of thought, which were based on “the assumption of progress, reformulated later as evolution.” The capitalist theories of modernisation were not alone in being constructed on a stage-by-stage evolutionary model. According to evolutionary Marxism too, there was a set of stages through which all States had to go. Only in this case, “the stages covered longer historical time and the model country was the USSR.” These are the stages known as “slavery-feudalism-capitalism-socialism.”

The critique of the “developmentalist” approach to history led, in the 1970s, to the provision of a “world-system” interpretation, which portrayed the modern world as a single capitalist “world-economy”. A proponent of the world-system theory, Wallerstein, suggested that “national States are not societies that have separate parallel histories, but parts of a whole reflecting that whole.” The emergence of such an understanding of the world was partly a result of the failure of the evolutionary models in explaining the non-conforming empirical realities. It had become more than obvious that most of the non-Western societies were not on a path to progress remotely similar to that of the West.

Nevertheless, “developmentalist” worldviews persisted, partly because they had found advocates among the elite and some intellectuals in the non-Westen societies themselves. Naturally, the most fervent advocates of the "world-system" theory were also found among the middle-class intellectuals of the non-Western societies in the “periphery” of the “world-system”. This was a process of challenging “the European political domination of the world” and “the Euro-centric constructions of social reality.” The new social reality described modernism as the entrenchment of the Western mode of economy, which was a product of a certain period of historical development of Western Europe (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). This economic mode relying on the instrumental concepts of efficiency and technology had already been globalised in the wake of colonialism and establishment of a world market.

According to “world-system” perspective, there is no clear reason as to why the world should have naturally adopted the Western capitalist mode of economy. It was only that as a result of a series of historical events, such a system had been established globally, and in its success had convinced almost every society to follow the same path to development. As such, the acceptance by the non-Western societies of this path as the way to future was basically the acceptance of the Western ways. Thus, social transformations in this direction were clearly the Westernisation of these societies. The use of the term modernisation in this context was obviously politically expedient in its function in inhibiting the ethnocentric and nationalist aspirations of the indigenous population of non-Western societies.

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1 Wallerstein, I. 1979, p. 50
2 Ibid, p. 52
3 Ibid, p. 53
4 Ibid, p. 55
The "world-system" theory rejected the claim that the capitalist mode of economy was embraced by most of the non-Western world because of its capacity to realise an economic advancement of the Western sort. Instead, it asserted that the global success of the Western capitalism was due to its power to eliminate all other forms of economic life through militaristic, political, technological and cultural hegemony. Thus, only to the extent that this Western hegemony was achieved, one could speak of modernisation of the peripheral societies. In this perspective, the kind of modernisation that many so-called Third World counties were currently implementing was seen as qualitatively different from the process of modernity in the advanced capitalist States.

Having differentiated modernity from modernisation, as two completely different phenomena, we may then proceed to define the Western modernity as the result of mainly internal interactions of the European system since the sixteenth century. In this perspective, the Third World modernisation would be understood mainly as the consequence of the geopolitical expansion of the already established Western capitalist ideological and economic structures, and particularly its globalisation since the nineteenth century. In this sense, the latter process was almost completely external to the non-Western societies, whereas the former process was internal to the Western societies.

By this, it is not meant that capitalism would not have developed in the non-Western world had it not been for the influence of the West. This would be a vain argument, just as much as it would be whimsical to assume the opposite. What could be said, however, is that capitalist enterprise, in its mercantile form was not alien to the non-Western world. Trade existed there since the ancient time, but consisted of essentially scattered and individual undertakings of long distance merchants and certain local businesses. The transformation of the particular form of European capitalism into a universal economic structure through "capitalisation of agriculture, industrialisation, proletarianisation, urbanisation and bureaucratisation" is what might have developed differently in non-Western societies if the actions of the indigenous forces were not inhibited by the Western colonial expansion as it was. As it happened, the so-called "Third World" adopted or was caught in the race of adoption of the Western ways. Most of the "Third World" societies began to industrialise, raise standing armies, bureaucratise, urbanise and homogenise their culture on the Western model, but with the exception of Japan, they largely failed to rise much above the level of a peripheral status in the world-economy.

Nevertheless, modernisation/Westernisation had a tremendous impact on the social structure of the non-Western societies, albeit in distorted forms. For example, the bureaucratisation, which in the West led to the handing over of the control of the most important functions of the State and society to technically, commercially and legally trained government or non-government officials, was implemented in the non-Western countries with almost complete failure. It failed to produce the moral, institutional and functional capacities required for the transfer of social functions from the royal court and local authorities to a central bureaucracy. Its failure was also due to the fact that it could not create an efficient and truly functional class of officials. In political arena too, written constitutions and rules or laws were legislated in many non-Western countries on the Western model. But the sense of association with a rationally ordained law could not fully develop in the absence of a meaningful influence of the native religion and culture on the process of

1 The powder was also available in the non-Western world in the ancient time but was never developed into the basis for military technology; it was used for ages to spark fireworks in festivals and celebrations.
political development. Even where there was relative success in the economic sphere, the non-Western capitalist countries failed to sufficiently develop the moral and functional principles of the capitalist enterprise.\footnote{1}

**Modernisation of Iran beyond the White Revolution**

In Iran, like many non-Western societies, huge steps were taken in the path of modernisation under the Pahlavi regime in the 1960s and 1970s. But economic development and the importation of the Western rational techniques and laws did not result in the practical rationalisation of the relationship of the State and society. Missing was the forms of discourse and institutions that would inspire the creation of a civil society by invoking the appropriate collective memories and aspirations.\footnote{2}

These discourses could only grow out of the meaningful and creative interpretations of traditions, which could produce new collective political, social and cultural movements favourable to the formation of a civil society. To be sure, attempts to construct new discourses of power were made in religious and secular forms in order to create new modes of culture and new community structures. But these attempts - whether in social and political forms, or in cultural and artistic forms - took place without any meaningful interaction with the State. In fact, they occurred against the attempts of the State to distort or destroy them.

The White Revolution meant to modernise Iran, but beyond a surface modernisation of the economy, it produced no meaningful relationship either with the religious establishment or with the society in general. In this sense, it was clearly distinct from the development of modernity in the West where the tension between State and religion in many cases produced new philosophical and political discourses at the social level, which formed the intellectual backbone of the civil society.

Fischer maintains that in the 1970’s, Iran was a major test case for the modernisation theories. “It was the case where the constraints of capital theoretically were removed and which therefore was thought to have the best chance of relatively rapid transformation from a Third World country into a modern industrial First World Nation.”\footnote{3}

Indeed in many accepted indicators of development, Iran occupied a leading position within the Third World. Literacy figures, urbanisation, economic growth, and industrialisation were substantially higher than the Third World average.\footnote{4}

However, the process of Iran’s societal transformation from an agrarian to an industrial order had drastic consequences in terms of its effects on the Iranian culture and through that on the Iranian psyche. These effects were mainly negative, as they created a deep sense of inferiority, instability and insecurity among the people, which destroyed the trust in the existing order and made change a permanent dream. People thus refused to invest hope in the present for a desirable future; rather, they looked to the past traditions to get inspired and motivated for future action, which would change the present. Instead of looking forward the existing social and political institutions, they always looked beyond them for the fulfilment of their aspirations.

One of the major causes of instability in Iran, as Milani asserts, was that “socio-economic development (had) consistently outpaced the institution-building

\footnote{1} The recent economic malaise of South Korea, Indonesia and other relatively prosperous capitalist economies in Asia testifies to this fact.

\footnote{2} By civil society, I mean to emphasise a conventional liberal-democratic arrangement whereby the society would be protected against the arbitrary intrusion of the State by the rule of law, and where civil disobedience is tolerated by the State.

\footnote{3} Fischer, M. M. 1980, p. ix

\footnote{4} Benard, C. & Khalilzad, Z. 1984, p. 12
record of the incumbent regimes.”¹ This deficiency was coupled with the fact that in Iran, contrary to the West, the institution building process had to be carried out from above in a short period of time, creating excessive tension in the social traditions, hence shaking the foundations of the legitimacy of the ruling system. The Pahlavi regime was particularly susceptible to this problem, as the presence of alternative leadership provided by the ulama made it invariably insecure.

The failure of the Pahlavi regime in its modernising efforts was in some respects similar to what had happened in many other non-Western societies with powerful religious and belief systems. In most of the Islamic countries, this failure was attributed to the alien nature of Westernisation and the decline in indigenous economic, political and cultural position of these societies in the “world-system”. In these countries, religious revivalist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, set themselves the goal of reversing this process of decline by reinstating the early political and cultural glory of Islam. Obviously, Islam was not the only mode of resistance to the Western dominance, but it was successfully developed to become the dominant mode of resistance by being transformed into the political ideology of the disadvantaged and the disinherited.

In Iran, in the absence of sufficient material resources to put up by way of resistance against the technological and military superiority of the West, the Islamic ideologues developed an ideology of revolution, which was virtually based on the subjective defiance of the West. Hence, the efforts to mould an anti-Western state of mind in order to preserve the traditional values in opposition to the Western values. This process involved the construction of new ideologies and utopias out of the past historical and mythological memories.

The most prominent forms of ideological resistance to the Western hegemony in Iran since the 1930s were nationalism, socialism and religious revivalism. The religious discourse and action came to dominate the political opposition since the 1960s because of certain concrete reasons. The dominance of Shi‘ism was due to its deep indigenous roots, its functional character, its affinity with the Iranian psyche, and most importantly its acceptance as a national ideology rather than a mere sectarian adherence. Its preponderance was also due to the fact that liberal nationalism and socialism derived form the European systems of thought, had failed to demonstrate themselves as viable alternatives to the existing political order. Moreover, the process of rationalisation of religion and the new ideological developments in Shi‘ism enabled the religious discourse to accommodate the popular elements of nationalist and socialist ideologies without necessarily accepting them as partners.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as Fischer notes, Muhammad Reza Shah tried to establish legitimacy for his regime as a “strong kingdom in a modern nationalistic State”. He made an effort to industrialise Iran rapidly, but his efforts were inherently contradictory. He neither had the chance to return to the old form of empire, nor could he resort to the political interest group competition of a “mature bourgeois democracy”. Alternatively, he relied on a “centralised command structure, capable of seizing and utilising the affluence of oil income.”²

The Shah’s political strategy for concentrating power at the top was heavily conspiratorial. Inspired by the old pattern of absolutist rule in Iran, and equipped with modern political intrigue, he instigated distrust among rival powerful interest groups within the State bureaucracy; and he used the terror of the notorious SAVAK against

¹ Milani, M. 1988, p. 28
² Fischer, M. M. in Amirsadeghi, ed. 1977, p. 172
scattered dissident groups outside the State. His military policy also relied almost entirely on built-in rivalries in the command structure of the armed forces.

In creating the Rastakhiz (Resurgenc) Party, the Shah followed the example of the corporatist regimes based on one-party system. After he was deposed, the Shah wrote about his founding of the Rastakhiz Party: “This party, by including members of every social class and people of every shade of opinion, and by its constructive liberalism, would save time and men. ... This organisation would be a political and ideological school, which would engender a spirit of unity.” The Rastakhiz Party also followed a chauvinist strategy, similar to Reza Shah’s strategy, by trying to perpetuate a sense of particularism which, in its Iranian version, was based on the glorification of pre-Islamic Persian kings and the rekindling of the age-old anti-Arab sentiments. It intended to create a national sense of distinction for Iran among other Middle Eastern countries.

The economic policies of the Shah in the 1960s and 1970s led to the creation of a new class of bourgeoisie with increasing importance in the national economy, but without parallel political weight. The reliance of the regime on oil revenues resulted in the relative autonomy of the State with respect to the society, and thus in the total lack of social responsiveness on the part of the State. The Iranian State under the Shah was typical of what is called a “rentier State.” It received a substantial amount of external rent in oil revenues, and as such, enjoyed considerable structural autonomy from the social classes, including the new bourgeoisie. But the ever-increasing dependence of the State on oil revenues diminished its reliance on social sources of revenues, such as taxes. This situation, although diminishing the problem of capital scarcity, so common in the Third World, eliminated the State’s responsiveness to the civil society. This, in turn, added to the despotic character of the State.

**The Crisis of Modernisation in Iran**

It is widely accepted that the dilemma of the Shah’s modernisation efforts in the 1960’s and 1970’s lay in the uneven development of economic and political domains, namely that he modernised the former without changing the essence of the latter. Fischer has attributed the failure of capitalist modernisation in Iran to “the contradiction between top-down directed social change by a government which, relying on oil revenues, essentially made itself independent of any need to be directly responsive to its citizenry. And the need of such a government to suppress the local level of initiative because of its rejection of what it perceived as oppression by an alien culture or world economy.”

But more than political and economic problems, the Shah suffered from the deeper problem of a legitimacy crisis. He, like his father, disrupted the already existing social process of construction and reconstruction of a meaningful world at the level of traditional religion. He thus severed the social sense of continuity with the immediate past, trying to replace it by the out of sight and out of mind glory of the

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2. For obscure reasons Iranians have demonstrated a desire to be regarded as a nation of higher status than their neighbours.
4. The relative autonomy of the State from the upper classes can explain the Shah’s manoeuvre in the early 1960’s to reduce the political and social power of the large landowners. It may also illuminate the motive behind his move to grant “numerous non-cosmetic concessions to the workers in the 1970s despite strong opposition from the powerful industrialists.” See Milani, M. 1988, p. 34.
5. Milani, M. 1988, p. 4
pre-Islamic Persian Empire.

Prior to the 1960s, the monarchy enjoyed a somewhat “diffuse support” of the religious authority, largely through a tacit recognition of the State by this authority, and through limited mutual co-operation between the religious and political establishments. Since the early 1960s though the trend of the Shah’s modernisation substantially reduced this support and as such weakened the basis of the regime’s legitimacy in the eyes of the traditional social groups and the community of believers in general. Among the new middle-class with nationalist sentiments, the legitimacy of the Shah’s regime had already been weakened following the restoration of monarchy by the American-inspired coup of 1953.

The Shah’s programme of industrialisation and economic modernisation may thus be perceived as an attempt to address the legitimacy crisis of the regime. The Shah seemed to be aware of this crisis trying to broaden the social base of the State by buying the support of new social classes with economic rewards. Rapid industrialisation created a large number of jobs in the urban centres which, being better paid than agricultural labour, instigated a massive internal migration from rural to urban centres. But in creating this situation, the Shah inadvertently created the conditions for the intensification of the legitimacy crisis by causing an unanticipated socio-economic crisis.

From 1946 to 1976, the agrarian labour force declined from 75 percent of the total workforce to 34 percent. Most rural migrants were absorbed in the volatile construction boom of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Between 1966 and 1976, the workforce engaged in the construction business nearly doubled. Manufacturing sector also grew dramatically in this period, owing to the creation of large factories by the direct or indirect involvement of the State. Also the rapid expansion of the State bureaucracy resulted in the increase of the number of white-collar and professional employees making the State the largest employer of the white-collar as well as the blue-collar workers by 1976.

This trend inevitably enhanced the economic position of the salaried workers and wage earners, particularly through the State intervention in support of most of the worker’s non-political demands. As Amjad has pointed out: “The State policy toward the workers was one of punishment and enticement. On the one hand, the State supported most of the workers’ demands for higher wages; on the other, political demands of the workers were suppressed.” For a period, the economic prosperity seemed to be able to overshadow the political concerns of these new social classes.

The economic dependence of these classes on the State might have played a part in delaying their support for the anti-Shah movement. But the Shah failed to sustain the economic boom. The problem was that economic benefits appeased their beneficiaries as long as they were increasingly supplied to meet heightening expectations. The absence of popular confidence in the Shah’s regime left little capacity in the new middle-class and the new working class to tolerate any economic setbacks. The Shah’s ambitious economic reforms tumbled with the relatively minor economic downturn of the late 1970s; and the plunge of the economy into recession due to lack of public confidence put an end to the regime’s secure financial base. The regime was thus no longer capable of financially rewarding the new social classes that had depended on it and formed its social base. In this sense, the regime plunged into

1 Parsa, M. 1989, p. 128
2 Ibid, p. 128
3 Ibid, p. 130
4 Amjad, M. 1989, p. 111
an economic crisis, which was received by the people much more severely than in fact was.

The oil boom and bust in the 1970s exacerbated the latent contradictions of Iranian society and contributed to the emergence of a revolutionary situation in the 1977-1978 period. A major contributor to this situation was ironically the emergence of a rift between the State and some powerful groups, which had benefited from it, namely the new middle-class and the industrial workers. The oil boom, which had increased Iran’s oil revenues to nearly $20 billion a year in the early 1970s, elevated the real incomes of the workers and the white-collar salaried employees and raised their expectations. The economic bust became apparent in the wake of a period of reckless spending which culminated after 1975. In this situation, the economic position of the wage earners and salaried employees deteriorated, whereas the affluence of a privileged few - connected with the regime - increased. The popular resentment with the widening income gap between the privileged few and the majority of the population intensified as it became increasingly evident that the privileged few made their fortunes largely through commissions on large and questionable government contracts. And this was when purchase of a house or even a car was suddenly beyond the reach of new middle-class families.¹

The pressure of frustrated aspirations triggered the disillusionment of the new social classes with the regime. From the economic standpoint, the frustrated economic expectations of the salaried workers after a period of relative economic prosperity amounted to a measure of political discontent with the Shah’s regime. According to J.C. Davies’ theory, such economic turn-around can trigger political crisis and social unrest.² This theory might well be utilised to explain the contribution of the discontent of the modern urban classes to the revolution.

However, care should be taken not to accord a disproportionate weight to the economic factor in instigating the Islamic Revolution. In their own objectivity, even in combination with the subjective economism of the leftist political ideologies, the economic factors could only marginally promote a popular revolution. As in the previous social movements in Iran since the turn of the century, mere economic grievances had not been of a social potency sufficient to create a collective consciousness and momentum for political action. They could not produce a universal framework within which people were prepared to sustain a consistently high level of political action, which required readiness to sacrifice their lives. This needed an ideological motivation in socialist, nationalist or religious form.

In the case of Iran, the socialist and nationalist political ideologies were arguably not as compelling as a religious political ideology, mainly because of their modern and alien origins. This may explain why the bazaar merchants, who were of least economic significance to the State, could obtain the highest political clout as a social group through their association with the protest movement led by the ulama. Their receptivity towards the Shi‘i political ideology, which was in the process of formation in the 1960s and 1970s, made them one of the forerunners of the 1979 Revolution. Due to the political significance of the bazaar in modern Iran, I shall briefly discuss the role of the bazaar in the revolution here.

The Role of the Bazaar

The role of the bazaar as an economic force with moral and political influence

¹ Bakhash, S. 1984, p. 13
was instrumental in passing the political leadership of the indigenous forces of resistance against the Shah to the ulama. I have already discussed the sources of moral and political influence of the bazaar. Here, I shall concentrate on their conflict with the Pahlavi State. The origin of the anti-Pahlavi attitude of the bazaar can be dated from the Reza Shah’s attempt in the 1930’s to restructure the economy as a national unit by controlling the economic activities of the bazaar merchants. Ever since, the bazaar merchants had got involved in using traditional forms of organisation with the potential of providing an ethical basis for criticising the Pahlavi policies.

True, the Iranian bazaar had been transformed by modernisation. It was also diminished in its traditional moral credence. But still, it had retained its basic traditional character and a large part of its social and moral influence. As I have mentioned earlier, the traditional character of the bazaar was derived from the persistence of traditional economic and cultural norms in its structure. These norms were inherited from Medieval Iran, when the bazaar complex took shape to regulate the economy of the then comparatively small urban centres. As such, the bazaar formed a geographic entity, containing the hub of the economic and cultural life of the traditional urban middle-class. Even, the architecture of the building complex that housed the multitude of professions in the central bazaar had only slightly changed up until the modern time.

This natural resistance to change was assisted by the physical interconnection of the bazaar network, which provided it with a sense of common fate. Misagh Parsa has given this picture of the bazaar in the 1970s: “In most major cities, the central bazars are concentrated in a single location, in narrow alleys under covered roofs. The concentration and proximity of shops facilitate communications. All bazaaris, meaning both merchants and shopkeepers who distribute goods and artisans who produce goods on a small scale, deal in very specialised commodities ... Closeness and dependence on single commodities can generate intense competition for customers. At the same time, however, proximity and dependence on similar commodities for livelihood can create a common fate with respect to market conditions, changes in technology, rise of new competitors and external factors of production such as the role of the State in business.”

Convergence of the professional interests of the bazaar merchants was further strengthened by their essentially religious worldview. The central bazaar was a centre for organising religious processions and sermons. It also housed a holy shrine or a main mosque, and as such provided for the bazari affinity with the ulama.

It goes without saying that the bazaar was foremost an economic entity; and as such its political orientations were primarily determined by changes in the economy. But economic change in Iran was predominantly determined by the State, hence the active political engagement of the bazaar with the State in the late nineteenth century and in the early and mid twentieth century in defence of the national commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. Thus, the oppositional role of the bazaaris presented both nationalist and religious concerns.

During the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty the ulama-bazaar alliance was further strengthened and put forward a series of fundamental political demands. This tendency intensified particularly with the increased desire of the Pahlavi State to bring the bazaar activity under direct State control. It gradually gave the bazaar an internal political and economic structure in opposition to the State.

Like Reza Shah, Muhammad Reza Shah pursued the policy of bringing the bazaar under the State control. The tendency of the bazaar to conduct its affairs

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1 Fischer, M. M. in Amirsadeghi, ed. 1977, p. 178
independent of the State had resulted in the creation of a dual economic structure, which was incompatible with the modern and centralising theme of the Pahlavi economic policies. The initiation by the State of strategic industries and new economic enterprises held them in the ownership or under the control of the State. By contrast, the bazaar affairs never came under total governmental supervision. One basic reason for this situation was that the bazaar derived its socio-economic relevance from the pre-modern social structures. A second reason was probably the State’s failure in meaningful incorporation of the bazaar into the modern economy.

This failure was of high political cost for the Pahlavi regime. After all, it was through the bazaar network (and its function in creating a loosely organised community of lay believers) that the religious authority drew most of its recruits and finances. Moreover, the sons and daughters of the bazaaris were highly likely to be educated, attending universities, or occupying professional positions; and many were likely to have internalised the anti-regime sentiments of their elders. They were thus likely to propagate these anti-regime sentiments in their work places or among the university students. Many of these young men and women would fill the lecture theatres in the Husseiniyyeh Ershad and other religious centres to listen to the Muslim ideologues, such as Ali Shari’at, Morteza Motahhari, Ali Khamene’i, and other modernist and radical orators.

Around the bazaar economy had formed a fairly sophisticated social organisation of work engendering certain moral ideologies in support of traditional forms of organisation. The traditional bazaar had long contained “a differentiated network of commission agents, jobbers, hawkers, peddlers, wholesalers, long-distance merchants, brokers, money-changers, craftsmen and shop assistants.” Business was regulated by Islamic economic rules, set primarily by the ulama and considered to be religious duties. These rules were updated in the treatises of religious duties (Resaleye Tawzih ul-Masa’el) issued by the mujtahids as their theological doctorate theses. These rules contained essentially a “contractual view of economic exchange; … children may not buy and sell … and goods may be returned if the buyers find they bought them above the fair price.”

As Fischer has noted, the belief that the ultimate proprietor is God distinguishes the Islamic economic morality from that of laissez-faire capitalism. In theory, the Islamic taxation system (Khums and Zakat) is meant “to redistribute to the public domain and the poor what is not utilised and what, through inevitable inequalities, builds up in the hands of the fortunate.”

Thus, the bazaar had developed an independent moral standing with almost none of the elements of its existence derived from the modern Pahlavi State. Its moral legitimacy had a religious basis, and as far as the economic transactions were concerned, it had established a communal system of distribution with internal regulatory systems. The government strategies alienated the bazaar whose socially meaningful alliance with the ulama became the driving force of the 1979 movement against the Shah. The government tried to discredit the bazaar by labelling it as the centre of “parasitic middle-men” or “the corridor of thieves.” The Shah took two important steps in eradicating the very basis of the socio-economic existence of the bazaar economy.

The first step had to do with the credit policy and the vigour in developing large enterprises since the 1960’s, which had devastating consequences for the
bazaar-oriented retail network. While low interest loans were allocated for large private companies owned by the “petro-bourgeoisie” and the foreign investors, encouraging large profits for them, little was done for the bazaar merchants or the bazaar-oriented retail industry. Keddie has noted that “rates of 6-9 percent were available only to large enterprises”, whereas most of the bazaar merchants, the small shop owners and craftsmen were starved for bank credit, ostensibly because their enterprises did not provide “sufficient collateral security for a loan.” They were generally not even eligible for normal bank rates of 12 percent, but had to borrow from the moneylenders at 20-25 percent. Moreover, the developmental policies of the government, such as the encouragement of chain supermarkets and department stores, created direct competition between the modern and the traditional sectors of the urban economy, and as such were detrimental to the interests of the bazaar and especially of the guilds. This situation entailed for the bazaar a strong measure of psychological insecurity, underlying the identity crisis, which prevailed in Iran in the 1970’s.

The Shah’s second step against the traditional bazaar economy was his so-called anti-profiteering campaign in 1975. As a result of this campaign, 8,000 merchants and retailers were imprisoned, and a very large number were fined or sent into exile. Although the bazaar merchants and the retailers benefited from the oil-boosted general prosperity from the mid-1960s onwards, they rightly gathered that there were no governmental policies designed to further their long-term interest.

The economic frustration of the bazaar in the 1960s and 1970s may be described in terms of what Durkheim called normative disorientation as a result of the destabilisation of the traditional guild system. Similar to what Durkheim pointed out about the psychological implications of industrialisation in Europe in his study of suicide, the general prosperity of the 1970s in Iran generated disorientation and “anomie” by disturbing the traditional order.

The role of the bazaar in the political and social developments of the 1960s and 1970s was also important due to its receptivity toward the massive immigration from rural areas to large urban centres. The new migrants, coming from traditional backgrounds, were naturally inclined to do business with petty retailers, bazaar wholesalers and traditional moneylenders, whereas the State had no desire to accommodate the economic needs of the growing influx of the provincial and rural migrants. This in turn contributed to a modest growth in the traditional economy. Parsa has noted: “By the time of the revolution, Tehran’s central bazaar (had) close to forty thousand shops and workshops, one half of which were located within the covered bazaar and the remainder in the immediate vicinity.”

According to Arjomand, the bazaar merchants and bankers, the traditional bourgeois sector of the economy, expanded in absolute terms during the two decades prior to the revolution. Robert Graham notes that despite the modernisation of the economy under the Shah, the bazaar still controlled part of the domestic wholesale trade and was also involved in international trade of items such as carpets, nuts and dried fruits. The significance of this trend is better understood if one accounts for the fact that the bazaar merchants, deprived of “petrodollars”, conducted their domestic and international trade independent of the

1 Keddie, N. R. 1980, p. 224
2 Despite religious prohibition of usury, money lending for interest was widely exercised in the bazaar with technical justifications.
3 Abrahamian, E. 1982, p. 498
5 Parsa, M. 1989, p. 92
6 Arjomand, S. A. 1988, p. 106
7 Graham, R. Iran: The Illusions of Power, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1979, p. 221
If the internal migration preserved the socio-economic relevance of the bazaar economy, it also increased the need for the ulama as the guardians of the religio-cultural norms. This was very much reflected in the religious vitality in the 1960s and 1970s. It also laid the foundation of the close co-operation of the ulama, the bazaaris and the newly urbanised masses with traditional worldviews. These three social groups became the principle forces of the Islamic Revolution.

The Religious Vitality of the 60s & 70s

The ulama social activity in the 1960’s and 1970’s was boosted by an important traditional characteristic. Its being urban-based inspired a largely urban social movement, which gradually included the rural population. Rural areas had long been the hinterland of the ulama field of activity. “In its classic pattern, cities with their mosques and madrasas constituted the centres of Islamic orthodoxy, and rural and provincial areas constituted its periphery.”

The internal migration from rural areas to cities rapidly strengthened the ulama constituency in the urban centres. Urban mosques were the most receptive centres for the congregation of these newcomers, who would find it very difficult and disturbing to join Western-style means of entertainment, such as discos, night clubs, cabarets, cinemas, etc.

As we have seen, the ulama were already influential in the general social conduct of the population through their role as “the norm-givers of the community of the faithful (and) ... the repositories and arbiters of legitimacy.” This influence amounted to a measure of socio-political power, which the ulama used from time to time to agitate or appease the masses, depending on the mood of their relationship with the State. With the enormous surge in the size of urban centres and the influx of large numbers of peasants into cities in the 60’s and 70’s, the influence of the ulama on the masses was boosted and found new orientations. There was also a surge in religious ecstasy and stimulation via participation in the religious rituals that marked the Shi’i calendar.

Also, the ulama affinity with the general public became more meaningful as a considerable measure of populism and a serious emphasis on social justice entered the religious discourse. The religious revival and the intensification of the question of social justice resulted from the fusion of cultural, political and economic problems caused by rapid modernisation. It originated a movement, which included not only the traditional urban classes (like the ulama and the bazaaris), but also part of the new middle-class and urban proletariat with traditional upbringing and with political and economic grievances. The rural and provincial migrants with more emotional but less disciplined religious beliefs, who comprised the poorest stratum of the urban centres, were also attracted by this trend and made their contribution to it. As Ernest Gellner has noted, the Islamic faith has been able to offer “a form of collective self identification, which is more positive and satisfying than the mere notion of the damned of the earth, or the disinherit proletariat.”

Increased religious vitality in the urban centres in the 1960’s and 1970’s could be perceived as the prelude to the Islamic Revolution, as it caused a surge in religious zeal affecting particularly the provincial and rural migrants. These migrants, with a newly acquired puritanical view of Islam, which they learnt from radical preachers in

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1 Arjomand, S. A. 1988, p. 106
3 Ibid, p. 67
the mosque congregations, were crucial in the formation of the radical political movement of the late 1970s. The number of these migrants who were destined to fill the ranks of Islamic revolutionaries in the forthcoming years sharply increased in the 60s and 70s. The Iranian national census indicated in 1976 that between 1959 and 1976 the urban population of Iran nearly trebled. Internal migration in this period accounted for a substantial proportion of the growth in urban population. According to Farhad Kazemi, between 1966 and 1976, more than 2.1 million people migrated from rural and provincial areas to major urban centres.1 Iran’s demographic pattern of the late 1950’s which, according to official estimates, located about 70 percent of the population in the rural areas was overturned because of the internal migration. By the late 1970’s about half of the population was estimated to be residing in the cities.

The provincial and rural migrants predominantly consisted of the uprooted peasants who were driven off land. They were stripped of land either because they could not afford to keep up with the programme of mechanisation of agriculture introduced by the Shah’s reforms, or because their lands were taken over by huge “agri-businesses”, owned mutually by the State and the big capitalist landowners. A small number of them were hired by the “agri-businesses”, but most of them had to seek their fortunes in the cities, which in many cases they did quite successfully. There were also migrants with a small capital, who had chosen to move to the large cities for more profit, and in many cases they were relatively successful. They predominantly established businesses in connection with the traditional sector of the urban economy - the bazaar - and employed a lot of poorer migrants. Arjomand has noted the sharp rise in the number of religious publications and the increase in the number of pilgrims to Mecca and other religious shrines in the 1960’s and 1970’s as an indicator of the increased religious vitality and traditional religious sentiments among these migrants. Furthermore, a large number of religious associations mushroomed in the same period, many of which were formed by rural and provincial migrants. Religious associations were particularly active during the months of Muharram and Ramadhan when the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and the assassination of Imam Ali were annually commemorated.

The increased activity of religious associations naturally heightened the demand for preachers and cantors. As Arjomand has noted, this demand outstripped the supply in the 1970’s and created “a market for religious tapes and cassettes”, which were largely supplied by the religious associations.2 In this manner, the religious associations gradually took the form of a loosely organised network. They came to play a crucial role in the success of the Islamic Revolution by reproducing and distributing Ayatollah Khomeini’s messages, and organising massive anti-Shah demonstrations in 1978. According to Algar the cassette tape was the technological symbol of the Islamic Revolution as the telegram was of the Constitutional Revolution.3

The Crisis of Legitimacy

As we have seen, a combination of socio-cultural change, demographic shift, economic failure and political repression in the Iran of the 1970s prepared the necessary grounds for social and political instability. Nevertheless, such instabilities might not have necessarily led to a full-scope revolution in the absence of proper

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1 Kazemi, F. Poverty and Revolution in Iran, New York University Press, New York, 1980, p. 262
2 Arjomand, S. A. 1988, p. 93
3 Algar, H. 1980, p. 55
subjective conditions. The formation of a revolutionary ideology, which successfully debased the illegitimacy of the State, was the keystone in triggering the revolutionary movement of 1978-1979. I have already discussed the intellectual developments against the backdrop of the events in the 1960's and 1970's. In the next chapter, I shall also discuss in detail the contributions of the Islamic ideologues. In the following sections of this chapter, I shall briefly review the socio-political and intellectual context in which the revolution was shaped.

Perhaps, one of the most important developments of this period was the open exposition of an acute legitimacy crisis that the system and concept of monarchy, in general, and the Pahlavi monarchy, in particular, had long sustained. It was ironic that this legitimacy crisis heightened when the Shah’s regime, in terms of accepted indicators that would determine the degree of the grip of a government over the apparatuses of power, was still in a promising position. Up until 1978, the army was unified and confident, with a high degree of loyalty to the imperial court. The economy, although in shambles, was still in a much better shape than many other Third World countries at the time, thanks to the oil revenues. And, there was no systematic, broad, and concerted opposition with vast popular support and with access to enough material resources (e.g. arms and finances) to mobilise a revolutionary struggle.

Hannah Arendt observed that government is upheld by power, supported either through consent or imposed through violence.¹ The Shah’s economic reforms had gathered a measure of consent from the upwardly mobile middle-class, and his army and secret police had certainly imposed power through coercion and violence. And yet in less than a year, all key areas of government were in deep crisis. The army was divided following its confrontation with multimillion-strong street demonstrations, the economy was paralysed as a result of general strikes, and the political command of the State was disintegrated by a powerful opposition with an extensive organised network and with meticulous efficiency. Almost all of these rapid upheavals were led by the Shi‘i ulama.

A key factor stressed by the ulama in their political strategy against the regime was the issue of legitimacy. The legitimacy problem of the Pahlavi dynasty, which was intensified under the last Shah, resulted largely from the erosion of four major components of the kingly power in Iran, which may be categorised as genealogy, authenticity, divine ordinance, rightful earthly power, and moral integrity. The Pahlavi kings suffered from serious weaknesses in all these areas.

Firstly, the humble origins of the Pahlavis did not support their claim to a kingly blood lineage, and their attempt to link themselves with the pre-Islamic Persian kingship was unsuccessful. They failed to inculcate in the public mind their alleged connection with the ancient kings, such as Cyrus and Darius, despite massive propaganda through the State-controlled media and other means of communication. The Shah, for example, organised huge and costly coronation ceremonies for himself, for the Queen and for the Crown Prince. He also held a costly celebration to commemorate 2500 years of monarchy in Iran. The failure of these attempts was perhaps due to the lack of success to meaningfully bridge the wide historical gap between the modern and ancient monarchies.

Secondly, the theoretical implication of the doctrine of Occultation, and the prevalent perception under the Pahlavis that religious legitimation was dispensable, damaged the myth of divine ordinance. The king was no longer believed to be

invested with a “divinely inspired mission” - a title under which the Shah tried to sell his modernisation programme. The Shah’s attempt to change the Islamic calendar to a calendar based on the foundation of the ancient Persian kingdom added by default to the popular perception about the illegitimacy of the Pahlavi regime. The popular resentment toward the Pahlavi monarchy was reinforced by the Shi’i belief that declared “illegitimate all authority during the Occultation of the Hidden Imam.”

Thirdly, the apparent subordination of the Pahavi kings to the Western powers in contrast with their suppressive measures against their own people created a flaw in the ancient image of kingship as invested with the power and will to engage in a battle against the forces of evil. This image had been already weakened by the military failures of the Qajar dynasty. But the popular belief that the Pahlavi dynasty was installed by one foreign power (Britain), and kept in place by another (the United States), further damaged the myth of the rightful power of the king.

Fourthly, the successful attempt of the forces of opposition in the 1970s in exposing the opulent and corrupt lifestyle of the Shah and his inner circle inflicted a major blow upon the myth of the moral integrity of the king. The opposition had no difficulty to contrast the extravagance of the royal court with the misery of the sprawling shantytowns in the margins of the large urban centres. The people came to shun the image of the king and the royal household as morally upright; and it became increasingly clear for them that the king had little if any concern for the wellbeing of his subjects. The exposition of the brutality of the SAVAK against the political opponents of the regime added to the popular perception about the immorality of the Pahlavi monarchy.

The rapid disintegration of the Shah’s regime bewildered not only those with conventional wisdom but even most of the Iran experts who did not perceive the Shi’i ulama as a serious threat to the Shah. Milani has given a good picture of the cultural contradictions in the Iranian society under the Shah, which confused the foreign observers and even deceived the ruling elite themselves. He has identified three contradictory Iran(s) under the Shah: “The first Iran was that of the rich, of the Western educated and oriented, of the high-rise buildings and discos, and of modern factories and armed forces. It was the Iran that the Shah wanted the World to see and accept. ... The second Iran was that of the new middle class and of the educated, anti-Shah dissidents. Although, small in number the middle class attracted a lot of attention from the Western experts. ... The third Iran was relatively unknown and mysterious to most Westerners. ... It was the Iran of the mosques, ta’ziyeh, flagellation processions, the Shanty-houses, the bazaars, the peasants, the workers and the poor.”

The majority of the population fell within the boundary of the third category. They had traditional and conservative views, and were unhappy about the penetration of the Western mode of living and culture at the expense of Shi’i popular culture and values. Defiant of the State policies and unable to express their sentiments openly, they largely presented their defiance in the form of public apathy; a feeling which was mistaken by some of the members of the ruling elite and some Western observers as a silent support for the Shah.

As a consequence of the official propaganda and the congenial relations between the Shah and the Western governments and media, this Iran remained relatively unknown not only to the foreigners but also to many Iranians. Consequently, the rise of the ulama as the representatives of the collective sentiments of the alienated population was bewildering to those who considered religion as a

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1 Milani, M. 1988, p. 25
2 Ibid, p. 26
social force in rapid decline. In 1972, Leonard Binder wrote in 1972 about the success of the Shah in weakening the religious institution as an autonomous force. In 1979, James Bill rejected the likelihood of the ulama participation in the formal procedure of running the government. The American Embassy in Tehran underestimated the ulama threat to the Shah. As late as January 1978, the U.S. Ambassador to Iran, William Sullivan, reported that although the ulama possessed an impressive organisational network, they would probably find it difficult to generate additional demonstrations immediately for purely political purposes. Gary Sick noted the failure of American intelligence agencies to gauge the revolutionary situation in Iran as late as 1978.

The leftists, too, presented the same lack of appreciation for the ulama political capacity. Convinced of the imminent triumph of the working class, and obsessed with a fatalistic interpretation of Marxism, they underestimated the ulama political relevance. Leftist economist-reductionist speculations, reflected in the numerous publications of the Marxist groups in the 1978-79 period, generated the assumption that once the Shah was deposed, class struggle would dominate the political scene, and the political significance of religion would decline. Many leftist experts predicted that the influence of religious dogma on the working class would collapse pretty soon, and then the way would be open to the left. As Milani has indicated many of these assumptions “were accepted as historical facts by Iranian elite and opposition leaders who predicted that the ulama would eventually return to their mosques.”

The New Middle Class and the Professional Revolutionaries

In amazing resemblance to the Constitutional Revolution, the coherent alliance of the ulama and the bazaar was joined, albeit incoherently, by the modern secular intellectuals - the inheritors of the legacy of the early twentieth century liberals and socialists. The liberal and socialist political parties had been formed in the 1940’s and had already experienced the political upheavals of the 1950’s. The National Front and the Tudeh Party drew their cadres mainly from the new middle-class with modern education and filled with aspirations of freedom, independence, democracy, and socialism. These groups relied on their knowledge of modern political thought, particularly the modern revolutionary tradition of the West, and drew on the democratic ethos of the Constitutional Revolution. They had also formed fairly sophisticated and rather effective political organisations with great impact on the course of Iran’s modern politics, notably during the oil nationalisation movement. Their suppression by the Shah after the restoration of the monarchy in 1953 had left them with an anti-Shah political legacy with potential to flower at a suitable conjuncture.

It has been noted that in the early 1960s, the anti-Shah uprising, inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini, had attracted many potential supporters of these groups leaving them no choice other than follow their anti-Shah struggle on the margins of the rising

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1 Hamid Algar was an exception who wrote in 1969 about the continued political influence of the ulama.
5 Sick G. 1985, p. 92
8 Milani, 1988, p. 24
Islamic movement. However, the emergence in the late 1960's of a guerrilla movement out of the ruins of the National Front and the Tudeh Party created a considerable measure of revolutionism quite distinct from the mainstream Islamic movement. In his study of the guerrilla movement in Iran, Ervand Abrahamian has pointed to the significance of this movement in inspiring many other radical individuals and groups, Islamic as well as Marxist, to take up arms against the Pahlavi regime.

Two important guerrilla groups, the Marxist Fada'iyan and the Islamic Mojahedin originated from the underground networks of the Tudeh party and the ruins of the National Front respectively. They particularly attracted the younger members of these organisations who questioned the traditional methods of resistance against the Shah, such as elections, boycotts, general strikes and street demonstrations. The founders of the guerrilla movement in Iran were very much inspired by personalities like Mao Tse Tung and Che Guevara, and by the experience of China, Vietnam, Cuba and Algeria in the 50s, 60s and 70s. They glorified armed struggle in their theoretical pamphlets. The titles of some of these pamphlets illustrate the urge for revolutionary armed struggle among the guerrilla groups. In terms of class background, most of the guerrillas came from the ranks of the middle-class intellectuals and were predominantly university students.

As Abrahamian has indicated, the growth of the guerrilla movement in no way correlated with any decline in the economy. On the contrary, the movement developed at a time of middle class prosperity. "They took up arms as a result of social, moral and political indignation, rather than of economic deprivation." The heroic acts of these professional revolutionaries in confrontation with the Shah's secret police, and their belief in a forthcoming violent revolution on the Russian, Chinese, or Cuban model contributed significantly to the formation of the imaginary of revolution in the 1970s.

Between 1971 and 1977, when the repressive Pahlavi State relied on the oil revenue to create a measure of economic prosperity, and when the regime's policy of carrot and stick had held the people in check, 341 members of the guerrilla organisations were killed by the regime. They were either killed in street battles, or were executed, or were tortured to death. All this raised the admiration of the general public who had become socially and morally alienated by the regime. But, it could not attract any form of sustained support from the population it claimed to represent.

The struggle of the professional revolutionaries suffered important deficiencies. Due to disengagement from the social developments, their chances of deepening their own understanding of local developments and the social structure of Iranian society were slim. They were not even able to enhance the political consciousness of the working class, which they meant to lead to revolution. Moreover, the strong-arm policy of the Shah in dealing with young revolutionaries led them to the unwise decision to go into strict secret activity; a decision, which left them no chance of producing effective links with the general public and finding a broad social base. Also, the atmosphere of terror and repression and the necessities of secrecy gave

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2 The following are some of the titles of the leftist pamphlets: Nabard Ba Diktatori-e Shah (Struggle Against the Shah's Dictatorship), Cheguneh Mobarezeh-e Mosallahaneh Tudeh-i Mishavad (How to Transform the Armed Struggle to Mass Struggle), Mobarezeh-e Mosallahaneh, Ham Esterategi Ham Esterategi (Armed Struggle-Both a Strategy and a Tactic), and Zarurat-e Mobarezeh-e Mosallahaneh va Rad-e Teory-e Baqa (The Need for Armed Struggle and the Rejection of the Theory of Survival).
3 Ibid, p. 4
4 Ibid, p. 3-15
rise to feelings of mutual mistrust between the underground groups, blocking the avenues of their co-operation.

In addition, this situation distorted the mutual understanding of the religious and secular parties. The *ulama* refused to approve of the atheist tendencies of the guerrilla organisations and the guerrillas underestimated the relevance of religious authority in affecting politics. Rather than concerning themselves with the cultural grievances of the people, the guerrillas were mainly concerned with the revolution itself. To the guerrillas the revolution would automatically produce the ideal society if they took its leadership.

Using Roland Barthes’s expression, one may argue that the professional revolutionaries always took “man on the eve of Revolution.” However, it was not the guerrillas who were able to ignite the revolution. As Gellner has pointed out: “Contrary to the Marxist theory, class conflict tends to erupt into revolution only if it can conceptualise itself in ethnic or religious terms.” In Iran various socio-economic economic grievances found political force only when they were expressed in religious terms.

The Islamic Revolution

The heightened moment came in the early months of 1978 with the eruption of anti-regime demonstrations. No doubt, Ayatollah Khomeini played a central role in the development and success of the Islamic Revolution. In the next chapter, I shall discuss the role of Khomeini’s discourse in putting the theory of Islamic Revolution into practice. But, as Shaul Bakhash has noted, “the breadth and intensity of the demonstrations” took even Khomeini by surprise. For instance, Ayatollah Khomeini expressed astonishment that “the people, for so long quiescent, had at last found their voice.” However, he was well aware that the social conditions for which he and his followers had struggled for a long time were at hand.

As Bakhash has pointed out, Ayatollah Khomeini set himself four goals (all of which he realised in practice): “to maintain the momentum of the protest, to use the movement to overthrow the Shah and the Pahlavi dynasty, to block all attempts at compromise, and to make the establishment of an Islamic government the goal of the entire movement.” To boost the momentum of the movement, Khomeini called on the people to continue putting up demonstrations on a larger scale, to speak out, issue leaflets and use the religious processions to expose the “crimes of the regime”. Apprehensive at the possibility that the protests might falter, he repeatedly warned in his proclamations that the “fire” of the popular uprising must not be allowed to be extinguished, because if it were, it could not be rekindled.

The Ayatollah also took care to ensure that the Shah remained the central issue. In building up his case against the Shah, he often appealed to constitutional and legal arguments, questioning the legitimacy of the Shah’s rule. He, for example, pointed to the British backed Reza Shah’s *coup d’etat*, the imposition of the Shah in 1953 with American backing, the repressive policies of the State, the Western

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2 Gellner, E. 1981, p. 66
3 Bakhash, S. 1984, p. 45
4 Ibid, p. 45
5 Ibid, pp. 45-46
6 Khomeini, R. M. *Payam-e Pishva dar Sal-e Enghelab* (The Message of the Leader in the Year of Revolution), [a selection of Khomeini’s messages], Fajr Publication, Qum, 1979, p. 93

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oriented culture, and the economic preponderance of the foreigners, as the bases of illegitimacy of the Pahlavi State.¹

The transfer of Ayatollah Khomeini to Paris in October 1978 contributed to the consolidation of the revolutionary movement and reaffirmed his leadership position of by giving him a world-wide exposure. Even the Shah's bow to the revolution, the appointment of liberal Shapour Bakhtiyar as Prime Minister, and the ensuing democratic reforms, did not gather enough momentum to challenge Khomeini's popularity.

By the early 1979, the Shah, stunned by the scope of the movement, had left the country and the Bakhtiyar government was paralysed in the face of mass demonstrations and the general strike. The unprecedented participation of women in the revolution, as well as the military activities of the guerrilla groups and the strike of the oil industry workers decisively debilitated the government.

Abrahamian has noted that the working class joined the revolution belatedly because of its relative material gains under the Shah. However, Islamic revolutionary enthusiasm overwhelmed mere economic interests. In this sense, the entry of the working class expedited but not caused the eventual triumph of the Islamic revolution. Because of the economic importance of the oil industry, the strike of the oil workers became a decisive contributing factor to the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

Women in Revolution

The mass participation of the veiled Muslim women in the revolution was no less effective than that of the working class men. To be sure, they did not have the economic significance of the working class, but they provided the Islamic Revolution with a sense of genuineness and sincerity, which created an invaluable moral force in support of the revolution. Until that point, the female population of Iran, with the exception of a tiny minority, had been socially innocuous and politically inept. To be sure, there were instances of women’s social and political activity in the nineteenth century, and a wider spectrum of women became engaged in such activities as a result of modernisation of the electoral laws, the educational reforms and the new forms of division of labour under the Pahlavis. However, the bulk of women were still socially static and politically subordinate.

The larger rate of illiteracy among men and the deep-seated male supremacy confined women to housework in the urban centres and to participation in agricultural labour in the rural areas. In both cases, women’s work was unpaid. Women were also restrained by the sexual ethics of pre-Islamic Arabia, which had been accepted and enforced by the Islamic tradition, and whose arbitrary social projections represented women as a faceless entity. The Arabian black veil was to obliterate the social image of women and the moral codes of public piety were to neutralise the Western orientations in women’s activities.

However, when devoid of Western orientations and individual presentation, and when embroiled in sacrifice for the sake of family, women’s activities were generally revered and considered genuine and sincere. A novel element of the Islamic Revolution was its use of gender in politics by urging women to participate in political activity. The role of women was important particularly in encouraging men to engage in violent action if necessary, and to boost the moral cause and the authenticity of the revolution. Moreover, the leadership of the revolution, by

¹Bakhash, S. 1984, p. 46
encouraging the use of the “chador”, undermined the Western orientations of the Shah’s regime and demonstrated the solid and united support of women for the Islamic values of the revolution. The unitarian image of women’s support for the revolution was certainly enhanced by the activation of the Mahdistic tenet and the yearning for the return of the Concealed Imam.

The uniform projection of the female component of the revolution concealed, at least temporarily, the real class and group divisions of interest. The unitarian character of the Islamic revolutionary ideology successfully inspired the massive mobilisation of women around a set of abstract principles with a concrete political goal. As such, Ayatollah Khomeini’s abstract notion of vahdat-e kalama (the unity of the word) successfully extended the concrete goal of overthrowing the demonised Shah to the ranks of the women. No other ideological or political organisation succeeded in inspiring such a nation-wide solidarity among women.

The social cohesion and the united participation of women in the Islamic Revolution was so strong that in many cases it led non-conformist women with modernist tendencies to give up the pursuit of their specific social rights and refuse to take up a more feminist approach. Although in some cases, female intellectuals and activists were driven by tactical concerns imposed by their political persuasions in not being explicit about their rights as modern women, in many instances this silence had become strategically internalised. What Benard and Khalilzad have referred to as “the political schizophrenia of Iranian modern intellectuals” was well illustrated in the political behaviour of many modernist Iranian women, who participated in the revolution. “They (were) required to share in the apologetics and defensiveness with which modernists explain some of the traditional treatment accorded to women, partly in order to disclaim Western superiority, partly in order to avoid the accusation that they are separatists co-operating with bourgeois Western feminism, partly in order to avoid alienating traditional women or providing fuel for fundamentalist claims that modernist women are immoral, and partly because of ambivalent attitudes held by their male counterparts.”

Enter the Angel and Exit the Demon

Filled with religious zeal, but with little disciplined religious awareness, the disoriented population was attracted by the radical politics that was motivated by messianic notions, ecstatic beliefs and populist rhetoric. The abstentionist political attitude of the orthodox Shi’i ulama based on the pacifist interpretations of the doctrine of Occultation was being shaken as it did not accommodate the desire of the radical elements to engage in radical politics. Impressed by the images of warriors of the Iranian and Islamic mythology, the revolutionary population had long yearned for the supreme leadership of a charismatic personality that was now at hand. Such leadership was personified in Ayatollah Khomeini when he innovatively departed from the abstentionist political attitudes of the Shi’i establishment and inspired a Mahdistic movement, presenting himself as the deputy of the Concealed Imam, Mahdi.

In his account of the Islamic Revolution, John Simpson has noticed the impact of the Mahdistic tenet. In his observation of the revolutionary crowd on the day of the return of Khomein, he wrote: “When Khomeini, whose followers gave him the title Imam, returned to sweep away the old, failed political system of Iran and establish an Islamic Republic, the clear blue skies and bright sunlight of that day seemed to them to take on the

1 Such was the case for the male participants of the revolution as well.
2 Benard & Khalilzad, 1984, p. 99
transcendent quality of a Second Coming, ... which raised the expectations to millennial, chiliastic heights." Simpson has also cited a poem from a Tehran magazine entitled “The Day the Imam Returns”, which illustrates the heightened idealism of the people:

“The day the Imam returns,
No one will tell lies anymore,
No one will lock the doors of his house,
People will become brothers,
Sharing the bread of their joys together
In justice and in sincerity. ...”

And there were numerous instances of attribution of miraculous powers to “Imam Khomeini”. For example, word was widely spread that Khomeini’s picture was projected on the moon, or that he was bestowed with divine revelations. Also there emerged a generous flow of religious and literary slogans, which modeled the battle cry of the street demonstrations or inspired the heated graffiti war against the Shah. For instance, the Persian verse: “div cho birun ravad, fereshteh darayad” (the demon retreats as the angel prevails), or the Quranic phrase “ja’al-haqq wa zahaq al-bati’” (enter the truth and exit the lie) were used to juxtapose the humiliating departure of the Shah and the triumphant arrival of the “Imam” in Iran.

These were not mere superficial emotional issues; rather they were instrumental in constituting a real force to drive the people consistently toward accepting “Imam Khomeini” as a supreme leader of divine credit and worthy to be sacrificed for. Soon raical slogans, such as ma hame sarbaz-e to’im Khomeini, gush be farman-e to’im Khomeini (we are your soldiers Khomeini, waiting for your command) and ta khun dar rag-e mast, Khomeini rahbar-e mast (until there is blood in our veins, Khomeini is our leader), became the battle cry of the revolution.

As Arjomand has pointed out: “The Shi’ite belief in the advent of the Mahdi, when activated ...creates a millenarian movement resting on a structure of domination characterised by the attribution of intense personal charisma to an acclaimed leader thus invested with Mahdistic authority.” Yet, the victory of the Islamic Revolution was not characterised only by the activation of popular yearning for the Second Coming of the Mahdi. It also incorporated some aspects of the concurrent modernist protest movement against the Shah, gathering a large part of that movement under its umbrella, and momentarily blurring its distinctive features.

As already mentioned, the radicalisation of the traditionalist movement was matched by a similar process in the secular movement. The peaceful means of protest were dropped for armed struggle and the political parties were turned to guerrilla organisations. Indeed the Shah’s repressive policies had made open political activity inoperative. The political parties that called for political restraint in the face of repression and insisted on non-violent means of protest rapidly lost popularity. Calls for a violent revolution were increasingly voiced as various versions of revolutionary Marxism dominated the activation of radical secular politics in the 1970s.

The fascination with a promised revolution of the Russian kind was so heavily emphasised that it sounded like the yearning for the Second Coming of the Messiah. As the ubiquitous myth of revolution was elevated to become the high objective of the radicalised secular movement, the more profane task of promoting a civil rights movement and pressing for reforms was given up. The secular movement tended increasingly to sell itself in terms of a millenarian revolution of sorts, promising a Marxist paradise, a classless society with people’s army, and with the State withering...

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1 Simpson, J. *Inside Iran*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1988, p. 34
2 Ibid, p. 35
3 Arjomand, S. A. 1984, p. 83
away. Devoid of its original reformist objectives, the originally moderate secular movement was turned to a movement of political extremists.

However, as an extremist movement, it had little chance to compete with the radical Islamic movement inspired by the Mahdistic tenet. Naturally, the religious cause provided a far more powerful spiritual and cultural motivation for the mainly traditional population to risk their lives in extreme political actions. A secular cause might have had a chance in the absence of the deep-seated belief in the Mahdi. In its presence, no radical alternative stood a ghost of a chance.

**The Submission of the Armed Forces**

By January 31, 1979, when Ayatollah Khomeini returned in triumph to Tehran, and the Shah’s State apparatus was in full disintegration, the only obstacle in the way of the Islamic Revolution was the Shah’s armed forces. The religious command adopted a tactic, which the armed forces could not effectively counteract. It “mobilised so numerous a force that nothing short of a holocaust could permit the occupation of the streets.”1 Furthermore, the army was in a state of frustration and half-heartedness since the Shah, its supreme commander, had left the country. The mutual rivalry and mistrust, reminiscent of the Shah’s policies in the armed forces, had eliminated the possibility of the rise of a decision-maker in the military ranks, leaving it effectively beheaded and divided without the Shah. A cassette tape containing the negotiations of the commanders of the armed forces in the period between the departure of the Shah and the victory of the revolution testifies to this fact.2

The lack of decisiveness on the part of the superior commanders was exacerbated by numerous mutinies by the junior officers and the soldiers, who had virtually joined the revolution. Many other soldiers deserted the army, and yet others needed slight encouragement of the revolutionary leaders to side with the revolution. This encouragement finally came from none other than Ayatollah Khomeini himself. In a message to the armed forces, he explicitly invited the troops to side with Islam against the “infidels”. The streets came under virtual occupation by the revolutionary crowds and the troops were in no position to confront the crowds. The revolutionary command encouraged the demonstrators to physically approach the troops and place flowers in gun barrels. Despite sporadic clashes and the slaying of those who confronted the troops bare-handed, the bulk of the army were attracted to the side of the revolution literally on the streets, handing their guns to the revolutionary activists, ripping off their military emblems and embracing the crowds.

With the rebellion of the junior Air Force Cadets in early February 1979, the divided armed forces plunged into deep chaos. The popular uprising of February 10 and 11, and the attack led by guerrilla forces on the military barracks, as well as the conquest of the National Radio and Television by the armed citizens, put a classic revolutionary end to the “hated Pahlavi regime”. But the defeat of the army was not an accomplishment of guerrilla forces. As I just mentioned, well before the guerrillas attacked the undefended barracks, the religious tactic of inviting the army to the side of Islam and people had brought the military command to its knees. The rate of desertion and turning against the commanders by the soldiers and junior officers had already heralded the emergence of the “Sacred Islamic Order.”3

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1 Afrashteh, K. in Ayoob, M. ed. 1981, pp. 90-120

2 These negotiations were co-ordinated by the American general Huyser in January 1979; the cassette tape of the negotiations, which was published in the form of a book in 1986, the army commanders failed to make any decision for action on almost all important issues arising from the revolution.

3 The Islamic Republican media juxtaposed the new government with the Pahlavi regime using such terminology.
Three Components of the Islamic Revolution

To many observers of the Islamic Revolution, and certainly to its participants, the image of the revolution was symbolised by large crowds marching the streets, chanting anti-Shah slogans. The spectacular crowd betrayed something reverent, and the sheer size of it convinced many of those who were not part of it to feel ashamed, irresponsible and abandoned by God and/or the people. It thus created an intense sense of patriotism and/or religious emotionalism among even the pacifist people and encouraged them to join the revolution.

This environment created the impression that whatever the crowd did was right, because it came out of genuine feelings and pure emotions of the devoted. It thus seems essential to examine the main features of what motivated the crowds to do what they did throughout the days of the revolution. These could be categorised around three basic elements, namely the political economy, the religious dogma and the advent of the Messiah.

The first element, as noted earlier, had to do with the socio-economic and socio-political developments in the State and society as a result of the inclusion of Iran as a peripheral State in the capitalist “world-economy”. These developments resulted in changes in the mode of land ownership, mechanisation of agriculture, industrialisation, urbanisation, national homogeneity, proletarianisation, bureaucratisation, and the formation of partisan political activism. It also led to the domination of Iran’s political and economic life by foreign powers by virtue of their strong position in the “world-economy”.

The second element had to do with the doctrinal developments in Usuli Shi’ism, which had established itself as the national religious authority and the sole institution capable of putting up a viable opposition to the policies of the Pahlavi State in political, economic and cultural fronts. Politically, it presented a defiant attitude toward the State, which it considered illegitimate in the absence of the Mahdi. Moreover, thanks to politicisation of the religion since the 1950s, a de facto faction was formed within the religious establishment, which legitimised direct political rule of the ulama on behalf of the Mahdi. The articulation of this contentious doctrinal innovation, against the background of expression of resentment by most of the grand Ayatollahs for explicit political activities, was crucial in giving the religious movement a coherent political ideology. Economically, the militant ulama posed an opposition to the Shah by lending support to the anti-government commercial bourgeoisie of the bazaar as against the State-affiliated “petro-bourgeoisie” and the corporate sector. As for the cultural opposition, the domain was virtually unlimited as the Shi’i belief was ingrained in he social consciousness of the population through observation of the Islamic rules and rituals and, more recently, through grass-root religious networks.

The third component of the revolution had to do with messianic notions and hysterical emotions associated with the imminent return of the Mahdi, and with the phenomenon of mass religion. This type of religion whose origins can be traced back to the early stages of the spread of Shi’ism in Iran, was undisciplined, non-elitist, non-scholastic, superstitious and by and large despised by the ulama elite as common and susceptible to eclecticism. The scholastic religion had in effect suspended the millenarian notions through rationalisation of religion. But the Babi experience was a bitter reminder of how millenarian movements could give their allegiance to an independent claimant of the Mahdihood. Nevertheless, there was an essential link...
between the popular and elite religions, as both were in general terms Islamic and Shi'i, and as neither could survive without the other. The elite were the high-up mujtahids, professionals in religious affairs and the professors of the Shi'i seminaries; and naturally their recognition by the public as the custodians of religious jurisprudence and scholarship was essential to their social existence. The religion of the public also derived its raison d'être from its being recognised by the Shi'i professionals and the established church. The ulama success in preserving their status depended to a large extent on their ability to keep on top of religious emotionalism, which was essential to the mass religion and any form of significant collective action. The initiation of a trend within the religious establishment since the 1960s to encourage and organise the mass religion entailed the suspension of apolitical and elitist character of orthodox Shi'ism and played an important part in the solidification of the politico-religious relationship of the ulama and the public.

None of these three elements alone though could possibly inspire such mass participation and dedication as was demonstrated in the days of revolution by millions of people. Economic problems alone were unlikely to instigate a revolution of such calibre. Egypt and Turkey were in a more or less similar economic condition, but they never faced the prospect of a mass revolution in the proportion of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Neither could the dogmatic party alone create such a social movement as it was dominated by elitist, scholastic and apolitical worldviews. Nor were the undisciplined religious emotionalism and the Mahdistic tenet on their own capable of organising a sustainable mass movement with specific political and cultural purposes. The most they could inspire would be another heated but short-lived religious revolt with little lasting consequence.

Combined with each other, however, these three components were able to create a magical moment, which instigated a mass movement with specific goals, and with enough resources, emotions and ecstatic energy to generate a desire for sacrifice in order to achieve these goals. This combination took place as a result of a peculiar historical conjuncture, where the political, economic and cultural conditions of the country accommodated a successful religious revival. When the people took to the streets in their millions to topple the Shah's regime, they demonstrated in their very actions – maybe without conscious knowledge – their commitment to these three components of the revolution. They attacked the banks and corporations, which represented the hegemony of the big bourgeoisie and the foreign capital. They attacked the military barracks and police stations, which they saw as instruments of political oppression. They observed religious codes of practice, chose mosques as their headquarters and the clerics as their leaders. Women wore the chador, the leaders cited the Qur'anic verses and the crowd chanted Allah-o-Akbar (God is Great) when engaging in heroic actions.

During the general strikes and the absence of the State authority - except in the form of the tanks and troops - a network for distribution of basic necessities was successfully formed around the mosques and functioned effectively as a de facto government. And finally, the inspiration for sacrifice and dedication that made possible the victory of the revolution came from the popular perception that the advent of the Mahdi was imminent. For a short period, Ayatollah Khomeini was attributed with miraculous powers, which could lead to his rise to the position of the Mahdi in the public mind. But his strong scholastic background, and the clear doctrinal rejection of direct claims to Mahdihood by the Usuli juridical establishment, prevented the elevation of Khomeini to Mahdihood. Instead, he accepted to be revered
as the deputy and forerunner of the Mahdi, a position he comfortably enjoyed until his death in 1989.

The Islamic Government in Power

The triumph of the Islamic Revolution had serious socio-political repercussions. It led to a myriad of transformations in the State and societal institutions in Iran, as well as in the political attitude of the religious authority towards the temporal power. Ayatollah Khomeini’s theory of velayat-e faqih, unelaborated as it was, was embodied in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. Article 5 of the Islamic Republic Fundamental Law (Ghanun-e Assassi), which was drafted and passed in an unusual legislative process, recognised the principle of a religious government, and identified the most qualified jurist as valy-e amr (holder of authority). It asserted: “During the Occultation, velayat-e amr (sovereignty) and the imamat (leadership) of the ummat (nation) is upon the just and pious jurist.” These powers were very close to those traditionally reserved for the Concealed Imam.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic handed over velayat-e amr to Ayatollah Khomeini as the natural choice of the population. The doctrinal and political repercussions of this event were immense and have been reflected upon ever since by those interested in modern Iranian politics. But the significant political, ideological and intellectual developments of the post-revolution era compel even more serious attention. I shall discuss some of these later in Chapter 8. Here, I shall review in passing some of the important transformations in the religious authority with respect to the State, which came about with the victory of the Islamic Revolution. With the establishment of the Islamic Republic, political order which traditionally was represented by the temporal authority - and hence was rendered illegitimate - became consecrated and the clerical ideologues sought to theorise this sanctity of the political order.

Before he was assassinated shortly after the victory of the revolution, Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari maintained in one of his speeches that the Islamic government was a sacred institution because its authority was derived from the qualified ulama, the deputies of the Concealed Imam. According to another ideologue, Haddad Adel: “This revolution (was) the integration of religion and politics, ... In other words, this revolution (was) the acceptance of the servitude of God for deliverance from the servitude of non-God, and the acceptance of the sovereignty of God for salvation from the domination of taghut, a sovereignty which is realised through obedience to the Prophet and the Infallible Imams and obedience to the learned and just ulama.”

In sharp contrast to the traditional Shi‘i jurisprudence which had postponed political activity until the reappearance of the Mahdi, people were urged to involve themselves in politics as an incumbent religious duty. In a Friday prayer sermon in 1983, Ayatollah Meshkini pronounced political activity an incumbent duty without which Shi‘i religion would not last. Ayatollah Khomeini himself repeatedly announced that the preservation of the Islamic Republic was a divine duty and that this duty must be fulfilled through the active involvement of the people. This attitude has been largely responsible for the enduring state of emergency in Iran and the continued use of mass mobilisation for political purposes.

It should be noted, however, that the arguments for the consecration of Khomeini’s Islamic Republic have predominantly come from the lower ranking

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1 Arjomand, S. A. 1988, p. 179
2 Cited in Ibid, pp. 179-181
mujtahids. The most learned mujtahids of Qom and other Shi'i establishments have either gone into opposition or have decided not to speak out. To be sure, none of them have openly approved the religious sanctity of the Islamic Republic. The inclination of orthodox jurisprudential Shi'ism has been to emphasise the significance of the specific socio-legal functions of the ulama as against the insignificance of direct involvement in policy making. Also there have been numerous movements of modernist Islamic persuasions that have opposed the identification of the government policies with divine rulings.

The following passage cited by Arjomand from A.A. Naseri’s Emamat va Shafa’at signifies the specific functions considered by the traditional Ayatollahs to be appropriate for the ulama under the title of velayat. “The velayat of the fully qualified faqih, according to indubitable evidence is the authority over the affairs of those minors who have no specific parents, and over the insane, so that he may manage their affairs according to expediency, and also authority over the wife of a person who has disappeared as regards maintenance and divorce … and the supervision of those awqaf which are without specific administrators, and the upholding of the hudud and judgeship and ruling according to the sacred law (hokumat) and resolution of hostilities and investigation of claims and upholding of rights and the like.”

In his revolutionary interpretation of Shi'ism, Ayatollah Khomeini extended these specific functions and advocated the direct administration of government by the ulama in order to implement the Sacred Law, hence his efforts to identify Islam with political activism and government. Khomeini’s maverick proposition, which defied the orthodox views of the Shi'i establishments in Qom and Najaf made the religious legitimacy of the Islamic Republic largely dependent on his own charisma. None of the grand Ayatollahs has any governmental post and not a single figure among the clerics who have high governmental positions can sustain Khomeini’s charisma. Thus the prospect of the doctrinal foundations of the Islamic government remains bleak after the demise of Khomeini, particularly with the intellectual challenge that has been put up against absolutist interpretations of velayat-e faqih by the religious opposition.

The Islamic government faces serious problems particularly from the ideological standpoint, mainly by becoming closed to alternatives. As Akhavi has noted, this is a dilemma virtually all ideologies seem to contend with. Their very strength may become their great weakness. Before Khomeini’s death in 1989, it was commonly held that at the very least his departure from the scene was a precondition for the Islamic government to begin to behave less ideologically. Indeed, this is a possibility if less ideological and more pragmatic figures dominate the Statesmanship. It may be, however, that Iranian politics will not easily return to an essentially pragmatic course in the post-Khomeini era.

The Khomeini-inspired Islamic Republic, which rose to power following the 1979 revolution, initially exhibited tendencies that other revolutionary regimes have produced, namely the totalitarian tendency. Not that Khomeini’s Islamic Republic emulated the existing totalitarian regimes, which have been predominantly inspired by Marxism. Far from it, it opposed these regimes because of their atheism. Nonetheless, the Islamic Republic clearly demonstrated that total ideologies, in theistic or atheistic forms, tend to expose many inherent similarities in their social operation. The study of the totalitarian aspects of the Islamic Republic is out of the scope of this work. Suffice it to mention in general terms that until recently, the Islamic Republic refused to recognise individual freedom as a relevant issue and emphasised corrective measures to put right the collective life of the society. This regime put into action an intense and

1 Ibid, p. 178
repressive program of social morality and public piety, addressing the people in cultural and moral rather than individual terms. Ironically, the proclaimed objective of the Islamic Revolution namely, the building of a morally upright society, equipped with a godly collective consciousness and devoid of corruption, has remained only an objective.

Apart from inspiring a sense of identity among a core constituency of believers, which was translated to a fierce campaign to impose strict religious solemnity, Khomeini’s ideological legacy has amounted to economic setbacks, social tension, and political chaos. However, one should be careful not to take the economic failure and political repression as linearly linked to the decline of collective religious convictions. When Khomeini’s life ended in 1989, millions of people took to the streets to mourn his loss. The procession of his funeral attracted the same if not more number of religious believers as did his arrival in Iran ten years earlier. Many have logically reasoned that ten years of economic stagnation and political repression, eight years of which were also marked by a disastrous war, had resulted in the decline of Khomeini’s preponderance. However, the astonishing turn out of the population to mourn his death with such passion demonstrated the still powerful religious aspirations of the Iranian believers. Ayatollah Khomeini defied logic in his death, as he did in his life.

As for the future, one may safely predict that, one way or another, the Islamic Republic will have to embark on more politically and economically pragmatic measures to serve its own institutional power and structural interests. More so, in the absence of the charismatic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, which seemed to be capable of sustaining a political regime incongruous to the existing world order. Signals from the post-Khomeini Iran indicate that the Islamic Republic, like the Safavid dynasty following the death of its founder, is likely to choose to preserve the theocratic posture of the polity, and at the same time rationalise religious dogma through the restoration of the normative order. Such a normative order will have to rely on the symbiotic interplay of religious and temporal authorities and is unlikely to resolve the Church-State question in a foreseeable future. However, it may promote a measure of political stability, opening up the prospects of a period of internal peace and economic and, to a lesser extent, political activity accompanied by efforts to accommodate the existing world order. There are already signs of economic and political improvements.

However, for the Islamic Republic to succeed in rationalising the polity, it will inevitably have to go through the painful process of re-appraising and redefining itself. For one thing, it will have to cast aside its extremist image both domestically and in the international arena. Like the pragmatic successors of the charismatic founder of the Safavid dynasty, the rationalist followers of Khomeini may have to turn against their comrades-in-arms, i.e. the revolutionary zealots who helped bring the Islamic Republic into existence, but who wish to sustain its “extremist” and “radical” character. The “pragmatists” would naturally be more concerned about the viability of the Islamic Republic in this world, and therefore should be prepared to abandon some of their “otherworldly” ideals where necessary. On the other hand, the “radicals”, who seek to uphold the idealist aspirations of the Islamic Revolution, would ineluctably accuse the “pragmatists” of hypocrisy and even treason. Their confrontation has already begun.
The Institutionalisation of the Revolution

Although Ayatollah Khomeini’s leadership of the revolution and the Islamic revolutionary government was undisputed, the actual process of the ascendance of the ulama to political leadership was far from smooth, and involved many upheavals and much violence. The process of the institutionalisation of the Islamic Revolution proved to be much more complex than the analysts of this revolution predicted, and as such more often than not defied their anticipations. This complex process began very early on with the formation of the revolutionary provisional government of Mehdi Bazargan and continued through the hostage-taking drama, the “cultural revolution”, the rise and fall of President Abol-Hassan Bani-Sadr, the ethnic wars, the riots and uprisings against the government, the brutal suppression of the opposition, and the power struggle within the government. Even the new doctrinal and ideological developments within the Shi’i establishment were a part of this complex process; as were the external adventures, such as the war with Iraq and the “export of the revolution” to other Islamic countries.

Many analysts have tried to analyse the process of the institutionalisation of the revolution in Iran on the basis of the conventional (Western) standards, identifying various factions within the post-revolutionary polity, such as “liberal”, “radical”, “moderate” and “fundamentalist” factions. These classifications certainly have merit, but they have so far been applied to the Iranian situation all too simplistically. As Henner Furtig has suggested, all these labelling have so far “failed to perceive that intrafractional dispute was almost always immediately suppressed when the power interests of the whole clergy were in danger.” He has rightly asserted that “the common interests of the clergy to stay in power” has strengthened the traditional affinity among them, and as such it is “almost impossible to label a given clergymen only as radical or moderate.”

However, the close association among the clergy does not preclude the existence of differences of opinion on important doctrinal, social, political and economic issues. Khomeini’s zeal in building an intricate institutional organisation for the Islamic Republic during his lifetime ensured that such differences would remain a feature of political life without destroying the political structure of the Islamic State as a whole. Through careful manoeuvring between the factions and the creation of multiple sources of political power, Khomeini skilfully played the factions against each other and kept himself as a source of superior advisory power above factional interests, with extreme influence, but with almost no responsibilities. By breaking down the legislative, judiciary and executive powers at various institutional levels, he prevented the concentration of power in any one institution or personality, while creating a de facto system of checks and balances. The overlapping powers and the inter-relatedness of these institutions, although they made decision-making difficult, created a suitable condition for the inhibition of dictatorial tendencies and the rise of a peculiar kind of political pluralism.

The institutionalisation of the Islamic Revolution thus involved an intense internal power struggle over the differences of opinions between the personalities and factions. Although this political struggle was muted in the lifetime of Ayatollah Khomeini due to his superior charismatic power, there were important instances of the outpour of these struggles requiring amendments and modifications of the existing institutions and laws, and in some cases, creation of further institutions and laws. For

2 Ibid, p. 23
example, the Islamic Republican Party, which had formed shortly after the revolution on the basis of the unitarian message of Ayatollah Khomeini, vahdat-e kalameh (the unity of word), was disbanded after signs of serious factionalism appeared in its structure at both leadership and grass-roots levels. The Islamic Republican Party (Hezb-e Jomhuri-ye Eslami) was on the course to shape the polity on a one-party model, similar to communist parties in the totalitarian States. It had become the single most important political organisation of the State and society by absorbing, outlawing and eliminating all alternative political thought and action.

The rapid rise of the Islamic Republican Party involved gathering all the Islamic associations and groupings loyal to Khomeini and the Islamic Republic around the Qur'anic concept of Hezbollah (Party of God), or the newly made up concept of the “Followers of the Imam’s Line” (Peyrovon-e Khatt-e Imam). The Islamic Republican Party was thus successful for a while in denying or undermining the real intellectual and ideological differences among the loyalists of the Islamic Republic. Those who were left outside the circle of the Hezbollah were subject to demonisation and eventually brutal suppression. Parties on the left of the political spectrum, such as the Mojahedin, the Fada'iyan and the Tadeh Party were the first victims of the revolutionary zeal for ideological uniformity, and with their naïve political tactics they even contributed to their own demise. Even the Islamic organisations or personalities came under attack if they did not follow the “Line of the Imam” as prescribed by the Islamic Republican Party. Prime Minister Bazargan and his Liberation Movement, and President Bani-Sadr were prominent Muslim figures and organisations that were ousted by the “Followers of the Imam’s Line” because they fell out with the Islamic Republican Party.

Ayatollah Khomeini, however, did not wish to see the rise of a single party to absolute political power even if that party operated under his own name and his own command. He probably realised the danger of the experience of the socialist revolutions in creating huge single party apparatuses, which tended to suppress all political and ideological differences and lead to the stagnation of the polity. As such, not long after the ouster of Bani-Sadr - a renegade President who had challenged the clerical power - he disbanded the Islamic Republican Party, and encouraged the Majlis-e Showray-e Eslami (the Islamic Consultative Assembly) to pass a law for the operation of a multiple-party system. Although the peculiar shape of this multiparty system was not similar to the Western model, and showed intense intolerance for political organisations of alternative ideological and intellectual persuasions, it nonetheless gave rise to an intense political and ideological struggle within the polity. It has thus led to the emergence of a certain kind of internal political opposition. This process began in the lifetime of Khomeini and immediately after the disbanding of the Islamic Republican Party, but it has intensified since his demise.

The Beginning of an Internal Power Struggle

Early signs of a growing concern about the political deadlocks between the President and the Majlis, and the Majlis and the Council of the Guardians (Showraj-e Negahban) - a constitutional body supervising the Majlis legislation - emerged when Ayatollah Khomein was still alive. The internal disputes over political, social, cultural and ideological issues were mainly a result of the vagueness of the relationship between the executive, legislative and judicial institutions and authorities, and the differences of opinions as to how the grey areas should be interpreted. Khomeini himself encouraged the existence of differences as long as they did not threaten the entirety of the Islamic regime. However, the internal power struggle became more
acute toward the end of Khomeini’s life, and particularly after the end of the war with Iraq in 1988 and the disqualification of Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri as the heir apparent of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Montazeri, the highest-ranking jurist among the radical ulama after Khomeini, had serious disagreements with Khomeini over the extent of religious and political power of the clerics. He did not hold any official post, and remained in Qom continuing his religious scholarship. However, he exercised a relatively strong political influence as the leader of Friday prayers in Tehran. In his sermons, he frequently criticised the attribution of divine weight to the political decisions of the clerics-turned-politicians. But his final fall-out with Khomeini was over the issue of the treatment of political prisoners including the Mojahedin-e Khalq who were considered by Khomeini and the cleric-politicians as the most dreadful enemies of the Islamic Republic. The conflict came to a head when a young relative of Montazeri, Mehdi Hashemi, was put on trial and subsequently executed on charges of treason for being involved in a plot against the regime, and for sympathising with the Mojahedin.

The war with Iraq, although disastrous, costly and inconsequential, was successful for eight years to repress the necessity of attendance to immediate socio-economic problems of the country. The war had created a sense of patriotism and a national emergency situation, which demanded a high measure of religious asceticism and the deferment of calls for material well being. With the end of the war, bold economic reforms were urgently needed to address the economic problems, which were aggravated by the destruction of the war. The importance of the disqualification of Montazeri, as the future Supreme Leader was due to the crisis that it caused with regard to the question of succession. After all, Montazeri was formerly the most respected of politically minded living mujtahids in line to succeed Khomeini.

As I have noted earlier, according to the original Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the position of the velayat-e faqih was understood as the source of real political power. According to Furtig, the political impetus of the original Constitution of the Republic, which had grown out of the immediate exigencies of the revolution, was predominantly “directed at fortifying the position of the clergy in a yet undecided power struggle.” And as such, it tended to invest the institution of velayat-e faqih with ultimate religious and political powers, while vaguely delegating legislative, judiciary and executive duties to the Majlis, the Supreme Court, the President, and the Prime Minister. Particularly, during Bani-Sadr’s presidency in the early 1980s and his power struggle with the clergy who had packed the Majlis, the interpretations of the Constitution by the clergy tended to minimise the power of the President vis-à-vis the Majlis and the Prime Minister. As Furtig has noted, with the ouster of Bani-Sadr in 1981, the consolidation of the power of the Supreme Leader, and the election of Hojjat-al-Eslam Seyyed Ali Khamene’i as President, the office of President was considered more as a “caretaker” position than a real source of power. Khamene’i as President deferred to the Supreme Leader on all of the important political decisions in order to affirm the political centrality of the velayat-e faqih.

As noted earlier, in this period, there also arose a power struggle between the Majlis and the Council of Guardians. This Council was a constitutional body of six conservative mujtahids and six lay religious activists mainly appointed by Khomeini, and was empowered to ensure that legislation of the Majlis did not contravene the Constitution and the Sacred Law. The conflict emanated from the push of a radical faction of junior clergy in the Majlis for radical economic reforms, such as the

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1 Ibid, p. 27
distribution of agricultural lands among poor peasants, and limitation of the economic expansion of the private sector, particularly the bazaar. Referring to the radical revolutionary rhetoric of Ayatollah Khomeini, these clerics and their lay religious allies called for economic policies in the benefit of the lower classes and against the wealthy bazaar merchants. They also insisted on a hard-line foreign policy. The more conservative ulama shared in the radical views in foreign policy, but they resented the economic views of the radical faction. Numerous instances of deadlock between the Majlis, which was dominated by the “radicals”, and the “conservative” Council of Guardians prompted Khomeini to introduce a new body called the Council for Arbitration (Showray-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat) in 1988.

There were also instances of religious and ideological deadlock between the “conservative”, “moderate” and “radical” clergy, which gave rise to a debate over doctrinal issues, such as the interpretation of the position of fiqh (jurisprudence) in dealing with socio-economic and socio-political issues. Hence, the intense argument by the “radical” faction for the essentiality of dynamic interpretations of jurisprudence (fiqh-e puya) as against the traditional jurisprudence (fiqh-e sunnati). In all these instances of dispute and deadlock, it was in fact the overarching influence of Ayatollah Khomeini that settled the conflicts, albeit temporarily. The power struggle within the regime also prompted a large number of the members of the Parliament, including some of his prominent followers, to call for amendments to the Constitution in order to resolve the political disputes.

The Rise of Junior Clerics and the Constitutional Amendments

With the election of the relatively young Hojjat-al-Eslam Rafsanjani as President of the Republic in the early 1989, and the meteoric rise of another young cleric Hojjat-al-Eslam Khamene’i as the Supreme leader after Khomeini’s death in the same year, a new era in the history of the Islamic Revolution began. Ayatollah Khomeini had been acutely aware of the problematic nature of the existing political realities, whereby the living grand Ayatollahs of the Qom and other Shi’i establishments in Iran, such as Ayatollahs Golpayegani, Mar’shi-Najafi and Kho’i, did not support his political reading of the concept of velayat-e faqih. And therefore, he anticipated the necessity of the rise to power of the capable and trustworthy younger clerics, who were loyal to him. Perhaps it was in this anticipation that, not long before his death, he issued certain decrees, and ordered the amendment of the Constitution through a referendum; moves which were designed to give more power to the new President and the Supreme-Leader-in-the-wings.

In fact, after the assassination of strong figures of the Islamic Revolution like Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari and Ayatollah Muhammad-Hussein Behashti, and the political elimination of Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri, younger politically active and ideologically committed clerics were the obvious choices for succeeding Ayatollah Khomeini. Clerics such as Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Seyyed Ali Khamene’i, although junior in the ranks, had proved to be more qualified than others - even the elder and the more learned ulama - to inherit the political power of “Imam Khomeini”. They were also most trusted by the leader of the revolution and the founder of the Islamic Republic. After all, it was under the advice of Rafsanjani – the ardent disciple and one of the closest aides of Khomeini – that the Supreme Leader gave up his intransigence and accepted the terms of the United Nations to end the war with Iraq.

Khomeini’s move to amend the Constitution was thus designed for two
political purposes. Firstly, it was to invest more political credit in the institution of velayat-e faqih as the supreme leadership of the Islamic Republic in order to preserve this institution as the centrepiece of the political structure of the Islamic State in his absence. After all velayat-e faqih as the theory of clerical political rule was Ayatollah Khomeini’s pet project and was conceived as the guarantor of the Islamic nature of the government. And secondly, the constitutional amendments meant to provide for the existence of a relatively strong but loyal president, who would not challenge the authority of the institution of faqih. This combination would reflect the long-held position of Khomeini to create internal checks and balances in government institutions in order to both avoid the rise of cult of personalities, and preserve the supremacy of religious over political authority. It was ironic that Ayatollah Khomeini cherished very modestly his own cult of personality as a divine and popular gift, but did not trust any other individual with such “corruptive powers”. He believed in and practised an ascetic lifestyle, and was popularly believed to be in control of his egotistic instincts. Neither Khomeini, nor the public, recognised any other individual as having such ascetic qualities.

Thus, the velayat-e faqih as enshrined in the original Constitution of the Islamic Republic, was formulated to fit the person of Khomeini, and there were clear doubts about its continued credibility after his demise. Khomeini probably realised that in his absence no body could carry his personal and charismatic influence. And perhaps, his initiation of new institutions, doctrinal interpretations and constitutional amendments were designed to further clarify the relationship of the legislative and executive powers after his death in order to provide his successors with Islamic mechanisms for conflict resolution. To be sure, his dominant message to his followers during his lifetime, which was also reiterated in his “Last will and Testament”, was to keep to the principle of “the unity of word” and avoid factional fighting of the Western type, while expressing different opinions.

Khomeini therefore initiated a debate, which resulted in the formulation of the concept of velayat-e motlaq-e faqih (the absolute governance of jurist), and ordered the amendment of the Constitution to differentiate the political and religious aspects of velayat-e faqih. It is now a matter of common knowledge that after the disqualification of Montazeri, Khomeini had already earmarked Khamene’i as his successor as the Supreme Leader. And most probably, in order to maintain the superiority of the position of faqih – which would be occupied by a junior cleric – over the power of the President – which was derived directly from popular vote – he insisted on the absolute authority of the faqih. Meanwhile, he hinted that he wished to consolidate the power of the President in the Constitution by eliminating the position of Prime Minister and delegating the responsibilities of that position to the President. The amended Constitution was approved in a referendum less than two months after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in June 1989.

The Question of Succession

As noted earlier, the main political problem of the original Constitution of the Islamic Republic was that its definition of the qualifications of the Supreme Leader (the valy-ye faqih) was designed to fit the person of Ayatollah Khomeini. He had combined in his personality the religious seniority of a marja’e taqlid (source of emulation) and the absolute political authority of an undisputed revolutionary leader. None of Khomeini’s living followers, except for Ayatollah Montazeri, could claim both religious and political authorities. And almost all of the older generation of grand
Ayatollahs of the Qom establishment were unwilling to directly participate in politics. The obvious choice was Ayatollah Montazeri, who was therefore nominated in 1982 as the heir apparent of “Imam Khomeini” by the Council of Experts (Majlis-e Khobregan) - another constitutional body dominated by the politically minded mujtahids - that had drafted the original Constitution.

The problem of succession became acute toward the end of Khomeini’s life when Montazeri in a serious fall-out with Khomeini over the treatment of opposition political parties was disqualified as his successor in the early 1989. The constitutional amendments that were initiated by Ayatollah Khomeini were thus aimed, at least partly, at addressing the question of succession. In the new amendments approved after Khomeini’s death, a differentiation was made between the political and religious functions of the velayat-e faqih. Accordingly, the new Constitution allowed that the most politically qualified clerics could occupy the position of the supreme leader without being necessarily a marja‘e taqlid, while a theologically qualified cleric from the scholastic establishment would be elected by the Council of the Experts to function as the marja‘e taqlid. Meanwhile, in accordance with Khomeini’s desire, the position of velayat-e faqih was declared as absolute in order to confirm the political authority of the newly appointed successor of Ayatollah Khomeini, who lacked religious seniority, and hence was not as popular as he was. Also in line with Khomeini’s wish, the position of Prime Minister was abolished and its authority was delegated to the President.

As I have already mentioned, just before Ayatollah Khomeini’s death, one of his most prominent of followers, Hashemi-Rafsanjani occupied the position of President; and with a degree of increase in the power of the President, he was charged with the task of rebuilding the war-stricken Iranian economy. Not unexpectedly, Khomeini’s other prominent disciple, Ali Khamene‘i, was elected by the Council of Experts as the Supreme Leader upon Khomeini’s death, and was invested with constitutional powers superior to the President. The new Supreme Leader also inherited the position of the commander-in-chief of the armed forces from Ayatollah Khomeini. Meanwhile, the very old grand Ayatollah Araki was nominated as the marj‘e taqlid in religious matters.

The Post-Khomeini Power Struggle

A feature of the post-Khomeini political development was the intensification of the power struggle and renewed expression of opinions about ideological, political, social, economic and cultural issues within the ranks of his loyalists. As Furtig has noted: “Different opinions of the clergy have become visible since 1989 – in addition to the debates of the Majlis-e Shura-ye Eslami – in an organisational structure mainly in the form of loosely knit electoral arrangements, unions, and networks.”

The original unity among the politically minded ulama in the Islamic Republican Party was replaced by a division, which occurred among the ulama and was consolidated around two main associations. These two associations were the Jame‘e-ye Rohaniyyat-e Mobarez (Society of the Militant Clergy) and the Anjoman-e Rohaniyyun-e Mobarez (The Association of the Militant Clergy).

The first group, as Furtig has suggested, includes the “majority of the teaching staff of the Howze-ye Elmi-ye (the Centre for Religious Learning) in Qom and is supported by well-to-do merchants of Tehran’s bazaar, private entrepreneurs, technocrats, and better paid

1 Ibid, p. 32
2 Ibid, p. 24
strata of the middle classes. The clergy, labelled as “moderate” in the Western literature on Iranian politics, such as the former president Rafsanjani, have had close ties with this group. So have those labelled as “conservative”, such as the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamene'i, the influential cleric, Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, and the powerful Speaker of the Parliament, Hojjat-al-Eslam Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nuri.

In the political arena, the Jame‘eye Rohaniyyat-e Mobarez by and large supports the absolute velayat-e faqih as the supreme source of political power. In domestic politics, there has been little disagreement within the Jame‘e on its unequivocal support for the mostly conservative-traditionalist rhetoric of the Supreme Leader Khamene‘i. But in foreign affairs, there exist diverging opinions within the group over the relations with the Western countries, particularly the United States. The former President Rafsanjani, for example, was known to advocate a more open policy toward the West, and still managed to attract some support from the Jame‘e Rohaniyyat-e Mobarez. Meanwhile, Ayatollah Khamene‘i, who has held a rather intransigent stance particularly against the United States, has also found supporters within this grouping.

Culturally, the Jame‘e holds conservative-traditionalist views, and economically it favours a national capitalist growth around the commercial bourgeoisie of the bazaar and with a diminished role of the State in the national economy.

The second group, Anjoman-e Rohaniyyun-e Mobarez labelled as “radical” in the Western literature, includes some of the ardent supporters of the revolutionary ideals. Some share with the “conservatives” in their insistence on upholding Islamic moral and cultural codes, but they have proved to be more resilient in the application of these codes. They also differ from the conservatives over political and economic issues. In the political arena, for example, the leading figures of this grouping have emphasised the supremacy of Islamic ideology, but they have gradually moved away from their initial emphasis on the original idea of the “export of the revolution”, and their uncompromising “anti-Western” stance.

Economically, this grouping has advocated State intervention in favour of the lower classes and curbing the unbridled capitalist growth, which has resulted in the accumulation of wealth by the “bazaar capitalists” and the widening of the gap between the rich and poor. Also the revolutionary groups, such as the Students of the Imam’s Line - who had occupied the American Embassy immediately after the revolution - the Islamic Teachers Union, and the Islamic Workers Union, have sided with the “radicals” of the Anjoman, and have in time become more moderate.

Under the presidency of Rafsanjani and the supreme leadership of Khamene‘i, the advocates of the latter group, who initially occupied most of the seats of the Parliament and some of the important Ministries, and expressed radical politico-economic views, were gradually driven from their positions. Particularly in the 1992 parliamentary elections, many of the so-called radicals lost their seats and were replaced by the more conservative figures. Rafsanjani had frequently complained about the blockade of his economic plans by the radical members of the Parliament.

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1 Ibid, pp. 24-25
2 In this regard, Ayatollah Khamene‘i has successfully combined a “radical” foreign policy rhetoric with a mostly “conservative” domestic standpoint. In offering a political rhetoric that combines “radical” and “conservative” tendencies Ayatollah Khamene‘i tends to follow the model of Ayatollah Khomeini’s discourse.
3 These figures include Mir-Hussein Musavi, the former Prime Minister Hojjat-al-Eslam Musavi Kho’iniha, the former Attorney General, Hojjat-al-Eslam Mohtashami, the former Interior Minister, Hojjat-al-Eslam Karrubi, the former Speaker of the Parliament, Hojjat-al-Eslam Khalkhali, the former Judge of the Revolutionary Islamic Courts, Hojjat-al-Eslam Reyshahri, the former Intelligence Minister, Behzad Nabavi, the former Minister for Heavy Industry, and interestingly Ayatollah Khomeini’s son Ahmad. See also Furtig, H. 1997, p. 25
Of course, Rafsanjani’s measures against his critiques were also tough. In fact, the followers of the President were accused of engaging in conspiratorial acts against their critiques. Even the sudden death of Ahmad Khomeini in 1995, at a relatively young age, sparked speculations of foul play by the government.

Thence, the resistance of the “radicals” against the “moderates” was mainly expressed through their publications particularly the newspaper *Salam*. Most of the press and the electronic media though praised Rafsanjani for his “wisdom” and “courage”. As Furtig has indicated, in 1989, the then Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Larijani stated: “Ideologically, we think the concept of Islam must be presented in a modern way, related to modern needs.” There were also instances of crack down on the opposition press, and in some cases led to the closing down of some newspapers. Meanwhile, Ayatollah Azari-Qomi, a conservative and influential cleric, published the newspaper *Resaalah* in competition with the “radicals”. This newspaper mainly represented the politically minded ulama of the Qom religious establishment and promoted “conservative” political and economic policies in opposition to both the “moderates” and the “radicals.” As it turned out, the struggle between the radicals and the moderates strengthened the position of the conservatives both in the Majlis and in the judiciary.

**Rafsanjani’s Reforms**

In Rafsanjani’s first term as President, a range of political, social and economic reforms were carried out, which primarily included the provision and implementation of a five-year plan of economic reforms. This plan was basically designed to open up the economy and instigate a rapid growth in order to address the breakdown of the economy as a result of the eight years war with Iraq. Rafsanjani, labelled as an “economic pragmatist”, emphasised in his economic plan the necessity of rapid growth of the economy and raising of the living standards of the population. He thus encouraged “foreign investment”, relaxed “the State control over the private sector,” and allowed “borrowing on the international financial markets.” He also “ordered the privatisation of public companies and arranged the establishment of special investment zones, for example, at the island of Kish in the Persian Gulf.”

President Rafsanjai also encouraged the return of the Iranian businessmen and specialists, who had left Iran in the heavily repressive and violent post-revolution environment. He also made overtures to the United States to release the frozen Iranian assets, which it had withheld since the victory of the revolution.

However, Rafsanjani’s reforms were not limited to the economic sphere. He also initiated certain political-institutional reforms. For example, he embarked upon merging the command structures of the army and the revolutionary guards on the one hand, and the police and the local revolutionary committees on the other. Here, Rafsanjani’s aim, as Furtig has suggested, was “to gain a better control of Iran’s armed forces and to contain the many adventurers in its ranks.” But Rafsanjani did not do so much in terms of relaxation of the suppressive measures of the government against the political dissidents. In fact, he was accused by the opposition-in-exile to have been involved in ordering the killing of leaders of monarchist, secular nationalist and leftist opposition, who lived outside Iran. The verdict of a German court in the

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1 Ibid, p. 26
2 Ibid, p. 37
3 Ibid, p. 38
4 Ibid, p. 33
early 1997 about the involvement of the Iranian government figures in an act of assassination in Berlin was not only damaging to President Rafsanjani and the Supreme Leader Khamene'i, but also created tension between Iran and some of its trading partners in Europe. Meanwhile, there were numerous reports about the imprisonment, persecution and even execution of political dissidents under Rafsanjani’s presidency.

By and large, President Rafsanjani’s reforms did not meet the expectations that they had raised when his presidency inaugurated. As already noted, his reforms were faced with constant criticisms of his opponents from both the “radical” and “conservative” side, which made life difficult for him. He was variously accused as betraying the ideals of the revolution and trying to revive the influence of the foreigners in Iran. He was also criticised for his preparedness for returning Iran into the capitalist world-economy dominated by the United States, and for being insensitive to the Islamic ideals of building a spiritual society with a modest economy, and with social justice as its feature. In fact, Rafsanjani’s reforms did not contain any serious social reforms to benefit the poor. He was thus depicted by his opponents as trying to return Iran to Western consumerism and materialism instead of giving priority to development of national industries and domestic resources, strengthening of the co-operatives and establishing a welfare system.\(^1\)

As a result of the mounting pressures of the opposition, Rafsanjani “eventually abandoned his collision course with his opponents and offered a compromise.”\(^2\) In his second term as President, he began to promote his modified policies around two strategic principles. One was the domestic strategy of keeping key industries and infra-structural enterprises under the public ownership, and another the international strategy of building a strong and economically independent Iran as a regional power and an “stabilising factor between the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.”\(^3\)

**More Recent Developments**

In the Presidential election of May 1997, Rafsanjani, having served two successive terms (according to the Constitution a President may serve a maximum of two terms), was succeeded by Hojjatol-Eslam Muhammad Khatami. Interestingly, for the first time since the revolution, a presidential candidate, who was neither endorsed by the Supreme Leader, nor was on the ticket of the powerful Jame‘e-ye Rohaniyyat-e Mobarez was elected President. Khatami, however, had the tacit support of his predecessor Rafsanjani, and had served in his cabinet as Minister for Islamic Guidance before he was demoted under the pressure of “radical” and “conservative” opposition. Khatami won his victory in an unexpected landslide on the platform of increased political participation, the rule of law and promises to raise the standard of living of the increasingly impoverished majority of the population. His main constituencies were women and the youth, two of the largest social groups in Iran at present. In fact, over 20 million eligible voters, predominantly the women and the youth voted for him.

Thus far, President Khatami has initiated a number of plans to relax political repression and institute social justice. He has also tried to establish a closer relationship with the ordinary people by travelling around the country in a pick-up truck instead of bullet-proof official vehicles. His power rests on the vote of about 70

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\(^1\) Ibid, p. 39  
\(^2\) Ibid, p. 42  
\(^3\) Ibid, p. 42
per cent of the eligible voters, but his position suffers from important constitutional weaknesses. Constitutionally, Ayatollah Khamene'i, as the velayat-e faqih, is superior to the President, and the President cannot make any important domestic or foreign policy decisions without his approval. So far, both the President and the Supreme Leader have cordially accommodated each other and avoided public confrontation.

The most serious of Khatami's domestic moves so far has been giving a more moderate and tolerant face to the Islamic government with respect to the society. He has also frequently spoken of the compatibility of Islamic values with values of a civil society, such as civil liberties, the rule of law and political pluralism. He has relaxed the censorship and has permitted some formerly banned books and films to be published or screened. Without any attempt to dissociate himself from the Islamic values or the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, Khatami and his followers, most of whom are the young reformed revolutionary radicals, are trying to provide new interpretations of Islam and revolution. According to these new interpretations, which are also resonated in academic and intellectual circles, Islam and revolution are portrayed in a more humanistic and peaceful light devoid of the aggression, militancy and xenophobic views of the "conservatives".

President Khatami's main move in the foreign policy has of course been his elaborate message to the American people in an interview with CNN in January 1998, in which he called for a dialogue between the two nations in order to "crack the mutual wall of mistrust." His comments on resumption of ties with the U.S. are still far from calling for government to government talks, but they nonetheless herald a new view of the West formerly missing in the rhetoric of the Islamic Revolution.

It is interesting that Khatami ran for President as independent of the powerful clerical establishment, and yet found overwhelming support among the public. This independence, if preserved and used wisely, may create an alternative way of development for the Islamic Republic totally different to the militant and extremist trends that have so far dominated the post-revolution politics. Particularly so, because it appeals to the more educated and younger generation of Iranians, who predominantly cherish their Islamic heritage, but do not subscribe to militant politics. But this independence may also lead to his rapid decline, if he cannot sustain his popularity or lose his prestige by reneging or not delivering on his election promises.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that in the context of increased religious vitality during the 1960's and 1970's, new forms of religious political thinking arose, which were to affect the traditional mode of religious thought and action henceforth. This new thinking found expression notably in transformations in the Shi'i political philosophy on the basis of the response of the ulama and lay religious intellectuals to exigencies of the two decades preceding the revolution. As a result different political, ideological and intellectual tendencies emerged with different views of the social changes brought about under the Shah; so did different opinions as to how these changes should be treated. These political and intellectual tendencies have continued unabated since the revolution and have heated up particularly in the post-Khomeini period.

The ideology of the Islamic Revolution found its most elaborate expression in the contributions of the individuals and groups who actively took part in the religious, philosophical, social and political debates and disputes in this era. Some of these ideologues were more significant than other ones. The eight ideologues, whom Hamid
Dabashi has studied in his *Theology of Discontent*, namely Al-e Ahmad, Shar’iati, Motahhari, Taleqani, Tabataba’ie, Bazargan, Bani-Sadr and Khomeini, were deservedly the most important figures who contributed to the construction of the Islamic ideology in the immediate stages before the Islamic Revolution. In the next chapter, I shall discuss the discourse of these Muslim ideologues in more detail, and in Chapter 8, I shall concentrate on the post-Khomeini political, ideological and intellectual developments.
President Khatami's path toward a foreign policy has of course been an elaborate message to the American people in an interview with CNN in January 1998 in which he called for a dialogue between the two nations in order to "crack the mutual wall of mistrust." His comments on assumption of ties with the U.S. are still for presidents for government and government talks, but they nonetheless herald a new view of the West formerly missing in the rhetoric of the Islamic Revolution.

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Oversimplified

In this chapter I have argued that in the context of increased religious vitality during the 1960s and 1970s, a new form of religious political thinking arose which went to refer to the traditional modes of religious thought and action previously. This new form of religious thought and action was a result of the increasing resistance of the Islamic revolution, a result of the increasing wealth of the Islamic revolution, and a result of the increasing wealth of the Islamic revolution. As a result different political, ideological and intellectual continuities emerged with different views of the social changes brought about under the Islamic revolution, and different audiences to whom they were addressed to be read. These political and intellectual continuities have continued and evolved since the revolution and have been transformed, particularly in the post-Khomeini period.

The ideology of the Islamic Revolution found its most elaborate expression in the constitutions of the individual movements and groups who actively took part in the religious, philosophical, social, and political areas and disputes in the past. Some of these ideologies were more significant than others. The eight ideological trends, which I"