CHAPTER: VI

PERSIAN CRITICISM AND THE IRANIAN SOCIETY

(a) Western impact on Persian Criticism

(b) Literary Criticism

(c) Modern trend in Persian Criticism
(A) Western impact on Persian Criticism

Criticism of Western culture is any and all criticism directed toward the modern Western thought and lifestyle. It can be seen as a part of the larger clash of civilizations, as that revealed by Joseph Conrad in his novel, Heart of Darkness. Modern criticism tends to focus on the increasingly secular and democratic nature of Western society. The lack of cultural traditionalism, the decline of morality, and the prevalence of materialism are also commonly cited. In the popular mind, criticism of Western culture is commonly associated with the War on Terror and the West's ongoing conflict with Islamic fundamentalism. Within the Western world, criticism can emanate from intellectuals, or within groups who have political disagreements.

To condense the history of western thought to around 50,000 words is the literary equivalent of trying to reproduce the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel on the inside of a matchbox. So it is to writer and film-maker Stephen Trombley's tremendous credit that his intellectual miniaturisation, while inevitably losing almost all the detail, leaves very little out and renders most of the original characters and scenes distinctive and recognisable.

Western culture, sometimes equated with Western civilization, Western lifestyle or European civilization is a term used very broadly to refer to a heritage of social norms, ethical values, traditional customs, belief systems, political systems, and specific artifacts and technologies that have some origin or association with Europe, having both indigenous and foreign origin. The term has come to be applied by people of European ethnicity to countries whose history is strongly marked by European immigration, colonisation, and influence, such as the continents of the Americas and Australasia, whose current demographic majority is of European ethnicity, and is not restricted to the continent of Europe.

Western culture is characterized by a host of artistic, philosophic, literary, and legal themes and traditions; the heritage of Greek, Roman, Celtic, Germanic, West Slavic, Jewish, and other ethnic and linguistic groups, as well as Christianity, including the Roman Catholic Church and
Orthodox Church, which played an important part in the shaping of Western civilization since at least the 4th century. Also contributing to Western thought, in ancient times and then in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance onwards, a tradition of rationalism in various spheres of life, developed by Hellenistic philosophy, Scholasticism, humanism, the Scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. Values of Western culture have, throughout history, been derived from political thought, widespread employment of rational argument favouring freethought, assimilation of human rights, the need for equality, and democracy.

Historical records of Western culture in Europe begin with Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. Western culture continued to develop with Christianisation during the Middle Ages, the reform and modernization triggered by the Renaissance, and with globalization by successive European empires, that spread European ways of life and European educational methods around the world between the 16th and 20th centuries. European culture developed with a complex range of philosophy, medieval scholasticism and mysticism, and Christian and secular humanism.\[1\] Rational thinking developed through a long age of change and formation, with the experiments of the Enlightenment, and breakthroughs in the sciences. Tendencies that have come to define modern Western societies include the existence of political pluralism, prominent subcultures or countercultures (such as New Age movements), and increasing cultural syncretism resulting from globalization and human migration.

The earliest civilizations which influenced the development of western culture were those of Mesopotamia; the area of the Tigris–Euphrates river system, largely corresponding to modern-day Iraq, northeastern Syria, southeastern Turkey and southwestern Iran: the cradle of civilization.\[2\]

The Greeks contrasted themselves to their Eastern neighbours, such as the Trojans in \textit{Iliad}, setting an example for later contrasts between east and west. In the middle Ages, the Near East provided a contrast to the West, though it had been Hellenized since the time of Alexander the Great.
Concepts of what is the West arose out of legacies of the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire. Later, ideas of the west were formed by the concepts of Latin Christendom and the Holy Roman Empire. What we think of as Western thought today originates primarily from Greco-Roman and Germanic influences, and includes the ideals of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, as well as Christian culture.

Western culture is neither homogeneous nor unchanging. As with all other cultures it has evolved and gradually changed over time. Nevertheless, it is possible to follow the evolution and history of the West, and appreciate its similarities and differences, its borrowings from, and contributions to, other cultures of humanity.

In Homeric literature, and right up until the time of Alexander the Great, for example in the accounts of the Persian Wars of Greeks against Persians by Herodotus, we see the paradigm of a contrast between the West and East.

Nevertheless, the Greeks felt they were the most civilized and saw themselves (in the formulation of Aristotle) as something between the so-called wild barbarians of most of Europe and the soft, slavish Middle-Easterers. Ancient Greek science, philosophy, democracy, architecture, literature, and art provided a foundation embraced and built upon by the Roman Empire as it swept up Europe, including the Hellenic World in its conquests in the 1st century BC. In the meantime however, Greece, under Alexander, had become a capital of the East, and part of an empire. The Celts also created some significant literature in the ancient world whenever they were given the opportunity (an example being the poet Caecilius Statius). They also developed a large amount of scientific knowledge themselves, as seen in their Coligny Calendar.

For about five hundred years, the Roman Empire maintained the Greek East and consolidated a Latin West, but an East-West division remained, reflected in many cultural norms of the two areas, including language. Although Rome, like Greece, was no longer democratic, the idea of democracy remained a part of the education of citizens.
Eventually the empire became increasingly split into a Western and Eastern part, reviving old ideas of a contrast between an advanced East, and a rugged West. In the Roman world one could speak of three main directions; North (Celtic tribal states and Parthians), the East (lux ex oriente), and finally South, which implied danger, historically via the Punic wars (Quid novi ex Africa?) The West was peaceful – it contained only the Mediterranean.

Christianity emerged from Judaism on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, and both spread around the Roman world, with Christianity being the more popular religion. With the rise of Christianity, much of Rome’s tradition and culture were reshaped by that religion, and transformed into something new, which would serve as the basis for the development of Western civilization after the fall of Rome. Also, Roman culture mixed with Celtic, Germanic and Slavic cultures, which slowly became integrated into Western culture starting, mainly, with their acceptance of Christianity.

The roots of the revolution go back to the nineteenth century – especially to the gradual penetration of the country by the West. This penetration weakened the tenuous links that had connected the Qajar court to the wider society. It did so in two concurrent ways. On one hand, it introduced a mutual threat to the many dispersed urban bazaars and religious notables, bringing them together in a cross-regional middle class that became conscious for the first time of their common grievances against the government and the foreign powers. This propertied class, because of its ties to the bazaar and the clergy, later became known as the traditional middle class (tabaqeh-e motavasateh-e sunnati). This vital link between mosque and bazaar, which has lasted into the contemporary age, can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, the contact with the West, especially through modern education, introduced new ideas, new occupations, and eventually a new middle class. Their members described themselves as “enlightened thinkers,” adopting first the Arabic term monvar al-fekran and later coining the Persian equivalent rowshanfekran (enlightened thinkers). In many ways, they resembled eighteenth-century intellectuals in the Tsarist Empire who had coined the Russian term “intelligentsia.” These new intellectuals had little in common
with the traditional “men of the pen” found either in the royal court or in the theological seminaries. They perceived the world not through “Mirror for Princes” literature, but through the French Enlightenment. They venerated not royal authority but popular sovereignty; not tradition but Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity; not Shadows of God on Earth but the inalienable Rights of Man. They talked not of social equilibrium and political harmony, but of the need for radical change, fundamental transformation, and the inevitable march of human progress. They promulgated not the advantages of absolutism and conserva
tivism, but of liberalism, nationalism, and even socialism. Their outlook was shaped not so much by the Koran, the shari’a, and the Shi’I Messiah, but by the Age of Reason and its radical notions of Natural Rights – rights citizens possess by virtue of being humans.

Western penetration started early in the century. It began with military defeats, first by the Russian army, then by the British. The Russians – armed with modern artillery – swept through Central Asia and the Caucasus, defeating the Qajars in two short wars and imposing on them the humiliating treaties of Gulestan (1813) and Turkmanchay (1828). Similarly, the British, who had been in the Persian Gulf since the eighteenth century, started to expand their reach, forcing the Qajars to relinquish Herat, and imposing on them the equally humiliating Treaty of Paris (1857). Iranians began to refer to the two powers as their “northern” and “southern” neighbors. The treaties had far-reaching consequences. They established borders that have endured more or less intact into the contemporary age. They turned the country into a buffer and sometimes a contested zone in the “Great Game” played by the two powers. Their representatives became key players in Iranian politics – so much so that they had a hand not only in making and unmaking ministers but also in stabilizing the monarchy and influencing the line of succession throughout the century. This gave birth to the notion – which became even more prevalent in the next century – that foreign hands pulled all the strings in Iran that foreign conspiracies determined the course of events, and that behind every national crisis lay the foreign powers. The “paranoid style of politics” which many have noted shapes modern Iran had its origins in the nineteenth century.
(B) Literary Criticism

Literary criticism is the study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature. Modern literary criticism is often informed by literary theory, which is the philosophical discussion of its methods and goals. Though the two activities are closely related, literary critics are not always, and have not always been, theorists.

F.R. Leavis says “Literary criticism, then, is concerned with more than literature... A serious interest in literature cannot be merely literary; indeed, not only must the seriousness involve, it is likely to derive from, a perception of-which must be a preoccupation with-the problems of social equity and order and of cultural health.”[3]

The nature of the literary criticism of F.R. Leavis cannot be properly understood apart from his social and cultural concerns; as he indicates above, behind all his work lies the preoccupation with the cultural health of society. His basic hypothesis is that modern civilization is diseased, and his primary concern is to foster the growth of the activities that will improve and remedy this condition. Perhaps more forcefully argued the case for the importance of literature and of literary criticism in modern society, but the importance he attributes to them must be seen in the context of his other concerns.

Leavis’s main early statements on the society being shaped by the machine come in ‘Culture and Environment’ (1934). He he sets out at greater length his analysis and critique of the effects of the machine: “The great agent of change, and, from our point of view, destruction, has of course been the machine-applied power. The machine has destroyed the old ways of life, the old forms, and by reason of them continual rapid change it involves, prevented the growth of the new. Moreover, the advantage it brings us in mass production has turned out to involve standardization and leveling-down outside the realm of mere material goods.”[4]

Whether or not literary criticism should be considered a separate field of inquiry from literary theory, or conversely from book reviewing, is a
matter of some controversy. For example, the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* draws no distinction between literary theory and literary criticism, and almost always uses the terms together to describe the same concept. Some critics consider literary criticism a practical application of literary theory, because criticism always deals directly with particular literary works, while theory may be more general or abstract.

Literary criticism is often published in essay or book form. Academic literary critics teach in literature departments and publish in academic journals, and more popular critics publish their criticism in broadly circulating periodicals such as the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *New York Times Book Review*, the *New York Review of Books*, the *London Review of Books*, *The Nation*, and *The New Yorker*.

More strictly construed, the term covers only what has been called practical criticism, the interpretation of meaning and the judgment of quality. Criticism in this narrow sense can be distinguished not only from aesthetics (the philosophy of artistic value) but also from other matters that may concern the student of literature: biographical questions, bibliography, historical knowledge, sources and influences, and problems of method. Thus, especially in academic studies, “criticism” is often considered to be separate from “scholarship.” In practice, however, this distinction often proves artificial, and even the most single-minded concentration on a text may be informed by outside knowledge, while many notable works of criticism combine discussion of texts with broad arguments about the nature of literature and the principles of assessing it. Criticism will here be taken to cover all phases of literary understanding, though the emphasis will be on the evaluation of literary works and of their authors’ places in literary history.

The functions of literary criticism vary widely, ranging from the reviewing of books as they are published to systematic theoretical discussion. Though reviews may sometimes determine whether a given book will be widely sold, many works succeed commercially despite negative reviews, and many classic works, including Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851), have acquired appreciative publics long after being
unfavourably reviewed and at first neglected. One of criticism's principal functions is to express the shifts in sensibility that makes such revaluations possible. The minimal condition for such a new appraisal is, of course, that the original text survives. The literary critic is sometimes cast in the role of scholarly detective, unearthing, authenticating, and editing unknown manuscripts. Thus, even rarefied scholarly skills may be put to criticism's most elementary use, the bringing of literary works to a public's attention.

The variety of criticism's functions is reflected in the range of publications in which it appears. Criticism in the daily press rarely displays sustained acts of analysis and may sometimes do little more than summarize a publisher's claims for a book's interest. Weekly and biweekly magazines serve to introduce new books but are often more discriminating in their judgments, and some of these magazines, such as The (London) Times Literary Supplement and The New York Review of Books, are far from indulgent toward popular works. Sustained criticism can also be found in monthlies and quarterlies with a broad circulation, in little magazines for specialized audiences, and in scholarly journals and books.

Because critics often try to be lawgivers, declaring which works deserve respect and presuming to say what they are really about, criticism is a perennial target of resentment. Misguided or malicious critics can discourage an author who has been feeling his way toward a new mode that offends received taste. Pedantic critics can obstruct a serious engagement with literature by deflecting attention toward inessential matters. As the French philosopher-critic Jean-Paul Sartre observed, the critic may announce that French thought is a perpetual colloquy between Pascal and Montaigne not in order to make those thinkers more alive but to make thinkers of his own time deader. Criticism can antagonize authors even when it performs its function well. Authors who regard literature as needing no advocates or investigators are less than grateful when told that their works possess unintended meaning or are imitative or incomplete.

What such authors may tend to forget is that their works, once published, belong to them only in a legal sense. The true owner of their works is the public, which will appropriate them for its own concerns regardless of the critic. The critic's responsibility is not to the author's self-
esteem but to the public and to his own standards of judgment, which are usually more exacting than the public’s. Justification for his role rests on the premise that literary works are not in fact self-explanatory. A critic is socially useful to the extent that society wants, and receives, a fuller understanding of literature than it could have achieved without him. In filling this appetite, the critic whets it further, helping to create a public that cares about artistic quality. Without sensing the presence of such a public, an author may either prostitute his talent or squander it in sterile acts of defiance. In this sense, the critic is not a parasite but, potentially, someone who is responsible in part for the existence of good writing in his own time and afterward.

Although some critics believe that literature should be discussed in isolation from other matters, criticism usually seems to be openly or covertly involved with social and political debate. Since literature itself is often partisan, is always rooted to some degree in local circumstances, and has a way of calling forth affirmations of ultimate values, it is not surprising that the finest critics have never paid much attention to the alleged boundaries between criticism and other types of discourse. Especially in modern Europe, literary criticism has occupied a central place in debate about cultural and political issues. Sartre’s own *what is Literature?* (1947) is typical in its wide-ranging attempt to prescribe the literary intellectual’s ideal relation to the development of his society and to literature as a manifestation of human freedom. Similarly, some prominent American critics, including Alfred Kazin, Lionel Trilling, Kenneth Burke, Philip Rahv, and Irving Howe, began as political radicals in the 1930s and sharpened their concern for literature on the dilemmas and disillusionments of that era. Trilling’s influential *The Liberal Imagination* (1950) is simultaneously a collection of literary essays and an attempt to reconcile the claims of politics and art.

Such a reconciliation is bound to be tentative and problematic if the critic believes, as Trilling does, that literature possesses an independent value and a deeper faithfulness to reality than is contained in any political formula. In Marxist states, however, literature has usually been considered a means to social ends and, therefore, criticism has been cast in forthrightly partisan terms. Dialectical materialism does not necessarily turn the critic
into a mere guardian of party doctrine, but it does forbid him to treat literature as a cause in itself, apart from the working class’s needs as interpreted by the party. Where this utilitarian view prevails, the function of criticism is taken to be continuous with that of the state itself, namely, furtherance of the social revolution. The critic’s main obligation is not to his texts but rather to the masses of people whose consciousness must be advanced in the designated direction. In periods of severe orthodoxy, the practice of literary criticism has not always been distinguishable from that of censorship.

Although almost all of the criticism ever written dates from the 20th century, questions first posed by Plato and Aristotle are still of prime concern, and every critic who has attempted to justify the social value of literature has had to come to terms with the opposing argument made by Plato in *The Republic*. The poet as a man and poetry as a form of statement both seemed untrustworthy to Plato, who depicted the physical world as an imperfect copy of transcendent ideas and poetry as a mere copy of the copy. Thus, literature could only mislead the seeker of truth. Plato credited the poet with divine inspiration, but this, too, was cause for worry; a man possessed by such madness would subvert the interests of a rational polity. Poets were therefore to be banished from the hypothetical republic.

In his *Poetics*—still the most respected of all discussions of literature—Aristotle countered Plato’s indictment by stressing what is normal and useful about literary art. The tragic poet is not so much divinely inspired as he is motivated by a universal human need to imitate, and what he imitates is not something like a bed (Plato’s example) but a noble action. Such imitation presumably has a civilizing value for those who empathize with it. Tragedy does arouse emotions of pity and terror in its audience, but these emotions are purged in the process (katharsis). In this fashion Aristotle succeeded in portraying literature as satisfying and regulating human passions instead of inflaming them.

Although Plato and Aristotle are regarded as antagonists, the narrowness of their disagreement is noteworthy. Both maintain that poetry is mimetic; both treat the arousing of emotion in the perceiver, and both feel that poetry takes its justification, if any, from its service to the state. It
was obvious to both men that poets wielded great power over others. Unlike many modern critics who have tried to show that poetry is more than a pastime, Aristotle had to offer reassurance that it was not socially explosive.

Aristotle’s practical contribution to criticism, as opposed to his ethical defense of literature, lies in his inductive treatment of the elements and kinds of poetry. Poetic modes are identified according to their means of imitation, the actions they imitate, the manner of imitation, and its effects. These distinctions assist the critic in judging each mode according to its proper ends instead of regarding beauty as a fixed entity. The ends of tragedy, as Aristotle conceived them, are best served by the harmonious disposition of six elements: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song. Thanks to Aristotle’s insight into universal aspects of audience psychology, many of his dicta have proved to be adaptable to genres developed long after his time.

Later Greek and Roman criticism offers no parallel to Aristotle’s originality. Much ancient criticism, such as that of Cicero, Horace, and Quintilian in Rome, was absorbed in technical rules of exegesis and advice to aspiring rhetoricians. Horace’s verse epistle *The Art of Poetry* is an urbane amplification of Aristotle’s emphasis on the decorum or internal propriety of each genre, now including lyric, pastoral, satire, elegy, and epigram, as well as Aristotle’s epic, tragedy, and comedy. This work was later to be prized by Neoclassicists of the 17th century not only for its rules but also for its humour, common sense, and appeal to educated taste. *On the Sublime*, by the Roman-Greek known as “Longinus,” was to become influential in the 18th century but for a contrary reason: when decorum began to lose its sway encouragement could be found in Longinus for arousing elevated and ecstatic feeling in the reader. Horace and Longinus developed, respectively, the rhetorical and the affective sides of Aristotle’s thought, but Longinus effectively reversed the Aristotelian concern with regulation of the passions.
Modern trend in Persian Criticism

A literary movement that started in the late 1920s and 1930s and originated in reaction to traditional criticism that new critics saw as largely concerned with matters extraneous to the text, e.g., with the biography or psychology of the author or the work's relationship to literary history. New Criticism proposed that a work of literary art should be regarded as autonomous, and so should not be judged by reference to considerations beyond itself. A poem consists less of a series of referential and verifiable statements about the 'real' world beyond it, than of the presentation and sophisticated organization of a set of complex experiences in a verbal form (Hawkes, pp. 150-151). Major figures of New Criticism include I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, David Daiches, William Empson, Murray Krieger, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, F. R. Leavis, Robert Penn Warren, W. K. Wimsatt, R. P. Blackmur, Rene Wellek, Ausin Warren, and Ivor Winters.

These linguistic movements began in the 1920s, were suppressed by the Soviets in the 1930s, moved to Czechoslovakia and were continued by members of the Prague Linguistic Circle (including Roman Jakobson (YAH-keb-sen), Jan Mukarovsky, and René Wellek). The Prague Linguistic Circle viewed literature as a special class of language, and rested on the assumption that there is a fundamental opposition between literary (or poetical) language and ordinary language. Formalism views the primary function of ordinary language as communicating a message, or information, by references to the world existing outside of language. In contrast, it views literary language as self-focused: its function is not to make extrinsic references, but to draw attention to its own formal features—that is, to interrelationships among the linguistic signs themselves. Literature is held to be subject to critical analysis by the sciences of linguistics but also by a type of linguistics different from that adapted to ordinary discourse, because its laws produce the distinctive features of literariness (Abrams, pp. 165-166). An important contribution made by Victor Schklovsky (of the Leningrad group) was to explain how language—through a period of time—tends to become "smooth, unconscious or transparent." In contrast, the work of literature is to defamiliarize language by a process of "making strange." Dialogism refers to a theory, initiated by Mikhail Bakhtin (bahk-TEEN), arguing that in a dialogic work of literature—such as in the writings
of Dostoevsky--there is a "polyphonic interplay of various characters' voices ... where no worldview is given superiority over others; neither is that voice which may be identified with the author's necessarily the most engaging or persuasive of all those in the text" (Childers & Hentzi, p. 81).

Study of different forms or types of literature Genre studies often focus on the characteristics, structures, and conventions attributed to different forms of literature, e.g., the novel, short story, poem, drama, film, etc. More recent inquiry in genre criticism centers on the bias often inherent in genre criticism such as its latent (or overt) racism and sexism.

Literature and philosophy have been traditionally linked in Russian cultural history, and many Russian thinkers have addressed specifically literary issues in their works. Lev Shestov (1866–1938) represents one of the best examples of this phenomenon, his whole philosophy being close to literature in a variety of ways. Regarded as a representative of existential philosophy and a precursor of Sartrean existentialism, Shestov started his writing career essentially as a literary critic with his unconventional studies of Tolstoi and Dostoevskii, and he has also written on other classical Russian writers. In his treatment of literary works he was first and foremost interested in the existential experience of the writer, whose oeuvre he regarded mostly as evidence of this experience. This produced some highly original, even if controversial, literary criticism and served as a welcome complement to existing, more conventional, studies on Russian literature. This paper examines Shestov's literary criticism, discusses his method and its conclusions, and demonstrates that in his approach Shestov anticipated such modern critical trends as the psychoanalytical method and the postmodernist method of 'narrative psychology'.

With the rule of the Pahlavi dynasty, architecture was modernised in a new way. Socio-political planning under the authoritative rule of government with the aid of westerners was the style of the period. During the rule of Reza Shah (1925-1941) the industrialisation of the country began to take place; road and rail networks were built, in conjunction with a marked Europeanisation of social behaviour. Education, the economy, and culture all figured on the agenda of Reza Shah under the influence of the West, while the reconstruction efforts in Turkey headed by Mustafa Atatürk
led to imitation and rivalry. During the two decades of Reza Shah’s rule, the government played an active role in the execution of civil projects. Western architects were invited to design new buildings for the first time, and the reconstruction plans were executed with great speed. As a result the traditional design of many cities changed significantly.

The development of modern Persian Literature has been closely associated with the social and political upheavals of Iran. The rivalry of British and Russian imperialism and the economic expansion of European nations received an impetus during the Nineteenth century, and it is from this date that the process of modernization started in Persian Society, Language and Literature. It was only after the assassination of Nasiruddin Shah in 1896 and especially after the granting of the constitution in August 1906 A.D. That a change could be noticed in Persian Literature.

Starting in the nineteenth century, criticism of literature became bound up with criticism of all the "entrenched political and economic institutions". This was due largely to the encroachment of European political and cultural influence which undermined the traditional society of Iran. During the nineteenth century, Iranians for the first time felt the impact of the industrializing European powers. Russia incurred the first serious defeat against Iran by a European power during the Russo-Persian War. The Treaty of Gulistan ceded large parts of Azerbaijan and Georgia to the Russian Empire. In Central Asia, Russia and Great Britain were waging a contest for influence and concessions. British interests in India compelled them to create the buffer state of Afghanistan. Iranian ambitions to recapture Herat, were constantly frustrated during the Anglo-Persian War and the city has remained a part of Afghanistan ever since. At the same time, European sea-traffic had bypassed the ancient Silk Road, which had been the backbone of Iran’s economy since time immemorial. Traditional craftsmen could no longer compete with a flood of cheap, industrially-produced goods from Europe. The nineteenth century was a traumatic period for much of the world as European imperial powers stretched their possessions over the globe, and Iran was no exception.

During the nineteenth century, Iranians for the first time felt the impact of the industrializing European powers. Russia incurred the first
serious defeat against Iran by a European power during the Russo-Persian War. The Treaty of Gulistan ceded large parts of Azerbaijan and Georgia to the Russian Empire. In Central Asia, Russia and Great Britain were waging a contest for influence and concessions. British interests in India compelled them to create the buffer state of Afghanistan. Iranian ambitions to recapture Herat, were constantly frustrated during the Anglo-Persian War and the city has remained a part of Afghanistan ever since. At the same time, European sea-traffic had bypassed the ancient Silk Road, which had been the backbone of Iran's economy since time immemorial. Traditional craftsmen could no longer compete with a flood of cheap, industrially produced goods from Europe. The nineteenth century was a traumatic period for much of the world as European imperial powers stretched their possessions over the globe, and Iran was no exception.

**Literary Critics**

In the midst of all these setbacks, many Iranians awoke to an urgent sense of the need for reform. More and more Iranians left Iran to study in Europe. Translations into Persian of Western works began to appear with greater frequency. Even the Qajar princes themselves, who were most threatened by these changes, attempted stillborn reforms of their own (usually military or industrial) in an attempt to catch up with the West. It is therefore no surprise that the criticism of literature at this time assumed a strongly social-reformist dimension.

The intellectual underpinning of the new criticism was possible because of the rise of rational, critical thought. The European thinkers most popular to the growing class of reformist intellectuals were those of the European Enlightenment, such as René Descartes and Isaac Newton.

The Iranian reform movement can be seen in the context of the earlier movements in Europe and North America whereby “philosophers and thinkers arose ... who, through their criticism, challenged deeply seated superstition, ignorance and injustice.”[5] An element common to these is the imagery of light and dark: The movement these thinkers set in motion stood as a bulwark in defense of knowledge, learning, and reform, and,
through the promotion of understanding and wisdom, sought to dispel the darkness of superstition and ignorance.\textsuperscript{[6]}

In the late Qajar period, from the late 19th century until the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, several themes are common among the new literary critics.

1. \textit{Realism}, or social critical realism; critics discouraged imaginative or fanciful works and urged the production of literature which reflected real life.

2. \textit{Patriotism}; critics appealed for the establishment of a strong national literature which would inspire patriotism in Iranians. Patriotism was considered a moral virtue and critics saw Iran's troubles grandly as the result of the decline in moral values.

3. \textit{Protest}; by this term what is meant is the graphic, vitriolic language used by these critics in their attacks. In this sense the modern critics really continue the classical critical tradition, if it could be so called, based on slandering rivals.

4. \textit{Simplicity}, that is, rejection of affectation and abstruseness language; critics encouraged simple, clear prose and verse styles.

For this generation of thinkers, Iranian backwardness was the result of its culture's decay. They sought to place attention on the shortcomings of Iran's literature, because they thought that by revitalizing it they could lay the ground for the revitalization of their society. "Such an approach, of course, ignores the fact that illiteracy and ignorance are the outward manifestations of a poor, backward, medieval economy."\textsuperscript{[7]}

Considered the founder of modern literary criticism in Iran, Mirza Fath 'Ali Akhund'zadah used literary criticism as the vehicle for his reformist impulse. Akhund'zadah, because of his unfamiliarity with the Persian language and its prosody, made technical errors in some of his criticism, and was just as verbose and incoherent as those he attacked. However, he was the first critic in the modern tradition. He emphasized realistic content in prose and poetry and attacked the "decadence of Persian literature — a literature that failed to address the social needs of its time."\textsuperscript{[8]}
He published many works on literary criticism:

- *Qiritikah* (Criticism)
- *Risalah-i Irad* (Fault-finding treatise)
- *Fann-i kiritikah* (Art of criticism)
- *Darbarah-i Mulla-yi Rumi va tasnif-i u* (On Rumi and his work)
- *Darbarah-i nazm va nasr* (On verse and prose)
- *Fihrist-i kitab* (Preface to the book)
- *Maktub bih Mirza Aqa Tabrizi* (Letter to Mirza Aqa Tabrizi)
- *Udsul-i nigarish* (Principles of writing)

Kirmani emphasized that it is meaning, not the mode of expression, that exerts the real influence on the reader, and thus discouraged the "destruction of the natural clarity of language ... by means of complicated metaphors, difficult words, long sentences, and complex expressions."[9]

- *Fann-i guftan va nivishtan* (Art of speaking and writing)
- *Namah-i bastan* (Book of ancient times)
- *Ayinah-i sekandari* (Alexandrian mirror)
- *Namah-i sukhanvaran* (Book of eloquent speakers), or *Ayin-i sokhanvari* (Rules of eloquence)
- *Takvin va tashri’* (Creation and lawmaking)
- *Sih maktub* (Three letters)
- *Sad khatabah* (One hundred lectures)

In his *Siyahat’namah-i Ibrahim Bayk*, Maraghah'i stressed love of country. He found Persian literature preoccupied with love and lyricism and negligent of social and national issues. Maraghah'i put his simple prose style into use.

Mirza Malkum Khan's Armenian background and Christian religion may have played a part in the simplicity of his Persian prose. In his most important literary-critical work, *Firqah-i Kaj'binan* (the squint-eyed sect), Malkum Khan lampooned the language of various classes of society and encouraged a more concise prose style.

- *Firqah-i Kaj'binan* (the squint-eyed sect)
Abdul-Rahim Talibuf, along with the earlier critics mentioned above recognized the didactic use of literature to instruct people. He also helped to establish a simpler prose style (sadah'nivisi) especially in scientific prose in Iran.

- **Nukhbah-i sipihri** (Best of the sphere)
- **Kitab-i Ahmad ya safinah-i Talibi** (The book of Ahmad, or the Talibi Anthology)
- **Fizik ya hikmat-i tabi’iyah** (Physics or the natural order)
- **Hay’at-i jadid** (Modern life)
- **Pandnamah-i Markus Uriliyus, qaysar-i rum** (Book of Counsels of Marcus Aurelius, Caesar of Rome)
- **Masalik al-muhsinin** (Principles of Beneficents)
- **Masa’il al-hayat** (Questions of life)
- **Izahat dar khusus-i azadi** (Explanations on liberty)
- **Siyasat-i Talibi** (The politics of Talibi)

Saeed Nafisi analyzed and edited several critical works. He is well known for his works on Rudaki and Sufi literature. Parviz Natel-Khanlari and Gholamhossein Yousefi, who belong to Nafisi's generation, were also involved in modern literature and critical writings. Natel-Khanlari is distinguished by the simplicity of his style. He did not follow the traditionalists, nor did he advocate the new. Instead, his approach accommodated the entire spectrum of creativity and expression in Persian literature.

Contemporary Persian literary criticism reached its maturity after Sadeq Hedayat, Ebrahim Golestan, Houshang Golshiri, Abdolhossein Zarrinkoub and Shahrokh Meskoob. Among these figures, Zarrinkoub held academic positions and had a reputation not only among the intelligentsia but also in academia. Besides his significant contribution to the maturity of Persian language and literature, Zarrinkoub boosted comparative literature and Persian literary criticism. Zarrinkoub's Serr e Ney is a critical and comparative analysis of Rumi’s Masnavi. In turn, Shahrokh Meskoob worked on Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh, using the principles of modern literary criticism.
Mohammad Taghi Bahar's main contribution to this field is his book called Sabk Shenasi (Stylistics). It is a pioneering work on the practice of Persian literary historiography and the emergence and development of Persian literature as a distinct institution in the early part of the twentieth century. It contends that the exemplary status of Sabk-shinasi rests on the recognition of its disciplinary or institutional achievements. It further contends that, rather than a text on Persian 'stylistics', Sabk-shinasi is a vast history of Persian literary prose, and, as such, is a significant intervention in Persian literary historiography.

In the 19th century, Persian literature experienced dramatic change and entered a new era. The beginning of this change was exemplified by an incident in the mid-19th century at the court of Nasereddin Shah, when the reform-minded prime minister, Amir Kabir, chastised the poet Habibollah Qa'ani for "lying" in a panegyric qasida written in Kabir's honor. Kabir saw poetry in general and the type of poetry that had developed during the Qajar period as detrimental to "progress" and "modernization" in Iranian society, which he believed was in dire need of change. Such concerns were also expressed by others such as Fath-'Ali Akhundzadeh, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, and Mirza Malkom Khan. Khan also addressed a need for a change in Persian poetry in literary terms as well, always linking it to social concerns.

The new Persian literary movement cannot be understood without an understanding of the intellectual movements among Iranian philosophical circles. Given the social and political climate of Persia (Iran) in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries, which led to the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906–1911, the idea that change in poetry was necessary became widespread. Many argued that Persian poetry should reflect the realities of a country in transition. This idea was propagated by notable literary figures such as Ali-Akbar Dehkoda and Abolqasem Aref, who challenged the traditional system of Persian poetry in terms of introducing new content and experimentation with rhetoric, lexicosemantics, and structure. Dehkhoda, for instance, used a lesser-known traditional form, the mosammat, to elegize the execution of a revolutionary journalist. 'Aref employed the ghazal, "the most central genre within the lyrical tradition" (p. 88), to write his 'Payam-e Azadi' (Message of Freedom).
An important movement in modern Persian literature centered on the question of modernization and Westernization and whether these terms are synonymous when describing the evolution of Iranian society. It can be argued that almost all advocates of modernism in Persian literature, from Akhundzadeh, Kermani, and Malkom Khan to Dehkhoda, Aref, Bahar, and Taqi Rafat, were inspired by developments and changes that had occurred in Western, particularly European, literatures. Such inspirations did not mean blindly copying Western models but, rather, adapting aspects of Western literature and changing them to fit the needs of Iranian culture.

Abdolhossein Zarrinkoub, prominent scholar of Persian literature and literary criticism. Following the pioneering works of Ahmad Kasravi, Sadeq Hedayat and many others, the Iranian wave of comparative literature and literary criticism reached a symbolic crest with the emergence of Abdolhossein Zarrinkoub, Shahrokh Meskoob, Houshang Golshiri and Ebrahim Golestan.

In the post-Mosaddeq era, during which Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (reigned 1941-1979) was able for the first time since his father's abdication in 1941 to tighten monarchical control and impose gradually increased censorship, and during which most of Chubak's work was published, writers, literary critics, and educated readers demanded that the writer be explicitly non-establishment and even anti-establishment. However, this was not a new demand. As early as 1946, in the First Congress of Iranian Writers, Alavi had stated, 'We must know the purpose of art and the duty of the artist'; he advocated a revolutionary position for the writer, who must "move in front of the people and guide them" in their struggle. This attitude, shared by most writers and their audiences even as far back as the Constitutional era (1906-1911), never having completely faded away, once again became a special focus of attention during the 1960s. Social commitment in literature and other extra-literary concerns then became major factors in the evaluation of literary works and the popularity of the writer, allowing Al-e Ahmad, for example, to become more popular in spite of (or perhaps because of) a number of his works having been banned. Similar criteria were decisive in the popularity of the new writers of these years as well, such as Samad Behrangi (1939-1968), whose stories lack sophistication and fail as literary pieces but were popular
after his sudden death, allegedly due to political activities, and who became a popular, almost cult figure among the antiestablishment and dissident forces. In such an atmosphere, Chubak's only two novels, Tangsir and The Patient Stone, were published, and subsequently received harsh attacks from a number of critics in Iran. With no taste for filling his work with direct political slogans and no inclination toward any personal participation in antiestablishment sociopolitical issues, Chubak was judged negatively by the Iranian intelligentsia, consisting mainly of dissident university students, poets, and writers (some of them critics trying to gain the approval of their literary audiences). These individuals had unwritten rules dictating the condemnation of those writers who did not openly and publicly conform to the norm of the writer as a leader of society. In addition, with the increased government control of the 1970s, almost every writer of some distinction underwent a period (however short) of incarceration, a very visible criterion in his evaluation as "committed." Chubak did not. Since the "committed" subject matter of Chubak's two novels as well as his short story collections, with their rather harsh criticism of Iranian society and its institutions, including its political institutions, cannot be overlooked by the objective reader, it would seem then that the "committed" nature of a work alone was not a satisfactory criterion for the favorable reception and critical praise of that work during the latter two decades of the Pahlavi rule. Rather, the personal involvement of a writer in antiestablishment political activities seems to have been a decisive factor in the overall acceptance of his works. But it would seem simplistic to assume that Chubak's politics alone was a source of displeasure for the Iranian literary public. During this same period, in the wake of the continuous bombardment of the country with Western ideas and influences, a new reactionary, xenophobic nationalism began to arise, one that condemned these influences as having "demolished" Iranian values.

During modern period Persian was so much influenced by progressive thinkers of Iran. They not only encouraged the movement of reforms in Persian Prose Literature but introduced a simple and intelligible Persian in their writings. Persian has always been the language of love, mutual understanding, morality and ethics. It has played a remarkable role in bringing the Iranian people and has sown the seed of love and national
integration among the people of Iran. It has left a deep impact on the culture and civilization of Iranian people.

The intellectual underpinning of the new criticism was possible because of the rise of rational, critical thought. The European thinkers most popular to the growing class of reformist intellectuals were those of the European Enlightenment, such as René Descartes and Isaac Newton. The movement these thinkers set in motion stood as a bulwark in defense of knowledge, learning, and reform, and, through the promotion of understanding and wisdom, sought to dispel the darkness of superstition and ignorance. Realism, or social critical realism; critics discouraged imaginative or fanciful works and urged the production of literature which reflected real life. Patriotism; critics appealed for the establishment of a strong national literature which would inspire patriotism in Iranians. Patriotism was considered a moral virtue and critics saw Iran's troubles grandly as the result of the decline in moral values. Protest; by this term what is meant is the graphic, vitriolic language used by these critics in their attacks. In this sense the modern critics really continue the classical critical tradition, if it could be so called, based on slandering rivals. Simplicity, that is, rejection of affectation and abstruseness of language; critic encouraged simple, clear prose and verse styles.

**Iranian Society**

The Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) represents the first direct encounter between traditional Shiite Islam and modernity. All the earlier attempts at modernization, although involving important changes in the legal, governmental, and administrative systems, were conducted in areas only marginally connected with underlying traditional values. In this Revolution, new ideas and terms emerged, among them, the idea of a Constitution, the limitation and separation of government power, freedom, state, the nation (millat) of Iran and the equality of all people before the law. This chapter will examine the period of 1848 to 1911, concentrating on the Revolution and its various backgrounds, and impacts. The study does not aim to repeat simply history and historical analyses; rather, the ensuing discussion will briefly clarify elements that would help us visualize and get a
deeper grasp of a situation that had an influence on the codification of the Constitution regarding the rights and status of religious minorities.

Muzaffaruddin (r. 1896-1907) was the fifth Shah of the Qajar dynasty who, with his special characteristics, helped the Constitutional Revolution attain victory and in particular helped in the establishment of the first Parliament (majlis). Among his colleagues only Mirza amin khan al-Dawla, \[^{[10]}\] (d.1904) the effective prime minister-- who served for only a short time is worth mentioning. The Shah died only ten days after his endorsement of the Constitution. Muhammad Ali mirza (r. 1906-1909) who continued the dictatorial policy of his grandfather became the sixth Shah of the dynasty.

He did not support constitutionalism and, backed by Russian troops, closed and bombarded the parliament. Soon after, armed revolutionaries took over Tehran (July of 1909) forcing him to take refuge in the Russian embassy and then with Russian support left Iran abdicating his position to his twelve-year son, Ahmad Shah, the seventh and the last Shah (r. 1909-1925) of the Qajar dynasty.\[^{[11]}\]

Education was exclusive for boys and was only possible in traditional schools (maktab khan-i) directed mostly by clerics. In these schools, the student learnt reading and writing, Persian and Arabic grammar, some classic literature, and the ability to read and memorize the Qur’an. If the students continued their education in the religious schools, they would learn some fiqh material, hadith, jurisprudence, Aristotelian logic, interpretation of the Qur’an and, in some cases, philosophy mixed with mysticism and theology in polemic fashion. Due to the fact that the usuli attitude triumphed over the akhbari after the death of Muhammad Baqir Bihbahani (1791-2), \[^{[12]}\] jurisprudential discussions were welcome more than before. There was no material beyond these subjects and at the same time the basic knowledge, the method of instruction and texts were not adequate for educational purposes. Religious schools still suffer from these defects today. A few students were going to Najaf and Karbala in Iraq (atabat-aliyat) in order to continue at higher levels of Islamic studies to reach the grade of mujtahid and perhaps become sources of emulation. The clerics who graduated from the atabat had great influence and they were highly respected by the people. As we shall see, all the clerical leaders
of the Constitutional Revolution, whether for or against, had been educated there.

It is pertinent to our discussion to look at the books that influenced the literate classes of society in the late 19th century. Books indirectly offered modern ideas such as the equality of all people before the law which later came onto the political scene in the society. The process of translating books was started by the order of Abbas Mirza with the assumption that by these books the government could acquire the valuable experience of Western progress. Some of these books were Voltaire’s *Essays on Peter the Great*, *Charles XII*, and Edward Gibbon’s (1737-1794) *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In the period of our study, there were scholars such as Fateh Ali Akhundzade (1812-1878), who held secular anti-clerical views and wrote notable books and plays in a new style, but they were never known among the masses. However, late during the rule of Nasir al-ddin Shah, a free translation of the novel of James Morier (1780-1849) *Haji Baba Isfahani* achieved enduring popularity. It was translated by Mirza Habib Isfahani and even though it displayed a hostile and disdainful portrayal of the Persian character, at the same time it provoked Iranians to acknowledge their backwardness and defects by its simple and funny language. The translator also had another story *Ghara’ib Ava’id Milal* (The Strange Things of Nations) which was rendered from Arabic and published in 1885. This book was a kind of anthropological story, described by the characters, and depicted the illogical and irrational convictions of various nations. One of them, according to the story, insulted the People of the Book and other religious people. The presentation of such a theme in fictional language was a really innovational act in a society that did not pay attention to other faiths. Another irrational conviction, according to the story, was the belief in the role of superstitions that was current among Iranians. Another important critical work was *Siyahat-nama-i Ibrahim*

*Biyg (The Travelogue of Ibrahim)* whose author explains through a fictional story the wishes of a Persian national who enthusiastically returns to his homeland and finds nothing except the tyranny of the ruler, ignorance and corruption. It was written by Zaynal-abidin Maraghi’. The first volume was published in 1896, the second in 1905, and the third in
The book had a great influence on revolutionaries and according to Nazim al-Islam Kirmani \[16\] the first volume was regularly read in secret societies before the Revolution. In very simple language, this was the first time a book contained material that had some ideas on codes of law, egalitarianism and administering the codification of law. The name of the constitutionalism and the *majlis* even are mentioned in this work. \[17\]

Since Kirmani was a cleric who belonged to the middle class of the society and did not follow the interests of any particular group, his work is the main source for all researchers, even Browne who used to live in Iran at that time. At the same time, it is the fact that he was close to the religious leaders of the Revolution. He wrote his daily memoirs during the events and, even though he did not have a standard style in recording historical events, his memoirs do enjoy scholarly value and validity. Kasrawi,\[18\] a historian who was living in Tabriz, wrote about events in Tehran but rarely of other cities and it was all based on his own information; nevertheless, his book has a style in recording historical events, which is quite new to the Persian. Since he was a secular, iconoclastic man, religious factions, whether Islamic or Bahai, do not like his reports and judgments. He also wrote treatises on Shiism and Bahaism and was finally assassinated by a radical Islamic group called the Devotees of Islam (*fadayan-I Islam*). \[19\]

Browne's works on Iran are still regarded as unique and authentic. He wrote his book over one hundred years ago and even though he mentioned in his introduction to *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* that he did not intend to write a historical work, he practically did. Without Browne's work, i.e. without the eyes of a foreign observer, one cannot look at the phenomenon as it was and perceive the facts. Furthermore, there are some monographs that were written for and against constitutionalism indicative of clerical attitudes on the subject. These monographs would help us to find the bases of those current *fiqh*-oriented opinions as well as some articles in the Constitution 1907 and 1979, which contain some discrimination against religious minorities. Among historians, except for F. Adamiyyat, few paid attention to these monographs that demonstrate the clerics’ impression of and their argumentation regarding modern concepts and terms.
The Crown Prince, the waliāhd, Mirza Muhammad Ali, who lived in Tabriz, with the aid of his Russian tutor tried to prevent publishing the news of Tehran in the city. He failed and the people of Tabriz strongly protested against the tyranny of the waliāhd and played an important role in the Revolution and subsequent events. They closed their shops and explicitly announced demands for freedom and the Constitution. On 27th September 1906, the news that the Shah had granted a Constitution reached Tabriz and the revolutionaries formed a society (anjuman) to hold elections. Amongst the deputies elected in Tabriz was a young revolutionary by the name of Sayyid Hasan Taqizad-ī who played complicated role in subsequent events. Later on, he was who accused of killing Sayyid Abd Allah Bihbahani, and of being linked with and depending on the British diplomatic mission. In time, he became a senator and even he was made chairman of the Senate Parliament in the Pahlavi period.

Some of the courtiers and governors, however, were not in agreement with this prescription as a cure or remedy. They believed that the common man, who remained ignorant, could not understand what a Constitution meant. Among the documents, there are some references that can be used to argue for the claim. Two letters are worth noting: he first one, a letter of Nasir al-Mulk, who belonged to this group to sayyid Muhammad Tabatabai, in early 1906, saying that a constitutional monarchy would cause disorder and confusion in the society. He argued that “Iran does not even have ten persons who know what a parliament meant, let alone make decisions for the country there”. The second was a letter of Sultan Abd al-Hamid (r. 1876-1909) from the Ottoman Empire, who wrote to Mujaffar al-Din Shah, referring to the reason for suspending the Constitution and the Parliament in his country. He mentioned the point that having and applying a Constitution was too soon for his own people and the same held true for Iran. The events that actually happened after 1911 approved their arguments.

Other serious arguments, which Nuri and other opponents made against the Constitution, refer to the content of those articles dealing with freedom and the equality of the rights of all people before the law. Examining their sayings can be helpful to grasp a better picture of the situation in the period. The content of the arguments is not new for the
present study, and they are the same materials that were dealt with in the previous chapter concerning the legal opinions of Shiite jurists. Addressing members of the majlis, Nuri remarked, "The rulings of Islam are based on inequality among mankind, so you took an oath to agree with equality! The Qur'an stated that a Muslim should not be retaliated against for a non-Muslim, and then you took an oath to agree with the right of retaliation for non-Muslims!"[22] “Whatever sounds contrary to Islam, will never have any legality whatsoever. Oh! Knaves, oh! Dishonesty, the owner of the Sharia gave you dignity and superiority and then you yourself give it up and say 'I should be a brother and equal with the Armenians, the Zoroastrians, and the Jews!'" [23]

As to Article 8 of the Supplement which states ‘the people of the Persian Empire are to enjoy equal rights before the law’, he wrote “I am told that if we do not insert this article in our Constitution, then foreign countries would not recognize us as Constitutionalists, I responded that in such a case then Islam is gone (fa’ala al-Islam salamun). Islamic countries will never be Constitutional since in keeping with Islamic teachings it is impossible to accept equal rights.” [24]

The adherent clerics of constitutionalism responded to the questions of the opponents. Concerning the philosophy of the establishment of the parliament, they argued that they were not going to codify new laws in the realm of the Sharia. In addition to those laws supervising the executive affairs of government, limiting the power of the Shah and statesmen, and preventing the oppression by local governors, the duty of the parliament was to deal with issues that were of benefit to the people at the time. Personal status and other Islamic laws introduced by the Prophet and the Imams are permanent and the majlis does not intend to change them. Furthermore, the supporters believed that by establishing the parliament, the nation would be able to save the country from the invasion of foreign powers, from their interference in its internal affairs and, finally, the majlis could realize the rule of exhorting the doing of good and the forbiddance of what is unlawful (al-amr bilmaruf wa al-nahy an al-munkar).

In the period under discussion, the economy of the country was mostly based on agriculture and primitive trade and the government
obtained income through taxes. The characteristics of the cities were more similar to that of villages or undeveloped societies. The high rate of poverty; the low standards of education, income, and health; interference in others’ affairs; and considering others who did not have the same tribal or religious affiliations as strangers were the main features accounted for in such societies by sociologists. Religious minorities had an inferior status and role in the society and because they accepted this status, they have often coexisted with Iranian Muslims in peace. For more security, in most cities, recognized religious minorities preferred to live together in certain local areas (mahall-i) separately and towards which local governors did not pay adequate attention. Perhaps one reason for the limited information regarding them in the sources would be the particular conditions in those areas. Neighborhoods where religious minorities lived did not have independent systems of education and health. It was only in the late 19th century when modernization began to appear in Iran that some schools, with the support of some foreign countries were established for Jews and Christians for the first time. It has been cited that religious minorities, especially Jews, some Zoroastrians and Christians who didn’t have lands to work on, chose as careers such activities as providing music for weddings, trading in alcohol, cloth, silk, and antiques, the buying and selling land, exchanging money (Sarrafi), usury and sometimes selling traditional drugs besides the crafts and the professions.205 The majority of Zoroastrians and Sabi’in were also peasants and artisans. [25]

People in 19th century Iran lived at a low socio-cultural and economical level. Religious minorities sometimes had problems that made their situation with more difficult; for example, Christians in the northwest had ongoing conflicts with Kurds and Turkish tribes of Iran and Turkey in the area and, from time to time, they were attacked by Kurds. Since the sabi’in was an isolated faith and tribe, they had less sociopolitical difficulties with Muslims and other groups. It is true that according to some reports religious minorities generally speaking, were “treated with much toleration, and are rarely forced to submit to greater injustice and indignity that is awarded to Muslims as well”. [26]

However, religious minorities, especially Jews and Zoroastrians, occasionally, were oppressed by local governors in order to extract more
taxes or take more bribes. Misusing legal opinions, low ranking clerics, attacked religious minorities through radical groups and pressured them to become Muslim or accept difficult regulations. There were also religious motivations to attack religious minorities but in the most of them, the major motivation was the tyranny of local governors. As far as I have found, among all the no-print documents in the Archives of the Foreign Ministry from 1862/1279 to 1906/1324 there were about two hundred cases recorded where religious minorities had been attacked. But one can rarely find a fatwa on behalf of a high-ranking jurist where he gave anybody the right to attack religious minorities, to force them to convert, or issued the right to identify religious minorities by special dress codes. The lack of implementation of the Sharia was a religious motivation that cleric-preachers used to exhort the people to protest against prevailing conditions, which they considered to be the cause for every social defeat, even the spread of cholera. In such an atmosphere when some radical clerics want to show the people examples of evil (munkar), they reduced the evil to the act of usury and the selling and drinking alcohol in public view by religious minorities. In some cases, they thought that if religious minorities became Muslim, or at least obeyed the specific regulations offered by the jurists, their situation would have been better in the light of God’s grace. This kind of treatment, according to some reports, existed from time to time since the Mongol period until the end of the Qajar dynasty.

The attack on religious minorities sometimes also had roots in the social and psychic feedback of another problem. For example, after Amin al-Dawla, who was an efficient Sadrazam for a short time in 1314/1896, and who prevented many abuses by the ulama and influential courtiers (darbariyani), decreasing their monthly allowances, some fanatic groups with the permission of some clerics attacked Jews and claimed that they should have a dress code to be distinguished from Muslims. The government for a short time had to order Jews to hang a silver necklace with musa’i (attributed to Moses) written on it on their clothes. [27]

There are some cases where Zoroastrians also converted to Islam to find a better socio-economic situation. Most of them were women seeking an opportunity to marry Muslims. Like Jews, Zoroastrians regard only
themselves as the chosen tribe of God and consider their blood pure. According to this belief, the marriage of a Zoroastrian with others is not lawful and conversion is regarded as a great heresy. The Zoroastrian documents consider all cases of conversion as forcible ones, but there are some documents that expressly indicate voluntary conversion as well. As to Christians and the Sabi’in there were no cases of conversion found for that time.

Most significantly, the question arises as to what exactly is the legitimate version of Islamic law as determined by the current clerical elite. In the Islamic Republic of Iran the ultimate source of law is the will of God as written in the Koran. However, because the Koran is an all-encompassing document which governs every aspect of daily life, it is prone to a multitude of different interpretations. Interpretations by Islamic jurists may differ based on the region of the country from which they come, whether they are Sunni or Shia Muslims or if they are conservative or moderates, or radicals.

Christians had their institutional as well as cultural dependencies on foreign churches and it was regarded as a kind of legal support for them. Therefore, at the same time that Christians have played an intermediary role in Iran they have regarded themselves as Iranian, keeping their own ethnicity, culture, religion, and language with foreign protection. Thus, they had not encountered forced conversion as far as the present author has found, and did not experience the problems which Jews or Zoroastrians had. When missions and archbishops were coming from abroad, the Christians had churches, including the Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Church of the Middle East, and the Roman Catholic Church. Missionaries who came to Iran were major supporters for the Christians. The exact date of the arrival of American, English, and Roman Catholic missionaries is not clear, however, some reports indicate that they have been coming to Iran at least since 1834. The Lazarus and Presbyterian missionaries came to Tabriz and Tehran from 1876 on and established some schools and orphanages in 1901. One of their aims among the native Christians and Jews in Iran was the direct attempt to convert Jews and Muslims to Christianity. Since the conversion of Muslims calls for the death penalty in the Sharia and being non-Muslim would place them in great danger, the
attempts by those missionaries to convert them failed. But their educational and medical activities saw considerable achievement in various cities. There are of course some instances of Jews who converted into Christianity. On the other hand, when the Belgians and Austrians controlled the management of the Ministry of Ports and Customs in Tehran (1890-1906), they only employed Iranian colleagues from religious minority communities, especially Christians. Such support and treatment provoked a negative Muslim Iranian attitude towards religious minorities.

Social progress made under the Pahlavi Monarchs has been completely reversed. The tenets of the 1975 Family Protection Act have all been rejected by the Islamic regime. In today's Iran, men can obtain a unilateral divorce from their wife or wives. The marriage age for females has been lowered to nine and in some instances to seven. Mothers no longer have equal rights in terms of child custody. The religious edicts of the mullahs are enforced by an armed moral police who arbitrarily stop couples in the streets to make sure that no immoral act is taking place. For instance; documents must be produced to prove to the moral police that the person you are being accompanied with is a close relative and not an unrelated man or woman. Young unmarried women found at parties are given automatic virginity tests and if they fail the test, as punishment, they can receive up to hundred lashes.

The Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979 brought a one hundred percent reversal in the trend of secularization which the country was experiencing. In fact, Islam became the official new state ideology of the clerical fundamentalist elites such a clear emphasis on Islam as the center of governance has profound effects on Iran's societal fabric. The 1979 Islamic Constitution resulted in a shift of the legal system from a secular to religious orientation. Concurrently, the Constitution provides political legitimacy to ‘God’ and the divine law given in the Koran. It is not difficult to see the profound implications of such a theologically based political and legal system. Attributing all power to God and the Koran allows for little space to maneuver outside of these strictly defined boundaries. Two questions arise: who is qualified to make the laws and what constitutes the correct form of Islamic law in the view of the clerical rulers of Iran.
Translated into real terms, only the clergy and those they select personally possess the necessary moral and religious qualifications to hold important judicial positions. Although, such individuals may be highly regarded in religious circles, it does not mean that they have the necessary educational and technical expertise to reconcile their religious and legal judgments with the needs of a modern society.


### References


4. ‘Culture and Environment’ pp.96-97


6. Ibid

7. Parsinejad (2003), p. 91


10. About him, see Kirmani, vol. 1: 154-55

11. Concerning this very sad and sorrowful period of Iran, see, C. Ghani (1998).

12. H. Algar ‘Behbahani, AqÁ Sayyed Muhammad Baqir’ in EIR

13. F. Adamiyyat (1357/1978): 151-152. M. Àjuduli: 213-14. Only the first volume of Gibbon’s work was published (no. 66 of Iranian National Library, quoted by Adamiyyat: ibid). Because of the death of Abbas Mirzand the fact that the text made Fath Ali Shah very angry, the remaining volumes were never published.


15. The author was Ruf’a’a Bak from Egypt
16. Some information concerning Kirmani will be offered below.

17. Adamiyyat, ibid: 96.


19. Farhad Kazemi, "Feda'ian Eslam", in EIR.

20. It seems that among works written on him, the following is academically the best one, see, 'Taqizad-i'In EWI by Abd al-husayn Ìdharang.


24. Ibid: 159-160


27. M. Ajudani: 272-75 and footnote, no. 465. The ulama also believed that Amin al-Dawla was going to establish new Western laws and he must be a naturalist – anti religious person.