

RELIGIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC BACKDROPS OF CONSTITUTIONALISM IN IRAN IN THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

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Abstract. The article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics that influenced the emergence of constitutionalism and the constitutional revolution in Iran in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It examines the complex interplay between religious, political and economic factors, elucidating their roles in shaping Iran's constitutional landscape. Through an examination of historical sources and scholarly analysis, the article reveals the significant influence wielded by religious institutions, particularly religious leaders, in either supporting or challenging constitutional reforms. This reflects the complex relationship between traditional religious authority and the emerging demands for secular governance. This article, therefore, explores complicated power struggles among political elites, consisting of a diverse groups of aristocrats, bureaucrats and intellectuals. These factions engaged in intricate maneuvers that often determined the course of constitutionalism in Iran. In addition, the economic backdrop of the late Qajar period, characterized by foreign intervention, economic disparity and social unrest, provided fertile ground for political reform and greater representation. By highlighting the multifaceted interactions between these forces, the article offers valuable insights into the evolution of constitutionalism in Iran. It reveals that understanding these historical dynamics is crucial for comprehending Iran's contemporary political landscape and the ongoing quest for democratic governance amidst complex religio-political and economic realities.

Keywords: *Political dynamics, religious authorities, political reform, constitutionalism.*

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1. Introduction

At the beginning of twentieth-century Iran, there developed the idea of constitutionalism that paved a way to what is called the constitutional revolution (Arjomand, 1979; Bayat, 1991; Milani, 1994). The revolution that took place from 1906-1911 involved many components of Iranian society, from traders, secular intellectuals, to 'ulama (Ansari, 2016). This revolution was the product of the strong demands of society for a constitutional political system, with a written constitution and the formation of a legislative institution through elections, replacing the traditional system of absolute monarchy. The constitutional revolution is a form of political system

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reform. This movement was a consequence of the modernization that had taken place since the 1820s after the end of the war against Russia, when ‘Abbās Mirzā formed a slim but modern armed force and sent a number of students to study in Europe. This policy produced a number of secular reformers consisting of several bureaucratic officials, diplomats stationed in several European countries and several alumni of the Dār al-Funūn modern school which was founded in the mid-19th century (Gheissari, 1998).

Despite the diversity of opinions among reformist groups, they were united by two things: the establishment of written law and modernization from above. However, most of them equated the reform with blind imitation of aspects of the European (modern) political system. The reformers wrote travel reports, translated European books, published newspapers and formed secret associations or societies (*anjoman*). They spread modern political ideas, such as the concept of popular sovereignty (Rousseau), the rule of law, protection of property and individual life and the idea of parliamentarism (Milani, 1994).

This article aims to analyze these multifaceted dynamics to explain the complex evolution of constitutionalism in the context of Iranian history. Based on a careful analysis of diverse historical sources and scholarly insights, this article underscores the important role played by religious institutions, political elites and existing economic conditions in shaping Iran's constitutional landscape. This article argues that religious institutions, especially religious leaders, have had a major influence in supporting or challenging constitutional reform, reflecting the complex relationship between traditional religious authority and emerging demands for secular government. At the same time, political elites, consisting of a variety of nobles, bureaucrats and intellectuals, were engaged in complex power struggles that often shaped the direction of constitutional development. Moreover, the economic backdrop of the late Qajar period, characterized by foreign intervention, economic inequality and social unrest, provided fertile ground for demands for political reform and greater representation.

2. Religio-political Dynamics of the Qajar Dynasty

The Qajar dynasty was founded by the Qajar family which was one of the Turkoman tribes who supported Ismā‘īl, the ruler of the first Ṣafawīyyah dynasty, in the conquest of Iran. They received compensation in the form of fiefdom. On this basis they became an important element in Iranian history until 1794, when Agha Muḥammad Khān defeated the Zand dynasty. Two years later he was crowned shāh (king). However, his reign did not last long (only lasted one year) before he was killed by two of his servants. By then he had consolidated his power over all of Iran and regained control of Georgia (Hambly, 1991).

Aghā Muḥammad Khān was succeeded by Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh (d.1834). Faṭḥ ‘Alī’s reign was marked by Iran’s defeat against Russia during the war of 1804-1813, when Iran lost provinces in the Caucasus. Apart from Russia, Iran also has close relations with England and France. Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh had great respect for the ‘ulama. This may have been partly due to his piety and partly due to the Qajar dynasty's need to establish its own legitimacy.

Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh, who made several pilgrimages to the holy places of Qumm and Mashhad, spent his wealth to repair these holy places, as well as other holy places in Iraq. He built mosques, madrasas and especially rebuilt the very famous Faydiyyah

Madrassa in Qum. The Qajar ruler made Tehran his capital and tried to invite many prominent 'ulama to come and settle in the city to increase the prestige of his capital. However, Tehran never became an important religious center like Isfahan during Safawiyyah times.

This fact may reflect the changing relationship between the government and the 'ulama. During his reign, Fath 'Alī Shāh instituted policies restricting religious activities that conflicted with Shī'ah orthodoxy. This policy encouraged the development of dominance of the orthodox Shi'ite 'ulama who were members of the Uṣūlī madhhab. An important figure of the Uṣūlī madhhab at that time was Muḥammad Bāqir Bihbahānī (1706-1790). This madhhab replaced the dominance of the Akhbārī in the previous period and even declared the Akhbārī as heretics and infidels (Algar, 1969).

The patronage of political authorities to orthodox 'ulama aims, among other things, to establish political and religious influence over the Shī'ah community. The religious controversy that emerged during this period was driven by the Shaykhiyyah movement founded by Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī. Fath 'Alī Shāh was not too involved in this issue, but it was the governor of Qazvin, 'Alī Naqī Mirzā who was able to reduce the controversy, especially when the leader of the Shaykhiyyah was accused of being an infidel by Muḥammad Taqī Baraghānī, an orthodox scholar (Algar, 1969).

The power of the Iranian clerics over the masses and the ability to move in ways not fully approved by the government has been demonstrated in the clerics' actions for jihad that sparked the second war between Russia and Iran and in the Griboyadov incident. 'Ulama often cooperate with the bāzār in their demands regarding trade destroyed by Western imports. Meanwhile, before the mid-19th century, 'ulama rarely actively opposed government policies. The shāhs during this period generally attempted to treat the 'ulama well and show respect to them, while the 'ulama in turn limited their political demands to matters relating to their immediate interests (Keddie, 1981).

Further conflict or tension with Western powers, in this case Britain, was somewhat averted in 1833 when the new Prince 'Abbās Mirzā put down a tribal rebellion in eastern Iran moving to take Herat. This city in western Afghanistan with a large Persian-speaking Shiite population was then under Afghan rule but was considered Iranian territory by the Iranians. The British opposed Iran's control of Herat by helping the Afghans, but this conflict was averted when 'Abbās Mirzā died. His son and successor, Muḥammad Mirzā, was summoned by the central government and the war ended (Keddie, 1981).

The death of 'Abbās Mirzā was a sudden blow to the future of "reform from above" which suppressed the army, biocracy and new education for both, which 'Abbās Mirzā had introduced in Azerbaijan based on the model of reform carried out by the Ottoman sultans and Muḥammad 'Alī in Egypt.

Fath 'Alī was succeeded by his grandson, Muḥammad Shāh who ruled from 1834-1848. After defeating a number of his rivals, Muḥammad Shāh was not very special in ruling because he was controlled by his prime minister, Ḥajji Mirzā Aqāsī. Muḥammad Shāh was interested in Sufism and Mirzā Aqāsī was his mentor in the field of Sufism.

Neither Fath 'Alī nor his grandson Muḥammad Shāh made any efforts to modernize or centralize power. Both ruled the old way, with very limited adjustments. Fath 'Alī is known more for his long beard and his large harem, than for any positive achievements (Keddie, 1981).

Fath 'Alī died not long after Abbas Mirza, in 1834. Prince Muḥammad Mirzāa's peaceful accession to the throne occurred thanks to the diplomatic and military support shown by the British with the approval of Russia. A peaceful accession was also guaranteed by the show of support by both powers, who had an interest in keeping the dynasty in power and free from civil war, thereby gaining important treaty concessions. The knowledge that Britain and Russia were behind the dynasty and would support any prince's accession to the throne helped quell rebellions against a dynasty widely seen as incompetent (Soroudi, 1979).

In return for their support, the British in 1836 and 1841 secured treaties that gave them privileges that had previously been granted to Russia. The British Treaty of 1841 included a most favored nation clause and by extension to other treaties, this meant that all foreign powers were united in extending their privileges (Keddie, 1981).

During Muḥammad Shāh's reign, foreign power, especially British, grew and it was during this period that the first petitions from the bazārī groups against Western domination were sent to the Shāh. Important religious movements and uprisings began to occur in these years, perhaps linked to the dislocations in Iranian life caused by foreign interference. One of them involves the Iranian Ismā'īlī community. In Iran there is still a small group of Ismā'īlī people whose leaders are direct descendants of priests from the Assassin group, a very important group in the 11th to 13th centuries in Iran which was later destroyed by the Mongol forces. The Ismā'īlī community remained underground until the Ṣafawiyyah gave them permission to worship openly, even though the Ṣafawiyyah had a different Shī'ah line. The leader of the Ismā'īlī community who used the hereditary title Aghā Khān became involved in provincial differences and launched a rebellion in south-central Iran, driven in part by personal motives and ambitions (Keddie, 1981).

Although the Qajar rulers collaborated with orthodox Shī'ah scholars to eliminate Sufi movements and orders with messianic tendencies, especially during the Fath 'Alī Shāh period, Sufi teachers remained popular and accepted by society. The development of Sufi orders gave rise to elements of proto-messianism which reflected high expectations for the rise of Imām Mahdī or the Hidden Imam (Keddie, 1962).

The Sufi order whose teachings contain elements of messianism is the Ni'matullāhiyyah order which was founded by Ni'mat Allāh Walī Kirmān (d.1431). The teacher of the Ni'matullāhiyyah order who was influential and sought to revive the legacy of this order was Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh who arrived in Shiraz in 1776. Together with two of his students (Nūr 'Alī Shāh and Mushtāq Shāh), Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh created practical guidelines (manuals) for Sufi life. Even though the doctrine and teachings of this congregation emphasize the importance of sharī'ah, it cannot be avoided that there are strong messianic tendencies in the legacy of this congregation (Amanat, 1989).

Apart from the Ni'matullāhiyyah, the Dhahabiyyah and Nurbakhshiyyah orders also experienced revival and renewal. An important figure behind the revival and renewal of the Dhahabiyyah order was Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Dhahabī Nayrīzī (d.1760). Meanwhile, the Nurbakhshiyyah order in this period was led by 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Nā'in (d.1797) who carried out reforms regarding the doctrine of messianism contained in the Nurbakhshiyyah order which was first formulated by Sayyid Muḥammad Nurbakhsh (1390-1464). The Dhahabiyyah and Nurbakhshiyyah congregations are fractions of the Shi'ite-tended congregation, Kubrawiyyah, which is attributed to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, but was developed by al-Simnānī during the Ilkhan-Mongol dynasty (Algar, 1991).

As already mentioned, Muḥammad Shāh succeeded Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh in 1834 and appointed Mirzā Aqāsī as prime minister. These two figures strongly supported Sufism, protecting the order, especially the Ni'matullāhiyyah. In his time, Sufis were appointed as government officials. The Dhahabiyyah and Nurbakhshiyyah orders also experienced very important developments (Amanat, 1989). Sufi orders (*Tarīqahs*) developed in important cities such as Shiraz. The presence of the congregation also attracted the interest of many people to join the congregation. It is unavoidable that there were Shi'ah elements in the congregations that developed at that time. This atmosphere later provided momentum for the growth of messianistic claims, for example, by Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, which gave birth to the Babi movement (Bayat, 1982; Amanat, 1989).

The Babi movement began with Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad's claim to be al-Bāb (gate) to Imām Mahdī (the Hidden Imam) in 1844. He was born in 1819 to a merchant family in the city of Shiraz. He studied religion with influential Shiite scholars in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq, which at that time were the territory of Ottoman Turkey. He became a follower of the Shī'ah movement or school called Shaykhiyyah, which was founded by Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī (1754-1826) (Bayat, 1982). Shaykhī thought includes more philosophical and mystical elements than most orthodox Shī'ah. However, their main characteristic is the view of the four pillars, which confirms that there are always people in the world who are able to interpret the will of Imām Mahdī and possibly communicate with him. After returning to Shiraz, in 1844 Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad proclaimed himself the Bāb (gate) to Imām Mahdī.

Since Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad's claims were rejected by most Shī'ah 'ulama and the 'ulama began to treat him as a heretic, he announced that he himself was the returning imam, as had been predicted, to make improvements and create justice on earth. In Shiraz and later Isfahan, he preached against the corruption of the 'ulama, and when the civil authorities turned against him, he attacked them too for their sins. Bāb had started with a small but devout and loyal following and then experienced rapid growth.

He then claimed to be the prophet and priest himself who returned to establish a just government throughout the world. He explained the differences between his holy book and the Qur'an with a theory containing progressive evolutionism which was rare in pre-modern thought. According to the general view of Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet who perfected the teachings of the previous prophets. However, the Bāb states that each prophet brought new messages and teachings that corresponded to the growth of human maturity and each new teaching surpassed the last. So the *Bayān* not only interprets but also surpasses the Qur'an, even though it also includes the essence of the message or teachings of the Qur'an. Previous prophets were revered and their laws were needed during their own prophetic cycles, but the teachings of those they superseded were no longer valid. This doctrine is considered heretical by Muslims and outside Islam.

Since 1848, this movement underwent a transformation from just a religious movement that had a different view from mainstream Islam and Shī'ah to a movement that launched resistance or rebellion against the Qajar government. Even though the Bāb as its leader was executed in 1850, the other leaders of this movement and their loyal followers continued to wage resistance and rebellion against the repressive authorities. The Babism movement which later developed into a socio-religious messianic rebellion can be understood as one of the political-religious messianic

movements that emerged under Western influence in the third world in the mid-19th century.

The repressive actions of the authorities were a reaction to the political threat posed by a movement whose leader claimed to be the Imām Mahdī or prophet himself. The 'ulama who rejected the doctrine of Babism were on the side of the authorities, because the doctrine of Babism also threatened their religious authority or influence (as mujtahids and representatives of the Imām Mahdī during the time of ghaibah) before the Shī'ah people in general. This lasted until around 1853 when the Qajar regime succeeded in crushing the movement which had carried out several rebellions in several places in Iran, such as at the holy places of Shaykh Ṭabarsī, Mazandaran and Nayriz.

The Bab's claims were based on hints made by Rashtī and also on Shaykhī teachings regarding the progressive nature of revelation. Because Babism was considered a departure from orthodoxy and al-Bāb's claim to be the Mahdi threatened political authority, the 'ulama collaborated with the Qajar authorities to crush the political rebellion carried out by Babism's followers during 1850-1853. It is clear that this movement was influenced by the doctrine of the resurrection of the Mahdi (messianism) and other esoteric Shi'ite teachings (Bayat, 1982; Amanat, 1989; Fuad, 1998).

Although Babism was a religious movement, its political significance cannot be ignored. After its destruction in 1853 and its split into two groups, Azalī and Bahā'ī, the remaining Bābī continued to attract large numbers of people. The conversion of some people to this movement was partly the result of repressive measures carried out by the Qajar government and orthodox 'ulama against the Babis. Although small in number, the Babis still played an important role as symbols and unknown leaders in Iran's reform rather than as a mass religion. This can be seen at the beginning of the 20th century, several prominent figures who paved the way for the Constitutional Revolution at the beginning of the 20th century were figures who had affiliations with Babism. Several Bābī Azalī people occupied strategic positions in government in Iran in the early 20th century (Amanat, 1989; Fuad, 1998).

3. Tobacco Concession and Boycott

Apart from the mutually beneficial relationship between the 'ulama and the state in certain periods, it was not uncommon for the 'ulama to also be involved in resistance and protest activities against the policies of the Qajar rulers which were considered unfair and detrimental. This is visible, for example, in the protest movement against the Tobacco Concession granted by the Qajar government to the British, although several studies of tobacco concessions and protests against them show that the role of traders was greater than that of 'ulama (Abrahamian, 2008).

Independent traders actually have the initiative to carry out a protest movement, because they are among the groups most disadvantaged by the concession policy. Gilbar, as quoted by Afary, stated that at the surface level the 'ulama did lead the protest movement that took place in 1891-1892 and succeeded in withdrawing concessions, but it was the merchant class who actually played a central role in the movement, giving it character and determining its ultimate goals. Moaddel, who was also quoted by Afary, stated that the traders' invitation to 'ulama was a smart step in using religion for secular and anti-imperialist goals and interests. By carrying religious symbols, traders succeeded in transforming the situation into a confrontation between

Muslims and infidels, which in the end was able to effectively mobilize the people against foreign economic intervention (Afary, 1996). In fact, the main problems were initially purely economic and political.

In connection with the tobacco concession, at the end of November 1891, a fatwā was issued using the name of an influential mujtahid in Karbala', Mirzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī, demanding a boycott of tobacco use (tobacco boycott). The fatwa was actually written by a group of traders with the Tehran mujtahid, Mirzā Ḥasan Ashtiyānī, although it bears Shīrāzī's signature. The participation of the 'ulama then convinced intellectuals such as Mirzā Aqā Khān Kirmānī to join the campaign by writing letters to the 'ulama to request support for their protest movement.

However, the involvement of the 'ulama in the protest movement is partly determined by their economic and political ties and interests. In Isfahan, for example, where the 'ulama had a direct interest in private lands and waqfs and where tobacco was widely planted and grew well, they collaborated with traders and called for a boycott of tobacco. However, in Mashhad, where the 'ulama's income is tied to the government and the shrine of Imam Riḏā they support tobacco concessions. Sayyid Abdullāh Bihbahānī in Tehran openly flaunts a fatwa banning the use of tobacco products, while smoking in public. Bihbahānī was known to be close to Prime Minister Amīn al-Sultān and it was reported that he was bribed by a British company. Therefore, he was among the 'ulama who supported concessions.

Even though there were 'ulama who supported the concession policy, the protest movement became a national movement involving many components of society, with strikes and demonstrations in cities such as Azerbaijan, Shiraz, Mashhad, Isfahan and Tehran. Other clerics such as Shaykh Faḏlullāh Nūrī were also involved in demonstrations against concessions. As the demonstration movement grew stronger, finally, in January 1892, the Qajar ruler Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh decided to cancel the concession, ignoring the advice of Amīn al-Sultān and a British minister (Keddie, 1981).

From this incident it appears that the relationship between 'ulama and rulers is largely determined by social, economic and political factors or power. The attitude of 'ulama towards the policies of the authorities is not unique, because each 'ulama has different considerations and interests. This will also later be seen in the differences in the attitudes of the 'ulama towards the constitutional revolution in the first decades of the 20th century.

4. Emerging Demands for Reform and Early Reformers

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, demands for justice were prominent in the writings of reformers, the lectures of popular preachers and the petitions of merchants. Such demands appear normal and legitimate, in accordance with the concepts and ideas of justice contained in the theory and tradition of Persian-Islamic government. Messianic ideas about the rise of the Mahdi who would uphold justice also spread in the collective consciousness of Shi'ite society in Iran.

This idea of justice found new resonance in the writings of 19th-century reformers. Drawing inspiration directly from the French revolution, freemasonry and free thinkers and even from Young Ottoman thinkers and advocates of political and moral reform, reformers in Iran sought to equate the idea of justice ('adalat) with the

goals of justice. The goal of social justice and equal rights of citizens is embodied in the French term, egalite (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-i>).

Mirzā Malkūm Khān (1833-1908) was the first reformist writer who had adequate knowledge of the French and English schools of liberal thought. Malkūm's eclecticism was a prominent feature of the Iranian modernists of his time, whatever their political views: the anti-religious Mirzā Faṭḥ 'Alī Akhundzada, the agnostic Mirza Aqā Khān Kirmānī, the agnostic Mirza Yusuf Mustashār al-Dawlah who was an Islamic modernist, Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī who was an activist for pan-Islamism Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'inī (Algar, 1973; Abrahamian, 1979).

Mirzā Malkūm Khān also wrote about political concepts adopted from European thought. Key terms such as *qānūn* (constitution), *eslāhāt* (reform), *majlis shūrā* (consultation body), *mellat* (nation), *melli* (nationality) and *ḥuqūq mellat* (people's rights), were first introduced in his work *Kebaca-ye gaybe ya daftar-e tanzimat* (book inspired by the supernatural or book of reform), written in 1858/59, which is the earliest known systematic explanation (exposition) in Persian of the constitutional system (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-i>).

As in his treatises on political, governmental, educational, financial and military reform, Malkūm urged rationalization (*entezām*) of government, separation of powers, consultation (*mašwarat*) and legislation (*waz' -e qānūn*) under the aid of an enlightened autocrat. Later, in his newspaper *Qānūn* (Constitution), published in London in the early 1890s, Malkūm combined a defense of reform with an unrestrained criticism of the tyranny and political corruption that prevailed during the Qajar period. In the decades before the Constitutional Revolution, the vague ideas of a parliamentary system with a constitution (konsteṭūsīōn, qānūn-e asāsī), division of power and popular representation put forward in the *Qānūn* were central to the emerging revolutionary movement (Algar, 1973; <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-i>).

Malkūm proposed that “at least a hundred great mujtahids, renowned educated men and Persian intellectuals should gather in a national consultative council (majles-e šūrā-ye mellī). They were to be responsible and given full authority to form, codify and officially promulgate the laws and principles necessary to reorganize (*tanzīm*) Persia. In addition, according to a systematic arrangement, the national consultation council must establish itself as a guardian, supervisor and agent for the implementation of the law (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-i>). Malkūm supported the natural rights of the people and emphasized their duties to their homeland (waṭan), but he avoided direct criticism of the Qajar ruler of the time, Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shah (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-i>).

In *Yak kalema* (One Word) Mustashār al-Dawlah quotes the Qur'an and Hadith to demonstrate Islam's compatibility with the ideas of equality and freedom, as well as with important articles of the French constitution—an effort that reflects the author's concern not to be stigmatized heretical. Nevertheless, he discovered five ways in which European written law differed from Islamic Shari'ah. European law is (a) the result of consensus between the state and the people, (b) universal in its application, (c) easy to understand, (d) relates only to world affairs and (e) includes customary law (*'urf*). He believes, cannot be overcome in Islamic Iran.

Apart from that, there was an intellectual named Akhundzada (Akhundov; 1812-78) who was a predecessor of the secularist school with real anti-clerical (anti-religious or anti-cleric) views. Many of the important themes of the constitutional period –

secular education, moral reconstruction, harshness against superstition – can be traced to his writings. Akhundzada, who spent his adult life in Russia's civil government, was anti-Islam and even an atheist (Bayat, 1982). He championed an Iranian cultural revival based on separation from Islam and the Arab elements associated with it, a goal shared with the Qajar prince Jalāl-al-Dīn Mīrzā (Bayat, 1982). In 1279/1863, in his work *Maktūbāt*, he attacked Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shāh for his ignorance of progress, love of luxury, failure in war and mismanagement of government and warned him that if he did not adopting modern laws then he would face other threats, a kind of Babi rebellion.

Meanwhile, Kirmānī (1270-1314/1854-96), a writer and activist in Istanbul circles with socialist tendencies, also supported the importance of a constitutional regime and secular culture and even anticipated a popular revolution. He came from a fringe Sufi background and was influenced by the Babi movement and ideas. He was a follower of al-Afghānī and a supporter of Malkūm, but above all he shared Akhundzada's criticism of the Islamic past as the main cause of Persian decline. Kirmani's emphasis on pre-Islamic Persian roots as a source of Persian national revival influenced writings during the constitutional period (Bayat, 1982). He was convicted after the assassination of Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shāh and he is remembered as a martyr for Qajar oppression. He is considered to have an important place in the intellectual genealogy of constitutional revolution.

Another member of the Istanbul circle was Mīrzā Ḥabīb Eṣfahānī, whose free translation of James Morier's *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan*, a cruel and sarcastic portrait of a Persian character is another example of the themes of decadence among writers of this period. His translation was praised by the Persian intelligentsia as a critique of the traditional ills of their society.

Another important contribution to the development of social criticism was the widely read *Sīāhat-nāma-ye Ebrāhīm Beyg*, written by a Persian expatriate who enthusiastically returned to his homeland only to find decline, corruption, tyranny and ignorance. The work was written by Zayn-al-'Abidīn Maragā'ī, a Persian merchant in Istanbul, who was very familiar with the writings of 'Abd-al-Raḥīm Tālibov and other Caucasian intellectuals. According to Nāẓim al-Islām, in the *Tārīk-e bīdārī*, on the eve of the constitutional revolution the *Sīāhat-nāma* was recited regularly in the Anjoman-e maḵfī, one of the proto-revolutionary secret groups in Persia (Bayat, 1991).

Persian and Turkish circles in the Caucasian cities of Baku, Tiflis and Yerevan also considered the cultural aspects of traditional Persian life to be the main cause of stagnation and decline. 'Abd al-Raḥīm Najjārzādā Tabrīzī, known as Ṭālebof (1834-1911), wrote short educational works on geography, physics, biology and other sciences (1312/1894-95) and then on the social and political institutions of modern Europe. These works had an even larger popular (reader) audience than Akhundzādā's works. 'Abd al-Raḥīm's passionate exposition of European sciences explains to the reader the scientific and technological backwardness experienced by Persia. His works on modern geography challenged the ethnocentric complacency of the religious milieu (Bayat, 1991; <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-i>).

The most important theme that emerged in the writings of the late 19th century was the idea that to ensure social justice and material (economic) progress, as well as safeguard Persian independence and national identity against European imperial domination, it was essential to promote a constitutional order. With this constitutional order, the Shāh's power would be limited, separation of powers enforced and the functions of government organs defined. Patriotism and recognition of Persian cultural

heritage are also prioritized as complements or even alternatives to loyalty to traditional religious beliefs and institutions (Martin, 2013).

However, these early reformers were not completely successful in realizing a systematic theory of government. Open support for European political and institutional ideas hindered the growth of currents concerned with the problems of the state and its relationship to the authority of the 'ulama within the Shī'ah. Traditional philosophers and mujtahids even distanced themselves from the debate, handing over the task of drafting a new constitutional order to dissident intellectuals, popular preachers and political activists.

For the first time in the history of modern Iran, revolutionary reformers attempted to replace arbitrary power with the creation of law (constitution), representative government and social justice. They also fought royal power with a sense of nationalism, popular activism and economic independence. Revolutionaries or constitutionalists also attempted to limit the power of conservative religious institutions through modern education and judicial (legal) reform. By centralizing the state, they sought to reduce the power of tribal and urban noble figures. The greater sense of nationhood that emerged from the revolution remains crucial to modern Persian identity (Bayat, 1991).

Meanwhile, the governmental, military, educational and economic reforms carried out by prime minister Mīrzā Taqī Khan Amīr Kabīr contributed to the opening of Persia to Western institutions and ideas, but at the same time helped maintain a monarchy characterized by coercion. -existence between the state and the 'ulama during the reign of Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shah (1848-96), despite often facing the power of popular resistance (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-i>). Although advocates of political reform were marginalized in the following decades and the entire movement towards reforming the political system was resisted, resistance never completely disappeared (Keddie, 1981; Bayat, 1991).

As already mentioned, the protests against tobacco concessions in 1891-1892 should be seen as the first sign of a popular uprising against the existing order. The tobacco protests seemed to be a rehearsal for the Constitutional Revolution, creating a secret anti-imperialist and anti-monarchist coalition of 'ulama, merchant interests and intellectuals opposed to the government. During the reign of Muzaffar al-Dīn Shah (1896-1906) the new intelligentsia used the press and modern education to win the support of this tacit coalition for its secular agenda of material and moral renewal, patriotism and political reform.

5. Themes of Constitutionalism

Until the first decades of the 20th century and the emergence of Persian nationalism had developed among the Azerbaijani population in the Caucasus and its influence had been felt in Persia through revolutionary orators, journalists, satirists in Tabriz. Haydar Khan Tārīverdīof, better known as 'Am(ū)oḡlī and Moḡammad-Amīn Rasūlzāda both belonged to the social democratic party. Many Persian migrant workers in the oil fields of Baku and the mines of Armenia and Georgia came from this party. Later party activists established branches in Tabrīz and Mashhad (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-i>).

Among the early constitutionalists in Tabriz, Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzāda, Muḡammad Šabastarī (Abu'l-Žīā'), Šādiq Mustāšār-al-Dawlah and Muḡammad-'Alī Tarbīat were

influenced by Turkish reformist publications in Istanbul. Taqīzāda's early article "Taḥqīq dar aḥwāl-e konūnī-e Īrān yā moḥākamāt-e tārikī" (An inquiry into the current situation in Persia, or historical trials; 1323/1905) reflected ideas popular among the Young Turks and Arab nationalists in Syria. The flight of many Persian constitutionalists to Istanbul and the formation of the Anjoman-e sa'ādat (1908–09) there coincided with the Young Turk revolution and the openly secularist views of the Young Turks had some influence on the debates in the Second Majlis (Bayat, 1991).

No less influential in the formation of Persian public opinion were newspapers, pamphlets and book publications. In the mid-19th century and especially during the era of Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan Sepah-sālār in the 1870s, the small Persian press, although controlled by the government, periodically reported aspects of Western constitutional and revolutionary events. In the closing decades of the 19th century Persian readers had their eyes briefly opened not only to colonial expansion and imperial competition, but also to the constitutional crisis in France, the British parliamentary system, the unification of Germany, the election of the United States president and many revolutionary events and struggles for independence. The small but numerous new print media in Persian cities during Muzaffar-al-Dīn Shah's period and afterward played an important role in spreading the constitutionalist message to the public.

Translations and adaptations of Western works on political philosophy, published in Persian before and during the Constitutional Revolution, also helped shape the ideology and rhetoric of the revolution. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Kawākibī *Ṭabāye 'al-estebdād* (Modes of despotism)—Arabic version of A. Javdat's Turkish translation of Vittorio Alfieri's *Della tirannide* (1800), which is a summary of Montesquieu's work *De l'esprit des lois*—translated into Persian by the Qajar prince, 'Abd-al-Ḥusayn Mīrzā. This work was very important in stereotyping despotism and providing an explanation of constitutionalism (Bayat, 1991; <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-i>).

Other translations of European works on fiction, geography, history and political philosophy helped broaden Persian intellectual horizons and provide a clearer picture of Europe and its political evolution. Fénelon's *Les aventures de Télémaque* (translated by 'Alī Khan Nāzem-al-'Ulūm as *Telemāk*, Tehran, 1304/1886), Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (translated by M.A. Forūgī as *Oṣūl-e 'elm-e tarwat-e melal*, Tehran, 1323/1905) and Muhammad 'Alī's comparative work *Forūgī Huqūq-e asāsī yā ādāb-e mašrūṭiyat-e duwal* (Fundamental laws or constitutional principles of nations) offer political ideas and new economy to the general principles of Persian Islamic governance.

History -such as works on the ancient Near East translated from French by Forūgī (*Tārik-e melal-e qadīma-ye šarq*, Tehran, 1318/1900), James Fraser's *The History of Nadir Shah* (trans. Abu'l-Qāsem Qaragozlū as *Tārik-e Nāder Šāh Afšār*, Tehran, 1321/1903), a history of ancient Greece translated from French by 'Alī Khan Naṣr (*Tārik-e Yūnān*, Tehran, 1328/1910) and a history of Islamic civilization by Georgi Zaydān (translation 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Mīrzā Qājār as *Tārik-e tamaddon-e eslāmī I*, Tehran, 1329/1911) was very influential in shaping historical awareness related to the growth of nationalism.

An imaginary debate between a Persian nomad and an Indian Muslim (*Mokālama-ye sayyāḥ-e īrānī wa šakṣ-e hendī*, attributed to Jalāl-al-Dīn Kāšānī Mo'ayyed-al-Eslām, Tehran, 1326/1908) and *Šab -nešīnī -e Ramazān yā šoḥbat-e sang wa sabū* (or dialogue of the stone and the jug; editor M. Itnā-'ašārī, Tehran,

1364/1985), written by Mīrzā Salīm Adīb-al-Ḥukamā' in 1327/1909, is very typical regarding works in which traditional and modern values are contrasted or opposed.

The constitutionalism proposed by popular preachers gained strength among the bāzār because of the complaints of traders and trade or workers' unions (guilds) who sought greater control over their economic and political fate. They opposed the appointment of the Belgian Joseph Naus in 1315/1898 to head the customs service and boycotted the new customs regulations. They also opposed the incident in 1323/1905 where two sugar traders in the Tehran bāzār were detained and beaten with clubs. Traders also funded anti-government protests by bazaars at the shrine of Shah 'Abd-al-'Azīm near Tehran, in Qom and at the British mission in Tehran. This all shows a new fighting spirit among the market.

Frustrated by government interference in markets and inability to deter unfair foreign competition in trade and banking, the bāzārī demanded resistance to further economic penetration. The work of the Naus government which was perceived by the bazaar as pro-Russian raised tariffs even higher for Persian merchants, which was an additional burden on those already forced by shortages of essential commodities and by volatile prices under 'Ayn-al-Dawlah. Issues such as the depreciation of silver currency, price fluctuations in international markets, unsafe roads, poor communications (especially on the Caucasian trade routes after quarantine was established in 1906) and the financial monopoly granted to the British Imperial Bank on Persia and the Russian Loan Banks, became important themes emphasized in the Ḥabl al-mafīn newspaper and other Persian newspapers.

It is no coincidence that the establishment of a national bank (*bānk-e mellī*), to be funded and owned by the nation and under the supervision of the Majlis, was among the initial and most urgent demands of the bāzār representatives. On the eve of the constitutional revolution, many merchants, landowners and urban nobles as well as members of the royal family were heavily indebted to foreign banks. After experiencing bankruptcy, they see economic independence as a way out of their financial problems.

For a long time, both religious and governmental legal systems, including religious and government courts, have proven inadequate in handling trade disputes, resulting in losses for traders. The existing literature in Shī'ah jurisprudence fails to adequately address the challenges posed by modern economics and foreign trade. However, there are some mid-level religious scholars or 'ulama who possess the ability to articulate the grievances of traders. Sayyed Jamāl-al-Dīn Eṣfahānī, in his work "Lebās al-taqwā" (Attire of Virtue), advocates for trade cooperation, corporate ventures and the promotion of Persian products, particularly textiles. He provides religious endorsement for commercial innovation, praises diligence and productivity and regards economic freedom as a means to prevent further economic decline.

Likewise, the modern press and educational institutions of the period provided a secular platform, as an alternative to mosques and bāzārs. Drawing inspiration from European ideas about education, figures such as Dawlatābādī and Mīrzā Ḥasan Roṣḍīya, even before the constitutional debate, had begun to introduce modern schools and the teaching of the sciences and European languages. This movement gained further strength from the support given by 'ulama such as Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Bihbahānī.

The creation of a semi-governmental council on education (Anjoman-e ma'āref) and the establishment of modern schools under the auspices of that council were among the measures that influenced the growth of a new pro-constitutional constituency.

Through newspapers, intellectuals also introduced constitutional issues and the dangers of religious obscurantism, stupidity and despotism.

Apart from traders, Western-oriented secular intellectuals were the third main group that played an effective role in the Constitutional Revolution. They included European-educated children of high officials, overseas Persian diplomats, and graduates of military schools in Tehran, Tabriz and Isfahan and two Persian higher education institutions, Dār al-Funūn (Polytechnic institute) and Madrasa -ye 'olūm-e sīāsī (School of political science, founded in 1317/1899 to educate diplomats), both in Tehran.

At the turn of the 20th century, reformist tendencies in Persia took on a different character. The October Revolution of 1905 in Russia, followed by the adoption of a constitution, provides an example of popular revolutionary struggle against despotic power in a country long a bastion of absolutism and military power. Somewhat earlier, Japan's decisive victory in the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05), the first by an Asian nation over a European power, was hailed in the Persian press and attributed to Japan's success in transforming itself from a backward feudal society into an industrial nation, which generated hopes and anxieties regarding the need for Persia to abandon traditional ways (Bayat, 1991; Hashemi, 2019).

As can be seen, the establishment of a constitutional government in Persia was the main goal of the revolution that took place in 1323-29/1905-1911. Like other great revolutions, the Constitutional Revolution in Persia encompassed a broad scope of ideas and aims, reflecting widely varying intellectual tendencies, social backgrounds and political demands (Hashemi, 2019). In fact, at that time the constitutional text itself did not have universal support. However, despite its ideological ambiguity, the Constitutional Revolution remains an epoch-making episode in modern Persian history because of its political achievements and long-lasting social and cultural consequences. So, as a modern revolution, the Constitutional Revolution aims to destroy the old order through popular (people) action and by spreading the teachings of liberalism, secularism and nationalism (Ansari, 2016).

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the examination of religio-political and economic backdrops provides a comprehensive understanding of the constitutional developments in Iran during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The intertwining of religious, political and economic factors underscores the complexity of the Iranian constitutional movement and its significance in shaping the country's modern history. Religious institutions, particularly the clergy, wielded significant influence in both supporting and resisting constitutional reforms, reflecting the tension between traditional religious authority and emerging secular governance structures.

Moreover, the role of political elites cannot be understated in this historical narrative. Competing factions within the political sphere vied for power and influence, often aligning themselves with or against the constitutional movement based on their own interests and ambitions. This political maneuvering further complicated the process of constitutional reform, highlighting the challenges inherent in navigating the delicate balance between centralized authority and demands for democratic governance.

Furthermore, economic factors played a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of constitutionalism in Iran. Socioeconomic disparities and grievances fueled discontent among various segments of society, driving demands for political reform and greater

representation. The economic backdrop of the late Qajar period, characterized by foreign influence, financial instability and unequal distribution of wealth, served as a catalyst for the constitutional movement, as ordinary Iranians sought avenues for redress and empowerment. Ultimately, the convergence of religio-political and economic forces propelled Iran towards constitutionalism, marking a pivotal juncture in its history and laying the groundwork for subsequent political transformations.

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