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# Media and Politics in Iran

Dr. Ali Asghar Kia





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# Contents

<b>PREFACE</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1 WHY THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD? .....	5
1.2 BOOK STRUCTURE .....	6
1.3 METHODOLOGY .....	7
<b>CHAPTER TWO: MASS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS</b> .....	<b>11</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	11
2.2 TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATIONS—THE ABSORPTION APPROACH .....	12
2.3 APPROACHES TO MASS COMMUNICATIONS THEORY .....	14
2.3.1 Mass Society Approach .....	15
2.3.2 Marxist Theory and Mass Communication .....	15
2.3.3 Functionalist Approach.....	17
2.3.4 The Culturalist Approach .....	19
2.3.5 Critical Political Economic Approach .....	20
2.3.6 Conventional Approaches—A Summary .....	21
2.4 SIX MAJOR PRESS THEORIES .....	21
2.4.1 Authoritarian theory.....	24
2.4.2 Soviet Press Theory .....	25
2.4.3 Free Press (or Libertarian) Theory .....	26
2.4.4 Social Responsibility Theory.....	28
2.4.5 Development Media Theory .....	30
2.4.6 Democratic-Participant Media Theory .....	32
2.4.7 Press Concepts .....	33
2.4.8 Press Theories, Concepts and Iran.....	37
2.5 PUBLIC COMMUNICATION IN A HISTORICAL PROCESS .....	38
2.6 THE PRESS AND TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS.....	42
2.6.1 The Print Media .....	45
2.6.2 Traditional Communications and Leadership.....	48
2.7 CLASS AND REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS .....	52
<b>CHAPTER THREE: THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION</b> .....	<b>59</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION .....	59

3.2	EARLY IRANIAN CIVILISATIONS.....	60
3.3	ISLAMIC IRAN .....	62
3.4	THE FEUDAL ASCENDANCY .....	64
3.5	THE SAFAVID PERIOD .....	66
3.6	THE QAJAR DYNASTY.....	69
3.6.1	Semi-Colonisation of Iran.....	71
3.6.2	Early Modernisation—Fath Ali Shah .....	72
3.6.3	Modernisation Renewed—Nasseru'd-Din Shah .....	74
3.6.4	Concession Hunting.....	75
3.7	THE PREPARATORY PERIOD—INTELLECTUAL ENLIGHTENMENT.....	76
3.7.1	The Preparatory Period—The Tobacco Concession.....	80
3.8	DECLINE OF THE QAJARS .....	83
3.9	CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION—THE EARLY PERIOD .....	85
3.9.1	The First Constitutional Period.....	87
3.9.2	The Role of the Anjomans .....	91
3.9.3	Civil War .....	96
3.9.4	The Second Constitutional Period .....	97
3.10	CONCLUSION .....	97

**CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION—  
TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS..... 101**

4.1	INTRODUCTION .....	101
4.2	THE ISLAMIC SERMON AS A POLITICAL CHANNEL .....	105
4.2.1	The Islamic Pulpit (Minbar) .....	107
4.2.2	Minbar, Political Communication and the 1906 Revolution ....	108
4.3	THE FUNCTIONS OF THE BAZAAR AND MOSQUE IN THE 1906 REVOLUTION .....	110
4.3.1	Definition of the Bazaar.....	110
4.3.2	The Political History of the Bazaar .....	112
4.4	THE MOSQUE (MASJID) AS POLITICAL COMMUNICATION.....	115
4.5	THE BAZAAR—MOSQUE AND ULAMA ALLIANCE DURING THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION .....	116
4.6	BAZAAR, MERCHANTS AND ULAMA IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION .....	120
4.7	CONCLUSION .....	129

**CHAPTER FIVE: THE RISE OF THE IRANIAN PRESS ..... 133**

5.1	INTRODUCTION .....	133
5.2	THE MISSIONARY PRESS .....	134
5.3	THE IRANIAN PRESS IN INDIA.....	134

5.4 THE PRESS UNDER THE QAJARS .....	136
5.4.1 News Traditions and Iran.....	138
5.4.2 The First Newspaper—Akhbar Vaghayeh.....	139
5.4.3 Amir Kabir and Vaghayeh Ittefaqiyeh .....	140
5.5 NASSERU'D-DIN SHAH AND THE PRESS .....	144
5.5.1 Technology and Transport.....	145
5.5.2 A Press Ministry .....	146
5.5.3 Provincial Papers .....	148
5.5.4 The Shah and Freedom of the Press .....	150
5.6 CONCLUSION .....	152

## **CHAPTER SIX: THE PRESS AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION .....**

<b>155</b>	
6.1 INTRODUCTION .....	155
6.2 THE EXILE PRESS.....	156
6.2.1 The Rationale of the Exile Press.....	161
6.2.2 Expansion of the Exile Press .....	162
6.3 THE DOMESTIC PRESS IN IRAN.....	163
6.4 THE RISE OF A REVOLUTIONARY PRESS.....	165
6.4.1 Journalists and the Anjomans .....	166
6.4.2 The Underground Press .....	168
6.5 JOURNALISTS AND THE REVOLUTION.....	169
6.5.1 The Constitutional Basis.....	170
6.5.2 The Journalistic Record .....	172
6.5.3 A Transfigured Press: 1906-11 .....	174
6.6 AN ENHANCED PRESS .....	177
6.7 A PARTY PRESS .....	179
6.8 A WOMEN'S PRESS.....	181
6.9 CONCLUSION .....	182

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: A REVOLUTIONARY PRESS .....**

<b>183</b>	
7.1 INTRODUCTION .....	183
7.2 THE LEADERSHIP FUNCTION OF THE POLITICAL PRESS.....	184
7.2.1 Akhtar (Star) Paper .....	186
7.2.2 Al-Urvatul-Vosgha (The Indissoluble Link) Paper .....	186
7.2.3 Qanun (The Law) Paper.....	188
7.2.4 The Political Press in the 1890's .....	189
7.2.5 Habl al-Matin (Firm Cord) Paper .....	191
7.2.6 Irane-Nuw (New Iran) Paper .....	193
7.2.7 Ruhul-Ghudus (The Holy Spirit) Paper .....	195

7.3 THE TANZ PRESS—A STIMULATIVE FUNCTION .....	196
7.3.1 Nasime-Shomal (Northern Breeze) Paper .....	197
7.3.2 Charand-Parand (Charivari) Paper .....	202
7.3.3 Azarbaijan Paper .....	203
7.3.4 Buhlul, A Comic Weekly Paper .....	205
7.3.5 Sheida (Madcap) Paper .....	207
7.4 NOCTURNAL LETTERS (SHABNAMEH) — T H E I N F O R M A T I O N F U N C T I O N .....	208
7.5 THE ANJOMAN PRESS .....	210
7.6 CONCLUSION .....	211
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION: INDEX AND AGENT .....</b>	<b>215</b>
8.1 INTRODUCTION .....	215
8.2 REVOLUTIONARY TRADITION AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION .....	216
8.3 RELIGION AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION .....	217
8.4 CLASS AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION .....	219
8.5 THE PRESS AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION .....	220
<b>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>243</b>
APPENDIX 1: THE PERSIAN ROYAL PROCLAMATION (FARMAN) OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION OF 1906.....	243
APPENDIX 2: THE TRANSLATION OF ROYAL PROCLAMATION OF 1906.....	244
APPENDIX 3: THE IRANIAN PRESS—AN OVERVIEW ANNUAL PUBLICATION—1907-1925 .....	245
APPENDIX 4: THE IRANIAN PRESS—1837-1925 .....	277



# PREFACE

This book is essentially a study of the development of the Iranian press, principally in the latter 19th Century and early 20th Century, and its relationship with traditional Communications systems during the broad period of the Constitutional Revolution, a seminal event in contemporary Iranian history. Although the core period of the Constitutional Revolution was 1906-11, the thesis also studies the role of both mass and traditional Communications systems in the preparatory period from the early 1880s. Furthermore, it looks more briefly at the aftermath of the Constitutional period until 1925 when the Pahlavi dynasty succeeded to the throne of Iran.

Thus, the book examines the press and its evolving role in Iranian society during a crucial period of more than 50 years after establishing a context for the introduction of printing and a press tradition in Iran. Overall, the Iranian press has had a turbulent history of some 150 years complicated by the country's struggle for democracy and national independence. The fortunes of the press have followed the political fortunes of the country. From the early 19th century until the Islamic revolution of 1979, the print media has been strictly controlled by the political regimes.

The Constitutional Revolution was the first step toward the realisation of freedom of press in Iran. However, the revolutionary forces were defeated by strong feudal elements who were supported by British and Russian imperialists. Nevertheless, one of the most remarkable features of the revolution was the rapid development of publications and the creation of new forms of political journalism which deeply influenced the modern history of Iran. During the revolutionary period, the number of publications increased and journalism as a social instrument of change played a significant role in enlightening the Iranian people. This book considers in particular three types of publications: the Political papers, the Humorous or satire (Tanz) and Nocturnal Letters (Shabnameh) or Underground Papers. Then, three functions of the press during the mobilisation of 1906-12 are identified and analysed:

- The leadership function of the political press;
- The persuasion or stimulative function of the humorous or satire (Tanz) papers; and

## 2 Media and Politics in Iran

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- The information function of the nocturnal letters (Shabnameh) or underground papers.

This thesis will also briefly discuss the Iranian exile publications and their functions.

Analysis of political and satire (Tanz) papers in particular reveals the manner in which the press played an active role in the social awakening of the Iranian people during the constitutional revolutionary period. Iran's political press expanded dramatically between 1900-1925, and some of those papers, notably the *Sure-Israfil* (The Angel of Resurrection), the *Habl al-Matin* (Firm Cord), the *Mosavat* (Equality), and *Nasime-Shomal* (Northern Breeze), played a serious role in popular enlightenment. Today, we cannot understand Iranian journalism without tracing its historical, political and economic backgrounds. Hence, a part of this book is devoted to the socio-political and economic development culminating in the Constitutional Revolution, so as to

establish a context for the analysis of print media, bazaar and mosque systems of communication.

In addition to the print media (Newspapers & Magazines), the traditional communication channels, especially the bazaar and pulpit (Minbar), also played a central role as political channels during the Constitutional Revolution. From the early 19th century until the Islamic Revolution of February 1979, the bazaar in Iran was constantly in conflict with the various political regimes in power. Historically, the bazaar in Iran has also served as a centre of urban life and an effective communication and political network largely independent of central government. During the constitutional revolutionary period the bazaar and merchants were the main agents of revolution, with the emergent press essentially complementing their decisive role. The book compares and assesses the respective role and contribution of both the formal mass Communications channels through the press and traditional Communications system through bazaar and mosque. While it stresses the overriding importance of these traditional channels in the Constitutional Revolutionary period, it also argues that during this period the basis was established for an increasingly viable and influential system of mass Communications in Iran.

This book is essentially a study of the development of the Iranian press, principally in the latter 19th Century and early 20th Century, and its relationship with traditional Communications systems during the broad period of the Constitutional Revolution, a seminal event in contemporary Iranian history. Although the core period of the Constitutional Revolution was 1906-11, the book also studies the role of both mass and traditional Communications systems in the preparatory period from the early 1880s. Furthermore, it looks more briefly at the aftermath of the Constitutional period until 1925 when the Pahlavi dynasty succeeded to the throne of Iran.

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