

evident particularly when compared with the dignified memoirs of some outstanding Iranians like Dr Mohammad Musaddiq which contains no political or social gossip at all. However, the memoirs of Ghani being the raw material for further research about the societal change and cultural developments in Iran under the Pahlavis would have a much higher value in the long term for future generations of the students of Iran.

### 9- Conclusion

Ghani was an anti-Communist pro-Western political operator. He was particularly interested to involve the U.S. in Iran to reduce the British influence. This policy was to some extent shared by Musaddiq.

Our study here is a critical review of Ghani's life. It reveals that he was a great achiever personally and a most successful man, educationally, socially and professionally. However, the study also reveals his failures. It seems that as a result of the societal changes under the Pahlavis - he suffered an identity crisis.

First, Ghani specialised in Islamic mysticism, but at the same time he made fool of those who practised it! Examples of his hostility to current spirituality which he witnessed in 1945 in U.S.A. is evident when he meets Rabi'a Martin (a follower of Enayat Khan in Fairfax in California) and Princess Norina Machabelli (a disciple of Mehr Baba in New York).<sup>(1)</sup>

Secondly, Ghani was a member of the Iranian mission which voted for the formation of the United Nations, but he did not believe in its programme and openly ridiculed those who talked of human dignity and human rights.

Thirdly, Ghani criticized various Iranians who had adopted a European or American life style, but he himself rejected his own native home, due to the bad politics of his time. Worse still, towards the end of his life, he decided to lead a lonely and unhappy life in the U.S.A. rather than returning to his family, friends and professional life in Iran. Many Iranians have taken refuge in the West, particularly after the 1979 Revolution. He was thus few generations ahead of the Iranian - Americans of today and exercised his personal choice of where to live.

Last but not least, Ghani latterly criticized the

Pahlavi dynasty and in particular spoke sharply of those who surrounded Muhammad Reza Shah, but he continued to remain in the service of the same regime personally until the Shah did not deliver to him the ambassadorial post that he had promised. Only when he had given up any hope of being back in power he woke up to the amazing task that Dr. Mohammad Musaddiq had undertaken by the nationalisation of Iranian oil. To his credit, Ghani then warmly greeted Musaddiq when he went to America to defend the Iranian case before the security council of the United Nations.

We consider Ghani to be typical of his generation. Although he was personally honest and had no hands in the corrupt practices going on during the Pahlavi regime, but he turned a blind eye on all the mismanagement and the corruption which were going on so that he would retain his position. It seems that to his generation there was no great principles involved in the management of the public affairs. If an Iranian is offered a high office, he would consider the interests of the public at large to become a secondary issue! This seems to be the crisis that the majority of the intellectuals and the educated class of Iran suffered under the Pahlavis. Ghassem Ghani was no exception to this pattern of behaviour.

In spite of such shortcomings, the present study proves that Ghani was an outstanding cultural figure in the Pahlavi era. His research work on Hafiz (d. 1389) and his History of Sufism gained him a deserved recognition internationally. Hence his name appears in many source books including several Encyclopaedias written in Persian. Furthermore, Ghani's memoirs are full of rich information demonstrating the cultural, political and societal developments under the Pahlavis. One might now criticize Ghani that he has often delved into too many trivialities - including gossips and the private life and even the love affairs of people or the occasional incest taken place in a Qajar family. Those criticizing Ghani on these issues, have certainly a point.

---

**HAPPY (Persian) NEW YEAR**

---

the occupation of Iran by the Allies. In the third year of the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, Ghani became a member of the cabinet, holding the rank of the Secretary for Education and later the Secretary of Health.

Ghani was also once approached by Mohammad Reza Shah in 1945 to become the Prime Minister. He writes in his diaries that he rejected this offer because he felt unable to serve well when the country was still under the occupation of the Allies. However, his main reason for feeling unable to serve was perhaps the fact that his closest lady friend at the time i.e. Maryam Firooz (daughter of Prince A.H. Farmanfarma) had joined the Iranian Communist Party and was about to marry the future Secretary General of that political party. It is obvious that Ghani could not have possibly risked taking any position of responsibility within Iran as he feared that his close association with such a communist activist would have made him virtually a hostage in the hands of the Iranian Communist Party. This fear is evident from the harsh words he has in the fourth volume of his diaries for Nouroddin Keyanouri.

In those circumstances, being fearful of his future political life, Ghani searched for a chance to leave the country. In a similar situation almost 20 years before that, Ghani when threatened by local opposition in his native town of Sabzevar had chosen the same root. So he made it known that he was interested to take up an ambassadorial post abroad, rather than a ministerial post at home.

#### 7- Iran and Human Rights

Dr. Ghani was a member of the Iranian Mission to the 1945 U.N. Conference which voted for the U.N. Charter and the resultant Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948.

Still from the journals kept by Ghani we see that this learned gentleman and most of the other members of the Iranian Delegation to the 1945 U.N. Conference did not whole-heartedly believe in the U.N.'s mission for the maintenance of international peace and security. Nor did they take the notion of human rights seriously. Ghani himself - although serving as the Iranian delegate to the first U.N. Commission on Human Rights -

seems to be one of these people who were least interested in the United Nations. He calls the campaigners for human rights the "Tartuffes of the modern age"! This dismissal of human rights campaign is identical to what Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi expressed in his last interview before his death in Cairo in 1980. At the same time, this same attitude of the Shah is not dissimilar to the position taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran after the 1979 Revolution as they rejected and dismissed "the Westernised values" of Human rights.

#### 8- Serving the Shah

Ghani later on was appointed the Iranian Ambassador to Egypt. The Shah's first queen (Princess Fowziyah, the sister of King Faruq, the last Egyptian monarch) had left him and had returned to Cairo. As the Shah's Ambassador, Ghani's mission was to persuade the young queen to return to Iran and join her husband, the Shah, and their little daughter. When Ghani failed in achieving this mission, he was ordered to obtain an amicable out-of-court divorce. In this he succeeded. More importantly, he engaged in a valuable cultural dialogue with the Egyptian elite and formed a solid friendship with Taha Hussain. Following this accomplishment, he became the Iranian Ambassador to Turkey. From Turkey he sent good reports to Iran and urged the regime to copy Turkey in receiving more aids from the U.S.A. Hence he accompanied Mohammad Reza Shah to his State Visit to the U.S.A.

Ghani was promised to be made the Ambassador to the United States; but the Shah never fulfilled his promise. That breach of promise - added to Ghani's fears from the Iranian Communist Party to which his former close friend was fully devoted - prevented his return to Iran. Disappointment with the Shah and the changes in Iranian politics by the rise of Mosaddiq, coupled with illhealth and emotional involvement made him grounded in the U.S. So Ghani spent much time there and eventually died there. There is a dark side to Ghani's memoirs when he lashes insult to many well-known personalities of his time including Ali Asghar Hekmat, Hossein Ala, Rezazadeh Shafaq, Rahi Moayeri, Hashem Afsar and others. The shortcomings of Ghani's memoirs become more

حافظ

support of the intellectuals and reformists for Reza Shah Pahlavi was the fact that the new Shah established law and order throughout the country. Reza Shah was not a just or a law abiding king, but he stopped many injustices. Perhaps this is why many reformists supported his dictatorial rule. Otherwise he was a harsh army officer who had little in common with the highly educated administrators who served him, men like Muhammad Ali Foroozghi, Ali Akbar Davar, Ali Asghar Hekmat, Abd - ul - Hussein Taymoortash, Nosrat al - Dowlah Feerooz , Hassan Taghizadeh and Ghassem Ghani.

These sophisticated men willingly served this ruthless soldier who had nothing but his own determination, ambition and ability. They dethroned the miser and weak Ahmad Shah Qajar and allowed Reza Pahlavi to crown himself instead as a military dictator.<sup>(1)</sup> It was due to the insecurity that the secularist reformists felt for themselves that they cooperated with this new strongman who had no feeling for democracy and for representative government.

It was during Reza Shah's reign that Ghassem Ghani was "appointed" by the Government! to serve as a Member of the Iranian Parliament i.e. The National Consultative Assembly. This may sound strange to readers who know fully well that the Members of Parliament must be elected in a general election by the citizens. However, it is an undeniable fact that under Reza Shah, the Iranian Parliament was simply a rubber stamp.

The Iranian "Parliament" during the Pahlavis was often an instrument in the hands of the Government and its members were not the representatives of the people. One can ask the burning question: why nobody did anything to stop the Executive from interfering in the Legislature? The answer is simple: those who dared to question this sort of irregularities were either jailed or murdered! Reza Shah's secret police on his personal order killed many of his political opponents including Mirzadeh Eshghi, Hassan Modarres, Nosrat al - Dowlah Feerooz, Taqi Arani, Farrokhi Yazdi and others.

Ghani was "appointed" the Member of Parliament for Mashhad in 1935. Soon after that, the religiously-charged citizens of that holy city mobilized themselves. They organised

demonstrations to withstand the Government's pressure which forced men and women to change their normal traditional clothing to a Government-decreed code of dress. The Government simply surrounded the gathered demonstrators, blocked their way of escape and shot at them! Hundreds if not Thousands were killed. Ghani, the M.P. for Mashhad, did not mention a word in support of the people whom he was supposed to represent. He was rewarded by the Government by being "re-elected" (read : reappointed)! as M.P. By contrast, Mohammad Vali Asadi (the Shah's representative at the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad) who tried to intervene between the people and the Shah was arrested, tried and put to death.

## 6- The End of Reza Shah

Few years later during the World War II, Britain and her Allies (the Soviet Union and the United States) occupied Iran and forced Reza Shah to abdicate. When in 1941 the old Shah had to leave Iran, no tears were shed by his subjects. Instead, they rushed to Courts of Law to sue him and his administrators for usurping their estates and to bring the security men of the dethroned Shah to justice for murder and/or unlawful imprisonment! All the political prisoners were freed and the lands usurped by the old Shah were returned to their true owners. The accounts of these legal challenges as I have reposted elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> elsewhere, demonstrated the cultural crisis of the Iranian intellectuals and the army of the well-educated new middle class who had served the dictatorial regime.

The Allies as the occupying forces first decided to declare Iran a Republic or bring back the Qajar dynasty. They found no suitable candidates and therefore accepted that the Pahlavi Crown Prince should succeed to the throne. They also agreed to allowed the irregular and illegal Iranian Parliament to remain as the legislature. Hence Ghani remained an M.P. for two more years after

2. Out of 85 Iranian M.P.s present in the Iranian Parliament only Sayed Hassan Taghizadeh (1878-1970), Mohammad Musaddiq and Hussein Ala as well as Yahya Dowlatabadi voted against the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty.

1. See, Amin, S.H., *The History of Law in Iran*, Tehran, 2004

anti-religious works of Anatole France (the French novelist and critic, 1844 - 1924) into Persian.

#### 4- Traditional v. Modernity

One of the examples of the insensitivities of Ghani towards native traditions was his proposal as a Muslim to marry an Armenian girl by the name of Helen Petrosian who had fled Russia with her family and settled in Sabzevar after the 1917 Russian Revolution. Similar liberal associations with non-Muslim and Muslim women were traced and seen as evidence of lacking in Islamic sentiments. Eventually some people petitioned the local religious authorities i.e. the Mujtahid of Sabzevar to issue a Fatwa against him. As the petitioners were moving the local Mujtahid to issue a decree against Dr Ghani, one of his able cousins by the name of Mirza Hussein Arabshahi - who was my maternal grandfather - arrived and defended him by saying: "Dr Ghassem Khan is a member of the Arabshahi clan; and a descendent of the Family of the Prophet. To signify his honourable descent he proudly wears his black shawl under his cloths." This testimony in terms of the accepted norms of the traditionalists by a trusted member of the community won the day and saved Ghani.

It must be said that Ghani's religious status was also being questioned. This was due to the fact that his maternal grandfather had joined, a minority religious sect - grown out of Shi'ism - whose first leader by the name of Sayed Ali Mohammad of Shiraz (1819-1846), known as the Bab ("gate" to the Hidden Shi'a Imam disappeared in 874) was a follower of the Shaiki sect. Few years before Ghani's birth, his maternal grandmother had been tried and executed in Yazd for rejecting the finality of the prophethood in the person of Prophet Muhammad (the founder of Islam). Dr Ghani - as his own writings clearly establish beyond doubt - personally did not share the sectarian beliefs of his grandfather. At the same time, his modern life-style did not exactly correspond to the strict established Muslim rules of good conduct. He did not participate in the usual rituals of Muslims publicly, and in private he might have occasionally even uttered few words criticizing some prevailing religious norms. This

would have been quite expected from an enquiring mind such as his, taking into account his long absence from Iran and his European sources of reference for knowledge and information which would have been quite different from the traditional sources current in his time. All such non-orthodoxy and difference of opinion would be attributed to the bad faith he might have inherited from his maternal grandfather.

In the event thanks to the intervention of Ghani's cousin, Mirza Hussein Arabshahi, and eventually the involvement of the whole Arabshahi clan who were numerous and influential in Sabzevar at that time, the petition for a Fatwa against Ghani did not proceed. Never the less, Ghani was so frightened from this incident that he almost immediately left Iran and went to Europe. There is a letter from Hassan Aqazadeh (the then M.P. for Sabzevar) sent to Ghani to Paris which I have published before. In this letter the MP invites Ghani to return to Sabzevar. He promises that he would protect the frightened doctor from "all risks".

Ghani's fright was entirely justified. He knew that a similar crowd in Yazd had managed to obtain a Fatwa for the execution of his maternal grandfather. He had also witnessed a highway robbery when he was still a secondary school student. In that incident, the thieves held a number of his fellow travellers for ransom. One of the men held was a young fellow - by the name of Mohammad Choobeeni - who had just married Ghani's sister. At the end, the thieves did not release Ghani's brother-in-law and eventually killed him!<sup>(1)</sup> One can never know, but it may well be that one of the reasons for not accepting a negotiated ransom for Ghani's brother-in-law, as opposed to all other hostages who were released, was religious sectarianism.

#### 5- Intellectuals Favouring Modernity

Many intellectual learned men like Ghassem Ghani participated willingly in the demise of the Qajar dynasty and the rise of the Reza Kahn to power and served him as administrators, civil servants, ministers, and MPs. A reason for the

1. Ghani, Ghassem, *The Memoirs of Dr Ghassem Ghani*, edited by cyrus Ghani, London, 1984, Vol. 11, p.31 and Vol. 1, pp. 75-92

who acted as his aids and administrators. As evidence, we can see that in the Iranian Parliament 80 representatives - out of a total 85 members present - voted for his accession to the throne.

The newly coronated Reza Shah and his administrators tried to organise Iran as a modern Nation State. In doing so they chose to reject much of the immediate social, cultural and religious background of the country. They went for the modernisation of Iran full-heartedly. All existing traditions to them were signs of an undesirable underdevelopment which should be rooted out. In their rush for modernisation and transformation of the country, they changed the name of the country from Persia to Iran, changed the traditional local dress by force, restricted the jurisdiction of the clergy and banned wearing turbans by men and Hejab by women.

Reza Shah established new institutions patterned after the European models. These included the army, judiciary, police, land registry, a university and many new schools, hospitals, factories, railways, roadways, prisons et cetera. Sadly the dictatorship which achieved all this modernisation, in the process ruined the democratic institutions such as the Majlis, set up by the Iranian Constitution of 1905. This can be explained by the fact that the new Shah had no exposure - in theory or practice - to democracy and representative government.

### 3- Ghani, A Representative of Modernist Characters

Ghassem Ghani was a representative supporter - if not a product - of the Pahlavi social engineering towards modernity and Westernisation. To demonstrate this, his life and works are studied critically here. Ghani was born in the old city of Sabzevar in Khorasan Province. He lost his father at the age of 13 but completed his primary education locally. For his secondary education, with the help of his uncle, he went to Tehran. He first enrolled at the Tarbiyat School (a private secondary school) and finally at the Dar- al-Fonun (The Polytechnic) established by Amir Kabir (the modernist / reformist administrator of Iran during 1848 - 1851).

For his higher education, Ghani went to the

Lebanon and studied medicine at the American University at Beirut during the First World War.

Upon completing his medical studies in the Lebanon, Ghani returned to Iran and practised medicine for several years. Then, he was the only University - trained doctor in his native town. With the help of the local governor and thanks to the contributions of the local people, Ghani managed to build the first modern hospital in Sabzevar. He not only served the people of his native city but also the many patients who came to him from all the neighbouring towns. He was a successful physician, and his professional services were greatly admired by all including Reza Shah who passed through Sabzevar.

In the course of the challenge between the forces of tradition and the power of modernist ruling monarchy, Ghani had other problems. His difficulties arised out of the conflict between his modernist Westernised attitudes and the traditionalist Islamic values which prevailed in his home town. Few years before his returning to Sabzevar, a couple (an Armenian woman and a Muslim man) were stoned to death for adultery there by the Fatwa of the local Mujtahid. During his medical practice in Sabzevar, the official judge appointed by the central government for the administration of secular laws was forced to escape from the city as he was accused of adultery. Every step of every body was being watched and talked about by every one else. Ghani was no exception.

Ghani although as a doctor helped his patients and served his people, could not be comfortable in such an environment which did not tolerate any diversion of the old social codes of behaviour. Ghani had been culturally influenced by modern secular values. He had a totally secular training and maintained a fully liberal attitude in his social life. Because of this modern life style he was accused of bad morals. It is remarkable that we find no trace of his observing any religious (Islamic or non - Islamic) rituals in his voluminous journals that he has kept. He was obviously a free thinker, a humanist, not practising any religion and was not adhering strictly to any faith. Again it is quite revealing that the modern physician, when deciding to venture into literary creativity, chose to translate the

# The Forces of Modernisation Against Traditionalism in Modern Iran, 1920's to Date

by: Hassan Amin, Ph.D., Editor in Chief

## 1. General Background

In the past twelve issues of *Hafiz Monthly* we have run several reviews of the cultural, political and societal developments in the modern Iran since the constitutional Revolution of 1905 and then under the Pahlavis, 1921-1979. During this era, Iran witnessed a measure of the transformation of a most static society towards modernity. By contrast, the 1979 Islamic Revolution brought back to power the traditional forces e.g. the Bazar, the clergy and the religious values and sentiments. The historical sketch in this issue revolves around the life and works of a number of cultural and political characters of the time. These personalities include: Reza Shah and his son Mohammad Reza Shah and many of the Iranian statesmen and noted personalities including Faramanfarma, Dr. Mohammad Musaddiq, Ahmad Qavam, Nosrat al-Dowleh, S.H. Taghizadeh, Ghassem Ghani, Jamalzadeh, Ali Akbar Fayyaz, Jalal Ale Ahmad, Ayatollah Milani, N. Kiyanoori, Maryam Firooz, S. J. Ashtiyani, M. Mortazavi and others.

One of the most interesting and engaging characters of the Pahlavi era is Dr. Ghassem Ghani (1895 - 1952), physician, man of letters, statesman, bibliographer, and a leading expert on Islamic mysticism. He was a keen observant of the Iranian developments during the first half of the twentieth century. He kept a highly informative and detailed journal of the events of the last few years of his life. He also wrote his memoirs of the earlier periods of his life. In addition, his numerous scholarly and literary works - particularly his study of Hafiz (the world renowned Persian poet) and his translations of the work of Anatole France (the famous French writer) - deserve much attention.

As explained in this issue of *Hafiz Monthly* by the late M. A. Jamalzadeh, Ghassem Ghani's own life is a testimony to the characteristics of the Iranians. His writings also testify to the socio-cultural changes which occurred in his life

time in Iran. These changes resulted from the social and cultural engineering unashamedly planned by the Iranian Government during the Pahlavi era with a view to modernise and secularise the Iranian society.

## 2- Reza Shah: Attempts at Modernisation

Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878 - 1944) was originally an able but illiterate army officer. He rose through the ranks by his own personal qualities and determination, in a country where the Qajar kings paid little attention to the military training and promotion. The Qajars had degenerated and Reza Shah deposed the absent and weak but seemingly democratic Ahmad Shah whose coronation had taken place in 1914 and took over as the King in April 1926. In this issue of *Hafiz Monthly* we have published a long essay by Ghassem Ghani on a Qajar family which shows clearly the ups and downs of the Iranian ruling class in this era.

Reza Khan as an army officer had distinguished himself during the anti - Communist skirmishes in the north. Eventually, it was this same able officer who - on the verge of the disintegration of Iran in 1921 - was chosen by the British to stage a coup with a view to create a military dictatorship capable of securing the Iranian boundaries - for the sake of the security of the British India - and of stopping the advances made by the Communists in Iran. This little - known army officer accompanied a pro-British young journalist by the name of Sayed Zia al-Din Tabataba'i in the march to the capital city of Tehran. Reza Khan first became the Minister of War in 1921 and then the Prime Minister in 1923. He then considered to take over the country by proclaiming a republic. When he did not succeed in that (mainly due to the opposition of the religious classes to republicanism), he crowned himself as the Shah. All this he achieved with the cooperation of the modernist intellectuals (like Davar, Taimooortash, Firooz, Forooghi, Taqizadeh, Hekmat, and others)