

THE PROBLEM OF IMPERIALISM IN NINETEENTH CENTURY IRĀN*

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For the most part recent Western work on the social and political history of modern Irān has been disappointing. Either it has suffered from a lack of regard for the standards of scholarly research demanded for the analysis of such a delicate and largely unexplored field; or even when detailed information has been proffered, its lack of theoretical viewpoint has made it dissatisfying and often dry reading matter. Still worse, Western historians and social scientists have failed to explore what might be called the "subjective dimension"; the relationship between cultural and historical problems and between social action and the value system through which the Irānian people themselves interpret their historical and contemporary heritage. The works of Minorsky, Barthold and Christensen, all of which deal with periods earlier than the Qājārs, embody a much greater sensitivity to social questions, and a much higher standard of historical analysis than do those of more recent writers. As yet we possess only one good general interpretive account of the modern period, that of Joseph Upton,¹ and works of quality on more specific subjects are few and far between. As far as the nineteenth century is concerned, Professor Lambton's devotion and scholarship have provided us with invaluable information and insight on a wide range of problems, and a young American, Nikkie Keddie, has published good studies on Sayyed Jamāl ed-Din and the Tobacco Regie.² But still the number of topics covered and the problems illuminated are relatively few, and the social and economic history of this period has, on the whole, been sadly neglected.

* A review of Firouz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1884-1914. A Study in Imperialism*. (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1968).

1. J. Upton. *The History of Modern Iran: An Interpretation*. (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1960).

2. N. Keddie. *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*. (London: Frank Cass, 1966); *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

This dearth of historical information is not only a pity in itself, it also constitutes a serious hindrance to those wishing to understand contemporary problems; a point amply illustrated by some of the recent work on the modernisation of Irān. The trouble is that the explanation of contemporary issues related to social and economic development hangs on much more than the relatively loose, if useful concepts of "tradition-alism", "modernism" and "westernisation" at present in vogue in Western academic circles. Rather it demands a thorough understanding of the struc-ture of traditional society on the eve of the new era and the specific patterns of and responses to initial and later contacts with the West; a knowledge of the meaning that modernisation has come to have within the society, and an analysis of the specific characteristics of those aspects of traditional social institutions and relationships which have survived and become assimilated to the emerging modern structures and which have, to some extent, moulded the latter in their own image.

It is with these problems in mind that the student of modern society greets any new publications of quality on modern Irānian history. The latest is Firouz Kazemzadeh's *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914*. Seven hundred pages long and subtitled *A Study in Imperialism* this book promises a full treatment of a subject which, although enormously impor-tant, has up till now received but scanty attention in the West.³ The au-thour, himself Persian, is, with his knowledge of several languages, in-cluding Russian, well equipped to tackle the variety of source materials relating to his problem. He has made skilled use of the despatches of the British, French and Russian legations in Tehrān, of the letters and me-moirs of prominent European and Qājār statesmen, and of the archives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Britain, France and Irān to provide us with what can only be called a definitive work as far as the documen-tation of diplomatic intrigue and imperial policy making is concerned. Not only has he given us a new account of the events of the first stage of imperialist penetration in Irān, but he has also allowed us to peep into the darker corners of diplomacy, and beyond its sentiments and rigidities into the personalities and motives of the men at the centre of the stage of nineteenth century Persian politics.

3. The only detailed work available up till now has been R. L. Greaves, *Persia and the Defence of India, 1884-1892: A Study in Foreign Policy of the Third Marquis of Salisbury*. (London: University of London. The Athlone Press 1959).

The central thesis of his book follows Rose Greaves' argument that Irān became the theatre of a particularly destructive imperialist conflict because of her position as a buffer state between Russia to the north and India to the south-east and, that in this situation, the political motives of the two great powers are more crucial to the explanation of their activities in the country than are their economic interests. It is important that this point of view has been expressed again since there are those who uphold the premise that, in all instances, imperialist penetration was motivated by economic interests. But the evidence presented by Kazemzadeh makes it extremely difficult to support the case for economic motivation during *this period* of imperialism in Irān. He shows that most phases of British imperial policy were determined by the state of Russian expansionism in the direction of the Persian Gulf and India. But much more important and original is his careful documentation of the fact that the subjects of both powers found it difficult to pursue their economic ventures (apart from normal trade with Persian merchants) without the support of their governments and that, in the majority of instances, their enterprises were readily sacrificed when political considerations demanded it. This line of debate is, moreover, strengthened by a discussion of the ways in which economically unprofitable ventures were used to gain political influence. Both powers adopted as many instruments as were available to them to increase their ability to exercise control over the Shāh's government and among these concessions and financial loans were of the utmost importance. A rather strange sidelight on the difference between the nature of the Russians and British as imperial powers is, moreover, revealed as a result of the author's discussion of this point. Russia, which as a nation was far more backward economically than Britain, was much more liberal in her use of this technique. Her government readily placed state financial resources at the disposal of its businessmen and diplomats if it was felt that the occasion demanded it. For example, in the case of the Poliakov concessions of 1890 and 1891, the one to set up a loan company and the other to build a road between Tehran, Tabriz and Julfa, "The timely intervention of the Russian Ministry of Finance turned failure into success and gave Russian powerful instruments of influence.. the Discount and Loan Bank and the northern highways".⁴ In contrast the British, while at times using the slogan of the protection of commerce

4. Kazemzadeh, *op.cit* p.270.

for some of their frankly non-commercial activities in Sistān were notably more conservative in this respect.⁵ True their concession seeking took place on a much larger scale and caused a great deal more resentment than did that of the Russians, as is witnessed by the Reuter concession and the Tobacco Regie, and they certainly recognised the political value of the Imperial Bank; but at the same time their business men did not find their government a ready source of money when their ambitions floundered. This cautious approach is well illustrated by the hesitating attitude of the British government towards the problem of extending a loan to the tumbling Qājār monarchy in the 1890's, even in the face of Russian open-handedness and Persian fear of the stranglehold which the Tsar's government was attaining over internal affairs.

But acceptance of this political interpretation involves an important cautionary note. The failure to sustain the "economic thesis" in the case of nineteenth century Irān does not have an important bearing, as one reviewer of Greaves has implied, on the Marxist theory that imperialism is a phenomenon arising out of the economic structure of capitalist society in Western Europe.⁶ In the first place the facts relating to the motivation for a particular case of imperialist penetration are not those referred to as significant by the general theory in question and, in the second place, even if imperialism were economic in its origins, it is natural that, as colonial expansion gathered momentum, the preservation of political interests became an important supplement to the need to guard trade and investment in different parts of the world and even, in many cases, took an independent role. Moreover, a strong case can be made to show that in India imperialist domination was quite definitely economic in its origins.⁷

A second important aspect of Kazemzadeh's book, and one which he explicitly justifies by citing his substantive argument, is its preoccupation with diplomatic questions. From cover to cover his documentation and interpretation takes place almost entirely from this perspective. In a rather defensive preface he states that he is working without any special definition of imperialism. Indeed he says that what he had originally

5. Kazemzadeh, *op.cit* p.416.

6. Yapp. Review of R.L. Greaves "Persia and the Defence of India", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. Vol.XXII Pt II 1960.

7. See M. Barratt Brown *After Imperialism* (London: Heinemann, 1963).

intended to write was a diplomatic history whose focus was a particular phase in Anglo-Russian relations. However, "the nature of the subject inevitably turned this work in to a case study in imperialism". He continues;

"Diplomatic history is somewhat unfashionable these days. Yet in Persia diplomacy was the main instrument of policy and diplomats exercised great influence on the course of events. Though military power always loomed in the background, it was seldom used. Economic conflict never played a decisive role".

As the quotation itself implies, this is an approach for which historians of imperialism have often been criticised. But the objections which have been made to diplomatic history are not merely a matter of fashion; the failure to consider the nexus of economic and social relations set up by the dominance of the Western powers over the rest of the world is common among its practitioners and has all too frequently led to rather shallow conclusions about the nature of imperialism as a global social system. Diplomacy is an *instrument* of the foreign policy of nations and, although there are, of course, circumstances in which the activities of diplomats might play a relatively independent role in the shaping of the historical process, the explanation of those activities must lie in a complex of factors well outside the diplomatic sphere itself. Further, although diplomatic documents are particularly rich in information on very many subjects they do not represent a neutral source through which all the realities of the imperialist relationship can be examined. Certainly some members of the European diplomatic corps were talented at reportage and political analysis, but on the whole their formal education and their social position did not equip them with the ability to understand the complex social and political factors behind the events they saw around them.

The question therefore is: how far can we accept Kazemzādeh's argument that his approach is justified in this particular case because diplomacy played an important independent role in determining the nature of the imperialist relationship? The answer depends in the first instance on what problems we might consider relevant to a case study of imperialism as it affected a particular society; and in the second instance on how far the diplomatic approach has been able to clarify these problems as they affected Irān.

What is quite clear is that the study of imperialism involves much more than an explanation of the motives of the imperial power itself and a description of events which determined, or followed upon, particular

policy decisions. For all non-Western countries, the encroachment of Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whatever the motives involved or the methods used, set up a social relationship between two unequal parties in which the weaker side was forced to witness the disintegration of the very institutions which had previously sustained its life and to accept, eventually, new and strange ways of doing things. The many nationalistic movements which sprang up in the later stages of colonial domination and advocated a return to traditional values were never a real alternative to their modernistic rivals, the international system which imperialism generated destroyed the very conditions under which the utopias they advocated could survive and flourish. Nearly all non-Western societies found that the pattern of their future development was determined by forces outside their own control. Westernisation became the only viable method of resisting the de-humanising effects of the arrogance and superiority displayed by the representatives of imperial governments and of restoring the material well-being of millions whose livelihood had been destroyed by the impact of the West on their indigenous economic systems. But the particular form that resistance took, the way in which the problems were faced and solved in any one society, depended on the peculiar blend between the forces of its own traditional social structure and the type of imperialist impact it experienced. Thus the proper study of imperialism involves an analysis of the relationship between its agents and members of the victim society, and a consideration of the changes which took place on the economic, political and cultural levels of that society either as a direct consequence of the intended or unintended effects of imperial policy itself, or as a product of the reaction of various groups in the society to the threat presented to them by the imperial presence.

One of the features of Irān's imperialist experience is that she avoided formal occupation. This, together with the fact that, in the pre-oil era, investment in the extraction of raw materials was not an important aspect of economic imperialism (as it was in many other countries), meant that there was an almost complete absence of institutional innovation brought about as a matter of conscious colonial policy. Diplomacy was, as Kazemzadeh rightly says, a major channel through which the society related itself to western imperial hegemony. Moreover, despite the sentiments expressed by some British statesmen to the effect that the social

and economic development of the country should be aided, diplomats were not generally concerned to change the society they found around them. Rather the task of British and Russian agents was to utilise the weaknesses of the social and political system as it stood in order to maximize the methods by which influence could be sought in a situation in which neither power could resort to military or political force because of constant fear of the retaliation of the other. The constant struggle for influence between the two empires meant that Irān, whilst suffering from some of the nastier shocks brought about by imperialism, was even deprived of what might be called its "fringe benefits".

Perhaps the best chapter in Kazemzadeh's book, entitled "Penetration Pacifique," deals with this issue. Here he shows that, despite the desire of both Russia and Britain to ease their access to Irān, and thus to build the necessary system of communications, in the end mutual rivalry meant that the country never got even the bare bones of a modern transportation system from those who sought to rule her. Both British and Russian concessionaires were, in the 1880's, seeking permission to build railways, but their governments feared that the completion of these would disturb the balance of power. Their jealousy was such that when Naser ed Dīn Shāh, eager to obtain some of the benefits of Western technology, attempted to gain the co-operation of an American company, the British exerted all their influence to prevent the appearance of another rival on the scene. The agreement signed in 1890 between Amin os-Soltān and the Russians, which stated that the Persians would neither construct railways, nor grant concessions to others to do so for the next ten years, is one of the most telling symbols of the nature of colonial dominance in Irān.

But, if the imperialists themselves did not undertake institutional innovations, this does not mean that important social changes did not take place as a result of their presence. Indeed, the economic and social impact of the West was a source of pressures which radically affected the position of the different classes in Irānian society and which altered the relationship between them to such a degree that it very nearly destroyed the foundations of the old socio-political system. In countries which, like Irān, already possessed a highly developed, centralised, political structure, and in which political occupation did not take place, the pattern of social dislocation that occurred depended on a number of factors. Amongst these, one of crucial importance was the way in which the

ruling class attempted to solve the problems presented to it by colonial domination.

The point is that imperialism represented a completely novel kind of threat to the authority of this class. It was, moreover, a threat which could not be met by any of the methods they had traditionally used to preserve their position. The technical superiority of the West rendered war a completely useless instrument of defence and, even more bewildering, its all pervading influence attacked from within the society in ways which promised to make the despot impotent within his own domain. Thus survival meant either coming to terms with the imperialists and acting as their willing collaborators in the exploitation of land and people, or making a final attempt at resistance by adopting some of the West's own techniques. It may be true that the traditional political elites were doomed from the very beginning, whichever course they adopted. But whether these initial measures served their original purpose or not, they played a fundamental role in determining the particular structure of social institutions which emerged from the society's confrontation with the West.

What may be called Irān's first experience of the imperialist relationship came when Russia's attempt to expand its southern borders in the first half of the nineteenth century brought her into a military conflict with her southern neighbour which ended in the defeat of the latter state and the signing of the treaties of Golestān and Turkmanchai in 1821 and 1828. Only a few years earlier, in the reign of Āqā Mohammad Qājār, the differences between the Shāh and the Russian Tsar displayed all the features of a conflict between two oriental despots over the hegemony of border provinces and their petty dynasties. But Article 5 in the Treaty of Golestān, in which the Russians recognised Abbās Mirzā as heir to the Persian throne and pledged their help to him in case his claim should be disputed, initiated a very different relationship between the two states. Russia thereby acquired an instrument, reinforced in the later treaty by the introduction of a reign capitulations for her merchants trading in Irān, for interfering in the internal affairs of her neighbour.⁸ Moreover, Irān's shattering defeat in the intermittent battles between the two powers, and her later defeats at the hands of the British, provided one of the first indications of her weakness at the hands of states which had

8. Kazemzadeh, *op.cit.* p.5.

already begun to modernise. From that time onwards, the financial and military might of the West gradually beat the Qājārs into accepting a relationship with it in which the latter was to play of a helpless, if somewhat temperamental child.

Some elements of the Qājār ruling class favoured a programme of modernisation as a strategy of resistance to colonialism. But the extent and effectiveness of reform has to be seen in its proper perspective. Certainly during this period there was a growing consciousness that the strength of the West lay in its technical superiority and in certain aspects of its social organisation which were thought to encourage progress and inventiveness. Talk of the necessity to meet its challenge by means of social change was widespread among upper class and intellectual circles, but concrete reforms were few in number. Only three prominent reformers, Abbās Mirzā, Amir Kabir and Moshir od-Dowleh were ever in a position to carry out any of their plans, and even they met with but short-lived success. Abbās Mirzā died prematurely, Amir Kabir was assassinated after three promising years in office, and Moshir od-Dowleh met his downfall because of the discontent caused by his betrayal of his country in the Reuter Affair.⁹ Even the few reforms that were implemented, mostly in the army and the administration, were not well enough accepted and did not go far enough to affect the social structure in any real sense, nor, and this is all important, were they part of any programme accepted by the Shāh and his ministers as a matter of policy.

Instead the strategy, if it can be so called, adopted by the Qājārs to relate themselves to the imperialist West, was one of piecemeal diplomatising, a point well illustrated by Kazemzadeh's book. Individual Shāhs and ministers pursued the course of acquiring as much personal gain as they could from their dealings with the British and Russian legations, while at the same time attempting to avoid direct control by playing off one against the other. Kazemzadeh's own description of the Qājār's attitude to the West is probably much more realistic than the viewpoint which stresses the attempts at reform which took place in the nineteenth century. At one point in his book he says:

"... But it was not Descartes that fascinated and attracted Nasser

9. Hafez Farmanfarmiain, "Modernization in Nineteenth Century Iran" in W. R. Polk & R.L. Chambers eds. *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

ed-Din Shāh and the tiny group around him who ruled and owned Persia. Even a useful invention such as the telegraph did not appeal to the rather limited imagination of the Shāh. The one thing he understood well was money, of which he never had enough, yet which seemed to flow in abundance in Europe..."

"The exquisite crown jewels of the Persian King of Kings, sparkling reminders of the loot of India, brought no income, but stories of a new India, an India of stocks and bonds, of coupons and interest, of concessions and loans, excited his cupidity. Persia could not long remain unaffected by the money making passion of the age, nor did her rulers want to stay outside the magic circle of cascading gold".¹⁰

The elite, therefore, launched themselves on the incredibly short-sighted course of selling the resources of their own land to foreign concessionaires. Much has been written about the shocking history of "concession hunting" during the nineteenth century and Kazemzadeh's book adds a lot of fascinating details. But no-one has so far pointed out that the importance of concessions lies neither in the motivation they may or may not have provided for foreign governments to increase their influence in Irān, nor in their real economic effects, which were probably slight, but rather in the way they symbolised the attitude of the Qājār ruling class to their own people.

However, the emergence of this kind of relationship cannot simply be explained by pointing to the Shāh's penchant for gold, and it is at this point that Kazemzadeh's concentration on diplomatic history begins to show its weaknesses. His otherwise excellent study does not enable us to understand why the Qājārs should have failed to carry out the social reform they talked about so much, nor does it provide an analysis of the consequences of that failure which would allow us to grasp in proper perspective its significance for the development of Persian society. Instead of being treated as a product of internal trends and external pressures, the whole question of the prelude to and the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution is looked at from the point of view of the day to day effects of British and Russian policy. Nowhere in the book is there even a summary account of what the structure of traditional Persian society was like at the time. Yet this is of utmost importance to the explanation of the dynamics of the imperialist relationship as it was experienced in Irān.

Perhaps this issue can be put into sharper focus by drawing a brief comparison with Ottoman Turkey during the same period. There are, of course,

10. Kazemzadeh. *op.cit.*, pp. 100-101.

many fundamental differences between the two societies and between their respective experiences of the impact of the West; but still their similarities are enough to make the comparison viable. Moreover, since historians have paid much more extensive attention to the internal social and economic problems of Turkey at this time, their analyses enable us to see more clearly what internal factors may have been significant in Irān.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Ottoman state was faced with two major challenges to its power. The first came from the expansionist West and showed itself in the form of severe military defeat on a number of the empire's borders. The second, which was completely unconnected with imperialism, was an internal challenge from a class of landowners (the 'ayān) who had slowly been gathering power in the countryside by means of their tax farms, and whose existence threatened not only the substance of the Sultan's authority but also its economic foundations.¹¹ Faced with this situation the Ottoman elite adopted a strategy which, it was hoped, would deal with the regime's two enemies in one blow. The oriental tendency towards centralisation and the strengthening of the two main instruments of power of the despot, the army and the bureaucracy, was combined with a programme of modernising reform in both. This programme, though radical in comparison with reforms that had taken place at earlier dates, did not excite the opposition of the major power groups at the centre of the empire—the higher *ulamā*, bureaucrats and army officers, because, as classes, their primary vested interest was in the maintenance of the strength of the Sublime Porte.

Moreover, at this early stage, although the reform involved, besides technological innovation, social reorganisation in both institutions, it was still regarded as an attempt to adapt western techniques rather than a move that would bring about changes in the very structure of pivotal social institutions. But later developments were to show that, by modernising the very basis of his power, the Sultan was creating an element in Ottoman Society that was to form a novel source of opposition to his rule. This modernisation of the bureaucracy and army meant that a new kind of man had to be recruited to undertake new tasks, with the result that both organisations became channels of social mobility for those who were able

11. K.A. Karpat. "The Land Regime, Social Structure and Modernization in the Ottoman Empire." in W.R. Polk & R.L. Chambers eds. *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

to acquire even the elements of a Western education. Such groups did not have the vested interests of the hereditary families who controlled the organs of government in the Sublime Porte, and, although by reason of their education, they became more and more crucial to the maintenance of the empire, their career advance was blocked by the hegemony of the latter elements.¹² Frustration, combined with the influx of liberal ideas in to Turkey and the inherently "modernistic" orientation which its position in the social structure gave this group, served to make it into a source of opposition not only to the Sultān and the old system of privilege, but also to the very principles upon which the traditional socio-political system was based. Moreover, the groups who carried out the Attaturk Revolution were distinguished not only by the novelty of their political demands but also of their methods; so that the Sultān, whose position was already considerably weakened, was faced with a challenge which he could meet neither by further reform, nor by traditional techniques of appeasement or suppression.

Turning to the question of Irān. The Qājār's impotence arose from a combination of internal and external factors which served to make them extremely vulnerable. Among these, of course, was the strength of imperial pressure itself. It was basically a piece of historical misfortune that their lands bordered on the "brightest jewel" in the British imperial crown. Moreover, one might note that their contact with the West was much less than that of the Ottoman elite who had experienced centuries-long relationships of conflict with their Christian neighbours and for whom military defeat was a much more severe shock. Apart from this, the social and political situation within the country made it difficult for them to undertake any effective strategy of resistance. Despots though they were, as an elite they never managed to establish that firm control which had enabled the Saffavids before them to develop a smoothly functioning, relatively durable machinery of government. Their rise to power followed on a period of political and probably economic chaos, and their control over the provinces, not to mention renegade members of their own family was, at times, shaky.¹³

12. S. Mardin. *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*. (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962).

13. Lambton A.K.S. 'Persian Society under the Qajars' *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, XLVIII, 2 (April 1961) pp. 123-139.

But perhaps even more crucial is the fact that there existed no elite group in nineteenth century Persia, comparable to that of Ottoman society, for whom the centralisation and power brought about by modernisation became a condition of survival. Even though the institutional structure of the government was basically oriental in character, it was functioning badly and was in a tremendous state of confusion. The pivotal needs of such a system, a class of upper level bureaucrats and army officers cut off from social bases other than the office itself, was largely lacking. Bureaucratic office, it is true, was still a major road to political influence and one of the most important means of obtaining wealth; but Lambton's work indicates that, during this period, the landowning class was increasing both in power and in numbers.

"As the control of the government weakened so the tendency grew to convert *tuyuls* into *de facto* private property, inheritable and alienable by sale. The ranks of the landowners proper thus came to be swelled by erstwhile or actual government officials and *tuyuldārs*".¹⁴

The financial and administrative weakness of the government also meant that anyone who had the funds was in a position to buy the crown lands which were being put for sale to ameliorate the financial difficulties of the Shāh.

At first sight this may seem to be a trend similar to the growth of the *'ayān* in the Ottoman Empire as it has been described by Karpas. But the significant difference between the two situations lies in the fact that in Turkey the *'ayān* emerged as a class which was sharply differentiated from the military and the political bureaucracy and whose social and economic interests clearly opposed those of the latter group. In Iran on the other hand, the change affected by the alienation of control over state lands appears to have been in the opposite direction. The bureaucracy and independent landowners, instead of being in conflict, were being assimilated to one another. Thus the bureaucracy, which might have been the group to have provided the impetus towards modernisation within the context of the traditional social and political system did not feel their position to be threatened and developed no particular interest in preserving the strength of the state. The immediate advantages that were to be obtained through the corruption of the old system were infinitely more

14. Lambton A.K.S. *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1953). p. 139.

attractive than the prospects of modernity. The landowners, in their turn, had no reason to be dissatisfied with their growing power and, although some sections might have liked to gain secure control over their possessions by turning them into absolute private property, on the whole this group does not seem to have felt any severe threat to its position either from the political centre or from the imperialists.

The position of internal weakness of the government was, moreover, supplemented and probably exacerbated by the critical economic position of the country of which the financial crises of preceeding the Constitutional Revolution were only reflections. Imperialism appeared not only as an external political threat, but also as something which crept into and affected the old equilibrium of the social and political order itself. Even though the basic motives for the activities of the British and Russian diplomats in Persia were primarily political, the generally expanding web of economic dominance of the capitalist countries, reigns of capitulations for their merchants, and the political presence of their governments, served to expose the Persian economy to the full impact of economic imperialism. As yet we possess no economic history of this period but still some important trends and their consequences have already been outlined.

Throughout the nineteenth century the volume of Persian trade with the West increased and, although, according to Curzon's figures, this meant an increase in Persian exports, it also meant a far greater increase in imports. His statistics for the year 1899 show that whereas imports were valued at 3,913,100 lire, exports amounted to only 2,126,000 lire.¹⁵ This, coupled with the fact that trade itself was increasingly in the hands of foreign companies meant that there must have been a considerable drainage of financial resources from the country. Writing as early as the reign of Fath'Ali Shāh, the British historian and traveller, Watson remarks that,

"Within the last thirty years an extensive and flourishing trade has sprung up between Persia and various European nations. As imports exceed exports and Persia is, each year, drained of a considerable amount of gold and silver to make up the balance."¹⁶

Further, the major imports from the West were cheap woollen and

15. Curzon G.N. *Persia and the Persian Question* (London: 1892)

16. Watson R.G. *A History of Persia from the beginning of the Nineteenth Century to the Year 1858*. (London: 1866) p. 33.

cotton cloths whose influx meant the destruction of much domestic industry.¹⁷ In these and in other ways the national economy gradually weakened until finally, through the agency of the Banque D'Escompte and the Imperial Bank of Persia, and through considerable monetary loans, the imperialists control over the finances of the state was complete.

The Qājār's relationship with the British and Russians, and the destruction of the old economic equilibrium wrought by Western supremacy in trade and finance, had the effect of turning the merchant class into a source of discontent and eventually of revolutionary protest. Perhaps some elements of the traditional merchant classes found personal prosperity as a result of increased foreign demands for certain kinds of goods and of the contact they had with foreign trading houses. But for the most part this was the class which felt the negative effects of western domination most acutely.

Besides the direct threat it presented to their livelihood, imperialism opened up new horizons whilst at the same time preventing any real possibility of achieving them.¹⁸ Furthermore traders have always, in traditional communities, been a vehicle of communication between different cultures and different sections of their own society. The travel implied by increasing trade over the frontier doubtless created a consciousness of the prospects involved in the development of an industrial society and a liberal political community among the more active members of this class which eventually seeped, albeit in adulterated form, to the farthest bazaars of the land. Perhaps the high level of political activity among the merchants of Tabriz, who more than any others enjoyed extensive contacts abroad, is a good indicator of the importance of this breakdown of cultural isolation from the West.

Added to this structural dislocation in the position of the merchant class was their feeling that they had been betrayed by their rulers. The sale of concessions to foreigners was interpreted as a direct snub to their own interests and became, together with foreign loans, both on the occasion of the Regie revolt and in the years directly preceding 1907, the catalyst which turned discontent into rebellion. The actions of

17. Ashraf. A. 'Historical Obstacles to the Development of the Bourgeoisie in Iran.' Unpublished paper read at conference on the Economic History of the Middle East. School of Oriental and African Studies. 4-6th July 1967.

18. See. Ashraf. *op.cit.*

the Qājār ruling elite, combined with the new circumstances of the middle classes, produced a complete breakdown in the notions of legitimacy which had hitherto governed to the relationships between the rulers and the major groups of traditional Irānian society. Resentment spread from the bourgeoisie to the 'ulamā and to intellectuals who supplemented it with an explosive combination of the influence of western liberal political philosophy and the traditional *shī'ite* tendency to reject political authority. The culmination of these trends in the attempt to limit the despotic power of the Qājār Shāhs and in the demand for constitutional government represents perhaps the only really significant attempt of Persian society to resist imperialism through positive transformation of its institutions.

It is interesting to note that, whereas in Turkey the overthrow of the old political system was brought about under the leadership of a group which constituted an early example of the rise of the "new middle class"- a phenomenon often remarked in the contemporary societies of a developing countries; in Irān the breakdown of the traditional political, but not social system, occurred as a result of the temporary transformation of the old middle class groups into a widespread democratic movement of protest whose organisation was to some extent based on the patterns of social organisation of their traditional communities.¹⁹ The fundamental differences in the character and consequences of the Persian Constitutional Revolution and the Attaturk Revolution can, at least in part, be attributed to the widely differing character and orientation of the groups who carried them out.

The coming of the diplomats to Irān upset the old power structure of the society; from the time the imperial legations established themselves in Tehrān nearly every social force of importance was forced to take account of them in its activities. *Mollās*, merchants, princes, courtiers and Shāh all had their relationships with the British and Russians and no major political conflict between these groups occurred without their interference. There is no doubt that the bribery, intrigue and betrayal which characterised this type of contact were important factors in determining the course these conflicts took. The balance of power between

19. See Lambton A.K.S. "Persian Political Societies 1906-1911", in *St. Antony's Papers*, No. 16, (London: 1963) pp. 41-89.

Britain and Russia and thus the state of politics amongst the European imperialist states; the phases of imperialist policy which were determined by much broader considerations than immediate problems in Irān, as well as policy aims determined by ambassadors"and attaches"personal assessment of the advantages to be accrued by supporting different internal trends, all combined to affect the outcome of the political struggle of the period. But although imperialism as a politico-diplomatic phenomenon manifested itself as a dominant way in which the influence of the West penetrated Persian society, the dynamics of the imperialist relationship can only be understood with reference to the reactions of its internal forces. Further, the impact of the West was not only felt in the form of political domination. However irrelevant the economic question may or may not have been to the British and Russian governments, economic imperialism was, from the point of view of the Persian people, an all-embracing reality.

Kazemzādeh's study is a *tour de force* in the documentation of imperial diplomacy as it affected Irān in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hitherto unutilised and very valuable historical data have been made available, many hitherto uncertain points have been clarified. As a diplomatic history the work will almost certainly be unrivalled for many years to come, but as a study of imperialism it displays weakness which can only be corrected by a complete revision of the usual approaches adopted by historians of Irānian affairs.

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