Modern Movement and the Debates of Tradition and Modernity in Iran

Article by Hamid Aghaei Rad
Alzahra University
E-mail: radaghaei@gmail.com

Abstract

This article considers and analyses the historical events of 200 years (i.e., 1779–1978) and two dynasties: the Qajar and the Pahlavi in Iran. Arguments proceed chronologically. The main intentions of the leaders of the modern movement, social modifications and related criticisms are analysed.

From a historical point of view, this article explores the history of the modern movement and the debates around modernity in Iran. From an analytical point of view, this article considers the background of Iranian criticism against Westernisation and analysed the situation that led to raising the debate on modernity.

Criticisms against modernity are considered in this essay. In addition to eco-social changes, it explores criticisms about modernity in different fields such as philosophy and literature. This essay also highlights that from a philosophical point of view Gnosticism became important as an alternative to Westernism. In this respect, the perspective of Nasr, an avant-garde scholar, is outlined.

Keywords: *Modern movement; westernism; Gnosticism; history of Iranian modernisation; Social modifications and its impact on Iranian architecture.*

Qajar Era (1779–1925)

Welcoming the modernity

Historically, a preliminary movement towards modernity began in the *Qajar* era (1779–1925). This movement was scattered and occurred slowly. To analyse the modern movement in Iran, it is necessary to understand that modernity was welcomed in the *Qajar* period. In this section, the Iranian movement towards modernity, its influence on Iran and, more specifically, its influence on architecture and urbanism are discussed. This movement was dependent on prominent individuals (such as ministers or princes) and, consequently, there was no conformity in its strategies. Two important authorities, Abbas Mirza (x–1833) and Amir Kabir (1844–1889), played an important role in this respect. The movement towards modernity in the *Qajar* era can be divided into three periods. The first period relates to Abbas Mirza, while the second and the third periods relate to the Amir Kabir and Mashroteh revolutions, respectively. There are two reasons for this categorisation. First, there was a considerable gap between the first and the second periods. Second, modifications in the third period were the result of the earlier

endeavours. The effect of modernity can be seen more clearly in Iranian society in the third period, which occurred after the industrial revolution in France.

The first period occurred when Abbas Mirza was in power as the crown prince. A war between Russia and Iran acted as trigger for the early movement in modernity, as Iran was defeated due to a lack of modern equipment. Consequently, Abbas Mirza realised that the only way to increase Iranian power was to outfit Iran with European knowledge and technology.[1] Architectural historians[2] believe that before this time, Iran's relationships with European countries meant that it already had some familiarity with modernity in Europe; however, it was only when the Iranian Royal Family's power was threatened that modernity became important in Iran. The first steps towards modernity taken by Abbas Mirza included sending students and labourers to Europe,

---

[1] Vahid Ghobadian, *Sabk Shenasi Va Memari Nazari Dar Memari Moaser Iran*, 26.
[2] Ghobadian, Katozian and Masoud.

translating European sources, increasing trends between Iran and Europe and running small factories based on European methods.[3]

When Abbas Mirza died, the first stage of the modern movement came to an end. Historians such as Bani believed that, compared to other countries such as Egypt and Turkey, a lack of support from the King made Abbas Mirza unsuccessful.[4] A lack of funds and unrest within Iranian boundaries meant that there had been no serious decision to adopt modernisation strategies. Further, changes to the Iranian military occurred more slowly than expected and European regimes suspended their support from time to time on the basis of the political situation.

A few years later, Amir Kabir began a path known as the second period of the *Qajar* era. The changes Amir Kabir made were based on observations from his travels to Russia and Turkey (this reveals why no conformity can be seen in his actions).[5] In contrast to Abbas Mirza who attempted to send students to France in accordance with an agreement between Iran and Napoleon,[6] Amir Kabir established a new school for higher education; he also opened new weapons factories and various organisations within the Iranian army.

The movement towards modernisation by Abass Mirza and Amir Kabir's in the *Qajar* era lacked a theoretical basis. Indeed, it was based only on their observations and understandings of modernism. Their endeavours were undertaken to gain power against Western countries and their neighbours. Communications and exchanges between Iran and Western countries led to some superficial modifications at the top levels of Iranian society and changed the expectations of Iranians towards their government. By way of example, Naser Al-Din Shah Qajar (1831–1896) was the first Iranian king to travel to Europe three times. These travels led to changes to the furniture of his court and changes to the clothes of his courtiers. It is unclear why similar modifications were not seen in middle class Iranian society, as they too would have been under influence of the modern movement; however, religious beliefs may have been the reason for this.

As a result of Amir Kabir and Abbas Mirza's endeavours, communication between Iranians and Europeans modified some major parts of Iranian society. These modifications can be categorised as follows:[7] (1) Industrialisation: The importation of Western products to Iran created a movement towards industrialisation. This also forced Iranian manufacturers to modify their traditional systems to be more effective. (2) Exportation: Iranians began exporting their agricultural products, including tea, sugar and tobacco. (3) Migration to cities: Increased income in rural areas and the increased activity of brokers and investors in agricultural products led to migration from rural areas to cities.

Importantly, the changes that occurred in the first and second periods supported the movement towards modernity in the third period. From 1903 to 1905, under the influence of intellectual and educated people, protests occurred in which the middle classes opposed the Royal Family. These protesters wanted to reduce the king's power and found a parliament similar to that in European countries, particularly England. It was called "Mashroteh", which translates as "conditional."

From Ghobadian's point of view, Mashroteh was informed by: (1) the Iranians becoming familiar with European countries, their power systems and social rights over recent decades; and (2) the poor education and hygienic systems in Iran.[8] Some historians (such as Bani) referred to the influence of people who visited Western countries in this movement; however, modern schools and publications were the most important factors in the Mashroteh movement. In addition, religious clergymen and intellectuals encouraged people to insist on limiting the government's power through the creation of a parliament. Interestingly, while both intellectuals and clergymen criticised the government and the King, their approaches

---

[3] Ghobadian, *Sabk Shenasi Va Memari Nazari Dar Memari Moaser Iran*, 27.

[4] Amir Bani Masud, *Memari Moaser Iran, Takapoei Beyn Sonat Va Modernite (Iranian Contemporary Architecture, an Inquiry into Tradition and Modernity)* (Tehran: Honare Memari, 2009), 15.

[5] Ibid, 18.

[6] Ghobadian, *Sabk Shenasi Va Memari Nazari Dar Memari Moaser Iran*, 27.

[7] Masud, *Memari Moaser Iran, Takapoei Beyn Sonat Va Modernite*, 21.

[8] Ghobadian, *Sabk Shenasi Va Memari Nazari Dar Memari Moaser Iran*, 91.

differed. Intellectuals believed that a lack of commonwealth law, updated knowledge and an abundance of religious superstitions had led to a despotism that had to be broken by the Mashroteh. Conversely, clergymen believed that the unlimited power of Royal Family had led to corruption.

In summary, movements towards modernity in Iran began after it was defeated in war due to a lack of modern equipment. Consequently, to maintain power, the Iranian Royal Family took steps towards modernity and forming relationships with Western countries. They began by modifying the Iranian army and educational system at a high level. These changes were followed by the emergence of services such as hospitals, a newspaper, trains, electricity and banks. The relationship between Iran and Europe also led to reform in Iranian agriculture and manufacturing. After a few decades, and as Iranians' knowledge of European societal rights and the limitation of the power of European governments increased, protests broke out that led to the establishment of a parliament in Iran. Ultimately, the Royal Family could not control the consequences that had arisen by their welcoming modernity into Iran.

Pahlavi Era (1925–1978)

Accelerating modernity (1925-1941)

In this section, historical events and eco-social forces (seen in light of the modern movement in Iran) will be analysed. Particular attention is given to the influence of modernity on politics and how the new economic situation, the increasing the role of women in society and educational plans accelerated the modern movement in Iran.

Historically, modernity appeared in Iran in the *Qajar* era; however, the first *Pahlavi* is known as the beginning of modernity in Iran for three reasons. First, in the *Qajar* era the influence of modernity was mostly limited to the noblesse (i.e., the upper-class) and castles. Conversely, in the first *Pahlavi* era almost all social classes were affected. Second, in the first *Pahlavi* era the scale of influence of modernity was considerable and could be seen in both the economy and society. Third, all these influences happened in less than 20 years and modernity became pervasive in a short time.

Despite differences in speed, scale and area, modernity appeared in both eras; however, in relation to power, modernity had opposite influences. The last king of *Qajar* was overthrown because he could not manage the government. Following this, Reza Khan became King and established the *Pahlavi* dynasty in 1925. Reza Khan was an opinionated person and despite not believing in democracy, he obtained power through parliament (a result of modernity from the *Qajar* era). Thus, modernity caused despotism.

Despite the despotism of the first *Pahlavi* era, the Iranian people were mostly satisfied, as the King controlled and managed the country. They may have compared their present situation to the late *Qajar* period in which rebels made parts of Iran unsafe. In addition to safety, the economic situation improved during this time. While oil was discovered in the late *Qajar* period, oil trading first began in the early *Pahlavi* period. It made the King rich and allowed him to take steps towards industrialisation and modernity. A railway system was the first step; Reza Shah connected the Caspian Sea in north to the Persian Gulf in south. Then Iran National Bank also granted many low rate loans to encourage industrial investors to run modern factories. Resultantly, the number of industrial factories increased 17-fold in a short period.[9]

Reza Shah was opposed to the influence of religion in politics and in this period tried to cut its roots in power and society. With this aim, Reza Shah changed the system of justice from Islamic to non-Islamic. In the *Qajar* era, clergymen were judges in the courts; however, Reza Shah changed this and employed judges from Switzerland. Additionally, a translation of French Commonwealth law was used instead of Islamic law.[10] Reza Shah also banned the majority of religious ceremonies, changed the Iranian Islamic calendar and, more importantly, banned the veil for women.

In encouraging the middle class towards modernity, Reza Shah took three steps. First, women were encouraged to engage in social activities and discrimination based on gender became a serious crime. Consequently, women were able to work in hospitals, schools and even

---

[9] Mikhaeil Ivanove, *New History of Iran*, trans. Houshang Tizabi (Tehran: Eslouj, 1977), 80.

[10] Masud, *Memari Moaser Iran, Takapoei Beyn Sonat Va Modernite*, 186.

factories. Second, based on Western fashion, national clothes were designed that everyone (men and women) had to wear them in public. Third, music schools were opened that taught traditional and Iranian music, as music in Islam had been forbidden, this action was a step towards the Westernisation of Iranian society.

These changes show Reza Shah's desire to make Iranian people similar to Western people. However, other than his modifications to the industrial fields and educational system, many of these actions were merely superficial movements towards modernity. Changes to the educational system played an important role. Reza Shah implemented a French educational system in place of the traditional system to ensure that adolescents would be ready to study higher degrees at universities. He also established the first university in Iran; that is, Tehran University (1934). The academic staff and the lecturers of Tehran University came mostly from European countries and were assisted by Iranians who had graduated from European universities.

Eco-social Forces and Modernity (1941-1978)

At the close of the Second World War, the Allies had occupied Iran and Reza Shah had been exiled to South Africa. With the support of the Allies, Reza Shah's eldest child, Mohammad Reza, became King and the second *Pahlavi* era began in 1941. This section considers the continuation of the modern movement in this period, particularly, the influence of modernity on Iranian society, economy, urbanism and architecture. In addition to criticisms on modernity, the issues of tradition and modernity generally and in architecture specifically will be considered.

Following the rule of Reza Shah, power was not transferred to Mohammad Reza easily. As Mohammad Reza was quite young and inexperienced, England and Russia interfered directly in Iran's internal and external affairs. These interventions made the dominion of Mohammad Reza weak and fragile. In 1953, he dismissed the Prime Minister, who had attempted a coup against him, with the support of America to increase his own power. This was the first time that America would play a role in Iranian contemporary history. From then on, Mohammad Reza paid particular attention to America (rather than Europe) in a variety of areas, including politics, economy and technology. Thus, the US became the prototype for leaders of the modern movement in the second *Pahlavi* era.

At the beginning of the *Pahlavi* era, Reza Shah directly dictated some changes to society in light of modernism; however, these changes were not all supported by society. The passing of time allowed these changes to become more balanced and stable. Thus, in this period, the natural influence of modernity appeared in Iran society and Mohammad Reza was able to follow his father's policies with some flexibility. A high income also accelerated these social modifications.

Social Changes and the Emergence of a New Social Level

Two decades into Mohammad Reza's period, social indicators (including education, the hygienic system, the rate of migration, social class differences and prosperity) changed rapidly due to the high income of the government derived from land modifications[11] and oil exports.[12] The numbers of students at different levels grew by 77 per cent. Additionally, universities received more support and became more popular. Consequently, the number of students at universities increased by 65 per cent.[13] The hygienic system improved because of the increasing number of hospitals and clinics. However, as the number of general practitioners and dentists only increased by 43 per cent, the government had to employ foreign doctors at public hospitals and clinics to meet the needs of society.[14] It is important to note that all these improvements occurred unevenly across rural areas and cities.[15]

As mentioned above, because of the increasing number of people migrating to major cities to find better jobs, the model of population

[11] Land modifications were part of the White Revolution conducted by Mohammad Reza Shah to limit the power and wealth of landowners.
[12] Exploiting oil occurred nationally early in the second *Pahlavi* era. Consequently, exporting oil became the primary source of income for the government.
[13] Said Laylaz, *Moje Dovom: Tajadodsazie Amerane (Second Wave: Dictated Modernity)* (Tehran: Nilofar, 2013), 472.
[14] Ibid, 473.
[15] Ibid, 471.

density in Reza Shah's period changed.[16] It also increased in Mohammad Reza's period as people began attending universities and seeking better medical services. Increasing the number of higher educational centres in the major cities was not only an attraction for young rural people; it also led to the expansion of the middle class. These individuals, trained in the light of modernity, were called intellectuals and the government described them as the modern models for the entire society. Generally, the middle class was secular and held a positive attitude towards modernity.[17]

The middle class was the main target for the cultural strategy of Mohammad Reza. The government adopted a strategy as part of the modern movement that had two main aims. The first aim was to revive Iranian pre- Islamic culture and promote the idea of "returning to our ancient roots."[18] For example, Mohammad Reza called himself the heir of Cyrus (the most famous king of the Iranian Empire in 500 BC) and changed the Iranian calendar from solar to Imperial. The second aim was to promote Westernisation.

Some historians such as Bani Masoud argued that these two aims were in conflict with one another.[19] However, following these principles can be interpreted in the debates of tradition and modernity. Mohammad Reza was more liberal than his father and, consequently, religious people had more freedom to follow their rituals and ceremonies; however, it should be noted that he was anti-Islam for the same reasons as his father and heterogeneous principles assisted him in this respect.

Another point of view

Generally, there is a negative attitude towards the Mohammad Reza era in books published after the Islamic revolution in 1978; however, Abrahamian (1940) analysed this period with a positive attitude in his book *A History of Modern Iran* (2008). He believed that Mohammad Reza's economic policies and plans, especially the "White Revolution", improved Iran's economy and created many job opportunities in the private sector and, more importantly, led to a small industrial revolution.[20] Further, Abrahamian argued that Europe was not an ideal model for Mohammad Reza, but that the King sought a lifestyle superior to Western countries and blamed European countries for their economic and social issues. The King believed that he could present a model better than capitalism and communism by combining the pre-Islamic style with modernism. Conversely, some Western authorities stated that, like Napoleon, Mohammad Reza was too ambitious.[21]

Abrahamian (and other historians) noted that there was a gap between the various levels of the society, but his description of the middle class differed from others. In his view, the middle class was not limited to secular and modern people. He argued that approximately 22 per cent of Iranians could be placed in this level and should be divided into two groups of "traditional" and "white collar." The second group included people employed by organisations in either the private or public sectors. People working in bazaars (i.e., traditional business) belonged to the traditional group. It is important to note that despite a reformation and modernisation of the economy, more than 50 per cent of trade continued to be conducted at the traditional bazaars. Further, these traditional businessmen had a strong relationship with clergymen and religious groups who supported their ceremonies, traditions and religious schools. It should also be noted that some oil income was spent opposing modernity.[22]

Social tensions

Mohammad Reza planned the White Revolution to prevent any possible communist revolutions; however, the White Revolution caused serious tension in society and eventually led to the Islamic revolution of 1979.[23] Three eco-social problems can be recognised as a

---

[16] Katozian, *Eghtesad Siasei* Iran, 322.

[17] Seyyed Alireza Azghadi, *Tarikh Tahavolat Siasi Va Ejtemaei Iran (The History of Political and Social Modifications in Iran)* (Tehran: Samt, 2004), 161.

[18] Jalal Satari, *Derbi Dolat Farhangi, Negahi Be Barkhi Takhavolat Farhangi Va Honari Dar Bazpasin Salhaye Nezampishin* (Tehran: Markaz, 2000), 236.

[19] Masud, *Memari Moaser Iran, Takapoei Beyn Sonat Va Modernite*, 256.

[20] Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 241.

[21] Ibid, 240.

[22] Ibid, 250.

[23] Ibid, 252.

consequence of the White Revolution. First, the White Revolution in rural areas granted land to peasants, but as there were insufficient arable lands, many peasants had to migrate to cities where there was a lack of job opportunities and the expense of living forced them to settle in very poor conditions. Thus, the gap between the middle and lower classes became wider.[24] Second, despite expectations, the White Revolution did not distribute wealth evenly and Iran had the worst distribution of wealth of any country in the 1970s.[25] Third, despite increasing the number of social indicators (such as students and hospitals) most people were unsatisfied, as there was an uneven distribution of hygienic, educational and other social services. For example, while only 20 per cent of the population lived in Tehran, the city was home to more than 60 per cent of government employees, 82 per cent of companies, 50 per cent of factories, 66 per cent of university students, 50 per cent of physicians, 42 per cent of hospitals and 72 per cent of publications.[26] Overall, the eco-social situation of Iran appeared to be worse than in neighbouring countries (such as Iraq and Syria) with less income.[27] Eminent leaders such as Dr Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Khomeini reflected these social tensions in their opposition to the government. Dr Shariati, a graduate from France, was quite popular among the younger generation, including university graduates.

Criticisms on modernity

In *Qajar* era, as modernity spread in Iranian society, it began meeting with opposition. Modernity lacked a theoretical basis in Iran; however, this was not the reason it was opposed; rather, individuals seeking personal benefits opposed it. These opponents came from different backgrounds and fields and, while not against modernity, opposed it because the modifications caused by modernity threatened their benefits.[28]

In the first part of *Pahlavi* era, the modern movement in Iran has been criticised from different perspectives, including by advocators of traditionalism or Islam. However, even scholars who agree with the essentiality of modernity have criticised the modern movement in Reza Shah's period.

Before considering the nature of criticism on modernity in the *Pahlavi* era it is significant to note that from a philosophical point of view modernism is not the same as modernity. Abd Al-Karim Soroush argued that modernity refers to the condition of becoming new unintentionally and by nature, while modernism is an ideology for replacing the new with old. In this ideology, the new is preferred to the old.[29] Thus, in modernism, new demands, customs and ideas bring about a new series of relationships between manufacturing, economy and society. Conversely, modernity is based on a new attitude and cosmology that are made internally and cannot be exported. However, it should be noted that Iranian historians have not always acknowledged these differences in definitions and these terms have often erroneously been used interchangeably.

Many historians, such as Katozian, Bani Masoud and Kianei, have criticised the modern movement in Iran on the basis that it was not ideological; for example, Kianei argued that a superficial understanding of development and innovation identified the external situation of Western societies as a symbol and reason for modernity. Consequently, social behaviour, literature and even clothing became important so that Iranians would be viewed as the same as their Western equivalents.[30] Katozian referred to this as being "pseudo-modernist"; this brought a new meaning to Westernism.[31] Katozian believed that the modern movement was based on an irrational attitude towards Iranian Islamic identity and a passionate excitement for Westernisation.[32] Due to their national humility, the King and, consequently, the government

---

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid, 256.

[27] Ibid, 257.

[28] Masud, *Memari Moaser Iran, Takapoei Beyn Sonat Va Modernite*, 24.

[29] Abdalkarim Soroush, *Biger Than Ideology* (Tehran: Serat, 1996), 350.

[30] Mostafa Kianei, *Memari Dore Aval Pahlavi (Architecture of Fisrt Pahlavi Era)* (Tehran: Institute of Study for Contemporary History of Iran, 2004), 156.

[31] Mohammadali Katozian, *Eghtesad Siasei Iran (Political Economy of Iran)* (Tehran: Papirous, 2006), 145.

[32] Mohammadali Katozian. "Dolat Va Jame Dar Doran Reza Shah," (Society and Government in Reza Shah Period) in *Dictated Modernity* ed. Toraj Atabaki (Tehran: Ghoghnous, 2006), 150.

were keen to follow Western countries in all aspects even beyond rational boundaries.

Similarly, Bani Masoud believed that the Iranian movement towards modernity was a partial reflection of rationalism in Europe. He interpreted rationalism as a combination of actions used to establish new organisations in society, the secularisation of government and society and the industrialisation of economy. He defined the relationship between the government and its people. In this model, materiality was given priority over spirituality.[33] Bani Masoud did not explain the term "partial reflection", however, it appears that the speed at which these modifications occurred was at least six times faster than that in Western countries (e.g., if compared to the Renaissance).

Alternately, Ghobadian argued that the difference between the modern movement in Iran and Europe depends on its application. The modern movement in the first *Pahlavi* era was conducted by the government and was not fully developed, particularly in politics. Thus, Ghobadian referred to this as "governmental modernity." Conversely, in Europe, modernity began with the middle classes and was conducted mostly by intellectuals.[34]

Criticisms of Westernism and the Emergence of Gnosticism

In addition to the social and political tensions mentioned above, the main criticisms related to the combination of Western and Iranian pre-Islamic cultures and the ignoring of Islam. Nodoushan (1925), for example, stated that the result of this combination was unrelated to Iranian culture. The government, as the cultural leader, was confronted practically and theoretically by Iran's original culture and it could not be separated from Islamic culture.[35]

Another criticism related to the exaggeration of Westernisation. The number of scholars criticising Westernisation increased in the middle of the second part of *Pahlavi* era; for example, Al-Ahmad (1923–1969) wrote an influential book about Westernisation in which he stated: "Instead of following the west we should leave it … since the west is not a hero."[36] Al-Ahmad also identified Westernisation as being similar to colonialism and stated:

When "the West" passed the ignorance period of Middle Ages, it called us "the East" (from west coast of Mediterranean Sea to India). And in quest of sun, spice, silk and other goods, the West first came to East as spiritual Christian pilgrims (Bethlehem, Nazareth, etc.); after that as armoured crusaders, merchants, Christian missionaries, and by the support of its ships cannons and finally as representative of modernity. This very latter is absolutely nonsense for the term "Estemar" (exploitation) is derived from "Omran" (constructing) and those who are searching for it deal with "Medina" (city).[37]

Naraghi is another scholar who criticised Westernisation. He argued that the West had nothing special to offer the East. However, he suggested a combination stating: "today it is necessary for the East to borrow Western technology while keeping its own cultures and civilisations because following Western growing models especially in the field of culture will result a negative consequent for Eastern societies."[38]

Other scholars such as Dariush Shayegan and Borujerdi shared similar views to Naraghi. Borujerdi compared Western and Eastern philosophy and stated that Western philosophy was based on reason, while Eastern philosophy was based on intellect and that is why metaphysics is ignored in Western countries. In his view, the social crisis in the West was caused by this ignorance.[39] Similarly, Shayegan stated that there was a clear difference between Western and Eastern cosmologies and it was not possible to welcome Western technology without its side effects.[40]

---

[33] Masud, *Memari Moaser Iran, Takapoei Beyn Sonat Va Modernite*, 184.

[34] Ghobadian, *Sabk Shenasi Va Memari Nazari Dar Memari Moaser Iran*, 130.

[35] Mohammadali Islami Nadoshan, "Bar Iran Chegozasht? Edare Iran Ba Farhang Gheyre Irani" (What Did Happen for Iran?), *Etelaat*, Januarary 29, 1978, 5.

[36] Jalal Al Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi (Westernisation)* (Tehran: Jamedaran, 1986), 6.

[37] Ibid, 24.

[38] Ehsan Naraghi, *Anche Khod Dasht (What He Had)* (Tehran: Amirkabir, 1976), 7.

[39] Mehrzad Borujerdi, *Roshanfekran Irani Va Gharb (Iranian and Western Intellectuals)* trans. Jamshid Shirazi (Tehran: Farzan Rooz, 2005), 230.

[40] Importantly, similar to Seyyed Hussein Nasr, Shayegan believed that

The majority of criticisms about modernity in the second *Pahlavi* era were aimed at Westernisation, with scholars emphasising the advantages of Eastern philosophy over Western philosophy. They sought to remind intellectuals of the privileged position of the East. In the Middle East and from a philosophical point of view, philosophy cannot be separated from Islam; however, the government issued considerable propaganda against Islam. All these matters formed the basis for an emerging mysticism that was understood as a Persian version of Islam.

Talinn Grigor explained this situation as follows:

For the duration of the 1960s and 1970s, the government intensified its assaults on the religious establishment. It cut off Ulama income from shrine and mosque endowment; declared the King as both religious and political leader of Iran; portrayed the clerics as "medieval black reactionaries"; discouraged the historical use of mosques and Madressas; prevented publications on religious matters; intensified the activities of the religious corps in rural areas; and in 1975 replaced the Muslim calendar with the royal calendar, beginning not with prophet Muhammad[s] but with Cyrus the great. The discourse on aesthetics, which ran the whole gamut from anti-colonialism to *Sufi* spirituality, was in tune with the political tides of the time.[41]

Nasr should be considered the most prominent scholar in introducing mysticism and particularly *Sufism* to contemporary scholars and intellectuals in the 1970s. The following section reviews his criticisms about Westernisation and fundamentalism and, more significantly, the mystical role of Man.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

It has been noted by some historians such as Bani Masoud that the idea of bringing together Western technology and Islamic culture was similar to the ideas of Nasr; however, this is inaccurate, as Nasr believed that Islam should not be limited to rituals and *Sharia* laws.[42] Additionally, Nasr believed Western understandings of Islam interpreted it as being part of fundamentalism (as suggested by some scholars), whereas he believed that despite some superficial similarities between Islam and fundamentalism, there were clear and important differences. He stated:

One must distinguish in all religions and civilization, not only between traditional and the modern, but also between authentic tradition and that pseudo-tradition which is also counter-traditional, but which also displays certain characteristics outwardly similar to traditional … pseudo-traditional perspective is often identified with one form or another of "fundamentalism."[43]

Nasr believed that the new interpretations of Islam and tradition would lead to a combination of modern technology and tradition that would not protect the East against the West. He also argued that without metaphysical knowledge, Man would not be successful, even in the West. He stated:

Although science is legitimate in itself, the role and function of science and its application have become illegitimate and even dangerous because of the lack of a higher form of knowledge into which science could be integrated and destruction of the sacred and spiritual value of nature. To remedy this situation the metaphysical knowledge pertaining to nature must be revived and the sacred quality of nature given back to it once again.[44]

---

[41] Grigor, *Building Iran,* 162.

[42] Seyyed Hossien Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (New York: Chapman and Hall, 1990), 373.

[43] Ibid, 18.

[44] Nasr also emphasises this matter in another book, stating: "The *Quranic* verse cited above defines the situation of man in this world in a manner that is at once perennial and universal. Man was created in the best stature *(a/:zsan taqwim)* but then fell into the terrestrial condition of separation and withdrawal from his divine prototype, a condition which the *Quran* calls the lowest of the low *(asfal safilin).* And inasmuch as the situation described in this *Quranic* verse pertains to the innermost nature of man it is a permanent reality that he carries within himself. No amount of supposed evolution and change can destroy the divine image which is his origin or the state of separation and hence wretchedness and misery in which he finds himself due to this very separation from his spiritual origin. Man carries both the image of perfection and the experiential certainty of separation within himself and these elements remain as permanent aspects and conditions of the human state above and beyond all historical change and transformation." Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1972), 25.

In Nasr's view, modern peace was not achievable because civilisations had become devoid of metaphysics. However, he believed that Gnosticism and particularly *Sufism*, coming from the spirit of Islam, could bring peace and offer integrity between Man and his nature. He stated:

Islam has quite unjustly been depicted as a religion of the sword and of war whereas it is a religion which seeks to bring about peace through submission to the Will of God, as the name Islam in Arabic meaning both peace and submission, indicates; and this is only made possible by giving each thing its due. Islam preserves a remarkable equilibrium between the needs of the body and those of the spirit, between this world and the next. No peace is possible in a civilization which has reduced all human welfare to animal needs and refuses to consider the needs of man beyond his earthly existence. Moreover, having reduced Man to a purely terrestrial being, such a civilization is not able to provide for the spiritual needs which nevertheless continue to exist, with the result that there is created a combination of crass materialism and an even more dangerous pseudo-spiritualism, whose opposition to materialism is more imaginary than real. And thus we are faced with the endangering of even the terrestrial life which today has come to be cherished as the final end in itself. One of the basic messages of Islam to the modern world is its emphasis on the importance of giving each thing its due, of preserving each element in its place, of guarding the just proportion between things. The peace that men seek is only possible if the total needs of man, not only his capacity of a thinking animal but also as a being born for immortality, are considered. To be concerned only with the physical needs of men is to reduce men to slavery and to produce problems even on the physical plane that are impossible of solution. It is not religion but modern medicine that has created the problem of over-population. But now religion is asked to solve this problem by accepting to forgo the sacred meaning of human life itself, if not totally, at least in part…Islam possesses all the means necessary for spiritual realization in the highest sense; *Sufism* is the chosen vehicle of these means. Now because *Sufism* is the esoteric and inner dimension of Islam it cannot be practised apart from Islam; only Islam can lead those who have

the necessary aptitude to this inner court of joy and peace that is *Sufism* and which is the foretaste of the "gardens of Paradise". Here again the characteristic of the contemplative way of Islam, or *Sufism*, is that it can be practised anywhere and in every walk of life. *Sufism* is not based on outer withdrawal from the world but on inner detachment.[45]

Unlike other Iranian philosophers, Nasr considered the place of art and architecture. In his view, Westernisation, through secularisation and fundamentalism, had a destructive influence on architecture in Islamic countries and limited the concept of architectural elements to their exoteric meanings, changed the attitude of architects and building users, and reduced their spiritual senses. Most importantly, he believed the current architecture revealed a downgrading of Western architecture.[46]

Conclusion

This article highlights that in Iran the tendency to modernity flourished in the *Qajar* era, the modern movement sped up in the first part of *Pahlavi* era and reached a peak in the second part of *Pahlavi* era.[47]

These above analyses show that leadership influenced the movement. The aims and intentions of leaders differed. While Europeans tried to limit the power of governments through political development, in Iran, at the end of *Qajar* era, the Royal Family had initially welcomed modernity to increase Iranian military power; however, because it limited his power in parliament, Mohammad Shah became the most important and powerful person to oppose modernity. From a similar perspective, Reza Shah wanted to limit the power of his opposition—clergymen—to retain his power. Thus, modernity provided a justification for Reza Shah to secularise Iran so that he could ban religious ceremonies and reduce the power of clergymen.

The essay also demonstrated that from a philosophical point of view, Gnosticism became important in the debates on modernism as a privileged feature of Eastern culture against

---

[45] Ibid, 169.

[46] Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 373.

[47] The second *Pahlavi* era ended with the Islamic revolution (it should be noted that the modern movement continued after the revolution, but this is beyond the scope of this study).

Western culture and Seyyed Hussein Nasr was an avant-garde scholar in this respect. In this respect, the essay concludes that Nasr played a key role in the debates on modernity by promoting the esoteric aspect of Islamic philosophy, and particularly *Sufism*, as a Persian interpretation of Islam against Western culture, while the Reza and Mohammad Reza Shah issued considerable propaganda against Islam as a non-Persian culture.

References

[1]. Abrahamian, Ervand. *A History of Modern Iran.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

[2]. Adamiyat, Freydon. Amir Kabir Va Iran (Amir Kabir and Iran). Tehran: Amirkabir, 1975.

[3]. Ahmad, Jalal Al. Gharbzadegi (Westernisation). Tehran: Jamedaran, 1986.

[4]. Amin, Banani. The Modernization of Iran,1921-1941. Standford: Standford University Press, 1961.

[5]. Anisi, Alireza. "Early Islamic Architecture in Iran (637-1059)." PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2007.

[6]. Arjmandi, Mahmod. "Akhbar." Art and Architecture, 10–11 (1971): 104–09.

[7]. ——— "Talashhaye Omrani Bank Rahni Iran." Art and Architecture 10–11 (1971): 109–125.

[8]. Asfour, Khaled. "Cultural Crisis." The Architectural Review 203, no. 1213 (1998): 52-60.

[9]. Avanessian, Vartan. "Masael Marbot Be Memari Dar Iran." (Issues About Architecture in Iran) Architect, 1 (1961): 4–9.

[10]. ———. "Memari Iran Dar Dorahi Sabk Meli Va Jadid." Art and Architecture, 1 (1969): 30–39.

[11]. Azadi, Ismaeil. Andishe Memaran Moaser Iran (Ideas of Iranian Contemporary Architects). Tehran: Saba, 2010.

[12]. Azghadi, Seyyed Alireza. Tarikh Tahavolat Siasi Va Ejtemaei Iran (The History of Political and Social Modifications in Iran). Tehran: Samt, 2004.

[13]. Bavar, Cyrus. "Darmored Memari." Art and Architecture, 2 (1969): 31–32.

[14]. ———. Negahi Be Peydayesh Memari No Dar Iran (Looking at Emerging Novel Architecture in Iran). Tehran: Faza, 2009.

[15]. Borujerdi, Mehrzad. Roshanfekran Irani Va Gharb (Iranian and Western Intellectuals). Translated by Jamshid Shirazi. Tehran: Farzan Rooz, 2005.

[16]. Daftari, Freshteh, and Layla S. Diba. Iran Modern. New York: Asia Society Museum, 2013

[17]. Dehkhoda, Aliakbar. Dictionary, vol. 31, Tehran: Tehran University 1970.

[18]. Derakhshani, Farrokh. "Iran in the Regional Context." AD: Iran: Past, Present and Future (April 2012).

[19]. Diba, Kamran. Building and Projects. Hatje: Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1981.

[20]. ———. 'shushtar New Town, Iran." Mimar: Architecture in Development no. 17 (1985): 49-53.

[21]. Eshragh, Abdolhamid. "Tarh Jame Shahr Tehra." (Tehran Master Plan) Art and Architecture 5 (1970): 6–90.

[22]. Etesam, Iraj, and Hassanali Poormand. Memari Moaser Iran, 75 Sal Tajrobe Banahaye Omomi (Contemporary Architecture; 75 Years Experience in Public Buildings). Tehran: Payam Sima, 2010.

[23]. Falamaki, Mansour. Sheklgiri Memari Dar Tajarat Iran Va Gharb (Creating Architecture in Iran and West Trading). Tehran: Paykan, 1992.

[24]. Farahi, Farshad. "World of Similitude: The Metamorphosis of Iranian Architecture 52." AD: Iran: Past, Present and Future (April 2012): 52-61.

[25]. Feysi, Mohsen, and Mahdi Khak Zand. Tajziye va Tahlil Dah Asar az Memari Moaser Iran (Iranian Contemporary Architecture: Analysing 10 Projects). Tehran: Matin, 2010.

[26]. Ghahi Bolkhari, Hassan. "sheikh Akbar and Sheikh Ahmad." Andishe Dini 17 2005.

[27]. Ghobadian, Vahid. Sabk Shenasi Va Memari Nazari Dar Memari Moaser Iran (Styles and Concepts in Iranian Contemporary Architecture). Tehran: Elmememar, 2013.

[28]. Habibi, Sayyed Mohsen. Sharh Jaryanhaye Fekri Memari Va Shahrsazi Dar Iran Moaser (Intellectual Trends in the Contemporary Iranian Architecture and Urbanism). Tehran: Cultural Research Bureau, 2010.

[29]. Issawi, Charles. "The Iranian Economy 1925-1975: Fifty Years of Economic Development." In Iran under the Pahlavis, edited by george Lenczowski, 130-66. standford, CA: Hoover Institution Publication 1978.

[30]. Ivanove, Mikhaeil. New History of Iran. Translated by Hoshang Tizabi. Tehran: Eslouj, 1977.

[31]. Jodidio, Philip. Iran, Architecture for Changing Societies: An International Seminar. Umberto Allemandi & C. for Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 2004.

[32]. Katozian, Mohammadali. "Dolat Va Jame Dar Doran Reza Shah." (Society and Government in Reza Shah Period) In Dictated Modernity edited by Toraj Atabaki, 23–64. Tehran: Ghoghnous, 2006.

[33]. ———. Eghtesad Siasei Iran (Political Economy of Iran). Tehran: Papirous, 2006.

[34]. Khosravi, Hamed, "Politics of DeMonst(e)ration," Tehran Projects 6 (2013): 1-10.

[35]. Kianei, Mostafa. Memari Dore Aval Pahlavi (Architecture of Fisrt Pahlavi Era). Tehran: Institute of Study for Contemporary History of Iran, 2004.

[36]. Laylaz, Said. Moje Dovom: Tajadodsazie Amerane (Second Wave: Dictated Modernity). Tehran: Nilofar, 2013.

[37]. Masud, Amir Bani. Iranian Contemporary Architecture. Tehran: Honare Memari, 2009.

[38]. ———. Memari Moaser Iran, Takapoei Beyn Sonat Va Modernite (Iranian Contemporary Architecture: An Inquiry into Tradition and Modernity). Tehran: Honare Memari, 2009.

[39]. Mokhtari, Eskandar. Miras Memari Modern Iran (the Heritage of Modern Architecture of Iran). Tehran Daftar Pajoheshhaye Farhangi, 2011.

[40]. Mozaffari, Ali. "Inscribing a Homeland: Iranian Identity and The Pre-Islamic and Islamic Collective Imaginations of Place." PhD thesis, University of Western Australia, 2010.

[41]. Nadoshan, "Mohammadali Islami. Bar Iran Chegozasht? Edare Iran Ba Farhang Gheyre Irani." (What Did Happen for Iran?) Etelaat, 29 Januarary, 1978.

[42]. Naghsh, Moshaver. Naghd Ashari Az Memari Moaser Iran (Criticizing Iranian Contemporary Architecture). Tehran: Vezarat Maskan va Shahrsazi, 2007.

[43]. Naraghi, Ehsan. Anche Khod Dasht (What He Had). Tehran: Amirkabir, 1976.

[44]. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for its Study by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā", al-Bīrūni, and Ibn Sīnā. London: Thames and Hudson, 1978.

[45]. ———. Introduction to Islamic Patterns: An Analytical and Cosmological Approach, by Keith Critchlow. New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

[46]. ———. Introduction to The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture, by Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

[47]. ———. Islam and the Plight of Modern Man. Kazi Publications, 2001.

[48]. ———. Islam in the Modern World : Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition. New York HarperOne, 2010.

[49]. ———. "Islam, Muslims, and Modern Technology." Islam & Science, no. 12 (2005): 109-18.

[50]. ———. Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man. Unwin Paperbacks, 1968.

[51]. ———. Science and Civilization in Islam. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.

[52]. ———. Sufi Essays.London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1972.

[53]. ———. Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ibn 'Arabī. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.

[54]. ———. Traditional Islam in the Modern World. New York: Chapman and Hall, 1990.

[55]. ———. "The Principles of Islamic Architecture and Contemporary Urban Problems." Arts & the Islamic World (1985): 33-6.

[56]. ———. "Who Is Man? The Perennial Aswer of Islam." In The Sword of Gnosis edited by J Needleman, 203-17: Penguin Books Inc, 1974.

[57]. Navai, Kambiz. "An Architectural Analysis: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Iran." International Journal of Architectural Research 4(1) (March 2010): 194–207.

[58]. Orcad, Bernnand. 'Shahrsazi Va Bohran Shahri Da Ahd Mohammadreza Pahlavi." (Urbanisation and Urban Crisis in Mohamadreza's Period) In Tehran Paytakht Devist Sale, edited by Shahriar Adl and Bernnad Orcad, 231–248. Tehran: Sazman Moshaver Fani va Mohandesi Shahr Tehran, 1996.

[59]. Pakdaman, Behroz. "Negahi Kotah Bar Shiveha Va Gerayeshhaye Memari Dar Tehran." (Review of Architecture Styles in Tehran) In Ketab Tehran, 52–80. Tehran: Roshangaran, 1994.

[60]. Pope, Arthur. A Survey of Persian Art. London: Oxford University Press, 1930.

[61]. Rajaee, Farhang. Islamism and Modernism, the Changing Discourse in Iran. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007.

[62]. Safardost, Ahmad. Dar Jostejoye Hoviyat Shahri Rasht (Searching for Identity of Rasht). Tehran: Sazaman Omran va Nosazi Shahr Tehran, 2005.

[63]. Sani, Rafooneh Mokhtarshahi. "A Conceptual Undrestanding for Teaching the History of Islamic Architecture: An Iranian (Persian) Perspective." Archnet IJAR 3, no. 1 (2009): 233-44.

[64]. Satari, Jalal. Derbi Dolat Farhangi, Negahi Be Barkhi Takhavolat Farhangi Va Honari Dar Bazpasin Salhaye Nezampishin. Tehran: Markaz, 2000.

[65]. Sedigh, Isa. Cultural History of Iran: From Beginning until Present. Tehran: Tehran University, 1975.

[66]. Seyhoun, Houshang. "Mosahebe Ba Seyhoun." (Interview with Sayhon) Bank Sakhtemani, no. 1 (1961): 10–13.

[67]. ———.Housing Seyhoun, Half a Century Artistic Activities in the World of Art and Architecture. Houston: Sabco Intrests, 1998.

[68]. Shakur, Tasleem. "East Goes West." Mimar, no. 40 (1990): 30.

[69]. Shaygan, Daryoush. Asia Dar Barabar Gharb (Asia against West). Tehran: Amirkabir, 1999.

[70]. Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. Islam in Modern History. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

[71]. Soroush, Abdolkarim. Bigger Than Ideology. Tehran: Serat, 1996.

[72]. ———. Ghomar Asheghane. Tehran: Serat, 1989.

[73]. Willer, Ponald N. Iran, Past and Present. Princeton, Nj: Princeton University Press, 1981.