

## **The Role and Contribution of Imam Khomeini In Iran's Islamic Revolution**

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The Revolution in Iran is termed by the historians as one of the biggest historical events in the past 100 years. A revolution is a mass movement that aims to establish a new political regime by violently transforming the existing government. The Iranian Revolution of 1978–1979 violently ended the monarchy of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (1919–1980) and replaced it with an Islamic republic, the theocracy of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1901–1989).

The shah's reign had been briefly interrupted between 1951 and 1953 with the interlude of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq (1881–1967). This revolution is regarded as the main turning point of the Islamic World as it opened the eyes of those Islamic states although being powerful with the riches of oil are still being played under western powers.

We have to take a look at the historical elements that lead up to the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Post World War II created a very different world. Colonial (English, French, Dutch, and other) control of much of the Mid-East, Asia, Africa, South American (the Third World) was on the wane. Two superpowers emerged, the United States and the USSR (Russia).

The USSR leaving regimes were based on a military government with socialist tendencies and a strong tribal, regional or ethnic minority base; this was the case in Algeria, Syria, Iraq, South Yemen and Egypt.

### **BACKGROUND**

Different to popular western misconceptions, the Iranian Revolution of the late 1970s was remarkable in that it was motivated by a large alliance of classes and religious groups within Iran; each with similar social, economic, political, and religious agendas. These groups were united in majority in their initiative to topple the Shah Kingship due to his heavy handed, and dictatorial style of rule (Friedman, 2009).

Additionally, these various groups and organizations were deeply dissatisfied with restrictions on access to the political process, the tight concentration of Iran's huge oil revenues into the hands of a very small, elite group orbiting around the Shah, as well as a growing perception that Iran was becoming too westernized and had lost her grounding in Iranian traditional values and cultures.

It explains that, in 1979, millions of Iranians succeeded in removing Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979), the Shah of Iran and forced him to leave the country. While the Shah was known as a 'darling to the West', he tried to authoritarian modernize too rapidly and did not adapt his political institutions sufficiently to the economic and social changes he had brought about.

Although inspired by hopes for democracy, economic prosperity for all classes, gender equality and a leadership that would not allow Iranian culture to be destroyed by the Western values; many Iranian women joined the rebellion.

The world was surprised and astonished by the Iranian Revolution, which was led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in exile in Paris. The proposal relates that the Muslims believed that the modern age was 20th century remake of the Jahiliyya of ancient times that had to be destroyed as Mohammed the prophet had destroyed its predecessor. That is why Ruhollah Khomeini and his team bore the seeds of this revolution to overthrow the non-Islamic and tyrant rule of the Shah (Seyed, 2002).

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 has been described as one of the epochal events of the twentieth century, inaugurating a period of Islamic revivalism and struggles against "modernization" in many nations where Islam is the predominant religion. In discussions of the 1979 Revolution, the significance of Islamic fundamentalism, the use of political repression by the regime of Mohammed Reza Shah (heretofore referred to as the monarchist regime), particularly the violence perpetrated by SAVAK (the secret police), widespread corruption by individual public officials and members of the oligarchic economic elite, as well as official favoritism, rising income inequality, and the impact of "Western" imperialism have all played causal roles.

However, there has been a marked paucity of discussions of the way the 1979 Revolution was shaped by struggles over class processes, defined as the particular forms in which surplus labor was produced and distributed. In particular, discussions of the 1979 Revolution have failed to recognize;

- i) The role of internecine conflict within the ranks of capitalist appropriators, and
- ii) The importance of ancient (or self-exploiting) direct producers and their allied agents in the collapse of the monarchist regime. It is the argument of this chapter that struggles over class processes were a significant factor in shaping the crises that culminated in the 1979 Revolution and of subsequent struggles over the specific form of economic and non-economic relationships in the post-revolutionary Islamic republic. The primary thesis of this chapter is that the efforts of the monarchist regime to create a particular form of capitalism, herein described as oligarchic Capitalism that would serve as catalyst for Iran's rapid economic growth created a range of social crises that threatened the survival of ancients (or self-exploitation) and non-oligarchic capitalism.

The policies of the monarchist regime sometimes referred to as the modernization programme had a definite impact upon class processes in Iran, created and then deepened the social crises that threatened pre-existing configurations of surplus appropriation, particularly the prevalence of self-exploitation in the rural villages and urban bazaars, resulting in complex forms of resistance (Gabriel, 2001) .

Among those with self-interest in opposing the modernization program were a wide range of social agents who desired an end to these crises, including non-oligarchic capitalist appropriators, ancient direct producers, and social agents allied to one or the other or both of these groups of appropriators, including the Shi'a Islamic clergy.

In so far as the monarchist regime's modernization program was designed to displace self-exploitation, which was arguably the most widespread form of surplus appropriation in terms of numbers of direct producers involved, with oligarchic capitalist exploitation, the 1979 Revolution might better be described as a counter revolution, i.e. a change in the political relationships constituting the state designed to avert a gradually progressing economic revolution. On the other hand, capitalist exploitation was clearly dominant in terms of the total value of produced commodities in Iran (Ibid).

## **THE UNDISPUTED PERSONALITY OF AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI**

The personality of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini was a critical element in defining Iran's war role. Khomeini's background, charisma, and thirst for revenge on those who inflicted personal injury upon him influenced the atmosphere leading to the war. One can understand Khomeini's personality and beliefs by examining his background. Khomeini's paternal origins were not Iranian, but Indian, and he spent a substantial part of his life outside Iran.

His devotion to Shia Islam, reflected by his simplistic ascetic lifestyle focused on spiritual matters, attracted the majority of Iranian peasant-oriented society. Many of these traditional citizens flocked to the modern cities seeking opportunity, only to wind up crowded into slums.

Khomeini's Islamic ideology countered the former Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's Iranian nationalism associated with the glory and affluence of the pre-Islamic Persian Empire of Cyrus the Great. Khomeini's connections outside Iran inhibited his adoption of Persian nationalist ideology in the war. But for many Iranians the Iraqi invasion reignited anti-Arab historic feelings dating from the medieval Islamic conquest. For Khomeini, his religious faith enabled him to confront stronger opponents in hostile environments (Gabriel, 2001, Shahi, 2009).

Khomeini's charisma drew followers of Islam, especially in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, where Shia'ism dominates. The Shiites for centuries served as a low caste of underprivileged heretics throughout the Sunni dominated Moslem world. Shia'ism emphasizes martyrdom and suffering along with the belief in a messianic era entering upon the return of the Twelfth Imam, a descendant of Mohammad. Khomeini's life of suffering and final return to Iran replicated a legacy of the Shiite experience.

Khomeini's life paralleled in many ways the sect's medieval founder, Imam Hussein, whose army of followers was defeated by a mightier Sunni-led Umayyad Army. In the aftermath of his defeat, Hussein, the model of martyrdom, was beheaded and his followers were left persecuted and oppressed. Although Khomeini denied assertions of being the messianic 12th Imam returning to bring world redemption, Shiites called him "Imam," alluding to his religious stature of messiah among the illiterate poor.

Khomeini's record of overpowering enemies such as the Shah, President Jimmy Carter, and Saddam Hussein through the Iranian Revolution, the American Hostage Crisis, and the Iran-Iraq war was viewed by his followers as miraculous and a reward for his piety (Society, 2011).

There was a revengeful side to Khomeini's personality which was cast in religious terms of good overcoming evil among his faithful. Khomeini sought personal revenge on those who wronged him by equating personal enemies with enemies of the Iranian state. Khomeini's targets for revenge were the Shah, Jimmy Carter, and Saddam Hussein. Khomeini suffered harassment and expulsion both under the Shah and Saddam Hussein. He finally died in 1989.

### **IMAM KHOMEINI'S POLITICAL THOUGHT AND LEGACY**

- Imam Khomeini adamantly opposed monarchy, arguing that only rule by a leading Islamic jurist would insure Shariat-e-Muhammadi was properly followed (velayat-e faqih).
- Imam Khomeini believed that Iran should strive towards self-reliance. He viewed certain elements of Western culture as being inherently decadent and a corrupting influence upon the youth. As such, he often advocated the banning of popular Western fashions, music, cinema, and literature. His ultimate vision was for Islamic nations to converge together into a single unified power, in order to avoid alignment with either side (the West or the East), and he believed that this would happen at some point in the near future.
- Imam Khomeini expressed support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; in Sahifah-e-Noor (Vol. 2, page 242), he states: "We would like to act according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We would like to be free. We would like independence."
- Imam Khomeini led an ascetic lifestyle, being deeply interested in mysticism, and was against the accumulation of land and wealth by the clergy.
- Many of Imam Khomeini's political and religious ideas were considered to be progressive and reformist by leftist intellectuals and activists prior to the Revolution.
- Imam Khomeini's definition of democracy existed within an Islamic framework. His last will and testament largely focuses on this line of thought, encouraging both the general Iranian populace, the lower economic classes in particular, and the clergy to maintain their commitment to fulfilling Islamic revolutionary ideals (Shraghi, 2009; Wikipedia, 2012).

### **THE SIX MAJOR POINTS IN THIS REVOLUTION**

i) First, a broad coalition of opposition forces came together to overthrow a dictatorial regime, building on longstanding social grievances but also energizing nationalist sentiment against a state and ruler seen as too compliant to foreign interests. The coalition mobilized under Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership ranged from liberal and Marxist to conservative and religious forces: in effect a classic populist alliance.

ii) Second, the victory of the revolution both required and were facilitated by the state's weakness of leadership and internal divisions. The Shah was ill, his advisers and generals were uncertain. The resemblance to other figures and regimes in a time of crisis - Louis XVI and Czar Nicholas II, as well as Charles I of England - is evident.

iii) Third, the revolution possessed the quality that distinguishes mere coups d'état or rebellions from major revolutions: namely, it was not just political (in the sense of changing the political elite and the constitution or legitimating system of the country but had profound and ongoing social and economic consequences. Because of it, Iran today has a new social order and a new set of social values - even as a new revolutionary elite, an Islamic nomenclature, united by ties of power, business and marriage, controls state revenues.

iv) Fourth, the revolution's core ideology may have propounded the need for a new, radical and egalitarian order; but it was supplemented by pre-existing ideas that were crucial to sustaining domestic support (above all nationalism and a sense of the country's historic standing and mission). Ayatollah Khomeini at first refused to use the word fatherland, and denounced secular nationalism as an insult to Islam. But with the invasion by Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1980 all this changed, and he and other leaders adopted the Iranian version of the term used by French revolutionaries in the 1790s.

v) Fifth, the explosion of revolution at the center of a multi-ethnic country - and driven especially from within its dominant ethnic component - had profound reverberations on the relations between the Iran's different national components. In particular, it led not to the era of fraternal cooperation and solidarity anticipated in much of the political rhetoric of the time, but to conflict and war.

vi) Here again, the pattern - a revolt at the heart of a plural country and the consolidation of a new authoritarian regime provoking contrary forces in the periphery - has rich historical precedents. The Young Turk revolution of 1908, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, and the Ethiopian revolution of 1974 are prime examples; their echo in Iran concerned, above all, the Kurds. The hopes of this significant part of the population, of an autonomous Kurdistan within a democratic Iran (and they knew the first was impossible without the second) were to be dashed.

vii) Sixth, the revolution in Iran had explosive international consequences. There were persistent attempts to export the revolution to neighboring countries, which intensified regional rivalries and fostered conditions that led to inter-state war. The Iranian revolution's efforts to promote its state interests and extend itself soon acquired resemblances to a reviving empire - with traces of France and Russia in particular, not least the contradictory trends whereby some forces in the region were inspired by the revolution while others drew on older antagonisms (such as Saddam Hussein's excoriation of Khomeini as a magus [Zoroastrian priest] and more recent concerns about a powerful new Shi'a "crescent") (Halliday, 2009).

## **CONCLUSION**

This revolution (more than any other in history) did not rely on force, military rebellion or guerrilla war but on politics. This is true in particular with regard to the two instruments that European revolutionaries had themselves long dreamed of using The mass mobilization of people in the streets (in the Iranian case, the largest such opposition demonstrations ever recorded anywhere) and the political general strike to identify.

The non-acceptance of the Shah's decision (which, from October 1978, paralyzed the economy and foreign trade with foreign national particular American). This was perhaps the most consistent and original aspect of the Iranian revolution: in its political form and process, and despite its religious and traditional appearance, it was said to be the first modern revolution.

Iran's experience departed from the standard prescribed by both historical example and textbooks of historical sociology: namely, that a revolution's crucial requirement was the weakening of the state, usually as a result of foreign pressure - either defeat in war or by invasion, or via the withdrawal of support from an external supporter (in the case of China and Cuba, this was the United States). Some people (majorly from the West and Middle East) argue that this revolution was initially a Worker's Revolution which was later on hijacked by the extremist Islamic Clerics of the country.

This revolution was termed as the Islamic Revolution as the country had lost its Islamic Ideology throughout the Shah's Rule and struggle was to re-instate the Islamic Values and the Sharia't Law in the Country. So the accusation stands false on its ground rejected by ever concerning source.

It was the Ayatollah's effort that the country (the people and all Clerics belonging to different sects and ethics) collectively made him the country's Supreme Leader of the country (a person who is

responsible for the election of the government and the Islamic Constitution) where he remained till his death in 1989. It was said that his funeral was attended by 6 Million people approximately which is the biggest in history until now.

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