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State, society and labour in Iran, 1906-1941 : a social history of Iranian industrialization and labour with reference to the textile industry

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Chapter Two: From the Consolidation of the Qajar Monarchy to the Constitutional Revolution: Iran in the Nineteenth Century

Introduction

Political, economic and social developments which took place throughout the 19th century in Iran paved the way for the Constitutional Revolution at the turn of the 20th century and played major roles in shaping the subsequent history of the country. It is thus necessary to provide an overview, albeit a brief one, of this period. This chapter outlines the 19th century historical background of Iran, emphasizing its economic and social and political aspects. In the following pages, economic developments are handled with a special emphasis on the crafts industries and their development in the context of European economic penetration. Following this discussion is a consideration of social developments and the state of Iranian society at the turn of the 20th century, when our narrative of the social history of Iranian textile labour begins. The chapter ends with concluding remarks about the 19th century.

Under Qajar rule, the foundations of modern Iran were laid. Thus, ‘the history of nineteenth century Persia forms a bridge between the medieval and the modern periods’¹. The century was marked by political, economic and social developments out of which several ideological currents emerged. Due to both internal circumstances and external influences, several ideologies emerged in Iran which ranged from nationalism to socialism and from Islamism to anti-clericalism. Yet it was, above all else, constitutionalism that changed the course of the Iranian history. Rather than being a distinct ideology, constitutionalism was an amalgam of many ideologies, and it brought together otherwise conflicting groups. The outbreak of the Constitutional Revolution in 1905 significantly weakened the Qajar monarchy, which was to disappear at the end of the first quarter of the century. All of these developments had important societal consequences and significantly transformed Iranian society.

Reforms under the Shadow of Arms: Military, Politics and Reforms in Iran 1813-1848

With the decline of Safavid rule in 1736, a period of tribal conflict ensued in Iran during which several tribes struggled for power. Throughout the period, the country remained disturbed and fragmented and the main power bases changed hands at relatively short

¹Ann K. S Lambton, *Qajar Persia* (London, I. B. Tauris, 1987), viiii.

intervals between the Afsharids, Zands and Qajars. The instability ended a few years before the turn of the 19th century, with Agha Mohammad Khan's rise to ultimate power in 1796 as the founder of the Qajar dynasty. The Qajar tribe had been one of the original components of the Safavid Qizilbash confederacy.² Having remained a hostage of Karim Khan Zand in Shiraz, the capital of the Zand dynasty (1751-1794), for almost twenty years, Agha Mohammad Khan closely observed the advance of Zand power which he was soon to replace with his own. The turning point was in 1779, when upon Karim Khan's death Agha Mohammad Khan escaped from Shiraz to his homeland, Mazandaran. After gradually consolidating his power in the Alborz region he moved further to central Persia and captured Fars and Kerman. He reached to the peak of his rule by extending his control over Georgia and Khorasan. Soon after he became the almost undisputed ruler of Iran, Agha Mohammad Khan was stabbed to death by his servants in 1797. In 1798 Fath Ali Khan, Agha Mohammad Khan's nephew, crowned himself Shah and became the second Qajar Shah, after his uncle, who had been castrated in boyhood by the enemies of his father and thus had no male heir.

By the time Fath Ali Shah died after his nearly four decade-long reign, the country had suffered the devastating consequences of two bitter defeats at the hand of Russians, and the burden of subsequent treaties. The first war between Iran and Russia started with the Russian invasion of the Caucasian parts of Iran in 1804 and lasted, though intermittently, for nine years until 1813. Even though Fath Ali Shah personally took part in the battles, the greater part of the war was commanded by Abbas Mirza, the heir apparent and the prince-governor of Azarbaijan. He was deservedly regarded by many European observers 'as the one man capable of initiating a national revival'.³ In 1809 the Shah obtained a fatwa from the mullahs who declared holy war (*jihad*) against the Russians and proclaimed that 'the king of the Muslims is in this battle a ghazi fighting the Holy War' and urged Muslims to take part in this war claiming that the participants in the war would merit remission of their sins on the Day of the Judgement.⁴ The war was not a complete military disaster for Iran from the beginning until the end. Quite to the contrary, Iran proved successful from time to time during long-lasting fights. However in 1812, the defeat of Napoleon, whom the Russians had been fighting for some time, enabled Russia to allocate greater resources to the Caucasian front.

² Gavin R. G Hambly, "Agha Muhammad Khan and the Establishment of the Qajar Dynasty", in *The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. 7, From Nader Shah to the Islamic Republic*, eds., Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly & Charles Melville (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), 104.

³ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴ Hasan Fasai, *History of Persia Under Qajar Rule*, trans. Heribert Busse (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 127-28.

The difference between the modern, well-equipped and disciplined Russian troops and the tribal forces of Iran was decisive. In the end, Iran had to accept a humiliating peace treaty known as Treaty of Golestan signed in 1813. According to the treaty Iran lost many of its Caucasian provinces: Qarabagh, Ganja, Shirvan, Baku, Georgia and parts of Talesh. Also, Russia gained the exclusive right to have warships on the Caspian Sea, which left Iranian shores vulnerable to Russian attack. In addition to these conditions, Russian recognition would be necessary for legitimate succession to the Persian throne.

The treaty satisfied none of the parties and Abbas Mirza, who did not consider it as a definitive settlement, prepared for the next war. News about Russian misconduct against Muslims in the lost territories drove large numbers of Muslims, and even Georgian Christians, into exile in Iran.⁵ Finally in 1826 a new fatwa was issued which declared that opposition to the jihad was a ‘sign of unbelief’.⁶ Abbas Mirza was confident in his newly organized army, under the *nezam-e jadid* (The New Order). Yet, Iranian troops could not hold out for long against the Russians who secured a decisive outcome after a short struggle. The subsequent Treaty of Turkomanchai signed in 1828 only added to the disaster brought about by the previous treaty. On top of the previous territorial losses, the khanates of Erivan and Nakhchivan were lost to Russia. Iran had to pay Russia a huge sum, 20,000,000 roubles, as a war indemnity. Further diplomatic and economic privileges given to Russia were also among the terms of the treaty. The economic aspects of this treaty will be dealt with in the following sections. Suffice it to say, however, that the treaty determined for a long time the basic frames of Russo-Iranian economic relations. In political terms, the wars fought against Russia and the two treaties dealt major blows to Iran and its newly founded dynasty. The last but not the least important consequence of the post-Turkomanchai status quo was the ever-increasing influence of Russia over Iran, a phenomenon which was to bring about far reaching consequences in the political, economic and cultural spheres in the decades to follow.

Despite his ambitious military reforms, Abbas Mirza’s army fell short of expectations during the fights against the Russians. The defeats at the hands of the Russians were both the reason for and the result of the strikingly inadequate attention given by Qajar Shahs to the creation of a modern military force similar to those created by the neighbouring Ottomans from late 18th century onwards, or by Mohammad Ali of Egypt in early 19th century. Russian-officered

⁵ F. Kazemzadeh, “Iranian relations with Russia and the Soviet Union to 1921”, in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, 336.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 336.

Cossack Brigades, formed rather late in the century, remained the only serious and disciplined military force for a long time. Nonetheless, Abbas Mirza's reform program was not restricted to the military sphere and his legacy was to leave its mark on the rest of the century. He was the first Iranian ruler to send students abroad. Their goal was to professionalize mostly military-related affairs and institutions, but the graduates also brought back with them European ideas and material culture, such as the printing press and the newspaper. Westernization had made its way into Iran, but how it could be accommodated to the native culture was yet to be determined. Fath Ali Shah's death and that of the heir apparent one year earlier secured Mohammad Mirza a peaceful accession to the throne with the support of the British and the consent of Russia. Mohammad Shah reigned from 1834 until 1848. Russia had already made their power felt in Iran and Britain was soon to join it. With the two treaties signed in 1836 and 1841 between Iran and Britain, the British gained the same privileges previously conceded to the Russians, plus the status of one of the 'Most Favoured Nations'. The rivalry between the two Great Powers of the time for exercising influence on Iran brought about two diverse consequences. On the one hand it prolonged the life of the Qajar dynasty, whose ruling elite came to excel in balancing one power against the other.⁷ Although Iran has never officially become a colony of either of the two powers the degree of the foreign presence in this country made its independence, especially in economic terms, questionable. Consequently the Qajar dynasty fell further into disfavour once the patriotic, and later nationalist, feelings merged with heightened anti-imperialism amongst the higher and lower classes of society. This paved the way for a number of major political, social and economic developments which characterized Naser al-Din Shah's reign (1848-1896).

⁷ Nothing could illustrate this policy better than the words of Hosayn Khan, a nineteenth century Persian diplomat. In an interview with Prince Metternich he held in Vienna on the way back from his mission to Britain to congratulate Queen Victoria on her accession in 1838, Hosayn Khan described the attitude of Muhammad Shah as follows: "The Shah is sovereign of his country and as such he desires to be independent. There are two great powers with whom Persia is more or less in direct contact—Russia, and the English power in India. The first has more military means than the second: on the other hand England has more money than Russia. The two powers can thus do Persia good and evil; and in order above all to avoid the evil the Shah is desirous of keeping himself with respect to them within the relations of good friendship and free from all contestation. If, on the contrary, he finds himself threatened on the one side he will betake himself to the other in search for support which he shall stand in need of. That is not what he desires but what he may be driven for he is not more the friend of one than of the other of those powers: he desires to be with them on a footing of equal friendship. What he cherishes above all is his independence and the maintenance of good relations with foreign powers". Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 88.

From Reform to Revolution: The Age of Ambivalent Reforms and the Coming of the Constitutional Revolution 1848-1905

Naser al-Din Shah's reign, particularly in its early years, was marked by a series of reforms mainly launched by his prime-minister Mirza Taqi Khan, who was also known as Amir Kabir. During his tenure between 1848 and 1852 Amir Kabir undertook a series of reforms similar to those of Abbas Mirza which the former had personally witnessed during his early career in Tabriz.⁸ He opened modern schools, and in 1851 founded the *dar al-fonun*, (the House of Sciences), and took several initiatives to promote native industries.⁹ Amir Kabir's reforms were multidimensional and included almost every aspect of the political, military, economic and cultural spheres. In many respects he was a typical ambitious modernist Muslim statesman like Sultan Mahmud II in Istanbul or Mehmed Ali Pasha in Egypt. The implementation of his far reaching reform program required the adoption of sound economic measures to ensure economic development and directing extra revenue to the state treasury. In the mid-19th century another important development took place in Iran and it brought about many important long term consequences. A young merchant from Shiraz named Sayyid Mohammad Ali using reinterpretation of Traditions concerning the Hidden Imam, proclaimed the coming of a new age and himself as the Bab (Gate) to the Hidden Imam, the Twelfth Imam in Twelver Shiism, whom he promised was soon to arrive.¹⁰ Despite clerical opposition, Naser al-Din Shah did not take any attempt against the movement in the beginning. The Bab was executed in 1850, yet the turning point came in 1852 when a few of his followers were accused of an assassination plot against the Shah. Babis were persecuted and many were executed, including the female poet-leader Qorrat al-Ayn. Out of Babism emerged Bahatism, preached in 1860s by Baha-Allah, who claimed to be 'He whom God shall make manifest' as promised by the Bab. In some respects, the movement had reformist ideas but from an Islamic point of view their teaching triggered severe criticism.

When Amir Kabir was first dismissed in 1851 and then executed in 1852, his reform program was also set aside. The unpopular Mirza Agha Khan Nuri was appointed as prime minister until 1858 when he was dismissed by the Shah, who was dissatisfied with his lax conduct in office. From this time until the early 1870s Naser al-Din Shah ruled without a prime minister,

⁸ The following is a classic study on Amir Kabir: Fereydon Adamiyat, *Amir Kabir va Iran* (Amir Kabir and Iran) (Tehran: Khawarezmi, 1985/1362).

⁹ Adamiyat, *Amir Kabir*, 354-367 & 387-401.

¹⁰ For an ample study on the Babi movement see: Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca and London Cornell University Press, 1989).

first through a number of ministries and then through a consultative body he established in 1859 which included princes, notables, mullahs, clerks and officials.¹¹ In 1871 the Shah appointed Mirza Hosayn Khan, Moshir al-Dawleh the Sepahsalar as prime minister. Coming from a successful career at the Iranian Foreign Service he had closely observed the Ottoman reform movement from 1856 onwards and was in close contact with such reformists as Fath Ali Akhundzadeh and Malkom Khan. A true successor to Amir Kabir, Moshir al-Dawleh undertook a series of reforms, mostly administrative, in order to secure a rational administration and end corruption that was very common both in the centre and the provinces. His reform program faced resistance from courtiers as well as from the clergy, and his opponents finally succeeded in having him dismissed in 1873. Following the dismissal of Moshir al-Dawleh, a period of more arbitrary rule by the Shah started.

Unpopular policies, particularly those related to the economy, further alienated diverse segments of society and intensified discussions about restricting the despotic powers of the monarch. A number of concessions granted to foreign nationals from the early 1870s onwards were what pulled on the trigger. In fact, this economic policy was not the creation of Naser al-Din Shah alone. After the attempts to promote native industries by Mirza Abbas and Amir Kabir failed to amount to much, a period began when the main financial policy was to secure as much cash as possible from customs duties and foreign investment. This policy was the major point of contention not only between Abbas Mirza and Naser al-Din Shah, but also between the two reformist chief ministers, namely Amir Kabir and Moshir al-Dawleh. As Nikki Keddie observes, although Amir Kabir believed in and acted to provide a development policy independent of Britain and Russia, Moshir al-Dawleh favoured British involvement in Iran's protection and development.¹² He was a strong supporter of the famous Reuter Concession, granted to the British subject Julius de Reuter, which he helped persuade the Shah to sign in 1872.¹³ This concession described by Lord Curzon, himself an economic and political imperialist, as "the most complete and extraordinary surrender of the entire industrial resources of a kingdom into foreign hands that had probably ever been dreamed of".¹⁴ He was hardly exaggerating. As a matter of fact the concession mainly granted Reuter the right to build a railway from the Caspian ports southward, but it also included exclusive rights to the erection of factories, processing minerals, undertaking irrigation works, launching agricultural

¹¹ Nikki Keddie, "Iran under the Late Qajars 1848-1922", in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, 183.

¹² Keddie, "Iran under the Late Qajars", 186-7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁴ Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1981), 58-9.

improvements, and developing new forms of transport.¹⁵ Internal opposition, Russian hostility, and the lack of British support brought about the end of the concession. Apart from political and economic implications, the movement against the concession was in a sense a dress-rehearsal of the Tobacco Protest which was to take place less than two decades later. Maybe for the first time in modern Iranian history a heterogeneous group ranging from the notables to mullahs and from intellectuals to common people united, though on a small-scale, for a common cause.¹⁶

A similar oppositional coalition came on the scene again in early 1890s. This time the Shah granted in 1890 a complete monopoly over the production, sale and export of all Iranian tobacco to a British subject, Major Gerald Talbot, for fifty years. This concession was not essentially different from the previous concession attempts of the Shah. Yet the ensuing mass opposition movement, which is justifiably described as ‘a prelude to the Constitutional Revolution’¹⁷ was not only broader in scope than the movement against the Reuter concession, but was also operationally more effective. The concession was kept secret for a while until late in 1890, when the newspaper *Akhtar*, published in Istanbul, disclosed the agreement. Tobacco was widely grown in Iran, profiting many cultivators, landlords, shopkeepers, and exporters, along with mullahs who had close contacts with many of these groups. On the strength of the Treaty of Turkomancahi, Russia protested against not only this particular concession but any concession to be given to foreigners.¹⁸ From early 1891 onwards a series of protests, some of them rather bloody, took place in various cities of the country. Clerical opposition was further emphasized by a subsequent fatwa by Hajj Mirza Hasan Shirazi, a prominent mullah, which denounced the concession in the following words: “In the name of God the Merciful, the Forgiving. Today the use of tobacco in whatever fashion, is tantamount to war against the Imam of the Age [the Hidden Imam], may God hasten his glad advent.”¹⁹

With protests already underway, the fatwa further contributed to the agitation. Smoking was abandoned altogether, reportedly even by the wives of the Shah and by non-Muslims too, and the bazaars closed down. The concession was finally abolished early in 1892 with a cost of £ 500,000 to be paid as compensation to the company which the government borrowed from the

¹⁵ Nikki Keddie, “Iran under the Late Qajars”, 187.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 189-90.

¹⁷ Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 223.

¹⁸ Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 227.

¹⁹ Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 247.

British-owned Imperial Bank as the first Qajar foreign loan. The Tobacco Protest of 1891-92 was a turning point in many ways. From a societal viewpoint, Iranians were once again convinced that ‘the Shah and his government were selling the country to unbelievers’ and thus they should keep an eye on the government’s policies.²⁰ Besides, the common ‘enemy’—the foreigner—became more manifest than ever, a phenomenon which was to become one of the main components of the oppositional discourse in almost every major disturbance in Iran in the decades to follow. Finally, although a relatively quiet period followed the protests, the government’s tobacco policy further paved the way for constitutionalist demands and the success of the protests reinforced popular perception as to the utility of collective action. Naser al-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896 and his son Mozaffar al-Din succeeded him to the throne. The discontent accumulated especially during the last decades of the 19th century could find during Mozaffar al-Din’s reign a rather favourable atmosphere for collective action, which brought about the Constitutional Revolution in 1905.

Economy and Society in 19th Century

Geographical factors had an immense influence on Iran’s demographic and economic development. A lack of navigable rivers and lakes, shortage of rainfall, and a vast central desert surrounded by four formidable mountain ranges—the Zagros, the Alborz, the Mekran and the Uplands—fragmented the population into secluded villages, isolated towns and nomadic tribes.²¹ Although there are no reliable demographic statistics on 19th century Iran, it is estimated that while the population was around 5-6 million in the beginning of the century, by the early 20th century it had increased to some 10 million.²² It is obvious that greater part of the population lived in rural areas and the nomadic portion of the population was significant. Tribal nomadic population, on the other hand, fell from perhaps as high as 50 percent in 1800 to 33 percent by 1850 and to 25 percent by 1914.²³ In the absence of any significant transportation or communication facilities, geographic and demographic factors had important political and economic consequences. They prevented the emergence of a high

²⁰ Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 90.

²¹ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982), 11.

²² Nikki Keddie, “Iran under the Late Qajars”, 174; Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran: 1800-1914* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 20. Also, while in 1807 General Gardane estimates the population of Iran to be nine million at most, this seems to be an over-estimation. Sir John Malcolm give an estimate of six million. Ann K. S Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 44.

²³ John Foran, “The Concept of Dependent Development as a Key to the Political Economy of Qajar Iran (1800-1925)”, *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2/3 (1989), pp. 5-56. Here p. 24

degree of centralization similar to what took place in the contemporary Ottoman Empire or Egypt.²⁴ This left tribal elements enough space not only to manage their own internal affairs but also to rule over the villages within their territories.²⁵ Geographic fragmentation also made the creation of an efficient country-wide market impossible. Thus even at the turn of the twentieth century ‘Iran could in no way be regarded as a single economic unit’.²⁶ The most disastrous consequences of the physical isolation of the region were to be seen in the catastrophic famines during which while, in one region, thousands lost their lives to hunger, another region enjoyed relative prosperity.

Iran remained an agricultural economy well into the twentieth century. The population was divided into various classes, mainly the landed upper class, propertied middle class, urban wage-earners, and rural population.²⁷ As for the third and the fourth classes, and for the second also to some extent, major dislocations took place throughout the century for several reasons. Most importantly the increasing commodification of agriculture displaced many peasants from their lands and deprived them of even the essentials for their living. On the other hand, in the absence of any effective tariff protection or any notable economic policy to promote native production, increasing European economic penetration destroyed many handicrafts industries and native manufactures. As a result, the number of the urban unemployed increased during the century.

Land, Industry and Labour

Nineteenth century Persia is sometimes loosely described as feudal. Although it was, strictly speaking, a medieval European phenomenon, the term feudalism is used for Persia because it effectively explains the power structure based on the possession of land and the fragmentation of authority, leading to disorder, that was common in Qajar Iran. Yet Iran’s feudalism was more apparent than real. In principle “feudalism is a form of clientage that has been given sanction *in law*”.²⁸ Therefore, although the Qajar Iran did carry some of the characteristics of a feudal society it was not feudal in the technical sense.²⁹ Nonetheless, both the economy of

²⁴ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran*, 1.

²⁵ Keddie, “Iran under the Late Qajars”, 174.

²⁶ Julian Bharier, *Economic Development in Iran: 1900-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 7.

²⁷ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 33-4.

²⁸ Steven Hause & William Maltby, *Western Civilization: A History of European Society* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2004), 143-3. Emphasis added.

²⁹ Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, P. xi

the country and the livelihood of the populace continued to be land-based. Suffice it to say that more than four fifths of the total population was engaged in agriculture.³⁰ Four main categories of land were recognized according to the nature of ownership or the mode of its exploitation. The first was private property (*melk*, pl. *amlak*), second was the crown land (*khaleseh* pl. *khalesat*), the third category was the land immobilized for charitable or other purposes (*waqf*, pl. *awqaf*) and the fourth and the last was dead land (*mavat*) with no owner or abandoned land (*bayerat*) which was fallen out of cultivation.³¹ Unsurprisingly, the changes in the land regime as well as the shifts in the cultivated crops had remarkable economic and social consequences. Also large landowners, whether they inherited or purchased their land, or obtained it by dubious means, played important roles throughout the century and later. Peasants worked the land and paid a rent in cash or kind. Or otherwise, they cultivated it under a crop-sharing agreement (*mozara'eh*) details of which were largely determined by local customs. If a landowner rented his land or farmed it on a *moqata'eh* contract or he was granted a *toyul*, without tax-immunity, he was responsible for the payment of the government tax. Otherwise the taxes were collected by provincial governors.³²

Throughout the nineteenth century considerable demographic fluctuations occurred in Iran. Cholera and plague, which appeared several times in several regions during the century, along with other epidemic diseases, famines and other natural calamities were both the causes and results of poor agricultural methods.³³ They in turn resulted not only in the depopulation of many villages and districts, but also severely hurt non-agricultural activities, particularly those based on agricultural produce. Thus, the workforce released from agriculture fell into further misery without any viable prospect in urban industries, which did not fare any better.

The concept 'industry' is, at least in the Iranian context, far from self-explanatory. If we follow the division of industrial vs. pre-industrial we should then be cautious as to how to describe Iranian manufacturing before the introduction of factory-based production to the country, which took place through the end of the period covered in this study. Generally speaking, in Persian literature, the native manufacturing was called *san'at*/industry or *herfeh*/craft. Iran had a historically and technically well-established system of traditional artisanal industry, mainly concentrated in such cities as Isfahan, Yazd, Shiraz, Kashan,

³⁰ Ahmad Seyf, "Technical Changes in Iranian Agriculture, 1800-1906", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Jul., 1984), 142-154. Here 142.

³¹ Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 51.

³² *Ibid.*, 62-3.

³³ For an ample discussion of agricultural methods in 19th century Iran see Ahmad Seyf, "Technical Changes".

Kerman, Tabriz, Hamadan and Rasht. Production mostly took place in enterprises employing less than 10 persons³⁴ using manual power or very simple equipment. The workforce consisted, almost as a rule, of a master, a few journeymen, and some young unskilled assistants. The product was usually sold where it was produced. This type of manufacturing was organized around guilds (*senf- pl. asnaf*) which can be defined as “group[s] of townspeople engaged in the same trade or craft, who elect their own chief and who pay guild taxes; this group having economical, social, fiscal and political functions”.³⁵ The main characteristic feature of a guild is the guild tax or collective tax which a guild’s members collectively paid to the Government. As Willem Floor also points out, despite their significance, there is not adequate literature on guilds compared to, for example, the Egyptian or Ottoman cases, even though guilds attracted the greater part of attention given to Iranian manufacturing history.³⁶ Furthermore, as Donald Quataert rightly observes for the Ottoman case, in their study of Ottoman manufacturing most observers considered only two forms of industrial activities. “To them”, says Quataert, “manufacturing was visible only when it was urban-based and either guild-organized or located in a factory setting.”³⁷ The same holds true for Iran. Leaving aside the discussions of factory-based manufacturing for later sections, one can argue that the reason for and the consequence of this approach was the underestimation of the manufacturing capacity of rural settings which, needless to say, is very hard to investigate.

A comprehensive analysis of guilds falls outside of the scope of this study, as do the technical aspects of manufacturing history in Iran. Nonetheless, the crises in industrial manufactories had significant social, economic, and political consequences, requiring a further discussion of this transformation. It is important to emphasize from the beginning that when guild-based production was gradually losing ground to foreign ready-made imports especially from the mid-19th century, manufacturing as a whole found survival strategies via different avenues. Before moving on to the analysis of these strategies we should first investigate the nature of this foreign economic penetration.

It is often stated that European economic penetration was the main cause of Iran’s economic misfortune and the further decadence of its native manufacturing. Although the genesis of this

³⁴ Willem Floor, *Guilds, Merchants and Ulama in Nineteenth Century Iran* (Washington: Mage Publishers, 2009), 99.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁷ Donald Quataert, *Ottoman Manufacturing in the Age of Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2.

penetration is hard to determine, the assertion seems to have gained universal acceptance.³⁸ Not only did later generations of historians hold this view but also, as Charles Issawi states, contemporary accounts attest to it.³⁹ In order to be able to judge European impact on the 19th century Iranian economy as a whole and on the traditional crafts in particular we should first draw a picture of economic activities during the century. As a matter of fact, determining the European impact is important in order to trace the production capacity of artisanal manufacturing in Iran during the 19th century. This latter point is usually dealt with in terms of the decline of Iranian crafts. A perception of decline in the face of European imports seems to exist among the contemporary Iranians. Thus, European economic penetration gradually produced some sort of an anti-foreigner attitude amongst Iranians who in time came to accuse Europeans (*farang*) for the economic misfortunes and later for the political evils befalling them. This perception became widespread, and endured through the rest of Iranian history. Nevertheless instead of looking for the traces and the effects of economic decline, it is better to investigate how Iranian manufacturers survived this increasing European economic penetration. The fact that Iranian crafts continued to exist well into the 20th century calls for special attention to the survival strategies of craftsmen who somehow maintained their position in the domestic market.

Iran's economic contact with Europe did not start in the 19th century, nor was it a peculiarity of the Qajar era. Yet, following the relatively chaotic atmosphere of the post-Safavid period, the country achieved some stability under Qajar rule in a time which coincided with the increasing economic role of Europe worldwide. The European economic impact was consolidated with the Treaties of Golestan and Turkomanchai, which provided that both Russian imports into Iran and exports from it would pay a 5% ad valorem duty. These treaties determined the administrative framework of the expansion of Iran's trade.⁴⁰ Russia was soon followed by Britain which with the two treaties signed in 1836 and 1841 gained the same privileges, and furthermore became one of the 'Most Favoured Nations'.⁴¹ Along with their

³⁸ Keddie "Iran under the Late Qajars" , 192; Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 167; Charles Issawi, "European Economic Penetration: 1872-1921", in *The Cambridge History of Iran Vol. 7*, 604; Ahmad Ashraf, "Historical Obstacles to the Development of a Bourgeoisie in Iran", in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East from the Rise of Islam to the Present Day*, ed. M. A Cook (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). 308-332. Here P. 325; Willem Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry in Historical Perspective 1500-1925* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999), 108-13; Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 59.

³⁹ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran*, 258.

⁴⁰ Charles Issawi, "European Economic Penetration", 956.

⁴¹ The Treaty did not literally make Britain 'the most favoured nation'. Instead the first article of the treaty read as follows: "The merchants of the two mighty States are reciprocally permitted and allowed to carry into each other's territories their goods and manufactures of every description, and to sell or exchange in any part of their respective countries; and on the good which they import or export, custom duties shall be levied, that is to say,

economic aspirations in Iran, both Russia and Britain did not hesitate to block Iran's development in order to curb each other's influence over the country. For example, when the famous Reuter concession had to be cancelled by Naser al-Din Shah due to Russian and Iranian opposition, the British in return used this cancellation as a pretext to block Russian railway concessions. The Russians then signed a secret agreement with Iran blocking the construction of railways in that country for ten years.⁴²

Although European imports did not take control of Iranian markets overnight, and for a time Iranian merchants benefitted from the low customs duties on imports, especially to Russia, Iranian handicrafts were soon to be badly hurt by the increasing inflow of ready-made goods. Tariff protection could no longer be used to shelter native manufactures against the unequal competition of European machine-made goods. During the rest of the century a sharp rise was experienced in imports. Textiles came at the top of the list of imports, particularly cotton goods which by the 1850s accounted for some two-thirds of total imports.⁴³ Both Russian and British, and later on Indian, merchants increasingly adapted themselves to Iranians' demands and started to produce manufactures to local taste, while on the other hand, "a taste for European goods [was] but arising" as Fraser observed as early as 1820s.⁴⁴ Since textiles were most affected by European competition, it is useful to analyse the state of the industry during this period.

on entering the country the same amount of custom duties shall be levied, once for all, that is levied on the merchandise imported *by the merchants of the most favoured European nations*; and at the time of going out of the country, the same amount of custom duties which is levied on the merchandise imported by the merchants of the most favoured European nations shall be levied from the merchants". J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Middle East: A Documentary Record 1535-1914*, Vol. 1 (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1956), 124, emphasis added. Practically speaking the treaty put Britain on equal footing with Russia which meant a five percent custom duty ad valorem on British imports to and exports from Iran. A comparison of this treaty signed between Britain and Iran in 1841 with the one signed between the former and the Ottoman Empire in 1838 gives interesting insight into the economic mentalities of the two neighbouring Islamic states. Being a product of the post-Napoleonic era when Britain became the major political actor in the Middle East, the 1838 treaty, or Balta Limani Treaty as it is known, reconfirmed and added to the already major economic role of Britain in the Ottoman Empire. After stipulating in the first article that all the rights and privileges granted by the Ottoman administration to the ships or the subjects of any foreign power would also be enjoyed by British ships and subjects, the second article read that: "If any article of Turkish produce, growth, or manufacture, be purchased by the British merchant or his agent, for the purpose of selling the same for internal consumption in Turkey, the British merchant and his agent shall pay, at the purchase and sale of such articles, and in any manner of trade therein, the same duties that are paid, in similar circumstances, *by the most favored class of Turkish subjects* engaged in the internal trade of Turkey, whether Mussulmans or Rayahs [the non-Muslims subjects]". Hurewitz, *Diplomacy*, 110-11. Emphasis added. The interesting difference between the two treaties was that against the Persian five percent custom duties ad valorem both on imports and exports the Ottomans agreed on a five percent custom duty on imports ad valorem while on exports twelve percent was the agreed custom.

⁴² Nikki Keddie, "The Economic History of Iran, 1800-1914 and its Impact: An Overview", *Iranian Studies* Vol. 5, no.2/3 (Spring-Summer, 1972), pp. 58-78. Here p. 61

⁴³ Issawi, "European Economic Penetration", 597.

⁴⁴ Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry*, 98.

Textile Industry during the 19th Century

Textile basically refers to any industrial activity that involves spinning, weaving, or both. The textile industry, with its various branches, has historically been among the most widespread and the most developed industries in Iran. It was not only a source of livelihood for professional craftsmen but it also provided a substantial additional income for many Iranian cultivators. Wool and linen were the fibres that have been used in the Iranian textile industry for ages, whereas cotton was a relative newcomer to the industry, coming into widespread use only in the early medieval period.⁴⁵ The finest of all fibres used in the Iranian textile industry, however, was silk.⁴⁶ Each fibre had its own phases of processing until it was spun and became ready for weaving.⁴⁷ Once a fibre was spun into thread it was then dyed by either natural or by aniline dyestuffs. The transition from natural to aniline dyestuffs late in the 19th century was at first a painful one which reduced the quality of Iranian textiles. Yet, with the improvement of synthetic dyestuffs and the increasing ability of Iranians to use them properly, synthetics became more and more widespread.⁴⁸ Between 1500 and 1925 some 90 textile crafts were operative in Iran.⁴⁹ Kashan, Yazd, Isfahan, Tabriz, and Mashhad were the main textile centres as far as urban production is concerned.

Based on the Bourgin model of production activities in pre-industrial Europe, Floor classifies each type of manufacturing activity for Qajar Iran as follows:

- a. The small, mostly, family operated workshop which was the most frequent industrial activity that one found in Qajar Iranian cities. These workshops usually had one master with 2-3 journeymen and some unskilled helpers. There was neither division of labour nor specialization in the process. All parts of a product were made inside the workshop and put together to make a final product. Often the workshop was not only the site of production but also the location of sale of the product. In Isfahan, in the 1850s, there were many hundreds of workshops located in the covered bazaars, the total length of which was 3 miles.
- b. Scattered, but interconnected, workshops. Here there was specialization of process and one artisan produced only an intermediate product, for another artisan, and the last one

⁴⁵ Hans E. Wulff, *The Traditional Crafts of Persia: Their Development, Technology and Influence of Eastern and Western Civilizations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: The M. I. T Press, 1966), 177-8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴⁷ For the technical details of these processes see *Ibid.*, 179-188.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴⁹ Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry*, 30.

in the production line would make the final product. The textile industry is a good example of this type of workshop. After the wool (or cotton or silk) had been purchased, it was carded, spun, washed, dyed, and then woven. Finally, the cloth would get a final processing such as printing or tailoring.

- c. Concentrated manufactories were less prevalent in Iran. This type of manufacture was basically a large building where all parts of the production process and its labour force were brought together. This allowed an increase of productivity and better quality control. Also, the use of mechanical devices such as water or animal operated mills/machinery was possible. This applied, for example, to the leather industry where all processes were as a rule carried out in the same workshops.
- d. Finally, factories that were equipped with machinery that allowed even higher productivity and better quality control than the previous industrial categories. In fact they allowed, comparatively speaking, mass production of the final product. As of the 1850s, we see that a number of such factories were established in Iran.⁵⁰

These four categories coexisted during the 19th century. Besides, although the first two were the oldest forms of production, the fourth category was an innovation of the mid-19th century.⁵¹ The textile industry was among the few in which division of labour prevailed as a crucial principle. The industry was organized around guilds in towns. Despite regionally and professionally variant features, guilds commonly enjoyed some fundamental characteristics. Namely, a guild protected the monopoly of its members' occupation, with certain rules being established for those who practiced this occupation. A newcomer held his training within the guild and workmanship was standardized in a certain way. Also, there was a sense of solidarity among the members of a guild, who assisted each other in times of need. Apart from these professional functions, a guild also was a channel of communication between its members and political bodies. Lastly, socially speaking, guilds played religious and ceremonial functions in Iranian society.⁵²

The internal structure of a guild was based on certain rules which were not always clear, and thus showed variation. For example, a master would receive the right to set up a shop (*haqq-e bonicheh*) from a city's mayor (*qalantar*). The Kalantar held monthly meetings with the head of certain crafts such as bakers, butchers and grocers to set the minimum prices of the

⁵⁰ Floor, *Guilds, Merchants and Ulama*, 100.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 103.

products sold by these guilds. The elders of a guild (*rish safidan*) were responsible for the smooth functioning of guilds. Throughout the nineteenth century guilds maintained a tenuous and fluid position in the face of political and economic developments to which they proved highly vulnerable. On the one hand, they continued their regional economic activities, while on the other hand wider economic developments, such as increasing foreign imports, developed among guildsmen a certain sense of common action. However, the more federated the guilds became, the more political their roles turned out to be. During the early twentieth century, for example, guilds constituted themselves into *anjomans* which were to play important political roles during the Constitutional Revolution and for a short while in its aftermath. In Tehran alone seventy *anjomans* were established by guilds and later formed into a central council (*anjoman-e markazi-e asnaf*).⁵³

The observations of E. K. Abbot in the mid-19th century show not only that Iranian handicrafts were not in a state of decay despite the setbacks caused by increasing imports, but also that textiles played a major role in urban handicraft industry.⁵⁴ Main artisanal Iranian towns enjoyed, at that time, a relatively lively economic atmosphere. The following examples from his report suffice to illustrate this point: Kashan with its 30,000 inhabitants had 27 caravanserais, 770 shops, 130 merchants; 80 coppersmiths, 800 silk looms; ‘a great deal’ of cotton twist spun, 1,500 mule-loads having been sent to Astrakhan alone in 1848. Isfahan had 28 caravanserais, 340 traders; 200 silk looms, ‘the manufacture of cotton goods is carried to a great extent, and affords occupation to many of the inhabitants of the town and surrounding villages’.⁵⁵ Yazd with its 35,000-40,000 inhabitants had 250 merchants; 2,200 shawl manufacturing looms, 220 woollen looms, producing £40,000-45,000 worth of goods “exclusive of that about 325 looms belonging to 9 villages around, valued at Tomans 15,000 (£7,000) more”.⁵⁶

Also, writing in 1889, Curzon states that there were in Mashad 650 silk looms and 320 shawl looms and in Tabriz 116 caravanserais and 3,922 shops while in 1870 Kerman had 80 cotton factories and 6 “really good carpet factories” and in the mid-nineteenth century had had “as

⁵³ Willem Floor, “Asnaf”, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Edited by Eshan Yarshater, (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987),. Pp. 772-8; here 777.

⁵⁴ “Notes of the Trade, Manufactures and Productions of Various Cities and Countries of Persia”, FO 60/165. Quoted by Issawi, *Economic history of Iran*, 167-8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 167

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

many as 1,800 silk factories employing 9,000 hands ...”⁵⁷ At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth there were 1,000 shawl looms in Kerman with an annual export of 300,000 tumans; 200 woollen looms in Nain and 300 in Kerman. Kashan had 200 silk looms with a monthly output of 400 pieces while there were in Yazd 400 workshops with 2,000 looms. Mashhad had 100 shops with 200 looms. Nishapur had 16 shops with 3 to 4 looms in. As for cotton weaving, Yazd had 800 workshops with 2,000 looms while Kashan 100 workshops.⁵⁸

We need detailed monographs on the history of guild-based labour about which we currently know only a little. It is safe to suggest, however, that generally speaking their living conditions escalated during the nineteenth century and many guildsmen lost their jobs and turned into labourers.⁵⁹ For example in Yazd in 1895 the bulk of weavers received from ½ gran to 2. ½ grans for a twelve-hour working day.⁶⁰ Thus, the average purchasing power of a worker was as follows:

Table 1.1: The Daily Purchasing Power of a Weaver in Yazd in 1895⁶¹

	Daily Wage	
	½ gran	2. ½ grans
Rice	0.5 lb. [0.23 kg.]	2.7 lb. [1.22 kg.]
Bread	2 lb. [0.91 kg.]	10 lb. [4.54 kg.]
Meat	0.8 lb. [0.36 kg.]	4 lb. [1.81 kg.]
Sugar	0.35 lb. [0.16 kg.]	1.8 lb. [0.82 kg.]
Cheese	0.65 lb. [0.29 kg.]	3.25 lb [1.47 kg.]
Eggs (no.)	20	100

Source: J. R Preece, CR ‘Isfahan and Yazd’, in PAP 1869 lxxxviii, quoted by Ahmad Seyf, “Iranian Textile Handicrafts”, 56.

Apart from urban-based production the manufacturing of textiles in rural settings was also significant, and was gradually integrated into more organized and disciplined manufacturing processes via putting-out networks. Yet, considering the inadequate documentation of guilds there is little chance of finding any notable data on rural manufacturing activities. Thus in

⁵⁷ Curzon, *Persia*, I: 167, 521 and 2: 242, 245; see also Tomara pp. 26-27. Quoted in Issawi, *Economic history of Iran*, 268.

⁵⁸ Issawi, *Economic history of Iran*, 268.

⁵⁹ Keddie, Nikki, *Roots of Revolution*, P. 63

⁶⁰ About 2.5 old pence and about 12 old pence or one shilling respectively. Ahmad Seyf, “Iranian Textile Handicrafts in the Nineteenth Century: A Note”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Jul., 2001), pp. 49-58, here P. 56

⁶¹ Kgs are added by me and 1 pound is calculated at 0.454 kilo grams.

most cases we have to base our arguments on impressionistic evidence rather than sound hard data. However, bearing in mind the predominantly agrarian nature of Iranian society which endured throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, mention should be made of this production. Quite late in the 19th century a report by the British political agent in the Gulf shows the critical role of textile manufacturing as non-farming employment for many cultivators. Writing in 1899 he says: “poverty of the cultivators who are the principal customers of cotton goods, caused transactions to be limited. The failure of the crops for three successive years on the Persian coast led many cultivators to resort more largely to weaving for a livelihood, a demand thereby created for yarn and twist.”⁶² Cultivators did not necessarily spin or weave as an income producing activity but they also did so for their own use. In Tabriz for example, Consul Jones reports in 1873, “the lower classes make use of the produce of their domestic looms”.⁶³ When threatened by cheaper imports, Iranian textile industries could maintain their position and reduce expenses by largely employing the workforce in waiting in rural areas. Even in the carpet industry, rural spinning and weaving hands played an important role. Persian carpets were already among the export items of Iran by the early 19th century. Yet, interest in Persian carpets increased in Europe after the World Trade Fair in 1851. The World Trade Fair in Vienna in 1873 substantially added to the demand for Persian carpets.⁶⁴ Carpet industry was important mainly for two reasons. Firstly, rather than solely relying on modern methods of manufacturing, the carpet industry functioned to a great extent through a putting-out system where an extended chain of village production played an important role.

Iranian entrepreneurs played a decisive role in the functioning of this system. For example Tabrizi merchants took almost complete control of carpet trade in Kashan, which was the main carpet weaving centre.⁶⁵ Some merchants even specialized in the trade of peasant and tribal rugs. Secondly, the carpet industry constituted the major field of direct foreign investment which contributed to the development of the industry in Iran. To realize sustainable and high quality production, foreign companies, such as the British-Swiss Ziegler&Co. and the Dutch Hotz&Zoon, directly invested in the carpet weaving business. Soltanabad near Farahan district is a good example of this type of investment. While there were in the region some 40 looms around 1870, ten years later the number of the looms in the

⁶² Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry*, 20.

⁶³ Seyf, “Iranian Textile Handicrafts”, 54.

⁶⁴ Willem Floor, *Labour and Industry in Iran* (Washington: Mega Publishers, 2009), 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

town reached 1,200 and 5,000 with weaving villages around it. 10,000 persons were employed in their operation.⁶⁶ By the turn of the 20th century 65,000 persons were employed in carpet weaving, whereas the number had been a mere 1,000 around 1860. The rising production was also reflected in the volume of output. While in the 1870s estimated total exports of carpets was about £ 75,000, it was estimated to be around £ 100,000 in 1889. In 1903 the value increased as high as £ 500,000 and in to £ 1 million or 12% of Iran's total export.⁶⁷

The integration of the urban and rural types of manufacturing brought about a more intricate industrialization process in Iran. As Rudolf Braun observes:

When an urban and bourgeois industry spreads out from the city into the surrounding countryside, it penetrates an unfamiliar environment and economy which receives industrialization on its own terms. For those involved in the industrialization process it meant that the country inhabitants experienced industrialization not merely as passive recipients but also by actively shaping it.⁶⁸

Information regarding the details of this integration is lacking. Neither do we know how peasants living in 19th-century Iran received this transformation and how they actively shaped the process in their own way. At any rate, throughout the 19th century, European economic penetration became increasingly visible by either challenging the existing manufacturing methods or by adding new dimensions to them. This was a slow and gradual process. For the simple fact that throughout the 19th century, and for some time into the 20th, a country-wide market did not exist in Iran but rather the country consisted of isolated provincial markets, the effects and the extent of this penetration was not the same throughout Iran. The textile industry provides the best opportunity to investigate the varying effects of imports in Iran. Ahmad Seyf states that the fact that the areas more easily accessible to foreign imports such as the Caspian shores, Azarbaijan and the Persian Gulf shores produced few or no cotton and silk goods attests to the effect of foreign competition as the chief contributing factor to the decline of Persian handicrafts.⁶⁹ Yet, even at the end of the 19th century in Isfahan—a favourite centre of importing companies, especially British ones—artisans could produce a particular cotton product, *qalamkar*, for export, as the business escalated thanks to the use of cheap aniline dyes.⁷⁰ Therefore, if urban production appears to decline, we should look for

⁶⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁸ Rudolf Braun, *Industrialization and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10.

⁶⁹ Seyf, "Iranian Textile Handicrafts", 51. Emphasis added.

⁷⁰ Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry*, 108.

other production methods, mainly to putting-out industry, to see how Iranian industries coped with imports. However, this in no way implies a complete denial of the negative role imports played in the fate of Iranian crafts. What is important here is to see that the process was more complex than how it is often depicted.

After providing statistical information on Iranian handicrafts in several cities, Abbot refers to the great injuring role of European competition on the crafts. He also mentions the increasing numbers of shops selling foreign goods.⁷¹ On the other hand, writing about the Persian industry which he cautioned was not comparable with that of most European states, Jakob Polak observed that it was “not insignificant and meets domestic needs.” He makes the following important point:

When one considers that nothing is done by the government to raise the level of industry that on the contrary an irrational tariff system encourages import of foreign goods to the detriment of domestic products, that roads and means of communication are lacking, that metal deposits lie buried in the womb of the earth and that all iron must be brought in from abroad, at high prices; when one contemplates the imperfection of tools and machines, the shortage of capital, the high rate of interest and the lack of development of credit facilities – one must truly wonder how many domestic products manage to compete with foreign.⁷²

Several factors added to the undermining of the Iranian economy and its crafts industries in the 19th century. First, natural conditions were unfavourable. While the northern parts of the country enjoyed abundant rainfall, the southern and central regions were blessed with only a little. Additionally, despite the relatively stable political atmosphere of the Qajar era, the country was still far from centralized and a country-wide market was absent. Irrational tax policies also severely hurt economic activities. A dispatch from the British Consul in Tabriz in 1851 attests to this. According to the dispatch, whereas a European merchant paid 5% on his imports, an Iranian had to pay 7,7% on textiles and 14% on sugar plus he paid *rahdarlik* (road tax) every time his goods passed through an Iranian town.⁷³ Also, the insecurity of private property and the absence of proper protection impeded creativity and demotivated investment in production techniques.⁷⁴ The situation was further complicated by increasing imports of foreign goods into Iran. From the early 19th century onwards, economically speaking Iran found itself in an unequal competition vis-à-vis European, mainly Russian and British, states. Apart from such products as sugar and tea, textiles were the most desired

⁷¹ Issawi, *Economic history of Iran*, 167.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 268.

⁷³ Issawi, “European Economic Penetration”, 600.

⁷⁴ Seyf, “Iranian Textile Handicrafts”, 49.

imports. Nevertheless, dressing habits and traditions were difficult to change. Thus, foreign firms tried to adopt to Iranian taste while Iranians showed in time a certain interest in foreign costume. Fraser observed in mid 1820s that “a taste for European goods is but arising”.⁷⁵ By the end of the century the change became more visible and foreign imports were now almost everywhere in the country.

The ever-increasing imports drew attention very early in the century. In the subsequent decades two main attitudes prevailed: protectionist and developmentalist. The first groups argued that foreign goods, especially luxury articles, should simply be prevented from entering the country. They used two different supporting arguments. According to some, Iran had enough productive capacity to meet domestic demand. Therefore there was no need for foreign goods. Others argued that Iranians did not need those imported items, simply because they were unnecessary and created bad consumption habits among the populace. This view was particularly voiced by some in the early twentieth century, and its supporters held big merchants responsible. Developmentalists on the other hand admitted, though grudgingly, that Iran did not have enough productive capacity, which caused the inflow of foreign goods. However, as far as a remedy was concerned, they divided into two camps. Some of them argued that Iranian craft industries could meet domestic demand if promoted and supported by sound protective measures. Yet, others opted for factory-based large scale industrialization and claimed that traditional methods of production were obsolete and unable to meet even domestic needs properly. These two attitudes were not mutually exclusive, and as a matter of fact throughout the nineteenth century neither approach produced the desired outcome: the curtailing of imports. Still, considering the diverse and heterogeneous segments involved in the discussions, they provide us invaluable insights into popular perceptions of the economy and politics, and enrich our understanding of state-society relations in Qajar Iran.

Roughly until the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, the protectionist attitude was favoured, the only exception being Abbas Mirza’s attempt at pursuing developmental economic policies. From Naser al-Din onwards some steps were taken to industrialize Iran, especially by Amir Kabir, and the Constitutional Revolution furthered hopes in this regard. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, in the aftermath of the First World War protectionist voices were again raised though to no avail. With the consolidation of the Pahlavi dynasty in the 1930’s, developmental policies, mixed with protectionist measures, were pursued and a period of

⁷⁵ Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry*, 98.

industrial leaping forward was launched. Leaving the constitutional and Pahlavi periods to the second part of this dissertation, here I will analyse the period up to the early twentieth century.

Already during Fath Ali Shah's reign manufacturers are reported to have petitioned the Shah for the prohibition of further imports.⁷⁶ Likewise, in 1836 Mohammad Shah commanded his subjects to wear cloths of Iranian make. Furthermore he instructed all his courtiers to adopt a new style of dress consisting of European trousers and redingote. His intention was to disseminate this change to the rest of the population. The attempt soon ended in failure and the Shah gave up the effort, but the merchants did not.⁷⁷ In 1844, merchants of Tabriz petitioned the crown prince to prohibit European imports "on the ground principally of the ruin Persian manufacturers are reduced to by the constant and immense importation of foreign goods".⁷⁸ In the same year the traders and manufacturers of Kashan presented a memorial to Mohammad Shah Qajar in which they prayed "for protection of their commerce which they presented as suffering in consequence of the introduction of European merchandise into their country".⁷⁹

Already in the 1810's, Abbas Mirza sent groups of Persian students to Great Britain declaring that "they shall study something of use to me, themselves and their country".⁸⁰ They studied, among other things, chemistry, engineering and gunsmithery. However, Abbas Mirza's attempts were mainly aimed at military modernization. In the following decades, further efforts to introduce modern industries were made. For example in 1829, the Persian ambassador in London was instructed to engage a superintendent of iron works, two furnace men, a glass worker, two miners, and a cloth manufacturer, and a steam engine was sent from England to Iran.⁸¹ Amir Kabir's economic reforms provided the first country-wide attempts at economic development. The main components of his economic policies was "to end the economic regression in the country, the establishment of small industries for this purpose, the development of agriculture, decreasing the imports and increasing the exports as well as preventing the outflow of 'the golden suns' [gold coins] in his own words".⁸² Yet, being well-aware of the industrial developments in the West his economic program, like those of many of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁸ Issawi, *Economic history of Iran*, 259.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 259.

⁸⁰ Floor, *Labour and Industry in Iran*, 10.

⁸¹ Mirza Abul Hasan Khan to Castlereagh, 9 January 1820, and Ouseley to Planta, 23 November 1820, FO 60/19, quoted in Issawi, *Economic history of Iran*, 260.

⁸² Adamiyat, *Amir Kabir*, 387.

his successors, also included the significant and explicit objective of “introducing new industries” to the country.⁸³ The tension and the gap between promoting crafts industries on the one hand and introducing European-type factories on the other remained, from this period on, one of the main challenges of modernist economic policies in Iran. At any rate, Amir Kabir’s economic policies provided in Iran the first organized attempt at import-substitution.

In the second half of the century a number of factories with varying capacities and financed by both domestic and foreign capital were erected in Iran. A series of popular ventures should be mentioned alongside the developmentalist efforts. In 1897 the *Anjoman-e Sharqi* (Oriental Society) was founded in Isfahan with the explicit aim of promoting the consumption of Persian goods. Likewise, in 1890 the *Anjoman-e Eslami* (Islamic Society) was founded for the same purpose. The two societies established a company named *Sherkat-e Eslami* (Islamic Company) and produced a cloth named *Parcheh-e Eslami* (Islamic Cloth).⁸⁴ In order to promote the use of the home-made textiles Seyed Jamal al-Din Va‘ez Esfahani, a cleric and promoter of the *Sherkat-e Eslami*, wrote a treatise in 1900 titled *Lebas al-Taqwa* (Cloth of Abstinence) by using the Quranic metaphor of ‘the cloth of abstinence’ Esfahani calls on his fellow countrymen to wake up from the heedless sleep and to unite in order not to depend on foreigners for their textile needs.⁸⁵

Especially from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, several large-scale industrial projects were undertaken.⁸⁶ However, we lack any reliable statistical data on these initiatives. The lists available on some sources not only display a fairly poor industrial scene for a country of such magnitude as Iran, but should also be met with a certain degree of suspicion since many of these industrial enterprises had to shut down after some time, for a variety of reasons. Poor planning, high transport costs, inability to compete with imports, and inadequacy of raw materials were the main causes of the failure of early industrial enterprises. Moreover as far as textiles were concerned, such additional factors as the use of aniline dyes, manufacturing of

⁸³ Ibid., 387.

⁸⁴ Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry*, p. 119

⁸⁵ Seyed Jamal al-Din Va‘ez Esfahani, *Lebas al-taqwa*, ed. Homa Rezvani (Tehran: Nashr-e Tarikh-e Iran, 1985), 10-11. The original verse in Quran goes as “O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness - that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember.”, Quran, 7/26. Vaez’s work will be dealt with in the following chapters.

⁸⁶ For a list of them see: Abdullayev 1974, 114-120; Issawi 1971, 258-310 (and literature quoted and translated); Haqiqat Rafi’, 1352, 439; Hedayat 1363, 129-131; E’temad al-Saltaneh, 12981300, vol. 3, 107, 222, 232, 246, 271, 281; Ibid., 1306, 82, 93-126; Ibid. 1368, Vol. 2, 1245, 1348, 1390, 1392. All compiled and quoted in Floor, *Labour and Industry in Iran*, 13-15.

inferior products, and change in fashion, further handicapped national industries.⁸⁷ Thus, unsurprisingly, the following pessimistic judgment about industrialization in Iran could be made by a British mission as late as 1905:

It is hopeless for any Indian or English manufacturer to think of establishing works in Persia at present. If he embarks on such an enterprise, he will but add another item to the long list of industrial ventures that have failed in that land. The difficulties that stand in the way of such enterprises are at present too great. There is first the Government. No foreigner is allowed to own land or house in Persia except under very stringent rules and if he becomes a Persian landholder he must, as a rule, first become a Persian subject. If he becomes a Persian subject he must expect continually to be “squeezed”. Then there is the cost of transporting machinery, which is prohibitive, and at present no heavy machinery could be got up at all. Labour, too, in Persia while fairly cheap (though dearer than India) is inefficient and undisciplined to a degree hard to conceive.

Lastly, any factory setting up would have to be on a small scale, only large enough to use local supplies, for once you have to carry raw material any distance the present cost of transport renders it prohibitive. This means hopelessly expensive working as having small factories scattered all over the country would make the cost and task of supervision prohibitive.⁸⁸

Factory-based production was regarded by many contemporaries as an extension and prerequisite of modernization, i.e. westernization, in the industrial realm. It was believed that the rationalization of production along European lines would sooner or later replace the ‘obsolete’ methods of production. Put differently, modernization required a country to modernize its military forces on European terms. This in turn necessitated equally modernized industries. Such a country would be able to withstand its enemies—particularly Russia, in the case of Iran—and would protect its sovereignty. Several Iranian and foreign contemporary observers refer in their writings to the lack of factories in Iran, their observations usually being accompanied by derogatory remarks about the country and its inhabitants. In what follows, a sketch of the late 19th-century Iranian society will be provided by referring to the effects of the political and economic developments discussed above.

Iranian Society on the Eve of the Constitutional Revolution: A People in Flux

The nineteenth century was a period of transformation for Iran, in various ways. Caught between the two rival superpowers of the time, namely Britain and Russia, the country

⁸⁷ Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry*, 108-113.

⁸⁸ Issawi, *Economic history of Iran*, 260.

developed its economic and political path within a context of semi-colonialism. At first the British were particularly interested in Iran in political terms, i.e. securing their interests in India and preventing any Russian advance to the south. Later on however, both Britain and Russia developed economic interests in the country which initially entailed the supply of raw materials from it but later on evolved into regarding it as an open market for their industrial products. It is hardly an exaggeration that "Iran thus had all the disadvantages of being a colony without any of the few advantages, such as the creation of industries either to the direct benefit of the colonizers or for their military purposes, improvements in the juridical system, and so forth."⁸⁹ The military defeats at the hands of Russia and the ever increasing influence of both this northern neighbour and the southern, Britain, in time paved the way for a series of military, economic, and political reforms. Once the practical-minded reforms in these fields failed to produce the desired outcomes, a perception prevailed among intellectuals and dissatisfied groups that the problem actually lay deeper in the political system, which should be thoroughly reformed. This gradually paved the way for the Constitutional Revolutions of 1905-1909.

Throughout the nineteenth century, epidemics, mainly cholera and plague but also small-pox, malaria and typhoid fever, were prevalent all around the country; so were famines. Recurring epidemics had disastrous consequences. Several factors contributed to this. Ahmad Seyf lists five such factors.⁹⁰ Firstly, the country had almost no hospitals and public health administration during the entire century. Secondly, the quarantine arrangements to isolate the sick from the rest of the population were insufficient. Thus, epidemics travelled freely from town to town, adding to the number of casualties. Thirdly, flowing water was believed to be always safe, and this contributed to the spread of disease. Fourthly, the dead, even those who perished in epidemics, were carelessly washed before burial, and this polluted the clean water. Fifthly there was the custom of temporary burial which was particularly practiced by wealthy individuals. Out of a desire to be buried in such holy towns as Mashhad, Qom, Najaf, and Karbala, the body of a wealthy Iranian, even if he died in an epidemic, would be removed from his temporary grave where he would stay for a few months to be carried on mule back to

⁸⁹ Bausani, *The Persians*, 172 quoted by John Foran, "The Concept of Dependent", 22-3.

⁹⁰ Ahmad Seyf, "Iran and the Great Plague, 1830-1831", *Studia Islamica*, No. 69 (1989), 151-165, here 151-2.

his eternal grave in one of these towns. Between 1800 and 1905 twenty six outbreaks of cholera and ten outbreaks of plague seem to have taken place in Iran.⁹¹

The plague of 1830-31 was the most devastating epidemic of the century in terms of the casualties it caused. Spanning almost the entire country with the exception of Khorasan and Kerman, the plague hit the northern regions particularly hard. For example, after the plague, Mazandaran was in a state of ruin, with some the cities being largely depopulated. According to Fraser, Rasht, a prominent trade and handicraft center, which had more than 60,000 inhabitants in 1822, contained around 15-20,000 people including non-residents.⁹² Again, about the Caspian province at large, he observed that "... of all districts which have been visited in Persia... I knew that Gilan and Mazandaran had suffered most, and I was prepared to find a diminution of population in both provinces, but I was not prepared for what I did see here..."⁹³ According to Abbot, a full two-thirds of the population of Gilan have apparently been carried off by the calamity.⁹⁴ Also the most destructive cholera epidemic broke out in the last decade of the century between 1892 and 1893. As many as 1,037 people are reported to have died in Tehran alone, with an average of 148 deaths per day. The average number was, according to E'temad al-Saltaneh, a contemporary Iranian, 200 per day.⁹⁵ The cholera claimed thousands of lives outside of the capital too. In Gilan, for example, 20,000 people are reported to have died from cholera.⁹⁶

Apart from epidemics, famine was another ultimate cause of death in nineteenth century Iran. Caused mainly by inadequate rainfall and partly by unplanned agrarian practices, once it occurred, the disastrous consequences of a famine would be doubled by the inhospitable landscape of the country in the absence of insufficient transport facilities. To illustrate this point, suffice it to say that "even at the end of the [19th] century the important road between the southern port of Mohammereh (Khorramshahr) and Tehran was so slow that to get from the latter to the former it was quicker to travel from the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea by boat, from Erzerum to the Caspian Sea by land, from Baku to Enzeli (Pahlevi) by boat again and finally from Enzeli to Tehran by land."⁹⁷ Not infrequently, therefore, while some parts of the country suffered severely from a famine, other parts could enjoy relative prosperity. The

⁹¹ Ahmad Seyf, "Iran and the Great Plague", 153; Seyf, "Iran and Cholera in the Nineteenth Century", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Jan. 2002), 169-178, here 171-2.

⁹² *Ibid.*, Seyf, "Iran and the Great Plague", 158.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁹⁵ Both numbers are taken from Seyf, "Iran and Cholera", 172.

⁹⁶ Seyf, "Iran and Cholera", 173.

⁹⁷ Abrahamian, *Iran Between two Revolutions*, 14

greatest of famines in modern Iranian history was experienced between 1870 and 1871. Almost no rain had fallen during the previous year and this continued to be the case during 1870-71 with the exception of the western and southern regions. Khorasan, Isfahan, Yazd and Fars suffered particularly from the drought, which brought about a sharp rise in grain prices and bread riots in several towns. In Mashhad, for example, the price of wheat reached 100 tumans per kharvar which was more than twenty times the former price.⁹⁸ The famine and the enormously rising prices of essential foodstuffs produced horrible consequences in people's daily lives. Reportedly, those who failed to afford bread ate dogs, cats, rats and even dung and grass. There were also reports of cannibalism in some towns where ruffians are said to kill women and eat them and in some cases parents were even reported to have eaten their own children.⁹⁹

Concluding Remarks

The Constitutional Revolution broke out in 1905 against this historical background. Economic dissatisfaction, internal disorder and recurring calamities deepened the sense of dissatisfaction among the populace. This dissatisfaction was to be formulated within the vocabulary of the spirit of the age: the call for a constitution and a parliament. The underlying objective, however, was rather simpler: to secure justice. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the greater part of the Iranian population who supported the establishment of a parliament, even the bulk of the clerical support in favour of it, came from equating it with the House of Justice, an institution associated with the culture of kingship.¹⁰⁰ Safeguarding the lives and property of the subjects were the main pillars of kingly justice. As long as these were secured, Iranian society cared little about central policies, let alone risking an open confrontation with the authorities. Dissatisfaction started and disseminated once increasing numbers of Iranians

⁹⁸ Shoko Okazaki, "The Great Persian Famine of 1870-71", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 49, No. 1, In Honour of Akk K. S. Lambton (1986), 183-192, here 183. A *kharvar*, or a donkey load, equals one hundred kgs.

⁹⁹ Shoko Okazaki, "The Great Persian Famine", 185. In the rest of the article, Okazaki discusses in detail the reasons for this famine and challenges the established view that regarded the conversion from grain cultivation to cash-crops as the main reason for it, as stated by N. Keddie, among others. See Keddie, "The Economic History of Iran", 69. After showing in numbers that even the main areas of cotton and opium production, as two main cash-crops, were not monocultural, and that grain production did not decrease enough to be the cause of the famine, Okazaki then brings into consideration other possible reasons of the famine. He concludes that "the abnormal increase in grain prices and consequent shortages that led to deaths by starvation and to cannibalism were not caused by drought alone, but were artificially induced by hoarding and market manipulation". 191

¹⁰⁰ Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 338.

felt threatened by the existing political and economic developments. After all "... when the shah's urban subjects (and perhaps others too) were displeased with him, they cared not for divine grace, hereditary right nor the epithet of Pivot but for his duties as an Islamic ruler to regulate, equalize and maintain the balance."¹⁰¹ Such diverse classes as the mullahs, merchants, princes, intelligentsia and subaltern groups were involved in constitutional uprisings. The revolution was in this sense a collective action of various social strata, but the traditional structure of Iranian society was to transform in its aftermath.

¹⁰¹ Venessa Martin, *The Qajar Pact: Bargaining, Protest and the State in Nineteenth Century Persia* (London, I. B Tauris, 2005), 12.