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Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh: a political biography

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Conclusion

Very soon after embarking on my own journey towards completing this study, I realised the sheer magnitude of the task I had set myself to achieve: attempting to explore more fully than had previously been done the role that Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh played in Iran's journey towards embracing modernity. From an early age, Taqizadeh's life was a seemingly unending quest for self-betterment which led him to develop his own beliefs around modernity and to strive to persuade others that if Iran was to raise its profile on the global stage, it was crucial that the nation itself move towards modernity. The aim of this research has been to shed more light on the development of this idea of modernity as part of the intellectual and political history of Iran by using Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh's biography as a mirror and by doing so to address some of the controversy surrounding him and his actions. It has traced the development of Taqizadeh as an individual as he worked towards his goals, striving to actualise his ideas and importantly set this within the historical context of Iran and at times within a broader geographical context. Compiling a biography of Taqizadeh has entailed dealing with a substantial and important part of the history of contemporary Iran as well as global events. A comprehensive understanding of Taqizadeh and the role he played in the history of Iran was not possible without delving deeply into this period and at points zooming out to examine key events of that time. At other points in the research, in contrast, it was necessary to zoom into the minutiae of some of the details of Taqizadeh's life in order to explore the reasons for and the manner in which he carried out his actions. This research is a combination of the weaving together of these finer points within events in a broader historical context. It is hoped that this has facilitated a better understanding of the individual and his actions as well as allowing an examination of a period of the intellectual history of Iran from a nuanced perspective. In this way this research has managed to manifest a more comprehensive understanding of Taqizadeh as a political figure, his intentions and his role and participation in the process of practising modernity in Iran.

The aim of this research was to expand the details surrounding certain key points in his life whilst including crucially important historical details of events in the region and beyond which were taking place simultaneously and which affected the trajectory of Taqizadeh's life and influenced his thought and opinions. Taqizadeh's life was bound up with his desire to seek a way for his nation to modernise itself and with an awareness which had been acquired thanks to increasing globalisation. Taqizadeh's life began as Iranians had found themselves facing the inevitable consequences of foreign countries' increasing power and the invasion of Iran's territories. This together with advances in means of communications meant that Iranians had begun to be able to compare themselves with those in other countries; they had an increasing awareness of what was happening beyond Iran's borders. This comparison for many who could comprehend the situation had led many Iranians, including Taqizadeh, to realise that Iran needed an urgent change; for this change to happen Iran needed not only to adapt itself to the new situation but also to survive as a country with its own identity, language, literature, religion and culture. This desire for change resulted in the development of a discourse of modernity specific to Iran. Taqizadeh's life revolved around the concept of change and as this research has detailed, he played a fundamental role in this process. Taking some basic elements of this concept from a number of his predecessors he developed his beliefs and ideas by reading, travelling, theorising and finally putting into practice those ideas he had developed. The Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906 which led to the opening of the First Parliament in Iran was the perfect opportunity for Taqizadeh to be able to practice what he had theorised. This opened the door to his lifelong political engagement and his later roles as a member of parliament and statesman.

Taqizadeh had a strong desire to influence the movement for change in Iran. He was able to do so in various ways: influencing the movement indirectly having educated himself by reading and researching about international happenings and sharing this knowledge with a wider public. Taqizadeh's humble background allowed him an insight into the psychology of the common people; he was skilful in expressing his thoughts and ideas in such a way that they would be easily understood and digested by not only intellectuals but also by the general public. As this research has shown, some of his strength in influencing

others and his popularity stemmed from the connection he could make with a broad spectrum of people. However, due to long periods of residence outside Iran, in particular in Germany where he was able to witness first-hand the top-down modernising of the country following its Bismarckian tradition, Taqizadeh's advocating for a bottom-up approach for Iran changed as he developed a strong belief in the importance and usefulness of universal laws of development which he tried to implement. This top-down approach led him away from solely wanting to represent the wishes of the common people and as his career path moved towards becoming a political statesman, his popularity began to wane and his opinions and actions came to be seen as more controversial. This research has highlighted some of the myths that have arisen as a result of some of his actions and seemingly opposing opinions about him have been addressed.

Taqizadeh's life journey took him from the strongly religious education of his youth to become an avid supporter of European civilisation and positivism. He saw peoples of the world placed at points along a spectrum of hierarchical standing, with Iran at one end and some other more industrialised and modernised countries at the other. He believed Iran had the potential to move along this cline but only with much effort and dedication. He firmly believed in human agency and, based on that, he worked hard and encouraged others to work similarly hard in order to achieve the goal of a modernised Iran. In the beginning he had believed this could be achieved through political means. However, through a process of trial and error and the rich experiences of his life, he came to realise that political modernisation was not possible without people having a comprehensive understanding of modernity. He, who had gone to extremes to create change through politics, gradually came to the realisation that the education of the masses was of prime importance. Convinced of this idea, Taqizadeh, who had been initially steadfast in his reluctance to co-operate with the ruling autocratic rulers, would later willingly accept governmental positions under a strong ruler and in that way contributed to the practice of authoritarian modernisation. He had seen that his previously idealistic views had not resulted in positive change and in fact he had witnessed a chaos in Iran. Now, he believed that under the security provided by an authoritative government his ideas might be able to be put into practice and this would be the first step towards democracy.

Taqizadeh will be remembered, in particular, for several important changes he helped bring about and the notable challenges he faced whilst working towards implementing those changes. Introducing a secular government to a society governed or highly influenced by religious authorities was not an easy task for Taqizadeh. Launching a European-inspired plan for development in a highly religious country where Islam was considered as the perfect religion with comprehensive rules for every aspect of life was a challenging task. He introduced a model of development for Iran which has had its own advocates and also opposition. Taqizadeh faced many serious challenges in pursuing this task. He faced strong accusations and had to live in exile for many years due to the strength of opposition against the reforms he was advocating. His residence abroad and his relationship with numerous foreigners, including politicians and scholars, made him vulnerable to accusations of being a spy or foreign subject. Although Taqizadeh has been presented by some as a man at the service of what they considered the imperialistic and corrupt West and as their ‘Trojan Horse’ in Iran, he can also be considered as a figure who sought to build a bridge between the civilisations, in the realm of politics, history as well as culture and literature.

His name is inextricably linked to the field of journalism in Iran, and in particular his founding of the *Kaveh* newspaper, one of the pioneering publications of the modern press in Iran. He wrote, encouraged and supported others who wrote on the subject of Iranian studies, using history, language and literature to help construct a unified nation.

Taqizadeh has become an icon of the model for the movement from tradition to modernity. He will be remembered by many for his transformation from a traditional clergyman following tradition to a modern man advocating science and scientific methodology. He also advocated for the use of more empirical based research in the field of humanities. His belief in human agency, too, sits in stark contrast to those who believe in fatalism and conspiracy theories. With his religious education and his constant study of the history of Iran he could find connection points to glue together the different periods of Iranian history and use this continuous narrative to help build the new identity for modern Iran.

Taqizadeh played an important role, too, in the fight for equal rights of all sectors of society. He was a pioneer in defending the rights of religious minorities and voiced his opinion for the emancipation of women. A native speaker of Azerbaijani Turkish himself and not opposed to multilingualism in essence, with a focus on moving Iran towards becoming a state that embraced modernity, Taqizadeh strongly advocated the idea of the Persian language as a unifying force for the building of a nation state. The insistence on a policy of monolingualism within a multicultural and plurilingual country could be argued to have encouraged the marginalisation of other languages and cultures in Iran. This matter of linguistic hegemony continues to be a divisive and sensitive issue in present day Iran.

Finally, he will be remembered as a man of principle and a gentleman. Although criticised for mistakes he made, Taqizadeh reflected on and learned from these mistakes or errors of judgement and notably had the strength of character to admit that, in hindsight, at times he may have been wrong. This courage to admit his mistakes is something exemplary among Iranian statesmen. Taqizadeh also stands out as a man who, although he might have disagreed with or even had a personal dislike for certain others, refrained from publicly maligning them or plotting against them; again, an exemplary personal characteristic in the field of politics that should act as a role model for others even today.

The research presented here has aimed to provide a more complete biography of Taqizadeh than has previously been produced, utilising some more diverse and newly discovered documents connected to both the personal and political narrative of his life. It may help those who later investigate Taqizadeh to have a richer and more nuanced understanding of the life and times of this leading figure, though I would suggest that no biography, no matter how comprehensive, can fully trace more than selected periods of its subject's life.

Throughout the research process, I aimed to remain neutral at all times, but the reader will be the judge of that; whilst words may be written in a neutral style, there is no such thing as complete objectivity in thought and inevitably the researcher's perspective may have crept in despite the best efforts to avoid that. For that, I must take responsibility.

However, as I followed Taqizadeh's journey through life and traced his developments in parallel with that of his country, my journey, too, has allowed me to develop as a researcher. Whilst Taqizadeh's journey came to an end with his passing in 1970, the journey into a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of his role in Iran's history has not yet reached its final destination. It is hoped that the present study has filled a substantial gap in the historiography of Taqizadeh and the Constitutional Revolution Movement and has gone some way towards demystifying some of the controversy surrounding his actions. However, much still remains to be uncovered, explored and analysed through other theoretical lenses. With Taqizadeh's unending perseverance and determination as a role model, this researcher's journey will continue.