



ĀQĀ NAJAFĪ EŞFAHĀNĪ

ĀQĀ NAJAFĪ, ḤAJJĪ SHAIKH MOḤAMMAD-TAQĪ EŞFAHĀNĪ (1262-1332/1846-1914), prominent religious leader involved with a number of important political events of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Opinions differ concerning his role. One of his disciples, Ḥājji Mīrzā Ḥasan Khan Shaikh Jāberī Anṣārī, states that Āqā Najafī elevated wisdom and religion and gave the state a new life (*Tārīk-e Eşfahān o Ray o hama-ye jahān*, Tehran, 1331 Š./1952, p. 369 and passim). Āqā Bozorg Ṭehrānī calls him “one of the pillars and custodians of religion in his age,” and adds that the bloody incidents that resulted in Āqā Najafī’s banishments were simply the fruit of his enemies’ jealousy (Āgā Bozorg Ṭehrānī, *Ṭabaqāt a’lām al-šī’a* I, Najaf, 1373/1954, pp. 247-48). Other writers have called him a hoarder, conspirator, opportunist, and murderer.

Āqā Najafī’s ancestors were originally related to the khans of Varāmīn, near Tehran. The family moved to Isfahan, then a great center for religious studies, where they produced numerous distinguished ‘*olamā*’ and *mojtaheds*. Āqā Najafī’s grandfather, Shaikh Moḥammad-Taqī b. ‘Abd-al-Raḥīm “Şāḥeb-e Ḥāšīa” (d. 1248/1832), and his father’s uncle, Shaikh Moḥammad-Ḥosayn b. ‘Abd-al-Raḥīm “Şāḥeb-e Foşūl” (d. 1261/1845), founded their own school of Shi’ite jurisprudence, which was followed by such later Shi’ite authorities as [Ākūnd Korāsānī](#).

Āqā Najafī received his early education under his father Shaikh Moḥammad-Bāqer, in Isfahan and then went to Najaf, where he studied *feqh* and *oşūl* under Mīrzā Ḥasan Şīrāzī, Shaikh Mahdī Āl Kāşef-al-ġetā’, and others.



Returning to Isfahan, he undertook various religious responsibilities in cooperation with his father. After Shaikh Moḥammad-Bāqer's death (1301/1883), Āqā Najafī was recognized as an authoritative *mojtahed* and judge; at times, following his father's pattern, he exercised his own judgments despite a governmental injunction to the contrary (Y. Dawlatābādī, *Tārīk-e mo'āşer yā ḥayāt-e Yaḥyā* I, Tehran, 1336 Š./1957, p. 78). He led the congregational prayers in his father's place in the Shah Mosque of Isfahan and preached at home. He came to be called "Āqā Najafī," a title that implied he was a qualified graduate of the Najaf circle of learning; by compiling or translating a number of books on *feqh*, he was able to "occupy the chair of the sole clerical leadership" (Dawlatābādī, *Tārīk* I, p. 38).

Writers and biographers credit Āqā Najafī with books on various religious subjects, reportedly published at his own expense. His nephew Abu'l-Majd Shaikh Moḥammad-Rezā, ascribed over 100 books to him (*A'lām al-šī'a* I, p. 248), but "many informed people believe that these were not Āqā Najafī's own, but were written by others and published in his name" (Bāmdād, *Rejāl* III, p. 326). Mortazā Modarresī Čahārdehī says that Āqā Najafī published Fāzel Golestāna's *Šarḥ asmā' al-ḥosnā* in his own name; he also translated and published Imam Yāfe'ī's *Kawāşş-e şowar-e Qor'ān* and claimed it as his own. For Modarresī, Āqā Najafī's best book is his *Dalā'el al-feqh*, but he believed that it was comprised of the personal notes of Āqā Najafī's grandfather (*Tārīk-e rawābeṭ-e Īrān o Erāq*, Tehran, 1351 Š./1972, pp. 295-96). Āqā Najafī lectured on philosophy (*ḥekmat*), theology (*kalām*), and other religious subjects before a sizable body of disciples; one of them, Shaikh Moḥammad Ḥosayn Nā'inī (d. 1936), became a leading clerical supporter of the Constitutional Revolution and an authoritative *mojtahed* (A.-H. Hairi, *Shī'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran: A Study of the Role Played by the Persian Residents of Iraq in Iranian Politics*, Leiden, 1977, pp. 109-11 and *passim*).

Āqā Najafī's wealth meant he had certain common interests with the ruling class, such as Zēll-al-soltān, governor of Isfahan. At times they opposed each other (Kasravī, *Maşrūṭa*, Tehran, 1344 Š./1965, pp. 227-28), but they often cooperated in ways that protected their financial interests and earned Āqā Najafī more religious and judicial prestige (Dawlatābādī, *Tārīk* I, pp. 86-87).

To avoid paying government taxes, Āqā Najafī manipulated revenue officers; one he publicly treated as unbeliever (Nūrallāh Dāneşvar 'Alawī, *Tārīk-e maşrūṭa-ye Īrān o jonbeş-e waṭanparastān-e Eşfahān o Baḳtīārī*, Tehran, 1956,



p. 189); in the end he had to pay taxes of at least 60,000 tomans a year (Dawlatābādī, *Tārīk* I, p. 339). According to M. Malekzāda, during a famine Ḥājji Moḥammad Ja'far, the mayor of Isfahan, complained that people were dying of hunger while Āqā Najafī had stored thousands of *karvārs* (one *karvār* = 300 kilos) of wheat that he would not sell at any reasonable price; the mayor was then tortured to death in the street (*Tārīk-e enqelāb-e mašrūṭiyat-e Īrān* I, Tehran, 1327 Š./1948, p. 166).

Āqā Najafī often accused his opponents, such as the well-known constitutionalists Mirzā Naṣrallāh Malek-al-motakallemīn and Moḥammad-Walī Khan Sepahdār A'zam Tonokābonī, of Babism and heresy (Nāẓem-al-Eslām Kermānī, *Tārīk-e bīdārī-e Īrānīān*, ed. 'A. A. Sa'īdī Sīrjānī, Tehran, 1967-70, I, pp. 259-60, 347, 355; III, p. 100). In the name of fighting Babism, Āqā Najafī became actively involved in two massacres, one in 1307/1889 (Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan E'temād-al-salṭana, *Rūz-nāma-ye kāṭerāt*, Tehran, 1350 Š./1971, pp. 684, 697, events related to 8 Raḡab and 15 Ramaẓān 1307; Dawlatābādī, *Tārīk* I, pp. 86-89, 315-25) and the other in 1320/1902. In a letter to Mirzā Moḥammad-Ḥasan Āštīānī (d. 1319/1901), Āqā Najafī appears to have sought sanction for the execution of the "accursed sect of Babis" (E. Ṣafā'ī, *Nāmahā-ye tārikī*, Tehran, n.d., pp. 63-65). On the two occasions, Āqā Najafī was summoned to Tehran to reduce tensions. Dawlatābādī believed that the second incident stemmed from Babi activities under Russian patronage and the negative British response (*Tārīk* I, pp. 315f.).

Āqā Najafī supported the nationalist movement against the tobacco concession in 1309/1891-92 and was among the first *mojtahe*ds to ban the use of tobacco (Nāẓem-al-Eslām, *Tārīk-e bīdārī*, Moqaddema, pp. 23, 26, 45). He also backed the constitutional revolution, though not consistently. He was criticized as being venal and unreliable in one of the sessions of the secret society (*anjoman-e makfī* held by the Persian nationalists in Tehran in 1323/1905 (Nāẓem-al-Eslām, *Tārīk-e bīdārī* I, pp. 31-32). According to Kasravī, he had frequently changed his position during the revolution, but after Eqbāl-al-dawla, a good friend of Moḥammad-'Alī Shah, became governor of Isfahan and treated Āqā Najafī and his brother very badly Āqā Najafī rose against the despotic shah and openly supported constitutionalists (*Āzarbāyġān*, pp. 2-3). Nevertheless he refrained from issuing a *fatwā* against the shah's despotism as long as possible, because he was afraid that "Moḥammad-'Alī Shah might eventually defeat the liberals, and that he might take Āqā Najafī to task" (Dānešvar 'Alawī, *Tārīk*, p. 188).



Kasravī denounces Āqā Najafī’s constitutionalist activities as “insipid shows” harmful to the revolution (*Mašrūṭa*, p. 387), but he did take measures in favor of the constitutionalists. Thus he signed a manifesto declaring the enemies of the Persian constitution to be “in the rank of the murderers of Sayyed-al-šohadā” (i.e., Imam Ḥosayn; A. Tafrešī Ḥosaynī, *Rūz-nāma-ye akbār-e mašrūṭiyat o enqelāb-e Īrān*, ed. Ī. Afšār, 1351 Š./1972, pp. 109-10); he took *bast* in Qom with the constitutionalist ‘*olamā*’ of Tehran in 1324/1906 (Nāẓem-al-Eslām, *Tārīk-e bīdārī* I, p. 31); and he cooperated to some extent with the constitutionalist ‘*olamā*’ of Najaf (ibid., II, p. 215). He also cooperated closely with the Baḳtīārīs after signing an agreement with them, who under their pro-British, constitutionalist leader Ḥājj ‘Alī-qolī Khan Sardār-e As‘ad, conquered Tehran in 1327/1909 (Dānešvar ‘Alawī, *Tārīk*, p. 40; F.O. 416/36, Grey to Marling, Foreign Office, 10 June 1908, no. 269[94]; Hairi, *Shī‘ism and Constitutionalism*, pp. 96-98; G. R. Garthwaite, “The Baḳhtīyārī Khans, the Government of Iran, and the British, 1846-1915,” *IJMES* III, 1972, pp. 24-44).

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