



KĀŠEF-AL-SALTĀNA [2011]

KĀŠEF-AL-SALTĀNA, ḤĀJJ MOḤAMMAD MIRZĀ QĀJĀR QOVĀNLU, also known as Čāykār (tea planter), Qajar diplomat, reformer, author, constitutionalist, and promoter of tea cultivation (b. Torbat-e Ḥaydariya, 1865; d. Kotal-e Malu in Fars, 1929).

Early Life. The eldest son of Asad-Allāh Mirzā Nā'eb-al- Eyāla and Jahānārā Kānom 'Aziz-al-Saltāna, Moḥammad Mirzā was descended through both parents from two sons of Faṭḥ-'Ali Shah Qajar, namely 'Alīšāh Z̄ell-al-Soltān and 'Abbās Mirzā Nā'eb-al-Saltāna (Kāzemi, p. 19; see also Bāmdād, III, p. 273). His father received the title “Nā'eb-al- Eyāla” when he served as district governor of Bušehr, Dašti, and Dašttestān under the provincial government of his wife's uncle Soltān-Morād Mirzā Hosām-al-Saltāna (Fasā'i, I, pp. 822, 827, 833; Eḥtešām-al-Saltāna, p. 23). Moḥammad Mirzā spent the early years of his life in Torbat- e Ḥaydariya before his father was posted to Tehran, where his family subsequently moved. After the death of 'Aziz-al-Saltāna and remarriage of Asad-Allāh Mirzā, the young Moḥammad Mirzā joined the household of Ḥosām-al-Saltāna, as the latter had become his guardian. Here he most likely received the primary education—especially in the Persian and Arabic languages—given to children of the Qajar nobility (Kāzemi, pp. 21-23; Kāšef-al-Saltāna, 1995, p. 3). He subsequently entered the Dār-al-Fonun (q.v.), where he was exposed to such disciplines as mathematics, the biological sciences, the visual arts, Persian literature, as well as the French, Russian, and English languages. His schoolmates in this period included Mirzā Maḥmud Khan Eḥtešām-al- Saltāna and Abu'l-Našr Mirzā Hosām-al-Saltāna (Kāzemi, pp.



21-23; Eḥtešām-al-Salṭana, pp. 26-30).

Early Career and Ideas of Reform. At the age of sixteen, Moḥammad Mirzā became a junior secretary to the then minister of foreign affairs, Mirzā Naşr-Allāh Khan Moşiral- Dawla, and served in that capacity for two years. Following that, in 1881, he was posted to Paris, where he began his work in the Iranian legation as a “second-tier secretary” (dabir dovvom; Kāżemi, p. 23; Bāmdād, III, p. 273). While in Paris, Moḥammad Mirzā pursued his education as well and specialized in “administrative law” (Kāżemi, p. 23; Pirzāda, I, p. 186; Bāmdād, III, p. 273). After five years of work and school, he was promoted to a “first-tier administrator’s position” (nā’eb-e sefārat, nā’eb-e awwal-e şefārat, secrétaire de la légation) in the legation (E’temād-al-Salṭana, p. 988; Kāżemi, p. 23; Pirzāda, I, p. 186; Feuvrier, p. 60). It was during this time in Paris that Moḥammad Mirzā adopted the epithet “Kāşef” (the inquirer or investigator) subsequent to writing a dissertation (*resāla*), which marked the completion of his legal studies (Bāmdād, III, p. 273). In 1888, the youthful Moḥammad Mirzā wrote an extensive pamphlet (*moḵtaşar resāla*) explaining the reasons for the “progress (*taraqqi*), wealth (*tarwat*), and power (*qodrat*) of Western nations” and “the destruction of the foundation of Iran’s historical prosperity, power, and independence (*esteqlāl*).” In this work, he argued that, while modern education (*eḥdāt-e madāres-e kub wa monaẓẓam*) is considered by some as one of the preconditions for the rise of the West, it was less important than the establishment of modern industries in the course of the nineteenth century. He specifically noted that the development of the steam engine (*enkeşāf-e qowwa-ye boḵār*), as manifested especially in the contemporary transportation technologies (*eḵterā’-e kaştī-e ātaşi wa rāhāhan*), constituted the single most important breakthrough that directly enriched and empowered Europe (Kāşef-al-Salṭana, 1995, pp. 25-27). Using historical examples and statistical data from France and other European countries, he argued at length that the construction of a transnational railway would in due course improve Iran’s agriculture, industries, commerce, tax revenues, and even public wealth (Kāşef-al-Salṭana, pp. 67-101).

When Nāşer-al-Din Shah Qājār was on his third European tour in 1889, Kāşef used the good office of Mirzā Maḥmud Khan Eḥtešām-al-Salṭana, his sister’s husband, to get appointed as translator for the royal entourage and the shah’s personal physician, Dr. Joannès Feuvrier. Somewhat reluctantly, he later returned with the royal retinue to Tehran, where he served for a time as interpreter for the shah and engaged in some translation work for the



Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kāẓemi, p. 23; Bāmdād, III, pp. 273-74; Feuvrier, pp. 60, 234). When Abu'l-Faṭḥ Mirzā Mo'ayyad-al-Dawla, Ḥosām-al-Salṭana's son, became governor of Khorasan in 1892, he appointed Kāšef as governor of the district of Torbat-e Ḥaydariya, a position he held for a few years (Kāẓemi, pp. 23-25, 213; Yate, pp. 54-57; Bāmdād, III, p. 274; Feuvrier, pp. 60, 234). It was probably during this time that Moḥammad Mirzā received the title "Kāšef-al-Salṭana" (inquirer or investigator on behalf of the monarchy). The circumstances under which this honorific was adopted remain somewhat obscure. While Ṭorayyā Kāẓemi has suggested that the title was given him by Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah at the conclusion of Moḥammad Mirzā's services as consul-general in India in 1900, it is evident that he had in fact received the title some years earlier during the Naserid period and in any case no later than 1893, when Charles Edward Yate visited him in Torbat-e Ḥaydariya (Yate, pp. 54-57).

Going into Exile. Sometime in the last two years of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah's reign, Kāšef-al-Salṭana seems to have incurred royal displeasure (Kāẓemi, p. 25). The reasons are unclear. It appears that from the beginning of his arrival in Tehran Kāšef-al-Salṭana had problems with money or the amount of salary he received (E'temād-al-Salṭana, p. 760; Bāmdād, III, p. 274; Mahdavi, p. 117). On one occasion, moreover, he criticized the central government and verbally abused some British officials, including the British consul in Mašhad, in a reception sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (E'temād-al-Salṭana, p. 772). The British consul in question may have been Charles Edward Yate, although the latter does not make any reference to this incident in his descriptive account *Khurasan and Sistan*. Drawing on the personal and family accounts of Kāšef-al-Salṭana, Ṭorayyā Kāẓemi asserts, furthermore, that he opposed the Naserid government, which had grown more authoritarian, and actively promoted constitutionalism in this period by writing "nightly newsletters" (*šab-nāmas*; Kāẓemi, p. 25). On the contrary, Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan E'temād-al-Salṭana reports in his diary that at least in one instance, Moḥammad Mirzā applied excessive force in punishing a certain well-connected political dissident in Toršiz (E'temād-al-Salṭana, pp. 988-89). Whatever the reasons, some time before the assassination of the shah, Kāšef-al-Salṭana felt compelled to leave the country, first for Russia and then for Turkey. In Istanbul, he engaged in the carpet business for a time before proceeding back to Paris (Kāẓemi, p. 25; Bāmdād, III, p. 273).

Proposing Reforms in the Southern Provinces. Following the death of Nāṣer-al-



Din Shah, Mirzā Moḥsen Khan Mošir-al-Dawla, the then minister of foreign affairs, appointed Moḥammad Mirzā as consul-general in India (Kāzemi, p. 30; Bāmdād, III, p. 274). On his way to Bombay, Kāşef-al-Salṭana spent several months in Baghdad and Buşehr, whence he dispatched several reports on the condition of the southern provinces (Kāzemi, pp. 30, 99-134). In these reports, he gave an account of the agitation among the Baḳtiāris of Kuzestān, the rebellion of Sheikh Moḥammad of Lenga, and the British involvement in the regional unrest (ibid., pp. 110-18, 189-92). He criticized the ineffective operation of the regional governments and the customs (*gomrok*; ibid., pp. 119-22, 125-28). He warned the government that the Great Powers—especially Russia and Britain—were competing over exerting influence and establishing local clientele in these regions (ibid., pp. 123-29). He urged the central government to keep “a few warships” in the Persian Gulf, build permanent army posts, and send reinforcements in order to put an end to the frontier rebellions and prevent likely future incidents (ibid., p. 116). Kāşef-al-Salṭana had a set of proposals for the effective penetration of the Qajar state bureaucracy in the southern frontiers. These included Iranians taking back the management of the customs (which was at this time in the hands of an agent of the British Imperial Bank of Persia), taxing the trade in “stimulants” (*maḥşul-e moḳayyalāt*), establishing modern “court houses” (*‘adālat-kāna*) in every port city and town, instituting modern “municipal government” (*munisipālita*), and exerting national rights over the water extending from the coastlines (ibid., pp. 128-29). These reports along with a number of dispatches written from India have survived in Kāşef-al-Salṭana’s family archive and have recently been published by Ṭorayyā Kāzemi—Kāşef-al-Salṭana’s granddaughter—in her book.

Interest in Indian Tea. Kāşef-al-Salṭana arrived in Bombay in late 1898 and almost from the outset engaged in acquiring information on the cultivation of tea in India (Kāzemi, pp. 135-37). In his dispatches to Iran, he refers to Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah’s oral and written statements, which had stressed the importance of bringing the know-how of tea culture into the country (Kāzemi, pp. 136-37, 152, 164, 170-71, 192-95; Floor, p. 478). It seems that the Qajar government was following the examples of England and Russia in initiating indigenous tea cultivation at this time. The interest in tea was, moreover, part of a larger attempt on the part of the central government (and merchants) to reduce the total value of import from India. The reason for this was the continuing drain of specie in the trade with that country (Lambton, pp. 131-32, 296). Given that the estimated value of tea imports from India amounted to a



million *tumāns* annually—nearly 83 percent of all tea consumed in Iran came from there—the government considered that domestic production of tea would simultaneously address the growing internal demand and reduce the import trade from India. Furthermore, tea could in time function as well as other valuable cash crops (e.g., opium, silk, and tobacco) that were so crucial for the balance of trade with the neighboring countries. Kāšef-al-Salṭana estimated that domestic tea cultivation could not only make the country self-sufficient in a matter of ten to twelve years, but provide a valuable cash crop for Iran’s sluggish export economy (Kāžemi, pp. 170, 96; Gleadowe-Newcomen, p. 916; Matthee, pp. 260-64, 287-88; Floor, pp. 478-79).

In the course of his stay in India from November 1898 to July 1900, Kāšef-al-Salṭana traveled widely across the subcontinent and took an interest in the agricultural innovations he observed there. In particular, he paid close attention to the methods of tea cultivation (Kāžemi, pp. 173-75, 224-64). In the three months spent in Simla—the summer capital of the British Raj in the northwest Himalayas—he appears to have also tried growing tea in a small farm (*bāğča-ye moḵtašari*) he had rented there (Kāžemi, p. 195). During his service in India, he mailed to Tehran tea seeds and books on methods of tea cultivation, and when he returned, he imported a variety of plants he hoped to mass-produce inside Iran. These included tea plants (*nehāl-e čāy*), coffee shrubs, pepper, cardamom, camphor, and quinine seedlings, and a number of other herbs, spices, and plants (Kāžemi, pp. 170, 263-64). In addition, he ordered at least two sets of the agricultural implements—a large plow (*kiš-e dandānadār-e bozorg*) and an industrial press (*mangana*) to extract juice from sugar canes—he particularly liked when he visited an exhibition in Agra (Kāžemi, p. 252).

Following his return, the shah granted Moḥammad Mirzā a monopoly over the production of tea in the country (*ibid.*, p. 35). Kāšef-al-Salṭana began cultivating tea in two separate farms in Gilān and Māzandarān and gradually expanded his enterprise. Finding it difficult to draw investment from the central government, Kāšef-al-Salṭana sought foreign—in particular British and Russian—capital and technical expertise in order to further develop his undertaking (Floor, p. 479). In 1902, he recruited two Russian experts to instruct local farmers on raising and preparing tea (Kāžemi, p. 49). It was a measure of his initial success that by 1903 the number of tea plants had reached 300,000 in Lāhijān, Gilān alone (Foruḡi, II, p. 1315; Floor, p. 478). In Māzandarān, the tea plantation was located in Tonokābon and seems to have



also been supervised by Kāşef-al- Salṭana’s relation, Moḥammad-Wali Khan Tonokāboni, Naşr-al-Salṭana, later Sepahsālār-e A’zam (q.v.) (Kāżemi, p. 37; Foruġi, II, p. 1567; Rabino, p. 441; Floor, p. 479).

The Constitutional Period. On the eve of the Constitutional Revolution, Kāşef-al-Salṭana was posted to Paris as charge d’affaires of the Qajar state and served in that capacity until 1908 (Kāżemi, pp. 58-62). Meanwhile sympathizing with the revolutionary movement, he joined the first regularly affiliated Masonic lodge in Iran, Réveil de l’Iran (Loż-e Bidāri-e Irāniān), which was formed in 1906 to promote constitutionalism among Iranian elites and intellectuals and which was affiliated with L’Ordre Grand Orient de France (Rā’in, II, pp. 76, 80, 87, 451; see [FREEMASONRY ii](#)). After his term in Paris, Kāşef-al-Salṭana was appointed as mayor of the capital city for one year, during which time he tried to implement some of his reform plans, including a basic public health campaign (Kāżemi, pp. 62-64; Kāşef-al-Salṭana, 1907, pp. 1-22). Some of these reform ideas are contained in a small book titled *Ketābča-ye qānun-e baladiya* which he authored in this period (*ibid.*; Kāżemi, pp. 62, 84). He also published a short manual on the cultivation of tea titled *Resāla-ye dastur al-’amal-e zerā’at-e čāy*. Later, in the short-lived foreign ministry of Mirzā Jawād Khan Sa’d-al-Dawla, Kāşef-al- Salṭana took charge of the courts under the jurisdiction of the Foreign Ministry (omur-e moḥākamāt-e wezārat-e kāreja). Next, he briefly served for a second time as consul-general in India. At the end of the constitutional period in 1911, Kāşef-al-Salṭana left Iran once again first for Mecca and then for Berlin. However, he returned before the outset of World War I and served as vice prime minister in the short-lived cabinet of Moḥammad-Wali Khan Tonokāboni, Sepahsālār-e A’zam (q.v.), in 1916 (Kāżemi, pp. 64-67).

Expanding the tea industry. In the meantime, the nascent tea industry faced new challenges. In 1906, a small amount of the Lāhijān tea was exported to Calcutta in order to test its marketability. Consumers, however, found it to be of significantly lower quality than the varieties from India or China. Any international export appeared at this point improbable. Kāşef-al-Salṭana encountered further difficulties raising funds for the maintenance of the plantations. By 1908-09, the British vice-consul in Rasht, H. L. Rabino had to report that the number of plants was reduced to forty thousand. He added, “Unfortunately, the Russian gardener, engaged to teach the natives how to grow and blend the tea, left on account of misunderstandings with his employer [Kāşef-al- Salṭana], and the [local] ‘Gileks’ are now working without



technical knowledge” (Rabino, p. 436; Floor, p. 479; see also Kāẓemi, p. 49). To be sure, the crux of the matter was the absence of a financial backup (Kāẓemi, p. 49). Thereafter, Kāšef-al-Salṭana appears for a time to have lost heart in developing a tea business in the country (Floor, p. 479).

With the rise of Reẓā Khan (later Reza Shah) to power in the early 1920s, Kāšef-al-Salṭana disengaged from politics and returned, perhaps with the encouragement of the new political climate, to the business of developing a tea industry in the Caspian provinces (Floor, p. 69). Still he put together the first and only issue of a “periodical” called *Majalla-ye ḥayāt o mamāt*, which was published by the National Consultative Assembly (Majles-e šurā-ye melli) in 1922. The word *majalla* (magazine) in the title being a misnomer, this was essentially another pamphlet on the importance of constructing a national railway across the country (Kāšef-al-Salṭana, 1922, pp. 1-60; Šadr Ḥāšemi, IV, p. 240; Kāẓemi, p. 84). A clear indication of his preoccupation with improving the communications technologies, this theme also appears in an earlier dispatch he wrote from India to Mirzā ‘Ali-Ašġar Khan Amin-al-Solṭān, the prime minister of Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah, in 1899 (Kāẓemi, pp. 219-21). In 1927, Kāšef-al-Salṭana was recruited as an expert on tea culture (*motakaššeš-e čāy-kāri*) by a government agency (Edāra-ye falāḥat) that operated under the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce, and Public Welfare (*Wezārat-e falāḥat wa tajārat wa fawāyed-e ‘amma*; Kāẓemi, pp. 69-70). The following year, he traveled to South and East Asia in order to further explore methods of tea cultivation and import new varieties. In these travels, he observed the agricultural modernization that was taking place in parts of India, China, and Japan and obtained seeds of a few plants and some modern agricultural implements. Moreover, he recruited four Chinese tea specialists, who arrived in Iran along with him in 1929. On his way back from this Asian tour, Kāšef-al-Salṭana met an unexpected end in a car accident on the road between Bušehr and Shiraz. He was buried in Lāhijān, where a mausoleum and a tea museum now commemorate his efforts to initiate a tea industry in the country (Kāẓemi, pp. 69-76; Bāmdād, III, p. 274).

Popular Myth and Conspiratorial Thought. As is the case with many other public figures in Iranian history, a number of fictitious accounts have been woven around the life and work of Kāšef-al-Salṭana. It has been erroneously reported that he had to conceal tea seeds in his personal walking stick in order to bring them from India to Iran (Kāẓemi, p. 35). Another version of this account asserts that, because tea production was the largest industry in India



at the time, the British considered the techniques of tea production to be confidential and would not allow foreigners to acquire information on methods of farming. As such, Kāşef-al-Salṭana for a time pretended to be a French laborer and started to work in the tea plantations and factories in order to learn how to produce tea. Furthermore, his importation of tea seeds was successful only because of his diplomatic immunity, which stopped the British from searching his secretly stashed sample (Kāżemi, p. 32). To be sure, Kāşef-al-Salṭana states in a report that he and a certain Mirzā ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn, who accompanied him in some of the travels across the subcontinent, dressed like Europeans (*bā kolāh-e farangi*) and introduced themselves respectively as French and English merchants (*tājer-e farānsavi*, *tājer-e engelisi*) in Kulu, Kalka, and Amritsar in order to “obtain intelligence” (*kasb-e eṭṭelā’āt*; Kāżemi, p. 244). However, it is unclear in this and other reports—and seems unlikely—that by “intelligence” he meant specifically “secrets” of British tea production in India.

Seeing a mysterious hidden hand behind the difficulties Kāşef-al-Salṭana faced in the course of his career as an industrialist, his own granddaughter Ṭorayyā Kāżemi has accused the British and their “collaborators” inside the country (*‘ommāl-e jirak’ār-e Engelis*) of hampering Kāşef-al-Salṭana’s efforts to expand tea cultivation and ultimately of “murdering” him. Drawing on some oral accounts, she maintains that a British employee (a certain “Monsieur Portois”) who had accompanied Kāşef-al-Salṭana in his trips to India and China shot him in the head on the way to Shiraz. Providing little corroborated evidence, she explains this alleged assassination in the following manner. The British initially considered it would be unlikely for the initiative to introduce tea cultivation in the Caspian provinces to be successful. However, they gradually changed their position as they witnessed some modest early successes. They subsequently felt that the development of a tea industry by Kāşef-al-Salṭana would in due course undermine their monopoly in India. For this reason, they conspired to prevent him from establishing a competitive tea industry (Kāżemi, pp. 35, 49, 73-76).



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