



# KASRAVI, AḤMAD I. LIFE AND WORK

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## KASRAVI, AḤMAD

### i. Life and Work

*Early life.* Kasravi was born in Ḥokmāvār, a poor rural quarter in the suburbs of Tabriz, to Ḥāji Mir Qāsem, a small merchant in a family of religious functionaries. He entered a traditional school (*maktab*; see [education iii](#)) at the age of six in the expectation that he would become a mullah to carry on his paternal ancestors' role of religious leader for the quarter. Although the school's semiliterate mullah could not educate the intelligent and curious young boy, Kasravi successfully completed the traditional program in the course of four years with the help of his father and other relatives at home. At the age of 11, he lost his father. At 13, responsible for his family's future, he took charge of his father's carpet-weaving business, a job that ended after eight months upon the permanent closing of the business. He then took over the management of the carpet-weaving business of a close friend of his father. About three years later, at the urging of his family he left that trade to resume his theological studies. In a short time he mastered Arabic grammar and then enrolled in the Ṭālebiya School, the biggest school in Tabriz, where he met Shaikh Moḥammad Kīābāni (q.v), who was teaching traditional astronomy (*Hay'at-e qadim*; Kasravi, 1990, pp. 5-30).



## THE CONSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENT IN TABRIZ

*Kasravi as a constitutionalist.* In 1906 there broke out in Iran the Constitutional Revolution (q.v.), of which Tabriz became a, if not the, principal home. Kasravi had just turned 16. He subscribed to the seminal ideas of the movement, such as the establishment of a constitutional government and the founding of a National Assembly (Majles-e šurā-ye melli). When a segment of the Shi'ite clergy proved hostile to the movement, he did not hesitate to denounce them openly (idem, 1990, pp. 31-32).

A bloody war broke out between the adherents and the detractors of the movement, turning the town into a battlefield. Most of the men of the Kasravi family were opposed to the movement, which forced him to go into seclusion and devote his time to reading all the books he could find. As a result of the defeat of the opponents of the movement and the dismissal of Moḥammad- 'Ali Shah Qajar (r. 1907-09), the town recovered its composure, and Kasravi resumed his theological studies (idem, pp. 33-35).

*Kasravi as a mullah.* After two years of study, he became eligible for the rank of mullah. His family wanted it, but Kasravi hated this job and preferred to find work in the bazaar of Tabriz. In the end he gave in to his family's wishes, but he decided not to act like an ordinary mullah: he refrained from reciting tales of martyrs and criticized from the lofty pulpit the false claims of the mullahs about the martyrs. After a while, he did no more than officiate at religious marriages, and he refrained from performing the other duties of his position. This lasted a year and a half, and throughout that time he tried to free himself of the burden of an occupation he found so disagreeable. Nonetheless, he memorized the Qur'ān and meditated on the meaning of its verses. Thus doubt began to gnaw at his mind (idem, 1990, pp. 35-43).

In 1911, Moḥammad- 'Ali Shah, the deposed and banished king, secretly returned to Iran and, rallying his supporters, attempted to overthrow the constitutional government (idem, 1992, p. 172). A new war broke out between the adherents and the detractors of the movement. The town of Tabriz found itself surrounded by the forces favoring the deposed king. The appearance of Halley's Comet in the sky over the town at the moment when savage combat was taking place within its confines terrified the population, most of whom took this coincidence as a sign of the imminent end of the world. On several nights Kasravi climbed to the roof of his house and observed the comet in an attempt to discover some facts on this matter. Eventually he came across an



article in Arabic in a special number of the Egyptian monthly *Al-moqtatef*. On the one hand, he was astonished that so sumptuous a magazine was published in Egypt, and on the other, he realized that European astronomy had nothing in common with what was known by that name in Iran. This incident led him to become involved with modern science. He acquired physics, chemistry, mathematics, and geography books and began to read (idem, 1990, p. 44).

In late December 1911, a merciless war pitted the constitutionalist combatants of Tabriz against Russian soldiers sent by the Czarist government to snuff out their movement and restore the deposed king to the throne (idem, 1992, pp. 261-74). The fervor aroused in Kasravi by the heroic resistance of the fighters led him to take to the pulpit in mosques throughout the town to call the population to rise up. But after four days of relentless combat, the war ended with the rout of the defenders and the execution of the most ardent (idem, 1992, p. 275). The anti-constitutionalist mullahs took advantage of the presence of the Russian forces and thundered relentlessly against the constitutionalist faction, including Kasravi by virtue of his pro-resistance position. They even excommunicated him in an attempt to turn the faithful against him. All these events had a happy outcome for Kasravi, for he would be freed from the onerous position of mullah (idem, 1990, pp. 45-46).

Palpable terror ruled the town. Kasravi once again found himself in seclusion. He spent his time studying mathematics and astronomy. He would also occasionally visit the main bazaar in town to pass some hours at the business offices of his circle, where he met educated men, all of them partisans of liberty, some of whom spoke European languages. It was they who taught him the real meaning of the word *mašrūteh* (constitutional government), of which he would remain for the rest of his life a staunch defender.

At the same time he was pursuing his study of Arabic, so successfully that after a while he began to write articles in that language and send them to the scientific journal *al-'Erfān* published in Sidon, Lebanon, which welcomed them.

The outbreak of World War I in summer 1914 engendered great hopes among the constitutionalists. Azarbaijan became a theater of operations. The Russians increased their numbers there, and the Ottoman troops, fighting the Russian army, approached Tabriz. The constitutionalists seized the opportunity to join forces with them (idem, 1992, pp. 591-98). But the Ottomans immediately suffered defeat and fell back.



In 1915, Kasravi was 25. After several years of attempting to penetrate modern science, he realized that he needed to learn a European language. He first studied French and acquired a degree of familiarity, and then he enrolled in English classes at the Memorial School, an American school in Tabriz (see [education xv. foreign and minority schools in persia](#)), where at the same time he was asked to teach Arabic, for which he wrote an elementary textbook. Meanwhile, he learned Esperanto, from which he began to translate articles into Arabic for publication in *al-Erfān* (idem, 1990, pp. 60-61).

At the end of the academic year, Kasravi was again unemployed, and since he could not find work in Tabriz, he decided to go to the Caucasus to look for a job in one of the prosperous towns of the region. He settled in Tbilisi, where he set about learning Russian and striking up friendships with many supporters of liberty. His job search did not succeed; in late September he returned to Tabriz (idem, 1990, p. 71).

#### THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The Russian Revolution of February 1917 stirred great excitement throughout Iran and especially in Azarbaijan. The Russian soldiers in Azarbaijan switched sides and after six years of occupation and terror displayed a change of heart toward the local fighters (idem, 1992, p. 674). Meanwhile, conflicts between the various religious sects took on a political aspect. The Šaykīs, the Motešarreʿ, the Karimkānis, the Azalis (q.v.), and other sects bridled against each other. Kasravi attempted to soothe these confrontations, which he considered meaningless and useless. These incidents had a profound effect on him and led him in later years to work out a Deist religion called Pākdini (“pure religion”) with the aim of denominational unification of all Iranians (idem, 1998a, p. 5).

After the October Revolution and the departure of the Russians, Shaikh Moḥammad Kīābāni, a member of the old Democratic Party that had been dissolved in 1912, rebuilt the party in Azarbaijan, but dissent broke out immediately at its heart; Kasravi intervened, and the Democrats, whom Kasravi joined, ended up uniting under the authority of Kīābāni, but shortly after, the arbitrary decisions of its head led him to openly criticize the leadership of the party, which resulted in a movement of dissent. A group gathered around Kasravi calling itself *Tanqīdiyūn* (“the Critics”) and seceded from the party. The opposing group called itself *Tajaddodiyūn* (“the Modernists,” referring to the newspaper *Tajaddod*, published by Kīābāni as the organ of his Democrat Party (Ferqa-ye Demokrat; see Šadr Hāšemi, *Jarāyed o*



*majallāt* II, pp. 105-6). Kasravi paid the price of his daring by his forced resignation from the public high school in Tabriz, where he had been teaching Arabic, and fled to Tehran (Kasravi, 1990, pp. 90-95).

On 8 April 1920, after a successful uprising, Kīābāni seized all the levers of power in the town. In order not to impede the performance of the new provincial government and to avoid all confrontation, Kasravi and his companions dissolved their group by sending out a press release. But the diehard Kīābānites harassed them. Kasravi had to secretly leave Tabriz and take shelter for a week in a nearby village. After his return to Tabriz, he was contacted and encouraged by a representative of the central government and the British *chargé d'affaires* to challenge the power of Kīābāni, but he refused to take part in any rebellion against him. Even though he was innocent, he was suspected by Kīābāni of participating in a conspiracy and found himself forced to leave the town for Tehran in the wake of the revelation of a plot incited by the central power against Kīābāni with the involvement of some of his companions (*idem*, 1992, pp. 865-79).

#### A JUDGE AND JURIST UNLIKE ANY OTHER

In Tehran, Kasravi was hired by the minister of education to teach Arabic at the Tervat High School. He stayed away from all unrest among Azarbaijani exiles against Kīābāni. The failure of negotiations of Ḥāj Mok̄ber-al- Saḷṭana, governor-designate of Azarbaijan, with Kīābāni resulted on 8 September 1920 in attacks by Cossacks on the headquarters of the Democratic Party of Azarbaijan and the homes of its leaders in Tabriz. On 21 September 1920, Kīābāni died in his hideout during a fight against his attackers (*idem*, 1998b, pp. 165-67). Kasravi refused to return to Tabriz, but in a letter to his comrades he asked them not to refrain from showing their sympathy toward the companions of Kīābāni, most of whom had been arrested.

During his stay in Tehran, which lasted only five months, the Justice Administration offered him several positions in various towns, which he refused. In the end he accepted the position of judge in the Tabriz appellate court, but three weeks later, on 21 February 1921, a coup by the Cossack division under the command of Colonel Reza Khan put an end to it. Power fell into the hands of Sayyed Žiā'-al-Din Ṭabāṭabā'i, who ordered the suspension of the activities of the Justice Administration. Kasravi was out of work (Manafzadeh, 2004, p. 71).



Meanwhile, with the participation of several scholars he founded an association with the name “Esperanto.” His interest in this language was due to the fact that in his eyes, one of the problems of humanity lay in the multiplicity of complicated languages, and thus in the mutual incomprehension that resulted. He hoped that Esperanto would become, by reason of its extreme simplicity, the second language of every nation on earth (Kasravi, 1990, p. 122).

In August 1921, he lost his wife. Deeply affected, he entrusted his two young daughters to his brother and once again set out on the road to Tehran. After a month of negotiation with the Justice Administration, he accepted appointment as a judge on the Court of Appeals of Māzandarān, the Caspian province. After four days of travel by horse and mule, he reached Sāri, capital of the province, where he stayed for only four months, thanks to the closing of his Court of Appeals by order of the minister of justice, ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Teymurtāš. When he got back to Tehran (in April 1921), he met with him and was promised a good job. But two days later, the government of Sayyed Žiā’ collapsed, and Teymurtāš lost his portfolio. Nonetheless, shortly afterward Kasravi was given a judicial assignment in Damāvand, a town northeast of Tehran, where he spent the three summer months, an opportunity he took advantage of to write in Arabic the history of the constitutional movement for the monthly *al-ʿErfān* (idem, 1990, p. 141). The Persian version of this history was to be published beginning in 1934 as a supplement to the monthly magazine *Peymān* that Kasravi started in 1933.

In October 1922, under a law passed by the Assembly, judges were required to take an examination in Tehran. Kasravi passed. During his two months in Tehran, he began research into the history of Māzandarān, whose results were published in the weekly magazine *Nobahār*. Meanwhile, he was sent on a fact-finding mission regarding a clash in Zanjān sub-province in northwestern Iran. He there thwarted the power of the mullahs, who, despite the establishment of a constitutional government in the country, still controlled the judicial system of the town. He succeeded in liberating Justice from the supervision of the clergy (idem, 1990, p. 153).

At Zanjān, he continued to write his Arabic history of the role of Azarbaijan in the constitutional movement (see below, iii) and simultaneously undertook research on the Babi movement (see [babism](#)), of which this town had been one of the most active centers. At the end of summer 1923, he took a few weeks of vacation to visit his family in Tehran (he had remarried during his stay in



Māzandarān). Then Justice appointed him examiner of the competence of judges in Qazvin and Zanjān—a job which involved administering a series of tests.

#### IN KHUZESTAN

Shortly afterward, in December 1923, Aḥmad Shah (q.v.), who was preparing to leave for Europe, named Reza Khan Sardār Sepah, the powerful war minister, as prime minister. The judicial authority of the new government summoned Kasravi to Tehran to send him to Shushtar as head of the tribunal of Khuzestan, an oil-rich province in southwestern Iran, where Shaikh Ḳaz'al (q.v.), chief of the Arab tribe of the Bani Ka'b, ruled over what was in practice a British protectorate. Kasravi's work there was contested by the men and the sons of the shaikh, who controlled nearly all the towns of the province. In fact, he ascertained that the heads of the state administrative departments were mere pawns of the shaikh. By his activity and his desire to make the law of the country supreme, Kasravi aroused the animosity of Shaikh Ḳaz'al and his sons (idem, 1994, pp. 227-25).

While he was there, he also undertook research into the dialects of Khuzestan, just as he had done in Mazandaran. His research on Iranian dialects would harmonize later with the movement for purification of the Persian language, which would be launched with the support of the political authorities, in order to render Persian more vigorous and better able to respond to the needs of modern times. Within these dialects Kasravi found a real treasure of Iranian words that had become obsolete centuries before from not having been used by poets and administrators, to the extent that the Iranians considered them foreign. In his opinion, all these dialects—as well as all the regional languages, including Kurdish, Turkish, and Arabic—were bound to disappear bit by bit, being replaced by Persian, which he hoped would become robust, evolved, and powerful. His understanding of language and its role in modern society was incorporated into the framework of his project for the construction of a modern nation-state in Iran replicating the European model of nation-states.

Kasravi also threw himself into the study of the history of Khuzestan and undertook research on ancient sites such as Susa, Gondēšāpur (q.v.), and Ahwaz (q.v.), as well as on the origins of the Ḳaz'al family. He would later publish the results of these investigations in a book called “Five centuries of the history of Khuzestan” (*Tāriḳ-e pānšadsāla-ye Ḳuzestān*). At the same time he continued his work within the Justice Administration, but his activities



clashed with Ḳaz'al's sabotage and with the system he had set up. Meanwhile, the national army had turned toward Khuzestan and was reconquering, town by town, this highly coveted province. Kasravi and his staff took part in the capture of the city of Dezful (q.v.; idem, 1994, p. 247).

Shortly after the war's end in December 1924, during the transitional period from the semi-autonomous rule of Shaikh Ḳaz'al to the establishment of the central authority, Kasravi's intransigent nature led to a serious conflict with the carefully designed operation of the central government. General Fażl-Allāh Zāhedi, the military governor of Khuzestan, pursued a policy of the gradual submission of Shaikh Ḳaz'al to preclude his uprising against the small government garrison in the region. Ignoring the operational design of the central government, Kasravi rushed to establish the justice department in Nāşeri (see *ahvāz*; Kasravi, 1990, pp. 228-34). In early 1925, at the behest of the prime minister, Reza Khan Sardār Sepah, the minister of justice recalled Kasravi to Tehran. Meanwhile, Shaikh Ḳaz'al, who had lived freely after the arrival of government troops in Khuzestan, was arrested and sent to Tehran, and his dominion collapsed (idem, 1994, p. 249).

#### RESEARCH IN TEHRAN

As soon as he arrived in Tehran, Kasravi learned from the minister of justice himself that a file had been opened against him on the basis of the reports of the military governor of Khuzestan in order to take him to trial. But shortly afterward, the truth of what had happened in Khuzestan came out, and the minister of justice thanked him for his work there. Nonetheless, he did not wish to go to the provinces, and the minister could not find a job for him in Tehran. Thanks to the provisional pension granted him in recognition of his services in the Justice Administration, Kasravi resumed his research (idem, 1990, p. 244).

The first book he published after his return to Tehran was called *Āzari* (a historical survey of the ancient language of Azarbaijan). He shows that the word *āzari* found in most books of medieval history, especially those from the first centuries of Islam, is the name of the old language of Azarbaijan that was related to the Iranian languages and was a descendant of the language of the Medes with no relationship to Turkish (idem, 1993, p. 62). This book enjoyed worldwide scholarly success. The publication of this work can also be considered an affirmation of the indestructible bond of Turkophone Iranians to Iran. Investigating the linguistic relationship of the Iranians of the past was



just as much an assertion of their linguistic unity in the future as a means of demonstrating that every Iranian rejoiced in the same, continuous identity (Manafzadeh, 2004, p. 95).

His further works included: “Shaikh Şafi and his lineage” (*Şayk Şafi va tabāraş*), in which he questions the supposed prophetic ancestry of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736; Kasravi, 1996b, pp. 59-105); “History of the lion and the sun” (*Tāriḳča-ye šir o ḳorşid*), a work on the emblem on the Iranian flag of the era, under which he hoped to reunite all his compatriots (idem, 1996b, pp. 17-55); “The names of Iranian towns and villages” (*Nāmhā-ye šahrhā va dihhā-ye Irān*), an unprecedented, systematic investigation of a topic in the geography of Iran (idem, 2000, pp. 193-286); and finally, “The unknown rulers” (*Şahriārān-e gomnām*), relating the history of the dynasties that came to power in Iran during the first centuries of Islam, who were unknown to the historiographers of his time (idem, 1978, p. 13). Kasravi was so engrossed in his research that he was not even aware of the deposition of the Qajar family and the accession of the Pahlavi dynasty (12 December 1925).

#### JUDGESHIP IN TEHRAN

A few months later, a new minister of justice was lavishly inaugurated in the presence of the new king (Reza Shah). Kasravi was named public prosecutor of Tehran (*modda'ia'l-omum*). He carried out an educational mission in Khorasan and, on the insistence of Dāvar, the minister of justice, replaced his turban with a hat. But because of his inflexibility in the application of the law, he fell into open conflict with his supervising minister and found himself obligated to resign from the Justice ministry.

After his resignation, for a little over a year he practiced law, and then returned to the Ministry of Justice and took a job in the Court of Assizes in Tehran. Next, on the insistence of the minister of justice, he became president of the *tribunal de première instance* (*dādḡāh-e bedāyat*), a position he held for 18 months. In his own estimation, it was the most meritorious period of his life (idem, 1990, p. 281). While he held this position, he fought every breach of the principles of deontology within the Justice ministry. During that time he wrote a book called *Qānun-e dādḡari* (The law of justice) in which he condemned the inconsistencies in the ministry's laws and the strictness of its procedures. In 1929, he was appointed to the Department of the Inspector-General, newly created by the minister of justice, to scrutinize the tribunals of various departments. He went with a group of inspectors to Hamadān and Arāk (idem,



1990, p. 311).

At the end of 1929, his position within the Justice ministry became more and more tenuous. His courageous behavior aroused both jealousy and hostility among high-ranking members of the ministry. Also his own personality traits contributed to making the situation worse. Although Kasravi enjoyed the patronage of ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Teymurtāš, the powerful minister of court, who even supported him in his ruling against the royal court over the dispute on Evin farmlands, and ‘Ali-Akbar Dāvar, the reforming minister of justice, frequently overlooked his innate righteousness and intransigence, Kasravi found himself alienated at the ministry and resigned. After several months of inactivity, he was eventually authorized to resume the practice of law (idem, 1990, pp. 317-25; for mounting problems during the early years of judicial reform by Dāvar and the complexity of the formation of modern judicial and legal systems [q.v.], see Golšā’iān, I, pp. 52-59, 24-127, 141-49).

#### UNCOMPROMISING REFORMER

Beginning in 1933, when he founded the magazine *Peymān*, a new period of his life commenced. While he continued to pursue his studies in history and linguistics, he entered the lists as a reformer or, as he put it, as a destroyer of illusions. That was the period when the enforced modernization of the country was in full swing. Aware of the limitations imposed on him by the Board of Censors, he began to work out his ideas in certain very specific domains. His history of the constitutional movement was published in Persian for the first time starting in 1934 as a supplement to this magazine.

One of the most burning questions he addressed at this point concerned cultural relations between Iran and the West. It was a time when the passion for Europe among Iranians who favored modernism was at its peak. Kasravi reacted against this passion, which he dubbed “Europeanism,” by writing a book called *Āyin* (The way) in which he questioned the idea of progress by wondering about the consequences of technological innovations for human life (idem, 1933, p. 22). Still, he approved of several aspects of Western civilization, such as constitutional government, patriotism, the rule of law, modern science, and the textile and agricultural industries, and he urged his compatriots to take full advantage of certain scientific and technological innovations (idem, 1940, nos. 4 to 10, p. 18). On the other hand, he warned them against certain “negative” aspects of that civilization, such as materialism, the din of progress, the burgeoning of political parties, romance



novels, and so on. Where this book touches on the place of women in society, he remained dependent on Irano-Islamic tradition. He thought that in a society dominated by men, a woman absolutely must live under the protection of a man (idem, 1932, p. 78). This conformist attitude reveals to us how difficult it was for him to free his mind from the influence of the religious education he had received in his youth.

The language used by Kasravi at this time in his articles explicitly violates the usual norms of the Persian language, both syntactically and lexically (idem, 2002, pp. 139-62). His perseverance on this path and the enthusiastic reception accorded by some of his sympathizers to his linguistic innovations even encouraged the state authorities to decide in favor of a language reform that grew bit by bit into a movement that continues to this day.

In 1934, while Kasravi was teaching Iranian history as an adjunct professor at both the Faculty of Theology (Dāneškada-ye ma'qul o manqul) and the Military Academy (Dāneškada-ye afsari) in Tehran, the National Assembly ratified the law of appointment and tenure of professors. Even though he met all the requirements, the university administrations subjected his nomination to the condition that he retract his outrageous proposals concerning “poetry and the craft of the poet” that he had published in his magazine. But Kasravi did not submit (Zokā', 1973, p. *hašt*). Yet his name appears among the professors of history at the Faculty of letters of the University of Tehran (*Sāl-nāma-ye šarq*, 1320 Š./1941, p. 131). In 1937, he agreed to provide the defense of 53 communist sympathizers (*Panjāh o se nafar*) who had been arrested on the order of Reza Shah. Without having the least intellectual affinity with the defendants, he skillfully undermined the basis of the indictment (Kāme'i, 1982, p. 167).

#### AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF REZA SHAH

The outbreak of World War II and the ambiguity of the position of Iran vis-à-vis the belligerents led on 16 September 1941 to the abdication of Reza Shah in favor of his son. One of the consequences of his departure and the Allied occupation of the country was the emergence of several political parties. Kasravi seized the opportunity to propagate his ideas freely, and to this end he immediately founded an organization called “Society of Free Men” (Bāhamāde-Āzādegān), whose platform consisted basically of combating what he called illusions (Rā'ed, 1986, pp. 39-47). In 1942 he started a newspaper, *Parčam*, which was envisaged as a daily, the better to disseminate his thought.



A politico-cultural movement grew up around the platform of his organization and from time to time carried out despicable acts such as the annual burnings of books that Kasravi considered deleterious to the education of youth. Collections of poems by the great Persian poets, including Jalāl-al-Din Rumi, Hafez (q.v.), Khayyam (q.v.), and Sa'di, were also cast into the flames during a symbolic ceremony performed on the 22nd of December every year. For according to Kasravi, classical Persian poetry had no other message to convey than Sufism, against which at the moment he was conducting a ruthless war. In his book *Şufigari* (Sufism), he deprecates the solemn tributes that the European orientalists and their Iranian associates were then awarding the Persian mystical poets. He held that Sufism taught the young nothing but idleness, inactivity, and celibacy (Kasravi, 1996a, p. 228; see below, vi).

Meanwhile, he continued to practice law; in the summer of 1942, he provided the defense of Rokn-al-Din Moḳtār (q.v.; Sarpās Moḳtāri), chief of police of Reza Shah, who, after the latter's departure, had been indicted for acts deemed criminal during the exercise of his authority (Makki, 1980, p. 786). Kasravi defended a considerable number of the undertakings of Reza Shah. At the time when (after his abdication) he was the object of virulent attacks by many journalists and some politicians, Kasravi wrote in his book *Dādgāh* (The tribunal, Tehran, 1944) in favor of the major accomplishments of Rezā Shah, such as the creation of a national army, imposition of public order, the military draft, limiting the influence of the clergy, prohibition of women wearing the veil, banning public selfflagellation in honor of the martyrs of Karbalā, the requirement to dress in European fashion, and the imprisonment of marauding chiefs of nomadic tribes (Kasravi, 1944, pp. 52-53).

The occupation of the country by foreign troops, which lasted until the end of the war, created a condition of disorder and fostered intense political rivalry within the Assembly and in the press. Taking advantage of the presence of the Red Army in Azarbaijan, Sayyed Ja'far Piševāri, a veteran Azarbaijani communist, seized the opportunity to found the Democratic Party of Azarbaijan and in November 1945 proclaimed the autonomy of Azarbaijan. Supported by the Soviets, the Party constituted a local authority to which the Iranian army units stationed in Azarbaijan submitted. Another separatist government, a Kurdish one supported by the Democratic Party of Azarbaijan and the Soviets, was formed at Mahābād. For their part, the English, in collaboration with the nomadic tribal chiefs of the south and southwest, were getting ready to impose their empire in the southern provinces and Khuzestan.



The dismemberment of the country appeared to be a *fait accompli*. This was the milieu in which Kasravi composed an essay with a political tinge called *Sarnevēšt-e Irān čeh kāhad bud?* (What will the future of Iran be?), in which he analyzes the country's perilous situation, delivers an intelligent critique of the political platforms of the parties, and lastly takes on the undignified behavior of both the majority and minority deputies in the National Assembly, who at the time were ripping into each other with abuse and slander. He lists the dangers that were threatening the territorial integrity of the country and reveals the flaws of the political plans of the parties and the incoherence of the ideologies that controlled their minds (*idem*, 1945, pp. 74-89). Most of the themes of the essay remain relevant today.

Faithful to his principles, to the end of his life Kasravi remained an unremitting defender of order, national unity, justice, the Constitution, and the modernization of the country. He staunchly opposed everything he considered an obstacle to realizing these ideals. Thus it was that he ventured onto a dangerous path that all the secular intellectuals of his period attempted to bypass. The defiance he would hurl at Shi'ism was unforgivable, not only for the clergy and religious fanatics, but also for the high officials of the country. With the publication of his book *Ši'igari* [Shi'ism] in late 1943, he signed his own death warrant. Shortly after its publication, he wrote another book, on Bahaism, called *Bahā'igari*, which takes it to be an extension of Shi'ism. The two books complemented each other. Kasravi treats some aspects of Shi'ism in the book on Bahaism. According to him, the messianism on which Bahaism relies is an illusion, contrary to the natural law of the universe. Such a belief prevents men from exercising good behavior, since it is assumed a priori that man can do nothing against the evil that grows from day to day (Kasravi, 1996a, p. 63). In his analysis of this religion, Kasravi appeals generously to reason. He rejects all argument from authority (*dalil-e naqli*), without which no revealed religion can stand. He intended in part to lift the intellectual obstacles that formed a barrier to national unity and in part to propagate a degree of rationalism in a world where the ancestral culture transmitted by literature and religious faith found it hard, because of its propensity for the irrational, to incorporate scientific thought, the keystone of the incredible success of Western societies.

Kasravi's critical analysis of Shi'ism undermined its historical foundations and in the process its doctrinal bases. According to him, Shi'ism began as a legitimate political movement, and its adherents were devout men who fought



loyally for their cause (ibid., p. 109). But from the moment of their failure, Shi'ism lost its legitimacy and little by little became a backward current. The temporal nature of the origin of Shi'ism and its subsequent development allowed Kasravi to analyze it rationally without risking any sort of theological debate. In this way he questions the Imamate in its entirety and the very concept of the Hidden Imam, two essential elements without which Shi'ism makes no sense. As for Shi'ite rituals, he placed them in a positivistic perspective and observed them from a purely sociological point of view (see below, v). As soon as Kasravi's book of *Šī'igari* appeared, it aroused a severe reaction on the part of the mullahs and fundamentalist Muslims and led to his assassination by a band of Devotees of Islam (Fedā'iān-e eslām; q.v.) on 11 March 1946 (see below, ii).

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For a comprehensive bibliographical survey on Kasravi, see below, vii.

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