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ḴĀLEṢIZĀDA, MOḤAMMAD B. MOḤAMMAD-MAHDI

ḴĀLEṢIZĀDA, MOḤAMMAD B. MOḤAMMAD-MAHDI (b. Kāẓemayn, 1308/1890; d. Baghdad, 1383/1963, FIGURE 1), contemporary Iraqi-Iranian reformist cleric and political activist. He was active in anti-British protests and the early struggles of the Shiʿites for more political, administrative, and military positions in Iraq, and one of the earliest proponents of political power for the Shiʿite jurists in 20th-century Iran. It has been suggested that his activism may well have influenced Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers, particularly in the unprecedented (in a Shiʿite context) assumption of the title of Imam (Arjomand, 1988a, p. 189; idem 1988b, p. 101).

Ḵāleṣizāda was the son of the famed *mojtahed* Shaikh Muḥammad-Mahdi Ḵāleṣi (d. 1925). His family originated in Ḵāleṣ, a small farming town some 70 km north of Baghdad. The family's men of religion chose the holy city of Kāẓemayn as a center for their activities (Luizard, p. 225). Mahdi Ḵāleṣi and his sons, all ethnically Arabs, became Iranian nationals during the Ottoman period in order to avoid conscription (Nakash, p. 82). Ḵāleṣizāda's religio-political life can be divided into three different stages; two in Iraq (the first up to 1922, and the second during the 1950s), and one in Iran (1922-49).

IN IRAQ UP TO 1922

During the 1914-1915 war against the British occupation of Iraq, Ḵāleṣizāda

fought alongside the Shiʿite fighters (*mojāhedin*), who formed a faction of the Ottoman army's auxiliary forces (Luizard, pp. 226-27). After World War I, he became active in the tribal uprising in 1920 against British control in Iraq. When the British Mandate bestowed the throne of Iraq on Fayṣal (r. 1921-33), and the latter called for elections to create a constituent assembly, the chief *mojtaheds*, including Mahdi Ḵāleṣi, issued *fatwā*s boycotting the elections (Hairi, 1977, pp. 129-35). They are said to have considered the elections to be a harbinger of a more reduced role for them in the Iraqi state to a level similar to that of the Vatican in Italy (Nakash, p. 79). In the summer of 1922, when the Anglo-Iraqi treaty was put before the Iraqi cabinet for consideration and approval, the leading Shiʿite jurists organized protests in Kāẓemayn and a number of other places, including tribal territories (for this treaty, see Hurewitz, II, pp. 310-12).

The British High Commissioner, Sir Percy Cox, deported some principal ringleaders and sent word to two main Shiʿite clerics in Kāẓemayn, Shaikh Mahdi Ḵāleṣi and Sayyed Moḥammad Ṣadr, that their sons who had taken a prominent part in orchestrating the protests had to leave the country within twenty-four hours. They complied and went to Iran in August 1922 (Kedourie, pp. 149-50; Hairi, 1977, p. 131; Luizard, pp. 229; Nakash, p. 81). According to one source, while the British exiled Ṣadr, it was, in fact, Fayṣal who had banished Ḵāleṣizāda (Ḵalili, p. 197). In June 1923, Mahdi Ḵāleṣi, his other two sons, and his nephew were also deported. In protest, the nine most prominent Persian theologians also left Iraq for Iran on 2 July (Nakash, p. 82).

IN IRAN (1922-49)

Upon arrival in Iran, Ḵāleṣizāda published several statements demanding, inter alia, the immediate abrogation of the British Mandate system, and stating that the Anglo-Iraqi treaty was an insult to Islamic law, since article 12 of the proposed treaty (Hurewitz, II, p. 311) allowed missionary activity in Iraq. Copies of his statements arrived in Iraq soon after their publication (Nakash, p. 81). It has been stated that Ḵāleṣizāda's "hostile attitude toward the British had invited the latter's suspicion of his being fostered by Russians" (Hairi, 1977, pp. 133-34). Ḵāleṣizāda's own accounts confirm his correspondence with Lenin through the vice-ambassador of Russia in Tehran in late 1922 or early 1923 (Luizard, pp. 231-32). In his letter to Lenin, Ḵāleṣizāda is reported to have written that, should an Islamic government be established in Iraq, it would expel the British and would even establish friendly relationships with the U.S.S.R. (Rajabi, p. 189). When Ḵāleṣizāda's father died in Mashhad in 1925,

the general consul of the Soviet Union in Khorasan published an official statement expressing, in highly respectful language, his regret over this "greatest calamity" (*moṣibat-e ʿoẓmā*) and his condolences "especially" to Shaikh Moḥammad Ḵāleṣizāda. The statement went on to invite Russian financial firms and the citizens of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to "participate in the honor" of observing the passing of Ḵāleṣizāda's father by suspending work for two days (Ṣafāʾi, p. 113).

During the first few years of his life in Iran, Ḵāleṣizāda was one of the most politically active Shiʿite clerics of the time. The years immediately following his arrival coincided with Reżā Khan Sardār Sepah's campaign to establish a republic. Unlike most of the other influential émigré Iraqi clerics who endorsed Reżā Khan, Ḵāleṣizāda sided with Aḥmad Shah and his crown prince (Hairi, 1985, pp. 183, 187, 192) and publicly opposed Reżā Khan's campaign to establish a republic (Baṣiratmaneš, p. 352). Meanwhile, he is said to have attempted to negotiate between the crown prince, Sardār Sepah, and Ayatollah Sayyed Ḥasan Modarres (ʿAyn-al-Salṭana, p. 7157). Ḵāleṣizāda is best remembered in historical accounts of the period for his brazen public display of opposition. When Modarres, the main opponent of Reżā Khan, was slapped in the face by one of the latter's supporters in the Majles, the police shut down the Masjed-e Šāh, a major mosque of Tehran, to bar any attempt at mounting a protest.

In response, Ḵāleṣizāda registered his indignation by defiantly reciting prayers in the middle of Tehran's bazaar (Makki, pp. 483-86; Bahār, II, p. 36-44; Mostawfi, III, pp. 595, 597). In a politically charged speech delivered on the heels of this episode, he pressed for "freedom of belief and press" and demanded "the release of those arrested" (ʿAyn-al-Salṭana, pp. 6820-21). There are eyewitness accounts of frequent, fiery sermons emphasizing the role that the Shiʿite jurists had to play as a powerful political force, along with the British threat to "divide" (*tajzia*) Iran, something that can only be countered with "religion [Islam] and the believers" (ʿAyn-al-Salṭana, pp. 6993, 7064). For a while, he set up a platform outside of Tehran's Darvāza Dawlat, from which he would shout, "Down with England" (Ḵalili, p. 204).

In July 1924, following the murder of the American vice-consul in Tehran, Robert Imbrie, Ḵāleṣizāda was arrested as "the leading Mulla" along "with 200 suspected of participation in [the] crime" (Kornfeld to Secretary of State) and was charged with "instigating people" in the anti-Bahai riots that led to Imbrie's killing (Aḥmadi, p. 55; Yazdani, 2011b, pp. 104-14). He was

subsequently exiled for a few months to Ḵˇāf, a remote district near the border of Afghanistan. He returned to Tehran after a few months, and in 1928 he was exiled to Tuyserkān (Aḥmadi, p. 55). While some scholars have interpreted his imprisonment and exile to Tuyserkān as an attempt by Reżā Shah's regime to suppress the politically active cleric by exiling him to an isolated region of the country (Baṣiratmaneš, p. 353; Aḥmadi, p. 57), Aḥmad Kasravi (d. 1946), who served as the judge who ordered Ḵāleṣizāda's banishment, presents a different picture. According to Kasravi, Reżā Shah, as the custodian of the endowments (*awqāf*) associated with the Shrine of Imam Reżā in Mashhad, rented the lands of endowment in Evin village near Tehran to Ḵāleṣizāda in order to appease him and "quiet him." Ḵāleṣizāda put undue financial pressure on the villagers who farmed those lands. The farmers filed an official complaint against the royal court. In an unprecedented trial, Kasravi ruled in favor of the farmers. As a result, the royal court annulled the rental contracts, and Ḵāleṣizāda was imprisoned and later exiled to Tuyserkān (Kasravi, 1944, pp. 137-40; idem, 1976, pp. 320-24) for eleven years (Jaʿfariān, p. 116).

After Reżā Shah's forced abdication, the British exiled Ḵāleṣizāda to Kāšān because of the disruptions he caused to their road construction project near Tuyserkān (Jaʻfariān, p. 116). In 1945, he returned to Tehran, where he became engaged in journalism. The contemporary cleric historian Rasul Jaʿfariān (pp. 117-18) contrasts "the Ḵāleṣizāda of Reżā Khan's period" with the one during this period who "lent himself to collaboration with elements such as Sayyed Żiāʾ-al-Din Ṭabāṭabāʾi" (d. 1969). In 1948 Ḵāleṣizāda was exiled to Yazd because of his activities such as leading the protest against the transfer of Reżā Shah's corpse to Iran (Aḥmadi, p. 78).

Ḵāleṣizāda, in his *Kašf al-astār*, written in late 1943-early 1944, is an open advocate of the clergy's political power, in response to ʿAli-Akbar Ḥakamizāda's controversial booklet, *Asrār-e hezār sāla*, in which the contemporary clerical and economic systems in Shiʿism are criticized in the form of questions. On the question of governance in Islam, Ḵāleṣizāda wrote that it was the jurists (*foqahā*) who are qualified and have the right to govern the country. In his characteristically forthright language, he then added that Iranians had to drive the "ignorant" and "irreligious" away from, not only governmental positions, but also the world, and send them to hell (Ḵāleṣi, n.d., p. 18). He also indicated that, while electing representatives for the creation of new laws was forbidden (*ḥarām*), even tantamount to infidelity (*kofr*), electing representatives for the protection of Islamic law was necessary (Ḵāleṣi, n.d., p.

19). It was either because of such bold statements or the criticisms leveled against "some" clerics that a group of jurists in Qom decided to restrict the publication of *Kašf al-astār* and instead chose Ayatollah Ruḥ-Allāh Ḵomeyni (d. 1989) to write the rebuttal. Ḵomeyni then wrote *Kašf al-asrār*, which, among other things, was much more circumspect regarding the political "rights" of the clerics (Markaz-e asnād, pp. 197-201; Jaʿfariān, p. 45). Ḵāleṣizāda's advocacy of Islamic government went beyond what he wrote in *Kašf al-astār*. Years later, in 1938, when asked whether he considered himself an Iranian or an Iraqi, he replied by saying that he was a "citizen of Islam" (*tabaʿa-ye Eslām*), and he wanted "a great Islamic government to come to power" that would transcend all sectarian differences (Ṣafāʾi, p. 108).

Ḵāleṣizāda was critical of a few normative Shiʿite views. For example, he considered concepts such as pleading for intercession (*tawassol*) to be polytheism (*šerk*; lit. joining partners with God), and rejected some Shiʿite traditions (*aḥādiṯ*) as superstitious (*ḵorāfi*; Ḵāleṣi, n.d., p. 2). Some contemporary scholars disparaged him for having the audacity to "challenge Shiʿism and its core doctrines" (Markaz-e asnād, p. 196), and some others characterized him as a Wahhābi (Šarif Rāzi, I, p. 23). He regarded the Friday prayer an individual duty (*wājeb-e ʿayni*; Ṣāleḥi Šahidi, p. 36; Aḥmadi, pp. 66-67), a stance quite revolutionary for its time. On the question of the use of the veil (*ḥejāb*), he harbored views that were then unorthodox, finding it unnecessary for women to cover their faces, the palms of their hands, and their feet (Ḵāleṣi, 2001, pp. 728-48; Machlis, pp. 153-55). For such reasons, his contemporaries in Iran saw him as having "peculiar" beliefs (*dārā-ye ʿaqāʾed-e ḵāṣṣa*; Ḵalili p. 195). He is also reported to have indicated, at least once, even though he later denied it, that he did not believe in religion itself, let alone rituals like *esteḵāra* (seeking divine guidance for the choice between two or more possible options; Ḵalili, p. 197).

Ḵāleṣizāda's animosity toward Bahais is evident in his anti-Bahai activities, which includes engagement in long debates that have been recorded, writing anti-Bahai polemics, as well as actively persecuting them in almost every Iranian city (e.g., Kāšān, Yazd) in which he resided (Nawwābzāda, pp. 392-94; Aḥmadi, pp. 65-66, 109-111; Jaʿfariān, pp. 117, 158; Yazdani, 2011b, pp. 187-92; Machlis, p. 98). He had a role in publishing, and perhaps editing, what became the final copy of "The Confessions of Dolgoruki" (see DOLGORUKOV MEMOIRS), the document forged to "prove" that the Bābi and Bahai religions were created by a Russian agent (Abedi, p. 51; Yazdani, 2011a, p.

28).Ķāleṣizāda's "character traits and mode of behavior" have been as much a matter of scrutiny as his socio-political activism. ʿAbbās Ķalili, a journalist, who was in contact with him during his time in Tehran, described him as "eager for fame and position" (*ṭāleb-e šohrat wa maqām*), "untruthful" (*kāḏeb*), and "licentious" (*šahwatrān*; Ķalili, pp. 195, 203), and recounted how Ķāleṣizāda would write "strange letters" to peoples and states (*melal wa dowal*) and introduce himself as the leader of the Islamic movement (*qāʾed-e nahżat-e eslāmi*), and how he had staged a failed assassination of himself by forcing one of his servants to shoot him at night, so that he could claim that terrorists were after him (Ķalili, pp. 203-4).

Ķalili also recorded how Ķāleṣizāda's rivalry with Sayyed Moḥammad Ṣadr, who had been exiled with him, led him to accuse the latter of being a spy for the British, having been factitiously sent as an exile along with him to keep an eye on him. He went so far as to devise and partly implement a plot to have Ṣadr trapped as a spy, making fake telephone calls pretending to be from the British minister, and forging a letter on letterhead created in the Russian Consulate addressing him, all with the intention to get Ṣadr killed. He considered all these efforts as part of a holy war (*jehād*; Ķalili, pp. 197-202).

In the same vein, he claimed that an Arab shaikh, who had fled from his country's heavy taxes to Iran, was a spy of the British, and he regarded stealing the latter's money and other valuables as acts honorably performed in the path of holy war. To rob the shaikh of his belongings, Ķāleṣizāda planned to distract him by soliciting prostitutes to join him in one of the gardens around Tehran. Once he could not implement this plan, he personally tried to steal the shaikh's valuables in the dark of night. He was caught in the process and lost face, but the government and some influential individuals kept the matter from the newspapers, lest the reputation of the clerics be infringed (Ķalili, pp. 195-96). Ķalili also indicates that Ķāleṣizāda married numerous women. In each city to which he was exiled, he married religiously "committed women" and then left them (Ķalili, pp. 204-5).

BACK TO IRAQ (1949-63)

In 1949, Ķāleṣizāda returned to Iraq, and, during the 1950s, he became one of the more well-known Shiʿite figures in that country. He regenerated the *madrasa* that his father had founded and developed it into an institute called Jamʿiyat Madinat al-ʿElm. He also pursued journalistic endeavors and tried to forge better relations between Christians and Muslims while at the same time

doing missionary work among non-Muslims (Ende, pp. 232-34). He also made attempts to provide a Sunni-Shiʿite rapprochement (*taqrib*) at the level of theology and Islamic law (Ende, p. 233). In these attempts he went so far as to omit the third profession of faith (*šahāda*; i.e., *Ašhado anna ʿAli*^{an} *wali Allāh*: "I affirm that ʿAli is the *wali* of God") from the call to prayer, on the account that it was an innovation of extremists (*ḡolāt*; Qafāri, p. 209; Ende, pp. 238-39), and he performed Friday prayers, along with his followers, at the shrine of Abu Ḥanifa, the eponym of the Hanafite school of law, and supported performing them with the Sunnites (Ende, p. 235). Because of attempts such as these, he has been described as having been influenced by the Salafi movement (Arjomand, p. 188).

His efforts for rapprochement, however, were welcomed neither by the Sunnite clerics, who interpreted such efforts as ways of propagating Shiʿism, nor by the majority of the Shiʿite clerics who rejected the "modernism" with which such attempts were bound (Ende, pp. 235, 238). According to Rainer Brunner, Ḵāleṣizāda ended up being "a truly tragic figure" since he "experienced ill will from all sides from the later 1940s." On the one hand, he was the target of the attacks of Sunni polemicists, and on the other hand, his Shiʿite "brethren-in-belief" did not come to his defense, since they were taken aback by his controversial suggestions, such as the elimination of the third profession of faith in the Shiʿite call to prayer. So dismayed was he by the actual difficulty involved in bringing about some sense of confessional concord among Muslims that in his philosophical-religious testament he opined, "it was impossible to preclude that one day there might be a complete abolition of religious law" (Brunner, pp. 195-97).

Ḵāleṣizāda was a prolific writer. Different authors have estimated the number of his published works as ranging from around seventy (Zerekli, VII, p. 86) to one hundred (Ṣāleḥi Šahidi, p. 36). Some of his works have been published in Iran in recent years.

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