



WAKIL-AL-RA'ĀYĀ, ḤĀJĪ SHAIKH TAQI IRĀNI

WAKIL-al-RA'ĀYĀ, Ḥāji Shaikh (Moḥammad) Taqī Irāni (b. ca. 1285/1868, d. 1318 Š./1939), a prominent merchant and the Majles deputy of Hamadān, who, in October 1906, was the first provincial deputy (*wakil-e majles*) to take his place in the First Majles (parliament) to be established after the [Constitutional Revolution](#) (Browne, p. 131). *Wakil-al-ra'āyā* (lit. deputy of the subjects), a title which first appears in documents of the later Safavid period, referred to a provincial magistrate appointed by the shah to investigate administrative malfeasance or injustice and promote harmony among the governing, commercial, and working classes of society (see Perry, 1978). By the later Qajar period, the title appears to have been devalued to one of the many honorifics for public figures. It was bestowed on Ḥāji Shaikh Taqī by the *anjoman* of Hamadān (called *majles-e fawā'ed-e 'omumi*), to which he was elected in 1906, in recognition of his services to the Constitutional movement (Aḏkā'i, p. 439).

During his first term, Ḥāji Shaikh Taqī solicited charitable donations for various humanitarian causes, and feuded with a more established and conservative delegate, Āqā Aḥmad Mo'in-al-Tojjār (see, e.g., "Moḏākarāt," in *Irān-e now*, Year 1, no. 197, May 7, 1910); in March 1908, supported by Sayyed Ḥasan Taqizāda, he successfully supported the right of political assembly (*anjoman*) for women (Moḏākarāt, 1, p. 474). Re-elected to the Second Majles (1909-11), he again spoke up for the rights of women. When the new electoral law (as drafted by a commission chaired by [Moḥammad-'Ali Foruḡi Dokā'-al-](#)



Molk was submitted to the Majles on 4 August, 1911, women were listed among those classes ineligible to vote. Ḥāji Shaikh Taqī, alone among the deputies, protested that women, too, were God's creatures, and demanded on what grounds they were disenfranchised. Foruḡi, supported by the more "rational" people's representatives (the Wakil-al-Ra'āyā of Hamadān had already gained a reputation as an eccentric), explained that there was no objection in principle, but women in Iran were not yet ready for the vote (*Moḏākarāt*, 2, p. 1531). This clash gained some international notice, and has even entered the mythopoeia of feminism: legend has it that Ḥāji Shaikh Taqī was ejected from the parliament by a prominent cleric for his protest (*The Times*, London, 1911, 22 August, p. 3; 28 August, p. 3; repr. in Bayat-Philipp, p. 301; Bāmdād, *Rejāl* III, pp. 325-26 [which differs most noticeably from the official record]; Afary, pp. 73, 76-7). Had the Wakil-al-Ra'āyā's view prevailed, Iran would have been years ahead of Britain and nearly all other parliamentary democracies of that time in respect of women's franchise; only four countries permitted women to vote in 1911.

The reputation of Wakil-al-Ra'āyā is tarnished, ironically, by accusations of nepotism and peculation from the treasury (e.g., see "Moḏākarāt," Year 3, no. 7, April 2, 1911; no. 19, April 17, 1911; no. 36, May 7, 1911; no. 73, June 21, 1911; Adkā'i, pp. 447-48). Upon the dissolution of the Second Majles at the end of 1911, he retired to Hamadān, where he remained active in charitable and educational affairs. In later years he evinced increased signs of eccentricity and dementia. He left five sons, four of whom distinguished themselves in public life (*Malekzāda*, IV-V, pp. 1040-41).

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