

Research Article

# Study of Socio-political and Economic Developments in the Qajar Government

Karim Rezadoost<sup>1\*</sup> , Mohammad Reza Alam<sup>2</sup> , Mehran Bondori<sup>3</sup> ,  
Abbas Eghbal Mehran<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sociology, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Department of History, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran

<sup>4</sup>Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran

## Abstract

The Qajar dynasty (1789-1925) witnessed major changes in social, political, and economic fields. In the social dimension, cultural awakening and the emergence of new classes through the establishment of schools and the growth of the press led to fundamental changes in society. These changes paved the way for the social and political awareness of the people. Politically, the weakness of the central government and the inability to confront internal and external pressures accelerated the emergence of constitutionalist movements. Also, in the economic dimension, dependence on foreign powers and the lack of management of domestic resources exacerbated economic crises. These developments not only affected the fate of the Qajar dynasty but also shaped the course of contemporary Iranian history. This research aims to examine the socio-political and economic developments in the Qajar government with an analytical perspective. Therefore, it seeks to answer these questions: 1- What factors led to the emergence of social developments in the Qajar period? 2- How did the weakness of the Qajar government affect the emergence of political movements? The research findings indicate that the increase in the level of education and social awareness in the Qajar period led to the formation of social and political movements. Economic dependence on foreign powers in the Qajar period weakened the country's political and economic independence.

## Keywords

Developments, Social, Political, Economic, Qajar

## 1. Introduction

The Qajar tribe was a nomadic and pastoral tribe belonging to the Western Turkic branch [21]. During the Safavid dynasty, this tribe often fulfilled its obligations to protect the borders of Iran and were loyal to the Safavid court. During this period, there was no movement or rebellion from this

tribe that had the aspect of an uprising against the central government of Iran. In most of the major wars during this period, which alternated between Iranian forces and Ottoman and Uzbek forces in the east and west of Iran, the leaders and some of the elites of the Qajar tribe participated. The reason

\*Corresponding author: rezadoost41@gmail.com (Karim Rezadoost)

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for this peace and the Qajar leadership during this period can be considered, on the one hand, the ethnic affinity of the tribe with the early Safavid sultans and, on the other hand, the differences and divisions among the leaders of the tribe [20]. Although the Safavid kings invited the Qajar leaders to the royal court of Isfahan, the tribes carefully dispersed and dispersed them. Some were sent to Georgia to protect the northern borders; some were sent to Khorasan to fight the Tatars, and a group was sent to Mazandaran to defend the city of Astarabad from the local Turkmen [1]. The turbulent period after the fall of the Safavids became the scene of attacks by powerful tribes, each of which tried to establish a powerful dynasty in Iran like the Safavid dynasty and, after their power was institutionalized, establish a form of order and security in this land. After the death of Karim Khan Zand, Agha Mohammad Khan, the head of the Qajar tribe, with the help of his tribe and some other tribes, entered the field of conflict to establish a new dynasty. Taking advantage of the existing disorder and using the tools at his disposal, and especially considering the nature and fate of the Zand dynasty, he chose a very different path from his predecessors to achieve the throne and establish his dynasty [5]. After numerous wars and escapes, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar finally defeated Khan Zand with the help of Haji Ibrahim Khan Kalantar, the prime minister of Lotf Ali Khan Zand, and one of the powerful officials and merchants of the Zand dynasty, and in 1210 AH, he was crowned as the king of Iran and the founder of the Qajar dynasty [5]. During his 18-year reign, the head of the Qajar dynasty brought a large part of the Iranian territory under his control, and in this way he used three weapons: sword, bribery, and strategy [9]. After taking control of Iran, the Qajars did not create a new order, but imposed their will on the existing situation and installed their own people in government positions and positions instead of members of the previous government [8]. The Qajar period is the continuation of the period of decline in Iran. This period coincides with the flourishing of Europe and the Industrial Revolution and the occurrence of the French Revolution. Population growth, parliamentary system, growth of national wealth, extreme growth of nationalism, growth of science, feeling of superiority of European man in the West. During this period, the Europeans divided all of Africa among themselves and the rest of the world was either colonized or more or less placed in the area of influence of the West and Europe [18]. Until the end of the reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar, we encounter a cycle consisting of a succession of order and disorder, or in other words, security and chaos. A cycle that affects all socio-economic fields as well as all cultural and psychological areas of Iranians [5]. Before that, Iranian society had been unaware of the progress of material progress and the advancement of science and wisdom in Europe for a long time. The change in trade routes, the numerous internal wars after the extinction of the Safavids, and the general chaos in Iran should be considered the main causes of this ignorance and backwardness. In addition, the settle-

ment of the Ottoman Turks in the Asia Minor peninsula was another factor that, like the Chinese Wall, blocked Iran's breathing space and isolated it from the progressive world [2].

## 2. Research Background

Momani and Mohammadzadeh (2019) in their study titled "Fath Ali Shah's Succession and Its Reflection in Foreign Relations" showed that the competition between princes over the issue of the crown prince and the selection of a successor had various political consequences, the most important of which was in the foreign relations of the Qajar government. The UK and Russia used the issue of succession as a tool for greater influence for the Qajar ruling body. Afsari-Rad et al. (2019) in their study titled "Patrimonialism and Political Autocracy in the First Era of Qajar Rule" showed that in the Qajar political structure, the Shah was at the head of all affairs, acting in the role of a patrimonial ruler who, according to his own will and with the criteria he determined, selected members of the bureaucracy, controlled them with strict supervision, and whenever his authority was threatened with a decrease, he attempted to remove them from the assembly of bureaucrats. Bureaucratic members, on the other hand, focused their efforts on strengthening the traditional dominance of the Shah over society by fulfilling their duty of loyalty. Pahnadayan (2017) shows in an article titled "A Review of the Social and Economic Structure of Iran in the Qajar Era": In the structure of the Qajar government, the Shah was the supreme power and there was no legal structure or mutual commitment between the Shah and the governed. In other words, the Shah had no commitment to the people and other social groups and the country was considered the vast property of the Shah in economic terms. Despite the ancient, brilliant and ancient civilization and culture of Iran, the Qajar society itself was a worn-out society with strong national and religious prejudices, which underwent transformation in political, military and economic dimensions when confronted with Western civilization, and its social structure collapsed. The Shah's power was challenged and the course of social life changed from the past. In an article titled "The Thought of Intellectuals of the Qajar Era and the Possibility of Transition from the Theory of Government to the State," Kazemi Zamehriz (2014) finds that with the entry of modern ideas into the Iranian world in the Qajar era, we witness the obvious collapse of these beliefs and the need to rethink them. Intellectuals in the Qajar era were in charge of such a matter. Intellectuals faced practical obstacles in rethinking the beliefs inherited from the ancient world. Therefore, instead of addressing the foundations of political society and the state, they made the proper use of political authority - like the thinkers of the ancient world - the main topic of their theorizing. Khansari (2014) showed in a study titled "How the Qajar government faced the issue of legitimacy" that constitutionalism and its course during the Qajar era were also one

of the most important events that shook the pillars of the acceptability of the Qajar government; The prolonged rule of Nasser al-Din Shah, the increase in his tyranny and tyranny, and the granting of unlimited privileges to foreigners, turned the relationship between the scholars and the people and the government into an adversarial relationship. Saleh-Nejad et al. (2012) in a study titled "Kadkhoda in the Qajar Period" defined the position of Kadkhoda in this period in various areas, including Kadkhodas of urban neighborhoods, guilds, and villages. They had specific duties and functions in each of these three areas. Studying the surviving sources and documents related to this period shows the extent of influence and impact of this position on people's lives because it played an important role in regulating the relationship between people and the government, and through playing its role, it could be effective and beneficial, and sometimes even harmful, and take steps towards improving life or in the opposite direction. Bashir (2007) in a study titled "Iranian Intellectuals and Political Discourse in the Qajar Era" found that the emergence of the intellectual class was mainly the result of Iran's contact with the West. Different intellectual groups faced different reactions from the Qajar government, the clergy, and other segments of the population. They were able to introduce various Western political and social doctrines to Iranians with the help of new communication media such as the press. For the first time in the 19th century, these intellectuals set out to propose new concepts such as nationalism, freedom, democracy, and law and order.

### 3. Theoretical Basis of the Research

Wallerstein chose a unit for his analysis that was different from that of most Marxist thinkers. He did not focus on workers, nor on classes, nor even on states, because he considered most of these units too limited for his purpose. Instead, he chose a broad economic phenomenon with a division of labor in the broadest sense and without cultural boundaries as his unit of analysis. He found this unit in his concept of the world system. A concept that encompasses a self-reliant social system with definite boundaries and a definite lifespan. In this sense, the world system does not last forever. This system itself is made up of a variety of social structures and groups. It is also composed of a collection of various forces that are inherently in tension with each other. These forces are always ready to break apart. Wallerstein says that we have had two types of world systems so far. One was a world empire like ancient Rome, and the other was the modern capitalist world economy. A world empire is based on political (and military) domination. While the global capitalist economy relies on economic dominance [17]. Wallerstein divides the world into three main regions: core, periphery, and quasi-periphery. The core (core) geographic region is a place that dominates the global economy and exploits the rest of the system. This region has a strong economy and advanced technology, and while having an industrial and

commercial center, it benefits from powerful and stable states, modern middle classes, and cosmopolitan culture. Periphery: It includes regions that provide raw materials for the core region. Peripheral societies are single-product, have backward technology, and lack extensive trade and industrial relations, and while relying on weak and unstable states, they also suffer from low-quality and peripheral cultures. Semi-peripheral societies: These societies have the characteristics of both core and peripheral societies. In the global system, they play an intermediate role that presents certain characteristics, some of which are characteristic of the core and some of which are characteristic of the periphery. Semi-peripheral societies play an important political-economic role in the global system due to this dual nature [11]. Lipset classified a number of societies according to whether they are stable democracies or unstable and dictatorial democracies, and by presenting a table with various indicators of wealth, industrialization, education, and urbanization, Lipset was able to show that stable democracies have a higher score in all these cases. Lipset was interested in the conditions and conditions under which conflicts and conflicts arising from competing goals and values can be accommodated within the political system. Lipset's opinion was that the existence of a certain amount of institutionalized conflict and conflict is useful for maintaining a democratic consensus [22]. According to Lipset, there is a significant relationship between political democracy and socio-economic development. In his opinion, developed countries enjoy a democratic status because they have a class structure with a small volume of upper and lower classes and a population density in the middle class. In his opinion, the greatest and best form of political participation is carried out by this middle class [7]. Gramsci believed that in order to realize a social revolution, the masses must take action, they must be aware of their situation and the nature of the system in which they live. Although Gramsci recognized the importance of structural factors, especially the economic factor, he did not believe that these factors would force the masses to revolution. The masses need a revolutionary ideology and cannot act on their own. He operated with an elitist concept according to which intellectuals create ideas, then spread them to the masses and through them put these ideas into practice. The masses cannot create such ideas, but can only put them into practice with their own faith after they have come into being. The masses cannot achieve self-awareness by their own efforts; They need the help of social elites. But once the masses are influenced by these ideas, they can take actions that lead to social revolution [17].

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. The Emergence of Intellectuals

The emergence of the intellectual class in Iran arose for several reasons. First, the encounter with the new Western civilization and its customs and traditions introduced the

Iranian people to many Western wisdom customs, and a new class was raised with new ideas that protested the status quo. In fact, the awakening of ideas in Iran was the result of familiarity with Western knowledge and civilization, and familiarity with Western civilization was the result of establishing contact between Iran and Europe, the expansion of European countries' policies in Iran at the beginning of the 19th century, and Iran's proximity to Russia, which, due to geographical necessity, placed Iran in constant contact with the Western world, and with the development of international relations, the scope of these exchanges increased [2]. The second reason for the emergence of intellectuals in the Qajar era was rooted in the growing crises in the political order. After the collapse of the Safavid government; The inability of the Zand and Afshar dynasties to establish a stable and efficient model for organizing political order was a prominent feature of Iranian society [13]. With the entry into the Qajar period, developments in the field of modernization of society were carried out by modernizers and reformers such as Abbas Mirza and Amir Kabir. This was done in various fields such as the education system, modernization of the army, reforming the legal system, etc. [25]. The first modernization program was initiated by Abbas Mirza. He, who was the undisputed heir to the throne and governor of Azerbaijan, realized during the first Iran-Russia war that the tribal cavalry - which he contemptuously called thugs - was no match for the mobile artillery of the Russians. Therefore, imitating the reformer of the Ottoman Empire at the time, Sultan Selim III, and in accordance with his understanding of the new Ottoman system, he set about creating a new system in Azerbaijan. The core of this new system consisted of six thousand soldiers. These forces were equipped with mobile artillery and completely new weapons, received regular stipends, wore uniforms, lived in barracks, and were trained by European officers there. To supply and equip this new army, Abbas Mirza built a cannon and rifle factory in Tabriz and established a translation department to translate and compile the necessary military-engineering regulations and regulations. For the aforementioned measures, he opened the first permanent Iranian representative offices in Paris and London, and also sent the first group of Iranian students to Europe to receive training in some applied fields such as military sciences, engineering, gunsmithing, medicine, printing, and modern languages to supply the strength of this institution [6]. The initiator of the second step towards modernization was Mirza Mohammad Taghi Khan Farahani, known as Amir Kabir [1]. He revived the standing army and built fifteen factories to meet the needs of the army and cut off foreign imports; factories for the production of cannons, light weapons, military uniforms, various military insignia, woolen fabrics, trousers and other fabrics, carriages, samovars, paper, cast iron, lead, copper and sugar [1]. The Amir's economic development policy was based on the creation of new industries, agricultural progress and the development of domestic and foreign trade [3]. The Amir's plan for building a

national industry included mining, establishing various factories, hiring technical masters from England or Prussia, sending craftsmen to Russia, purchasing factories from France, and supporting domestic products. A decree was issued to allow Iranian citizens to mine; both the government and the people took up this task. As several mines were established, textile factories, sugar factories, porcelain and crystal factories, paper factories, iron foundries and metalworking factories, and other small industries were established [3].

## 4.2. Iran's Encounter with European Countries

At the same time as the scientific and technological advances taking place in the Western world, and as a result, Western nations began to invade other nations in the continents of Asia, Africa, and America, the Qajar kings were in a state of silence, and in the meantime, Iran, as a country far from progress, was coveted by colonial countries. Iran's first encounter with European countries occurred during the time of Fath Ali Shah and his crown prince Abbas Mirza in the war with Russia. The defeats of the incompetent Qajar Shah made him desperate and he reached out to European countries. From then on, a new chapter in Iran's relations with the West began: In order to preserve his rule, given the lack of cooperation of the British in confronting Russia, the Qajar Shah decided to resort to the third power of the time, France, and signed the "Finnishtenstein" agreement with the French government on 25 Safar 1222 AH/1807 AD. After signing this treaty, on Napoleon's orders, General Garden came to Iran with a delegation of seventy people to train the Iranian army, teach how to make cannons, establish an arms factory in Isfahan, and map roads [16]. Napoleon I's foreign policy and his love for conquering England brought the French and Iranian courts closer together, and the closeness of the two to each other drew England into the arena of political conflict in Iran and Western Asia. On the other hand, the most intense and longest foreign wars of Iran between this country and the colonialist country of Tsarist Russia began in this era. The issue of the alliance between England and Russia against Napoleon's conquests forced the British government to intervene and mediate in the wars between Iran and Russia, and as a result, irreparable losses were incurred by our country [20]. Since Iran during the Qajar era had practically no authority that it had in the past and was no longer famous, in Iran's confrontation with Western colonial countries, it played more of a role of a toy among these countries. Sometimes the court's policy turned towards Russia and England and sometimes towards France, which had very serious consequences. By concluding treaties such as Golestan and Turkmen-Chai, it changed Iran's international status and reputation in the public mind inside and outside the country and had unpleasant consequences for the country. In addition to the seizure of some of the best regions of the country, receiving compensation, the right to use capitulation and other privileges, Article 7 of the Turkmen-Chai Treaty, which

guaranteed Russia to maintain the monarchy in the descendants of Abbas Mirza, the son and crown prince of Fath Ali Shah, caused a foreign country to make the most important pillar of the country, namely its political sovereignty, its debtor and indebted. The result of such an action was Russia's dominance over the Iranian court, and its influence on the decision-making of the Qajar kings and rulers, and subsequently, the government's overt but unofficial domination and rule over the northern half of Iran [23].

### 4.3. Creating New Schools

If the coins of small countries like Greece, which have a population of no more than three crores, are common in the world, and our money is not credible, then the weakness of our government and nation has reached such a level that it is "not respected in any government." Just as the statements of other governments are valid everywhere, our statement is invalid. This is also due to a lawless government and the consequences of tyranny. If our ambassadors and ministers are not respected in foreign countries and do not respect our treaties, it is also due to the weakness of this government and our lawlessness. All of these circumstances indicate that our country is afflicted with a serious illness and we must seek to cure it [4]. The intellectual stagnation that had dominated Iranian society since the Safavid era, i.e., since the early 10th century AH, continued, and in the face of the booming market for religious and material sciences (hadith, news, and the like), interest in and attention to rational and reasonable sciences such as wisdom, philosophy, natural sciences, and mathematics decreased day by day [20]. This was due to two basic conditions: first, the social environment was not suitable for intellectual and intellectual growth, and second, the kings of that era had no inclination toward such sciences. The short period of the Afshari and Zand dynasties, which can be considered a transitional period between the long Safavid and Qajar dynasties, was spent mostly in internal and external conflicts, clashes, and wars. In terms of science and literature, this period should also be considered a continuation of the Safavid era, with the difference that the passage of time to some extent eliminated the effects of the Safavid dry religious policy, and intellectual and intellectual activities began again among Iranian society [20]. After the Qajar era came to power, and especially since the reign of Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar, as a result of the people of Iran becoming familiar with the manifestations of Western civilization and the efforts of the Great Amir, the young Iranian class became familiar with intellectual sciences. With the establishment of the Dar al-Fonun school, the first step was taken towards acquiring the new European civilization and establishing new schools in Iran. The Amir's thought in building the Dar al-Fonun was not inspired by a single source, but rather the result of his collective learning. He had seen various Russian academies and schools; In the book *Jahan-Nama-e-Jadeed*, which he translated and compiled on his own initiative and

under his supervision, he had read descriptions of the Dar al-Ilms of all Western countries in various fields of science and art, along with statistics on their students; and he was aware of the cultural foundations of the modern world. In addition, he was aware of the Tayyiba School and the Ottoman Askariyya that they had built under the command of the Tanzimat [3]. The educational fields of the students of the Dar al-Fonun, who were all sons of the nobility, were: foreign languages, political science, engineering, agriculture, mining, medicine, military science, and music. To finance these projects, Amir Kabir reduced additional expenses, especially court expenses, and increased government revenues by raising import customs duties, suspending the sale of administrative officials, closely monitoring the work of tax officials, and imposing a new tax on the tax collectors who no longer sent armed forces to defend the country [1]. Also, during his trip to France, Mozaffar al-Din Shah had invited several good teachers to Iran to teach medicine, mathematics, and other sciences [7].

### 4.4. Publishing Newspapers and Books

The important role of the media, especially the press, in the political development of society has been at the forefront of various studies. This is especially true in relation to the democratic function of the media. It has always been emphasized in studies that the press has always played an important role in political development, this role is based on the principle of "freedom of the press" as a prerequisite and safety shield in a democratic society, and the function of the media, especially the press, is inseparable from the issue of freedom and supervision. Since the conventional method of dividing the democratic role of the media is based on three principles: freedom-seeking, supervisory function, public spokesperson function, and information source, the above three functions play a vital role in creating a democratic society, and the lack of each of them is an obstacle to the process of political development [19]. Intellectuals who were sent to Europe during the reign of Abbas Mirza to acquire modern sciences became familiar with journalism and the press there and upon their return to Iran, they published newspapers in the same style. Journalism in Iran began with the emergence of the news paper in 1253 AH by Mirza Saleh Shirzai, who was one of the first Iranians to study in Europe and who at that time held the ministry in Tehran. Following the European style, he published a publication called the news paper, which was published monthly for about three years on a folded sheet of paper with one side blank on two pages: the first page (right hand) contained "Eastern News" and the second page (left hand) contained "Western News" [14]. The process of the history of the press in Iran during the Qajar era shows that changes in attitudes, perspectives, and the desire for innovation and modernity were among its results and consequences. For example, the connection between domestic and foreign intellectuals and its influence on political events, including

the Constitutional Revolution, can be considered among its achievements in Iranian history at this time [15].

#### 4.5. Constitutional Revolution

Before the Iranians encountered modern civilization, the perception of the strength and weakness of governments was measured based on criteria such as the ability to establish security and maintain boundaries, and the main basis of economic prosperity and, as a result, the relative well-being of a traditional Iranian society was determined by the security existing in that society and then the justice of the rulers in dealing with their subjects, especially in collecting taxes from them [10]. The generations after Abbas Mirza, in order and according to the social and political environment in which they were born, each looked at Europe in a different way, and as a result, each reached different results in response to the causes and causes of the superiority of the Europeans and the backwardness of the Iranians. The generation after him looked at Europe with a look of astonishment and admiration and was amazed and astonished by the advancements, inventions, and technical advances of the West. The next generation went a step further and realized that the basis of all that progress and advancement was the use of modern science and knowledge. The next generation gradually realized that it was not only science, knowledge, industry, books, printing, and railroads that distinguished Europe from Iran. From their perspective, what had made Westerners successful and completely different from Iranians was summed up in social institutions and the way of government. This generation was not simply seeking to bring factories, telegraph lines, trams, locomotives, electric lights, colleges, hospitals, etc., but more importantly and fundamentally, it was seeking to bring the political structure of the West to Iran. A generation that ultimately paved the way for the Constitutional Revolution [24]. The most fundamental change of this era was the change in political and social thinking and the way people viewed life, which led to a relative change in the traditional structure of power. This, which was influenced by the results of the five-hundred-year effort of European thinkers to find a desirable answer to “how to live,” took a hundred years. During this not-so-long period, the “divine legitimacy of kings” was questioned in theory and practice, and “law” replaced it as a criterion of legitimacy [12]. While in many European countries, rulers and sultans had no power, and instead, parliaments, political parties and movements, organizations and trade unions constituted a significant part of political power, and the press freely criticized and examined the performance of the government and politicians, in Iran, power was concentrated in the hands of one person named the Shah. Royal orders and demands were implemented without question and had the force of law. There was no party, no newspaper, no law, no political and social security, no trade union organization or force, and no official had the courage to speak a word or express an opin-

ion or belief contrary to the resolutions of the Aqdas Homayuni [24].

#### 5. Conclusion

Many events were involved in the emergence of the Qajar government. If many events had not occurred, perhaps the Qajar government would not have been so notorious in Iranian history. Diseases and intrigues caused the noble men of the Qajar government who could have brought back the previous authority to the homeland to leave Iran. Great men such as Abbas Mirza died of illness and Amir Kabir also left the scene of the times due to the intrigues of ill-wishers. Perhaps any other government that had arisen in place of the Qajar government would not have been able to resist those colonialists, because the necessity for the Westerners of that time to yield was certainly the authority of the country, which had long been associated with science, and the Iranian state had also been deprived of modern science. This lack of authority had caused the Westerners to be tempted more and more every day and to bring their borders closer to present-day Iran, and from time to time, they separated a city from Iran through contracts and annexed it to their colonies or, like Russia, annexed it to their territory. It seems that the variables that were examined from the beginning were also sequential in terms of time. The Constitutional Revolution in Iran did not come about overnight. The Constitutional Revolution in Iran was due to the fact that first a class of intellectuals emerged, and in the next stage, the intellectuals' acquaintance and interaction with the powerful nations of that day made them realize the country's shortcomings and shortcomings, including the country's scientific backwardness, and the need to eliminate this backwardness was to establish new schools in the country. Making this backwardness known to everyone requires the press and media, including newspapers, which at this stage play the role of awakening in society. An awakening that leads people to become aware of their rights, to criticize the king's way of governing, and ultimately leads to the Constitutional Revolution. And the law, although incomplete, replaces the king's orders and marks a new beginning in the history of Iran. A beginning in which the king is no longer considered the shadow of God on earth, and the king, like other members of society, must be accountable for his actions and deeds before the law.

#### Author Contributions

**Karim Rezadoost:** Writing – original draft

**Mohammad Reza Alam:** Writing – review & editing

**Mehran Bondori:** Writing – review & editing

**Abbas Eghbal Mehran:** Writing – review & editing

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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