

THE IMPACT OF RELIGION AND POLITICS IN IRAN

A Presentation by Rhea Soman

Religion and Politics



Those who believe religion and
politics aren't connected don't
understand either.

— *Mahatma Gandhi* —

AZ QUOTES

MOVIE CLIP FROM DEBATE SCENE OF FILM PK

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKVza1N0o9A>
- John Locke: It is not the diversity of Opinions (which cannot be avoided) but the refusal of Toleration to those that are of different Opinions (which might have been granted) that has produced all the Bustles and Wars upon account of Religion.

Why Strong Ties between Islam and Politics?

- ❖ **Islam has always been connected to political movements**
- ❖ **Islamism is the belief that Islam can be the basis for government**
- ❖ Islam means “submission” and Muslim means “a person who submits to God”
- ❖ **Submission to God = Liberation from people**
- ❖ Muhammad, the Holy Prophet, was not only a religious leader but a political leader as well

Why Strong Ties between Islam and Politics?

- ❖ Rule of law important
- ❖ Even the caliph, or the religious leader to succeed Muhammad, is subjected to it since **ultimate sovereignty belongs only to God**
- ❖ Caliphate Abu Bakr said: “Obey me as long as I obey God and His Messenger. When I disobey Him and His Prophet, then obey me not.”
- ❖ Democracy is based on the idea that the people themselves are sovereign, making it difficult for Islamists to embrace democracy

SAFAVIDS AND QAJAR

- ❖ Safavids dynasty (1502-1722) made Shia Islam the official state religion in Iran
- ❖ Due to the various fluctuations that occurred in Iranian history, Iran's Shi'ite clergy attained a sense of independence from the state, allowing individual clerics to have a bigger role in country affairs
- ❖ Qajars gave the Muslim clergy, called ulema, political power

PAHLAVI DYNASTY

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4g8SOLa0E4>
- MOHAMMAD REZA PAHLAVI SHAH
- REPRESSED ISLAMISTS/ POLITICAL OPPONENTS → CENSORSHIP, ARRESTS, TORTURE
- ANGERED & DISILLUSIONED GENERAL POPULATION
- LED TO REVOLUTION AND SHAH FLEEING

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

- PERSEPOLIS CLIP 19:00
- Right time, right place, right words
- Charismatic, strong ideals
- Unify people under hatred of the shah
- Unify people under religion
- Completely unique (why moderates sometimes lose out)
- felt that a king's power un-Islamic
- Shia tradition was to fight that power.
- Assumed levers of power

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

- Ended Iran's monarchy
- Established theocracy based on velayat-e faqih
- velayat-e faqih: rule of Islamic jurist
- Government should run on sharia or Islamic law

Iran's Government Structure

- sharia law scholar → most knowledgeable about law and justice → ultimate authority
- President, legislature, prime minister → their decisions could be overturned by Supreme Leader → Khomeini
- Ultimate authority is will of God/ not will of people
- Supreme Leader representative of that

Why Opposition So Little?

- Created the Islamic Revolutionary Guards & Hezbollah
- To defend the revolution against coup attempts
- “Revolutionary courts” :
- Applied sharia & hash & curtailed opposition parties
- Appeal to belonging to ruling stratum of society
- Clergy “not interested in politics”
- Blackmail using Shah secret police info

Women in Iran under theocracy

- ❖ After the 1979 revolution women have struggled to regain lost rights and to win a bigger role in society in spite of the regime being unfriendly to women's issue
- ❖ Suspended Family Protection Law (in place during the monarchy) and put women at the mercy of men in the family
- ❖ All females (including young girls) were forced to dress according to Islamic dress code

Women in Iran

- Made gains in education!
- Iranian women display of great energy → fighting for their rights → deeper into public arena
- Current leader → Hassan Rouhani → mixed bag
- Appointed 4 women as VPs
- 3 as governor
- Did not name women to cabinet or revive Ministry of Women's Affairs

Effects of Little Opposition

- By October 1979, hundreds of people already executed
- Khomeini could:
 - Appoint heads of Revolutionary Guard,
 - Could approve the candidates for presidential elections
 - Could appoint six of the twelve members of the Guardian Council that approved legislation from the parliament before it became law.
 - Control education, national TV and radio stations [Persepolis: 29:40]
- Later leaders esp, like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, used “God’s will” to appear blameless

MORE POWERFUL THAN MONARCHY?

- Looks similar to other governments on outside
- Michael Axworthy: “above and beyond stood the faqih, with the power and the responsibility to intervene directly in the name of Islam; indeed with powers greater than those given to most monarchs in constitutional monarchies.”

PERSECUTION OF BAHÁ'Í IN IRAN

- Officially recognized minorities in Iran are:
- Christianity
- Zoroastrianism
- Judaism
- Baha'í → largest minority → still not recognized!
- barred from many opportunities including higher education
- often harassed and executed

PERSECUTION OF BAHÁ'Í IN IRAN

- Baha'i not considered people of the book (formed after Islam)
- Deviation from true faith, Shia Islam
- Do not believe that Mohammad was the final prophet
- Considered political entity rather than religious – so have no protection
- Threat to clerical power:
 - baha'is have no priest
 - Interpretation up to individual
 - Critical of Muslim cleric influence over public

Discrimination in Iran

- Muhammad has said, “Truly the Arab has no superiority over the non-Arab, nor the non-Arab over the Arab, nor the Black over the White, nor the White over the Black.”
- Muhammad had said: “People are equal like the teeth of a comb”

GREEN REVOLUTION

- Occurred 2009-2010
- Big protests after Iranian election
- Involved young people
- Led by Shia reformist cleric
- Argued for more rights and liberties

Life in the Islamic Republic of Iran Today

- Life in Iran is still very repressive
- High percentage of criminals still executed in Iran

Philosopher's questions

- Is political authority to be grounded in the claims of revelation or reason, Jerusalem or Athens?
- Is the authority of the natural law ultimately grounded in divine law?
- What authority does the state retain when its principles conflict with God's?

RESOURCES USED

- <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religion-politics/#ThrArgForDocRelRes>
- http://altreligion.about.com/od/controversymisconception/tp/bahai_persecution.htm
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka8csjsmX6I>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8w4Ku6l7OEI>
- <http://www.cfr.org/iran/religion-politics-iran/p16599>
- Persepolis Movie
- PK Movie