

OPINIONS OF SUFISM IN IRAN, 1850–1950

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the diverse opinions about Sufism that existed in Iran between 1850 and 1950, a century that captures both Kasravi's and the preceding generation. Such a wide temporal horizon will be investigated because the intellectual currents and prejudices of one generation always have a bearing on the subsequent one. The whole period was one of remarkable, if not unprecedented, change in Iran, as from 1850 onwards the forces of modernisation and the threats of European imperialism from both Britain and Russia resulted in the realisation that Iran was placed in a precariously weak economic, political and military situation. The international circumstances and increasing information about the advances in science and the socio-economic welfare of European countries contributed to the growing demand among some of Iran's intelligentsia and religious classes for reform of the autocratic royal court and for a change in values among Iranians. Aside from the turmoil associated with contacts with the West, there were also indigenous factors that presented the state and other power-brokers with potential threats. One of the most explosive issues was the emergence of Babism, out of which developed Baha'i-ism. A combination of all of these factors helps to explain why Iran was in such a state of ferment in the second half of the nineteenth century and the subsequent fifty years witnessed circumstances that perpetuated a sense of upheaval. These included the granting of a constitution which limited the autocratic rights of the Shah (and which also gave rise to the subsequent chaos and civil war), the continuing threat to Iran from Britain and Russia (and then the Soviet Union) and the rise of Reza Shah and his policy of absolute rule, modernisation and secularisation.

One might suppose that in such circumstances the attention given to Sufism by the court, the intelligentsia, the Shi'ite establishment and other groups interested in Iran would have been overshadowed, but this was far from the case.¹ Although these groups had varying degrees of concern about Sufism, the intelligentsia and the Shi'ite clerics remained conscious of the Persian mystical tradition and contributed to the on-going discussion of its place in modern Iran. Moreover, the Sufis too did not remain as an isolated group within society that was immune from

national and international developments and opinions, and some Sufis adopted the new trappings of modern life and embraced contemporary ideals to meet the challenges of the twentieth century.

Despite this there did seem to be a consensus that traditional forms of Sufi ritual and practice were on the decline. In the words of the celebrated historian of Persian Sufism, ‘Abd al-Hosayn Zarrinkub,

Towards the end [of the Qajar era], aside from the discovery and promotion of the new thinking – and what has been called “progressive thought” which regarded mysticism and Sufism as the cause of the decline of the kingdom and nation – the existence of perpetual conflict between the [Sufi] sheikhs in defending [their claims to] *qotb-ship* [i.e. spiritual leadership] was also among the reasons for its accelerating decline, and with the start of the Constitutional Revolution and in subsequent years, the market day of Sufism in Iran virtually ceased to exist. Despite this, there is a literature worthy of consideration from the long history of Sufism and its ups and downs that remains as a legacy.²

Although Kasravi claimed that the Sufis were not few in number, his views accord with those of Zarrinkub concerning the hidden influence of Sufism through Persian literature, which contained the Sufi “evil teachings”.³ Another respected intellectual who lived and wrote in this period was Sa‘id Nafisi, and he expressed a similar view to that adumbrated by Kasravi, although he was more favourably inclined to Sufism. He observed:

Sufism has been completely adopted from the day it appeared. All thinkers, poets from Iran and India have, whether they want to or not, been Sufi-natured up to today. This wisdom has settled so deeply in the peoples of these two countries, that they themselves do not know to what extent they are Sufi.⁴

The challenges facing Sufism in the modern period were unique, because in addition to the traditional complaints and criticisms against it (such as the permissibility within Islam of certain Sufi beliefs and ritual activity) there were new questions that were raised concerning the desirability of such beliefs and rituals within a modern nation-state with a rational, secularising tendency. At stake was the creation of Iranian identity and the ability to influence those who possessed power, and this involved not only the court and politicians but also the Shi‘ite clergy and the intelligentsia.

Before describing how various groups in Iranian society responded to Sufism between 1850 and 1950 it should be stressed that use of the terms “Sufi”, “Shi‘ite cleric” and “intellectual” are not mutually exclusive. Each of these is an umbrella term including a wide variety of followers; Sufis may also be Shi‘ite clerics, and intellectual in the Iranian context included secular individuals, devout Shi‘ite

Muslims and also Sufis. Examples abound of Sufis who were Shi'ite clerics or *mojtaheds*,⁵ and likewise there are examples of modernising intellectuals who were affiliated or sympathetic to Sufi groups, as will be shown in this chapter.

Shi'ite clerics

Shi'ism became the state religion of Iran under the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722) which had emerged at the beginning of the sixteenth century as a mystically inspired movement that was supported militarily by Turkish tribes that bestowed their allegiance to their spiritual master who was the leader of the Safavid Sufi order. However, the eclipse of Sufism under the Safavids probably reflected the realisation by the Shah that the maintenance of law and order would be difficult to effect given the claims of competing and conflicting groups, including the various extreme Sufi movements (such as the Qizilbash) and the Shi'ite clerics. Aside from political considerations, the criticisms of Sufism by the Shi'ite clerics of this period reflected a combination of distaste for the theological implications of Sufi belief and disgust at Sufi rituals. For example, in the seventeenth century Molla Mohammad Taher Qommi complained of the ritual of *chelleh*, a period of forty days for spiritual contemplation during which, according to Qommi, the Sufi experienced visions and believed he had ascended to God and sometimes viewed himself as God.⁶ Such theological criticisms and also the accusation that some individuals use Sufism as an excuse to satisfy their greed and participate in musical concerts were common during this period.⁷

Clerical authority was based upon the claim that the senior Shi'ite clerics, or *mojtaheds*, were responsible for guiding the community, because they were those best qualified through their learning and rationally derived knowledge to interpret the probable will and desire of the Hidden Imam. This notion of authority and power based on learning contrasted with the Sufi belief in mystical experience, through which the individual could gain access to God. Even though most of the Sufi orders, at least by the end of the Safavid dynasty, had themselves adopted Shi'ism as their own form of Islam, the Sufi claim of direct experience of the divine by-passed the *mojtahed's* argument to be the best representative of the sacred realm on earth. Such Sufi claims continued into the Qajar period, and so, for example, Safi 'Ali Shah (d. 1898), one of the most prominent Sufis of the late nineteenth century, described how just as the Mahdi (or the Hidden Imam) will arrive in the world of phenomena (the Shi'ite doctrine being that the Mahdi will establish a brief period of justice prior to the end of time) he also appears mystically within the gnostic possessing the power of "spiritual witnessing".⁸ True authority lies with the Imam to whom all obedience is due, but since the Imam is in occultation and it is the gnostic that has direct contact with him, the Imam's "guiding functions devolve practically upon the *qotb* [the Sufi gnostic]".⁹ Some scholars have claimed that the Sufis actually recognised the *mojtahed's* deputyship of the Imam in juridical matters;¹⁰ however, acceptance of this view must be taken with caution, especially in the light of Safi 'Ali Shah's remark that the Sufi

sheikh or *pir* is the successor (*khalifeh*) of Mohammad Mostafa in the holy law (*shari'at*) and the deputy of 'Ali's vicegerency through the designation of friendship (*be-nass-e valayat*) in the Sufi path (*tariqeh*).¹¹

It would be too simplistic, however, to describe the Shi'ite clerics as claiming absolute authority over believers, as Sachedina concludes that Morteza al-Ansari, the leading Shi'ite cleric of nineteenth-century Iran, held that "the rescript of the twelfth Imam, although in some sense portending the general deputyship of the Imamate jurist, lacks sufficient evidence to establish total discretion of the jurist over the lives and property of believers".¹² Bearing this in mind, the clerical revolution for the absolute obedience given by Sufi disciples to their masters is understandable. The reformist cleric Shari'at Sangalaji (1890–1944) abhorred the authority of the Sufi sheikh over his disciples and that they frequently compared the relationship of the disciple to the sheikh in terms of a cadaver in the hands of the washer of the dead.¹³

An example of obedience by a disciple to a sheikh can be witnessed in the episode concerning the aforementioned Safi 'Ali Shah and his disciple Zahir al-Dowleh (1864–1924) who was the Shah's son-in-law and Minister of Public Ceremonies. Naser al-Din Shah (r. 1848–98) sent Zahir al-Dowleh to Safi 'Ali Shah's *khanaqah* so that he could know what was going on there; however, Zahir al-Dowleh was spiritually affected by Safi 'Ali Shah and became one of his disciples.¹⁴ Following this there is the remarkable story of how on Safi 'Ali Shah's command Zahir al-Dowleh came to the *khanaqah* having walked slowly in a "female fashion" through the streets of Tehran in dervish clothing, carrying the Sufi *kashkul* and axe and praising 'Ali. At a certain crossroads he paused for a quarter of an hour and continued his praise of 'Ali in a loud voice, and passers by were astounded that a minister of the Shah's court behaved in this manner. They dropped gold and silver coins into the *kashkul* and Zahir al-Dowleh proceeded on to the *khanaqah*. When Safi 'Ali Shah saw Zahir al-Dowleh he was happy and said, "I wanted to make you fall from that peak of grandeur that the pride of royal connection has brought about in you." He then commanded Zahir al-Dowleh to change his clothes and to serve the people.¹⁵ It is unclear whether this episode actually took place, but it has certainly been reported within Sufi circles as fact and serves as an good illustration of how the disciple must be loyal and obedient to his spiritual master.

It was also the spiritual teachings of Sufi masters or sheikhs that was the cause of some distaste for the clerics. The Sufis are well known for their spiritual interpretation of sacred texts, including the Qur'an, and for some, their method of "spiritual unveiling" permitted too great a degree of hermeneutical flexibility. Sufi hermeneutics contrasted with that of the clerics, so that one of the prevailing tendencies in Mashhad in the early twentieth century defended "the independent understanding of Qur'anic knowledge... from allegorical and rational inferences from Islamic texts, and firmly rejects Islamic philosophy and mysticism".¹⁶ (This later was known as *maktab-e tafkik* or school of segregationism).

Another source of power over which the Shi'ite clerics and Sufi competed against one another was financial. Traditionally, the clerics could expect to receive the religious taxes (*khoms*). From this source of revenue the clerics were then able to offer bursaries to religious students, and the number of bursaries a cleric was able to create was an indication of the esteem he enjoyed. The Sufis had to compete financially with the clerics, and Chahardahi claims that the Sufi orders received a tithe, rather than the *zakat* and *khoms*, and he cites a Ne'matollahi Sufi, Shams al-Orafa (d. 1935), who stated, "One eighth of yearly profit, properly accounted, must be handed over to the sheikh's *khanaqah* which will be used for the benefit of the poor [Sufis]."¹⁷ Whether those who donated one-eighth of the profit and the *khoms* to the Sufis and to the clerics can only be conjectured. However, it can be assumed that as Iran's economy deteriorated in the nineteenth century with the dramatic increase in European imports, it would certainly have been difficult for Iranians to meet all of these financial "obligations".

The competition between clerics and Sufis for Iranian hearts and pockets applied even to the person of the Shah. The Shah did not wield absolute and unquestioned power in Iran, for the monarchs of the Qajar dynasty were aware that their claims to legitimacy were somewhat tenuous, as Shi'ism denies political legitimacy to monarchs, which belongs to the Hidden Imam, and in his absence, to his representatives. Believing that they were these legitimate representatives, the clerics recognised the *de facto* legitimacy of the monarchy so long as Islam was observed. The institutional power enjoyed by the clerics in Iran during this period also helped to guard their privileged position in society, as they controlled the religious courts, officiated at the signing of commercial agreements in the bazaar, and were largely responsible for education. The influence that the *ulema* enjoyed at the royal court depended to a large extent upon the religious proclivity of the ruler, but an example of the extent of clerical power can be illustrated by the fact that Fath 'Ali Shah (d. 1834) was pushed into a disastrous war with the Russians in 1826 by clerical persuasion.¹⁸ Moreover, the attempts of Naser al-Din Shah to generate income by granting concessions to Europeans failed partly due to the resistance of the *ulema*.¹⁹

Sufism re-emerged in Iran in the nineteenth century after its eclipse under the Safavids, and inevitably it was regarded as a threat by some clerics to their own position in society. This was particularly the case during the reign of Mohammad Shah (1836–48) who was attracted from an early age to Sufism. During his reign the Sufis and their shrines enjoyed lavish royal patronage, and Sufis were even awarded with posts at court. The advances made by the Sufis during Mohammad Shah's reign were "never entirely lost, and they enjoyed a position of security and even respect in the reign of Naser al-Din Shah", yet they never represented anything more than "a mild irritant for the ulama".²⁰

Aside from issues of power, finance and theology, Shi'ite clerics were also concerned with Sufi practices, which the scholarly Shi'ite clerics regarded as superstition and innovation. (Of course, the Shi'ite tradition too had its own share of "superstitions" and here it is possible to witness a convergence of folk Sufism

with folk Shi'ism.)²¹ Typical of the criticisms of Shi'ite clerics are those of Khalkhali, an influential cleric during the period of the Constitutional Revolution in the first decade of the twentieth century. In a treatise written in 1907 Khalkhali condemned the Sufis for transgressing the law, superstition, pomposity, begging and smoking opium.²² The Sufis have often been associated with the smoking of opium, and indeed, Safi 'Ali Shah freely admitted to smoking it at a *khanaqah* in Haydarabad as if there was nothing unusual or problematic about the practice.²³ Another issue of concern for the Shi'ite clerics surrounded the lack of respect that the Sufis paid to the Qur'an and to the holy law. Safi 'Ali Shah mentioned how some people complained about his rendering of the Arabic Qur'an into Persian verse, thus providing a *tafsir* of God's word for literate Persians.²⁴ Safi 'Ali Shah's response was that he had put into verse the interpretation of the Qur'an, not the Qur'an itself.²⁵

At this point it is necessary to distinguish clearly between popular Sufism, which its critics sometimes associated with begging, smoking opium, excessive asceticism and ecstatic dancing, and a "higher" and more intellectualised version known as *'erfan* (sometimes translated as gnosis).²⁶ The difference between Sufism and *'erfan* was not something that emerged during the period of Qajar Iran; indeed, eminent scholars of the School of Isfahan during the Safavid era were also critical of the ecstatic Sufi tradition and its superstitions and tricks,²⁷ preferring a more philosophical and theoretical approach to metaphysical questions that at the same time did not negate the possibility of mystical experience. In the latter half of the nineteenth century the study of *'erfan* was led by Hajji Molla Hadi Sabzevari, Molla 'Ali Modarres Zonuzi (who was also a Sufi initiate and wrote a response to questions posed to him from a Qajar prince)²⁸ and Aqa Mohammad Reza Qomsha'i, and Tehran became the centre for following Islamic philosophy and *'erfan*.²⁹

The study of *'erfan* was adopted too by some of the leading clerics of the first half of the twentieth century, thus Shari'at Sangalaji was taught *'erfan* in Tehran by one Mirza Hashem Eshkevari,³⁰ and Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–89) took classes in the same subject offered by Mirza Mohammad 'Ali Shahabadi (1875–1950) and Mirza 'Ali Akbar Hakim Yazdi (d. 1925). Khomeini mentions the suspicion that some clerics held for mysticism to the extent that it was necessary to find a preacher to testify from the *minbar* that Mirza 'Ali Akbar Hakim Yazdi actually read the Qur'an. Sympathetic to the tradition of *'erfan*, Khomeini was later to observe, "Those who wear cloaks and turbans and denounce the mystics as unbelievers do not understand what they are saying; if they did they would not denounce them."³¹ Another example of the suspicion surrounding *'erfan* concerns the difficulty in obtaining mystical texts; as a young scholar in Mashhad (the holiest city in Shi'ite Iran because of the existence of Imam Reza's tomb) in the 1920s, Badi' al-Zaman Foruzanfar could not find a copy of Rumi's *Divan-e Shams* (perhaps due to the Sufi nature of the contents, or, as Franklin Lewis suggests, because Rumi was a Sunni).³² Such caution about *'erfan* resulted in some holding secret classes (as in Khomeini's case),³³ and even if the classes were public then

the prerequisites for entry into the class prevented access to those who were not serious or academically minded. E.G. Browne has recorded the difficulty in attending Hajji Molla Hadi Sabzevari's classes on metaphysics and Molla Sadra. His students would have had to have shown proficiency in preliminary studies of Arabic grammar, logic, mathematics, jurisprudence and scholastic theology.³⁴

There were some clerics, however, who regarded both Sufism and *'erfan* as dangerous; perhaps the best example is provided in the writings of 'Allameh Abu Fazl Borqe'i, which were probably published in the 1950s.³⁵ Of particular note is Borqe'i's works entitled *Haqiqat al-'erfan: taftish dar shenasa'i-ye 'aref va sufi va sha'er va hakim va dervish* ("The Truth of Gnosis: A Search to Recognise the Gnostic, the Sufi, the Poet, the Wise Man and Dervish").³⁶ This book is 391 pages in length and is divided into seven sections: the words of God, the prophet and the immaculate imams (peace be upon them) on the subject of Sufism and the dervishes; the words of the Shi'ite *ulema* about them; mention in the books of the Shi'ite learned ones on this topic; the states (*ahval*), ways, saying and beliefs of the gnostics and the spiritual elders; refutation of their innovations with rational and legal proofs; the infidelity of the gnostics, spiritual elders and philosophers, and an exposition refuting them; that the originators and heads of the orders have not been Shi'ites and that all of the Sufi sects are the same in being lost.

These headings offer an indication of Borqe'i's opposition to the Sufis, but the majority of the text contains two sections, five and six, which examine the Sufi innovations (*bi'dat*) and Sufi heresies (*kofr*), respectively. The fourteen Sufi innovations that Borqe'i discusses are primarily concerned with practice, and 131 pages are devoted to this topic. The sub-titles in chapter five reflect the Sufi innovations which are "causing disunity among Muslims"; the long moustaches of the Sufis (which for Borqe'i contravened the practice of Mohammad); "passionate love (*'eshq*)"; "poetry and the poets"; "inappropriate interpretations and filthy, gnostic explanations and accounts"; "the silent and loud *zeker*"; "*chelleh*, asceticism (*riyazat*) and spiritual witnessing (*mokashafeh*)"; "spiritual witnessing and charismatic powers (*mokashafeh va karamat*)"; "establishing the *morshed*, the pole and the *vali-ye amr*"; "knowledge, books, asceticism (*zohd*), piety (*taqva*) and the [refutation] of them"; "music, dancing, and singing"; "going to the *khanaqah* and abandoning the mosque"; "unity between enemies and friends without [feeling] revulsion"; "inventing *hadiths*, defamation and lying" and "customs, etiquette and Sufi paraphernalia". The sixth section reflects Borqe'i's dislike of Sufi theology and faith, and this chapter (which is fifty pages in length) contains twelve heresies: denial of the fundamentals of religion (*osul-e din*); making legal (*halal*) prohibited things (*haram*); the unity of existence (*vahdat-e vujud*), unification (*ettehad*), religious acts that may or may not be performed and the relinquishing of obligatory acts, claiming connection (*vesal*) to the Truth, the pre-determinism (*jabri*) of the Sufis and gnostics, the fatalism (*qadari*) of the Sufis and gnostics, devotion to the *morshed* in worship, witnessing the Truth, and reincarnation (*tanasukh*).

Having explained in detail the innovations and heresies of the Sufis, Borqe'i then provides a summarised version in an index (or a list that appears at the very

end of the book), of fifty-two beliefs of the gnostics and Sufis that stand in contrast to Islam, and he offers the “correct” Shi‘ite understanding directly opposite to the Sufi innovations.

As one might expect, Borqei utilises much of that dimension of the Shi‘ite tradition that rejects Sufism. In chapter one he focuses his attention on sacred scripture, in particular the sayings of Mohammad and the Imams. The most extensive section in this chapter is a discussion of fourteen *hadith* (from Mohammad and the Shi‘ite Imams); the seventh *hadith* that is cited serves as a good example and is traced to Imam Reza who said, “No one speaks of Sufism and dervish-hood unless he wants to deceive people, or unless he [himself] is lost or is stupid.”³⁷ Borqei’s discussion of how the Sufis made certain Qur’anic verses null and void is short and disappointing. It is significant, however, because of his desire to protect the sacred texts of Shi‘ites from Sufi “distortions” while at the same time utilising them to reveal the evils of the Sufi tradition. This methodology is a feature that distinguishes Borqei’s anti-Sufism from those anti-Sufis who did not write from within the clerical context. What they all share in common, however, is an appeal to reason, and Borqei’s anti-Sufi text states in the introduction that the logic of Islam is based on revelation and the sayings of the immaculate Imams, and there is no other evidence for Muslims, although reason (*‘aql*) is a proof in all religions.³⁸ The protection of Shi‘ism through revelation and reason was necessary for Borqei because he felt that in the contemporary period there was a danger that greed and self-promotion could result in religion being manipulated and in an increase in conflicting opinions. This is a serious problem because “foreign enemies” have taken advantage of this situation and they support minorities, overturn Islam, pollute and destroy the nation (*mellat*) and take riches in plunder that make their own countries flourish. “We would prefer that there are no intellectual differences and schisms in the nation so that our state and nation can be at peace, because schisms cause misfortune and destruction.”³⁹ This linkage of Sufism with the weakening of the nation, and its connection with foreign powers, is a theme that re-occurs among anti-Sufis in the twentieth century as will be shown in the course of this book.

Not all clerics were opposed to the Sufi or *‘erfani* tradition, however, as the interest shown by Ruhollah Khomeini in mysticism clearly demonstrates. In 1930 Khomeini completed his first independent treatise on *‘erfan* in Arabic called *Mesbah al-hedayat* (“The Lamp of Guidance”), and although it was not printed, it was circulated in manuscript and several of his elders in Qom wrote glosses upon it.⁴⁰ Parts of this work include sections inspired by the ideas of Molla Sadra who portrayed a mystical journey to perfection composed of four stages. These four stages, as explicated by Khomeini, depict the type of ontology of which Kasravi was so critical. In the first stage, man casts aside the veils of sensuality which had previously tempted him to enjoy worldly pleasures and he is able to witness the divine through creation: “the face of the Presence of the Truth and the face of God is revealed for him and the end of this journey is when he sees all creation as a manifestation of His Majesty, the Truth, and he observes everything as

His signs”.⁴¹ Khomeini uses the terms that have been common currency among Sufis and gnostics for centuries, and so, for example, he says that during the first journey, the seeker has a truthful existence through the state of annihilation (*fana*). In this state, it is possible that God bestows his favour upon the individual and the state of annihilation is terminated and the seeker recognises himself as nothing but a slave to God. It is here that the second journey commences, a journey “from the Truth [witnessed in creation] to the Truth by means of the Truth”. Again, Khomeini utilises the familiar Sufi terminology by stating that in this station, the seeker enjoys the state of subsistence in God (*baqa*). During this state, the seeker experiences God directly, and worldly concerns are completely transcended. During the third journey “from the Truth back to man” the mystic returns to the creatures, and although having a share in prophethood, he does not have the authority to legislate. He is able to “see the reality of things and their perfection and the circumstances of their progress to the first station and their return to their original homeland”. In the fourth journey, “from man to man by means of God”,

he watches over creatures and their work and needs . . . and in so far as he can, he makes them return to God, and he informs others of everything he has known and of everything that is an obstacle for the travelling in God, and it is during this time that legislative prophethood is yielded for him.⁴²

He brings religion and religious law and he makes exoteric commands pertaining to the body and he gives information about God Most High and His attributes and names and the rightful mystical learnings to the degree that the able ones have the talent for comprehending.⁴³

The implications of Khomeini’s mystical world-view are difficult to unravel because his texts offer a somewhat ambiguous presentation of the identity of the individual who engages in the four journeys. Some scholars have suggested that Khomeini himself believed he had passed these journeys; for example, Baqer Moin claimed, “Khomeini’s strength and self-righteousness . . . was based upon his mythical view that he had been through the four journeys sought by the Sufis, to reach absolute unity with God.”⁴⁴ Other scholars have been more cautious, as Vanessa Martin observes that for Khomeini the perfect man who completes the four journeys has the status of a prophet or Imam, although she also adds that there are hints to the effect that the status of the perfect man may also be identified in ordinary mortals.⁴⁵

It is significant, however, that Kasravi did not mention the political ramifications of Khomeini’s writings, and this was because the text was only distributed among a select élite and was not published. However, on the subject of power and kingship, Kasravi comments that it is the Sufis who claim to bestow kingship upon others rather than taking it themselves, and he gives examples from the medieval period as well as from the modern era.

Khomeini's interest in *'erfan* did not come to an end with the publication of *Mesbah al-hedayat* as in 1944 he published a work entitled *Kashf al-asrar* ("Unveiling of Secrets"). This was partly a response to the work of 'Ali Akbar Hakimizadeh who had once been a cleric, but had been attracted to the kind of world view that was advocated by Kasravi, and had published a short essay entitled *Asrar-e hezar saleh* ("Thousand-year old secrets") which questioned some of the fundamentals of Shi'ism⁴⁶ (and which was published by Kasravi's press).⁴⁷ In Khomeini's response (in *Kashf al-Asrar*) he made use of the *'erfani* tradition and cites Ibn 'Arabi and Molla Sadra.

Khomeini's attachment to *'erfan* was so strong that it informed his teaching of ethics, in which he held classes on Thursdays and Fridays. The effect that these classes had upon his students is, perhaps, best expressed by Morteza Motahhari, who attended Khomeini's lectures: "the ethical lessons delivered by the figure I adored (each Thursday and Friday) made me inebriated. The lessons were, in reality, lessons of divine knowledge (*ma'arif va sair va suluk*) and not only ethical lessons in the narrow technical sense".⁴⁸

At about the same time that Khomeini was teaching his ethics and *'erfan*, Seyyed Mohammed Tabataba'i (1901–81) was also asked to teach Molla Sadra's "four journeys" when he moved to Qom. His course became very popular, to the extent that over one hundred pupils attended, yet the stipends of all those who attended the lectures were curtailed by Grand Ayatollah Borujerdi, the leading clerical figure in Iran. Borujerdi's reason for this action is somewhat vague ("the open teaching of the Asfar in an official seminary setting, that is not appropriate"), but even more revealing is his admission that he had also studied the text as a student, but in secret!⁴⁹ Allameh Tabataba'i's reason for teaching this text was because of his belief that it was Islamic philosophy and mysticism that had a better chance of challenging the secular ideologies that were becoming increasingly popular in Iran than the obscurantist literalism of some of the traditional Shi'ite clergy.

Tabataba'i's concern with mysticism and philosophy should not be regarded as merely intellectual, as it appears that he engaged in traditional Sufi ascetic practice (although not the antinomian variety) and certainly believed that he had received certain spiritual unveilings. Tabataba'i's writings include an account of a dream in which he was spoken to by the prophet Idris, and this dream "was the first transformation that connected the material world of nature to the supernatural realm for me".⁵⁰ Another indication of Tabataba'i's active engagement with the mystical tradition that went beyond mere speculation was his practice of bibliomancy (determining a course of action with reference to the message contained within a random *ghazal* from the *Divan-e Hafez*).⁵¹ Moreover his description within his work "The Kernel of the Kernel" of what the wayfarer witnesses and experiences during the spiritual journey suggests that he may have believed that he had gone through something similar himself (although it may also be possible that he was drawing on the works of celebrated mediaval Sufis such as Najm al-Din Kobra whose writings also describe such mystical, visionary journeys).

In his *‘erfani* perspective, Tabataba’i did not see any contradiction between mysticism and Shi’ism, for he describes how the particular guide for the wayfarer is the Twelfth Imam for

the source of all that which finds concrete existence and manifestation in the world of creation is the Divine Names and Attributes, and the reality of the Imam is the same as the Names and Attributes of God... Accordingly, in the process of wayfaring, the traveler traverses within the planes of the Imam’s luminosity. Any spiritual station he may ascend or status he may attain, the Imam already possesses and accompanies the wayfarer in that plane and station.⁵²

Moreover, Tabataba’i’s portrayal of the spiritual journey is one that conforms to Shi’ite piety and the observance of legal norms, and those who believe that they have reached such advanced spiritual stations that the *shari’a* is no longer applicable to them merely make prevarications and false assertions.⁵³

Sufi critics among the intellectuals

From the late nineteenth century to the period in which Kasravi was composing those works of his that were critical of Sufism and mystical Persian literature, there emerged a growing criticism of Sufism within circles that may be characterised as reformist and intellectual. Perhaps the most famous of all nineteenth-century Islamic reformers was Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, frequently associated with the popularisation of Pan-Islamism. Afghani believed that Sufis had contributed to the decline of the Muslim world; specifically, he believed the Sufis were irrational, encouraged fatalism and blindly followed their sheikhs.⁵⁴ Subsequent Iranian reformers (especially those who were not so interested to preserve their Islamic heritage) were concerned with “social critical realism” which some considered to be the antithesis of Sufism. Such reformers included Mirza Fath ‘Ali Akhundzadeh (1812–78) who criticised the poetry of Rumi for its “pantheism”, doctrine of annihilation (*fana*) and the return of the human spirit to God.⁵⁵ But perhaps the most virulent opponent of Sufism among these nineteenth-century reformers was the Babi sympathiser Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani (1853–96) whose critique of Persian poetry includes the following:

As a result of their exaggerations and excesses, lying has been implanted in the simple nature of people. Their eulogies and admirations have encouraged kings and the viziers to commit atrocities and stupidities. Their mystical and Sufi poetry has led to nothing but laziness, animalistic sluggishness, and the production of beggars and vagabonds. Their sonnets about roses and nightingales has encouraged the youth to pursue pederasty and booze... it was the otherworldly mysticism and Sufism of Sheikh Iraqi, Maghribi and others which has produced so many lazy, spineless, passive beggars.⁵⁶

In the tradition of Kermani was Zayn al-‘Abedin Maragheh’i (1838–1911) who deplored the content of Sufi love poetry in Persian literature and regretted that the poets had not spoken of love for the country or nationalism.⁵⁷ He claimed, “Till now no one in our dear land has spoken a word about love of country, nor put down in writing useful matters from which the common people may benefit as required.”⁵⁸ “Our compatriots ought to know that there is another ‘love’ besides the love of Leili and Majnūn, Farhad and Shīrīn, Mahmūd and Ayāz.”⁵⁹ Zayn al-‘Abedin Maragheh’i adds that there is no more demand for the allusions found so frequently in Sufi poetry, and he says, “Instead of ‘Black Mole Above the Lip’ one should speak of the black coal in the mine . . . the ‘Story of the Candle and the Moth’ is worn out, speak about founding Spermaceti Candle Factory.”⁶⁰

Mention should also be made of Jamal al-Din Va’ez (Isfahani) who was a great supporter of the Revolutionary Committee, one of the secret societies set up in the years leading to the Constitutional Revolution and which advocated the overthrow of despotism and the establishment of the rule of law and justice.⁶¹ (It is interesting to note that Abrahamian claims that among the members of this committee was the leader of a Ne’mati order.)⁶² Jamal al-Din was a great exponent of secularism; indeed, he had been thrown out of Isfahan for his “audacious advocacy of secular ideas”⁶³ and his criticisms were levelled at the Shi’ite clerics and Sufis. In his essay of 1900 *Lebas-e taqva* he complained of the Sufi nomadic life and their parasitical nature as they had no jobs to procure a livelihood, and he also rebuked them for gambling and engaging in “other forbidden deeds”.⁶⁴

Criticisms of Sufism also emerged in the decade after the Constitutional Revolution, for Sa’id Nafisi mentions a controversy that erupted within the Democrat Party in the wake of the First World War, in particular between Bahar⁶⁵ and one Mirza ‘Ali Asghar Khan Taleqani. Taleqani published a series of articles in his newspaper *Zaban-e Azad* (Free Speech) under the title, the “School of Sa’di”. In these articles Taleqani argued that traditional Persian poetry had inculcated a “dervish spirit” among Iranians which was the cause of their weakness and backwardness.⁶⁶ Nafisi claims that this dispute raged not only in Tehran but in other cities too, especially in Shiraz (which was the birth place of Sa’di), and he concludes that the controversy over Sufism and mystical Persian literature was not an event instigated by Kasravi (for this occurred in the 1930s) but that he merely “rekindled the fire”.⁶⁷

With the rise of Reza Shah and the increasing contact with the West, the intellectual currency in Iran developed an increasing secular flavouring. This can be attributed in part to the rising level of cultural and scientific knowledge derived from the West, in particular, forms of nineteenth-century liberalism, reason, the stress on individualism and positivism. During the nineteenth century Western intellectuals were increasingly critical of established religion and were adopting a more “rational” world-view, and this perspective was adopted by some of the Iranian intellectuals. Typical of such intellectuals was ‘Ali Dashti (1894–1982) who achieved fame during the reign of Reza Shah as editor of the newspaper *Shafaq-e Sorkh* (“Red Dawn”) which ran between 1922 and 1935. Dashti’s views on

religion and mysticism can be gleaned from his *Ayyam-e mahbas* (“Prison Days”), a book composed of his writings during Reza Shah’s rule.⁶⁸ One of the striking elements of this work is the lack of Islamic reference as opposed to the citations from and references to Western thinkers. Although not a “practicing” Muslim,⁶⁹ there are references in this work to God, and Islam as the best religion to render humans happy due to its ethical duties.⁷⁰ The concern for the welfare of the community at large resulted in Dashti rejecting mysticism as a means of social progress. Moreover, the practical circumstances of humans in the modern age (especially the dependence on material things) has resulted in life being an endless struggle which can only be resolved through effort. To engage in mystical renunciation in order to attain happiness is considered impractical by Dashti because humans cannot free themselves from “love of the self”.⁷¹ Consequently, he recognised that Sufism was instrumental in “paralysing the powers of resistance and struggle in the individual members of a nation and weakening the moral fabric of a society”.⁷² Dashti’s distaste for Sufism increased when he was researching a book on Rumi (published in 1958)⁷³ and he visited some *khanaqahs* and met with some Sufi sheikhs. “He was struck by the hypocrisy, the pretentiousness, the amateurish, superstitious-filled, and pseudo-magical trickery of the Sufi clergy.”⁷⁴

An intellectual who possessed a similar opinion of Sufism and mysticism was Sadeq Hedayat (1903–51), who is regarded by many Western observers as Iran’s most famous modern novelist and whose fiction is dark and pessimistic. Hedayat was one of the leading literary figures of his time, and therefore his writings represent a certain trend within the Iranian literati. The themes of oppression and despair are prominent in his work, as is biting criticism of much of the Islamic religious tradition in Iran. Perhaps a good reflection of the type of personality that was Sadeq Hedayat is manifested through his works about and opinion of ‘Omar Khayyam, the great twelfth-century composer of quatrains, made famous in Britain in the nineteenth century by Fitzgerald’s rather loose translations. But just as Fitzgerald distorted Khayyam’s poetry to suit the sensitivities of elements within Victorian Britain, Hedayat too had a tendency to push Khayyam into the background and bring forth his own thoughts and psychology in the guise of an interpretation.⁷⁵ Hedayat claims that Khayyam should be considered a Deist who denied an immanent God who acted in the particulars of the world, and therefore the world-view of Hedayat’s Khayyam stands in opposition to that of the Sufis.⁷⁶

Hedayat’s refusal to witness any ultimate values in Sufism is best reflected in a short story entitled *Mardi ke nafs-ash-ra kosht* (“The Man who Killed his Soul”) which appeared for the first time in a collection of his short stories entitled “Three Drops of Blood” in 1932.⁷⁷ This story tells the fate of Mirza Hosayn ‘Ali, a school teacher who had a keen interest in Sufism, to the extent that he lived in seclusion and whose pleasure was in reading Sufi and gnostic texts. He regarded Sheikh Abu’l-Fazl, a teacher of Arabic,⁷⁸ as a guide on his Sufi path, although he is portrayed as rather pompous. Yet Mirza Hosayn ‘Ali had some doubts concerning the mystic path, especially when he pondered some of the verses by Hafez and

Khayyam which he understood as enjoining humans to worldly pleasures. In an attempt to resolve his problem Mirza Hosayn 'Ali decided to refer to his sheikh, but on reaching Abu'l-Fazl's house he found an irate man accusing the sheikh of making his daughter pregnant. Mirza Hosayn 'Ali's doubts about the sheikh deepened when he learnt that he ate roast partridge privately while publicly partaking of crusty bread and mouldy cheese. Realising that the sheikh was a charlatan, Mirza Hosayn 'Ali became depressed and thought that he had wasted his youth in his Sufi yearnings. So he then went to a bar where he drank wine, listened to music and returned home with a prostitute. The story ends with the non-appearance of the teacher at school, and the readers are left to assume that he has committed suicide; rather than killing his lower, selfish ego, or soul (*nafs*), Mirza Hosayn 'Ali took his own life.

In itself the story is not that convincing. Why would Mirza Hosayn 'Ali become so full of doubt about the truth of mysticism because of the actions of one individual? Indeed, those learned in Sufi texts would be familiar with warnings about those who abuse Sufism for their own personal gain. Yet, the story serves as a barometer for the anti-Sufism that was prevalent among a group of intellectuals who reacted against the hypocrisy of some "Sufis" and who also rejected the ultimate truths that could be derived from following the Sufi path. Is it the voice of Mirza Hosayn 'Ali or Hedayat himself when on drinking wine in the bar, and on looking at the prostitute's face he comprehended the mystery of life – to enjoy worldly pleasures, as advocated by Hafez and Khayyam? Salvation through mysticism is not the answer to the pain of existence, and this rejection of religion has its ultimate expression in the suicide of Mirza Hosayn 'Ali (or Hedayat), as suicide is forbidden within the Islamic tradition.⁷⁹

Towards the end of his life Hedayat became associated with the Tudeh Party,⁸⁰ Iran's Communist movement. The forerunner of the Tudeh Party emerged in the 1930s, and in 1935 a study group of young Marxists was formed, with its chief ideologue being Taqi Arani, a German educated university professor. This group published a newsletter called *Donya* ("The World") in which Arani presented his views. Arani and his fellow Marxists, amounting to fifty-three individuals, were arrested in 1937 and brought to trial, and Arani received a maximum ten-year sentence, but he died within two years. Kasravi had little time for Arani's left-wing views, and indeed, the former's first book, *Ayin*, "was aimed [in rejection] at the theory of class struggle".⁸¹ Nevertheless, ever a man of principles, Kasravi was prepared to defend his Marxist adversaries during their political trials in 1938.⁸²

Arani's opinions of Sufism are contained within a fifty-nine page article published in *Donya*, called '*Erfaan va osul-e madi*' ("Mysticism and the Principles of Materialism").⁸³ The basis of Arani's argument lies in his argument that all thought is subject to material influences; the brain is composed of matter and it is influenced by external, material factors, including food, temperature, and its social environment. Humans become aware of universal laws by reflecting on their needs and their classification of the information about their material

conditions. The input of God, or a divine being, is something that is not considered in Arani's view and stands strikingly in contrast with Sufi thought. Arani views mysticism in general as a belief that appears in times of despair and material loss; when a group in society has no hope for progress and advancement it finds solace in mystical ideas by scorning worldly pleasures that are beyond its reach and by considering the existential differences between itself and the more fortunate group as imaginary and superficial. In this way, Sufi ideas are an attack on the enemy.⁸⁴ With regard to the emergence of mysticism in the Islamic tradition, Arani seems to believe that its origin was the result of opposition to the centralised and despotic caliphate in Baghdad. Indeed, he argues that Sufis such as Mansur Hallaj were middle class, and his declaration of "I am the Truth" was not a claim to divinity, but rather it was a cry against "power and the special importance [attributed to] God", and Hallaj's execution was to preserve the central power of the caliphate,⁸⁵ which was necessary given the support that mysticism enjoyed in Iranian villages.

Arani's understanding of Sufism is in some ways more sophisticated than Kasravi's because the former recognises important distinctions among the Sufis (such as the different ideas of the unity of existence (*vahdat-e vujud*), incarnationism (*holul*) and union (*ettehad*)).⁸⁶ Moreover, he does not regard Sufism as static, as he mentions that Sufism develops in response to changing material conditions. However, although the language and tone may be milder than that found in Kasravi's writings, there is little doubt that Arani had no sympathy for Sufism, and his criticisms of the Sufis include their use of narcotics to induce "states of yearning and attraction"⁸⁷, the invention of chains of initiation⁸⁸ and the scant regard for reason.⁸⁹

True to his Marxist beliefs, Arani argued that dialectic materialism would inevitably prevail and mysticism and Sufism would disappear. He does not discuss in depth the state of contemporary Sufism in Iran, yet in his introduction he comments that the aim of the article is to "awaken the masses to avoid the disease of mendicancy, contentment, seclusion, opium, and the madness of claiming divinity, and to encourage people to [adopt] a material life and to [engage] in a struggle to preserve life".⁹⁰ Obviously Arani believed that there was a certain mentality among some Iranians at least, which needed to be cured. However, he also seems to recognise that "formal" Sufism was declining, as he claimed that the Safi 'Ali Shahs and the Gonabadi Sufis of Iran were disappearing and that although Eastern Sufism may merge with European mysticism for a while, ultimately the world would no longer listen to the preaching of such mystics.⁹¹ Arani's positive prediction for the future of materialism is due to his belief that

today, the principles of materialism and logic have connected humans to all sciences, industries, societies and arts, and it has liberated humans from common superstitions whether through nature, biology, physiology or sociology, and it has shown humans the path of happiness.⁹²

Supporters of Sufism among the intellectuals

Thus far presented, the modernist intellectual tradition in Iran has been very critical of Sufism, yet a full picture must take into account the emergence of a group of intellectuals and academics in the 1920s–30s, some of whom entered the political world and became great supporters of mystical Persian literature. Within this group we may include Mohammad ‘Ali Forughī, ‘Ali Asghar Hekmat, Sa‘id Nafisi, Badi‘ al-Zaman Foruzanfar, Mohammad Qazvini and Mohammad Mo‘in, who were all inspired by the literary and ethical merits of the texts, although their formal affiliation to Sufi orders remains unclear.⁹³

Forughī first emerged as a politician during the constitutional period and became Reza Shah’s prime minister on two occasions (1926, 1933–5). He had a great affection for Persian literature, in particular for Sa‘di and Ferdowsi, and he also published a selection of Hafez’s *ghazals* in 1937.⁹⁴ Yet he was severely censured by Kasravi because of the belief that Iran should promote its internationally recognised poets, including those such as Khayyam, Hafez and Rumi who had all received much attention from the European community of scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Another politician who was active in publishing Sufi related material was ‘Ali Asghar Hekmat (who was the minister of education (1933–8), and also chancellor of Tehran University between 1935–8). His publications on Sufis and mysticism include “A Lesson from the Divan of Hafez”,⁹⁵ a book on the fifteenth-century Sufi, ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami⁹⁶ (and in 1947 he translated into Persian the third volume of E.G. Browne’s *A Literary History of Persia*, something which probably would have incurred the wrath of Kasravi (see Chapter 5) had he been alive at the time).⁹⁷

Kasravi’s anger was, no doubt, exacerbated further by some of the academics within the Faculty of Theology of Tehran University that had opened in 1935. Badi‘ al-Zaman Foruzanfar (1900–70) is a good example of such scholars; having graduated from a religious seminary, he was appointed vice-president of the Faculty of Theology and became professor of Islamic mysticism soon after.⁹⁸ His first publication was a history of Iranian poets of the early centuries, which appeared between 1929 and 1933, and after completing his dissertation on Rumi in 1936, the Iranian Ministry of Culture asked Foruzanfar to prepare selections from the *Masnawi* for students. So in 1943 he published *Selections from the Masnawi*, which included an introduction in which he defended Sufism from the kind of criticisms that Kasravi levelled against it.⁹⁹

There were other prominent academics associated with the University of Tehran who were publishing and editing works written by Sufi authors. For example, Sa‘id Nafisi’s publications during the 1930s and 1940s included editions of poetry from Rudaki,¹⁰⁰ Kashani,¹⁰¹ ‘Attar¹⁰² and Hafez.¹⁰³ Nafisi’s colleague Reza-zadeh-Shafaq (1895–1971) was also productive, having published a popular work for high schools entitled *The History of Literature in Iran* in which he praised the mystical poets.¹⁰⁴ His views of Rumi’s verses provide a typical example of his

attraction to mystical poetry, which accepts the “reality” of mysticism:¹⁰⁵

The special quality of Mawlana’s *ghazals* is the effervescence and tumult of love that moves anyone possessing a heart and arouses his or her emotions. In fact, in each *ghazal* there is a trace of spiritual attraction, mystical state (*hal*), fire and palpable ardour, and in essence, the spirit of the *samaʿ* and the gnostic dance is blown into the majority of *ghazals*, because passion and obvious excitement and the burning of love is manifest throughout.¹⁰⁶

In a section on Hafez he states: “Hafez’s spiritual greatness and mental power proceeded from the mystical consciousness which in him attained perfection.”¹⁰⁷ There is little doubting, therefore, Rezazadeh-Shafaq’s sympathies with the mystical tradition. Also worthy of mention is Mohammad Moʿin (1917–71) who published in 1940 a work of some 800 pages on Hafez, a book that he dedicated to the “pure spirit of Hafez”. In his introduction, Moʿin lamented that materialism ruled the contemporary world and stated that humanity feels the need of spiritual consolation. Returning to the great poets of the past could assist in this, and his descriptions of Hafez as having discovered “the secret of happiness” and “the reality of life”¹⁰⁸ are based upon his view that Hafez was essentially a mystic. Moʿin even described Hafez as a “celestial poet” (*shaʿer-e malakuti*)¹⁰⁹ who had a “heavenly book” (*ketab-e asemani*)¹¹⁰ and claimed, “After Jalal al-Din Mawlavi, Hafez is the most obvious manifestation of the gnostics (*ʿarefan*) in this period.”¹¹¹

Another great scholar of Hafez was Mohammad Qazvini (1877–1949) whose publications on Hafez include *An Investigation of the Works, Thought and Life of Hafez*.¹¹² Like Moʿin, Qazvini considered Hafez the greatest of all Persian poets, and in a conversation with Dr Ghani he remarked that if a statue from each country were to be erected in Hyde Park, then the form of Hafez would be found in London as the Iranian representative.¹¹³

Western opinions of Sufism

A source worthy of inspection in an inquiry concerning Iranian opinions of Sufism can be found in the literature written by Western scholars and travellers in Iran during the period in question. Although caution needs to be exercised when investigating such literature, it is probably true to say that the comments of such travellers reflect to varying degrees the opinions of their Iranian friends or hosts. Many European writers were indiscriminating in their portrayal of Sufism, lumping the various Sufis groups within a single mould, yet there were great differences in the types of Sufism that existed in this period, especially when the Khaksar-Jalali dervishes are compared with the Neʿmatollahi Sufis. In this section, the descriptions of Sufis by Morier, Lady Sheil and C.J. Wills probably reflect their experiences with Khaksar dervishes who have been characterised as

wandering dervishes.¹¹⁴ Zarrinkub claimed that they were prevalent in the late Qajar period and were numerous in Tehran, Khorasan and Fars.¹¹⁵

Western criticisms of Sufism in nineteenth-century Iran can be found in a satirical novel by James Morier, entitled *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan*, which was published in 1824.¹¹⁶ This English work was then translated into Persian in the late nineteenth century by Mirza Habib Isfahani; yet many Iranians believed the book to have been written by a native Iranian, so accurately portrayed were the customs, traditions and foibles of Iranians.¹¹⁷ *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan* includes extensive sections in which Sufis are presented in a derogatory fashion (for example, the names of the Sufis are *Dervish Sefer* (“the wandering dervish”) and *Dervish Bideen* (“the dervish without religion”). At one point, Dervish Sefer admits: “We hold men’s beards as cheap as dirt; and although our existence is precarious, yet it is one of great variety, as well as of idleness. We look on mankind as fair game – we live upon their weaknesses and credulity.”¹¹⁸ Although Morier presents a caricature of Sufism in his book, it was certainly the one that Iranians recognised, and it confirms that there were individuals who regarded the Sufis as charlatans and tricksters.

Writing some time after James Morier, Lady Sheil recorded her memoirs and experiences of travelling in Iran in the early 1850s.¹¹⁹ In a section relating her observation on antinomian Sufis (including a dervish who spent his time exclaiming “Wool! Wool!” as he wandered through the bazaar in Tehran, encouraging others to reject the material world, and another who on begging would declare “A thousand toumans! I won’t accept anything less!”), Lady Sheil remarked that

the character of these derveeshes is exceedingly low in general estimation, and yet a certain reverence is attached to the profession. Under the pretence of abandoning the vain cares of a fleeting world, they devote their lives to idleness and the inebriation arising from chers, roving from city to city, by the orders of their moorshids, or spiritual chiefs, and levying contributions from the multitude.¹²⁰

Lady Sheil also described how the Sufis exacted taxes on the wealthy by sowing a field of wheat, a yard square, adjacent to the property of respectable householders. The Sufi then blew his horn and screamed devotions until he received his presents. Other Sufis hurled “dreadful abuse” on those whom they met, cursing those who refused to submit to their extortion.¹²¹

Another negative portrayal of dervishes is found in C.J. Wills’ account, *Persia As It Is*, which was published in 1887. (Wills was a doctor who spent fifteen years in Iran between 1866 and 1881.) He considered all dervishes as mendicants who told stories, had marvellous memories, possessed the arts of the ventriloquist and the mimic and were mesmerists and conjurors. Moreover,

Dervishes have all the vices of the Persians. They drink, they eat and smoke both bhang and opium; they are as a rule dangerous and

insidious libertines; their victims in purse and person being the ignorant village women... In fact, if a man in the East has utterly gone wrong, he burns his ships, buys a tall hat, a leopard skin, and a big club, and, without ceremonial or initiation, he becomes to all intents and purposes a dervish – a vagrant and companion of vagrants.¹²²

Wills adds, “The Persians themselves consider that a dervish *per se* has no virtues, but that he is able by his *nuffus* (or holy inspiration) to perform miracles and foretell events.”¹²³

In contrast to these negative portrayals of Sufism, which must have been informed to some degree by indigenous Iranian perspectives, there are also positive descriptions of Sufism by British citizens who had experience of Iran. Sir Percy Sykes (who worked for British army intelligence and spent over twenty years in Iran between 1893 and 1918) visited the shrine of Ne‘matollah Vali (1331–1431) in Mahan and remarks approvingly that the *morshed* at the shrine believed that all religious fanaticism is the result of ignorance and should be swept away to make room for universal love.¹²⁴ Sykes also alludes to the prophecies of the fourteenth-century founder of the order, which gained much currency in nineteenth-century Iran (prophecies that the last Shah of Iran would be called Naser al-Din,¹²⁵ and that the Muslims would eventually reign supreme, the last prophecy was prevalent in the wake of the Indian “Mutiny”).¹²⁶

A veritable mine of information on Sufism in late nineteenth-century Iran is present in the writings of E.G. Browne, the British orientalist about whom there is much to be said in Chapter 5. At this point, however, it is worthwhile to refer to his *A Year Amongst the Persians*,¹²⁷ which is an account of the year he spent in Iran between 1887 and 1888 and in which there are many references to Sufism. In this work Browne often recorded the anecdotes told to him by Iranians, and one such episode reveals, perhaps, a stereotype and caricature of a certain form of Sufi. Browne was told that a poor man was travelling alone in a desert when he saw a terrible looking dervish coming towards him, carrying “an enormous and ponderous club”. The poor man climbed a tree to get out of the path of the dervish who decided to sit beneath the shade of the very same tree. The dervish set out five clay figures before him and addressed the first as ‘Omar, the second Caliph recognised by the Sunnis and rejected by the Shi‘ites for usurping the rights of ‘Ali to guide the Muslim community. The dervish asked the clay figure why he had not recognised ‘Ali’s rights, and of course there was silence in response to the question. Angry at this the dervish smashed the figure with his club. The dervish then addressed the second clay figure as Abu Bakr, the first Sunni Caliph, also rejected by the Shi‘ites. The dervish gave this clay figure the opportunity to account for his sins, but following a brief silence, the dervish once more pulverised the clay figure with his club. The third clay figure was addressed as ‘Ali, and the dervish asked it why he had allowed himself to be sidelined by his adversaries. When silence was followed, the dervish once more demolished the figure. The dervish then brought forth “Mohammad”, the fourth clay figure, and asked that

since he enjoyed “Divine Inspiration” why did he take no precautions concerning his succession. Once again, following a silence the dervish destroyed the figure with his club. The last clay figure was addressed as “Allah” and was asked the divine mystery behind all the troubles that had befallen the prophet’s family. At this juncture, the poor man, still hiding in the tree, lost his fear of the dervish and angrily objected in a loud voice at the smashing of Mohammad and ‘Ali and warned the dervish that God’s wrath would smite him. On hearing this, the dervish was afraid, thinking he had heard the voice of God, and he uttered a loud cry, dropped his club and slumped to the floor, dead. The poor man came down from the tree and discovered that the cloak of the dervish concealed a hidden treasure of golden coins.¹²⁸

This anecdote pokes fun at the wandering dervishes, who are commonly associated with poverty but who were also viewed by many of their non-Sufi contemporaries as avaricious, money-seeking hypocrites. Yet as a caricature it reveals an antinomian dimension of Sufism that the “orthodox” considered reprehensible. Browne’s *A Year Amongst the Persians* is littered with references to dervishes that he met, yet despite his favourable opinion of the Sufis, his following remarks about a dervish that he chanced to meet betray the sentiments of Iranians themselves:

He was one of those dervishes who inspire one with respect for a name which serves but too often to shelter idleness, sloth, and even vice. Too often is it the case that the traveller, judging only by the opium-eating, hashish smoking mendicant, who, with matted hair, glassy eyes, and harsh, raucous voice, importunes the passers by for alms, condemns all dervishes as a blemish and a bane to their country.¹²⁹

The opinions of Western scholars concerning the glories of Iranian civilisation and history (which included the Sufi tradition) became significant in the 1920s and 1930s because of the activities of an organisation named *Sazman-e Anjoman-e Melli* (Society for National Heritage). This was an organisation that was formed in 1921 around a nucleus of some of the leading academics and politicians of the day, including Mohammad ‘Ali Forughī, ‘Ali Asghar Hekmat, ‘Isa Sadiq, ‘Abd al-Hosayn Taymurtash (the court minister) and Hasan Pirnia (a former prime minister). The organisation’s aim was to “preserve, protect and promote Iran’s patrimony”,¹³⁰ and in its attempt to achieve this end, Western academics were invited to Iran to offer their opinions about the importance of Iranian heritage. The German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld was invited to Iran in 1925, as was the American art historian Arthur Upham Pope. Pope’s lecture in 1925 was heard by the power-brokers in Iran, including Reza Khan who was soon to become prime minister. In the course of his speech, Pope praised Persian poetry, indicating that the voices of Ferdowsi, Sa’di, Hafez and Khayyam stirred hearts everywhere. Although the Sufi nature of some of these poets was to be questioned by Kasravi, his general point that the Western academics praised Persian poetry (much of it Sufi) remains valid. However, his view that they did so to promote the interests of

the Western nations is rather controversial (and this topic is addressed in more detail in subsequent chapters). It is perhaps worthwhile noting the extent to which foreign opinions on Iranian culture and civilisation were considered in this period, in an attempt to recultivate “good taste”. In 1934 the Congress of Orientalists was held in Iran to celebrate the millennium of Ferdowsi, and many Western scholars were invited to attend and participate. In addition to presenting their papers, trips were arranged to Tus (where Ferdowsi’s grave is located), and on route the visitors were taken through Nishapur, where the grave of Khayyam can be found. The story of the trip is recounted by ‘Isa Sadiq who described the pleasure of the Middle East specialists when they approached Khayyam’s tomb. Some of them read Khayyam’s verses in Persian, and Sir Denison Ross recited Fitzgerald’s versions aloud. One of the visitors began to weep because of the emotion and passion of the occasion, and the other guests followed suit.¹³¹ It is likely that Kasravi would have heard of this episode, especially since he was a member of the Congress of Orientalists,¹³² and he must have been bemused on hearing these events that celebrated a poet whose verses he detested and whom was not generally considered by most Iranians to be a great poet until Fitzgerald had published his translations.¹³³

The Sufis

Increasing calls for modernisation from 1850 until the rise of Reza Shah included the accountability of the royal court and regulation of the political process through more open suffrage, equality, justice and greater efficiency in the bureaucracy. In essence, the demands for modernisation were appeals for greater participation within an orderly system. Furthermore, the reformism advocated by individuals such as Akhundzadeh in the late nineteenth century and ‘Ali Dashti of the twentieth century was a form of modernism that included the demystification of religious beliefs. Order, discipline and control of religion were major elements defining the rule of Reza Shah that transformed Iranian society and culture dramatically.¹³⁴ Reza Shah’s form of modernisation was one that was imposed from the top down, and therefore the democratic aspect of modernity was not accorded much importance. Potential threats were dealt with accordingly, including religious (whether Sufi or jurist), so that the clerical authorities, although not completely ignoring the challenge of the Sufi tradition, had to focus their energies elsewhere in their attempts to preserve and promote their interests in Iran.¹³⁵ Likewise, the Sufis had to respond to the challenge of modernity, which predates the emergence of Reza Shah, for as we have seen, the criticisms of Sufism from the intellectuals appeared towards the end of the nineteenth century.

This section presents a case study that will highlight how one of the Sufi traditions in Iran responded to these new circumstances (a task that has been made easier due to the publication of informative pieces of work in English in recent years).¹³⁶ The focus of attention will be directed to the Safi‘alishahis, one of the

largest of the Ne‘matollahi groups of Sufis.¹³⁷ The Safi‘alishahis have been selected as a case study for a number of reasons: first, their fame and relative numerical strength in Iran; second, because their response to the changing times offers a contrast to the stereotypical portrayal offered by the critics of Kasravi’s ilk; and finally because there is a substantial quantity of literature (both primary and secondary) with which to work.

***The Safi‘alishahis: an aristocratic order
searching for Sufi universalism?***

One of the most celebrated Sufis of the late nineteenth century was Safi ‘Ali Shah (d. 1898) who was a disciple of the Ne‘matollahi sheikh, Rahmat ‘Ali Shah (d. 1861), and then Monavvar ‘Ali Shah until he severed his connections with the latter. In 1877 he created the nucleus of what was to become a separate line of Ne‘matollahi Sufism, which was eventually institutionalised by royal decree in 1899 in the form of an organisation known as the Society of Brotherhood (*Anjuman-e Okhovvat*), see Figure 2.1.

The Ne‘matollahis were well known for their aristocratic connections, and some of Safi ‘Ali Shah’s poetry would have done nothing to quell the resentment of those who disliked the corruption and nepotism of the royal court. Safi ‘Ali Shah’s works include sycophantic praise of the fourth Qajar monarch, Naser al-Din Shah, who was unfortunate to live at a time when Iran was caught between the two superpowers of the age (Russia and Britain). These two nations prevented each other from gaining the upper hand in Iran, thereby preventing Iran from achieving significant socio-economic development. Although there were some attempts at social reform and modernisation, the reign of Naser al-Din Shah is not usually known for its freedom,¹³⁸ and the weakness of the central government was partly attributable to the extravagances of the royal court (including expensive royal tours in Europe), the non-remittance of taxes from the provinces and



Figure 2.1 The Safi‘alishahis and the Society of Brotherhood Leaders.

the granting of monopolies to European companies. Despite this, Safi 'Ali Shah said that in forty years of rule, (the Shah) had made Iran flourish just as if there had been forty world-experienced, wise, perfect and just monarchs.¹³⁹ Moreover, he described the Shah's royal court as just, and Iran was referred to as enjoying such security that even small children could carry gold and jewels from one city to another, whereas in previous times thieves and villains abounded.¹⁴⁰ The charges of nepotism and sycophancy would have been all the more stronger in light of the gift of land made to Safi 'Ali Shah by Mohammad Mirza Sayf al-Dowleh (who was the son of 'Azd al-Dowleh, one of the sons of the second Qajar monarch, Fath 'Ali Shah) so that a *khanagah* could be built for Safi in Tehran.¹⁴¹

The relationship of the Safi'alishahis with the Iranian aristocracy needs further investigation because these Sufis claimed that their form of Sufism addressed the problems of Iran's hierarchical social structure. Given the increasing demands for widening participation within social institutions, the claims made by Safi 'Ali Shah and his successors may be regarded as a self-conscious attempt to respond to the forces of modernity.¹⁴² The Safi'alishahi order became structured through the Society of Brotherhood, and its leaders stressed the "brotherhood" of its members regardless of rank and status; yet despite this, the aristocratic connections of the organisation persisted well into the Pahlavi dynasty.¹⁴³

Safi 'Ali Shah's successor was 'Ali Khan Qajar who came from an aristocratic family and whose father was a minister of state and had twice been the governor of Shiraz.¹⁴⁴ 'Ali Khan Qajar also had a distinguished career at court as he was made minister of public ceremonies by Naser al-Din Shah, received the honorific title of Zahir al-Dowleh, was also given the Shah's daughter in marriage and was governor of Gilan, Hamadan, Kermanshah and Tehran. Zahir al-Dowleh (whose Sufi names were Safa 'Ali Shah and *Mesbah al-Valayat* (lamp of friendship)) was able to extend the patronage of the highest echelons of court society to Sufism, and he achieved this through the creation of the Society of Brotherhood. Sympathetic sources claim that Safi 'Ali Shah had desired to create this society himself,¹⁴⁵ but it was Zahir al-Dowleh who founded the Society of Brotherhood, to which end he received royal assent in 1899.

The names of the leading members of the Society of Brotherhood in its formative years under Zahir al-Dowleh betray its aristocratic leanings,¹⁴⁶ as do its connections with the latter Qajar monarchy. These connections included an interest expressed by Ahmad Shah (the last monarch of the Qajar dynasty, deposed in 1925) who sent the crown prince, Mohammad Hasan Mirza, to the Society's base in Tehran. It is claimed that he was even initiated as a dervish in 1911, on the occasion of the twelfth anniversary of the Society's establishment. On this occasion, Zahir al-Dowleh was able to stress the principle of equality of its members, claiming that, "it was the Society of Brotherhood that smashed the face of the arrogant ones, and made the contemporary leaders and the sons of the rulers of the age sit on their knees with the poor (*foqara*) and tradespeople".¹⁴⁷ These ideals reflect Zahir al-Dowleh's support of the Constitutionalist Movement, and indeed, as an aristocratic supporter of Constitutionalism he was subject to intimidation

from Mohammad ‘Ali Shah. The aristocratic tag and the connections with monarchy persisted despite the demise of the Qajar dynasty and the death of Zahir al-Dowleh. Indeed, the cordial relationship between the Society of Brotherhood and the Pahlavi dynasty may have been based upon the position enjoyed by Zahir al-Dowleh’s successor Binesh ‘Ali Shah (or Seyyed Mohammad Khan Entezam al-Saltaneh), who served as Reza Shah’s director general in the Interior Ministry.¹⁴⁸ In addition, Binesh ‘Ali Shah’s son, who a member of the Society, was a friend of Reza Shah’s son from 1936.¹⁴⁹

It seems unlikely that the Safi‘alishahis encouraged universalism and the connections with the aristocracy for their own mercenary purposes. There are sufficient indications that leaders of the movement were genuine in their efforts to eradicate social distinctions. For example Safi ‘Ali Shah’s attempt to present Sufism as a spiritual and ethical reformist movement is revealed in an endeavour to spread his message beyond aristocratic circles. His versified Persian interpretation (*tafsir*) of the Qur’an (*Tafsir-e Manzum*)¹⁵⁰ was written to render the Qur’an (and its mystical meanings) intelligible to all literate Farsi speakers.¹⁵¹ (This must have been regarded as a threat by some of the Shi‘ite clerics who viewed themselves as the legitimate interpreters of the Qur’an, and some may also have been repelled at this “tampering” with the divine word. The controversy over this *tafsir* reached as far as Naser al-Din Shah who was tempted to exile Safi ‘Ali Shah from Tehran but was persuaded to refer the case to the leading Shi‘ite cleric, Ayatollah Shirazi, whose fatwa decided in favour of Safi’s work.) Zahir al-Dowleh was also committed to eradicating social distinctions and his slogan and that of the Society of “brotherhood, equality and service to the people” is reflected in his pro-constitutional activities, which resulted in the anti-constitutionalist monarch Mohammad ‘Ali Shah destroying his house in Tehran (which also served as the head-quarters of the Society of Brotherhood). Subsequently, Zahir al-Dowleh organised charitable activities called the Festival of Charity in the summer of 1909 to raise funds for the families of those killed and wounded in the constitutional struggles. He was able to “invite” senior state officials to these events which lasted for about two weeks, and many of them donated large sums of money to help. Donators included the minister of war, the interior minister, the prince ‘Ayn al-Dowleh and Qavam al-Dowleh.¹⁵²

The Anjuman-e Okhovvat: a modernist Sufi organisation?

The emergence of a well-organised society (which had a register, a constitution, a system of financial accountability, chairs to sit on (instead of sitting on a carpet))¹⁵³ with Sufi ethical ideals at this time should not be surprising for a plethora of secret societies with socio-political agendas appeared on the death of Naser al-Din Shah. The development of Society of Brotherhood is an interesting case, however, because it demonstrates how Sufism could operate within a society that was increasingly turning to modern and Western models of organisations with socio-political agendas.

The modernising tendency was initiated by Safi 'Ali Shah, although it is not always easy to distinguish between the trappings of modernity with elements already existent within Sufi life-styles. For example, Safi 'Ali Shah's attempts to "cleanse" Sufism included his advise to Zahir al-Dowleh to wear normal clothes and his order that no one should remain idle without a job or profession (a rejection perhaps of the life-style of the wandering dervishes).¹⁵⁴ Yet this advise has a certain resonance with the Malamati Sufi tradition of the mediaeval period, a tradition that attempted to conceal outward manifestations of piety and spirituality in order to avoid the pitfalls of pride and reputation. Safi 'Ali Shah's views reflected, perhaps, the mushrooming of individuals claiming overarching spiritual authority, as he commented that "in Tehran the *morsheds* of poverty are greater (in number) than professional and craft masters".¹⁵⁵ (Safi 'Ali Shah also discussed a group of "Sufis" who were opposed to the Imams, but they merely wore Sufi clothing and were "wolves" in sheepskins. Such individuals not only made use of Sufism (also claiming to perform "charismatic powers"), but their kind were also found among the *ulema*, and it is on this point that Safi 'Ali Shah stated that he viewed no incompatibility between those who follow the *shari'at* and those who follow the *haqiqat*.¹⁵⁶)

Some of the trappings of Western culture, which have been associated with modernity, were embraced by the Safi'alishahis, and this is nowhere more evident than in the charity raising events of Zahir al-Dowleh in 1909. During these events the guests were entertained with a Western-style orchestra, a lottery, and were nourished with "expensive" food (it is assumed that the proceeds of these events were used for charity),¹⁵⁷ and there were stalls selling books and haberdashery goods.¹⁵⁸ These features, the Western-style orchestra and, in particular, the lottery¹⁵⁹ indicate that this "quasi-tariqa"¹⁶⁰ was comfortable with new modes of activity, and perhaps more significantly, it felt at ease in promoting an ethical code, which some Iranians viewed as a Western import and also un-Islamic.¹⁶¹

A feature that should not be ignored in this discussion of the *Anjoman-e Okhovvat* is the presence of women. It seems likely that the wife of Zahir al-Dowleh, Malakeh-ye Iran, the daughter of Naser al-Din Shah, shared her husband's mystical inclinations, and indeed, she is shown in a photograph with her two daughters in dervish costume, carrying the Sufi axe and begging bowl. Of more interest is that the ladies are virtually bareheaded.¹⁶² While it could be argued that this photograph of bareheaded ladies was intended for private viewing and did not necessarily reflect the "modernising" tendency of female liberation from the *hejab*, it is significant that Malakeh-ye Iran used to go to the meetings of the *Anjoman-e Okhovvat* unveiled, and moreover, she used to address the members of the order which included both men and women.¹⁶³ Another remarkable episode surrounding Malakeh-ye Iran was that she composed a song that became popular and was sung by both men and women.¹⁶⁴ While it was not unheard of that females composed poetry and songs, in general in Qajar Iran, the composition of poetry was a male domain and it was considered shameful for females to expose, or "unveil" themselves in this literary fashion.¹⁶⁵

The modernising tendencies of the Society of Brotherhood are also evident in its publications. Based in Tehran, the *Majmu'eh-ye Akhlaq* ("Magazine of Morals") was published from 1905 and continued to print in total eighteen issues which contained contributions in verse and prose from Zahir al-Dowleh.¹⁶⁶ This magazine of eight pages discussed ethical issues, mainly written by Mirza Ibrahim Khan (the Deputy for Isfahan in the Second National Assembly), and according to Browne it "professedly avoids political and religious matters".¹⁶⁷ (Zahir al-Dowleh was also instrumental in founding a weekly paper in Hamadan, called '*Adl-e Mozaffar* and then changed its name to *Ekbatana*.)¹⁶⁸ Another member of the Society of Brotherhood, Hajji Dadash, established a branch in Kermanshah, and from there he published a journal (*The Magazine of Brotherhood*) which "explored current, worldly affairs and in many cases related them to patriotic or nationalist themes".¹⁶⁹

One of the major issues that plagued the Sufis of the late Qajar and early Pahlavi period concerned *qotbiyyat*, or spiritual leadership, which demanded ultimate allegiance to a spiritual master, the position of which was often earned through hereditary succession. Discussions and conflict surrounding *qotbiyyat* were present in the major Sufi orders of Iran during the period in question,¹⁷⁰ and disputes over succession frequently led to an ever increasing splintering of the orders. The Safi'alishahis suffered this problem as much as other orders, as four individuals claimed to be the exclusive successor to Safi 'Ali Shah,¹⁷¹ and Binesh 'Ali Shah (the successor of Zahir al-Dowleh) was also opposed by Vafa 'Ali Shah (d. 1949) (who Kasravi claimed was a disciple of Safi 'Ali Shah) and Hajji Dadash. It was perhaps a result of the Society's ideal of equality, combined with a self-conscious recognition of the damage that the squabbles over *qotbship* had on public perceptions of Sufism, and the increasing awareness of equality within other social institutions (Iranian or otherwise) that Binesh 'Ali Shah, as vice-president of the Society of Brotherhood's Consultancy Council, decided to abandon the tradition of appointing a successor and *qotb*. Indeed, during his own lifetime the leader of the Consultancy Council was more of a first among equals (perhaps taking the ideal of brotherhood and equality of the Society to its ultimate conclusion), standing in contrast to the charismatic, authoritarian guide, which was the traditional Sufi model. Although the Society remained without a *qotb*, it was agreed that Sufi sheikhs could be appointed by the Consultancy Council for the spiritual guidance of the Sufis.¹⁷²

Although the organisation seems to have been comfortable with the trappings of modernity, this did not mean that it jettisoned its Sufi heritage both in terms of ritual and belief. The life and writings of Safi 'Ali Shah manifest elements of the Sufi tradition that anti-Sufis and modernists criticise as irrational and incompatible with the modern age. For example, his writings contain stories in which he believes that he heard a guiding, divine voice,¹⁷³ that Ne'matollah Vali appeared in his heart and acted as his host during a pilgrimage to the saints tomb in Mahan¹⁷⁴ and that he was miraculously saved from drowning in a river (the water of which rose dramatically, caused by divine wrath for Safi's intention to drink wine) by his sheikh's brother.¹⁷⁵ Critics of Sufism, such as Kasravi, would also

have disliked Safi's espousal of the unity of existence (*vahdat-e vujud*) which is commonly associated with Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1265) and has been understood by its opponents as a monistic or pantheistic worldview.¹⁷⁶

Yet Safi 'Ali Shah was also critical of elements of the "Sufi" tradition in Iran, perhaps a reflection of the splintering of the Ne'matollahi order, and the abuse that Sufism has always suffered at the hands of the unscrupulous. Indeed, his following comments could easily have been written by Kasravi a generation later:

Some make claims to *qotbiyyat* in their writings and they boast of 'I and no other', contrary to [the practice of] famous and unknown [masters]. And some others claim perfection through the subjugation [of nature], alchemy, summoning spirits, talismans, the [mystical] wisdom of letters and words, the exorcism of evil spirits, and *zeker* recital in [their attempts] to curry favour or cause separation, and some others speak about dervish-hood by reciting litanies and reading the treatises of past masters such as the *Masnavi*¹⁷⁷ and the *Fusus*¹⁷⁸ without learning the science of Sufism from its adherents, and they deny the recognised or unrecognised gnostic of their time.

And some others invent unknown things in mentioning the circumstances of their contemporaries, and in each gathering they say that we were assembled together in so and so a time, in so and so a party, with so and so, and this and that took place.

They always talk of these things with reference to the dead or those who are absent, but not to those worthy who are present.¹⁷⁹

Under Zahir al-Dowleh the Society of Brotherhood maintained a traditional Sufi perspective, typified in his six principles for membership: respecting God's commands, compassion for God's creatures, serving the people of God (the fellow Sufis), devoting oneself to God's path, concealing the mystery of God and obedience to the friend (*vali*) of God, which for Zahir al-Dowleh meant Safi 'Ali Shah.¹⁸⁰ Moreover it is possible to see within Zahir al-Dowleh's ideas an attraction to a mystical dimension of letters; thus he spelt out that the real meaning of dervish (which in Persian is composed of the letters d, r, v, i, and sh) in the following fashion: the 'd' in dervish represents *dorosti* (correctness), the 'r' is symbolic of *rasti* (honesty), 'v' stands for *vahdat va yeganegi* (unity and oneness), 'i' represents *yaqin-e kamel* (utter certainty) and 'sh' is for *shokr dar asayesh va sakhti* (gratitude in both comfort and in adversity).¹⁸¹ In addition, Zahir al-Dowleh opened the Society of Brotherhood with 110 members, a number which has the very same numerical value of the sum of numbers contained in the letters *ayn*, *lam* and *ye*, which spell 'Ali. It is not clear whether this was designed with the intention of receiving some mystical blessing or whether it was purely symbolic and had more to do with asserting the identity of the society.

The society met weekly on Thursday evenings, and distinctly religious activities also took place during the months of Moharram, Safar and Ramadan when the

members observed lamentations and recited religious poems in its *khanaqah*. Moreover, the Society celebrated the births of Mohammad and ‘Ali and the latter’s appointment as the prophet’s successor at Ghaderr¹⁸², and each year during the month of Farvadin the Society held the Festival of Flowers during which special songs were composed and played by the orchestra.¹⁸³

Yet the Sufism of Zahir al-Dowleh has a very different taste from the more ecstatic form contained within his master’s writings, and it would seem that the Society of Brotherhood served as an extension of Zahir al-Dowleh’s political and Sufi perspectives. Afshar claims that as governor of Hamadan he was known as a supporter of the Constitutionalists and a friend of the people and that such opinions spilled over into the Society of Brotherhood,¹⁸⁴ and Safa’i observes that for many years people had imagined that dervishes conditioned their body, abstained from work, wore patched and dirty clothes, adopted seclusion as a way of life and sometimes begged. For Safa’i, the greatness of Zahir al-Dowleh was that he used mysticism to serve society and brought the spiritual and Sufi teachings out of the *khanaqah* and took them to the centres of society in order to awaken people’s minds and improve their ethics and make them aware of the concept of freedom.¹⁸⁵

The Society of Brotherhood was particularly concerned with worldly matters and ethics, and this is reflected in its constitution (written by Zahir al-Dowleh) which does not mention any kind of mystical vision and only refers to God once in the context of not performing ugly acts since God is everywhere and witnesses everything. The mention of Sufi ritual practice is also very brief, with passing reference to the observance of reciting *zehr* and litanies. Instead, the constitution is more concerned with external behaviour, the general tenor being an exceedingly sober manifestation of Sufism. It rejects the kind of Sufis who beg for a living or else rely on the charity of others: “The pinnacle of honour is when (Sufis) earn a living through their own labour and effort.” Interestingly too, the constitution states that it is impermissible to “insult the *ulema* of the holy law, rather one should express amity (*mavaddat*) because the kernel requires a skin, and the body needs clothes”.¹⁸⁶ The stress on ethics was continued after Zahir al-Dowleh, as its leaders were people who did not “pretend to spiritual unveiling and vision, and neither like the other *shaykhs* of the path, to supernatural things”.¹⁸⁷

Zahir al-Dowleh’s poetry reflects the concerns of Sufism and its aim of serving God, and union with him on the one hand with humanistic ethics on the other. The latter is typified in a poem contained in *Varedat* in which he protests at the practice of grain hoarding, something of which he had first-hand knowledge as governor of Hamadan, when he threatened to resign unless he was given the authority to take appropriate action to make the hoarders sell at a reasonable price. Having assembled a large mass of angry and hungry people, he instigated them to march on the stocks, and the grain was subsequently sold at reasonable prices:¹⁸⁸

If we have a Shah he is building up a store of grain
If we have a minister he is a thief and despises humanity

All the princes drink the people's blood...
 What is their sorrow if the poor are all dead?
 Neither the full person has any mercy for the hungry
 Nor the prince has any sympathy for the poor.
 You see a dead person in every road
 Frozen to death from cold and hunger.
 There is much food everywhere,
 In the kitchens, stores and shops
 But there is no pity in hearts
 That they could show mercy for people in this state...
 We must go and smash the stores
 Open them up and eat, there is no other choice.¹⁸⁹

His Sufi poetry, however, is traditional in describing complete devotion to an immanent God;

Listen to a short account about the people of the path,
 Listen to a secret of theirs, in truth.
 A path has sprouted from the heart and soul
 And from all places they have turned to God.
 They are strangers to everyone, they are people of the heart –
 Unaware of themselves and united to the Truth (*be-haqq vassel-and*) –
 There is nothing except trust (in God) for them
 There is nothing except poverty in their thoughts.
 They are in the stage of traversing the path
 They have amassed gnosis, in truth.
 The path-revealer is on the way to annihilation (*fana*)
 The masters of honour are [leaning] on the throne of subsistence
 (*baqa*).¹⁹⁰

In this survey a wide variety of opinions related to Sufism have been described, ranging from outright rejection to sympathy and ardent support. By the time that Kasravi commenced his criticisms of Sufism in the 1930s, the nature of Sufism in Iran had changed dramatically from its mediaeval or even its nineteenth-century manifestations. Kasravi himself admitted this in his *Sufigari*, for he claims in the introduction that Sufism no longer has the power to attract individuals to renounce their worldly possessions and leave for the *khanaqah* or adopt a wandering life-style. Life in Iran during the 1930s and after would certainly not have permitted such a life-style; certainly, the centralising reforms of Reza Shah would not have tolerated the kind of antinomian Sufi activity that is commonly associated with groups such as the Qalandar. Indeed Kasravi notes that one of Reza Shah's accomplishments was the eradication of the Sufis in public: "He cleansed the markets and streets from the filth of the mollahs and the dervishes."¹⁹¹ Yet as has been shown, some groups of Sufis had adopted the kind of world-view of which

Kasravi would have approved, including performing acts of charity, working for one's livelihood and marrying and having children. The case study of the *Anjoman-e Okhovvat* and the focus on Zahir al-Dowleh illustrates this point, as does the Society's further development in the 1930s and beyond, when the role of a single leader was replaced with a consultative council, and the members of which did not "pretend to 'disclosure and vision' "¹⁹² Such tendencies were not limited to the *Anjoman-e Okhovvat*, as another branch of the Ne'matollahis, the Soltan'alishahis manifested other reformist tendencies.¹⁹³

The creation of modern Iran was the major aim of the intellectuals and politicians of Iran during Kasravi's lifetime, and it is hardly surprising that Persian literature became one of the points of controversy. Since much of Iran's literary heritage is of a mystical nature, Sufism became one of the topics that was a cause of intense debate. One of the intriguing points in this debate is the lack of information concerning Reza Shah's position on Sufism,¹⁹⁴ although the opinions and policies of Hekmat and Forughi in promoting Sufi literature served his policy of fostering a sense of national glory in Iran. While Kasravi shared the aim of establishing a modern nation-state in Iran, he was concerned that Iranians did not possess the requisite mentality to achieve this and, in particular, he pinpointed the hegemonic Sufi world-view that was enforced by a rich literature that dated back over a thousand years. As already noted, many scholars, both Iranian and otherwise, have noted the influence of Sufi literature, and its power has been summarised by de Bruijn who commented, "Classical Persian literature . . . up to the present century, continued to be the most conspicuous element of the Persian cultural identity."¹⁹⁵ It was with this that Kasravi wished to engage in battle, as he considered it a threat to the nation-state of Iran.

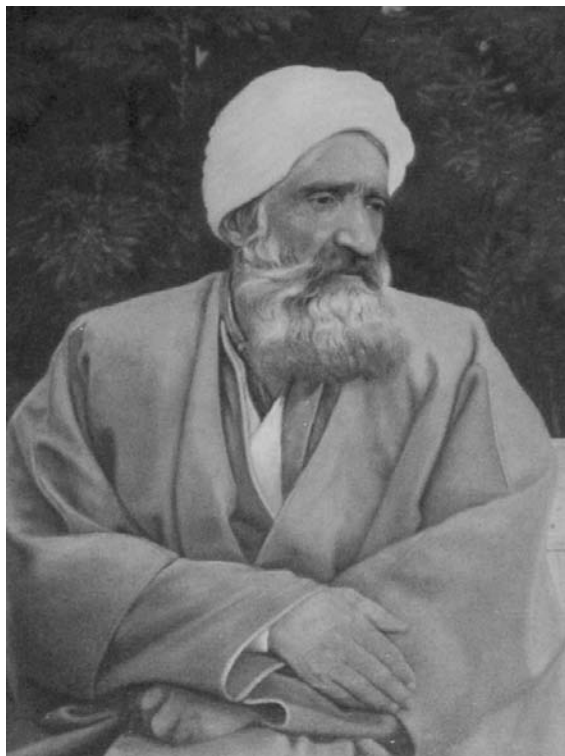


Figure 2.2 Safi 'Ali Shah.



Figure 2.3 Zahir al-Dowleh in dervish clothing.

- Fatimeh and they had three children (Farrokhzad, Mahin and Khojasteh). Kasravi had one more wife, but they had no children. 'Azizeh separated from Kasravi (although there was never an official divorce) and Fatimeh also left Kasravi shortly after the birth of her third child. (My thanks are extended to Amir Kojoory (the son of Zahra Kasravi) who supplied me with this information.)
- 43 See I. Parsinejad, *A History of Literary Criticism in Iran*, p. 170.
 - 44 H. Katouzian, "Kasravi va adabiyyat", *Iran Nameh*, XX, 2–3 (2002), p. 174.
 - 45 Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Pansad Saleh-ye Khuzestan* (Tehran: 1933–4).
 - 46 Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Hijdah Saleh-ye Azarbayjan* (Tehran: 1934–41).
 - 47 M.A. Jazayery, "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker", in Ahmad Kasravi (ed.), *On Islam and Shi'ism* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1990), p. 5. As a journalist who was the editor of the newspaper *Payman*, Kasravi was prolific. *Payman* was published from 1933 and ceased publication in 1942. He was then the editor of a daily newspaper called *Parcham*, the first issue of which was 23 January 1942 and which ceased publication on December 8. He continued publishing his views through a series of publications that he himself edited. See Jazayery, "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker of the Twentieth Century", in *On Islam*, p. 6.
 - 48 On the *Azadegan*, see Jazayery, "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker", pp. 6–14.
 - 49 S. Nafisi, *Dar Piramun-e Roman* (Tehran: 1943–4), p. 4.
 - 50 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
 - 51 Abrahamian, "Kasravi: The Integrative Nationalist", p. 123.
 - 52 *Ibid.*
 - 53 *Sokhan*, cited in N. Pakdaman, (see Note 35) pp. 235–6.

2 OPINIONS OF SUFISM IN IRAN, 1850–1950

- 1 Sufism has been overlooked by scholars of twentieth-century Iran. A glaring example is found in Hamid Algar's article "Religious Forces in Twentieth Century Iran" in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 (1991), pp. 732–64, in which there is no mention at all of Sufism.
- 2 'Abd al-Hosayn Zarrinkub, *Donbaleh-ye jostaju dar tasavvof-e Iran* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1369/1990), p. 349.
- 3 Kasravi, *Sufism*, pp. 74–83 in this book.
- 4 Sa'id Nafisi in A. Barq, "Ta'lifat-e Safi'alishah," *Indo-Iranica*, VII, pp. 7–8, cited in Matthijs van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes*, p. 213.
- 5 These include, for example, Vafa 'Ali Shah (d. 1918) and Munes 'Ali Shah (d. 1953). See L. Lewisohn, "An Introduction to modern Persian Sufism, Part I", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61, 3, (1998), pp. 467–8.
- 6 See K. Babayan, "Sufis, Dervishes and Mullahs," in C. Melville (ed.), *Safavid Persia: Pembroke Papers 4* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 130–1.
- 7 See for example, A. Newman, "Sufism and anti-Sufism in Safavid Iran," in *Iran*, XXXVII (1999), pp. 95–108.
- 8 Safi 'Ali Shah, *Resaleh-ye Mizan al-Ma'rafah*, in *'Erfan al-haqq* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Safi 'Ali Shah, 1378/1999–2000), originally published in 1306/1927–8), p. 251. See also *Asrar al-ma'aref*, in *'Erfan al-haqq*, pp. 224–5.
- 9 H. Algar, "Religious Forces, 18th and 19th Century," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 (1991), p. 723.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 723 citing Richard Gramlich "Pol und Scheich im heutigen Derwischtum der Schia", p. 175.
- 11 Safi 'Ali Shah, *'Erfan al-haqq*, p. 83. Originally published in 1297/1918–19.
- 12 Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shi'ite Islam* (Oxford: University Press, 1988), p. 225.

- 13 Cited in Yann Richard, "Shar'at Sangalaji: A Reformist Theologian of the Ridā Shāh Period," translated by Kathryn Arjomand, in S. Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 169.
- 14 See the introduction by I. Afshar in his introduction to *Khaterat va Asnad-e Zahir al-Dowleh* (Tehran: Entesharat-e zarrin, 1367/1988), p. xl.
- 15 This episode is told by I. Afshar in his introduction to *Khaterat*, p. xl, who traces it back to Nazm al-Dawleh (one of Safi 'Ali Shah's disciples). The story is also told in more detail by M. Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh-ha-ye tariqeh-ye Ne'matollahiyyeh dar Iran* ("History of Ne'matollahi Orders in Iran"), (Tehran: Entesharat-e Maktab-e 'erfan-e Iran, no date), p. 320. The episode is also reported by I. Safa'i, *Rahbaran-e Mashruteh* ("Leaders of the Constitution"), (Tehran: 1363/1984–5), pp. 137–8.
- 16 Mahmud Taqizadieh Davari, *Socio-political Philosophy in the Works of Murtaza Mutahhari (1920–1979)*, (PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1996), p. 20.
- 17 N. Chahardahi, *Selseleh-ha-ye Sufiyyeh-ye Iran*, (Tehran: Entesharat-e Batunak, 1360/1981–2), p. 143.
- 18 See F. Kazemzadeh, "Iranian Relations with Russia and the Soviet Union to 1921," *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7, (1991), p. 714.
- 19 An example for a failed concession that was awarded to a European is the Tobacco Concession, which was given by Naser al-Din Shah to an Englishman named Major Talbot. Talbot acquired a fifty-year monopoly for the distribution and export of tobacco in exchange for a personal gift to the Shah of £25,000, an annual rent of £15,000 to the state, and a 25% share of the profits for Iran (see E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 73).
- 20 Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), p. 107.
- 21 In *Religion and State in Iran* (p. 134), Algar provides an example of what I term folk Shi'ism in his discussion of the events surrounding a cow that on being led past the tomb of a descendant of an Imam halted twice while its owner was trying to pull it on to the slaughter house. The tradition has it that the tomb of the Imamzadeh is a location of sanctuary. When the owner of the cow attempted to pull his cow away for a third time he was struck down dead by the power of the dead saint. Subsequently, the cow's hairs were considered sacred and even the British consul donated a candelabra to the shrine.
- 22 Treatise written by Sayyid 'Abd al-'Azim 'Emad al-'Ulama' Khalkhali, translated by Hamid Dabashi, "On the Meaning of Constitutional Monarchy and its Benefits" (1907) in S.A. Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1988), p. 343.
- 23 M. Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh-ha*, p. 271. I am grateful to Dr Nile Green for supplying this information. L. Lewisohn also states that Nur 'Ali Shah II (d. 1918) of the Gonabadi Ne'matollahi order wrote a treatise which lauded the virtues of smoking opium. See L. Lewisohn, "An introduction to the history of modern Persian Sufism, Part I", p. 451.
- 24 It is the tradition that the Qur'an, as God's sacred word, should not be translated into the vernacular of non-Arabs, but one wonders whether the rendition into Persian was considered a threat by the clerics as it would open up the text to many people who would now comprehend the meaning behind their rote memorisation of the verses.
- 25 See the introduction to Safi 'Ali Shah, *Divan-e Safi 'Ali Shah* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Safi 'Ali Shah, 1379/2000–1), pp. 22–3.
- 26 The difference is somewhat arbitrary, however, especially as there were individuals such as Safi 'Ali Shah who straddled both categories.
- 27 See J. Cooper, "The Intellectual Milieu of Safawid Persia" in F. Daftary (ed.), *Intellectual Traditions in Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 151–2.

- 28 S.H. Nasr, "Sadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and Islamic Philosophy", in E. Bosworth and C. Hillenbrand (eds), *Qajar Iran* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1983), p. 191.
- 29 Ibid., p. 190.
- 30 Yann Richard, "Sharī'at Sangalajī", p. 162.
- 31 Cited from Khomeini's Lectures on *Surat al-Fatiha*, delivered in 1979 and which appear in *Imam Khomeini, Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations*, translated by Hamid Algar (London: Kegan Paul International, 1985), p. 424.
- 32 Franklin Lewis, *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), p. 555.
- 33 H. Algar, "Imam Khomeini, 1902–1962" in Burke and Lapidus (eds), *Islam, Politics and Social Movements* (University of California Press, 1988), p. 269.
- 34 E.G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians* (first published by A & C Black in 1893), (reprinted by Cambridge: University Press, 1923), pp. 147–8.
- 35 His *Haqiqat al-'erfan* does not give any publishing details; however, the text mentions the removal of Premier Mosaddeq from office, which occurred in 1953 (p. 63). The Library of Congress lists the book with the date "195?."
- 36 His other works include *Al-taftish dar maslak-e sufi va dervish: rahnama-ye gomshodegan (dar bayan-e 'aqa'yed-e orafa va morshedan)*, ("The Search on the Sufi and Dervish Way: The Guide for the Lost (Explaining the Beliefs of the Gnostics and the Spiritual Elders'")) and *Eshq va Asheqi* ("Love and Being in Love") both of which were published in the 1950s according to the Library of Congress Catalogue.
- 37 Borqei, *Haqiqat al-'erfan*, p. 12. In the course of the text, Borqei cites and discusses numerous *hadith* from the Imams and verses from the Qur'an. To his credit, he is careful to list his sources and gives the *isnad* for the *hadiths*. His care for such detail stands him in contrast to Kasravi who rarely cited his sources, and even in his footnotes to texts such as *Sufigari*, sources were not given.
- 38 Ibid., p. 2.
- 39 Ibid., p. v.
- 40 H. Algar, "Imam Khomeini, 1902–1962: The Pre-Revolutionary Years," p. 286, n. 37. This book was published in Arabic with a Persian translation by one of Khomeini's students, one Sayyid Fihri: see *Mesbah al-Hedaya ila al-Khalifa wa 'l-Wilaya* (Tehran: Payam-e Azadi, 1982).
- 41 Khomeini, *Mesbah al-Hedayat*, p. 209.
- 42 Ibid., p. 207.
- 43 Ibid., p. 210.
- 44 Baqer Moin, *Independent*, Monday 5 June 1989. Moin's source for such a claim is a former student of Khomeini, Mehdi Ha'eri Yazdi (who was the son of Ayatollah Ha'eri). See B. Moin, *Khomeini* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), p. 51.
- 45 Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 39.
- 46 See M. Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West* (Syracuse, NY: University Press, 1996) p. 88.
- 47 Yann Richard, "Sharī'at Sangalajī", p. 160.
- 48 Mahmud Taqizadīh Davari, *Socio-political Philosophy in the Works of Murtaza Mutahhari (1920–1979)*, p. 34.
- 49 For the background to this event see Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent* (New York University Press, 1993), pp. 273–84.
- 50 Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Kernel of the Kernel: Concerning the Wayfaring and Spiritual Journey of the People of Intellect* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), p. 72.
- 51 Tabataba'i's practice of bibliomancy is mentioned by Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, pp. 282–7.
- 52 Tabataba'i, *Kernel of the Kernel*, p. 109.
- 53 Ibid., p. 37.
- 54 See E. Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, pp. 68–74. See also N. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (University of California Press, 1983), p. 8.

- 55 For Akhundzadeh's views on Rumi see I. Parsinejad, *Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh and Literary Criticism* (Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1988), pp. 60–9.
- 56 Taken from Kermani's epilogue to his book *Nameh-ye Basta*, which he wrote in 1896. Cited in I. Parsinejad, "Mirzā Āqā Khān Kermānī: An Iranian Literary Critic," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, No. 37 (1989) (Tokyo), p. 151.
- 57 See his views in his *Siyahat-nameh-ye Ibrahim Big*, cited throughout I. Parsinejad, "Zeyn ol-'Abedin Marāgheh'i: The Iranian Literary Critic," *Area and Culture Studies*, 44 (1992) (Tokyo: Tokyo University for Foreign Languages), pp. 67–82.
- 58 Cited in I. Parsinejad, "Zeyn ol-'Abedin Marāgheh'i," p. 71.
- 59 Cited in I. Parsinejad, *Annals of Japan Association for Middle Eastern Studies*, 2 (1987), p. 306.
- 60 Cited in I. Parsinejad, "Zeyn ol-'Abedin Marāgheh'i", p. 73.
- 61 See E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, pp. 77–9.
- 62 Ibid., p. 78. On the Ne'mati order (the Ne'matollahis) see the section on The Sufis of this chapter.
- 63 Ibid., p. 79.
- 64 Cited in M. Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution* (Oxford: University Press, 1991), p. 65.
- 65 For Bahar (1886–1951) see M.B. Loraine, "Bahār, Mohammad Taqī Malek al-Šo'arā' " in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, in which he is described as a poet, scholar, journalist, politician and historian.
- 66 Sa'id Nafisi, *Khaterat-e siyasi, adabi, javani*, pp. 308–9. See also M.A.H. Katouzian, "Risheh-ha-ye Sa'di Koshi" in *Iran Shenasi*, XIV, 3 (2002), p. 512.
- 67 Sa'id Nafisi, *Khaterat-e siyasi, adabi, javani*, p. 310.
- 68 This book has been analysed by J.E. Knörzer, in *Ali Dashti's Prison Days* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1994).
- 69 Ibid., p. 142.
- 70 Ibid., p. 83.
- 71 Ibid., p. 82.
- 72 Dashti cited by J.E. Knörzer, in *Ali Dashti's Prison Days*, p. 97.
- 73 *Kolliyyat-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, (ed.), B. Foruzanfar, which includes an article, *Sayri dar Divan-e Shams*, by 'Ali Dashti (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1336/1957–8).
- 74 J.E. Knörzer, *Ali Dashti's Prison Days*, p. 25. Dashti was to compose a work that was critical of Sufism in the 1960s although this work falls beyond the scope of our discussion. See his *Pardeh-ye Pendar* (Tehran: Ettela'at, 1974). In this work he described the anti-rational, superstitious and obscurantist manifestations of Sufism. Subsequently he portrayed a more positive dimension of Sufism in *Dar Diyar-e Sufiyan* (Tehran: Javidan, 1983). See J. E. Knörzner, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, entry on "Dašti, 'Alī".
- 75 H. Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), p. 23.
- 76 S. Hedayat, *Taraneh-ha-ye Khayyam* ("Melodies of Khayyam"), (Tehran: 1934), p. 32.
- 77 *Seh qatreh-ye khun* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1311/1932). An English translation of this work was published by J.W. Clinton in *Literary Review*, 18, 1 (Fall 1974), pp. 38–52.
- 78 The argument has been made that "the specifically anti-Islamic touch in this story" is the Arabic teacher, "since the Arabs and Arabic language were often associated with Islam and counterposed to Iranian nationalism in the literature of this period." See A.R. Navabpour, *A Study of Recent Persian Prose Literature with Special Reference to the Social Background* (PhD thesis, Durham University, 1981), p. 151.
- 79 The theme of suicide re-appears frequently in Hedayat's writings. The following remarks in *Taraneh-ha-ye Khayyam* were written one year after he completed his story about Mirza Hosayn 'Ali, and perhaps they foreshadow his own suicide:

One should know that although Khayyam believed from the bottom of his heart in happiness, his happiness was always twinned with the thought of

nothingness and non-existence. From this perspective Khayyam's philosophical meaning in the outer dimension is an invitation to happiness but in truth, the rose and nightingale, the pitchers of wine, ripe fields and his sensuous images are no more than ornamentation, just as someone who wants to kill himself busies himself in ordering and ornamenting his room before his death.

(Hedayat, *Tāraneh-ha-ye Khayyam*, p. 37)

- 80 For Hedayat's complicated relations with the Tudeh Party see H. Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, pp. 160–77.
- 81 Abrahamian, "Kasravi: The Integrative Nationalist", p. 115.
- 82 Ibid., p. 116.
- 83 Taqi Arani, "'*Erfan va Osul-e Madi*'", in *Neveshteh-ha-ye 'elmi, falsafi va ejtema'i* (Scientific, philosophic and sociological writings) (Florence, Italy: Mazdak, no date). In this book, Sufism is not the sole concern of Arani, rather it is a whole range of mystical thinking which includes the mysticism of Plato, Ancient India, China, Iran and also the mysticism in Christianity and in modern Europe. Those passages on Sufism represent a small portion of this work.
- 84 Ibid., p. 58.
- 85 Ibid., p. 23.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Ibid., p. 34.
- 88 Ibid., p. 22.
- 89 Ibid., p. 30.
- 90 Ibid., p. 4.
- 91 Ibid., pp. 34–5.
- 92 Ibid., p. 58.
- 93 Interview with Dr Mojtaba'i, head of the Sufi section at the Institute for the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia in Tehran (August, 2003). However, it has been claimed that Forughī was a pupil of Mohammad Hakimiyan (d. 1948) whose spiritual genealogy links him to Safi 'Ali Shah. See Matthijs van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes*, citing Chahardahi, *Sayri dar tasavvof-e Iran* (1982–3), p. 149. The leanings of some intellectuals to Sufism has been mentioned by Ehsan Tabari, who claimed that during Reza Shah's rule they frequented the *khanagahs* along with state officials, and both paid great tribute to the dervishes and their teachings. See A.R. Navabpour, *A Study of Recent Persian Prose Literature with Special Reference to the Social Background*, p. 148.
- 94 Mohammad 'Ali Forughī, *Ẓobdeh-ye Hafez* (Tehran: 1316/1937).
- 95 'Ali Asghar Hekamt, *Dars az Divan-e Hafez* (Tehran: 1320/1941).
- 96 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, *Jami: Motuzammini tahqiqat dar tarikh-e ahval va asar-e manzum va mansur-e khatam al-sho'ara Nur al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman Jami* (Tehran: 1942), 'Abd al-Rahman Iami.
- 97 Browne, *Az Sa'di ta Jami*, translated by Hekmat (Tehran: 1947–8).
- 98 Abd-al-Hosein Zarrinkub, "Forūzānfar", in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.
- 99 Badi' al-Zaman Foruzanfar, *Kholaseh-ye Masnavi*. For more on Foruzanfar see Franklin Lewis, *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West*, pp. 554–7.
- 100 Rudaki, *Ahval va 'ashi'ar-e 'Abu Abdallah Ja'far Ibn Mohammad Rudaki Samarqandi* (Tehran, 1930).
- 101 Kashani, *Roba'iyat-e Baba Afzal Kashani* (Tehran, 1933).
- 102 'Altar, *Jostaju dar ahval va asar-e Farid al-Din Attar Nishaburi* (Tehran, 1941).
- 103 Hafez, *Dar Piramun-e ash'ar va ahval-e Hafez* (Tehran: Iqbal, 1321).
- 104 S. Razazadeh-Shafaq, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Iran* (Tehran: Entesharat-e daneshgah, 1320/1940).
- 105 Ibid., p. 296.

- 106 S. Razazadeh-Shafaq, *Tarikh-e adabiyyat-e Iran* (Tehran: Entesharat-e daneshgah, 1320/1940), p. 296.
- 107 Ibid., p. 333. Rezaazadeh's views on Hafez have been translated by A.J. Arberry in *Fifty Poems of Hafiz* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1993), pp. 14–18.
- 108 Mohammad Mo'in, *Hafez-e Shirin Sokhan*, (Tehran: 1940) p. 23.
- 109 Ibid., p. 22.
- 110 Ibid., p. 18.
- 111 Ibid., p. 641.
- 112 M. Qazvani, *Bahs dar asar va afkar va ahwal-e Hafez*, I (Tehran: 1321/1942).
- 113 This conversation is also recorded by A.J. Arberry in *Fifty Poems of Hafez*, pp. 18–22.
- 114 'Abd al-Hosayn Zarrinkub, *Jostaju dar tasavvof-e Iran*, (Tehran: Chapkhaneh-ye Sepehr, 1367/1988–9) p. 375.
- 115 Zarrinkub, *Arzesh-e Miras-e Sufiyeh*, (Tehran: Chapkhaneh-ye Sepehr, 1369/1990–1) pp. 261–2.
- 116 J. Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan* (London: 1828, reprint 1897, Lawrence and Bullen Ltd).
- 117 See the comments of M.A. Jamalzadeh in his introduction to the Persian translation: *Hajji Baba-ye Isfahan* (Tehran: 1344/1965–6), p. viii.
- 118 J. Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan*, p. 61.
- 119 Lady Sheil, *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia* (London: John Murray, 1856).
- 120 Ibid., pp. 192–3. The author lists the following groupings of Sufis in Iran: "Ajem, Khaksar, Niāmet-oollāhee, Zehabee, Jellālee, Kemberree, Dehree", p. 194.
- 121 Ibid., pp. 152–3, 193.
- 122 C.J. Wills, *Persia As It Is* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1887), p. 96.
- 123 Ibid., p. 95.
- 124 Percy Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia, or Eight Years in Iran* (London: John Murray, 1902), p. 197.
- 125 As Sykes himself points out, this prophecy was recognised in its time as worthless since Naser al-Din's son succeeded him, becoming Mozaffar al-Din Shah.
- 126 Percy Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia*, p. 149.
- 127 E.G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*.
- 128 Ibid., pp. 197–8.
- 129 Ibid., p. 312. On page 80 of the same work, Browne mentions that the cities of Zanzan and Kerman suffer particularly from the number of beggars, although the poverty of the mendicant classes was greater in Kerman.
- 130 For a discussion of the activities, membership and context of this society, see Talinn Grigor, "Recultivating "Good Taste": The Early Pahlavi Modernists and Their Society for National Heritage", *Iranian Studies*, 37, 1 (March 2004), pp. 17–45.
- 131 Cited in H. Bahr al-'Olumi, *Karnameh-e Anjoman-e Asar-e Melli* (Tehran: 1355/1976/2535), p. 53.
- 132 Ibid., p. 39.
- 133 See J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry* (Richmond, VA: Curzon Press, 1997), p. 9.
- 134 F. Vahdat speaks of two approaches to modernity, namely the "positivist" aspect which emphasises categories such as technology and efficient bureaucracy, and the "cultural" aspect which focuses more on the democratic facets of modern civilisation (*God and Juggernaut*, Syracuse, NY: University Press, 2002 p. xvi). Under Reza Shah's rule it is widely acknowledged that the second aspect was severely neglected, while the first aspect improved with increasing centralisation (settlement and disarming of tribes) and the influence of the state in fields such as education, justice, and religion.
- 135 It is accepted that Reza Shah was hostile to Shi'ism, and his rule saw the introduction of numerous policies that belittled Shi'ite influence. These include the establishment of Tehran University with a faculty of theology (a rival to the Shi'ite seminaries), the

- unveiling of women, conscription to the armed forces in 1925 (no exemptions for religious students), reform of the judiciary in 1926 which eroded the power of the clerics' *shar'* courts, the law of uniformity on dress and encouraging Western-style apparel, the supervision by the Ministry of Education of examinations of clerics and the licensing of teachers in 1928. For Reza Shah and the clergy see M. Faghfoory, "The Ulama-State Relations in Iran: 1921–1941", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19 (1987), pp. 413–32.
- 136 The publications worthy of mention are Matthijs van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes*, and Leonard Lewisohn "An introduction to the history of Modern Persian Sufism, Part I", and "An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism, Part II, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 62, 1, (1999), 36–59. These works were extremely useful for their analysis, information and bibliographical details.
- 137 Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh*, p. 266. By the turn of the nineteenth century the Ne'matollahi order had split in to several sub-orders, each one recognising their own leader as the Pole. In the first half of the nineteenth century there had been splits, which produced the Kawsariyyeh Ne'matollahi branch and the Shamsiyyeh branch. The main branch, recognising Mast 'Ali Shah (d. 1837) as the Pole, split into further sub-groups in the late nineteenth century. Information on the history of the other Sufi orders in Iran, such as the Khaksar, and the Zahabiya can be found in Lewisohn's articles.
- 138 Criticism among the fledging Iranian newspapers was largely censored, see N. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 64–5.
- 139 Safi 'Ali Shah, *Resaleh-ye Mizan al-Ma'rafeh*, p. 258.
- 140 Ibid. This idealised vision of security in Iran does not correspond with the description of the travels of Edward Browne in *A Year Amongst the Persians*.
- 141 Safa'i, *Rahbaran-e Mashruteh*, p. 137. See also Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh*, p. 258.
- 142 To accept that the Sufis were responding to modernity in their attempts to overcome hierarchical social structures societies is somewhat problematic, however, given the universal claims of Sufism.
- 143 However, it is difficult to assess the claims of critics such as Kasravi, who made generalisations to the effect that Sufis sought to influence the rulers of the time for their own benefit, which denied the validity of their "spiritual" message.
- 144 Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh*, p. 316.
- 145 Ibid., p. 306. In *Rahbaran-e Mashruteh*, (p. 138), Safa'i also claims that the prototype of this society was created by Safi 'Ali Shah and operated secretly.
- 146 These names (or titles) include Zahir al-Dowleh, Mostafa Salara, Nazem al-Dowleh, Yamin al-Mamalek, Nazm-e Lashgar, Mirza Mohammad 'Ali Khan Nusrat al-Sultan, Mirza 'Ali Akbar Khan Sorush, Mirza Baqir Khan Safa Manesh, Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab Jawhari and 'Ali Reza Saba (Mokhtar al-Molk).
- 147 Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh*, pp. 328–9.
- 148 F. Azimi, "Entezam," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VIII, p. 461.
- 149 Matthijs van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes*, p. 131.
- 150 This work was finished in 1310, and several sections were published, but it was not until 1938 that the whole work was published by the Society of Brotherhood in two volumes.
- 151 See speech by Marzban in Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh*, p. 310.
- 152 See Afshar, *Khatemat*, p. 73.
- 153 For the significance of chairs and tables rather than sitting on a carpet during a religious meeting see R. Matin, M. Woodward and D. Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), p. 162.
- 154 See Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh*, p. 304.
- 155 Safi 'Ali Shah, *Asrar al-Ma'rafeh*, p. 211. Safi also criticises those who dispense with traditional Sufi masters and believe that reading Rumi or Hafez will turn them into

- gnostics and they will experience mystical states and compose their own poetry. See Ibid., p. 210. Criticisms of other types of corrupt sheikhs and dervishes appear in page 197.
- 156 Safi 'Ali Shah, *'Erfaan al-haqq*, pp. 102–3.
- 157 See Afshar, *Khaterat*, p. 73.
- 158 See the photographs in Afshar, *Khaterat*.
- 159 During the reign of Naser al-Din Shah a concession for a lottery was given to Mirza Malkam Khan. For various reasons the concession was rescinded.
- 160 The term used by L. Lewisohn, "An introduction to the history of modern Persian Sufism, Part I", p. 456.
- 161 On another occasion the Society held a musical concert to raise funds for victims burnt in a fire in Tehran bazaar. See Safa'i, *Rahbaran-e Mashruteh*, p. 143.
- 162 This photograph is reproduced in Iraj Afshar, at the very end of his introduction to the book.
- 163 Badr al-Muluk Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light: Women's Emancipation in Iran*, translated by F.R.C. Bagley (New York: Exposition Press, 1977), pp. 31–2.
- 164 Ibid., p. 32.
- 165 F. Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1992), pp. 46–73.
- 166 Afshar, *Khaterat*, p. 49.
- 167 E.G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia: Partly Based on the Manuscript Work of Mirza Muhammad Ali Khan "Tarbiyat" of Tabriz* (Cambridge: University Press, 1914), p. 134.
- 168 Ibid., p. 118.
- 169 Matthijs van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes*, p. 103.
- 170 Soltan 'Ali Shahis, Zahabis, etc.
- 171 See Matthijs van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes*, p. 93.
- 172 Ibid., pp. 106–7.
- 173 Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh*, p. 266.
- 174 Ibid., p. 281.
- 175 Ibid., p. 282.
- 176 For Safi on *vahdat-e wujud* see Safi 'Ali Shah, *'Erfaan al-haqq*, pp. 112, 120.
- 177 A reference to Jalal al-Din Rumi's famous work, the *Masnavi*.
- 178 A reference to Ibn al-'Arabi's famous work, *Fusus al-Hikam* ("The Bezels of Wisdom").
- 179 Safi 'Ali Shah, *Asrar al-ma'rafet*, pp. 197–8.
- 180 Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh*, p. 326, see also Afshar, *Khaterat*, pp. 43–4.
- 181 Cited in Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh*, p. 326.
- 182 Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh*, p. 327.
- 183 Ibid., pp. 326–7. On the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Society, Amin al-Molk Marzban delivered a speech to the Society in which he said that members made their own instruments. He made this comment in the context of criticisms from "ignorant people" who have claimed that the Society has encouraged laziness. One wonders if he was responding to Kasravi's criticisms of Sufism. Marzban's speech is reproduced by Afshar, *Khaterat*, pp. 53–60.
- 184 Afshar, *Khaterat*, p. 30.
- 185 Safa'i, *Rahbaran-e Mashruteh*, p. 139.
- 186 The whole constitution is reproduced in Homayuni, *Tarikh-e selseleh*, pp. 331–3.
- 187 See M. Van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes*, p. 107.
- 188 Safa'i, *Rahbaran-e Mashruteh*, pp. 145–6.
- 189 Mirza 'Ali Khan Zahir al-Dawleh, *Majmu'eh-ye ash'ar* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Vahid, 1363/1984), pp. 319–20.
- 190 Mirza 'Ali Khan Zahir al-Dowleh, *Majmu'eh-ye ash'ar*, pp. 268–9.

- 191 Ahmad Kasravi, cited in A. Fathi, "Kasravi cheh mi-guyad," *Iran-nameh*, p. 269.
- 192 I. Afshar's introduction to *Khaterat*, p. 80, cited in M. van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes*, p. 107.
- 193 These include the publication of Pand Saleh in 1939 (written by the leader of the order, Saleh 'Ali Shah) in which the mystical content is noticeable for its absence. Indeed, one scholar has commented that "there is little in it that could distinguish these Sufis from other Iranian Shi'ites" (van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes*, p. 90). Another point of interest in relation to the Soltan'alishahis during the 1930s is the conflict surrounding a renegade Soltan'alishahi Sufi, Keyvan Qazvini, who rejected the inherited nature of the Qutbship within the order. For Keyvani, see van den Bos, *Mystic Regime*, pp. 81–6.
- 194 For the links between Reza Shah and the Soltan'alishahis, see van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes*, pp. 88–9. These links are described by Sufis of the order, so they should be treated with caution. The source used by van den Bos also claimed that Kasravi was a professor at Tehran University; however, Kasravi never taught at Tehran University and was never made a professor (*ibid.*, p. 83, n. 55).
- 195 J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry* (Richmond, VA: Curzon Press, 1997), p. 2.

3 SCOURGE OF THE SUFIS: KASRAVI'S REJECTION OF PERSIAN MYSTICISM

- 1 It is of note that a minority faction of the Democrat Party, led by Kasravi, was expelled for opposing the regional demands on the central authorities (see E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 113; see also Kasravi, *Zendegani-ye man*, 86–96). Kasravi wrote his first work "Azari: Or the ancient language of Azarbayjan" in the aftermath of Khiyabani's revolt, "to prove that Azeri, the original Aryan tongue of his native province, had been destroyed by the Turkic invasions. He concluded that the existing foreign-imposed Turkish dialect should be replaced now by Persian, the state language". E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 125.
- 2 E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 119.
- 3 I. Parsinejad, *Literary Criticism in Iran*, p. 169.
- 4 A. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921* (London: Longman, 2003), p. 30. Related to the issue of Khuzestan, it is worth noting that Kasravi's second book, "Five Hundred Year History of Khuzistan" "tried to show the harmful consequences of tribal and religious conflicts in the southwestern regions", E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 125.
- 5 E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 154, citing Kasravi, "The Case for the Defence of the Accused", *Parcham*, 16 August 1942.
- 6 Cited in E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 123.
- 7 E. Abrahamian, "Kasravi: The Integrative Nationalist", p. 122.
- 8 Kasravi, *Farhang chist*, in *Panj Maqaleh* (Köln: Entesharat-e Mehr, 1372/1993), p. 244. *Farhang chist* in this edition is a pamphlet of forty-one pages and was first published in 1943–4.
- 9 Communal tension was exploited by Mohammad 'Ali Shah during the struggles over the constitution. He attempted to weaken his opponents by reviving old conflicts between Shaykhis and Motashar'is in Tabriz, Karimkhanis and Motashar'is in Kerman, Muslims and Zoroastrians in Yazd, Persians and Azaris in Tehran, Haydaris and Ne'matis in Qazvin, Shustar, Shiraz and Ardabil. See E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 89.
- 10 Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Mashruteh-ye Iran*, pp. 196–7.
- 11 Cited in Kasravi, *Iran-nameh*, pp. 343–4, originally found in Kasravi's *Zendegani-ye man*, p. 11.

SUFI CASTIGATOR

Ahmad Kasravi and the Iranian
mystical tradition

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