

## **Akhond Khorasani's Viewpoints towards Modern Concepts**

### **POINTS DE VUE DE KHORASANI AKHOND VIS-À-VIS DES CONCEPTS MODERNES**

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**Abstract:** In 1906, at the dawn of the twentieth century, Akhond Khorasani assumed the leadership of the Iranian constitutional revolution. He was a prominent figure in Iranian history regarding whom this paper sets out to unveil his mentality vis-a-vis the modern concepts of freedom, constitutionalism, justice and parliament. Before the occurrence of the constitutional revolution, such concepts were not present in Iran's political – social culture. These were modern concepts which entered Iran coming from the west and were subsequently utilized during the constitutional revolution. As the revolution's leader, Akhond Khorasani made use of these words in his political literature. Discovering the manner in which he integrated and used these concepts in his works is the objective of this article. In order to reach this objective, all the primary sources that included the Akhond's announcements, letters, telegraphs, answers to questions and fatwas through which he specified his political mentality are made use of in this quantitative research where the method of evident content analysis is implemented for the purpose of data analysis.

Iran is a society intertwined to a high degree with religion and thus the clergy are highly influential on the people. The understanding and comprehension of traditional clergies' mentality in relation to modern concepts has the potential to shed light on the issue of whether this influence can be continued.

**Key words:** Constitutional revolution; Freedom; Justice; Parliament; Political culture; Clergies

**Résumé:** En 1906, à l'aube du XXe siècle, Akhond Khorasani a assumé le leadership de la révolution constitutionnelle iranienne. Il est une figure marquante dans l'histoire iranienne, et cet article se propose de dévoiler sa mentalité vis-à-vis des concepts modernes de liberté, de constitutionnalisme, de justice et de parlement. Avant l'apparition de la révolution constitutionnelle, ce genre de concepts n'existaient pas dans la culture politique et sociales de l'Iran. Ce sont des concepts modernes qui sont entrés en Iran en provenance de l'ouest et ont ensuite été utilisées au cours de la révolution constitutionnelle. En tant que le leader de la révolution, Akhond Khorasani fait l'usage de ces mots dans son discours politique. L'objectif de cet article est de découvrir la manière dont il a intégré et utilisé ces concepts dans ses œuvres. Afin d'atteindre cet objectif, toutes les sources primaires, y compris les annonces de Akhond, ses lettres, ses télégraphes, ses réponses aux questions et les fatwas dans lesquels il a précisé sa mentalité politique, ont été utilisés dans cette recherche quantitative lorsque la méthode d'analyse de contenu évident est mis en œuvre pour l'analyse des données.

L'Iran est une société liée étroitement à la religion et donc les clergés sont très influents sur le peuple. La compréhension de la mentalité des clergés traditionnels par rapport à des concepts modernes a le potentiel

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d'éclairer la question de savoir si cette influence peut être poursuivie.

**Mots clés:** Révolution constitutionnelle; Liberté; Justice; Parlement; Culture politique; Clergés

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Before the Iranian constitutional revolution, at the dawn of the twentieth century in 1906, Iran still had to deal with despotic governments and it was during the Qajar period that the nation suffered unprecedented tyranny in addition to economical, cultural and political pressure. All this led to the formation of constitutional revolution and subsequently to the fall of the Qajar dynasty. At the time of the revolution, nonreligious intellectuals got acquainted with modern concepts such as freedom, constitutionalism, justice and parliament. Through their trips and or conducting business with the democratic west they found these concepts to be essential in the political – social culture of Iran. However, this group of individuals was not in touch with the masses and as a result they did not possess a strong base among the people and they were considered as unreligious and westernized. On the contrary, the clergy had a special place in people's hearts and held influential reputation among them, but in contrast to the intellectuals; they were not acquainted with modern western concepts. Due to this contrast, there existed a conflict and contradiction in understanding and defining these concepts between the intellectuals and the clergy and each party explained the concepts in their own special way of thought. This conflict and contradiction which had even divided the clergy themselves into two main groups of pro-sharias and constitutionalists was the biggest failure of the constitutional revolution in reaching its objectives. Akhond Khorasani was the leader of the constitutionalists whose understanding and comprehension of the aforementioned concepts can result to a better recognition of the prevailing mentality in Iran at that time, especially in regard to the constitutionalist clergy.

## 2. DISCUSSION AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The leader of constitutionalists in the Iranian constitutional revolution, Akhond Khorasani, who was a resident of Najaf city and was not a direct participant in the revolution's events, communicated with the people and led the revolution by means of intermediaries. Clearly, during the time of the revolution (1906-1911) which happened almost a hundred years ago, means of communication were not as simple, rapid and instantaneous as they are today. Communications took place through slow methods such as sending of letters using the postal system or especial envoys. Telegraphs were also used in that period, which due to their limitations were only used for short messages. Taking these conditions into consideration, Khorasani conducted the revolution's leadership by means of announcements, letters and telegraphs. Moreover, questions were asked of him which were more focused on political issues and enlightenment of his ideas. In addition, Fatwas, in the context of politics and religion, were also issued by Khorasani. These Fatwas were his strict and unconditional orders in relation to happenings and events during the revolution which manifested the Akhond's interpretation and perception of the actual conditions.

Since the aim of this research is to grasp the mentality of the constitutionalist leader in terms of modern concepts such as constitutionalism, parliament, freedom and justice, all of the abovementioned means of communication which were in the context of the revolution reveal the mentality of Akhond Khorasani, and therefore the literature containing his mentality is reviewed in this study.

Akhond Khorasani possesses thirty seven announcements which are manifestations of his views in relation to the general public. In fact, they are general orders or requests which have more of an enlightening and informative aspect. Moreover, the Akhond has a number of forty five letters sent by him. In contrast to the announcements, the receivers of the letters are clearly specified, among whom are the Shah himself, the special clergy who were involved in the issue of the revolution and the parliament. These were the targets of most of his long letters.

Besides, twenty three telegraphs were sent on behalf of the Akhond. The recipients of these telegraphs are either special individuals or associations and special groups. With the aim of grasping and understanding the opinions and ideas of the Akhond, as the leader of the revolution, some people asked him questions which were responded to by the Akhond himself in a written form. Overall, there are twenty four of these types of answers. The topics of politics and the revolution are commonly found in all these responses.

While Akhond Khorasani was considered the political leader of the revolution, he was also the religious leader and the people's source of emulation (*Marjae taghlid*). Because of this, he had several religious orders which are called Fatwas. These orders were to be followed by all the people who chose him as their source of emulation (*Marjae taghlid*). The Akhond issued a total of eleven Fatwas. (Kadivar 2006)

In order to specify the number of documents belonging to Akhond Khorasani that is available today and also to separate these documents into announcements, letters, questions, telegraphs and Fatwas which is an important task in terms of statistics, an statistical discussion is performed so that the qualitative research is supported by the quantitative

analysis. In essence, the combination of the two qualitative and quantitative methods which is used in data gathering and the consequent analysis is the evidence of clarity in research study (Nancy 2009).

Overall, in a time frame starting from the first letter being written by the Akhond in 11/2/1900 until the last announcement published in 14/1/1912, he had a total of 140 letters, announcement, telegraphs, questions and answers, and Fatwas (Kadivar 2006).

**Table 1**

Text	Announcement	Letter	Telegraph	Question & Answer	Fatwa	total
Numbers	37	45	23	24	11	140

Though this number of expressions of views and opinions by the Akhond in a space of thirteen years, that is five years before the start of the revolution and a year after the extinguish of the revolution's flames, may not be very high, however considering the conditions such as long distance and a lack of today's communicational facilities this is actually a high number of documents that were published by the Akhond from Najaf to Iran.

As indicated by the table, the number of letters is higher than other documents. This is due to the fact that the letters were sent to the important individuals and political elites of that time for the purpose of explaining and expressing the importance of the revolution, its requests and goals, and also the obstacles present in its way, and moreover because it seems that direct communication with special targets and individuals has a higher effect, letters were used to serve this purpose.

It is worth mentioning that out of the forty five letters, eleven were addressed the Shah himself or the prime minister and two were sent to the prince who was heir to the throne. These individuals were the most important and influential people in deciding the external and internal politics of the Iranian nation. Moreover, seven letters addressed the well accepted clergy who were involved in the issues of politics and the revolution and were also prominent and famous among the masses and therefore had a role to play in the guidance and the direction of the revolution. Quantitatively, this number of seven letters may not look sufficient, however this could indicate that the clergy had a common way of thought and their viewpoints were similar or close to each other and therefore there was no need for numerous letters to be exchanged between them in order to express their requests.

**Table 2**

King	Prince	Clergies	Parliament
11	2	7	9

The parliament was also one of the addressees of the Akhond's letters. Overall, nine were sent to the parliament, the first being sent in 17/2/1907 for the purpose of congratulating the parliament's inauguration and the last in 15/10/1911. It should be mentioned that from 23/6/1908 to 15/10/1909, in a period of fifteen months, the parliament was closed due to it being cannon bombarded by the orders of Mohammad Ali Shah.

**Table 3**

	Numbers
Announcement	37
Question & Answer	24

In order of quantity, the announcements are in second place. They consist of thirty seven announcements. All of them were addressed to the general public and had the intention of raising the public's awareness. They did not have specific addressees, but they targeted associations, guilds, scholars, nomads and all the Iranian Muslims.

In order to clarify an issue and to be guided for the purpose of certain actions, political or religious, some people asked questions from the Akhond to which he responded to them in a written form. The number of these questions and answers which were mostly political due to the circumstances at the time was twenty four. These were messages which were sent thorough telegraphs. Ten were sent to the clergy, seven to the parliament, three to the Shah, two to the local associations, and also one was addressed to the internal minister.

**Table 4**

King	Minister	Parliament	Clergies	Associations
3	1	7	10	2

Fatawa is a definite opinion which is a source of emulation (*Marjae taghleid*) and is issued on the basis of considering the circumstances of the time, in addition to the teachings of Islam. The Akhond had eleven political and religious Fatwas during the era of the constitutional revolution. As previously mentioned, this study seeks to understand the mentality of the Iranian constitutional revolution's leaders. In terms of modern political concepts which at the time were beginning to find their way into the political literature of Iran.

These are the four constitutionalist concepts of parliament, freedom and justice which were heard in the Iranian political arena for the first time and resulted in a political change and revolution. In his statements, letters, telegraphs, questions and answers and even Fatwas, the Akhond has used these concepts and indicated his understanding of each one of them. The following is a tabulated overview of the Akhond's quantitative numerical expression of these modern concepts.

**Table 5**

Concepts	Announcement	Letter	Telegraph	Question & Answer	Fatwa	Total
<b>Constitutionalism</b>	30	34	3	7	2	76
<b>Parliament</b>	16	26	9	13	1	65
<b>Freedom</b>	15	7	—	—	—	22
<b>Justice</b>	12	6	—	2	—	20

Akhond Khorasani repeated the concept of constitutionalism in his messages seventy six times, among which his letters contained the highest number of repetition followed by his statements. Parliament has also been repeated 26 times.

The announcements include the second highest number of repetition of these concepts (16 times). It can be understood that the existence of constitutionalism and the formation of a parliament had a high degree of importance for the Akhond. This is because he mentioned these two concepts to his public and privat addressees many times. Due to this reason the word parliament was repeated thirteen times in his answers to questions and also nine times in the telegraphs, because of the importance of this concept, this is a high number.

Quantitatively, the concepts of freedom and justice have been used fewer times compared to the concepts of parliament and constitutionalism. Freedom has been repeated fifteen times in the statements and seven times in the letters. The other concept, justice, has been repeated twelve times in the statements, six times in the letters and also two times in the answers to questions posed to the Akhond. The word freedom has never been used in the telegraphs, the answers, and Fatwas and in a similar fashion, the concept of justice has not been used in the telegraphs and Fatwas.

The above statistical discussion is an indication of a transparent content analysis, meaning that in order to find the relationships between the variables, an inductive process is performed which is called analytic induction (Babbie 2007).

Therefore, on the basis of Babbi's viewpoint, the more the aforementioned concepts have been used by the Akhond, the more important they were in line with his opinions. In essence, this form of analysis is based on a method of reaching a conclusion from the specific to the general and according to Babbie, it has a high degree of reliability (Babbie 2007).

### 3. CONCLUSION

The viewpoints and opinions of Akhond Khorasani are important and contemplable because of his stature as the leader of the first Iranian revolution during which Iran was faced, for the first time, with cultural and political challenges and all of its intellectual capital was utilized to eliminate them. However, the country did not succeed in this sense and did not have the strength to cope with the waves created by modernism, in addition to the obstacles which strongly hindered the path of modernity into Iran such as the opponents to constitutionalism. The conflict between traditionalism and modernism and the opposition to the entrance of political concepts originated from the West still continues in today's Iran managed in a traditionalist and religious fashion. Despite the efforts of Akhond Khorasani in accepting and institutionalizing these concepts, it seems that his definitions and reasonings as a prominent Shiite cleric have dealt with analytical and understanding differences and have not proven to be an intellectual model for governing leaders and the clergy.

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