REVIVING THE LEGACY: A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE ON PAHLAVISM AND THE SHAH OF IRAN'S DYNASTY

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ABSTRACT

Pahlavism, which served as a philosophical foundation for the modernization of Iran under the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979), sought to centralize power, promote national identity, and drive socio-economic transformation. This study examines effects of Reza Shah Pahlavi's modernization program on the formation of the Iranian government and identity and its impact on socio-economic structure.

Using a qualitative research methodology, this paper employs historical and discursive analysis as a way of seeing how Pahlavism is still shaping the political discourses of today in Iran. Although Pahlavism facilitated state-led modernization and the development of basic infrastructure, it also faced criticism for political repression and curbs on civil liberties. Within the last few years, especially after 2022's "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, there has been a revival in public discourse that re-evaluates the Pahlavi years. This research contributes to a more general debate on nationalism, governance, and historical memory in Iran by examining what newly casts itself as significant currents in contemporary socio-political argument.

Keywords: Pahlavism, Pahlavi dynasty, nationalism, secularism, modernization, identity, socio-economic development, historical memory, political discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the Pahlavi era, Iran's modernization combined

- political
- imperial
- social
- cultural developments.

Pahlavism was the official ideology of the Pahlavi dynasty and was based on:

- State-driven secularism
- Nationalism
- Economic modernization

Though these policies sought to merge Iran under one roof, they also constructed vast socio-political divides. The story of the political elimination of Pahlavism continues, with some accusing its base of national progress and revivalism. Others criticize it for autocratic rule and the repression of political dissent.

This study investigates Pahlavism's theoretical essentially, key tenets, and its influence on the political path of Iran. Although the Pahlavi dynasty was officially dissolved in 1979, recent socio-political developments suggest a revival of interest in its ideological legacy.

The Woman, Life, Freedom movement gained traction in 2022 after the death of Mahsa Amini and has sparked renewed conversations about governance, nationalism, and historical identity in Iran. This resurgence is evident in the digital discourse on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), where users frequently reference the Pahlavi era and in public demonstrations and media portrayals, including documentaries aired by the MANOTO TV channel.

Existing scholarship on Pahlavism has primarily focused on its role in state-building, economic reforms, and authoritarianism (Abrahamian, 1982; Katouzian, 2006; Milani, 2012). However, limited research has explored the revival of Pahlavism in contemporary Iranian discourse, particularly among younger generations. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the ideological resurgence of Pahlavism and its implications for Iran's political future. Historical and discourse analysis evaluates how the memory of the Pahlavi era is being reconstructed in the context of present-day political debates.

By reassessing Pahlavism through a contemporary lens, this study contributes to broader discussions on nationalism, governance, and historical memory in the Middle East. It aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how historical narratives continue to shape national identity and political aspirations in Iran.

2. METHODOLOGY

This work uses a historical method and modern discourse analysis to examine the long-term effect of Pahlavism on Iranian individuals' identities and the organization of their society and economy. The methodology comprises three interrelated parts: historical analysis, discourse analysis, and qualitative content coding.

2.1. Historical Analysis

The study employs a historical approach to explore how the ideological foundation behind Pahlavism came into being and was seen in practice under Reza Shah Pahlavi. This includes a complete examination of government records, speeches, policy documents, and academic literature of both the primary and secondary kinds. It places Pahlavism in the context of global modernization attempts of the early 20th century and its intersections with nationalism and state-building.

2.2. Discourse Analysis

A discourse analysis from present socio-political debates is performed to understand current theories' perspectives on how Pahlavism developed and what it meant. This includes:

— Research social media platforms (e.g., "X" was formerly Twitter) to find the latest trending talks, important themes, and general sentiment surrounding thought in such an era.

— Coverage in news and media, especially from sources such as MANOTO TV, which has aired documentaries revisiting the saga of the Pahlavi dynasty.

— Public speeches, political communiqués, and editorials by Iranian activists, historians, and politicians joining in on the debate over the dynasty's heritage.

By conducting discourse analysis, the study identifies patterns, themes, and narratives that capture how Iranians, especially young people today, are part of their times in society's bigger picture, the "Women's Life Freedom movement".

2.3. Qualitative Content Analysis

In order to understand how digital and media representation is used to create national identity and revive memory of the past, a form of qualitative content analysis has been taken. Key aspects include:

— Role of cultural and artistic achievement in shaping communal memory (e.g., banknotes carrying Shah-era iconography seen online).

— Reinterpretation of historical figures like Reza Pahlavi in contemporary political activity.

— Impact of television and digital media on the public story about the Pahlavi era today.

Data Collection and Sources

Primary sources encompass various archival materials from the Pahlavi era, beginning with government decrees and hand accounts by Iranian intellectuals. Secondary sources include
social science books.
Academic publications.
Analyses in contemporary news venues.
Ethnographic techniques in online social media communities can be utilized to examine the rural poor in Peasants in History.

Limitations

Despite this qualitative approach allowing for substantial inquiry into historical narratives and current trends, it has limitations. The study does not rely on quantitative methods, which could validate widespread feelings statistically. Moreover, access is restricted due to the political situation of this digital age. Iranians rarely get to talk directly with government archives. There are interviews by state officials that have been passed on second-hand.

Historical Context

To understand Pahlavism, the historical to power was a critical turning point in must be explored extensively Iran's history.

He set a transformative path to modernize and secularize the country, facing the many challenges of the early to mid-20th century.

Nationalism and Identity

Pahlavism—at its most fundamental level—worships Iranian nationalism, aspiring to rise above the country's ethnic and religious factions. Reza Shah's attempts to create a unified identity among Iranians also reflected this emphasis on national unity and solidarity.

Language Promotion:

Reza Shah implemented policies to elevate Persian as the primary language of communication, education, and governance, fostering a shared identity (Matin-Asgari, 2018).

Cultural Renaissance:

Pahlavi leaders promoted Persian culture and heritage, restoring historical sites and encouraging artistic expression to reinforce national identity (Chehabi, 2019).

Historical Narratives:

Pahlavism emphasized Iran's contributions to civilization, fostering pride and unity through shared historical roots (Keddie, 2020).

Religious Pluralism:

While upholding Shia Islam, Pahlavism advocated for religious tolerance to create an inclusive Iranian identity (Saleh, 2021).

Secular Vision

By advocating modernization and industrial progress, guiding the country toward secularism, and reducing the influence of the clergy in government, Reza Shah's rule marked a turning point for Iran and its history.

The White Revolution introduced broad reforms in land ownership, education, and women's rights, reshaping Iranian society in pursuit of progress.

1. **Challenges to Religious Authority:** Pahlavism aimed to curtail clerical influence in governance, challenging entrenched religious power (Keddie, 2020).
2. **Separation of Powers:** It advocated a clear distinction between religion and state to ensure governance beyond sectarian interests (Chehabi, 2019).
3. **Recalibrating Power Dynamics:** Reza Shah sought to centralize authority, shifting control from religious institutions to the state (Matin-Asgari, 2018).
4. **Positioning Iran as Progressive:** Pahlavism aligned Iran with modernization trends, breaking free from archaic religious governance (Saleh, 2021).

Nationalistic Aspirations

The post-World War I era saw a global rise in nationalism. Reza Shah recognized the need for a cohesive national identity to unify Iran's diverse communities and resist external pressures.

Global Context: Pahlavism's nationalism was shaped by the broader trend of post-war identity formation (Chehabi, 2019).

Cohesive National Identity: Reza Shah sought to unite Persians, Azeris, Kurds, and others under a common Iranian identity (Keddie, 2020).

` **Promotion of secular values, modernization, and industrialization White Revolution:**

• Reforms on land tenure
• Advances in education and women's rights

3. NATIONALISM AGAINST THREATS:

Directed against geopolitical threats (Matin-Asgari, 2018)

1. Cultural pride:

Revived ancient Persian legacy fostering national resilience (Saaleh, 2021)

2. Authority & Organization:

Centralization of power is essential for governance.

3. Persian Transition Period:

Required throwing away decaying institutions (Chehabi, 2019)

4.   Transformational change:

Strong central authority enabled comprehensive reforms (Matin-Asgari, 2018)

5.   Discipline And Order:

Realization of policies through authoritarian principles (Keddie, 2020)

6.   Quashing Resistance:

Acted against opposition from traditional thinkers and clerics

7.   Economic Development

Pahlavism's commitment to development in all fields and sectors

8.   Strategic Infrastructure Projects:
- Construction of roads, bridges
- Trans-Iranian Railway service stabilizing the economy (Chehabi, 2019)
- Oil Industry Development: Nationalizing oil resources under the National Iranian Oil Company strengthened economic independence (Matin-Asgari, 2018).
- Transportation Networks: Rail and road infrastructure investments improved internal
- and international trade.
- Industrialization Initiatives: Policies promoting industrial growth reduce reliance on agrarian economies (Saleh, 2021).
- Global Economic Standing: Foreign investments and partnerships enhanced Iran's economic stature (Keddie, 2020).

4. CONCLUSION

Pahlavism remains a potent force in Iran's political and social landscape, with its legacy increasingly invoked by frustrated Iranians. The deepening economic crisis, widespread corruption, and brutal crackdown on dissent have led to nostalgia for the Pahlavi era among an ever-growing number of Iranians who openly demand the return of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi.

His name is heard in protests across Iran, symbolizing a desire for stability, modernity, and national spirit— elements that many associate with the rule of his grandfather. Sensing this changing mood, the Iranian regime has stepped up its efforts to suppress discussion in relation to the Pahlavi legacy.

The Munich Security Conference's withdrawal of an invitation to Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, reportedly due to pressure from the Islamic Republic, is an example of how Tehran uses international forums as a tool to silence opposition figures. Similarly, European governments— including the Dutch government— have not been keen on engaging with Reza Pahlavi.

They are showing their political weaknesses and the reach of Iran's influence into Western diplomacy. On the verge of social upheaval and change in Iran, the Islamic Republic is in a state of near collapse. The regime realizes that the more people rally around the Pahlavi name, the greater its own danger. With protests still happening and public calls for change becoming ever louder, Pahlavism has emerged not just as historical but as a living ideology shaping the entire nature of discourse about Iran's prospects.

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