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A Study on the Nationalist Thought of Iranian Historians (from the Constitutional Revolution to the Pahlavi Era)

Abstract

Research into the works of thinkers such as Hassan Pirnia, Saeed Nafisi, Ahmad Kasravi, Mohammad Qazvini, Abbas Iqbal, and Mojtaba Minovi, among others, reveals a rupture in the paradigm of Iranian historiography. This transformation, influenced by familiarity with modern research methods in Europe and access to Western scholarly sources, opened a new chapter in Iranian historiography. Among these figures, individuals like Ahmad Kasravi, relying on personal insight and theoretical precision, adopted a different approach to recording events. In this approach, “Iran” was redefined not as a descriptive subject, but as a “concerned category” and an identity marker. This current continued the thinking of earlier nationalists such as Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani and Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh. These thinkers, with a critical eye, attributed the roots of weakness and despotism in the post-Islamic eras to external factors. In response, they sought to revive Iranian authenticity and draw on modern models to facilitate the cultural and historical separation of Iran from the Arab-Islamic sphere. The present article, using a descriptive-analytical method, examines how the spread of nationalist ideas in the works of historians such as Pirnia, Iqbal, Kermani, and Kasravi influenced the intellectual developments, identity formation, and the structuring of contemporary Iran.

Keywords:

Nationalism, Iranian Historians, Ahmad Kasravi, Abbas Iqbal, National Identity.

Theoretical Framework and the Context of Transition from Traditional to Modern Historiography

To understand the intellectual transformations of Iranian historians in the twentieth century, one must first examine the underlying epistemological shifts in the perception of “time” and “identity.” Historiography prior to this period in Iran was primarily based on “event-recording.” Time was conceived as cyclical, and history was viewed as the repetition of the rises and falls of kings within a circle of justice (Shaygan, 1383: 42). In this traditional model, history resembled a “register of events” rather than an “analytical science.” However, with the emergence of modern ideas and influence from European methods, the paradigm of “linear time” replaced the old one. In this new perspective, history is no longer repetitive but a path toward “progress” or “decline” (Abrahamian, 1382: 88). This fundamental change in the conception of time was, in fact, a

prerequisite for the formation of the concept of “nation,” because in linear time, humans can shape the future based on lessons from the past.

This paradigm shift occurred amid the turbulent political context of the late Qajar era. The political and economic stagnation of the government from the second half of the thirteenth century (Hijri) led Iranian intellectuals to challenge the political legitimacy of the Qajar dynasty (Abrahamian, 1382: 112). In this period, we witness a conceptual shift: the “sacredness” previously reserved exclusively for the person of the Shah and the institution of monarchy gradually faded, giving way to the concepts of “homeland” (*vatan*) and “Iran.” *Vatan* slowly transformed from a purely geographical notion into a political-emotional entity in the literature of intellectuals and the masses (Fasihi, 1372: 55). After encountering Western ideas, Iranian intellectuals came to believe that history was not a display of God’s will and destiny, but the continuous progress of humanity. However, this progress had conditions: liberation from royal despotism, outdated religious prejudices, and imperialist influence.

The political developments of the late Qajar period—especially the devastation caused by World War I, widespread famines, and the incompetence of the young Shah—severely destabilized Iran’s political environment. Meanwhile, Britain’s efforts to impose the 1919 Agreement strengthened nationalist and anti-colonial sentiments among the elites (Abrahamian, 1382: 154). These external pressures and internal instability created a societal demand for a “strong leadership,” which ultimately paved the way for the coup d’état of 3 Esfand 1299 (February 1921). In this political atmosphere, the necessity of “constitutional government” and early democracies gave way to the idea of a “unified government” and “national unity.” This political reorientation directly affected historiography, as the new nation-state sought “national narratives” to unify society around a single identity (Shaygan, 1383: 78).

In this context, the role of “Orientalism” and “nationalism” is undeniable. Nationalist historiography in Iran was shaped both under the strong influence of Western Orientalist methods and in confrontation with them. Historians of this period were influenced on one hand by Comte and Saint-Simon’s positivism, Gobineau’s racialism, Parsons’ theories, and Marxism, while on the other hand, they sought to redefine “Iranian identity” using these very tools (Yazdani, 1383: 102). This current gradually leaned toward “ancientism” (*bastan-gara’i*). They realized that to counter colonial humiliation and rebuild national self-confidence, they needed to return to the pre-Islamic era.

Thus, nationalist historiography in this period emerged from a kind of “semi-modernism” that reached its peak in the Pahlavi era. This approach was based on ancientism and racialism and, in many cases, led to “neglect of post-Islamic Iranian history” due to its intense focus on pre-Islamic glory (Fasihi, 1372: 112). Although this current suffered from oversimplification in some aspects, it greatly contributed to the formation of the “nation-state.” In circles such as *Kaveh*, *Iranshahr*, the *Farhangestan* (Academy), and radical parties like the *Tajaddod* Party and the Socialists, nationalism was formed on the basis of ancient Iran and the Aryan race. It assumed the role of social and political cohesion in place of religion (Yazdani, 1383: 118).

Familiarity with European historiographical styles—whether through translation or study in the West—drew historians toward “historical criticism.” They no longer accepted traditional, flattering narratives and sought to rewrite history with a critical eye. This process led to approaches in which history was written not to praise kings, but to identify the causes of the

country's decline and backwardness. In this transformative environment, prominent figures such as Akhundzadeh, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, Moshir al-Dowleh Pirnia, Ahmad Kasravi, and Abbas Iqbal emerged. Each, with a different approach, attempted to answer the question of "Iranian national identity."

Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani: Philosopher of History and Romantic Nationalism

In the evolution of modern Iranian historiography, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani can be considered a point of rupture and a symbol of rebellion against old historiographical traditions. He entered the field at a time when historiography in Iran was mainly in the form of "event-recording" or "biographical writing"—texts in which history was merely a sequential report of events aimed at praising kings or recording occurrences in the style of "Khodaynamehs" (Shaygan, 1383: 55). With a bold approach, Kermani shifted the subject of history from the "biography of kings" to "social transformations and historical currents." This shift was, in fact, an epistemological revolution, as for the first time, history was defined not as a story of aristocratic lives, but as a tool for understanding "the evolution of a nation" (Kermani, 1384, Vol. 1: 12).

Methodology: From Description to Explanation and Causality

In his historiographical method, Kermani moved away from simple description toward "reasoning," "induction," and "causality." He believed that historical events were not random occurrences or the mere will of kings, but rooted in "political and social foundations." From this viewpoint, history became a laboratory for identifying the causes of Iran's decline and backwardness. He wanted to know why Iran had deviated from the path of progress and what factors had caused a nation with such ancient glory to reach stagnation in the present era (Kermani, 1384, Vol. 2: 45).

To achieve these analyses, Kermani adopted a rigorous approach to sources. Instead of relying on oral narratives or flattering courtly texts, he turned to "inscriptions," "archaeological finds," and "ancient texts." He valued specific knowledge and material evidence for writing history and sought to extract historical truth from beneath the rubble of distorted narratives using these tools (Yazdani, 1383: 130). This approach was a prelude to the scientific-positivist methods that later matured in the works of Pirnia and Iqbal.

Linguistic Nationalism and National Epic

One of the fundamental axes of Kermani's thought was the connection between "language," "literature," and "national identity." He viewed the *Shahnameh* not merely as a literary work, but as the "manifestation of the Iranian spirit" and the primary source of national life (Kermani, 1384, Vol. 1: 18). In Kermani's view, the Persian language was not just a means of communication but the "guarantee of national survival." He believed that if a nation lost or forgot its language, it had in fact lost its identity and authenticity (Shaygan, 1383: 67). In other words, Kermani called history the "deed and title of a people's nobility and honor." Through rereading history, he sought to instill a sense of "collective identity" and "patriotism" in Iranians. In his thought, *vatan* expanded from a limited geographical concept to "Iran" as a broad cultural-historical entity. This type of nationalism had a romantic dimension, in which the ancient past

was imagined as a “lost paradise,” and returning to it was seen as the only path to salvation from the current situation.

Dialectic of Civilization and Colonialism: View of the West

Kermani’s approach to the West was dual and contradictory, reflecting the situation of intellectuals of that era. On one hand, he considered “Western civilization” an essential condition for progress and called on Iranians to acquire Western knowledge, science, and modern political organizations (Abrahamian, 1382: 160). On the other hand, he vehemently condemned the “colonial practices of the West.” He clearly understood that civilization and colonialism were not necessarily the same, and that many Western governments used the very civilization they promoted as a cover for plundering resources and subjugating weaker nations (Kermani, 1384, Vol. 3: 22). This distinction between “Western science” and “Western colonial policy” gave his nationalism a strong anti-imperialist character. He was an advocate of the religion of “humanism” and sought to create Iranians who, while modern, preserved their national pride and political independence.

History as a Tool for Awakening

Kermani’s ultimate goal in historiography was “awakening.” He believed history could strengthen the sense of patriotism in the masses and guide them toward clear and progressive social goals (Yazdani, 1383: 142). In his works, history was no longer a narrative of the past but a “manifesto for the future.” By recalling the greatness of ancestors, he wanted to break the chains of despotism and prejudice.

Kermani’s approach, although influenced in some aspects by the romanticism and racialism of his time, was the first serious attempt to move history from the “shadow of the court” to the “light of society.” He paved the way for figures like Kasravi to treat history not as a story, but as a “document of social analysis” (Shaygan, 1383: 81). He taught us that to understand the future, we must search for the roots of decline in the soil of history and, relying on national authenticities, move toward modernity.

Moshir al-Dowleh Pirnia: Documentary Positivism and the Reconstruction of Ancient Glory

While Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani viewed history through a romantic and philosophical lens, Moshir al-Dowleh Pirnia introduced a completely different and contrasting approach upon entering the field of historiography. If we call Kermani the “philosopher of history,” Pirnia can be described as the “architect of historical documents.” He worked in a period when Iran was transitioning to the Pahlavi era and there was an urgent need for a “documented and scientific national identity” (Shaygan, 1383: 70). Relying on modern European methods, especially the school of Leopold von Ranke, Pirnia sought to remove historiography from the realm of romantic imaginations and oral narratives and turn it into a “positive science.”

Rankean Methodology and the Paradigm of “History as It Actually Was”

Pirnia was heavily influenced by the methodology of Leopold von Ranke, the prominent German historian. Ranke’s fundamental principle was that the historian must abandon all preconceptions, biases, or philosophical interpretations and seek only to reconstruct events “as they actually were” (Pirnia, 1388, Vol. 1: 11). Pirnia institutionalized this approach in Iran. He believed that historical truth could only be reached through “documents,” and anything recorded in history without material or written evidence should be viewed with skepticism (Pirnia, 1388, Vol. 2: 24).

This “documentary” approach manifested in Pirnia’s works as a focus on minute details rather than general narratives: precise examination of ancient texts, translation of Western Orientalist works based on primary sources, and utilization of archaeological findings (Yazdani, 1383: 145). With his attention to sources, he tried to substantiate each event by citing its primary source. This precision in gathering sources elevated his historiography from “storytelling” to “scientific research.” However, it also produced texts that many critics described as “dry” and “lacking analytical spirit” (Shaygan, 1383: 75).

The Psychology of “Return to Antiquity” in Contrast to Qajar Decline

To understand Pirnia’s intense focus on ancient Iran, one must consider the psychological and political context of his time. As a high-ranking courtier and diplomat of the Qajar period, Pirnia witnessed the gradual decline of Iranian power and the national humiliation of Iranians in international circles. In Western diplomatic environments, he encountered a contemptuous view of Iranians as a nation “in decline” (Abrahamian, 1382: 170).

At this juncture, the return to antiquity in Pirnia’s thought was not merely a scientific interest but a “strategy for reclaiming dignity.” By reconstructing the glory of the Achaemenid and Sasanian eras, he wanted to prove to the world and to Iranians that this nation possessed roots in greatness and civilization that no colonialism or decline could completely erase (Pirnia, 1388, Vol. 1: 40). By proving that Iranians had once created one of the world’s greatest empires, he sought to deliver a crushing response to the contemptuous Western gaze. Therefore, unlike the romantic nationalism of Kermani, Pirnia’s nationalism was “argumentative and documentary.” He wanted to prove Iran’s glory not through poetry and imagination, but through “documents and reality.”

Methodological Critique: The Trap of “Dynastic History”

Despite its methodological precision, Pirnia’s historiography suffered from a fundamental weakness: it fell into the trap of “history from above” or “dynastic history.” Due to its heavy focus on official documents and court reports, the “masses” were completely omitted from his works. In Pirnia’s view, history was the history of kings, ministers, and commanders (Shaygan, 1383: 82). He believed that the driving force of history was the will of rulers and measured social changes solely through their political decisions. This approach, despite its scientific accuracy, left his historiography devoid of “structural and social analyses.” Although he paid attention to the influence of geography on national spirit, he never addressed the role of the masses in this process or how class contradictions led to the fall of one dynasty and the rise of another

(Abrahamian, 1382: 185). In effect, Pirnia meticulously recorded “when” and “who,” but largely remained silent on “why” and “how.”

Impact on National Identity in the Pahlavi Era

Pirnia’s approach provided a suitable foundation for the official ideologies of the Pahlavi era. To legitimize itself, the Pahlavi government sought a historiography that combined ancient glory with modern (scientific) methods. Due to its documentary precision and focus on national greatness, Pirnia’s works became a source for reconstructing national identity during Reza Shah’s reign (Yazdani, 1383: 155). Through this, he taught us that to have a strong national identity, we must first reconstruct our “historical memory” based on facts.

Ultimately, Moshir al-Dowleh Pirnia, by building a bridge between “Western Orientalist methods” and “Iranian national identity,” pushed Iranian historiography toward professionalization. Although he could not move history beyond the “dynastic” framework, his promotion of “documentarism” opened the way for figures like Kasravi and Iqbal to pursue deeper social and cultural analyses with more precise tools (Shaygan, 1383: 88).

Ahmad Kasravi: Revolution in Historiography and the Emergence of “History from Below”

While Moshir al-Dowleh Pirnia sought to present a precise but static image of dynastic history through documentary precision, Ahmad Kasravi created a “paradigmatic rupture” upon entering the field of historiography. If we call Pirnia the “document-weaver,” Kasravi can be called the “surgeon of history.” He distanced himself not only from Pirnia’s positivist-documentary methods but also from Kermani’s romantic nationalism. For Kasravi, history should not merely be a collection of documents to prove glory, but a tool for “analyzing the causes of failure” and “reconstructing national reason” (Kasravi, 1381, Vol. 1: 5). By shifting the focus from the “court” to the “masses,” he introduced a concept into Iranian historiography that can be called “history from below” (Abrahamian, 1382: 212).

The Historian as “Judge”: Critique of the Illusion of Neutrality

One of Kasravi’s most radical views was challenging the concept of “neutrality” in historiography. While many of his contemporary historians, influenced by Western positivism, tried to present themselves as “impartial observers,” Kasravi argued that history is never a neutral entity. In his view, the historian should not merely be a “narrator” or “scribe,” but must sit in the position of a “judge” and, based on evidence, pass judgment on historical events and figures (Kasravi, 1381, Vol. 1: 11).

He believed that the historian’s silence in the face of truth or avoidance of judgment was in fact a betrayal of history and society. Therefore, in his works, he not only narrated events but, with a sharp and critical tone, scrutinized figures and evaluated them according to the criteria of “reason,” “justice,” and “national interest.” This approach elevated history from a “report” to

“critical analysis” and transformed historiography from an archival activity into a political-social one (Shaygan, 1383: 92).

Democratizing History: From “Khodaynameh” to the “History of the Masses”

Kasravi’s greatest methodological achievement was removing the centrality of the king from history. Through his severe critique of “Khodaynamehs,” he argued that history should not be limited to the biographies of kings and courtiers, because in that case, the masses would be relegated to the margins as nameless “soldiers” or “subjects” (Kasravi, 1307: 42). Kasravi believed that the driving force of history was the will and actions of the masses.

This approach reached its peak in *The History of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*. Instead of focusing on great names, he analyzed “social currents.” He examined the role of class contradictions, the clergy, merchants, and intellectuals in the Constitutional developments, and how the masses reacted to despotism (Kasravi, 1381, Vol. 2: 150). Kasravi viewed history as a “social school.” Through a precise analysis of Constitutional events, he sought to understand why the Iranian revolution failed and how lessons from these failures could lead to progress (Abrahamian, 1382: 215).

The Concept of “Iranology” and Rereading the Margins

Kasravi defined “Iranology” not as a dry, descriptive academic discipline, but as a “project of rediscovery.” He believed that to understand national identity, one must explore the “hidden and forgotten corners” of history. In his work *Unknown Rulers*, he created a serious break with centralized historiography. Instead of focusing on central kings in Tehran or Isfahan, he turned to local dynasties, provincial governors, and regional powers (Kasravi, 1307: 88).

This was, in fact, a form of “democratizing history,” where history no longer belonged only to palace halls but encompassed all geographical points of Iran. By doing so, he showed that Iranian identity is a collection of local and civilizational multiplicities that together form a national whole. With a “surgical” method, he also discarded distorted narratives serving political or religious interests to recover historical truth through scientific induction (Shaygan, 1383: 98).

Methodological Critique: Lack of Structural-Economic Analysis

Despite all its innovations, Kasravi’s historiography suffered from a fundamental weakness: although he emphasized the role of the masses, he ignored “structural-economic” mechanisms in his analyses. In Kasravi’s works, history revolves more around “human will,” “reason,” “ignorance,” and “moral judgment.” He paid less attention to materialist analyses or deep economic contradictions (such as the landownership system or relations of production) that are key to understanding history in Marxist or modern sociological texts (Abrahamian, 1382: 228). This feature allowed his writings to establish an emotional and direct relationship with the reader. Instead of being dry academic texts, his works became “national manifestos” that invited readers to reflection and awakening. Kasravi transformed history from a “subject of study” into a “tool for change” (Shaygan, 1383: 105).

Ahmad Kasravi, by promoting “history from below” and “historical judgment,” opened a path in which the historian is no longer a court servant or a simple archivist, but a “social thinker” whose duty is to criticize the past and chart a brighter future for the nation. He taught us that to know the truth, we must distance ourselves from the “center” (the court) and look toward the “margins” (the people and the provinces).

Abbas Iqbal: Academic Synthesis and Preservation of Linguistic Identity

If we call Moshir al-Dowleh Pirnia the “document-weaver” and Ahmad Kasravi the “surgeon of history,” Abbas Iqbal can be called the “architect” of academic historiography in Iran. Iqbal entered the field when Iranian historiography was divided between two opposing poles: on one hand, Pirnia’s positivist-documentary approach, which, though precise, suffered from “structural dryness” due to the omission of the masses and focus on dynasties; and on the other, Kasravi’s radical and analytical approach, which had created a tense atmosphere through its severe critique of traditions and religious narratives (Shaygan, 1383: 95). Iqbal sought to create a “third way” or a “synthesis”: a historiography that benefited from precise Western methods while remaining loyal to Iran’s cultural, linguistic, and religious heritage, thus establishing a balance between “science” and “identity” (Yazdani, 1383: 160).

The Journal *Yadgar* and the Institutionalization of Historical Research

One of Abbas Iqbal’s greatest contributions to Iranian historiography was founding the journal *Yadgar*. This was not merely a literary or historical periodical but the first platform for institutionalizing historical knowledge in Iran. Through *Yadgar*, Iqbal gathered scattered research and promoted modern scientific methods, especially “textual criticism” and “manuscript editing” (Iqbal, *Yadgar*, First Year, No. 1).

Iqbal believed that to strengthen national identity, “correct knowledge” must replace “false perceptions.” In *Yadgar*, he established rigorous standards for publishing articles, meaning no historical claim was accepted without citation of a reliable source and cross-examination of manuscripts (Shaygan, 1383: 102). This approach helped transform historiography in Iran from “scattered essays” into a “specialized discipline.” Iqbal thereby initiated the “professionalization” of historiography in Iran and built a bridge between traditional scholars and modern academic methods (Yazdani, 1383: 165).

Persian Language as the “Iranian Spirit” and Civilizational Link

In Abbas Iqbal’s thought, national identity was not defined on the basis of race (which was prevalent under the influence of extreme nationalisms at the time), but at the intersection of “language, literature, and geography.” Unlike some radical nationalists who viewed the Islamic era as a period of “fall” or “incompleteness” and looked only to the pre-Islamic era, he held a more comprehensive view (Iqbal, *Articles*, Vol. 1: 44).

According to Iqbal, Iranian identity did not disappear in the Islamic era but returned in a new form with greater energy. He argued that the “Persian language” was the manifestation of the

Iranian spirit and that this language had preserved the bond among Iranians amid massive historical upheavals, the Arab invasion, and Turkish domination (Shaygan, 1383: 118). In fact, Iqbal saw “language” as the “symbolic capital” of the nation. He believed that Iranian civilization in the Islamic era, using the Persian language, managed to indigenize the new religion and create a “cultural synthesis” in which ancient glory merged with Islamic civilization (Iqbal, *Articles*, Vol. 2: 82). This perspective elevated his nationalism from a “closed racial” discussion to a “civilizational-linguistic” concept.

Anti-Colonial Approach and the Strategy of “National Unity”

In his works, especially articles on “national unity,” Abbas Iqbal demonstrated a very perceptive and analytical view of colonialism. He understood that twentieth-century imperialism no longer advanced solely through military armies but through “cultural colonialism” and “influence on language and thought” (Abrahamian, 1382: 192). Iqbal warned that great powers, under the guise of “spreading civilization” and “aiding modernity,” sought economic and cultural plunder of smaller nations. In his view, colonialism exploited “division” and “internal contradictions” to subjugate nations. Therefore, “national unity” in his thought was not merely a political slogan but a “survival strategy” in the modern world (Iqbal, *Articles*, Vol. 1: 112). He believed that if Iranians could not unite around a shared identity (centered on language and culture), they would easily be swallowed by foreign powers. This view transformed Iqbal’s nationalism from a purely ancient or literary discussion into a “political necessity” so that Iran could maintain its independence in the competitive space of the modern world.

Final Synthesis: Between Pirnia’s Dryness and Kasravi’s Sharpness

Abbas Iqbal’s role in Iranian historiography can be seen in creating a “balance.” On one hand, he accepted Pirnia’s documentary precision and rigor to distance himself from “romantic imaginations.” On the other hand, unlike Pirnia, he valued the “spirit” and “culture” of history and did not allow it to become a collection of dry numbers and dates (Shaygan, 1383: 120). Moreover, unlike Kasravi, instead of “destroying” traditions to reach the truth, he sought their “reinterpretation.”

Iqbal taught us that one can employ modern and critical methods (textual criticism) while maintaining a deep emotional bond with one’s cultural heritage. He transformed historiography from a “weapon of war” (as seen in Kasravi’s works) into a “civilizational tool” (Yazdani, 1383: 172). By creating an academic framework, he paved the way for future generations of historians to study Iranian history not as a series of events, but as a “cultural continuity.” By defining national identity around language, he bridged the gap between “pre-Islamic Iran” and “Islamic Iran” and presented a unified image of Iranian civilization (Iqbal, *Articles*, Vol. 2: 188).

Historiography as a Project of “Becoming” and Rediscovering Identity

In the examination conducted, by passing through the intellectual rises and falls of the four architects of modern Iranian historiography, a grand picture emerges. The movement from Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani to Abbas Iqbal was not merely a shift in time or change in names, but an “epistemological evolutionary course” in which Iranian national identity transformed from a

vague and romantic feeling into a structured and academic knowledge. This path essentially narrates a nation's effort to redefine itself on the threshold of entering the modern world.

Comparing Approaches: From Imagination to Document, from Document to Analysis

If these four approaches are placed on an analytical continuum, a logical progression becomes visible, with each filling the void of the other (Shaygan, 1383: 125):

- First stage (Kermani): Historiography as “rebellion.” In this stage, history was wrested from the hands of the court and turned into a weapon in the hands of intellectuals to rise up against decline and despotism. Here, documentary precision was sacrificed for national fervor and social awakening (Kermani, 1384, Vol. 1: 12).
- Second stage (Pirnia): Historiography as “discipline.” With the establishment of the new nation-state, the need for “proof” replaced “claim.” Through his documentary positivism, Pirnia brought scientific discipline to Iranian historiography and transformed ancientism from a wish into a documented reality (Pirnia, 1388, Vol. 1: 11).
- Third stage (Kasravi): Historiography as “social surgery.” By critiquing the history of kings, Kasravi showed that national identity is constructed among the masses and in the heart of social transformations. He defined history as a “court” to separate the pure from the impure and reconstruct collective reason (Kasravi, 1381, Vol. 1: 11).
- Fourth stage (Iqbal): Historiography as “civilizational synthesis.” Iqbal opened a third path by combining Pirnia's documentary precision with Kermani's identity concerns. He found national identity not in race, but in “language” and “cultural continuity,” and strengthened the link between pre- and post-Islamic Iran (Iqbal, *Articles*, Vol. 2: 188).

From Orientalism to “Indigenism”

One of the most important achievements of this era was the transition from “being an object” to “being a subject.” In the nineteenth century, the history of Iran was mostly written by Western Orientalists; that is, Iranians were the “objects of study” for Westerners. But these four thinkers, using the same scientific tools of the West (positivism, textual criticism, archaeology), began writing their own history (Abrahamian, 1382: 230).

This process led to a kind of “reversed Orientalism.” They used Western methodology to challenge the “Western narrative” of the East (which was largely based on decline and backwardness). By reconstructing ancient glory and emphasizing Iran's cultural capacities, they redefined Iranian identity from a “defeated” one to a “civilization-building” one (Shaygan, 1383: 130). This movement is, in fact, the root of indigenism in contemporary Iranian thought—an effort to “define oneself, by oneself.”

Identity-Building Legacy: Answering the Fundamental Question “Who Are We?”

Historiography in this period was, beyond an academic discipline, a “national project.” The

historians of this era sought answers to the question: “Why did we fall behind and how can we become great again?” Their answer lay in returning to the “historical self” (Yazdani, 1383: 175). Through rereading history, they reconnected the “collective memory” of Iranians, which had been severed during the Qajar era.

- From Kermani remained “national zeal” and a philosophical view of history (Kermani, 1384, Vol. 3: 22).
- From Pirnia remained “national dignity” based on documents and ancient realities (Pirnia, 1388, Vol. 1: 40).
- From Kasravi remained “critical reason” and attention to the role of the people in national destiny (Kasravi, 1381, Vol. 2: 150).
- From Iqbal remained “cultural continuity” and the preservation of language as the boundaries of identity (Iqbal, *Yadgar*, Vol. 1: 44).

Conclusion

From this examination, it can be said that modern Iranian historiography in the period from the Constitutional Revolution to the Pahlavi era succeeded in establishing “Iran” as a “unified political and cultural unit” in the collective mentality. If today we consider ourselves heirs to a several-thousand-year-old civilization that simultaneously interacts with the modern world, this is thanks to the methodical and dedicated efforts of these four thinkers. With their pens, they laid the bricks of the edifice of national identity in an era when the storms of colonialism and despotism threatened Iran’s very existence. For these great figures, history was not a graveyard of dead events, but a “living force” that gave direction to the future. They taught that national identity is not a static and inherited concept, but a “continuous process of rereading and rediscovery” through which, relying on this analytical heritage, one can preserve one’s identity in the face of globalization’s challenges—not with prejudice, but with “historical reason.”

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