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The Religious Thought of Aḥmad Kasravī Tabrīzī

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**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the
degree of Master of Arts**

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I dedicate this work to my dear sisters, Shamsi and Setareh, without whose encouragement and continuous moral support it would not have been completed.

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Abstract

The advent of Ahmad Kasravī (1890-1946) and his *Pakdīnī* movement represents one of the most important developments in the history of socio-religious thought in Iran in the Pahlavī era (1925-1979). It was one of the greatest home-grown ideological challenges to Shi'ism and Shi'i clergy in the twentieth century.

Kasravī saw a web of interrelated and deep-rooted fallacies, pseudo religious beliefs and corrupt ideologies at the base of his country's backwardness. Urged by a sense of religious vocation, he set out to develop a systematic socio-religious ideology that would be the guiding light in his society's struggle for salvation from its ailments and in the creation of a better world for everyone. Simultaneously, he started a radical campaign of criticism aimed at a total reevaluation of Iran's cultural and social values. Naturally, his endeavours roused the vested interests of his society, especially the religious establishment and the political elites, against him. Eventually, a small group of fanatic Shi'is who enjoyed the full support of the clergy and the tacit cooperation of a number of influential political elites, assassinated him.

Ever since Kasravī's assassination, his writings and ideas in general, and his religious ideology in particular, have been suppressed so severely and distorted to such an extent that today few Iranians, even among intellectuals, are aware of his true socio-religious ideas or know him as a religious thinker. Still, among those who are, more or less, familiar with Kasravī's writings on religion, some have cast doubt on the genuineness of his interest in religion.

The present thesis aims to analyze Kasravī's religious ideology. It examines first the historical factors that played a significant role in the development of Kasravī's socio-religious consciousness and his keen interest in religion. Secondly, it explores the intellectual contexts of his religious thought --its origins, the controversial nature of it, the original aspects of it, the reaction of the clergy and intellectuals of the time to it, and its significance and impact on the coming generations. Finally, the key concepts of Kasravī's socio-religious ideology and some major current misunderstandings of them are examined.

What makes such a study imperative at this point in time is the fact that, since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, many of the religious issues explored by Kasravī have now become major concerns of the whole nation. The readership of Kasravī's writings is also on the rise, especially among those opposed to the rule of the Shi'i clergy. In the absence of a comprehensive study of Kasravī's thought, however, highly politicized interpretations of his thoughts have distorted or obscured his authentic doctrinal theory.

Résumé

L'avènement de Ahmad Kasravī (1890-1946) et son mouvement *Pakdīnī* est une des plus importants développements de l'histoire de la pensée socio-religieuse en Iran pendant l'ère Pahlavī (1925-1979). Il était un des plus grands défis idéologiques au Shi'ism et au clergé Shi'ite dans le vingtième siècle.

À la base du retard dont souffre son pays, Kasravī observe une interconnexion de sophismes profonds et étroitement reliés entre eux, des croyances pseudo-religieuses et des idéologies corrompues. Stimulé par un sens de vocation religieuse, il commença le développement d'une idéologie systématique socio-religieuse, qui serait le guide dans la lutte de sa société pour le salut de ses maux et pour la création d'un meilleur monde pour tous. Simultanément, il lança une campagne radicale de critique dirigée vers une réévaluation totale des valeurs culturelles et sociales en Iran. Naturellement, ses efforts attiraient vers lui l'attention des parties qui avaient un intérêt matériel dans la société, surtout les institutions religieuses et les élites politiques. Il finit par être assassiné par un petit groupe de fanatiques Shi'is, avec l'appui total du clergé et la coopération tacite d'un nombre de personnalités influentes au niveau de la politique.

Depuis l'assassinat de Kasravī, ses écrits et ses idées en général et son pensée religieuse en particulier ont été tellement déformés, qu'aujourd'hui peu d'Iraniens, même les intellectuels, ont connaissance de ses idées religieuses, ou le connaissent comme un penseur religieux. Entre ceux qui sont plus ou moins familiers avec les écrits de Kasravī sur la religion, certains sont dans le doute sur sa sincérité religieuse.

La présente thèse a pour but d'analyser l'idéologie religieuse de Kasravī. Elle examinera d'abord les facteurs historiques qui ont joué un rôle important dans le développement de conscience socio-religieuse de Kasravī. Deuxièmement, elle étudiera les contextes intellectuels de sa pensée socio-religieuse - à savoir son origine, sa nature controversée, son aspect original, la réaction du clergé et la réaction des intellectuels, et sa signification et l'effet sur les futures générations. Finalement, on examine ensuite les concepts principaux de l'idéologie religieuse de Kasravī, et on conteste quelques des malentendus majeurs actuels.

Ce qui rend une étude comme celle-ci urgente à ce point-ci est fait que depuis la Révolution Islamique de 1979, beaucoup des questions religieuses examinées par Kasravī sont devenues maintenant des soucis sérieux pour toute la nation. Le nombre de lecteurs des écrits de Kasravī monte, surtout parmi ceux qui s'opposent au gouvernement du clergé Shi'ite. En l'absence d'une étude compréhensive des pensées de Kasravī, des interprétations très politisées de ses écrits ont faussé sa doctrine authentique.

Acknowledgments:

This thesis was started during a very difficult period of my life when my mind was often occupied with problems other than my studies. My adverse circumstances left me little serenity of mind, patience, or energy to concentrate on my research, and seriously delayed the completion of this study. At one point, I even decided to quit my studies, and if it were not for the encouragement and generous moral support provided by a number of friends and family members, especially my dear sisters, this project would not have been completed. I would like to thank all of them wholeheartedly. I owe a great deal to Prof. Ü. Turgay, the director of the Institute of Islamic studies at McGill University, for his considerate and unfailing support. I am grateful to Prof. C. Adams, my former supervisor, who first suggested that I write on Kasravī. I wish to thank my current supervisor, Prof. S. Alvi for her patience with me and valuable suggestions toward the improvement of this thesis. I would like to express my thanks to Profs. A. Fathi and M. A. Jazayeri for sharing their great knowledge of Kasravī and his works by kindly answering my questions. I am also grateful to our dear librarian Ms. S. Farahian, without whose assistance I would not have reached many of the primary sources which proved absolutely necessary for writing this thesis. I would like to thank M. Cochrane for his careful proofreading of this work. My many thanks are due as well to the following friends and acquaintances who assisted me in the preparation of this thesis by lending books, by helping with computer work, and by offering their moral support: Nader Sadeghi, Hosein Molavipour, Nima Mash'ouf, Davood Bakhtnia, Jalal Khvarazmi, Hosein Torkpour, Dr. Fereydoun Haghighi, Armin Layegh, and Mehdi Sirdehi.

Transliteration

The present thesis adopts the transliteration system of the American Library of Congress for Persian words. This system, however, is not applied to the names of famous places or cities, i.e. Azarbaijan, or to those words that have found their way into the English dictionary, i.e. Shi'i, mulla, Imam, Sufi and so on. I have also respected the authors' and publishers' choices in the transliteration of their own names when I have cited their books or articles-- hence Jazayeri or Tooka and not Jazāyirī or Tukā. The transliteration system adopted in this thesis is not applied to quotations from books originally written in English, nor to existing translations in English.

Letters of the alphabet:

| | | | |
|---|----|---|----|
| ء | ' | ص | ṣ |
| ب | b | ض | ẓ |
| پ | p | ط | ṭ |
| ت | t | ظ | ẓ |
| ث | ṯ | ع | ' |
| ج | j | غ | gh |
| چ | ch | ف | f |
| ح | ḥ | ق | q |
| خ | kh | ک | k |
| د | d | گ | g |
| ذ | ẓ | ل | l |
| ر | r | م | m |
| ز | z | ن | n |
| ژ | zh | و | v |
| س | s | ه | h |

ش sh

ی y

Vowels and diphthongs:

— / i
 — / a
 — u
 ی — ā

آ، ا — ā
 و — ū
 ی — ay
 و — aw

Introduction

I. Kasravī's stature as a religious thinker

Ahmad Kasravī Tabrīzī (1890-1946) and his *Pākdīnī* movement represent one of the most important developments in the history of socio-religious thought in Iran in the Pahlavī era (1925-1979), as well as one of the greatest home-grown ideological challenges¹ to Shi'ism and Shi'i clergy in the twentieth century. Despite the fact that Kasravī was a controversial writer who wrote extensively on subjects as varied as, history, religion, politics, linguistics and literature, and despite the fact that his relentless criticism of the outdated and decadent aspects of Iranian culture aroused strong reaction from different sections and interest groups within society, no comprehensive study of his thought and works has yet been produced. Kasravī's ideological opponents derived from the ranks of the Shi'i clergy, politicians and cultural elites –the very groups who were the targets of his diligent criticism. They did their best to suppress and distort his ideas and prevent the publication of his writings. During the Pahlavī era, pro-establishment men of letters generally chose to keep silent on the issues raised by Kasravī, hoping that with the help of state censorship, the whole matter would slip into oblivion. The clergy and the writers associated with them, however, produced a number of basically cheap and nasty pamphlets full of baseless accusations. These pamphlets identified Kasravī as an agent of foreign powers, or accused him of insulting the Qur'ān. Strangely enough, even among the non-religious anti-establishment intellectuals of Iran, virtually no one showed interest in undertaking a thorough study of Ahmad Kasravī's thought and works.² The main reason,

of course, was that these intellectuals saw in the clergy a potentially important ally in their struggle against the political regime of the time, and did not want to jeopardize such an alliance by raising issues that might provoke the clergy's anger. Thus those hostile to Kasravī and his ideas were successful in a tacitly coordinated show of their suppressive capabilities. It is not surprising then that in 1964, eighteen years after the death of Kasravī. W. C. Staley, a Ph. D. student from Princeton University who was at the time visiting Iran to gather information for his dissertation on Kasravī, offered the following observation: "Distortion and ignorance of his (Kasravī's) ideas are fairly universal in Iran today, even among educated people."³

After Kasravī's assassination in 1946, his books, with few exceptions, were banned. In the years preceding the 1979 Revolution, however, his followers were able to republish some of his writings whenever changes in the political atmosphere of the country gave them opportunity to do so. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran there have been no such opportunities, and a much stricter ban has been applied to Kasravī's writings. The Islamic Republic has only allowed the publication of his two books on the Constitutional Revolution of Iran, which are considered by most historians to be the classic sources on that historical event. Nonetheless, to this new edition of the book a lengthy foreword by the publisher has been attached explaining how erroneous Kasravī was in his judgments against the clergy and Shi'ism, and even expressing the publisher's gratification at the assassination of the author by the so-called *Fidā'iyān-ī Islām* (the Devotees of Islam). This recurrent and ongoing censorship has made accessibility to Kasravī's numerous books and articles extremely difficult for those willing to write on him and his works. As a result, most writings on Kasravī and his thought have been based on limited original sources and, as such, have often been impaired by

misjudgement and a lack of objectivity.

Kasravī's religious thought is certainly the least known and most misunderstood part of his oeuvre --a fact best demonstrated by the very different and often contradictory opinions expressed upon his religious ideas. While some of his Shi'i opponents accuse him of claiming to be a new prophet,⁴ there are those who see in him a champion of secularism.⁵ Some argue that he aspired to revive the pre-Islamic traditions and religion of Iran,⁶ whereas others characterize him as an anti-religious thinker.⁷ Finally, there are those who consider Kasravī's concern for religion secondary to his much greater concern for the national unity of Iran, or who see his religious thought as simply a tool to realize this latter concern.⁸

This thesis is based on the examination of a great number of Kasravī's books, including all those on the subject of religion. It aims at analyzing Kasravī's stature as a religious thinker by discussing the authenticity of his interest in religion and examining his religious ideas. Thus, it intends to introduce Kasravī's religious thought by highlighting the ideas mistakenly ascribed to him.

The first chapter examines Kasravī's life, not in the form of biography per se, but rather as a study in the development of his religious and moral consciousness. This chapter focuses on the deep sense of vocation he felt, and explicates the impact of his life experiences upon his character, his thought, and his writings throughout his career. The main intention here is to establish that religion was a matter close to Kasravī's heart and, as such, to challenge the views of those observers who label him as an anti-religious thinker, or those who cast doubt on the authenticity of his religious sentiments.

Kasravī's theory of religion, its background, its key doctrines and its

significance are analyzed in the second chapter. In the third chapter Kasravī's socio-religious thought and his understanding of religion in relation to other spheres of man's social life, namely science, politics, and history are explored, and some unsubstantiated interpretations of his positions on these matters are argued.

What makes a study of Kasravī's thought imperative at this point in time is the fact that, since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran, many issues previously raised by him, especially those concerning the social role of religion, have become subjects of national debate. Today, Kasravī's religious writings, especially his criticisms of the Shi'i doctrines and the Shi'i establishment, are often invoked in popular political discourse, especially by those opposed to the rule of the clergy in Iran. Generally, such highly politicized interpretations of Kasravī's words are not based on a thorough study of his doctrinal ideas and, as such, fail to do justice to the man and his thought. Furthermore, the fact that both an interest in Kasravī's legacy and the general readership of his writings, are on the rise, testifies to the relevance of many of his ideas to the present situation in Iran and to the necessity of further academic inquiry into the lesser known aspects of his thought. This preliminary study of Kasravī's religious thought should be viewed in this light.

II. Review of literature

Prior to Kasravī's assassination in 1946, the Shi'i clergy and those closely associated with them produced a number of pamphlets and books, including *Kajravīgarī*, *Ātash-i Inqilāb* and *Kajravī-hāyi Kasravī* against him and his ideas.⁹ The authors of these pamphlets and books, such as Murtazā Mahdavi, Qāsim Islāmī and Farhang Nakha'ī, almost all

amateur writers, were primarily concerned with what they saw as Kasravī's innovative religious views and blasphemous criticism of Shi'ism and the Shi'i establishment. The main problem with these writings is that they are full of slander and personal attacks, and do not follow a logical line of argument. Their authors share the view that Islam in its Shi'i form is the last and perfect religion and beyond any criticism. Thus they hold that Kasravī, who has dared to deny the authenticity of Shi'ism and has criticized its sacred doctrines, is a heretic. The fact that Kasravī, due to the publication of his book, *Āzarī, Zabān-i Bāstān-i Azarbaijan* (Azari, the ancient language of Azarbaijan), was offered the membership to a number of academic societies in Europe and America, including the Royal Asiatic Society of London, gave some of his opponents an excuse to accuse him of being an agent of foreign powers. According to Ramyar, Mahdavi, for example, suggested that Kasravī was a foreign agent who under the supervision of the Royal Asiatic Society was trying to subvert Islam and to weaken people's belief in the religious norms and establishments of their society. Thus Mahdavi and other like-minded authors encouraged both people and the government to suppress Kasravī's voice of dissent.¹⁰

As a result of their biased arguments, most of these writings soon slipped into oblivion and today it is very difficult to find their copies. It was probably due to their ineffectiveness that the Faiziyyih of Qum, the most important centre of Shi'i scholarship in Iran, prevented the publication of a number of similar books and pamphlets by unskillfull clergymen. The Faiziyyih published a book, however, against Kasravī and like-minded intellectuals that was written by a Shi'i scholar who was regarded as more knowledgeable on controversial subjects.¹¹ This book, entitled *Kashf ul-Asrār*, was published in 1943. The as yet unknown author was Ruhullāh Khumainī, the later founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This book was supposedly conceived in answer to a book entitled

Asrār-i Hizār Sālīh by 'Alī Akbar Ḥakamī Zādiḥ, in which the latter had posed a number of challenging questions to the Shi'i clergy. However, as Jazayeri writes, Khumainī's book "is actually an attack on Kasravī, whom he does not mention by name, but such phrases as 'the adventurer from Tabriz'."¹² This book does not differ significantly in tone and approach from aforementioned books, and is dotted with name-calling and insults not only to Kasravī and Ḥakamī Zādiḥ,¹³ but also to such religious and historical figures as Zoroaster,¹⁴ 'Umar¹⁵ and Uthmān.¹⁶ In his book, Khumainī expressed the anger of the Shi'i clergy toward Kasravī and others who dared to openly criticize the Shi'i dogmas and challenged the religious authority of the clergy. The following passage from *Kashf ul-Asrār* clearly shows the extent of their anger:

Scholars who see the content of our responses can judge for themselves and identify seditious and evil intentions of such people. And if they (the scholars) regard themselves as charged with protecting the religion, the Qur'an and all that is sacred, they will break the teeth of these imbeciles with their iron fists and crush their heads under the feet of their courage. And we expect the Muslim government to always act in accordance with the religious laws and stop these journals which are against the law and religion, and put all those who say such nonsense words to death in front of the faithful.¹⁷

Nowhere in his book does Khumainī explain in sufficient detail those views which he intends to refute. The views of critics of Shi'ism and the Shi'i clergy are mentioned briefly, and generally these views are misrepresented. The Shi'i doctrines in dispute, such as Imamate and *vilāyar-i faqīh*, are then defended on the basis of the author's interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses and the words of the prophet, Shi'i Imams and important Shi'i scholars of the past. Thus, while Kasravī's arguments are based on free reasoning, Khumainī's counter-arguments are

based primarily on faith. In response to those who find it unreasonable to accept any religion, including Islam, as the end of divine missions, for example, he contends that the truth of Muslims' claim is so clear and self-evident that there is no need for reasoning. In his words:

If someone questions why Islamic laws are eternal and [why] the prophet of Islam is the last of the prophets till the end of time, he should not be answered, [rather] he should be ridiculed.¹⁸

This attitude does not, however, entail that Khumainī is totally unaware of the need to present his arguments in a more rational manner to his readership. In fact, he tries to do so in many parts of his book, but has difficulty bringing reason and faith together. Consequently, in many cases he offers confused, twisted and even sophistical arguments. For instance, in response to those critics of Shi'ism who challenge the authenticity of the Shi'i doctrine of Imamate and who question why such an important issue is not mentioned in the Qur'ān, he writes:

The faithful can respond by saying that if Imamate is not true, why did God not mention its falsehood ...It would have been better if God had revealed a sura declaring that 'Alī and his descendents have no right to Imamate after the prophet of Islam.¹⁹

The logic that Khumainī adduces in this passage requires God to name all those people whom He has not chosen to succeed the prophet in the Qur'ān --naturally a very long list of names-- instead of designating one person and his descendents to that position.

Since Kasravī's assassination, he and his works have been cited in numerous books and articles mostly on the subject of Iranian history, and particularly on the history of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911.

Four major works, one in Persian and three in English, have also been produced on Kasravī's life and thought. Kasravī's religious thought is not the focus of any of these works, but is discussed briefly in all of them.

1. Staley's dissertation entitled "The Intellectual Development of Ahmad Kasravī." submitted to the Department of Modern History at Princeton University, is still the most comprehensive and detailed work in English on the first thirty years of Kasravī's life. This 219-page dissertation is divided into eleven chapters, each focused on a certain period of young Kasravī's life. Thus there appears no discussion of the ideas that Kasravī developed later in his life, including his religious theory. Only three pages (10-13) fall under the section entitled "Religion," which is an identification of Kasravī's books on religious subjects.

Staley's purpose in his study is simply to lay the ground for an understanding of a thinker whose work, he believes, "is important to the West no less than the East because he was able to cut through the argot and dogma of ages and to discover truly important facts and issues."²⁰ Staley's work is basically descriptive. He has borrowed heavily from Kasravī's autobiography, many pages of which he has translated and incorporated as direct quotations into his dissertation. Even his arrangement of materials and chapters very much resembles that of Kasravī's autobiography.

Overall, Staley was able to present a fairly balanced assessment of the interrelated factors that contributed to the intellectual development of Kasravī by gathering information from Kasravī's books, from other sources on the modern history of Iran and, finally, from a number of interviews with both prominent cultural and political figures of the time and members of Kasravī's family.

2. Another study on Kasravī and his legacy, entitled “Sayyid Ahmad Kasravi, Historian, Language Reformer, and Thinker,” is an M.A. thesis by Minoo Ramyar.²¹ This thesis is not focused on any specific aspect of Kasravī’s thought or works. In the abstract, Ramyar indicated the goal of her study as “to outline the contents of Kasravī’s writings, to quote comments by his admirers and critics, and to express our own views when possible.”²² Each one of the seven chapters of the thesis is a summary of Kasravī’s views or writings on a general topic such as history, language, religion or literature. The comments offered at the end of some chapters are rarely based on well-defined or well-analyzed cases. Some are rather cursory and unsubstantiated judgements.

Unfortunately, Ramyar’s thesis suffers from a number of other serious problems such as poor translation of Kasravī’s statements, and even some titles of his books, from Persian into English,²³ and insufficient information or incoherent discussion of issues. For example, in chapter five, which summarizes Kasravī’s religious thought, his views on important notions such as prophethood, reason, science and religion and so on are explained in one or two short paragraphs.²⁴ Kasravī’s understanding of the hereafter, for instance, is explained in just three sentences. A major issue such as ‘revelation’ is not discussed at all, and correlations among these notions remain unexplored and unexplained. They are presented rather as fragmented and unrelated pieces of information. Oversimplified and occasionally incorrect or contradictory comments on Kasravī’s ideas, however, constitute the most serious flaws in Ramyar’s work.²⁵

The bibliography of the thesis, however, is impressive. It shows that Ramyar had had access to all Kasravī’s books, with the exception of *Ā’in*, and many books and pamphlets written by both Kasravī’s sympathizers and his Shi’i critics. She also includes a book entitled *Payām-i Man bih*

Sharq (My Message to the East) in her list of Kasravī's books. This title is not to be found in Katīrāyī's bibliography of Kasravī's writings, which is one of the most reliable works of its kind.²⁶

3. Dastghaib's *Naqd-i Āsar-i Ahmad Kasravī*, which appeared in 1978, remains the most detailed study of Kasravī's thought and writings yet published in Persian. The book is divided into ten chapters. The fifth chapter deals with Kasravī's religious thought. Here, Kasravī's religious views are briefly outlined and then compared with the related views of a number of Iranian and European philosophers of the past and present. Dastghaib also criticizes several of Kasravī's views, including his more or less negative position on the Darwinian theory of the evolution of man from apes and his indiscriminate rejection of all materialist ideologies despite their fundamental differences with each other.²⁷

What Dastghaib has written on Kasravī, however, is too eclectic and digressive to be called a truly scholarly work. He drifts easily from the subjects at hand to discuss many other issues not clearly relevant to Kasravī and his works. A good example is the second chapter, which professes to be a study of Kasravī's view of the relationship between the East and the West. Although there are some references to Kasravī's writings on this subject in the first few pages of a 45-page chapter, the remainder is dedicated to the author's allusions to a vast range of world-famous philosophers, scientists, novelists, politicians, poets and musicians. While, for example, the Romantic movement in European literature and music, or the views of Russian writers such as Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy on the subject of 'the East and the West,' are examined in some detail, Kasravī and his ideas are ignored. This problem more or less exists in every chapter of the book, and inevitably creates the impression that the author is "showing off" his knowledge of these subjects.

The insertion, amid his discussion of Kasravī's views, of arguments against certain contemporary writers whom the author opposes on issues unrelated to the subject at hand, also diminishes the scholarly quality of his book.²⁸ And the fact that a number of Kasravī's important books, including *Dar Rāh-i Sīyāsat*, *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Khirad*, *Pursish va Pāsukh*, *Dīn va Dānish*, *Sarnivisht-i Īrān Chih Khvāhad Būd?* and *Afsarān-i Mā*, are missing from the bibliography represent a further shortcoming of Dastghaib's book.

4. An article entitled "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker of Twentieth-century Iran," which M. A. Jazayeri produced as an introduction to the first English translation of Kasravī's *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Islām* and *Shī'igarī*, is one of the most reliable and informative sources on Kasravi's ideas and ideals. Though concise, this article clearly maps the development of Kasravī's thought, and explains the interconnections among his social, political and religious views. Jazayeri, who in his youth was associated with Kasravī and his movement, also shares with his readers some firsthand knowledge of Kasravī's Āzādigān party, its activities, its plans for Iran and its fate.

A number of minor works which allude to Kasravī's religious thought are also cited in this thesis.

1. "Kasravi: The Integrative Nationalist of Iran" by E. Abrahamian is one of the most scholarly and well-argued articles written on Kasravī. This article, as its title indicates, is not concerned with his religious views. The article's thesis, however, is that "the transformation of unintegrated traditional Iran into...an integrated modern Iran" was far more important to Kasravī than his other concerns, including religion. Since we tend to differ with Abrahamian on the latter part of this

proposition, we have argued it in the present thesis.²⁹

2. A. Ṭāhirī's book *Holy Terror* is not concerned with Kasravī or his religious thought. The subject is rather the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the consequent rule of the clergy in Iran. At one point, however, the author refers to Kasravī and approvingly ascribes to him both an assessment of Islam as suitable only for the uncivilized Arab tribes of fourteen centuries ago and an aspiration to revive Iran's pre-Islamic religious and moral values.³⁰ Since we find such claims unsubstantiated and an improper politicization of Kasravī's views and ideals, we have challenged them in the present thesis.³¹ Apparently Ṭāhirī has not consulted Kasravī's writings to verify that such ideas, to which he himself subscribes, cannot be found there at all. A further indication of such a neglect is that on the same page, Ṭāhirī has introduced Kasravī as a graduate of the Sorbonne University in Paris.³² It is well known that Kasravī completed his studies at a traditional religious school in Tabriz, and that he never travelled to Europe. These facts could have been verified by consulting Kasravī's easily accessible autobiography, or almost any other work on his life.

3. Fīrūz Kāzīm Zādih's claim in his article "Ideological Crisis in Iran," as cited by Staley,³³ that Kasravī was an anti-religious thinker, is also challenged in the present thesis.

4. Another minor work on Kasravī is B. Chūbīnih's introduction to a new edition of *Bahā'igarī* published in the U.S.A. In his article, Chūbīnih clearly indicates that he merely intends to present a modest sketch of the most important events in Kasravī's life, because he does not see himself

capable of drawing a vivid picture of Kasravī's full life and thought.³⁴ Chūbīnih does not, however, relate the events of Kasravī's life in an orderly manner. At times he even mixes up events from two very different periods in Kasravī's life.³⁵ Furthermore, some of Kasravī's statements are wrongfully related in this article.³⁶ Chūbīnih also offers some unsubstantiated judgments on Kasravī's views, and throughout his article adopts a panegyric tone. For instance, he introduces Kasravī as a secularist with an absolute belief in the separation of religion and politics.³⁷ This mistake can probably be attributed to his misunderstanding of Kasravī's conception of religion. The fact that Chūbīnih vehemently attacks the Shi'i clergy, and tries to argue against the legitimacy of their theocratic rule in Iran since 1979, may have also been a motivation for drawing such a conclusion. In this respect, Chūbīnih's article is another example of the improper politicization of Kasravī's ideas for the sake of contemporary political discourse. Since this article is also a typical misreading of Kasravī's understanding of the relationship between religion and politics, we discuss it in greater detail in this thesis.³⁸

Chapter 1

Dangerous times: The formation of Aḥmad Kasravī's religious sensibilities

Aḥmad Kasravī Tabrīzī was one of the most prolific writers of twentieth-century Iran. By the time of his death he had written more than seventy books and pamphlets on a wide range of issues, including religion, history, literature, linguistics and current political matters.

To fully understand what Kasravī dreamed for not only his nation, but also the world at large, we need to know the eventful period in which he lived and those experiences which contributed most to the make-up of his character and belief system. He lived in a chaotic world where wars and revolutions were the order of the day. He witnessed the endeavours of the Constitutionalist revolutionaries against an outdated despotic political order in his homeland, and whole-heartedly subscribed to their ideals of freedom, progress and rule of law. He experienced the chaos and misery that the two world wars brought to Iran, and was disgusted to see how world powers crushed weak nations such as his and played with their destinies. He also saw how numerous religious and ethnic conflicts were destroying the unity of his people and their chances to build a prosperous and strong nation. His careful observations as well as his in-depth study of the history of his country convinced him that a vast stockpile of deep-rooted irrational beliefs and practices, especially pseudo-religious beliefs and traditions, were at the basis of his people's backwardness and destitution. Such beliefs prevented them from embracing new ideas. He also discovered the existence of certain special-interest cliques within political and cultural establishments who had a vested interest in perpetuating the status quo and rushed to suppress anyone or any movement that dared to challenge their powers and privileges.

Kasravī thought that since all these factors contributing to the backwardness and miseries of his country were interrelated, an open

all-out war against them, as well as the introduction of a proper and comprehensive alternative, were necessary to revitalize the nation. He did not subscribe to the economistic view that all social problems emanate from poverty and thus economic reform will solve them. From his perspective, if the old fallacies continued to grip the minds and lives of people, Iranians would not be able to advance and create a democratic, developed and prosperous country.¹ Thus, a new assessment of Iranian life and culture in all of its aspects --religious, literary, political and social-- would be necessary in order to fight the destructive effects of the erroneous beliefs and ideologies of the past on the present life of the nation. Otherwise, people would not open their eyes to the new realities and show no real interest in the socio-political affairs of their country. The establishment of a democratic and progressive society in Iran, therefore, remains an unfulfilled dream. He wrote:

What is Constitutionalism? Constitutionalism means that when twenty or thirty million people live in a country, they see it as their own home and are ready to do their utmost effort and self-sacrifice to keep it safe and prosperous. Where is the compatibility between such a thing and Sufism, Shi'ism, Khārabātism, or materialism!? How can you reconcile these two facts that, on the one hand, you advise people to show interest in the affairs of their country, and show their utmost effort and self-sacrifice for its preservation and prosperity, and rid themselves of tyrants and live freely, and on the other hand, mullas order, "We should wait for appearance of the Hidden Imam, and unless he emerges, all efforts (to achieve a just society) are useless, and injustice will grow day after day." Or, the Sufis teach that "One should give up the world and be content with a piece of bread, even if it is won by begging, and get in a secluded corner to purify one's soul." Or, *Khārabāti* fabricates a philosophy, "The world is meaningless and void, that one should care about neither the past nor the future, and, instead, should take advantage of the moment and live a life of boozing and lust.

How can people whose minds are filled with such faulty teachings conduct a democratic life? Strangely enough, according to the basic doctrine of the official faith (Shi'ism) in Iran, the right to govern belongs to the Hidden Imam and, since he is in occultation, the 'ulama' are his successors.

Accordingly, people should obey them and pay them *khums* (an Islamic tax equal to one-fifth of a person's income) and *zakat*, (alms tax in Islamic law) which are substitutes for taxes, and regard these governments, which are made up of ministers, as *jā'ir* (oppressor) and *ghāsib* (usurper) and, as long as possible, disobey them ²

Kasravī often referred to the fact that more than forty years after the Constitutional Revolution, the great majority of people did not yet know the true meaning of constitutionalism (or democracy). He argues that, besides fighting obstacles to the establishment of a true constitutional state in Iran, knowledgeable and progressive forces in society should continuously educate people in the principles of such a political system, so that they may see its merits and take interest in it. Only such an education can make people worthy of democratic life to the extent that they will defend it whenever it is threatened by anti-democratic forces. To materialize this hypothesis, Kasravī established his own party of *Āzādigān* to educate people. At one point, he compared his party with other political parties of the time:

The interest some people take in (their) country and nation is limited to setting up a party, gathering some force, and having a hand in the affairs of the country. They never care about redeeming people from false beliefs and other corruptions, or taking the country out of this weakness. The difference between us and them is that they want people to remain as they are, so that they may take the lead and march them behind and subordinate to the great British, Russian, and American nations. We, however, try to save our people from corruption and weakness, elevate their competence, so that not only can they go together with other nations as equals, but also can run their lives themselves.³

To keep the memory of the true heroes of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911 alive and give the coming generations an opportunity to learn from their experiences, Kasravī undertook to write the history of that democratic revolution. As a result, he wrote and published two large books entitled, *Tārīkh-i Mashrūṭih-yi Īrān* ⁴ and *Tārīkh-i Hījdah Sālīh-yi Āzarbāijān*.⁵ He also wrote a book in praise of the principles of democracy entitled, *Mashrūṭih*

***Bihtarīn Shaki va Ākharīn Natījih-yi Andīshih-hāyi nīzhād-i Ādamī Ast.*⁶**

Regarding the religious diversity of the country, a major criticism from Kasravī was that Iran's numerous contending religious groups, each with a different and divergent set of goals and aspirations, divided people and destroyed their chances to achieve a strong national unity as the foundation for rebuilding and developing their impoverished homeland. He believed that a true religion, unlike religions of Iran, should bring people together and create an atmosphere of cooperation and harmony. He often reminded his readership that Iran, with its fourteen religions and sects, looked more like an assemblage of fourteen countries with fourteen nations and fourteen sets of goals, than it resembled a united country.⁷

Kasravī maintained that there was also a need for a continuous campaign of criticism against the existing pseudo-religions in order to convince people to cast them aside and to embrace a new understanding of religion which was compatible with new realities of the world and which could unite them with its rational teachings. With a strong sense of mission, he began to develop such a religious ideology, which was later known as *pākdīnī* (pure religion). Abrahamian, however, argues that, compared to national unity, religion was not a chief concern of Kasravī:

Although most of these descriptions contain an element of the truth, none defines the essence of Kasravī. For his chief concern was neither religion nor irreligion, neither democracy nor overthrow of the establishment, but, far more important to him, the transformation of unintegrated traditional Iran into what he hoped would be an integrated modern Iran.⁸

Although it is true that the integration of Iran was at the top of Kasravī's list of priorities, and one can find ample proof for that evaluation in his writings, it is not accurate to assume that he was far less concerned with religion. In his writings one can find as much, if not more, evidence for his religious concerns as for his desire for national integration of his people. Secondly, Kasravī's religious sense of mission is apparent not only in his works, but also in the

professional and political aspirations of his life, as shall be outlined throughout this thesis. In his juridical and political vocations, as in his career as a journalist, one can trace the spiritual convictions that suffuse a seemingly humanist agenda. Thirdly, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to draw a clear-cut line between the religious consciousness of a person and his social convictions, especially when his words on social matters are so rich with religious nuances. In fact, it is not necessarily a contradiction for a person who is inwardly occupied with religious thoughts to show great concern for the unity and welfare of his people. Such concern can be, at least partly, due to his religious conviction, especially in the case of a person such as Kasravī who did not view religious and social life as two separable spheres as well as argued that living in a rational manner in unity and harmony with others was one of the definitions of a true religion.

Kasravī was a humanist who cared very much about human destiny, and was troubled by the deploring condition of the world in his time. He took it as a sign that human civilization had come to a dead-end and needed a new religious movement to lead it out of the impasse, and show people a new way to salvation. Unlike many among of his contemporary intellectuals, he did not believe that science could provide a solution for all the basic problems of the world. The fact that the world had come to such a standstill at a time when universities were counted by thousands and scientists by millions convinced him that the answer to the fundamental problems of humanity lay with religion, not science.

We went ahead in the name of religion while its name had been disgraced and a great many educated and prominent people had turned their back on it and openly disdained it. Some of them approached us and said, "Are you still talking about religion?" Or they said, "It is not a good idea even if you do so as a political tactic or gesture." Few believed that we were really standing up for religion.⁹

A careful study of Kasravī's works points to the fact that he thought of himself as the initiator of a movement that eventually

could lead humanity out of its dire situation. The following passages from his book *Dādghāh* clearly shows this:

Our efforts are not limited to Iran. We want to redeem the world, and lead the people of the world out of the impasse, in which they are so desperately entrapped, to a straight and shining high-road [of life].¹⁰

An examination of the important factors that affected the formation of Kasravī's religious consciousness in every stage of his life, provides a greater insight into his religious ideology. The formative impression of these factors is outlined in the following sketch:

I. Family background

Aḥmad Kasravī was born on September 29, 1890, in the Hukmāvār district of Tabriz¹¹. He belonged to a very traditional and religious family which had produced Shi'i clergy for at least three generations. His grandfather, Mīr Aḥmad, was a very respected 'ālim who founded a mosque and a court of Islamic law in Hukmāvār¹². The people of Hukmāvār and the neighbouring district of Qarā Malik regarded him as their spiritual leader. Upon the death of Mīr Aḥmad, his eldest son, Mīr Muhammad Ḥusain, took charge of his father's mosque and court. Later on, to complete his religious studies, he went to the city of Najaf. Having completed his studies, he set out to return to Tabriz, but died suddenly. His younger brother, Mīr Qāsim (Kasravī's father), however, had preferred to take up a business in the bazaar of Tabriz rather than to become a mulla. Mīr Qāsim, however, wished to have a son who would one day take charge of the family's ancestral mosque and court of law. Mīr Qāsim's first three sons, all of whom he named after his father, Mīr Aḥmad, died soon after birth. The fourth, Mīr Aḥmad (Kasravī), survived. Seeing in him the future 'ālim of the family, Kasravī's parents and relatives, especially his aunts, paid great attention to his upbringing and education. As Kasravī mentioned in his autobiography, they did not allow him to go out and intermingle with other children. His mother went so far as to

forbid him to play even at home.¹³ Thus Kasravī grew up in an atmosphere of high expectation and strict discipline. From a purely psychological point of view, the great sense of mission which suffused Kasravī's life in his later years and caused him to launch his radical socio-political and spiritual movement was probably derived from the way he was brought up in his childhood. The qualities that made him a steadfast critic of the degenerative morals, values, and conventions of his society—perseverance, dedication, strong sense of morality and high self-esteem in his personal life—all find their roots in these formative years of his life.

II. Paternal influence

The autobiography of Kasravī leaves no doubt that his father's (Mīr Qāsim) influence on him was one of the most significant factors in shaping his character. There, he describes his father as a pious and benevolent Muslim who cared very much for his poor and downtrodden fellow citizens. He was regarded as the wise man of the district to whom people brought their grievances and disputes, seeking his opinion or arbitration.

Although Mīr Qāsim was a pious Shi'i believer with a high opinion of the religious leadership exercised by Shi'i *mujtahids* (high-ranking Shi'i jurists), he did not refrain from criticizing those Shi'i beliefs and practices which he thought to be irrational and harmful to the peace and welfare of the society. He did not approve, for example, the over-enthusiasm of the Shi'is for pilgrimages to the holy cities of Iran and Iraq.¹⁴ Noticing that many families, especially of peasants had been drawn into poverty by spending all their savings on such pilgrimages¹⁵, he argued that God would be better pleased if people spent their savings on the welfare and education of their children, or on helping their poor and needy neighbours.

Mīr Qāsim used the same logic to criticize another Shi'i practice, namely '*rauḡah khvān*'¹⁶ He also despised the fact that, for the great majority of mullas, preaching religious values had turned into a profit-making business, from which they earned their livelihood. In his view, a man of religion should strive to raise the religious and social

awareness of people and never refrain from telling them the truth. He thought that the mullas' dependence on people's generosity for their livelihood would corrupt them in their mission. Mīr Qāsim believed that, since money rather than piety, had become the main objective of so many mullas, they would tend to preach what people would like to hear and not what they needed to hear. Thus, instead of preaching true religious values, mullas would become advocates of popular superstitious beliefs.¹⁷ Kasravī always remembered his dying father's last advice to him:

My son, Mīr Ahmad, should study. There must be always an 'alim in our family, but he should not eat the bread won by *mullāyī* (priesthood). The bread of *mullāyī* is the bread of polytheism.¹⁸

What Mīr Qāsim despised most, however, was the religious conflict among different Islamic denominations which turned the society into a number of contentious groups and caused much suffering and bloodshed. At the time, Azarbaijan was a centre of such conflicts. The followers of the Shi'i sects of Mutasharri', Shaikhī and Karīmkhānī¹⁹ were always at odds with each other and occasionally, engaged in violent clashes in the streets of Tabriz and other cities. Furthermore, at times Sunni Kurdish tribesmen, enraged by some anti-Sunni rituals of Shi'is, attacked the Shi'i villages and towns, and brought havoc on their inhabitants. In his autobiography, Kasravī gave an account of his childhood memories of these sad events in his home province:

At the time of Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh (1848-1896), Shaikh 'Uбайдallah (d. 1883), the Kurd, took up arms and attacked the cities of Sāvujbūlagh, Mīyānduāb and Īrūmī. The Kurds stopped at nothing in villages and rural districts. They had cut women's breasts, and I remember, at the time when I was seven or eight years old, miserable women who came to doors (for begging) and showed their breast-cut chests. It was this story that my father used to mention and say that it had been a result of Shi'is ugly (hate-provoking) deeds.²⁰

Despite being a Mutasharri', Kasravī's father never took part in such conflicts, and always showed respect for the followers of the other sects. Even some of his closest friends were Shaikhī. Kasravī loved his father and was proud of the fact that people from different and even contending denominations respected him for his wisdom. Kasravī's love and respect for his father made him more receptive to his influence.²¹ One can easily surmise that Kasravī's social and religious consciousness originated in his father's socio-religious convictions and conduct. As Staley writes,

If the sweeping cultural and political movements that were rampant in Iran during Kasravī's youth left their everlasting marks on him, so too did the fabric of the traditional society in which he grew up, certain childhood events, his relationship with his family and friends, and especially with his father who clearly planted ideas and ideals in Kasravī's mind which were to remain guiding principles throughout his entire life.²²

III. Educational background

Another important factor in shaping Kasravī's character and his future religious views was his religiously-oriented education in the traditional school system of the period. He started his education at a *maktab* in his own neighbourhood.²³ According to Kasravī, this was the worst *maktab* in the whole city of Tabriz because the people of Hukmāvār did not care much about the education of their children. In this *maktab* he studied Arabic, Qur'ān and a few Persian books of literature and history.²⁴

Kasravī was thirteen years old when his father died. He did not go to school for the next three years. Instead, he worked hard, under the supervision of Āqā Mīr Muḥsin, his father's brother-in-law and closest friend, to keep their small family-owned carpet-weaving factory running. Mīr Muḥsin, who rendered support to Kasravī's family during these difficult years, always encouraged him to resume his studies in a religious school in order to become a mulla. Despite his dislike of *mullāyī*, Kasravī finally acquiesced to Mīr Muḥsin's

insistence and went to a school called Sādiqīyyih. A few months later he went to another school named Tālibīyyih, which was the biggest and most prestigious religious school in Tabriz. Besides studying the Qur'ān and Shi'i doctrines, Kasravī greatly improved his knowledge of the Arabic language in this school. However, due to the outbreak of conflict between the Constitutionalist revolutionaries and the allied forces of Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh²⁵ and Anjuman-i Islāmiyyih (the Islamic Society) of Tabriz,²⁶ his studies were periodically disrupted. During this period, Kasravī grew familiar with the basic tenets of Constitutionalism and democracy, and accepted them whole-heartedly. However, since his relatives and whole neighbourhood opposed the Constitutionalists, he could not express his sympathy with these revolutionaries and had to keep it a secret. The conflict finally ended with the victory of the Constitutionalist forces, and order was restored in Tabriz. Then, for more than two years, Kasravī attended the courses of *fiqh* and *uṣūl* (jurisprudence and its principles) offered by Shaikh Ḥusain Tūtūnchīzādih, who had been a pupil of a Shi'i scholar of Najaf, Shaikh Hādī Tihrānī. After successful completion of these studies, Kasravī, now twenty years old, attained the title of 'mulla.' It did not take long, however, for Kasravī to find his moral convictions and religious sensibilities in conflict with the mullas' hypocritical code of conduct.

IV. An unwilling mulla

Despite becoming a mulla, Kasravī shirked going to the mosque and preaching; but the pressure to do so imposed by his family, relatives, people of neighbourhood and, especially, by Āqā Mīr Muḥsin, was so great that once more he acted against his own wishes. In his autobiography he wrote:

One of those days after my recovery from typhus, some people had gathered in the outer courtyard and, since it was the first day of Ramazān, wanted to take me to my grandfather's mosque so that I would perform prayers and preach from the pulpit. I did not wish to do so, and I found it very burdensome. However, since I knew that it had been arranged by Ḥājī Mīr Muḥsin Āqā. I was forced to accept, and I

gave a sermon. Then Muharram came, and again I had to climb the pulpit. In short, by force and pressure, they had turned me into a mulla. But I was in great distress. Besides that, I became very ashamed and sometimes I would reflect and say to myself: What benefit will this work have for me or for the people? What are the other mullas [good for] that I should be one? I considered it a duty to myself to think about another kind of work.²⁷

During his short period of *mullāyī*, Kasravī who had found the mullas' code of conduct full of hypocrisy and imposture, and the Shi'i clerical milieu backward and corrupt, behaved very unconventionally and challenged the existing norms of his school. Unlike other mullas, he grew no beard, wore glasses, machine-made socks and a small turban, and sent his two brothers to a newly-opened secular school.²⁸ In his sermons, he never made people cry for the centuries-old events of Karbalā or any other tragic event in the history of Shi'ism. Instead he always preached moral values, tried to raise the social awareness of his audience, and reminded them of their responsibilities vis-à-vis their families, their fellow citizens and their country. Furthermore, he routinely interrupted and criticized the sermon of any mulla who promoted superstitious beliefs or advocated religious intolerance by distorting historical and religious facts. His frank and unconventional manner soon disappointed his audience who were so much habituated to the old ways and, as a result, the number of those attending his sermons rapidly dropped. He subsequently conducted only that part of his duties as a mulla that he liked, namely marriage sermons. During this period, he also used his increased leisure time to memorize the Qur'ān, a process which gave the first jolt to his religious convictions. He wrote:

It was not difficult to memorize the Qur'ān, but, in order not to forget them, I had to know the meaning of the verses and their interconnections very well. This made me spend some time finding out the meaning of the Qur'ān, the meaning conveyed by its own verses. My process of finding out the meaning [of the Qur'ān] has its own story, and it caused the first shake up in my convictions and beliefs.²⁹

In his autobiography, Kasravī did not explain the nature of this "shake up" or challenge to his convictions and beliefs. Staley, however, assumes that it "means that he found flaws in its reasoning." ³⁰

V. The Constitutional Revolution

The Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911 was the greatest social event in Kasravī's period. Staley measures the impact of this revolution on young Kasravī's character and soul with these words:

Kasravī was a product of the Constitutional Movement in Iran; his world was a dynamic one which tended to spur on his developing capacities and to incite his intellectual and crusading drives...³¹

In the fall of 1911, Tsarist Russia which had expansionist designs on Iran, especially on the northern provinces of Azarbaijan and Gilan, and wished to crush the constitutionalist revolutionaries of Iran (in close contact with Russia's own revolutionaries in the Caucasian region), sent its army to the city of Tabriz. The Constitutionalist freedom-fighters resisted this powerful army and initially defeated it, but were eventually forced to retreat from the city. The Russians occupied Tabriz and during their occupation of the city committed great atrocities and executed many Constitutionalists in the most brutal manner. Kasravī, on the one hand, took pride in the patriotism and fortitude of the revolutionaries who defied the enemy even in the face of death at gallows. On the other hand, he was disgusted at the fact that most mullas of the city and their followers used the opportunity to take revenge on Constitutionalist revolutionaries by cooperating with the Russian army in arresting, torturing and killing them. From what Kasravī recorded about this period of his life, one can surmise that the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911 was the single most important factor in shaping his political conscience and convictions. Staley suggests that the strong contempt Kasravī showed towards the clergy through the rest of his life was partly due to the active participation of the Shi'i clergy of Tabriz in the brutal

suppression of the Constitutionalist revolutionaries and their ideals of legal government, freedom and democracy, to which the young Kasravī had ascribed so wholeheartedly.³² Kasravī encouraged people of his neighbourhood to support the Constitutionalists' resistance against the Russian army, and thus became a target for the vengeance of the mullas, some of whom called him irreligious and incited their followers to hurt him. Despite the strain of living under constant threat, Kasravī remembered fondly one outcome of his new situation. In his words

I have not forgotten and I will not forget the bitterness of those days. But, among all these misfortunes there was one thing good, that due to these events, people got disappointed in me and left me alone. Thus, the yoke of *mullayī* was taken off my neck.³³

For the next two years Kasravī kept a low profile in public but joined a number of Constitutionalists in a semi-secret and loosely organized kind of discussion group. They met regularly and discussed the socio-political issues of concern, or read books and journals. More important, however, was his commencement of a serious and thorough investigation of the history of Iran. His knowledge of Arabic proved to be very helpful in gaining access to some unique resources on the history of Iran. Kasravī's study of history, combined with his experience of the Constitutional Revolution, bore fruit years later, when he wrote a number of great history books and shed light on some of the least known and most ambiguous parts of the history of Iran. He further established his position as one of the greatest contemporary historians of Iran by writing the history of the Constitutional Revolution, which is recognized by most scholars as the most reliable work of its kind. V. Minorsky, for example, once wrote: "Kasravī possessed the spirit of a true historian. He was accurate in detail and clear in presentation."³⁴ Jalāl Āl-i Ahmād, the famous Iranian author and political activist, went so far as to assert that "*His History of the Constitutional Revolution* alone is worth more than the whole literary, historical, and academic research [of others] in that twenty-year period."³⁵ Kasravī's in-depth study of the history of

Iran played an important role in shaping his convictions about the past and present religions and religious sects of Iran. It also helped him to elaborate his definition of a true religion as opposed to a pseudo-religion, and how the former degenerates into the latter. In his writings, including those on religion, he usually referred to historical events and facts in order to clarify or support his arguments.

One of the few times in [the history of] the world when reason overcame illusion and ignorance was in the early centuries of Islam among Muslims and Iranians. How do people expect to understand the status of Iranians in those days and the extent of their advancement and elevation in wisdom, knowledge and prestige, if they do not research in history? ...Here I must explain a fact from the history of Iran so that our readers understand on what a fire Batinism and Sufism have set Iran.³⁶
[Emphasis added]

VI. Political affiliations

In the summer of 1916, Kasravī went to Tiflis, the capital of Georgia, where he found the people friendly and the political atmosphere vigorous and interesting. Soon he found friends from among the freedom-loving revolutionaries of Caucasus and attended their meetings regularly. He was astonished by the strong sense of unity and cooperation that he saw among Russian, Georgian, and Muslim revolutionaries and the extent of their self-sacrifices for liberation of their people from the yoke of Tsarism. Soon after his return to Tabriz, he thus wrote about his experience:

The truth was that the forty-five days in Tiflis and those selfless efforts of the Russian, Georgian, and Muslim freedom-lovers there had shaken me badly.³⁷

In 1917, for the first time, Kasravī joined a political party. After the overthrow of Tsarism in Russia, and subsequent evacuation of Azarbaijan by Russian forces two rival political parties, namely Hizb-i Dimukrāt (the Democrat Party) and Dimukrāt-i Qānūnī (the Lawful

Democrats) were created. The former, which had been established by Shaikh Muhammad Khīyābānī, a prominent figure among Constitutionalists, eventually grew so powerful that, for a while, it controlled Azarbaijan and prevented the establishment of the central government's authority in that province. Kasravī was not affiliated with either of these parties and, despite his friendship with Khīyābānī, remained impartial in their rivalry. Later, he joined a group of Constitutionalists who had decided to mediate between the leaders of the two parties in order to put an end to their conflicts. As a result of their mediation, it was decided that both parties should be dissolved and, out of their joined forces, a new party with a new leadership committee be created. This was done, and, by the force of circumstances, Kasravī joined the Democrat Party. Despite his great respect for Khīyābānī, Kasravī grew impatient with his autocratic attitude and, eventually, became the most outspoken critic of the undemocratic decision-making of the party's leadership. Finally, the relationship between Khīyābānī and the critics of the leadership within the Democrat party, including Kasravī, turned so sour that it led to the creation of a minority faction by Kasravī and his friends in the Party, who were known as Tanqīdīyūn (the Critics). At last, when Khīyābānī ordered the arrest and imprisonment of his opponents and critics, Kasravī and many others escaped to other cities. Prior to Kasravī's departure, Major Edmond, the head of the British political Bureau, met him and asked if he could organize the opposition to Khīyābānī and overthrow him with full military and financial support of the central government. His answer was clear, he neither could nor wished to do so. Kasravī, then went to Tehran. There, a group of his fellow democrats and others had come together to organize some activities against Khīyābānī. He did not join them, because he did not want to be involved in any conspiracy against Khīyābānī, whom he still respected. Furthermore, he despised joining such a group of people, among whom were a number of infamous former anti-constitutionalists. Years later, Kasravī used his experiences with the Democrat Party to establish his own party and launched his *Pākdīnī* movement.

In 1941, the presence of the foreign forces in Iran and abdication of Rīzā Shāh threw the country into chaos but, after so many years of dictatorship, also made possible the formation of political parties. In late 1941 or early 1942, Kasravī formed an organization known as 'Bāhamād-i Āzādigān' (the Party of Freeman), which soon had branches in all the major cities. The official organ of the Party was the daily *Parcham* (banner, or flag) in which all aspects of Iranian culture and society were carefully scrutinized; traditions, social conventions, and those moral values which were thought to be outdated and rotten, and, as such, obstacles to social peace, democracy, welfare, unity and progress, were ruthlessly criticized. Kasravī's criticism of the status quo and the alternatives he offered in his writings won not only many active supporters for his cause, but also a large readership for *Parcham* and other party publications. Obviously these writings also earned many bitter enemies for him and his party among the custodians of the old ways of life, especially within the religious establishment, literary circles, and the political elite, who felt their positions and interests threatened by this new challenge, and did their best to silence this voice of dissent. Towards the end of 1942, the government temporarily revoked all newspaper licences, including that of *Parcham*. In March 1943, Kasravī published a fortnightly edition of *Parcham* which was banned six months later. A weekly edition which started in March 1943 met the same fate in less than two months. Still, a year later, a monthly journal was launched, with each issue carrying the name of its respective month as its title.³⁸

VII. Judgeship and the rule of law

Soon after his arrival at Tehran Kasravī was invited by the Ministry of Justice to accept a position in the Court of Appeal of Tabriz. Despite initial hesitation, eventually, he accepted this offer. He explained the reason for his earlier hesitation and final acceptance of the offer in these words:

It is correct that in 1919, I was in the Department of Justice in Tabriz for more than six months, but since at that time I was occupied with controversies in the

Party, I spent little time there. The fact is, the Department of Justice was so infamous and most of its judges were so unworthy and corrupt that I found it disgraceful to be among them. Therefore, when I came to Tehran, I did not go to the Ministry of Justice. Instead, I asked for and got a job with the Ministry of Education.

However, during my five months stay in Tehran, I had come up with new thoughts about that matter. I told myself: Judgeship is a worthy occupation which has a lot to do with wisdom, knowledge and virtue, [and] the social life necessitates such a profession. Why should I run away from it? Isn't it better if I work in the Department of Justice and, to the best of my ability, demonstrate decency and integrity and, if possible, join hands with good and righteous judges and initiate a group for fighting with the rest? I told myself: At least, I can try to be myself an example of honesty and integrity.³⁹

For the next ten years, Kasravī worked with the Ministry of Justice in different parts of the country, including Damāvand, Zanjān, Māzandarān, Qazvīn, Khūzistān and Tehran. During this period, he proved to be a decisive, insightful, incorruptible and compassionate judge. It should be noted that, at this time the notion of secular courts of justice was a novelty in Iran, and in many parts of the country such courts did not exist at all. Thus, no matter where Kasravī was sent on duty, to succeed in establishing the authority and rule of law, he always had to initially fight against the interference of mullas and feudals in the affairs of the court of justice. Kasravī was also annoyed by the widespread corruption that he saw within the judicial system. In fact, the strength of his religious and moral convictions were put to test in such an extremely corrupt environment. When Dāvar, the Minister of Justice, sent a message to Kasravī asking him to change his verdict regarding a certain case, in which the Minister had special interest, Kasravī said:

Tell the Minister that I have never rescinded my judgment because of anybody's request, especially since, at the opening day of the Department of Justice, you yourself put the Qur'ān in front of us and we took an oath and swore to God that we would never turn a blind eye to law and justice. So, was it all just a plaything?, How do you expect me to reverse my verdict?⁴⁰

Still, the best example of Kasravī's unshakeable commitment to implement justice and the rule of law was his ruling against the Royal Court of Rizā Shāh in its land dispute with a group of farmers from the village of Ivīn in northern skirts of Tehran. Two days later Taymūrtāsh, the Minister of the Imperial Court, called him to his office. To quote Kasravī's encounter with the Minister:

As I entered, Taymūrtāsh asked angrily: "Why do you attack us, Sir!?" I said: "If Your Excellency has the case of Ivīn in mind, it is better if I explain." He said: "Do so please." I said: "A judge is free in his decisions." He interrupted me and said: "A judge is free in his decisions!? A judge is a servant of the Government." I answered: "A judge is not a servant of the government. The judiciary is an independent power." He said: "These are the words of the Democrats." I responded: "These are words of law. A judge cannot be a judge unless he is free [in his decisions]."⁴¹

From then on, Kasravī found it more difficult than ever to work in the Ministry of Justice. He finally left the Ministry of Justice and started to work as a private lawyer.

One can even find religious nuances in Kasravī's attitude toward his duties as a judge. In his biography, he writes: "These eighteen months [in the Courts of First Instance] were days when my soul was in a state of extreme restlessness and I was very uneasy. For instance, I did not get tired of working. I enjoyed fighting injustice and evil very much."⁴²

VIII. A humanist mission, a spiritual vision

From his writings, it is clear that in the early 1930s Kasravī underwent an intense spiritual experience which shook his soul and left a deep impression on his views and attitudes. Although he does not explain this experience, he refers to it in a number of his writings, including *Zindigānī-yi Man* and *Pursish va Pāsukh*. This experience proved to be a turning point in his life. From then on Kasravī dedicated his time and energy to disseminating his socio-

political and religious views in order to fight the ailments afflicting Iranian society and culture. In the words of Staley: "He subjected practically every element of Persian life to penetrating scrutiny, and it was this pursuit that turned him into the controversial figure he became."⁴³ Kasravī's concerns soon grew to embrace the whole humanity and made him a great advocate of the humanist approaches to the problems of the world. The first fruit of the spiritual experience Kasravī went through was a two-volume book entitled, *Ā'in*. Besides his case against materialism, irresponsible handling of technology, and the war mentality of the Western countries, the other main agenda of the book was his criticism of the Eastern nations, including Iranians, for their fascination with Western values, ways of life and technology, at a time when the Western countries, having recently recovered from World War I, were preparing their armies for another bloodbath. In this book, Kasravī's contention is that technology alone cannot lead to a better world, and that not only Iranians but all nations need a new spiritual movement which can appeal to human reason, open a new way of life, and create a peaceful and humane environment. Later Kasravī developed and discussed these ideas in his numerous books. Jazayeri is right in observing that "the germ of virtually all the ideas he was to develop later can be seen in this [book] and the second volume, but the theme is *Orupayigari* ('Europeanization')."⁴⁴

An interesting feature of this book is its simple yet eloquent language, which at times calls to mind the wording of the old sacred scriptures. The religious spirit that manifests itself in the book's mode of expression makes it possible for the reader to feel the sense of mission that must have pervaded the soul of its author. This sense of vocation reveals itself clearly in the opening of the second volume of the book, which reads:

In the Pure Name of the Creator

O lord, I begin in your name and I need your help.
 Lighten the hardships of this path for me and help
 me overcome them. People's hearts are in your
 hand. Summon those who are virtuous to my
 assistance and those who are pure-hearted to my
 support. Open ears and hearts to my words.
 O lord, what a dark time!, what a troubled world!

Some have abandoned the way of salvation and are entrapped in the desert of aberration; yet, instead of saving themselves, they wish others entrapped too. ...People of the world have cast aside peace and freedom and of their own accord are rushing towards the trap. Alas! such a corruption; Alas! such a loss.⁴⁵

After *Ā'īn*, Kasravī not only wrote many other books, but also became a prolific journalist. In his informative introduction to the English translation of two books of Kasravī, namely *Dar Pīrām ūn-i Islam* and *Shī'īgarī*, Jazayeri gives an account of the journalistic activities of Kasravī, which began in 1933 with publication of a monthly journal called *Paimān* (Covenant, or Pledge). This journal, published for almost nine years, was "Kasravī's major vehicle for developing and disseminating his ideas."⁴⁶

IX. The vengeance of the clergy

The Cold War that, according to most historians, started even before the end of the World War II, greatly affected the policy-making approach of the Iranian state, which was always apprehensive of its powerful Soviet neighbour's designs on Iran. This apprehension affected not only foreign policy of the Iranian government but also its domestic policies. Anxious to diminish the influence of communism in Iran, the government began to reinforce the religious establishment, a policy that was destined to bring down the secular state some thirty years later as a result of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The Shi'i clergy, which had been weakened and isolated during the reign of Rīzā Shāh, were now given incentive to increase their activities and expand their sphere of influence, despite the fact that many among them regarded any kind of secular government as illegitimate and discouraged people from cooperating with it.⁴⁷ The government, however, went so far as inviting to Iran a number of prominent Shi'i *mujtahids* who resided in Najaf. Interference by the clergy in the social and political affairs grew rapidly, and Kasravī's persistent criticism of Shi'ism and the Shi'i clergy elicited attacks on him and his

party. Instigated by the clergy, the fanatic mob repeatedly attacked the party's offices and its members. The government usually turned a blind eye to these acts of violence and, at times, even encouraged them. As Jazayeri comments:

The bolder and more open they [supporters of Kasravī] became, the more violent and persistent became the opposition. But they stood their ground on all fronts: against the religious and educational establishments, against the government, and against personal and institutional attacks. They were subjected to mobbing, knifing, imprisonment, dismissal from government jobs, denials of promotions. They were attacked in the parliament and on the government-run Radio Tehran... Numerous anti-Kasravi complaints, some bearing hundreds of signatures, were instigated by the Shi'ite clergy. These complaints took the form of telegrams to newspapers and government authorities, or of widely circulated communiques. Appeals were made to the Shah. Some newspapers published hostile articles.⁴⁸

Finally, the religious establishment resorted to murder in order to silence Kasravī. 'Alī Davānī recalls that once in a meeting, Shaikh Muḥammad Āqā Tihirānī, a prominent clergyman, openly suggested that Kasravī be eliminated.⁴⁹ Quoting Shaikh Muḥammad Rizā Nīknām, a member of Fidā'iyyān-i Islām, he wrote that once a number of *mujtahids* gathered in the house of Āyatullāh 'Allāmiḥ Amīnī in Najaf to decide what to do with Kasravī, and that at the end of their consultations concluded that he was a heretic whose blood should be shed.⁵⁰

Sayyid Muḥtabā Mīr Lauḥī, a young mulla and student of theology, better known as Navvāb Ṣafavī, volunteered to kill Kasravī. He left Najaf and came to Tehran, where he was provided with money and a gun. Navvāb Ṣafavī then formed a small group of young Shi'i fanatics, known as Fidā'iyyān-i Islām, and began preparing a plan for the assassination. On April 29, 1945, he made an attempt on Kasravī's life in one of the busy streets of Tehran. Kasravī was seriously wounded by two gun shots and multiple knife wounds, but survived, and soon after recovering steadfastly resumed his activities. His

enemies, on the other hand, were busy hatching a new assassination plot. In the second attempt on his life, less than a year after the first, Kasravī and his secretary were killed. In Jazayeri's words:

Finally, at the instigation of the Speaker of the Parliament, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Justice, Kasravi was charged in court with "slander of Islam," a legal offence under a law never before enforced. On March 11, 1946, during the last session of the preliminary hearing on these charges in the Palace of Justice in Tehran, he was assassinated in court. The assassination was the first by the Fedaiyan-e Islam ("Devotees of Islam"). Mohammad Taqi Haddadpur, a young party member and employee of the party's secretariat, who was accompanying Kasravi, was also killed...

The assassins, who, after the assassination, had left the scene, reportedly loudly declaring what they had done, were later tried. The results were announced on November 2, 1946: Two men were sentenced to three-year prison terms, as the actual assassins; another five, as the accomplices, to seven months and fifteen days (time already spent in jail awaiting trial). The two men appealed; an extensive campaign was launched by Navvāb Ṣafavī and Shī'ī clerics in Iran and Iraq in their behalf; and the appeals court acquitted them.⁵¹

It is also known that the Prime Minister Muḥsin Ṣadr, also known as Ṣadr ul-Ashrāf,⁵² and Āyatullāh Kāshānī, a grand *mujtahid* of the time, were involved in planning this murder. A year before his assassination, Kasravī referred to Ṣadr's animosity toward him and wrote:

To please mullas, Muḥsin Ṣadr sent the book *Shī'igarī*, which is full of truths, to the Public Prosecutor's Office (*dādsarā*) in order to give them a pretext for making a penal case against me. He did not stop at it and pushed for the book to be banned.⁵³

Thus the custodians of those conventions, beliefs and institutions which Kasravī had always criticized as outdated and rotten finally silenced his voice of dissent in the most brutal manner. What made them resort to such a vicious act was their perception of Kasravī's words and ideas as a threat to the foundation of their power.

Kasravī's assassination, however, did not mark the elimination of his ideas. By the time of his death he had written about seventy books of different lengths, as well as hundreds of articles, all of which remained as sources of inspiration for generations to come.

In this chapter we have examined the life experiences that breathed a genuine sense of religious vocation into Kasravī's soul and the factors that went into the make-up of his character. Kasravī, as explained, lived in a time when the world, despite man's great breakthroughs in science and technology, underwent one of the darkest and most troubled periods in its history. He was raised in a religious household in an atmosphere of discipline, study and high expectations, and was greatly influenced by the socio-religious convictions and conduct of his father, who was a critic of irrational beliefs and traditions. Kasravī's religious studies and his short experience of *mullāyī* convinced him of the incapacity of the existing religions to show people a way out of misery and moral crisis. Hence, he came to the conclusion that neither science nor traditional religions could lead man to salvation. The way to salvation lay rather in a new religious message which was compatible with reason and scientific knowledge. His extensive study of the history of Iran and its religions further strengthened this conviction. The Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911, which was the greatest event in shaping Kasravī's socio-political outlook, also brought to the surface his resentment of the country's conservative Shi'i establishment. His experience of the Constitutional Revolution, his participation in the Democrat Party and his years spent working as a judge reinforced his belief in the democratic way of life and the rule of law. Finally, he launched his campaign for radical socio-political and religious reform by establishing his *Āzādigān* Party and disseminating his ideas through its publications. The main concepts of Kasravī's religious thought, and the socio-intellectual climate and contexts in which he generated these concepts, will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 2

Kasravī's religious thought

In the last chapter we considered the factors affecting the development of Kasravī's religious thought. In this chapter Kasravī's theory of religion, its key doctrines and its significance are discussed.

I. Background

Kasravī's religious thought is comprised partly of features that find their origin in his traditional religious studies. Besides his great knowledge of Islam in its all branches and denominations, he was familiar with Judaism, Christianity and the old Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism. He wrote, however, most extensively on Islam, Shi'ism, Sufism, and Baha'ism. He started writing a book on Judaism and Christianity entitled *Mardum-i Yahūd* (The Jewish People), but due to his assassination it remained unfinished. Based on his writings it can be assumed that he was neither concerned nor very familiar with Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. In fact, his vision of a true religion is more in line with the so-called Abrahamic religions, especially Islam. He did not adhere to the pantheistic view of God which is characteristic of most Sufi orders and Eastern religions. He referred to the early Islam as a model of what a true religion supposed to resemble. Kasravī, quite in line with Islam, adhered to a strict monotheism and rejected all those religions that openly or tacitly accepted any being other than God as somehow participant in running the affairs of the world. In fact one of his main criticisms of Shi'ism in all its branches was the Shi'is' extreme exaggeration of their Imams' power and knowledge. The Shi'is had gone so far astray, he argued, that they saw the hands of their Imams, even a millenium after their deaths, at work in the affairs of the whole universe. This, in his view, was quite contrary to the early Islam, and a clear example of polytheism.¹

II. Kasravī's theory of religion

A review of Kasravī's books reveals that he was seriously preoccupied with the idea of developing a new theory of religion, especially in the last thirteen years of his life. In a number of his books, including *Shī'igarī* and *Mā Chih Mīkhvāhīm*, Kasravī argued that through the passage of time, all the great religions of the past, which had once enabled man to take great steps forward and to create better and more advanced civilizations, eventually lost their vitality and true essence. Established religions became so corrupted by the false beliefs and superstitions that people attached to them that they no longer served their original purposes. In other words, as a result of their degeneration from great movements for the elevation of the human spirit into dogmatic systems of belief, they lost touch with the realities of life and became obstacles to the further progress of human civilization.²

Moreover, by losing sight of their original purpose, each of these surviving religions have split into numerous branches and sects that are usually at odds with one other. Thus instead of uniting people and creating an atmosphere of cooperation and brotherhood, which must be a main concern of every religion, these religions divide people into contending groups and cause enmity and violence among them. This is therefore another sign of their outdatedness. Furthermore, the advancement of science has exposed great flaws in many doctrines and dogmas upheld by these religious systems. Despite their inability to produce any convincing answer to these flaws and problems, however, the adherents of these religions insist on their irrational dogmas and are incapable of adapting their religion to new developments in scientific knowledge.³ Thus when modern materialist ideologies emerged and used science as their main weapon to win the minds and hearts of people, these religions had little to say in response to challenging questions raised by materialists. Hence they lost much of their credibility.⁴

In almost all his books on the subject of religion, Kasravī explains his own particular definition of the word 'religion' at the outset so that his readership will not confuse his usage with the traditional and

popular understanding of that term. In his writings he suggests a number of definitions for religion, some of which are: "Religion is the language of nature."⁵, "Religion is the way of life."⁶, "Religion is knowing the meaning of life and living in accordance with the principles of reason."⁷, "Religion is the teacher of rational faculties."⁸ and "Religion is a tree whose root is human perception and its fruits, the salvation and contentment of the people of the world."⁹ What is common to all these definitions is that they represent religion as a phenomenon primarily concerned with this world and man's present life.

From the perspective of Kasravī, man's contemplation of the world and human existence eventually leads him to the discovery of some basic truths that underlie these realities. Thus man becomes aware of the existence of the Creator, the purposefulness of life, and the fact that all events and interactions in the world, including the events of human life, are subject to the laws that God has inscribed in the structure of nature and the universe. Such a knowledge provides the basis on which a true religion is built.¹⁰ In Kasravī's view, although belief in the existence of God, Survival of the human soul after death, and some sort of retribution in the other world for one's deeds in this life, are at the foundation of religion, they are not the proper focus of the religious discourse. This is so because there is no rational way for further investigation of these subjects.

A great many people think that religion must provide information about non-material and invisible things. It should decipher the sealed mysteries of the universe, and have answer to everybody's questions: How and when did the world come into existence?.. What is God and where is He?.. Why has God intertwined good and evil?.. Why has He created beasts of prey or poisonous creatures?.. These people do not know the meaning of religion. Religion is not for explaining non-material, intangible and incorporeal phenomena. It has not been, and it will not be, for decoding the sealed secrets of the world. Only God knows the unseen. Many secrets of the world, including the beginning of the creation, the end of the world, the essence of God, the side-by-side existence of good and evil, and so on, cannot be uncovered, and shall remain sealed. Those things to which the door to discovery is open

fall within the domain of science. These are matters of scientific concern, and sciences are supposed to come to certain conclusions about them through research and experiment.¹¹

Kasravī defines his notion of religion as 'the language of nature' because, besides being a result of man's thoughtful observation of nature, it is primarily concerned with human life and not with metaphysical notions. Furthermore, he emphasizes that religion is not an end in itself, but rather a means to salvation for the people of the world and a cure for their spiritual and social ailments. Religion is supposed to harmonize every aspect of human life and give people a strong sense of purpose in the world. In the case of the existing religions, however, people are expected to do their utmost sacrifices in service of a rotten system of beliefs, and to perform countless rituals that are either irrational and superstitious or emptied of their original meanings. Thus instead of delivering man from the problems of life, these so-called religions become burdens on his shoulders.¹²

Kasravī maintains that compatibility with *khirad* [For more discussion of *khirad* (reason, rational faculties) see p.53] is what distinguishes a true religion from a pseudo-religion. Furthermore, he argues that there is a mutually supportive relationship between religion and *khirad* --that the strengthening of one naturally results in the strengthening of the other. In other words, religion should be understood in the light of *khirad*, and *khirad*, should be fostered by religion.¹³ Jazayeri explains Kasravī's understanding of the relationship between religion and *khirad* in these words:

Kasravi believed that religion should be compatible with reason [*kherad*]. He never appealed to *iman*, i.e. "faith" as used in religious discussion. To those who asked why, if *kherad*, or reason, was effective, there was need for religion at all, he said religion is a teacher presenting the various truths to the people, but they use their *kherad* to judge what it presents to them. This is similar to the situation of students in a classroom. They need a teacher, but they use their own faculties to understand him.¹⁴

Besides compatibility with *khirad*, fighting with fallacies and corruptive ideologies of the time is another criterion of a true religion. All the great *barangikhigān* (prophets) of history had first to fight against the corrupt belief systems of their respective times in order to prepare the ground for the establishment of their new religions. For instance, Kasravī criticized Baha'ism as a pseudo-religion because, in his view, its founders did not fight the degenerated belief systems of their time which were Shi'ism, Shaikhism and Ṣufism, and instead made the foundation of their so-called religion an amalgamation of the irrational teachings of these sects.¹⁵

III. Key doctrines in Kasravī's religious thought

Some misunderstandings of Kasravī's religious ideas are due to the fact that in his writings a number of religious terms convey meanings that are different from the meanings of those terms in traditional religious discourse. In the following section, we examine and clarify the key doctrines of Kasravī's religious thought, which have often been overlooked by previous comentators.¹⁶

i. The existence of God:

If you see a footprint in a desert, you will know that a human being has passed from that place, and from the size of the footprint you will know if he has been a child or an adult. You may even find out if he has been running or walking, but you will never know whether that person has been a woman or a man, whether his language has been Persian or Arabic, or why he has passed from that place. It would be irrational of you to try to find out all these details from a footprint.¹⁷

This metaphorical example adduced by Kasravī sums up his view on man's potential for attaining knowledge of God. From his perspective, man's capacity to acquire such knowledge is very limited. In his numerous books and articles on the subject of religion, Kasravī advocates a natural approach to the understanding of the existence of God. This world of phenomena with its amazing order and design, he

argues, is what leads man to God and testifies to His omnipotence and omniscience. Thus, the existence of God, the Creator of the world, is the proper and rational conclusion of man's contemplation of the world. With this reasoning, Kasravī disputes the authenticity of claims by Sufis to an immediate and purely intuitive knowledge of God. These claims, he suggests, are either the figments of their imaginations or empty words of exaggeration, for which there is no rationally credible means of examination or verification. Furthermore, all the sensual, rational, and spiritual faculties of man are conditioned by the world around him and, accordingly, direct and intimate knowledge of God is not plausible. Man can perceive God only through contemplation of His creation, including man himself.¹⁸

In Kasravī's view, the order and design of the world proves that God Himself is rational and does not act capriciously. It also indicates that the creation of the world has been neither accidental nor purposeless. Man may never know God's purpose for the creation of the cosmos, but owing to his God-given *khirad* he may take up the challenge to learn evermore about the purpose of his own existence on Earth. In doing so, he can establish an increasingly stronger basis for his social and spiritual life. Furthermore, the order and design of creation, and the fact that the world, despite its infinite diversity, is a single interrelated system, attests to the Oneness of its Creator. Kasravī believes that every human being who uses his rational faculties properly will acknowledge the existence of God and His Oneness. However, for a wide range of reasons, including human arrogance, an impaired sense of judgment, and overreaction to the absurdities of existing religious systems, many people arrive at false conclusions and reject such simple truths.¹⁹ In *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān*, Kasravī points to the fact that not only a great number of scientists and thinkers of the modern period, but also some of the most sophisticated minds in the whole history of humankind --people such as Voltaire (1694-1778), schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Nietzsche (1844-1900)-- were advocates of atheism. Many of them, he suggests, were warm-hearted individuals whose yearning for the truth and concern for the destiny of humankind brought them into conflict with the outdated and degenerate religious belief systems of their time. However, in the heat

of battle with such obsolete religious systems, they let their rage blur their sense of judgment and blind their eyes to the very truth they were so eagerly seeking. They did not realize, Kasravī asserts, that divine truth was a gem lost in the swamp of corrupt religious systems and covered in the mud of distortion. Thus, instead of recovering the gem and reclaiming it from those obscene pseudo-religions, they just abandoned it and upheld another fallacious idea, namely atheism. Hence, despite their good intentions, they did not arrive at the truth.²⁰

Kasravī maintains that his arguments for the existence of God, despite being simple, are not only well-founded and sound, but also compatible with science and scientific method. He goes so far as to compare his own approach to that inquiry with the approach taken by Isaac Newton in his investigation of the force of gravity:

Our word on God and Isaac Newton's argument about the force of gravity are along the same line of reasoning. Seeing an apple falling from an apple tree made Newton contemplate [on its cause]. He noticed that it happened for no obvious reason, but his investigations led him to the discovery of a latent force that he called the force of gravity. In the same manner, we see the world and the ongoing interactions within it, and when we look for their causes, we discover the existence of a latent and invisible entity that we call God.²¹

In a number of his writings, Kasravī strongly opposes the arguments of the advocates of atheism, i.e. the followers of Arānī and the Tudeh Communist Party, who thought the progress of science would finally put an end to belief in God.²² He suggests, quite to the contrary, that further developments in science and human knowledge will provide man with better and more convincing reasons for his belief in the existence of God. From Kasravī's perspective, although the investigation of the world leads man to that truth, he cannot proceed beyond it and make the Creator Himself an object of his inquiry. God, he claims, is simply incomprehensible, and there is no merit in discussing purely speculative topics such as the essence of God or His whereabouts. He argues that man has never benefited from such illusive and futile inquiries, and that those have always been a

source of confusion and misunderstanding. Instead of pursuing such misguided curiosities and obsessions with the supernatural, people should be concerned with the world in which they live, in order to discover its secrets and make it a better place for all.²³

Kasravī frequently criticizes most theological and philosophical schools of the past for their disconcerting discourses on the nature of God and a whole range of eschatological notions. He thinks that, out of their arrogance, the theologians and philosophers associated with such schools have neglected to concede that sometimes "we don't know" is the best and wisest answer to such questions for which there is no rationally verifiable means of investigation. Instead of resisting the temptation to improvise pseudo-answers, he adds, they turned theological discourse into the playground of their imaginations and, as such, added much to the stockpile of religious superstitions. Kasravī refers to the proposition of "the ten intellects," which concerns the structure of the world and is ascribed to the Greek philosopher Plotinus, as an example of such improvisation. The main problem here, he notices, is that these wild ideas soon spread to the whole society, where they become very damaging. Since human imagination is boundless and can go in any direction, he adds, every group chooses a different direction, and conflict eventually arises over baseless and illusive conceptions of God or other related issues. Many times throughout human history, people have committed atrocities against each other over differences of opinion about the Divine. Kasravī broadly argues that no real gain is achieved from such purely speculative investigations, and that they do not lead to the betterment of human life because they do not solve any real problem in this world; they only satisfy the misguided curiosity of some philosophers and theologians.²⁴ Kasravī believes that questions about the essence of God and the beginning of creation are unanswerable, and questions about the structure of the universe and its evolution should be left to the natural sciences to be answered. He insists that it is not up to religion to explain the history of the universe or the laws of physics, and that any religious explanation of these matters at best will be a discredited mixture of scientific facts with the products of human imagination.²⁵ In his words:

In the investigation of the world's past through sciences you may go as far as you can. Rather than raising any objection to that, we will be pleased and gratified. However, it is irrational if you mount the blind horse of imagination and ride at full gallop in every direction in the darkness.²⁶

Kasravī's argument for the existence of God, as has been established, is based on the order and design of the world of which man is but a small part. However, in *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān*, he also approaches the issue from a somewhat different angle. There, after giving some examples of good and selfless deeds of human beings toward one another, and after attesting to the authenticity of the old sayings "Man himself is a small world," and "Know yourself so that you may know your God," he suggests that the first step toward knowledge of the Creator is knowledge of the self.²⁷ As he openly indicates, Kasravī puts forward this line of reasoning as a challenge to those advocates of materialism who, besides rejecting the existence of God, see selfish motivation as the basis of all human actions. Kasravī argues that such ideas destroy the basis for morality and fill man's heart with self-doubt and despair. Furthermore, by denying the existence of a source of good within human nature, these materialists, intentionally or unintentionally, provide justification for immoral and unjust acts. Thus, by emphasizing the existence of a source of good within the human soul, from which the capacity to strive for love, justice and truth emanates, Kasravī aims to raise man's self-confidence and hope, and thereby to encourage him to make the fullest use of his God-given potential in order to create a better and more humane world. Moreover, he suggests that the existence of such a force in man [the microcosm] proves that an infinitely greater force of good is also at work in the universe [the macrocosm].²⁸

ii. The relation of God to His creation:

From the perspective of Kasravī, God and the world, including man, are bound in a creator-creation relationship. He does not adhere to the pantheistic view of God which characterizes some Eastern

religions and mysticism. His notion of God is more in line with the so-called Abrahamic religions, especially Islam, in the sense that it situates the Creator above His creation and distinct from it. However, his view differs radically from the Abrahamic religions over the alleged frequency and nature of Divine intervention in the affairs of the world. Kasravī is highly critical of those religious beliefs that portray God as a capricious king of the universe who gets angry as soon as people act sinfully and punishes them by sending calamities such as earthquakes, floods and famine, and who does not forgive them unless they make sacrifices or pray day and night for His pity and forgiveness. He finds such portraits of God both banal and incompatible with the essence of true religion. In his belief, the world runs according to the laws and principles which God has written into its structure. Although God is omnipotent, He acts in a highly rational manner and does not manipulate His own creation arbitrarily. Kasravī's God, therefore, is a rational God. In fact, reason is the most frequently mentioned attribute of God in Kasravī's writings. It is also man's God-given ability to reason that makes him the paragon of creation.²⁹

According to Kasravī, God does not interfere in the affairs of the world arbitrarily, or out of spontaneous, anthropomorphic emotions such as anger and pity. This view, however, does not entail that the Creator has left the world completely to itself. He argues that God has not abandoned the world, and at times His hand can be seen directly at work in it. Although exceptional, these interventions are an integral part of the divine scheme of the world, and Kasravī goes on to explain the nature of such divine interventions.³⁰

To clarify his viewpoint and differentiate his understanding of the issue from those of traditional theologies, he borrows a concept from the Darwinian theory of evolution, namely the concept of mutation. In the theory of evolution, the relatively sudden inheritable change that happens in genes and causes the emergence of a new species of plant or animal is referred to as mutation. Kasravī, however, uses this term in a much broader sense to explain not only great sudden changes in the realm of the physical world, but also great turning points in the evolution of both the scientific and the spiritual

aspects of human knowledge and civilization.³¹ From his perspective, the birth of our solar system, the emergence of life on earth, the coming into existence of plants and animals, the advent of man and the rise of civilizations and true religions are all great examples of mutation. He regards these turning points or so-called mutations as instances of God's direct intervention in the affairs of the world. In such cases, the direct act of God is meant to give birth to new phenomena, to accelerate the pace of evolution, or to give a new direction to the course of events.³² Here, Kasravī breaks away from most theologians of the past, especially those of the Abrahamic religions, insofar as he defines the act of creation not as a once-for-all-time undertaking by God, but rather as an ongoing process. He sees the divine scheme of creation still unfolding on its evolutionary path, the end of which is only known to God. Religion, like any other phenomenon, is on an evolutionary course; there is no end to it, and there is no such thing as the last religion, despite the claims to this status made by adherents of some religions. The religion that has lost its purity or compatibility with the time must give place to a new religion which is more relevant to the existing conditions of human civilization and the development of scientific knowledge.³³

It should be noted that although Kasravī borrows the concept of mutation from the Darwinian theory of evolution to substantiate his own viewpoint on creation, he is reluctant to accept the idea of the descent of man from apes. In his early writings, especially *Ā'īn* which is basically a defense of religion against materialism, his stance on Darwin's theory of the evolution of man from apes is one of outright rejection. Kasravī believed that this aspect of the theory represented an overreaction by scientists to the superstitious stories of creation maintained and advocated by Europe's oppressive and anti-science churches of the time. Kasravī found the theory of evolution, including the idea of the survival of the fittest, generally rational and acceptable insofar as it concerned plants and animals, but not as applied to man. He thought that man, as the best of creation, must have come into being differently and, as such, could not be compared with animals. He did not himself, however, propose any alternative theory to explain the advent of man.³⁴

Kasravī's reluctance to endorse the theory of evolution was due to the fact that, to his great disgust, the idea of the survival of the fittest, so deeply embedded in that theory, had also been applied to the study of human life by some social thinkers and scientists. He saw a great danger in this tendency for the whole of humanity, and repeatedly warned against its consequences for human civilization.³⁵

In his later writings, such as *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān*, Kasravī modified his position regarding the theory of man's evolution from apes, and apparently came to terms with it. Eventually, he recognized it as the most credible existing theory of its kind, but still insisted that the difference between man and animals was so great that one should not put the former in the category of the latter:

There is a wide gap between man and ape which cannot be filled even with the so-called "missing link." Darwin's own words are more to the point when he says that a mutation has occurred here. Here, the laws of nature have shifted. Here, the hand of the Creator has been clearly at work in the affairs of the world. Even if man has evolved out of the ape, he is still a special being. He is the fruit of the tree of the Creation; he is the chosen one among all created beings.³⁶

At one point, Kasravī went so far as to say that God created the Earth for the sake of the best of His creation, namely man.³⁷ Criticized for holding such an unscientific position, he later clarified his view of the matter:

One may find these words in our books: "Man is the best of the creation." Many have criticized it without knowing what we mean by that. We do not mean that God created the world for human beings. If there is such a thing in our writings, it simply means that the emergence of man and his life is the last outcome of the creation of the world. However, we see that the creation, which has been ever-expanding and has become better and more magnificent through the passage of time, has presented man as its last and best product.³⁸

Furthermore, Kasravī maintained that since man is the only known being, except for God, who possesses rational faculties and the power

of will, he is in a sense God's deputy on the Earth.³⁹ In this capacity man is obliged to cleanse the Earth of everything evil; make life flourish; create a prosperous, peaceful and a just social environment; and take care of the other creatures of the world.

Kasravī thought that what makes man a being qualitatively different from animals was the dichotomy of his nature. Jazayeri explains this point in the following words:

Kasravi, who granted the possibility that evolution was a valid theory (after originally rejecting it), proposed that, although man might have evolved out of animal, he had advanced considerably beyond it, not only physically, but in one other highly significant way: by developing a major behavioral feature peculiar to him, and not present in animals: whereas he shares one driving force with animals--egoism; he now has another force absent in animals: altruism. The Persian words he used to designate the sources of these two driving forces were: *jān* and *ravān*, each representing one of the two conflicting facets of human nature [*seresht*, or *gowhar* or *nahad*]: *jān*, the facet shared with animals, and *ravān*, which was unique to humans.⁴⁰

This purely positive facet of human nature, namely *ravān*, introduces an unmitigated distinction between man and animals. Kasravī thought that this aspect of human nature, from which man's rational faculties, capacity to think, and yearning for justice and altruism emanated, had been neither properly nor sufficiently acknowledged by the advocates of the theory of evolution. This lack of appreciation and perception, he suggested, was an important factor in the rise of social Darwinism and similar ideologies which justify ruthless and degrading competition among peoples of the world by invoking the law of the jungle, namely the survival of the fittest, and applying it to human society.⁴¹

iii. *Jān* and *ravān*:

The postulate of the human soul is one of the cornerstones of the religious thought advanced by Kasravī. This notion and the very stimulating questions it presented to him occupied his mind for a long time. He acknowledged that, although he had been writing extensively

on religious topics, he had consciously avoided the issue of the human soul for some time. This omission, he wrote, was due to the fact that he had not yet found a comprehensive and convincing explanation for that phenomenon. However, he found the answer he was seeking in an unusual manner:

We were silent on this issue for more than two years since we did not have much to say. However, the time came when we knew what to say. Once in Mihr (the first month of fall in the Iranian calendar) 1315, we were on our way to Tabriz. It had passed midnight and we were moving ahead in the spiral mountainous road of Qafilankuh. My companion was sleeping on the back[seat] and, sitting awake beside the driver, I was deep in sweet thoughts. In the world of my reverie a number of my difficulties were being solved. In my life there has been no greater night than that one: the virtue of that night's experience cannot be put into words. I came back from that trip with precious gifts, one of which was the story of *jān* and *ravān*.⁴²

Kasravī explains that, unlike mullas and the custodians of most other religions, he was not concerned to prove the existence of such a thing as the Day of Judgment in his investigation of the problem of the human soul. What prompted him to examine this phenomenon and write about it was rather the great danger he saw in the spreading materialist ideologies of the time. He thought that these ideologies with their rejection of all important spiritual and religious notions, such as the existence of God and the human soul, obscured the distinction between man and animals. They degraded man by applying the laws of the jungle, namely the survival of the fittest and the right of the powerful to crush the weak, to his social behaviour, and provided the psychological ground for some of the most horrendous events in the history of humankind to occur in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴³ Thus, Kasravī raised the issue of the human soul to challenge the materialist views of man. He wanted to prove that there is a source of goodness, rationality, and yearning for truth and justice in man; that man is not just about selfishness, greed and hunger for power. He maintained that he did not raise the issue of the human soul in order to fabricate stories of the other world or

the so-called Day of Judgment, but rather to awaken people to the God-given source of goodness in their nature.⁴⁴

Kasravī argues that unlike animals, whose nature has a single facet, namely *jān* (the animal soul), human nature is two-faceted. Besides having *jān*, man has also *ravān* which is probably a product of a great God-willed mutation in his evolution from the highly-developed animals.⁴⁵ This mutation has caused such a great break and qualitative difference between man and animals that it is no longer appropriate to speak of man as merely a speaking or thinking or tool-making animal. This difference in kind is as great as the difference between inanimate and animate beings, or between plants and animals. Man, he insisted, should be recognized as constituting a new and different category of creature.⁴⁶

Physically, man and animals have many similarities; furthermore, both have *jān*. What makes man so different from animals is the fact that he has *ravān*, which enables him to reason, to search enthusiastically for the truths of life, to go beyond himself and his animal instincts such as selfishness, to show compassion and self-sacrifice, and to have a complicated and highly developed social life.⁴⁷ Kasravī rejected the view that these so-called human qualities are only a result of many years of moral teachings and social education and instead argued that man has an innate capacity for such qualities and that they spring from the *ravān* part of his soul. Good social and moral teachings, however, are necessary to strengthen man's *ravān* and make his best human qualities blossom. Lack of such moral education leads to weakness in his *ravān* and domination of *jān* over it, that leaves him to act on the basis of selfishness and sheer animal instincts. To further clarify his point, Kasravī offers the example of a fruit-stone that has the capacity to grow into a tree if it gets planted and receives enough water and sunshine, as opposed to a piece of stone that may never grow, no matter how much water and sunshine it receives. The point of this analogy is that the former possesses the capacity to grow in its very nature, while the latter lacks it. Man, likewise, shows those aforementioned good qualities primarily because he has the capacity for them in the unique part of his nature that distinguishes him from animals.⁴⁸

In *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Khirad*, Kasravī rejects those views which do not distinguish between the *jān* and *ravān* aspects of human nature, and which attribute both good and evil deeds to a single source, namely a unified soul or spirit. The very contradiction that exists in human actions, he asserts, is proof of the existence of two opposing forces in man's soul. He sees a clear-cut division between *jān* and *ravān* and their functions, and maintains that those who fail to grasp this duality of the human soul obscure the distinction between human behavior and that of animals. Thus they are apt to misjudge man.⁴⁹ He cites Nietzsche's exaltation of power and contempt for religious codes of conduct that advocate helping the poor, as well as the pessimist views of man held by Schopenhauer, as prominent examples of such materialist misjudgments.⁵⁰ Kasravī identifies materialism as a dangerous philosophy and one of the main reasons for the increasing violence and struggle among individuals, as well as nations, in modern times.

Kasravī argues that negative and evil traits, such as selfishness, arrogance, brutality, and all those behaviours that are common between man and animals, emanate from his *jān*. However, he emphasizes that not all attributes of *jān* are evil. Some of them --for example, the desire for sex and reproduction-- are essential to the survival of the human race. Yet he contends that even in such cases, man's behaviour can be radically different from that of animals, and can transcend the sheer satisfaction of animal instincts. Thus, when *ravān* and *khirad* are in command of man's life, even his instinctive behaviours will be ennobled by love, moral values and respect.⁵¹

Kasravī describes a titanic battle going on in human nature between his *ravan* forces, which are good, and the evil traits and forces emanating from his *jān*. This struggle in the human soul represents the very source of human freedom because it gives man the opportunity to break the bondage of his animal instincts and to choose his actions. Man's good traits, such as altruism and the yearning for truth and justice, as well as his *Khirad* are all associated with *ravān*.⁵² The latter is the means by which man can distinguish and choose between good and evil. Reason never dictates a wrongful act. To Kasravī, acting disgracefully for the sake of one's immediate

benefit is not a rational choice, but rather a pseudo-rationalization of one's subhuman wants and deeds. Such acts are neither dictated by reason nor truly beneficial to the individual. They originate from the dark side of human nature, and their end result is a further weakening of *ravān* and the encouragement of still more degrading wrongdoings. They lead to the destruction of the human aspect of one's nature and, consequently, reduce one to the level of animals. To shed more light on his understanding of the relationship between the forces of *jān* and *ravān*, Kasravī wrote:

The story of *jān* and *ravān* is like the story of a horse and its rider. It is obvious that a person who is sitting on the back of a horse is a separate being from the horse, and that each of them has his own feelings and sensations which may be at odds with each other. However, if the rider is competent, he will take the bridle skillfully to ride the horse, and use it in order to fulfill his own purposes and desires.⁵³

A strong *ravān*, in this manner, can subdue and control *jān*, dictate its own wishes to it, and prevent it from going astray. Kasravī believes that all true religions and moral teachings are designed to strengthen this rational aspect of the human soul and the faculties associated with it.

iv. *Khīrad*:

It should be noted that Kasravī has a particular understanding of the word *khīrad*, knowledge of which is essential to a proper interpretation of his writings on related topics. His definition of *khīrad* is based on his understanding of the *ravān*. He refers to *khīrad* as man's most precious God-given power, by virtue of which he can distinguish good from evil and right from wrong and thus, find his way to the truths of life. This power, according to Kasravī, is an attribute of *ravān* which is the source of all that is good in man. Hence, there is a very strong moral connotation to Kasravī's usage of *khīrad*. *Khīrad* not only distinguishes good from evil and right from wrong, but also urges the individual to choose the former over the

latter. What is rational and in accord with the dictates of *khirad* is always good, moral and beneficial to man. Thus the ill-defined and improper common understanding of the word *khirad* as cunning and self-serving calculation should not be confused with the true meaning of the word. What is rational and in accord with *khirad* is not only good for an individual, but also, by its very nature, good for society and even the world at large. Acting immorally for immediate material gains or pseudo-pleasures is neither rational nor beneficial to man, because in the long run such behaviour weakens the *ravān* of the individual and destroys his very human essence. This in turn makes him apt to commit more wrongdoings, and thereby contributes to the creation of a corrupt social environment in which everyone suffers.⁵⁴

Kasravī also distinguishes between *khirad* and *andīshih* (thought). *Andīshih*, he says, is man's ability to use his previous knowledge of something to discover the unknown in other things, which is the process of acquiring new knowledge. *Khirad*, as stated, is the power that makes man capable of distinguishing right from wrong and good from evil, the ability to find out the truths of life. That Issac Newton determined the existence of gravity, Kasravī suggests, was a result of his *andīshih*, but his understanding that there is a reason for everything that happens in the world was a result of his *khirad*.⁵⁵

Kasravī views *khirad* as impartial in its judgments, not bound by an individual's desires or the immediate selfish gain he may obtain from an act. That is why at times we regret our wrongdoings and become ashamed. Since *khirad* always discourages irrational and immoral acts, suppression of it is a prerequisite for committing such acts. A person commits a crime when his *khirad* is already weakened so much that it can no longer direct his behaviour. Furthermore, repeated wrongdoings numb *khirad* and reduce its effectiveness, and can lead to the total destruction of the individual's human character and, finally, to his descent to the level of animals.⁵⁶

Regarding the relationship between *khirad* and the human brain, Kasravī's comments seem somewhat confusing and inconsistent. In his book *Dīn va Jahān*, published in 1943/44, he maintains that, imagination, thought and *khirad* are all different powers of the human brain.⁵⁷ In *Nīk va Bad* and *Dādghāh*, which were published a year

later, he still proposes that all the actions of man originate in and are controlled by his brain.⁵⁸ However, in his later book, *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān*, published in 1945/46, he argues that only those instincts, perceptions, desires and acts that are associated with the *jān* portion of the soul originate from the brain. *Ravān* and its powers, such as *khirad*, are not only immaterial, but also independent from anything material, including the human brain. In other words, *khirad* is not a function or product of the brain.

The final judgments of *khirad*, Kasravī suggests, are what make man capable of discovering the truths of life. He disputes the views of those, especially the Sufis, who dismiss the merits of *khirad*, and he regards their claims to intuitive knowledge of the truth through strict ascetism and mortification of the body as unsubstantiated. In his words:

Sufis say: "We find out the truth by intuition..., and we see God by our eyes." But we ask them: "Where should we take these claims of yours [for verification], and how are we supposed to know if you are lying or saying the truth. Where *khirad* is to be set aside, how are people then supposed to believe the authenticity of your claims to intuition and illumination? What makes yourselves convinced of its authenticity?"⁵⁹

Kasravī also rejects the Shi'i practice of *taqlīd* (imitation of Shi'i Imams and jurists in religious and social matters) on the same basis. He regards this practice irrational and against the essence of man as God meant him to be. Every human being is supposed to use his God-given *khirad* to find his way in life. Seeking the advice or guidance of a more knowledgeable person is completely in accord with the dictates of *khirad*. However, blind imitation of an individual, whether an Imam or a jurist, is absolutely against it. Religion, therefore, should never discourage people from using their *khirad*.

v. Death and hereafter:

According to Kasravī, death puts an end to man's body and his *jān*, but his *ravān* survives and continues to exist in the other world.

After death, the body decomposes and returns to its basic elements; it will not resume its particular bodily composition again. Thus Kasravī rejects belief in the physical resurrection of human beings, and argues that whatever is going to happen in the other world concerns man's *ravān*, not his body. Since *jān*, unlike *ravān*, is totally dependent on the material body, it will not survive the body's death and so ceases to exist. *Ravān*, however, is neither material nor totally dependent on the material body; therefore, the laws of the material world, death included, do not apply to it. Only for its functioning in this material world it has to rely on the body, and so, after death, *ravān* does not remain in this world.⁶⁰ Kasravī rejects the notion of spirits visiting the material world and influencing events as mere superstitious belief. Regarding the possibility of *ravān*'s return to the material world through the process of entering a new body, namely reincarnation, one finds two very different remarks in Kasravī's writings. In *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān*, he rejects the possibility of communication with spirits and accuses those who practice it of spreading lies and superstitious ideas, including the belief in reincarnation.⁶¹ In his other book, *Varjāvand Bunyād*, however, he tones down his total rejection of the possibility of reincarnation:

It is true that we do not know how *ravān* remains after its separation from body, whether it enters another body or continues its existence in separation. We do not know these things.⁶²

Kasravī suggests that man should exercise restraint in his curiosity about the other world, and be content with the limited and general knowledge he can acquire about it through deductive reasoning. Since the door to a thorough knowledge of future life is closed to man, any attempt to uncover the mysteries of *ravān*'s life after death will lead to nothing but baseless and superstitious stories about it. Only irrational people will overlook the world in which they live and instead indulge in sheer speculation about the other world. All those detailed stories about heaven, hell and angels, he argues, are nothing but illusory figments of man's imagination.⁶³ Despite the fact that Kasravī rejects the popular belief in such escatological notions, he

upholds the idea that there will be retributions in the other world for man's deeds in this world, and that *ravān* will be subject to these retributions.⁶⁴ By its very nature, he says, *ravān* demands that one's life be conducted in a virtuous and rational manner, from which it gets strength and exaltation. In contrast, one's *ravān* always endures pain and mortification as a result of one's immoral behaviour and evil conduct in life. In this world, however, a person may not perceive the intensity and acuteness of pain he afflicts on his own *ravān* by his wrongful acts, or conversely the depth of the pleasure which his *ravān* derives from righteous deeds. This insensitivity occurs because the demands of his *jān*, which tempt him usually toward pseudo-pleasures and compete with his *ravān* force for control of his actions, obscure his perception and render him injudicious. When death puts an end to *jān*, the *ravān* of the departed person experiences joy or pain in the most acute way. In the next world, the *ravāns* of those who have conducted good and virtuous lives on earth will be joyful and content. On the other hand, *ravāns* of immoral and corrupt people will discover intense feelings of pain, chagrin and regret. Kasravī argues that, using our God-given power of reason, we can obtain only this much knowledge about the other world and the rewards or punishments to which human souls will be subjected. He does not dismiss the possibility of other kinds of rewards or punishments in the hereafter; however, since there is no reasonable evidence for them in this world, he warns once again that further speculation about such possibilities can only lead to superstitious beliefs.⁶⁵

Another conclusion that Kasravī draws from his arguments about the rewards and punishments due to *ravān* is that the material world and the other world are linked to each other, insofar as doing good in this one brings good in the next one. He maintains that salvation in the other world does not come as a result of scorning the material world and withdrawing from it, or by spending all one's life praying to God and performing religious rituals. Man should rather appreciate this wonderful world and its legitimate pleasures. What makes one's salvation in the other world possible, he writes, is one's righteous conduct of life in this world and one's endeavours to make it a better place for everybody.⁶⁶

vi. Revelation:

The concept of revelation has a very significant place in Kasravī's understanding of the relationship between God and man. In his view, revelation is an authentic concept, but not in the sense understood by most followers of the existing religions.

Today, one of our problems is that we use certain words in our writings from which people take very different meaning than what is intended. 'Religion' is one of such words, and 'revelation' is another example.⁶⁷

In his later writings, especially *Varjāvand Būnyād*, Kasravī uses the word *farhish*, a derivative of the archaic Persian verb *Farhīdan*, instead of the current Arabic-derived word *wahy*, to differentiate his view of revelation from commonplace understandings. He rejects the version of revelation as God's orders delivered to a chosen human being by a certain angel called Gabriel (and many stories that are attached to this events) as nothing but a distortion of the true meaning of revelation. He also rejects the concept of revelation as God practically and verbally speaking to a prophet, and perceives it rather in the sense of God's inspiration which enables a human's mind to see the truths and verities of life far better than others. Referring to the fact that *wahy* in Arabic simply means 'inspiration' or 'to give rise to an idea,'⁶⁸ Kasravī argues that in religious matters *wahy* should be defined as God's inspiration to someone's heart or mind.⁶⁹ Furthermore, he claims that, even in the Qur'ān, *wahy* is used in this sense. He refers to a Qur'ānic verse which reads, "And thy Lord revealed unto bees, saying: Take unto yourselves, of mountains, houses..."⁷⁰ Kasravī argues that the true meaning of this verse is that God gave bees an instinct to build their houses in the mountains, and that it would be ridiculous to interpret this verse as relating how God sent the angel Gabriel to deliver His message to bees.⁷¹ In his book *Varjāvand Būnyād*, Kasravī thus explained revelation:

Farhish [revelation] in its true meaning is that God may choose a person at any time and, relative to the need of the time, make him rise to shake up people's minds and *khirads*, to fight ignorance and corruption, and open a rational high-road of life [to humanity]...⁷²

Whenever God chooses a person to lead human beings, He gives him an insight to distinguish truth from falsehood, and to him the distinction of these two will be unequivocal. And, whenever he faces an impasse, God will show him a way out through *farhish*.⁷³

According to Kasravī, all founders of the true religions understood the meaning of the world and life in their own respective times, and each advanced humanity a few steps by promoting valuable truths of life. Furthermore, he concludes that the rise of these great men and God's revelations to them were prerequisites for the progress of humanity and human civilization.⁷⁴

Kasravī believed that there was no contradiction between science and revelation; they simply belonged to two different spheres of human knowledge. However, in *Dar Pīrām ūn-i Islām*, he maintains that revelation is strictly concerned with religious truths rather than scientific knowledge. He refers to the fact that most of the statements made by religious founders of the past about scientific matters such as the structure of the universe have proven to be incorrect. As an example, Kasravī refers to the story of Zulqarnain in the Qur'ānic *sura* of the Cave, where it is said that: "When he [Zulqarnain] reached the setting of the sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring..."⁷⁵ The story continues: "Then he followed a way until, when he reached the rising of the sun..."⁷⁶ In these verses, Kasravī argues, the Earth is assumed to be flat, which is quite consistent with the general knowledge of the time. Otherwise, if the Earth had been assumed to be round, Zulqarnain could have not reached the setting and the rising places of the sun. Thus, the statements have no scientific value and prove that not every statement by a founder of religion should be taken as God's revelation.⁷⁷ Furthermore, he contends, the person who receives God's revelation conveys it to people "through normal methods of human

reasoning,"⁷⁸ in his own words and in a language comprehensible to his people.

vii. Prophethood

In his early writings, such as *Ā'īn*, Kasravī uses the current Persian word *Payāmbār* (the messenger) or its variant *Paighambar* to convey his understanding of prophethood. However, he later decided that it was an improper word insofar as it reflected popular misunderstandings of the subject. The word *Payāmbār*, he realized, wrongfully implied that a person received God's messages through regular meetings and verbal communication with Him or His angels, and then delivered them to other human beings. To differentiate his view of prophethood from traditional and popular understanding of it, Kasravī adopted the word *barangīkhtih* in place of *Payāmbār*. As Jazayeri writes:

Instead, he (Kasravī) coined *bar-angikhteh*, the participial form of an archaic Persian verb meaning 'to impel,' 'to incite,' 'to move (someone to do something),' 'to provoke,' and so on. Other derivatives include *angizesh* 'incitement' etc., both words also used in Kasravī's style, especially the former. *Bar-angikhteh*, then, means something like 'moved or impelled' by something, in the present context presumably by God.⁷⁹

Kasravī states that at some points in human history, especially at troubled times marked by widespread human suffering, the world witnesses the appearance of an individual who receives God's revelation, meaning God's inspiration to his heart, and who rises to save humanity from misery, chaos, aberration and corruption. By God's will, this individual sees the truths of life better than anyone else, and so takes it upon himself to rouse the *khirads* of people, lead the fight against all kinds of fallacies and corruptions, and to direct man to a new high-road of life that leads to peace and salvation.⁸⁰ Although this individual is chosen by God, everything he says or does with regard to his divine task should be in accordance with the dictates of reason. In Kasravī's view, this is one of the most important

criteria for knowing a true *barangīkhtih*. Jazayeri thus explains Kasravī's reasoning:

One does not need to (and cannot) verify the genuineness of a claimant to prophethood in order to verify the truth of what he says. If anything, one might say, the reverse is the case. One, using his reason, verifies the truth, and then concludes that the person must be a prophet. In fact, if a person puts forward such a claim, insisting on being accepted as a prophet, claiming to perform miracles and do other unnatural (and unnecessary) things popularly associated with prophethood, catering to the existing superstitions rather than fighting them, that in itself raises, or should raise, questions about him.⁸¹

Kasravī rejects not only the necessity of miracles for a religious mission, but also their authenticity. He argues that God's creation is not a plaything for those who wish to manipulate and change its design, and that all the miracles ascribed to great prophets such as Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad are nothing but baseless stories. He reminds his readers that whenever the prophet Muḥammad, in his view the greatest of all the prophets of the past, was asked to perform a miracle he would dismiss such a request and say: "I know not the unseen. And I say not to you, I am an angel; I only follow what is revealed to me."⁸² In Kasravī's belief, what should attract people to a *barangīkhtih* is his reasoning power and the depth of the truths he advocates, not anything else. People who ask for miracles are usually those who lack insight into the real wonders of creation and the order of the universe. In his words:

In this regard they [common people] are enmeshed in a deep-rooted fallacy. The fact of the matter is that they disregard this world and its God-willed order and design, as though these are not from God. That is why they have such a high opinion of the unexpected and extraordinary affairs and remember God only in such cases. A tree that turns green in the spring and grows red and white flowers is full of wonders. Where have these leaves and flowers been? Where do they come from? If all people get together, can they make such a tree? This is a wonderful example of God's omnipotence, but they do not care or acknowledge it. However, if a tree blossoms in the autumn, which is unusual, only then they recall God's

power and say: "Look what God's power can do." That is the reason why they see it necessary for *barangīkhtigan* (prophets) to perform wonders. A *barangīkhtih* is supposed to make camels out of rocks, make a spring flow from his fingers, speak to a crocodile, and reverse the direction of the sun. Only acts that are contrary to God's scheme of the world make them believe him. If a *barangīkhtih* rises and reveals the truths, fights against fallacies, and shakes up the *khirads*, which are the true signs, they will not acknowledge him.⁸³

Kasravī believes in compatibility of *Barangīkhtigī* (prophethood) and science. He suggests that mutation is a feature in God's design of the world which occurs not only in the domain of biology and physics, but also in man's life, society and history. The emergence of a *barangīkhtih* who leads humanity from the darkest moments of its history to the light of a new way of life and restores human dignity is not only an indication of God's hand at work in human life, but also one of the signs of His very existence.⁸⁴ In Kasravī's words, "the story of *barangīkhtigī* is one of the wonderful secrets of the world."⁸⁵

Kasravī concludes that, despite the fact that the final goal of all prophetic missions has been the same, every new religion has marked a significant step forward in revealing the truths of life and precipitating the progress of human civilization. Furthermore, he argues that since the law of constant evolution and progress runs through the whole existence, including man's life, there cannot be an end to the need for still newer prophetic missions.⁸⁶ These ideas contrast sharply with the traditional views of Muslims, who regard Muḥammad as the seal of the prophets. Hence Kasravī's ideas once again caused an uproar among Shi'i 'ulama'.

Kasravī maintained that unless God shows the way to salvation, people will always go astray and come to grief. God, however, bestows one individual, a *barangīkhtih*, with divine insight into the truths of life and makes him to rise to save the world whenever humanity finds itself at a dead end. Such an individual alone has the exclusive right to teach people the secrets and truths of life and to show them the way to salvation. All righteous people should assist him in his divine mission rather than compete with him. At any given time there can

be only one *barangīkhtih*.⁸⁷ Otherwise, people will divide into competing groups and will engage in conflicts, so undermining the purpose of a true religious mission.⁸⁸

Kasravī argues that a *barangīkhtih* has certain duties to perform. He should shake up the *khirads* of people by teaching them the truths of life and by leading the fight against all kinds of corruption. He should also demonstrate a new way of life that is in accordance with the dictates of reason, that is free of fighting and contention, and that is consistent with the essence of *ravān*. Furthermore, he should establish the rules and maxims necessary for social life, and, preferably, elaborate a political system that can put them into effect.⁸⁹ In this last respect it seems that Kasravī's view can be best identified with Islam as the model of a true religion. The fact that Kasravī assessed Islam as the most complete religion of the past corroborate such a conclusion.

IV. Controversies and debates

After the abdication of Rīzā Shāh in 1941, both the Shi'i clergy and the communist movement, which had been suppressed for many years, reemerged. The Tūdeh Communist party grew rapidly in popularity. Supported by the political elites as a deterrent to the communist threat, the clergy also returned to the scene and exercised great influence in the socio-political affairs of the country. Kasravī established his own political party, Bāhamād-i Āzādigān, which gained a sizable following in all major cities of Iran.

Kasravī wrote extensively in the publications of the party, and his writings, even those on purely historical subjects, usually created debate and controversy. As Abrahamian writes, Aḥmad Kasravī "was the most controversial of all modern Iranian Intellectuals."⁹⁰ His writings on religious topics, both his general views on the principles of religion and his direct criticism of Shi'ism and other existing faiths, proved to be the most controversial of all. By far, the greatest number of articles and books written against him and his religious ideas, were produced by the clergy and the writers closely associated with them. Minoo Ramyar writes: "The many books which were written against

him come mostly from inept persons, who do not answer him [Kasravī] but simply repeat old dogmas or pour out abuse."⁹¹ The interesting thing is that even the titles of many such books show the rage of their authors toward Kasravī.⁹² The authors of these books shared the basic view that Kasravī had committed blasphemy not only by rejecting main aspects of the established religion, such as miracles, the existence of Angels and Satan, the existence of heaven and hell, and the Adam and Eve story, but also by redefining religious concepts such as prophethood, revelation, the human soul and hereafter. What infuriated them even more was Kasravī's direct and undisguised criticism of Shi'i doctrines such as Imamate, *vilāyat-i faqīh*, *taqlīd*, and of Shi'i practices such as passion plays of Muharram and *rauzih khvānī*.

The most important book that the clergy produced against Kasravī was Khumainī's *Kashf ul-Asrār*. In this book, however, Khumainī answered the questions raised by Kasravī and like-minded opponents of the clergy in his own terms. For instance, while Kasravī rejected miracles from a rational point of view, Khumainī tried to prove their authenticity by referring to verses from the Qur'ān or to the words of the Shi'i Imams and Shi'i scholars of the past. Khumainī also published a pamphlet entitled *Bikhvānīd va bih Kār Bibandīd* (Read and Implement), which was clearly a reaction to Kasravī's book *Bikhvānand va Dāvarī Kunand* (Let Them Read and Judge), also known as *Shī'igarī*. In this pamphlet Khumainī invited the Shi'i clergy to act against Kasravī:

If you lose the opportunity and do not rise for God, and if you do not restore the traditions, tomorrow a bunch of lustful vagrants will dominate you...You all saw that the books of a worthless man from Tabriz abused your faith and in the centre of Shi'ism made so much insult to Imam Sadiq and the Hidden Imam (may my soul be sacrificed for him), and you did not utter a word... What is this weakness and helplessness that has overcome you?⁹³

Through the publications of the *Bāhamād-i Āzadigān*, Kasravī and his party members were actively involved in debates and polemics with other organizations or individuals on political, literary

and religious matters. Kasravī also had lively debates with the adherents of leftist ideologies, especially with those associated with the Tūdeh Party, not only on political issues, but also on such subjects as materialism, religion and its role in the modern world, the theory of evolution, and the nature of the human soul. These debates, however, were generally conducted in a tolerant and non-threatening manner

Kasravī regarded materialism as the greatest aberration of the modern era and blamed it for many of the problems of the world. He believed that the traditional religions were unable to provide answers to the questions raised by materialist ideologies. Thus he tried to formulate a religious ideology strong enough to stand against materialism and defend the cause of religion. His debates with adherents of these ideologies proved to be very useful for him in refining and formulating his own ideas. The best example is Kasravī's book *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān*, which is a collection of his lectures on the human soul, materialism, the theory of evolution and other related subjects. In every lecture he tried to answer questions raised by those, from the audience or otherwise, who held materialist views.⁹⁴ Kasravī argued that, by rejection of a source of good in man, namely *ravān*, materialism destroyed the foundation of moral values and put human civilization at great risk. Thus, what made Kasravī take up issues such as *jān* and *ravān* was his apprehension of the negative impact of materialism, especially in the form of social Darwinism, upon humanity.⁹⁵ As we will discover, these books clearly show how Kasravī incorporated parts of the theory of evolution, especially the concept of mutation, into his own belief system in order to give a sharp edge to his case against materialism.

v. The significance of Kasravī's rational redefinition of the basic principles of religion

Kasravī's attempt to come up with a new interpretation of religion through a rational redefinition of the basic principles of religion clearly reflects his concerns identified below as to what was going on in Iran and the world at large in the first half of the twentieth century.

Materialism: Kasravī blamed materialist ideologies for most of the tragic events which took place in this period of human history, and which had grave consequences for most nations, including Iranians. Kasravī had grown disillusioned with the existing religions, which he thought to be degenerated and laden with superstitious beliefs. Yet he firmly believed that only religion could control and subdue the destructive forces in human nature that were unleashed by materialist teachings. Thus he tried to defend religion against materialism by providing rational explanations for its basic tenets, such as the existence of God, God and His creation, *jān*, *ravān* and *Khīrad*, death and hereafter, revelation, and prophethood, and thereby making religion compatible with the new realities of the world. In doing so, he wished to close the wide gap that separated religion from the modern scientific knowledge upon which most materialist ideologies based their arguments against religion. He thought that unless religion acknowledged and took into account the merits of the modern sciences, it rendered itself both irrelevant and an obstacle to human civilization.

The fate of Constitutional Revolution: Another major concern which prompted Kasravī to develop his religious ideology was the fate of constitutionalism in Iran. Soon after its initial victories, the Constitutional Movement received a severe blow from the Shi'i establishment which, despite its early sympathies for the Constitutional Revolution, had turned into one of its staunchest enemies. The Shi'i establishment had come to a realistic conclusion that its support of the Revolution would not lead to a further strengthening of its own position vis-à-vis the state. In fact as Martin writes:

But the secularizing tendency of Western thought and radical changes it would engender were not necessarily apparent to those of the 'ulama' who gave it their attention. It is also doubtful whether those few [ulama] who responded understood fully the practical implications of the reformers' ideas and in any case their number was small.⁹⁶

Although the Constitutional Revolution led to the creation of a more unified state with a parliament, with predominantly secular legal and educational systems, and with some modern socio-political institutions, it failed in its main objectives, namely the establishment of a democratic political system and the rapid modernization of the country. Jazayeri suggests that Kasravī was the only Iranian thinker who seriously investigated the reasons for the failure of the Constitutional Revolution. He comments:

He [Kasravī] concluded that there was failure. However, the failure was not the failure of democracy. Rather, it was the failure of the leaders of the revolution, and those who followed them, to understand that democracy could not long survive in a society whose most cherished cultural institutions, most of all its majority religion, are strongly antipathetic to democracy. For democracy to be, or to become, viable in such a society, those institutions have to be shaken to their very foundations; and new foundations laid. That is why Kasravi considered his own movement a continuation of the Constitutional Revolution. And that is why his ideology was so radical, and so comprehensive.⁹⁷ [emphasis mine]

The rational approach to religion: The fact that reason reigns supreme in Kasravī's religious ideology, and is not bound by or subordinate to the words of a holy book or a holy prophet, is unprecedented in the modern history of religious thought in Iran. This supremacy of reason and adherence to rational explanations for basic religious tenets enabled Kasravī to go, once more, beyond the past religious thinkers of Iran in reconciling religion with science. Kasravī's rational approach also enabled him to apply historical method to the study of Iran's religious schools of thought, especially Shi'ism, Baha'ism and Sufism, and to produce some of the first such studies in Iran. It was on the basis of such studies that he raised the greatest challenge to shi'ism and Shi'i clergy in the twentieth century.

The compatibility of religion and democracy: Kasravī is the only thinker of the twentieth-century Iran to develop a socio-religious ideology independent of the predominant religion of the society, and to do so in response to the social and ideological

challenges of his time. A number of nineteenth-century social thinkers of Iran, such as Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī and Tālibzādi, had defenended constitutionalism and democracy by criticizing the traditional religion in the light of reason. Kasravī, however, was unique in the sense that he went a step beyond criticism and tried to devise a new systematic and comprehensive religious thought that would be compatible with democracy. Thus he wrote:

At the dawn of Islam, government was dictatorial and autocratic and there was no readiness for the government of the people (or democracy), which is the best type of government. For this reason, Islam was only able to decrease the autocratic nature of that kind of government and couple it with justice and good will. But today, as a result of lofty ideas, the grounds for democracy have been prepared and most countries have accepted it. In any case, religion must accept this and add other good ideas to it.⁹⁸

The Darwinian theory of evolution: Moreover, Kasravī incorporated one of the central tenets of Darwinian theory of evolution, namely the concept of mutation, into his religious thought. This adoption of the concept of mutation for explaining some basic elements of religion, such as God's relation to His creation, the nature of the human soul, *barangīkhtigī* and revelation --all doctrinal issues discussed in this chapter-- represents a unique phenomenon in the development of religious thought in Iran.

But, perhaps the most significant feature of his thought lies in his defence of every human being's right to question all those old traditions and beliefs, religious or otherwise, that exercise control over his life and the collective life of his society. Kasravī's views on the role of religion in social life, especially religion's relationship with science, politics and history are explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

The role of religion in modern social life

Kasravī may have regarded the great religions of the past as giant steps forward in the history of human civilization, but this recognition of their respective value did not prevent him from offering a sustained critique of their relevance to, and suitability for, human society in the early twentieth century. In fact, he viewed the numerous extant branches and sects of these religions as outdated systems of belief that had degenerated into obstacles to further human progress. Quite naturally, in his writings Kasravī focused on Islam, and most particularly on its Shi'i branch, as the predominant religion of Iran. His view of the role that religion should play in the modern society contrasted with the views held by advocates of other major religious or social schools of thought in Iran.

I. Kasravī's socio-religious thinking

Regarding the origin of Kasravī's socio-religious ideology, we can identify two contributing sources, namely his traditional religious studies and his direct or indirect knowledge of Western schools of thought. In fact, his religious ideology maybe understood as a synthesis of these two, adorned by his great knowledge of the history of religious thought in Iran and in the world of Islam.

The socio-religious thought of some European thinkers, especially those of the eighteenth century, and the Iranian social thinkers of the late nineteenth century, provided Kasravī with ample source material for elaboration of his *Pākdīnī* ideology. Although one finds references to such

European thinkers as Voltaire (1694-1778), Descartes (1596-1650), Rousseau (1712-1778) and Darwin (1809-1882) in Kasravī's books, the extent of his knowledge of their thought and works is not clear. There is, however, some evidence in his writings to indicate his lack of in-depth study of them. In a number of his books Kasravī himself referred to inadequacy of his knowledge of the European philosophies and ideologies. In *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān*, for example, he argued that he was more concerned with the disastrous consequences of materialism than its denial of God, "I have not researched about the origin of this philosophy [materialism] and the way it spread in Europe and America. Thus, I do not have sufficient information about it."¹

Considering the fact that Kasravī never travelled to Europe, except for a trip to the Caucasian region of Russia in his youth, and the fact that gaining access to original books by European thinkers in Iran was quite difficult at the time, it seems correct to assume that he gathered his knowledge of them basically from secondary sources. In his autobiography, he indicated that the Arabic magazines *al-'Irfān* and *al-Muqtaṭif*, the former published in Lebanon and the latter in Egypt, were among his important sources of information about Europe.

Kasravī was, however, well versed in the writings of the nineteenth century social thinkers of Iran, some of whom had visited Europe or had lived there long enough to acquire a good knowledge of European schools of thought. The most prominent among these social thinkers were Fath 'Alī Ākhundzādi (1812-1878), Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kirmānī (1853-1896), Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī (1838-1897), Mīrzā Malkum Khān (1833-1908) and 'Abdul-Rahīm Tālibzādi (1834-1911). Their ideas and works greatly influenced the development of socio-religious thought in Iran and prepared the ground for the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911. Mangol Bayat assesses the general views of these social thinkers as follows:

Despite some basically technical differences, they held in common a faith in the transforming power of enlightened ideas; a belief in change as something not to be feared but to be welcomed; and a self-conception as the new apostles carrying the message of the age: that of reason, science (in non-religious terms), liberty, and progress. Though they played no major role in the important political events of their time, they laid out the course of future action for their fellow citizens.²

One can find great similarities between the views of these social thinkers and those of Kasravī, especially with regard to their shared criticism of the traditional religious establishment and religious dogma. Of course there are also many important differences between the views of Kasravī and those of these reformers. Many among the social reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including most of the aforementioned thinkers, tended to identify one or other of Iran's numerous social ailments as the main cause of the country's stagnation and backwardness. Each thought that the elimination of what he had identified as the cardinal problem --be it disunity among Muslims vis-à-vis European powers, or the country's archaic political system, or general illiteracy in the population-- would necessarily lead to the elimination of all other national problems. Thus, while for some the key lay in the promotion of Islamic unity, for others it was educational reform and the opening of modern schools. There were also those who thought that the establishment of a parliament and enactment of Western-style laws would put an end to all other national problems.³

Kasravī, however, did not share this belief in a "master key" solution to Iran's ailments. In his view, Iran's problems were deep-rooted and interrelated and, as such, had to be fought on several fronts at once. These problems, in his view, were all nurtured by centuries-old fallacies and degenerated beliefs, religious or otherwise, which had a suffocating grip on

people's minds. He often emphasized the need to cleanse people's minds of these corrupt beliefs, and to constantly educate them in the principles and merits of a truly civil and democratic way of life, so that they would participate in the struggle for unity and democracy and always be ready to defend the achievements of such a struggle. Otherwise, he added, these achievements would be short-lived.⁴ Kasravī believed that to lead such a struggle on so many fronts would require a guiding ideology and strong organization. His attempts to develop such an ideology, which was later known as *pīkdīnī*, and his establishment of the Āzādigān Party, both derived from the exigencies of such an envisioned struggle. Kasravī's systematic approach to the ailments of Iranian society, and his endeavours to develop for his cause a suitable ideology distinct from the established religion and other rampant ideologies, represent some unique features of his career and legacy. None of the aforementioned social reformers of Iran, nor any after Kasravī, has gone so far toward constructing such an indigenous socio-religious ideology.⁵

The second major distinction is that Kasravī went far beyond these reformers in his criticism of the West, its way of life, and the way it handles its power, science and technology. This position adopted by Kasravī, discussed in detail in his book *Ā'īn*, also proved to be very controversial. To quote Jazayeri:

The book received considerable attention in Iran and abroad. It triggered a lively exchange in the Tehran newspaper *Shafaq-i sorkh* between kasravī, on the one hand, and journalist Dashti; (later parliament deputy, and still later senator) and parliament deputy Liqvani, and others, on the other... This book is a warning to Iranians not to be blind to the damages of indiscriminate acceptance of all things Western, material and spiritual. He returned to this topic again and again through the years.⁶

In *Ā'īn* Kasravī also attacked Taqīzādh, one of the most influential political figures of the time, for his suggestion that “Outwardly and inwardly, in body and spirit, Persia must become Europeanized.”⁷ This also caused some controversial debates between Kasravī and supporters of Taqīzādh.

II. Religion and society

In the first half of the twentieth century, three different perspectives of the role of religion in social life influenced the Iranian society. These distinct views were held by three active parties in the political and intellectual sphere of the society, namely the Shi'i clergy, the leftists, and Kasravī and his *Bāhamād-i Āzādigān*. The ideological differences evident among these three forces can be best understood through a comparison of their respective attitudes toward modern science, the continued relevance of religion as a social force, and the democratic principle of separation of church and state.

i. Religion and modern science:

The attitudes of these groups toward the relationship between religion and modern science is generally predictable. The Shi'i clergy -- like the custodians of most, if not all, traditional faiths-- rejected for as long as possible any new scientific fact that contradicted their ossified dogma. Eventually, however, they either chose to remain silent on such topics or came up with new interpretations for certain verses of the *Qur'ān* or *ḥadīṣ*, subsequently claiming that these scientific facts were already known to their prophet or Imams. Kasravī wrote:

A group of them set about to reconcile sciences with their collection of the words of *barangīkhtihs* and religious leaders. For instance, they take a sentence from the Qur'an and say: "Here it is talking about the airplane." It is almost forty years now that it has become a hobby for some charlatans...Someone has written a book claiming that the Qur'an has recognized not only the spherical shape of the Earth, but also its rotation around the sun, as well as its other movements. These people make out natural sciences from a divine book that is supposed to be a guideline for life.⁸

Kasravī believed that a true religion was not supposed to interfere in matters of strictly scientific concern. The way man handles the outcomes of science and technology, however, was a very legitimate concern of religion, in his view.⁹ The leftists, of course, argued that religion had nothing to do with science, but was rather a product of man's ignorance and a useful tool for the ruling classes in keeping the working class under their control. Thus, as a result of the further progress of science, as well as the establishment of a classless society, religion would finally disappear.

Kasravī maintains that human life, like all other phenomena, is on a course of constant evolution and progress. Man has risen from primitive conditions of life, when he lived in caves with almost no tools and no knowledge of the world around him, to his present highly-developed state of civilization in two different but closely related ways: first, through scientific and technological advancement, and secondly, by better understanding the truths of life through strengthening of his *ravān* and *khirad*. He calls the former 'the way of science' and the latter 'the way of religion.'¹⁰

a.^{The} Compatibility of religion and science:

By 'science' Kasravī means positive knowledge obtained from experiment and direct observation of phenomena. It is a process in which man uses his God-given reasoning power to move from the understanding of certain facts to a discovery of the laws of nature, which in turn enables him to tame the forces of nature and advance his technological capabilities. However, there are certain laws and truths governing human soul and society that cannot be grasped by science alone; they rather belong to the realm of religion.¹¹ Besides the fact that science and religion are generally the products of human curiosity about the world and the meaning of life, they are specifically man's solutions to the two greatest struggles of his life. Science serves in his struggle against the blind forces of nature, his struggle to improve his quality of life by overcoming these forces. Religion, which provides man with a sense of purpose in life, is the means by which the destructive forces of human nature can be tamed and the pernicious struggle of human beings against each other be prevented, so that peoples can flourish in a peaceful, harmonious and healthy environment.¹² Thus science and religion represent two different but parallel roads that lead to the same destination, namely the betterment of human life in every respect. This unity of purpose, he argues, proves that the materialist ideologies are wrong in their assessment of the relationship between science and religion as antagonistic.¹³ A true religion, rather, is compatible with science and goes hand in hand with it, yet does not cross the line that separates it from matters of strictly scientific concern:

The mysteries of the material world, the skies and the Earth, should not be sought but through natural sciences. All that is said up to now about these matters either in the name of philosophy or religion, should be thrown away.¹⁴

b. The challenge of science to existing faiths:

Kasravī does not find the existing religions compatible with science because, instead of ridding themselves of their irrational and superstitious beliefs and dogmas, they have remained unchanged, or, at most, have adopted pseudo-scientific arguments to justify themselves. To answer the question of how the advancement of science and technology in the last three centuries pushed these religions to the edge and rendered them bankrupt, Kasravī adduces three explanations. First, it proved that these religions' assumptions about natural phenomena, such as the structure of the universe and the creation of man, as postulated in their holy scriptures, were nothing but unfounded stories. Secondly, scientific advancement gave rise to materialist philosophies which proved to be the most powerful enemies of religion and the greatest challenges ever raised against it. Thirdly, it brought about totally new conditions and problems, created more complex societies, and gave a global dimension to human interactions.¹⁵ Overwhelmed by the speed and extent of these changes, the existing religions proved unable to adapt themselves to the new realities of the world or to provide answers to man's new questions. Having lost their credibility, many people abandoned these religions and adopted atheistic ideas and ideologies. Even those who did not totally discard their religions became more or less sceptical.

c. The limitations of science:

Kasravī argues that failure of religions vis-à-vis the astonishing progress of the sciences has cost humanity dearly. He insists that no progress by man in the field of science, no matter how great it may be, leads him to a better condition of life unless it is supplemented by a great

step forward in the field of religion. Without the guidance of a true religion that can control the destructive forces of human nature and teach people how to live together in peace and harmony, advancement in the sciences fails to guarantee a better life for mankind.¹⁶ The grim situation of the world in the first few decades of the twentieth century, when the most sophisticated products of technology were used to kill people, to destroy cities, and to enslave nations, is but one testament to the fact that science alone cannot lead man to salvation. This historical example offers further proof that science has its own limitations and should leave certain domains to religion.¹⁷

d. Bridging the gap between religion and science:

The question, then, is how is it possible to advance the cause of religion so that the great gap that now separates religion from science may disappear and these may go hand in hand? Kasravī finds his answer to this question in the history of science. He argues that the great advancement of scientific knowledge in Europe after the sixteenth century was triggered when scientists abandoned the old approach to the explanation of phenomena, an approach which was based on a mixture of old ideas derived from the ancient Greek philosophers, the teachings of holy books, and the figments of their imaginations. They started a new approach founded on the rational analysis of scientific data and the direct observation of phenomena. If religion was to re-assert its proper role in contemporary human life, Kasravī argued, it also needed to adopt a rational approach.¹⁸ He believed, for example, that by observation of this world of phenomena we could rationally conclude the existence of God, but nothing in our observation could rationally lead us to understanding of His essence or His whereabouts. Thus all those beliefs and dogmas which

could not be rationally deduced from the observation of this world, i.e. the detailed stories of heaven and hell, needed to be swept out of religion.¹⁹

f. The Darwinian controversy:

From the writings of Kasravī and his contemporaries, it is clear that the theory of man's evolution from apes and its contradiction of religious dogma was one of the hottest topics of discussion and debate in the intellectual circles of the time. The Shi'i clergy clearly rejected this theory as contradictory to the words of God, as reflected in the Qur'ān. Although they attacked it in their sermons, they did not produce any noteworthy book expressing their views on that issue.²⁰ Kasravī, who had initially rejected the Darwinian theory, gradually came to accept it as the best available explanation for the advent of man. Kasravī's discussions of this topic and his arguments against the adherents of materialist and leftist ideologies are best recorded in his books *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān* and *Dīn va Jahān*.

ii. Religion and politics

Regarding the relationship between religion and politics, the leftists believed in the separation of church and state. This was theoretically the position of the Tūdeh communist party, which was the most influential leftist organization of the time. The Tūdeh Party, however, at times tactically supported the clergy against the government. In a number of his writings, especially in *Sarnivisht-i Īrān Chih Khvāhad Būd?*, Kasravī criticized the Tūdeh Party for such tactics and argued that they led to nothing but the reinforcement of fanatic and reactionary forces in

society.²¹

Ideologically, Kasravī did not believe that a true religion, which was supposed to provide guidelines for man's spiritual and social life, could or should be separated from politics. It should be noted, however, that in his ideal religion, he saw no need for any form of clerical hierarchy for supervising people's religious affairs, any form of clergy that might one day use its power to meddle in governance of the society. Practically, however, during this period Kasravī was more in line with advocates of the separation of state and religion, insofar as he was against the Shi'i clergy's interference in the political affairs of the country.²² This apparently secularizing stance derived from his conviction that Shi'ism was a highly irrational and outdated system of belief and the Shi'i clergy a reactionary and anti-democratic force whose further interference in public affairs would be disastrous for the country.²³

a. The issues of Imamate and *vilāyat-i faqīh*:

The Shi'i clergy, however, always held to their doctrine of Imamate, according to which the leadership of the community had passed from the prophet Muhammad to 'Alī, the first in a chain of twelve Shi'i Imams, and through him in a sequential order to his descendents, until it had reached Mahdī the twelfth Imam. Mahdī, however, went into occultation in 874 A.D., and until the death of his fourth and last deputy al-Samarī (874-941 A.D.) led the community indirectly.²⁴ Therefore, the doctrine maintains, since there was no deputy after the year 941 A.D., Shi'i 'ulamā. who now represented the Hidden Imam, should have comprehensive authority of the community, and the people should obey them absolutely. According to this doctrine, which is known as *vilāyat-i faqīh*, any other governing

authority is illegitimate and a usurper of the right of Imam, and those who cooperate with such secular authorities are *'Amaliḥ-yi zulm* (agents of tyranny). Throughout history, although the Shi'i 'ulamā' generally chose a more pragmatic approach and closely cooperated with the ruling monarchs of their time, they never gave up this doctrine and from time to time they used it to advance their power and interests.²⁵

Kasravī considered the doctrine of *vilāyat-i faqīh* harmful to the interests of the nation because it created a state within the state, a situation which rendered any government ineffective and hindered the country's progress. Kasravī saw 'ulamā's adherence to this doctrine as a clear sign of their hypocrisy, for while they enjoyed the security created by the government and its secular laws, they nevertheless incited people to civil disobedience and then criticized the government for all problems of the country.

People were discouraged from paying taxes, doing military service and working in the public sector. Those who had no choice but to work for the government were expected to purify the money they received from the government by paying a portion of it as *radd-i mazālim* (removing of oppression) to Shi'i 'ulamā'. On the subject of Kasravī's objection to the Shi'i clergy's claim to government, as well as the controversies that followed it, Jazayeri comments:

The concept of *velayat-e faqih* has existed for some time. However, it was seldom discussed beyond the theological circles, and even there not in great detail, and not openly. Neither the masses nor even the intellectuals either knew the term or the theory, though they were involved in its implications. It was Kasravi who brought up the subject openly for the first time. Even more significant, he took it beyond the theoretical realm, a topic for experts: He made a public issue of it. Kasravi had on a number of occasions referred to this claim of the clergy, and questioned it, more or less in passing. However, beginning in November 1942, he used a different approach, using much more explicit language, and calling attention more clearly to the direct

conflict between their claim and democracy, which gives the people the right to govern themselves.

In an article entitled "Message to the Mullahs of Tabriz", in the daily *parcham* for November 2, 1942, he addressed a series of questions to them concerning their claim. These questions, with modifications, were published several times before his assassination. After the first *parcham* publication, they were addressed to the clergy in general, or to particular clergymen by name, on one occasion to the *Imam Jom'a* of Tehran, who was said to have expressed outrage at Kasravi's (and his party's) criticism of Shi'ism. Then, in January or February 1945, the newspaper *Keyhan*, one of the two dailies with the largest circulation in Iran, and perhaps the most influential, published the most recent version of the questions. Seyyed Nur-al-Din, a major clergyman in Shiraz, answered them. *Keyhan* published the answers and Kasravi's response.²⁶

Likewise, in his book *Shī'igarī*. Kasravī, who regarded the clergy's claim to comprehensive authority as a great obstacle to the establishment of democracy in Iran, once more emphasized that "one of the great tasks that must be accomplished in Iran is to reveal how baseless this claim is and to cleanse the minds of the people of such sinister and poisonous ideas."²⁷

b. Religion and politics: A typical misreading of Kasravī's viewpoint

There are great misunderstandings in the works of a number of those who have written on Kasravī's view of the relationship between religion and politics. In his cursory and emotional introduction to the 1992 publication of *Bahāyīgarī* in the U.S.A., Bahrām Chūbīnih, for example, writes:

...Kasravī finds this religious dogma outrageous and knows that mixing religion with politics results in something disgusting which will be neither beneficial to politics nor to religion.²⁸

A careful study of Kasravī's view of the relationship between religion and

politics, however, clearly shows the inaccuracy of this statement. Such a mistake is probably an improper generalization of Kasravī's criticism of the Shi'i clergy of the time for their disregard of the laws of the land and their obstructive interference in the public affairs of the country. What Chūbīnīh has overlooked here is the fact that Kasravī opposed the Shi'i clergy's arbitrary interferences in the affairs of the state because he regarded them as generally self-serving members of an outdated and corrupt establishment motivated by a thirst for power and an extremely irrational religious ideology. He believed that the clergy's unjustifiable meddling in political affairs created a state within the state, and as such, incapacitated the government in fulfilling its duties and maintaining law and order. This argument by no means entails that he favoured the separation of religion from politics per se. In fact, his idea of good government falls within his broad definition of true religion:

What is the world? Who runs it? What is the purpose of our existence in it? What is man, and what differentiates him from animals? What are every individual's duties in life?; How should nations treat each other? How can we diminish wickedness and vice? In what ways can we make it possible for people to enjoy a more peaceful and pleasant life?; What is a government and how should it be? ...It is such valuable teachings that we call religion or the truths of life.²⁹ [emphasis added]

Great many Iranians do not reap the fruits of religion, because they do not know the world and are blind to the truths of life. Everyone pursues only his own good, and adheres to no rational guideline...In this nation no aspect of life, including agriculture, work and trade, married life, education, and government is truly understood... These are but few examples which we view as irreligion. It is irreligion when a people are incompetent in conducting their mundane affairs and, with so many God-given riches, live the lowest life and at the same time boast about religion and their knowledge of God, and talk about the abundance in the future life.³⁰

Kasravī's words in these passages clearly show that, in his understanding, it is neither possible nor beneficial to separate a true religion from politics or from any other aspect of social life. Hence does Prof. A. Fathī, an authority on Kasravī's ideology, call it a "civil religion."³¹

In *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Islām*, Kasravī sheds more light on this subject. As was mentioned in the previous chapters, his model of a true religion resembles more closely to the early Islam than any other religion. In that book Kasravī praises the prophet Muhammad for not only offering people the monotheistic doctrines of Islam, which cleansed people's beliefs and taught them many truths of life, but also for establishing a political system which united all Muslims under its banner and gave them power to overcome the great empires of the time.³² In his article "Dīn va Sīyāsāt," he discusses this issue in detail and recognizes the interest in legislation and politics as a very positive aspect of the early Islam. He even identifies Muslims' lack of interest in their political life and institutions as one of the primary reasons for the Islamic world's continuous decline in power and subjugation to the European powers.³³

Kasravī's argument for democracy also shows religious overtones. He maintains that God has created all human beings free and, as such, no individual has the right to violate the freedom of others in order to rule over them. He then concludes that democracy, in which people themselves choose their government and are free to participate in decision-making, is not only more rational than undemocratic forms of government but is also more in accord with the spirit of true religion.³⁴

iii. Religion and history:

Every religion is a phenomenon that, at a certain point in the history of humankind, emerges, matures, grows old, dies out, and gives its place to a new religion, argues Kasravī. This cycle persists despite the fact that the fundamental teachings and goals of all religions remain basically the same. That is how Kasravī answers the question why once in a while in the history of humankind there is a need for a new religion:

In any case, there are two circumstances in which a religion fades away and another one takes its place: first, when a religion is depleted of its true essence and has degenerated into irreligion; second, when the exigencies of the time necessitate a new way. Based on these two reasons, whenever God wishes so, the world witnesses the emergence of a God-inspired movement, and a new way [to salvation] gets opened. This is a divine scheme which is necessary for the progress of the world.³⁵

Kasravī maintains that constant change and development of human civilization also bring about new problems, new questions and new fallacies to which religion is supposed to give proper answers in order to provide people with new guidelines for salvation. Every new religion does so, more or less, for a certain period of time. Each gradually loses its initial dynamism, gets contaminated with superstitious ideas that people attach to it, and loses touch with the realities of man's ever-changing and complex civilization. Finally it degenerates into a pseudo-religion (*kīsh*) which has lost its purity and divine essence, and only carries the title of a religion. Thus a religion that once elevated human civilization to new heights turns into a barrier to its further progress.³⁶

Kasravī unequivocally argues that religion is not an end in itself but rather a means to the salvation of humanity. Therefore, when a religion gets corrupted and can no longer lead man to salvation, it should be abandoned in favor of a new blooming, resourceful and pure religion. He

likens the vain attempts of those who want to restore the initial power and glory of their outdated religion to breathing life into an already dead body. "It would be no more of an exaggeration for someone to say that he wanted to move a mountain than it is for them to say that they want to "return the religion to its origin," asserts Kasravī.³⁷

Kasravī's standpoint, as such, is a total rejection of religious fundamentalism in all its forms. His writings also demonstrate how far from the truth are those who claim that Kasravī aspired to revive the pre-Islamic religious and moral values of Iran. Comments made by Ṭāhirī clearly exemplify common distortions of Kasravī's ideas. To quote Ṭāhirī:

Kasravī had attended a seminary in order to become a mulla... The young talabeh quickly concluded that Islam was a religion fit for nomadic and barbarous Arab tribes in a state of pre-civilization. Anxious to know how and why Islam had managed to conquer Iran, Kasravī concluded that the successful Arab invasion of the country in no way proved the validity of the Islamic message...Once the Arabs had conquered Iran they imposed their faith on people by force. Kasravī dreamed of a return to Iran's pre-Islamic glories, including its moral ideals.³⁸

To challenge Ṭāhirī's comments, it is enough to compare them with some of Kasravī's own words on this subject:

One of the few instances in [the history of] the world when reason overcame illusion and ignorance was in the early centuries of Islam among Muslims and Iranians...Some may argue that if the condition of Islam and Iran was so [good], as you say, why then do some Iranians detest Islam and regret the fact that Islam prevailed in Iran!? I ask, Which Iranians? If you are talking about the Iranians who lived in those centuries, there were no such people among them. History truly testifies to the fact that as long as Iranians did not know Islam, they bravely fought against it. Even after their defeat, they did not show cowardice and continued to resist it. However, when they found out the truth of that pure religion, they willingly accepted it and made much self-sacrifice for its cause...What were Iranians supposed to do if they would not

accept Islam? What had remained of Zoroastrian religion that could justify their rejection of Islam? Was it worthy of a people such as Iranians to deprive themselves of a high-road to divine knowledge? A people who turn their backs to the truth are blind. How then could Iranians accede to be inwardly blind?...However, if you are asking about today's Iranians, it is correct that thirteen and a half centuries later, some thoughtless people have suddenly remembered Zoroastrianism...Those who have become pawns in this political game, and cause cracks in the foundation of Iranianhood (*Iranīgārī*), are only a bunch of ignorant and disgraceful people. I repeat that Iranians accepted Islam of their own accord, and they should not have done otherwise. It was under the aegis of this pure divine religion that in a short period of time *khirad* rose to eminence, and illusion and ignorance were diminished to a great extent.³⁹

Kasravī also discusses this issue in his book *Dar Pīrām ūn-i Islām*. There, despite expressing admiration for the early Islam as a truly great religion superior to all previous ones, he argues that it too has come to an end and can no longer lead man to salvation.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Ahmad Kasravī lived during one of the most troubled periods in both the history of his nation and that of humanity, a period about which he once wrote: "O Lord! what a dark time, what a chaotic world!"¹ It was a time of wars and revolutions, a time when it seemed that man had gone insane, when his great advancements in science and technology had merely provided him with more efficient tools for self-destruction. Hence was Kasravī convinced that science alone cannot guarantee a better future for humanity, and that materialism poses a great threat to the peace and well-being of all people. Thus he warned:

Who knows that the world with these cars, airplanes, railroads, electric lights, telephones, telegraphs, radios, cinemas and other European decorations is not like that would-be-sacrificed camel [of the *'Id-i Qurbān*] decorated with tassels, little bells and expensive shawls hanging from its head and neck whom the horse riders, riding in front and behind it and making merry by playing *surnā* (a kind of oboe), show round in market places and quarters while that poor mute animal (*zabanbastih*) does not know that this decoration and merrymaking is itself the messenger of a sudden death.²

The grave condition of the Iranians, whom Kasravī found entangled in a web of poverty, ignorance and superstition had already dissuaded him of belief in the ability of old-established religions to show people a way to salvation and to stand against the latest fallacies, namely the flood of materialist ideologies coming from the West. Disillusioned by modern science and the old religions' incapacity to ensure a better future for man, and urged by a deep sense of religious vocation, he searched for a way out of the impasse to which his nation and the world had come. He found his answer in what he called a true religion:

Religion is the best thing that curbs the extent of this struggle [of people against each other] and works for people's well-being and peace. What religion can do in this respect nothing else can do. Let the enemies of religion say whatever they want to say, we have tested irreligion and we know that it is an enemy of the peace and well-being of people of the world. We know well what vicious acts have been done in the name of religion in the past, yet we still see religion as necessary for the world and we despise irreligion.³

As we examined in the preceding chapters, by true religion Kasravī understood one supposedly bereft of all irrational and superstitious teachings and far-fetched speculations, more concerned with the social and spiritual well-being of man in this world than with scholastic or eschatological notions, and one not contradictory to indisputable scientific facts.

Formulating a basic answer, Kasravī then dedicated the rest of his life to fighting against what he considered the main obstacles to a better future for his people, namely the old degenerated traditions, beliefs and institutions, as well as the erroneous materialist ideologies of modern times. At the same time, he strove to disseminate his own religious ideology as an alternative. Kasravī's writings and activities, however, challenged the vested interests of the society, especially of the religious establishment, which finally resorted to the most brutal means of silencing his voice of dissent. Kasravī was not oblivious to the dangers of the path he had chosen:

You know that this year we took great steps forward in our struggle and started a face-to-face battle against evil-wishers. This battle is becoming more intense day by day. I cannot predict what shape this battle will take and what stories will be unfolded. Many among our comrades are worried that once more a conspiracy may spring up from somewhere. They take this silence of the evil-wishers as a sign of their dastardly covert trickeries. I do not dismiss it either. Such things, however, will not stop us in our struggle. We have raised our flag and, confident in God's support, take our steps. Let happen whatever is to happen. Our struggle is over the life of twenty million people. Over an issue of such importance one should not be afraid of being harmed or hurt, and the fear of

sustaining a loss should not make one leave the scene. It is our goal to compel evil-wishers to leave this unfortunate nation alone, and to wipe out these institutions of treachery. This is our ideal and for it we shall struggle.⁴

In the eyes of his enemies amid the ranks of the religious establishment and the political elites, Kasravī was setting a dangerous example for others insofar as his daring venture, more than anything else, was about the right of every individual to rise up and use his God-given *khirad*, to question the authenticity of all the traditions, beliefs and institutions that controlled his life.

Kasravī and his writings posed a particular threat to the Shi'i establishment. Hence the Shi'i clergy used all they had in their arsenal against him: they excommunicated him; wrote books and pamphlets against him; instigated mobs to attack the members of his party and burn and loot his party's offices; made numerous complaints to the king (Muḥammad Rizā Shāh); and finally planned and carried out his assassination.

Many among the political elites of the country also perceived Kasravī and his party as a growing threat to their power and interests. In a number of his books, including *Dadgāh*, *Afsarān-i Mā* and *Daulat bih Mā Pāsukh Dahad*, Kasravī identified a number of political figures by name and unveiled their corruption, unlawful activities and treachery. Among these were a number of ministers, generals, and some members of the parliament. These members of political elites did their best to suppress Kasravī and his party by occasionally banning his books and the Āzādigān Party's publications, dismissing the Party sympathizers from army and government offices, and by not prosecuting those who committed acts of violence against members of the Āzādigān Party. What worried these political elites more was the fact that, a year before his assassination, Kasravī decided that the time had come for his party to get involved in practical politics and to aim for political power. Jazayeri writes:

On March 29, 1945 (exactly a month before the first attempt on his life), he started a new series of lectures by announcing: "In these endeavours which we have undertaken, one of our tasks will be

to take control of the affairs of the country. This is one of our objectives; and beginning this year (i.e. the new Iranian year begun on March 21, 1945) we must take steps in that direction and prepare ourselves...It is our obligation to try to attain to that position."⁵

Finally, a number of eminent political figures, especially Muḥsin Sadr the Prime Minister, became conspiratorial partners with the clergy in their plan to assassinate Kasravī.

A few years after the assassination of Kasravī the political atmosphere of the country changed dramatically, and the regime adopted a more dictatorial approach by revoking most political freedoms. From then on, Iranian intellectuals were more than ever attracted either to versions of communist ideology or to radical views of a politicized Islam. More moderate philosophies, including that of Kasravī, were simply overlooked. A tendency arose among non-religious, and even leftist, intellectuals of the time to see the clergy as a potential ally in the fight against the dictatorial rule of the Shāh. Thus they hesitated to seriously discuss issues, such as Kasravī's critique of religions in general and Shi'ism in particular, that could rouse the clergy's ire. Jalāl Āl-i Aḥmad, one of the most influential writers of twentieth-century Iran and a one-time member of the Tūdeh Party, clearly exemplified such a tendency when he wrote:

I want to show that whenever the clergy and the intelligentsia of the time go together or side by side or follow in one other's steps, there is victory, progress and a step toward change and evolution. And whenever these two have opposed each other or have turned their backs to each other or have participated in a struggle alone, from the social point of view there have been defeat, regression and a step backward.⁶

The Islamic Revolution of 1979, in which a great majority of intellectuals supported the clergy, changed the whole situation. The question of religion and its social function in general, and of Shi'ism and the Shi'i clergy in particular, became a matter of interest not only to the intelligentsia but to the whole nation. The issues on which Kasravī had written so extensively were now impossible to ignore.

The harsh suppression of socio-political freedoms by the Islamic Republic soon disillusioned many people, especially intellectuals, who had invested great hope in the Revolution for its promise of a freer society. Prior to the Revolution, however, many people had acquiesced to the clergy without having the faintest idea about such doctrines as *Vilāyat-i Faqīh* and its implications for society. Thus today, Kasravī's body of work, especially his critiques of the Shi'i doctrines and the Shi'i clergy, has become a primary source of information for those opposed to the rule of the Shi'i clergy in Iran. The readership of Kasravī, as such, is on the rise, and his works are cited more than ever in articles by anti-regime emigre intellectuals. Inside Iran, a strict ban is observed on the writings of Kasravī. In a number of books recently published in Iran, especially the memoirs of the old members of the *Fidā'iyān-i Islām*, Kasravī and his activities are discussed briefly; considerably more information is provided about the plan for his assassination.

Kasravī's daring and systematic critique of the outdated aspects of Iranian culture, particularly the old religious dogmas and institutions, made its mark on the social and religious consciousness of many people both among his contemporaries and of subsequent generations. His example made it easier for others to recognize and to exercise their right to question the old cultural and socio-religious values that govern their lives, and to re-evaluate the authenticity of those values in the light of reason. Even some of those who showed hostility toward Kasravī were, in a way or another, influenced by him, although they never acknowledged it. A good example is 'Alī Dashtī who, as a member of the parliament, had asked the Iranian government to ban Kasravī's writings as blasphemous to Islam and Shi'ism. Years after the assassination of Kasravī, however, Dashtī wrote his book *Bīst-u-Sih Sāl* (Twenty Three Years) in which he repeated some of Kasravī's ideas on Islam. Dashtī published his book anonymously, and only those editions of the book that were published after his death bear his name.

The impact of Kasravī's works on the development of ideas in fields other than religion, particularly in the field of historiography, beyond the scope of this study, are valuable. Many of the questions

he raised especially about the dogmas and practices of the religious establishment in Iran, have remained unanswered and, as such, have not lost their relevance. They have become even more relevant after the establishment of the Islamic Republic and the assumption of political power by the Shi'i clergy. The new situation generates urgent concerns about religion and its relevancy to the realities of the modern world, its place and role in social life. These issues have consequently become major concerns of the people. It is no surprise then that the new generation of Iranians is showing increasingly more interest in the works and legacy of Aḥmad Kasravī.

Today, Kasravī's arguments against Shi'ism and the Shi'i clergy, as well as his views on the role of religion in society, are often cited by those opposed to the Islamic Republic in their attempts to ruin the ideological bases of that regime and the legitimacy of the clergy's claim to power. The problem, however, is that the political uses to which Kasravī's religious texts have been put are rarely based on in-depth study or a thorough understanding of his ideology. These mostly politicized or romanticized interpretations of Kasravī's religious writings tend to distort or obscure his real ideas. Numerous examples of these distortions are examined in the preceding chapters. The doctrinal aspects of Kasravī's ideology, therefore, continue to be overlooked and well-substantiated synopses of his religious thought remain difficult to find. Thus there persists a real need to expand the preliminary study presented in this thesis. By the same token, Kasravī's views on Islam, Shi'ism, Sufism and Baha'ism are subjects that warrant further study.

In this thesis, the genuineness of Kasravī's sense of spiritual vocation and the development of his religious and moral consciousness were first explored. The social and intellectual contexts of his religious thought, namely its origins, the original or controversial aspects of it, the reactions it elicited among Kasravī's contemporaries, and the degree of its relevancy to the present situation, were subsequently examined. This approach provided a basis for the presentation of key doctrines in his religious ideology, doctrines which have been routinely overlooked by previous commentators.

The endnotes of the introduction:

1. Like other religions, Shi'ism has had to face European atheistic ideologies, particularly communism, which took root in Iran after the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911 and attracted a great many people, especially from the ranks of intellectuals.

2. Here, Dastghaib's book is an exception. Dastghaib. *Naqd-i Aṣar-i Ahmad-i Kasravī*. Tehran: Pazand Publishing, 1978.

3. Staley. "The Intellectual Development of Ahmad Kasravī." Ph. D. Diss., Princeton U., 1966, p. 4.

4. Ansarī. *Nabard ba bīdīnī*. Tehran: Taban Publishing, 1944, p. 23.

5. Chubīnih. Intro. to *Bahā'igarī* by Kasravī. San Jose, CA: Tooka Publishing, nd., P. 26.

6. Ṭahirī. *Holy Terror: Islamic Terrorism and the West*. London: Hutchinson Ltd., 1987, p. 55.

7. Kazimzadih. "Ideological Crisis In Iran." *The Middle East in Transition*. ed. W. Z. Laqueur, London, 1958, p. 202. cited in: Staley. "The Intellectual Development." p. 37.

8. Abrahamian. "Kasravī: The Integrative Nationalist of Iran." *Towards a Modern Iran*. eds. Elie Kedourie & Sylvia G. Haim, London: Frank Cass Ltd., 1980, p. 100.

9. For a list of such books and pamphlets see: Ramyar. "Sayyid Ahmad Kasravi: Historian, Language Reformer and Thinker." MA Thesis. School of Oriental Studies, Durham U., U.K., 1969. pp. 290-302.

10. In her thesis, Ramyar quotes examples of such accusations against Kasravī. For further information see: Ramyar. "Sayyid Ahmad Kasravi." pp. 291-300.

11. Bodlā. "Kashf-i Asrār va Zamīnih-yi Piḍāyish-i Ān." *Kayhān-i Andīshih*, no. 29. pp. 166-167.

12. In 1943, "Ali Akbar Hakamizadeh, who knew Kasravi and was at least partially sympathetic to certain of his views published a book entitled *Secrets of a Thousand years*." Jazayeri. "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker of the Twentieth-century Iran." Intro. to *On Islam and shi'ism*. English Trans. of *Dar Pīramun-i Islam* and *Shī'igarī* by M. R. Ghanoonparvar. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1990. p. 23.

13. Khumainī. *Kashf ul-Asrar*. Qum: Muṣṭafavī Publication. n.d., pp. 18, 102, 169, 215, 303, ...

14. Ibid., pp. 59 & 332.

15. Ibid., p. 119.

16. Ibid., p. 107.

17. Ibid., p. 105.

18. Ibid., p. 309.

19. Ibid., p. 113.

20. Staley. "The Intellectual Development." p. vii.

21. This work of more than four hundred pages was originally submitted as a Ph. D. dissertation but, due to its serious shortcomings, it was accepted for M.A. degree.

22. Ramyar. "Sayyid Ahmad Kasravi." p. 1 (of the abstract).

23. While, for example, Kasravī has written, "It is God's will that once in a while a God-inspired movement emerges," Ramyar has reduced Kasravī's formulation to the following: "It is God's will that every other century there will be a renewal." Ramyar. "Sayyid Ahmad Kasravi." p. 238.

Also the titles of some of Kasravī's books are not properly translated in Ramyar's thesis. *Varjāvand Bunyād* (The Sacred Foundation), *Ā'in* (Creed, or Ethos), and *Dar Rāh-i Siyāsāt* (On the Path to Politics), for example, are incorrectly translated as "Basic Holiness," "The Model," and "Methods of Politics" See pp. 255 & 345.

24. For examples of these problems, see pp. 255-265.

25. On page 272 of her thesis Ramyar writes: "Kasravi had often said that Islam has lost its early vitality and some of his opponents had suggested that it should be restored to its original state. Kasravi not only fears that this delicate operation will be difficult, but has a presentiment that it maybe impossible." On page 274, however, she contradicts this statement: "Kasravi repeats that he has no intention of introducing a new religion, but aspires to revitalize Islam and purify it as it was at the dawn of its history."

Also, Ramyar's argument on pp. 261-262 that "Kasravi insists that...God's messengers are all in the same high intellectual range,...but Mohammad is the last of prophets," clearly contradicts Kasravī's own words when he writes: "Muslims' claim that Islam is the last religion is baseless. Such an statement contradicts God's law and progress." Kasravī did not believe in an end to either divine missions or the sequence of *barangīkhtigān* (prophets). Kasravī. *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Islām*. Tehran: Pāydar Publishing Co., 1969, p. 84.

26. In my discussions with Prof. Jazayeri, an authority on Kasravī's works and ideology, he agreed that it was not one of Kasravī's writings.

27. Kasravī himself mentions his insufficient knowledge of materialist ideologies at the opening of his book *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān*. However, he emphasizes

that he is primarily concerned with the harmful consequences of such materialist teachings as the denial of God's existence and the refusal of man's need for religion. Such materialist teachings, in his view, can destroy the foundations of human morality and, consequently, unleash the destructive forces of human nature.

28. Dastghaib. *Naqd-i Āṣā r.* pp. 40-44.

29. See pp. 8-9 of this thesis.

30. Ṭāhirī. *Holy Terror.* pp. 54-55.

31. See pp. 85-86 of this thesis.

Some of Kasravī's opponents from the ranks of the Shi'i clergy had ascribed similar views to him before. Strangely enough, Ṭāhirī ascribes the same views to Kasravī while attempting to defend him against the clergy.

32. Ṭāhirī. *Holy Terror.* pp. 54-55.

33. Staley. "The Intellectual Development." p. 37.

34. Chūbīnih. Intro. to *Bahā'īgarī.* p. 11.

35. Kasravī, according to his autobiography, studied English in the American Memorial School in Tabriz many years before writing his books *Shī'īgarī* and *Sūfīgarī*. Chūbīnih, however, writes: "With the publication of these books (*Shī'īgarī* and *Sūfīgarī*) Kasravī lost his peace completely, especially after he started studying English. The mullas shamelessly made his study of English an excuse to accuse him of studying Babism." Chūbīnih. Intro. to *Bahā'īgarī*, p. 20.

36. On page 14 of his article Chūbīnih writes: "Kasravī had seen with his own eyes how the fanatic Shi'is cut Sunni women's breasts, and that these poor women begged in the streets of Azarbaijan by showing their breast-cut chests to well-off people and stimulating a sense of pity in them." Chūbīnih, however, has committed two errors in his quotation from Kasravī's autobiography. First, Kasravī did not report that he had witnessed those horrible acts as they were taking place. Secondly, Kasravī pointed to some Sunni Kurdish tribesmen as the perpetrators of such atrocities against the Shi'i inhabitants of certain villages they attacked, and not the other way around as Chūbīnih has related. To see the translation of Kasravī's own words on this issue, see p. 21 of this thesis.

37. Chūbīnih. Intro. to *Bahā'īgarī.* p. 26.

38. For further discussion of this issue see pp. 81-83 of this thesis.

The endnotes of the chapter 1:

1. In fact, as Jazayeri writes, "The most important premise, basic to all Kasravi's teachings, and one that he discussed repeatedly, is the primacy of ideas as determinants of human action: a person's ideas, beliefs, dictate his behaviour." Jazayeri. "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker of Twentieth-Century Iran." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 9.
2. Kasravi. *Dādghāh*. Tehran: n.p., 1978/79, pp. 10-11.
3. Kasravi. *Dīn va Jahān*. Tehran: Paimān, 1945, p. 7.
4. Kasravi. *Tārīkh-i Mashrūtiy-i Irān*. Tehran: Amīr Kabīr Publishing Co., 1990/91.
5. Kasravi. *Tārīkh-i Hijdah Sālih-yi Azarbaijan*. Tehran: Amīr Kabīr Publishing Co., 1961.
6. Kasravi. *Mashrūtiy Bihtarīn Shakh va Ākharīn Natījiy-yi Andīshih-hayi Nizhād-i Ādamī Ast*. n.p., nd.
7. Kasravi. *Khudā Bā Mā Ast*. Tehran: Chāpāk Publishing Co., 1970/71, pp. 33-34.
8. Abrahamian. "Kasravi: The Integrative Intellectual." in *Towards a Modern Iran*. p. 100.
9. Kasravi. *Mā Chih Mīkhvāhīm?* Tehran: Rushdīyyih, 1979/80, p. 80.
10. Kasravi. *Dādghāh*. p. 30.
11. In Kasravi's autobiography, *Zindigānī-yi Man*, Hukmāvār is described as one of the most backward districts of Tabriz. This book also relates how easily the neighborhood's mostly illiterate, superstitious and ignorant inhabitants were manipulated, by self-seeking clergymen, into opposition and even acts of violence against the freedom-loving revolutionaries of Tabriz during the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911. Kasravi. *Zindigānī-i Man*. Tehran: Chapak Publishing, 1969/70, pp. 12-13 & p. 45.
12. Prior to the Constitutional Revolution, both the educational and the judicial systems of the country were mainly controlled by the Shi'i clergy.
13. Kasravi. *Zindigānī-yi Man*. pp. 9-10.
14. Pilgrims travelled mainly to the shrines of 'Alī (d. 661) and Husain (d. 680), the first and the third Shi'i Imams, in the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala, and also to the burial site of Rīzā (d. 818), the eighth Shi'i Imam in the city of Mashhad in northeast Iran.
15. Due to the absence of proper roads or an adequate transportation system, and also to the great insecurity of the countryside, pilgrims sometimes took months to reach their destinations. Many of them, especially the old, died on the way.

16. *Rauzih khvānī* is a popular Shi'i ritual. A family who can afford to hold this ritual usually invites people of the neighbourhood, as well as a mulla, to their house. The mulla recites sad stories of the sufferings and martyrdom of Husain and his relatives and friends in the deserts of Karbala at the hands of the army sent by Yazīd (680-683), the second Umayyid caliph. The recitation is done in a very melancholic voice in order to stimulate grief in the audience and bring them to tears. According to Shi'i popular belief, the Imams are so dear to God that He will forgive the sins of those who shed tears for the Imam's sufferings and would reward the faithful for their tears in the other world.

17. Kasravī. *Zindigānī-yi Man*. pp. 16-22.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

19. The word Mutasharri' refers to the orthodox Twelver Shi'ism. Shaikhīs are followers of another Twelver Shi'i sect founded by Shaikh Ahmad Ahsā'i (1753-1826). Ahsā'i reinterpreted the Shi'i doctrines in the light of philosophy and mysticism. He also rejected the role of the Shi'i clergy and the Shi'i practice of *taqlīd*. Karīmkhānīs are followers of Hājī Muhammad Karīm Khan-i Kirmanī (1810-1871) a disciple of Shaikh Ahsā'i. He reinterpreted his master's conception of the Perfect Shi'i and set the standards for recognition of such a person [the Perfect Shi'i] who should lead the community, and whom people should obey. Muhammad Karīm Khan regarded himself as the perfect Shi'i of his period.

20. Kasravī. *Zindegānī-yi Man*. pp. 17-18.

21. The depth of affection Kasravī felt for his father is evident in a short passage from his autobiography, where he wrote: "I have rarely been without sadness in my life, yet I have cried little. Now that I have passed my fiftieth year, if I should count my tears --the tears which I have shed from my own sadness-- there have not been more than four or five times. One of these occasions, and perhaps the hardest of all, was on the day my father died." *Ibid.*, p. 30. quoted by Staley. "The Intellectual Development." p. 69.

22. Staley. "The Intellectual Development." p. 53.

23. The traditional Qur'anic primary schools of the time were called *maktab*.

24. The textbooks taught in *maktab*s were not written or designed for children at all. They were generally chosen from among centuries-old books written in a convoluted form of the Persian language, bombastic in style and heavily dosed with Arabic words. The study of the Qur'ān, however, formed the basis of education in *maktab*s.

25. Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh (1907-1909), the Qājār ruler of Iran, abrogated the Declaration of Constitution, signed by his father, Muẓaffar ud-Dīn Shah (1896-1907). With the support of Tsarist Russia, he began a brutal suppression of the Constitutional Movement of Iran, the first act of which was the bombardment of the parliament and the execution of some revolutionary leaders. He, however, was not successful in putting down the resistance from the constitutionalists of Tabriz, and lost the war he had waged against them.

Eventually, the constitutionalists deposed him, and he escaped to Russia. Supported by some Turkmen tribes of north-east Iran, he later tried to capture Tehran, but was defeated once more. Finally he died in exile.

26. Anjuman-i Islāmīyyih was a hastily organized group of the Tabrizi mullas and their followers who were supported by Muhammad 'Alī Shah and fought with the constitutionalists of Tabriz from within the city.

27. Staley. "The Intellectual Development." p. 95.

28. Initially most mullas adamantly opposed the establishment of modern schools and the teaching of modern sciences. They pronounced these initiatives as a conspiracy to turn away childrens from Islam and Islamic values.

29. Kasravī. *Zindigānī-yi Man*. p. 57.

30. Staley. "The Intellectual Development." p. 209.

31. Ibid., P. 52.

32. Ibid., p. 120.

33. Kasravī. *Zindigānī-yi Man*. pp. 62-63.

34. Staley. "The Intellectual Development." p.9.

35. Āi-i Ahmad. *Dar Khidmat va Khīyānat-i Rushanfīkrān*. vol. 2, Tehran: Khvarazmī Publishing Co., 1978/79, p. 158.

36. Kasravī. *Yak Dīn va yak Dirafsh*. Tehran: Paydār Publishing Co., 1972, p.3.

37. Staley. "The Intellectual Development." p. 111.

38. All information on the publications of Bāhamād-i Āzādigan is taken from: Jazayeri. "Kasravī, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. pp. 5-7.

39. Kasravī. *Zindigānī-yi Man*. p. 152-153.

40 Ibid., p. 418.

41. Ibid., p. 425.

42. Ibid., p. 370.

43. Staley. "The Intellectual Development." p.10.

44. Jazayeri. "Kasravī, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 15.

45. Kasravī. *Ā'īn*, vol. 2, Tehran: Jār Publishing Co., 1976/77, p. 1.

46. Jazayeri "Kasravī, Iconoclastic Thinker." intro. to *On Oslam and Shi'ism*. p. 5.

47. Since the secular government was supposedly the usurper of the right of Imams and their deputies to rule, most mullas during this period suggested that paying tax to the government, doing military service in the army, and accepting jobs in government institutions were sinful and *haram*.

48. Jazayeri. "Kasravī, Iconoclastic Thinker." intro to *On Islam ans Shi'ism*. p. 6.

49. Davānī. *Nihzat-i Rauhanīūn-i Irān*. vol.2, n.p., The Cultural and Charity Institution of Imam Riza, n.d., p. 195.

50. Ibid., p. 196.

51. Jazayeri. "Kasravī, Iconoclastic Thinker." intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 32.

52 Less than a year before his assassination, Kasravī strongly objected to the parliament's choice of Muhsin Sadr as the new head of government. He described Sadr as an ignorant and superstitious person who knows nothing about politics and international affairs, someone who always uses his position in the government for personal, especially financial, gains. Kasravī argued that a person like Muhsin Sadr who had actively collaborated with the despotic regime of Muhammad 'Ali Shāh during the supression of the Constitutional Movement, and who had participated in the interrogation of political prisoners, many of whom were later executed, should not have been chosen as the prime minister of a state which claimed to be constitutional. Kasravī. *Sarnivisht-i Iran Chih Khvahad Bud?* Saarbrücken: Nawid Publishing Co. & Köln: Mehr Publishing Co., n.d., pp. 28-29.

53. Kasravī. *Dādghāh*. p. 25.

The endnotes of the chapter 2:

1. Kasravī. *Shī'īgarī*. San Jose, CA: Tooka Publishing Co., pp. 32-40.
2. Kasravī. *Mā Chih Mīkhvāhīm?* p. 175.
3. Kasravī. *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Islām*. pp. 28-29.
4. Kasravī. *Mā Chih Mīkhvāhīm?* pp. 192-193.
5. Kasravī. *Pursish va Pāsukh*. Tehran: Bahamād-i Āzādigan, 1946, p. 57.
6. Kasravī. *Mā Chih Mīkhvāhīm?* p. 81.
7. Kasravī. *Pursish va Pāsukh*. p. 47.
8. Kasravī, *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Khirad*. Tehran: Paimān, 1943/44, p. 18.
9. Jazayeri. "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 38.
10. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyād*. Tehran: Farrukhī Publishing Co., 1974/75, pp. 11-16.
11. Ibid., p.100-101.
12. Ibid., pp.100-103.
13. Kasravī. *Dar pīrāmūn-i Khirad*. pp. 17-20.
14. Jazayeri. "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 38.
15. Kasravī. *Bahā'īgarī*. p.83.
16. In some of its fundamental principles, Kasravī's religious thought is not totally unique. Dastghaib, for instance, alludes to Kasravī's argument for the existence of God as follows: "Concerning the existence of God and man's limit of knowledge, he says the words that Firdausī (d. 1019-1020) and the Mu'tazilites had said many centuries ago." Kasravī's understanding of the relationship between the two facets of the soul, namely *jān* (life, animal soul) and *ravān* (human soul, psyche), is not unique either. In fact, the very example that he offers in his book *Dar Pīramūn-i Ravān* in order to explain this relationship is nearly identical to that used by the famous Islamic thinker Imam Muhammad Ghazzālī (1059-1111) in his treatise known as *Dar Ma'rifat-i Ākhirat* (On Knowledge of the future world). Dastghaib. *Naqd-i Āṣār*. p.142. Ghazzālī, "Dar Ma'rifat-i Ākhirat", in *Risalih-yi Uzhuwīyyih*, by Abu 'Alī Sīna, ed. & trans. by Husain Khadīv Jam. Tehran: Ittilā'at publication, 1985, p. 121.
17. Kasravī. *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Falsafih*. Tehran, 1965, pp. 13-14.
18. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyād*. pp. 37-38.

19. Ibid., pp. 12-13 & pp. 23-25.

20. Kasravī. *Dar Pīramūn-i Ravan*. Tehran: Chāpāk Publishing Co., 1945/46, pp. 95-96.

21. Kasravī *Khvāharān va Dukhtarān-i Mā* Bethesda, Maryland: Iranbooks, Inc., 1992, p. 45.

22. Kasravī. *Payām bih Dānishmandān-i Urūpā va Āmrīkā*. Tehran: Paydar Publishing Co., 1977/78, p. 22.

23. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyād*. pp. 24-25.

24. Kasravī. *Dar Pīramūn-i Falsafih*. pp. 12-20.

25. Kasravī. *Mā Chih Mīkhvāhīm?* pp. 92-93.

26. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyād*. p. 24.

27. Kasravī. *Dar Pīramūn-i Ravan*. p. 99.

28. The problem with such a conclusion is that, by the same reasoning, the negative feature of the human soul can be taken as proof of the existence of an infinitely evil force at work in the universe. Kasravī, however, does not believe in the existence of such a force.

29. Kasravī. *Khudā bā Mā Ast*. pp. 6-9.

30. Ibid., p. 27.

31. It should be noted that the first Persian translation of a major book by Darwin appeared many years after the death of Kasravī. He probably gleaned most of his information about the theory of evolution from scattered and unspecialized articles in the two Arabic magazines of the time, namely the Lebanese *al-'Irfān* and the Egyptian *al-Muqtatīf*, to which he subscribed. In his own time, when a young Iranian author published a book in which he had explained this theory, Kasravī was so delighted that he immediately recommended its reading to his friends and followers. Kasravī. *Dar pīramun-i Ravan*. p. 17.

32. Kasravī. *Khudā ba Mā Ast*. pp. 26-28.

33. Kasravī. *Mā Chih Mīkhvāhīm?* p. 212.

34. Kasravī. *Ā'īn*. vols I & II. Tehran: Jār Publishing Co., 1976/77, p. 11.

35. Kasravī strongly resented the application of the principle of 'the survival of the fittest' to human life. He regarded this idea, known as 'social Darwinism,' as one of the philosophical foundations for the violence of capitalist competition, the most manifest examples of which were the barbaric wars that swept the world in the first half of the twentieth century. In his view, the western powers exploited this idea to justify their imperialist designs vis-à-vis each other and the rest of the world.

36. Kasravī. *Dar Pīramun-i Ravan*. p. 17.

37. Kasravī. *Payam bih Danishmandan*. p. 25.

38. Kasravī, *Dar Pīramūn-i Jānivarān*. Tehran: Parcham, 1945, p. 2.

39. As Dastghaib has mentioned, Kasravī's view probably has its origin in the Qur'an, 2: 29, "And when thy Lord said to angels, 'I am setting in the Earth a viceroy.' *The Koran*, trans. by A. J. Arberry, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 5.

40. Jazayeri. "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 36.

41. Kasravī. *Varjavand Bunyād*. pp. 37-53.

42. Kasravī. *Mā Chih Mīkhvāhīm?* p. 112.

43. Kasravī. *Dar Pīramūn-i Ravān*. pp. 45-46.

44. Ibid., pp. 46-47.

45. Kasravī regarded the theory of evolution as the best explanation found so far for the existence of plants and animals, and even for the advent of man. However, he also thought that this theory underestimated the magnitude of the mutation that led to the appearance of man on Earth.

46. Kasravī. *Dar Pīramūn-i Ravān*. p. 77.

47. Ibid., pp. 11-15.

48. Ibid., p. 105.

49. Kasravī. *Dar Pīramūn-i Khirad*. pp. 6-8.

50. Kasravī. *Dar Pīramun-i Ravan*. p. 5.

51. Ibid., pp. 30-32.

52. Kasravī. *Varjavand Bunyād*. pp. 36-37.

53. Kasravī. *Dar Pīramun-i Ravān*. p. 55.

54. Kasravī. *Dar Pīramūn-i Khirad*. pp. 8-10.

55. Kasravī. *Dīn va Jahān*. p. 50.

56. Kasravī. *Dar Pīramūn-i Khirad*. pp. 17-18.

57. Kasravī. *Dīn va Jahān*. p. 49.

58. Kasravī. *Nīk va Bad*. Tehran: Pāydār Publishing Co., 1977/78, pp. 12-13.

59. Kasravī. *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Khirad*. p. 16.
60. Kasravī *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān*. pp. 78-80.
61. Ibid., pp. 106-109.
62. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyād*. pp. 126-127.
63. Ibid., pp. 24-25.
64. Kasravī. *Pursish va Pāsukh*. p. 27.
65. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyād*. pp. 130-132.
66. Ibid., pp. 131-132.
67. Kasravī. *Pursish va Pāsukh*. p. 56.
68. Ibid., p. 59.
69. Ibid., p. 59.
70. Al-Qur'an. 16:70.
71. Kasravī acknowledges that the name of the angel Gabriel is mentioned in the Qur'an. However, he indicates that nowhere in the Qur'an is it suggested that the prophet Muhammad actually saw the angel Gabriel, or any other angel. Kasravī. *Pursish va pāsukh*. p. 139.
72. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyād*. p. 109.
73. Ibid. p. 121.
74. Kasravī. *Bahā'igarī*. San Jose CA: Tooka Publishing Co., 1992, pp. 80-81.
75. Al-Qur'an. 18: 85.
76. Ibid., 18: 89.
77. Kasravī. *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Islām*. pp. 50-51.
78. Jazayeri. "Kasravī, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 41.
79. Ibid. p. 40.
80. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyād*. pp. 109-116.
81. Jazayeri. "Kasravī, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 41.
82. Al-Qur'an. 6: 50.
83. Kasravī. *Khudā bā Ma Ast*. pp. 9-10.

84. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyād*. p. 115.
85. Ibid., p. 111.
86. Kasravī. *Dar pīrāmūn-i Islām*. pp. 82-85.
87. Related to this point is Kasravī's criticism of the two closely related faiths of Babism and Baha'ism in his book *Bahā'igarī*. There, he questions the rationale behind the need for a new religion only thirteen years after the death of the founder of the first. Suggesting that it has never been the case that two true founders of religion rise at the same period of time, he writes: "It can be asked why there has been a need for two religions at the same period of time. If Sayyid Bāb was truly a messenger of God and had established the faith by His order, why should it be abolished in a matter of a few years when it had not taken root yet?" Kasravī. *Bahā'igarī*. p. 90.
88. Kasravī. *Mā Chih Mīkhvāhīm?* pp. 224-225.
89. Kasravī. *Payām bih Dānishmandān...*p. 15.
90. Abrahamian. "Kasravi: The Integrative Nationalist." in *Towards a Modern Iran*. p. 100.
91. Ramyar, Minoo. "Sayyid Ahmad Kasravi " p. 303.
92. These titles include: *Nabard bā Bīdīnī* (Fighting against Atheism), *Shikast-i Kasravī* (Kasravī's defeat), *Tīshih bar Bunyād-i Kasravī* (An Ax to the Foundation of Kasravī), *Ātash-i Inqilāb* (Fire of Revolution) and *zarabat-i Bīdīnī ya 'Āshura-yi Dīn* (Strokes of Irreligion, or the 'Āshura of the religion).
93. Gūdarzī, Mahmūd. "Ahmad Kasravī, Nakhustīn Āmaj-i Fatva-yi Qatl-i Āqā-yi Khumainī." *Shahrvand-i Vancouver*, vol. 5, no. 245 , 1996, p. 3.
94. In *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān* Kasravī also discusses the contents of two books by Taqī Arānī, namely *Irfan va Uṣūl-i Madī* (Mysticism and the Principles of Materialism) and *Bashar az Nazar-i Madī* (Man from the Point of Materialism). Arānī, a friend of Kasravī, was a well-educated intellectual who tried to establish a communist organization in Iran, but was arrested along with fifty two others by Riza Shāh's regime. Buzurg 'Alavī, a member of Arānī's circle and one of the fifty three prisoners, describes the events that led to the murder of Arānī in prison in his book *The Fifty Three*. 'Alavī, Buzurg. *Panjah u Sih Nafar*. Tehran: Amīr Kabīr Publishing Co., 1978/79.
95. Kasravī. *Dīn va Jahān*. pp. 9-10. Also, Kasravī. *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān*. pp. 2-3.
96. Martin, Vanessa. *Islam and Modernism: The Iranian Revolution of 1906*. NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989, p. 7.
97. Jazayeri. "Kasravī, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 9.
98. Kasravī. *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 106.

The endnotes of the chapter 3:

1. Kasravī. *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Ravān*. p. 43.
2. Bayat, Mangol. *Mysticism and Dissent*. NY: Syracuse University Press, 1982, p. 134.
3. At times these reformers' faith in the feasibility of their master key solutions seems rather naïve. Regarding Malkum Khan's argument for the adoption of European laws, for example, Bayat writes: "Thus, Malkum dramatically sounded the alarm by predicting that, if reforms were not immediately undertaken to modernize the country, Iran would perish. He warned: 'We either have to lift ourselves from this base level up to that of Europe within the next two or three years, or from now on we should consider ourselves as already drowned and buried under the European flood.'...He [Malkum] firmly believed that the Western system of government could be imported as easily as the telegraph was, and political progress would be achieved 'without committing any injustice, without opposing the Muslim law, without problems and without losses.'" [emphases mine] Bayat. *Mysticism and Dissent*. p. 162.
4. As an example of this claim, Kasravī often adduced the fact that, despite adoption of a parliament and Western-style laws, the Constitutional Revolution failed to establish a truly democratic political system. He once wrote: "Is it not true that forty years after [the Constitutional Revolution] still a great majority of people do not know the meaning of democracy? Is it not true that still many groups with large followings detest constitutionalism and law and do not hesitate to denounce it? Is it not true that the system we have today and call constitutional is a disgrace to our history?" Kasravī. *Dar Rah-i Siyāsāt*. Tehran: Paydar Publishing Co., 1961. p. 35.
5. Jazayeri also highlights an important difference between Kasravī and other religious reformers of Iran: "Each of the others tried to reform his own religion, keeping it separate from others. To Kasravī a major purpose of religion was to bring people together. He addressed all religionists. He sought to reform, not a religion, but religion." Jazayeri. "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 44
6. Jazayeri. "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 15.
- 7 Ibid., p. 15.
8. Kasravī. *Mā Chih Mīkhvāhīm?* pp. 88-89.
9. Ibid., p. 92.
10. Kasravī. *Mā Chih Mīkhvāhīm?* pp. 92-97.
11. Ibid., pp. 92-93.
12. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyād*. pp. 39-45.

13. Kasravī. *Dar pīrāmūn-i Ravān*. p. 49.
14. Kasravī. *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Falsafih*. p. 40.
15. Kasravī. *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Islām*. p. 23.
16. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyad*. pp. 97-99.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-97.
18. Kasravī. *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Falsafih*. pp. 66-67.
19. Kasravī. *Varjāvand Bunyād*. pp. 20-25.
20. It is interesting to note that upon the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran, the study of the theory of evolution was omitted from school curricula.
21. Kasravī. *Sarnivisht-i Irān*. pp. 14-15.
22. Kasravī. *Shī'īgarī*. pp. 94-97.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 94-104.
24. Corbin, Henry. *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique*. Persian Trans. by Asadullah Mubashshirī. Tehran: Amīr Kabīr Publishing Co., 1979/80, pp. 347-348.
25. The following passage from Khumainī's book *Kashf ul-Asrār* is an example of the somewhat pragmatic approach of the clergy to the secular monarchy of the time: "As we have [already] stated, every reasonable person agrees that the establishment of a government and monarchy is good and in accordance with the interests of the country and people. Of course, a system that is based on divine laws and divine justice is best, but since they [people?] do not accept it from them, they ['ulamā'] never opposed this incomplete system and never tried to subvert the basis of the government. If at times they opposed a monarch, their opposition was confined to that person because they saw his particular rule as contrary to the interests of the country. Otherwise, to this day this class ['ulama'] have never opposed the principles of monarchy, and in fact many among the prominent grand 'ulama', such as Khvajih Nasīr al-Dīn, 'Allamih Hillī, Muhaqqiq Ṣanī, Shaikh Baha'ī, Muhaqqiq Damad, Majlisī, etc., cooperated with monarchs." *Kashf ul-Asrār*, pp. 186-187.
26. Jazayeri. "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 21.
27. Kasravī. *OnIslam and Shi'ism*. Trans. by M. R. Ghanoonparvar. p. 195.
28. Chūbīnih, Intro to *Bahā'īgarī*. p. 26.
29. Kasravī. *Farhang Chīst?* Tehrān: Paydār Publishing Co., 1965/66, p. 4.
30. Kasravī. *Pursish va Pāsukh*. pp. 15-17.

31. Jazayeri writes: "Civil religion" was suggested by professor A. Fathi of the university of Calgary (in private conversation). Jazayeri. "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 53.

32. Kasravī. *Dar pīrāmūn-i Islām*. p.5.

33. Kasravī. "Dīn va Sīyāsāt." Tehran: Bāhamād-i Āzadigān, 1969, pp. 7-11.

34. Kasravī. *varjāvand Bunyād*. pp. 139-141. & Kasravī. *Dar pīrāmūn-i Islām*. p. 82.

35. Kasravī. *Dar pīrāmūn-i Islām*. p. 84.

36. Kasravī. *Dīn va Jahān*. pp. 15-17.

37. Kasravī. *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 86.

38. Ṭāhirī. *Holy Terror*. pp. 54-55.

39. Kasravī. *Yak Dīn va Yak Dirafsh*. pp. 3-4.

40. Kasravī. *Dar Pīrāmūn-i Islām*. pp. 84-85.

The Endnotes of the Conclusion:

1. Kasravī. *Ā 'īn*. vol. 2, p. 1.
2. Ibid., vol 1, p. 5.
3. Ibid., p. 12.
4. Kasravī. *Afsarān-i Mā*. Tehran: Rushdīyyih, 1979/80, pp. 92-93.
5. Jazayeri. "Kasravi, Iconoclastic Thinker." Intro. to *On Islam and Shi'ism*. p. 13.
6. Āl-i Ahmad. *Dar Khidmat* ., vol. 2, p. 52.

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