

## **Failure of Political Parties in Iran between the Years 1942-1954: A Structuralist Investigation**

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**ABSTRACT:** *It may not be possible to review all theorists' and writers' views who have studied the evolution and functions of political parties; therefore it is better to concentrate on some of the important and selected viewpoints of some significant theorists. In this regard we should scrutinize the approach which relates with the political parties along with its conceptualization and widening of the related paradigms.*

*The article is divided into different divisions and subdivisions. The first portion deals with the introduction. The second part is concerned with the theoretical perspective. This section is further divided into three parts. In the first part of this section there is a discussion of the political parties from the perspective of structuralism. The second part of the section is concerned with the political parties from the perspective of functionalism, and the last part of this section analyses the political parties on the basis of their economic structure. The final section attempts to give a brief conclusion on the failure of the political parties in Iran.*

**Keywords:** *Political Parties, Structuralism, Functionalism, Economic Analysis, Iran*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Iran, during its long history, has been governed by dictatorial governments. All of them gained power by way of armed forces, and until there emerged a stronger individual or dynasty, these governments were in charge of all aspects of people's life in the country. Dictatorial governments imposed heavy taxes, and repressed any sign of opposition. People had respite only intervening period of change of dynasties. Even these islands of peace proved very fragile as people had to face the wrath of local governors who found themselves free to exploit people in the absence of a strong central power.

Through the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, people tried to establish a closely controlled judiciary and parliament from the period of Mozaffar al-Din Shah. The effort of his successor, Mohammad Ali Shah, to lock down the parliament was unsuccessful, when, like other Iranian people, the people of Tabriz, in the North-West of Iran, resisted his despotism and marched towards Tehran to force him to resign in favour of his son, Ahmad Shah. However, because of the intervention of Russia and the British Empire in Iranian affairs, the Constitutional Revolution in a little while, lost its force. After a while during the First World War, Iran became the battlefield for Russian and British armed forces in the fight against the Ottomans and German agents.

"For a decade Iran experienced foreign interference, disorder and insurgency in many provinces. Though there was not yet an independent judiciary, the new parliament survived, and there was at times a lively independent press. The early 1920s saw the rise of Reza Khan, the end of the Qajars and a return to despotism. Reza Shah, a westernized secular nationalist, formed a strong military and a centralized bureaucracy, and established both secular judiciary and a secular educational system which the constitutionalists had wanted all along. In these and other ways he deprived the clerics of former monopolies and resources, though he did not go as far as his neighbour and model, Kemal Ataturk. Many of his reforms were popular, but the constitution was ignored and dissent was ruthlessly suppressed. The clerics, labelled as fanatical reactionaries, in this modernizing milieu, were furious but reduced to silence" (Mir-Hosseini and Tapper, 2006:13).

The reality is that Iranian people were sick of the long years of disorders. After the Constitutional Movement, and with the inefficient rule of the last Qajar king, people seemed to welcome Reza Khan. Unfortunately, Iranian history was repeating itself once again and Reza Khan was not any different from his predecessors. The people had no option but to choose either unconditional chaos or unlimited dictatorship. In full agreement with the existing political culture, *Reza Shah* viewed political parties mainly as vehicles for hostility. He considered political parties as a cause of confusion, disagreement, and disparagement for his own rule. He did not see parties as vehicles for endowing the government with controlled support in society or for organizing accepted support with the final plan of pretentious government.

The issue of the absence of successful and large scale political parties in Iran worried many Iranian intellectuals. *Reza Shah's* dictatorship prevented the people from learning to cooperate, but after his abdication in 1941, party activity became stronger.

In 1941 the allied occupation of Iran changed authoritarian rule of *Reza Shah* to constitutional government; while their occupation was also a problem to the growth of Iranian constitutional foundations. When allied forces were busy fighting war in Russia their main concern was to protect their source line. Therefore they did not show any interest in local political developments in Iran with the exception of preventing the conditions getting dangerous for them. They entered into Iran and the people felt somewhat relieved from the earlier restrictions on free speech and free discussion which they had experienced under the regime of their earlier dictator. It was unexpectedly a positive change after the twenty years of *Reza Khan's* repression. Voices for establishing democracy started emerging from the intellectual elite corners of Iran as they saw the world drastically changing. The continuously changing government in those days added to the uncertainty by unsystematic repression of the opponent media. The way by which Iran appeared from this stage apparently unharmed is witness to the political wisdom of its leaders; it also shows the nature of Iranian politics.

As *Elwell-Sutton*, (1949:46) says, "In 1941 there were no political parties in Iran neither was there any possibility of the continuity or restructuring of the earlier parties which had emerged in the previous period between 1906 and 1921. Of course, many of the old politicians still survived, but the conditions they knew had passed away, in Iran as well as in the world outside. Nevertheless, it was to these old men that the Allies turned, rather than to the young and enthusiastic - but untried - products of *Reza Shah's* educational system. This traditionalism, once established, set the tone of Iranian politics even after the Allies had gone. The 300- odd vacancies in some 24 cabinets between August 1941 and November 1948 were filled with few exceptions from a clique of 70 or 80 politicians, all over fifty years of age, and many over sixty".

Political parties in Iran got created following the emergence of its political reconstruction. In the twentieth century, the creation and growth of political parties in Iran became the main feature of country's political modernization.

It may not be possible to review all theorists' and writers' views who have studied the evolution and functions of political parties; therefore it is better to concentrate on some of the important and selected viewpoints of some significant theorists. In this regard we should scrutinize the approach which relates with the political parties along with its conceptualization and widening of the related paradigms.

## **II. POLITICAL PARTIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF STRUCTURALISM**

The first study of political parties was done by the structuralists. Structuralism emerged in the 1960s, and was based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). Saussure's work was oriented to understanding the structures underlying languages. Structuralism also influenced anthropology and Marxism. In the former case, the work of Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009) exhibits this influence. Levi-Strauss attempted to extend structuralism to anthropology, focusing on communication. He reinterpreted social phenomena for their effects on communication. Structural Marxism took from structuralism an interest in the historical origins of structures, but continued to focus on social and economic structures (Ritzer, 2002: 595). In the study of political party from the structuralism perspective, party organization has an important role. Relationship between party's organization and other systems in the society such as political systems, economic systems and social systems has a great importance. Thus we should search interaction between parties and other organization in the society. Robert Michels, a German sociologist, is most famous for the study of the leadership of left-wing democratic parties to be found in Political Parties. With particular reference to the Social Democratic Party in Germany, he was particularly interested in the ways in which organizational dynamics inhibit the realization of radical objectives. He concluded that all organizations have oligarchical tendencies, a proposition which he formulated as an 'iron law of oligarchy', which states that 'it is organization which gives birth to the domination of the elected over the electors, of the mandatories over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who say organizations says oligarchy. According to Michels (2009: 189), as a political party grows and becomes more bureaucratic, it is increasingly dominated by officials who are committed to internal organizational goals rather than social change, and by middle-class intellectuals who pursue their own personal objectives which are usually different from those of the party rank-and-file.

## **III. POLITICAL PARTIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FUNCTIONALISM**

Another type of study of political parties was done by researchers who analysed the "role" and "function" of these parties. Functionalism is one of the core perspectives of sociology. The functionalist perspective evolved from the work of Emile Durkheim, though it was shaped by Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons during the mid-20th Century. According to Bohm & Vogel (2001: 78), functionalism can be explained up with one simple premise: "the world is a system of interrelated parts, and each part makes a necessary contribution to the vitality of the system". Functionalism could be explained as the most simplified and unsuccessful of the sociological schools. Other hand Functionalism basically serves as the most conservative of the sociological schools of thought.

Functionalists have paid particular attention on political party's role in society, especially their role in connection with political system. These studies included significant percentage of existing research about political parties and are seeking to answer just a question: what are party's functions in society?

It must be said that the word "function" can be used in both special and general meaning. According to the first it only covers party activities but in the second case in addition of direct performance it also includes results and indirect effects of party activities.

#### **IV. ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

This analysis of political parties is more familiar to the political theorists. It seeks to explain political parties as a market based fact. Max Weber was the first sociologist offered economic analysis of political parties. Weber discusses political parties in his political writings as well as in his sociology. He was much concerned with the power position of the bureaucracy in modern political parties.

Weber defined a party as follows: "the term party will be employed to designate associations, membership in which rest on formally free recruitment. The end to which its activity is devoted is to secure power within an organization for its leaders to attain ideal or material advantages for its active members" (Swedberg, 2005: 194).

According to this perspective political parties always are a market based fact. Elections are a type of political market, in which parties offer their candidates and their policies in exchange for the votes needed to gain office. In this market, parties gain what is surely their key resource, control of public office. Just as a business can maintain itself by selling its product at an adequate price, a party able to win office has no difficulty in obtaining all the elements of a vital organization: attractive candidates, willing workers, and money givers. And, just as the economic market sends clear and unambiguous messages to the business firm concerning the success or failure of its product, the political market evaluates openly, automatically, externally, and with exquisite numerical precision the output of the political party. The political and economic markets are not, of course, identical. The political market operates much more discontinuously in accord with the electoral cycle. Much of the most important difference between the two kinds of markets lies in the character of what is being traded. Elections create an imbalanced market. Parties receive votes and the control of office. These are private benefits, or goods which go only to the party and to its candidates. But the parties offer to voters, candidates and policies, benefits which go to everyone regardless of the votes cast. Thus they offer collective benefits. This is in sharp contrast to the economic market in which both sides to a transaction give and receive private or selective goods (Schlesinger, 1994: 13).

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

In the current article the discussions highlighted the reach, utility and inadequacies of the perspectives adopted in the study of political parties. In this research, while using structuralist perspective, the researcher is looking for a way to prove that social, political, economic, and cultural structures during 1942- 1954 were the cause of instability of political parties in Iran. Political system in this period of time had a totalitarian or authoritarian structure in Iran.

Authoritarianism is characterized by highly concentrated and centralized power maintained by political repression and the exclusion of potential challengers. It uses political parties and mass organizations to mobilize people around the goals of the state.

In other hands Iran's economy in this period during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, significant increases in oil revenues, coincident with the centralization of the economy, compounded societal stress and imbalance. The modernization that continued throughout the Shah's rule affected the economic infrastructure but not the monarchical political structures. In this situations party's role and their durability in the Iranian society in the historical period of time that faced with more ups and downs. Favorable conditions for existence of the parties how they react in competition conditions and in the periods of gaining the power. Appearance, development of the political parties, and their proper behavior in Iran could make good effects on social maturity and cultural expansion, and to also establish large and quick development in this atmosphere. Some believe the imbalance between political and economic development is the main cause of political inefficiency of parties in Iran.

Like most third world countries, in Iran also, authority did not distribute power with political parties and other political groups, on the other hand government tried to weaken parties, especially those which opposed them.

Another reason for failure of political parties in Iran was that most parties had close association with foreign power doctrinaires. From the left wing, the Tudeh Party openly proclaimed its adherence to communism, this party and also Democrat Party of Azerbaijan was supported by Soviet Union. On the other hand, from the right wing parties, the National Will party with liberal democratic ideas was perceived to be somewhat close to the British.

During this time in Iran there was no friendly relationship between political parties, and most of them were competing with each other. For example, all of the right wing parties had their base in response to the growth of the Tudeh party. The Tudeh party was seen as Soviet sponsored, and thus left-wing and right-wing had not only internal clashes but also rivaled in the context of international politics.

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