

The Role of Mahmoud Tarzi in Iran-Afghanistan Relations

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Abstract

Intellectual elements, particularly if they have a highlighted role in the structure of political power, can have undeniable effects in line with political-social orientations of their own society. Mahmoud Tarzi, a contemporary Afghani writer, intellectual and politician is one of the famous figures who during the upheavals of recent century, have attracted the attentions of researchers. But, the main approach of investigating his ideas and intellectual foundations have been focused and consequences and effects of his thoughts in relation with other countries and particularly Iran have received less attention and investigations. In most of researchers, always Tarzi's suggestions regarding reformist plans in Afghanistan and his efforts in line with reforming inappropriate political and cultural behaviors of the Afghani society and the lack of systematic and effective relations with the countries of the region and beyond have been focused. In this article, with a historical-analytical approach regarding Tarzi's dependency to the government, is to investigate some aspects of his main ideas in the Newspaper of Siraj-ul-Akhbar, his efforts to present ideas about the superiority of a single ethnic group-Afghan- and a single language-Pashtu- and the reasons of his opposition to the presence of Iranians in the political, economic, and cultural systems of Afghanistan.

Keywords: Iran, Afghanistan, Pashtunism, Siraj-ul-Akhbar, Mahmoud Tarzi.

Introduction

Mahmoud Tarzi, a famous Afghani writer, journalist, poet and politician, is among the figures who due to his long presence abroad was familiar with modern thoughts and ideas and influenced by such ideas, took the weakness and backwardness of the Afghani society in the

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serious approach to the fields of universal education, the growth of individualism and extensive relationships with the surrounding world particularly with European countries and the Muslim country of Turkey which was considered the dream of hopes of the Afghani government. Siraj-ul-Akhbar released in a simple and understandable-for-all language by a group of young Afghanis believing in nationalism and modernism in line with the development of reformist movement of Afghanistan could be a tip of hope of a better future for the backward and poor Afghanistan. The main basis of ideas of Mahmoud Tarzi was constructed by the issue of nationalism more than everything else; the issue that indicates his affectability of world upheavals during his exile from his home. Due to such awareness that Tarzi tries to link national ideals with modernist objectives. To Tarzi, hometown is the origin of religion and religion is the basis of freedom, honor, nationalist and personal identity. Tarsi also tried to line the legitimacy of Afghani government with Islamic principles with this belief that religion, nationality, hometown and government are indispensable and sacred concepts. But his nationalism and the Afghani government for him was conceptualized as the superior and dominant ethnic group which has no rival and it was represented in the ethnic group of Pashtun, while other groups in Afghanistan, particularly Shiites and Persian speakers were considered as second-ranked citizens deprived of legal and citizenship rights.

Other bases of Tarzi's vision was the issue of modernism in his thoughts and writings. He believed that issues of public education and relationship with modern western world and basic reformation of Afghani society with reorganization of institutions and modern sciences and technologies, but in the beliefs of Tarzi and Afghani reformists, modernism was considered a prescription in line with cultural renaissance, virtual revival and national rebirth in the form of "Pashtunism" which could approach the pre-modernist society of Afghanistan to a modernist environment. Getting far from Iran and tendency toward Turkey are considered as the most obvious Tarza's intellectual aspects which are to be investigated in the present study.

Newspaper of Siraj-ul-Akhbar and Mahmoud Tarzi's intellectual foundations

The newspaper of Siraj-ul-Akhbar which was a bi-weekly one, first was published from 1911 to 1919 and after that, it was republished with the name of Amanyah of Afghan. It is considered as the first effective newspaper during the history of publication of Afghanistan |(Anderson,1990: 86).

The founder of and managing editor, Tarzi, the son of Gholam Mohammad Khan among the famous heads of the tribe of Mohammad Zaei residing in Ghaznei, due to what was called the conspiracy of Sardar Gholam Mohammad Khan against the government in 1882 by Amir Abdurrahman Khan, was exiled with his family (Habibi, 1970: 151).

The father of Mahmoud Tarzi, along with his family, firstly stayed in India for three years. Mahmoud learned Urdu and then entered the court of the Othman Empire and reside in Damascus. The family of Tarzi were favored and welcomed by Sultan Abdulhamid II-the Othman Emperor- and they were allowed to stay in the realm of the Othman Empire. The years of exile which endured for two decades was an important period for the young Tarzi and gave him the chance to learn Turkish, Arabic, and French as well as get familiar with modern thoughts and institutions with education in the scientific centers of Damascus and Istanbul (Arghandavi, 2001: 125). At the same time, he got familiar with the nationalist-modernist movement in Othman country and Seyyed Jamaluddin Asadabadi's pan-Islamic ideas (Katib of Hazara, 1993, vol. 2: 267).

At the same time, he as one of the officials of the Othman government, gained invaluable experience and in 1902 and after that when Amir Abdurrahman died, by announcing an amnesty by the new Amir, Habubullah Khan, returned to Afghanistan. Soon, the young Tarzi focused his efforts for the beginning of reformist plans in Afghanistan and started his measured by turning the attention of Amir to the shortages of the country in relation with education, communication and industry, and mentioning unfavorable political and cultural behaviors, as well as intellectual isolation.

Tarsi soon was appointed as the head of translation office of the court. His main task was to inform Amir the events and upheavals in the Islamic world and Europe (Farrokh, 1992: 154). Tarzi's consistent efforts and the supports of Enayatollah Khan, the son of Habibullah Khan, who were the head of royal press and education, caused the advent of Siraj-ul-Akhbar (Gerigorian, 2009: 395).

The important aim pursued by Mahmoud Tarzi was the publication of the newspaper, making the society of Afghanistan familiar with one of the representations of advancement and development of the underdeveloped society of Afghanistan, i.e. newspaper. Tarsi believed that except for primitive and unsophisticated tribes, there is no organized society but news media. He released Siraj-ul-Akhbar by utilizing Persian language and translation them to foreign languages such as Urdu, Arabic, Turkish and English. In fact, Siraj-ul-Akhbar, under his supervision, was involved with the ideal of Afghani nationalism and reformation, the promotion of modern political thoughts and removing traditional thoughts and beliefs from the society of Afghans.

"The main theme of the newspaper was constructed by following the policies of Young Turks, particularly the Union and Progress Party which Tarzi one of the advocates, a nationalism combined with pan-Islamism and quarrel with colonialism. But, in addition, promotion of teachings, quarrel with superstitions and teaching of Pashtu were among their main objectives (Farhang, 2011, vol. 1: 510).

Tarsi and his colleagues tried to induce a country with at least half non-Afghans that the fear of them is meaningless and reformation and nationalism could reinforce the control of Afghans all over the country.

Another function of this group in the Newspaper of Siraj-ul-Akhbar for persuading the governor of Afghanistan for political and economic upheavals was such that no threat would damage the structure of the monarchy (Gharjestani, 1993: 63).

Tarsi and the young Afghans were faced with the difficult tasks of persuading religious centers. In this arena, the difficulty of persuading Afghani Shiites who believed that the plan of reformation and the ideal of Afghani nationalism is a plan for weakening marginalizing them and the domination of Sunnis all over the society (Qandehari, 1983: 49). In spite of the propaganda of Tarzi and his colleagues, the prediction of the Shia society of Afghanistan based on the next upheavals was true.

Tarsi believed that a brief view over the society of and the history of Afghanistan indicated that the farness from science and rationalism were considered the commonest factors of backwardness of Afghani people.

The lack of attention to law and order, superstition and tribalism were other components that were considered factors of backwardness of Afghani society and caused the separation of regions such as Sistan and Baluchistan which, according to them was taken from Afghans by force (Gerigorian, 2009: 289).

Tarsi did not believe to not have communication with the outside world and not have information of the world upheavals. Therefore, Tarzi and his newspaper tried to be effective

on the modern cultural, political and social structures in the society of Afghanistan by providing a new vision in the mentioned fields.

The lineage of modernity and Islam in Tarzi's view

Mahmoud Tarzi and his colleagues were among the first modernists of Afghanistan who discussed that the superiority of the western world is not just in the military structure of their society, but the present achievements in the western world should be considered as intellectual, cultural and economic. Afghans should not suffice their traditions, they should accept the representations of modernity such as railways, telephone and telegraph as well as military technologies (Khasteh, 1950: 27).

Tarzi also warned that the government and the public of Afghanistan should not imitate the West and its achievements. According to Tarzi and his colleagues, reformation and passing its path were not compatible with Islamic and traditional beliefs of Afghani society. Therefore, he seriously challenged the traditional and religious conditions of the Afghani society. Mahmoud Beig Tarzi, in his works, condemned and criticized the religious centers which criticized modern scientific centers as non-religious achievements. He declared that such a tendency could show the catastrophic situation of ignorance in Afghanistan. He reminded that in Europe and western countries, sciences and religions, each has their own status, while in the society of Afghanistan, there is no separation and border between them (Ravan Farhadi, 1976: 151). Tarzi considered the religious scholars of his country as the causes of the greatest problems for the country due to what he called tolerance and unawareness of affairs. Religious centers and leaders, by persisting that all educational plans were their exclusive rights, created a lot of hindrances and difficulties on the path of developing education and promotion of modern culture among the Muslim Afghans.

In the vision of Tarzi and his colleagues, it should not be allowed that the importance of reformation, which was compatible in its nature with the supreme decisions of Islam, be considered unimportant. He asks how it is possible that the Muslims of Afghanistan consider sciences and industries as heretic, while the development and advancement could contribute to defensive systems and independence of the country. The acceptance of western science and technology cannot necessarily be the acceptance of European traditions (Jubelle, 1963: 94). He believed that the history of Islam and consequently the Quran indicate that they not only involve in the Hereafter, but they advise the necessity of science and knowledge by the Messenger of Islam.

The authors of *Siraj-ul-Akhbar* utilized the thoughts of Mahmoud Tarzi in getting help from religious texts in line with proving their ideas, such that Adulhadi, one of the colleagues of Tarzi, reminded the travel of scholars of Islam as the models of intellectualism and universalism of knowledge and thought (Farhang, 2011, vol. 1: 581).

In opposition to the ideas of religious scholars and claimers of the Afghani society which considered learning a foreign language as forbidden and fought with it, Tarzi believed that learning a foreign language cannot damage the identity of the youth or corrupt them. Tarzi and his colleagues, even used the anti-Britain feelings of Afghans for pressing the country for teaching foreign language all over Afghanistan. He emphasized that Afghans, by learning English can learn all mysteries of scientific and industrial knowledge of Britain (Gerigorian, 2009: 397).

He concluded that it was necessary to reform fundamentally the Afghani society with reorganizing institutions and sciences and technologies. The achievement of this critical tasks should be the common mission of religious leadership, the leadership of Muslim intellectuals, researchers and governmental elites. The task of religious leaders and intellectuals is that liberate the advancing spirit of Islam and Muslim society of Afghanistan from non-Islamic superstition, traditions and ideas. Tarzi believed that the age of theory had been passed, now is the time of action and practice, the age of machinery and electricity. The age of camels, bulls and donkeys had been passed (Ahang, 1985: 54).

Tarzi's challenges and those of Afghani intellectuals raised the opposition of the religious society of Afghanistan and according to Ludwig, Amir Habibullah Khan Tarzi threatened that he would cut his head off" (Adamak, 2005: 97). But Tarzi believed in the changes in the intellectual space and social reformation of the society of Afghanistan via cultural relationship with the outside world and in this line, he knew his model to be Turkey because he believed that "the policy of the union of Islamic world reaches Afghanistan by Turkey" (Gerigorian, 2009: 295).

Regarding women's rights, healthcare, and many other similar issues, his models were Turkey and Europe, to Tarzi, Iran could be a threat in the path of advancement and development of Afghanistan particularly in security and political issues. Tarzi and his colleagues, in addition to explaining rational, scientific and industrial achievements in Europe, in Siraj-ul-Akhbar and other works, illustrated the greatness of science and research in the pre-modern and underdeveloped Afghanistan in any form and by utilizing the supports of the government.

The libertarian character of Tarzi, soon was influenced by the tyrannical spaces of the king and courtiers and the Afghani intellectual member collapsed from his wide intellectual world to a mere dogmatic ideologist during the political-social ups and downs.

Apart from the marriage of his girls to the sons of Amir Habibullah Khan, the King of Afghanistan, he warned Amanullah Khan, who later became kings of Afghanistan from doing tyrannical measures and wrongdoings. Beyond that, in poems composed by Tarzi, Amir Habubullah Khan was described and praised as a fair, rational, wise, religious, the shadow of God and the called the day of his accession to the throne the day of the honor of the kingdom (Habibi, 1993: 160).

Tarzi, as it is the characteristics of tyrannical governments, in an obvious withdrawal and as a nationalist figure, wanted the establishment of the national language-Pashtu- in Afghanistan and for the first time during the history of Afghanistan press, the Newspaper of Siraj-ul-Akhbar contained Pashtu poems and articles. His supports for the policy of political-cultural Pashtunism of the governments of Habibullah Khan, Amanullah Khan and Mohammad Nadir Shah, made him a figure opposite to the promotion and development of Persian language.

According to the managing editor of Siraj-ul-Akhbar, literary and historical studies should be in line with the promotion of the status of Pashtun and Pashtu language. He and his colleagues considered Pashtu as the "language of Afghans" and official language against Persian language. "Pashtu or Afghani" was the symbol of national capacity and origin of all languages, it was a real national one. Accordingly, this language should be taught to all racial groups in Afghanistan. Islam, the history of Afghanistan, and Pashtu, all constructed material which stuck the racial mosaics of the country (Newspaper of Siraj-ul-Akhbar, 1955, no. 1: p. 2).

Therefore, in Tarzi's beliefs and tradition and those of the modernists of this age, reformation as a prescription of cultural renaissance, virtual innovation and national rebirth in the framework of Pashtunism as an strategy which could change the underdeveloped society of Afghanistan into a modern and advanced one. Siraj-ul-Akhbar closures in 1918 was in fact a

kind of support for Pashtu against Persian language and announcing loyalty to Pashtunist governments of Afghanistan. Libertarian newspaper which previously criticized the improper management and convenience of the elites of the country including the king himself, after a while, in the age of Amanullah Khan, he was appointed as the minister of foreign affairs of Afghanistan and due to political and intellectual dependency to Turkey, took his time and efforts to be closer to Turkey and farer from Iran (Ghodsizadeh, 2010: 125). His orientation towards Turks caused that he translate the book of International Law by Hassan Fahim Pasha and the five-volume work of the history of Russian-Japanese war written by the Chief of the Turkish General Staff (Gerigorian, 2009: 215).

Further, he started to do reformist and innovative measures such as the boom of the Turkish translation office and the translation of "workbooks" from Turkish in such a way that by the help and guide of Tarzi during 9 years and also the help of Turkish experts, more than 70 workbooks were published (Sykes, 1987, vol. 2: 412).

Tarzi suggested that Turkish officers, technicians, and medical experts should be hired as the symbol of union and coordination of Muslims for helping the execution of reformation plans in Afghanistan. He discussed that Turks would not result in internal conflicts; therefore, their presence would facilitate reformation (Newspaper of Siraj-ul-Akhbar, 1950, no. 14: 9-10). Gerigorian writes: three influential families in Afghanistan were advocates of Turkish policies with reformist and nationalist visions; one of them was the family of Masahaban (Yahya Kheil) educated in India. The family of Charaki and the family of Tarzi (Gerigorian, 2009: 276).

, it seems that Tarzi with his all innovative components, like a lot of Afghani nationalist, did not remain far from the dogmatic religious environment of Afghanistan. He always saw and investigated the political, social, and cultural issues from a Hanafi Sunni. Therefore, in spite of the fact that he had pan-Islamic beliefs, and used them as instruments for Islamic union and the rejection of imperialism, he declared that there would be no political tolerance due to the severe tendency of Iranians to Shia. In fact, he considered the Shia government of Iran as a serious barrier in the convergence of Sunni world and creating his desired pan-Islamism (Zaboli, 2002: 195). One of the reasons of his serious tendency to the Sunni government of turkey was the presence of Shia in the texture of Iranian society, an issue which he and his colleagues did not like it.

As implicitly mentioned in resources, Mahmoud Tarzi was the main counselor of the Afghani Kings and particularly Amanullah Khan. Therefore, intendency of Tarzi and his colleagues can be considered as a kind of dissatisfaction of the government and the religious elements of the Sunni society of Afghanistan with mostly Shia Iran. It seems that Afghani intellectuals, as they declared Pashtu as the real national language, pursued to create a distinct identity from Iran. To emphasize a distinction with Iran in line with differences and intrinsic independence, they highlighted religious intolerance.

Tarzi and modernist Afghani nationalists advised the politicians the establishment of diplomatic relations with the outside world and particularly Europe as an important tool in the access of Afghanistan to achievements and development. Political isolation resulted in intellectual isolation and backwardness; therefore, with Tarzi's emphasis, Afghani diplomatic missions travelled to Turkey, European countries, the USA in the age of Amanullah Khan (Farhang, 2011, vol. 1: 427). After the relative stability in the country, Tarzi persuaded Amanullah Khan to travel abroad, an abroad which was the first visit of the King from India, Europe, and the Middle East (Gerigorian, 2009: 263).

The peak of the travel of the king and his companions was when he visit Turkey and Iran. "As soon as entering Turkey in 19 May 1928, a king of friendship was established between the

two countries, and the king called Turkey as the older brother and a guide. Turks also praised the independent spirit of brave Afghans and stated that Turks and Afghans had a common objective and could call themselves as the heirs of the same nation. He declared that Amanullah was exactly the same leader which Afghanistan needed" (Gerigorian, 2009: 320). In the agreement signed by Turks and Afghans in 1921, Turks recognized the independence of Afghanistan and agreed that they should not sign any agreement with a third country and Afghans considered Turkey as the country which guided the world of Islam. This agreement was the most important measure for Amanullah Khan and Afghani reformists because military and cultural aids of Turks was coordinated with their Sunni Islamic union; therefore, the path they wanted for modernizing Afghanistan became obvious.

With such a background which did not have any compatibility with Iran and beyond that, to Reza Shah and Iranian politicians, it was considered a kind of offence and distrust to Iranian government, Afghans traveled to Iran after their several month travel. The behaviors of the King of Iran and Iranian politicians was unfriendly with the Afghani King and his companions. Reza Shah's inattention caused that some of the Afghani historians simplistically consider this inattention due to the lack of Islamic veil of Princess Sorayya, the wife of Amanullah Khan (Farhang, 2011, vol. 1: 526).

But paying a close attention to political behaviors of Afghans and signing political, economic, and military agreements with Turkey as well as ignoring Iranian government and non-Persian propagandas in Afghanistan were interpreted the most important reasons of unfriendly treatment of Iranian politicians with their Afghani peers. It might have been due to the reason that after the return of Afghani king, he praised Ata Turk and Turkish government, he criticized Iranian government and Reza Shah in *Loya Jirga*; a behavior in which the undeniable role of Mahmoud Tarzi can be observed.

Tarzi's enthusiasm to the Turkish government was so great that after the collapse of the government of his son-in-law, in which he played role as the minister of foreign affairs and Afghani embassy in Paris, in 1929 traveled to Istanbul after the social upheavals and the collapse of Amanullah Khan. With the financial supports of Turkey, he stayed in that country and at last, he died there in 1933 (Adamek, 2005: 94).

Conclusion

Mahmoud Tarzi and his colleagues, as reformists influenced by the process of modernity and innovation in the west, by all difficulties of the underdevelopment of the Afghani society, tried to exit the pre-modernist Afghanistan from its unfavorable conditions via mass media and *Siraj-ul-Akhbar* Newspaper. Tarzi's and his colleagues' familiarity through their familiarity with international upheavals and the existence of civil institutions in the west persuaded them to provide the grounds in the traditional society of Afghanistan and create the ground of its contacts with European and western culture and institutions. In their difficult path, there were barriers such as the ignorance dominant over the society and the existence of powerful religious institutions. Among other difficulties, one can refer to the institution of monarchy which considered each kind of criticism as a political barrier for itself and tribalism which hindered the national convergence as the basic difficulties of Tarzi and his colleagues. However, Tarzi, in his works and particularly the Newspaper of *Siraj-ul-Akhbar*, suggested the ignorance of his own society from education and science, disorder and the lack of the law of superstition, the lack of efficient relations with the outside world as the main part of the exit of Afghanistan from the status quo. Later, Tarzi, by joining to the line of government and his establishment in the texture of political power, got far from his ideals. In his new intellectual

approach, Tarzi, unlike his previous nationalism, his new nationalism was limited to the dominance Pashtun over Afghanistan; therefore, the right of a large part of people in Afghanistan was ignored intentionally and by force. A lot of Persian speakers and Tajiks were considered as the second-ranked citizens. In the domain of Islamist nationalism, and pan-Islamic thought insisted by Tarzi and by ignoring the rights of non-Sunni citizens and particularly Shiites could not exit Afghanistan from backwardness. His enthusiasm to Turkey which he considered as the model of the development of Afghanistan, in many cases, from the domain of foreign policy to culture and economy, drew him and the politicians influenced by Tarzi's thoughts to confronting with Iran and provided the grounds of the divergence of the two countries in spite of all historical and cultural commonalities.

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