

The Political - Social Role of Media in the Constitutional Movement through Souresrafil and Mosavat Newspapers Review Approach

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ABSTRACT

The prominent feature of social revolutions is development of new values and believes that had been ignored in the society earlier due to political repression and lack of obvious reasons and unavailability of the goals people strive to achieve. In the nineteenth century, especially in its last decades, the press had become the most important leverage of enlightenment and political passion. As expected, the press release and various associations establishment have a highlighted role in emergence and rise of community evolutions. Following these evolutions and activities, the Iranian Constitutional Movement was a great achievement which was one of the important objectives obtained with the efforts and persistence of enlighteners and journalists of that era. Publications should have gone beyond the common boundaries of school knowledge promotion, as was the style of training in that age. So the fledgling publications of that era found a new mutation and instead of relying on news reports, raised to support the weak and the masses and promote concepts that were requirements of the time. This article, looking at the history of journalism and its role in shaping the nineteenth century Iran, seeks to review and explain the role of media in improving people's awareness and culture, and with a concise and comprehensive content analysis of both renowned and popular magazines of the Constitution era, namely Souresrafil and Mosavat, will review the direction and goals of these two publications and will study their importance in shaping the Constitutional Movement. Looking at the content and point of view of these newspapers, it can be concluded that the two publications of Souresrafil and Mosavat in shaping the constitutional revolution, with promoting the liberal ideas and new information, have become a new class of knowledge transfer for public. The content of these publications, instead of addressing common issues of everyday life or flattery and appreciation of Qajar court, improved the confidence and awareness of people of that age to such level that they reached their important and predetermined goal.

KEYWORDS: Constitutional Movement, Souresrafil, Mosavat.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the terms that defines the collection of methods and conditions of public and regular dissemination of all elements of information and judgment and human culture, is the term of "social communication" or "media". Press is one kind of a media which undoubtedly and significantly influences society and is important in community and culture development and public awareness. With completion of printing industry in Europe, after invention of hand script and paper, European societies entered their second era of social communication through press release; after invention of printing press by Gutenberg in 1436 AD and establishing proper technical, organizational and financial requirements in producing and reproducing writings and written messages, a big change in indirect communication has started and vast opportunities arose to disseminate knowledge and information and human thoughts and progress human culture. (Ismaili, 2000). One of the tasks and social functions of press is creating a good platform for social control over government and society. In the Constitutional era despite severe repression of writers and intellectuals, and also censorship which was a Western concept, many publications without fear attempted for social awareness and started to criticize the government and Shah. Studies have shown that the role of journalism and social communication during the French Revolution, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, and many incidents and accidents, is indisputable. (Shabestari, 1999). During the reign of Qajar and especially Fath Ali Shah in the first half of the nineteenth century, Iran's relations with European countries began to develop, and development of typography and other related communicational issues once more were considered seriously. So since 1195 Solar / 1816 CE, printing machines were gradually brought from Russia to Iran and were operated in Tabriz. For several years Tabriz was the only city that had thrived in typography, and locals used to call the print house "stamp house" (Basmeh Khaneh). The first Persian book printed Tabriz in 1196 (Solar) / 1817 AD was "the Koran" (Moulana, 1979).

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The history of social communication in Iran, in the third year of the reign of Mohammad Shah Qajar, witnessed the foundation and publish of the first Persian printed newspaper in Iran, which had no official name but is known as the "news paper" (Kaghaz Akhbar). It was published on 25 Muharram 1253 AH / 1216 (Solar) / 1837 AD under the management and editorial of Mirza Saleh Shirazi in Tehran which was a lithographical newspaper with Nasta'liq script. The "News paper" was published 215 years after the first newspaper published in London, in a printing house that had been transferred from Tabriz to Tehran, and its publication period was monthly and was released for about three years and it was in the state ownership (Shabestari, 2004). Studies show that within thirty-five years since the publication of the first governmental newspaper in Iran, around ten newspapers were published in Tehran and other cities including: "News Paper" (1837 AD, state, monthly, Tehran), "Zararyt Bahra" (1851 AD, non-governmental, monthly, Urmiah), "Vaghaye Etefaghiye", (1851 AD, state, weekly, Tehran), "Tabriz" (1858 AD, state, monthly, Tabriz), "The Supreme government of Iran" (1860 AD, state, weekly, Tehran), "Elmiyeh" (1864 AD, state, monthly, Tehran), "Mellati" (1866 AD, state, monthly, Tehran), "Dowlati" (1866 AD, state, monthly, Tehran), "Iran" (1871 AD, state, three days a week, Tehran), "Fars" (1872 AD, state, weekly, Shiraz). Publication of these papers shows the attention of Shah's authoritarian government in social communication to deal with liberals. (Moulana, 1979 pp. 94-97). Also half of the 83 newspapers published in Iran since 1216 (Solar) / 1837 AC, has been published in the first six years of the twentieth century. Also Tabriz was considered as the largest center of state or non-governmental newspapers in the first period of the Constitutional Revolution. The contents of the press in this period were all political and critical, and absolutely non-political entertainment, cultural, and literature issues were not seen much. Press in the first period of the Constitutional Revolution - with promotion of liberal ideas and new information - became a new class of knowledge transfer between public. In other words, liberals and those with more education received press messages, and using multi-stage pattern spread them among various sectors of society (Shabestari, 2004). The present study regarding the performance of these publications in society and their great role in the culture and public awareness, is trying to study the role and functioning of the two important publications in Constitutional Era, namely Souresrafil and Mosavat briefly and usefully analyze the content of these two publications.

2. Souresrafil newspaper

Newspapers publication in Iran as a means of mass communication and media development in the Qajar era, and development of national and non-governmental social communication within and outside the country, is one of the important features of the Qajar reign. (Moulana, 1979). One of the high-circulated and important newspapers of that era was Souresrafil which is considered as the most impressive newspapers of that era. The first issue of Souresrafil was released on Thursday, 17 Rabi Alakhar 1325 AH (31 May 1907) in Tehran and the last issue was released on 15 Safar 1327 AH in Yverdon in Switzerland. The Souresrafil weekly paper was published and written by effort and thought and writings of three people: Mirza Qasim Khan Tabrizi, Mirza Jahangir Khan Shirazi (Souresrafil) and Mirza Ali Akbar Khan Ghazvini known as Dehkhoda. (Yazdani, 2007, 15). The name of the newspaper came from a religious background, and on the other hand its logo is the image of the dead awakened, which represents the awakening mission of Iranian intellectuals in the nineteenth century. In the Picture of "Souresrafil" an angel (Seraph) holds a cloth on which it is written "liberality, equality, fraternity" which is the same as the famous slogan of the French great revolution. (Kasravi, 1978). Souresrafil with five thousand copies was the most popular Iranian Journal at the beginning of the Parliament formation. The circulation of this newspaper was reported up to 24 thousand copies (Baryer, 1984, p 38) and even 35 thousand copies (Bank Melli Iran, 1938, p 400), but more important than sales, is its high influence on people. Souresrafil was read in public places like coffee houses for the illiterates and in some parts of the country was considered as the best souvenir (Dorodian, 1999, p 138) and was purchased by the poor for its divine reward (Dabirsiaghi, 1958, p 330). in the first number of Souresrafil journal which was released about nine months after Constitutional decree publication, in an article entitled "pen liability", the author regards "Karamolkatebin" (an angel who records the deeds of men), "the natural conscience and human soul" and "population of a country and the soul of a nation with a thousand eyes" who is monitoring his actions and writings and observers himself liable against history "who is the chairman of the universal audit and registrar of the sons of the world". He met with a terrible Black giant that is heard saying: "my name is the rotten Investigation Office and I'm involved in this work. First, give us our treats, secondly I have to investigate you and you're responsible against me!" To dispose that giant, who was monitoring the press for 25 years, he begs Seraph and Azrael to help him. When the first issue of Souresrafil was released, Mirza Jahangir Khan, the director of the newspaper, was summoned to the Ministry of Science and Endowments, and the Minister the famous "Mokhbero al-saltaneh", told him he should present in the Parliament and speak about Souresrafil gazette with senators, and it has been decided that he should be punished. Then he ordered, "Hence, you should leave this kind of writing." Mirza Jahangir Khan answered: "Nothing has been written to be punished for,

and if I shall be punished for comfort and freedom of nation and good will of the government, I would be proud." up to issue No. 6, both administrators' names - Mirza Jahangir Khan and Mirza Qasem Khan - can be seen on the front page of the newspaper. After number 8 -7 which was published in one issue, the administrator's name is only Mirza Qasem Khan Tabrizi. The name of Mirza Jahangiri Khan from issue No. 8-7 to No. 14 was removed from the last row of administrator's names and again has been added from No. 15 and remained to No. 32, the last issue in Tehran. Total numbers of Souresrafil pages are not identical, often each Souresrafil issue has 8 pages, and there is a number that is 16 pages. Any way 32 issues of Souresrafil gazette has been published from 14 Rabi al-Awwal 1325 AH, January 3 1898, to 20 Jamadi al-Awwal AH 1326 in Tehran. In all the thirteen-month period of Souresrafil publication it was subjected to frequent seizures. This magazine was able to issue 32 numbers in Iran with the utmost clarity, and lay behind 5 seizures, until the date of parliament bombardment (1907 AC). Mirza Jahangir Khan, three days after the last issue, was arrested in the bombardment event and the same day was executed in front of Mohammed Ali Mirza's bloody eyes (Raees nia, 2003, pp. 361 to 370). After the execution of Mirza Jahangiri Khan in "Baghe shah" in Tehran (1326 AH) Dehkhoda fled to Switzerland and released three issues there and then it was closed for ever (Kohan, 1983, 136).

3. Mosavat Newspaper

Mosavat was an extremist and revolutionary newspaper in constitutional age that began to publish in Tehran on 13 October 1907, with editorial of Seyed Mohammad Reza Mosavat and help of Abd al-Rahim Khalkhali. This newspaper was banned after release of aggressive articles against Mohammad Ali Shah. After the parliament bombardment, Mosavat fled from Tehran, and continued to publish this newspaper in Tabriz and after the conquest in Tehran, continued to publish it again in the capital. (Shamim, 1992, p 491). According to statistics shown by Edward Brown, the Mosavat newspaper circulation was three thousand copies. (Brown, 1958). Farashbandy believes that Mosavat newspaper was the first newspaper and the best Gazette that was prior in excellence of virtues and grace of character and attempted for freedom and patriotism and resisted against minor tyranny and believes its concessioner excelled other newspapers and journalists in Dashtestan and Borazjan. (Farashbandy, 1957). Farashbandy to confirm his words about Mosavat and his newspaper, cites the quotes of Edward Brown in the "History of Iranian literature" and Dr. Abdullah Razi in "Detailed history of Iran", and says: "Mosavat newspaper from a literary point of view is the best press after the Constitutional Revolution and can be considered in the row of Souresrafil and Nassin Shomal and Nobahar. Dr. Abdullah Razi also believes that Mosavat was one of the richest newspapers in the capital which was equal with Souresrafil and Majles and Adab newspapers." This newspaper was published weekly in Tehran in four middle leaves; Mosavat totally published twenty-five issues of the mentioned newspaper in Tehran and thereafter released number 26 and onwards in Tabriz. The first issue of Mosavat newspaper was published on Sunday, the fifth day of Ramadan 1325 AH and the last number in Tehran was coincided with the Parliament bombardment." Farashbandy and most of the contemporary historians believe that the main purpose of this paper was fighting against Muhammad Ali Shah and his corrupted court. (Farashbandy, 1957).

4. Role of Dehkhoda in the Constitutional period press, and especially the Souresrafil newspaper

Dehkhoda's cooperation with Souresrafil newspaper, made this paper famous and it became one of the best newspapers published in the Constitutional Revolution. Dehkhoda was a conscious and punctual man. He was fully familiar with Souresrafil predecessor newspapers and knew the advantages and disadvantages of the domestic newspapers well: "One of the positive and obvious aspects of Mirza Ali Akbar Dehkhoda's spirit in the turbulent journalism lifestyle is his caution and sociology and time consciousness." (Taghizadeh, 1998, p 396). What distinct Dehkhoda's journalism from his contemporary journalists, is that Dehkhoda is conscious of his style. That is why he never had appreciated a Minister or Amir in his writings and chooses people's way. Dehkhoda promises to familiarize public opinion especially plebeians with newspaper and believes the best way is choosing the public language. For this reason he chooses a simple signature as "Dakhou" (simpleton) and offers his writings under the titled of "Charandparand" (nonsense). Because he knew that even every rural old man and woman is familiar with these words and will seek to read them (Mohammad Galin, the Future Journal, p 490). What Dehkhoda offers in Souresrafil newspaper under the title of "nonsense" is the beginning of people awakening, in a way that within one year, 12 journalists followed Dehkhoda and emulated his work. The Souresrafil newspaper was shut down after publishing three issues in Switzerland. The three issues that Dehkhoda released in Switzerland, were typeset by Dr. Alam al-Dowle Saghafi in Yverdon in French and Farsi, and since Moazed al-Dowle had Persian letters in his print house, asked him to typeset the Souresrafil in his print house and Dr. Alam al-Dowle accepted (Yazdani, 2007). It seems that Dehkhoda had a significant and important role in growing and enhancing the press in Iran's Constitutional Era. In his own way, he led the Iranian public toward awareness and enlightenment and finally after years of effort and suffering, the result of these efforts was paid off.

5. The political - social role of press in Constitutional Era (Souresafil and Mosavat newspapers)

The journalistic style that emerged in 1907 had a few differences with the old style. The first difference was that the history of those who published the novel newspapers was not at least similar to the background of Zaka al-Molk. Mirza Jahangir Khan Souresafil and Seyed Mohamad Reza Mosavat, who respectively were the publishers of Souresafil and Mosavat newspapers, not only belonged to the middle classes of society, but also were among the political activists, because before the revolution both of them were members of secret pro-Constitutional associations. Mirza Jahangir Khan Souresafil together with Seyed Mohammad Reza Mosavat, were members of Free Men association that was founded to fight against tyranny. Secondly, after the formation of the parliament, a wave of excitement and optimism about the future of Iran was revealed everywhere, as if there was a change in people's minds and because they were aware of their rights, they would not allow anyone to invade their lives arbitrarily. Therefore, a magazine which was willing to attract such a people should surpass the boundary of common knowledge and school education, the way it was the education style of that age. This way the young journals found new dynamics and instead of relying on news reports, rose to support the weak and the masses and promote concepts of the time: including the slogan "Liberty, equality and fraternity". The Mosavat magazine also adds to this slogan the word of "justice" and published it at the top of each issue. (Rahim Nia, 2003). The similarity of slogans in these two publications did not mean the similarity of their positions toward subjects of the day. Probably Mosavat should be known as the most extremist journal among its contemporary journals; because it had an explicit tone and its writings were filled with audacious criticism of the governing body. The most widely read magazine of that era, as mentioned was the Souresafil which through simple language and interactive and humorous writings of Ali Akbar Dehkhoda, its circulation was about 5500. However, the common characteristic of both publications was their emphasis on the role of ordinary people in Iran to change the society (Nabavi, 2008). What seemed to be new in Mosavat and Souresafil newspapers was encouraging people of Iran to move and involve in the political arena. Debates about people's rights and freedoms, monitoring the work of senators, the importance of legitimacy and the constitutional law and the meaning of parliament, formed a new political discourse that "the street man" was an integral part of it, both in explaining the internal regulations of the Parliament and emphasizing the necessity of unity between the government and the nation. (Nabavi, 2008). These publications believed that their main task was turning the villein to active citizens of society. Also when a combination of not gained expectations, and continuous chaos and anarchy was injecting despair and depression to the political path, these publications did not hesitate to call people to move and operate. Although at the first glance, these two phenomena appear to be inconsistent, but overall they represent the belief of many Iranians in that era; the belief that people with their enthusiasm and unwavering faith can cut out the roots of tyranny. Also these publications by reflecting the public thoughts and trying to shape them added to the consciousness of readers and strengthened their sense of responsibility.

In the Age of Constitutional press, Souresafil was heretic in two areas: first, presenting a rich and warning humor in the form of a simple and vivid and non-ideological prose in constitutional literature, and second in terms of writing style and journalism elegance it was in a way that none of Persian-language newspapers had been published like that (Brown, 1948, p 395). The success of these presses was due to pursuit of these objectives in Iran, was a function of "political power" and "civil society status" that after Constitution also had ups and downs. Souresafil believed that its responsibility is criticizing the behavior and styles of rulers, nature of the ruling class, the state of lower classes, the national economy, especially the agrarian issue, and religious status of the community and was willing to reveal all the evil and corrupt and vicious (Yazdani, same: 2006).

In Souresafil the tendency to use slang and simple language, is displayed mainly in the "nonsense" column, otherwise some of its social and political articles were difficult and full of heavy and non colloquial Arabic words (Yazdani, same, 2002). In this column Dehkhoda with his humor could demystify the power and through satire and seriousness made a bridge from awareness to modernism (Asil, 2008: 9) and made Souresafil an effective, popular and a bestseller magazine. From the beginning the political writings of Souresafil included "power criticism" to the level of the king, and presented the "nation's rights". Dehkhoda wrote editorials of the first to the third issues published in Switzerland, continuously about the necessity of observing "people's right" by the king, and regarding nation's demands, stated that the Shah could face two kinds of destiny: "the Spanish Abou Abdollah Shaghi" and "the Japanese Mikado" both are registered in the history and chronicles, and apparently the world is the world of authority, and human is the autonomous doer" (Dehkhoda, 1946, p 1). Because Abou Abdollah Shaghi oppressed his people, his government and dynasty was ended by an alien enemy and the history cursed upon him, but Mikado led the reforms in his country and became a fabulous ruler (Yazdani, the same: 95).

The contents of most of the press that served the social movements, and were considered the reflection of the people's ideas at the first period of the Constitutional Revolution, in the second period also became a written battlefield, and even for the first time religious scholars dragged the seminary topics and their different views to

press. On the other hand, the open press situation was stricken with journalists' personal conflicts. (Ghassemi, 2001). Both Souresrafil and Mosavat publications, as many constitutionalists in an attempt toward modernity, restated that the reason of Europe progression was that Europeans had understood Quran better than Muslims. Concepts such as constitution, freedom and equality originally existed in Islam, but later were forgotten (Yazdani, the same 197). This approach was being followed not only in politics but also in all spheres of individual and social life by Souresrafil practitioners and especially in its editorials. The content of 34 issues of Souresrafil shows that in the duration of its release, 8 issues had editorial of which three articles were paid to domestic policy, two articles to economic issues, two to cultural issues and one article paid to social issues (Khanyki, the same, p 359). In Souresrafil and Mosavat columns, letters from groups or individuals, by men and women from various cities and provinces of the country, were published describing the requests and complaints of their authors. Rarely a letter was sent in response to a post in the magazine, but there were letters in response to another published letter. In other words, publishing these letters provided an opportunity that not only a wide range of readers, including parliamentarians and government officials, became aware of readers' demands and complaints, but also it was a way to spread uncensored and unfiltered ideas and thoughts and public. If anyone's plaint was not dealt with, he would repeat his petition in the newspaper; if readers were angry with the slow process of change, they would take advantage of pages of newspapers to state their anger and frustration. Journalists did not fear the behavior of the state power elites even the rulers or close advisers of the king, and did not hesitate to express their complain and criticize about ignoring the constitution law and insistence on continuing the authoritarian tradition. In fact, readers' letters contained the most extremist and frank content of these newspapers, and perhaps somehow it provided an instrument for the publisher and the editor of newspaper to declare extremist ideas by the language of readers without any fear of possible danger.

Here it is necessary to mention a few points. First, sometimes authors by refusing to sign their names, or using an alias name, did not reveal their real identity. Even the authors' name itself did not give any information about their identity. Consequently, categorizing the authors of such letters is not easy. However lack of such details in letters should be considered as a significant indication of a change in journalism culture of that time. This fact becomes clearer when we compare these letters with the letters that for example were published in the "Tarbiat" Journal, which often associated with the introduction of their authors. These introductions, apart from the author's name included his occupation or social status, and even the father's name. Stating the authors' title in some of these letters confirms this assumption that most of "Tarbiat" readers were among society elites. When the author comments or allegations in a letter appears to be controversial, sometimes to make sure the reader of the author's good intentions, a detailed explanation about the virtues and social status of the author was enclosed by the letter. Moreover, when Zaka al-Molk did not know an author of a letter personally, he would publish what he had heard about him from others along with the letter. So the fact that newspapers in the Constitutional Revolution era especially Souresrafil and Mosavat, did not care to disclose identity and the name of all letter writers, may indicate their willingness to share everyone in exchanging ideas and attracting more community members and encourage them to express their opinion. With increasing number of published letters, the number of readers increased; particularly those readers who were keen to be aware of views and feelings of their compatriots. The approach of Mosavat newspaper toward Mohammad Ali Shah's assassination is also interesting. On 4 of Zihajeh, 6 January, a Zoroastrian man named Feridon was killed, and it is clear that it was a criminal act and murder is strongly condemned. But that's fair to accept that an ordinary citizen murder could not cause a national disunity and crisis in the convergence process, and threaten the future of a movement and country, while the murder of Mohammad Ali Shah, especially in the period in question undoubtedly had negative consequences. However, the Mosavat newspaper that claims to be constitutional and the mission of its pen is providing national interest and is incumbent of movement interests regardless of political friendships and hostility, his mission would require that at least pay to any event equal to its effect on country's political destiny; whereas Mosavat, like its other aligned newspapers including Souresrafil, showed a reverse behavior. This newspaper in issues number 14-10 and 17 and 18 and 25, wrote near 26 article about the murder Feridon with passion and empathy and sympathy and by inducing pessimism and attacking political opponents and accusing them, asks all the nation "to the last point of justice they must stand with all their power to punish thugs". But the same newspaper only in issues numbers 15, 21 and 24 pays to the subject of King's assassination, and allocated almost six columns to it, of which only one column paid to the news of assassination and said that peace and unity is needed, without any regret and sympathy, which seems more it was just to say something, and the other five columns criticized the arrests of accused people in that event and defended them!

Looking at the contents and position of these papers, it can be concluded that the two publications naming Souresrafil and Mosavat in forming constitutional revolution, by promoting liberal ideas and new information, became as new classes of knowledge transfer for public. The content of these publications instead of subjects of

everyday life or flattery and appreciation of Qajar court improved the confidence and awareness of people in that era to a degree that they achieved their important and predestined target.

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