

Ma'arif Research Journal (January – June 2016)

Ram Mohan Roy's *Neo-Vedanta* and Role of *Brahmo Samaj* as a Socio-Religious Hindu Reform Movement of Nineteenth Century Bengal

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ABSTRACT

Pluralistic Bengali society experienced religious encountering from time immemorial. This encountering resulted in amalgamation and syncretism that was a threat to the individual identity of every religion generally and Hinduism particularly. In the course of history, many reform movements were launched by Hindus and among these one is Brahmo Samaj that was a socio-religious reform movement. The founder of this movement was Ram Mohan Roy, who is called the father of socio-religious reform movements of nineteenth century Bengal. On one hand, he incorporates the ideas of Muslim Sufis, western scientific look, utilitarian and deistic thought for his socio-religious reform program, on the other hand, from Hindu philosophical schools, he adopted the Advaita Vedanta of Shankaracharya. In the Ram Mohan's selections of Advaita Vedanta the influence of Orientalist and Christian Missionaries can not be ignored. That facilitates him to design his neo-Vedanta which in its basis shares the concept of formless one God of Shankaracharya Advaita Vedanta. But it deviates from classical Advaita Vedanta in shifting of authority from Vedas to Upanishad, abandoning of idol worship, caste system, polygamy (kulinism) and widow burning. Because Shankar's Advaita Vedanta accepts all these Hindu socio-religious duties as part of his dharma.

Key Terms: Brahmo Samaj, Advaita Vedanta, neo-Vedanta, Orientalists.

1-INTRODUCTION

Hinduism witnessed the process of regeneration and reformation through various movements in history. Although these movements were flag holders of exactly individual philosophy, but generally these were following the route of spirituality, secularity and scientific aspects of Vedic customs. Whole interrogation was for constructing an egalitarian society. The foundation of which was emptied of caste, gender and race discrimination¹. Hindu social reform movements of fourteen to Eighteen century are treated under the influence of Islam, monotheistic and democracy². One of such social reformer and caste crusader was Sri Chaitanya (1486-1534), advocator of the *Vaishnava* school of *bhagti yoga* in Bengal. His reform movements appeared distinct from other movements as no other reform movements of Bengal attained recognition and acceptance from whole India except his movement. The reason of proliferation and promulgation of this movement in India seemed to reside in its lacking of particular Bengalism³. Chaitanya's main concern was the exaltation of Krishna

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Date of Receipt: 18-12-2015

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propaganda this particular agreement faced difficulties in approval from the US congress.

CONCLUSION

The relations between both states have changed greatly over the years. During the Shah's era, the periphery doctrine and common threats of USSR and unified Arab bloc kept the two countries on the same side. Although Tehran was unwilling to formally recognize Tel Aviv but they did have a number of secretive deals that were mutually beneficial. After the revolution, the relations between both states dramatically changed and the hold of the periphery doctrine was weakened, but still both countries complied against the common enemy with secret arms deal. However, during and after the Iran-Iraq war a number of geopolitical factors came into play which ultimately ended the covert relations between both states. The anti-Israeli rhetoric from Iranian clerics, as well as the weakening of the Arab bloc after Egypt-Israeli peace treaty made Tel Aviv turn away from Iran. Furthermore, the end of the Soviet Union and fall of Iraq eliminated both of the two countries major opponents. Since then Israel successfully worked with Washington to further isolate Tehran in the region. As Iran has become more isolated, it has also worked harder to gain relevance in the region. Because of its anti-Israeli rhetoric and support for Hezbollah Tehran succeeded to gain relevance in the region specifically in its rival Arab countries where a significant number of people did not see Iran as a threat to their countries and support it for its anti-Zionist policies.

Over the past decade, Iran has emerged as Israel's main rival. From Lebanon to Gaza to the dramatic 2011 revolts that swept through Egypt and the Arab world, Israelis view nearly every regional challenge through the prism of Iran. The nuclear agreement between Iran and P5+1 also played a phenomenal role in redemption of Iranian position in the region as an economic and political power. Furthermore the Iran's role in fight against the ISIS also made it a necessary ally for the Western powers. This scenario further escalated the tension between both rivals for the supremacy in the region. Despite brief attempts to relax tensions with the Islamic Republic in the late 1990s, any vestige of the periphery doctrine is now gone. Today, there is a basic incompatibility of interests between the two countries, suggesting that a return to even limited cooperation—as occurred both before and after the 1979 Islamic revolution—may no longer be possible.

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administration. President Rafsanjani tried hard to neutralize the situation and offered a billion dollar oil deal to the American Company, Conoco, which was also halted by Israeli diplomacy in summer 1995. In addition, the House of Representatives passed the Iran-Libya Sanction Law, with a unanimous vote to increase sanctions and penalize non-American companies from certain trade deals with Iran.

IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

Since the Revolution Iranian nuclear program has become a threat for Israel and other regional and Western states. From then on Iran continuously claims that its nuclear program is for energy purposes only. Iran's nuclear program began in 1957 under the American "Atom for Peace" program. Iran signed the NPT in 1968 and ratified the treaty in 1970. During the Shah's regime Iran also signed agreements with French and German companies for the acquirement of nuclear technology. But after the revolution hostile policies towards West and its own nuclear program changed everything. The Western firms refused to work under the new regime and during the Iran-Iraq war the nuclear facilities were also attacked and badly damaged by Iraqi air forces. However, during mid 80s, Iran acquired ballistic missiles from Russia and also restarted its nuclear program. In 1990s, the Islamic Republic signed agreements with Russia and China for gaining cooperation in nuclear technology since they were unable to gain western assistance. With the help of American pressure Israel succeeded to halt Sino-Iranian nuclear cooperation but it failed to gain success against Russian-Iranian nuclear cooperation.

In 2002 it was revealed that Iran is working on two undeclared nuclear sites in Natanz and Arak. Although the sites were under construction which was not illegal under the NPT and according to the law Tehran had to declare the sites before the actual functioning of these sites but Tel Aviv utilized the moment against Tehran and from then on the program faced constant criticism from the international community. The nuclear enrichment program is the basic source of tension and it is widely believed that Iran is aiming for the nuclear weapons but still there isn't any hard avoidance on this allegation and International intelligence agencies failed to prove their propaganda against Iranian nuclear program. On the other hand Israel possessed nuclear weapons since the 1960's and it is the only state in Middle East to have nuclear weapon capability. However, Tel Aviv never acknowledged possession of nuclear weapons and Israel is continually working against any regional country that has tried to attain nuclear program. The comprehensive agreement between Iran and P5+1 (America, Russia, England, France, China and Germany) is strongly neglected by the Israeli administration and Prime Minister Netanyahu and his cabinet members made strong statements against this phenomenal deal between world powers and Tehran. Throughout the period of interim agreement Israel tried to sabotage the talks through heavily influenced media and its lobbies in US. Because of Israeli

geographical scenario and Iranian policies towards Tel Aviv were the primary reasons which ended the historical cooperation between both countries.

During the Rafsanjani and Khatami administration Tehran adopted more aggressive policy towards Israel and United States. However the above mentioned geographical changes made Iran the most powerful state of the region after Israel. In fact, without their two major enemies in the region, both countries had additional resources, and a desire to gain regional supremacy.⁴³ After the Iran-Iraq war, Tehran remained isolated because of its revolutionary ideology which was detested by the Sunni Arab rulers. On the other hand it was also playing active part in Palestinian cause and actively involved in supporting anti Israeli groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas through Lebanon.

In this scenario, Tel Aviv tried to getting closer to the regional Arab states portraying Iran as the main threat. In early 90s Israeli Prime Ministers Peres and Rabin began lobbying the U.S and E.U in order to convince them of the threat of Iran to Israel and the rest of the region.⁴⁴ The Israeli lobbies in West were succeeded to convince international community that Iran is not only threat for regional peace but also for the whole Western world. There are number of issues which became the focal point in campaign against Iran. The major issues highlighted by Tel Aviv were Iran's nuclear program and its support for Hezbollah. Most importantly, the anti-Israeli rhetoric by new Iranian regime played decisive role and made Israeli case strong in the eyes of the West.

In October 1991, Madrid Conference was held under the supervision of United States to initiate the peace process among Israelis and Palestinians. Due to strain in diplomatic relations, United State didn't invite Iran and other regional states including Iran's only ally Syria were invited. This was a huge blow to Iran who felt that it should have been invited. As a respond, President Rafsanjani increased funding for Hezbollah, which had previously been decreased during the beginning of his presidency. Furthermore, in opposition to the Madrid peace talks, Rafsanjani even sponsored an "International Conference to Support the Islamic revolution of Palestine" that was held at the same time as the Madrid conference, and invited Hamas, Hezbollah, and other Palestinian groups.⁴⁵

Later in August 1993, the Israeli-Palestinian peace deal in Oslo helped Israel to develop diplomatic relationship with a number of Arab states ending its regional isolation. This scenario further isolated Iran in the region because of its unwelcoming relations with Sunni Arab states. Israel also began lobbying hard to convince regional states that Iran under Shia clerics is the major instability factor in Middle East. In May 1993, the Clinton Administration announced the policy of Dual Containment, under which Iran and Iraq were under partial economic sanction. This partial sanction converted into a total embargo within next two years as the American congress and pro-Israeli lobbies pressurized Clinton

to its interfering policy in their domestic issue, countries with large Shiite population such as Bahrain, Kuwait and Iraq were unhappy with new Iranian administration and the tensions emerged between Iran and the states of the Arabian Peninsula.

ARMS TRADE DURING 1980S AND THE IRAN-CONTRA AFFAIR

Soon after the revolution, Saddam Hussein initiated a war against Iran. Because of Iran's unwelcoming policies towards regional states, the Arabs didn't show any willingness to support Iran. The American Embassy hostage crises with subsequent trade embargo, as well as the disarray of the post-revolution armed forces, put Iran in a position where it was forced to rely on shady dealings with Israel for Arms and there spare parts. Due to its historic alliance with United States Iran possessed U.S. military equipments and only Tel Aviv provide the spare parts of those weapons. The cooperation between two countries remained secret until the reports were published in a Middle Eastern newspaper. Both sides had number of shared threats which promoted both administrations to work together to secure their regional interests.

Soon after the initiation of Iran-Iraq war, Israel sent a number of weapons to Iran without the knowledge of United States, while at the same time there were a number of Israelis in Iran training Iranians in the use of their new advanced weaponry.³⁹ The weapons Israel sanded to Iran includes 250 tiers for F-4 fighters as well as \$135 million worth of anti aircraft battery missiles, mortars, ammunition and other weapons. Meanwhile Tel Aviv also sent back American manufactured tanks which were sent by Shah to Israel for repair before he went to exile. From 1980 to 1983, Israel provided \$500 million worth of arms to Iran and in response Tehran sold oil to Tel Aviv at a 25% discounted price.⁴⁰

It is also believed that the Iranian intelligence agencies provided the Intel and the areal photographs of the Iraqi Tamuz reactor to Israel which was later destroyed by an Israeli air assault in 1981. Soon after Israeli attack Saddam Hussein claimed that Iran is working with Israelis but Iranians repeatedly denied this claim.⁴¹ In 1986, United State became also involved in both direct and indirect arm trading with Iran. This covered American arm trade later called 'Iran gate' or the Iran-Contra Affair'. Through this trade United States sold 4,000 Tow missiles to Iran via Israel. These deals tremendously benefited Iran and Israel. On one side Iran was succeeded to acquire American weapons witch played important part in its war against Iraq and on the other hand Israel succeeded to prolong the war and prevent Iraq from gaining regional supremacy.

IRANIAN ISRAELI RELATIONS AFTER KHOMEINI

At the end of Iran-Iraq war the relations between both states took a u-turn because of major regional changes. The most important of these changes included the collapse of the USSR and the weakening of Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent invasion of Iraq by a U.S led coalition in 1991.⁴² This new

with Iraq over the Shatt-Al-Arab waterway in return for stopping interference with Iraqi Kurds. After this agreement Iraq also agreed to stop supporting opposition movement in Iran. The Shah's decision of making agreement with Iraq without consulting Israel and United States made them both very upset. But still both states cooperated on intelligence sharing and issues of their joint interests.

In late 1977, Israel and Iran both felt that they were unable to rely on the Carter administration in the U.S or on the UN to assist them in a time of emergency.³⁵ Furthermore in that particular year Iraq received missile shipment from the Soviet Union which caused panic in both countries and led them both to form a joint missile program without the knowledge of the US administration. Under the "Oil for Arms" deal Israel shipped the advanced weapons to Iran. To counter the opposition uprising the Shah appointed Shahpour Bakhtiar as a prime minister of Iran in December 1978. The new prime minister drastically changed the Shah's foreign policy and halted the oil exports to Israel as well as supported Palestinians for their homeland. Although Shahpour remained in power for only three months but he set the policy for Khamenei, especially the issue of selling oil to Israel.

IRANIAN ISRAELI RELATIONS IN KHOMEINI ERA

The 1979 Islamic Revolution caused a dramatic change in Iran's foreign policy towards Israel as well as its policies towards other regional and international powers. Soon after the revolution the relations between both countries became severed. Despite the growing rivalry, both countries worked together secretly on issue to issue bases throughout the 80s. The main problems both countries facing were hostility from their Arab neighbors, especially Iraq, as well as the threat from the Soviet Union.³⁶ The Islamic republic's regional isolation dragged it to the costly Iran-Iraq war. Due to Shah's military buildup of Western arms, the Khomeini administration was forced to turn to Israel in order to gain military parts during eight years long war with Iraq. Tel Aviv began selling weapons to Tehran soon after the war started and this arrangement went on until the Iran-Contra affair was exposed in mid 80s. At the same time, Khomeini openly pursued anti Israeli policy and began funding Hezbollah which exposed its dual policy towards Israel.

On February 18, 1979 the Prime Minister of Iran Mehdi Bazargan severed all ties with Israel, including oil sales and commercial flights among both countries.³⁷ The new administration redefined the Arab-Israel conflict as an Islamic one and new policy was adopted in order to gain leadership role in the region. The new stance on Palestinian issue gave Tehran the opportunity to mobilize Arab people on the street to their cause and protect their regional influence even though they were ethnically and religiously different, and rather isolated.³⁸ After taking charge Khomeini accused Arab leaders that they are abandoning Islam and embracing secularism which upset the Arab leaders. Due

In the Iranian port city of Khoramshahr near the southern border with Iraq, MOSSAD and SAVAK established an office to use the local Iranian Arab population to infiltrate Basra and Baghdad in Iraq.²⁷ The operation was extremely important, and through the use of this joint office, "Iran and Israel were able to obtain valuable information on Soviet arms transfers to Iraq, such as the number of Soviet advisors assisting the Iraqi military and the exact types of weapons delivered."²⁸

In late 1958, Iran, Turkey, and Israel formed an intelligence exchange alliance called "Trident."²⁹ According to documents stolen from the American embassy in Tehran and subsequently published, "the Trident organization involves continuing intelligence exchange and semiannual meetings at the chief of service level."³⁰ The Persian section of the 11th published volume of documents states that "the main goal of the Israeli-Iranian relationship was the implementation and development of anti-Arab and pro-Israeli policies, which was the decision of the Iranian leadership...Mossad regularly provided reports about the various activities of Egypt in other Arab countries as well as uprising and events in Iraq, and the activities of the communists which would have impacted Iran."³¹

SAVAK and Mossad conducted joint intelligence operations that involved breaking into Tehran-based embassies of Arab states to gain access to their materials in addition to anti Egyptian and anti-Iraqi intelligence work. Mossad also trained SAVAK agents in "torture and investigative techniques."³² Israel became a new source for Iranian weapons purchases, selling Iran high-tech military equipment and training pilots, paratroopers, and artillery men.³³ The Shah's regime was even willing to sacrifice relations with powerful Arab states in favor of Israel, as it perceived states such as Egypt and Iraq as a threat to Iranian national security. Because Israel also perceived such states to be a threat to its own national security, Israel provided Iran with this crucial intelligence and training.

RELATIONS THROUGHOUT 1960S & 70S

During 60s Iran emerged as an economic and military power due to its increasing oil sales. In this decade the Shah further strengthened his relation with Tel Aviv. On domestic front the opposition movement was gaining influence through this era. Khomeini was gaining power and Egyptian President Jamal Abdul Nasir supported Khomeini's 1963 uprising and provided facilities and training camps in Egypt for his urban guerrilla forces.³⁴

During the 70s Shah was able to side more with the Arabs, due to a number of reasons. Firstly the Arabs were adopting the policy of individual state interests rather than Pan-Arab ones and secondly the new Egyptian president Anwar Sadat adopted the new position on the regional issues and joined the American camp. In 1975, the Shah also reached out to Iraq and signed the Algiers Accord

years following Israel's creation, Iran provided assistance to Iraqi Jews fleeing to Israel. Beginning in 1948 and continuing through 1952, Iran allowed thousands of Iraqi Jews to use Iran as a transit point on their way to Israel.¹⁷ In order to successfully facilitate the movement of Iraqi Jews to Israel, Israel cooperated with SAVAK, the shah's intelligence agency.¹⁸ Iran today is home to the largest Jewish population outside of Israel in the Middle East.¹⁹ Despite the discrimination that they face living in the Islamic Republic, article 13 of the Iranian constitution names Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians as the only recognized religious minorities in Iran, enabling them to "perform their own religious rites, and to act according to their own canon in personal matters and religious education." Official censuses conducted by the Islamic Republic in 1986 and 1996 place the numbers of Iranian Jews at 26,354 and 12,737, respectively; outside estimates place the number closer to 35,000.²⁰

During late 60s, the emerging Iraqi Baathist regime refused to accept the 1937 treaty regarding the Shatt-al-Arab waterway, and halted Iranian oil exports through the Persian Gulf. Both sides sign this treaty for the equal access of to the Persian Gulf but this new regional conflict further closed Iran to the Israeli regime. The policies of new Iraqi administration were not acceptable for Tel Aviv and Tehran therefore both states jointly initiated a secret program to train and provide weapons to Iraqi Kurds for their fight against Baathist regime.

Both Iran and Israel shared an interest in keeping Iraqi forces engaged in its northern territory to avoid pressuring Iran to its southern border and Israel on its eastern.²¹ Iran was worried about the Baathist regime's hostility and increasing Soviet influence in Iraq, and Israel viewed Iraq as a threat if it were to attempt an attack on Israel.²²

Israeli decision-makers also saw an important window of safety if Iran could balance against Iraq.²³ Both Iranian and Israeli officials agreed that supporting a mere guerilla campaign alone would not be effective; they instead agreed to provide training and equipment to Mullah Mustafa Barazani's Kurdish rebels.²⁴ Throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s, Iran and Israel provided the Kurdish rebels with arms, ammunition, military advisers, training courses, and funds. Both Iran and Israel viewed Iraq at this time to be a security threat and worked within their respective goals, undermining threatening regimes and using periphery states to affect the inner circle, to aid the Kurdish rebels against the Iraqi government.

Aside from aiding Kurdish rebel forces within Iraq, SAVAK and MOSSAD took advantage of other opportunities for significant cooperation regarding their respective states' mutual security concerns. Iranian SAVAK chief Teimur Bakhtiar met in Rome with the Israeli ambassador and Mossad chief Isser Harel in 1957.²⁵ From this point forward, "Israel and Iran exchanged intelligence on Egyptian activities in the Arab world and participated in some joint operations."²⁶