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Examining the Components of Legitimacy in Iran-Shahri Thought and Comparing Them with the Second Pahlavi Period

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Scientific Research Article history: Received: 2025-10-30 Received in revised form: 2025-12-10 Accepted : 2026-02-14 Available online: 2026-10-24 Keywords: Iran-Shahri Thought, Political Legitimacy, Second Pahlavi, Nationalism, Modernization.	Objective: This study examines the influence of Iran-Shahri political thought on the formation of legitimacy and the subsequent decline of the Second Pahlavi regime. The central research question concerns the extent to which this intellectual tradition affected the legitimacy of the Pahlavi monarchy and its role in the regime's decline. Method: This study utilizes a historical-analytical approach grounded in conceptual-comparative analysis. Data collection involved examining historical documents and library sources, as well as analyzing the policies and ideological symbols of the Second Pahlavi period, including textbooks and official events, in comparison with the indicators of Iran-Shahri thought. Findings: The Second Pahlavi regime incorporated symbolic elements of Iran-Shahri thought, such as king-centeredness, divine glory, antiquarianism, and Iranian nationalism, to construct symbolic legitimacy. However, essential components of this tradition, including the promotion of justice, the integration of religion and politics, rationalism, pluralism, and participatory institution-building, were not institutionalized within the regime's power structure. The divergence between symbolic and substantive Iran-Shahri thought, alongside imitative modernization, foreign dependence, anti-religious policies, injustice, authoritarianism, and excessive reliance on repression, contributed to the erosion of legitimacy and the widening of the state-society divide. Conclusion: The Second Pahlavi regime's selective and propagandistic use of Iran-Shahri thought failed to generate sustainable legitimacy, instead precipitating a legitimacy crisis. The lack of institutional realization of Iran-Shahri components, combined with contradictions between political discourse and social realities, was central to the monarchy's decline and the subsequent success of the Islamic Revolution. The findings indicate that symbolic appeals to historical traditions, without corresponding institutional and social foundations, are insufficient to consolidate political legitimacy.

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Introduction

Iran-Shahri political thought is regarded as one of the most important and enduring theoretical traditions in the history of governance in Iran. Over the centuries, this tradition has explained the relationship among power, society, and legitimacy on the basis of concepts such as king-centeredness, divine glory, the promotion of justice, cosmic order, the relationship between religion and politics, rationalism, and military authority. These components not only provide a conceptual framework for understanding the mechanisms underlying the continuity and decline of power in ancient Iran but also have the potential to be employed in the analysis of modern political systems. In this regard, the mode of governance and politics in ancient Iran represents a reproduced version of the “Mirror for Princes” tradition of the Sasanian era (Ahmadvand et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH: 32).

Despite its theoretical significance, the comparative analysis of the relationship between Iran-Shahri thought and governance structures in contemporary periods, particularly during the Second Pahlavi regime, has received limited scholarly attention. This research addresses this gap in the literature.

Although Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi increasingly utilized symbols, rituals, and concepts from Iran’s imperial heritage from the 1960s onward, it remains unclear to what extent this appropriation was institutional and substantive versus symbolic, propagandistic, and instrumental. This distinction is critical for analyzing the decline of the monarchy’s legitimacy within Iran’s specific social, cultural, and historical context.

Accordingly, the research question is as follows:

‘What impact did Iran-Shahri political thought have on the legitimacy of the Second Pahlavi regime, and what role did this intellectual tradition play in the process of the regime’s decline and downfall?’

In response, this study posits the central hypothesis that the Second Pahlavi regime’s engagement with Iran-Shahri thought was predominantly selective, symbolic, and driven by propagandistic objectives. While the regime frequently referenced imperial symbols, national myths, Achaemenid and Sasanian heritage, official celebrations, and cultural antiquarianism, it failed to institutionalize the core components of Iran-Shahri thought, such as social justice, pluralism, the integration of religion and politics, rationalism in governance, and political ethics, within its power structure. This incongruity between institutional and performative Iran-Shahri thought contributed to the erosion of legitimacy and the widening of the state-society divide.

The significance of this study is twofold. First, by adopting a conceptual-historical approach, it treats Iran-Shahri thought not merely as cultural heritage but

as a theoretical framework for analyzing political legitimacy in contemporary Iran, a perspective seldom addressed in existing literature. Second, the study demonstrates that state appropriation of historical traditions, when lacking social, institutional, and cultural linkages, fails to generate sustainable legitimacy. This analysis provides new insights into the interplay among ideology, tradition, and power in contemporary Iran and offers a framework for comparative studies of political legitimacy.

1. Research Review

The scholarly literature related to “Iran-Shahri thought and political legitimacy” can be categorized into two principal areas. The first consists of studies that explain the conceptual and historical foundations of Iran-Shahri thought. In contrast, the second comprises studies examining the characteristics of legitimacy and the structural crises of the Second Pahlavi regime. The present study seeks to integrate these two areas within a single analytical framework and examine the relationship between the components of Iran-Shahri thought and the legitimacy model of the Second Pahlavi regime. Accordingly, the review of the literature indicates that combining these two scholarly currents addresses a research gap that has received comparatively little attention to date.

1.1. Theoretical Studies on Iran-Shahri Thought

A substantial portion of the existing theoretical literature focuses on reconstructing the components of Iran-Shahri thought within the context of Iran’s political history. These studies regard Iran-Shahri thought as an intellectual tradition through which political authority in ancient Iran was justified and reproduced on the basis of fundamental elements such as king-centeredness, the promotion of justice, cosmic order, divine glory, the relationship between religion and the state, rationalism, and military capability (Zamani Mahjoub, 2008 AD/1387 SH; Tabataba’i, 2001 AD/1380 SH; Rezaei Rad, 2010 AD/1389 SH; Khalatbari et al., 2010 AD/1389 SH; Ashraf, 1973 AD/1353 SH; Ahmadvand et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH).

1.2. Studies on the Legitimacy of the Second Pahlavi Regime

The second body of literature consists of works that have examined the legitimacy of the political structure of the Second Pahlavi regime from sociological, political, and historical perspectives. In general, these studies emphasize that Mohammad Reza Shah’s legitimacy during the final decades of his reign was weakened by a combination of factors, including excessive reliance on repression, weak participatory institutions, contradictions between political discourse and practice, foreign dependence, and social inequality (Abrahamian, 1982;

Salehi, 1988; Skocpol, 1982), which the present article also draws upon.

Studies by Ansari (2017) and Ramezani (2004) have likewise emphasized the “Performative” dimension of Pahlavi legitimacy. These works indicate that the 2,500-year celebrations, the title *Aryamehr*, and antiquarian rituals had a primarily symbolic and propagandistic function rather than being manifestations of substantive institutional realization. At the social level, moreover, they had adverse effects because of prevailing inequalities and livelihood-related crises. This point is also utilized in the present article’s critique of the symbolic legitimacy of the Pahlavi regime.

An important point emerging from the literature review is that none of the previous studies has employed Iran-Shahri thought as the principal analytical framework for interpreting the legitimacy and decline of the Second Pahlavi regime. Accordingly, this field has faced a “Research Gap” regarding its relationship with Iran-Shahri thought. The political structure of the Second Pahlavi regime has not previously been examined systematically from both conceptual and operational perspectives.

Therefore, the novelty of this article lies in its attempt, for the first time, to compare the conceptual indicators of Iran-Shahri thought, such as justice, king-centeredness, divine glory, and military capability, with the policies, discourse, and practices of the Second Pahlavi regime and, from this perspective, to reassess the “Legitimizing Factors” and the “Factors Contributing to Decline.”

2. Theoretical Foundations: Iran-Shahri Political Thought

The term Iran-Shahri thought in the pre-Islamic period was used to describe a particular type and method of governance, especially with regard to legitimacy. This mode of thought, which represents the model of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in the Iranian Empire (Sissa, 2012: 15), concerns the survival and continuity of the governmental structure in light of social, political, and cultural relations (Khalatbari et al., 2008 AD/1387 SH: 2). At the same time, failure to observe the conceptual propositions of Iran-Shahri political thought, given the historical consciousness and general culture of a nation, appears to be a factor contributing to the decline and collapse of government. To gain a deeper understanding, the following sections examine the indicators and conceptual propositions of Iran-Shahri political thought.

2.1. King-Centeredness and Cosmic Order

Cosmic order is of great importance in Iran-Shahri political thought. In this context, myths addressed the political justification of the legitimacy of the political system and its political figures. They sanctified these figures by connecting the

earthly system of life with the cosmic order. For example, the king was regarded as the representative of the cosmic king. The earthly king, known as the *shahri-yar* in ancient Iran, was the center of various commands concerning both the celestial and earthly orders (Pouladi et al., 2014: 3).

The rationale underlying cosmic order is that the universe, as a coherent whole, is governed by Ahura Mazda, and that this cosmic order must be administered by an ideal princely government so as to harmonize with the earthly order and correspond to earthly society. It is precisely for this reason that Iran-Shahri political thought speaks of an ideal prince occupying a prominent position (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 74). Thus, Ahura Mazda, as the greatest of the gods, created Darius and entrusted the kingship to him; by the will of Ahura Mazda, Darius was king (Malandra, 1983: 50). To the extent that, according to the principles of Iran-Shahri thought, which emerged from Zoroastrian political theology, the king was regarded as being like God on earth (Tabataba'i, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 115), he enjoyed divine support and assistance, while Ahura Mazda and the other gods endowed him with royal glory and wisdom. Accordingly, kingship derived from a position independent of the gods and was considered sacred (Shomali, 2020: 157).

2.2. Overlap between Religion and Politics

In Iran-Shahri thought and in many of the diverse emphases found in Iranian nationalism, various linguistic, territorial, ethnic, and religious elements are present (Tabataba'inejad, 2014: 210). In this regard, the religious legitimacy of government constitutes a fundamental basis of governance in Iran-Shahri thought. Indeed, government may have been established for the implementation of religion. Therefore, religion is one of the king's extensions and must constitute the foundation of his kingship. "The king must remain faithful to his religion. This is because kingship and religion are twins," (Tabatabai, 1995: 20) "Born from the same womb, and these two should never be separated." (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 78). Accordingly, the ruler was advised to consult with religious scholars. This was because the king was regarded as having the right to rule over his subjects, since he attained this authority by virtue of divine grace and choice. This is what has been termed the theory of divine right to authority (Ashtiani et al., 2021: 125). The king must preserve religion because his crown and throne depend upon it (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 78).

2.3. Expansion of Justice-Centeredness

Justice in the Iran-Shahri context, which in turn became connected with the political philosophy of major Islamic thinkers such as *al-Farabi* and *Khwaja Nasir*

al-Din al-Tusi, as well as with the tradition of “*Andarz-nama*” literature, particularly that of *Nizam al-Mulk al-Tusi*, identifies kings and rulers as the most central element in establishing a good state through justice (Ghezelsofla et al., 2019: 139). Kingship was regarded as an institution that guaranteed the “Lasting Unity” and “Interests” of the people by defending their right to participate in decision-making, a conception referred to as Iran-Shahri. In fact, the concept of kingship transformed the people’s “Unstable Equilibrium” into a stable “Nation” through “Just Kingship.” (Tabatabaiejad, 2014: 210)

However, if disagreements among its members become so extensive that they no longer possess the virtue of equality, it cannot constitute an ideal constitutional or political state. An ideal state is defined as “A community of equals whose aim is the best and highest possible life. In this context, the highest good is happiness, and this entails the expenditure of energy and the complete exercise [of human capacities].” (Prasad, 2012: 52)

The importance of justice lies in its role in regulating relations among the constituent elements of society. Emphasis on a hierarchical order and social security is based on solidarity and the preservation of unity, solidarity that must revive the collective unconscious. In this context, kings are encouraged to uphold justice and morality (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 74). Therefore, stable power is based on the preservation of hierarchy or, more precisely, on justice. In other words, justice enables government to reach its ultimate end. Kingship is a gift from God, and the king must show gratitude to God by establishing justice. The exercise of such justice fulfills the people’s demands, which in turn consolidates the state. Conversely, with the dissolution of the social order, the state becomes corrupt, and kings fall (Ghezelsofla et al, 2019: 141-142). In this context, increasing social transformation and mobility across classes lead to unemployment, while unemployment results in the loss of industry, sedition, and incivility. When professions disappear, justice and security disappear as well (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 79). In other words, the role and importance of justice have been regarded as essential to the survival of government and, consequently, as a criterion for the implementation of domestic policy and a constraint on the external conduct of despotic rulers.

2.4. Avoidance of Despotism and Orientation toward Rationality

Within the order based on Iran-Shahri thought, everything derives from divine providence, while the king’s authority also derives from his absolute authority. No one, whether humble or noble, has the right to disobey the caliph, because his legitimacy derives from the proof of God. Nevertheless, legitimate power is not identical to force. Force has only natural limits, whereas legitimate power is

subject to formal legal constraints (McClelland, 1996: 8) and does not entail a tendency toward despotism. In this regard, Tabataba'i emphasizes the inherently pluralistic and rational characteristics of society and refers to this as the spirit of Iran-Shahri thought. This spirit was embodied and articulated in a form of governance known as imperial kingship. The king was regarded as the leader of diverse ethnic peoples inhabiting different territories and possessing different religions, languages, and customs. Accordingly, the imperial kingship constituted a state composed of different peoples. Tabataba'i argues that this form of statecraft is incompatible with despotism, which leads to political uniformity at the expense of pluralism. In fact, "Without such plurality, the imperial kingship cannot exist." (Boroujerdi et al., 2014: 3)

Furthermore, one of the ideals of Iran-Shahri thought was political and religious unity. In this context, during the Sasanian period, Iran-Shahri unity was disrupted by excessive taxation imposed on peasants and social classes that were deeply dissatisfied with their circumstances (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 78). Therefore, rationality within society, and particularly on the part of the king, was essential. Constitutional government possessed three principal elements. First, it was a rule directed toward the general or common interests of the people, in contrast to the rule of a faction or tyrant acting for the benefit of a ruler, one person, or a few individuals. Since it was lawful, government was administered on the basis of general regulations (Prasad, 2012: 52).

All that the king requires for good governance is two types of rational counsel. One strengthens his own authority, while the other legitimizes his rule in the eyes of his people. The former is more appropriate and effective for initiating the king's domination. In contrast, legitimacy-producing consultation generates greater consent among the people and more effectively stimulates their support for the king. This is because the power of the state derives from legitimacy, while legitimacy, in turn, is produced by power (Shomali, 2020: 159).

2.5. Military Capability and the Army in Iran-Shahri Thought

In Iran-Shahri political thought, the authority of the king was based not only on divine legitimacy and God glory, but also on military power and the existence of a strong army, which were regarded as among the principal pillars of the survival of kingship. In ancient texts, the ideal king was one who, in addition to administering justice, possessed the ability to defend the borders and preserve the cohesion of the empire (Rezaei- ad, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 125). The army, as an instrument of order, security, and the expansion of sovereignty, was regarded not merely as an operational institution but also as a symbol of imperial grandeur (Tabataba'i, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 73).

The idea of a powerful army reached its peak particularly during the Sasanian Empire, where the military, alongside religion and the king, constituted the fundamental triad of power (Mazdapour, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 48). Within this framework, military capability was not merely an instrument of warfare but also part of the mechanism through which kingship was legitimized. From the perspective of Iran-Shahri thought, a king without a powerful army was neither capable of protecting the borders nor considered worthy of God glory (Ashraf, 1973 AD/1353 SH: 210).

Table 1. Characteristics and Features of Iran-Shahri Political Thought in the Legitimation and Decline of Government

Conceptual Propositions	Legitimizing Conditions	Factors Contributing to the Decline of Government
The institution of kingship or <i>shahri-yari</i>	Justice-centeredness in society	Injustice by the king
Cosmic order and <i>God glory</i>	Good and people-oriented kingship	Bad kingship
Administration of justice	Proportionality and appropriateness in governance	Disorder in governance
Interweaving of religion and politics	Religious orientation in governance	Anti-religious policies by the king
Military capability and a powerful army	Maintenance of security	Failure to maintain security
Rationalism and absence of despotism	Emphasis on competence and political pluralism	Greed, class disintegration, and lack of pluralism

Source: Research findings

The foregoing discussion indicates that the concept of Iran-Shahri political thought possesses considerable potential for analyzing the processes through which a monarchical government acquires legitimacy and subsequently undergoes decline and collapse, particularly through the exercise of authority that can affect people as subjects within the social sphere. From this perspective, by drawing on the indicators and conceptual propositions of authority and subjecthood within Iran-Shahri political thought, as manifested in the nature of Mohammad Reza Shah's relations with society, the present article seeks to examine the legitimizing factors and the conditions underlying the decline of the First Pahlavi period.

3. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and employs a historical-analytical approach. Its principal objective is to explain the relationship between the components of Iran-Shahri thought and the model of legitimacy of the Second Pahlavi government. Accordingly, conceptual-comparative analysis was employed to extract, interpret, and compare the relevant concepts. The research data were collected through library research and documentary analysis. The sources used include theoretical texts related to Iran-Shahri thought, historiographical works on the Second Pahlavi period, sociological studies of political legitimacy, and documents and analyses reflected in the article. In addition, the table of Iran-Shahri indicators and data related to the discourse and performance of the Pahlavi government, including imperial symbolism, foreign dependence, and cultural policies, was analyzed as secondary data.

4. Distinguishing Genuine Iran-Shahri Elements in the Discourse of the Second Pahlavi Period from Conceptual Similarities

An examination of the discourse and policies of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi reveals that not all components of Iran-Shahri thought were necessarily reflected in his programs and actions in a substantive and concrete manner. Some of these components were consciously and directly incorporated into royal policies. For example, the emphasis on Aryan propositions, the reconstruction of the Academy, and the promotion of the Persian language were all, in one way or another, aligned with Iran-Shahri elements and were manifested in practice.

By contrast, some features of Iran-Shahri thought are observable merely at the level of historical or analytical similarities rather than as deliberately planned or practically implemented policies. These similarities often involved references to myths, ancient narratives, or analytical interpretations of Iran's past, which were primarily symbolic or propagandistic in nature. Their purpose was to legitimize the monarchy and foster a sense of national identity rather than to reflect the historical or cultural realities of Iran-Shahri directly thought.

In this regard, the Pahlavi regime made extensive use of education as a state subsystem for legitimizing the political system. Education thus became an arena for pursuing cultural objectives in the process of modernization. An examination of the content of school textbooks provides insight into the nature of the cultural policies of the Second Pahlavi period.

Table 2. Frequency Percentages of Political-Ideological Themes in Textbooks under the Pahlavi Regime

Theme	Second Grade	Third Grade	Fourth Grade	Fifth Grade	Total	Percentage
Pre-Islamic Iranian myths and traditions	7	9	4	5	25	39
Praise of the Shah	0	8	3	0	11	18
Government propaganda (modernization efforts)	0	6	3	0	9	14
Patriotism	1	2	4	2	9	14
Benevolent ruler	0	2	3	1	6	9
Extreme patriotism	0	0	0	4	4	6
Total	8	27	17	12	64	100

Source: Ayvazi, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 263

Therefore, it can be argued that the discourse of the Second Pahlavi period was a combination of genuine Iran-Shahri elements and their conscious incorporation, on the one hand, and Iran-Shahri conceptual and symbolic representations, on the other, which were employed as political and ideological instruments. This distinction demonstrates that an analysis of the Pahlavi discourse requires careful attention to the boundary between what was genuinely implemented in practice and what was merely represented symbolically or historically.

5. Legitimizing Factors of the Second Pahlavi Period

Iran-Shahri thought is regarded as one of the factors contributing to the continuity of Iran's political and cultural life, embodying the ideas and patterns of statecraft associated with the Sasanian government. In the following discussion, an attempt is made to examine the influence of Iran-Shahri political thought in legitimizing the government of the Second Pahlavi period.

The Second Pahlavi period is considered a highly significant era in the formation of Iran's political-social identity discourse. During this period, an independent, centralized, and powerful government with a distinctive political

ideology emerged and sought, through the use of both soft and hard power, to transform society in accordance with its own agenda. It appears that an analysis of the governmental structure and the path it pursued toward legitimization depends on the factors that contributed to its formation.

If we accept that the political and social culture of society played a significant role in the establishment and development of the state structure (Naqibzadeh, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 74), it can necessarily be argued that this factor likewise influenced the Second Pahlavi state. In fact, Mohammad Reza Shah sought ways to acquire legitimacy and present the Pahlavi government as legitimate in order to legitimize and preserve his power. He was able to draw upon Iran-Shahri political thought in pursuit of this objective, as discussed below.

5.1. Emphasis on the Iranian Royal Tradition

In Iran, loyalty to the state resembled the relationship between ruler and subject within a religious monarchical system grounded in Zoroastrianism (USI Publications, 2012: 177). During this period, the government's entire propaganda apparatus and official press were mobilized to construct a charismatic image of Reza Shah and a deified conception of the Pahlavi monarchy, rooted in Iran-Shahri thought. In fact, the machinery of the Pahlavi government made considerable efforts to disseminate various myths of nationalism, particularly through the new medium of television. The major ceremonies of the period, including the coronation, the commemoration of 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy, and the fiftieth anniversary of Pahlavi rule, were essentially visual spectacles intended to impress ordinary people with the majesty and grandeur of the Shah (Ansari, 2017: 285). The purpose of the 2,500-year celebrations was to identify the Shah not only with Cyrus the Great but also to associate him with the great historical monuments and achievements of Iran's past (Ansari, 2017: 302). Mohammad Reza Shah went so far as to hold his coronation in 1350 by paying homage to his self-proclaimed ancient predecessor, Cyrus the Great, at the king's tomb in Pasargadae (Ramazani, 2004: 554).

Accordingly, it can be argued that the Second Pahlavi government sought to legitimize Mohammad Reza Shah through the revival of the Iranian royal tradition and Iran-Shahri thought. In this context, before the Shah could effectively identify himself with Cyrus, the Achaemenid king first had to be introduced and familiarized to the general public. Thus, during the Second Pahlavi period, Cyrus was described in the following terms: "From the beginning of our glorious history, our country has been renowned for peace, friendship, and humanity, and this can be clearly demonstrated by studying the methods and policies of the great kings, such as Cyrus the Great, whose efforts made it possible for us to

celebrate the 2,500th anniversary of the Iranian monarchy next year.” (Ansari, 2017: 303)

This was a situation centered on the institution of kingship as the principal axis of the Iranian state and society. In this regard, political elites regarded the White Revolution as a means of consolidating the Shah’s power and authority and essentially associated social and economic reforms with a monarchy in which the monarch reigned rather than governed (Ansari, 2017: 230-231). Accordingly, the Second Pahlavi government, by drawing on Iran-Shahri symbols and historical myths, particularly Mohammad Reza Shah’s identification with Cyrus the Great, and by employing the media and official rituals, sought to strengthen the legitimacy of the monarchy and establish kingship as the principal axis of political power and national identity.

5.2. Mohammad Reza Shah’s Support for Religiosity and Islamism

Throughout Iran’s history, which encompasses one of the world’s oldest centers of human habitation and civilization, religion and religious commitment have constituted an established and demonstrable reality. Accordingly, a reciprocal relationship existed between the political life of Iranians and the religious and sectarian beliefs of society. The two spheres of religion and government, both of which belonged to the public sphere of society, overlapped in many instances in fulfilling their respective material and spiritual interests. Governments were founded upon religious and sectarian foundations. At the same time, kings and rulers sought to strengthen the foundations of their political power by expressing interest in the prevailing beliefs of society and gaining the support of the religious establishment of their time (Zamani Mahjoub, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 43).

In this context, following the events of Shahrivar 1320 and the departure of Reza Shah, his young son, Mohammad Reza Shah, came to power. The young Shah changed his father’s approach, visited religious authorities, and established good relations with them. During this period, when greater freedoms were introduced in the country, people once again had an opportunity to revive their lost traditions. Ayatollah Borujerdi, who was responsible for the affairs of the Shi’a community, maintained good relations with the Shah and prohibited religious hardliners from intervening in politics. Consequently, relations between the government and the religious establishment remained favorable (Basirat Manesh, 1999 AD/1378 SH).

The Shah participated in interviews, religious ceremonies, festivals, and mourning observances, and presented himself as one who had received divine favor and was the object of God Almighty’s and the impeccable Imams’ (AS) attention and support (Center for Historical Documents, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 418).

It can therefore be argued that he sought to use religion and tradition as sources of legitimacy for the monarchy.

The Shah undertook measures that led religious forces to believe that Mohammad Reza Shah had abandoned his father's approach to combating religion. His first measure in relation to religious currents was the return of Ayatollah Qomi. He also visited Ayatollah Borujerdi while the latter was hospitalized and allowed the clergy and religious forces considerable freedom in carrying out religious affairs. These measures ushered the clergy into a new phase of activity and strengthened this social group, enabling the Shah, with the assistance of the clergy, to preserve Iran's unity in the face of foreign forces seeking to partition the country (Najafzadeh, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 8). Indeed, by late 1332, when the Shah had reasserted his royal power with the assistance of the United States, leading clerics had already expressed strong active or implicit support for the Iranian monarchy as an institution (Skocpol, 1982: 273).

In fact, by rebuilding positive relations with religious institutions and the Shi'i clergy, Mohammad Reza Shah used religion and religious traditions as a source of legitimacy for the monarchy. His measures, including restoring the role of Ayatollah Qomi and supporting religious activities, strengthened the clergy and elicited their implicit support, thereby contributing to the consolidation of the monarchy and the preservation of national unity in the face of foreign pressures.

5.3. Emphasis on Iranianism and Antiquarianism

Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's theories and policies aimed at reconstructing Iran's national identity were shaped particularly around Aryan propositions and the cultural heritage of ancient Iran (Bashiriyyeh, 1383: 120). By drawing upon mythical and historical elements, the Shah sought to consolidate his personal and dynastic position within Iran's political culture. Among his symbolic initiatives was his desire to add the title "Aryamehr" (Sun of the Aryans) to the list of royal titles. This initiative continued Reza Shah's aspiration to establish a grand dynastic state (Abrahamian, 2008: 123).

The White Revolution, as a turning point, reflected Mohammad Reza Shah's effort to formulate a coherent ideological program that reconstructed modernity and dynastic nationalism in the form of "Pahlavism" (Ansari, 2017: 230). This program was designed not merely as a symbolic project, but also to consolidate the political position and legitimacy of the monarchy in relation to society and history. The Shah sought not only to be perceived as a progressive and benevolent monarch but also to present himself as the founder of a new and revolutionary order. This required linking monarchical power to the historical and

mythical teachings of ancient Iran (Ansari, 2017: 231).

One important dimension of these policies was the emphasis on consolidating loyalty to the Shah and allegiance to the government, which was also reflected in education and curricula. This demonstrated how the state, by associating itself with ancient history, sought to establish the foundations for its continuity and legitimacy (Zanjanieh et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 110).

On the other hand, the Shah's identity-building policy, based on the ideology of Iran's glorious ancient past, was accompanied by an exclusionary approach toward neighboring countries and non-Iranian cultures. This approach, sometimes referred to as "Neo-Achaemenid Aryan nationalism," highlighted the contrast between Iranians and Islam and presented an interpretation of history in which the Arab conquest was portrayed as a negative event responsible for cultural and political decline (Mereu, 2019: 774). On this basis, Mohammad Reza Shah's nationalism functioned as an instrument for legitimizing the state and advancing modernization, while simultaneously providing Iranians with a framework through which to define themselves in contrast to their Arab and Turkic neighbors and in alignment with Europeans (Martin, 2021).

Furthermore, the White Revolution was employed not only as an instrument of economic and social modernization but also as a means of national integration and consolidating the position of the monarchy within society. By offering economic promises to the peasantry while simultaneously putting pressure on landowners and traditional classes, the Shah was able to consolidate his support and legitimacy and manage ethnic and class tensions (Ansari, 2017: 232; Abrahamian, 1982: 435). The Shah's three-week visit to Azerbaijan in 1326 and the warm reception he received from the people demonstrated the direct role of the monarchy in fostering a sense of national unity, while this popularity, particularly following periods of crisis, was regarded as an indication of his social legitimacy (Ansari, 2017: 137). During the 1350s, coinciding with the rise in oil revenues, Mohammad Reza Shah focused on highlighting Iranian culture and identity through the revival of the Academy and the promotion of the Persian language. The purpose of these measures was to preserve the status of the Persian language and to study Iranian languages and dialects in order to enhance national awareness (Martin, 2021). Accordingly, it can be argued that Mohammad Reza Shah sought to strengthen the legitimacy of the monarchy and link modernization to a national-dynastic identity by reconstructing Iran's national identity on the basis of its ancient cultural and historical heritage, particularly Aryan and mythical concepts, and through programs such as the White Revolution, the promotion of loyalty to the Shah, national education, and the revival of the Academy. These policies simultaneously served as instruments for

consolidating political power and creating national unity by emphasizing Iranian culture and highlighting historical differences with neighboring countries.

5.4. Mohammad Reza Shah's Promotion of Justice

The Allied occupation of Iran in 1941 abruptly brought Reza Shah's rule to an end and inaugurated a new era characterized by a greater degree of pluralism and civil-society activity, empowering a range of political groups, including communists, liberals, and Islamists. The parliament was no longer merely a rubber stamp and now occupied a central position in Iranian politics. This political opening generated hopes that Iran might develop along democratic lines, with power transferred to parliament and state institutions entrusted to a broader range of social and political actors.

Following Reza Shah's abdication, the judiciary acquired greater independence, and its first major action was the trial of Reza Shah's loyalists in one of the longest trials in modern Iranian history. As noted earlier, under Reza Shah, the police were subject to military regulations that allowed them to bypass or undermine the judiciary at will. One of the first measures adopted by the new government, on September 28, 1941, less than a month after the abdication, was the passage of a law transferring jurisdiction over certain offenses committed by the police and other non-military government personnel (Enayat, 2013: 175). In fact, the occupation of Iran created an environment of pluralism and civil-society activity that strengthened various political groups and increased the role of parliament and judicial institutions. These changes reflected a relative transfer of power from the monarchy to parliament and greater judicial independence, thereby creating opportunities for democratic development and the assignment of responsibilities to a broader range of social actors.

5.5. Establishment of a Powerful Army during the Reign of Mohammad Reza Shah

Following the occupation of Iran during World War II and the abdication of Reza Shah, the new Shah attributed the army's defeat to inadequate mechanization. He believed that other armies had undergone transformations precisely because of such technological deficiencies (Ansari, 2017: 116). During the Second Pahlavi period, the army was regarded as a vital pillar of the monarchy (Ansari, 2017: 250). From the beginning of his reign, the armed forces constituted the principal pillar of Mohammad Reza Shah's government. Accordingly, the Shah was careful to cultivate the loyalty of the officer corps. He therefore provided generous salaries and various benefits, including subsidized housing, free education for their children, commissions and subsidized exchanges, favorable

pensions, and, in some cases, appointments as provincial governors, positions in government ministries, or employment with state-owned companies. The Shah also periodically reappointed officers in order to prevent the emergence of power blocs within the army. He was likewise required to approve all troop movements and military operations, thereby reinforcing his control and initiative among his commanders. This system of control served the Shah well under normal circumstances (Eisenstadt, 2011: 2).

During the Second Pahlavi period, the army was regarded as a vital pillar of the monarchy, and Mohammad Reza Shah consolidated his power and influence over the armed forces by strengthening officers' loyalty through extensive salaries and benefits and by maintaining close control over military movements. In addition to ensuring the army's support, this mechanism prevented the emergence of independent power blocs within the military institution and constituted a principal pillar of the monarchy's stability.

6. Analysis of the Factors Influencing the Decline of the Second Pahlavi Period

The return to Sasanian and Achaemenid paradigms was misguided. Its objective was to legitimize the Pahlavi government through authoritarian methods. Mohammad Reza Shah's grand objective of transforming Iran into a "Great Civilization" was shaped more by dynastic ambitions than by the pursuit of Iran's national interests. To achieve this objective, he sought to arm Iran to the teeth so that it could become one of the world's five major conventional military powers (Ramazani, 2004: 554). This section seeks to explain the factors contributing to the decline and eventual collapse of the Pahlavi regime in light of the conceptual propositions of Iran-Shahri political thought.

6.1. Neglect of Religion and Anti-Religious Policies

There had been no confrontation between the Shah and religious forces until the early 1960s. Despite his outward displays of religiosity, Mohammad Reza Shah was, in his personal, political, financial, and moral life, a highly indifferent and permissive individual who was deeply aligned with the anti-cultural, anti-religious, and secular policies of the West (Center for Historical Documents, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 420). In fact, the government's modernization policy had seriously challenged the position of traditional classes, including the clergy, and marked the beginning of striking tensions between religious forces and the Shah.

The most controversial aspect of his ideological outlook concerned his vision for the future. He began by advocating the development of a "Model" country, which by the early 1970s had evolved into the concept of a "Great Civilization."

This represented his vision of a new order that would successfully combine the traditional institution of kingship with “Modernity.” (Ansari, 2017: 250)

“Mohammad Reza was always dissatisfied with the fact that Islam was identified as the official religion in the Constitution, saying that this was contrary to human rights!... Mohammad Reza called the clergy the “Black Reaction.” He believed that the best way to confront the mullahs was to weaken Islam, which had been imposed upon the Iranian nation through the Arab conquest of Iran, and that as long as the people did not abandon religious fanaticism, we would not achieve progress and development!” (Ghazanfari, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 157)

Accordingly, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Shah used state power and modernization programs to attack the Shi‘i clergy. The top-down land reforms of the 1960s dispossessed many clerics as well as religious institutions and served to sever the clergy’s ties with the landed upper class. Educational, welfare, and legal reforms created modern, professional, and state-sponsored competitors for the Shi‘i clergy in all of their historically important social functions (Skocpol, 1982: 274).

Furthermore, under the provisions of the second phase of the land reforms, holders of *Waqf* properties were required to negotiate ninety-nine-year lease agreements with *Nasq* shareholders. In most cases, the annual rents paid by the *Nasq* shareholders were lower than those they had paid under the previous system. This reduced the income of the religious scholars from *Waqf* properties (Milani, 1988: 47).

In fact, the Shah’s social modernization program, through the use of state power and modernization policies, confronted the Shi‘i clergy. Land, educational, and legal reforms reduced the economic and social influence of the clergy. They restricted their traditional sources of income and historical power. At the same time, the Shah’s ideology pursued the weakening of religion and the reconstruction of a modern political order with the aim of advancing the “Great Civilization.”

6.2. Avoidance of Justice

Under Mohammad Reza Shah, the country’s legal system was based on the assumption that the government could not be wrong. Many historians and experts maintain that under the Pahlavi regime, the judiciary had become almost entirely integrated into the executive branch. Judicial decisions reflected the will of the government. Furthermore, with the expansion of military courts and special civilian courts, the jurisdiction of the judiciary was gradually restricted (irdc.ir, 2021).

Government interference in the judiciary progressed to the point that SAVAK,

in the name of national interests, undertook the arrest, interrogation, torture, imprisonment, and execution of individuals without effective oversight or accountability to any individual or institution. As a result, the credibility of the judiciary declined sharply, and the rule of law was effectively absent, because accepting the rule of law would have constrained the Shah's absolute power. The regime's appropriation of the judiciary had a negative impact on the population, to the extent that people became completely disillusioned with the country's judicial system. In an editorial dated 20 Dey 1340, the *Ettela'at* newspaper addressed this issue as follows: "The people have lost hope in justice, and this is the most deadly social danger. The members of the judiciary themselves, even the minister, deputy director-general, and senior-ranking judicial officials, all know that the people have become disillusioned. They regard justice as moderate, and they themselves know that the people are right. But why is the judiciary not reformed, and why are they unable to reform the judiciary?... This is because the judiciary has been placed under a spell, and no one has yet emerged to break it?" (irdc.ir, 2021)

The functioning of the judicial system under the Pahlavi regime turned judges, lawyers, and human-rights activists into one of the first groups to openly express their dissatisfaction with the regime in the years leading up to the Revolution (Kamali, 1997: 184). In May 1977, fifty-three jurists initiated public protest by sending an open letter to the royal palace. In their letter, they accused the government of interfering in the courts and announced the establishment of a special committee to preserve and protect the judiciary from the legislature (Abrahamian, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 619). The extent of injustice under the Second Pahlavi regime was such that in August 1977; sixty-four prominent jurists publicly gathered at a hotel in Tehran and issued a strongly worded statement. In the statement, they accused the government of violating the Constitution, demanded the immediate abolition of all courts inconsistent with the Constitution, and declared that because judges were entrusted with safeguarding the Constitution, they considered it their duty to assume responsibility for defending the independence of the judiciary (Abrahamian, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 620-621).

Therefore, during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, the integration of the judiciary into the executive branch and extensive government interference in judicial affairs weakened the independence of the justice system. At the same time, the rule of law was effectively set aside. This practice not only diminished the credibility of the judiciary but also provoked widespread dissatisfaction among jurists and human-rights activists, demonstrating that the absence of the rule of law was one of the key factors underlying the crisis of legitimacy and the emergence of social opposition in the period preceding the Revolution.

6.3. The Contradiction between Discourse (Deepening Nationalist Sentiments and Antiquarian Interests) and Practice (Importing the Achievements of Western Civilization)

The culmination of Mohammad Reza Shah's nationalism and antiquarian interests can be observed in the 2,500-year celebrations. These celebrations received extensive international media coverage and were attended by numerous heads of state, at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars, at a time when famine and hunger had spread throughout society. While the Shah increasingly dictated the political agenda domestically, many policies and ideological structures were increasingly influenced by developments abroad and by the Shah's desire to broaden his horizons. Consequently, even domestic events were engineered with foreign perceptions in mind; indeed, this aspect became an imperial priority. Television became an important medium in this regard. Thus, whereas the coronation was primarily an Iranian event, the celebration of 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy was essentially an international event (Ansari, 2017: 284).

Since 1332, when the CIA-backed coup removed the nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh and consolidated the Shah's supremacy, a prevailing perception held that he owed his throne to foreign powers, particularly the United States (Eisenstadt, 2011: 1). In 1342, when the United States made its ill-advised demand for a change in the existing status of the agreement concerning the presence of its forces, he did not defend Iran's sovereignty. Likewise, in 1352, when Nixon proposed sending Richard Helms, the former CIA director, as ambassador, the Shah did not object (Limbert, 2010: 532).

In 1342, within the framework of the White Revolution, the Shah launched a series of extensive reforms aimed at modernizing and Westernizing Iran with the support of the U.S. government (Sharma et al., 2014: 1). This resulted in rapid urbanization and the adoption of Western habits and customs by the ruling elite, which alienated traditional and religious elements within Iranian society (Eisenstadt, 2011: 2). In this context, both clerical leaders and activist religious scholars were morally angered by the spread of immorality, permissiveness, and foreign culture under the Pahlavi regime (Arjomand, 1986: 401). To the extent that young intellectuals in the 1970s turned toward Islam and presented it as a revolutionary ideology. A defining feature of this new ideology was hostility toward the West and an emphasis on the local economy and culture (Bashiriyeh, 1982: 70).

Furthermore, the Shah's modernization programs required a substantial presence of foreign personnel, including 9,000 American technicians and military advisers and 60,000 foreign workers and businessmen, most of whom were American. The widespread presence of these foreign workers, who often re-

ceived considerably higher wages than their Iranian counterparts, generated resentment and evoked nationalist and religious sensitivities (Eisenstadt, 2011: 2). In this process, he transformed Iran into one of the major purchasers of U.S. arms, a client state of the United States, and an American policeman in the Persian Gulf (Ramazani, 2004: 554). In this regard, Asadollah Alam, the Minister of the Imperial Court, provides an illustrative account of Mohammad Reza Shah's compliance. According to Alam, President Nixon apparently asked the Shah to provide financial assistance to the notorious Committee for the Re-election of the President during the 1972 presidential campaign, and the Shah considered himself obligated to make the payment (Limbert, 2010: 532). Thus, it can be argued that Mohammad Reza Shah was perceived as placing foreign interests before those of his own country. In this regard, many Iranians regarded his agreement with the Pentagon concerning the status of forces as a violation of Iran's national interests, as it effectively revived the hated foreign capitulatory privileges in Iran. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini called the agreement a "Document of Iran's Enslavement," while one of the most popular revolutionary slogans encapsulated the sentiment: "American Shah." (Ramazani, 2004: 554)

According to Amuzegar, the Shah's downfall resulted from the conflict between Western modernization and traditional, religious, economic, and social structures. The Shah's human-rights violations committed in the course of his modernization policies, generated popular resentment both toward the Shah's policies and toward modernization itself. Consequently, Iranians turned toward the alternative and negative conception of modernization advanced by Khomeini's camp. On the other hand, because the Shah pursued Westernization recklessly, the reaction was naturally violent (Amuzegar, 1991: 37).

To the extent that the 2,500-year celebrations and Mohammad Reza Shah's modernization programs, while emphasizing Iran's ancient identity, simultaneously relied heavily on the United States and Western-oriented elites, they distanced society from local traditions and values. The presence of foreign advisers and workers, the adoption of Western culture, and modernization policies, together with human-rights violations, aroused nationalist and religious sensitivities and created the conditions for Iranians to turn toward an Islamic revolutionary ideology and express widespread opposition to the monarchy and Westernization.

6.4. Disregard for the Law and Authoritarian Rule

From the perspective of Iran-Shahri thought, and particularly the notion of a divine right to authority, the foundations of despotism are reinforced (Ashtiani et al., 2021: 125). According to this theory, it is God who chooses the Shah, not the

people, and their votes cannot interfere with the Shah's exercise of power. God has also endowed him with the arts of kingship; therefore, he does not need to acquire knowledge or learn the art of governance (Sonn, 1996: 125). This may explain why, despite the Pahlavi regime's efforts to implement the Constitution properly, it refrained from adhering to the Constitution once it had consolidated its power (Esmaeili, 2019: 121).

The worst-case scenario for an Iran-Shahri society is the disintegration of social classes and the disappearance of professions. If the classes disintegrate, chastity, modesty, and integrity, the moral foundations of society, are destroyed (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 79). In this context, Mohammad Reza Shah focused primarily on socioeconomic modernization while neglecting political development. This, in turn, led to the erosion of institutions and severed the relationship between the state and the people (Abrahamian, 1982: 438). Under such circumstances, students and graduates from the lower-middle and middle strata, particularly those studying applied sciences and engineering, found themselves excluded from the upper echelons of the Westernized social order and from senior government positions (Arjomand, 1986: 401). According to Jerrold Green, political dissatisfaction generated an increasingly polarized political environment. At the same time, large numbers of Iranians who had previously remained politically passive developed anti-regime sentiments and adopted revolutionary forms of behavior (Green, 1982: 115).

The absence of political pluralism, combined with the Shah's growing reliance on personally handling domestic political affairs, resulted in the emergence of a form of political stability centered on the Shah's actions. Domestic politics throughout most of this period, particularly until the late 1970s, revolved around the commands of a patrimonial Shah, surrounded by politicians who competed with one another for his greater favor and recognition (Ansari, 2017: 284). The Shah personally made most economic and political decisions without being accountable to anyone (Amjad, 2001: 167). In addition, after rebuilding an army that had been dismantled as a result of foreign invasion, he established a political police force. He expanded the bureaucracy in order to control all the channels of Iranian society and establish autocratic rule (Abrahamian, 1982: 437).

In fact, Iran's authoritarian regime did not permit the implementation of a democratic process, even though it formally remained a constitutional monarchy. In practice, it functioned more as a dictatorial monarchy (Hooglund, 1981: 113). Following the 1332 coup, the Shah harshly persecuted his opponents and restricted political freedoms. As a result of the repression associated with the "Police State," opponents were forced to operate underground and consequently became more radicalized (Salehi, 1988: 10). Moreover, in 1354, the Shah ad-

opted a one-party system and consequently established the Rastakhiz (Resurrection) Party virtually overnight. The Shah used the Rastakhiz Party as an instrument for implementing his policies and establishing a one-party political system loyal to him. Party members enjoyed numerous opportunities, while opponents of the party were regarded as traitors (Milani, 1988: 124).

This was despite the fact that in 1340, in "Mission for My Country," the Shah had written: "If I were a dictator rather than a constitutional monarch, I might perhaps be tempted to establish a single, all-encompassing party, like the party Hitler established." Nevertheless, the democratic and constitutional façade, as well as the commitment to the Constitution, was ultimately completely abandoned with the establishment of the one-party system in 1354 (Foran, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 467).

Thus, the impact of despotism on the Iranian Revolution was primarily manifested in creating the conditions for popular uprising (Haghighat, 2000: 259). In some of its fundamental characteristics, the Revolution did not conform to the conventional norms of Western revolutions, because the state was not merely an ordinary dictatorship; rather, it was an absolute and arbitrary regime that lacked political legitimacy and a broad social base altogether (Katouzian, 2009: 20). Politically, it is not sufficient to say that violence and authority are opposites. Where one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence emerges when authority is threatened, but allowing violence to follow its own course ultimately results in the disappearance of authority (Arendt, 1970: 56). In this regard, the establishment of the Rastakhiz Party had two profound, and perhaps one could say disastrous, consequences for the regime. It intensified state control over the salaried middle class, the urban working class, and rural agricultural cooperatives. The state's reach extended further into these segments of the population. More importantly, the state now threatened to enter spheres from which the traditional middle class, particularly the bazaar merchants and the clerical establishment, had previously kept it excluded (Abrahamian, 2008: 151). All social relations characterized by subjugation or the enslavement of freedom of thought are not only incompatible with the seriousness and significance of authority but also undermine fundamental human rights. The imposition of absolute obedience and submission constitutes a violation of the freedom and dignity of others and is certainly characteristic of despotic relations rather than authority.

6.5. The Dysfunction of Mohammad Reza Shah's Army

On the eve of the Revolution, "Iran's senior military leaders could not decide whether to continue supporting the government headed by Bakhtiar or to support the Islamic opposition. While millions of people participated in massive

demonstrations in Tehran and throughout the country, the army experienced its first major act of revolt against the political system: on December 11, 1978, army conscripts attacked the Lavisan barracks in Tehran, killing more than one person and wounding dozens of officers and numerous others. This incident inspired revolts and insurgent actions elsewhere.” (Eisenstadt, 2011: 3-4)

Students and technicians, supported by the Feda’iyan and the Mojahedin, confronted the Imperial Guard at the main air force base near Jaleh Square. However, the chiefs of staff declared neutrality and confined their soldiers to their barracks. Of the three pillars that the Pahlavis had constructed to reinforce their government, the army had become immobilized, the bureaucracy had joined the Revolution, and court support had become a source of profound embarrassment. The voice of the people was more powerful than the Pahlavi monarchy (Abrahamian, 2008: 162). Accordingly, in the sequence of events leading to the Islamic Revolution, the army ultimately exhausted, weakened, and paralyzed the Pahlavi regime (Skocpol, 1982: 272). Amid signs of the disintegration of the army and the opposition’s looting of government arms, the council ordered all military personnel to return to their bases. The army’s declaration of neutrality effectively handed control of the country to Khomeini, after which Shapour Bakhtiar resigned, formally marking the end of the Shah’s regime (Eisenstadt, 2011: 4). During the Islamic Revolution, the armed forces came under intense pressure in response to the growing strength of the movement. At critical moments of the Revolution, divisions emerged along class lines within the armed forces, causing them to lose their cohesion. In this context, lower-ranking members of the armed forces attempted to gauge the attitudes of the masses in light of their commitment and firm determination to transform the existing order.

7. Critical Analysis: The Instrumental Use of Iran-Shahri Thought under the Second Pahlavi and the Reasons for the Failure of Legitimation

Based on the foregoing discussion, the failure of the Pahlavi political system to establish the ideal of the Good as the basis of domination reveals the absence of a symbolic sphere and creates divisions within the social sphere. In addition to these divisions, the king-centered form of government drives the subject toward efforts to effect change and overcome loss within the symbolic structure. Revolution, therefore, constitutes the most magnificent and compelling political spectacle through which an attempt is made to symbolize the real world and overcome disorder within the symbolic order. During this brief moment following the collapse of the old order and preceding the rise of the new order to

power, a gap can be discerned within the symbolic structure, and the presence of the political can be felt. Such an interpretation brings ideas of revolution closer to the political sphere. For example, the confrontation between the subject and authority in the Iranian Islamic Revolution, together with the fantasy of a return to the self or the emergence of an antiquarian discourse resulting from the disruption in the process of aligning Iranian identity with others bears traces of this phenomenon. The fantasy of returning to the self-emerged as a response to the Western-oriented and antiquarian symbolic structure of the Pahlavi regime, within which the subject had become alienated from itself. Subsequently, Iranian society's desire to align its identity with political Islam moved toward a return to the self (Sarhadi et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 66).

According to Amuzegar, Iranians have always been prepared to accept order and authority pragmatically. Iranians fear power when necessary and may even respect it, but deep within themselves they possess strong impulses toward reconsideration and reassessment. Accordingly, their artistic and mystical expressions have served to bridge the gap between their spiritual heritage and the materialism and modern rationalism of the West. Owing to the power and attractiveness of their culture, they possess a unique capacity to transform defeat into victory and to compel foreign invaders to adopt their customs, values, and way of life (Amuzegar, 1991: 100).

In this regard, one of the key points in examining the relationship between Iran-Shahri thought and the policies of the Second Pahlavi period is the distinction between the "Symbolic and Instrumental Use" and the "Institutional Realization" of these components. Mohammad Reza Shah selectively and propagandistically employed many Iran-Shahri symbols and rituals in order to reproduce the legitimacy of the monarchy; however, the contradiction between discourse and practice prevented this symbolic legitimacy from developing into sustainable legitimacy.

First, the legitimacy of the Pahlavi regime was largely "Performative." The 2,500-year celebrations, the coronation at Pasargadae, and the conferral of the title "Aryamehr" were all symbolic representations of the grandeur of the Iranian monarchy that remained largely at the level of propaganda (Ansari, 2017: 284-285, 302). These rituals presented an image of an authoritative Shah in the short term; however, at the social level, the contrast between the luxury and grandeur of the court and people's livelihood problems and economic inequality transformed symbolic legitimacy into its opposite (Ramazani, 2004: 554).

Second, there was an obvious contradiction between rhetoric and practice. In the White Revolution, the Shah spoke of justice and welfare, but independent political and judicial institutions were weakened, and justice was reduced to

the level of rhetoric (Kamali, 1997: 184; Skocpol, 1982: 273-274). As a result, society, particularly the emerging middle class, experienced a gap between the government's claims and social realities.

Third, dependence on foreign powers undermined the Shah's nationalist legitimacy. While the Shah claimed continuity with national grandeur by invoking Cyrus and Iran-Shahri heritage, the presence of foreign advisers and extensive ties with the United States and Britain undermined this claim (Limbert, 2010: 532; Eisenstadt, 2011: 2). This contradiction hollowed out national-historical legitimacy from within.

Fourth, the Shah's use of Iran-Shahri symbols generated divergent messages for different social constituencies. State-dependent elites viewed them as symbols of national power. In contrast, the clergy and the bazaar largely interpreted them as signaling the marginalization of Islamic traditions, and the lower classes perceived them as reflecting indifference to their everyday problems (Bayat, 1987: 77; Arjomand, 1986: 401). Thus, the Pahlavi Iran-Shahri discourse did not produce a homogeneous basis of legitimacy at the social level.

Fifth, instead of establishing participatory and justice-oriented institutions, the regime relied on instruments of repression. SAVAK and the army played prominent roles in controlling society, but this excessive reliance on coercion eroded the monarchy's soft legitimacy (Abrahamian, 1982: 435; Salehi, 1988: 10). The experience of the Revolution demonstrated that symbolic legitimacy without sustainable institution-building could not withstand social and political crises (Skocpol, 1982: 272-274).

Ultimately, components such as justice and pluralism are inherently institutional and enduring dimensions of Iran-Shahri thought. In contrast, the Second Pahlavi regime employed them only at the level of slogans and propaganda. This structural gap between "Symbol" and "Institution" was a principal reason for the failure of the Second Pahlavi's Iran-Shahri project to generate legitimacy (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 74; Shomali, 2020: 159).

Accordingly, it becomes clear that Iran-Shahri thought during the Second Pahlavi period was present primarily at the symbolic and propagandistic level rather than at the institutional and practical level. Although the Pahlavi regime's use of these elements generated symbolic legitimacy in the short term, its distance from the social realities of Iranian society ultimately contributed to a crisis of legitimacy and the decline of the monarchy.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that the relationship between Iran-Shahri political thought and the legitimacy of the Second Pahlavi regime was complex

and multilayered, combining substantive, symbolic, and instrumental elements. The findings indicate that a significant portion of the cultural, symbolic, and ideological policies of the Second Pahlavi government drew upon Iran-Shahri components; however, this appropriation largely remained at the symbolic and propagandistic level and did not progress to sustainable and practical institutionalization. This gap between “Symbol” and “Institution” ultimately constituted one of the key factors in the decline of the political legitimacy of the Second Pahlavi regime.

The evidence demonstrates that, in its efforts to consolidate its legitimacy, the Second Pahlavi regime employed such elements as king-centeredness, Iranianism, God glory, the promotion of the Persian language, and the revival of pre-Islamic symbols. These elements were rooted in Iran-Shahri thought and were represented within the official ideology of the monarchy. This approach contributed to strengthening “Symbolic Legitimacy” and consolidating the monarchy’s identity structure in the short term. Nevertheless, as noted above, the substantive foundations of Iran-Shahri thought rest upon justice, cosmic order, the interrelationship between religion and politics, rationalism, avoidance of despotism, and sustainable institution-building. During the Second Pahlavi period, these elements were articulated primarily at the discursive level, while in practice they came into conflict with imitative modernization, the concentration of power, foreign dependence, and political repression. The table presenting the components of Iran-Shahri thought likewise demonstrates that the neglect of each of these components directly contributes to governmental decline.

On the other hand, the documentary analysis conducted in this study indicates that the Pahlavi regime’s excessive reliance on SAVAK and the army, together with its neglect of participatory institutions and social justice, severely weakened the government’s soft legitimacy. Moreover, the cultural and educational policies of the Pahlavi regime demonstrate that, rather than engaging in participatory institution-building, the Second Pahlavi government focused on antiquarianism, royal propaganda, glorification of the Shah, and the myths of ancient Iran. This indicates the predominance of “Symbolic Iran-Shahri Thought” over “Institutional Iran-Shahri Thought.”

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the substantive elements of Iran-Shahri thought, justice, the interrelationship between religion and politics, rationalism, pluralism, and institution-building, were not realized during the Second Pahlavi period, whereas its symbolic elements, king-centeredness, God glory, antiquarianism, and ritual legitimation, were employed as instruments of monarchical propaganda. This “Duality between symbol and institution” meant that, rather than strengthening legitimacy, Iran-Shahri thought contributed to a

crisis of legitimacy and ultimately to the collapse of the monarchy. Accordingly, it can be argued that instead of constructing a nation-state based on the enduring principles of Iran-Shahri thought, the Second Pahlavi regime primarily employed this tradition as an ideological instrument of legitimation. This selective and propagandistic appropriation, when combined with the failure to align the political structure with the social values of Iranian society and with the growing rupture between state and society, ultimately not only failed to create sustainable legitimacy but also contributed to the intensification of the legitimacy crisis and the collapse of the regime.

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