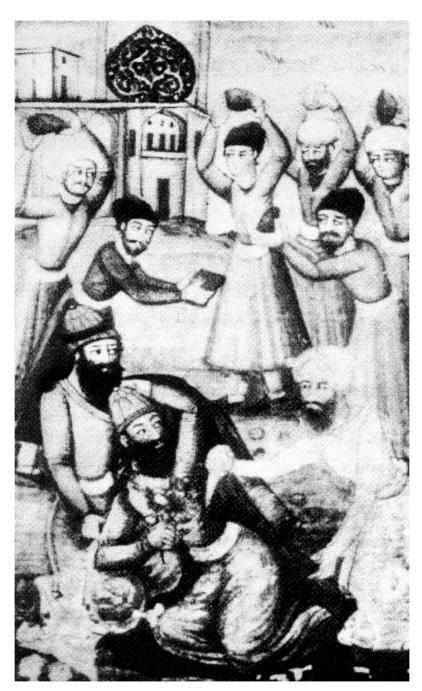# Introduction:

19th-Century Persian Sufism in its Shiʿite Milieu

The Rise of the Safavids and the Establishment of Shiʿism in Iran

The Safavid Empire[1] was the first and greatest Persian Empire following the Muslim conquest of the Iranian plateau. The first Safavid King, Shāh Ismāʿīl (r. 1502-1524), was only 15 years old when he assumed the throne and declared that his realm was to follow the Twelver Shiʿi teachings. He required all mosques henceforth to add to the call to prayer the recognition of the Imām ʿAlī, the cousin and son-in-law of Muḥammad, as the true heir to the Prophet by means of the declaration, 'I witness that ʿAlī is God's friend (*walī Allāh*).' The Safavid kings were able to create stability for Persia. During their reign (907-1135/1501-1722), the Shiʿite seminary schools in Persia became centres for religious and philosophical sciences, fostered by the Safavid royal policy of inviting Shiʿite scholars from other Muslim lands to Persia, mostly from the Shiʿi centres in Syria, southern Iraq and the Arabian peninsula. The religious and social impact of the Safavids pro-Shiʿi policies changed the lives of Persians, who prior to this time were primarily Sunnis.

The shift from Sunni to Shiʿi was the great turning point for the religious history of Persia. The enormous efforts of the Safavid kings to develop Shiʿism as an established jurisprudential seminary school in Persia formed a new religious lifestyle for Persians. It is also undeniable that the Safavids had a great effect on the history of Shiʿism through the establishment of Shiʿi seminary schools (*ḥawza*) especially in Qum, which has been among the most influential centres for theological and jurisprudential studies since Safavid times.

The Stoning to Death of Mushtāq ʿAlī Shāh. (From Gulābzada, *Pazhūhishī dar rūydād-i qatl-i Mushtāq,* p. 84)

The Rise of the Qājār Dynasty

After two centuries of Safavid rule, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn's (r. 1074-1101/1694-1722) inability to govern the empire led to the Afghan invasion, which ended in the fall of the Safavids (1135/1722). After the fall of the Safavid dynasty (907-1135/1501-1722), Persia faced several chaotic eras. Although strong charismatic leaders such as Nādir Shāh Afshār (d. 1160/1747) and Karīm Khān Zand (d. 1193/1779) were able to establish relative stability in their territories, soon after their deaths Persia again faced renewed chaos. These leaders were not able to form strong, long-lasting dynasties. However, a powerful leader, Āqā Muḥammad Khān Qājār (r. 1195-1211/1782-1798), was able to consolidate his kingdom and form the Qājār dynasty (1210-1344/1796-1925) which would rule Persia for over a century. From the Safavid time to the Qājār era, the majority of Persians were followers of Twelver Shiʿism, which was inherited from the Safavid era.[2] Shiʿite clerics were more involved in the private and political lives of Shiʿites than Sunni clerics were in the lives of Sunnis. Consequently, there were always powerful clerical elites in Shiʿite societies, although, in certain periods (especially during Nādir's reign), their powers were reduced.[3] The clerics were not favoured by Nādir and Karīm Khān.[4] This was a bitter experience for Shiʿite clerics, but under the Qājārs they managed to regain and even increase their authority. Under Qājār rule the role of the Shiʿi clerics became a determining factor for the religious, political and social life of Persians. The Qājār monarchs consistently asked for their help on certain political occasions, and so became indebted to them.

Shiʿite clerics wanted to gain influence and a power that would be independent of the state. They did not want to experience the same bitter treatment which they had endured with Nādir Shāh Afshār, who dismissed them from court and did not subsidise their positions. And things only got worse under Karīm Khān, who viewed them as parasites on society.[5] Therefore, they formed an independent system that became increasingly powerful, to the extent that, at times, they challenged the power of the state. Shiʿite clerics thus played an important role in the formation of the political, intellectual, religious and mystical milieus of the era.

The Political Milieu

The Zand dynasty ruled Persia for about half a century (1163-1209/1750-1794), and Karīm Khān, its founder, was able to stabilise the country to a

certain extent, as Persia had been divided into different territories ruled by various princes after Nādir Shāh's death.[6] Karīm Khān established Shīrāz as his capital city. However, the Zand rulers were not able fully to recover from the destruction, and after Karīm Khān passed away the former chaotic political situation returned to Persia. Karīm Khān was a charismatic and humble leader, who believed that a man must be proud of his sword and work rather than his noble lineage. He ruled Persia for 22 years.

Luṭf ʿAlī Khān Zand (d. 1209/1794) was the last Zand ruler and was opposed to Muḥammad Khān Qājār (d. 1211/1797), Karīm Khān's most powerful enemy and chief of the Qājār tribe. After a long period of quarrel between Luṭf ʿAlī Khān and Muḥammad Khān Qājār, Luṭf ʿAlī Khān was betrayed by the governor of Bam, a city near Kirmān. He was captured and, consequently, the Zand dynasty ended in 1209/1794.[7] Āqā Muḥammad Khān became king, while Persia faced disunity, the threat of neighbouring countries and civil war. For most of his rule he was in negotiation with enemies or at war.[8]

Āqā Muḥammad Khān did not adopt the title of Shāh until he had subdued Georgia and unified Persia, and about a year later he passed away.[9] To help promote his legitimacy, Āqā Muḥammad Khān Qājār related himself to the Safavids. He strongly emphasised his Shiʿite beliefs as he claimed to be the legitimate heir to the Safavid legacy.[10] Āqā Muḥammad Khān turned to any influential class in the social, religious or political system of Persia to consolidate his power. The Uṣūlī mujtahids[11] (a high rank of Shiʿite clerics following the Uṣūlī School) were such a class. Mīrzā Abū al-Qāsim Qumī, known as Mīrzā-yi Qumī (d. 1231/1816),[12] composed a 'Book of Guidance' (*Irshādnāma*) in which he clarified the importance of having a king within a nation. He used the term 'Shadow of God' to describe kings. However, he was very careful not to downplay the authority and independence of Shiʿite clerics. He stated, 'As God Most High has established kings for the protection of the world of men . . . the *ʿulamāʾ* need them; and as He established the *ʿulamāʾ* for the protection of the religion of men . . . the king and other than the king need them.'[13] Qumī had close ties to Āqā Muḥammad Khān Qājār and his heir, Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1250/1834).[14]

During the Qājār era, the people of Persia faced an unstable economic situation. The Persian army faced a long war with Russia, which made it weak and tired from continuous fighting.[15] In the 18th century the Russians were looking to expand, and they invaded territories in Persia and Central Asia. The Russians were especially interested in certain Persian territories. In 1194/1780 a small army of Russians attacked Bihshahr in Northern

Persia, where Āqā Muḥammad Khān's army captured a number of these Russian officers and forced them to retreat.[16] Caucasia and Georgia were the two main territories that Persia and Russia fought for. Sometimes these wars were beneficial for other colonial powers, especially for England.[17] The Perso-Russian wars can be divided into two eras. The first era lasted from 1218-1228/1803-1813, and in it the Persians were defeated. The second era started in 1241/1825, when the Russian army unexpectedly invaded Persian borders. This expedition ended in 1243/1827, and some Persian territories were handed over to Russia.[18]

In 1211/1798 Āqā Muḥammad Khān was assassinated, and his nephew, Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh, became king of Persia. Edward Browne's description of Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh is quite useful for a better understanding of his personality. Browne noted:

> Áqá Muḥammad Khán was succeeded by his nephew, the uxorious and philoprogenitive Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh. He was avaricious and vain, being inordinately proud of his handsome face and long beard, but not by nature cruel (at any rate compared to his late uncle), and it is related that, though obliged by custom to witness the execution of malefactors, he would always avert his face so as not to behold the unhappy wretch's death-agony. He was something of a poet and composed numerous odes under the pen-name of Kháqán.[19]

At that time, England desired a friendly relationship with Persia. Therefore, Lord Marquess Wellesley (d. 1842)[20] appointed Sir John Malcolm (d. 1833) to lead a diplomatic mission to Persia. The British deputies, John Malcolm and the diplomats sent from the East India Company who accompanied him were warmly welcomed by the Persian state and Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh.[21]

In January 1801 (Sha'bān 1215) two treaties were signed between Persia and the East India Company, one of which was political and the other commercial. In the political treaty, the Persian monarch promised the British that if Afghanistan attacked India, the Persian monarch would declare war against Afghanistan. Persia was also not allowed to have any diplomatic relationship with the French government. In the commercial treaty, the Englishmen were exempt from paying duties to the Persian government. Englishmen had the right to punish domestic natives for debts.[22]

Despite these treaties, the British authorities did not support Persia when the Russians started to attack in 1218/1803. In response, Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh started a friendly correspondence with French authorities instead.[23]

On 4 May 1807, Napoleon and Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh signed the Finkenstein treaty, under which France promised to support Persia in restoring its army. Consequently, General Comte de Gardane (d. 1818) came to Persia with his army corps to train the Persian army. In June 1818, Russia and France signed the Treaties of Tilsit, which meant that the treaty of Finkenstein was no longer beneficial for the French. The French governor accused Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh of being hesitant to sign the Finkinstein treaty, and they annulled it.[24]

The Perso-Russian wars were major threats to Persia, resulting in the two disastrous peace treaties of Gulistān (1228/1813) and Turkaman-chāy (1243/1828).[25] In both treaties, Persian monarchs agreed to give certain territories to Russia. However, Muḥammad Hāshim Āṣif, Rustam al-Ḥukamāʾ, a bureaucratic historian of the Qājār era, claimed that the Shāh accepted those treaties for the benefit of his nation.[26] Britannia took advantage of this political situation and tried to persuade Persia again to have diplomatic relationships with her, which would benefit Britan economically and politically. Therefore, Persia went through a series of struggles and wars for England's colonial purposes.[27]

In 1809, Sir Harford Jones-Brydges (d. 1847) entered Persia as the plenipotentiary deputy of England from India and was welcomed by the state and people of Persia.[28] One of Jones-Brydges's duties was the limitation of financial subsidies from Britannia to Persia. In March 1809, Persia and Jones-Brydges signed a treaty which nullified the Finkinstein treaty between France and Persia.[29]

Persia, like most territories in that area, became the subject of quarrels between France, England and Russia. Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh's weakness as a leader was a huge factor in the country's downfall. The religious establishment of Persia was very involved in the political milieu of the time, and Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh was known to be a superstitious person who relied heavily on Shiʿite clerics, praising them to an extreme extent. In this respect he always stated, 'Our [Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh's] rulership is on behalf (*bi-nīyābat*) of the mujtahids of the Age'.[30]

The Religious Milieu

After the greater occultation of the twelfth Imām,[31] Twelver Shiʿism gained a distinct character because Shiʿites no longer had access to the living source of divine knowledge, that is the Imām.[32] One cannot understand the religious environment of the Qājār era without considering the history of Shiʿism, especially after it was declared the state religion of Persia by Shāh Ismāʿīl (d. 930/1524), the first Safavid king. The institutionalised hierarchy of Shiʿite

clerics and their struggle for authority is another important issue after the solidification of Shi'ism in Persia. The quarrel between the traditionalist Akhbārī school of Shi'ism and the Uṣūlī cult of mujtahids resulted in the triumph of the Uṣūlī school, which gained ultimate authority over Shi'ites.[33]

As we have seen, one of the key outcomes of the Safavid revival of Shi'ism was the vast power acquired by seminary scholars in Shi'ite society. Browne has pointed out that the terms 'clergy' and 'seminary scholar' cannot accurately define the Shi'ite seminary scholars and their hierarchy, vis-à-vis the role of Sunni religious scholars, who were simply men learned in the Qur'an, hadith and shariah. The Shi'ite clerics believed that they had a kind of spiritual power and divine faculty.[34] However, as they became more powerful in society, they permitted themselves to take over the role of the Imām in Shi'ite communities, as they collected obligatory religious payment meant for the Imām (*saḥm-i Imām*) and issued edicts to conduct holy wars on the assumption that they were the true spokespersons for the Imām.

The Safavid version of Shi'ism was more of an institutionalised Shi'ism as opposed to esoteric Shi'ism. As Henry Corbin has observed, '[Their Shi'ism gave birth] to something like an official clergy, exclusively concerned with legality and jurisprudence, to such a point that original Shi'ism, in its essence gnostic and theosophic, has, so to speak, to hide itself.'[35] As a result of that institutionalisation, Shi'ite clerics felt the need to have supreme authority,[36] for the consolidation of their political and social influences. However, they all believed that the sole legitimate ruler was the Imām.

Prior to the 18th century, the majority of Shi'ite thinkers and clerics avoided any political power and believed all governments to be illegitimate during the occultation of the twelfth Imām. However, as they felt the need to have their status in the religious hierarchical system elevated to the rank of deputy or sometimes even to that of the ultimate deputy and sole representative of Imām, their political power became more evident in the 19th and 20th centuries.[37]

Consequently, some high-ranking clerics began to emphasise their political duty to ensure that the acts of the ruler were in accordance with Divine Law, and people began to view both kings and clerics as qualified to lead the community politically.[38] The emphasis on the king's religious duties and even criticism of the king's rulership during the Qājār dynasty is indicative of the vast influence and power of Shi'ite clerics.

During the chaotic period of the Afsharid and Zand rules, which was an era of civil wars as well as wars with neighbouring countries, Shi'ite clerics had the opportunity to develop their own independent power, and their

authority increased considerably.[39] Mīrzā-yi Qumī (d. 1231/1816) was among the influential Shiʿite clerics of his time. He was a staunch Uṣūlī and a student of Āqā Muḥammad Bāqir Bihbahānī (d. 1205/1791), known as *waḥīd*, the reviver of the Uṣūlī school.[40] It is clear from his correspondence that he had a close and friendly relationship with the Qājār court.[41] His book *Irshādnāma* was written during Āqā Muḥammad Khān's reign (r. 1195-1211/1782-1798). In this treatise Qumī claimed that a king becomes a king by Divine will; therefore, others are obliged to obey him, while the king is obliged not to do injustice to his subjects. However, the treatise also states that even if the king is a tyrant the subjects must still follow his orders, regardless of his tyranny.[42]

Qumī also kept a very close bond with the next Qājār monarch, Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh, and recognised him as a legitimate ruler.[43] In this treatise he indicates that the kingship of the Shāh of Persia continues to the coming of the Mahdī.[44] He specifies that all subjects, including the Shiʿite clerics, are in need of the king for their political protection, while at the same time the king and his subjects are all in need of Shiʿite clerics for religious protection.[45] Qumī's views of kingship are much more positive here than in his later writings.[46] However, he never gave ground on the supremacy of Shiʿite clerics.

In another treatise called *Principles of the Religion* (*Uṣūl al-Dīn*), written for his followers, Qumī criticised Sunnis heavily for believing in the king as the one 'who must be obeyed' (*wājib al-ṭāʿa*).[47] He said that a subject's obedience to the ruler of the Shiʿite community is obligatory only at a time of defence or to prevent domination by the enemy.[48]

In his *Jāmiʿ al-Shatāt* Qumī questioned the rulers of the time, calling them 'oppressive rulers' (*ḥukām jāʾir*). He indicated that it is not permitted to pay any religious taxes, including legal alms (*zakāt*), to the oppressive Shiʿite ruler, unless permitted by a just, high-ranking Shiʿite cleric.[49] Only with the authorisation of a just mujtahid can people give legal alms to the state for the good of Muslim society. In a letter to Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh he challenged those who called the king 'the one with ultimate authority' (*ulū'l-amr*) and he clearly stated that the ones who have the ultimate authority are the prophets and Imāms. If the Imāms are not accessible, one can go to the clerics.[50]

Both Shiʿite clerics and the king, Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh, had reason to keep a friendly relationship. In order to legitimise the kingship of the Qājārs, Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh needed to preserve his close relationship with Shiʿite clerics. He renovated and rebuilt some of the holy Shiʿite shrines for this purpose.[51]

Continuous wars with Russia were another political issue for which the Shāh needed the support of Shi'ite clerics, as explained earlier in this chapter. For the Shi'ite clerics, although they viewed themselves as having higher authority over the community than the king, they also felt the danger of Sufism spreading in Persia, and in order to suppress the Sufi movement they needed the support of the Shāh. Since Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh was a superstitious man, his superstitious inclinations created more opportunities for the Shi'ite clerics to make him antagonistic to Sufi beliefs.[52]

Shi'ite clerics were extremely cautious about their rivals (court elites, Sufis and Akhbārī scholars), and they did not tolerate any challenges.[53] As they were trying to regain their challenged political and social authority, in order to do so they developed the theory that they were the channels to the Imāms, just as the Imāms have always been the intermediaries between God and humanity. According to this theory, the mujtahid was qualified to be an exemplary model and common Shi'ites could emulate him. As Algar claimed, 'The resemblance of the ulama to the Imams lies rather in their supplying a living source of reference and leadership for the Shi'i community.' The mujtahid became the personification of leadership, which became the chief source of their political and social influence in Qājār Persia.[54]

Akhbārīs were a group of traditionalist Shi'ites who were opposed to *ijtihād* (personal striving on jurisprudential matters based on the Qur'ān and Shi'ite tradition) and *taqlīd* (emulation of a recognised member of the ulama). *Ijtihād* and *taqlīd* were the two main factors in creating a strong authority for Shi'ite clerics over the community. Akhbārīs rejected the division of community into the elite group of mujtahids, who became the exemplary models, and their imitators (*muqalid*). They believed that all members of a Shi'ite community are imitators of the Imām.[55]

Due to several theological disagreements, Akhbārīsm constituted a serious challenge to the authority of Uṣūlī scholars[56] such as Āqā Muḥammad Bāqir Bihbahānī, who did not tolerate Akhbārīsm. This led to the harsh persecution of Akhbārī scholars.[57] The Uṣūlī seminary scholars were able heavily to suppress Akhbārī scholars, so much so that they almost wiped out Akhbārī thought from Shi'ite seminary schools of Persia.

The Shi'ite Sufis were other major victims of the Uṣūlī movement.[58] Most of these Sufis were charismatic leaders, emphasising an emotional relationship with and direct experience of God. In certain cases they challenged the authority of Shi'ite clerics. This disagreement ended in the harsh persecution of Sufis, which will be explained in more detail below. As Mangol Bayat asserts, 'The bitter Akhbari-Usuli controversy that dominated

Twelver Shiʿa circles in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries must be viewed as a reaction to the power acquired by the mujtahids. Some leading Sufi masters and theosophers also strongly resented the mujtahids' dominance of the Shia intellectual scene, and objected to the limitations imposed by the official Usuli determination of Shia doctrines. Some of them echoed the Akhbaris in charging the mujtahids with literalism and a narrow-minded interpretation of the holy text.'[59]

An example of a jurist living during the end of the Zand period and the beginning of the Qājār period is Āqā Muḥammad ʿAlī Bihbahānī,[60] who claimed that the persecution of Sufis was his religious duty. He constantly pressured the royal court to capture and persecute Sufis. Āqā Muḥammad ʿAlī Bihbahānī forced the court to summon Muʿaṭar ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1217/1802), another Sufi master, and Muʿaṭar ʿAlī was beaten to death in Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh's court.[61] Bihbahānī believed that the persecution of Sufis was under the jurisdiction of Shiʿite clerics, as he declared, 'The responsibility of such acts [punishment of the Sufis] falls only within the jurisdiction of the ʿUlama and the executors of the holy law.'[62] Therefore, he viewed himself as a legitimate authority to issue a death sentence. He followed the same path as his father as regards Akhbārī scholars. Muḥammad Bāqir Bihbahānī (*Waḥīd*) was surrounded by groups of thugs (*mīrghazab*s) who would execute capital punishment and commit murder at his command. They attacked Akhbārī Shiʿites by Bihbahānī's order.[63]

Some powerful men paid tribute to the Shiʿite clerics to gain fame. Ḥājī Ibrāhīm Khān Iʿtimād al-Dawla (d. 1216/1801), a powerful minister, was among this group. Ḥājī Ibrāhīm Khān sent two of the Niʿmatullāhī masters to Bihbahānī and, in his letter to Bihbahānī, stated, 'We send them . . . to be delivered over to you, whom we consider the wisest, the most learned, and the most virtuous of all the ulāmāhs of our kingdom. Put them to death, confine them, or punish them in the way you deem most proper and most consonant to the decrees of the holy religion.'[64] Some of the people belonging to the royal court officially recognised the clergymen's ability to order capital punishment. This culture of persecution of the Sufis was inherited by Shiʿite clerics from the Safavid era,[65] and Muḥammad ʿAlī Bihbahānī, the true heir of his ancestor Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1110/1700), continued this animosity towards any mystical belief and philosophy, especially Sufis. He was successful to a certain extent, since the rapid growth and propagation of Sufism ceased for a short time. However, from the end of Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh's reign to Muḥammad Shāh's reign Sufism regained it popularity.[66]

The primary sources of income for the Shiʿite clerics were endowments (*awqāf*) and the financial support of their followers through bequests and gifts.[67] They also collected alms and other religious tithes.[68] Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh also used to send money to certain Shiʿite clerics, Qumī among them.[69] Even during the time of economic crisis, when Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh himself received financial support from England, he did not cease these payments to Shiʿite clerics.[70] Certain religious taxes also had to be paid only to Shiʿite clerics and not to the state. Therefore Shiʿite clerics were financially able to establish a powerful independent authority in Persian society. They were so influential that Qājār monarchs would ask for their help on many political and social occasions. Becoming the ultimate religious authority in Persian society made them intolerant of any challenging religious beliefs and philosophy such as Akhbārīsm and Sufism. As we can see, the intolerance of modern-day Iranian Shiʿite fundamentalism toward Sufism was both terminologically and theologically a by-product of this hard-line outlook espoused by 19th-century Uṣūlī theologians.[71]

The Literary and Intellectual Milieu

As Browne has pointed out, 'The eighteenth century of our era, especially the troubled period intervening between the fall of Ṣafawí and the rise of the Qájár dynasties (A.D. 1722-1795), was the poorest in literary achievement; after that there is a notable revival, and several poets of the nineteenth century, Qáʾání, Yaghmá, Furúghí and Wiṣál and his family, can challenge comparison with any save the very greatest of their predecessors.'[72]

Most of the poets mentioned by Browne lived at the end of or even after the timeframe of this work, and this literary revival did not reach its apex during the time under consideration here. Religion played a crucial role in the formation of Persia's literary milieu. Although many intellectuals did not have any background in Shiʿite theology, that theology still dominated, or at least affected, their work. As an example, Persia was facing modernisation, and Qāʾānī (d. 1270/1854) was known to be one of the least moral and most irreligious poets of his era. However, the dominance of religion in Persian culture can be seen in his elegy on the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn.[73] Mourning for Imām Ḥusayn became a popular activity. Sessions were led by a preacher from the Shiʿite clerical class. The culture of 'reading eulogies and narrating the story of Ḥusayn's martyrdom' (*rawḍa khānī*) became so popular that some of the intellectuals criticised the excess of mourning and the luxurious settings in which these mournings were celebrated.[74]

A large number of writings of this era were about the role of the king. Most of the literary elite was related to the royal court and its writings inevitably extoll and praise the king. For instance, Muḥammad Hāshim Āṣif, Rustam al-Ḥukamāʾ, praised Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh as holding the rank of deputy of God and believed that everyone was obligated to follow his orders. He claimed that rulers were the deputies of the twelve Imāms.[75] Rustam al-Ḥukamāʾ also asserted that, as God governs the whole world, kingship is the manifestation of divinity. His opinions on this matter were closer to those of the scholars who were against mujtahids and wanted to prove that Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh had the role of 'the one with ultimate authority' (*ulūʾl-amr*). At the same time, however, he condemned those who permitted the damnation of Sunni caliphs. He stated that the intellectual and educated clerical classes of Persian society do not practise these irrational acts which are practised only by the ignorant classes.[76] Rustam al-Ḥukamāʾ stated that the quarrels and disagreements between Shiʿites and Sunnis were useless and futile,[77] demonstrating his reconciliatory behaviour towards Sunnis.

Asad Allāh Shīrāzī (d. 1262/1846), another philosopher of the Qājār court, claimed that kingship was equivalent to prophethood.[78] His statement was outrageous to the religious seminary class. Muḥammad Nadīm Bārfurūshī (d. 1241/1825), the royal librarian, also claimed that only two groups, prophets and kings, had ultimate authority over the people. He avoided mentioning the names of any Shiʿite clerics.[79]

The war against Russia not only affected the religious clerics; it also resulted in the creation of a genre of religious treatises about the conduct of holy war, called *Jihādīyya*. There were signs of hatred in those writings. ʿAbd al-Wahāb Muʿtamid al-Dawla Nishāṭ (d. 1243/1828), royal scribe and poet in Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh's palace, stated that the Russians were infidels; his hatred of Russians is clear.[80]

Persia was increasingly modernising, and Persians had begun travelling to European countries. As a result, sciences other than seminary sciences gradually became part of their intellectual milieu. Shiʿite seminary scholars had to elaborate their views about modern sciences, as they were always known to be the possessors of knowledge. They had different views regarding modern sciences of the time. Qumī, for example, did not allow any sciences to be taught in the seminary school of Qum other than the Uṣūlī seminary sciences.[81] Mullā Aḥmad Narāqī (d. 1245/1829) had a different view; he did not reject all types of modern sciences. He believed that sciences such as medicine and astronomy were obligatory (*wājib kafāʾī*) for some people to learn in order to supply society's needs. He also asserted

that learning mathematics strengthened intelligence. However, he did not accept all modern sciences. He asserted that the 'real sciences' are divided into three types. The first was the 'divine science' (*'ilm Ilāhī*), which was about the principles of religious beliefs, origins of creation, and resurrection. The second was the 'science of ethics' (*'ilm akhlāq*), which was the science needed to reach salvation and suppress the carnal soul (*nafs*). The third was 'the science of jurisprudence' (*'ilm fiqh*), which was about the exoteric laws and how to follow religious laws. He believed that it was obligatory for everyone to learn these three sciences.[82]

There were numerous compendia of poetry belonging to the Qājār era. Browne claimed that there was a period of poetic revival under Qājār rule. That is true to some extent because Āqā Muḥammad Khān, the first Qājār monarch, was able to stabilise Persia after a long period of war and chaos. Also, afterwards, his heir and nephew, Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh, had a milder administrative method and paid more attention to literary works at the royal court. And as noted above, he himself composed some poetry under the pen-name of Khāqān. Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh gathered poets around him, compiling several anthologies such as 'Ornaments of eulogies' (*Zīnat al-madā'iḥ*), 'Meeting with the Emperor' (*Anjuman Khāqān*), 'The Praised Garden' (*Gulshan-i maḥmūd*), 'The Praised Ship' (*Safīnat al-maḥmūd*) and 'Dārā's Picture Pavilion' (*Nigāristān-i dārā*).[83] The literary value of Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh's poetry is undeniable but, as Browne has stated, 'his poetry, being mostly panegyric, has little attraction for us, but is extraordinarily melodious'.[84] Muḥammad Taqī Malik al-Shu'arā (d. 1370/1952) called this period the 'Era of Revival or Renaissance of Literature' *(rastākhīz ya bāzgasht-i adabī)*, which lasted from the era of Nādir Shāh to the Qājārs.[85]

Riḍā Qulī Khān Hidāyat (d. 1250/1871) believed that there was an extreme decline in Persian poetry before the Qājār era. Riḍā Qulī's claim was far from the reality, as the dominant form of early Qājār poetry was the panegyrical ode (*qasīda*) to the king, which was only flattery. Maḥmūd Khān[86] Malik al-Shu'arā-yi Ṣabā (d. 1237/1822) is a good example of this literary trend. He used to compose poems for the princes of the Zand dynasty, but prudently destroyed nearly all of them after their overthrow. His poems were all flattery, with no mystical element or any indication of the society of his time.

Another poet drowned in the system of flattery was Mīrzā 'Abd al-Wahhāb Mu'tamid al-Dawla, with the pen-name of Nishāṭ. He was a Sayyid, a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad, from Isfahan. He was a literary man, well versed in poetry and knowledgeable in the Persian, Arabic and

Turkish languages. He was first appointed as a royal secretary to Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh and later became the director of the royal court's correspondence. He accompanied the Shāh in all his travels and arranged all his letters and orders. He was well aware of the political situation of his time, but he never spoke of it because of his allegiance to the Shāh, for fear of undermining his own security. Another great poet of this era is Sayyid Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1226/1811), with the pen name of Mijmar. He was given the title of Mujtahid of Poets (*mujtahid al-shuʿarā*) by Riḍā Qulī Khān and was praised by Persian princes.[87]

During this era, the noble and wealthy classes of society were becoming familiar with the West. However, there was no movement against colonisation. Contrary to his traditionalist and superstitious beliefs, Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh did not commission any intellectuals or scholars to research the evils of colonialism and its dangers. Some intellectuals such as Abū al-Ḥasan Ilchī (d. 1262/1846) became infatuated with the West. The latter was fascinated by British culture, and he said, 'I became a freemason and I became extremely happy.'[88]

The dominant literary works of that era were odes, as noted above, mostly in praise of the Shāh. Even scholars such as Ḥājī Asad Allāh Qawāmī (death date unknown), whose father and uncle were executed by order of the Shāh, praised him after being pardoned. Qawāmī called the Shāh the '[u]nique king of kings and the king with the virtue of Muḥammad.' He also called the Shāh 'deputy of God on earth'.[89] Obvisouly, flattery dominated the literature of the era and the culture of obsequiousness towards the Shāh became part of the society. Serious literature based on reason or genuine spirituality was extremely rare.

Overall, the intellectual and literal milieu of the Qājār era was not one of return to the peak of Persian literature that existed in the days of Rūmī (d. 672/ 1273), Saʿdī (d. 690/ 1291) or other great poets of the 7th/12th to 9th/14th centuries. However, there was a progression in Persian literature in comparison to past eras. Even Sufi masters and poets like Nūr ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1212/1797) and Muẓaffar ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1215/1800), who were enthusiastic and charismatic besides being knowledgeable in philosophy and the seminary sciences, were not comparable to the classical Sufi poets. Their poetry overflowed with passion and mystical love and was full of extravagant utterances about divine union, but their level of literary skill is much lower than that of the earlier classical Sufi poets. Overall, the chaotic social environment, the dominance of Shiʿite clerics and the culture of flattery did not create a favourable atmosphere for serious literature to bloom in.

The Mystical Milieu: The Sufis and Their Orders

Sufis were an important element of the religious history of the Qājār era. The oppression of Sufis during the Safavid era had led to the migration of many Sufi orders from Persia to other, more welcoming and stable places. Many Sufi masters with Sunni tendencies migrated to the Ottoman Empire, but most of the masters and orders migrated to India. Despite the Safavids' systematic persecution of Sufi orders,[90] some of them retained their identity as Persians and always anticipated a return. After the fall of the Safavids, Persia faced a chaotic period of social turmoil and political quarrels between Afshārs, Zands and Qājārs. Therefore, only a few Nūrbakhshī masters in Mashhad and Dhahabī masters in Shīrāz remained in Persia.[91]

The revival of Sufism in the Persian empire started during the Zand dynasty and continued through the Qājār era. As Zarrīnkūb has pointed out, the Qājār era was a time of nostalgia for the noble past. Of course, their mystical philosophy had to fit the theological standards of Shi'ite society.[92] The two leading Sufi orders in this revival movement were the Ni'matullāhīs and the Dhahabīs.[93] These two had much in common, as both emphasised the importance of following Islamic laws and Shi'ite beliefs. They were known to be the propagators of Akbarian philosophy in Persia.[94] These Sufi orders aimed for survival despite the inquisitions of Shi'ite clerics.[95] Besides the two orders, there were some minor activities by Naqshbandīs, Qādirīs, Khāksārs and wandering dervishes, but these were not as influential as the Dhahabīs and Ni'matullāhīs, as speculative Sufism (*taṣawwuf-i naẓarī*) predominated in these two orders.[96]

The *Qalandarān* and the *Darwīshān-i gul-i Muwlā* were two groups of wandering dervishes who became popular at the time. Their food was provided through offerings from passers-by and tradesmen in the bazar. Their earnings were based on begging. They did not ally themselves to any particular Sufi order. However, they soon formed a system of unified beliefs, practices and philosophy and called themselves *Khāksār*. Their hierarchical system was not as well established as that of the Dhahabīs and Ni'matullāhīs. *Khāksārs* (also known as Jalālīs) traced themselves back to Ghulām 'Alī Shāh Hindī.[97] Fatḥ 'Alī Khān, with the spiritual title of Ghulām 'Alī Shāh, was also known to be a Khāksār master who entered Persia through Bushihr's port from India.[98]

Mast 'Alī Shāh believed that the Jalālī order in India had Shi'ite beliefs. However, when he travelled to India, he found them to be a group of lib-

ertines who did not follow Islamic laws, smoked hashish and wandered around.[99] These wandering dervishes were known for their charismatic powers and their knowledge of occult sciences; therefore, there was a sense of general respect mixed with fear of them in society.[100]

As mentioned above, the seminary-trained religious classes in Persia adopted an exclusivist approach towards other religions and religious minorities. The Shiʿite clerics engaged in the refutation of other schools of Shiʿism. Sufis were not immune to similar exclusivist views, although they have always been known to be more lenient towards other religious beliefs. As Ibn ʿArabī says:

> My heart is open to every form:
> It is a pasture for gazelles,
> And a cloister for Christian monks,
> A temple for the idols,
> The Kaʿba of the pilgrim,
> The tables of the Torah,
> And the book of the Quran,
> I practice the religion of Love;
> In whatsoever direction His Caravan advance,
> The religion of Love shall be my religion and my faith.[101]

Unfortunately, as Shiʿite clerics were extremely influential over the population of Persia, they also influenced Persian Sufi masters. This calamity of exclusivism existed between different Sufi orders as well, which led to intense and long-lasting disagreements between different Sufi orders, criticisms and quarrels about their leadership, which still continue today.

The Niʿmatullāhī Order

The Niʿmatullāhī order is named after a prominent Sufi master of the 14th-15th century, Shāh Niʿmatullāh (d. 834/1431). Shāh Niʿmatullāh was a Sufi, poet and mystic philosopher who played a crucial role in the revival and reformation of Sufism and Sufi philosophy in Persia. Shāh Niʿmatullāh was born in Aleppo, Syria, and claimed descent from the seventh Shiʿi Imam, Musā al-Kāẓim. Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī was among the most influential Sufis of the 14th/15th centuries during the Timurid dynasty. He is traditionally considered by his followers to be *raʾīs al-silsila wa ab al-ṭāʾifa* (head of the order and father of the [Sufi] tribe).[102] Like many great Sufi

shaykhs, Shāh Ni'matullāh travelled extensively to meet with and learn from various Sufi masters, and he studied the works of Ibn 'Arabī.

One of his mentors was Shaykh Rokn al-dīn Shīrāzī (d. 769/1367), who was a Sufi and a well-known commentator on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*Bezels of Wisdom*) of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī (560–638/1165-1240).[103] Shāh Ni'matullāh was a strong promoter of the 'unity of being' (*waḥdat al-wu-jūd*) school of mystical philosophy that was established by the followers of the famous Andalusian Sufi and metaphysician Ibn 'Arabī.

In Mecca he met Shaykh 'Abd Allāh al-Yāf'ī and became his disciple. Shaykh 'Abd Allāh al-Yāfi'ī was a great Yemeni Muslim jurist, theologian, historian and *ḥadīth* scholar, who gained the title of *nazīl al-ḥaramayn* (the resident of the two holy sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina).[104] Shāh Ni'mat-ullāh served Al-Yāf'ī for seven years, attaining the rank of spiritual master. He then set out on new travels throughout the Islamic world and settled in Samarkand, where he reportedly met Tamerlane, and then settled in the Kir-mān region. He lived to the age of 104 and his shrine is in the city of Māhān.

Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī gained fame among the people because he brought to Persian society a traditional way of thinking that not only empha-sised the inner meaning of religion, but also popularised Sufism among all classes of society instead of focusing only on the elites. His spiritual and social fame reached the royal courts of the Timurids and Bahmanids.

Shāh Ni'matullāh insisted that his disciples should follow the *sharī'a* and refused to separate the inner aspect of religion (*ṭarīqat*) from its outer aspect (*sharī'a*),[105] which occasionally resulted in libertine behaviour and views being attributed to some Sufis. He also insisted that his disciples should pursue a gainful occupation, instead of leaving society and becom-ing hermits. He believed that farming or having a mundane profession and serving society were part of the Sufi path.[106]

It was customary for Sufis of that era to wear distinctive clothing. Although in most of his portraits he is shown wearing a *tāj* (Sufi hat), he discouraged his disciples from demonstrating their affiliation with Sufism in their clothing.[107] Some Sufi orders were elitist in their choice of followers. Shāh Ni'matullāh, however, believed that anyone could be a member of his community. He once said, 'All those whom the saints have rejected, I will accept, and, according to their capacity, I will perfect them.'[108] This policy led to his popularity, as many people from all classes of society flocked to him and became his followers.

He worked as a farmer and his spiritual influence was vast, he having initiated hundreds of thousands into his Sufi order. Shortly before his death

he was invited to live near the court of Sulṭān Shāh Al-Walī Bahmanī but, claiming he was too old for the move, he sent his son, and thus began the rise of the Niʿmatullāhī order in India.[109] The heritage of Shāh Niʿmatullāh continued through the Niʿmatullāhī Sufi order that is one of the most influential Shīʿī-Sufi orders in Persia. His son, Shāh Khalīlullāh (d. 860/1455), succeed him at the head of the order after his death.

The Niʿmatullāhī Sufi order was in its decline prior to the formation of the Safavid empire. The successors of Shāh Niʿmatullāh migrated to the Deccan plateau, India.[110] Riḍā ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1214/1799) was the last Niʿmatullāhī master in India. He felt the need for a revival of the Niʿmatullāhī order in Persia after receiving complaints from Niʿmatullāhī Sufis in Persia about their not having a local master.[111] Mīr Sayyid ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1212/1797) was a noble Indian and a well-known disciple of Riḍā ʿAlī Shāh who was eventually appointed as a spiritual guide to revive the order in Persia.[113] This revival movement will be explained in detail later on in this book.

Maʿṣūm went to Persia in 1190/1776 for his spiritual mission. Before long, he became very popular among the people of Shiraz and his charismatic personality attracted many common people to the Niʿmatullāhī Order. It is undeniable that Niʿmatullāhī masters gained lots of popularity although Sir John Malcolm probably exaggerated the number of Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh's disciples as amounting to 'thirty thousand'.[112] Sufism was rapidly spreading among the Persians. Amanat claimed that Maʿṣūm gathered a small number of disciples around him, who were extremely active in propagating Niʿmatullāhī beliefs.[113] Maʿṣūm's charisma and enthusiasm attracted many disciples in Shiraz, among whom were Mullā ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Ṭabasī Fayḍ ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1199/1785), his son, Mullā Muḥammad ʿAlī Nūr ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1212/1797),[114] and Mullā Mahdī Mushtāq ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1206/1792), who were initiated into the order during this period. For the purpose of their spiritual mission, these Niʿmatullāhī masters travelled to cities such as Mashhad, Hirāt, Najaf, Kirmān, Kirmānshāh and Mūṣil for the propagation of Sufism.

The Niʿmatullāhīs entered Persia with the appearance of wandering Sufis, wearing *Qalandar* cloaks.[115] The first masters of Niʿmatullāhī's revival movement—namely Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh, Nūr ʿAlī Shāh and Mushtāq ʿAlī Shāh—were all enthusiastic masters with Qalandariʾite appearances. Their charismatic personality, their poetry and their emphasis on direct mystical experiences and love of God created a philosophy which attracted Persians. However, as they challenged the political system and religious clerics, they faced harsh persecution. Most Shiʿite clerics opposed the Niʿmatullāhī mas-

ters, and those few who openly showed sympathy towards Ni'matullāhīs were excommunicated by the Shi'ite clerical class.

As a result of this challenge to their authority in society, Shi'ite clerics decided to persuade Karīm Khān, the king of Persia at the time, that Ma'ṣūm'Alī Shāh's beliefs were corrupt. According to Dhahabī texts, Karīm Khān followed Shaykh Mufīd in exoteric matters of religion and Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim Shīrāzī Dhahabī (d. 1190/1776) in mystical matters,[116] and was very suspicious of any quasi-Mahdi figures or beliefs. He believed that those dervishes who propagated magic and hashish-smoking deserved punishment. Considering societal attitudes towards dervishes, it proved easy to persuade Karīm Khān about the danger of Ma'ṣūm's beliefs. Shi'ite clerics also managed to convince Karīm Khān that, besides Sufis' heretical beliefs, they claimed kingship by adding the term 'Shāh' to their spiritual titles.[117] They were so successful in damaging the relationship between Karīm Khān and Ma'ṣūm that Ma'ṣūm was banished from Shiraz. Aḥmad Dīwānbaygī claimed that it was due to Karīm's generosity and humility that he only banished Ma'ṣūm from Shiraz with no other punishment.[118]

As mentioned earlier, there was also some opposition from other Sufis towards the Ni'matullāhīs, as is indicated in some of the Dhahabī texts. It is even narrated that aspersions cast by Jānī, a wandering dervish, were the main reason for Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh's exile from Shiraz.[119] Yet Muḥsin Kīyānī believed that the persecution of Sufis by the state was to gratify Shi'ite clerics, and that the banishment of Ni'matullāhī masters was mainly for this reason.[120]

Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh and Nūr 'Alī Shāh, two other Ni'matullāhī masters, were also banished from Isfahan by 'Alī Murād Khān's order. Contrary to this order, the Ni'matullāhī masters were only welcomed in Tehran by Āqā Muḥammad Khān Qājār, the Qājār king, who paid for their pilgrimage to Mashhad.[121] Despite Āqā Muḥammad Khān Qājār's good relationship with Sufis, he did not have enough time to establish any firm beliefs regarding Sufism because he was busy with wars and the consolidation of the Persian kingdom. His heir, Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh, was against Sufism, being more inclined towards the exoteric aspects of religion.[122] However, he took direct action against them only when the Shi'ite clerics began to feel threatened by the renaissance of organised Sufism and tried to stand up to it.[123]

A small group of Shi'ite clerics, including Mīrzā-yi Qumī, preferred an intellectual debate with Sufis as opposed to their persecution, so they refuted the Sufis in speeches and writings. Other groups of Shi'ite clerics, whose champion was Āqā Muḥammad 'Alī Bihbahānī, believed that there must be physical persecution of Sufis as well. They viewed themselves as protectors

of religion; therefore, they thought they were qualified to demand persecution for those who 'polluted' the religion of God. Bihbahānī encouraged the Qājār rulers to discriminate against Sufis, which resulted in the martyrdom of Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh[124] and Mushtāq ʿAlī Shāh. Nūr ʿAlī Shāh was also poisoned twice. For that reason, Bihbahānī gained the title of Sufi-killer (*Ṣūfī Kush*). Malcolm, who had a close relationship with him, took a reproachful tone when talking about Bihbahānī's conduct towards Sufis. He stated, 'Aga Mahomed Ali treats every Soofee sect with a severity that must detract from the credit due to his extensive knowledge.'[125]

Sufism in Persia was generally interpreted in the light of the conduct of the wandering dervishes. The Niʿmatullāhī masters became well aware of this perception people had of Sufism, which was not pleasant for them. Therefore, they felt the need for more education about the intellectual and practical beliefs of Niʿmatullāhī Sufis in order to revive the Niʿmatullāhī order in Persia. Majdhūb ʿAlī Shāh aimed to propagate Niʿmatullāhī philosophy in the clerical environment of Shiʿism. Mullā ʿAbd al-Ṣamad Hamadānī (d. 1216/1802), Mullā Muḥammad Naṣīr Dārābī (d. 1226/1811) and Shaykh Zāhid Gīlānī (d. 1222/ 1807), who were influential people in Shiʿite society, were initiated into the Niʿmatullāhī order.[126] They were among the scholars who elaborated on the philosophical beliefs of Sufism based on seminary teachings.[127] Before Riḍā ʿAlī Shāh's death, Maʿṣūm and the other masters appointed by him were able to revive the old pattern of hierarchy within the Niʿmatullāhī order in Persia. Although they looked like *Qalandars,* they advocated the necessity of following Islamic laws.[128]

The first Quṭb after Riḍā ʿAlī Shāh was Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh (see chapter IV below), who belonged to a clerical class of society with few philosophical or mystical tendencies. He was known to be a good preacher in the mosque. Therefore, he did not change his lifestyle. His religious seminary background was always a path of rescue for him. For instance, when he was imprisoned along with Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh and Nūr ʿAlī Shāh, he was released because of his seminary background.[129] During his leadership period, the Niʿmatullāhī order entered a state of complete dissimulation, so that even Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh did not declare his Sufi beliefs. The Sufi hat (*tāj*), wandering dervish bowl (*kashkūl*) and Sufi axe (*tabarzīn*), which were all used by wandering dervishes, were replaced by clerical cloth. Not only did the members' outward appearances change, but also their personalities. That was because the enthusiastic, charismatic dervish masters had been persecuted, and so the three poles (*aqṭāb*) after them adopted the personality of seminary scholars.

Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh was a preacher who spent most of his time in seminary school. He guided only a small number of elite disciples. The Sufi practice of vocal invocation (*dhikr jalī*), or any activity that indicated Sufi practices, was forbidden in public by Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh's command. Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh managed to stabilise the Ni'matullāhī order. Although he was relatively able to reduce the persecution of Ni'matullāhīs, Shi'ite clerics continued their opposition, and due to their influence on Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh's court, they were still able to make the Shāh anxious as regards Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh. As a result, Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh was summoned to the royal court. He was tormented and humiliated; but because of his seminary knowledge and his clerical background, he was able to win the heart of the Shāh.[130] The Shāh eventually ordered him to continue preaching in the mosque.

Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh, Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh's successor, was also a seminary scholar, but with more mystical tendencies. He was well versed in mystical philosophy, being highly influenced by Mullā Ṣadrā (d.1050/1640), Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1090/1680) and Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 787/1386). He became familiar with these philosophers while studying in Kāshān.[131] He spent most of his time writing apologetic texts for Sufism. He strove to prove that real Sufism was in complete accord with Shi'ism. He was able to attract some of the seminary scholars, and thereby to propagate the Ni'matullāhī order to some extent. As a result, the Ni'matullāhī order flourished under his leadership, but in a different form from in the time of Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh, Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh and Nūr 'Alī Shāh. Instead of an enthusiastic movement, Majdhūb led the order towards becoming a scholarly movement. His apologetic treatises in defence of Sufis reached the seminary schools.

This transformation is evident in the manner of their opponents, Shi'ite clerics. Āqā Muḥammad 'Alī Bihbahānī, who was the champion of Sufi persecution and wrote a 'Treatise on Good Deeds' (*Risāla-yi khayrātiyya*)[132] in refutation of Sufism, as well as a number of rude anti-Sufi treatises in which he did not hesitate to use the most indecent terminology towards Sufi masters. The most vehement of these works was against Ma'ṣūm and his disciples. In a brief religious verdict (*fatwā*) he declares, 'Beyond any doubt, the deviation of this condemned group from the path of rightfulness and true guidance, and their efforts to provoke discontent and to corrupt people of the cities, have become obvious and apparent.'[133] He believed that Sufis deserved death, being deviators from the Shi'ite community.

Majdhūb was a student of Qumī, and always mentioned him as his teacher in his writings. Qumī's manner towards Majdhūb was different from Bihbahānī's. He was against Sufism and he wrote a treatise against it;

however, he kept his polite manner. His politeness represented a transformation of Shiʿite clerics' conduct towards Sufis. Mast ʿAlī Shāh followed a path between that of the enthusiastic Niʿmatullāhī Sufis (companions of Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh) and that of his master, Majdhūb ʿAlī Shāh. He was very outspoken, but not as knowledgeable as Majdhūb about seminary sciences. As he narrated in his writings, he was victimised by Shiʿite clerics many times, and he always condemned that persecution.

These three poles (*aqṭāb*) of the Niʿmatullāhī order after Riḍā ʿAlī Shāh all played their own role in the revival and survival of the order. In accordance with the circumstances of the time, they were able to keep the order alive in Persia. Although the diffusion of Niʿmatullāhī Sufis may have suffered a decline under Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh, it was in a way necessary at the time, based on Niʿmatullāhī texts. Generally speaking, Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh, Majdhūb ʿAlī Shāh and Mast ʿAlī Shāh were all able to continue the Niʿmatullāhī Sufi tradition, despite the persecution to which they were subjected.

The Dhahabī Order

Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh was banished from Shiraz when the city was no longer a welcoming place for Niʿmatullāhī Sufis. However, the Dhahabī masters managed to live there in peace and prosperity. They had been living in Shiraz for generations,[134] and in order to stay there they were very careful in their actions. As Leonard Lewisohn pointed out, 'For the last three centuries the Dhahabiyya has been characterized by an overtly Shiʿite spirit, and pious conservatism which enabled it to survive the anti-Sufi pogroms of the Safavid period, and to endure the pressure of the fundamentalist regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran.'[135] Dhahabīs were known for being very precise in following the exoteric laws of Islam.[136]

Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim Shīrāzī (d. 1190/1776) and his successor, Āqā Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Nabī (d.1230/1815), were the two main masters of the Dhahabī order during this era. They avoided any possibility of struggle with Shiʿite clerics.[137] Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim Shīrāzī, known as *darwīsh,* was one of the greatest Sufi figures of this era. He was born sometime between the years 1105/1693 and 1109/1697 into a bureaucratic family and was himself a bureaucrat in Fārs.[138]

At some point in his life he became disillusioned with worldly matters and gave up his worldly life. Soon afterwards, Nādir Shāh's army occupied Shiraz and he was among the captives taken to Isfahan. However, Nādir pardoned Hāshim and he returned to Shiraz.[139] There are many hagiologi-

cal narratives about his abandonment of worldly matters; for instance, it is said that due to some chronic disease, his right index finger was amputated. During the amputation, he heard a spirit saying, 'Do you still want to write for the court with this finger?'[140]

Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim Shīrāzī was about 28 or 29 years old when he began living in solitude as an ascetic. He practised brutal self-mortifications, which made him extremely weak. These self-mortifications led him to a 'spiritual quest' (*ṭalab*) for truth. He wandered around in search of a qualified master, and in this hope resided in Isfahan and Najaf for a time.[141]

He also met an Indian dervish known as Shāh Kawthar and was initiated into the Shaṭṭārīyya order.[142] During this period, he wore *qalandar* garments and lived as a wandering dervish. He returned to Shiraz because he did not find Kawthar satisfying enough for his spiritual thirst. In Shiraz he met Mīrzā Muḥammad Nasābih, who was the deputy of Shaykh 'Alī Naqī Iṣṭahbānātī (d. Circa 1129/1717).[143] Iṣṭahbānātī commanded him to practise certain mystical practices and to recite the Qur'ān to prepare for initiation into the order. Iḥsānu'llāh Istakhrī and Muḥammad Yūsuf Nayirī believe that Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim was initiated into the Dhahabī order through Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Nayrīzī (d. 1173/1760).[144]

Dhahabī texts indicate that from the time he met Iṣṭahbānātī, he passed the state of spiritual drunkenness and entered the path of spiritual sobriety. He spent most of his time in the company of the masters or reading the Qur'ān. The key spiritual quest of the Dhahabīs was to enable the mystic to attain a deep mystical perception of the Qur'ān. Hāshim met Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Nayrīzī in Shāh Dā'ī's Shrine in Shiraz. Hagiographies indicate that Nayrīzī told him that he had been with Hāshim spiritually from the beginning of his mystical quest. This was how he met the 32nd pole of the Dhahabī order. Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad gave his daughter's hand in marriage to Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim as a sign of Muḥammad Hāshim's succession.[145] Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim Shīrāzī was, therefore, the successor to Quṭb al-Dīn Nayrīzī.

Karīm Khān Zand, the King of Persia at the time, not only had a good relationship with Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim Shīrāzī, but he also admired him. While Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh and Nūr 'Alī Shāh of the Ni'matullāhī order were banished by Karīm Khān, Hāshim Dhahabī enjoyed a close relationship with him.[146] He was at Karīm's deathbed and all of Karīm Khān's successors had respect for him and his successors.[147] According to Dhahabī texts, their good relationship continued into the Qājār era as well; the texts narrate a story about Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim and Āqā Muḥammad Khān,

the Qājār monarch, where Hāshim prayed for Āqā Muḥammad Khān and told him to recite the Qurʾān.

Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim lived for about 90 years and, at the end of his life, he adopted an ascetic lifestyle and spent most of his time praying.[148] He was well known for his piety. He wrote a poem in praise of Imām ʿAlī called *Qaṣīda-yi Shamsīyya*[149] and a compendium of poetry called *Wilāyat-nāma*. He also wrote *Manāhil al-taḥqīq*[150] about the reality of sainthood and the deputies of God on earth.

His successor, Āqā Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Nabī (d. 1230/1815), was the custodian of the *Shāh Chirāgh* shrine in Shiraz (shrine of the son of the seventh Imām, who died in 202/835), which was a holy place for all Shiʿites. This created further prestige for him among all the various classes of Shiʿite society. The Dhahabīs claim that he was a descendant of a leading theologian, Mīr Sharīf Jurjānī (d. 816/1413). Being from a noble religious line brought more legitimacy to the masters of the time. He studied in Shiʿite seminary schools and became well versed in religious sciences. He was also educated in Persian literature and the Hebrew language. He taught in *Madrasa-yi Manṣūrīyya*, a seminary school.[151]

ʿAbd al-Nabī met Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim, who initiated him, and followed this master for 28 years until, eventually, Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim appointed him as a guide to the Dhahabī path in the year 1198/1783. Although most of Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim's close companions and disciples believed that ʿAbd al-Nabī was Hāshim's successor,[152] there are texts stating that Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim did not appoint any successor for himself, believing that Dhahabī Sufis must ask for the spiritual intercession of the twelfth Imām to show them the true master.[153] For 50 years after the time of Āqā Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Nabī, there was a period of interregnum for the Dhahabī masters, since ʿAbd al-Nabī's legitimacy as the successor was not clear to all.[154]

Āqā Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Nabī was known to be a quiet and retiring person, which encouraged this period of intermission for the Dhahabī tradition. He was also very cautious about following Islamic laws and did not utter any statements challenging the authority of Shiʿite clerics.[155] He retired into the seminary school of Manṣūrīyya where he lived as an unmarried bachelor in solitude. After giving lessons, he would go to his room and spend most of his time praying.[156]

The Dhahabīs believe that he lived in seclusion due to the exclusivist views of Sufi masters and the quarrelling between Sufi orders. Since Shiʿite clerics also persecuted Sufi masters, he had adopted a quiet life so that he could advance Dhahabī culture in Persia without facing any persecution

or quarrels.[157] He dissimulated his mystical state to the extent that even his own family was not aware of it. He did not write any books and he remained for most of his life in Shiraz, where he died in 1231/1815.

The Dhahabīs, like other Shiʿite Sufi orders, claim that all Sufi orders can trace themselves back to one of the Shiʿite Imāms. Dhahabī masters strongly emphasise their Shiʿite beliefs. They believe that there were certain periods of time when other Sufis were integrated into Sunnism, whereas the Dhahabī order was always strongly attached to its Shiʿite beliefs.[158] The Dhahabīs divided *wilāya* (sainthood) into two forms, one superior to the other. The superior form of sainthood is present only in the Prophet Muḥammad and Shiʿite Imāms, and it is called 'Solar Sainthood' (*wilāyat-i shamsīyya*). The inferior part is called 'Lunar Sainthood' (*wilāyat-i qamarīyya*) and is the possession of Sufi masters. This philosophy indicates that the ultimate guidance is the light of Shiʿite Imāms (the sun) and, through this light, the Dhahabī master can become illuminated with the light of Shiʿite Imāms' guidance, the way the moon receives its light from the sun.[159]

The Dhahabīs placed tremendous emphasis on following the exoteric Islamic Law, claiming that the 'shariah is the pillar of Dhahabī Sufism' (*sharīʿat pāyih faqr-i Dhahabī ast.*).[160] They claimed that the reality of the Sufi path (*ṭarīqat*) was one of strict obedience to Islamic exoteric laws. To reach the state of sainthood one must honour the heritage of the Prophet Muḥammad, meaning the Qurʾān and the tradition of the Prophet's household (*ahl al-bayt*).[161] They also refuted those Sufis who did not follow Sharīʿa and believed that there was no need for shariah once a person had entered the state of *ṭarīqat*.

Dhahabīs and Niʿmatullāhīs were strong promoters of the school of the 'Unity of Being' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). However, both orders condemned narratives and traditions that inclined towards pantheism. Āqā Muḥammad Hāshim's poetry was greatly inspired by both Akbarian and Ishrāqī philosophy.[162] Thus, Khāwarī dedicated a chapter in his book to the Dhahabī view of the 'Unity of Being'.[163]

The Naqshbandī Order

The Naqshbandīs and Qādirīs are the only two Sunni Sufi orders that managed to survive during the transition from the Safavid to the Qājār era; however, the sources explaining their social and political role are scarce. There is almost no information about the followers of these orders in Balūchistān in Persia.[164]

The Kurdish orders are in many cases led by their tribal elders or their *sādāt*[165] (Sayyids). Therefore, these elders figured more as a tribal custom than leaders of a specific Sufi order. If a tribal elder changed his Sufi order, the whole tribe would change its beliefs in response. Evidently, tribal ties and connections played a crucial role in the spiritual leadership of Kurdish tribes.[166] Shiʿite seminary scholars and Shiʿite theology had little influence on Sunni Sufi orders, which were not as exclusivist and intolerant as the Shiʿite Sufi orders.

The Naqshbandī order traced itself back to Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband (d. 791/1389) from Bukhārā.[167] There are different narratives about the origin of the word Naqshband; some believe that it is the name of the village Bahā al-Dīn came from. Others believe that due to Bahā al-Din's excessive practice of a Sufi invocation (*dhikr*), the repeated invocation was engraved (*naqsh bast*) on his heart.[168] Although many Naqshbandī masters were Persian and most Naqshbandī texts are written in Persian, this Sufi order did not have any impact on later Persian Sufi culture.[169]

After the Safavid era when Shiʿism became the dominant religion of Persia, the Sunni Sufi orders became weakened and persecuted. Naqshbandīs became known as *Bakrīs* (an order belonging to Abū Bakr, the first caliph according to the Sunnis), which was used as a pejorative term. The Safavids began persecuting Naqshbandīs right after the conquest of Hirāt during Shāh Ismāʿīl's time.[170] The Naqshbandī Sufi order is among the Sunni orders whose followers were drastically reduced during this era and, as stated above, there are very few sources explaining their circumstances during the early Qājār era. One must go through other social and historical texts of that era in order to find information about Naqshbandīs. One of these sources is *Bustān al-Sīyaḥa* by Mast ʿAlī Shāh.

As mentioned above, the Naqshbandī order traced itself back to Abū Bakr (d. 13/634). The order was also called Ṣidīqīyya, referring to the first caliph's reputation as impeccably truthful (*ṣiddīq*). However, Mast ʿAlī Shāh believed that there was no strong evidence of this.[171] Mast ʿAlī Shāh did not name a person, but he narrated that one of the Naqshbandī masters, who lived in India and was originally from Uzbekistan, traced the Naqshbandī chain of spiritual authority through Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 145/765) back to Abū Bakr. Obviously, all Shiʿite Sufis refuted this claim, and believed that the Naqshbandīs were nothing but a perverse Sunni Sufi order. Mast ʿAlī Shāh referred to Qādī Nūrullāh Shushtarī (d. 1019/1610). In Mast Ali Shah's writing he stated that the claim of the Naqshbandīyya to be a Sunni order was an innovation.[172] However, on the other hand, Mast

'Alī Shāh also claimed that the Naqshbandī order was originally a Shi'ite order, and the innovations of its contemporary masters led them to claim it was a Sunni order.[173]

Mast 'Alī Shāh did not accept the Naqshbandī order as a legitimate spiritual and mystical path; however, he admired some of the contemporary Naqshbandī masters. He met the Ottoman Shaykh al-Islām Muḥammad Durīzada Effendī, who followed the Naqshbandī order for spiritual matters. Mast 'Alī Shāh stated that he was Durīzada's guest for a while and that he was a unique person in nobility.[174]

Mast 'Alī Shāh reported on the activities of Naqshbandīs in Khurāsān (which is part of today's Iran and Afghanistan). He met Sufi Islām (a Naqshbandī Shaykh), who was an Uzbek. Sufi Islām was said to have more than 200 deputies propagating Sufism in Khurāsān, Tūrān, Khāwrazm and other areas in North East Persia. Mast 'Alī Shāh claimed that more than 100,000 households were his disciples. He was eventually killed in one of the wars fought in Kurkh (near Hirāt) at the beginning of the 19th century.[175] This account by Mast 'Alī Shāh indicated that there were probably vast numbers of Naqshbandīs in the North East on the borders of Persia, but not in the heart of Persia.

The most important figure in the history of the Naqshbandī order during the 19th century is Mawlānā Khālid Naqshbandī Shahrūzī (d. 1242/1826). He was from Sharūz in the Ūramān Mountains in Kurdistān, which today is part of Sulaymānīya in Iraq.[176] He was a scholar of Kurdish, Persian and Arabic literature. He was first initiated into the Qādirī order and was a disciple of Sayyid 'Abd al-Karīm Barzanjī, who was a Qādirī Shaykh.[177] Then he went to India where he became a disciple of Shāh 'Abd Allāh Dihlawī Naqshbandī.

He returned to Persia from India and resided in Sulaymānīya, where the Qādirīs opposed him. Their pressure limited his propagation of Naqshbandī beliefs to such an extent that he left Sulaymānīya a few times. His biographers noted that he taught in a Sulaymānīya seminary school and composed poetry in Kurdish, Persian and Arabic.[178] He passed away in 1242/1826. Khālid had numerous deputies, none of whom were his blood relatives or descendants. However, his brother, Shaykh Maḥmūd Ṣāḥib, who passed away in 1283/1866, was one of the most influential masters in Sulaymānīya. Having said this, the spread and propagation of Naqshbandī Sufism was not very influential on the culture of central Persia during this era. The Naqshbandīs had more influence on Kurds (on the western border of Persia), Balūchs (on the eastern border of Persia) and Uzbeks.

The Qādirī Order

The Qādirī Order was named after a great 6th-century Sufi master, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir Gīlānī (d. 561/1166).[179] Mast ʿAlī Shāh declared that this order had expanded in Persia, Iraq and other areas around him.[180] This was a Sunni Sufi order as well, and therefore the number of its initiates was reduced after the Safavid era. The majority of Qadirīs were Kurdish, and their order had no significant influence on Persian Sufism in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The sources explaining the Qādirī order in Persia are scarce as well; however, there are indications that they were not totally wiped out. Baghdād continued its heritage from the Abbasid era of being a welcoming city for all types of religious beliefs and sects. Mast ʿAlī Shāh reported that he had visited Qādirī masters in Baghdād.[181] He also told that there were Qādirīs in Constantinople. Most of these Qādirī Sufis lived outside Persia.

The masters of the Qādirī order in Kurdistān were the elders and knowledgeable men of their tribes. The Sayyids of Barzanj are a good example. Although they claimed to be descendants of Mūsā and ʿĪsā Barzanjī, known to be brothers of Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 869/1465),[182] it is not clear how these two brothers had come to a Kurdish area and how they had become connected to the Qādirī order. Even in academically authentic sources about the Qādirī order there is very little evidence about the Kurdish Qādirī order's origins.[183] The authenticity and legitimacy of the Kurdīsh Qādīrī order can be questioned because of the appearance of names such as Sayyid Aḥmad Badawī (d. 675/1276) (the founder of the Badawīyya order) and Sayyid Aḥmad Rifāʿī (d. 578/1182)[184] (the founder of the Rifāʿīyya order) in their chain of initiation (*Silsila*), who were not part of the normal Qādirī chain of initiation.[185]

Mūsā and ʿĪsā Barzanjī, the two brothers, claimed that they had had a vision of the Prophet Muḥammad who had commanded them to settle in Barzanjih (in what is now Iraq) in the year 685/1287. Mūsā did not have any descendants and Sādāt Barzanjī claimed to be the descendant of ʿĪsā Barzanjī. All of these *sādāts* trace themselves back to Bābā Rasūl (d. 1074/1646), who died in Barzanjih.[186]

Shaykh Aḥmad Galih Zarda (d. 1184/1771) was the one who received permission to guide spiritual seekers to the Qādirī order.[187] Another influential figure in the history of the Qādirī order in this era was Shaykh Maʿrūf Nudihī (b. 1165/1752), who travelled to different cities in order to learn seminary sciences, jurisprudence, the science of hadith and interpretation of the Qurʾan under the direction of well-known seminary scholars. He

also received permission from Shaykh 'Alī Barzanjī to engage in various mystical practices.[188] He wrote numerous books on the seminary sciences and Sufi spirituality.[189] He was a poet as well, and composed his poetry in Persian, Kurdish and Arabic. His son, Kāk Aḥmad Shaykh (d. 1304/1887), became the leader of the Qādirīs after him.

A number of *sādāt* of Barzanjih became well-known seminary scholars in Mecca and Medina. They were very wealthy, which made them more popular and influential among the men of power in the Ottoman Empire, Persia and surrounding territories.[190] For a long time, the Barzanjī Qādirī order became a hereditary order, which resulted in a dimunition of its spiritual quality. Lineage became more important than achieving a higher mystical state, and spiritual merit lost any real significance among them.

The Ṭālibānī Qādirī masters were the rivals of the Barzanjī Qādirī order. Mullā Maḥmūd Ṭālibānī was the first Qādirī master in his tribe. His son, Shaykh Aḥmad Ṭālibānī (d. 1256/1841), became a popular Qādirī master and gathered a large number of disciples from Turkey, Persia, Iraq and Syria. His son, Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khāliṣ (d. 1273/1857), succeeded him, and his brothers were sent to spread his order. It can be noted that the Qādirī order flourished in areas of Kurdistān in Persia, Iraq and Turkey. As they were Sunni tribal groups and did not challenge the authority of Shi'ite clerics, their names did not appear in the religious verdicts or treatises written in refutation of Sufism. However, some Shi'ite scholars have written quite critically of the founder of the Qādirī Order, 'Abd al-Qādir Gīlānī.

The Ahl-i Ḥaqq Order

The Ahl-i Ḥaqq order is a quasi-Sufi Kurdish group. The Ahl-i Ḥaqq Sufis are also known as 'Alī Allāhīs, a pejorative term used by those unfamiliar with their beliefs and philosophies. The term *'Alī Allāhī* indicates that 'Alī (the first Imām) is the incarnation of Allāh (God). Nūr 'Alī Ilāhī (d. 1394/1974), a well-known master of the 'Ahl-i Ḥaqq order, dedicated a chapter in his mystical treatise, *Burhān al-Ḥaqq,* to denying that the Ahl-i Ḥaqq actually believe that 'Alī was a divine incarnation.[191] Yet Mast 'Alī Shāh has referred to them as 'Alī Allāhī. A number of Ahl-i Ḥaqq masters claimed to be 'people of Truth' (*ahl-i ḥaqq*) instead of 'people of the Sufi path' (*ahl-i ṭarīqat*), and they differentiated themselves from Sufis. They believed that they were in a higher state than the 'people of the Sufi path'.[192] Well-known Ahl-i Ḥaqq masters, known as *sayyids*, lived in Kurdish areas, mostly in Persia and Iraq.

It is said that Nādir Shāh Afshār had a good relationship with the Ahl-i Ḥaqq dervishes since some of his theological beliefs were close to Sunnism. Nādir respected the Ahl-i Haqq mystics and he reconstructed some of their shrines. He also gave some land as fiefs to Ahl-i Ḥaqq's masters and brought the sayyids of Atash Baygī tribes of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq back to their homeland of Kirmānshāh after they were exiled during the Safavid era.[193]

Āqā Sayyid Farḍ ʿAlī, known as Āsid Farḍī (d. 1169/1756), was one of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq's Sayyids who was believed by his disciples to be a manifestation of ʿAlī. Nādir Shāh met him on his way to Baghdād and asked for his blessing, and appointed lands as fiefs to Sayyid Farḍ ʿAlī.[194] The Afsharid era was a time of revival for the Ahl-i Ḥaqq.

The Ahl-i Ḥaqq continued to flourish during Karīm Khān Zand's reign, but there is not much information about them from the time of Karīm's death down to the Qājār era, when Ahl-i Ḥaqq masters were scattered around Persia. Darwīsh Dhu'lfaghār Gūrān (b. 1172/1758) was a poet who, by the command of a master, started to interpret Kurdish Ahl-i Ḥaqq poetry.[195] Khalīfa Naẓar Garmīyānī (d. 1295/1878) from Karkuk was another great figure in the history of Ahl-i Ḥaqq. He was a great poet, following the model of Gūrānī Ahl-i Ḥaqq Kurdish poetry. Sayyid Ḥaydar from Kirmānshāh, known as Sayyid Būrākih (d.1290/1873), was also another great figure in the history of Ahl-i Ḥaqq, a poet who was eventually murdered. Darwīsh Ujāq Gahwāriyī (d. 1286/1869) was a disciple of Sayyid Būrākih who also composed poetry. Mīrzā ʿAlī ʿAbbāswandī (d. 1276/1859), known as Aʿlā Dīn, is yet another disciple of Sayyid Būrākih who composed poetry in the Gūrānī dialect of Kurdish.[196] During the later Qājār era, the Ahl-i Ḥaqq's masters formed different movements against governments in Irāq, Persia and Turkey. They began to be seen as a threat to the state, but this concerns an era beyond the scope of the timeframe of this work. Since the Ahl-i Haqq were wandering mystics who lived in Kurdish areas of Persia, there is very little historical information about their activities during this period. It is clear that their poetry, which was largely written in Kurdish, did not have much influence on Persian poetry and literature of the Qājārs.