

Enlightenment and Islam in Iran: The Case of Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh

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Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh is considered one of the most important and influential personalities in the religious-social life of contemporary Iran. He began his cultural activities writing dramas and criticizing the religious-social situation of the society he lived in. He said that this resembled Protestantism. In addition to this, he also dealt theoretically with the criticism of religion and issues related to it.

This article is an attempt to survey the basic features of his intellectual system and his main objections to religion-in particular the religion of Islam-as they are reflected in his major works. Hence, a comprehensive view of his life as well the events that influenced his ideas have been presented herein.

Keywords: Akhundzadeh, Protestantism, Criticism of Religion, Islam.

Introduction

The new confrontation with religion in Iran was not based upon religious research and not by means of any scientific or academic

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methods or approaches. Historical documents reveal that the first objections to religion were more or less influenced by the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment and those of Western critics of religion.

Akhundzadeh was one of the first and most important people to have seriously confronted religion in general and Islam in particular in Iran. Also, he was the first person in contemporary Iran to have criticized the prevailing religious system. He criticized the various aspects of religion after he had familiarized himself with the ideas of major thinkers of the modern era in the West.

A casual glance at the criticisms of Islam made in Iran and other Muslim countries shows that most of them are the repetition or explanation of the objections put forth by Akhundzadeh. However, they do take on a more methodical and systematic form after him.

In this article, an attempt has been made to present the main intellectual features of Akhundzadeh from the perspective of religious knowledge. In this way, we will be able to respond to the following questions:

1. What are the main sources that he used in his confrontation with religion?
2. What are his main and most outstanding anti-religious views?
3. What strategies and tactics did he use to destroy religion?

1. Biography

Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (Akhundov) was born in Nukha in 1812. During his youth, he got familiar with Khachatur Abovian, a well renowned anti-church author. Then, through Abovian, he got familiar with many thinkers of the modern west and also became acquainted with the general atmosphere of the Russian literature: "The study of Russian literature and philosophy and in particular the works of revolutionary democrats has a noticeable role in the formation of the

philosophical beliefs of Akhundov. His notes in the margin of works by Blinsky and Pisarev, which are available in his library, confirm this claim” (Jafarov 1962, 22).

Researchers believe that Akhundzadeh familiarized himself with the works of many European philosophers and famous authors such as Spinoza, Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, Russo, Holbach, Mill, Buckle, Renan, Homer, Petrarch, Moliere, Hume, Helvétius. and others (мустафаев 2013, 222; Jafarov 1962, 21). Also in his personal library, books from many Western scientists, such as Darwin, Huxley, Faraday, Schleiden (Мамедов 1978, 36), as well as the famous book by Renan, *Life of Jesus*, were found (Мамедов 1978, 37).

During his lifetime, Akhundzadeh produced six comedies and one story. The names of his works are as follows: *Molla Ebrahim Khalil: The Alchemist*, *Mousier Jourdan* and *Darvish Mast Ali Shah the Famous Magician*, *Vazir-e khan-e sarab*, *Quldurbasan Bear*, *A Miserable Man*, *Dispute Lawyers*, and *Betrayed Stars* or *Yusof Shah-e Seraj* (which is his only story).

Because of these plays, he is considered to be the founder of realistic comedies in Azerbaijanian literature (Мамедов 1982, 4). Also “with the translation of some of the works of Mirza Fath Ali into Russian, French, German, English, and Norwegian, he became so famous that some began calling him ‘the oriental Molière,’ ‘Caucasian Gogol,’ or ‘the Moliere of Azerbaijan’” (Malekpour 1385 Sh, 1:132; Brands 1986, 1:332).

Akhundzadeh’s remaining works are letters and treatises, which have been written separately and have been collected in different collections and published in Persian under the two titles of *New Alphabet* and *Articles*. However, *Letters of Kamal al-Dawlah*, which is without a doubt one of his most important works, has not been published in Persian. The publication of this work, according to

Ajudani, marked the beginning of his adventure of prevention (Ajudani 1382 Sh, 33-35).¹

After many years of tireless efforts to explicitly remove religion and traditional ideas from the society, Akhundzadeh died on 10 March 1878, at the age of sixty-six (Jafarov 1962, 27). Algar believes that the reason of his death was a heart disease (Algar 1985, 1:739). The translator of the book *The Tale of a Miserable Man* mentions the place of his burial to be the Muslim graveyard in Tbilisi (Akhundov 1971, VIII).

2. Ideas

2.1 Intellectual Periods

The course of Akhundzadeh's beliefs can be divided into three periods: The first period is concurrent with his childhood and youth. During this period, Akhundzadeh was a follower of the traditional religion. The second period starts from his youth when his mind changes and he moves towards the criticism of religion within the framework of Islamic Protestantism. In the third period, his various criticisms of religion lead him to abandon religion altogether.

In the first period, we find Akhundzadeh as a child busy with studying the prevailing sciences of his age, Persian and Arabic languages, the Islamic, sciences, and Persian literary works. According to the desire of his father and his guardian (Akhund Molla Asghar), he was supposed to become a Muslim cleric, but as he himself says, "another event took place which caused me to change my mind" (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 11). This event was the meeting between Akhundzadeh and *Mirza Shafi'* in Ganjeh, from which point the second period of his life starts.

During this period, Akhundzadeh directed all of his efforts towards improving society by removing from Islamic beliefs what he considered

1. For a different treatment of why some of ākhundzādeh's works, and in particular his *Letters of Kamal al-Dawlah*, were not published, see Mazināni (1389 Sh, 58).

to be superstitious ideas. He did this by means of emphasizing on learning contemporary sciences. In this period, most of his works were tainted with a critical view of religion. Nevertheless, they were still not what later became his complete denial of religion altogether. His most significant activity in this period was his effort to create a new alphabet, in which he imitated the western alphabet.

However, the failure of Akhundzadeh's efforts and his distancing himself from traditional Islamic thought lead to the last and most important intellectual period of his life, which he called "Islamic protestantism." By the word "Protestantism," he means a complete destruction of Islam as a religion. This is something that will be discussed further in detail later on.

In summary, in one phase of his life he attempted to adapt religious ideas with new ideas. However, in the later phases, he took a step further and categorically denied religion (Gudarzi 1387 Sh, 124).

In fact, we can classify the periods of his thought using the contemporary jargon in the following way: In the first period, he still believed in Islam and had a traditional view. In the second period, he rejected some of the teachings and laws of Islam within the framework of a plan to reform it. He did this under the banner of "Islamic Protestantism." And in the third period, he rejected the principles of Islam. In particular, he rejected the belief in God. Consequently, He rejected all kinds of religion, Islam or otherwise.

Below, we will analyze the second and third periods of Akhundzadeh's thought.

1.1.2 The Second Period

The first step that Akhundzadeh took towards progress was to promote western concepts and methods of study. He began by utilizing one of the most important methods of forming new ideas, i.e., criticism. He presented this concept under the title of *kritika* and was of the opinion

that this was a lofty method for education. It is for this reason that he made a clear distinction between criticism and admonishment and said that while the first was an effective method of amendment and purification, the second was useless (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 23; 1349 Sh, 10).

Thus, he started his activity by criticizing the intellectual, religious, and social situation of his age, and his main means in this period was to write plays and to have these plays performed on stage. In the play *Molla Ebrahim Khalil, the Alchemist*, he deals with the issue of superstition and compares religion to it. The play *Monsieur Jordan, the French Botanist and Darvish Mast-'ali Shah, the Famous Magician* also deals with the confrontation between magic and superstitious women with new sciences and their representatives. Azhand writes about this work:

The play *Monsieur Jordan* is a comparison between the world of the east and the world of the west. The charlatanism and demagoguery of some of the elements in society, the ignorance of eastern people, the progressive ideals of western civilization, its new culture and science and the necessity of adoption from this culture are among the themes of this play. (Azhand 1373 Sh, 27)

His other works entitled *The Vizier of Khan-e Lankaran* is based on two important political and social ideas. One is the criticism of oriental despotism and the other is the relation between women and freedom. In another work called *Quldurban (Bear)*, he criticizes the social situation of his time as well as the rituals and customs prevailing in Caucasia. In brief, he imagines them to be the result of illiteracy, ignorance, and superstition. The play *A Miserly Man*, which, according to some critics, is one of his best plays (Algar 1985, 1:736; Malekpour 1385 Sh, 1:161), is the story of a miserly cloth salesman named Haji Qara who has an Islamic appearance. However, when working with a certain Heydarbeyg, he gets involved in stealing and smuggling. His

last work, *Dispute Lawyers* is about the efforts of a man named Aqa Hasan, who strives to marry a rich girl named Sakine Khanum but is rejected by her. For this reason, he tries to steal the inheritance of this girl with the help of some lawyers. The most important doctrinal part of this story is expressed in a dialogue between Aqa Mardan and the sheriff about lawyers. Aqa Mardan asks the sheriff: "They are aware of their own religious problems?" The sheriff responds: "I assure you that all are literate. They all make difficulty for the demon. Do not take them to be simpletons. All the four men do congregational prayers in the mosque" (Akhundzadeh 1349 Sh, 294).

The only fictional work of Akhundzadeh is called *the Story of Yusof Shah Seraj*. In this work, he rejects astrology, fortune telling, the belief in the goodness and badness of certain times, the influence of stars, magic, and alchemy. Also, as he does in his other works, in this work he attacks the Islamic scholars and dervishes. Concerning this work, Aryanpur writes:

The intention of the author of this story is to express the tyranny and despotism of the Shah and the stupidity and flattery of ministers, officials, the clergy, and poor people. Another theme is that the cause of the destruction of the once glorious Iran and the abjection of its condition is nothing but the trustees of the state, the [seemingly] great scholars and the [apparently] respectable ministers. (Aryanpur 1379 Sh, 1:346)

His works are chiefly characterized by a criticism of religion in a direct manner within the framework of plays and stories. However, following this, he chose a new method for the presentation of his material.

2.1.2 The Third Period

In this period, he expressed himself in a more direct manner and in the framework of articles and treatises. The first effort he made to actualize his goal was to propose a new alphabet for the Persian language. He

considered the main reason for the backwardness of Iran and Iranians to be the Islamic alphabet. Of course, he does not clearly specify why he believes that the prevailing Persian alphabet stems from religion and not the evolution of language per se. What is more, he presents this issue in the form of a dialogue (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 188-90). In this dialogue, he says that the way to development is literacy, and this is only attained by changing the alphabet. He says that “through the new alphabet, the whole nation of Islam will be able to read and write in their own language in a relatively short period of time” (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 190).

In order to attain this goal, he tries to show that this idea is in agreement with religious laws: “I am certain that this type of reform is not incompatible with the noble religious law and that the respectable scholars will not prevent it from being taught” (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 7). But his main intention in changing the alphabet can be understood from the following quote: “One of the bad effects of the dominancy of the wild Arab nomads was that they imposed upon us such a complex alphabet that made the acquisition of even an ordinary level of literacy a very arduous task” (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 207). We can see the roots of his negative feelings towards Arabs and religion from such statements. Describing the view of Akhundzadeh, Adamiyat writes: “If you want to know the truth, Mirza Fath Ali had never felt pity for the noble religious laws. Nor did he ever believe in religious obligations. Be means of changing the alphabet he really wanted to remove the clergy from the scene” (Adamiyat 1349 Sh, 79).

After this useless effort, he proposed a new plan (Ostadi 1392 Sh, 11). In his letter to the editor of the newspaper *Haqayiq* in 1872, he wrote: “The present Islamic alphabet should not be changed at all ... However, when new works are written, the translations of foreign nations and ideas should be written in the new alphabet” (Akhundzadeh 1963, 196).

Following his defeat in reforming the script, he investigated the causes of his failure and came to the conclusion that the religious sentiment of the masses was the major obstacle standing in the way of the transformation of the script. Thus, he came to the conclusion that the only way to achieve his reformations was to destroy the very basis of religion (Mowlavi 1369 Sh, 1:156). In order to carry this out, he wrote *The Letters of Kamal al-Dawlah*. No doubt, these were ideologically impacted by the *Persian Letters* of Montesquieu (мыстафаев 2013, 219). It is interesting that the author of the book *M. F. Akhundov* places *The Letters of Kamal al-Dawlah* at the same level as that of the *Persian Letters* of Montesquieu (Jafarov 1962, 20).

Nevertheless, in a letter in 1876, Akhundzadeh writes: “It is not necessary to directly oppose the religion of our ancestors. We should apparently follow religion in a brotherly fashion but to be followers of the truth in our hearts” (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 196). However, in an article on *Biyaghrafiya*, he clearly states that the publication of *Kamal al-Dawlah* was for the purpose of “the destruction of the base of this religion” (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 15). And in a poem, he states: “If I do not uproot this religion, I would not be ‘Ali, the son of Taqi Hasan” (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 234-35). In another place, he clearly states that the blow that the letters will deal to Islam will be more effective than the blow that an army of one thousand people could deal to it. It will weaken the faith of the people and they will begin to doubt Islam (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 234-35).

All in all, he considered his work to be very important and crucial. He felt that it would determine the future of his society. Moreover, he felt that he had a special dignity: “In my view, *The Letters of Kamal al-Dawlah* are to be translated into French, like the work of Renan. If it is translated, it will be received warmly by European readers” (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 307). Thus, the third period of his ideas climaxed with this work and with his *Criticism on a Single-Word*, the

translation of some western texts and his correspondence with people of the same views.

Like other people of his time, he felt that Muslim countries were suffering from many problems. He came to this idea after he had accepted the philosophical principles of modernity. According to Akhundzadeh, the despotic regimes in the Islamic countries were the source of the backwardness prevailing in them. They were the source of all the social diseases in these countries. The despotism, injustice, and oppression in them was the source of their own destruction (мыстафаев 2013, 223). Due to this, Akhundzadeh views the historical conditions of Iran as being similar to the beginning of modernism, progress, and change in Europe (Taleshani 1385 Sh, 70).

He actually intended to open up a new horizon before the people of Iran as well as its neighbors by means of his new plan. These new horizons were humanism, materialism, scientism, literary realism, nationalism, liberalism, law and constitution, and many other mottos like these (Farasatkah 1374 Sh, 63). In fact, he has been portrayed as “a liberalist and secularist in the western meaning [of these terms]” (Haeri 1360 Sh, 29).

His basic plan was founded upon some of the essential ideas of the Age of Enlightenment, which he described in the beginning of his *Kamal al-Dawlah* in detail. He was of the belief that the main way to save a nation was for it to acquire the knowledge necessary for the acquisition of livelihood, the perfection of the natural sciences and industry, ethical goodness, and the adoption of the norms of civilization (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 9). He maintained that in order to achieve civilization, progress is necessary; in order to achieve civilization and progress, people must be liberal; and in order to achieve freedom and liberation, there is no way but revolution:

Revolutions occur when the people become fed up with the unlawful behavior of a despotic king. They rebel in an attempt to remove him

and to legislate rules for their own welfare and happiness. They come to realize the absurdity of religious beliefs and stand up to religious scholars and select a school of thought that is in agreement with the intellect and grounded on the prescriptions of the philosophers. (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 10-11)

Thus, in the first of these letters, he tried to identify Islam with despotism, and in the other letters, he criticized Islamic beliefs. In this way, he sought to annihilate what he felt was the despotic policy of Islam.

One of the important factors of progress, according to Akhundzadeh, was the presence of what he called "*Faramushkhaneh*." It has been said that "Akhundzadeh was an advocate of the formation of Freemasonry in Iran and he believed that this was one of the tools for freedom and liberation" (Haeri 1360 Sh, 27; Adamiyat 1349 Sh, 149-50).

Quoting three different works of Akhundzadeh in which he advocated and admired masonic lodges, Rain believes that, despite an oral speech by Akhundzadeh to the contrary, he was never a member of any Freemasonry lodges (Rain 1357 Sh, 1:459-60). However, He further quotes pieces of evidence which reinforce the possibility of a relationship between Akhundzadeh and Freemasonry (Rain 1357 Sh, 1:461-65).

Following the discussion regarding the opposition between despotism and Islam, the second main issue discussed in his *Letters* is nationalism. After having denied religion, he tries to replace it with "nationalism and the love of one's nation." He portrays himself as an adherent of the ancient culture of Iran. In a letter in 1871 addressed to Maneckji, a prominent Persian in India, he writes: "Though I am apparently Turkish, my ancestry goes back to Persia" (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 249) and "You are the memorial of our ancestors" (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 249). He also writes the following in another place: "The Zoroastrians are our brothers, countrymen, and members of

our race and share the same language with us” (Akhundzadeh 1963, 214).

On one hand, he introduces himself as a person opposed to despotism and in a letter to Jalal al-Din Mirza, he writes the following:

In Iran, after the overcome of Arabs and the degradation of Persian government and annihilation of the culture and rules of Mahbadian, the sovereignty has not been a real one. After the Hijrah, the rulers of this country have been despotic and illegal. (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 255)

On the other hand, this nationalism is fully in conflict with his anti-despotism, because he gives the title “angelic kings of Persia” to the despotic kings of Iran (Mowlavi 1369 Sh, 1:157). Also, according to Akhundzadeh, religion cannot really prevent the intrusion of foreigners, since nobody really believes in the importance of heaven or martyrdom. In order to prevent that, it is necessary to plant the seed of nationalism and patriotism in their hearts (Adamiyat 1349 Sh, 115; Mowlavi 1369 Sh, 1:157).¹

The third issue that Akhundzadeh tackles in *Letters* is the philosophical, ethical and jurisprudential dimensions of religion, and, in his plays, he mentions some of his objections to ethical and jurisprudential topics. In philosophy, his methodology was based upon rationalism and scientism. He states that “as long as science does not prevail and as long as people are unable to distinguish right from wrong by means of science [the state of affairs will be the same]” (Akhundzadeh 1963, 183), and “if science prevails ... cases like theirs will be prevented from reoccurring and creatures will be free from ignorance, intrigue, and distress” (1963, 183-84). In this regard, Adamiyat writes: “Then he took his ideas from the philosophical and

1. It should be noted that the knowledge of Ākhundzādeh about ancient Iran was very little, that most of what he knew about it was taken from the biased works of some orientalist and Iranologists.

scientific thought of Europe ... He measures the principles of religious laws by the spirit of the history of time and becomes the mouthpiece of religious reform” (Adamiyat 1349 Sh, 174-86).

Of course, Adamiyat’s views are partially wrong, since Akhundzadeh did not intend to become the mouthpiece for the reform of religion, even though he was in disagreement with all kinds of religious thought. As he states, “The invalidity of the older religions is unclear for the followers of these three religions—i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, when their features are properly explained for them and their invalidity is proven, they will also confirm their invalidity automatically and willfully” (Gudarzi 1387 Sh, 129; Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 281).

For this very reason, he considered himself to be one of the philosophers who rejected the foundations of the revealed religions—that is, God. He was also of the opinion that Rumi, Sheikh Mahmud Shabistari, Abd al-Rahman Jami, and other mystics had grasped such a philosophical theory but that they expressed it in the guise of mysticism due to a fear of the masses (Madadpur 1386 Sh, 3:330-31). In this regard, he lays the foundation of his discussions upon a specific epistemological vision. He believes that the world and its rules are fully understandable. These rules are discovered through science. The foundation of human knowledge is the external world, which is grasped through the activity of our senses. This sensation is the only thing that gives us proper knowledge of the external world, and it is the source of true knowledge. Knowledge in his view is only trustworthy when it is based on sensation (Мамедов 1978, 59). He confirms this by means of something he found in the margins of one of the books of Zimmerman. Zimmerman wrote that human sensation is necessarily limited and that there are many things that human beings do not grasp by means of their senses, but they exist. Man can discover the insensible rules of nature with the help of the abstract mind. As an example, he mentions the law

of gravity. He believes that from the beginning, the function of the scientist was to discover the secrets of the universe.

Akhundzadeh accepts these statements by Zimmerman and emphasizes that humans can study the objective world through the senses and the mind and learn about it by these means (Мамедов 1978, 63-64). Akhundzadeh begins his philosophical investigations with a discussion regarding God and the concept of the Necessary Being. He believes that it is impossible to prove this entity by means of the impossibility of an endless chain of causes (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 121-24).

Of course, he believes in a specific type of determinism and has his own idea of causation, according to which humans are the causes of the effects that stem from them and God does not interfere in the creation of their actions. In a letter to Mankji (July 29, 1871), he states that becoming a devil or an angel depends on a non-divine cause: "When that non-divine cause is eliminated, the devil will become an angel" (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 250).

Most of his objections to the existence of a creator and the impossibility of a proof for religious beliefs were taken from Hume. He also wrote some letters to scholars in India and Mumbai in which he wrote extensively about Hume (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 121). A meticulous study of his ideas and arguments shows that in addition to Hume, in some aspects, his philosophy was very similar to Spinoza. This is especially true with respect to the idea that nature is its own cause (*causa sui*) (Мамедов 1978, 37).

Also, in his views about issues such as space and time, the criticism of religion, fanaticism, and superstitions, he was in agreement with the viewpoints of the French materialists, particularly Holbach (Мамедов 1978, 39). In his personal library, there was a book on the history of philosophy, in which, under Holbach's explanation of "the system of nature," Akhundzadeh wrote that the aforementioned judgment "was correct" (Мамедов 1978, 37).

Akhundzadeh did not believe in God. Not only does he deny the philosophical-theological God, he also denies the God of the mystics as well. He has a detailed critique of Rumi, in which he mentions three objections:

1. The belief in free-will for the Universal Being and the theory of the Unity of Being.
2. The belief in mystical annihilation in God that had been presented by the Indian Buddha. According to him, this is a meaningless concept that the wise Hindu and Muslim people have never been able to understand (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 36). He also says that attributing the dictum “Die before you die” to the Prophet (s) is mistaken and that this dictum is probably taken from the Buddhist tradition (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 37).
3. The belief that “the spirit remains after separation from the body and will be attached to the Universal Being. However, the wise men of Europe do not believe in the immaterial and independent spirit” (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 37).

In the end, he says that the objections he has leveled at Rumi are not his own but are taken from European scholars (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 37). In light of this, we can definitely state that he does not have any belief in the immaterial spirit or super-natural beings and that he thinks in a purely materialistic manner.

In fact, contrary to the logic of Muslim theologians and mystics who believed that the rules of nature and society were based upon the divine will, he felt that the world always moves forward because of a series of internal laws that govern it (Мамедов 1978, 54).

With the denial of God, the immaterial spirit, and metaphysics, there is no room left for any other religious belief; nevertheless, he occasionally attacked other principles of religion—including prophecy,

theodicy and imamate (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 99; 1357 Sh, 190). An important point to note is that he not only criticized Islam but also other religions as well (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 94-95).

Thus, with this attitude, for the first time in the intellectual history of Muslims and Iranians, a concept named Protestantism was put forth—a worldview in which the rights of God and the obligations of servants of God were totally annihilated and only the rights of people remained. It has often been observed that “the concept of Islamic ‘Protestantism’ is fully different from the meaning this term has in the religious reforms in the West” (Akhundzadeh 1963, 12).

In fact, before him, the concept of Protestantism was limited to the denial of certain laws and rituals of Islam. However, his can be defined as the denial of the rights of God and the religious obligations of human beings.

In the beginning, he considered praying and other religious rituals as absurd. Then, he separately criticized various types of Islamic rulings, such as the religious taxes, the ritual prayer, fasting, the punishment for extra-marital affairs, retaliation, and so forth (Akhundzadeh 1351 Sh, 101). He blamed all these problems on the clergy and criticized this group intensively (Akhundzadeh 1963, 36-38).

He proposes the secularization of society, with the intent of removing Islam from it. This secularization is nothing but the marginalization of religion from the social and political spheres. As he writes in a letter to Mostashar al-Dawlah in 1871, while admiring the idea of a “single world,” he criticizes the efforts to link religious decrees to French Constitution. He believes that the solution to the problems is the following:

Judgment is to be taken away from clergies in all parts of Iran, and all courts are to be attached [directly] to the Ministry of Justice. From now onwards, the clergies should not interfere in any dispute

or in the settlement of affairs. Like the Europeans, they should only pay attention to matters such as prayer and some personal affairs, such as marriage, divorce, and the burial of the dead bodies. (Akhundzadeh 1357 Sh, 200-1)

In fact, in a letter he wrote in 1871, Akhundzadeh presents the same concept of state-nation in a very simple language and sees the solution to lie in the creation and establishment of a national state and a national government (Ajudani, 1382 Sh, 51). In this way, he intended to separate politics from religion. Adamiyat believes that, among the authors of the Islamic world, Akhundzadeh was the only person who pointed out the impossibility of combining “European politics and principles of religious law” (Adamiyat, 1349 Sh, 154).

Conclusion

Akhundzadeh is considered one of the first critics of religion in the Muslim world and in Iran in particular. He was under the intellectual influence of thinkers such as Voltaire, Helvetius, Holbach, Diderot, Hume, Newton, Petrarch, and some Russian thinkers. He borrowed most of his anti-religious arguments from Ernest Renan and Thomas Buckle.

The gist of Akhundzadeh’s discussions and the results he intended to reach can be observed in the following statement: “Now it is the time to use your five senses, to enjoy and live in the world, and gain virtues in worldly affairs” (Akhundzadeh 2535, 12-13). Jafarov rightly comments in this regard: “The struggling atheist character of Akhundov has an inseparable link with the materialistic understanding of the phenomenon of the nature” (Jafarov 1962, 21).

Most of Akhundzadeh’s criticisms of Islam are in fact the old criticisms of western orientalist (Algar 1985, 1:738). However, a very basic problem in his thinking was that he had very little knowledge of Islam and the cultural-historical situation of Islamic lands, including Iran (Ostadi 1392 Sh, 19). Mojtahedi writes in this regard:

In a sense, Akhundzadeh is the inventor of a way of thought which has gradually been reinforced in Iran and has led to the formation of a type of superficial, positivistic philosophy and banal scientism, which does not surpass the limit of words. However, it is very dangerous and the cause of the annihilation of philosophical contemplation and original scholarly research. (Mojtahedi, 1384 Sh, 182)

The main sources of Akhundzadeh's thought can be divided into two categories: (1) works that made him acquainted in his childhood with some Islamic concepts and sciences, but they did not allow him to deeply ponder over their content; (2) the works of modern western thinkers, including natural scientists, philosophers, and politicians. He became acquainted with modern concepts and the prevailing discussions of his era by means of these sources. Relying on them, he attacked all types of metaphysical concept, without studying them in a scholarly and unbiased manner.

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