Chapter 1
Introduction

This research is a study of the power-struggle between the reformists and conservatives in Iran. A case study of president Khatami era (1997 – 2005) has been undertaken to highlight the nature of this struggle. The whole research has been designed under the backdrop of a theoretical framework, the broad outline of which is given below.

"Since the death of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, the Islamic Republic of Iran has entered a period of Thermidor (Wells 1999: 28).” The term ‘thermidor’ implies a particular phase of a revolution in which the prevalent political conditions resemble the pre-revolutionary state. In his book The Revolution Betrayed, Leon Trotsky (1972: 83-107) has sought to define the term ‘thermidor.’ The rise of Stalin and the accompanying post-revolutionary bureaucracy was described by Trotsky as the ‘Soviet Thermidor’ (Trotsky 1972: 82-107 and Knei-Paz 1978: 400). Trotsky has given a graphic detail of the political and social conditions of the Stalin era to bring home the point that it resembled the pre-revolution Soviet state and society.

According to Trotsky, in the period of thermidor, there is a likelihood of a social upheaval; and the possibility of a reversal to the pre-revolutionary society could not be completely ruled out. During the period of thermidor, the social contradictions become increasingly irreversible and consequently, the regime finds it difficult to hold control over power (Knei-Paz 1978: 400). Several scholars have applied this concept of thermidor to the Iranian Revolution (Ehteshami 1995 and Wells 1999). These scholars have attempted to draw a parallel between the conditions of Stalin era in the former Soviet Union and the post-Khomeini era in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

While applying this concept to the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79, Wells (1999: 27) defines “thermidor” as “the closing phase of a revolution wherein hard-line revolutionaries are increasingly challenged by reformists.” Wells sees thermidor as the product of a popular backlash to the revolutionary policies of the ruling elites. The power of the state is consolidated in the hands of a ‘central core’ immediately after the
revolution. In this process of consolidation, those factions who are intensely loyal to the charismatic leader often get ascendancy to power. These factions, that are also called the hard-liners, then attempt to impose their political, economic and social agenda on the whole populace of the country. However, these efforts are stiffly opposed by other factions. Such opposing factions are usually referred to as the moderates or the reformists or the revisionists. Wells (1999: 27-28) terms such opposing factions as the "thermidoreans."

While the theory of ‘thermidor’ positions the contemporary politics of Iran in the context of its revolutionary history, the concept of ‘circulation of elites’ as developed by Vilfredo Pareto (1935), in his book, The Mind and Society, helps us to understand the nature of power struggle (Lerner 1991: 348). Pareto has distinguished between the ‘governing elite’ and the ‘non-governing elite.’ The governing elite is the one that holds power for the time being while the non-governing elite constantly tries to replace it by showing greater ability and excellence. The behaviour of elite is characterized by a constant competition between the governing and non-governing elites. This results in what is termed by Pareto as the ‘circulation of elites.’ The masses, however, have no chance of entering the ranks of elites (Gauba 2003: 258 and Lerner 1991: 348). The power struggle in the post-revolution Iran may be explained with the help of this concept of circulation of elites.

Post-revolutionary Iran has been governed by a group of clergies led by the Velayet-e-Faqih (the Supreme Leader). The Constitution of Iran is designed in such a manner that the most important institutions such as the Supreme Leader and the Guardian Council involve little public participation. Even where common people are constitutionally eligible to choose their representatives – like in case of the President or the Majlis (the Parliament) – such participation is trifled by various vague and overlapping provisions of the constitution. This effectively renders the ‘masses’ completely out of the power struggle.

Further, among the elites, those institutions and people who are either directly under the constitutional subordination of the Supreme Leader or toe his line are real recipients of
power and, following Pareto's line of argument, may be termed as the 'governing elites.' The rest of the elites who are 'non-governing' elites, consistently strive to capture the power, but the 'governing-elites' equally struggle hard to retain their hold over power. In this power-struggle the rhetoric plays a very important role. In the post-revolutionary Iran, particularly during Khatami era of presidency, the politics of political and social reform came to the centre-stage. Consequently, the power struggle between the governing and non-governing elites appeared as the power struggle between the reformists and the conservatives.

It is also imperative to understand what the term 'reformists' and 'conservatives' denote in the context of Iranian politics. "The reformists, as represented by Khatami, did not wish to do away with the Islamic Republic, but to make it democratic, tolerant, progressive, and in tune with the needs of the people (Siddiqi 2006)." The conservatives on the other hand can be understood as those who resisted such changes.

In the pre-revolutionary period, the clergy presented a united face, but in practice they remained divided over many counts. In particular, they differed over the future model of government. There was a wide division between those who expected a secular democratic government to follow in the Islamic Republic and those who supported a theocratic future. Consequently, the post-Khomeini period has been "marked by intense factional fighting (Wells 1999: 29)" between the conservatives and the reformists over the future of the republic.

The political developments of the post-revolutionary Iran can be divided into three identifiable stages (Banan 2004). These stages highlight the traditional and continuing conflict between the conservatives and the reformists. The first stage (1979-88) was the period which witnessed a gradual elimination of all those traces of modern or liberal behaviour that the leaders of the revolution had themselves initially emphasized. The second stage (1988-97) was the era of president Rafsanjani. During his two successive tenures as president, Rafsanjani tried to rebuild the war-torn economy of the Islamic Republic. He had shown himself as keen to bring about change in the republic. He also sought to establish a pragmatic legitimacy to the Islamic Republic. While the
conservatives remained strong throughout this period, the reformist movement was still able to grow within the religious system. The third stage (1997-2005) was the period of Khatami's presidency (Banan 2004). Khatami's tenures were remarkable in as much as it stirred the Islamic Republic and instilled the hopes of substantial changes in the minds of the people of Iran.

Khatami had won his first presidential election in 1997 against the establishment-backed candidate Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri. This was widely seen as a signal of popular dissatisfaction with the ruling elite. However, he had to walk a narrow path. On one hand, he was repeatedly criticized by the conservatives for being too swift with his reforms. While on the other hand, the liberal sections of the press charged him for failing to bring about any tangible improvements in the lives of the people (Siddiqi 2006). Still, it was not difficult to see that his victory dawned a new period in the Islamic Republic. Khatami's election agenda was evidently designed to bring home this point of change. His election programme gave priority to the vital issues such as law, civil society and dialogue with the West. This approach of Khatami promised the prospect of real change. This kind of confrontation was earlier never witnessed by the conservatives (Banan 2004).

Khatami popularised the appealing slogans such as Ghanoon madari (rule of law) and Jameyeh Madani (Civil Society). This was the result of his realization that the dominance of Islamic laws over people's public and private lives had a very bad effect on the people of Iran. Further, the suppression of the individual rights of the people had led to their growing frustration and anger towards the Islamic regime. Khatami and his reformist camp had realized that accommodation of the basic rights of freedoms was essential for the Islamic Republic to remain relevant. Therefore, Khatami made the press his arm for spreading his message around the country (Jahanbegloo 2001: 124-129). Khatami had rightly realized that in the absence of recognized political parties, the press was the only channel for the aggregation and articulation of the public’s interests.

However, the conservatives never let loose their hold over power and Khatami’s quest for reform became increasingly difficult. The ensuing power struggle between the reformists
(headed by president Khatami) and the conservatives is the main focus of this study. Before going further with the study, a brief mention is made of the rationale of this study. Also, we highlight the main objectives of the study. Next we enlist the hypotheses with which the research had been started. These hypotheses would be taken up again at the end of the thesis to testify them against the findings. Further, a note on the research methodology has been given and then the design of the whole thesis has been presented.

Definition, Rationale and Scope of the Study

This research is an attempt to study the contemporary politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran has reached a phase of thermidor in its revolutionary history and is witnessing intense power struggle between the conservatives and reformists. There is disagreement among the Iranian elites about the future course of Iran. The constitutional omnipotence of the Velayet-e-Faqih makes Iran a unique political system. Therefore some adjustments are needed to be made while applying the established theories of thermidor and power in this unique context of Iranian political system.

During his two terms in office, president Khatami was able to introduce some reforms to the Iranian political system, however all in all, he is widely considered to have lost the power struggle with his opponents. As the president of the Islamic Republic, Khatami had little or no authority over many of the key state institutions such as the judiciary, the state radio and television, and the armed forces including the police and the military. The root cause for his failures, thus, appears to be the constitutionally less powerful position of the president in the Iranian political system. This is an important subject matter of this research.

This study conceptualizes the issue of political reform as a perspective of the power struggle between the reformists and the conservatives. One important aspect of the research has been to identify the major competing centres among the ruling elites. Further, a comparative study of the various constitutional political institutions has been undertaken. A case study of Khatami period has been undertaken to find out the nature of the power struggle between the reformists and the conservatives.
Objectives of the Study
The research has been started with the following main objectives in mind: (1) To position the contemporary politics of Iran in the context of Islamic Revolution using the concept of Thermidor and to identify the thermidoreans. (2) To identify the reformists and conservatives in Iran and study the power struggle between them using the Elite theory of Power as developed by Pareto. (3) To study the politics of reforms and its relationship with the power struggle between reformists and conservatives during Khatami era. (4) To study the role of the civil society in the ensuing power struggle during Khatami period. (5) To analyze some prominent parliamentary bills and politics of power struggle surrounding these bills.

Hypotheses of the Study
Following were the initial hypotheses of the study: (1) The need of political reform started building up soon after the Islamic Revolution and gathered momentum after the death of Khomeini. (2) Political reform in Iran was used as a tool by the Reformists in their power struggle with the conservatives. (3) At the institutional level, the power struggle was between the reformist president and the conservative Guardian Council. (4) The Conservative Guardian Council was the primary opposing force towards the reform measures introduced by Khatami.

Research Methods
Historical and analytical methodologies have been applied in course of this research. A historical study of the political system of Iran has been undertaken since the Islamic revolution of 1978-79. For this purpose, mainly secondary sources have been referred to. Subsequently, an analytical study of the political transformation was undertaken since this revolution. An important constituent of this research has been the development of a theoretical framework for the study of the power struggle in Iran. A thorough analysis of the thermidor in the Islamic Republic of Iran was undertaken and hence the competing power centres were identified.

In this study, the whole issue of political reform in Iran during Khatami period has been treated as a perspective of the power struggle between the reformist president and the
conservative Guardian Council. The focus of the study was the reforms that were attempted during Khatami period, but a brief historical account was also undertaken in order to place the core issue in the proper perspective. Various primary data have been used as reference materials including the important reform bills that were either presented in the Majlis or were passed by it.

An analysis of the political system of Iran until Khatami era was carried out in order to determine the relative importance of the various centres of power. Further, the nature of the hurdles faced by the reforming forces was studied and the differing roles played by various power-centres have been determined.

The Design of the Thesis

The whole thesis is divided among six chapters. The first chapter (Introduction) prepares the ground on which the whole thesis evolves. This chapter has four sections. The first section ("Present Political System of Iran") gives a brief political history of Iran since 1905. This year has been chosen as it is believed that modern Iranian history begins with the first Constitutional Revolution which took place around this year. The socio-economic and political conditions of the years preceding the Islamic Revolution (1978-79) has been discussed. The emphasis is placed on the political transformations that took place since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Further, an attempt has been made to figure out the explicit and implicit power-structure of the Iranian political system. The Guardian Council is a very important constitutional body in Iran; accordingly its role has been highlighted in this section. Finally, an analysis of the Iranian political system has been done in order to find out the inherent contradictions in the Islamic Republic.

The second section ("The Post of the President") highlights the position of the President in the institutional framework of the Iranian political system. An attempt has been made to determine the actual power of the president vis-à-vis other power-centres of Iran. The third section ("The Islamic Revolution") gives a brief account of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The contemporary Iran is the product of the Islamic Revolution; hence the course of this revolution has been traced out in order to contextualize the present state of Iran in the proper time frame. The fourth and last section ("Iran after Revolution") of the
first chapter presents an account of the post-revolutionary Iran. An effort has been made to find out the relevant changes that had been effected in the Iranian constitution since its inception in 1979.

Theoretical Framework is the title of the second chapter. As is reflected from the title, this chapter captures the theoretical framework that had been developed to carry out this research. The subject of the research demanded a rigorous theoretical treatment of the political dynamics of Iran in the chosen period. Hence, a workable theoretical construct was developed using the appropriate political concepts. Accordingly, the first section ("The Concept of Thermidor") of this chapter explains the concept of 'thermidor.' Apart from defining this concept, this section also tries to trace the history of formulation of this concept as attempted by Trotsky. Several theories of revolutions have also been touched upon in this section in order to place the concept of thermidor in the wider context.

The second section ("Thermidor in Iran") of this chapter illustrates how the concept of thermidor is found to be applicable in the Iranian case. The onset of thermidor in Iran has been described and also the reasons of the same have been incorporated with due justifications. The third section ("The Theories of Power") of this chapter deals with the various theories of 'power.' A thorough investigation of this concept has been made in order to find out its meaning and its various dimensions. An elaborate treatment has been given to the relevance of the concept of power in the study of politics.

The fourth section ("Pareto's Theory of Elites as Applicable in Iran") deals specifically with Pareto's theory of elites and its applicability in the case of Iran. The concepts 'elite' and 'elitism' have been defined and the elite theory of power has been investigated. Further, an investigation has been made to trace and identify the political elites in Iran. The last section ("Reformists and Conservatives") attempts to define and distinguish the two opposite terms - the reformists and the conservatives. The term 'conservatism' has been defined and also an attempt has been made to understand what is understood by the term 'reform bills.' Finally, in this section, a thorough investigation has been made to identify the reformists and conservatives in Iran.
The third chapter, titled *Genesis and Evolution of Power Struggle*, traces those factors and forces which contributed to the factional division of the power elites in Iranian political system. Further, this chapter also incorporates the ensuing power struggle between such politically polarized factions. The essence of this chapter is captured in four sections. The first section ("A Historical Overview of Power Struggle in Iran") starts with an investigation of elite formation in modern Iran. Subsequently, it finds out how Iranian political elites were divided into different opposing factions during the course of the revolution itself. An attempt has also been made to find out the reasons for such frictions and accordingly the roles of political culture and economy have been highlighted among other prominent factors.

The second section ("Evolution of Power Struggle in Post-Revolution Iran") takes up the matter from where it was left in the previous section. Accordingly, this section first deals with the evolution of power struggle in the period between 1979 and 1989. The year 1989 was a turning point for the Iranian politics. In this year Ayatollah Khomeini died, leaving a power vacuum which was very difficult to fill. This resulted in an intense power struggle among the warring factions of the Iranian elites to capture power. The period between 1989 and 1997 has been dealt with subsequently in this section. Notably, this section stops the treatment of the subject before the beginning of the Khatami era. The development of the power struggle during Khatami period has been undertaken in the fourth section of this chapter.

The third section of this chapter ("The Reformists and Conservatives in Iran") revisits the two important concepts as defined in the fifth section of the second chapter. Here an attempt has been made to understand the behaviour of these factions under the light of the wider ideological context. It is important to focus on the discourses on ‘Islamism’ and the ‘liberal ideas’ in order to explain this phenomenon of friction within the ruling elites. The different sub-factions within these two broad camps have been explored and the bases of their disagreements have been investigated.

Having explored the ideological differences in detail, the last section ("Power Struggle between Reformists and Conservatives") of this chapter takes up the matter of power
struggle during Khatami period. Here the emphasis is made on finding out the factors which were responsible for bringing about the segregation of political elites into two evident warring factions during this period. The political conditionings promoting this phenomenon have also been traced. Having done that; an account of the course of the events illustrating the power struggle between the reformists and conservatives have been presented in this section.

The fourth chapter (*Power Struggle and the Politics of Reform during Khatami Period*) undertakes the case study of Khatami period to understand the power struggle perspective of the politics of reform. This chapter too has four sections. The first section ("Sayyed Muhammad Khatami") gives a brief biography of Muhammad Khatami. The purpose here is to evaluate the ideological influences on Khatami. This approach is important since understanding such influences would help us to a great extent in finding out the actual intentions of Khatami in introducing his political reforms in Iran. Next, an account of political life of Muhammad Khatami is furnished. Here, the emphasis is on the period from 1997 to 2005 during which he served two terms as the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The second section ("Khatami’s Reforms") of this chapter presents the detail of those reform measures that Khatami attempted to introduce during his two tenures as the president. For an exhaustive study of these measures, the respective two tenures of president Khatami have been dealt with separately. A comparative analysis of the two terms vis-à-vis his reforms have been presented subsequently.

The third section ("Power Struggle and Politics of Reform") deals with the power politics of Iran highlighting how the warring factions have used all available means at their disposal for capturing power. In course of time, the Islamic regime had become quite unpopular due to its failure in fulfilling the revolutionary promises. The nature of the regime was increasingly found to be authoritarian by those sections of the society that wanted some liberal changes.

However, despite the authoritarian nature of the established regime, there was some
scope for real politics in the Iranian political system. Thus the reformist forces tried to capitalize on the situation when the regime appeared suffering from a legitimacy crisis. The reformist camp was not completely devoid of such personalities who genuinely wanted to bring about liberal changes to the system. Still, the primary aim of the reformists was to use the popular demand for change as an opportunity to vest power from the conservatives and establish their own hold over the system. They used the liberal ideas as an effective tool to fight against the conservative forces in their quest for power. All such attempts on part of the reformists have been captured in this section. Further, this section also explains the efficacy of such methodologies and attempts to answer the question as to why the reformists were ultimately not successful in vesting power from the conservative stronghold.

The fourth section ("The Tussle between the President and the Guardians Council") essentially deals with the tussle between the reformist president Muhammad Khatami and the conservative Guardian Council. The antagonistic relationship is understood both at the institutional level and at the power struggle level. The Expediency Council was created to mediate between the Majlis and the Guardian Council. However, during the course of this research it was found that this constitutional body (Expediency Council) instead strengthened the Guardian Council further. This caused further complications for the President. At the end of this chapter an analysis of the Guardian Council has been presented highlighting its obstructionist role towards any attempt at liberalizing the Iranian political system. Further, an account has been given as to how this body proved to be the most uncompromising obstacle to any attempt at capturing power by the reformist camp headed by president Khatami.

The fifth chapter, titled Parliamentary Bills and Power Struggle, mainly deals with the important reform bills that were presented to the Majlis during the two terms of Muhammad Khatami as the president. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section ("The Role of Majlis in Iranian Politics") positions the Iranian parliament into the overall Iranian political system. In course of this research, it was found that though the elected representatives did not have as much power in the unique Iranian political system as the unelected officials; still, these elected bodies had important roles
to play in the Iranian politics. Their importance lies in the fact that the results of the elections are important in gauging the mood of the populace and hence giving the regime much-needed political inputs to make course corrections in order to maintain the legitimacy and perpetuate the stronghold over the power. Hence the political events happening in and around the Majlis is important to understand the political dynamics of Iran and accordingly these are given due consideration in this section.

The second section ("Prominent Bills during Khatami Era") brings the case study of Khatami period to the next important level by enlisting some of his important reform bills. Among such reform bills, two are worth mentioning in detail. These are: (1) The Press Law; and (2) The Twin Bills. These two bills have been chosen here, since they exemplify most comprehensively the whole political dynamics of the Iranian politics. They are, thus, analyzed in an exhaustive manner.

The reform bills are important focal points in understanding the power-struggle dynamics of the Iranian politics, particularly during Khatami era. Apart from the description of such bills, and the circumstances in which they were presented, it is also quite insightful to concentrate on the actual motivations behind their presentation. This approach brings forth the ensuing power-politics revolving around these reform bills. This vital aspect is the subject matter of the last section ("Reform Bills and Power Struggle") of this chapter.

The last chapter (Summary and Conclusion) gives a summary of the study, apart from enlisting the main findings of the research. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to present a holistic picture of the Iranian politics from power struggle perspective under the light of these findings. Also, the initial hypotheses have been revisited to test them under these new findings. Finally, an attempt has been made to make a sense out of these new understandings in order to place them in the wider context of the overall politics of Iran. Accordingly, this chapter has been divided into four sections. These sections are titled "Summary of the Study, "Major Findings", "Testifying the Hypotheses" and "Implications of the Study" respectively.
I. Present Political System of Iran

A Brief Political History of Modern Iran

"Modern Iranian History began with [the] nationalist uprisings against foreign economic intrusions in the late nineteenth century (Banks 1998: 429)." The year 1906 has been considered as a turning point in the history of modern Iran. This is so believed since in this year the Shah of Iran was forced to grant a limited constitution (Tulsiram 1985: 13). The coalition that forced the Shah to take this drastic step included merchants, clergy and intellectuals. This Constitutional Movement had earlier started in a dramatic manner in December 1905. The immediate cause of such a protest movement is believed to be the increased price of sugar. This increase in the price of the sugar was the result of the new tariff agreements which was seen as pro-Russian (Ibid.). The subsequent events that took place were indeed dramatic.

On December 11, 1905, a group of merchants showed their protests by calling for a strike and the bazaars were completely closed. The government of the Shah did not keep quite and retaliated strongly. The protesting merchants were flogged and on December 13, some two thousand merchants and clergymen took sanctuary at a nearby shrine of Shah Abdol Azim. These merchants were headed by two moderate Mujahids, Sayyed Mohammad Tabatabai and Sayyed Abdullah Behbahani (Ibid.). This proved to be the climax of the constitutional movement.

In the shrine, the merchants demanded a "house of justice (Yahya 1970: 258)." The protest movement had reached a stage where it was not possible to pacify these merchants. The events that took place subsequently, took a serious turn. Consequently, on August 5, 1906, considering the intensity of the protest movement, Shah Muzaffar al-Din granted a constitution and a Majlis (Tulsiram 1985: 14). This effectively reduced the power of the Shah. The Shah’s power was further curtailed due to a particular provision in the constitution that made it compulsory for the Shah to ratify any foreign agreement by the Majlis (Ibid.). This resistance movement against the Shah’s autocratic rule was first of its kind in the modern Iranian history. However, the prime fury of the masses was directed against the foreign influence in the sphere of the Iranian state.
A second revolutionary movement in 1921 was also directed against the similar type of foreign influence (Banks 1998: 429). This revolution was initiated by Reza Khan. Reza Khan was an army officer who had seized power and four years after acquiring that power ousted the Qajar family. Thus he established the Pahlavi dynasty. He adopted the model of Kemalist Turkey and initiated the forced modernization of Iran based on this model. However, his proximity to the Nazis resulted in the occupation of Iran by the Soviet and British forces in 1941. Subsequently, he was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (Ibid.). This ended the era of Reza Khan.

Since the opening years of the twentieth century, Iran was under the suzerainty of the Great Britain and the Soviet Union. As we have seen above, in 1941 these two countries completely occupied Iran in order to ward off a threat of invasion by Germany. In course of time, the situations changed, resulting in the Soviet Union withdrawing its active forces in 1946 and subsequently, in 1950s Iran completely got rid of the Soviet Union (Lal 1985: 8). However, the turbulent phase of Iran was yet to see an end.

“A subsequent uprising of Iranian nationalism resulted in expropriation of the British-owned oil-industry in 1951, during the two-year premiership of Mohammad Mossadeq (Ibid.).” Mohammad Mossadeq had planned a coup in August 1953. When this plan failed, he was arrested by the loyalist army forces. In the arrest of Mossadeq, the loyalist forces were assisted by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The downfall of Mossadeq paved the way for a period in which the Shah assumed a more active role. This culminated in systematic efforts at political, economic and social development. This was hailed by the monarchy as the “White Revolution (Banks 1998: 429).” Later, Iran also got rid of Britain (Lal 1985: 8) and the nation charted its course to an eventful journey.

The White Revolution was formulated between 1958 and 1963. Ansari (2001: 1-2) observes that “situating itself within Iranian political discourse, the concept [of ‘White Revolution’] retained an essential ambiguity until its explicit adoption and promotion by Mohammad Reza Shah in 1963, which was to continue until 1978.” This period was dominated by the ideology of ‘nationalism.’ However, this wave of nationalism was
temporarily “eclipsed” in this period by the popular demands of ‘modernism.’ This in itself was conflicted with the ‘tradition’ of monarchy. Thus Ansari interprets the ‘White Revolution’ as an attempt by the Shah and his supporters to provide a “legitimating myth” for the Pahlavi monarchy. This legitimacy was sought to be achieved by a reconciliation of these contradictions (that were implicit in such ideologies) in the person of the monarch. Ansari concludes that the ‘White Revolution’ not only “undermined the structural foundations of the Pahlavi monarchy, but also crucially contributed to its ideological destabilization (Ansari 2001: 1-2).”

In March 1975 the Shah announced the dissolution of the two-party system that was in place at that time. Now, both the government and the opposition parties were to be controlled by the throne. A decree was also made for the formation of a new National Resurgence Party. This new party was to serve as the country’s sole political group. However, by late 1977, both political and religious oppositions to the Shah had intensified further. Among such opposing sentiments, the conservative Muslim sentiments were represented by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Banks 1998: 429). Khomeini’s leadership provided new vigour to this mass uprising against the Shah.

Ayatollah Khomeini was a senior Mullah of the time who had been living in exile since he had mounted a series of street demonstrations against the ‘White Revolution’ in 1963. In this lead role as the voice of the conservative Muslim sentiment, Ayatollah Khomeini was accompanied by the relatively moderate Ayatollah Seyed Kazem Shariatmadari. Ayatollah Shariatmadari was based in the religious centre of Qom. In their political endeavour, both these leaders were supported by the Liberation Movement of Iran. The Liberation Movement of Iran was a long-established group and was at that time led by Dr. Mehdi Bazargan (Ibid.). This new alliance gave impetus to the protest movement.

By mid-1978 demonstrations against the Shah regime had become extremely violent. The turn of events that were subsequently witnessed, potentially changed the Iranian politics for a long time to come. On December 29, the Shah named Dr. Shahpur Bakhtiar as the prime minister designate. Dr. Bakhtiar was a prominent National Front leader. Merely ten days after Bakhtiar’s investiture, on January 6, the Shah left the country for “an extended
vacation.” Soon after Shah’s departure, on February 1, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran from his exile. Just a week later, Ayatollah Khomeini announced the formation of a provisional government. This provisional government was to be formed under a Revolutionary Council (Ibid.). The clergies led by Ayatollah Khomeini thus got a firm grip over the power.

The legitimacy to the new government was successfully provided by a referendum. In this referendum, held on March 30-31, 1979, a reported 97 percent majority approved the proclamation of an Islamic Republic. Within a matter of days, on August 3, the election of a Constituent Assembly (formally titled as Council of Experts) took place. The Council of Experts was delegated to review a draft constitution that had been earlier published in mid-June. The new constitution, as reviewed by the Council of Experts, was subsequently approved in a national referendum on December 2-3 (Ibid.: 429-430). This new constitution established Iran as an Islamic Republic and gave Ayatollah Khomeini an all pervasive power over the state system.

**Political Transformation in Iran Since 1979**

The Islamic Revolution of Iran had ended one of history’s most oppressive regimes as represented by the Shah. Like every other struggle for similar liberties and freedom, this one too, came as a result of mass uprising. As we have seen above, the struggle that culminated in the 1979 revolution had its beginning in the late nineteenth century. “In fact, Iran was at the vanguard of struggle against oppression and colonial transgression in Asia long before India and China (Banisadr 1981: vi).” It was indeed ironic that Iran finished last in its victory over internal oppression, although the external influences in this country were marginalized much earlier.

“It [the Islamic revolution] effectively completes the process launched in the West by other ideologies that were adopted by or adapted to all other parts of the world (Wright 2000: 8).” The concepts of liberty, freedom and self-rule found new meanings in the Islamic Republic. “It would, therefore, be less than sincere to claim – as some have – that only a particular group was responsible for the revolution, or that the ‘seed’ of the revolution was ‘sown’ in the June 5, 1963 uprising against the Shah (Banisadr 1981: vi).”
The downfall of the Shah was brought out by many ideologically diverse groups and individuals. Such groups and individuals included clergies, merchants, intellectuals, students as well as women. The contemporary history of Iran is a clear testimony of such diverse forces.

It is noticeable that the political developments that have followed in Iran since the 1979 revolution have been largely governed by two major factors (Banan 2004). The first factor is that an ideological system was established in Iran which was ruled by political associations of doctrinal nature. This system was headed by the clergy. It is again notable that this does not mean that the country became entirely an Islamic state. Rather, it implies that in the post-revolutionary Iran, both the country and the society were effectively controlled by the men of religion. This ideology-based system provided the clergy an upper hand in the governance of the state (Ibid.). As we shall see in the later chapters, this factor has been largely responsible for the constricted progress of democracy in Iran.

It is imperative to highlight here the concept of democracy as applied in the Iranian context. “Democracy, or at least the campaign for democracy, in modern Iran definitely begins at the turn of the century with the constitutionalist movement ... although the concept of democracy in theory, and especially its application in practice, was not quite the same as it was understood and applied in the west (Katouzian 2003: 101).” In the post-revolutionary Iran, there are elements of democracy in the highly regimented procedures of the presidential elections and on the Islamic and local consultative levels, “but active political participation in decision-making process is far from being reached (Banan 2004).” Therefore when we talk about democracy in Iranian context, we don’t just think about a democratic government, rather we think of a democratic society that embodies liberty, equality and justice.

The second factor that governs the post-revolution Iran is the fact that this doctrinal ideological system has helped a trend that is bureaucratic and pro-Islamic (Ibid.). This pro-Islamic bureaucratic trend that controls Iranian society has made the reformation of Iranian society and polity more difficult. Islam was generally portrayed as a dying force
prior to the Islamic Revolution. However, this kind of flawed wisdom was effectively defied by the Shia ulama who “became the ‘philosopher kings’ of a new theocracy founded on the doctrine of the Velayat-e-Faqih or the ulama’s direct rule (Milani 1994: 2).” The result of this rule of philosopher has been that apart from Imperial Iran becoming Islamic Iran, it has also become the centre of a new Islamic movement. This new Islamic movement has been so intense that it has haunted much of the world in general and Islamic world in particular during the past decades (Ibid.).” This tone of Islamism, however, has been substantially toned down in the last few years as we shall see in the subsequent chapters.

“Post-revolutionary Iran has undergone significant socioeconomic, political, and ideological transformations with legal, material, intellectual, and institutional consequences (Hooshang 1988: 6).” For understanding the political transformation of post-revolutionary Iran, Banan’s (2004) classification is found helpful. Banan classifies Iran since 1979 into three main stages “which highlight the traditional and continuing conflict between conservatives who call for adherence to the revolution’s strict ideology and reformists, who demand freedom and change (Banan 2004).” These three stages are: (1) The Period of Revolutionary Islam (1979-88); (2) The Period of Construction (1988-97); and (3) The Period of Openness (1997-2005). We take up these three stages in detail in the following paragraphs.

(1) The Period of Revolutionary Islam (1979-88): Immediately after the Islamic revolution, its leaders tried to convey to the Iranian society that adopting Khomeini’s philosophy would not mean that Iran was moving away from modernism. However, very soon Iran was found to be diverging drastically from all symbols of modernism. This was in fact necessitated by some bitter experiences that the ruling clergies had with the relatively liberal leaders. The attitudes of some liberal political leaders such as Mehdi Bazargan, Abolhassan Bani Sadr and Mohammad Rajai were found to be a threat to the rule of the clergy and hence they found it judicious to distance away from modernism. The result was that the revolutionary leaders began to express their unwillingness to bargain from their Islamic principles (Ibid.)

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By the third year of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters were in total control of the Iranian state and its revolutionary institutions. “For all practical purposes, the opponents of the Islamic Republic had been either silenced, killed, or exiled (Milani 1994: 197).” The ruling clergy also began to impose forcefully its revolutionary logic and religious values. Consequently, the promises of modern and liberal values that were initially emphasized were gradually erased. The impact of such policies was such that “the post-Shah period witnessed strong repression of individual, political and social freedoms, and could not really be considered less oppressive than the last days of the monarchy (Banan 2004).” The ruling clergy had taken such approach in order to hold a tight grip over power, however, this approach instilled great amount of dissatisfaction in the minds of the Iranian people.

(2) The Period of Construction (1988-97): This period coincides with the two tenures of Rafsanjani as the president of the Islamic Republic. The government of Rafsanjani tried to take some positive steps in order to improve the economic and social conditions of Iran. He tried to rebuild the war-torn economy of Iran and dealt with the problems associated with the high population growth. Rafsanjani also made an attempt to end the political isolation of the country that had resulted because of Iran’s extremist and antagonistic international policies of the previous decade. He showed a keen interest to bring about change in the Iranian policies and sought to establish a pragmatic legitimacy (Ibid.).

These steps of Rafsanjani were clear indication that Iran was slowly drifting towards reforms. However, the conservatives remained strong throughout this period holding tight grip over the decisive institutions of the country. Nevertheless, the reformist movement as espoused by Rafsanjani was still able to grow within the religious system (Ibid.). In a way, Rafsanjani had cleared some of the road blocs that Khatami was about to face during his attempts to social and political reforms.

(3) The Period of Openness (1997-2005): The third stage of Iran that began with the election of Khatami in May 1997, promised to a great extent a more open society. Khatami’s victory over the conservatives’ nominee Ayatollah Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri
ushered in a new period that could be described as a transition from the age of the charismatic leader to the age of the people’s welfare. “For the first time since the revolution, the religious camp was confronted by the prospect of real change, as represented in Khatami’s election programme, which gave priority to issues of civil society, law, respect for others and dialogue with the West (Ibid.).” Khatami’s election was a breakthrough as it was for the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic that a candidate opposed by the clerical establishment had won with such a huge margin.

The election of Khatami was a break from the past since the Iranian revolution and the rise of Islamic revivalism and fundamentalism in the 1980s and 1990s had posed a new challenge to the democratic tendencies in the Islamic world. Khatami sought to give a new direction to the Islamic Republic. Appleton’s (2000: 13-14) observation is relevant in this context when he contends that though the immediate post-Cold War era seemed to promise the continuation of the third wave of democratization “the 1990s witnessed more, not less, political instability and democratic reversal (Appleton 2000: 13-14).” Khatami’s election and his enthusiasm towards democracy and civil liberties promised positive changes in the minds of the people of Iran.

Like every other revolution in the world, Iran’s Islamic Revolution too created the new political elite. The distinct feature of Islamic revolution was that the fundamentalists became the ruling elites. Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters were at the heart of this new elite structure. Other members of the Iranian elite included the fundamentalist ulama and the top officials of the government. The revolutionary institutions and the armed forces were important part of the elite structure. “Although the fundamentalist camp was not homogeneous from the outset of the Islamic Revolution, it demonstrated a remarkable degree of cohesion when fighting its rivals. More than any other group, the fundamentalists recognized and defended their corporate interests (Milani 1994: 197-98).” This posed great difficulties to Khatami in his fight for social and political reforms.

In the Muslim world, Islam has been a major force in politics and society since the 1970s. This factor has largely challenged the development theory that was built upon the concepts of secularization and modernization (Appleton 2000: 14). Iran was struggling
along the same line since its establishment as an Islamic Republic. The Islamic government of Iran had itself come to realize by the 1990s that ideological rhetoric did not offer much in the way of material benefits. "The ability of Iranian traditionalists neither to effectively run the affairs of the modern state nor to reconcile their traditional outlook of Islam with modern issues (e.g., democracy) has helped increase the popularity of Islamist reformists in Iran (Ibid.: 130)." Khatami's approach was to capitalize on this account.

The prevalent demand for social and political reforms was evident in more than one ways. The April 1992 parliamentary elections in Iran clearly emphasised this point. This election brought to the Iranian Majlis a host of new representatives who were ideologically less radical than their predecessors. It would be naïve to see this shift in ideological orientation as a change of heart by the Iranian leadership. Rather it was due to the popular resentment at the worsening economic and social situation in Iran. The standard of living of Iranians had been steadily declining ever since the revolution. "The overwhelming popular support for President Muhammad Khatami in Iran since 1997 further reflects the Iranian electorates' anxiety over economic problems and political heartache (Ibid.: 130)." Khatami was aware of this mindset of the people and sought to challenge the ruling clergy based on this popular support.

**Iranian Political System**

The political system that was established as a result of Islamic revolution has been largely a result of Ayatollah Khomeini's vision of state and society. From the very outset Khomeini tried to make it amply clear what type of state he wished to establish. This was evident as much in the provisions of the new constitution as it was in Khomeini's speeches and proclamations. On April 3, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini in a radio television announcement, officially announced the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the 12th of Farvardin (April 1st) was confirmed as the beginning of the Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed:

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"All are obliged to follow Islamic rules. Our market must be an Islamic market. It must be cleaned of all inequalities. All present governmental ministries and governmental offices and all future ones must be based
upon Islamic principles. A country which has a tyrannical form must be changed to a country which has a Divine form.” (Ministry of National Guidance: 9)

Ayatollah Khomeini made it clear that his state would be Islamic in all aspects – economic, social as well as political. According to him, only this form of politics and society could promise egalitarianism and justice. A divine state was thus established with the clergy as its custodians. A look at the preamble brings forth the nature of the state that was sought to be envisaged in Iran after the Islamic revolution. The preamble of the Iranian constitution of 1979 says:

“The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran bespeaking the cultural, social, political and economic organs of the Iranian society, is based on Islamic principles and precepts and reflects the true aspirations of the Islamic nation. The nature of the great Islamic Revolution of Iran and the course of struggle of the Muslim people from the beginning till victory, which crystallized decisive and forceful slogans of all sections of the people has outlined these fundamental aspirations, and now at the dawn of this great victory our nation demands the achievement of such aspirations with all its heart and soul.” (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

Hence it is evident that the Islamic Republic of Iran intended to follow the Islamic principles in every sphere of life. All organs of government would be Islamic in nature and the policies and procedures followed by its functionaries would be according to the Islamic principles. Khomeini had himself emphasized his views on the subject reiterating that he considered Islam as a ‘Political Religion’. On August 24, 1979, upon the occasion of Id-ul-Fitr (the festival which marks the end of the month of fasting) Ayatollah Khomeini declared:

“Islam is a political religion. It is a religion in which politics can clearly be seen in the instructions and rituals. The purpose of the gathering daily in mosques in Islamic countries, in all the provinces, villages and remote districts is so that Moslems can become aware of their own problems as well as the problems of deprived and abased peoples.” (Ministry of National Guidance: 22)

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In effect, the Shia Islam was established as the official state religion. The constitution of the Islamic Republic placed supreme power in the hands of the Muslim clergy and named Ayatollah Khomeini as the nation's religious leader (Velayat-e-Faqih) for life. The power of the Velayat-e-Faqih is immense. Velayat-e-Faqih is the supreme commander of the armed forces and the Revolutionary Guard. He has the authority to declare war. Importantly, the Velayat-e-Faqih is empowered to dismiss the president following a legislative request or a ruling of the Supreme Court. He is in fact formally responsible for the delineation of national policies in all areas (Banks 1998: 431). The concept of Velayat-e-Faqih is enshrined in Article 5 of the Iranian Constitution which says:

"During the Occultation of Hazrate-e Valli-e Asr (The Mahdi (or the Messiah)) (May God hasten his reappearance) the leadership of the nation in the Islamic Republic of Iran shall be the responsibility of a Faqih (Jurisconsult) who is just, virtuous, has contemporary knowledge, is courageous and efficient administrator. He shall assume such responsibility in accordance with the provisions of Article 107." (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

The Velayat-e-Faqih is therefore clearly made the guardian of the Iranian nation. The Iranian Constitution reflects very well Ayatollah Khomeini’s thinking regarding the role of religious leader on the governance of an Islamic State. The institution of Velayat-e-Faqih "serves as the constitutional base for Ayatollah Khomeini’s leadership in Iran (Bilgrami 2004: 16)." From the outset, Khomeini was aware of the oppositions to his concept of the Velayat-e-Faqih or the ‘leadership of the theologians.’ This is evident from one of his speeches. On November 5, 1979, Khomeini gave the following message on the Constitutional Law to the students of the Faculty of Economy of Isfahan University and a Technical Development Group dispatched to Kurdistan:

"With the Will of God, Parliament will be established. The Constitutional Law will be put to a vote. It is nearly finished. It will be put to vote after we read and approve it. If our people show coldness, it is one of the cases in which there is a conspiracy, in order to discourage people from this Constitutional Law. Ask them which article among all articles of this Constitution is a reactionary? Originally the first article which they put their finger on was article five, ‘leadership of the theologians’. It is an Islamic pattern and because they are afraid of Islam and they consider Islam to be reactionary, they do not dare call Islam reactionary." (Ministry of National Guidance: 63)
Evidently, Ayatollah Khomeini sought to establish that Article 5 had to stay, no matter how much there might be oppositions to it. Khomeini made it clear that the ‘leadership of the theologians’ was not just the core of the whole political system, but it was something extremely desirable for the success of the Islamic Republic. Thus, Ayatollah Khomeini continued:

“So many progressive ideas are hidden in the idea of the leadership of the theologians which are not obvious in other articles you see. People themselves elect a person whose ethics, religion and nationalism, as well as his knowledge and actions are set. Such a person supervises the situation so that treason is not committed.” (Ministry of National Guidance: 63)

Apart from making the power of the Velayat-e-Faqih amply clear, Khomeini also delineated the position of the president in the Iranian political system. He continues in this speech:

“The same is true of the President whom people themselves elect. With the Will of God, they will appoint an honest person from now on. But nevertheless, an expert, religious theologian, who has spent his whole life in theology and has served Islam for a lifetime, is elected for precautious measures to observe what he does, lest he does wrong. Our coming President will not do wrong but precautious measures have been taken in order to prevent it from ever happening. Our military, gendarmerie and other high-ranking leaders are no longer persons who are treacherous. But precautious measures have been taken so that the theologian, as an observer, supervises sensitive affairs. This is among the most progressive articles they approved in the Constitutional Law.” (Ministry of National Guidance: 64)

As reflected from Ayatollah Khomeini’s speech, the president was practically subordinated to the Velayat-e-Faqih without a shred of doubt. In accordance with Khomeini’s conviction, gradually all positions of power were placed under the watchful eyes of the clergy. Khomeini’s vision was drafted in the constitution of the Islamic Republic and thereafter all opposition was effectively neutralized. In October 1981 the position of the president, which had been occupied by a non-clerical figure, was also given to a clergyman, Hojjat al-Islam Ali Khamanei. Thus very soon “Khomeini had attained his primary objectives of Islamizing the state according to his own perception of
As referred in the above speech of Ayatollah Khomeini, according to the provisions of Article 107 of the Iranian Constitution, an elected Assembly of Experts appoints the country's Supreme Leader. The Assembly of Experts is composed of 83 Mullahs and has broad powers of constitutional interpretation (Banks 1998: 431). A detailed account of the role of the Assembly of Experts is given in Article 107 which says:

"After the Religious Authority and great leader of the universal revolution of Islam and founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Late Ayatollah-AL-Ozma-Imam Khomeini (may God bless him), who was recognized and accepted for religious and political leadership by the decisive majority of the people, the Leader shall be determined by the Khobregan (Experts) elected by the people. The Leadership Khobregan shall examine and discuss about all Fqihs (Jurisconsults) qualified under Article 5 and Article 109 hereof. Should they find one of such Fqihs as a greater authority on religious matters and issues of Fegh (Religious Jurisprudence), or on political and social issues, or having popularity or special distinction in one of the qualifications mentioned in Article 109 hereof, they shall choose such a Fqih as the Leader. Failing this, they shall choose and declare one of them as the leader. The leader thus chosen by the Khobregan shall have Velayat-e Amr (Religious and political leadership) and all responsibilities arising therefrom. The Leader is equal before law with other people of the country." (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

The conditions that were delineated in the Constitution for becoming a Velayat-e-Faqih, was at the time of Khomeini fulfilled most suitably, apart from himself, by Ayatollah Hossain Ali Montazeri. Therefore, in November 1985, following Khomeini's advice, the Assembly of Experts appointed Ayatollah Montazeri as Khomeini's designated successor. Montazeri was a distinguished theologian and a former student of Khomeini. Therefore he was found to be a natural choice for the coveted position.

However, Montazeri’s subsequent behaviour regarding Iran-Iraq war and the functioning of the government was not to the liking of the clergy establishment. Montazeri had sincerely protested the abuse of human rights in general, and in Iranian prisons in particular. He also made clear his opposition to the large scale corruption and the abuse of power by the government officials. This kind of behaviour of Montazeri was seen as
intolerant by Khomeini and the clergy in power. They considered it as naïve, disloyal and ultimately dangerous to the clerical hold over power. Therefore, in March 1989 Khomeini asked Ayatollah Montazeri to resign. Ayatollah Khomeini also set up a body to review the constitution as it was warranted by the changed conditions due to Montazeri’s removal from the designated post (Moin 1994: 92).

The removal of Montazeri was a turning point in the history of Islamic Republic. He was the only leading theologian after Khomeini holding the desired revolutionary credentials. This peculiar situation compelled the Assembly of Experts to appoint a less qualified man, who lacked the stature of Khomeini, as his successor. It was inevitable as no major Faqih was available to lead the country according to Khomeini’s principle of Velayat-e-Faqih (Ibid.: 92). The issue of Montazeri’s removal had a long term repercussion in the Iranian power struggle as we shall see later.

According to the Iranian Constitution, the president has been designated as the country’s chief executive officer and is popularly elected for a maximum of two four-year terms. The legislative authority is assigned to the ‘Majlis’ (Iranian Parliament) which is unicameral. Its members also serve four-year terms. According to the original constitution of 1979, there was also a provision of a prime minister. However, as part of the basic law revisions approved by a referendum in July 1989, the post of the prime minister was eliminated. The president has been authorized to appoint members of the council of ministers. This appointment, however, is subject to the legislative approval. The Majlis has also been empowered to impeach the president by a one-third vote of its members (Banks 1998: 431). Evidently, these provisions make the president’s power limited to a great extent, which is quite unlike the unelected Supreme Leader, who is equipped with unlimited power by the same constitution.

Article 115 of the Constitution enlists even further specifications in the selection of the presidential candidates. It specifies that the president must be elected from among the religious and political personalities. A long list of qualifications is described in the Constitution that must be fulfilled by the person who wishes to contest the post of the president. The presidential candidate must be of Iranian origin and nationality. He must
have the ability to be an administrator and must be resourceful. His record must be good and he has to be trustworthy and pious. He must believe, furthermore, in the Islamic Republic’s fundamental principles and the country’s official religion. It is not difficult to see that these required qualifications are difficult to meet and the election officials themselves concede that “these rules are nebulous (Samii 2001: 651).” These provisions also indicate that the president is supposed to be a non-clergy man as against the Velayat-e-Faqih, who must be a clergy.

The check to the presidential candidacy has been institutionalized by the creation of the Council of Guardians. According to the Iranian constitution, a Council of Constitutional Guardians is empowered to veto presidential candidates. This Council can also nullify laws considered contrary to the Constitution or the Islamic faith. The Council of Guardians consists of six specialists in Islamic Law who should be appointed by the Velayat-e-Faqih and six jurists who are to be elected by the legislature from the nominees selected by the High Council of the Judiciary (Banks 1998: 431). This is perhaps the most difficult stage to pass for any person wishing to become the president of the Islamic Republic.

The Council of Guardians is an extremely powerful body. Its configuration shows that it is desired by the Constitution that the Council should be dominated by the clergy. The prime responsibility of the Council of Guardians is interpreting the constitutional law and supervising elections. Largely, the Council of Guardians has worked along Khomeini’s line. However, at times it has refused to go along with Khomeini’s directives. The land reform issue may be cited as an example of the differences between Khomeini and the Guardians Council. In order to avoid such confrontations, Khomeini had later authorized laws passed by the parliament to take effect even if the Council had vetoed them (Delury 1983: 473). This effectively positioned the Velayat-e-Faqih above the Guardians Council.

A Council for the Expediency of Stated Decrees was created in February 1988 to mediate the differences between the ‘Majlis’ and the relatively conservative Council of Guardians. The Expediency Council is composed of six clerics and seven senior governmental officials. The original configuration reflected the tilt of the Expediency
Council towards the non-clerical domain. However, the authority and size of the Expediency Council were expanded in March 1997 by Ayatollah Khamenei. This change was seen by some analysts as “a way to preserve the influence of the clergy if it were to lose control of the Majlis (Banks 1998: 431).” Khamenei had taken this measure as he was lacking in the charismatic essence that was commanded by his predecessor Ayatollah Khomeini.

Guardians Council

The configuration of the Guardians Council in the present form has a history of its own. Although, the first draft of the Islamic Republic’s constitution had proposed a twelve-member Guardians Council, it was supposed to be made up of five clerics and seven laymen. This was done to ensure that all legislation was compatible with Islam. However, the power of the Council of Guardians to actually veto legislations was limited (Samii 2001: 644). There was a debate among the secular and socialist parties regarding the nature of the membership of this Council. The secular parties had argued for greater decentralization and greater power for the legislature. On the other hand, the socialists and Marxist parties contended that the proposed constitution would legitimize the “anti-revolutionary intentions and activities” of the “bourgeoisie” (Bakhash 1990: 77 in Samii 2001: 644).

Ayatollah Khomeini thoroughly disapproved this kind of debate and strongly rebuked those who tried to divulge the constitutional provisions away from Islam. In late June 1979 the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini urged a meeting of clerics in Mashhad to fight back. He said in his speech:

“It is those knowledgeable in Islam who may express an opinion on the law of Islam. The constitution of the Islamic Republic means the Constitution of Islam. Don’t sit back while foreignized intellectuals, who have no faith in Islam, give their views and write the things they write. Pick up your pens and in the mosques, from the altars, in the streets and bazaars, speak of the things that in your view should be included in the Constitution.” (Ayandigan 23 June 1979 in Samii 2001: 645)

This kind of exhortation to the clerics by Ayatollah Khomeini and his indication to a foreign conspiracy showed Khomeini’s desperation against any compromise in his
Islamic schemes. It is also notable that at that time Hojatoleslam Ali Khamenei, who is now the Supreme Leader had objected to the inclusion of any lawyers (Baktiari 1996: 61 in Samii 2001: 645). Consequently, in the Article 91 of the Iranian Constitution that was adopted in December 1979, the final provision was made for six clerics and six jurists (Samii 2001: 645).

This is how the present form of the Council of Guardians took place. The Council of Guardians thus consists of six specialists in Islamic Law and six jurists. The six clerics are appointed by the Velayat-e-Faqih. The six jurists, however, are elected by the legislature from the nominees selected by the High Council of the Judiciary. The Council of Guardians is empowered to veto presidential candidates (Banks 1998: 431). More importantly, it is responsible for interpreting the constitutional law and supervising elections. These provisions have made this Council an “extremely powerful body” (Delury 1983: 473).

Article 99 of the Iranian Constitution delineates the power of the Guardians Council to approve the credentials of the candidates for elected offices. According to this article, “the Guardian Council has the responsibility of supervising the elections of the Assembly of Experts for Leadership, the President of the Republic, the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and the direct recourse to popular opinion and referenda (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran).” Though this provision was made to save the power from going in the wrong hands, it has come to be “the most debated role of the Guardians Council (Samii 2001: 645).” This kind of power has also been seen as a great obstacle towards any kind of reform in the Iranian political system.

The Republic of Contradictions
“The intense factional struggle that has come to characterize virtually all aspects of life in contemporary Iran has its roots in the ambitious proposition put forward at the birth of the Islamic Republic ... that it be both an ‘Islamic’ state run by clerics and a republic ruled by popular consent (Abdo 2001: 9).” This political contradiction may be associated with many of the political dilemmas that are faced by the Iranian nation. From the very beginning, the Islamic Republic has been a state divided between competing centres of
power. At times it becomes a daunting task to trace and define the real centres of political authority in the Iranian political system. “The conflict that is gripping Iran today is a manifestation of contradictions deeply embedded in Iran’s governing structure (Takeyh 2003: 43).” This contradiction also gives great leverage to the Supreme Leader in asserting his own voice wherever specific constitutional provisions are found to be vague.

It is therefore rightly observed that the “failure to resolve this tension in a lasting and profound way has badly weakened the cohesion of the clerical class, undermined the legitimacy of the Islamic system, and left the state increasingly paralyzed in the face of mounting internal pressures (Abdo 2001: 9).” The original constitution had pledged that the foremost purpose of the state was to “create conditions under which may be nurtured the noble and universal values of Islam (Algar 1980 in Takeyh 2003).” However, the inherent contradictions made the attainment of this mission extremely difficult.

To achieve this mission, the constitution was drafted in such a manner that provisions were made for unelected institutions. Such unelected institutions were further empowered with the ultimate authority over national affairs. The Spiritual Leader and the Guardians Council were two such unelected institutions, with huge powers. Still, the structure of the Islamic Republic differed significantly from that of a typical totalitarian state. This was so because the constitution also empowered Iranian people to elect the president, parliament, and the municipal councils. “Such perplexing duality reflects the legacy of a revolution that saw a diverse coalition of secularists, liberals, and fundamentalists uneasily cooperating in the overthrow of the monarchy (Takeyh 2003: 43).” The result of this mix, however, was a kind of chaos that saw intense power struggle among the competing elites.

Consequently, the disagreement and tension have persisted in implicit or explicit form. These disagreements have been mainly between those seeking to establish a divine order and those advocating a more representative polity (Ibid.: 43). We have seen above how Montazeri was ousted when he did not fit in the scheme of the ruling elites. Even before the removal of Montazeri, Ayatollah Khomeini was experiencing a lot of difficulties in ruling the country. When he found it difficult to run the government strictly according to
the Islamic texts, Khomeini was forced to take drastic measures.

This is the backdrop which necessitated Khomeini’s historical statement on ‘Velayate Motlaqeh-ye Faqih’ or the absolute rule of the theologian. On, January 1988, Ayatollah Khomeini declared: “Islamic government, which stems from the absolute guardianship of the Prophet Muhammad, is one of the primary injunctions in Islam, taking precedence over all subsidiary precepts, even praying, fasting, and performing Hajj (Moin 1994: 92).” This proclamation served as the extreme step taken by Khomeini to control the whips of the government by giving him the ultimate authority in all matters of governance.

Ayatollah Khomeini had made it clear that such an absolute authority could even abrogate the constitution (Ibid.: 93). This was indeed an extremely unprecedented move and had great implications. Now, the Faqih was able to change, or at least revoke, all legal rulings which had been firmly enshrined as part of Islamic law. Evidently, it was Khomeini’s impatience that had prompted him to justify the Faqih’s assumption of absolute political power (Ibid.).

The inherent contradictions of the Iranian political system are also evident in terms of the position of the political parties in the country. Article 26 of the Constitution of Islamic Republic provides that the “formation of parties, societies, political or professional associations, as well as religious societies, whether Islamic or pertaining to one of the recognized religious minorities, is permitted provided they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, the criteria of Islam, or the basis of the Islamic Republic (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran).” Thus, political parties are technically authorized “although no candidates at the 1984, 1988, 1992 or 1996 Majlis balloting were permitted to declare formal party affiliation (Banks 1998: 431).” Even after 1996, the situation was no different in this regard. This has effectively rendered the political parties out of the system of the political process as they are not formally recognized.

In the latter years of the monarchy, only the Shah’s official parties were functioning
legally. However, during the first two years of the 1979 Iranian revolution, nearly 100 political organizations came up. The sudden emergence of huge number of political organizations of various types was seen by the ruling elites as a threat to the Islamic Republic. Some of these political organizations including Tudeh Party and the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization were quite open in their opposition to the clerical domination of the government. Therefore Ayatollah Khomeini ordered a severe crackdown on such opposing groups. After the completion of this exercise of silencing such political organizations, the Spiritual Leader ensured the passage of a political party law in September 1981. This law was directed towards stipulating the nature and function of political organizations (Fairbanks 1998: 20). The extent to which political parties are allowed to function in Iran today is largely the result of this legislation.

According to the current position of the Iranian political system, “Iran’s electoral system is a two-ballot (run-off) plurality model (Sarabi 1994: 101).” The choice of plurality model with a second ballot was made by the ruling elites since it served the interest of the clergy at the cost of the voters. This is so because “in the absence of political parties and the presence of a large number of independents, candidates sponsored by the major factions enjoyed a clear advantage (Ibid.: 103).” And the major factions obviously are the representatives of the ruling clergy.

Such contradictions in the Iranian political system have compelled some observers (Katouzian 2003: 10) to conclude that Iran has been an arbitrary state and society throughout its history. Katouzian believes that power and authority have never been based in law in Iran. Iranian “state and society have been virtually independent from, hence, antagonistic towards, each other; the state has not been representative of the higher social classes; on the contrary, they have been its clients by virtue of the privileges it has bestowed upon them (Ibid.).” Khatami’s attempts of social and political reforms were in fact directed towards reversing this status quo and make the state as the representative of the people.

Muhammad Khatami’s victory in the 1997 presidential election was the result of an increasing desire for change in the minds of the people. The people vying for a more
A representative state gave him unprecedented degree of popular support. It was genuinely hoped by these supporters of Khatami that the Iranian system would open up politically. They also looked forward to the prevalence of a more meaningful party activity which had been practically banned for the past 16 years. However, the clerical regime had always considered the establishment of parties by civil groups as a direct threat to their control over power. They saw such active political parties as against the theory of the divine legitimacy of the regime. “The alternative, however – official government parties – would amount to little more than the party system under Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (Fairbanks 1998: 17).” This was one of the major dilemmas by which the ruling clergy was grappling at the time of Khatami’s election.

As a result of Khatami’s victory, numerous political organizations started registering themselves in the late 1990s. Such organizations were regarded as either ‘conservative’ or ‘reformist’, and were representative of the respective factions in the legislature. However, regardless of the popular demand, “under the Iranian electoral system, political parties do not field candidates per se at elections, but instead back lists of candidates, who are allowed to be members of more than one party. In early 2004 there were estimated to be more than 100 registered political organizations (World Regional Survey 2005: 447).” This reflects how difficult it was to effect a substantive change in the Iranian political system.

The huge majority of Iranian population that voted Khatami to the post of the president had expected people’s government and institutions of civil society in Iran. However, the ideas of representative government and civil society were difficult to reconcile with the rule of the theocracy. The reconciliation of an Islamic government with an Islamic republic was difficult to achieve. It was not easy to answer whether the political parties were to arise from the people or they were to be imposed by the regime as was seen in the period of Shah. This was one of the most divisive issues for the Khatami era and the failure to settle this pressing issue effectively put a question mark over the validity of Khomeini’s theory of Velayat-e-Faqih and the rule of the clergy (Fairbanks 1998: 31).
II. The Post of the President

The present form of the president is the result of the constitution revision which was implemented in July 1989. This constitutional revision was warranted by the political situations of Iran before the death of Ayatollah Khomeini on June 3, 1989. We have taken up such situations in detail in a preceding section of this chapter. Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, who was the Speaker of Parliament at that time, was one of the initiators of this revision. The result of this revision was that the president was granted an expanded responsibility (Buchta 2000: 22). However, despite this revision, the power of presidency was still no match to the power that was enjoyed by the Supreme Leader or the Guardians Council.

Structurally, the main effect of the constitutional amendments of 1989 was to create a presidential system. The post of the prime minister was abolished in favour of the president. Now the president was responsible for selecting his council of ministers. These ministers would be subject to the legislative approval. The president was to be elected by the people as per the earlier provision of the constitution (Zubaida 1997: 107). The removal of prime minister’s post therefore removed at least one of the dualities of the Iranian political system.

Despite the constitutional revision, the influence of the president remains primarily over the economic, social and cultural policies of the country. In the foreign policy matters the Iranian president does not have much say (Buchta 2000: 23). The post of the Iranian president is unique in many respects. Although Iranian president is popularly elected, his election must be confirmed by an unelected supreme religious authority. In fact, in the Iranian political system, the entire executive branch is subordinated to a religious authority. According to the Iranian constitution, only the Velayat-e-Faqih has an overarching power over all matters of governance. The most startling feature of the Iranian political system is that it is perhaps the only system where the state executive exercises no control over the armed forces (Milani 1993: 94 in Buchta 2000: 23).

It is important to emphasize here that unlike many Islamic countries, the Constitution of
the Islamic Republic is not the Islamic Sharia. However, the Sharia has been privileged as the source of Iranian legislation. The dualism in the Iranian Constitution is evident in the simultaneous existence of the posts of Velayat-e-Faqih and the president. Thus there is a dualism between the sovereignty of the people and the sovereignty of the God. The Velayat-e-Faqih or the sovereignty of the God is more powerful as it combines the legislative and executive functions. Also, as the supreme mujtahid (jurisconsult), the Supreme Leader exercises the ultimate powers of interpretation of the religious sources. This effectively makes him the ultimate authority in regards to the approval of all legislations (Zubaida 1997: 106). These provisions are clearly posed in such a manner that any president would find it extremely difficult to go against the wishes of the Supreme Leader.

The president’s power is trifled as compared to the power of the Supreme Leader. It is the Supreme Leader and not the president who holds the power to appoint and dismiss the chief of general staff, the other chiefs of the defence forces, and the head of the Revolutionary Guards. Similarly, the president, despite being elected by popular vote, has to be appointed by the unelected Supreme Leader. The Leader also holds the power to dismiss him (Ibid.).

It is worth noting that this kind of all pervasive power was assigned to the post of the Supreme Leader considering the charismatic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. These powers appeared quite appropriate for Ayatollah Khomeini due to his personality. Therefore, the section of the constitution dealing with the powers of the Supreme Leader was written with him in mind as the undisputed leader of the revolution. However, “since his death in 1989, constitutional amendments and political developments have diminished that power of the Leader (Ibid.).” Naturally, this so happened since no other leader after Ayatollah Khomeini could fit his place and stature.

The Iranian Constitution envisages that all laws passed must be in accordance with the Sharia, the Quran and the Traditions. This is ensured by the institutionalization of juristic supervision. This supervision is conducted by the Council of Guardians which consists of six qualified jurists and six lawyers. These lawyers are selected from various branches of
the law. The provision for six qualified (i.e., lay Muslim) lawyers implies that a degree of religious laity is desired among the ruling elite. This is one of the many contradictions of the Iranian political system. Evidently, “the republic is not envisaged as being entirely clergy-dominated, and the restrictions placed on the office of president by comparison with the authority of the jurist could be read as assuming that the president is likely to be a layman (Martin 2003: 162).” It is this religious laity that provided some scope of political manoeuvring to the reformists as represented by president Khatami.

III. The Islamic Revolution

It is often observed that Iran finds it difficult to get away from its revolutionary past. This makes it essential to place the contemporary politics of Islamic Republic in the context of its Islamic revolution. The Iranian revolution has been considered as one of the epic events of the post-war world history. The political mobilization that was witnessed during this revolution was remarkable in many respects. The way an apparently stable regime of the Shah was overthrown in 1978-79 took most observers by surprise. What was even more surprising was the fact that the new regime that took Shah’s place was not secular, but completely theocratic. The study of Iranian Revolution serves as “an important case-study of how far Islam as a religion can explain the course of political events in a late twentieth-century context (Halliday 1995: 42).” Its understanding also explains many of the contradictions that are found in the political system of the post-revolutionary Iran.

The Islamic revolution had overthrown the pro-Western authoritarian Pahlavi regime in February, 1979. The victorious new government came from the conservative Islamic movement led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. He was a prominent Shia cleric of Iran who returned from his exile in Paris to establish an Islamic state in the place of old regime. With the arrival of Khomeini in the Iranian scene and “with the success of the Iranian revolution, a new era of political Islam was born (Gerner 2000: 119).” The repercussions of Khomeini’s rule were felt not just domestically but also internationally, since he sought to export his brand of Islam.

Ayatollah Khomeini, along with his followers, implemented a conservative political
agenda to the revolutionary Iran. This agenda was sought to be entirely derived from the traditional Islamic thought and practice. The clerical regime led by Ayatollah Khomeini claimed that all laws of the land would be in accordance with the Sharia. However, it was soon realized that in actual practice the implementation of Sharia also involved the imposition of such conservative social norms that were not actually addressed in the Quran. The Islamic Republic of Iran was completely subordinated to the clerical rule when the supreme authority of the state was placed in the hands of religious councils which chose a supreme religious leader. Khomeini held this position of the Supreme Leader until his death in 1989 (Gerner 2000: 119).

The Course of the Revolution
The events that ultimately resulted in the fall of the Shah had spanned over a period of more than one year. Since 1941, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had been ruling the country and at least since 1953 his rule was increasingly autocratic. One important event of 1953 was the military coup that had overthrown the nationalist government of Mohammad Mosaddeq. This military coup was carried out with the assistance of the United States and Britain. Since the overthrow of this nationalist government there was not witnessed much of an open opposition to the regime for some time. However, the period 1960-63, was an exception when the Shah faced some protests against his reforms. This protest was made by the nationalist politicians and a section of the clergy led by Ayatollah Khomeini. They had also protested against the Shah’s control of the political life of the people of Iran (Halliday 1995: 48).

The event of Mosaddeq and his nationalist government forced the Shah to realize that an effective internal security service was needed if such happenings were to be avoided. This is how the notorious SAVAK was established. SAVAK was a large organization set up in 1957 for the internal security. Its establishment was aided by the American CIA and the Israeli Mossad. This kind of assistance made SAVAK extremely efficient. However, the external assistance also “added to feelings against the countries that helped train SAVAK (Keddie 2003: 134).” The establishment of SAVAK made the rule of the Shah even more autocratic.
In order to pacify the populace, the Shah initiated a series of social and economic reform programmes during the 1960s. This was hailed by the regime as the ‘White Revolution’ and claimed to be directed towards the welfare of the people. The regime of Shah was compelled to take such measure of reforms since he was facing both internal and external pressures. However, this reform measure could not prove much helpful to the regime. “Many believe that the White Revolution and its land-reform programme led to the pauperization of peasants and their exodus to urban areas, factors that in turn contributed to the revolution of 1977-79 (Ashraf 1996: 21).” Still, one can say that the immediate political repercussions of such reform measures could not be called as drastic.

The drastic oppositions to the Shah were evident after over a decade of apparent calm. The initial impetus to this opposition was provided by activities related to a newspaper article which insulted the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini. In January 1978 street protests were organized by religious students in the city of Qom. They protested heavily against this insult on their leader and for the next few months there were successive protests and strikes in the main urban centres of Iran (Halliday 1995: 48). The protest movement was indeed under progress in a big way now.

This protest was also the reaction of a large scale crackdown on the clergy in the 1970s. During this time, the Shah had persecuted more than 600 religious scholars in one way or other. Also, in the last years of monarchy, many religious buildings were attacked by the police. “Indeed, the clerics had fallen on hard times in the 1970s (Clawson 2005: 89).” The insult of their leader was too much to bear for these clerics.

The political protests against the Shah began in September 1978. At the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, over one million people rallied in Tehran as the traditional religious processions. This was however seen as a political protest against the Shah. The Shah therefore retaliated on 8 September by imposing the martial law. This was also followed by the shooting of the demonstrators. A wave of strikes began in October (Halliday 1995: 48). The political opposition to the Shah was in full force and it was not difficult to see that these strikes had “sealed the shah’s fate (Clawson 2005: 92).”

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These strikes were initially organized to make economic demands or as protests against the press censorship. However, by late November and December, they set in motion a process which led to a nationwide political general strike. The timing of these strikes was of importance from the point of view of the revolution. By this time, Khomeini had become an active leader and was seen as the symbol of opposition to the Shah’s regime. Khomeini declared from his base in Paris that there would be no compromise with the Shah (Halliday 1995: 48-49). The masses in Iran largely followed Khomeini by now.

The Shah was taken by surprise by this scale of mass unrest. His growing self-confidence in the 1970s had prevented him from anticipating such a mass opposition. He was not prepared to deal with such unanticipated opposition. Moreover, “his cancer, the drugs he was taking, and probably his doubts about American and British intentions, added to his tendency to withdraw and collapse in face of opposition (Keddie 2003: 237).” Consequently, encountering such uncompromising opposition to his rule, the Shah left Iran on January 16. He was never to see his country again. The government was now in the hands of former opposition leader Shahpour Bakhtiar. When Bakhtiar asked Khomeini for a compromise as a condition for his return from exile, Khomeini refused. The popular pressure forced the government to allow Khomeini to fly into Iran from Paris on February 1. Ayatollah Khomeini was “greeted by millions of deliriously happy Iranians (Clawson 2005: 93).” With the return of Ayatollah Khomeini on Iranian soil, a new era of Iranian history had begun.

As mentioned above, the Shah had left behind a government headed by former opposition leader Shahpour Bakhtiar. The army that was left by the Shah was completely demoralized and divided. Bakhtiar, who headed the government now, had discredited himself in the eyes of the Iranians as he was seen to accept his office from the Shah. Precisely because of this reason, Khomeini had refused to negotiate with his government. Consequently, after returning to Iran on 1 February, Khomeini pronounced Mehdi Bazargan as the head of a rival government. This way, Iran had two governments for ten days (Halliday 1995: 49).
On 10 and 11 February, pro-Khomeini mutinies followed in the garrisons of Tehran. Thereafter, the groups of armed civilians seized control of government buildings and military camps. In the ensuing conflict between Khomeini and Bakhtiar the army command declared itself neutral. At last, Bakhtiar and his associates along with the remaining royalists either fled or were arrested (Ibid.). The Iranian government was now completely in the hands of the revolutionaries headed by its undisputed leader Ayatollah Khomeini.

The new Bazargan government, under the supervision of Ayatollah Khomeini, then proceeded to institutionalize the post-revolutionary regime. On 30 March a referendum proclaimed Iran an Islamic Republic. Similarly, in November 1979 a new Islamic constitution was passed by a referendum. Ayatollah Khomeini was now officially accepted as the Velayet-e-Faqih or supreme judicial authority (Ibid.: 49). As we have seen earlier, the power that was granted to the post of Velayet-e-Faqih, made it the most powerful organ of the Iranian political system. Ayatollah Khomeini was thus in complete control of the Iranian politics and society and the rule of the clergy in Iran was in full force now.

A popular revolution overthrowing a repressive despot is neither strange nor unique. The history of revolution is full of such examples. “Truly startling, however, was the role of Islam played in precipitating the Islamic Revolution and its emergence as the hegemonic ideology in postrevolutionary Iran (Milani 1994: 1).” Iran’s revolution surprised nearly all foreign observers. “That the opposition to the shah rallied behind the banner of Islam was the revolution’s greatest surprise (Clawson 2005: 88).” This revolution had far-reaching changes in the Iranian society. It dramatically reversed the Western-style modernization that had been the central feature of the Iranian life since the early years of Reza Shah’s reign (Ibid.: 88).” This dichotomy of modernism versus traditionalism was the main essence of the ensuing power struggle between the reformists and the conservatives in the post revolutionary Iran, particularly in the Khatami era.
IV. Iran after Revolution

The Islamic revolution had thus established a new system in the place of the old one. However, there were many challenges ahead. Two features lie at the root of every revolution. One is the discontent that is directed towards the existing situation, and the other is the aim of establishing another, different situation. “Understanding a revolution means knowing the causes of discontent, and knowing the aim which the people have (Afshar 1985: 201).” We take up these two features in detail for a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary Iranian political system which is largely the result of the Islamic revolution.

The Iranian revolution was mainly the result of the reaction to an extremely repressive regime of the Shah. Naturally, the hopes that were generated in the minds of the people by this revolution were extremely high. However, as the time progressed, this revolution proved to be disappointing to its original supporters. After the revolution, Iran was subjected to the inner conflict between the theological and the material. The initial round of this conflict went in the favour of the theological and the clerical since the clergy were holding tight the strings of power. “But, as the time passed, the impact of the material, and of a broad popular aspiration for economic improvement, became more evident (Halliday 1995: 74).” This engrossed the whole of Iran into a continuing battle in all segments of politics and society.

It is rightly observed that when a revolution achieves victory, in reality it has only reached the beginning of the path it wants to follow. Therefore, the victory of a revolution means the removing of the obstacles in order to reach the goal (Muhajeri 1982: 71). The people of Iran were rightly expecting some positive changes in their lives due to the change of the regime. Khomeini’s achievements in his ten years in power were considerable as the leader of the revolution. After successfully leading the revolution, Khomeini was successful also in remaining in power. He can even be credited for the smooth transition of power that took place after his death (Halliday 1995: 67). However, in terms of satisfying the people’s aspirations from the revolution, his achievements at best could be termed as limited.
In fact, the post-revolutionary history of Iran has highlighted the limitations of the solutions offered by the Islamic clergy (Ibid.: 74). The course of revolution and the eight-year war with Iraq that followed immediately after the revolution had brought a lot of material hardships in Iran. Many sections of the Iranian population had been alienated by the repression that followed the revolution. Still, the “ten years after Khomeini came to power, the Islamic Republic enjoyed considerable legitimacy within Iran: it was this support that made it more possible for Khomeini’s associates to organize a smooth transition (Ibid.: 68).” However, the alienation of so many people from the system was something that was generating discontent in some sections of the society.

The leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini had ensured that the legitimacy of the government remained intact despite this discontent. “People cannot stage a revolution without leadership, just as the leadership cannot fulfill a revolution without the people’s forces (Jihad-e-Sazandegi 1982: 61).” Since, Ayatollah Khomeini was the leader of the Revolution, even after the revolution, during the first decade of the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian people generally rallied around him. However, gradually, the discontented and alienated Iranians either fled the country, or joined the militant anti-regime organizations such as the Mujahidin-e Khalq. Still, “by and large, the 1980s were marked by the solidarity of Iranians with the new, revolutionary Islamic Republic (Calvert 2008: 127).” This task was not easy to achieve and it was surprising that the clergy could maintain such strong hold over the power despite such increasing internal oppositions.

The decade of Khomeini’s rule was not without its own turbulence. It was marked by the growing power of his followers and elimination of the opposition groups. The oppositions were often silenced by violence. The period also witnessed increasing enforcement of ideological and behavioural controls on the lives of the people. The original goals of the revolution were greater freedom and social equity. Although some successful social programmes were introduced, these goals were largely not fulfilled. The “events of the first decade produced widespread disillusionment both with Khomeinism and with various leftist alternatives (Keddie 2003: 241).” However, Khomeini emerged successful in keeping the system intact despite these turbulences.
Khomeini’s success was mainly because the clerical elite proved to be more unified and competent than its opponents. The ruling elites managed to build a functioning state which was supported by a powerful security forces. The traditional bazaar bourgeoisie and the clergy were the popular classes that continued to support the Islamic regime. “Increasingly in the postrevolution period, political and economic power was concentrated in the hands of the Khomeinist clergy and the bazaar bourgeoisie (Ibid.: 255).” These classes heavily reaped the benefits of the power at the cost of many other sections of the society.

Despite the seemingly stable regime of Ayatollah Khomeini, his last years were marked by great difficulties. The primary reason for this instability was the uncertainty within the ideology of the revolution itself. The regime was struggling to maintain the precise role of the state in the new post-revolutionary situation. It was also struggling to explain the precise relationship between government and Islam (Halliday 1995: 68). These were some tough challenges that were faced by Iran during this time and needed immediate attention. These questions had been making the system inherently destabilised during the last days of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Iranian politics after Khomeini era has been divided by Keddie (2003: 263) into two major periods: (1) From mid-1989 to spring 1997; and (2) The period of Mohammad Khatami as President. The first period was the period of presidency of Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani. He generally allied with the new Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. Rafsanjani’s government had achieved some economic reconstruction of Iran after the Iran-Iraq war. He also made attempts to improve Iran’s foreign relations. However, he did not appear to be willing to attempt drastic changes that would have significantly improved Iran’s domestic and foreign situations (Keddie 2003: 263).

The second period of post-Khomeini era started in the spring of 1997 when the reformist Mohammad Khatami won election with huge margin. Khatami and other reformists tried to introduce increased freedom of the press. They also tried to bring freedom in other cultural matters and were successful to some extent. However, these attempts were encountered by a powerful conservative backlash. This backlash resulted in reassertion of
many controls on the people’s behaviour such as their speech and writing. Consequently, there was a widespread disillusionment among those sections of Iranian society that hoped significant reforms after Khatami’s victory. However, the struggle for power continued in Iran and the Iranians showed their solidarity to the reformists by voting for them in several elections at local and national levels (Ibid.: 263).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have prepared the ground on which the whole thesis would evolve. We have started with the definition, rationale and scope of this study. The main objectives and hypotheses of the study have been enlisted. Also, a note on the adopted research methodology and the design of the thesis has been presented. The first section of this chapter started with a brief political history of modern Iran. We have explained how modern Iranian history is said to have begun in the late nineteenth century. The relevance of the year 1906 and the constitutional movement has also been highlighted. Also, the significance and politics of White Revolution have been covered in detail.

The two factors governing the political developments in Iran since the 1979 revolution have been: an ideological system and the bureaucratic pro-Islamic trend. These have largely helped the clerics in maintaining control over the system. They have also made it difficult for the reformers to change the system and introduce modernism and liberalism. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic embodies the vision of Ayatollah Khomeini regarding the role of the religion in the governance of an Islamic State. The institution of Velayat-e-Faqih serves as the constitutional base for Ayatollah Khomeini’s leadership in Iran.

It is observed that the provisions of the constitution of the Islamic Republic have made the Iranian political system full of contradictions. The ensuing factional fighting has also been largely the result of these vague constitutional provisions. The ambitious proposition of making Iran both an Islamic state as well as a republic has made the system prone to destabilisation.
In the second section of this chapter we have seen that the present form of the president is the result of the constitution revision which was implemented in July 1989. This had followed immediately after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Iran’s presidency is unique in many respects. The influence of Iranian President is primarily over the social, cultural and economic policies of the country. The President does not have much say in the foreign policy.

The constitutionally weakened position of the president vis-à-vis the Supreme Leader and the Council of Guardians makes it extremely difficult for the president to come up to the people’s expectations who actually vote him to power. In fact many of the executive and legislative functions are combined in the post of the Supreme Leader who is not popularly elected. Therefore, a dualism is found in the Iranian Constitution between the sovereignty of the people and the sovereignty of the God.

In the third section of this chapter a brief account of the Islamic revolution has been presented. We have highlighted the major course of events preceding the revolution in order to place the contemporary Iranian politics in its revolutionary perspective. We have noted how the authoritarian Pahlavi regime was overthrown in February 1979 and it was replaced by the conservative Islamic government led by Ayatollah Khomeini who was a prominent Shia cleric. Khomeini implemented a conservative political agenda that was derived from traditional Islamic thought and practice.

In the last section of this chapter we have described how Iran became the site of a competition between the theological and the secular forces. Initially, the theological forces had smooth sailing. However, as the time passed, the broad material aspirations of the people put some pressure on the clerical regime. During the ten years of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic Republic enjoyed considerable legitimacy within Iran. However, after Khomeini, the Iranian system saw factional fighting between the competing forces.

Post-Khomeini era has been divided into two major periods. The first period coincides with the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani. The second period is the period of two tenures of Mohammad Khatami as the president of Islamic Republic. This latter period
saw some serious efforts towards reformation and the resultant stiff power struggle between the reformists and the conservatives. With this background in mind, we proceed to the second chapter wherein the theoretical framework is developed.