Chapter 3
Genesis and Evolution of Power Struggle in Iran

This chapter traces those factors and forces which contributed to the factional division of the power elites in Iranian political system. Further, it also incorporates the ensuing power struggle between such politically polarised 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 pr-revolution Iran. Then it explores how Iranian political elites were divided into different opposing factions during the course of the revolution itself. An attempt has 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 the point 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 had died which left a power vacuum which was very difficult to fill. This resulted in an intense power struggle among the warring factions of Iranian elites to capture power. The period between 1989 and 1997 has been dealt subsequently in this section. Notably, this section stops the treatment of the subject before the beginning of the Khatami era. The development of power struggle during Khatami period has been undertaken in the fourth section of this chapter.

During the later part of 1990s, the politics of Iran was highly polarised into two distinct opposing camps. These camps were generally known as the 'reformists' and the 'conservatives'. Hence, 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 the behaviour of these factions has been understood under the light of the wider ideological context. The discourse on Islam and liberal ideas are important to explain this phenomenon of friction within the ruling elites. The different
sub-factions within these two broad camps have also 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 briefly takes up the matter of power struggle during Khatami period. The emphasis here is to find out the factors which were responsible for bringing about the segregation of political elites into two evident warring factions during this period. A full treatment to this subject is given in the case study in the next chapter. The political conditionings promoting this phenomenon have been traced. Having done that; an account of the course of events illustrating power struggle between the reformists and conservatives have been presented in this section.

I. A Historical Overview of Power Struggle in Iran

Elite Formation in Pre-Revolution Iran

Until the mid nineteenth century, Iran was a medieval monarchy. With the help of the Western investments and loans, Iranian Shahs attempted to modernize the country which was greatly helped by the oil wealth by the beginning of the twentieth century. Then Iran witnessed a bitter civil war during the first decade of the twentieth century in which a constitution and parliament was granted. Thereafter, an immense progress was witnessed during the 1920s and 1930s (Clawson 2005: 1).

The period of 1951-1953 witnessed another confrontation which revolved over the oil nationalization under Prime Minister Muhammad Musaddiq. Still, Iran continued on its path to rapid modernization. "Then came the Islamic Revolution in 1979; Iranians shocked the world, through, not so much by overthrowing their increasingly autocratic and aloof Shah, but by replacing him with a theocracy (Ibid.)."

Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, who was the ruling monarch during the Iranian revolution of 1978-79, had acceded to the throne in 1941. His claim to the throne came after the twenty-year rule of his father whose reign was full of chaos. It was with the help of the British and Russians that Reza Shah could secure the throne after his father was
deposed by these foreign forces. Thereafter, the new Shah made all attempts to establish a strong base for his political support. He also tried to build a strong army with the help of his foreign friends. With his civil and military elites, he could continue to maintain a tight grip over power (Zonis 1971: 3).

However, an aborted assassination attempt and a failed coup exposed the weakness of Shah's civil and military elites. The Shah had survived Mosaddiq's challenge because of the Imperial Iranian Armed Forces. Therefore, the Shah further strengthened his army with the help of the United States (Ibid.: 3, 4). Now, using the power of his strengthened military, the Shah went on to neutralize the Iranian Communist Party, the Tudeh and the supporters of Mosaddiq (Ibid.: 4).

After the calm prevailed, the Shah started his experiments with new forms of control. He created a two-party system which failed to work. When his political opposition mounted, the Shah tried to pacify it by his policy of liberalization (Ibid.: 4). Thereafter, by 1963, he introduced his populist Six-Point Reform Program. However, no sooner had these programmes earned universal support than the Shah once again backed off. He supported the formation of a single political party in 1964, encompassing his favourite set of elites whom he termed as progressive (Ibid.: 4).

The 'White Revolution' coincided with the death of the Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Hosein Borujerdi in 1961. Ayatollah Borujerdi was a powerful conservative leader of the Shia community. His death gave way to the opening up of the clerical establishment to new ideas. Because of this, the division took place in the rank of the clerics resulting in three broad factions. The largest faction included highest ranking ulema which continued the stance of their predecessors. The second faction consisted of those ulema that collaborated with the Pahlavi regime. These ulema were denounced by Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers as 'clerics of the palace' (Rahnema 1996: 35).

The third faction consisted of militant clerics who hailed from the religious establishment of Qom. By opposing the actions of the Shah including the land reform, women's suffrage and American diplomatic immunity, they sought to appease those ulema who
resented such actions. This group rallied around Ayatollah Khomeini, who commanded a charismatic personality. Ayatollah Khomeini therefore soon emerged as a new object of emulation with the title of the Grand Ayatollah (Ibid.: 35).

A memorandum of July 1972 shows that a plan was put in place to destroy the influence of Ayatollah Khomeini. This was to be achieved by linking Ayatollah Khomeini with the Baathist regime in Iraq with which Iran was experiencing tense relations during that time. Therefore, it was planned to discredit Ayatollah Khomeini by fabricating such documents which would show his collaboration with the Iraqi government (Akhavi 1980: 135).

The significance of this memorandum is that it showed the regime's increasing antagonism towards the clergy. It was also during this time that the regime had started a Religion Corps and had shut down the Husayniyah Irshad (Ibid.: 137). Dr. Ali Shariati was active in the Husayniyah Irshad during 1967-1973 and was working towards the reform of the clergy. He was also critical of the "bureaucratization of power" and therefore became the target of the Shah's wrath (Ibid.: 143).

After destroying the organized internal opposition (Zonis 1971: 4) the regime had broadened its international support which included "not only the United States and its Western allies, but also the USSR and other Communist nations as well (Ibid.)." It was only after ensuring the firm grasp over the political process that "the Shah had devoted himself and Iran's continually increasing oil income to internal development (Ibid.)." However, despite the ensued progresses, Reza Shah could not make a popular political base. Even the single party did not prove much helpful. This way the Iranian political system was only defined by the Shah and his relationship with his political elite (Ibid.: 5).

The Shah and his political elite were the two primary actors in the political process. The Shah was the dominant political actor. While the Shah's decisions directly affected the political elite, he himself was influenced by the behaviour of the elite. "There was a feedback system at work in which the Shah and the elite, whose makeup he had largely determined, interacted and together elaborated Iranian politics (Ibid.: 9)."
“Most of the literature on the political history of modern Iran has mainly focused upon the theme of the oppositional political behaviour of the Shia ulama (Alam 1998: 110).” This was mainly due the two successful revolutions in which the Shia ulema had played dominant role. These were the constitutional revolution of 1905-06 and the Islamic revolution of 1978-79. Therefore, a distinct feature of the modern Iranian society has been the active participation of Shia ulema in their political struggle against the ruling regime (Ibid.).

However, it is notable that the same religion has also been used by the successive Iranian regimes in their pursuance of power. “Much like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, an enquiry into the political history of Iran reveals that the successive regimes in Iran right from the Safavid to the present day government, have used Shiism and its institutions in order to acquire and consolidate power, to enhance the legitimacy of the regime and to eliminate political enemies (Ibid.: 111).” Significantly, this factor provides a certain amount of continuity in the transition of Iran from pre-revolution to its post-revolution period.

Elite Factionalism during Revolution

The “dissent movement” that culminated in the Iranian revolution of 1978-79 was not monolithic (Abidi 1989: 112). This movement was constituted by two broad groups. The first group was that of ‘Islamist-nationalists’. The other was a cluster of ‘secular’ groups. This secular cluster can be further divided into three different groups. The fist of them was the group of anti-revolutionaries. This was primarily composed of the ‘monarchists’. Despite being the dissidents, they were not in favour of the revolution. The second secular group consisted of the ‘republicans’. These were the revolutionaries and some of them also held government positions in the post-revolutionary period (Ibid.).

The third group of the secular cluster consisted of an assortment of the rest of the groups. None of these groups was either compact or monolithic (Ibid.). All these dissidents “coalesced in two main ideological strains (Keddie 1993: 614).” These strains had “already existed in embryo in the revolution of 1905-11 (Ibid.).” The secular or ‘liberal’ were in favour of Westernization. However, the Islamic-nationalists or the ‘fundamentalist’ wished to “return to a ‘pure’ Islam, particularly as interpreted by
Ayatollah Khomeini and those around him (Ibid.). Since the fundamentalists shot into prominence during the revolution of 1978-79, it was termed as ‘Islamic revolution’ (Keddie 1993: 614).

At the ideological level, there was one more type of dissenting force which was represented by the Left (Abidi 1989: 150). The Fedaiyan-e Khalq, the Mojahedin-e Khalq, Paykar, the Tudeh Party of Iran and the Kurdish Democratic Party were the principal constituents of the Left in Iran (Ibid.). The first three groups were guerrilla organizations. They came into being in the early 1970s. The Fedaiyan and the Mojahedin were subject to the major repression of the Shah and were the largest in terms of their following. “The Fedaiyan, the Mojahedin and the Paykar entered the revolutionary fray as separate organization (Abidi 1989: 150).” Keddie (1993) observes about the Mojahedin-e Khalq:

“The important guerrilla group, the Mojahedin-e Khalq, combined new interpretations of Islam with socialist ideas that were often close to those of the great orator and hero of progressivist Islamic revolutionaries, Ali Shariati (d. 1977). Significantly, none of these groups or individuals should properly be termed ‘fundamentalist’ or even fully ‘traditionalist.’ Most merely wished to escape the related evils of internal despotism and of ‘Westoxication’ – socioeconomic and cultural dependence on the West.” (Keddie 1993: 616)

Since the revolution of 1978-79 was participated by many groups of differing ideologies and interests, including secular, leftists, liberals and religious, the resulting state saw a “self-styled Islamic republic (Ibid.: 614).” “The 1978-79 revolution was clearly Islamizing, despite the far greater Westernization of education, law, government, culture, and the economy that had taken place by then (Ibid.: 614).” Keddie argues:

“For fifty years the Pahlavi dynasty had forced the Westernization of Iran. In the course of that Westernization the customs and beliefs as well as the prerogatives not only of the ulama but of many bazaaris and ordinary peasants, nomads, and the urban poor were attacked. Far more than the Qajars, the Pahlavis were perceived as tools of Western or Westernized powers, chiefly the United States and Israel. Even the liberal constitution had been subject to autocratic manipulation. The regime came to be seen as, among other things, too Western, and there developed among the
alienated a search for roots and for a return to ‘authentic’ Iranian or Islamic values.” (Keddie 1993: 614)

As a reaction to the Westernization of Shah regime, many Iranians started propounding “progressive versions of an indigenous Islamic ideology (Ibid.: 614).” This was done to ensure the restoration of Iranian self-esteem. “Such versions were possible because so many liberal and even leftist ideals were contained in different strands of the Islamic revival (Ibid.).” Among such Iranians, Mehdi Bazargan and Ayatollah Shariatmadari were representatives of the “liberal ideals (Ibid.).” These people were also among the prominent figures of the revolution and had influenced the factions of the post-revolutionary Iran.

Ayatollah Taleqani and Ali Shariati gave even more “progressive interpretations of Islam (Ibid.).” “Many continued as late as 1978-79 to advocate enforcement of the constitution of 1906-07, although they stressed the necessity of implementing its provision for a committee comprised of five or more of the ulama to ensure the compatibility of laws with the sharia (Ibid.).” All these people had long term influence on the coming generations of the Iranian leaders.

The peculiar political system that followed the Islamic Republic after the revolution of 1978-79 had its own history. The conception of an “Islamic government” in Iran was earlier devised in a simplistic form by Navvab Safavi whose ideas “may have been influenced by Khomeini’s Kashf al-Asrar (Moin 1999: 223).” Safavi was a charismatic figure and had his own followers. However, Safavi lost his life due to his resort to violence for imposing Islam on society. After Safavi’s death, his followers turned to Khomeini for this cause in the early 1960s. Khomeini was an emerging leader during that time (Moin 1999: 223).

When the revolutionaries became victorious and the Shah regime was overthrown, then Khomeini was under immense pressure from the followers of Navvab Safavi for implementing the rule of Islam in its entirety. However, due to his pragmatic orientations, Khomeini did not want to part ways from the secularists immediately. Khomeini also
didn’t want to repeat the mistakes made by Navvab Safavi (Ibid.: 224). So he took a different course.

Consequently, in accordance with the wishes of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Iranian constitution that was devised after the revolution reflected the attitudes of both Islamists and ‘secularists (Ibid.).’ These were the two main types of Khomeini loyalists in the Assembly of Experts which was assigned the task of producing the constitution. Therefore, while the Assembly of Experts “laid the foundation for a theocracy and for a legal system based on Islamic jurisprudence (Ibid.),” it also included some provisions for popularly elected institutions.

The Islamists wanted the “Islamic rule with the Quran as its ‘constitution’, untainted by the Western concept of democracy and division of powers and responsibility (Ibid.).” The secularists, on the other hand, wanted the new constitution to have at least a “semi-democratic structure (Ibid.).” The accommodation of the two different groups resulted in “a peculiar political formula (Ibid.: 225),” which made the state theocratic despite having some traces of a republic. Understanding this way, the name ‘Islamic Republic’ for the post-revolutionary Iran, appears self explanatory.

In fact the establishment of a theocracy after the revolution was not imagined by many Iranians who played major role in the revolution. For instance, Bani Sadre had played a very significant role during the revolution and was “instrumental in the success of Khomeini (Omid 1994: 89).” During Khomeini’s exile in Paris, from where he worked towards revolution, a number of Muslim intellectuals had helped him. These included, apart from Bani Sadre, Sadeq Qotbzadeh and Ebrahim Yazdi. Although they were not clerics, they were devout followers of Khomeini’s teachings (Ibid.).

“This entourage was convinced that given care and good management Khomeini would remain a spiritual leader and that on their return, they, the intelligentsia would take over the government (Ibid.).” These people wanted to set up “a form of democratic socialism” in Iran after the revolution. Like Ali Shariati, Bani Sadre also “combined a firm belief in Islam with a conviction that Islamic rule would be representative, democratic, and
welfare-oriented – views that he had already expressed widely in his writings on Islamic politics and economics (Ibid.)."

When the new constitution made the revolutionary Iran a theocratic state, these participants of the revolution were surprised as much as the world at large. Therefore, it may be said that the genesis of the factional conflicts of contemporary Iran could be found during the course of the revolution itself. Abidi concurs:

"In the political mosaic of Iran on the eve of the revolution there was a plethora of political and professional groups and group-lets which insisted on the basic freedom as the first imperative. The relationship of most of these with the clerics was an uneasy one. The Islamic spectrum itself had varying colours. Its largest and most extremist component was dominated by Ayatollah Syed Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini. However, there were other Ayatollahs who did not share his views and vision and who, on the other hand, thought on modernizing and reformist lines. Secularist, moderate, and reformist Muslims dissented from Khomeini’s concepts as well as his hostility towards nationalism and Socialist ideas. While no one, at that time, openly criticized Khomeini, disagreement did exist, and that was the latent source of dissent in post-revolution Iran." (Abidi 1989: ix)

Abidi argues that the “dissent movement which boiled into a revolution was propelled by the concerted efforts of secular and religious segments but, under specific conditions the decisive thrust was provided by the cleric leadership (Ibid.: 1).” The way the new constitution turned up had frustrated many participants of the revolution and this frustration, though dormant during Ayatollah Khomeini’s time, became visible after his death. Abidi sums up this frustration in these words:

"Neither the secular liberals nor the Marxists nor even the Muslim freedom fighters known as Mojahedin even contemplated an Islamic theocracy headed by Ayatollah Khomeini, as a viable substitute for the Shah’s dictatorship. Members of these political factions and the average apolitical Iranians aspired for a more pluralistic progressive society. The religiously inclined Iranians, that is, the majority of the Iranian population, wished to see a secular type of Shiite state run by laymen. The political unrest in Iran reflected the tense sense of frustration felt by all major groups of opposition who not only felt betrayed but also helpless in their power struggle with Khomeini and his aides.” (Abidi 1989: 9)
Ayatollah Khomeini was himself totally aware of this ‘frustration’ and the resultant opposition to the rule of theocracy. This is evident from his message that was delivered on November 5, 1979. Forcefully defending his ‘Islamic Republic’, Ayatollah Khomeini said:

“The same persons who shouted and wrote, ‘Who needs Islam. Let’s have a Republic’, are afraid of Islam. They say, ‘Let it be a Democracy or a Democratic Republic’. They do not understand that there are so many democracies known today in the world but do you know any country in which the great powers have acted on the basis of democracy? The word democracy is used in a special way by everyone. It has a special meaning to the Russians. It has another meaning to the Americans. It had a special meaning for Aristotle. Today, it has another meaning. We say that we do not want to include something which is ambiguous and is interpreted everywhere in a different sense in our Constitution, so that later on anyone could change it according to his or her own option. We say Islam. Islam does not intimate a different meaning in every place. Islam is clear and every Moslem knows what it means. We say Islamic Republic. Our people have also asked for an Islamic Republic. It is this which our people agreed to in a vote of 98.2 %. 1.8 % is not a significant opposition.” (Ministry of National Guidance: 64)

This conflict was present even at the highest level of the clergy. During the Iranian revolution of 1978-79, “there were two Ayatollah al-Ozmas – Syed Ruhollah Khomeini and Syed Kazem Shariatmadari – who enjoyed the supreme status of ‘marja-e taqlid’ (Source for emulation) not only for the Shiites of Iran but also those in other countries (Abidi 1989: 91).” On political issues, Shariatmadari was “liberal and accommodating (Ibid.)”, while Ayatollah Khomeini was “rigid and assertive (Ibid.)”.

These two Ayatollahs greatly differed in their views on Islam and the role of the ulama in society. “Moreover, Shariatmadari and Khomeini represented two conflicting schools of Shiia ulama which emerged during the Safavid period. They were the ‘useoli’ (rational) and ‘akhbbari’ (traditional) (Abidi 1989: 91).”

Ayatollah Shariatmadari was considered a ‘centrist’ and had challenged the “attempt by Khomeini to impose an Islamic republic through the March 30 referendum (Ibid.: 92).” This was a “subtle rebuke” to Ayatollah Khomeini, by his “principal rival”, Shariatmadari “in a struggle for political power (Ibid.)”. Shariatmadari believed that the
clergy "should not involve themselves in politics and government and their duty was to
guide the people on the righteous path (Ibid.)." As opposed to Shariatmadari, Ayatollah
Khomeini's view on the relationship of state with religion was just the reverse as
exemplified in his conception of Velayat-e-Faqih.

Ayatollah Khomeini had completed the task of conceptualising his own brand of
'Velayat-e-Faqih' or the 'Rule of the Jurisprudent' during his long exile in Iraq (Agwani
shows that he had "made notable departures from the Shia tradition both in terms of his
vision of Islam and of the ulama's political role (Ibid.)." Commenting on such departures,
Agwani argues:

"Khomeini's main departure from the Shii tradition lay in giving a new
meaning to the term 'Velayat' (guidance) and a new role to the Faqih
(jurisprudent). In Shia theology there can be no formal Islamic
government during the absence of the Imam and the task of jurisprudents
(Fuqaha) is confined to providing Velayat or moral guidance to the
community. Khomeini reinterpreted the term 'Velayat' to mean
"governance by a jurisprudent", commonly acknowledged as the most
tminent one of his age." (Agwani 1992: 68)

Agwani quotes Ayatollah Khomeini to show Khomeini's conception of the rule of the
jurisprudent. Ayatollah Khomeini has thus been quoted:

"Despite the absence of a provision designating an individual to act on
behalf of the Imam in the case of his absence, the presence of the qualities
of a religious ruler in any individual still qualify him to rule the people.
These qualities which are knowledge of the law and justice are available in
most of our jurisprudent in this age ... If a knowledgeable and just
jurisprudent undertakes the task of forming the government, then he will
run the social affairs that the Prophet used to run and it is the duty of the
people to listen to him and obey him." (Agwani 1992: 68)

Ayatollah Khomeini, however, had taken due care to add that "fitness of a jurisprudent
for rule does not raise him to the status of prophecy or of Imams but only refers to the
practical task of running the State and applying the laws of the Shariah (Ibid.)." This way,
the concept of Velayat-e-Faqih as conceptualised by Ayatollah Khomeini became the
cornerstone of the new constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
The opponents of Khomeini’s theocratic regime initially gathered around Ayatollah Shariatmadari who was the primary rival of Ayatollah Khomeini. “They saw in the dissent between the leading religious figures an opportunity to create further fissures in the Islamic fold (Ibid.: 95).” However, in the ensuing power struggle, “a concerted campaign to debunk Shariatmadari” had been launched which resulted in his public humiliation by making him “the first Ayatollah to be derobed (Ibid.: 96).” With his death in 1986 in “wilderness (Ibid.),” the primary opponent of Ayatollah Khomeini was effectively silenced.

**Political Culture of Iran**

A country’s politics is largely determined by its political culture. Iran has been no exception. Much of what is seen in contemporary Iran can be explained by going back to its history and understanding its political culture. Further, Iran’s political culture has been shaped in many ways by its history and social structure (Gasiorowski 2007: 65). Iran has a long history and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have witnessed many foreign interventions in this country. This has been a primary reason for making most Iranians “deeply nationalistic and wary of foreign interference (Ibid.).” Apart from having its implications on Iran’s foreign policy, much of the domestic politics of contemporary Iran revolves around such themes as nationalism and foreign threats.

Iranians’ nationalist sentiments and their perception of the Shah as a “puppet of foreign powers (Ibid.)” were largely responsible for the nationalist movements which ultimately led to the overthrow of the Shah. Even some of the contradictory behaviour of the political elites that we witness in Iran has its root in its “prickly national pride (Clawson 2005: 2)” and its “rich historical fabric (Ibid.).” As an Islamic theocracy, Iran roots its historic legacy in its own ancient civilization. “The most important festival in Iran today, for example, is Nowruz, the pre-Islamic Persian New Year, when rather than go to mosques, Iranians follow the ancient tradition of lighting bonfires to welcome the spring (Ibid.).”

Although Iran’s recent “Islamic Revival” is new in some respects, “it follows a long tradition in both Iran and in the Muslim world of expressing socioeconomic and cultural
grievances in the only way familiar to most people — a religious idiom arraying the forces of good against the forces of evil and promising to bring justice to the oppressed (Keddie 2003: 3).” Keddie further explains this phenomenon in the following words:

“In Iran as elsewhere, the so-called Islamic Revival does not mean that most people are more religious than they used to be: for the majority the degree of religiosity shows no sign of significant change. Rather, it means that Islam is reentering politics and government in a stronger and more militant way than it had in most areas for many decades. Within this general trend, however, Iran is, to date, a special case, in having ruled by a leader of the regular Islamic ‘ulama’ (a word that in Twelver Shiism can be rendered by “clergy” as all believers must follow the rulings of one of their leaders). This difference between Iran’s religiopolitical movement and that of other Muslim countries is based in part on the contrast between the way the two main divisions in Islam, the Shias of Iran and the Sunni who rule most of the rest of the Muslim world, have developed.” (Keddie 2003: 3)

This explains the unique political culture which is guided by its nationalism while at the same time adhering to the Islamic discourses. However, “the fundamental historical barrier to steady political development in Iran has been the repetitive cycle of arbitrary rule and public rebellion and disorder followed by arbitrary rule, which has been a product of the absence of law, and the lack of social legitimacy for the state (Katouzian 2003: 131).” And this has resulted in the neglect of the basic rights and freedoms to a large segment of the Iranian population which were largely “excluded from the social and political processes (Ibid.: 132).”

Further, “the strong emphases on martyrdom and social justice in Shia Islam have been recurring themes in Iran’s modern history (Gasiorowski 2007: 65).” Even in the 1978-79 revolution, the discourses of martyrdoms and morality became the central themes. This led many Iranians to willingly sacrifice their lives not just during the revolution but even after that in the Iran-Iraq war (Ibid.). This explains much of the political behaviour of Iranian people.

Similarly, the emphasis on political pluralism has also been a recurring theme of the political culture of Iran. “This emphasis on pluralism has led all major popular movements in modern Iran to claim to speak in the name of the Iranian people and
advocate political freedom, constitutionalism, and representative institutions (Ibid.). The impact of such aspects of Iranian political culture was evident in its widest manifestations during the Khatami era politics of reform.

The strong national identity works towards knitting together a “remarkably diverse population (Clawson 2005: 3).” “Iran is a rich mosaic of ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities; Farsi-speaking ethnic Persian Shiites were not a majority at the time of the Iranian revolution (Ibid.).” Though Armenians, Assyrians, Jews, and Zoroastrians are the only recognized religious minorities, in the Islamic Republic, Article 13 makes them “legally free in the practice of their religious ceremonies, on matters of personal status, and religious education (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in Sanasarian 2000: 65).”

Even the Left had profound impact on the political and intellectual history of Iran, despite never holding political power in the country. “From the constitutional period, through the oil nationalization crisis, to the Islamic revolution, leftist forces have played a significant and even, sometimes a determining role (Cronin 2000: 231).” This has resulted in the presence of the Leftist discourses in the Iranian politics in one way or another. “Their influence, in both organizational and ideological terms, on the evolution of Islamist trends, including on Khomeini himself, is clear (Ibid.).”

The impact of such a political culture can be seen on the post revolutionary Islamic regime of Iran that has “always displayed an unusual mixture of authoritarian and democratic features, including a powerful repressive apparatus and institutions that ensure clerical control but also relatively free elections, a fairly open political climate, and frequently intense contestation among the diverse factions of the Islamist elite (Gasiorowski 2007: 67).” These features had large implications on the politics of social and political reform and the ensuing power struggle between the conservatives and reformists that were witnessed during the Khatami era.
The Role of Economy in Iranian Politics

Apart from the social repressions that were witnessed during the post revolutionary Iran, economic grievances were also significant in generating people's discontentment towards the Islamic regime. Considering the importance of economy in Iranian politics, we present here a brief economic background of Iran. This would serve towards placing the economic grievances of the people in proper perspective.

Before the 1920s, Iran's economy was mainly based on agriculture, although some other activities were important such as the trade and manufacturing of textiles and carpets. In Iran, oil was first discovered in 1901 and started playing an important role in the economy in the 1920s and 1930s. Much of Reza Shah's development programmes were helped by the oil revenue (Gasiorowski 2007: 68). Since 1947, oil revenues were used to finance a balanced economic development through successive five year plans. Such developments included the industrialization of non-oil sectors and the maintenance of a substantial agricultural sector (World Regional Survey 2005: 406).

In the late 1950s, oil revenue started growing rapidly and reached an eight-fold increase during 1970-1974 (Gasiorowski 2007: 68). This huge increase in oil revenue resulted in generating "a huge expansion of Iran's economy, with real gross domestic product (GDP) growing by an average of 9.8 percent annually in the 1960s and 12.1 percent in 1970-1976, after which it stagnated for several years and then declined sharply, as the revolution unfolded (Gasiorowski 2007: 68)." In fact, some observers have termed the economic growth of this period as "stunning (Clawson 2005: 84)."

Referring to the Iranian economic growth of the period preceding the revolution of 1978-79, Clawson (2005) mentions a report of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which said:

"During 1960-1976, Iran enjoyed one of the fastest growth rates in the world; the economy grew at an average rate of 9.8 percent in real terms, and real per capita income grew by 7 percent on average. As a result, GDP [gross domestic product] at constant prices was almost five times higher in 1976 than in 1960. This stellar performance took place in an environment

This fact negates any such image which portrays the Shah’s rule as an economic failure (Clawson 2005: 85). However, it is significant to note that despite such economic modernization, there was no occurrence of the political modernization. “The Shah saw the successes of his economic programme as proof of his wisdom and reason for him to have greater power. Society, however, was headed in the other direction: the social impact of modernization was making the population chafe at authoritarianism (Ibid.).” And this was a major reason for the discontent against the Shah’s regime.

“Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has been plagued by an economic crisis of the post-revolutionary type (Behdad 1996: 97).” Although, similar type of economic crisis have been witnessed in other countries facing revolutions, “Iran’s post-revolutionary economic crisis has been aggravated by disputes among proponents of various interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence, the war with Iraq, and frequent gluts in the international oil market (Ibid.).” The international isolation of Iran had also played in the deterioration of its economy. “That Iran was able to conduct a war and manage an economy in a period of declining petroleum prices is a tribute not so much to Khomeini as to the cumulative impact of twenty-five years of rapid social and economic change (Richards 1990: 431)” that preceded the revolution.

“The revolutionary Government that followed the Shah’s downfall reassessed nearly all of Iran’s economic and social strategies (World Regional Survey 2005: 407).” Further, the private investment was reduced sharply due to the revolution and war, resulting in “a 21 percent decline in Iran’s real GDP from its peak in 1976 to its level in 1988 (Gasiorowski 2007: 68).” The problem was further compounded by the high birth rates of the 1980s, resulting in Iran’s real GDP per capita falling by 48 percent between 1976 and 1988 and even many years later, in 2006, it still remained below the 1976 level (Ibid.).

Another important factor affecting the post revolution Iranian economy has been “the disagreement over the degree of government involvement in business (World Regional Survey 2005: 407).” The government appeared to favour an increase in state control after
1981. "However, 'conservative' religious leaders, businessmen, the Council of Guardians and many members of the Majlis maintained that the Government should play a minimal role (Ibid.)." Despite such oppositions to the government control over economy, this period saw the strengthening of those elements in the government which favoured more control of the economy by the state (Ibid.).

However, the period after 1984 witnessed increased economic problems giving strength to the voices of the "pragmatists who wanted to rescue the economy with free market measures and lessened government controls (Keddie 2003: 256)." However, such voices were forcefully opposed by the radicals. "In a vigorous press campaign at the end of 1985 the radicals alleged that the courts were overturning revolutionary measures and allowing expropriated industries to be returned to their former owners (World Regional Survey 2005: 407)." Such conflicts among the various factions compounded the economic problems and therefore "in January 1988 Ayatollah Khomeini decreed that government policies could overrule Islamic law where this was in the interest of the state (Ibid.)."

Thereafter, Iran's leaders carried out a series of five-year development plans for "stimulating the economic growth and employment by liberalizing the economy and expanding its non-oil sectors (Gasiorowski 2007: 68)." However, none of these plans could see much success. The first plan covering the period 1989-1993 faced strong opposition from Islamic Leftists who argued that the liberal economic policies would hurt the poor. When the Islamic Leftists lost control of parliament in 1992, the hopes of economic reform revived. However, many of the ambitious objectives of the second development plan (1994-1999) were still opposed by the new conservative-controlled parliament (Ibid.).

The period of mid 1990s saw a moderate phase of Iran in terms of not only political developments, but also economic reforms. "Consequently, after his election in 1997, President Khatami continued to implement the reforms embodied in the second plan (Ibid.)." Khatami introduced a "new five-year plan" for the period from 2000-2004 which had "many positive features (Siddiqi 2006)." Through this plan, Khatami sought to introduce large scale economic reforms (Ibid.). "The victory of the pro-reform Sayed
Muhammad Khatami in the May 1997 presidential election heralded a more determined pursuit of economic restructuring, deregulation and liberalization (World Regional Survey 2005: 409)." Notably, in comparison to his political reforms, Muhammad Khatami faced less challenge in pursuing his economic reforms.

II. Evolution of Power Struggle in Post-Revolution Iran

Post-revolution Iran has been characterized by "a multiplicity of power centres (Clawson 2005: 93)" which had implications on the power struggle among various factions. Since its inception, the formal structures of the government of the Islamic Republic have struggled to have control over the unaccountable revolutionary institutions. This often resulted in bitter and complex internal infighting (Ibid.). It has been extremely difficult to find a common pattern of the Iranian political scene as they kept changing very quickly since the beginning of the revolution.

"It is easy to get lost in the factional details, but the main recurring theme is the increasing power of the revolutionaries and the constant undercutting of those who would reestablish more modern, normal government and institutions (Ibid.)." The formal power centres of the Islamic Republic are the representative institutions and the "constitutionally-mandated Islamic oversight institutions (Somasundram 2007: 130)."

The Presidency and the Majlis (Parliament) are the representative institutions while the Office of the Supreme Leader and the Guardians Council are the oversight bodies. "The informal power centres include various politico-religious associations, the huge government-linked charities or bonyads, and the paramilitary groups aligned with various factions of Iran's clerical leadership (Ibid.)." The conflict among the formal and informal power structure and further within its own ranks have been a defining feature of post-revolutionary Iranian politics.

Since the beginning of the revolution, a clerically dominated Revolutionary Council had held the real power (Clawson 2005: 94). The liberals in the government initially believed that this was a temporary institution for purging the Shah's bureaucracy. However, it was
soon realized that “the power of the Revolutionary Council foreshadowed the system of dual institutions, with the clerics firmly holding power, which soon came to characterize Iranian politics, economics, and society (Ibid.).” It became extremely difficult to challenge this clerical hold of power.

In the Iranian political system, the Supreme Leader sits at the top holding most of the power. Other powerful institutions are the Guardians Council and the Expediency Council. President and Majlis are much below in the power hierarchy. However, they are significant for providing policy input to the regime. The Guardians Council is entrusted to ensure the Shariah compliance of all legislations. This way it checks the Majlis. The Expediency Council was created in 1989 to mediate between the Majlis and the Guardians Council and it has become increasingly powerful over the years. The Assembly of Experts is another very important body which has the authority to elect and dismiss the Supreme Leader (Somasundram 2007: 130).

The political culture of a county plays a significant role in determining the political dynamics of that country. In case of Iran, different types of political culture can be identified in the different segments of the society. “Most importantly, the political culture of the modern segment of Iranian society differs substantially from that of traditionalist, who are generally more religious, less educated, less cosmopolitan, more reliant on personal connections, and often deeply concerned about the decline of Islam and the spread of Western culture and values in Iran (Gasiorowski 2007: 66).”

The nature of the conflict that post-revolutionary Iran witnessed reflected the typical political culture of Iran. Thus we witnessed the clashes between Islamic leftists and conservatives in the 1980s, centrists and conservatives in the early 1990s, and reformists and conservatives in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Ibid.). The way Islamic Republic was conceived, it was not very unnatural to have witnessed that kind of power struggle among its political elites.
Elite Factionalism in the Islamic Republic of Iran: 1979-89

The Iranian revolution of 1978-79 had united diverse groups into a coalition with the single objective of overthrowing the old regime. However, the inherent differences soon started appearing. A characteristic feature of this revolution had been the leading role of the cleric after the revolution. "Most nonclerics in the opposition underestimated both the probability of clerical rule and the ability of the clergy to rule — this was true of Khomeini's Islamic but nonclerical Paris advisers, of various liberal and leftist groups, and also of the oppositionists who fled Iran, all of whom thought they could come out on top as clerical incompetence was manifested (Keddie 2003: 240)." However, this underestimation of the ability of the clerics to hold power was realized very soon.

Therefore, after the inception of the Islamic Republic, for the first ten years at least, the power was strongly controlled by a relatively small group of clerics. These clerics belonged to the religious colleges and were heavily influenced by Shia themes (Akhavi 1987: 181). Their leader was Ayatollah Khomeini. Other individuals in the ruling elite were his students and shared his mindset. The two major exceptions of this uniformity were Ayatollah Bihishti and Hashimi Rafsanjani (Ibid.). Although the power was concentrated in the hands of these clerics, many other groups (with the exception of the Left) with varying interests were also accommodated in the government (Keddie 2003: 242). Their disagreement, however, were not allowed to surface during the time of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Despite the efforts of the clerical regime to present a united face, the conflict did exist throughout the first ten years. Rafsanjani's statement of July 1986, when he was the Speaker of Parliament, gives credence to this argument. He said, "In Iran ... two relatively strong factions exist. One [the "leftists"] supports the nationalization of most industries while the other [the "rightists"] supports the private sector (Iran Times 25 July 1986 in Akhavi 1987: 184)." Rafsanjani had also indicated that Khomeini did not wish these factions to "clash" or "weaken each other" (Iran Times 20 June 1986 in Akhavi 1987: 184). It also shows how the inherent conflict was contained by Ayatollah Khomeini, never allowing them to surface.
Ayatollah Khomeini could manage to contain such conflicts because of his charismatic personality. "Khomeini was popular because of his uncompromising attitude to the Shah, his anti-imperialist and populist rhetoric, his simple lifestyle and language, and his religious status (Keddie 2003: 244)." However, Khomeini's "position in this conflict between 'right' and 'left' is intriguing (Akhavi 1987: 184)." Nevertheless, at least publicly, he largely tried to remain neutral in case of factional conflicts.

"By the fall of 1980 Khomeinis controlled all institutions except the presidency and some important cabinet positions (Keddie 2003: 252)." Khomeini and his associates consolidated their power through three major stages (Akhavi 1987: 182). The first stage was the referendum on the nature of the political system. This happened in March 1979 and resulted in the endorsement of an Islamic Republic. The second stage was the elections for the Council of Experts. In August 1979, the Council of Experts was assigned the task of drafting a new constitution. The third stage was the referendum on the new constitution in November 1979 (Akhavi 1987: 182).

Akhavi (1987) has enlisted many more stages to demonstrate how Khomeini consolidated power throughout his tenure. Apart from the above three stages, other important stages enlisted by him include: Presidential elections in January 1980; Parliamentary elections in March and May 1980; the reign of terror following the bombing of the headquarters of the Islamic Republican Party in June 1981; the pursuit of the Iraqi troops into Iraq in July 1982; elections for another Council of Experts empowered to select Khomeini's successor in December 1982; mass arrests and detentions of members of the Tudeh (pro-Moscow Communist) Party in April 1983; and finally, the announcement in November 1985 that Ayatollah Muntazeri had been officially elected Khomeini's successor by the Council of Experts (Ibid.).

In their progression to power, some of the clerics became closer to Khomeini than the others. "The virtually undisputed dominance of Khomeini as leader of the new republic weakened any other political forces and encouraged factionalism among those eager for his support (Halliday 1995: 49)." Although, the "new Khomeinist elite" appeared united, "they became increasingly factional (Keddie 2003: 255)." The factions kept changing
over the years depending on the issues. Keddie (2003) divides such factions into three broad categories.

According to Keddie’s categorization, the first faction was the ‘Islamic Left’. It comprised ‘Khomeinists’ and supported land reform and the nationalization of enterprises. It was also against better relations with the West. The second faction was the ‘Conservatives’ or the ‘Islamic Right’. This faction favoured private property and religious control. The third faction, which came later, was the ‘Pragmatists’ or the ‘Modern Right’. This faction was an offshoot of the Conservatives. It mostly focussed on Iran’s economy which was in a very bad condition due to the effects of the revolution, war with Iraq and the exodus of the trained personnel. “Khomeini mostly stayed above the factions and tried to mediate among them (Keddie 2003: 255).” Due to this, the conflicts among these factions could not spill over during Khomeini’s time.

Therefore, the ruling elite appeared “unified enough to prevent the opposition from mounting a challenge to its rule (Akahi 1987: 198).” Further, the opposition itself was in a fragmented state. The political system was centralized around the Supreme Leader and the key judicial institutions. Still, the system was not monolithic. The ruling elite mainly came from the “petit bourgeois or peasant backgrounds”, which reflected the “background of theological seminary students in general (Ibid.).” Their background and trainings had implications on their political behaviour.

Although the elite successively consolidated its power, it failed to evolve consistent public policies. “Part of the explanation for the inconsistencies in (or even the lack of) policies is that revolutionary conditions existed (Ibid.).” The problem was further compounded by the long war with Iraq. It was indeed surprising that the consolidation of power happened without the evolution of a public policy. Another significant fact about the elite was that their “homogeneous training (Ibid.)” could not ensure unity among them.

The clerical elite that emerged by 1980, spent the next eight years monopolising almost all political institutions of the Islamic Republic (Clawson 2005: 97). Surprisingly, instead
of ending the political disputes, the complete victory of the clerical camp in fact resulted in more intense factional disputes. This was so, because they immediately split into competing camps. This was a pattern which kept on repeating time and again in the post-revolutionary history of Iran. “Indeed, factional infighting among the elites has been a constant characteristic of the Islamic Republic; all that has changed has been the composition of the various factions (Ibid.).”

Over the course of the stages in the consolidation of power, the articulation of the political elite evolved. Akhavi (1987) identifies nine key members of these elite as of 1989: (1) Ayatollah Khomeini, whose informal authority as “the Imam” and constitutional authority as the Velayat-e-Faqih was pervasive; (2) Ayatollah Montazeri, who was the officially appointed successor of Khomeini; (3) Ali Khamenei, who was two-term President of the Republic and later succeeded Ayatollah Khomeini (Akhavi 1987: 183).

Other important figures of that time who were listed by Akhavi were: (4) Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, who was two-term Speaker of the parliament and held other important positions; (5) Ayatollah Ali Mishkini, who was the Chairman of the Council of Experts; (6) Ayatollah Abd al-Karim Ardabili, who was the Chairman of the Supreme Court and of the Supreme Judicial Council; (7) Hujjat al-Islam Musavi Khuayniha, who was the State Prosecutor-General; (8) Mir Husayn Musavi, who was the two-term Prime Minister and (9) Ayatollah Muhammad Rayshahri, who was the Minister of Information and Intelligence (Akhavi 1987: 183). Some of these elites continued until the contemporary period of Iran shaping and reshaping the formations of various factions.

Akhavi also enlists some other important elites whom he calls “the second level of elite”. Although, they did not take part in daily strategic decision-making, they were consulted for advice and were in a position to object to cabinet decisions, legislative enactments or judicial verdicts. In this group were the six members of the Council of Guardians and officials of the Supreme Judicial Council. The cabinet members such as the Ministers of Interior and Islamic Guidance were some additional actors. The Commander of the
Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards) was also in a very crucial position in the structure of political elite during that time (Ibid.).

"In the early period of the Islamic Republic, greatest emphasis was laid on the question of how Islamic thinking could influence state policy (Halliday 1995: 68)." This is how the new constitution was written to include the concept of the Velayat-e-Faqih, economic policy was altered and education was transformed to reflect Islamic thinking. This is how the "Islamization" of the state took place (Ibid.).

Notably, this 'Islamization' went together with another debate on "how far the precepts of Islam could act as a constraint upon the actions of government (Ibid.)." This debate was opened initially by the religious opponents of the Khomeini regime. They "argued on Islamic grounds for a limitation of the new republican regime's power (Ibid.)." This way, both opposing groups took recourse to Islam and its precepts to justify their own stances. In this respect, the role of the Guardians Council became quite prominent.

Apart from the power that is assigned to it, the structure of Guardians Council makes it extremely powerful in the clerical state. The Guardians Council is made up of twelve members out of whom six are appointed by the Supreme Leader. The other six are appointed by the Majlis from a list approved by the Supreme Judicial Council. The Supreme Judicial Council itself is composed of high-ranking clerics. In effect, the Guardians Council becomes dominated by the Muslim jurists with wide powers to scrutinize and censor legislation. They are charged with ensuring that legislation agrees with the "tenets of Islam". "Given that these are not written in a codified form, the Council has unlimited areas and powers of intervention (Zubaida 1997: 106-07)."

The Guardians Council used these powers throughout the 1980s to veto legislation which interfered with rights of private property such as land reform and nationalization of foreign trade. "In the context of debates between conservatives and radicals on economic policy, the Council of Guardians consistently favoured the conservatives (Ibid.: 107)." It is notable that these judgments were not inevitable since other jurists, also proceeding from the sacred sources, reached different conclusions. "The stance of the Council was
considered obstructive of government policy, and in 1988 pressure mounted on Khomeini to stop this intervention (Ibid.: 107)."

It was in this context that Ayatollah Khomeini made one of his most important political pronouncements. This pronouncement was made in January 1988, in the form of a letter to the then president, Ayatollah Khamenei (Halliday 1995: 68). Khamenei had earlier argued that the government could exercise power only within the bounds of divine statutes. However, Khomeini disagreed and stated that the government was “a supreme vice-regency bestowed by God upon the Holy Prophet and that it is among the most important of divine laws and has priority over all peripheral divine orders (Ibid.).” Ayatollah Khomeini also listed a set of exceptions on which the government would not be able to take action if such views were not applicable. These included:

“Consumption, compulsory dispatch to the fronts, prevention of the entry or exodus of any commodity, the ban on hording except in two or three cases, customs duty, taxes, prevention of the distribution of narcotics, ban on addiction of any kind except in the case of alcoholic drinks, the carrying of all kinds of weapons.” (Halliday 1995: 69)

Stating on his views on the ‘absolute vice regency’ and the role of the government, Ayatollah Khomeini continued further:

“I should state that the government which is part of the absolute vice-regency of the Prophet of God is one of the primary injunctions of Islam and has priority over all other secondary injunctions, even prayers, fasting, and hajj. The ruler is authorized to demolish a mosque or a house which is in the path of a road and to compensate the owner for his house. The ruler can close down mosques if need be, or can even demolish a mosque which is a source of harm... The government is empowered to unilaterally revoke any Sharia (Islamic law) agreements which it has concluded with the people when those agreements are contrary to the interest of the country or to Islam. It can also prevent any devotional or non-devotional affair if it is opposed to the interests of Islam and for as long as it is so.” (Halliday 1995: 69)

“This explicit statement was not just a legitimation of what already existed in Iran, namely a clerical dictatorship. The concept of the ‘absolute vice-regency’ (velayat-i mutlaq) was a major new formulation of Islamic politics in the context where an Islamic
state had already been created (Halliday 1995: 69).” This pronouncement was seen as directed towards the empowerment of the government and parliament against the obstruction of the Guardians Council in the name of Sharia (Ibid.).

The weakening of the Council was institutionalized soon after with the founding of another body, the Council for the Identification of [the Republic’s] Interest (also known as the Expediency Council) (Zubaida 1997: 107). Although the Expediency Council included the members of the Guardians Council, their clout was diluted with a larger number of members drawn from government and parliament (Ibid.). This new body was supposed to break the deadlock between the Majlis and the Guardians Council.

The similar political expediency of Ayatollah Khomeini is evident by the way he handled his policy of export of revolution. The revolutionary Iran had presented itself as a model to be reproduced elsewhere and the export of Islamic revolution was an important component of this policy. This became the rationale of Ayatollah Khomeini “for continuing the war after July 1982 when the Iraqi’s were driven out of Iranian territory (Halliday 1995: 70).” The way Khomeini came out of this dilemma has been clearly summed up by Halliday (1995) in the following words:

“The proclamation of Iran’s continuing role as leader of the oppressed across the world was important not just for external reasons, promoting the image and prestige of Iran, but also internally as a means of sustaining the morale of the population, distracting from domestic economic crisis, and preventing an emergence of ‘liberalism’, a spirit of compromise or accommodation with the outside world. After the August 1988 ceasefire with Iraq, Khomeini felt there was a danger that the Iranian revolution would falter and lose its revolutionary orientation. It was in this context that he reasserted his view that Iran should remain independent of international economic forces, even at the cost of austerity. But he also used an issue that gave him the opportunity to provoke a major crisis with the non-Islamic world and at the same time to present Iran as the leader of the Islamic cause. Khomeini’s call for the death of Salman Rushdie, the author of ‘The Satanic Verses’, was a means of meeting his two main policy goals – mobilization at home, confrontation internationally.” (Halliday 1995: 71)

These policies of Ayatollah Khomeini reflected how “priorities of power and the maintenance of state control determined his use of Islamic concepts (Halliday 1995: 71).”
This is how Ayatollah Khomeini could successfully maintain control over the power despite the oppositions to his clerical rule.

Milani (1997) has observed how Khomeini had gradually incorporated all his supporters into a “ministate” that he created. This ministate was so strong that it could neither be controlled nor contained by the regular state. Milani identifies five pillars of this ministate. The first was the Islamic Republican Party which worked as Khomeini’s “eyes and ears.” The second pillar was the ‘komites’ (committees) which acted as a vigilante police. The revolutionary courts served as the third pillar which imposed an Islamic system of justice. The Revolutionary Guards worked as the fourth pillar which was capable of neutralizing any anti-Khomeini coup by the regular army. Finally, the fifth pillar of Khomeini’s ministate was the Mostazefin Foundation which inherited the massive fortunes of the Pahlavi Foundation (Milani 1997: 84).

“Khomeini was the leader of this ministate; the lower classes were its soldiers, the Islamic Republican Party its brain, the komites its local police, the Pasdaran its army, the Revolutionary Courts its judiciary, and the Mostazefan Foundation its source of revenue (Ibid.).” This way, Ayatollah Khomeini had an overarching power over almost all functions of the state. With this ‘ministate’ Khomeini maintained control over the levers of power and never allowed the power to slip from his hands.

Although Ayatollah Khomeini was successful in controlling the power, he was helpless in preventing the emergence of various factions which was largely the result of different vested interests of the respective factions. However, Ayatollah Khomeini still managed to prevent any spill over by keeping these factions competitive and never allowed one faction to dominate or eliminate the other. He always acted as “the final arbiter (Milani 1997: 87)” of the factional conflicts that were witnessed during his lifetime.

**Elite Factionalism and Power Struggle after Khomeini: 1989-97**

We have seen above that after the establishment of Islamic Republic some of the groups with varying programmes were allowed in the government, while many were not included. During the first ten years after the revolution, the Islamic regime tried to
present a united front. However, there were inherent factionalism and conflict that were not visible by then.

The ruling elite was unified enough to prevent any opposition to its rule, despite the strong differences among themselves on socio-economic issues. This was the result of the factionalism which was originally formed within the Islamic Republican Party. Until the time Ayatollah Khomeini was alive he always kept the factions competitive and acted as the final arbiter. However, despite Khomeini’s tactics, differences among factions reached to such a critical level that, in 1987, Khomeini was compelled to dissolve the Islamic Republican Party. With the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, politics of Iran entered into a phase which saw intense factional strife.

The period 1989-97 was marked by two important events. First, this period started a new era of intense struggle for power between those factions which were dormant until the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Secondly, this period also saw a new pragmatist politics with the emergence of Hojatolislam Hashemi Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani had emerged as a very powerful leader of post-Khomeini period.

There have been various attempts by the scholars to identify these warring factions and to understand their behaviour. Among these works, Wells’ (1999) study of elite factionalism during this period is found very comprehensive. Drawing heavily from the earlier works on the subject by other prominent specialists on Iran; Wells identifies four such factions, the detailed analysis of which is presented here.

On the extreme left were the hard-line ‘Khomeinists’. This faction may be called as ‘Islamic Left’. It was a collection of ‘Islamic socialists’ and was sometimes referred to as Maktabis.¹ This faction was composed of two sub-groups. One was secular and technocratic; the other clerical. This faction favoured policies such as land reform and the

¹ The term ‘socialist’ is used here in a broad sense. It should not be confused with Marxian socialism which is regarded as atheistic and thus antithetical to Khomeinism. “In fact, those Islamist groups which have sought to draw links between Islam and Marxism (e.g. the Mujahedin-e Khalq) were largely excluded from power.” (Wells 1999: 29)
nationalization or ‘Islamization’ of the economy. This faction was also opposed to renewed relations with the US and the West (Wells 1999: 30).

Throughout the 1980s, the Islamic Left was the largest faction in Iran. They were dominating Parliament as well as the Exigency Council. In the 1990s, their main political organization had been the Association of Combatant Clergy of Tehran (*Majma-e Ruhaniyoun-e Mobarez-e Tehran*). “The Islamic left was the only faction that could still be regarded as ‘Khomeinist’ as it was the only one which continued to argue for a continuation of Khomeini-era policies (Ibid.).”

The main opposition to the Islamic Left came from the so-called *Hujjatis*. This faction was the Islamic Iran’s equivalent of a radical right. It comprised of both economic conservatives and cultural extremists. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, their main political organization had been the Society of Combatant Clergymen of Tehran (*Jameh-e Ruhaniyat-e Mobarez-e Tehran*) (Ibid.).

Although they claimed that their faction was made up of followers of Khomeini, this faction cannot truly be classified as ‘Khomeinist’ (Ibid.). “*Hujjatis* have been known to question Khomeini’s concept of Velayet-e Faqih and to maintain close ties to the anti-Khomeini clerical establishment led by the grand mujtahids and their associates (Akhavi 1987 in Wells 1999: 30).”

There were two more factions sandwiched between the Maktabis and the Hujjatis. These were regarded as partial or ex-Khomeinist, and therefore were largely the ‘reformists’. The first was a ‘centrist’ faction which revolved around the charismatic personality of Rafsanjani. On economic issues these centrists were flexible but tended to lean towards the right. However, on cultural and legal issues they tended to take the side of the left and were only partially committed to the alteration of the country’s legal and educational systems. “They had proved more willing to compromise than their counterparts on the wings. Consequently, they gained for themselves the title of ‘pragmatists’ (Wells 1999: 31).”
The second among these two factions was a collection of moderate clergymen. Before 1989, this faction revolved around individuals like Khomeini’s former successor, Ayatollah Montazeri and the chair of the Assembly of Experts Ayatollah Meshkini. However, they later revolved around the former president Muhammad Khatami. Like the centrists, these moderates were slightly flexible on economic issues. Still they opposed the Left’s policies of imposing stringent controls over the bazaar and foreign sectors. Further, “while they supported clerical rule, they sought to place limits on clerical participation in the legislative and executive branches thereby avoiding the pitfalls of careerism (Ibid.).”

This faction was equally flexible on cultural issues. That is why this faction was termed as the ‘liberals’. In the foreign policy matters, this faction was more open to the idea of renewed relations with the US and the West. These ‘liberals’ had joined with the ‘centrists’ in 1996 to form an umbrella organization which was known as the Servants of the Reconstruction (Ibid.).

Throughout the 1980s, all of these groups were affiliated or associated with the Islamic Republican Party (IRP). However, the grand mujtahids was the only exception which remained aloof from the regime. The IRP served to mitigate the conflicts between these ‘wings’. It also created illusion of a united front. Ayatollah Khomeini sat above this ‘grand coalition’ and used his official and unofficial powers to regulate the conflicts among the constituting factions (Ibid.).

The IRP and its affiliates were outwardly united on peripheral issues. However, internally, the various factions were deeply divided on economic and cultural ones. By the mid-1980s it was clear that there was a growing backlash to Khomeini-era policies. The party could not withstand this pressure, and, as a result, was dissolved in 1987. “The dissolution of the party was one of the first signs of the approaching Thermidor (Ibid.: 32).”

The power of the clerics who led the different factions obtained not only from their institutional positions, but also from material resources based on the control of
foundations. "Most of these foundations derived their wealth from the postrevolutionary takeover of abandoned properties, enterprises, and foundations of the ancien régime and rich families associated with it (Zubaida 1997: 113)." Bonyad-i Mostazefin was the largest of such foundations. It comprised of many big enterprises that commanded high revenues (Ibid.). Despite the intermittent claims of corruptions, these foundations continued to provide support to the leaders of the respective factions.

It is also notable that in case of Iranian factions, the Western concepts such as “moderate”, “liberal” or “extremist” cannot be precisely transferred since there are subtle differences in their meaning (Bill 1982: 35). Further, in case of Iranian elites, the switching of sides based on a particular issue was highly prevalent. Also, it was not very uncommon for the clerical elites “to speak one way and then to act in quite another way (Ibid: 36).” Such problems pose difficulties in dealing with the power politics of post-revolutionary Iran.

We encounter still another problem when we attempt to categorise a particular faction as ‘conservative’ or ‘liberal’ in the Iranian context. "From a relative perspective a conservative can be defined as someone within a particular context who is more traditional and opposes radical change, whereas a liberal is someone who is less traditional and favours change (Wells 1999: 30)." This way the term “conservative” is used in a relative sense and by implication the Hujjatis could be called as conservatives since they were more prone to defend traditional Shia Islam. Also it was so because of their resistance to the efforts of the less traditional Maktabis. “In a non-contextual or European sense their economic policies are neo-liberal because they favour laissez-faire capitalism (Ibid.).”

“Despite these obvious problems, it is important to attempt to classify and to distinguish, since differences, no matter how subtle, will have a decided influence on behaviours and policy (Bill 1982: 36).” Clawson (2005) observes that “with the end of the war in 1988 and Ayatollah Khomeini’s death the next year, Iran entered into a ‘Second Islamic Republic’ whose leaders have fine-tuned the system in one way after another in a vain effort to restore popular support for the Islamic Revolution (Clawson 2005: 115).” The
eight-year (1989-1997) presidency of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani “saw some reforms, though change was erratic and revolutionary principles still prevailed in such key areas as foreign policy (Ibid.: 115).” Before going further into the Rafsanjani era politics, we give here a brief biography of Ayatollah Khamanei who had emerged as the most important political actor of post-Khomeini Iran.

Ayatollah Khamenei

Sayyed Ali Khamenei was born in the year 1939 in the holy city of Mashhad in Khorasran province in the north eastern Iran. His parents belonged to religious families. Khamenei completed his theological studies at the famous religious centre of Qum in the year 1964. He further pursued his religious studies at the theological academy at Mashhad until the year 1968 (Shahbaz 1994: xv).

While, he was participating in the revolutionary movement against the Shah from Paris, he was selected as the member of the Revolutionary Council. After the downfall of the Shah and the formation of the clerical regime, Khamenei represented the Revolutionary Council of the Army and also served as the Deputy for Revolutionary Affairs at the Ministry of Defence. He was later appointed as the Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (Ibid.: xvi).

In 1980, Khamenei was elected to the First Islamic Consultative Assembly. He was also one of the founding members of the Islamic Republican Party and was its first Secretary-General (Ibid.). “His speech at the Consultative Assembly was instrumental in the dismissal of Bani-Sadr from the presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Ibid.).” In 1981, following the death of Muhammad Ali Rajaei, the second President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Khamenei was elected as the President. He was again elected for his second term as President in 1985. After the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, Khamenei was chosen as the new Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic on June 4, 1989 by the Assembly of Experts (Ibid.: xvii).

At the time of Ayatollah Khomeini’s death, Khamenei was not an Ayatollah. He was relatively a junior cleric and had held the rank of Hojatolislam. Due to this, his
appointment as the Supreme Leader was opposed by the 'radicals' who saw it as "a fundamental weakening of Velayet-e-Faqih, the founding principle of the revolution (Zubaida 1997: 108)." However, since his appointment, Ayatollah Khamenei and his allies made efforts to "boost his religious standing and rank (Ibid.)." One such notable attempt happened in 1994.

"The Death of Ayatollah Araki, the marja-i taqlid or 'source of emulation' for Twelver Shiites, at the end of November 1994 marked the beginning of a short-lived propaganda campaign for the selection of Ali Khamanei as his successor by parts of the Iranian media, such as the dailies Ittilaat and Tehran Times and the Iranian state controlled radio and television (Gieling 1997: 777)." However, Khamenei's nomination for this religious rank and the ensuing campaign was severely criticised by the Iranian dissidents and the Western media and the nomination was even described as "a religious coup (Ibid.)."

This criticism was resulted mainly because "Khamanei did not meet in the least the required standards for the position of marjaiya (Ibid.)" and also because this was seen as too much interference of politics into religion. Gieling (1997) describes the rationale behind such attempts in the following words:

"Khamanei's nomination was not an isolated event but part of a process which had started with the death of Khomeini in 1989. Because of his political clout, Khamanei managed to succeed Khomeini as rahbar in spite of his low religious status and the existence of constitutional impediments. The policy of the Iranian leadership in the following years was to ensure that the Velayat-e Faqih was the real political and religious authority, not only on the basis of the constitution and Khomeini's remarks that the government was an offshoot of the mandate of the Prophet, but also on the basis of a state controlled marjaiya. When the opportunity arose after the death of Araki in 1994, Khamanei made a move to get himself appointed and so to combine in himself all the authority which had once been Khomeini's." (Gieling 1997: 777)

However, the opposition to such efforts proved too strong for the clerical establishment to bear and therefore "the pre-eminence of the Velayat over the marjaiya was emphasized by the regime in an effort to limit the damage (Ibid.)." This episode, apart from showing Khamenei's attempts to earn religious legitimacy, also showed "that the Iranian
government was still in doubt and indecisive about the consequences of the elimination of marjaiya from the requirements for the Iranian leadership in the revised Constitution of 1989 which resulted in a new dualism of political and religious authority (Ibid.).” Due to these reasons Ayatollah Khamenei was not in a position to contain the factional conflicts the way his predecessor, Ayatollah Khomeini used to manage.

Consequently, immediately after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iranian politics saw a transition from the revolutionary politics to the politics as usual with all its compromises in place. Under this scenario, Rafsanjani had emerged as a strong political leader of post-Khameini Iran.

The Rafsanjani Era
The Constitutional revision of 1989 resulted in the creation of a new executive presidency which effectively combined the offices of president and prime minister. Hashemi Rafsanjani won the presidential election in August 1989 according to this revised constitution (Murden 2002: 175). The election of Rafsanjani as the new president did not immediately attract much opposition from the conservatives. However, when Rafsanjani revealed “the extent of his reform programmes (Bakhash 1993 in Wells 1999: 32), there was panic among them.

Rafsanjani tried to “do something about the highly intolerant nature of the political culture (Murden 2002: 175).” His presidency (1989-1997) “cultivated a slightly more relaxed atmosphere (Ibid.).” Rafsanjani encouraged private and foreign investments, and discouraged the activities of the rigorous Islamic enforcers. He also encouraged greater participation of women in society. “The atmosphere may have relaxed during Rafsanjani’s period in office, but a real break with intolerance was not made (Ibid.).” The Majlis proved to be a big obstacle towards his attempts.

The Majlis at that time was controlled by the conservatives and it refused to pass many of the reformist legislations. It also vetoed the appointment of cabinet ministers and initiated other conservative campaigns such as the issue of bad hijab and satellite television (Ibid.). The new Majlis, elected in 1992, “at first appeared to be highly favourable to
Rafsanjani, whose supposed supporters secured an absolute majority (Zubaida 1997: 113). However, due to “certain fluidity in factional loyalties (Ibid.),” Rafsanjani’s achievements could best be considered as limited.

Elections for the Fourth Majlis in 1992 were the first such elections held since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Such elections were gradually developing into “a process of regulating factional rivalry between Iran’s religious power blocs (Sarabi 1994: 89).” This election saw a rivalry between two prominent political groups. These were the Ruhaniyat and Ruhaniyoun. The Ruhaniyat were led by President Rafsanjani and it advocated “revising the domestic and foreign policies of the Khomeini years (Ibid.).” The Ruhaniyoun, on the other hand, advocated the continuity of the Khomeini-era policies.

In the Fourth Majlis, Rafsanjani and his supporters tried to weaken their conservative critics who were the main opponents of the third Majlis (Zubaida 1997: 112). President Rafsanjani showed keen interest in economics. “He was known for his political skills and hence, set as his priority the rebuilding of the war-torn economy (Sarabi 1994: 91).” He favoured economic reforms and privatization.

Rafsanjani also tried to inculcate competence and technocratic skills in the cabinet. “The requirements for achieving his ambitious economic tasks and delegating part of the responsibility to the domestic and foreign private sectors led to the emergence of a new sense of pragmatism, flexibility, and tolerance in Rafsanjani’s administration (Ibid.).” However, despite his attempts at economic reforms, Rafsanjani did not delve much into the domain of the political reform which was to be attended by the reformists of the Khatami era.

### III. The Reformists and Conservatives in Iran

In the fifth section of Chapter 2, we have defined and identified the ‘reformists’ and ‘conservatives’ in post-revolutionary Iran. Here, we delve deeper and attempt to understand these terms in the wider context of factional strife which was witnessed
during the Khatami-era politics of Iran. In course of doing that we take up the issues of Islamism and liberal ideas, which is essential to understand the segregation of prevalent ideologies in contemporary Iran. Also, these concepts can not be understood in isolation from the revolutionary context. Therefore, an attempt has also been made to trace these liberal ideas in the course of Islamic revolution itself.

Conservatives consist of clerics who supported the revolution because of the power it gave them over society. They used clerical rule for reinforcing what they saw as the Islamic values. Conservatives were neither organized nor homogeneous. Various groups of the conservatives supported each other depending on the issues (Zubaida 1997: 112). The reformists, on the other hand, were those who advocated increased freedom in society. They were in favour of gradual democratisation of the Iranian political system. The reformists wished to make Iranian polity more democratic, tolerant and progressive (Siddiqi 2006).

Islamism in Political System

The politics and society of Iran after the revolution of 1978-79 was “Islamized” in a number of respects (Zubaida 1997: 111). In the new Republic, religion entered prominently into the political discourses. Every political actor gave his own justifications and claims to the legitimacy based on the appeals to religion. Even for military mobilizations, “religious rhetoric and exhortation” served as important ideological resources. In the Islamic Republic, every city has its own Imam Jomeh (Friday prayer leader and preacher) who is appointed by the government. The Friday sermons of these Imam Jomeh have traditionally been “occasions for political exhortation and advocacy (Ibid.).”

All contesting candidates for the public offices are supposed to demonstrate their “practical commitment to Islam and to the Islamic government (Sarabi 1994 in Zubaida 1997: 111).” This is so because, “the election law requires a candidate to be a believer in God and a loyal supporter of the Islamic regime, the constitution, and the Leader (Zubaida 1997: 111).” There are constitutional oversight bodies to ensure such
adherences. "The Council of Guardians is entrusted with the task of vetting each candidate for these qualifications (Ibid.)."

Such arrangements effectively exclude those who openly oppose basic elements of the Islamic Republic's constitution. "High-ranking clerics opposed to Velayat-e Faqih or to the regime’s repressive policies are also excluded (Ibid.)." We have already mentioned earlier how Ayatollah Shariat Madari was stripped of his ranks. Arguably, "the criterion of Islamic rectitude, then, is one which seeks to verify political reliability and loyalty rather than faith and piety (Ibid.)."

However, despite such constraints, "the Iranian model is not one of a totalitarian religious state (Gerner 2000: 121)." There has been a provision of a functioning secular government that largely remains in place for "theological reasons and for pragmatism (Ibid.)." More importantly, "the religious authorities themselves derive their power from the approval and respect of their followers (Ibid.)." Such features make the Islamic Republic a unique political system.

Islam and the Liberal Ideas
The politics of social and political reform of Khatami era witnessed a lot of debate and discussions among the conservatives and the reformists related to Islam’s compatibility with the liberal ideas such as democracy and freedom. Here we attempt to trace the genesis of such discourses in the Iran’s intellectual and social spectrum of earlier years.

"KHASHM, meaning ‘rage’, was the code word Muslim activists used for their struggle against the Pahlavi dictatorship, climaxing in the Islamic Revolution of 1978 (Irfani 1983: 1)." The revolution was actually a rage of the Iranian people against an extremely authoritarian and repressive regime of the Shah. "The word [KHASHM] was formed by putting together the first letters of the three forces in the Islamic spectrum that brought about the Revolution – Khomeini, Shariati, and Mujahideen-e-Khalq (Ibid.)."

Khomeini represented the politicised Shia clergy and was responsible for successfully placing the struggle against the Shah in an “anti-imperialist framework (Ibid.)"
giving this struggle a religious sanctity. The other two, Shariati and the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, played the important role of developing “a revolutionary Islamic ideology to form the basis for a progressive Islamic movement (Ibid.).” This “movement” has been called “progressive” because of its dynamic approach to Islam and the Quran (Ibid.). Irfani (1983) explains this “progressive Islamic movement” in the following words:

“The central ideological concern of the progressive Islamic movement is to redefine Islam in the light of modern knowledge and scientific advancement. This is a challenge which requires the Muslim intellectual to rethink the whole system of Islam without breaking away with the past. It was Syed Jamal-ud-Din Afghani who fully realized the importance and immensity of this task, because of his deep insight into the inner meaning of the history of Muslim thought and life, his broad vision and wide experiences. By generating a new wave of consciousness in Islamic thought, Afghani became the living link between the past and the future, and the nucleus for progressive Islamic movements of the future.” (Irfani 1983: 1)

It was increasingly realized that Islam had been made the victim of political expediency and this necessitated the drawing of “a line between the dynamic spirit of Islam and the static dogma” that was imposed in the name of Islam (Ibid.: 116).” Dr. Ali Shariati had stated this problem in one of his opening lectures on Islamology in the following words:

“Which Islam do we have in mind when we wish to speak of an Islamic Ideology? It is difficult for me to explain what I wish to say ... because when I speak about Islam, I must use words and terms which ... have lost their meaning. This is why I am compelled to continuously explain in order to identify the Islam I am speaking of: it is the Islam of justice and leadership, not of leaders, classes and aristocracy, it is the Islam of freedom, awareness, and movement, not the Islam of bondage, stagnation, and ignorance, it is the Islam of ‘mujahid’ (holy warrior), not that of ‘rouhani’ (clergyman). In short, the Islam I have in mind is one which leads to holy battle for shaping society, for scientific ‘ijtehad’ (principle of reconstruction and renewal in Islamic thought) and for illuminating belief. It is not the Islam of imitation, prejudice and resignation.” (Irfani 1983: ix)

Dr. Ali Shariati continues:

“Therefore, in speaking about Islam, the major problem stems from the fact that the general impression people have about Islam (a reactionary weapon wielded by the decadent ruling class) acts as a deterrent to its
reintroduction in the Muslim society. Hence, it is no easy task to speak about the uncomprehended spirit and the forgotten contents of Islam. What I wish and hope for, is a return to Islam and its acceptance as an ideology. As an ideology, Islam can be grasped and applied through a scientific, analytical, and comparative understanding of its basic principles.” (Irfani 1983: ix)

The discourse of Islam’s compatibility with the liberal ideas, which is thus seen to be present in the course of Islamic revolution itself, has been alive in the intellectual and political spectrum of Iran. This idea got a forceful impetus during the Khatami era when President Muhammad Khatami, hailed as a reformist, vowed to bring out liberal changes in the Iranian politics.

Khatami’s two terms (1997-2005) of presidency thus witnessed a vibrant debate between the proponents and opponents of the theme of the compatibility of Islam with the liberal ideas. This whole issue would be captured in detail in the next chapter when we take up the case study of President Khatami. Here, we give a brief account of the power struggle between the conservatives and the reformists during this period.

IV. Power Struggle between Reformists and Conservatives

Muhammad Khatami’s election as president of Islamic Republic in May 1997 was significant from many respects. It proved to be a turning point in the revolutionary history of Iran as it clearly showed all those features that were to be found in a period of thermidor. With the election of Khatami, the revolutionary politics of Iran saw a kind of factional conflict that was at its peak. The struggle for power was never so evident as during this period, when the reformists, headed by Muhammad Khatami, locked themselves into an intense battle for capturing power from the conservatives.

Before proceeding further with this power struggle, it is imperative to emphasise here that the simplistic labels such as conservatives versus reformists do not adequately capture the various ideological strains that are actually present in Iran (Sisodia 2007: 131). These are composed of many subgroups and are in no way monolithic. The various ideological
strains that constitute the broad categories of reformists and conservatives have been explained earlier in this chapter.

The reformists and conservatives were themselves coalitions of various factions which had their own respective agenda. Nevertheless, during the Khatami period, the two major rival factions were largely identified as the reformists and the conservatives. Thus the struggle for power in Iran during this period did seem like struggle between the conservatives and the reformists. Khatami and his entourage made the politics of reform as the major tool for vesting power from their conservative rivals.

Rajaee (1999) has identified this broad division in the Iranian politics while coining a new term to define these reformists as “Islamic Yuppies”. His view on this issue is worth quoting in full. He says:

“There was a fundamental choice that day on 23 May 1997 when 83 percent of eligible Iranian voters went to the polls and elected the seventh president of Iran. A fault line was exposed. While there are many ways of defining Islam, and it is very difficult to generalize about the main features of the various Islamic movements, it seems that in the front line of Iranian politics, two differing approaches compete: that of Islamists and that of what we may refer to as ‘Islamic Yuppies’. Whereas the former approach arises from an alliance of the traditional oligarchy and the revolting masses of the ‘downtrodden’ class, the latter hails from the tradition of ‘Islamic reformism’, and the middle class. The Islamists came out of the ideological politics of the 1960s, while the ‘yuppies’ now emerge from the era of globalization at play in Iran and in the wider world of Islam.” (Rajaee 1999: 217)

During this election, Muhammad Khatami had represented various groups and factions that were seeking moderation and republicanism while his rival candidate, Speaker of the parliament, Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri was representing the Islamist coalition. Notably, this type of competition was made possible in the theocratic state of Iran because of the presence of “an Islamic pluralism (Rajaee 1999: 217).” This “pluralism” had been evolved “within the history of the Islamic movement in Iran (Ibid.).” It was this “pluralism” that had given rise to various political factions in course of Iran’s revolutionary history and specially “after the dissolution of the umbrella organization, the Islamic Republic Party, on 1 June 1978 (Ibid.).”
The reformists under Khatami, gave primacy to the rule of law and civil society. Khatami and his allies tried to introduce a number of reforms in Iran. Still, it would not be correct to assume that these reformists wished to completely change the “Islamic fabric of the state and society (Rajaee 2004 in Somasundram 2007: 132).” Instead, these reformists were “trying to negotiate modernity with tradition (Ibid.).” They did not want to “subvert the system altogether (Ibid.)” and rather wanted to “reform the system from within and merely curtail the unbridled power of the unelected traditionalist clergy (Ibid.).” Consequently, they faced stiff resistance from the very forces (the conservatives) whose power they were trying to curtail.

**Power Struggle after Khatami**

The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the president in June 2005 had surprised most observers. “The relatively unknown, austere, firebrand politician Mahmoud Ahmadinejad gained the upper hand over arguably the most well-known politician in Iran – the former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research 2006: 43).” “Rafsanjani had portrayed himself as a moderate” while Ahmadinejad was backed by “morally conservative organizations (Ibid.).” The victory of Ahmadinejad can be put in the correct perspective with the help of the following words:

“Against the notoriously wealthy and politically promiscuous cleric Rafsanjani, Ahmadinejad was the candidate of change, of protest – he was not a cleric, nor was he rich or corrupt. He seemed genuinely committed to greater social justice, equality and conservative values. The Iranian people clearly wanted change – as they had when they elected the reformist, Mohammed Khatami in 1997 – and Ahmadinejad easily defeated Rafsanjani.” (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research 2006: 43)

By implications, the victory of Ahmadinejad was not a sign of a reverting back to the conservatives, but rather disillusionment of the people from the reformists. Khatami and his reformist allies could not ultimately capture power from their conservative rivals. However, the course of events that took place during the eight years power struggle had significant implications on the future of Islamic Republic of Iran.
These events showed that “the ability of elected officials actually to accomplish anything is circumscribed (Samii 2004: 422)” by their unelected counterparts who “wield real power (Ibid.).” It was also witnessed that “much of the population has withdrawn from the system (Ibid.)” since they have realized that their inputs through the elections “does little more than legitimize the regime (Ibid.).” Finally, it can be said that “the Iranian political system is capable of change but this could take a generation and is by no means guaranteed (Ibid.: 423).”

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to trace those factors and forces which contributed to the factional division of the power elites in Iranian political system. The first section started with an investigation of elite formation in pre-revolution Iran. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Iran was a medieval monarchy. The first decade of the twentieth century Iran witnessed a bitter civil war in which people of Iran won a constitution and a parliament. Next significant period of confrontation was 1951-1953 which revolved around the nationalisation of oil by the Prime Minister Muhammad Musaddiq.

Despite the nationalisation of oil, Iran continued on its path of rapid modernisation and experienced growth rates that were among the world’s highest for the period 1953-1978. In the pre-revolutionary Iranian political system, the two principal actors were the Shah and his political elite. The king was the dominant political actor and his actions directly affected the political elite. With the revolution of 1978-1979, the entire elite structure of Iran changed. A new chapter was added to the Iranian history and the world was surprised by the replacement of an autocratic monarchy by a theocracy.

We have observed in this section that the new political elites who came into prominence after the revolution were divided into different opposing factions during the course of the revolution itself. We also made an attempt to find out the reasons for such frictions and accordingly the roles of political culture and economy had also been highlighted. The
dissent movement which overthrew the Shah regime was not monolithic. This dissent movement was divided into two broad groups.

While the first group was that of Islamist-nationalists or fundamentalists, the other was secular or liberal. Further, the seculars consisted of three different groups. The first of them was the group of anti-revolutionaries which was composed primarily of monarchists. They were against the revolution itself. The second group was that of the republicans. Some of these republicans also held government positions in the post-revolutionary period. The third group of dissenters was an assortment of all the rest of the groups. This group mostly remained apolitical. Notably, none of these groups was either compact or monolithic.

Hence, various dissent groups had coalesced into two broad ideological strains before the revolution. These were the liberals and the fundamentalists. The liberals desired Westernization while the fundamentalists supported the return to a ‘pure’ Islam, particularly as interpreted by Ayatollah Khomeini and those around him. In course of the revolution, the fundamentalists group got prominence. This is why the revolution of 1978-79 has been termed as the ‘Islamic revolution’.

Due to the prominence of the fundamentalists, Ayatollah Khomeini was under immense pressure to implement the rule of Islam in its entirety after the revolution. However, due to his pragmatic orientation, he didn’t want to part ways immediately with the liberals. Therefore, the constitution that was devised reflected the attitudes of the two different groups. First was those who wanted Islamic rule with the Qoran as its ‘constitution’. The other was the group of those who believed that Islamic rule could be made more effective by giving it a semi-democratic structure. The result of this mix was a unique constitution which made Islamic Republic a theocracy despite having traces of democratic institutions.

In the second section of this chapter we have first dealt with the evolution of power struggle in the period between 1979 and 1989. The subsequent period of 1989 to 1997 has been dealt with subsequently in this section. However, in this section, we stopped the
We have noted that like most other revolutions, the Iranian revolution of 1978-79 too had united several groups, classes, and parties. However, they were united only by their common objective of overthrowing the old regime. Therefore, this coalition did not last long after the revolution. However, for the ten years, political power in the Islamic Republic of Iran had been in the hands of a relatively small group of clerics. These people were the members of the country's religious colleges and were trained as judges. Because of their specialized theological training, their perspective of the outside world was highly provincial. This group of cleric was led by Ayatollah Khomeini. Most of his students were in the ruling elite and had the same mindset. However, Ayatollah Muhammad Bihishti and Hojatolislam Ali Akbar Hashimi Rafsanjani were two exceptions.

After, the establishment of Islamic Republic, some of the groups with varying programmes were allowed in the government, which did not include the Leftists despite their importance in the revolution. During the first ten years after the revolution, the Islamic regime tried to present a united front. However, there were inherent factionalism and conflict that were not visible by then.

The ruling elite was unified enough to prevent any opposition to its rule. However, this was mainly because of their fragmented opposition. Although the political system was centralized around the Velayat-e-Faqih and key judicial institutions, the whole system was not monolithic. The differences between the ruling factions on socio-economic issues were quite strong. This was the result of the factionalism which was originally formed within the Islamic Republican Party.

Until the time Ayatollah Khomeini was alive, he never allowed one faction to dominate or eliminate the other. He always kept them competitive and always acted as the final arbiter of the factional feuds. However, despite Khomeini's tactics, differences among factions reached to such a critical level that, in 1987, Khomeini was compelled to
dissolve the Islamic Republican Party. This event has been seen as the first sign of an approaching thermidor.

With the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, the Islamic Republic of Iran entered into a period of thermidor and a new type of politics took shape. The period 1989-97 was marked by two important events. First, this period started a new era of intense struggle for power between those factions which were dormant until the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Secondly, this period also saw a new pragmatist politics with the emergence of Hojatolislam Hashemi Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani had emerged as a very powerful leader of post-Khomeini period.

In this chapter, we have noted that there have been various attempts by the scholars to identify these warring factions and to understand their behaviour. Among these works, Wells' (1999) study of elite factionalism of this period was found very helpful due to its comprehensive nature. Wells has identified four such factions.

On the extreme left were the hard-line Khomeinists. This faction may be called as Islamic Left. It was a collection of Islamic socialists and was sometimes referred to as Maktabis. This faction was composed of two sub-groups. One was secular and technocratic while the other was clerical. Throughout the 1980s, the Islamic Left was the largest faction in Iran. They were dominating parliament as well as the Exigency Council. In the 1990s, their main political organization had been the Association of Combatant Clergy of Tehran (Majma-e Ruhaniyoun-e Mobarez-e Tehran).

The main opposition to the Islamic Left came from the so-called Hujjatis. This faction was the Islamic Iran’s equivalent of a radical right. It comprised of both economic conservatives and cultural extremists. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, their main political organization had been the Society of Combatant Clergymen of Tehran (Jameh-e Ruhaniyat-e Mobarez-e Tehran).

There were two more factions sandwiched between the Maktabis and the Hujjatis. These were regarded as partial or ex-Khomeinist, and therefore were largely the reformists. The
first was a ‘centrist’ faction which revolved around the charismatic personality of Rafsanjani. On economic issues these centrists were flexible but tended to lean towards the right. However, on cultural and legal issues they tended to take the side of the left and were only partially committed to the alteration of the country’s legal and educational systems.

The second among these two factions was a collection of moderate clergymen. Before 1989, this faction revolved around individuals like Khomeini’s former successor, Ayatollah Montazeri and the chair of the Assembly of Experts Ayatollah Meshkini. However, they later revolved around the former president Muhammad Khatami. Like the centrists, these moderates were slightly flexible on economic issues. Still they opposed the left’s policies of imposing stringent controls over the bazaari and foreign sectors.

This faction was equally flexible on cultural issues. That is why this faction was termed as the ‘liberals’. In the foreign policy matters, this faction was more open to the idea of renewed relations with the US and the West. These ‘liberals’ had joined with the ‘centrists’ in 1996 to form an umbrella organization which was known as the Servants of the Reconstruction.

Throughout the 1980s, all of these groups were affiliated or associated with the Islamic Republican Party (IRP). However, the grand mujtahids was the only exception which remained aloof from the regime. The IRP served to mitigate the conflicts between these ‘wings’. It also created illusion of a united front. Ayatollah Khomeini sat above this ‘grand coalition’ and used his official and unofficial powers to regulate the conflicts among the constituting factions.

The IRP and its affiliates were outwardly united on peripheral issues. However, internally, the various factions were deeply divided on economic and cultural ones. By the mid-1980s it was clear that there was a growing backlash to Khomeini-era policies. The party could not withstand this pressure, and, as a result, was dissolved in 1987. This is why the dissolution of IRP has been considered as the first sign of the approaching thermidor.
We have found in this chapter that Western concepts such as 'moderate', 'liberal, and 'extremist' cannot be exactly used in the Iranian case since there are subtle differences in their interpretation. Similar rule applies to the terms 'conservative' and 'reformist'. Therefore, the term conservative is used in a purely relative sense. From a relative perspective a conservative can be defined as someone within a particular context who is more traditional and opposes radical change, whereas a liberal or reformer is someone who is less traditional and favours change. Understanding this way, the Hujjatis were conservatives because they were more prone to defend the traditional Shia Islam. It was also because of their resistance to the efforts of the less traditional Maktabis.

The conflict over succession of Ayatollah Khomeini has been seen as another sign of thermidor. We have seen how his designated successor Montazeri was sidelined for his criticism of the clerical regime. After the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the way Khamenei was elevated to the position of Supreme Leader was a subject of great controversy in the Islamic Republic. In the midst of this chaos Rafsanjani emerged as a major power-broker of the post-Khomeini period.

We have also found out in this section that despite all its intolerance, the Islamic Republic had a constitutional system that gave scope for real politics. The end of the Iran-Iraq War and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini provided some scope for political progress. The constitutional revision, the designation of Khamenei as Supreme Leader and the election of Rafsanjani as the president were some important events that promised slight impetus to the political process.

As the president of the Islamic Republic, Rafsanjani (1989-97) tried to create a slightly more relaxed atmosphere. His leadership made a move to do something about the highly intolerant nature of the system. He encouraged the private and foreign business interests and attempted to improve the conditions of women. Further, he discouraged the activities of the rigorous Islamic enforcers. However, Rafsanjani could not bring out any substantial change to the system.
During the later part of 1990s, the politics of Iran was highly polarized into two distinct opposing camps. These camps were generally known as the 'reformists' and the 'conservatives'. Hence, in the third section of this chapter, we have revisited the two important concepts as defined earlier in the fifth section of the second chapter.

Here, we delved deeper and attempted to understand these terms in the wider context of the factional strife which was witnessed during Khatami era. In course of doing that we took up the issues of Islamism and liberal ideas, which was essential to understand the categorization of prevalent ideologies in contemporary Iran. Since these concepts could not be understood in isolation from the revolutionary context of Iran, an attempt was also made to trace these liberal ideas in the course of Islamic revolution itself.

The discourse of Islam's compatibility with the liberal ideas, which was found to be present in the course of Islamic revolution itself, had been alive in the intellectual and political spectrum of Iran even after the establishment of the Islamic Republic.

This idea got a forceful impetus during Khatami era when President Muhammad Khatami tried to bring out liberal changes in the Iranian politics. Khatami's two terms (1997-2005) of presidency therefore witnessed a vibrant debate between the proponents and opponents of this idea of compatibility of Islam with the liberal ideas.

In the fourth section we have given a brief introduction of the power struggle between the reformists and the conservatives. Muhammad Khatami's election as president of Iran in May 1997 was widely seen as a turning point in the history of Islamic revolution. It reemphasized that the thermidor of the Iranian revolution was well underway. This was evident as the politics of revolutionary Iran was turned into politics as usual, with all its features in place.

The struggle for power was never so evident as during this period, when the reformists, headed by Muhammad Khatami, locked themselves into an intense battle for capturing power from the conservatives.
This dynamism of contemporary Iranian politics is captured in detail in the next chapter where we take up the case study of Khatami period. So we now move on to our case study which is a very important constituent of this research.