PREFACE

In the recent past, many developments like the Iranian revolution, the Rushdie affair and the Gulf War of the early 1990s, brought into focus the sharp differences in perception of the Western world and the third world, particularly the Arab and non-Arab Islamic world. The Iranian revolution, contributed in a big way to the surfacing of these differences. This conflict of perceptions is viewed by many, as a contest between modern and medieval social values and moorings; as a tussle between westernisation and Islam; as a battle between two cultures or civilisations and so on. These differing perceptions, generated a lot of passion in both the worlds. There is a need to decipher the actualities of these contesting worlds of perception and this thesis is an attempt at such an understanding in the specific realm of American perceptions on the making of the Iranian revolution of the late 1970s.

Many descriptions of this confrontation between the West and the so-called ‘orient’ treated their differences as something incompatible. The West, through the discourse of orientalism, treated the ‘occident’ and the ‘orient’ as two essentially different worlds. Through the depictions of the orient as the Other—a terrain to be known and to be controlled—the Western discourse of orientalism portrayed the ‘orient’ in all sorts of moulds and images, in such a way that the logic of control is legitimised.

What is endeavoured in this study, is an analysis, on the one hand, of the multiple ways in which the West has been dealing with the ‘orient’, by examining the concept of orientalism and by critiquing it, and on the other, by examining, in the light of such a critique, American perceptions on the making of the Iranian
revolution. In order to place orientalism in proper perspective, an attempt is made to analyse Edward Said's conception and critique of orientalism, the critiques of orientalism by scholars like Anour Abdel-Malek, R. W. Southern, Norman Daniel, Romila Thapar, A. L. Tibawi and Abdallah Laroui on the one hand, and those by Bryan Turner, Sadik al-Azm, James Clifford, Basim Musallam, Aijaz Ahmad and Aziz al-Azmeh, on the other. Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse and his exposition of the knowledge/power linkage are being scrutinised to demarcate the conceptual field. The problems of his method are also sought to be brought out.

From the assumption that American imperialism and orientalism are integrally linked together in enunciating any particular US attitude or policy discourse, an analysis of this linkage is undertaken in this work to lay the foundation for studying American perceptions on Iran.

This is not a study of US policy towards Iran. Nor is it one on the history of American-Iranian relations. It, rather, focuses on the policy discourses of US circles in the making of the Iranian revolution. It attempts at analysing these policy discourses and perspectives in the overall framework of a critique of orientalism. Not only the clashes between American policy pursuits and the Iranian reality, but also the very structure of American diplomatic, academic and journalistic discourses on the Iranian situation, are examined during the course of this work.

The Iranian revolution of 1978-79, like all major revolutions, is a result of a combination of factors. On the one hand, political economy factors like economic deprivation, uneven development, class antagonisms, role of state and imperialism, etc. seem to function at the basic level for the emergence of the revolution. On the other hand, a Shi'i Islamic discourse being made operative by leaders like Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Khomeini seems to contribute a great deal to the ideological mobilisation of the Iranian masses against the monarchist state. This study, in an attempt to grasp the factors contributing to the Iranian revolution, proceeds with the
assumption that while socio-economic conditions were becoming a fertile ground for political struggle, the Islamic discourse and ideology based on Shi‘i cultural tradition were becoming operational tools of the revolution.

The scheme of chapters of this study is as follows: the first four chapters provide the conceptual and contextual background which is followed by the actual exposition of US perceptions on Iran. The first chapter conceptualises orientalism and provides its critique by analysing the works of the authors mentioned earlier. This chapter draws a lot from a wide spectrum of disciplines and opinions. This conceptual framework is contextualised in the second chapter by providing an analysis of the linkage between American imperialism and orientalism in such a way as to decipher the mechanisms and imperatives of operation of US policy discourses.

The third and fourth chapters analyse the Iranian revolution from two different angles so that the ground reality in Iran could be understood and compared with the images, perceptions and realities on Iran represented by the American discourses. While the third chapter deals with the making of the Iranian revolution from the perspective of Shi‘i political discourse, the fourth one discusses the political economy parameters of the revolutionary upheaval.

In the following chapter, US perceptions and policy discourses are studied by tracing the growth of American interests in Iran, by looking into American notions about the Iranian Islamic establishment, by reviewing the diplomatic statements and by comparing and contrasting diverse opinions that emerged in the US policy-making circles during the advent of the Iranian revolution. These observations are put in proper perspective by referring them back to the conceptual and contextual tools and analyses provided by the background chapters. Thus, this is basically a study of ideas, attitudes, views and perceptions of the United States on the making of the Iranian revolution.
A set of primary sources to be relied upon for this study, is the volumes of document captured from the US Embassy in Tehran during the "hostage crisis" of November 1979. "Muslim Student Followers of the Line of Imam", who seized the Embassy and captured the documents, published them under the title Asnaad-e Laaneh-e Jaasooxi meaning "Documents of the Spying Den". US foreign policy statements, memoirs of American diplomats and statespersons, other relevant documents also form part of the primary sources.

Secondary sources of the work consist of a wide range of books and articles dealing with orientalism, power, discourse, postcolonialism, International Relations, Islam and political, religious and ideological realms of Iranian society. They emanate from a variety of disciplines and viewpoints.

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