Due to its long history and strategic relevance in the West Asian region, Iran has always been a fascinating country as a subject of study. Nevertheless, my first acquaintance with this country had been through its literature which I used to read with great interest since my school days. They served as rich resources towards familiarising me with Iran's ancient civilization and culture. One notable feature running across most of the Iranian literature has been its strong sense of nationalism.

Many years later, when I enrolled myself as a scholar of the Area Studies in the Centre for West Asian Studies, taking up Iran as the country of specialization seemed a natural choice. However, by that time, my rosy perception of this country had been vitiated to a great extent due to the continuous presence of Iran in the international news for all the wrong reasons. The country's appetite for indulging in all kinds of conflicts not just internationally but also domestically appeared quite intriguing.

While Iran's international posture could be explained to some extent by its sense of nationalism, its domestic conflicts required some deeper investigations. When I was selecting the topic for my Ph. D. thesis, the Islamic Republic of Iran was in the midst of an intense factional strife. The reformists had just lost the battle against the conservatives and the reform movement was widely considered as a spent force.

During the eight years of Khatami's presidency, the domestic politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran was echoed by the voices of reformism and the ensuing struggle for power between the reformists and the conservatives. Such phenomena raised two questions in my mind. First: What was the motive behind the introduction of reform policies? Was it for the genuine reason of solving people's problems and ensuring a more liberated society, or was it just a fight between two sections of the political elites of Iran for a greater control over the state's affairs?

The second question that puzzled me was: How did the reformists attempt to vest power from their conservative rivals and why did they fail ultimately? This question, of course,
was under the assumption that the whole politics of reform was nothing but the power struggle between the two broad factions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. After all, this was how the whole issue of politics of reform was largely seen by most of the observers. Nevertheless, I sought to enquire both these questions in an objective manner without falling into the trap of assumptions. This thesis has emerged as a product of that enquiry.

Accordingly, the whole research is a study of the power struggle between the reformists and the conservatives in the Islamic Republic of Iran. A case study of President Khatami era (1997-2005) has been undertaken to highlight the nature of this struggle. The whole research has been designed under the backdrop of a theoretical framework. The theory of thermidor has been applied to place the contemporary politics of Islamic Republic into the proper context of its Islamic revolution of 1978-79. This has been so necessitated since even after the three decades of the revolution, Iran has often been seen to revert back to its revolutionary past in all its social and political aspects.

Consequently, this research has been an endeavour to study the nature of the contemporary domestic politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran. An effort has been made to find out the behaviour of the ruling elites and the aspirations of the masses. The research has brought to light the facts that help us in appreciating the intricacies of the society and politics of Iran in a more informed manner.

Interestingly, while this research was under progress, the international politics in general and West Asian politics in particular, witnessed a number of new developments. These developments have reinforced the need of engaging Iran in the international dialogues. While an informed understanding of the domestic politics of any country is essential for its effective engagement, it is particularly so in case of the Islamic Republic of Iran which has largely remained an enigma for most of its revolutionary history. It is sincerely hoped that this study would serve towards filling some of the existing knowledge gaps in this respect.

Asif Shuja

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