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DAWLATABADI, SAYYED YAHYA (b. Daw-latabad near Isfahan, 17 Rajab 1279/8 January 1863, d. Tehran, 4 Aban 1318 Š./26 October 1939), celebrated educator, political activist, and memoirist of the constitutional and postconstitutional periods. Yahya was the second of the five sons of an affluent family of landowning ?olama?. His father, Hajj Sayyed Mirza Hadi Dawlatabadi, was an influential local mojtahed and leader of the clandestine Azali branch of Babism in Persia. A haphazard education at traditional koranic schools (maktab) left a negative impression on young Yahya, an impression further reinforced at the Sadr madrasa in Isfahan and later the Mo?tamad-al-Dawla madrasa in Najaf in Iraq, where he joined his father in 1290/1873. Residing in Najaf added to his distaste for the conservative clerical milieu and its suffocating conformity (Dawlatabadi, Hayat-e Yahya I, pp. 11-18, 28-34).

After the family returned to Isfahan in 1294/1877 Yahya witnessed his father’s involvement in an extremely complex struggle for control of the city, with some of the influential ?olama?, most notably Mohammad-Baqer Najafi Esfahani and his son Mohammad-Taqi, better known as Aqa Najafi, on one side and the powerful prince-governor of Isfahan, Mas?ud Mirza Zell-al-Soltan, on the other (Daw-latabadi, Hayat-e Yahya I, pp. 37-44). The ambitious Mirza Hadi, whose Babi affiliation was a stigma impossible to disguise by any measure of dissimulation (taqiya), was able to build a popular base in Isfahan, at first with the tacit backing of Zell-al-Soltan, who hoped thus to weaken Najafi’s domination of the city. Soon, however, Hadi was denounced by Najafi as a heretic, which encouraged Zell-al-Soltan to put into action his own covetous land-grabbing schemes at the expense of Yahya’s father. Having become a pariah, Yahya found his stay in Isfahan becoming increasingly hazardous, in spite of his attempts to distance himself from the rival Bahai faction among the Babis, whose exiled leadership he bedeviled consistently.

Yahya, after a year and a half of self-imposed exile in Tehran and Mašhad, as a result of his denunciation (takfir)by the ?olama?, returned to Isfahan in 1299/1882; there he frequented the local literati. An encounter with the ascetic Babi preacher Shaikh Mohammad Manšadi Yazdi influenced him, as well as two other, later proponents of the Constitutional Revolution, Nasr-Allah Behešti (later Malek-al-Motakallemin) and Jamal-al-Din Wa?ez Esfahani. Yahya was also impressed by Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, then a refugee from his native province. Aqa Khan's intellectual disposition and rhetoric, blending modernism and esoteric thought, served as a model for the receptive Yahya (Hayat-e Yahya I, pp. 62-68).

After fresh denunciations, partly elicited by his repeated defiance of the ?olama? and Zell-al-Soltan, Mirza Yahya was banished from Isfahan a second time, between 1303/1886 and 1306/1888. He paid a short visit to Aleppo, then returned to the ?Atabat, where for a year he occasionally audited Mirza Hasan Širazi's lectures on jurisprudence before embarking on the Hajj (pilgrimage) via Alexandria and Cairo. He returned as far as Bušehr in 1304/1887, but news of fresh Babi persecutions in Isfahan forced him to retreat to the relative safety of the ?Atabat. He did finally return to Isfahan in 1306/1888 but was unable to stay there. By decree of Naser-al-Din Shah (1264-1313/1848-96) Yahya and his father settled in the capital, where they found a protector in the person of the vizier Mirza ?Ali-Asgar Khan Amin-al-Soltan (Hayat-e Yahya I, pp. 69-90, 111-12, 118-19).

In Tehran Yahya instructed members of the nobility in calligraphy. While attending the lectures of the celebrated jurist Mirza Hasan Aštiani, presumably in order to stave off suspicion of Babi heresy, he also had an opportunity to observe at close quarters the growing power of the ?olama? in a time of political turmoil. He was present when an angry crowd briefly stormed the royal citadel during the protest against the monopolistic Tobacco Régie of 1309-11/1891-92. In the meantime interest in speculative thought brought him to Mirza Abu'l-Hasan Jelwa, the leading philosopher of his time. None of these activities was able to assuage the moral crisis that he was experiencing at that time, however, a crisis exacerbated by increasing harassment, confiscation of family property, and diminishing income (Hayat-e Yahya I, pp. 108-22).

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The social quarantine imposed upon Yahya because of his Babi associations finally came to an end only during the reign of Mozaffar-al-Din Shah (1313-24/1896-1906). The reformist Mirza ?Ali Khan Amin-al-Dawla (q.v.) was appointed vizier in 1314/1897, which encouraged Yahya to try to change his father's course "according to the needs of the time and move in the direction of fundamental actions that could bring progress, development, and freedom of the country" (Hayat-e Yahya I, pp. 176-77). Although he remained a member of the ?olama?,establishing secular schools and furthering

modern education became the focus of his attention for the next ten years, perhaps the most fruitful period of his career. As a founding member of the Council of education (Anjoman-e ma?aref, q.v.), to which he was appointed by Amin-al-Dawla in 1315/1898 (Hayat-e Yahya I, p. 188; Ehtešam-al-Saltana, pp. 322 ff.), he brought his considerable imagination and discretion to bear in working with the daring but abrasive aristocrat Mahmud Khan Ehtešam-al-Saltana, the determined and intransigent Mirza Hasan Rošdiya, and others. In his memoirs Dawlatabadi may have overstated his own achievements and criticized his rivals too harshly, yet he should be credited with his persistence in establishing new schools and preparing the earliest elementary textbooks and school curricula. Ehtešam-al-Saltana (p. 529) characterized him as an honest and dedicated colleague, who nevertheless suffered from “extreme selfishness and self-centeredness” (kod-kvahi-e mofrat wa kod-pasandi-e biandaza). In 1316/1899 Yahya founded the Madrasa-ye motabarreka-ye sadat, which was dedicated to teaching the children of the poor among the descendants of the Prophet Mohammad (sadat). By promoting modern schooling for this group he not only challenged arcane scholasticism but also attempted to shaped the students into a constituency that could compete with seminarians (talaba) educated in traditional madrasas. He was also partly responsible for establishing at least three other schools, the Adab, Kamaliya, and Daneš, but his involvement led to personal quarrels and drained his finances (Dawlatabadi, Hayat-e Yahya I, pp. 178-204, 237-67).

The events leading up to the Constitutional Revolution (1924-29/1906-11) opened a new chapter in the lives of Yahya Dawlatabadi and his younger brother ?Ali-Mohammad (q.v.). They were among the early members of a small but influential revolutionary circle of Azali persuasion, which also included Jamal-al-Din Esfahani and Malek-al-Motakallemin, among others. At the same time Yahya established amicable ties with the proreform Ottoman ambassador Šams-al-Din Beg, whose sympathy he hoped to evoke for the cause of constitutionalism in Persia. During the crucial protest of the ?olama? in the shrine of Shah ?Abd-al-?Azim, which ultimately led to the “constitutional decree,” in 1324/1906 (see CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION ii), Yahya acted as a political broker between the reformist faction led by Sayyed ?Abd-Allah Behbahani and the government of ?Ayn-al-Dawla (qq.v.). According to his version of those events, he was the first to include in the list of otherwise mundane requests submitted by the ?olama? a general demand for “reform in all affairs,” which was soon articulated by himself and his collaborators as a demand for creation of a “justice bureau” (divan-e ?adalat) and a “national house of consultation” (mašwarat-kana-ye melli) to execute the “law of equity” (qanun-e mosawat) in all parts of Persia (Hayat-e Yahya II, pp. 22-24). Neither of these ideas was by any means novel in the dissident milieu of the time.

In spite of his ardent support for constitutionalism, Dawlatabadi’s public role was compromised by his Babi background, for which he was almost ostracized from the circles around the leading proconstitutionalist ?olama?,

Behbahani and Sayyed Mohammad Taba-taba?i. Furthermore, his hopes of close collaboration with such members of the reformist nobility as Ehtešam-al-Saltana and Mahdiqoli Khan Mokber-al-Saltana, in order to combat opposition from the royalists, achieved limited results His stigma as a Babi may also have barred him and his cohorts from election as deputies to the first constitutional Majles. In an attempt to strengthen his political stand, Dawlatabadi even tried, with little success, to patch up old differences with Shaikh Fazl-Allah Nuri, Behbahani's bitter opponent and later the leader of the anticonstitutional ?olama?. These setbacks did little to diminish Dawlatabadi's revolutionary zeal, however.

In 1325/1907, when the revolutionary activities of the anjomans (q.v.) were at a peak, Dawlatabadi helped to form the influential Anjoman-e markazi-e asnaf (Central association of guilds) in the Tehran bazar, drawing on members who were loyal to his father. As the mentor and spokesman for this anjoman, he had by mid-1326/1908 become sufficiently committed to the radical (tondrow) constitutionalist wing to be singled out by Mohammad-?Ali Shah (1324-27/1907-09) as one of eight antimonarchist activists within the Majles and the anjomans. Dawlatabadi's guilt was further confirmed in the eyes of the shah when he emerged as a prominent member of the Defense committee (Komisiyun-e modafa?a) responsible for recruiting the militia forces of the anjomans to defend the Majles. It was only his personal circumspection that saved him on the night preceding the coup of 23 Jomada I 1326/23 June 1908, when the Majles was bombarded. He sought refuge in a safe house while some of his revolutionary friends were arrested and executed. Having received verbal assurance of his safety from the British embassy, he then moved to the British-protected village of Qolhak north of Tehran, where his father had a family retreat adjacent to the British summer residence. After some negotiation with the court he welcomed an offer of voluntary exile and left Persia shortly afterward.

He arrived in Istanbul during the period of ferment preceding the revolution of the Young Turks but was received unenthusiastically by the Anjoman-e sa?adat (q.v.), which was dominated by exiled Azerbaijani constitutionalists suspicious of his background and motives. His acquaintance with political leaders of the Committee for union and progress (Ettehad o taraqqi komitasi), including Prince Salah-al-Din, leader of the federalist Ahrar party; Tal?at Pasha, later a member of the Young Turk triumvirate; and Shaikh Jamal-al-Din, šayk-al-Eslam (the highest religious official) of Istanbul, helped to boost Dawlatabadi's morale, though these men offered little practical help in furthering the Persian cause.

Dawlatabadi returned to Tehran in October 1909, three months after the city had been retaken by constitutionalist forces in July. His hesitation proved well founded. Despite his personal acquaintance with most of the revolutionary leaders, his efforts to steer a middle course between the newly organized E?tedaliyun (moderates) and the radicals of the Democratic party drove him farther into isolation. His condescending disposition to "advise" people in

power marginalized him still further. Although he eventually tilted toward the Democrats, he never abandoned his self-appointed role as an “interparty mediator” (mosleh-e dat-al-bayn; Hayat-e Yahya III, p. 121). His political views on the need for the separation of religious and secular authorities, expressed in his treatises Armagan-e Yahya and Rahnema-ye entekabat-e Majles-e šura-ye melli, in which he called for election of nonclerical figures, did not enhance his stature among the ?olama?. His frustration at the outcome of the revolutionary process reached a new height when, after the parliamentary election in June 1911, his credentials as deputy from Kerman to the Second Majles were heatedly challenged by his clerical opponents. Accused of having “corrupt beliefs,” he was forced to present his resignation and to refrain temporarily from all political activity. Seeking a pretext to leave Persia, in July 1911 he went to Europe at the invitation of the organizers of the International Congress of the Races, a philanthropic gathering in London (Hayat-e Yahya III, pp. 144-52).

On the eve of World War I the domestic situation in Persia and fear of partition loomed large in the minds of patriots like Dawlatabadi. Soon after his return to Tehran he joined the nationalist “emigrants” (mohajerin), who left the capital for Qom in November 1915, as a protest against the threat of Russian aggression. Subsequently he became a prominent member of the newly formed National defense committee (Komita-ye defa?-e melli) in Hamadan and then in Kermanšah (Hayat-e Yahya III, pp. 300 ff.). The committee, set up with German backing, became a provisional government in charge of conducting the national resistance against the Anglo-Russian occupation. After several military defeats during 1334/1915 and 1335/1916 the nationalists retreated to Qasr-e Širin, under the temporary protection of Sanjabi tribal chiefs, and soon after to Baghdad and then to Istanbul. Dawlatabadi arrived in Istanbul in early 1916 to find an atmosphere of gloom among the exiles, whose ranks were riddled with factionalism and personal animosities. The resourceful Dawlatabadi was able to renew his ties with the Young Turks, and it was perhaps at Tal?at Pasha’s suggestion that he first traveled to Berlin and then to Stockholm (Hayat-e Yahya IV, pp. 32-40), at that time the center of intelligence gathering and espionage. On the pretext of participating in the International Socialist Congress, he appears to have engaged in some intelligence activities (Hayat-e Yahya IV, p. 53). Soon after the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 and the ensuing Russian withdrawal from the Caucasian and Antolian fronts, including Persian Azerbaijan, Dawlatabadi hastened back to Persia. Benefiting from generous German assistance, he apparently was entrusted with the task of organizing a pro-German nationalist resistance against imminent British advances in the north of Persia (Hayat-e Yahya IV, pp. 160-66), a resistance already apparent in Shaikh Mohammad Kiabani’s uprising in Tabriz and the Jangali movement in Gilan (see COMMUNISM i).

The general armistice of October 1918, combined with the demise of the Young Turks and imperial Germany, put an end to this resistance. The formidable task of political reorientation prompted Dawlatabadi to turn for support to the

victorious British. In Isfahan he managed to penetrate the clandestine Ahan committee (Komita-ye ahan), which was apparently set up to create a unified pro-British front in chaotic postwar Persia (Hayat-e Yahya IV, pp. 114-15, 167 ff.). He was soon deprived of any meaningful role in this perfunctory organization, however, possibly because he was not trusted by other pro-British participants. The growing unpopularity of the 1919 Anglo-Persian agreement (q.v.) in Persia, moreover, dictated that Dawlatabadi should accentuate his differences with the prime minister Mirza Hasan Khan Wotuq-al-Dawla and his allies. The Ahan committee was later transformed in Tehran into the Zarganda committee and became one of the groups supporting the coup d'etat of 1299 Š./1921 (q.v.). In the treacherous political climate of postwar Tehran Dawlatabadi's advocacy of political harmony and austere patriotism, as expressed in his criticism of the 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement (q.v.) and of the rigged election of the Fourth Majles only prolonged his political quarantine.

The rise of Reza Khan Sardar-e Sepah (later Reza Shah), especially after the collapse of the government of Sayyed Zia?-al-Din Tabataba?i in June 1921, opened new prospects for Dawlatabadi. He soon managed to develop a close, though ephemeral, rapport with Reza Khan, who was admired as a champion of security and national renewal by many frustrated constitutionalists like Dawlatabadi. Reza Khan, on the other hand, detected in Dawlatabadi a clerical advocate of modernity willing to promote his cause in return for long-sought admission to the main political arena. As the opposition ?olama? were intimidated by the new military regime, in January-February 1923 Dawlatabadi was able to win election as deputy from Isfahan to the Fifth Majles, where he came to play a notable role as an early promoter of Reza Khan. He was an influential member of a committee of eight liberal politicians (including Mohammad Mosaddeq and Hasan Taqizada) who for a while advised Reza Khan on domestic and foreign affairs (Hayat-e Yahya IV, p. 325).

In 1303 Š./1924 Dawlatabadi initially supported Reza Khan's call for republicanism, yet he later also entertained conspiratorial suspicions about the degree of British involvement in the affair. After the collapse of the republican trend Dawlatabadi and his liberal cohorts in the Majles were faced with the disagreeable choice of supporting the moribund Qajar dynasty or Reza Khan's demand for change in the monarchy. Despite understandable trepidation, Yahya was one of four deputies who, on 9 Aban 1304 Š./31 October 1925, spoke out and voted against abolition of the Qajar dynasty and investiture of Reza Shah Pahlavi. This gesture of resistance, fortified by references to the Constitution of 1324/1906, sealed Dawlatabadi's political fate, and he, along with other veteran politicians, was relegated to a political oblivion from which he never reemerged. After a three-year residence in Brussels, where he served as an informal cultural attaché, he retired to Tehran and completed his famous memoirs, Tarik-e mo?aser ya hayat-e Yahya. He died in 1318/1939 and was buried at his own summer home at Zarganda in Qolhak, which was later expanded to include a public library.

His tomb was destroyed after the Revolution of 1357 Š./1979.

Yahya Dawlatabadi best epitomized the spirit of modernism in the quarter-century between the assassination of Naser-al-Din Shah in 1313/1896 and the accession of Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1324 Š./1925, the crucial era in the shaping of modern Persia. Not only did he witness the major developments of his own time and record them for posterity, bu talso he himself helped to influence the emergence of modern education, the growth of constitutionalism, revolutionary and postrevolutionary events, and the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty. His primary themes were separation of clerical and political authority, the importance of education and later of economic planning, devotion to the Constitution, condemnation of political factionalism, and above all morality and patriotism, all rooted in the Western-inspired modernism of his generation, though his attraction to many of them also reflected his religious inclinations. Indeed, it was his persistence in preserving a private Babi identity while trying to assimilate to the liberal polity of his time that proved the greatest obstacle to his political success. Although he never referred to his Babi affiliation in the four volumes of his memoirs, his career demonstrated the formidable barriers the majority political culture placed in the way of reformers of nonorthodox background. In the eyes of the ?olama? no one better symbolized the heretical nature of modernism than Dawlatabadi, even though he attempted to preserve his Islamic garb all his life.

Dawlatabadi’s self-censorship and his self-righteous tone undermined the quality of the otherwise remarkable record of his life contained in his memoirs, among the best produced by men of his generation. He should be recognized for his successful blend of insight, thoroughness, organization, and relative impartiality in his account of the history of modern Persia. His literary style, though slightly marred by a constant use of the present tense in an effort to convey con-temporaneity, combined the erudition of a seasoned writer with the flexibility of a politician and the analysis of a historian. It was based on diaries and notes that he had kept over the years. He completed the first edition of the memoirs in 1314 Š./1935 and revised it in 1316 Š./1937, an exercise in which he at times sacrificed immediate impressions to hindsight.

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