

**Heather Lehr, *The Iranian Revolution*, New York,
Chelsea House, 2010.**

Reviewed by

Dr. Ali Muhammad Bhat

Dept. of Islamic Studies

Islamic University of Science and Technology

Awantipora, 192122 Pulwama, Srinagar,

Jammu and Kashmir, India

Heather Lehr Wagner is a series writer having hold on many contemporary issues. Among those topics Iranian Revolution is one about which he emphasized many issues not raised by others. His work *The Iranian Revolution* was published by Chelsea House publishers New York in 2010 with an ISBN 978-60413-490-20. This book is available in both hard cover and electronic version. It has eight chapters followed by chronology, timeline, notes, biography, pictures, index, and further resources and ended with biographical note of the author.

The first chapter of the book titled as “The Ayatollah Return” deals with the thought attitude and action methodology of the Ayatollah Khomeini. This chapter opens by the arrival of Khomeini when the Air France boarded by very few people because the French authorizes were worried about the landing of the plane along with Ayatollah in Tehran airport. Huge gathering of religious leadership and politicians were waiting for this arrival. When he appeared from the window, the air on the airport was crowded with theslogans of “*Allahu Akbar*”. This movement at the airport was highly wonderful when a 77 year old man was received with prompt and love because he brought down a tyrannical rule of a monarch by strikes and protest.

Khomeini praised and acknowledged contribution of Students, clergy, businessman, traders, university officials and theological colleges, without their support it was impossible to achieve the revolution. After leaving airport he at *Behesht-e Zahra* cemetery praised those who scarified their lives for the cause. He stated firmly that Shah and his aide like Dr. Shahpur Bakhtiar. He was ready in every respect to form government of his own choice and nominated Mehdi Bazargan a liberal man as prime minster. Old regimes decision of westernization proved fatal for the Shah regime. Though his programme of reform open doors for some people but weakened the wealth and power of many upper class citizens. One of the wrong decision introduction and use of SAVAK against general masses by limiting their freedom of speech and basic human rights. All this proved useful for the revolution, utilized by Khomeini in his speeches while being at exile which were secretly send to Iran as a programme to topple the Monarchy. After using all odds failed against the revolutionaries to control them, Shah along with his wife left Iran on January 16, 1979. This news overjoyed the people and celebrations via Shouting's, car horns blared. People cried for Agha (Khomeini) and as earlier mentioned that hoped and raised slogans, "Agha Aamad" (respected in Coming).

Chapter 2nd of the book titled as "The Pahlavi Dynasty" opens with the emergence of Reza Khan an illiterate but powerful person who was strong enough in army tactically overthrow old Ahmad Shah secretly supported by British being fed-up with Old Shah. He along with 3000 strong army of Cossack Brigade marched towards Tehran with thought to help the Old Shah but actually was to coup. While emerging on the political front of the Persia declared Persia as modern Iran. He wants to modernize Iran on western lines as Mustafa Kamal Ataturk being his role model. Being ambitious to have control all parts of the Iran even on landlords but in the meantime declared neutrality in WW-II which was disliked by Britain and Russia and both invaded Iran and subjugated whole Iran within three days.

The new heir his son Muhammad Raza Shah Pahlavi, a weak politician having no courage to challenge the imperial forces and tried to ignite people for anti-British. More than came close to USA in order to get rid of such a situation. The Nationalists in the Iranian parliament predominantly Muhammad Mossadiq and Ayatollah kashani pressed for nationalization of resources and in 1951 election, Muhammad Mossadiq was elected as Prime minister. Muhammad Raza Shah's emissary to Muhammad Mossadiq was arrested and when censored danger Muhammad Raza Shah fly first to Baghdad then to Rome. Muhammad Mossadiq nationalized Iranian resources mainly AIOC and directed all British employees to leave Iran immediately. In response British forces led an embargo to halt Iranian oil ships brought economic disaster. On the other side US via CIA flooded money to many Iranians in army, organised protests against Mossadiq government and by a coup his rule was spill down in 1953. Shah return Iran and consolidated his position with the US security support and criticized Muhammad Mossadiq and his policies.

3rd chapter of the book deals with how and with what mindset and methodology Ayatollah Khomeini emerged in Iranian politics. This chapter titled "Sign of God" first provides biographical information about Khomeini. Being from religious family his father Mustafa a clergy was shot dead for a decision on dispute between two groups and his mother passed away due to cholera in 1918 when he was 16 years old. Started his education background from a Maktab and enrolled himself finally to Qom for higher education where he developed his personality as a real teacher and devotee to Islam. When Raza Shah Wife visited Qom Unveiled as a sign to dishonor clergy. Ayatollah Khomeini criticized her act of ir-religiosity and even to Shah's policies. Khomeini emerged a Faqhi a challenging and rigorous task which only few students can achieve to interpret law. In his 16th year in Qom when he was 34 years old as admitted to higher ranks of clergy known as Ayatollah (sign of God). He openly criticized the Shah's westernization policies chiefly US supported programme. He proved his

bravery in all field of life; as a teacher, Faqhi and as a politician. Thousands of students attended his lectures and influenced much of the Iranian youth.

Chapter 4 “Modernization and Reform” deals with idea of life Muhammad Raza Shah Pahlavi wants to accomplish. He wish to have modern life style based on westernization. For such a cause he found SAVAK so that no can dare to criticize but meantime he was highly worried about male heir and for this purpose he divorced two wives who failed to fulfill his dream. At economic level he rebuilt oil companies with US support which helped him to use petro-dollars to build Iran on modern lines. Literary Corps health Corps were introduced and Land reforms were taken into hand. All this was under the slogan of White revolution. This move was considered as to satisfy US for anti-Islamic purposes and resulted in hatred and criticism. Shah criticized clergy of Qom too and declared them backward with no zeal of life. Among those critics Ayatollah Khomeini vehemently criticize Shah for his westernization programme and ties with US and Israel even through his speeches, writings and skills organized people to protest against regimes move. Arrest of Khomeini took people to streets, government building were attacked continuously for 3 days. Shah called in military to set law and order but the objectives were not achieved. At the same time high class amnesty was given to US people even for their crimes Iranian law cannot punish them. Ayatollah Khomeini declared it high treason against Iranian people. In order to get rid of Khomeini he was exiled first to Turkey then to Najaf of Iraq and finally to Paris France. He send all his speeches in written and in cassettes which were smuggled to Iran for anti-Shah programme. Shah came up with heavy industrialization manifesto but this created a wide gap between rich and poor and further alienated Shah from the general masses. Plentiful Iranian wealth was used up on ceremonies in which Iran was linked to ancient history than Islam, which too outraged Iranians. Ayatollah Khomeini from exile declared Shah, enemy and traitor of Islam and Iranian nation along with those who participate in such festivals.

Chapter 5 titled by author “Rumors of Revolution” in which information was provided about different issues prevailing 1970’s in and around Iran. Iran oil got boom due to oil embargo to US for its support to Israel. Shah utilized much of the petro dollars to modernize military by get sophisticated paraphernalia. Due to industrialization programme cost of life grow into greater than before and inflation rate increased drastically. More education prevailed but less jobs were available According to Sattareh Farman cost of life become tough to bear. But the situation worsened when one party rule was introduced that too with unconditional and criticism free submission to Resurgence party (*Rasta Khaz*) of the Shah. Islamic Calendar was changed with Old Persian calendar. Even Shah blamed Khomeini as drunkard and British Spy but these blames have no effect on his credibility. Instead a letter was send to Shah by Iranian intellectuals raised concern about human right abuse and forced membership for Rasta khez even students in Washington protest against Shah’s visit with harsh slogans “death to Shah” and “death to America”. In Iran people demonstrated on streets in favour of Ayatollah and now became a concern for everyone. Streets were engulfed by riots against military brutality and business was completely paralyzed. Khomeini now in Paris made best use of free media and delivered anti-Shah lectures to overthrow his regime. Iranian young generation was much influence by Khomeini’s personality and his cause by adopting Khomeini’s modesty.

Capter6 “The Revolution Begins” discuss activities of Khomeini’s supporters who went door to door distributed pamphlets and cassettes of Khomeini’s contain directions to organize komitehsfor maximum involvement of people in protest. When Shah’s forces killed at least 88 people in a masses gather on Friday, protests soon engulfed even oil refineries and to chemical industries. This day was known now as black Friday in modern Iranian History. People raised huge barricades on streets and roads to restrict army tanks maneuver. When situation turned uncontrolled Shah was offered asylum by US president Jimmy Carter and on January 16, 1979 and he left Iran in dampen leaving Bakhtiar Shahpur as prime minister

who immediately restrained SAVAK, went for constitutional reform and cutoff diplomatic relation with Israel. Without any delay he return to Iran after 14 years of émigré. He setup his headquarters at Qom and advised people for any kind of cooperation with Shahpur and within 5 days named Bazargan new prime minister and ordered him to setup his government members. He commanded people to obey Bazargan government and any kind of revolt or breach against God's rule means revolt against God which is blasphemy. Revolutionary forces took most of Iran and set right gruella forces in streets and Shahpur regime fell and he fled his life. Khomeini broadcasted that Iran from this onwards would be an Islamic state and people linked to Shah's monarchy were executed.

Chapter 7 of the book titled "Revolutionary Government" which proclaimed by Khomeini and strength its power by introducing new military, police and revolutionary Committees in order to provide protection to masses from armed smugglers. Khomeini again commanded people to maintain peace and declared that all government offices will reopen from Fe. 17, 1979 but the situation worsened when on Feb. 14, 1979 was stormed by the pro Khomeini students for a very brief time. According to author two governments were prevailing in 1979 Iran, Bazargan as official prime minister and behind it Khomeini as real ruler. Now Bazargan publicly declared for referendum for Islamic rule with "yes or no" option. After achieving landslide victory in referendum, Khomeini proclaimed a four tier new Islamic republic of Iran having revolutionary supreme council at top followed by legislative body, executive body and judiciary. Faqhi was at the top serves as commander in chief of the armed forces. When new constitution was publicized, it was declared as dictatorial even by some religious leaders. Moreover when Shah was allowed to enter Washington for medical treatment, anti US protests were held and declared it US interference in Iranian affairs, it was soon followed by students storming again US embassy and took 62 people as hostages and finally 52 were held for 444days. Bazargan government resigned and a more conservative form of government was formed. US marines in an attempt to rescue hostages resulted in collapse of two black

hacks and death of eight marines. This event was enjoyed as divine help and freedom from US involvement in Iranian affairs as real victory.

Last chapter of the book titled “Islamic Republic of Iran” draws attention towards the Islamization of the Iranian society. The Qur’anic *Hadd* were imposed and loyalty to Islam instead of state was considered prime objective. Curriculum of universities and education system was Islamized and the heir apparent will be decided by Supreme Revolutionary Council through consultation process. Islamic dress code and moral base was imposed on all sections of the society. All sort of westernization like music, tie and journalist article criticizing Islam were banned. Khomeini desired to export revolution to all parts of the world and directed Shia population of Iran to overthrow Saddam Hussein. In the meantime pro army official who took shelter in Iraq misguided Saddam about peoples wish in Iran. In 1980 Iraqi forces launched a major attack against Iran via Khuzestan an oil rich region in order to overthrow revolutionary government. But Khomeini’s charismatic leadership not only gain back occupied areas but gave a major setback to Iraqi forces through volunteers of PasdaranInqalab. Khomeini was determined to continue war finally through public sentiments end it with a statement. *“Taking this decision was more deadly than drinking hemlock.....I submitted myself to God’s will and drank this decision for his satisfaction.... And on the interest of the Islamic republic”* (p.89)

After this a verdict was published from Khomeini to kill Salam Rushdie with an award of millions rupees and Iran cut-off diplomatic relation with Britain. He died on June3, 1989 at midnight and his funeral was attended by several million people and when it became impossible to take his coffin to Behest –e Zahra it was airlifted and laid to final rest with grief and cries from his mourners. After Khomeini’s burial his 29 page will was readout publicly to remain away from US and condemnation Saudi monarchy. His heir Ali Khamenei was elected as supreme head of supreme council and promised to fulfill his predecessor’s will. Many people happened to raise voice for reform they were brought under control by power

Ali Ahmad Bhat

even for election rigging blamed against the then president Ahmadinejad got full support from the Supreme council and resulted in excessive use of force against the agitators.

In conclusion revolution brought many things for Iran which seems impossible to be achieved through monarchical rule. Among these things; indignity in all spheres was achieved particularly in economics and technology and in the development of Infrastructure. Foreign influence ward-off while as nations under monarchy are still dependent on the foreigners. Peace and tranquility prevails in Iran than other middle eastern nations.