

Avery: Oh, no. Qajar was not an upstart. It was not an adventure. In fact, Fath-Ali Khan Qajar was considered important and influential enough for Nader Shah to be involved in his murder in the time of Shah Tahmasb the third. No, I don't think there's any comparison there. I think historically that would be inaccurate.

Q: I know. But what I mean is that it really doesn't matter where you come from. It's much more important where you are going to. Somebody has to start somewhere. And I think that after the revolution of 1906 -- I mean, I may be wrong. You correct me. But after the revolution of 1906 the country was gradually disintegrating and falling into pieces.

Avery: Yes. Reza Khan did a good job.

Q: And Reza Khan did come and got it together.

Avery: Oh, yes. I'm not contesting that.

What I'm trying to talk about is Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Reza Khan's son's feeling of inferiority in the presence of people like 'Ali Amini and Qavamossaltaneh. Reza Khan, his father, would have no feeling of inferiority. He couldn't care less. It was the son's psychology that I'm concerned with.

Q: Yes.

Avery: And his inability to take advice from people like 'Ali Amini. Reza Khan, his father -- Reza Shah was the one who said of 'Ali Amini's mother that she was the only man in the Qajar family -- showing the difference in attitude.

Q: Yes.

Avery: Reza Shah was not afraid of 'Ali Amini's mother. He recognized that she was a powerful and fine woman. If she'd given him advice, he'd have listened to it, as I believe he did on several occasions.

Q: Yes. If I were the Shah I wouldn't feel any inferiority towards the Qajars because whatever they may have been, they were towards the end a bunch of degenerate --

Avery: No, they weren't. That's not true either.

Q: Well, I mean, you told me a story on this tape saying that how he was getting his money out of the country.

Avery: Oh, Ahmad Shah. Yes, he was only one of them.

Q: That's what I mean.

Avery: But I didn't say that the whole of the Qajars were a bunch of degenerates because they weren't. 'Ali Amini is certainly not a part of a bunch of degenerates.

Q: No, of course, they are not. But I mean, Ahmad Shah certainly was. I mean, he clearly didn't care about the country and about the crown.

Avery: No. He was not a very good representative of the family.

Q: And somebody had to come and rescue, just as somebody now has to come and rescue.

Avery: Rescue the country, yes.

Q: That's right. Come and rebuild and start the process of rebuilding and regeneration, as it were. Somebody has to do it.

Avery: That's right. Yes. Did a job that was largely undone later.

Q: Anyway, so the N.I.O.C., then, was set up. And who were -- at the first -- the people who ran N.I.O.C.?

Because you said that N.I.O.C. was, on the whole, very well run.

Avery: Oh, it's very well organized. Fallah, of course, was important. And Fu'ad Rowhani was another and a very good team of engineers trained by the A.I.O.C. And then, 'Abdollah Entezam --

But the A.I.O.C.'s trained people gave it a momentum which carried it on for a very long time very well. Eventually, it came perhaps a little bit wobbly. But the whole industry was -- It worked itself with good technology and so on.

Q: And Eqbal was also at some point the head, wasn't he?

Avery: Yes, Eqbal became the head for a very long time, Manuchehr.

Q: But what --

Avery: Well, he never interfered because he didn't know anything about the industry. Well, he interfered a little. But he was generally kept very much in his place by Fallah and Baqer Mostowfi and others, the technologists. For Manuchehr Eqqbal really knew nothing about petroleum technology, of course.

Q: But of all those people, it seems to me that Fallah was the only one who managed to amass such an unbelievable fortune.

Avery: Yes.

Q: How did he do it? Was it?

Avery: I think he did that mostly in his dealings with foreign oil companies, not after the N.I.O.C.

He became very powerful -- a figure in the International Oil Cartel. It was out of international oil. He became a director, you see in numerous oil companies. Yes.

Though, I must say I never knew anything about his [chuckles] fortune till after his death.

Q: I mean, if he got it from other companies by being directors and by judicious investment and so on.

Avery: Oh, yes. I don't it was any more illegitimate than a great many fortunes gathered by great captains of industry of whom he became one. No, not at all.

Q: Oh, I see. So that clears up something.

Avery: It clears up quite a lot.

Q: Quite a lot.

Avery: No, a lot of his compatriots -- his Iranian friends and close colleagues -- of course, have declared it to be corrupt and illegitimate. But I think that sort of declaration may partly be ascribed to their lack of adroitness. They weren't as clever as he was. He was an immensely clever and very, very active man. [It was] partly sour grapes (I think) on their part.

I find it very difficult. The Reza Fallah that I knew fairly closely for a good many years -- I find



it very difficult to think of him as corrupt. I think he was immensely clever and immensely (probably) necessary to the international oil community with his vast wisdom and knowledge of the industry. But, of course, he took his wages for that knowledge from the industry that he was serving.

And it turned out that when he died that he was worth millions and millions of --

[tape stopped while Mr. Avery was speaking]

[end of side two of tape four]

Q: You were carrying on from about the Fallah connection.

Avery: Yes. I think this advice that he'd given and how, obviously, it become in international oil interests. Probably his last rope was what he would regard as legitimate wages. So perhaps it's an exaggeration to say that he was very corrupt, though I've heard it from his closest friends and associates -- a lot of tut-tutting and "Oh, how corrupt he was." But I wonder whether he was any more corrupt than a lot of other people in a very corrupt world.

I liked Reza Fallah. He was, of course, eventually very grand, very much inclined to talk to one, especially

"les peuvres comme moi de haut en bas". And yet, there was always a continuum, a kind of personality force in Reza Fallah which was always the same throughout the years I knew him.

And when I did meet him he was always courteous. He was the kind of man who'd walk across a room to say, "How do you do?" to an old friend.

Q: So it wouldn't matter, therefore, if some of that fortune

was set up for a fellowship in Persian studies.

Avery: I would welcome it.

Q: Right.

Avery: I'm not worried myself. I suggested once that when I was told by an intimate friend of her's that Madame Fallah was looking for ways of creating some kind of memorial to Reza's name. And I [chuckles] promptly said, "Oh, a prominent readership in Persian studies at Cambridge in the name of Reza Fallah -- to be called the Reza Fallah Readership of Persian Studies." I thought this was a splendid idea. She could subscribe five hundred or six hundred thousand pounds which would be the endowment necessary for such a readership without it making very much difference. And it would provide, certainly, a very honorable fellowship -- a memorial to her husband and a memorial of a kind which I think my old friend, Reza Fallah, wouldn't demur at. He might have been rather pleased.

When I suggested it to Iranians who were interested in a project such as this, I was told, "Oh, no. He was too corrupt. We couldn't have anything named after him."

But I think I was wrong in accepting that judgment. I think [chuckles] I just as leave have a



readership in Persian studies and perpetuity in Cambridge named after Reza Fallah as after anybody else.

Q: Yes.

Avery: It's like the story of when Samuel Johnson, who was very friendly with the Lord Harvey -- one of the Bristols, you know, and of the Harveys of...-- And somebody said something derogatory about young Lord Harvey in the great Dr. Johnson's presence. And Johnson -- all Englishmen love dogs -- meaning it as a compliment, rebuked this man and said, "Sir, I would as leave have a dog named Harvey as by any other name."

I think I must say that I'd as leave have a readership to succeed me when I retire in Cambridge in Persian studies named after Reza Fallah as after any body else, quite honestly. [chuckles]

Q: Yes. Now, I would like to talk about the whole of the Pahlavi period -- cultural contribution to Persian culture.

What would be your assessment?

Avery: Nil -- practically nil on the whole. The Pahlavi period contributed a reassertion of Iran as a sovereign entity. It contributed a real wakening in Iranians of a sense of national identity and of a sense of pride in being Iranians. It contributed an opening of Iran to the possibilities of modern development. It contributed a demonstration to the world of Iranian capacity to use modern

technology and to become adept in modern technology. It contributed the possibility of the dream

of Iran becoming a power in the world being realized -- albeit only a possibility. And I am here talking of it in terms of dreams.

But it contributed (I think) very little to the continuation of Persian culture. But then, not very much had been contributed to the continuation of classical Persian culture since the end of the Timorid period which is taking us down to what -- the middle of the sixteenth century. Not much was done except in the fields of architecture in the Safavid period, even, to the continuity of the subtleties of Persian art.

Q: Do you attribute that to the rise of Shi'ism and obscurantism

and general --

Avery: Obscurantism and Shi'ism -- You're a terrible interviewer to have because you speak almost entirely with my vocabulary. You always use exactly the words that I am about to use, as if you knew I was going to use those words.

Shi'ism and obscurantism are two pieces of my vocabulary that you've also used. You've answered the question you were asking in the way you asked it. Exactly, I do attribute this to those factors.

Q: Yes.

Avery: The rise of Shi'ism and its obscurantism (I think) were terribly addling forces.

What did they do, however? They did create a modern nation state as Walter Hintz says in his History of the Safavid

Persia and the Rise of the National State. They did -- it's cited in the book -- create a national state. They created a national state at the expense somehow of Iranian literary expression and culture.

The national state went on under the Qajars. But not very much has happened until the burst of modern Persian literature and poetry which were generally against the regime. Of course, it is one of the ironies of this history that we're talking about that the stronger and more integrated the Iranian state became, the less celebrated and vital it seems to have been in the production of a great literature. Take your Hafez and your Sa'di, or going further back -- your Sana'i and your Farideddin 'Attar and Mowlavi. Take those great exponents of Persian literature -- Ferdowsi. They all achieved their greatness in times of the utmost stress and division of Iran -- no national Iranian state in their time.

Hafez and Sa'di or Hafez of Shiraz, Sa'di of Shiraz -- Both belonged to a city called Shiraz -- Sana'i Ghaznavi, Ferdowsi lived at a time when it was necessary to recall a lost grandeur and glory, at a time when the Samanid renaissance had ended

And northeastern Iran was being taken over by Ghuz Turks in the persons of Mahmud or Sabuktakin and Mahmud Ghaznavi.

And that was the time when the great Samanid got written as an innuendo against the Turks and as a glorification of a past glory.

So that great poetry and great art seems to have flourished at times when Iran was divided, when there was not much national glory left, but only the poets left to salvage to remind people of an Iranian culture which was in eclipse. So these voices came forward to remind us of something

that was lost maybe out of the present age of Shi'ism's glory -- the triumph of Shi'ism at last. Maybe some great poetry or literature will suddenly emerge -- lampoons coterie poetry, satires. Which, of course, was what a lot of Hafez was -- produced almost clandestinely to remind us of the wit and of the brilliance and pragmatism of ordinary Iranian citizens at a time when they are under suppression. Do you see what I mean?

Q: Yes, indeed.

Avery: Am I making myself clear?

Q: No, no -- absolutely.

Avery: And so it's not surprising to me that literature didn't flourish very greatly under Safavids -- architecture, certainly.

To some extent, the Miniature -- the tradition established under the later Teymurids (another period, incidently, of political disintegration but during which in Herat and then later at Tabriz) -- was -- Art excelled under the later Teymurids and Shahrokh Shah and so on, and then later under the early Safavids

But then as the state became consolidated and became a great internationally recognized



sovereign state -- the first Iranian national state -- the arts ceased to flourish in an enduring form. And then you get a decline.

And again, under the Pahlavis a truly Persian culture hardly survived.

Q: Yes, but excuse me --

Avery: Efforts were made laterally. One of the tragedies of the demise of the Pahlavi dynasty is that the good works being put forward by the Empress -- under her patronage to some considerable extent -- were never given a chance to get off the ground. Because great efforts were being made.

She was a lady who did introduce an ameliorative factor into the vulgarity (if you don't mind my using the word) -- banality of the Pahlavi regime. But she didn't have time. Time was not left. She was a person, obviously, of good taste. And she was attempting to at least blend Iranian plastic arts -- visual arts -- with something of the West and refine Iranian plastic arts under the Qajar period there had been some good work in the visual arts which she was reviving.

But alas, one of the things I regret most about the revolution was that this kind of cultural effort being mounted by that lady was, of course, curtailed, cut short.

Q: But if you don't mind going back to the beginning of the Reza Shah era -- It seems to me that all through the Qajar, due to the total ascendancy of the mollahs and so on, the language itself had been so eroded that hardly any literary work was produced. But didn't it contain something like seventy percent Arabic words?



Avery: Yes. I wouldn't blame that on the mollahs so much.

The Arab ascendancy, of course, did come in periods of intense religiosity. It came back in the time of Mahmud Ghaznavi in his strong cultivation of Islam. The language of the chancellery became much more Arabicized than it had been during the Persianizing period under the Samanids.

And then, of course, the language situation became very involved later. Because you've got the Mongols who were talking Mongol and Turks, the Saljuqs, talking Turkish and so on. You've got Beyhaqqi who produced a marvelous Persian. Nezamol-molk who wrote a beautiful Persian. You've got, of course, continuators of the Persian cultural tradition under the Saljuqs and then later, under the Mongols. Rashideddin Fazlollah writing again in Persian. You've got attempts always to keep alive the Persian. You've got then, under the later Teymurids, you've got the Tazkirat al-Shu'ara' of Dowlatshah. You've got the great work of Amir 'Alishir-i Nava'i in his marvelous effort to encourage both the survival of the Persian language and the beginning of Joghatai Turkish. He is a sort of Zul-Lughatayn.

You've got all that and then you've got a period under the safavids when there was a retrogression. It was certainly a terrible relapse. You've got the famous stories of the attempt to Shi'itize (so to speak) Iran, the bringing in of mollahs from Iraq who didn't know Persian.

You have the marvelous episode that's recounted in

Browne's Literary History of Persia. I can't give you the page and volume references straight off. But anyway, the story of the mollahs being imported into Iran to propogate Shi'ism.

Q: And that dreadful mollah -- what was his name -- who was the Khomeini of the Safavids?

Avery: [chuckles] Oh, Majlesi who came later.

Q: Majlesi -- that's right.

Avery: With the two mollahs, one of whom knew one part of a Persian sentence and the other knew the latter part. And so they had to go around together pairing the two parts of the Persian sentence they knew together.

Then, of course, you did get a falling off in language.

Then under Nader Shah you got the historian of Nader Shah,

Mehdi Khan Astarabadi writing in a very bombastic over-Arabicized Persian. And the same time, you've got Mohammad Kazem of Marv who wrote a quite simpler, much more straightforward, quite good Persian. So you've got that.

And then, gradually, you've got a more and more tendency in chancery language -- an official language to Arabicization -- until the later Qajars and the realization that Iran had to pull its socks up and become a little bit more succinct, a little bit more direct. And so you've got Qaem Maqam Maqami and Amir Kabir and the various Qajar enlightened Vazirs who tended to try and purge the language of some of its empty bombasts.

But it wasn't, of course, really until the great writers of the vernacular of early twentieth century -- Talibof Maraghe'i and Siyahat Nameh of Ebrahim Beg and ultimately, Jamalzadeh and that Ten Berlin group in the first World War, and so on who started to write a directer, simplified Persian.

But this linguistic development -- I wouldn't blame its faults on the mollahs. The mollahs always continued to lisp, as it were, their own peculiar dialect which a friend of mine in Teheran used to be able to imitate so well. I can't do it -- slight whistle of the false teeth "Sobhanallah", you know, as you were getting into the "khazineh" of the "hammam".

Q: That's right.

Avery: I mean, the mollahs were always a bit of a joke, speaking in slightly Arabicized Najafi Iraqian, Persian. They say Khomeini does, too, as a matter of fact.

Q: Yes. But you see now --

Avery: He seems to be pretty effective with the masses, whatever the dialect may be.

Q: But the Reza Shah with the institution of the Royal Academy and with the appointment of



just about the best elite -- whether Western or traditional educated people -- to the best posts and chairs at the University of Tehran. That whole first generation really produced a cultural elite which was renovative, which was very progressive (in some ways) and which paved the way for people like Sadeq Hedayat and all the people who have been writing, you know, during the Pahlavi reign -- the poets.

I mean, today there is absolutely nothing. All the good poets that we know of the last thirty or forty years are the product of all that renovation (it seems to me) and all the backing for what is Persian as opposed to what is Arabic.

Avery: I wish I could agree with you that the Pahlavis did very much for Iranian culture. But I suppose certainly in de- Arabicizing Persian they did something -- quite a lot -- I suppose.

Q: Well, of course Rome isn't built in one day -- is it?

Avery: Well, the revolutions just destroy everything -- don't they -- the good with the bad. And I think in that case they were destroying good. They were destroying good. Also, of course, in one aspect of the thing that I see very little mentioned in the commentators on this revolution -- people are insensitive.

One of the things the Queen did and one of the things the Pahlavi Foundation did was to found orphanages to do wonderful works for impoverished and abandoned children and vagrants. Great works were done in this respect. Institutions were established. They were on unimpeccable lines. There were a lot Iranian workers -- men and women -- working with immense good will and devotion in this -- what some people (superficial

observers of Iranians) might regard as uncharacteristic Iranian occupations since Iranians are always considered so selfish and egotistical and so this and so that. People, perhaps, don't expect Iranians to be --

[tape stopped while Mr. Avery was speaking]

One of the things that happened under the Pahlavi regime -- good things -- was the establishment of these institutions who were looking after orphans, looking after the maimed, looking after malformed children. It's the sort of thing that the Empress was very interested in.

And one of the horrible aspects of the revolution was a sudden collapse of these institutions with these unfortunate children suddenly left and neglected and so on. I don't know what the resolution of that situation has been. But at the time of the revolution I was given information of the most disturbing kind of this abandonment of these good works that had been instituted under the Pahlavis. Of course, this was part of the tragic dichotomy that had arisen.

What had happened under the Pahlavis was the destruction -- the removal -- of former forms of Islamic philanthropy where the wealthy of a ward -- of an area, of a city -- would club together to insure that nobody ever died of starvation in their area. But clean and new suits were given to people at Nowruz and at Mehregan, the spring and autumn festivals, and so on.

And this traditionally was undertaken by the good burghers, by the good Muslim citizens of the districts -- the quarters of a Muslim township.

Gradually, under the modernization program characteristic of the Pahlavi era, a lot of this old fashioned type of philanthropy and social good fell into desuetude. But it was gradually being replaced under the Pahlavi Westernized system by modern institutions for taking care of the poor and the maimed and the malformed and so on.



And then the revolution comes and you get a complete reversal. The whole thing is halted. What was a whole process was halted. The Islamic institutions were gradually revived with the Khomeini regimes, of course -- emphasis on committee, work for the "mostaz'efin" (the wretched and the poor and the miserable). So that some kind of effort is being made, obviously, to restore the Islamic traditional type of provisions for the unfortunate members of society. But the hiatus in between the collapse of one nascent organization and the revival of another -- which was to its very nature being a revival, again be a nascent organization -- The damage in between, of course, is what would concern the careful observer.

This is all part of the tragedy in modern Iran. A state with suffering the tensions and parallels of the state in transition to which suddenly extra tensions and perils are added when the state in transition is halted in its process of transition by a revolution that is determined to reverse [chuckles] the whole procedure and to go back to a state as before the transition period began. There can be no improvement, not if matters can only be made worse.

Q: Yes. All the -- You know, I remember the publications like Sokhan, for instance, Majjeleh-e Sokhan --

Avery: Yes -- all that. Such good, serious journals.

Q: And also Rahnama-ye Ketab.

Avery: Yes.

Q: And all that group of people who worked on the Persian language. There were really good specialists of the language.

Avery: Especially Sokhan which began in that age of freedom I've talked about -- much earlier than Rahnama-ye Ketab. But Rahnama-ye Ketab was also a very good, serious contribution.

Q: And all that group of people. I mean, surely they have contributed something to the cultural revival that --

Avery: Yes. Oh, certainly. I think they have.

And also the text that was society's -- dedicated to the preparation of texts of good definitive editions of ancient works from manuscript. Enormously good cultural work was being done, especially in the latter years which has as all been halted. The works, of course, were undertaken by friends of mine like Dr. Khanlari and his wife and Zabiollah Safa and Hosein Khatibi and numerous others -- all brought to us.

Q: And books that were published at the expense of the --

Avery: An expense of the Royal Foundation's. All brought to a crashing halt by the revolution -- most tragic.

Q: It seems to me that books that would never have been published under commercial --

Avery: Well, I don't doubt.

Q: It seems they were helped by the royal patronage and also through the royal patronage. For instance, by the Owqaf        Organization --

Avery: Yes.

Q: Whose very good editions of the Qor'an, of holy texts --

Avery: Well, yes. Enough of that went on.

Q: You see, it would never have been possible if it was only the market forces operating in a commercial world.

Avery: Well, I wouldn't belittle too much the possibilities of Iranian private enterprise. I think they would have managed to produce quite a lot.

There certainly was a big literary flare -- a literary revival -- in the publication of literature, not in its creation -- not in its creation, but certainly in the publication and editing of ancient examples of literature.

Q: What about the poets -- the young poets and --

Avery: Not very good.

Q: You don't like any of their works -- Nader Naderpur?

Avery: Well, Nader Naderpur I like very much. He's a very good poet. Nima Yushij is very good. But you mentioned the more recent ones.

Q: The more recent ones -- I don't know of any.

Avery: No. Well, some of it was good -- some of it, yes.

Q: So how would you assert --

Avery: I've always felt with modern Iranian poets that they are saddled with such an extraordinarily grand, versatile "classical" tradition. They've got an awful job on their hand to try and produce anything innovative, really. They are overwhelmed by a vast -- Hafez is a very difficult act to follow, let's just sum it up putting it like that.

Q: That's right. But also, for instance, the Royal Academy --

[tape stopped while interviewer was speaking]

[end of side one of tape five]

Avery: Henry Corbin and the work that he and people -- scholars of the caliber of the late



Mohammad Mo'in did the old Franco-Iranian Institute on early texts was impeccable work. It was extremely fine -- the best of which France and Iran could be capable in this marvelous field that the French were so adept at of combining Oriental scholarship with contributions from the countries of the origin of the subjects being studied and French scholarship. This was very good.

Later on, when you got more and more institutions established, more help from the Pahlavi Foundation and so on coming, I think one got a lot of really less reliable scholarship manifesting itself -- a lot of it rather slick.

Q: So if you wanted to give an overall view of the last fifty years of the cultural scene -- what would it be for you?

Avery: Bad.

Q: But why? What about all their achievements?

Avery: Fifty years -- I'm terribly bad at mathematics. Fifty years takes us back to when? To 1954.

Q: No. I mean from the --

Avery: 1945.

Q: 1930 I would like to go back to, or 1925 from the advent of the --

Avery: Well, there was nothing in 1930.

Take it from 1941. As I've said earlier on, 1941 to 1951 a very great deal of cultural manifestation -- the writings of Hedayat, the writings of Ch u bak, the writings of Ahmad Mahmud, the writings of, oh, a number of people. That was a good period.

From 1953 onwards -- Or from 1951, the advent of Mossadeq, onwards, the scene gradually changes for the worse.

And in the last decade -- very bad. [There's] a great deal of book production, but nothing very truthful or lasting or worthwhile coming out.

Q: What about the renaissance of all the ancient crafts like pottery, like miniature, like weaving --

Avery: Wait a minute. It happened but it was very inorganic insofar as it had no roots in the culture it was representative of. It was artificial. It was artificially induced. It was what I call "museum culture". It was culture. It was pottery crafts produced in museum conditions -- not the

real thing. Better that than nothing. But if you're asking me about the cultural health that it demonstrated, my answer is thumbs down. Better that than nothing is the best I can say.

Q: You don't think any of the prose work or any of the poetry would survive?

Avery: No, I don't -- hardly. Survive as a curiosity, survive as a sociological tool to illustrate the expression of a society in transition and in difficulty. Survive for the historian as indicative of the disoriented, uncertain nature of the determination purposes of the society. But not survive as great art. No, I'm afraid not.

Q: Wasn't it at least better than the fifty years before?

Avery: Well, I don't think it was, necessarily. [I don't] think it was better than anything. No.

After all, the fifty years before it produced Hejazi. It produced Dashti and their best. They were quite the authors capable of survival, I think.

Q: But they were Pahlavi era -- weren't they -- Dashti?

Avery: They were.

Q: That's it. They were Pahlavi era -- Dashti and Hejazi and all those people -- weren't they?

Avery: Yes. Indeed they were.

Q: So one can't say that the elan is totally negative -- can one?

Avery: No. But I wasn't talking in terms of Pahlavi. I was talking in terms periods. You said this last period -- fifty years before.

Q: No. What I mean is the Pahlavi period. We're talking about the Pahlavi period.

Avery: Oh, the whole Pahlavi period.

Q: That's what I'm talking about.

Avery: No, I don't think you can -- I can't dismiss the whole Pahlavi period.

As I said, between 1941 and 1951 there's a great period of production of the arts. And that was Pahlavi period, too. Yes.

Q: Well, that's what we're assessing -- the whole of from the advent of the Pahlavis.

Avery: From 1925.

Q: That's right. That's what I said. Yes.

Avery: Oh, yes. Not very good from the whole. But it did produce Sadeq Hedayat. It produced Chubak. It produced some great art -- Dashti, Hejazi and others. From the whole, it's not a very great period. It was a period of great cultural uncertainty.

Q: But was the cultural decline due to the uncertainty?

Avery: [It was a] period of great cultural uncertainty, as I think the recent revolution has shown.

Now your question.



Q: The question is that if -- Is it because what Jalal Al-e Ahmad called Gharbzadegi was the cultural shock with the onrush of Western influences and Western languages and so forth? Or is it really, in some ways, a universal phenomenon insofar as, of course, I believe (I may be wrong) that in the West even -- although there is tremendous amount of activity and production -- there is very little of great importance incomparable to the best of the power as appeared even in the West since the second world war?

Avery: Oh, I think you're absolutely right. This is entirely outside the scope, incidentally of what I understood this recording to be about.

Q: Yes, sure, it is.

Avery: Which was my reminiscences of my experiences in Iran.

Q: That's right, but --

Avery: But I think you're absolutely right. I think the whole of the modern era in the West and in any cultures which are Western-oriented or Western-associated, which modern Iranian culture

certainly was until the revolution -- I think there's a terrible decline in standards, a terrible new ignorance, new gibberish and lowering in degradation and deterioration of standards and understanding.

Q: So, in other words, in a sense --

Avery: So that I mean, in a sense you can say that Iran was suffering from the malaise of the culture that had become too closely associated to it.

Q: That's exactly what I was trying to point out.

Avery: Yes. I think you're quite right there.

Q: That maybe that is what was part of the reason --

Avery: Yes. And this is one of the reasons why Jalal Al-Ahmad (an old friend of mine, incidentally) spent a day with me and a night once here in Cambridge -- literally a day and a night, for we never went to bed. We talked the whole day and we talked the whole night. We walked about Cambridge in the night looking at the stars, going on with our conversation. [chuckles]

He's a remarkable man. He wrote this book called Westernitis -- [chuckles] I suppose you could translate this -- Gharbzadegi. It's a strange title. It was banned, of course, for a long time -- this book was -- under the Pahlavis. It's not a good book, incidentally. Don't get me wrong. I mean, I'm not pretending, I'm not claiming that it was a work of great genius. In many ways it was an extremely wrong headed [chuckles] and imprecise and ill-informed book, if you don't mind my saying so. I mean, I do know young Europeans and young Iranians who are great believers in Jalal Al-e Ahmad who would be very angry -- they'd kill me for saying that. But I have to say it because I'm quite honest -- where literary matters are concerned -- and rather severe. [chuckles]

But he wrote this book. But he wouldn't have written this book, perhaps, had not Western arts themselves been in a state of deterioration and uncertainty, which he probably didn't appreciate.

But his own country's culture was in a state of grave uncertainty and he wanted to blame it on somebody. So he blamed it on "Westernitis" -- somewhat wrongly, I think. [chuckles]

But then, Iranians never blame their faults on themselves if they can help it. [chuckles] They always like to find somebody else to be the scapegoat.

Q: What about -- Another subject that I wanted to ask you about was the Freemasonry.

Avery: Yes.

Q: With their usual talent for exaggeration, Iranians think that Freemasonry was very important in Iran and --

Avery: [chuckles] Yes. Well, Freemasonry -- I don't think it was very important in Iran. Iran is a country of "dowrehs", of circles, of coteries -- groups. One of which liked to call itself Freemasonry. I don't think it was ever really recognized by any of the international Freemasonry lodges -- the Scottish, the English or the French.

Q: It wasn't?

Avery: No, not really properly.

And I don't think they were really serious as Freemasons. But it was another form of coterie and brotherhood.

In any kind of society that is socially and politically insecure, you've got a tendency to try and form coteries of men -- likeminded men, men of similar principles and pains and aspirations -- who like to join together and perhaps bind themselves, if their society's insecure, with oaths of secrecy and that kind of thing so they can feel that they're free in at least one place, at one time, to have open and frank discussion -- especially where people are sophisticated and intelligent as the sort of Iranians who would join such a coterie would be.

But I saw just a little of Iranian Freemasonry -- not that I'm a Freemason. I'm certainly not. I think that was brought up in Britain very much about my grandfather and father who very much