

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Representation of Medicine in the Iranian Constitutionalist Humor (1906- 1911): A Socio-Historical Analysis

Abstract

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution (Persian: Mashrūtiyyat), 1906-1911, culminated in the foundation of the first Iranian parliament. During and before this era, Iranians became acquainted with modern medicine. The high recurrence of the topic of medication in Constitutionalist humor gives occasion to feel qualms about the claim that the issue was simply due to its attractiveness instead of broader socio-political aims and objectives. Given that the Constitutionalist satirists used humor as a tool to criticize tradition, as well as to promote and defend modernity and its principles, it seems that they had a socio-political motive to use the theme of medication. Thus, they attempted to make the inefficiencies of tradition clear by contrasting it with medical discourse as a tangible and practical aspect of the life of people belonging to different classes. Their objective was to imply the superiority of modernity and to portray it as inescapable in the modern world.

Key words: Traditional Medicine, Modern Medicine, Constitutional Revolution, Iran

Received: 5 Jun 2021; Accepted: 31 Jul 2021; Online published: 28 Aug 2021

Research on History of Medicine/ 2021 Aug; 10(3): 171-184.

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Citation:

Dehghanian J, Rastegar Y, Arekhi M. The Representation of Medicine in the Iranian Constitutionalist Humor (1906-1911): A Socio-historical Analysis. *Res Hist Med.* 2021; 10(3): 171-184.



Introduction

The Qajar dynasty ruled over Iran from 1785 to 1925. This era is generally deemed as a serious fall from the previous brilliant economic and political era, i.e., the Safavid era, entering an era that was accompanied by a kind of recession and mediocrity. Nonetheless, this simplistic interpretation is challenged upon closer historical investigation: there are reasons to believe that the Qajar era was more dynamic than many tend to accept (Scarce, 2005). First, modern Iranian history began in the second half of the era when the idea of “progress” and modernization became commonplace in Iran through modernist intellectuals, politicians, businessmen, tourists and journalists. This led to a great challenge to the status quo of the society or a confrontation between tradition and modernity (Goodarzi, 2008, p. 92). It was during the reign of *Nasser al-Din Shah* (The Shah of Persia from 1848 to 1896) that Iranians became acquainted with the developments in Western civilization and came to the conclusion that Iran was a backward country. The gradual increase in relative awareness of the progress of Western societies and comparing it with the backwardness of the country brought modernist discourse into a new phase (Zarei and Zargarnejad, 2019). Second, the Constitutional revolution took place toward the end of this era, ushering a way for the society to seek modernization and promotion of the ideals of democracy and the rule of law. The Constitutionalist movement also had as its aim to “separate Iranians from many of the traditions, and systems to which they had been accustomed for centuries and encourage them to become familiar with modernism” (Goodarzi, 2008, p. 93).

Further, having relation with the West, notably through modern education led to the emergence of new ideas and jobs, and eventually the emergence of the new middle class in the society. This class, which was called the Persian and Arabic *monavaral-fekr* (literally clear-thinkers) and later the intellectual, was influenced by the tradition of the French Enlightenment, intending to bring about fundamental changes in Iranian society (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 35).

It was during this era that literature was used as a spearhead of progressive ideas, playing an important role in the developments of the Constitutional era. In literature, modernity brought about changes in genres, content, language, and style. Thematically, the idea of modernity became the most important issue in the literature of the era.

With the rise of journalism and criticism of the social circumstance, satire was used to target traditional ideas, contributing to the reform of the society and social equity and criticism of the unjust political and social relations (Ajand, 2005, p. 232). The most important newspapers of this era were Mullah Nasruddin, Nasim Shomal and Sorasrafil, all of which turned to write socio-political satire. Likewise, poets and writers frequently used humor to challenge tradition and to convince people of the necessity to accept modern institutions. In this line, one of the most frequently discussed satirical themes in constitutional literature was medicine. Constitutional satirists used the subject of medicine as a tool to critique tradition and traditional thought, seeking to soften people’s resistance to importing the notions of modernity and modern thought into their lives.

In the rest of this paper, the authors first described the status of traditional medicine during the reign of Qajar kings, the condition motivating the modern medicine came into being, and the society’s reaction to it, and then they examined the themes of medicine and sanitation in Ibrahim Bey’s Travelogue (A Persian novel written by *Haji Zayn al-’Abidin*



published in Istanbul), *Rah-e Ab Nameh*¹, The Adventure of Hajji Baba of Ispahan (*Sargozasht-e Haji Baba-ye Isfahani* is a translation of James Morier's novel, "The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan," by Mirza Habib Isfahani, a resident of Istanbul), *Masalak al-Mohsenin* (A book written by Talibov, an Iranian reformist of the Qajar era, in the form of the travelogue of an imaginary group of trekkers climbing to the summit of Damavand), *Kitab-e-Ahmad* (A book written by Abdolrahim Talibov, an Intellectual in Qajar), *Tamsilat* (plays) by Akhundzadeh (Iranian author, playwright, ultra-nationalist, philosopher, and founder of Azerbaijani modern literary criticism (1812-1878)), and *Charand va Parand* (Revolutionary satire written by Ali Akbar Dehkhoda in Iran, 1907-1909) by Dehkhoda (Iranian writer and linguist and author of Dehkhoda dictionary (1879-1956).

Traditional medicine during the Qajar era

Islamic medicine, called Tibb, denotes healing, treatment, magic or charm. The practice of medicine was highly influenced by religion in two ways. On the one hand, it had to do with trust in supernatural phenomena, for example, charm, divining and religion, or astrology. On the other hand, it had to do with Aristotelian and Galenic medicine, as long as it conformed with the religion of Islam (Ebrahimnejad, 2004, p. 402).

In addition, according to Floor (2004), there were three types of medical practice during the time of Qajar. The first was Greek medicine, used by the elite. The second and the most ancient one was a type of treatment based on magic and supernatural phenomena. The third was the so-called "prophetic medicine," which aimed to make magical practice religious in appearance as a way to localize the non-native practice. Ebrahimnejad (2004) pointed out that Iranian medicine was not a coherent collection in the 19th century. Rather, it was a broad assortment of medical knowledge, which incorporated a mix of different practices; therefore, with the appearance of Western medication in Iran, a Western-Iranian duality was formed, which characterized much of the later developments.

Greek medicine originated in Greece and spread throughout the Hellenistic world in the second century AD, reaching Iran and beyond. Islamic medicine was indebted to this system. In Iran, until the Qajar era, the Galenic-Islamic system continued to live as a guide to medical principles. The framework of this system was based on the balance between

1- *Rah-e Ab Nameh* is a satire written by Mohammad Ali Jamaalzaadeh which tells the story of a man, who has come to Iran from Europe, where he studies, to attend his sister's wedding. But after the wedding, he has a problem with the toilet, and the solution to this problem lies in the overall atmosphere of the story; In fact, the expression of the obvious facts lies in the type of communication, mood and behavior of the people of that day of Iran.



the four elements in the body (blood, bile, phlegm and soda). Therefore, the goal of treatment was to balance these elements and hence create balance in the body. So, if an element disturbed the balance of the system, its natural opposite element had to be increased to create a two-way balance; As a result, traditional medicine was based on the assumption that an ailment should be cured by its opposite (Ebrahimnejad, 2004). Traditional healers divided diseases and treatments into four categories: namely, coldness, warmth, dryness, and wetness. They prescribed medication based on the type of disease and the patient's nature.

In a satirical tone, Charles James Wills (1984) (A British physician, traveler, and author (1842–1912) observed:

“In Iran, medical science is experience-based. Thus, this noble science is learned experimentally over time. Doctors and scholars in this country divide all diseases and ailments into two types, naming one of them Harr, meaning hot, and the other Barrd, meaning cold. Almost all Iranian physicians are unaware of pathology, and whenever a sick person is not treated with one drug, they exposed them to another drug that works against the first drug. Iranian medicine is passed from father to son, and anatomy, as one of the requirements of medicine, is unknown to Iranian doctors.”

History of modern medicine in Iran

In the early Qajar era, European physicians entered Iran with political delegations. Hence, Western medicine slowly penetrated the trenches of Galenic medicine, and gradually traditional Iranian medical practices gave way to modern Western medicine (Elgood, 1951, p. 491).

The reformist and modernist Crown Prince of Fath Ali Shah, Prince Abbas Mirza (A Qajar crown prince of Persia and a military commander during the Russo-Persian War of 1804-1813), should be mentioned as one of the pioneers of promoting Western medicine in Iran. The war with the Russians made Abbas Mirza familiar with this type of medicine. During the war, he learned that with the help of modern medicine, many of the wounded Russian troops would return to the front line after a few months, but many of the wounded Iranian troops were practically inefficient (Zibakalam, 1999, p. 159). Apparently, this was the reason why the first Iranian s were sent to Europe to study medicine. This became the theme of James Morier's (1923) adventures of Haji Baba of Ispahan. The real origin of modern medicine in Iran should be considered since the establishment of the Academy of Arts or *Dar al-Fonon*. Amir Kabir (Iran's reformist chancellor of *Nasser al-Din Shah*) invited instructors from Austria to teach at the *Dar al-Fonun* School of Medicine in Iran, and it was from then on that medicine, surgery, and pharmacy began to flourish in Iran (Kiani Haft Lang, 2003, p. 10).

With the beginning of *Nasir al-Din Shah's* (The Shah of Persia from 1848 to 1896) reign, a fundamental change took place in the Centers for Disease Control in Iran, and several modern hospitals were established in Tehran and some other cities in Iran (Roustaei, 2003, p. 202). In 1888, having a medical certificate for employment in medicine became mandatory for the first time, and it was established that Iranian physicians should obtain a medical certificate for the treatment of patients (Adamiat, 1975, p. 336).

During the reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar (The second Shah (king) of Qajar Iran, from 1797), the translation of Western works began with the support of the court, focusing



on military and technical texts, and then spread to other areas, including fiction (Mirabedini, 2013, p. 65). One of the writers whose work was greatly appreciated by Iranian translators was Molière. Translators such as Mirza Habib Isfahani (Iranian poet, grammarian and translator, who spent much of his life in exile in Ottoman Turkey), Etemad-ol-Saltanah, Mirza Jafar Qarajeh Daghi and Mohammad Ali Foroughi translated some of his works into Persian. Perhaps, it is by no coincidence that Mirza Habib Isfahani was the same person who had earlier translated Molière's play "The doctor in spite of himself" into Persian (Mirabedini, 2013, p. 75).

The emergence of the discourse of modernity brought about significant changes in the structures of Iranian society. One area of change was medical discourse. Satire played a key role in this discourse shift through the following themes:

State of health

Personal and public health were described and criticized in many literary and nonliterary works including satire. For example, *Zeyn al-Abidin Maraghei* (2004) (*Zeyn al-Abedin Maraghei* (1840 in Maragheh – 1910 in Istanbul) was a pioneer Iranian novelist and a social reformer) who, in his book entitled Ibrahim Bye's Travelogue, considered the traditional baths of this era as one of the causes of diseases:

"When we entered the bathroom, pungent odor made me feel suffocated. There was a pit with stagnant water, and they called it Khazineh. Its water was dark green, the color of the feather of a peacock. With a little reflection, it became clear that the source of any contagious disease was this filthy water, because every person, blind, bald, male and female, would enter this three-month-old stale water."

This tangible objective image and the tacit irony of the author's initial premise, which saw Iran as a prosperous and free land, as well as the emphasis on "cleansing and taking a bath," created a bitter satire. Criticism of the contamination of traditional baths was also presented in Talibov's work. In *Masalak al-Mohsenin*, Talibov (1967) described the polluted baths of the city: "I started to arrange the work for tomorrow, then I went to the bath, Yet ... After coming out, instead of smelling fresh, I smelled like a dead fish."

A study of works written during the Qajar era shows that the non-observance of hygienic principles, along with the lack of quarantine principles, the pollution of cities and villages was the underlying cause of the death of many people every year. Similar reports were given by Dolatabadi (1984) and Serena (1884).

Hospital facilities

Criticism of the lack of medical facilities and services and the deplorable state of Iranian hospitals and patients were other themes of medical criticism in this era. For example, *Zayn al-Abedin Maraghei* (Maraghei, 2004) described Mashhad hospital: "You call it hospital! Every patient who goes there his/her sickness remains unsolved as long as they stay there unless they escape the hospital, being healed by the grace of God."

Having compared the medical status in Iran and the West, Talibov presented shocking statistics on the medical situation in Iran during the Qajar era; in this regard, Talibov (1967) stated: "In Germany, there is a doctor for every two thousand people. In Russia, there is a doctor for eighteen thousand people. In Iran, there is not a doctor even for five hundred thousand people and seven thousand square kilometres." Comparing the medi-



cal situation in Iran and that in the West, Dekhoda (2006) stated: “I do not claim that the plague is uncommon in the West, but why should we bury our young men and women in their thousands with our own hands every other year.”

According to Ghasemi Pouya (1998), during the Qajar era, the government did not provide any health care services to the nation, effectively forcing people to ask every foreigner they saw for help. In this regard, Ashouri (2005) stated: “for a long time, every European who came to Iran was considered a doctor as if he had a magical power and knew the solution to every pain.” In his book, *A Year Amongst Persians*, Brown (1893) gave a clear picture of Iran of that era. He reported patients whose relatives and acquaintances approached him and urged him to treat them.

The condition of traditional healers

Another theme of humor in the literary works of the Constitutional era was the description of traditional physicians and their practice of medicine. Traditional physicians practiced medicine without a medical certificate, and there was no special department that could approve their medical expertise and regulate or supervise their practice. Floor (2004) reported: “Iranian physicians do not need any diplomas to enter the medical profession. All they need is an unlimited reserve of arrogance and boldness.” This was the subject of much satire during this era. In a humorous tone, Talibov addressed his son, Ahmad: “Everyone who has read the book *Tohfeh (Tahfeh al-Mu'minin* is a medical book mainly in Persian, written by Mohammad Mohsen Hosseini Tonekaboni, known as Hakim Mo'men, a physician serving Shah Suleiman the Safavid, in the 11th century.) is a physician and if he has also read the Canon of Medicine, then he is a grand physician. They are, in fact, the butchers who are not responsible for what they slaughter”.

In *Rah-e Ab Nameh*¹, Jamalzadeh (1957) humorously described Mirza Musa Hakim-bashi as having received permission to practice medicine from his father by inheritance. With his dumb mind, he divided diseases into two categories: first, common diseases such as fever, smallpox and cold, which were known to the public, and second, all the diseases that he was unable to diagnose!! For the second category, he had a special prescription for each of the seven days of the week, and on that day he would prescribe exclusively the same prescription and prescribed the same medicine, whether the sick person was a man or a woman, old or young, terminally ill or just slightly ill.

In addition to traditional healers, old women, bath workers, and barbers were engaged in such medical practices as bloodletting (Delrich, 1996, p. 63). In fact, barbers and bath workers presented themselves to the community as a group of therapists who, in addition to public activities such as shaving heads and faces, were also engaged in medical and therapeutic measures, such as surgery and dentistry, bloodletting. Quoting a compatriot, Maraghei (2004) confirms the involvement of Iranian bath-workers and elders in medicine.

In his play “Mullah Ibrahim Kimiagar”, Fath Ali Akhondzadeh (A celebrated Iranian intellectual (1812 –1878) (1970) calls a bath-worker, who works as a traditional healer, a kind of murderer:

“... Your father worked hard to teach you barbering. Yet, you are not satisfied with that, you want to practice medicine like the barbers of Tbilisi. That is why you have sent so many people to the cemetery.”



The theme that the job of the traditional healer is murdering rather than curing can be seen in the literary texts of this era. For example, in the book *Rah-e Ab Nameh*, Jamal-zadah (1957) describes a traditional healer as “a human killer not a healer with Jesus’ breath.”

“Neighborhood gossip named the cemetery after the massacre of Mirza Musa’s patients, and when they saw him going there, onlookers blinked at each other and said that he was going to visit his martyrs. Another group, recalling the mung bean soup that he prescribed to his patients, would say that he was going to harvest mung beans from his farm.”

In Wazir Khan Lankaran’s play, *Akhundzadeh* (1970) portrayed the murderous nature of medical practice when a doctor killed a patient because of a misdiagnosis. The humorous part of the story was that the doctor not only asked for his fee from the dead man’s brother for the treatment of the patient but also asked for some more money, claiming that the dead man owed to him.

Morier (1923) makes satirical remarks on the murder of patients by traditional healers by comparing a doctor to an executioner: “a doctor and an executioner, whether in the white gown or the black cloak and hoods, resemble each other. After all, it doesn’t matter whether you die slowly because of a wrong prescription of a pill or fast because of an executioner’s blow.”

Notwithstanding, portraying traditional medication and medicine, Morier (1923) contrasted the modern doctor with the traditional healer, showing that people preferred the former. Given his realistic genre, he gave a picture that indicated the warm reception of the community of modern doctors. Morier (1923) described medication at length. At the outset, he explained why he wrote the book and, in a letter to an English tourist, exhibited a patient who became bed-bound. The patient had to choose between a traditional healer and a foreign doctor: “When I came here, I asked whether there were any physicians in the city; they said there were a Jews and a foreign doctor. I chose the foreign one. Believe me, if you were in my shoes, you would do the same. Thank God, I made the right decision”. What was interesting was that the foreign doctor was a fraud man and knew nothing of medicine, but still, people called him ‘ hakim’ (doctor) and had more trust in him than the traditional healer. In addition, Morier (1923) devoted part of his work to an extensive description of the confrontation between Mirza Ahmaq, the traditional court healer, and the foreign doctor, and people used to imitate the latter in mocking the behavior of the traditional healer.

The narrator’s description of the crowd at the physician’s house showed the author’s perspective of this comparison: all through the way, some patients tried to see the doctor- especially the poor patients who could not afford to go to the traditional healers of Iran. (Morier, 1923, p. 29).

Another significant point that was reprimanded by Constitutionalist humorists was the strong reliance of traditional medicine on superstition. Obviously, in such a situation, the subject of medicine could not be far from superstitious beliefs. People of this era had many superstitious beliefs about the causes of diseases and their treatment. Citing examples, Floor (2004) mentioned that all Iranians, doctors and patients, firmly believed in supernatural causes, such as the association of the movement of celestial bodies with the emergence of epidemics and other diseases.



Description of the reception of the Tehran residents of Darwish Safar (a traditional healer) and the satiric description of his pharmacy in the Adventures of Haji baba Ispahani gives a clear picture of the situation of the era.

“As soon as people heard about our arrival in Tehran, they came to see us from all parts of the city: a mother wanted a pray to protect her son from evil-wishers; a woman wanted to charm her husband. Unscrupulous young girls demanded a drug to hasten their marriage; young members of a family of fortune demanded a pray for the death of their fathers to secure their inheritance. Other girls demanded a pray for luck in marriage, but the most steadfast customers and the sweet morsels of the dervish were the people of the royal court, all of whom wanted the king’s love through the power of magic. To address these demands, the dervish’s pharmacy had and presented several spices, such as hyena’s genitalia, wolf’s hair, bear’s fat, hoopoe’s wings.”

Dehkhoda (2006) portrays the merging of traditional medicine with superstitions. One of these was the answer that a traditional healer wrote in response to a woman whose child was dying. His response shows that traditional medicine’s strong reliance on superstition.

“God willing, your son’s disease is not to do with evil-wishers. Rather, it is more to do with the heat and the sunshine. Give him some amber smoke tonight before anything else and see how it goes. If it doesn’t work well, boil some milk and mix it with donkey waste and pour it into his eyes.”

Another issue that was criticized by Constitutional satirists was the blend of medical teachings and religious beliefs. Basically, medicine had been associated with religious beliefs in many areas since ancient times, and people resorted to religious narrations and texts to cure their diseases. In fact, in this era when the situation of traditional medicine was facing a serious challenge, traditional physicians used religious propositions to prove their discourse. In *Rah-e Ab Nameh*, Jamalzadeh (1957) ridiculed the nightly prayers of Mirza Musa Hakimbashi.

According to Morier (1923), Hakim Bashi’s (A now obsolete title for traditional healers in Iran) treatment is also mixed with religious beliefs. “With each medication he gives to the patient, Mirza Musa reiterates that he should not forget to say the relevant prayer twelve times in the name of the twelve Imams (Shiet has twelve sacred leaders called Imam) since these magic words are more efficient than medicine.” Morier (1923) gives a similar account in *The Adventures of Haji Baba Ispahani*:

“... After that, he turned me upside down and, with the utmost etiquette, for the love of the fourteen infallible Imams, warmed fourteen places around my waist. He put the hot cups on my neck. When I screamed from the bottom of my heart, people around me hushed me by saying you are making his efforts void.”

Resistance to the advent of modern medicine

The advent of modernity has always provoked the traditional sections of non-Western societies to oppose the inevitable changes in the modern world. Modern medicine, as one of the important and objective achievements of modernity, encountered resistance at the outset of its arrival in Iran. In medical, historical and literary works of the Qajar era, there are signs of resistance from various sections of Iranian society to modern medicine. A paper in issue 11 of *Surasrafil* (Cited in Dehkhoda, 2006, pp. 48-49) reported:



“a woman has already buried her 20 children due to various illnesses, and now her only child is dying. However, she refuses to take her child to the doctor and to use modern medical services.”

The following section of the paper is devoted to resistance to modern medicine as one of the manifestations of modernity. Our objective is to show how Iranians coped with modernity at that time.

Opponents of modern medicine

Traditional healers: The opposition to modern medicine was to a large extent due to economic interests. An important part of the resistance came from those whose economic status was threatened by modern medicine. This was clearly seen in the opposition of traditional healers to modern medicine. In fact, traditional doctors should be mentioned as the first and most serious opponents of modern medicine. According to various sources, medicine was one of the most important and lucrative professions in Iran (Amanat, 1997, p. 446) and healers were respected and had a close association with kings. However, with any change would come resistance, especially from traditionalist forces, and medicine was no exception. It is, therefore, not surprising that the health commissions created for the first time in Qajar era were closed soon and did not reopen until 1877 due to the pressure of the cholera and plague epidemic (Floor, 2004).

Ringer (2013) considered the opposition of traditional Qajar physicians to modern medicine to be due to the defense of their social status in the face of the threat posed by European-educated physicians. In the book, *The Adventures of Haji Baba Ispahani*, the confrontation of traditional healers with the Western physician was only to maintain their social and economic status. For example, Mirza Ahmeq's (Mirza the idiot) words about the reason for his opposition to the smallpox vaccine were expressed from an economic point of view and not a religious and professional commitment: “Hajji ...! We have been making a living for years because of smallpox. This infidel, who is a foreigner, thinks we are foolish and wants to take it from us.”

In the book, Charand VA Parand, Dekhoda (2006) praised modernity, including modern medicine, caused many traditional healers to lose their income, turning them against him:

As the number of foreign physicians increased, objections began to be heard from the traditional branch. Drouvile (1812) reported one of these objections during the Aslandooz War (The Battle of Aslanduz took place in 1812 (on 31 October–1 November) between Russia and Iran): When Dr. Gorink, a highly-skilled British surgeon, took care of wounded Iranian soldiers and the soldiers did not suffer from mutilation, Iranian traditional healers said it was the work of Satan”

Religious forces: In addition to the traditional healers' opposition to Western medicine, the cultural structure itself, which was a religious paradigm, created a kind of dissatisfaction with modern medicine; “The main cultural objection to the European method of medicine ... was related to performing autopsy as a method of medical education.” According to Eduard Polak (1982), religious prejudices forbade him from autopsy, even in the case of criminals. Morier (1923) humorously wrote about a European doctor who had been summoned to the court:

Much to Haji Baba's shocking surprise, they complained that “the doctor had another



problem: he would tear the abdomen of a dead Muslim and cut off his legs and feet but, he was scared to death of seeing a corpse.”

Also, since the Iranians of the Qajar era considered foreigners unclean, when they had to refer to a foreign doctor, they would leave the doctor’s office as quickly as possible. According to Sayyah (1967), this caused the loss of 20,000 people in Tehran cholera in 1943 alone. These religious sensitivities about treating women were greater because women rarely took off their hijabs (Floor, 2018).

Distrust of the West

Distrust of the West led Iranians to oppose modern medicine and Western modernity in general. This distrust and disgust were so great that many even opposed what the Westerners were doing to save lives (Haeri, 1988, p. 394). It seems that the root of this opposition should be found in the mental background of Iranians and Orientals in general towards the West. In a speech in London, Mirza Malkum Khan (A prominent Iranian modernist (1834 - 1908) called the phenomenon of colonialism and the memory of the Crusades the most important factors in the hatred of the people of the East towards the West and Western modernity. To them, the West was the same as Christianity which started the Crusade. It was Christianity that threatened Islam, but this time the west, instead of the military army, intended use science, politics, trade and financial power to attack Muslims (Ajoudani, 2003). In the eyes of the people of this era, Western modernity not only originated from a dubious and even a blasphemous source but was also considered a kind of Western invasion to dominate politics, economics and ethics. Thus, resistance to Western modernity had a moral basis. Medicine was no exception to this rule. Thus, standing up to modern medicine had a religious and patriotic aspect (Floor, 2004, p. 239). Religious sensitivities were instrumental in exacerbating this opposition. According to Floor (2004), one of the reasons people opposed Western medicine was that they considered Western physicians to be Christians and unclean and believed that a Christian should not cure a Muslim. According to Ringer (2013), “when dealing with European physicians, people considered European prescriptions or methods foreign or Christian and did not accept them.” In fact, Qajar society considered the acceptance of modernity equal to surrender to Christianity and resisted the emergence of modern institutions - including modern medicine. Similarly, it reacted to other manifestations of modernity, such as electricity, railways, etc., and accepting them was considered as surrendering to the Christian community. Hence, some religious scholars were opposed to the presence of followers of other religions from other countries, especially with the titles of preacher and physician in the land of Iran. They linked the outbreak of cholera in Isfahan to the presence of Christians who taught Christian and Muslim children. In Tabriz, foreigners were introduced as the cause of cholera and famine.

Belief in divine destiny

Fatalism was another important factor in opposing modernity. A fatalist culture used to see some of the course of affairs beyond its control. leaving the administration of affairs in the hands of transcendental factors. But to the modern man, who lives in the texture of modernity, there is no longer a sense of destiny. As for medicine, it seems that this belief can be the cause of resistance to modern medicine, along with its preventive



measures, such as quarantine and vaccination. Regarding the role of fatalism in Iranians' opposition to vaccination, Ringer (2013) states: "The issue of vaccination was closely linked to the issue of free will against fate. For this reason, many opposed European efforts to vaccinate." Gobineau (2005) also considered fatalism as the main reason for the non-observance of the principles of quarantine by Iranians.

The literary texts of the Constitutional era also dealt with this issue; For example, *Zayn al-Abidin Maragheh* (2004) in Ebrahim Bey's *Travologe* reported the death of 600 Marandi children due to their parents' resistance to vaccinating their children against smallpox, and quoted a Mulla as saying: "smallpox? These are all the words of the foreigners. God's providence determines our fates."

Another point that was put under destiny and religion was the issue of *Istikharah*. Belief in *Istikharah* (A way to deal with doubts by taking a religious reading) encompassed all sections of Qajar society. *Nasser al-Din Shah*, as the highest government official, selected one of the three physicians to treat Mirza Hashem by *Istikharah*.

Conclusion

From the second half of the Qajar era, Iranians got familiar with the idea of modernity. The theme of medicine and in particular, traditional medicine was one of the important issues in the literature and in particular humor of this era. This specific theme of humor was used to prepare the mind of Iranians to accept modernity and progress.

Reflecting on the texts raising this controversy and challenge, one would conclude that it was not by accident that Constitutionalist humorists addressed this issue. Rather, it originated from a predominant discourse confrontation. Traditional medicine had a sacred and lofty status among the general public; therefore, accepting its failure in the face of modern medicine could be a prelude to accepting the failure of tradition and leaving other fields to modern thoughts. In fact, modern medicine and traditional medicine symbolized more material and objective manifestations of the two discourses of tradition and modernity. Thus, the efficiency and inefficiency of each were not limited to the medical field and were generalized to other fields as well. By winning this debate, modernist intellectuals and writers paved the way for dominance at other levels of discourse, especially those levels that could not be objectively manifested. The predominance in the field of modern medicine provided the ground for the general acceptance of other discourse propositions of modern thought and accelerated the modernist effort against traditional discourse.

In the Constitutionals' literary works, traditional medicine was strongly criticized while the achievements of modern medicine were praised. This reveals that the expression of the medical problems of the Qajar era served to show the inability of tradition against modernity to prepare the society for the acceptance of other paradigms of modernity. As the country's traditional sections strongly resisted the influx of modern ideas, modernist forces resorted to their methods to break this resistance. One of these tools was to contrast the objective and tangible aspects of traditional and modern achievements.

Nonetheless, the discourse of modern medicine provoked resistance among Iranians for various reasons. Modernity confronted resistance mostly among the traditional Qajar physicians, who saw their job interests at stake. The use of chemical drugs that to them



had a magical and unknown origin was another factor that triggered the opposition to traditional medicine. The materialistic approach taken by modern medicine to the human body was the third factor in the opposition of traditional healers to modern medicine. In traditional medicine, the material body was respected because the body was considered a carrier of the soul. Widespread dissatisfaction with the autopsy, together with other religious opposition, is a reflection of this discourse confrontation.

Another factor that made many citizens suspicious and distrustful of any Western idea was their past encounters and mentality with Europeans. In fact, many Iranians considered the introduction of modern medicine into the country as a part of the Western invasion of Islamic lands. Belief in destiny and fate was considered another obstacle to the reception of modern medicine in the Qajar era. Belief in a predetermined destiny not only made it difficult to “change” the state of society but also weakened the motivation to find the material and objective causes of diseases and their treatment.

Traditional medicine was marginalized from this era onwards, and this was not entirely due to the weakness of its scientific foundations. Unlike other Eastern societies, such as Japan, India, and China, which maintained their medical traditions to some extent, modernist groups in Iran failed to defend and theorize the principles of traditional medicine for a variety of reasons.

Also, a review of the history of medicine in Iran showed that there were three types of medical professionals in Iran: the first type was Iranian physicians, the second, herbalists and the third, bath-workers who did circumcision and bloodletting.

Considering these three areas as one, Constitutionalist humorists aimed at criticizing the whole tradition of discourse while the three groups were distinguished both in terms of the level of knowledge and literacy and in terms of social status and prestige. Thus, in the texts examined, the distinctions between social forces active in the field of medicine were discarded and simplified to some extent. It is noticed that criticism of traditionalist discourse occurred in two ways in satirical texts:

The first was to highlight the shortages of the practice. In other words, what was insignificant in public health in general and Iranian medicine, in particular, was ridiculed by satirists. The second was to tease the methods used, the knowledge, techniques and tools common to traditional Iranian medicine.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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