

Autumn in Tabriz

Running from the far end of the garden, the boy approaching out of breath invaded the privacy of crows. The crows flew into the slate-gray sky and the roar of their flight had the last leaves of trees fallen down. The boy didn't care about the privacy of the crows. He wanted to reach his father and get something to eat.

Karbalayi Qorban moved back a moment and paused, then asked, "What's up, Mohammad Taqi? You set the garden in chaos." Mohammad Taqi raised his head, his nose reddened with cold.

- I'm hungry... a piece of bread!

Karbalayi Qorban walked away saying, "Go home and get some from your mother."

Turning around his father, Mohammad Taqi didn't give up. Like a cat he had an eye on the food-loaded tray, which his father was carrying on the head. The boy kept jumping up and down.

- I can't. I'm hungry. Give me a piece of bread and I'll get back to play.

Karbalayi Qorban sped up his steps' pace. "The food gets cold. Why on earth don't you leave me alone? The food is for the children of the princes. You can't eat it. We're servants, understand? Our food is different. If they know we eat their food, they'll be mad with us," he said.

They reached the bottom of stone stairway of the portico. Mohammad Taqi spared his last effort and lamented, "But I asked for only a piece of bread." His father frowned. Raising his voice from deep throat, he shouted, "Go away, kid! Our food is different from theirs. Go and let me do my job." Then he stepped up the stone stairs. Mohammad Taqi stopped on the first stair and saw his father walking away. Karbalayi Qorban passed the

portico and opened the classroom door. The class went in pause and the hubbub continued a moment later. The father came out and closed the door. He put on his shoes and walked back to the top of the portico stairway. Mohammad Taqi took away his look from his father and looked back toward the garden. He saw the crows pecking on the ground. A crow buried a walnut in soil. "Crows are living better lives than ours," Mohammad Taqi thought.

All of a sudden he felt his father's hand on his shoulder and heard him asking: "Were you hurt?"

He didn't answer. He was starving. He heard the tutor's voice as the classroom door and windows were open. The students were repeating the tutor's poetic verses:

"Benefit from the existing endowments

**As positions and possessions are handed over
from generation to generation"**

The voice of students rang like a bell in his ears implying his ignorance. Spontaneously he

repeated the verse. The father took him to a side and said, “Let’s go. In a little while they take a break to eat and then resume their class. Come on to eat something and get back to play.”

Mohammad Taqi looked at his father’s wrinkled old hands from the corner of his eyes and poised the question he had kept in the safe of his mind for long.

- Why are they different from us?

Karbalayi Qorban sighed. “The position makes the difference, Taqi! The country needs all: a shah, princes and grass roots. Not everybody can enjoy the same position. Besides, I’m serving in a good position. Mirza Abolqasem Khan (Qa'em Maqam Farahani), whom I used to serve proudly, is a wise scholar man. His father, since we were fellow-citizens, brought me to this mansion and gave me a job. I feel indebted to them forever,” he said.

Mohammad Taqi slowed down his pace and wondered, “Why are we servants whereas the

others are masters? Why isn't it the other way round?"

Karbalayi Qorban breathed a long sigh. His mouth let out a thick damp breath. "It is destiny, which they say is written on your forehead."

Mohammad Taqi touched his own broad forehead with his little hand. "Is it also written on my forehead to be a servant and cook in the court?" he asked.

"I don't know! Maybe!" Karbalayi Qorban answered.

Mohammad Taqi stroked his forehead firmly with hand. "No!" he said, "I erase this destiny even if set in stone. I don't like to be a servant. No, I don't like either to be a servant or to have servants. The mother says that one earns a living depending on his capabilities."

Karbalayi Qorban smiled. "Get a grip! Whatever is God's willing will happen," he said.

When passing by the big pool, Mohammad Taqi saw his reflection in the water, larger than ever.

- My mom says if one tries to achieve something, God will help him to reap the harvest. God has assured us of his support as long as we do our best.

Karbalayi Qorban sat down on the edge of the pool and disapproved: “Your mother talks a lot of nonsense. What on earth can you do?” Mohammad Taqi stared at the surface of water whose ripples had broken his father’s reflection. The tutor’s verses had settled in his little mind.

“Benefit from the existing endowments

**As positions and possessions are handed over
from generation to generation”**

“From tomorrow on, I’ll deliver food to the classroom,” he said determinedly.

The father was taken aback and his hat dropped. “You? But the food tray is very heavy. Com on, boy! Didn’t you just say you don’t like to be a servant?” he asked while astonished. Mohammad

Taqi dusted the hat and handed it back to his father.

“Yes, I did say that but I don’t mind. I keep working as a servant until I become a nobleman,” he replied.

Which Is Better, a Brain or a Hat?

The croak of the crows broke the silence in the garden. It was snowing light, which whitened the elevated corners. The coarse croak annoyed Mohammad Taqi; he could hardly hear the tutor's lessons from behind the closed door. The lesson was about the discovery of alcohol and its discoverer.

For days Mohammad Taqi carried the food tray on his head and ran from the kitchen to the classroom at one go. He took the tray into the room, sat down behind the door on the pretext of taking back the dishes and eavesdropped as the tutor was teaching. He endured the bitter cold wind blowing from the mountains around Tabriz. He sniffed his runny nose and listened carefully. As he had neither a pen nor a paper, he made notes

of the lessons in mind and repeated them by heart. And the rest of the day he went outside the window by various excuses and like an eagle preyed every single word hanging out of the classroom with his sharp claws. To practice what he learned as homework, he recounted his mother the notes he made at night. Sitting down behind the closed door, shivering with cold and learning with eavesdropping for months resulted in a scanty knowledge saved up in the moneybox of his mind.

He was eavesdropping when his mother called him: “Taqi! Oh, Taqi!”

He turned toward the voice. She was standing at the edge of the portico with snow on her attire. He went to her quietly and asked: “Why did you come over here, mom?” He mother handed him a hat saying: “Cold kills you, my son! Take it! Cover your head!”

- No, I don't want it! Where did you get this?

- Take it easy. Come on, put it on! Cover your ears, too.

He took the hat and put it on. It was favorable warm. Already stiff with cold, his ears grew soft; soft and warm. He went back near the door. The lesson was about the poetry collection of Hafez '*Divan*' but he couldn't hear well; the croaking crows on top of the woolen hat. He took off the hat. Now he heard better. That was better!

"Which is better?" he thought, "A brain or a hat? A brainless head needs no hat."

He put the hat aside and kept his ears nearer to the door.

The Moon of Party

The garden was once more green and fresh without croaking crows. Green leaves shone with the warm sunlight and roses scented the air. There was a garden party and lots of hustle and bustle. It was the night of the Prophet Mohammad's birthday anniversary and Qa'em Maqam Farahani had invited many guests to the party. All the guests, however, hadn't showed up yet. Mohammad Taqi was staring at the garden through the kitchen window. His father called him and said, "I'm very busy. The footman has been away to bring a sheep (for food). Can you take the drink tray?"

Mohammad Taqi bowed his head. He was shy. He had seen Ali and Mohammad standing next to their father, Qa'em Maqam. Qa'em Maqam's

nephew, Esaq, was also there. Sometimes at midday when he took the lunch to the classroom, they had held him up to ridicule. He was afraid that they might ridicule and mock him again.

He tried not to look at the children. He offered the drinks and stood aside to take back the empty glasses. Qa'em Maqam didn't notice him. He asked the tutor about the children's progress.

The tutor said that he was pleased with their progress and that they were talented. Qa'em Maqam looked at his sons and asked: "You, Mohammad! Tell me who discovered alcohol?"

Mohammad paused and looked at Ali from the corner of his eyes.

"Would I answer that?" Ali asserted.

- Yes, go ahead!

- Of course, Avicenna.

Qa'em Maqam's regretful eyes turned toward his nephew. He asked him the same question.

"No, Avicenna was a poet," Esaq said. "The discoverer of alcohol is ...," he went on and

scratched his head as if he was awakening his brain. Mohammad Taqi happened to know the answer but he didn't dare to say that. He bit his lip and waited. Nevertheless, he thought: "I'll answer it! I'll prove the competence of a cook's child." So he put the tray aside and stepped forward. "May I answer it?" he asked.

Qa'em Maqam looked at him. Then all eyes were on Taqi.

- Yes, go ahead if you know it!

Mohammad Taqi raised his head and said: "Mohammad ibn Zakariya Razi."

Qa'em Maqam's eyes nearly popped out of his head. "Bravo, the son of Karbalayi Mohammad Qorban!" he admired him. Then he took a sip of the drink and contemplated. He was thinking about posing another question. He looked at the children and asked: "Who is the poet of these verses?"

A star arrived and became the moon of the party

She became a bosom friend of my untamed heart”

As all the children’s answers were wrong, he asked Mohammad Taqi the question. All eyes were glued to his mouth. He answered, “The verses are by Khajeh Hafez Shirazi.”

The throng in the party got exhilarated. He was given an ovation spontaneously and the party went in a state of euphoria. Qa'em Maqam asked him to come near. With the trembling in his legs and arms, he moved forward. He didn’t dare to look at anything but the carpet flowers on the floor.

“How old are you?” Qa'em Maqam asked.

- Twelve years old, sir!

- Your father never said that you’re educated and a man of knowledge! How did you learn these?

- With respect, sir, I overheard the tutor saying theses as I sometimes took the lunch to the classroom.

- That’s great!

- He called his steward. "Give this boy a gift," he told the steward.

Mohammad Taqi moved one more step forward. He knew that the children were looking at him with mockery and envy. "What's my gift?" he sobbed as his eyes went watery.

- What do you like it to be?

- To attend the class with other children.

A murmur of surprise and chuckling emerged from the people. Mohammad Taqi was still looking down. Qa'em Maqam touched his chin and raised his head. "You're talented. It'd be a shame to ruin your talent. You know this much without attending the class, let alone when you attend it!" he said.

Mohammad Taqi wiped the tears from his face with the back of his hand. He smiled and said, "Thanks."

Qa'em Maqam shook his hand as a sign telling him to say nothing more. "Thank yourself because you yourself asked for it."

Walnut Tree! Melon Tree!

In the afternoon when the class was finished, the children of Qa'em Maqam's family broke the silence of the garden. They ran after one another and splashed water on each other when they reached the pool. Mohammad Taqi didn't go with them. He sat behind the closed door of their small room and practiced handwriting and composition. It was his second year of attending the class and now he was educated. He could read the textbooks and anthologies and sometimes he made notes on the paper.

He thought to write a letter of criticism to Mirza Qa'em Maqam. A letter; an eloquent letter with nice handwriting.

He knew it wasn't a routine for a servant to write a letter to his master. He also knew, on the

other hand, that Qa'em Maqam was open-minded and intellectual. He had read a book of his and had enjoyed it. He was to indicate the book title in his letter, too. He took a pen and started the letter: “In the name of God, ...”

When Qa'em Maqam received the letter, he was absolutely astonished due to both the pretty handwriting and wonderful text. He remembered his sons, Mohammad and Ali and his nephews, who were studying for years, but they never had such handwriting and ideas. Enthusiastically, he took the letter to a ceremony where he was invited that day, a gathering of friends and colleagues. The commander of Tabriz army, Mohammad Khan Zanganeh, happened also to be in that ceremony.

“Gentlemen! Surprisingly, a man from Farahan namely Karbalayi Qorban is serving in the court. He has a son, who indeed has a brilliant talent and shows great diligence. If there were one hundred such talents - let alone one thousand - in our

country, Iran would be a real paradise,” he said. Then he began reading the letter and showed the fluent handwriting of the fourteen-year-old boy. Everybody was open-mouthed.

“Why don’t you give him a clerical job?” Mohammad Khan Zanganeh asked. “If you don’t need him, I want him as a secretary and book-keeper for my troops,” he added. This idea was a food for thought for Qa'em Maqam. Then, one who used to jeer and speak sarcastically, puffed on his hookah and said, “ Thanks God! There’re lots of geniuses around you. Your servants write like this, let alone your children? As the poet says:

**“The walnut tree is this big
Let alone the melon tree”**

Qa'em Maqam remained quiet and tolerated the teasing and the people’s chuckle in the party. He thought it was the end of the world. He was happy about the education of Mohammad Taqi in the court and sad about his dull sons, Mohammad in particular. He envied Karbalayi Qorban a little,

who he had brought up his son like a genius. Then he decided to do his best on the education of Mohammad Taqi and to provide him with his experience. When he returned home, he summoned Mohammad Taqi.

Mohammad Taqi was nervous. He kept squeezing his inked fingertips and regretted writing the letter.

“Come on, come and sit next to me,” Qa'em Maqam told him.

Mohammad Taqi stepped forward slowly and sat down before him. He still felt ashamed and got in a sweat.

Qa'em Maqam touched his chin, raised his head and looked at his glassy big eyes. “Your handwriting is fluent and your prose is clear. Today you proved that knowledge and wisdom have nothing to do with wealth and the social class, as there're aristocrats with brains as small as a pea whereas the file-and-rank members like you are highly wise and capable. Yet, the latter's talent

spoils unless they can develop their abilities”, he said.

When he learned he was summoned for a different reason, Mohammad Taqi straightened up his back and walked tall. Qa'em Maqam took his hands wet with sweat and squeezed them.

“From tomorrow on, I’ll see you more often. I’d like you to write my letters especially the private ones,” he said. “There’s also a lot of experience that you have to gain,” he went on.

Next Steps

Working in Qa'em Maqam's office for a few years made Mohammad Taqi a well-versed statesman. As every hour, day, month and year went by, he approached his goal more and more. Then he was granted the title *Mirza* (secretary) and became known as Mirza Taqi Khan.

In 1250 (lunar calendar) Qa'em Maqam was appointed as the prime minister to Mohammad Shah and moved to the capital. Mirza Taqi Khan entered the military (army) system in Azarbaijan and became a special secretary of Mohammad Khan Zanganeh. He wrote the confidential letters and military commands and Zanganeh trusted him.

Six years before, that is, in 1244, when he was a state accountant, he had accompanied a delegation to the Russian Tsar. In fact, it was his first

outward mission. Then, Russia, the northern neighbor of Iran, was influenced by the Industrial Revolution in Europe. It had developed industries and plants. The art and culture in the territory had already passed the development path.

The trip had a drastic impact on Mirza Taqi Khan. The delegation visited many factories including a silk factory, armourer's, paper mill, powder mill, crystal manufacturing plant and milling plant. Furthermore, they paid a visit to the universities, schools and public libraries in different cities. The visits brought about both the surprise and regret of the Iranian delegates because Iran had never achieved such developments. It was like a wonderland to them. The impact of the visit could be seen in the next stages the young Mirza Taqi Khan's life.

In 1251, Qa'em Maqam was cowardly murdered in a plot masterminded by Mohammad Shah. Mirza Taqi Khan's spirits sank at the news of the murder as he had lost his best teacher. A teacher

who played a major role in shaping his character and had no counterpart.

A couple of years later in 1253 Mirza Taqi Khan was assigned the ministerial position in Azarbaijan. In the same year, the Russian Emperor, Nikolai I, invited Mohammad Shah to meet with him in Yerevan. Nonetheless, Mohammad Shah was invading Afghanistan and couldn't leave the battlefield. He decided to send the seven-year-old Iranian crown prince, Nasereddin Mirza (Nasereddin Shah), accompanied by a delegation of high-ranking state officials to Yerevan.

Nasereddin Mirza lived in Tabriz. That was a custom in Qajar royal family to keep the crown prince in Tabriz until they came to the throne so that they were not exposed to any threats.

In this visit, Mirza Taqi Khan visited Russia for the second time. In the second day of their visit, the Iranian crown prince and his companions met with the Russian emperor in a glorious elegant

palace where they presented their gifts to the emperor.

When Mohammad Khan Zanganeh was introducing the members of the delegation and talked about their ranks and orders, he described Mirza Taqi Khan like this: “Mirza Taqi Khan was introduced to you in the previous visit. Thanks to his competence, he has been appointed as the defense minister.”

The emperor smiled and shook Mirza Taqi Khan’s hands firmly. He said, “Thanks God that I met with my comrade once more.” Then he greeted him in Russian language. Mirza Taqi Khan who knew scanty Russian barely managed to answer him.

Mirza Taqi Khan’s third journey was to Erzerum, a city in Turkey. The journey was very significant for the Iranian shah and government. As a matter of fact, Mirza Taqi Khan was the only special envoy from Iran to discuss a dispute with the Ottoman government and Russian and British

envoys to hammer out a fair settlement and call a halt to the conflicts. The mission and discussions lasted for four years and Mirza Taqi Khan tackled many challenges. Eventually, in the light of his competence and genius, once again Iran annexed Khoramshahr and Arvandrood occupied by Ottomans.

In the wake of this vital mission, everybody respected Mirza Taqi Khan. In a letter, Mohammad Shah expressed his gratitude and presented him with a brilliant sword adorned with precious stones. Mirza Taqi Khan was again appointed as the defense official in Azarbaijan and also an assistant to the crown prince in Tabriz. He served in this position until the death of Mohammad Shah.

Successor to the Dead Shah

In Tabriz nobody knew that Mohammad Shah was dead. Five days before, shah had died of gout. In Tabriz nobody knew about this, even his son, Nasereddin Mirza. In the sixth day, the exhausted dead-beat messenger of his death news reached the gates of Tabriz. He told the guards that he had brought a confidential letter from the shah's mother, and that he had to deliver it direct to the esteemed crown prince.

The crown prince opened the letter and recognized his mother's handwriting. In her letter, she had told him the tragic news of his father's death and had asked him to come over immediately to the capital so that he is soon crowned king of Iran.

When he read the letter, the sixteen-year-old crown prince shivered impulsively and burst into tears. Undoubtedly the tears were not for the tragedy of his father's death or because he was orphaned. Because years of living away from his parents had retained no such feelings in him. All his distress was for the chaos emerged in Tehran and that how to get there. The very messenger reported the turmoil in the capital. Opportunists like fierce wolves had been involved in drastic fighting to gain a position of responsibility.

“Didn't the letter have any attachment? Money or gold purse?” the crown prince asked.

The messenger opened his crossed arms and said, “No, sir! It seems that the national treasury is absolutely penniless.”

Nasreddin Mirza dismissed the messenger and immediately summoned his prime minister, Nasirolmolk, and the defense minister. As he was crying, he told them the news of the shah's death and asked both to assist him.

As soon as he heard the news, Nasirolmolk burst into tears and beat himself on the face and head and as if his own father had died. So the crown prince became disappointed with him and asked for the assistance of Mirza Taqi Khan. Unlike Nasirolmolk, Mirza Taqi Khan was walking with peace of mind and was calm. He was thinking to find out a solution. After some contemplation, he said, "Leave it to me. I'll seat you to the throne."

"This easy? Not a single penny in the treasury! Even if we alone ride on a mule to the capital, it will cost a fortune," the crown prince said and beat himself on the head while crying. Mirza Taqi Khan walked toward him in strides and comforted him. "Don't cry! You should have expected a day like this. Let bygones be bygones. Now you're a king. A king stands for a core of power in a country. Trivial problems shouldn't let down a king. Pull yourself together!" he said.

Nasreddin Mirza, who felt lonely and insecure, was aware of his defense minister's will and steadfastness. He grasped at Mirza Taqi Khan's arms and stared at him. "Would you help me? I promise to give you whatever you wish," he told Mirza Taqi Khan.

Mirza Taqi Khan smiled and set his arms free of the prince's hold. He knew the kings go back on their word. Despite this, he said, "I wish nothing but the prosperity of my country. For the time being, this country direly needs a king, a shah, not to get caught into anarchy. Write a letter to give me a mandate so that nobody can disrupt my function, and then leave it to me."

Writing such a letter was a risk but the young crown prince trusted him. In fact, he had no other choice. Nevertheless, Mirza Taqi Khan wasn't a man to take advantage of this trust. He took the letter and forged ahead determinedly.

As a first step, he procured money. He borrowed 30,000 tomans from a few businessmen

and promised them to give the money back as soon as he arrived in Tehran.

Mustering the troops of Tabriz garrison, he moved toward Tehran. He sent a few messengers in advance to herald this news so that the ground is paved for the king to come to the throne and everybody is kept in suspense. He knew how challenging it was to lead 30,000 soldiers for some days. He was, moreover, aware of the arrogant and corrupt character of the military people. Before the start, he warned all the soldiers and officers that on the way, none of them is entitled to wrest money or goods from people. He ordered that if a horse of the cavalry trespasses on a farm or garden, the horse is to be given to the land proprietor in compensation. If anyone treated another cruelly, they'll be given the capital punishment or death penalty.

The discipline and justice in this journey proved to be the best within the Qajar dynasty or even before. The general public on the way didn't

suffer any cruelty and the young shah was also pleased. Due to this fact, the shah awarded him the order of *Amir Nezam* (the commander-in-chief of the army).

They were on the way for forty days. In Tehran many were greedily looking forward to seeing the shah. Actually, they were looking forward to being given a position and office, especially the top job, that is, premiership.

As soon as he arrived in Tehran on 21, Dhu'l-Qa'dah, 1264, the shah came to the throne. At the very night he thwarted all plots as he decreed the appointment of his loyal companion, Mirza Taqi Khan, as *Atabak A'zam* (prime minister) as follows:

Defense Minister,

We assigned you all the affairs of Iran and you were responsible for all the good and bad happenings. We absolutely rely on your justice and decent behavior in treating the general public, and it is just you, who we rely. Thus, we are writing this letter.

Nasreddin Shah

What We Have and What We Don't

Taqi, the little Mohammad Taqi, now has the title *Amir Kabir* (Minister the Great). He remembered the verse by Sa'di he had engraved on his mind tree:

***“Benefit from the existing endowments
As positions and possessions are handed over
from generation to generation”***

Then, he was the captain of a ship in turmoil, which was treacherously to sink at any moment.

It was a cold night, the first night of the premiership. Amir passed the portico and entered the room. He was alone. He had dismissed everybody to have more privacy. He felt very lonely. Not a passing loneliness but he felt lonely in life and on the way ahead. His heart was pounding with anxiety. He stood up to say his

prayers, the longest prayers of his lifetime. He hanged on every prayer word, hesitated and gradually felt repose flowing like blood in his veins. Then, it was time for benediction.

- Oh, God! Don't leave me alone. My late mother used to say if one tries to achieve something, God helps him to reap the harvest. I tried, and you helped. I want to try more, not for me myself but for the entire nation. So I expect your help. My father was right. It seems it's written on my forehead to be a servant. Yet, this service is different from what he said. Up to now I was the servant of this king or the others. Now I'm serving people. Oh, God! Don't let me down! Make me feel proud....

The benediction took a long time. The moon had already come down to behind the dry branches of the trees in the backyard. Amir stood up and took a pen and paper. He thought a moment and stared at the pale paper in the candlelight. He drew a vertical line at the center of the paper dividing it

into two parts. He wrote on one part 'What We Have', and 'What We Don't Have' on the other.

What We Have:

- √ A corrupt and totalitarian system
- √ Illogical interference of Russia and the UK in the domestic affairs of Iran
- √ Anarchy and civil war in most parts of the country
- √ Foreign debts
- √ Imports of junk commodities

What We Don't Have:

- √ Full treasury
- √ Proper taxing system
- √ Competent, fair-minded and pitying figures
- √ Providing security for the life and property of people and roads nationwide
- √ Boom in industry and economy
- √ Agriculture and farming livestock
- √ Proper exploitation of mines

✓ Arts, culture, libraries and newspapers

✓ New technologies, schools, universities and
hospitals

Feeling pity for the country's awful conditions,
Amir stayed up until the next daybreak and drew
up plans to reform the system.

No Bribes or Kickbacks

To implement his plans, Amir Kabir required sincere and honest people who preferred the national interests to bribes. He fired all the corrupt ones with bad records and set sharp penalties for those who work improperly and dishonestly. He did his best to appoint capable figures.

When he appointed one named Mohammad Rahim Khan Nasqchi as the governor of Khoy, Amir asked him to be fair and to spare attempts for the progress of the city.

As he arrived in Khoy, Mohammad Rahim Khan asked his servants, “What makes a good gift from Khoy?”

“Copper dishes,” they answered. He ordered his servants to procure a few boxes. Afterward, he went to the copper bazaar and bought loads of

copper dishes including plates, bowls, pitchers, salt cellars and a lot more, placed them in the boxes and dispatched them to Amir Kabir as gifts.

A few days after, the caravan of the gifts reached Amir. “What are they and who has sent them?” Amir asked the head of the caravan furiously.

As he learned about Amir’s anger and annoyance, the head of the caravan stammered, “Sir! It was only my assignment to bring this to you. The governor of Khoy, Mohammad Rahim Khan, presents it to you humbly!”

Amir trembled with fury and pounded on the wall with his fist. “As you load the boxes again, I write a letter to Mohammad Rahim Khan. Take the letter and return the boxes to where you brought them from,” he told the caravan head.

Then he went to his room and wrote a letter:

“Who paid for this load of copper dishes? I appointed you as the governor of Khoy. You are

to collect taxes and I told you the allocation scheme. A percentage of that is for the shah, some as the share of the government and the balance is to be funded in the city of Khoy. Based on this, you are a governor.

What is the shah's share is to be paid to the treasury in its entirety. If this is the government's share, I never asked for copper dishes. If this is of your share, I never allocated you so much that you can afford this load of dishes from let alone the very beginning. If the gifts are intended to bribe me allowing you to treat people unfairly, you are utterly wrong."

Attempts to Pile Up the State Treasury

To implement his reform plans, Amir Kabir needed funds whereas the national budget was almost over. For long, no or partial taxes had been collected.

Another step Amir Kabir took to generate revenues for the treasury was that he decreased the privy purse of the shah and courtiers. Furthermore, he cut for good the remunerations of some of the court people who had nothing to do but sweet-talking. This, in return, made many enemies for Amir. They took every single chance to plot against him.

We Aren't Disable, Are We?

“How long should we remain a consumer and other countries be producers? How long should we pay gold in return for goods?” Amir Kabir asked. “But we have neither factories nor skilled workers,” he was answered. “Well, we aren't disable, are we? We set up plants and train skilled workers. Consequently, we'll generate jobs for the people and won't feel indebted to foreigners,” Amir Kabir argued.

With this mindset, he dispatched a team of smart Iranian workers to Russia. The trip was sponsored by the government so that the workers learn different industries. On the other hand, he employed a number of European experts and brought them to Iran to work in various businesses and train Iranians. He decreed the construction of

two sugar mills in Khuzestan and Mazandaran. Even the farmers of sugar cane and beet were exempted from paying the tax. Next in the list of the infrastructure plans were textile plants, coach fabricating workshops, paper mills as well as crystal and chinaware manufacturing plants. The projects introduced a revolution in the industrial sector nationwide.

He also considered small businesses and tried to support them. In an edition of *Vaqaye Ettafaqiye* newspaper, one reads that before Amir Kabir took up the premiership, epaulettes of military uniforms used to be imported from Austria. One day, a beautiful epaulette made by a lady called Khorshid ended up in Amir's hands. He liked it and encouraged her. He ordered to grant her the monopoly of the production of epaulettes for five years. He provided her with a workshop and some apprentices.

A Man of One Thousand Eyes and Ears

One of Amir Kabir's most significant achievements was the foundation of a secret police body. To get informed about the relationship among civil servants and people so that nobody dares to betray the government, he established a special intelligence body whose staff were unknown. The agents of the body had infiltrated everywhere in costumes of shepherds, beggars, vendors, robbers, etc and let Amir know about the offences committed anywhere. As a matter of fact, thanks to the body and its agents, nobody dared to commit any offences. Instead of two eyes and ears, Amir had thousands of eyes and ears.

Amir already knew that there are international agents infiltrated into the Iranian government departments and that through the spies the intelligence was passed on to other countries. Anybody knew that many plots and destructive conspiracies were masterminded by foreigners in their embassies. Hence, he needed to have agents infiltrated into them.

The old man cleared his throat. He coughed and walked toward Amir's room. But, the guards stopped him and asked, "Where are you heading for?" The old man had a ridiculing look at the guards. "Don't you know me? I'm the messenger of the Russian embassy. We are allowed to enter anywhere at short notice," he answered.

"Time has changed. Like others, you have to make an appointment in advance. Even if a Russian minister wants to get in, let alone you, he must make an appointment in advance. Now, give me your letter and I'll take it to Amir," one of the guards said.

The old man was irritated. “That’s beneath contempt. I have to hand in this letter to Amir in person. I’m also an Iranian. Have you forgotten this?” he said.

The guard answered, “Oh, I do know you. Neither you nor we have changed but the prime minister is now different. The rules have changed. Unlike before, there’s no anarchy. So hand us the letter to be taken to Amir or return to your master to ask for advice.”

The old man thought a moment. As he knew the letter was urgent, he gave it to the guard. “So please fetch the reply urgently. Right now!” he said. Then he waited for the reply but no reply showed up. He walked a bit, sat down a while and grumbled. Eventually he lost his patience and lamented, “What happened to the reply? Why are you wasting my time?”

“Not we but Amir is to answer your letter. He’s in a meeting for the time being. If you don’t have

time to wait, you can come back tomorrow. It's late in the evening," the guard said.

The old man lost his temper and shouted, "Damn you and Amir. You give me the reply now or I'll report this to the Russian ambassador."

Amir heard the loud voice and asked, "Who's shouting? This court has its own rules." One of the guards ran toward Amir's room and said, "Sir, it's the Russian ambassador's messenger! He wants the reply to his letter."

Amir ordered the guards to slap him across the face and to keep him in custody in the garden shed.

One hour later, the meeting finished and those in Amir's room left. To take a break, Amir left for the garden, too. He heard a voice from the garden shed. He went toward the voice and opened the shed door. The old man jumped up on his feet and bowed shivering with fear.

"Who are you?" Amir asked.

- I'm the messenger of the Russian embassy and the head of the embassy servants.

- Oh, so it was you setting here in chaos and yelling, eh?

The old man was quiet and apologized while feeling ashamed. He didn't sound as boastful as earlier that day. Amir Kabir looked at his clothes. "Your accent and clothes tell that you're Iranian and a Muslim!" he said.

- Yes, an Iranian Muslim.

- Old man! You have one foot in the grave and never think of the life hereafter. Why are you committing so many sins?

- I've been working in the embassy for years. I've earned my living there and have done my duties.

- You've earned your living in this country. You've breathed your country's air. What have you done for your country in return?

The old man bowed his head in shame. His hat dropped. "Nothing," he answered. Amir bent

forward and picked up the hat. The old man felt embarrassed and apologized. "If you still love your country even a bit, you can make up for what you did," Amir said.

The old man knelt down and took Amir's legs in his arms and said, "I do what you tell me."

Amir took him out of the shed. "Work for the people of Iran from now on," Amir suggested. The man unfolded his arms like wings and said, "Your wish is my command. I hand in my notice today."

"No, you needn't do that! Remain in your job in the embassy but work for Iran," Amir said. "How much is your salary?" he asked the old man.

- Four tomans a month.

- I pay you five.

The old man's eyes were shining with delight. "What am I supposed to do?" he asked in a trembling voice.

Amir looked around cautiously to make sure nobody is watching them and brought the man near the willow. "Where's your house?"

- In Sadat district.

Amir thought a second and said, “Do you know Seyyed Tafreshi whose house is in the same district?”

- Yes, I do.

- Ok. When you overhear a piece of news about Iran in the embassy, report it in secret to Seyyed overnight. It must be only between you and Seyyed. Nobody must know about it or you’ll pay for it, understand?

- Yes, sir!

- Every month you go in secret to Haj Ahmad Sarraf, who pays your monthly salary, and sign a remuneration receipt for it.

- Sure!

Amir returned to his room and breathed a sigh of relief. He worked out a way to learn about the decisions taken on Iran inside the Russian embassy.

Marriage of Convenience

It was four months from Nasereddin Shah's coronation and Amir Kabir's premiership. Amir had many enemies. Some were from the courtiers and shah's relatives. They urged the shah to oust Amir since he wasn't an aristocrat but from the lower class. They argued he was a cook's son and a servant and not many obey him. They asked the shah to fire him and appoint a nobleman as the prime minister.

That was food for thought for the shah; not to oust Amir since he liked Amir very much, but to give him a noble characteristic. The shah suggested Amir to marry his sister to prevent such gossips. The marriage of Amir with shah's sister was one of convenience as neither Amir nor shah's sister, Ezzato-Dowleh, agreed to this.

However, later on, this arranged marriage turned into a love one; a sincere and holy love. She gave birth to two daughters.

Overstepping the Mark

Prior to Amir Kabir's premiership, the Russian and British embassies had much freedom in Iran. They enjoyed many facilities that they were not provided with even in their own countries. Even their Iranian servants were privileged and nobody was allowed to stop them. Nevertheless, Amir set a mark for them not to be overstepped. He held everybody equal before the law.

The sun was a sizzling furnace in the sky. It was scorching. A huge throng had converged on Naqare Khaneh Square. From the right corner of the square, the soldiers brought a man, with his hand handcuffed behind his back, to Toop Morvarid. One in the crowd asked a young man standing in front of him, "What's he done?"

“You don’t know? He’s a servant in the Russian embassy. Last night he got drunk and was brawling from drunkenness. Then, Amir sentenced him to lashes in public,” the young man answered.

The old man commented, “He deserves it. Thanks to Mirza Taqi Khan. He makes no concession, neither to the servant of the Russian embassy nor to the British Queen’s. God protects him.” Then as if such scenes touched him, he left the square.

The news of the whiplash verdict reached the Russian ambassador like a flash. He did a letter immediately and sent it to Amir by a messenger.

Amir had gone to the square for the verdict. He was sitting aside puffing on a hookah. He was about to okay the penalty start when the messenger arrived and handed him the letter. Sitting on the ground, Amir didn’t care about the letter. He took the letter and put it under his knee. With a wave of the hand, he okayed the start. With every lash, the convict screamed with pain. The

viewing crowd was happy with the verdict, as they felt angry with such people.

For the second time, a messenger from the Russian embassy arrived and gave Amir a letter while insisting it was urgent.

“I know that,” Amir answered and without opening it, he put it under the knee and continued to smoke the hookah. The convicted servant in a sweat was lashed in the scorching sunlight.

When the verdict was fulfilled, Amir didn't smoke any more. He brought out the letters from under his knee and handed them to the foreign minister so that he reads and answers them. The minister opened and read the letters. After that, he told Amir, “It's about the servant. It reads we aren't allowed to penalize him.”

Amir, who already guessed the content of the letters, said, “None of their damn business. Reply to them and say that as the drunken servant was committing vice, we punished him with a lenient sentence. For further penalty, we extradite him to

the embassy. You'd better not to employ ineligible servants since they tarnish the image of the embassy."

Be the Shah of Goodness

Amir Kabir wasn't only a minister but also a wise father to the eighteen-year-old Nasereddin Shah. Within the fourteen years of his premiership, Amir Kabir kept advising him with letters or in person. In fact, he was educating the shah. It goes without saying that if anybody had been in his shoes, they would have taken advantage of the shah's ignorance and improper performance. Amir was also taking advantage of the shah, but in favor the nation and not for personal purposes. He used his mandate to do major reforms.

The young shah commissioned a goldsmith to make an eye-catching gold belt. Due to the intricacies the work had, it took a few days longer than promised to make the belt. The day when the

belt was to be delivered, Amir happened to have an appointment with the shah. Both were talking on significant issues in a room known as ‘private room’ whereas the goldsmith was waiting behind the closed door.

One of the servants who knew the shah is intrigued by the belt wanted to do a favor for the shah to get a tip. He opened the door a crack and showed the belt to the shah. At the sight of the belt, the shah cut in on Amir and clapped his hands with excitement. “Oh, goldsmith! Come in. Come in. I’m fed up with waiting,” he told the goldsmith.

The goldsmith had the belt in his hand like a gold snake. He stepped into the private room and presented it to the shah with both hands. Shah took the belt and stared at it with his both eyes popped out of his head. “Well done! Well done! What workmanship and creativity! It’s a masterpiece!” shah lauded the goldsmith.

Amir frowned and raged, “What’s up here?”

The goldsmith turned pale and stood up.

“Don’t get angry. Long time ago, I commissioned this word-breaking goldsmith to make a belt. The belt is ready and he’s brought it here. Look how beautiful it is!” shah said.

Amir cut in on the shah. He wrested the belt from his hand and hit it hard on the goldsmith’s head. “Don’t you see that the shah and his prime minister are discussing about the national issues? Why did you enter the private room? Get out of here immediately,” he said.

The goldsmith took the belt and went away. Nasereddin Shah, whose childish excitement had turned into astonishment and amazement. “Why did you do that, Mirza?” he wondered.

Amir, whose face was flush with anger, whispered a few words of prayers. When back to normal mod, he began to advise the shah.

“A country’s shah shouldn’t be impatient. For a belt worth of just two or three thousand tomans, you shouldn’t interrupt your prime minister. You

should have left it to the night when I wasn't here.
The goldsmith can only make a belt, but I
managed to breed a boom and generate millions of
tomans of profit for the country.

Others Farmed and We Harvested

In Iran Amir Kabir is known for the technology academy 'Darolfonoon' whereas it was just one his many major national achievements. Amir Kabir had both national pride and international mindset. In the light of his two tours of Russia and the news arriving about the scientific and industrial developments in Europe, Amir Kabir concluded that Iranian young people are provided with the due facilities, they can keep pace with other countries and do new scientific discoveries leading to the national independence.

Then, there used to be no school or university. There were small primary schools that taught some reading and writing to children. Amir discussed the Darolfonoon project with the shah. The shah was against this project. He was afraid to

be opposed by traditionalists. “Iranians can’t have any schools. If we require educated people, we can send students abroad,” he complained.

Amir Kabir argued that instead of sending twenty students to Europe, the government could employ seven European professors with the same budget and educate two hundred students. In the long run, the two hundred students become professors and educate new students. Finally, the shah agreed with him. Amir Kabir ordered the construction of Darolfonoon at a site that used to be a garrison. Afterwards, he dispatched an envoy to Austria to recruit the professors. The mission took sixteen months. He had to employ a professor of medicine and surgery, one of geometry and mathematics, a mineralogist, two specialized miners, a professor of pharmaceutical, one of artillery, a professor of infantry and one of cavalry. Their monthly salary was to be four thousand tomans based on a six-month contract. Then he was to bring them to Iran.

When the team of professors arrived in Iran, Amir Kabir had stepped down. One of them, Dr. Polak has written in his book: “We arrived in Tehran on November 24, 1815. We were given a cold shoulder. Nobody was there to welcome us. Later on, we learned that, in the meantime, everything had changed. A few days before our arrival, due to the conspiracies of the court people, especially the shah’s mother, who was Amir Kabir’s archenemy, Mirza Taqi Khan was disfavored and dismissed.”

Nevertheless, Darolfonoon was given the kick-off in 1268 (lunar calendar) staffed by international and Iranian professors. A few months later, it went on stream officially. Darolfonoon was a garden with saplings of science and knowledge. The saplings grew up and yielded fruit. The branches of the garden trees extended in every direction. As a result, today Iranian students are harvesting the earlier garden and study in Iranian schools.

Newspaper, Knowledge Key

The shah had a marble in his hand. He took it up and looked at the refracted light of the chandelier through it. “What’s the use of that?” he asked.

Fanning himself with a sheet of paper in his hand, Amir said, “Use of what? That you play marbles or that I publish a newspaper?”

Nasereddin Shah roared with laughter. He tossed the marble into the air and said, “You’re really my Amir! You aren’t afraid of either me or the executioner’s sword. When there’s a chance, you offer me your sharp sarcasm. On the other hand, you handle and do all the affairs yourself, and ask for my advice just thereafter.”

“At times you said that our nation is hungry, illiterate, without culture, arts, industry, business.

So what's the good of a newspaper for such a hungry, illiterate and artless nation? Gestures of this type go with the European nations, who are so well fed that they look for new hobbies," he added.

Amir went angry. He breathed a sigh and suppressed his anger. "My majesty, you know that ignorance and illiteracy are the roots of all the disaster and misery. Superstition and rumor stem from ignorance. Why are the arrogant countries, Russia and Britain, afraid of promotion of education in oriental countries? The fear that people find out about their corruption and crimes and revolt against them," he explained.

"What do you want to say, Mirza Taqi Khan?" shah asked.

Amir, who knew the shah was eager to listen to him, said, "Developed countries have newspapers. Newspapers are a means of providing the general public with major news and information. Many years ago, Mirza Saleh Shirazi was the pioneer but

his newspaper was shut down for some reasons. Now with your OK, I plan to have a weekly newspaper published. It's to contain domestic and international news, scientific articles, a pricelist of commodities and state notices.”

The shah leaned back in his chair and rested his head on it. He felt sleepy. He shut his eyes and said, “OK. I feel OK with that. But I know one day, either I or you lose our head,” and laughed. He laughed and yawned and through the colorful marble looked at Amir, who was to take his leave. Amir left and his image refracted and faded out.

The first edition of the newspaper namely ‘Vaqaye Ettefaqiye’ appeared on Friday, Rabi II, 1267. Its editorial read that the newspaper was to disseminate information and to promote knowledge and perception. It was published in stone printing style and costed ten shahi (or half a rial).

Bridges Break

After some four years of his premiership, the country and public status improved increasingly day after day. People loved Amir and their love for him was growing ever more. Amir had his own enemies. They were few in number but powerful. Like a sneaky mouse, they were beavering away at the bases of the building which Amir had constructed thanks to his efforts. In the opposition circle, one could see the dismissed courtiers, those whose salaries had been cut down and didn't dare to get bribes or corrupt. Amir's archenemies were two who plotted against him most, that is, Mahd Olia (Nasereddin Shah's mother) and Mirza Agha Khan Nouri. Both were supported by the British and Russian embassies.

Mahd Olia that was a corrupt hostile woman tarnished Amir's image before the shah. "A minister mustn't have this much authority and power," she blamed the shah.

Mirza Agha Khan Nouri, on the other hand, was after taking the position of Amir Kabir. Amir Kabir had agents everywhere and knew all about their conspiracies. He, however, went on with his reform plans under the auspices of Nasereddin Shah. As long as the shah trusted him, he knew no fear. Plotting against him continuously, his enemies decided to overcome him through the very person who supports him, that is, Nasereddin Shah. They broke the friendship and trust bridge between the shah and Amir. "Amir Kabir is masterminding a plot to succeed your step-brother, Abbas Mirza, to the throne," they told the shah. The lie and some more conspiracies aroused suspicion in the shah.

The ties between the shah and his mother waxed and waned. But his relation with Amir worsened

more and more. Now, he met with Amir less than before and himself interfered in the country affairs. He dismissed Amir's ideas and even issued decrees without asking for Amir's advice.

The court was in turmoil. Thinking that Amir might invade the court, Nasereddin Shah ordered some troops to guard the palace round the clock.

Quite worried about his severed ties with the shah and its aftermaths, Amir wrote a letter to Nasereddin Shah. In the letter he had apologized and said that with all respect, he had become indifferent toward his position and that the position had been only a cause of anguish and ill-timely death for him.

At last, on 19 Muharram, 1268, Nasereddin Shah came to terms with the requests of his mother and courtiers and wrote a letter to him announcing the termination of his premiership.

“As premiership is a position of responsibility and it proves grueling to you, I exempt you from the responsibility. With utmost confidence, start

your position of military sector. I dispatched you a sword and an order which entitle you as the commander-in-chief of the military forces. Take on the new position so that we assign other capable figures the position of responsibility and other affairs.”

As a result, Amir stepped down the premiership and took on the position of the defense minister. The letter got Amir really down.

“The enemies succeeded after all,” he thought. Since he knew that the enemies keep on plotting, he wrote some letters to the shah and asked to meet with him in person. Yet, the shah absolutely rejected all his requests.

The incident also made the shah’s sister and Amir’s wife, Ezzato-Dowleh, very sad. One day, he went to his brother in the morning. She begged him for a meeting with Amir. She told him that Amir had a lot to say. The shah felt compassionate at the sight of his tearful sister. He agreed to see Amir.

It was the evening and the sunshine was fading out behind the court towering walls. The shah and Amir met face to face. Amir's eyes were the color of sunset. Building a smile on his face, the shah was trying to avoid any eye contacts. He could not stand Amir's charismatic eyes. He loved Amir but at the time he was trying not to think of that. A few minutes passed in silence. The shah didn't dare to speak; Amir also was unable to. The shah was insulting Ezzato-Dowleh in his mind because she insisted on the meeting. Ultimately, he broke the silence and said, "If you have anything to say, go ahead please because I have a lot to do!"

Amir felt a pain in his shoulder, spreading to the bottom bone of his spine. Though he had thought to say many things, his mind went blank. He was to talk about cruelty and the cunning enemies' plots; the enemies who were cutting down their mutual friendship tree. He was to talk about four years ago in Tabriz where the young crown prince was trembling with fear of Mohammad Shah's

death news and he was at his wits' ends. Amir was to talk about his own plans for bringing the crown prince to the capital and succeeding him to the throne. He was to talk about the chaos and desperate conditions in the country, about corruption, bribery and plundering by incompetent rulers, about his reform plans, the reign of peace, national developments, etc. But he thought, "What's the good of saying these? He's not the old shah I used to know. He's changed." He remembered the shah's asserting words: "If you have anything to say, go ahead please because I have a lot to do!"

It was the end. The end of everything. Without saying a single word, Amir left the court garden for home. The home which he had to move so that the new prime minister, Mirza Agha Khan Nouri, could settle in.

A Wise Minister or a Wise Shah

Mirza Agha Khan Nouri was a totalitarian and mindless man. A few days after his appointment as a prime minister, he felt ever-increasing weakness. He failed to sustain Amir's efficiency and greatness. There was public unrest and rumors had it that Mirza Taqi Khan was to be reappointed prime minister.

Talks were around about Amir's reappointment; an alarm for Nouri and his circle. He was thinking how to rule Amir out of the power circle epicenter and how to erase his legacy from the world. In the light of a proposition by Nouri, Nasereddin Shah appointed Amir Kabir as the governor of Kashan so that he stayed out of the sight of the competitors.

Mirza Taqi Khan felt that the new position was a plot masterminded to kill him. He knew of the notorious background of Qajar dynasty in killing their ministers as Qa'em Maqam Farahani was also killed by Mohammad Shah. Amir, on the other hand, didn't like to leave the legacy he had hard achieved for his country. He rejected the new position and stayed in Tehran.

His foes didn't remain silent. Under the pretext of Amir's disobedience, they forced the shah to send Amir into exile to Kashan.

A few days later, Mirza Taqi Khan and his wife along with his two little daughters and his only son accompanied by two hundred soldiers headed for Kashan. Yet, the shah disagreed with the departure of his sister. Ezzato-Dowleh, however, resisted his brother's decree and said, "I like to be with my husband for life."

They spent the night at a caravansary on the way so that they set off again in the morning. Some of the soldiers were asleep; others feeding

the horses. Amir was walking at the corner of the yard where he happened to see one of his old friends. He used to be the special royal guard in Fars province. He knew the entire story about Amir. Grief had his face wrinkled. After greetings, he asked Amir, "What happens to the country after you leave?"

Amir sighed and shook his head. "Terrible!" he answered. "I was wrong when I thought the country needs a wise prime minister. No, the country requires a wise shah," he maintained.

The beautiful flowery garden, Fin, was like a golden cage to Amir. Amir and his family were under house arrest and expected a tragedy at one moment or another. Ezzato-Dowleh didn't leave her husband alone for even a single moment. She was shoulder to shoulder with him. Even before eating, she tried Amir's food to make sure it wasn't poisoned. Their children felt sad as they saw their parents' sadness. They didn't feel like playing.

In the capital, talks were around about the bad performance of Mirza Agha Khan Nouri breeding public discontent. The odds were very good that the irresolute Nasereddin Shah, whose heart still had shades of loving Mirza Taqi Khan, invited him to Tehran again. The shah's mother, Mirza Agha Khan Nouri and a number of other Amir's archenemies inculcated the idea of murdering Amir in the shah.

Finally, forty days after forcing Amir into exile, when he was drunk, the shah signed a decree to murder Amir, and the death squad rushed to Kashan.

Journey to Eternity

The court's special servant, Haj Ali Khan, was assigned to murder Amir. He received a letter from Nasereddin Shah. He wasn't literate to read even one of letter words:

The servant of the court of the protection angels, the special stalwart supporter of the eternal government, the special servant, Haj Ali Khan, the man of competence, is assigned to head for Fin in Kashan and relieve Mirza Taqi Khan Farahani of his pains. You are expected to understand the honor that Shah, has granted you to do this mission.

At the same night, Haj Ali Khan along with four members of the cavalry, left for Kashan. His duty was to do the mission promptly. Haj Ali Khan never liked to think of the past when he promised to make up for his mistakes and to give up

burglary; when Amir pardoned him and let him be the court servant. He was just thinking of the mission and murdering Amir.

In Fin garden, Kashan, the rumor was circulating that the shah had pardoned Amir and ‘the robe of pardon’ was on its way from the capital. Amir would return to Tehran with all the due respect.

At daybreak, Amir was still saying his prayers. Ezzato-Dowleh, put a bundle next to him. Amir was saying his prayers; his eyes filled with tears. Even the room darkness couldn’t conceal his tears. Amir wiped the tears from his eyes and neatened the prayer-carpet. He didn’t like his wife to know about his crying but she did. Near the window, she had drawn back the curtains and stared at the milky daybreak sky and the crows overcrowding on the trees. Her water-like whisper washed Amir’s ears: “It’s the end; the end of the nostalgia and your hidden tears. Go to the bathroom to wash

away the dust of these dreadful days from your body.”

Amir took the bundle with embroidery and said in a trembling voice, “As long as the firmament goes ahead in this manner, this game isn’t over.”

“Don’t say that! Go to the bathroom. The robe of pardon arrives here within a day or two,” Ezzato-Dowleh said.

“I’ve done no wrong to be given a robe of pardon. The main pardoner is God. I want God’s robe of pardon,” Amir said.

Ezzato-Dowleh bit her lip and complained, “You’re only talking of death these days! You deserve life, not death.”

The bathroom was ready. Ezzato-Dowleh had it closed to anybody. Amir undressed and stepped into the warm room and washed with the water reservoir. He came out and sat down to have the masseur massage and wash his body. All of a sudden, he heard the sound of footsteps; the sound of boots on the stone floor of the bathroom. From

behind the thick steam, he saw two approaching him. They had covered their faces, their eyes apart. Amir recognized both, the executioner and Haj Ali Khan. "It should be so urgent that they have come into the bathroom to see me," he thought. Then he said quietly, "Welcome, Haj Ali Khan!" And he felt bad. There was no sign of respect in Haj Ali Khan's behavior. He saw a piece of paper in his hand and asked, "What's up, the special servant?" Haj Ali Khan grinned from ear to ear. "Bad news, ex-minister! The death news," he said and cackled. His cackle echoed through the bathroom columns and arches. Amir stared at him. Haj Ali Khan wasn't afraid of Amir's eyes anymore. He handed Amir the shah's decree. "Come on! Read it! Everything is written here!" he said. Amir took the decree with his wet sweaty hands and read it: "The servant of the court of the protection angels, the special stalwart supporter of the ..."

Somewhere water was

dripping into a bowl, whose sound echoed in the bathroom. "Is it true?" Amir asked.

Haj Ali Khan snatched the paper from him and commented, "It's bitter but true."

Amir looked at his short body and round face. "You've been promoted a lot! Bravo! Do you remember the old days when you were living in desperate conditions?" he asked.

Haj Ali Khan tried not to think of the past. "Let bygones be bygones. I'm doing my duty," he answered.

"I'd like to write a letter to the shah," Amir said.

"I'm not allowed to let you do that," Haj Ali Khan refused.

Amir was thinking about Ezzato-Dowleh. He wished he had been allowed to see her. Now he could hear the sound of guards' footsteps walking on the roof and could see their crossing shadows. He felt like a panther in a trap. "So let my wife

come to see me for the last time before my death,” he asked Haj Ali Khan.

“I’m not allowed to do that. I’m here only to kill you. That’s all,” Haj Ali Khan said, as if Amir was speaking with a stone wall.

“Due to the favor I did you then, let me make a will,” Amir said.

Haj Ali Khan’s voice went sharp like a scream saying, “You didn’t have to do it. I’m now being fed by another hand. I’m serving another. For me, you’re dead.”

Amir found out he had no other choice but to submit to his fate. He stood up. He performed his religious ablutions and sat down at the warm room center. He was ready to die.

- You should know that this ignorant shah leads Iran into a mess.

Fiddling with the tip of his thin moustache, Haj Ali Khan said, “None of our business. Kings know how to rule their kingdom.”

“How are you supposed to kill me?” Amir asked.

Haj Ali Khan pointed to the executioner and said, “He’s ready to take your worthless life.”

Amir looked at executioner’s masked face and bloodshot eyes. The sword was trembling in his hands. He felt pitiful for him.

Amir was accustomed to being phlebotomized. He called the masseur. He whispered something in his ear and stared at the floor. The trembling masseur started phlebotomy hesitantly. Amir put his palm on the warm bathroom floor and with his serious and undisturbed eyes looked at the blood fountain. The white marble of the floor was reddened with his blood. Amir lowered his head and murmured, “I bear witness that there is no god except the One God (Allah), ...”

A few minutes went by slowly and Amir’s hefty blood-red body went pale and faded away like a leaf. He was breathing his last breaths; his throat grunting. The last sings of life were also fading

away. The faces flashed in his mind one by one; his wife, mother, children, father, Qa'em Maqam, tutor, the verse “As positions and possessions are handed over from generation to generation.”

His arms failed to stand the burden of his hefty body. His elbows bent and his face went down to near the floor. Haj Ali Khan pointed to the executioner. The executioner went over Amir's head and kicked him tough on the pale shoulder. Amir fell flat on his face. Then he wetted a piece of cloth and gagged Amir to stop his last breath. Amir's eyelids closed.

The end. Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir's existence bowl had no life but was filled with death dust. He died to leave his name undying.

Milestones:

- 1222 :** Birth date (his birth date and place are unknown; yet, the date is based on certain evidences)
- 1244-1245:**His first visit to Russia
- 1250-1251:**Appointed as the military chief in Azarbaijan, northwest Iran
- 1253:** His second tour of Russia
- 1259-1263:**Visit to Erzerum to settle a dispute between Iran and Ottoman empire
- 1264:** Nasereddin Shah came to the throne and appointed Amir Kabir as his prime minister
- 1265:** Married Nasereddin Shah's sister, Ezzato-Dowleh
- 1267:** Published the first edition of 'Vaqaye Ettefaqiye'

newspaper; established the
technology academy

“Darolfonoon”; accompanied
Nasereddin Shah in
Isfahan trip

1268: Darolfonoon academy went on
stream; Amir Kabir
was sacked and sent into exile to
Kashan; he was
martyred shortly afterwards.