

Reviews

**Stanisław Adam Jaśkowski, *Parčam – Journal of Ahmad Kasravi and His Followers. A Snapshot from the History of Press in Iran*, Warszawa: Dialog, 2018, 227 pp.
ISBN 978-83-8002-736-7**

This book presents a critical analysis of the content of the *Parčam* bi-weekly, one of the newspapers published by Ahmad Kasravi (1890-1946). It came out from early Farvardin to late Shahrivar 1322 (March-September 1943). Stanisław Jaśkowski gives a brief account of Kasravi's other periodicals (the bi-weekly *Peymān*, 1933-42; the daily *Parčam*, 1942; and the weekly *Parčam*, 1944), but he decides to concentrate on the bi-weekly *Parčam* since, as he explains, this was Kasravi's only journal which came out in an uninterrupted sequence of over 10 issues, and its content gives a relatively compact idea of Kasravi's and his followers' (*Āzādegān*), ideology. The book consists of two parts.

Part 1, "Iran and its journalism in the early 1940s. Press regulations in Iran until 1940s," gives a general outline of the situation of the press in Iran under Reza Shah and during the Second World War, with a detailed presentation of Iran's Press Law and its changing censorship regulations from 1908 to the early 1940s. Jaśkowski then proceeds to Ahmad Kasravi's publications and his subsequent newspapers. He gives a synopsis of them, and finally concentrates on the bi-weekly *Parčam* and Kasravi's views on the key issues presented in this newspaper, namely social, moral and religious questions rather than history, science and politics, which were the main subjects in his earlier periodicals. Next he examines the nature of the *Āzādegān* movement, its vague status as something of a cross between a cultural association, a religious sect, and a political party; its complex relationship with Kasravi's and his followers' earlier associations, known under such names as: *Peymāniyān* ("Peymanists") *Poštibānān-e Peymān*, ("Supporters of Peymān") and *Pākdinān*, ("Adherents of the Pure Faith"). In the following chapters Jaśkowski looks at the issues most often addressed in the *Parčam* bi-weekly:

– the language of *Parčam* and its articles calling for language reform, a topic Kasravi broadly discussed in his other writings as well;

– *ketāb-suzi*, the book-burning ceremony Kasravi and his followers performed annually to liberate Iranian society from “harmful and stupefying ideas,” the philosophy behind the event and the harassment it provoked, which granted the *Āzādegān* the status of victims;

– Kasravi’s negative attitude towards Islam, in particular its Shi’a branch, his critique of Shi’ite clergy and rituals; also his criticism of the Baha’i religion, which he apparently perceived as a dangerous rival to his own doctrine;

– his opinion on communism and its local variant, which was gaining popularity in wartime Iran (Kasravi blamed it for lack of seriousness and authenticity); his own, rather utopist and naïve concepts on economic matters and how to achieve universal well-being;

– finally, Kasravi’s own religious system (*Pākdini*), as represented in the *Parčam* texts; Jaśkowski discusses this aspect with reference to *Varjāvand Bonyād*, Kasravi’s main ideological manifesto first published in 1943, that is the same time as *Parčam* bi-weekly.

Part 2, “Presentation of the source material,” gives a detailed schedule of the content of all 12 issues of the *Parčam* bi-weekly, with a table of contents for each issue, the headline and a short summary of each of its articles, along with the advertisements. This offers the reader a full review of the topics addressed in the periodical, as well as the possibility to follow their development in subsequent issues (especially for the polemical articles and readers’ letters). This part of the book may serve as a useful research tool for all interested in Kasravi’s ideas and Iran’s modern socio-religious movements in general.

The book’s appendix contains an alphabetical list of members of the *Āzādegān* society, with the names of over 270 subscribers, authors, correspondents, activists, and participants of *ketāb-suzi* events, mentioned in the periodical. In most cases a short identifying note is provided (some of Kasravi’s followers and sympathizers are well-known personalities of Iran’s political or cultural affairs), however, several persons have not been identified. Jaśkowski notes the movement’s very few female adherents.

Another short addition is a list of “Selected words and phrases from Ahmad Kasravi’s language” (in fact only words) used in *Parčam* articles. The list includes grammatical terms, numerals and verbs coined by Kasravi, giving an insight into his extensive work to bring about a radical change in the Persian language.

The book is provided with a large bibliography and index.

Jaśkowski’s analysis combines the diligence of an archivist with the sensitivity of a historian of ideas: he is interested in the paper’s legal status, the practical details of its production, financing, distribution, and social range of its readership, as well as in the ideology and worldview it conveys. The way he presents the content of *Parčam*, which is topical in Part 1 and chronological in Part 2, enables him to follow the development of Kasravi’s doctrine and capture its drift away from its initially proclaimed declarations of tolerance and open-mindedness towards

a growing fanaticism and intolerance. Jaśkowski observes the journal's double function, on the one hand to bring together and integrate the *Āzādegān* closed community, and to attract new followers on the other hand. The book discusses Kasravi's doctrine and other issues raised in *Parčam* in a broad socio-political context of the situation in Iran during the Second World War.

The pleasure of reading this solid and useful monograph is spoiled by its careless editing and large number of typos.

Anna Krasnowolska