

Original Research Article

Baharestan Square and the Realization of Civic Space

(A Critical Reading by the Spatial Perspective of the First Modern Urban Revolution in Iran)*

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Abstract | In harmony with other aspects of civilization, Iranian cities, in the face of modernity, have taken a new step in their existence and, alongside the physical transformation and the emergence of architectural and urban spaces with a new configuration, have experienced a novel dimension of social space. Baharestan Square is a tangible example of this new spatial arrangement, which at the end of the Qajar era, outside the established order, transformed into a center of social activism and the libertarianism of the constitutionalists. This study, within the framework of a critical paradigm, seeks to explore the factors and forces that have shaped Baharestan Square as a civic space in modern urban order in the historical space-time of Tehran during the constitutional era. It aims to give voice to the overlooked aspects of this experience by narrating its social space, contrary to one-sided physical or symbolic analyses. Civic space, as the final layer of urban public space, is a living space that, with society's dominance over it, becomes a discursive and socio-political platform for citizens, allowing the free spirit of society to regenerate through the support of its institutions. Based on the interpretation of this study, Baharestan Square, during the constitutional era, became the possession of the constitutionalists, backed by urban independence and detachment from the cohesive network of public spaces, creating a discursive platform through the presence of the progressive institution of the parliament, associations, and affiliated organizations, as well as the diversity and multiplicity resulting from the formation of a modern society, and also, pursuing demands and litigations with the establishment of the dualism of the government and the nation, which, along with fundamentally disrupting the traditional governing order, brought the social life of the city into a completely novel existence and introduced a new experience of placemaking in the public spaces of the city.

Keywords | *Tehran in the Qajar era, Square, Urban public space, Civic space, Critical reading, Baharestan Square.*

Introduction | During the Qajar era, despite a developmental void, a fundamental transformation of society and public thought based on Western influence and confrontation with the manifestations of civilization occurred. This led Iranians, through understanding the contemporary conditions and comparing themselves with advanced European nations, to demand comprehensive changes and reforms (Haghir & Kamelnia, 2020, 63). These transformations created an unprecedented diversity in the political and social spheres, giving rise to a new society through civil movements. The Constitutional Revolution is recognized as a turning point in these transformations and as the “first reflection of the widespread Iranian endeavor to reconcile the idea

of European modernity with the social conditions of Iran” (Mirsepassi, 2019, 128). These changes not only affected social structures but also impacted architectural and urban fabric (Pourzargar et al., 2020), with the notable expansion of Tehran during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah (1827) as the “first sign of modernization in Iranian architecture and urban planning” (Habibi, 2018, 19). Therefore, with the transformation of the city and society in Qajar-era Tehran, the urban landscape, which had previously been the main scene of social activities in the form of traditional living relationships, took on a new form and became a newly emerging social space, the birthplace of civic aspirations of the city's residents. Among the urban spaces of this period, the square, which has always been the platform for collective life (Pakzad, 2006, 70, Gałkowski & Antosz, 2022) and one

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of the most important centers of urban movement, played a new role in the reproduction of social space with the emergence of new physical and social elements. Its peak was during the Constitutional Revolution and the events that followed. Extensive research has been conducted on the conceptual framework of the square and its position within the urban structure of Tehran (Najafi & Shakouri, 2020, Ghobadian & Rezaei, 2013, Hooshmand Shaban Abadi et al., 2020, Razavian & Khodabakhshi, 2015) and its significance as a social space (Ahari & Habibi, 2015, Najafi, 2013).

Amid these urban transformations, urban spaces that were silent and isolated from the network of public spaces in the city became arenas for civic activism by citizens in the final years of the Qajar dynasty. Baharestan Square, during this historical period, was the place where the cry for freedom by the people of Tehran was heard. The importance of Baharestan Square in the physical, spatial, and social transformations of Iran over the past century has consistently attracted the attention of researchers (Mohammadi & Asadi, 2021, Hosseini, 2020, Tavakoli, 2016, Anvari & Ahmadi, 2014, Bastani Rad, 2011, Lak & Hakimian, 2019, Mehan, 2017, Benacer et al., 2022). Nevertheless, understanding the historical rhythm that positions Baharestan Square as the center of civic activism in Qajar-era Tehran requires a critical re-examination; it is evident that the influence of forces beyond the dominant structure presents the constructed space as a manifestation of civil society.

On the other hand, the realization of the Constitutional Revolution marks a unique turning point in the space-time of contemporary Iran; a point where propositions of transformation from within the government and society coalesce in a specific context, culminating in a major social revolution. A significant part of the underlying conditions for this revolution relates to how society interacted with space in the new urban configuration. Given this issue, the present study aims to shed light on the spatial dimension of Iran's first modern urban revolution within the concept of civic space as a continuum of space-society and to answer the question: What factors and forces established Baharestan Square in space-time of Constitutional-era Tehran as a realized civic space within the new urban order? Through this perspective, in contrast to the dominant analytical approaches in Iran regarding the city and Baharestan Square, space is critically interpreted in direct relation to society and as a narrative arising from social events. The civic identity of the city, which is a challenging concept in urban studies, is understood, contrary to the top-down approach that views the city as a product of grand decisions, through the historical life of the community, the actions of individuals, and the narratives hidden behind spaces.

Research Methodology

Understanding how social constructs such as urban spaces

form and interpreting their role in the historical processes of a society requires a shift in the usual perspective on studying the relationships and forces that shape them. In this approach, space is the realm where the resultant of these forces materializes, not adhering to common cause-and-effect relationships. The urban space of Baharestan Square exemplifies the conjunction of various social components in a specific space-time context. From this standpoint, this study falls within the paradigm of critical reading.

A critical reading of space, unlike a physical and neutral approach that considers the current state as the only possible existence and accepts it, seeks to review and reflect on the forces and relationships that construct the space and attempts to intervene in the current situation (Dadashpour & Yazdani, 2019). Therefore, physical and place-based factors are studied within an intertwined continuum with socially meaningful relationships, and the city is read as a text containing messages, symbols, and meanings, reflecting the ideals, beliefs, and prevailing viewpoints (Sartipi Isfahani, 2023). From Foucault's perspective, this paradigm does not recognize any underlying foundation or principle within phenomena but sees only layers of interpretation at work (Ahmadifard et al., 2022). Thus, this research, based on previous sources and study experiences, aims to open a new window to the historical understanding of the public space in the Iranian city and illuminate the spatial possibilities beyond the existing order.

Research Background

This research is primarily based on studies that have, in various ways, focused on Baharestan Square as their subject of study. One of the most important of these is the work by Ahari and Habibi (2015), which examines the formal and substantive ups and downs of Baharestan Square from its inception until the Islamic Revolution. These transformations clearly illustrate the Iranian experience of modernity in this urban area. Tavakoli (2016) provides an account of the locations in Tehran that were the sites of the Constitutional Movement, focusing on the confrontation between Topkhaneh Square (symbol of Qajar authority) and Baharestan Square (symbol of constitutionalism), which ultimately led to the conflict between the two and the oppressive dominance of the Qajar Shah by bombarding Baharestan Square.

Mehan's (2017) analysis of the historical transformations of Baharestan Square highlights its unique position adjacent to the first building of the National Consultative Assembly, Sepahsalar Mosque, and Negarestan Garden, establishing the square as the first modern focal point of political and social life for Iranians. The book "Baharestan in History" by Hassan Bastani Rad (2011) also examines Baharestan Square from a historical perspective.

Regarding the role of traditional and modern squares in social movements in Iran, no comprehensive research has

been conducted so far. However, studies that have explored the concept of the square and its role in cities are noteworthy. Najafi and Shakouri (2020), in their examination of the evolving network of concepts related to squares, seek the history of this concept, stating that the square, as a public space, is a flexible concept encompassing multiple semantic domains. Their article highlights the transformation of the “square” scene, where people shift from spectators to actors, turning the square into a social arena. Razavian and Khodabakhshi (2015) have also explored the structural changes in Iranian urban squares transitioning from tradition to modernity, noting that Qajar-era squares combined traditional and modern elements within their structure and layout.

Pourzargar and Abedini (2020) view the traditional square, connected to the organic geometric pattern of the historical city and subtly organizing the social, economic, and religious relations of the city, as an arena for collective behaviors and the balance of social forces, which is disrupted with urban modernization and the advent of automobiles, leading to urban disjunction. Ghobadian and Rezaei (2013) have also historically examined the spatial and physical characteristics of traditional and modern squares in Tehran.

Theoretical Foundations

• The history of the experience of social activism in the urban space of Iran

The term ‘city’ in writings that provide a social interpretation of it, has a meaning aligned with civil society. As Louis Mumford explains, life in a city is defined and articulated around a set of political, moral, economic, and religious actions and reactions (Mumford, 2018, 14). Max Weber also believed that “the city is a place of civic association where citizens have special rights and bodies composed of citizens are involved in political and military administration” (Weber, 1966, 81 citing Momtaz, 2011, 111). Therefore, what makes a city a civilizational product is its dimension of social activism, which seeks to go beyond the existing situation and take control of its destiny. The Iranian city has also taken on a distinct character throughout history, following the cultural components embedded in its context, the constituting factors, and the influential powers in each era. These cities have always been, more than anything else, political, administrative cities, and centers of power that have exerted control over more or less extensive domains around them (Fakouhi, 2017, 395). Accordingly, tracing the history of civil activism is determined by the modes of urban governance currently in place.

In pre-Islamic Iran, the basis of urban organization was the ancient system of citadel, downtown, and outer city, with a focus on religious elements such as the fire temple and Anahita, and based on a class system (Habibi, 2020, 33). The city consisted of two regions - the citadel and the outside,

where the residents of the citadel were government affiliates, and the outsiders were peasants and common people. Therefore, public spaces lacked the conventional freedom of citizens to make choices for urban life (Mansouri, 2007), and were largely defined in a class-based manner, where not all city dwellers had access to all spaces (Haghighi Borujeni & Rahrovi Poodeh, 2021). Based on this form of the spatial organization of the Iranian city before the advent of Islam, the concept of public space as a realm of active presence of all individuals cannot be envisioned.

After the advent of Islam, the urban structure of Iranian cities transformed, and its foundation was based on the Islamic worldview, creating a new configuration. The spatial organization of Iranian cities during this period was based on four constitutive elements: the center (market, mosque, and square), the territory (walls and urban boundaries), the structure (communication network between components), and smaller units (neighborhoods and urban complexes), all centered around settlement and communal life (Abarghouei Fard & Mansouri, 2021). In this order, public activities became an integral part of the city’s framework. The center, with its symbolic role (political, social, and religious), became the main focal point for the formation of public spaces on a macro scale, while neighborhoods and smaller urban complexes, smaller than the center, established social-spatial order on a micro scale. Additionally, the structure, which facilitated connections between different parts of the city, served many social functions, thereby shaping the predominant social aspect of the city.

Among the historical experiences of public spaces during this period, one can mention the flourishing of collective spaces in Shiraz during the Buyid era (in mosques, squares, and religious buildings of other faiths and sects, accompanied by social gatherings) (Amini & Khademzade, 2022) and the public spaces of Isfahan during the Safavid era (in two forms: official, including the development section of Safavid city, which encompassed Chahar Bagh Avenue, Naghsh-e Jahan Square, bridges, and urban gardens, and unofficial, such as coffeehouses) (Hanaei et al., 2021). It seems that this spatial and functional transformation in public spaces of cities from the early Islamic period to the Safavid era, and from the Safavids to the mid-Qajar era, was the result of ideological shifts in the early Islamic period and the political space of Iran during the Safavid era (Haghighi Borujeni & Rahrovi Poodeh, 2021). However, from the mid-Qajar era onwards, due to encounters with modernity, the manner of presence in public spaces takes on a different form.

• Theoretical Evolution of the Relationship between Space and Society

The approach of this study aligns with the late 19th-century perspective that casts a shadow on studies of social philosophy. Table 1 highlights the prominent thinkers of this approach based on their historical development.

Table 1. Social Theorists in the Field of Spatial Theory and Their Notable Ideas. Source: Author.

Theorist	Theory	Description of the view of the public space	Source	Highlights
Karl Marx	Historical Materialism	The city is the place of concentration of the masses and the emergence of new social relations, where the working class has become aware and man is a rational being in the city.	Marx & Engels (1972)	Historical Materialism's Spatiality: Social relations are the basis for defining the city
Max Weber	The City	Every place containing a society of humans is not necessarily a city. Rather, the social form of the city is meaningful in light of three subjects: the citizenship rights of the city's inhabitants, the formation of unions and guilds, and the participation of the people in the administration of the city.	Porahmad & Vafaei (2015)	Reading the City in the Context of History: Social action and presence are the most important factors of urbanization
Georg Simmel	The Sociology of Space	Space is one of the most concrete characteristics of social life; a characteristic that helps to understand social life based on human experience.	Lechner (1991)	The Five Dimensions of the Sociology of Space: Singularity, Boundary, Fixation, Adjacency, Fluidity
Henri Lefebvre	The Production of Space	The method of social space has three basic forms: 1- Material: perceived space, 2- Mental: imagined space, and 3- Lived: represented space.	Habibi & Barzegar (2018)	The Spatial Triad of Spatial Perception: Spatial Arrangement - Spatial Representations - Lived Space
Henri Lefebvre	Right of the City	There are two rights for citizens: "the right to allocate space" and "the right to civic participation". The realization of the right to the city is achieved to the extent of the citizens' participation, ownership, and allocation of space in public spaces.	Alipour Kohi et al. (2023)	The Right to the City: Better living in the spatiotemporal continuum of everyday life is contingent on and entails the appropriation of urban space
Hannah Arendt	The Human Condition	The public sphere is political. It has two meanings: first, the space of presence among others, and second, the space between others.	Arendt, (1958, 50)	Public Space: The realm of speech, action, and liberty (free and political action)
Michel Foucault	Of other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias	Institutions (and the architectural forms that house them) play a controlling role in society. The specialized language or jargon of each field plays an important role in the production of independent, legitimizing, and excluding discourse.	Nesbitt (2014)	The Genealogy of Space; Space as a field of forces with multiple layers of interpretation.
David Harvey	The Political Economy of Public Space	The structure of capital, backed by modern urban planning, has reduced the public space to the stage of commodity display and the facilitation of money circulation. And the social aspect has come under the indirect supervision of commercial activities (malls).	Harvey (2006)	The Political Economy of Public Space: The commodification of public space, and the distancing from public and social benefit
Jürgen Habermas	The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere	The public domain is the place of growth of social awareness in modern society, and public opinion is formed in it through the use of critical reason and rational judgment, and is the only legitimate source of the laws governing social life.	Bandar Abad et al. (2015)	The public sphere is part of the social life of citizens and the site for the formation of public opinion and democracy.
Pierre Bourdieu	The Theory of Practice	Each actor, by virtue of their position in the field (social space), is accompanied by limitations and potentials that determine their habitus in the field.	Jamshidiha & Parastesh (2007)	Relation instead of Opposition between the Objective and Subjective: The dialectic of habitus and field according to the individual's position in social space.
Seta M. Lu	social construction of public space	The "social construction" theory examines the dispute between space and meaning for economic, political, and ideological reasons.	Low & Smith (1996)	Space is a product of meanings conveyed through language, social interaction, memory, representation, and human performance.

In the classical view, space is considered a container that accommodates objects and events associated with it. This perspective, however, regards space as a separate entity from events, which is the absolute space that expanded with the realist view from the Renaissance period (Falahat

& Shahidi, 2015), and was extended by Newtonian physics. From the late 19th century, particularly after the works of thinkers like Karl Marx, the understanding of space takes on a different position. From this perspective, space emerges as a practice and discourse, acting toward the attainment,

preservation, continuity, and expansion of social, political, and economic power (Zieleniec, 2020, 253). Georg Simmel can be considered the formal initiator of this view, which essentially serves as the historical foundation of sociological space. Other thinkers have attempted to expand and extend this new perspective. Henri Lefebvre, through the introduction of the spatial dimension to the prevailing dialectic, created a fundamental transformation in the relationship with critical spatial interpretation. According to Lefebvre, space is not merely a constructed environment; it is also a subject of political struggles and a tool of control by the state (Katzhelson, 1992, 98). This intellectual shift has been followed in recent years by David Harvey, Manuel Castells, and others. Michel Foucault, with “space genealogy”, disrupts the prevalent causal relationship and introduces various layers of confronting space. On the other hand, Hannah Arendt designates the public space as a material-political phenomenon and a field of social interaction, while the Frankfurt School’s critical heritage, Jürgen Habermas, with the two theories of “structural transformation of the public sphere” and “communicative action”, presents a different dimension of interpreting the public space.

The common chapter among these thinkers lies in their approach to the city as a critical object and their interpretation of it as a social text. Accordingly, in the new paradigm, space is a practice aimed at social production and reproduction, and as a multi-agential system and a contested arena, it encompasses conflicts between transformative components in urban construction. Space and its ongoing events are not separate entities; rather, they change shape and content as a result of their interplay. Space, influenced by the forces at play (the constituent factors), undergoes deformation and seeks a unique form of events. As much as power bases such as governmental structures, the society associated with its infrastructure, and its visible and hidden forces exert more propositions on space, they draw the resultant vector of forces toward their desired direction and impose their discourse on others.

• Civic Space; Manifestation of Civil Society in the Public Spaces of the City

Human beings, as citizens, have a free, decision-making, and demanding existence in the city. This voluntary and active presence of humans leads to the concept of the public sphere as the basis of urban living. The public sphere is an aspect of social life where social actors freely gather to compete, discuss, and express their views on current issues, and an independent “public opinion” is formed (Guzman & Moore, 2023). The public sphere is an intermediary realm between the state and the individual, and the result of the emergence of a type of awareness that represents the general social interests against the interests of a particular group (Crossley & Roberts, 2015, 14 & 55). Habermas (1964 & 1991) associates the realization and expansion of democracy with

the expansion of the public sphere and the participation of people in the democratic institutions that determine the fate of society (Mirsepassi, 2015, 51). The public sphere organizes interpersonal relationships (Madanipour, 2017, 216), is a watchful entity against the ruling class (Najafzadeh, 2011), the main pillar of civil society (Sabzehei, 2016), and the most important manifestation of the political action of citizens.

The public space is an important part of the public sphere, which is in a causal relationship (Abarghouei Fard, Motalebi & Mansouri, 2023) and reflects its condition. Improving the qualities of this space can be a factor in inviting citizens to be present, participate, dialogue, and develop the public sphere (Bandar Abad, et al. 2015). The public space is the site of intervention and contestation for city designers and planners, and provides important grounds for the further development of social movements; streets, squares, and bridges are among the important spatial resources that the city provides for these kinds of movements (Tonkiss, 2015, 101). The public space is also an interdisciplinary field (Abedini & Ayvazian, 2022) that appears in the city in various forms and ways (squares, streets, parks, cultural centers, etc.), adding great value to the experience and potential of urban areas (Carmona, 2019) and is considered an example of sustainable urban development (Majidi et al., 2021).

The public space is a completely relative concept because it has always been the arena of power struggles in the city, and its publicness depends on various factors and stakeholders (Abarghouei Fard, Mansouri & Motalebi, 2023). Superficial and literal interpretations pave the way for capitalist control over it (Madanipour, 2019). This publicness of space is of two types: “In the Western tradition, the city is recognized as the site of two completely different types of activities and moral opportunities. In one view, the city is ‘urban’, the center of commerce, market exchanges, and social individualism. In another view, the city is ‘civitas’, the active democratic civic space, legal equality, and civic virtue” (Jennings, 2001, 88 citing Arab Solghar & Imani, 2020). Therefore, to the extent that the concept of the city approaches the civitas and civic action and citizenship (Ghanbari & Eshlaghi, 2022), the concept of public space is more closely related to the public sphere and is referred to as a civic space, i.e., “a space in the process of interaction between the social and the political through the act of public participation” (Arab Solghar & Imani, 2020). On this basis, one of the highest aspects of the realization of the publicness of a space is its civic dimension, which provides the physical context, universal presence, and collective and active participation of individuals. Civic space is, in fact, the physical-spatial order in which civility can emerge at the highest level (Fig. 1).

Baharestan Square; from a recreational space to a political space

Baharestan Square, which is considered one of the



Fig. 1. The process of realizing the civic space in the city. Source: Author.

important social and political hubs of the last century in Iran, has emerged from the midst of a dense setting of contemporary historical events. By examining historical maps (Križ, 1858), the location of the square, prior to the Naseri expansion of the city (1867), was outside the Tahmasbi city walls. The proximity of this location to the Negarestan Garden complex has led to this place having a historical background, and it is referred to as the forecourt of the Negarestan Garden. Prior to the expansion of Tehran, extensive gardening was carried out around the city walls, and as a result, this forecourt was surrounded by the Negarestan Garden in the north, the Sardar Garden in the east, and the Nezamieh Garden in the south, becoming a square (Koban, 1991, 28-36). After the expansion of Tehran during the Naseri era, in the map of Abdolghaffar (1891), Baharestan Square was incorporated within the city walls and was recorded on the map as the Negarestan Garden forecourt square. This history marks the beginning of the urban life of the square as a recreational area. After the square was incorporated into the city, over time, the surrounding gardens were divided into smaller plots and came under the control of officials and courtiers, and a part of the Sardar Garden in the east of the square was sold to Mirza Hossein Khan Sepahsalar (the prime minister of Nasser al-Din Shah). Sepahsalar also built two important buildings in this garden, namely his own residential palace and the Sepahsalar Mosque (Mostoofi, 2009, 498). Gradually, with the construction of the adjacent structures, the square acquired a more formal and urban character and a defined physical form (Figs. 2 & 3). With the occurrence of the Constitutional Revolution and the transformation of the Sepahsalar Mansion into the venue for the first session of the National Consultative Assembly (October 21st, 1906), the ground was prepared for the physical transformation of the square and the emergence of various urban elements and functions. The square regained a new urban life, as in addition to its political and administrative functions supported by the presence of the National Consultative Assembly, it also acquired cultural, commercial, and educational functions. "The presence of the parliament not only led to the creation of a new urban fabric and furniture in Tehran, but also with the concentration of newspaper offices, political parties, and the residence of influential political figures, a new social identity was formed in the neighborhood" (Anvari & Ahmadi, 2014). Table 2 shows the chronology of the social-political events that took place in the context of Baharestan Square from the Constitutional Revolution until the end of the Qajar dynasty.

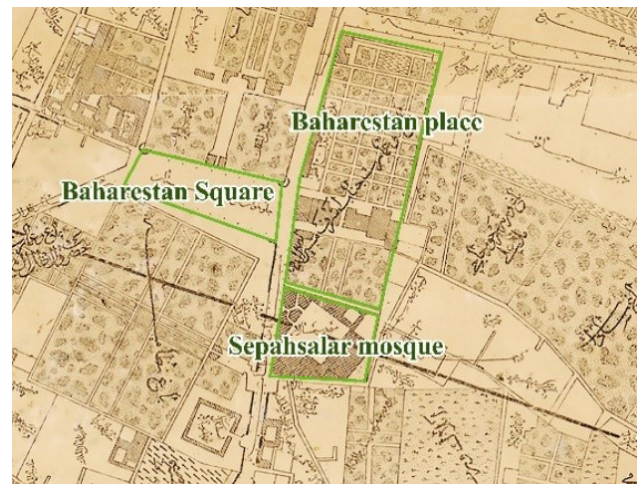


Fig. 2. The Bah-e Ngarestan area (frontcourt of Bah-e Ngarestan) in the map by Abdolghaffar (1891). Source: Author, adapted from <https://tehranshenasi.com>



Fig. 3. Baharestan Square and the National Consultative Assembly building during the Qajar period. Source: <http://www.negarestandoc.ir>

Findings Analysis

Based on the theory of the relationship between space and society, the historical trajectory of the formation of Baharestan Square, the study of past research, and the juxtaposition of distant and close perspectives on the issue, the theoretical propositions around the importance of the square and its transformation into a basis for civic aspirations are explicated. The present study aims to extract its unique interpretation from these propositions and to formulate a theory on the formation of the civic space of Baharestan Square in the history of Iran's city and urbanization. On this basis, the following theoretical propositions are presented as the results of the analysis of documents and studies, based

Table 2. Social-political events in the public space of Baharestan Square. Source: Adapted from Ahari & Habibi, 2015.

Year	Event	
1285 SH (1906)	Transfer of the location of the National Consultative Assembly from Madreseh-ye Nezam to the Baharestan building - 24th of Mehr (October 17, 1906)	Celebration of the approval of the constitutional law by the parliament - 8th of Dey (December 30, 1906)
1286 SH (1907)	- The assassination of the Grand Vizier (Atabak-e Azam) in front of the Parliament building by Abbas Sarraf - 8th of Shahrivar (August 31, 1907) - Celebration of the first anniversary of the Constitutional Revolution in Baharestan Square - 13th of Mordad (August 5, 1907)	Gathering of the residents of Nezam in Sepahsalar School and swearing an oath to not oppose the constitutionalism - 13th of Bahman (February 3, 1908)
1287 SH (1908)	- Shelling of the Parliament by Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar - 2nd of Tir (June 23, 1908) - Gathering of Tehran bazaar merchants in Baharestan in opposition to Mohammad Ali Shah - 27th of Khordad (June 17, 1908)	Gathering of Tehran associations in Sepahsalar School - 29th of Khordad (June 19, 1908)
1288 SH (1909)	The defeat of the government forces by the Mujahideen and constitutionalists, and their seizure of Baharestan - 22nd of Tir (July 13, 1909)	
1291 SH (1912)	Parliament session discussing the ultimatum to Russia and public demonstrations around the Parliament	
1295 SH (1916)	- Gathering of Tehran merchants and tradespeople in protest of Ahmad Shah's decision to leave Tehran - 28th of Mordad (August 19, 1916)	
1300 SH (1921)	- Demonstrations against Seyyed Zia Tabatabai - 3rd of Khordad (May 24, 1921)	
1301 SH (1922)	- Demonstrations by military personnel due to the resignation of Reza Khan (Minister of War) and threats to the Parliament during their passage through Baharestan - 15th of Mehr (October 8, 1922)	
1302 SH (1923)	- Demonstrations by supporters and opponents of the government in Baharestan Square - 23rd of Ordibehesht (May 14, 1923)	
1303 SH (1924)	- The opening session of Parliament to declare republicanism, a gathering of clerics and guilds in Baharestan against the republic and Sardar-e Sepah, and clashes with the military - 2nd of Farvardin (March 22, 1924)	
1304 SH (1925)	- Widespread public demonstrations in Baharestan Square and the intent to enter the Parliament, gunfire, killings, and bloodshed - 4th of Mehr (September 26, 1925)	- Demonstration of Tehran women and their request from the Parliament to provide bread and rations, and clashes with the representatives - 2nd of Mehr (September 24, 1925)

on the logic governing the researcher's perspective, and are discussed:

• **The constitutional revolution and the question of space; how did this revolution become urban?**

The popular movements during the Qajar period were predominantly urban in nature from the beginning. The assassination of Griboyedov, the bread riots, the tobacco movement, and many other events that occurred up until the Constitutional Revolution were essentially urban occurrences. The Constitutional Revolution was also, in a sense, the heir to these actions, which came to fruition in the final years of the Qajar era in the public spaces of the city. The Constitutional Revolution in Tehran was formed from the outset with the participation and accompaniment of the bazaar merchants, clerics, and intellectuals. Among the bazaar merchants, a wide range of traders, wholesalers, shopkeepers, and guilds were present. This led to a significant portion of the actions leading to the revolution manifesting in the centers and places associated with these classes, and the bazaar, as the meeting point of religion, politics, and economics in the traditional Iranian urban order,

accommodating many of the events leading to the revolution. In addition to the Grand Bazaar, schools, mosques, shrines, and private residences were involved in the transformations of the movement (Hosseini, 2020, 17-19). Therefore, prior to the fruition of the movement and the establishment of the parliament, the bazaar, with its multi-faceted ownership, maintained a balance between the various forces. Also, since the Constitutional Revolution was an attempt to accept the European idea of modernity and adapt it to social conditions (Mirsepassi, 2019, 128), like the modern Western social revolutions (such as the French Revolution), it saw the best way for its emergence in the urban spaces. The city and its public domain gave meaning to the civic movement and supported it, to the extent that the struggle over the city and its spaces became an important part of every modern social revolution.

• **Separation from the public spaces of the city; An opportunity to occupy the field**

The forecourt of the Negarestan Garden, when it entered the new urban domain, was an area detached from the urban spatial system and the social network prevailing in its public spheres, and was not considered a dynamic space in the early

stages of its urban life. Although this square was a place of recreation for the people for parts of the year (the royal ritual of camel sacrifice, the holding of mourning ceremonies, and the sale of goods in Ramadan in the courtyard of the Sepahsalar Mosque), it functioned separately from the interconnected network of the city's public spaces, namely: the Bazaar complex, Sabzeh-Meydan Square, Arg Square, and Topkhaneh Square. The spatial continuity between different parts of the city creates integration (Bagheri et al. 2022) and the extension of collective activities from one space to another. This separation from the intertwined urban system for the concentration of civic activity in Tehran had a precedent even before the Constitutional Revolution. After the pressures exerted on the consensus of intellectuals in the National Library on Naserieh Street, adjacent to the governmental building and the urban space of Topkhaneh Square, they chose the garden of Mirza Soleiman Khan Meykade on the current Gomrok Street, which was newly enclosed within the city walls and separated from other spaces, like Baharestan Square, to carry out their political activities with less trouble, and founded the "Revolutionary Committee" there (Malekzadeh, 2004, 237 citing Tavakoli, 2016, 34). Likewise, resorting to foreigners through the presence in the centers of foreign power (Savagheb, 2020), especially the experience of the Constitutional Revolution supporters' (merchants and clerics) sit-in at the British embassy (Basiratmanesh, 2022), indicates the people's recourse to the margins to escape the domination of the government over the official urban spaces. In other words, from the very beginning, the Constitutional Revolution demanded a new atmosphere and a new space. In Figure 4, the location of the main public squares of the city (Sabzeh-Meydan, Arg, Topkhaneh, and Mashq) and the passages and streets connecting them to Baharestan Square

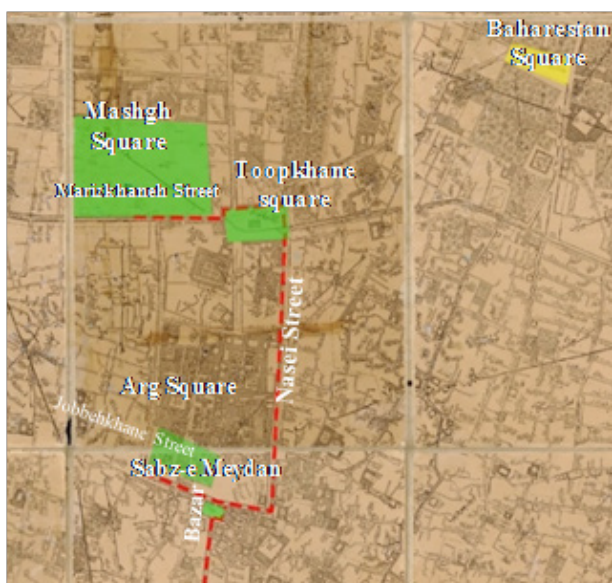


Fig. 4. The isolation of Baharestan Square in relation to the network of public spaces in Tehran after the Naserieh-era development, as shown in Abdolghaffar's map. Source: <https://tehranshenasi.com>

are shown, indicating the lack of direct and continuous connection between Baharestan Square and the most important public spaces of Tehran in the second half of the Qajar era.

On the other hand, unlike Topkhaneh Square, the formation of Baharestan Square in the development of Tehran during the Naseri era was not based on a pre-determined plan and objective. Baharestan Square was distant from the core governmental centers, situated on the outskirts of the city, and since it lacked a gate, it did not imply any special ownership or control over its occupants (Tavakoli, 2016, 78). In other words, it was neither too far from the city center to be inaccessible to the people, nor was it located in the saturated center of the city, lacking the potential for the formation of a new spatial environment. This distance from the city center allowed the parliament and the constitutionalists to organize their desired space without being overshadowed by the presence of ancient institutions and spatial traditions. The square itself, the large courtyard of the Baharestan building, and the Sepahsalar Mosque provided various means for the congregation of people and strengthened the connection of this institution with the city. This separation of Baharestan from the integrated urban order and the lack of continuous control by the governing apparatus over the square transformed it into a platform for the manifestation of a different form of public space, which was situated outside the direct and dominant supervision of the government. The constitutionalists also seized this opportunity and after the establishment of the National Consultative Assembly in the Baharestan building, they occupied the urban space of the square.

• The problematization of the urban space of the square for absolutism

Every human construction in the transition from traditional to modern order, due to the necessities and knowledge it carries with it, becomes a problem for the absolute and dominant power base. Just as the synchronicity of the Qajar dynasty with the encounter with the West, made the widespread outbreak of cholera, the general famine, and various crises, the issue of roads, health and body hygiene, the modern army, and education problematic for the Qajar rulers (Heydari, 2020, 228-252), the proximity of the Constitutional Assembly with the forecourt of the Negarestan Palace and the subsequent confrontations, transforms the phenomenon of the square into an urban problem for the power base. In contrast to the sovereign, dominated, influenced and controlled spaces of the power apparatus (such as the Arg Square and the Topkhane Square), the Baharestan Square becomes a refuge for constitutionalists and aggrieved people due to the same isolation. In the days of the confrontation between Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar as the greatest opponent of the Constitution and the constitutionalists, the urban space of Baharestan Square, which until then had been

the forecourt of the royal and court gardens and even had no distinct identity, suddenly became problematic and its name came up. Therefore, the extension of the constitutional movement against the power institution takes shape around an urban space, and the intellectual system of absolutism interprets the Baharestan Square as an urban issue. This view of the square space created a confrontation between the urban spheres, which ultimately led to a conflicting and resentful encounter; as if the Baharestan Square, which is no longer part of the Naserieh capital, was a part of enemy territory, until it eventually became the stage and arena for the Cossack commanders.

• **The Bombardment day¹: Physical elimination, a scenario of absolutism for confrontation**

The contemporary history of Iran has always faced an important question: what situation made the Qajar power base think of bombarding the parliament? To break the resistance of the constitutionalists, the ruling power resorted to the physical destruction of their base; it seems that absolutism has found itself in a new situation. The space that had been part of the government’s assets and a recreational area until recently has been taken over by the opposing front. Therefore, after much controversy, physical elimination is the absolutist’s solution to silencing the voice of the constitutionalists in the square and its surrounding spaces. Essentially, the Baharestan building and its forecourt had to be retaken from the enemies, and the inscription on its entrance had to be removed (Agheli, 1995, 54). Of course, the interpretation of this confrontation between Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar and his Cossack commander “Russian Liakhov” with the Baharestan complex does not end at this point. Examining the manner in which the parliament was bombarded on 23 June 1908, indicates the government’s attempt to destroy all manifestations of civil society that had concentrated in this square based on the events of a few years earlier. As shown in Figure 5, the deployment of cannons at the entrance of the four streets leading to the square means that all the facades of the square, which at that historical moment were mostly the locations of political-civil associations and centers (Rahmanian, 2011, 133), were attacked by cannons and military force, and maximum destruction became the scenario of absolutism to confront the problematic square. Similar to a recent experience, i.e., the destruction of the Pearl Monument in Lulu Square (Fig. 6) by the Bahraini government on March 8, 2011, which had become a symbol of the people’s desire for freedom during the Arab Spring revolutions, absolutism sees the only solution in the physical elimination of the manifestations of civil society.

• **The new socio-spatial experience and placeness of the square**

Drawing on the dialectic of space and society, Edward Soja considers space to have three dimensions: first, physical space; second, mental space; and third, social space. Based

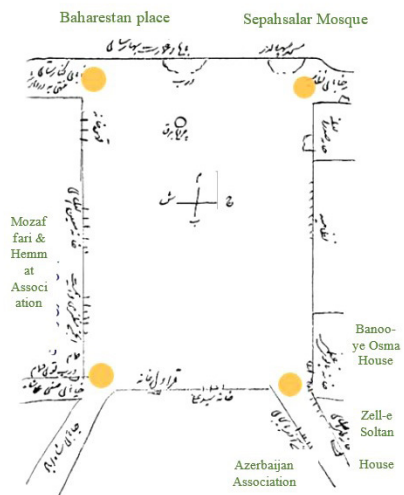


Fig. 5. Deployment of cannons at the entrance of the four streets leading to Baharestan Square and their dominance in the direction of destroying the physical manifestations of the square. Source: Tavakoli, 2016, 88.



Fig. 6. The Pearl statue of Lulu Square in Manama, Bahrain, which was destroyed by the government on March 8, 2011, during the Arab Spring revolutions, becoming a symbol of the people's struggle in Bahrain. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/international>

on Soja’s concept of the Third Space, space is created not only through physical structures and mental processes but also through the historical and social formation recognized by

social interactions in the process of human communication (Soja, 1996, 70-82). On this basis, citizens orient and utilize spatial structures (Afrakhteh, 2017). The third space is equivalent to Lefebvre's concept of lived space, and these two terms are addressed as the concept of place in various theories. Therefore, the place represents a dimension of everyday life that is experienced immediately and without mental representation in a space such as Baharestan Square (Sekhavatdoust et al., 2023). Urban public space becomes place-based through its social production and is placed in a unique position for citizens. The new experience of being in Baharestan Square has also provided the ground for its placeness in the body of contemporary political and social events in Iran as a collective memory, bringing a new horizon of inhabiting. This square, by finding a different meaning compared to other public places in the city, has become a symbol of idealism and the quest for freedom in the collective unconscious of the citizens, which extends for decades. Thus, the lived space of the square overshadows its other aspects and, by emphasizing the social dimension, leads to the emergence of unique meanings. In this way, the third or lived space (the social dimension) is directly related to the concept of civic space (the political dimension).

Critical Reading of the Civic Space of Baharestan Square

The position of a public space within a specific political, social, and spatiotemporal context leads to the realization of its civil dimension. What is evident is that civility in the public space is a relative concept and takes on meaning in relation to a particular situation. No urbanity or civility can be considered absolute, and the emergence of civic space in the city is not something that can be definitively ascribed to a particular space. The reading of the formation of this aspect of the public domain in Baharestan Square indicates that civic space is essentially a spectrum, realized under specific conditions, and there is no guarantee of its continued existence at all times. On this basis, civic space is the result of social action, alongside design considerations, the will of power, and other aspects governing the formation of space (both intentionally and unintentionally). It is society itself that enables its realization. The socially constructed nature of space at its core represents the occupied and lived space within the fabric of society, the consequence of the formation of the public sphere, and the emergence of social forces accompanied by its various strata. Based on this analysis, the civic space of Baharestan Square, after the transfer of the National Assembly to its vicinity at the dawn of the Constitutional Revolution, becomes visible outside the dominant rules and is perceived as the arena of resistance of the constitutionalists in the reports of their contemporaries. Therefore, the transition from the recreational space before the Constitutional Revolution to the civic space after it was

only possible through the effective agency of civil society. It is important to note that the transfer of the Assembly to the Baharestan building is not the only factor in the creation of these conditions, but rather the historical coincidence of the position and form of the square, the physical elements that make it up, and most importantly, the urban nature of the Constitutional Revolution, which brought the civic demand for rights to the public sphere, led to the realization of civic space in its innovative form in the Iranian city for the first time. On the other hand, civic space is essentially contingent on society (in its modern sense), regardless of racial, ethnic, tribal, and religious differences, thereby enabling presence, agency, participation, and demand-making within it. Therefore, this type of public space is dependent on the formation of society and the nation in the background. Based on the critical review conducted by this research, Baharestan Square in the Constitutional Era came under the control of the constitutionalists as a lived space (in Lefebvre's sense), based on urban independence and separation from the coherent network of urban spaces, the formation of a discursive context with the presence of the nascent institution of the parliament and its associated associations and centers, the plurality and diversity resulting from the formation of modern society and the diversity of tastes, and the demand for redress as a result of the formation of the state-nation dichotomy. The realization of the placeness of the square in the individual and collective memory of the citizens, created a fundamental and historical schism in the traditional and dominant order of urban spaces before it, so that the city entered a different horizon and resumed an entirely novel vitality. The most important propositions and key concepts resulting from the analysis of the formation of the civic space of Baharestan Square are presented in Figure 7.

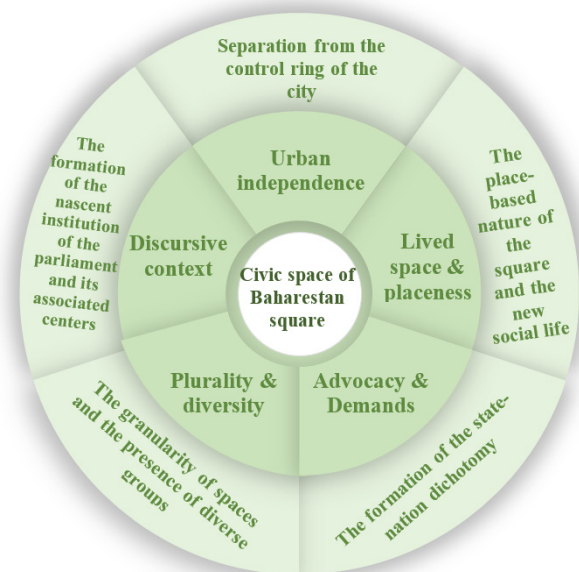


Fig. 7. The key propositions involved in the realization of the civic space of Baharestan Square and the creation of a schism in the traditional and dominant order of the public urban space. Source: Author.

Conclusion

A critical reading places every phenomenon in relation to its specific spatial and temporal conditions. Therefore, generalizing this reading to other events is generally not possible. However, such studies attempt to strengthen a different perspective on the city and disseminate the awareness that there are other possibilities in every situation. Therefore, the growth or decline of political-philosophical thought in each era and in every society can be recognized through the weakening or prosperity of the public spheres along with their physical embodiment in urban spaces; and changes in the architectural and urban planning system in different places and times can inform the evolution of political-philosophical thought and its growth or decline.

A city is a human construct and goes beyond its physical body and population. Tehran in the late Qajar period was a city in transformation and metamorphosis. Befitting the time and place, what emerged from this unprecedented transformation and cultural change was a new embodiment of the coexistence of the social and physical structure alongside each other. This is the historical moment when the concentration of new propositions enabled the emergence of the first urban civic space in the modern sense in Tehran. The experience of the formation of the civic space in the context of Baharestan Square indicates that this space does not emerge solely based on pre-determined characteristics and elements; therefore, design interventions in the city must be aware that civility and the pursuit of freedom manifest in the parts of the city that have more favorable conditions. The vector of social forces in this point overwhelms any other external factor and manifests in a particular form of spatial action in proportion to the background condition. Therefore, in the reading of civic space, social value takes precedence over architectural values, and the quality of the space from this perspective depends on the type of spatial action and practice of the citizens.

Iran has been experiencing a gradual process of awakening and awareness since the early Qajar era, and the expansion of this awareness into various social levels has paved the way for the first modern urban revolution. Essentially, from the mid-Qajar period onwards, the desire for modernity is visible in all practical and intellectual aspects of Iranian society. Supported by this innovation, the civic space of Baharestan Square represents the comprehensive demands of both the internal and external spheres of the Qajar government (despite opposition from both sides). In a general sense, the civic space is the ultimate layer of citizenship and urbanism; a place where society stands at the greatest angle possible against authoritarianism, and the space becomes a sanctuary for freedom-seeking citizens and their lived space. From this perspective, the civic space of Baharestan Square, as the body of society (not the entire society of that time, but only the constitutional movement), is attacked by the opponents of freedom, and when despotism cannot withstand dialogue with it, it resorts to destroying the manifestations of civic aspirations in the square, with the notion that this fragmented body will not be able to return to its former shape. Therefore, the civic space is like the freedom-seeking body of society, whose strength and weakness depend on the extent to which freedom prevails in the social sphere. In general, the modern Iranian city is not merely reflected in the physical representation, new street construction, physical elements such as streetlights, horse-drawn tramways, and so on, but at a certain historical moment, it has encountered social change with physical change, and at this moment the civic space has been born. Baharestan Square is a symbol of the Iranian society's failed attempt to breathe the atmosphere of freedom, which did not materialize due to historical reasons. The interpretation of this square conveys the effort of the Iranian community to actualize a civil society that failed and narrates the story of a city whose spring of freedom was crushed under the boots of the Russian Cossacks.

Endnotes

* The goal of this research is not to judge or theorize about the event of the Constitutional Revolution. The research does not aim to take a personal stance towards this movement or to evaluate it. Therefore, in a general understanding, the perspective on the Constitutional Revolution for this study is that it is the only important effort of Iranian society to achieve civil society and the dream of social modernity, which has taken on an urban dimension, and Baharestan Square is a spatial facet of it.

1. The term "Yowm-e-Toop" (literally "Day of the Cannon") refers to June 23, 1908, when Vladimir Liakhov, the Cossack commander of Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar and the security chief of Tehran, bombarded the headquarters of the Constitutional Revolution's freedom-seekers. Apparently, this compound term is grammatically incorrect (the linguistic blend of Arabic and Persian), but it is a thought-provoking metaphor for the lack of rationality of the Qajar state apparatus in the face of the reality of society and the resulting awareness.

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