The Spirit of Islamic Revolution: Revolution Ideology in making
Afghani, Iqbal, Shariati, Khomeini & the role of Shi’ism

The emergence of militant and radical Islam as a significant political force in Iran and in other Middle Eastern countries in the twentieth century acquired world attention with the Islamic revolution in Iran. It is important, because in the whole process of new development ‘Islam’ as a religion played important role. The sudden appearance of radical form of repoliticised Islam came as a shock to many because of its deviation from established norms and its unexpected success in some cases. In fact it was not a sudden appearance. The origins and import of contemporary Islamic resurgence can best be understood in the historical perspective. This phenomenon is actually a recent manifestation of a complex pattern of reactions to decline of Islamic society and institutions in the Middle East, stemming partly from and then accelerated by the economic, political and cultural intrusion of the west. The political cohesiveness of the Islamic empire had actually ended by the tenth century, though Islam continued indefinitely as a formidable cultural tradition periodically reaffirmed by movements of revival and reconstruction. Nevertheless, its intellectual resilience became less pronounced in the late medieval period, and though there was continuing creativity, scholarly activity was with increasing frequency based on reference to the legitimised sources of theological, legal and sociopolitical theory. The establishment of the Ottoman

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Empire represented the revival of a Middle Eastern Islamic political imperium, but its cultural achievements did not match those of the Abbasid period.

In the seventeenth century the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the gap in performance ability between the Middle East and newly galvanised Europe became clearly evident. The eclipse of the Ottoman Empire extended over more than two centuries following the end of the war with the European alliance. By the nineteenth century, the once invincible Ottoman imperium had become the "sick man of Europe", a prize to be won in the rivalry for colonial aggrandisement among Great Britain, Russia, France and Austria. For the Ottoman, the "Eastern Question" was a humiliating and traumatic experience in which their political and territorial sovereignty was progressively diminished and partition of the entire Middle East became inevitable. Iran, which had became a powerful state at the beginning of the sixteenth century, suffered the same fate and in 1907 was partitioned into zones of influence between Great Britain and Russia.

These untoward developments generated a quest to rescue the besieged Islamic order in the Middle East from the designs of the colonising powers. The European challenge had since the sixteenth century confronted most non-western societies with a crisis in which traditional cultures were subjected to the test of utility. From the beginning, the two responses to the problem in the Middle East were either "a rigorous reassertion of the pristine truths of religion, as preached by Mohammad himself" or
attempts “to appropriate those aspects of European civilisation which seemed responsible for the European success.”

These schools of thought on what form and direction the needed sociopolitical adjustments should take were the dominant responses to the problem of decline in the late nineteenth century. The first advocated direct borrowing from the western models of secular culture and nationalism, the presumption being that the only effective way to meet the challenge of Western political and cultural intrusion was to adopt, at least in part, those institutions that had made the European powers so irresistibly powerful. Also implicit in this approach was the premise that Western secular civilisation was innately superior to the established Islamic culture of the Middle East.

The second school of thought held that the only viable solution to the problem was the reconstruction of Islam itself. The underlying theory here was that contemporary Islam is a degenerate form of the original and that the only way to revitalise it is to reopen the doors of *ijtihad* (rational judgement) and overhaul the existing institutional structure, using early Islam and the best aspects of Western sociopolitical practice as the models. The relative roles of these two very different models were never adequately defined. This ambiguity left a significant uncertainty as to whether “Islamic modernism” as this doctrine of change came to be known, was essentially more “Islamic” than “modern” (in the Western sense) or vice versa.

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Iran witnessed a movement in the early 1900s, leading to the formation of a constitutional monarchy in 1906. Islamic modernism in the Turkish part of the empire was developed by some of the Young Ottoman thinkers. An even more comprehensive theory of Islamic modernism was elaborated in Egypt by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh in the 1870s and 1880s. Using the age of the salaf (early Muslim generations) as a model for change in the present, they called for the creation of the climate of free inquiry that had existed in the illustrious periods of Islamic history. This climate would enable contemporary Muslims to interpret Islam, implicitly even with reference to the modern West within proper bounds, in order to meet the challenges of modern times.

The Progressive Islamic Movement

The political activities and writings of Jamaluddin-al Afghani, greatly influenced the political situation of Iran where imperialism was on strong hold. Mostly, the Middle East countries had fight between imperialism and nationalism. In the process of political reforms, after World War I, the Western concept of nationalism began to emerge as the new ideological orientation of Middle East politics. Nationalism was never very clearly defined in Iran, but it was implicit in the constitutional movement of 1906 and to some extent in the programme of the Pahlavi dynasty after 1925.

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Jamaluddin Al-Afghani

Jamaluddin al-Afghani, the great Pan-Islamic, travelled in many parts of the Islamic world exhorting Muslims to unite in order to resist the influence of Europe and the west. From the late nineteenth century until after World War II, the main intellectual trend in the Muslim world was Islamic reformism, not militancy. Reformism centered in different areas and classes—especially the urban intellectuals and new middle class. Jamaluddin Afghani tied to reformism, had nonetheless remained popular, largely because of his anti-imperialist militancy. He grew up in a Iranian Shi'i tradition that simultaneously stressed rationalist philosophy and Islamic theorising and had knowledge of Shi'i struggle and of the militant heretical Babi movement in mid-nineteenth century Iran. He sensed the potential of militant Islamic identification as a well spring of political action in the modern world. Afghani responded to shifting moods: until the early 1880s his writings were nearly all in a liberal and local nationalist vein, with a strong dose of Islamic modernism and of hostility to British colonialism, the latter feature staying with him throughout his career. After the major 1878-1882 losses of Muslim lands to the West, Afghani joined those who promoted pan-Islamic unity against Western imperial conquerors.

Afghani, whose words were diffused in Arabic by his disciples, was a particularly influential pan-Islamist because he tied pan-Islamism to a strong resistance against British encroachments in Muslim lands. Indeed, his anti-imperialist proto-third-Worldist

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5 Ibid.
approach may be the most influential element in Afghani's thought. It had increasing importance after his death, and it is significant that Afghani is the only major writer and speaker popular with liberal and nationalist thinkers who retains his popularity with today's Islamists.  

Afghani, an Iranian by birth and schooled in the ideas of philosophers like Avicenna, traveled to Istanbul for the first time in 1869-70; there, he had contact with some advanced thinkers, especially in the field of educational reform and modernisation. His contact with the Young Ottoman thought is not clear, but some of his later ideas resembled theirs, especially Kemal's. Afghani is known as the intellectual advocate and leader of Pan-Islamism, a movement for the unity of Muslim people against the west. In fact, intellectual Pan-Islamism was advocated over a decade before Afghani first wrote of it by certain Young Ottomans, particularly Namik Kemal. It was a type of nationalist movement for some kind of political unity against outside encroachment. Afghani took more radical positions on a number of matters. In large measure this radicalism was based on Iranian philosophical and religious traditions, notably the Shaikhi religious movement that formed the background of the Babi-Baha'i offshoot from Shi'ism. He was also well schooled in the Islamic and Iranian philosophical traditions that stressed reason, antinomian mysticism or both. Along with the Islamic philosophers he believed that literalist religion was good to keep the masses orderly but that the intellectual elite could dispense with it for a more rationalist truth based on a Greek style philosophy

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founded on natural law. These philosophical notions fit well with the Deism of Enlightenment thinkers. It was, therefore, easy for Afghani to adopt a number of Western-style ideas without breaking radically with his own particular ground.

Among the discontented in the nineteenth century were also a small but growing group of intellectuals, many of whom had mercantile or government positions, who learned of Western ways. Those who went abroad were generally struck by Western economic and political development; their writings praise western ways and criticise Iran's autocratic rulers, petty officials, venal clerics, arbitrary courts and low status of women.\(^8\) Afghani was one among those writers, despite the fact he liked Western ways but the tone of criticism against the imperialist forces were never missing from his writings. The recurring alliance between the bazaaris and many of the ulama on the one hand and secularised liberals and radicals on the other has been largely based on the existence of common enemies - the dynasty and its foreign supporters - rather than on any real agreement about goals. The ulama wanted to extend their own power and to have Shi'i Islam more strictly enforced; liberals and radicals looked for greater democracy and economic development; and bazaaris wanted to restrict favoured foreign economic status and competition.\(^9\) The alliance formed by many of the ulama, the bazaaris, and a few secular intellectuals first showed its power after the Shah granted a British subject a monopoly on the purchase, sale, and export of tobacco grown in Iran. Afghani's appeal had a powerful impact on the masses. The decisive moment came when at the urging of Afghani, a radical Shi'i mujtahed and activist, and under pressure from the merchants, the

marja'-e- taqlid, Haj Hassen Shirazi issued a fatwa that made the use of tobacco "tantamount to war against the Imam of the Age.\textsuperscript{10}

The events preceding the constitutional revolution of 1905-11 were a continuation and intensification of the tobacco rebellion of the 1890, demonstrate the Iranian spirit against imperialism in Iran. The tobacco "victory" saddled Iran with a Sterling 500,000 loan to pay the British company for its lost monopoly. Afghani's writings and speeches made powerful impact on radical Iranians outside the political boundary. On 1 May 1896, Mirza Reza kermani, instigated by the anti-Shah pan-Islamic activities of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in Istanbul, assassinated Naser al-Din Shah. During the constitutional movement the preachers advocated that the then-ruling Qajar Dynasty were the Yazids of the Age, while those who fought them, fought the battle of Hussain. This religious cum revolutionary theme had already been voiced in writings by, among others, the famous radical pan-Islamist, Jamal al-Din-al-Afghani. He was one among those theologians, who have advocated the existence of a close linkage between politics and religion. He had begun to turn to new ideas, tried to rediscover Islam for himself.\textsuperscript{11} Islam as a salient political ideology has played instrumental role in many revolutions in world. In the case of Iran, it worked in the similar way since the constitutional movement. Afghani and other intellectuals succeeded in accommodating Islam with the ideas of modernisation and revolution. It can be argued that Iran witnessed political revival of Islam with the help of Islam as a political ideology. It was only in Iran

\textsuperscript{9} Keddie Nikki R. \textit{Iranian Revolution in Comparative Perspective}, New York University Press.
\textsuperscript{11} Bruke Edmund; \textit{Islam, Politics and Social Movements} (Edited) London, 1980.
where the historical condition did allow an effective junction of Islamic symbols, leaders and political action. In Iran since the very beginning, the opposition had been closely identified with a national religious establishment.

Afghani's theoretical opinion about Muslim cooperation and fight against imperialism were very clear, which formed strong bases for movements and revolutions in the future. He came out with three points programme, which acquired little response among the Muslim modernists. It were: (i) defence against Western imperialism through Muslim unity, (ii) internal political modernisation through establishment of constitutional governments and (iii) religio-intellectual modernisation. Afghani was of the opinion that the task before the Muslim societies was two fold – to survive against the immediate threat of imperialism and to re-emerge gradually as a powerful culture. On the political plane, Afghani suggested unity of Muslim states and political modernisation as a means to face the designs of western imperialism. On the intellectual plane he emphasised the need to fill the gap between the medieval Muslim and modern western knowledge.\(^\text{12}\)

Why Afghani was condemned by the 'ulama' and consequently, ordered by the government to leave the country? Afghani urged the people, during his lectures, to struggle as it was the demand of the time. Nothing could be achieved unless man strived for it. Even prophets did not succeed in their mission without effort.\(^\text{13}\) Afghani's views raised a bitter controversy. The ulama accused him of holding the heretical view that prophecy was also an art of equating the status of the prophet with that of the

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13 Athar, P. 70;(ibid).
It appears that the ulama did not favour the establishment of the new university, *Darul Funan*, devoted to teaching of modern sciences, which was considered by them, as a potential threat to the orthodoxy. Afghani's social political and religious area of activities were so vast that it gave a multi-facet and probably controversial touch to his personality. Afghani himself out of anguish says:  

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\begin{align*}
\text{The English people believe me a Russian} \\
\text{The Muslims think me a Zoroastrian} \\
\text{The Sunnis think me a Shi'i} \\
\text{And the Shi'ites think me an enemy of 'Ali} \\
\text{The atheists have imagined me a Materialist} \\
\text{And the pious a sinner bereft of piety} \\
\text{Neither does the believer call me to him} \\
\text{Nor the Muslims recognise me as his own...}
\end{align*}
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Allama Iqbal

Afghani is unique among the Muslim thinkers of the modern age who continues to serve as a source of inspiration for Muslim intellectuals, both conservative and modern, as well as the Muslim political elite of present day, in general. In the beginning of twentieth century, intellectual of modern sensibility, Allama Iqbal found in Afghani thought framework for the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam. His famous book 'Reconstruction of religious thought in Islam', was thought provoking modern source material for revolutionaries working for Islamic establishment across the nation. Even, Ali Shariati, the radical thinker provided the ideological framework for Iran's Islamic revolution by pursing intellectual direction set by Iqbal. Though Iqbal was not very

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14 Halil Fewzi, op. cit, quoted. Biography, p. 73.
16 Moazzam, Anvar; *Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, A Muslim Intellectual*. New Delhi. (from introduction)
popular in Iran, but at intellectual level his thought helped in giving a concrete and definite direction to the revolutionary movement in Iran.

The spirit of Afghani’s mission and the passion that had propelled his efforts for regenerating the Muslim society was given a concrete and definite direction by Iqbal, whom Dr. Ali Shariati hailed as a ‘distinguished figure in the history of human thought and a dazzling individual whom the pristine richness of Islam had presented to human society.’

Iqbal’s importance in the progressive Islamic movement is central because he gave the ‘revolutionary movement of Syed Jamaluddin “ideological sustenance”. He gave intellectual roots to the field of rebellion and revolt Syed Jamaluddin had tilled.’ Clearly then, Dr. Ali Shariati, the revolutionary thinker who provided the ideological framework of Iran’s Islamic Revolution by pursuing the intellectual direction Iqbal had etched considered Iqbal as ‘one of the greatest Muslim personalities that Islam had presented to the world.’ However, Ustad Taqi Shariati, father of Dr. Ali Shariati. Taher Ahmadzadeh, and Ayatollah Taleqani who began the first serious and concerted effort in Iran for a progressive Islamic movement in the early forties. Ustaq Taqi Shariati and Ahmadzadeh revived the Islamic revolutionary struggle after Reza Shah’s suppressive regime was deposed by the allies at the beginning of World War II. They established the first academic centre for a progressive Islamic movement at their native city of Mashhad in 1941, calling it the centre for propagation of Islamic Truth (Kamun-e-Nashre-e-Haqigat-e-Islamic). A few years later, this movement was further enriched with its discovery of

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17 Shariati, A: Maa Va Eqbal, (We and Iqbal), Hossienieh Irshad. Tehran. 1980.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
Iqbal and his ideas. By the early 50s Iqbal had became a well known figure among Iran's intelligentsia and educational circles. It is worth noting Mossadeq's contribution in projecting Iqbal among Iranians. As the country's Prime Minister and national hero Mossadeq broadcast a special radio message on Iqbal Day in 1952, and praised him for his role in the struggle of Indian Muslims against British imperialism. The same year *Rumi-e-Asr*, the first book introducing Iqbal to Iranians in their own language, was also published and so well received that soon it went through a second printing. During the decade that followed, the complete Persian works of Iqbal had appeared in Iran, and his Urdu poetry was also translated into Persian as were his lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam. Iqbal's ideas and approach to Islam had begun penetrating progressive religious circles and been incorporated into the ideological framework of Mehadi Bazargaan's Liberation Movement. The Liberation Movement presented the first organised attempt for incorporating Islam as the ideological foundation for a progressive Islamic movement at the social and political level. A distinctive feature of this movement was that it had developed independently of the theological schools in Qom. Shariati gave a crucial and revolutionary dimension to the progressive Islamic Movement. He went beyond the comparative approach of Iqbal and Bazargaan which relied on Scientific and philosophical developments for expounding Islamic principles. He discovered original relationships and new meaning within the Quranic context concerning social

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21 Irfani, K. A. H. *Iqbal Iranion Ki Nazar Main* (Iqbal as seen by Iranians), Iqbal Academy, 1956.
principles and social movements which he then tried to develop within the framework of a revolutionary ideology.  

**Shariati and Obscurantist Clergy**

Like Afghani and Iqbal, the progressive Islamic thinkers and reformers before him, Shariati was not spared the scathing attacks of the reactionary folds of the clergy. Many clergymen, some of them in collaboration with SAVAK but most of them because of their ignorance, hurled all sorts of accusations against Shariati. He was variously labelled ‘Marxist, ‘Apostate’, ‘Wahabi’, ‘Sunni’, Communist,’ ‘imposter’, - the choice for the accusative brand being determined by the accuser’s own prejudices. For instance, when Shariati opened a week long seminar on Iqbal at Hossienieh Irshad in 1972, where papers were read on the dynamic, anti-exploitative and anti-imperialist spirit of Islam, many mullas condemned Shariati in their speeches delivered form the pulpits in mosques for eulogising a Sunni Iqbal who had ‘insulted’ the prophet’s family.  

In the context of these accusations by the ‘rival’, Shariati wrote in his book on Iqbal: ‘This tirade of propaganda against the expansion and progress of Islam as a progressive revolutionary ideology is orchestrated by a rival who finds himself rebuffed, exposed, and threatened with extinction by the true Islamic ideology.’

Reflecting on the strait jacket mentality of mullas, Shariati wrote:

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25 Ibid.  
26 Ibid.  
27 Shariati, A: *We and Iqbal*. (Published Lecture), Tehran
Social revolutions, changes in the infrastructure of the society and in the system of production, distribution, and consumption, negation of classes and the exploitation of ‘work’ by ‘money’, problems of international imperialism, human rights, social laws, investigation of causes of social movements and change, economic and political dependence of Islamic societies on imperialism, cultural imperialism, comprador bourgeoisie and other contemporary problems are nothing but *kufr* for these religious scholars who claim to be inheritors of the Prophet’s mission. Anyone who finds himself concerned about these problems is rendered by a single stroke, an infidel, a *kafir*, a *Wahabi*, Communist or Christian*.28 Shariati found it intriguing that these ‘official’ custodians of ‘Islam’ in their opposition to true Islam were supported by those forces which were openly non-religious, formally secular, or were even opposed to Islam in principle. The supporters of this diseased Islam of the reactionaries, Shariati observed, were not afraid of *tauhid* as a *dogma* but were afraid of it as a world-view. As a world-view, *tauhid* aimed at realising the unity of God in human relations and social systems.

‘In our Islam, *tauhid* is a world-view, living and meaningful, opposed to avaricious tendency for hoarding and aims for eradicating the disease of money worship. It aims to efface the stigma of exploitation, consumerism and aristocracy.29 Thus, the reactionary clergymen who supported the existing system of the ruling classes were not afraid of the Quran, were it to be used as a ‘holy scripture’. But were it to be used as a manual for consciousness, guidance, responsibility and action, they were afraid of it. ‘Our Islam is uncompromising, blood-shedding enemy of oppression, ignorance, reaction, social

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28 Ibid.
stagnation, aristocracy and capitalism, and a friend of the hungry, the homeless, the victims of capital, prejudice and injustice.' 

This is how, Shariati interpreted Islam for a powerful ideological framework which played instrumental role in the process of revolution in Iran.

**Religious Modernism in Iran**

Religious modernism can be defined as an attempt to reestablish harmony between religion and a changing cultural socio-political environment in which the forces of change regard religion as dysfunctional in the process of development. It is essentially an intellectual endeavour to reinterpret religion so that it will no longer contradict the dominant spirit of the times in the more successful societies, and accepted notions of individual rights. It always arises when religion is in a position of weakness, for when religion exercises an intellectual and political hegemony over society, it can define the norms that rule society.

Religious modernism is thus a *reactive* movement. It is espoused by individuals who are committed to religion, but are also aware of science and the social problems resulting from technological and economic change. 

Islamic modernism displays a certain paradox in Iran. The man usually considered the founder of Islamic modernism, Syed Jamaluddin (al-Afghani) was an Iranian, and had a more lasting impact on Egypt and the Ottoman Empire than on the country of his birth.

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
Jamaluddin did his best to hide his Iranian origins, probably that his Shi'ite background would not affect his effectiveness in the Sunni world and had a more lasting impact on Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century the Shi’ite clergy were the most politically active ulama in the Islamic world, the independence of the clergy from the state enabling them to play that role. Modernist tendencies, as defined earlier, appeared relatively late among Iranian Muslims, probably because, compared to the Arab Middle East, the foreign impact was less dramatic in Iran. In Iran, even the clerical members of the modernist movement were regarded with considerable suspicion by the ulema. The existence of a powerful clergy in Iran also explains why the most important modernist movement of the nineteenth century, Babism, when faced with the hostility of the ulema, came to reject certain fundamental tenets of Islam and became in effect first a reformist movement and then evolved into a separate religion, the Baha‘i faith.

The most outstanding representatives of Shi’ite modernism in Iran were H.S.Mahmud Taleqani (1912-79), Mehdi Bazargan (b. 1907), and Ay. S. Morteza Motahhari (d. 1979). Their first activities consisted in the founding of associations for Muslims, a pattern congruent with religious modernists elsewhere. Only in 1961 did Bazargan and Taleqani found the Liberation Movement of Iran, a party with an ideology

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32 Ibid.
33 For that they were admired even by Sunni modernists who were doctrinally critical of Shi’ism : cf. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, p. 77.
and programme explicitly based on Islam. Mostly, this party has been in opposition to the ruling regimes in Iran.

In Iran, Islamic Modernism had to play important role, the intellectuals advocated to create a synthesis of Islamic law and Western parliamentary practice based on the concepts of natural law and popular sovereignty. The comprehensive theory of Islamic modernism elaborated by Jamaluddin Afghani had to work effectively as a strong force behind revolution. In fact the Iranian socio-political climate has historically been receptive to nurturing extremist and revolutionary ideologies. This is logical for one of the more persistent features of Iran’s political culture has been the arbitrary and absolute power bestowed on the person of the king, thus leaving no room for a legal and peaceful expression of the people’s legitimate discontent against those in power.36

**Shi’ism and Revolution**

Twelver Shi’ism is not a monolithic faith. Each marja’-e taqlid offers his unique interpretation of the Quran, the Hadith (the prophet’s and the Imam’s tradition), and the proper place of religion in temporal affairs, Shi’ism had historically been polyccephalic. In the sixties and seventies there were three currents of Shi’i thought, each addressed to a different constituency: the orthodox, the modernist, and the fundamentalist.
Orthodox Shi’ism

In pre-Revolutionary Iran, the dominant view of the orthodox current was socially and politically conservative. It supported the monarchy and rejected political involvement by the ulama except in situations when the temporal authorities legislated un-Islamic laws or blatantly threatened the survival of the faith. The most notable advocates of this interpretation were Ayatollahs Hossein Borujerdi (d. 1961), Hadi Milani (d. 1975), Kazem Shariatmadari (d. 1986), Hassan Qommi and Shahab al-Din Mar‘ashi Najafi.37

Since the June uprising of 1963, the Shah’s regime sought the collaboration of this group in neutralising the threat of fundamentalist Shi’ism and communism. Thus, when Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim, a leading Marja’-e Taqlid in Iraq, died in 1975, the Shah sent his condolence telegram to Ayatollah Shari’atimadari, thus recognising him as the sole Marja’-e Taqlid.38 In response to this kingly intervention, eighty-six of the ulamas in Iran sent their condolences to Ayatollah Khomeini in Najaf, thus elevating him as the sole Marja’-e Taqlid.

The orthodox ulama, of course, had their moments of confrontation with the regime. During the early sixties, many of them had opposed the Shah’s initiatives, and they had done so again and again when family protection laws granted women the right to ask for divorce under certain conditions, when the Shah celebrated the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian Empire, and when he changed the Islamic calendar. Due to

36 Moliani, Mohsen M. The Making of Iran’s Islamic Revolution (From Monarchy to Islamic Republic). West view press.
37 Ibid.

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their social conservatism, ulama had also been angered by the spread of the West’s “perfidious culture” in Iran. Thus, even if this group participated in the revolutionary movement of 1977-1979 and used its enormous organisational power and religious clout to mobilise the masses, it was not until the very last stage of the movement that it reluctantly and under pressure from the fundamentalists joined forces demanding the demolition of the monarchy.39

Modernist Shi’ism

The Shi’ite modernist played great role in preparing the ground of revolution in Iran. From the early sixties onward, a number of prominent non-clerical intellectuals profoundly influenced the evolution of Shi’i political thought and the relationship between Shi’ism and the intelligentsia. Mehdi Bazargan, Ali Shari’ati, and to a lesser degree Jala Al-e Ahmad (1923-69) were at the top of this list. Despite their diversity of approaches, they all shared the conviction that in Shi’ism one may find all the ingredients of a liberating, progressive and modern ideology capable of neutralising the cultural hegemony of the West in Iran, ending the endemic alienation of educated Iranians and protecting the country’s national identity and heritage.40 The central theme for all three was the return to Iran’s indigenous Shi’i culture. This was an expected reaction to the excesses of an earlier generation of thinkers, like Syed Hassan Taqizadeh (1878-1970) and Ahmad Kasravi (1890-1946), who had pointed to Shi’ism as a cause of Iran’s underdevelopment.

40 Ibid.
With the spread of modern education in Iran, and the ever-increasing presence of Westerners in Iran, the messages of radical thinkers – a well-crafted mixture of Iranian nationalism, Shi’ism, and some Western ideas – won the hearts and minds of a large segment of the educated population. The most enduring contribution of these thinkers was their role as the bridge-builders and peace-makers between Shi’ism and the Secular intelligentsia. The secular intellectuals, had to respect and accept Shi’ism as a progressive ideology and religion. In fact, they prepared the ideological ground for the coming of the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

**Shadman**

Syed Fekhredin Shadman Valavi (1902-1967) was one of the earliest pioneers of this powerful revivalist movement. Shadman was well acquainted with Western history and literature and had taught at major European and American universities. In 1948, in a book, *Taskhir-e Tamadon-e Gharbi* (The conquest of Western Civilisation), Shadman, a passionate nationalist, lamented that:

“Iran in its 2,500 years history, had confronted powerful enemies and had witnessed vicissitudes in its fortunes, from glory to national humiliation. But Iran has managed to survive as a nation. In the twentieth century, however, Iran is facing its most powerful enemy, Western civilisation. But Western civilisation is a different kind of enemy and it has a different tactic, and in my opinion the victory of Western civilisation
in Iran will be Iran's last defeat, that is after this defeat no longer will the Iranian nation survive."

In his opinion, the only way to deal with this formidable enemy is to conquer the Western civilisation before it conquers Iran. He further suggested that, this may be done first and foremost by learning about Western civilisation and its culture, history, religion, poetry, and so forth, and by incorporating into Iranian culture what is beneficial from it and disregarding what is harmful. It also requires protecting, purifying and enriching the Persian language, the symbol of Iran's national identity and safeguarding Iran's historical and cultural heritage, both in its pre-Islamic and Islamic forms. Shadman was among the first intellectuals to warn that modernisation of Iran was not tantamount to the complete rejection of all things Iranian and the acceptance of all things European. He relentlessly attacked the farangi-ma'ab (pseudo-Westerners) as deceptive, ignorant, arrogant and selfish, one who knows little of Western civilisation and even less of Iran's. But Shadman's influence was minimal and confined to a small and highly educated constituency. He was mistrusted by many impatient intellectuals, especially the radicals because he had developed congenial relations with the Shah's court and had held numerous ministerial positions in Abdul Hussein Hazir and Fazlollah Zahedi's cabinet. Some of his thought-provoking ideas, such as protection of Iran's Shi'i cultural tradition and denigration of the fokoli (the bow-tie wearer) were picked up and politicised by Jalal Al-e Ahmad.

Jalal al- e- Ahmad

A popular novelist and former member of the Tudeh party who split from the party in the late 1940s, Jalal Al-e Ahmad was the most outspoken critic of what he called Gharbzadegi, or Westoxication, a social disease of blind and total imitation of Western culture. The concept had striking similarities of Shadman’s fokoli. His hatred of gharbzadegi probably had much to do with his opposition to “Western imperialism” as the cause of Iran’s problems. After the June Uprising of 1963 and after his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964, he called for a return to Shi‘ism and the rejection of all Western ideologies, including Marxism. He strongly attacked “co-opted” intellectuals of past generations for collaborating with Western-supported regimes.

If Al-e Ahmad the Marxist saw in the proletariat the social force destined to create a classless society, Al-e Ahmad the Shi‘ite saw in the ulama a potential force capable of leading Iran to liberation. He looked to the ulama as the bastion that could protect Iran’s identity and independence from the onslaught of Western imperialism. He pleaded for a close alliance between the ulama and the intellectuals in the fight against despotism and imperialism. But unlike Malcolm and Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, who advocated an alliance between the ulama and the intelligentsia during the Constitutional Movement, Al-e Ahmad was sincere about this political strategy.

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42 Milani; Mohsen M, The Making of Iran’s Islamic Revolution (From Monarchy to Islamic Republic). West view press.

43 Ibid.
"We have witnessed success, progress, and social development whenever the ulama and the intelligentsia were allies struggling for a common cause. It is also true that whenever the ulama and the intelligentsia were in opposition to each other, or simply struggling on their own, instances of defeat, loss and social reaction followed." But the disintegration of the coalition between the nationalists and the fundamentalist ulama in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution shows the inaccuracy of this prescription.

Bazargan

Taking the same lines, but emphasising different aspects of Shi‘ism, Mehdi Bazargan and Ali Shari‘ati had a more profound impact on the Islamic Revolution than did Al-e Ahmad. They adroitly combined some aspects of Western social democracy and in Shari‘ati case fragments of Marxism, with Shi‘ism. Bazargan was born in a merchant family. He completed his high school education in Iran and his higher education in France. Unlike Al-e Ahmad, Bazargan attributed Iran’s backwardness not to Western imperialism but to internal conditions such as despotism and ignorance. One of the prerequisites to progress, he argued, is reliance on the true teachings of Shi‘ism and on the creation of an Islamic government to be run not by the Shi‘i ulama but by experts who are committed Shi‘ites.

Among all Shi‘ite modernists in Iran, Bazargan, being a politician, gave the most detailed attention to political questions. His political thought is pluralist, but he is

opposed to the secularist foundations of classical liberalism; “Islamic liberalism” thus describes his thinking best: Bazargan, a committed but non-clerical Shi’ite, has been a champion of political and religious reforms in Iran. He was one of the pioneers of a reform movement in the early 1960s that sought to reorganise the marja’-e taqlid organisation and to make it more compatible with the exigencies of a modern world.46

Bazargan was also one of the founding members of the Nehzat-e Azadi-ye Iran (the Liberation Movement of Iran), the nationalistic and Islamic organisation that began its activities in June 1961.47 Most of its founding members came from the high ranks of the National Front.48 Its reformist political orientation was succinctly summarised by Bazargan: “We are Muslims, Iranians, the followers of the Constitution, and are Mossadeqites”.49 It rejected the notion of the separation of Islam and politics and regarded political activity by the ulama and the faithful as a religious responsibility.

Bazargan’s conception of what constitutes the Iranian identity has a religious context. Bazargan coming from a religious background could not accept the marginalisation of Islam.

The Chaos of the early sixties and the repeated refusal of the Shah to recognise the Liberation Movement of Iran and other nationalist groups gradually radicalised the Freedom Movement. In the early sixties, it called for the formation of government under the leadership of Mossadeq. No explicit or implicit mention was made of the rule by the

ulama or by Ayatollah Khomeini.\footnote{Asnad-e Azadi, p. 17. Quoted in Chehabi; H.E., (Ibid).} The regime responded by arresting Talaqani and Bazargan and putting the members of the Freedom Movement under close SAVAK surveillance. From 1964 on, the organisation continued its surreptitious activities against the Shah and became one of the main sources from which the Majahedin originated and was nourished. Bazargan and his associates were also instrumental in creating a number of Islamic and professional organisations like the society of Moslem Engineers.

The radicalisation of the Freedom Movement seemed inconsequential to the Shah's regime. It was not. The Freedom Movement, like the National Front performed a dual role: Its demand for a share in the decision-making process was a source of irritation to the regime, but its loyalty to the monarchy and its liberal ideology was a deterrent against radicalism of the left and extremism of the right. By suppressing the Liberation Movement, the Shah's regime severed the bridge between the Shah and the reform-oriented segment of middle class.

\textbf{Ali Shari'ati}

Ali Shariati's influence was stronger and more pervasive than that of Bazargan. He was one of the most popular Shi'i thinkers of this century. Ali Shariati was born in 1933 and received most of his secondary and undergraduate education in Mashhad, in

\footnote{Milani; Mohsen M, \textit{The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution} (From Monarchy to Islamic Republic), West view press.}
Iran. In the mid-1950s, he was jailed briefly for his pro-Mossadeq activities. In 1960, he went to France to continue with his higher education. There his ideas were heavily shaped by Algerian Liberation movement and the works of Frantz Fanon and Jean Paul Sartre. In 1964, shortly after he completed his doctoral degree in sociology at the Sorbonne, Shari'ati taught at the University of Mashhad for a brief period. Because of his political activism he was dismissed from his post and went to Teheran. In 1969, he began lecturing at the Hosseiniye-ye Ershad until 1974 when the Hosseiniye, now turned into an intellectual centre of agitation against the Shah, was shut down by SAVAK. Banned from lecturing, he went into seclusion and put under virtual house arrest by SAVAK. Due to the Shah’s liberalisation policy, Shari'ati was allowed to leave Iran in 1977. Shortly after his arrival in London, he died of a heart attack.

Although Shari'ati’s productive years in Hosseiniye-ye Ershad were short, his contribution was immense and long lasting. His emotionally charged lectures attracted a large audience, mostly among the educated and young. In these lectures, he covered a variety of issues ranging from the history of Islam and Shi’ism to a harsh criticism of Marxism. Most importantly, his lectures legitimised the struggle against the Pahlavis.

52 In 1972, Shari'ati was jailed again. During the OPEC conference, the president of Algeria, whom Shari'ati knew personally, asked the Shah to release him and he was released.
53 The opposition to the Shah blamed SAVAK for Shari'ati’s death. The British coroner’s report attributed his death to a heart attack.
54 Hosseiniye-ye Ershad was founded by Mohammad Homayoun (d. 1976). Many of its members, including Ayatollah Morteza Mottahari and Seyyed Hossein Nasr resigned as Shari'ati became ever more vociferous in his attack against the regime.
55 See, for example, Ali Shari'ati, Khud Sazi-ye Engelabi (Revolutionary Self-Building), (Tehran, 1979); and idem. Che Bayad Kard (What is to be Done?), (Tehran)
Shariati, like Bazargan, was most concerned about the decline of Shi'ism in Iran. He attributed this decline to the infusion of Western ideas, like Marxism and liberalism, and to the failure of the ulama to spread the true teachings of Shi'ism. For Shariati, the struggle against the Shah was inseparable from rejection of alien western ideologies.

He argued that the true Shi'ism, which he called Alavi Shi'ism, began when Imam Ali's legitimate right to leadership was denied by Abu Bakr. From its inception, the Alavi Shi'ism was the liberating ideology of the discriminated against and the weak. As the state religion in 1501, Shi'ism was transformed into the Safavid Shi'ism, a conservative ideology for legitimising monarchical absolutism. In the opinion of Shariati, the conspicuous characteristics of this degenerated ideology were engagement by the faithful in irrelevant religious trivia and acceptance of suffering in the hope of the return of the Twelfth Imam. For Shariati, Safavi Shi'ism has acted as social anesthesia. This is why, he concluded, many Iranians had turned their backs on Shi'isms, for the Shi'ism they knew was indeed reactionary. It was the Shi'ism of the powerful and arrogant. Shariati task was to elaborate the meanings of revolutionary Shi'ism. Shariati was determined to reintroduce the true Shi'ism.

To incite his audience to activism, Shariati adroitly politicised many Shi'i concepts, including martyrdom and entezar (waiting for the return of the Hidden Imam). Entezar for Shariati had a new meaning:

"...belief in God's promise to the Muslims, in the final realisation of the wretched masses' ideal and hope; in the final triumphant emergence of the classless society, a
society freed from tyranny, injustice and deceit. Entezar means to say no to what is ....
Even negative entezar means revolt.... Whoever is content with the present, is not waiting ....he fears the future."  

Entezar, then is to say no to what is. Aware that to say no to an armed and powerful regime could be fatal, he made a highly emotional argument that those who are actually killed in defense of Shi’ism will be eternally alive. Here, he used Imam Hossein’s martyrdom to legitimise direct confrontation with the Shah’s regime:

In our culture and in our religion, martyrdom is not an unpleasant and bloody accident. In other cultures martyrdom is ...considered a tragic and lugubrious episode. Martyrodom is death by choice, chosen by the strugglers with complete consciousness, logic and awareness.

Al-e Ahmad, Bazargan, and Shari’ati were men of the pen. Others took their propositions seriously and hoped to implement them. They were men of the sword and prophets of revolution.

**Fundamentalist Shi’ism**

If political quietism and support for the monarchy were the characteristics of the orthodox Shi’i current, and if a revolutionary interpretation of Shi’ism with the help of borrowed Western concepts was the hallmark of modernist Shi’ism, aggressive political

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56 Ibid., Shi’i (Teharn, 1979).
58 Ibid., Shahadat (Martyrdom). (Tehran, 1971), p. 64.
activism and advocacy of the *fiqaha's* direct rule were the trademarks of fundamentalist Shi‘ism.\(^{59}\) The ultimate objective of this fundamentalism was the construction, through the leadership of the ulama, of a government that existed under the Prophet and during the brief reign of Imam Ali, and implementation of the *Shari'a* (Islamic laws).

But the Shi‘i fundamentalism, whose roots in contemporary Iran can be traced back to Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri during the Constitutional Movement of 1906-1911, was the view of a minority of the ulama in pre-Revolutionary Iran. Shi‘i fundamentalism emerged as the hegemonic ideology only in the post-Revolutionary period and only after a furious power struggle between he fundamentalists and other contenders for power.

**Ayatollah Khomeini**

The most articulate expression of fundamentalism is found in the writings of Ayatollah Khomeini. Ayatollah Khomeini’s political philosophy regarding the legitimacy of the monarchy and the ulama’s role in politics underwent two major transformations. The first stage began with the publication in 1941 of his first political treatise, the *Kashfol Asrar* (Secrets Discovered), and ended with his forced exile by the late Shah in 1964 to Turkey and then to Iraq. In this period, he was, like most other ulama, an advocate of reform.

\(^{59}\) Milani; Mohsen M, *The Making of Iran’s Islamic Revolution* (From Monarchy to Islamic Republic). West view press.

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*Kashfol Asrar* was a frontal attack on Reza Shah’s polices and a response to *Secrets of Thousands Years*, a book written in the thirties by a member of Ahmad Kasravi’s Pak Dini movement, a movement that attacked and denigrated the ulama and Shi’ism as champions of superstition and as the main cause of Iran’s backwardness. Khomeini lambasted the propagators of the Pak Dini movement, and defended Islam and the ulama as defenders of Iran’s national identity, independence and even its monarchy.

Khomeini also demonstrated his rebellions character when he criticised Reza Shah for the forced unveiling of women, “enforced at bayonet points”, for curtailing the power of the ulama, for spreading coeducation, and for proliferating “centres of corruption” like bars and liquor stores. Opposed to the prevalent quietist Shi’i view of the time, the book was replete with passionate pleas to the ulama to engage in politics and to save the integrity of Iran’s Shi’i culture.

The catalyst for the transformation of Khomeini’s thought was probably the events of the early sixties and the Shah’s White Revolution. At that time, despite his vociferous opposition to such specific issues as the granting of suffrage to women, the de facto recognition of Israel, the White Revolution, and the reenactment of the Capitulation Laws; Ayatollah Khomeini offered friendly advice to the monarch to reverse his policies and priorities. But Khomeini did not then denounce the monarchical order, although he attacked the person of the Shah. Nor did he elevate the ulama to the position of the righteous inheritors of the functions of the Hidden Imam.60

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60 Ibid.
The most profound transformation of Ayatollah Khomeini's thought occurred in the second half of the sixties, while he was in exile in Najaf, Iraq. In a series of lectures in 1969, he vehemently condemned the advocates of separation of Islam and politics and those who devote their energies to the rigid performance of Shi'i rituals and the elaboration of theological and eschatological issues, an argument he had explicitly made earlier in the Kashfol Asrar. Islam and politics he declared, are two sides of the same coin. Prophet Mohammad was the spiritual leader of the community. Upon the Prophet's death, these responsibilities were transferred to Ali, and from Ali to his male descendents through the line of Fatima. With the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam, the cycle of the Imamate was closed. "What should be the responsibilities of the ulama during the occultation", Ayatollah Khomeini asked. Just because the last Imam was ordered by God not to choose a successor, does it mean that the urgent task of building an Islamic government should be indefinitely postponed?

Perhaps the Imam of Times, may peace be upon Him, will not appear for another 200 years. What do we know? We are unaware of the facts. Perhaps, God willing he might even appear tomorrow. But if he does not appear until the end of time, as the Hadith has it, then should not the Islamic principles be implemented until the Day of Judgement?61

The Quran, the authenticated Hadith, and human reason, Ayatollah Khomeini argued, dictate that the ulama should perform all the responsibilities of the Prophet and the Imams, even if they are devoid of the miraculous qualities of the Prophet and Imams.
They should become the expositors, enunciators, and executors of Shi'i laws and traditions. This is how, Ayatollah Khomeini interpreted the interventory role of the ulama and thus gave a legitimacy to act in accordance of the Islamic laws, which were radicalised by him.

But Ayatollah Khomeini was not simply a destroyer of the status quo; he was also a builder of a new order. Once the satanic governments of the Moslem counties are overthrown, the ulama should collectively work to create “a large Islamic Government which recognises no limitation or boundary except the limitation of Islam.”

The condemnation of the monarchy was implicit in the Najaf lectures, it was not until 1971, on the occasion of the Shah’s celebration of Iran’s two and half millennia of monarchy, that Ayatollah Khoneini not only attacked the Shah for the ostentatious and expensive celebration but also made the unconventional declaration that Islam is fundamentally opposed to monarchy. He quoted the prophet as having said that the title often used the Iranian kings “Shahanshah,” Shah of the Shahs, “is for me the most hateful word”.

Putting aside scope for any compromise with the Shah, Khomeini became the first reputable religious leader to call for the monarchy’s overthrow in Iran.

How can we explain the radical transformation in Ayatollah Khomeini’s thought regarding the illegitimacy of monarchy and the advocacy of direct rule by the ulama?

62 Ibid., pp. 8-9.
64 Milani, The Making of Iran’s Islamic Revolution (From Monarchy to Islamic Republic). West view press.
Ayatollah was fortuitously in exile in Iraq (1965-1978) and out of reach of SAVAK, which made it easier for him to denounce the monarchy in Iran. But Shah’s decision to create the Religious Corps, somehow reduced the ulama’s power in rural Iran. The passage of the Family Protection Bill which granted women the right to sue for divorce under certain conditions had convinced the Ayatollah that the Shah’s regime was determined to destroy Islam and not salvageable.\(^\text{65}\)

While in Najaf, Khomeini was in contact with a number of radical thinkers and organisations, including the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Moslem Students Association. They probably influenced the evolution of his thought.\(^\text{66}\) Somewhere between the fall of the monarchy in Iraq in 1958 and the late 1960s, the al-Da’wa party, a radical Shi’i organisation, was founded in Iraq. Like the Moslem Brotherhood, the al-Da’wa called for the creation of an Islamic government and implementation of the Shari’a. Their idea of an Islamic government could have attracted Ayatollah Khomeini’s attention.\(^\text{67}\)

Ayatollah Khomeini was also in contact with Seyyed Mohammad Baqer Sadr, an Iraqi born ayatollah, noted as the most celebrated Shi’i economist. Sadr like Khomeini, was frustrated by the latest Arab defeat by Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967 and the deteriorating conditions of the Moslem countries. Sadr’s solution was the ulama’s direct rule, and in this vein he supported the al-Da’wa. Ayatollah Khomeini also established contact with Moussa Sadr, a highly educated and shrewd Iranian mulla. In the sixties,

\(^{65}\) Ibid.
\(^{66}\) Ibid.

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Moussa Sadr had gone to Lebanon, where he had gathered around himself a considerable following. In 1969, he founded the Higher Shi'ite Council to represent Shi'ite interests in government. Sadr created a trained militia which trained many of Iran's Shi'ite revolutionaries in the seventies. Sadr's political ambitions, his talent as an organiser, and his emphasis on organisation-building had an influence on Ayatollah Khomeini's thought and political strategy.

But much more significant than speculation on the causes for the transformation of Khomeini's political philosophy were the consequences of his interpretation of the Velayat-e Faqih: It further politicised many of the young, pro-Khomeini ulama in Iran and Iraq. Relying on the massive and information network of the ulama, Khomeini's followers began indefatigably to promulgate the new ideas on Islamic government and illegitimacy of the monarchy.

But the most profound consequences of Khomeini's new interpretation were the explicit rejection of the compatibility of Shi'ism Islam with monarchism, two institutions that share a long history of symbiotic coexistence in Iran, and the advocacy of the ulama's direct rule. Khomeini hoped to mix religion and politics, was neither surprising nor new in Iran's long and turbulent history.

The unique and surprising element about Khomeini's Velayat-e Faqih was that the first time in Iranian history it legitimised the monopoly of power by one religious class, namely the ulama. By giving new interpretation of the Velayat-e Faqih, he offered

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an alternative to the Shah’s Monarchy in Iran. Khomeini’s ideas gave religious sanction to rebellion against the Pahlavis and challenged the religious legitimacy of the institution.