INTRODUCTION

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 is a very significant event that overthrew centuries-old monarchy in the country. When Muhammad Reza Shah abdicated the throne, Ayatollah Khomeini declared the end of the American-supported government of the Pahlavis and paved the way for the creation of a religious state. A secular, westernized and liberal socio-economic system was transformed into a religious-oriented and ulama-controlled state, and the country was proclaimed as an Islamic republic.

The Iranian Revolution was the outcome of various social, cultural and political developments. It was a mass movement and various social elements like the ulama, workers, merchants, students, labourers, petty traders etc. took active role in the movement, and it was their collective work that destabilized one of the most powerful governments in West Asia. The mobilization of various sections of the society was achieved through the politicization done by the intellectuals. In this aspect, the religious scholars and the religious intellectuals played a pivotal role.

The Iranian society experienced various social and economic problems in the late 1960s and 1970s. The economic growth resulted from the oil boom of 1970s, industrialization and the consequent urbanization and migration of the rural labourers to the towns, unemployment among the youth and the wide economic disparities among different social sections created resentment among the people. On the other side, while the monarch introduced many social and economic reforms, he failed to reform the political institutions. The government became highly autocratic and a strong bureaucracy appointed by the Shah became the implementers of the will of the Shah. The army, the police and the secret police called SAVAK became the tools of government
oppression, and the people were denied all kinds of freedom. The Shah introduced certain innovations in the field of religious life also. The reforms introduced by his father Reza Shah, like confiscation of the *vaqf* properties, the unveiling of women, limiting the jurisdiction of the *sharia* courts, closing down of many religious and educational institutions and restricting the *ulama*’s political activities were continued through certain other measures. The change of *hijra* calendar as the official calendar of Iran and the replacement by the solar calendar beginning from the Achaemenian dynasty was the important among them. The White Revolution further reduced the *ulama*’s social, cultural and economic status and they began to be sidelined in the community. It was in this background that a complete politicization of the society was realized and the stage was set for the Revolution.

The Iranian society was mainly religious oriented. Being the adherents of *Ithna Ash’ari* Shi’ism, a creed that treats politics to be part of its core, the Iranians faced no barrier to engage in political activities. This factor provided the scholars an opportunity to utilize religious sentiments of the people to address their political grievances. Opposition to tyranny, oppression and dictatorship was an inherent feature of Shi’i Islam and enjoining good and forbidding evil are considered among the basic tenets of this school. Such a community found in their religion the ideology to combat contemporary evils, and to purify political institutions. To the people, the opposition to the regime of the Shah was considered the religious duty of the believers. It was in this background that Islam was presented to the people as the ideology to combat the corrupt government.

The linkage between religion and politics has been viewed as an essential feature of the Shi’i Islam. Throughout the periods of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, the Shi’is opposed the ruling governments. It was after the establishment of the Safavid government in 1502 that Shi’ism was
made the official religion of Iran, and the Shi’i ulama began to intervene in political activities. Claiming themselves as the deputies of the Hidden Imam, the ulama exercised religious, economic and political functions within the community. At the end of the 18th century, they began to question the legitimacy of the monarchy and advanced claims for political powers. The 1960s and the 1970s witnessed new shifts and changes in Iranian religious scenario. The economic and political developments of Iran in the early 1970s and the subsequent social dislocations provided the ulama an opportunity to orient the people towards religion. The traditional scholars as well as the religious intellectuals used Islamic principles and metaphors to rouse their sentiments against the ruler. The Shi’i rituals like commemoration of Karbala, the mourning for the dead and the principles like jihad, enjoining good and forbidding the evil (amr bi-al-ma’ruf was nahy-am-al munkar), establishment of justice and yearning for the advent of Imam Mahdi, were used for mobilizing the masses against the government. The political reading and interpretations to these rituals through lectures, classes and writings provided the intellectual framework for the people to carry out the Revolution.

The ulama as well as the lay intellectuals played significant roles in setting the stage for the Revolution. Senior clerics like Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Shaiatmadari, Ayatollah Tabatabai, Ayatollah Taleqani, Ayatollah Mutahhari and intellectuals like Mehdi Bazargan, Ali Shariati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad were the prominent among them. Though Al-e Ahmad was a secular intellectual, he believed that the ‘plague’ of western civilization could be wiped out only through re-asserting the Islamic past of the country. Ali Shariati idealized Islam as the ideology for the people of the third world countries to liberate themselves from western imperialism. The clerics generally considered Islam as the only viable political system to be implemented in an Islamic society. Khomeini went to a further extent that he
devised—the idea of vilayat-e faqih. This political theory advocates that only religious scholars have the right to exercise political power in an Islamic society. Since all other governments are usurpatory, he believed that, it is the obligation of the believers to fight against all secular governments, and such a fight was treated as holy war in the way of religion. Other ulama also held similar views though they differed in details.

Both the ulama and the intellectuals interpreted Shi’i ideas and principles in the light of new socio-political developments. They contemperorized Islam and remoulded it according to the demands of the new period. While the intellectuals used the tools and methods of the western philosophies, the ulama reached their conclusions on the basis of ijtihad. Consequently, it helped them to construct an intellectual framework to combat autocracy and despotism of the regime. Thus, a fourteen-century-old ideology has been transformed into a philosophy to fight against a rotten and decadent political system, and for the establishment of a new political order—an Islamic Republic- in its place.

All the scholars who studied the Iranian Revolution have appreciated the ulama’s role in it and sometimes referred to it as an ulama Revolution. Although many Iranian scholars have contributed to the fruition of this movement, the services of very few are appreciated and acknowledged by the modern historians. It is an indisputable fact that along with Khomeini, Shariati and other scholars, Ayatollah Mutahhari also has played a leading role in invoking in the people the spirit of the Revolution. While Ayatollah Khomeini and Ali Shariati have been given due recognition, others were not given serious attention that they deserve. Ayatollah Mutahhari is one such scholar who was not given due consideration. His services have been either neglected or underestimated. An investigation into the social and political ideas of Mutahhari will give us a definite picture of his role in bringing out
the Revolution. Hence, an objective and unbiased study of his social and political thought is being conducted here.

Ayatollah Mutahhari was born on February 2, 1920, in Farman village near Mashhad, the major centre of Shi’i pilgrimage and learning in Eastern Iran. When he was twelve, he joined the Islamic Educational Centre at Mashhad and pursued his studies there for five years. From there he began to concentrate on Islamic philosophy, theology and mysticism. Then he proceeded to Qum, the great centre of Shi’i education. He stayed there for fifteen years and completed his education in Islamic beliefs and jurisprudence under the supervision of the renowned philosopher Allama Mohammad Hosein Tabatabai, Ayatollah Burujirdi, Ayatollah Khomeini and many other distinguished scholars. The influence of these scholars instilled in him new passion for religious studies and he became an expert in logic, philosophy, theology, and jurisprudence. In 1954, he joined for the study of philosophy at the Faculty of Theology and Islamic Sciences of Tehran University, where he taught Islamic philosophy and theology until he was assassinated by an extremist group, Furqan on 1st May 1979, within few months after the Revolution. Mutahhari’s strong criticism of Communist ideology and Communist organizations is believed to be the cause for his assassination. Later he was hailed as a great martyr for Islam and as a tribute to his contributions to the Iranian society, the day of his death is being observed as the Teachers’ Day in Iran. At the time of his assassination, he was the president of the Constitutional Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran and a member of the Revolutionary Council.

Ayatollah Khomeini and Ali Shariati are considered to be the most important intellectuals of the Revolution. Both interpreted religion on political lines and tried to orient the people against the regime. But they differed in their approaches: Khomeini interpreted Shi’ism in political language and
interpreted religious rituals to suit the needs of the time; Shariati re-read Shi‘ism in a sociological way, and used the tools and methods of western philosophy to analyze religious principles. Mutahhari differed from both and approached the contemporary issues philosophically. He was not a political theoretician basically, but a teacher of Islamic philosophy and theology. His aim was not to prepare the people for a political movement but to reform the religion and reinterpret it to meet the challenges of western ideologies. However, his Islamization process led to the orientation of the people in Islamic principles that ultimately culminated in the Revolution. This contribution made him one of the main ideologues of the Iranian Revolution.

During the period of his education itself, Mutahhari felt that the Communists wanted to change Islam and destroy its spirit by mixing their atheistic views with its philosophy and interpreting the verses of the Qur'an in a materialistic way. Communism was not the only thing that received his attention. He also wrote on exegesis of the Qur'an, philosophy, ethics, sociology, history and many other subjects. In all his writings, the objective was to give replies to the criticisms raised by others against Islam, to prove the shortcomings of other schools of thought and to manifest the greatness of Islam. He believed that in order to prove the “falsity” of Marxism and other ideologies, it was necessary not only to comment on them in a scholarly manner but also to present the new image of Islam. Mutahhari’s works should be understood in this background. More than seventy books are attributed to him. The important among them are Usul-e Falsafah va Ravesh Rialism’, Khedmath Motaqabel-e Islam va Iran, Moqaddam-e bar jahan bini-e Islami, Adl-e Ilahi, Mas‘ala-e Hijab, and Nizam-e Huquq Zan dar Islam. These works give a clear picture of his socio-political ideas.
The Scheme of the Chapters

The first chapter gives a concise account of the position and influence of the Shi’i ulama in the Iranian society. The origins of Shi’ism and its later developments are discussed elaborately. The chapter gives an analytical description of the ulama, which initially collaborated with the government, later challenged its character and structure and at last replaced it with a theocratic government. It describes the various tenets and principles of Shi’ism that are used by the ulama to reorient the people to Islam and for mobilizing them against the government. This chapter is a prelude to understanding the background of the socio-religious milieu of the country in which Mutahhari’s thoughts have been developed.

The second chapter deals with the two key concepts of Mutahhari’s ideology; jihad (holy war) and shahadath (martyrdom). He treats these terms quite differently from the viewpoints of traditional scholars and interprets them in the light of contemporary political conditions. He broadens the scope of jihad from a war against unbelievers to the level of combat against all kinds of vices and evils. If one is killed in that attempt, he will be considered a martyr and eternal bliss is promised to him in the next world. It is noted that his justification and call of jihad is on behalf of defence - defence of one’s life, property, honour and for the protection of universal human values. However, the war against unbelievers for they being the enemies of Islam is not justified at any stage.

The third chapter throws light on Mutahhari’s idea of government. His notion of government is an Islamic one, but he does not go to further details about its character. Although he supports the vilayat-e faqih concept of Khomeini, in principle, he disagrees with its basic structure and proposes that the cleric is not the ruler, as envisioned by Khomeini, but an ideological supervisor. In his view, an Islamic government should be established on
certain inalienable principles, the denial of which will lead to its ruin. They are justice, consent and will of the people and the freedom of expression. Initially, he was of the opinion that the clerics shall have to concentrate on religious matters; teaching religion to the people, initiating reforms in the society, and regenerating religious thought among the people. But later he changed his view and advocated that the clergy should engage in day-to-day politics and they have the duty of supervision of the governmental affairs.

The fourth chapter elaborates the issue of nationalism in Iran. The potentials of Shi’ism and the abilities of its organizational structure to combat oppression and other vices of the government prompted the Shah to find an alternative for Shi’i Islam. He emphasized the institutions, values and traditions of the pre-Islamic Iran and projected Islam as an eclipse on its cultural glory. The promotion of nationalism gave two political achievements to the Pahlavis: firstly, sanctity was conferred upon the monarchy as an institution deeply rooted in the country’s history with the Pahlavis as the legitimate heirs to the throne; and secondly, the Arab invasion of Iran in seventh century A.D with its introduction of Islam was presented as the ultimate cause for the decline of the magnificent Persian civilization. With the support of the monarchy, a powerful cluster of academic people redefined different branches of Persian history and culture, and thereby presented the destructive aspect of the Arab conquest. These nationalist events created resentment and protest among the ulama against the monarchy. Contrary to the general view that Shi’ism is the Iranian protest against the Arabs, Mutahhari says that this argument is baseless and the causes for the origin of Shi’ism has to be sought somewhere else. In his view, Islam and Iran are not in opposite poles, as claimed by many scholars, but are complementary to each other and have rendered reciprocal services. This chapter should be read in the background of the Shah’s attempt to denigrate Islam as a blow to
Iranian nationalism and to discredit the clergy who were the spearhead of the anti-Shah political movement.

The fifth chapter is about the Marxian principle of historical materialism and his criticism of this doctrine. Historical materialism and its various aspects have been critically examined by Mutahhari because it was the most important of the Marxist doctrines that directly contradict the spirit of Islam. In the 1960s and the early 1970s materialist schools and atheist ideas gained wide currency in Iran. The western educated youth and the new generation considered religion as a barrier for the progress of the country, and they preferred atheism or materialism to Islam. The spread of materialism was so alarming that many religious leaders feared the extinction of Islam in course of time. It was in this background that Mutahhari dealt with this principle and explained the discord between the idea and the practical realities.

The sixth chapter discusses Mutahhari’s view on the position of women in the Islamic society. Many reforms introduced by Reza Shah and later Mohammad Reza Shah had significant influence on women. Abolition of veiling, entry of women to educational institutions and workplaces, presence of women in public life, publication of periodicals exclusively on women’s issues – all provided a new shift in women’s living conditions and their attitude to life. A general impression was created in the society that the Islamic laws and customs are nothing but arresting the progress of women. The Islamic principles on women’s status and rights were considered reactionary, and Muslim women were believed to be denied their human rights. There emerged in the country a new group who stood for emancipation of women and rights and privileges equal to men. It was in this background Mutahhari discusses the Islamic principles of mahr, equality of women with men, economic independence of women, law of inheritance, hijab, mut’a marriage etc.
In the seventh chapter Mutahhari describes about the status of the human being in Islam. Here the principles of predestination, human will, human freedom of expression and an ideal society of his vision are described extensively. He portrays his ideal human being as *insane-e kamil* (the perfect human being) and ideal society as *tawhidi* society. The eighth chapter gives the conclusion of the preceding chapters. It provides the over-all arguments of the thesis.

The present study is intended to investigate Mutahhari’s outlook on social and political issues on the basis of Quran, traditions and the teachings of the Shi’i Imams. They are interpretations of the traditional views according to the contemporary circumstances. However, many of his views seem to be innovative.

**Methodology**

The thesis is an analytical study of the social and political ideas of Mutahhari. A large array of literature written by Mutahhari on various subjects constitutes the primary sources for this study. All these works are written in Persian language. Only few are translated into English. All the important works are utilized for this study. Since the researcher is a mere literate in Persian and unable to comprehend the Persian sources directly, assistance is sought from experts. Some who know both Persian and English have helped in this regard. On other occasions, English translations of the original works are used. Many books and articles written by various scholars and writers provide the secondary sources. Works in English and Urdu are consulted in this section. These sources are collected, critically analyzed and interpreted objectively, to reach the conclusions.