Conclusion:

The trajectory of the latest confrontation of the Iranian Muslim intellectuals with modernity is expressive of the different and sometimes contrasting views posed about Islam, modernity, and tradition. These views, mainly classified into three categories of rejection, acceptance and critical selection of modernity from the Islamic vantagepoint, may find its parallels in the West as well. This range of Islamic ideas implies the deficiency of Orientalism and projects its being incapable to analyze the intellectual currents in societies like Iran. For, Orientalism implies the impossibility of the fusion of Islamic and modern horizons and therefore, the impossibility of playing a positive and even diverse role by Islam in generating social and political theories. Indeed it ignores the possibility of a constructive dialogue between Islam and modernity. Views based on Orientalism, take Islam as an entity other than modern one which is identified with traits such as mystical, irrational, metaphysical, subjective, and so forth. For this reason Orientalism is not able to explore various aspects of Islam, when being involved in different sorts of confrontation with modernity. Accordingly, in the context of Orientalism the recent confrontation of Islam and modernity in Iran cannot be explained and analyzed in a comprehensive and profound manner.

The constructive post-Islamic revolutionary years of 1980-95 emerged as a proper setting for a new confrontation of Islam and Modernity in Iran. In the initial days of the Islamic revolution, many Iranian Muslim intellectuals under the influence of Shariati’s ideas, believed that they could easily achieve an Islamic society by converging the positive
elements of religious tradition and modern ideas and institutions. These intellectuals apotheosized Shariati’s effort to interpret concepts such as freedom, justice, genuine democracy and socialism in the light of a reconstructed Islam, his perception about the return to the authentic culture of the society, and his preoccupation with overcoming the self-alienation through an ideological device based on ‘religious renaissance’. However, Shariati’s effort, perception and preoccupation did not provide them with a proper ground for ordering an Islamic society and organizing an Islamic state. These intellectuals who were actually involved in establishing an Islamic society and state, theoretically were not able to define the foundations of a free, just and democratic society in the light of Islam. Also they were not aware of the consequences of the fusion of the domain of religion with that of state. Eventually, the inability of the group of Muslim intellectuals, who assumed the responsibility of running the country, to establish modern institutions within an Islamic definition paved the way for the domination of the traditional forces, and this led to a totalitarian government by the clergies. Such an experience convinced many of the intellectuals that Shariati’s ideas in its optimistic sense would culminate in an ideological government, whether by the clergies or other groups. In a sense the experience of running the country by Iranian Muslim intellectuals was a new confrontation with modernity which drove many intellectuals to reflect upon the location of religion in the modern world and the relationship between tradition and modern. In fact, this latest confrontation raised a set of issues which emerged as vital and fairly unprecedented in the history of Iranian contemporary Islamic social and political thought. At this moment of the post-Islamic revolutionary period an intellectual movement was launched to explore the deepest dimensions of the concept of modernity. Such a
movement was completely different to the trend that prevailed in the Iranian Muslim intellectuals, in the first half of the century, that viewed modernity as a proper choice to reach an ideal social and political system. Indeed, the intellectuals of that period took the efficiencies and advantages of modern ideas and institutions for granted. Whereas in the post-revolutionary era the Iranian Muslim intellectuals reached the conclusion that first and foremost it is crucial to gain a comprehensive, thorough and profound understanding of modernity. They delved deeply into concepts such as rationality, science, progress, and secularization, and tried to define their notions of freedom and justice. Modernity which had been defended by its advocates for its progressive technological devices as well as ideas and institutions such as democracy, human rights, parliamentary system of representation and bureaucracy, in this period were reconsidered with its Enlightenment foundations, its trajectories and its consequences in the realm of theory as well as practice.

The issue of ideology was initially addressed by Abdolkarim Soroush, who pioneered the analysis of the consequences of an ideological Islamic state, as well as fusion of religion with state, from a liberal point of view. His challenge to an ideological government was in fact a response to many of the Iranian Muslim intellectuals who were frustrated by the totalitarian political system established by the clergies. It was Soroush who set out to delineate Shariati's views as part of an ideological interpretation of Islam. Analyzing the concept of ideology, Soroush tried to show Marxism and Fascism as the modern patterns for ideological governments. In this way, he posed one of the most powerful challenges to Shariati's ideas. Not only did Soroush criticize Shariati's ideological narrative of
Islam, but also he challenged harshly the dominant Islamic ideology, posed by the clerical establishment.

Later on, Abdolkarim Soroush's ideas, in defense of modernity, emerged as a complete theory. He explained and justified concepts of rationality, science, and progress in the context of a secularized religion. He addressed the question of epistemology based on the intellectual tradition of analytic philosophy to show the centrality of human experience and knowledge in knowing and understanding of phenomena in different domains of human life including that of religion. On such basis, at the plane of social and political theory, he proceeded to reveal the consequences of liberalism, even in a religious society. He proposed that justice and freedom does not emanate from the religious propositions. Rather they are conceived as general human values, which are evaluated without religion. Then, on the basis of his liberal image of freedom he posed a liberal democratic political theory.

At first instance such ideas, which had written on philosophical foundations, fascinated a host of Iranian Muslim intellectuals for their systemic, scientific form, as well as their argumentation against the close system of thought of the clergies. Particularly, the focus on freedom and democracy as well as secularism in Soroush's theories were, in fact, the best response to the religious totalitarian government. At this juncture, Sorosh's ideas were backed by the translation of many of Karl Popper's works, as well as the works of other thinkers affiliated with analytic philosophy, such as Alan Ryan. However, later on, with the translation of works on critical theory as well as postmodernity, Sorosh's views were faced with a serious challenge. In fact, the entrance of these works into the intellectual scene of society had two consequences for the theories formulated by Sorosh
in the domains of religion, society, and politics. On the one hand Soroush’s theories were regarded as an old-fashioned approach to religion as well as social and political theory, and on the other hand, the shortcomings of these theories were revealed through the criticism made by critical theorists and postmodern thinkers on modernity, its foundations and consequences. Moreover, Soroush’s social and political theories were not able to answer a crucial historical question: how can Iran’s society absorbs elements of modernity while it has not experienced the Western history? Here, immediately the second question comes: while many sectors of society are traditional and the core of Iranian lifeworld consists of religious beliefs, how can such a society ignore tradition and grasp a pluralist, secularist, and liberal social system? Of course Soroush’s emphasis on liberalism, brought about another obstacle to his ideas. Lack of equality and justice as discussed among the leftists posed Sorough with another challenge. Many intellectuals reached the conclusion that Soroush’s free, modern society at best is nothing but the kind of capitalist society that exists in the West in which exploitation of man by man prevails. Nevertheless one element that helped to sustain Sorough ideas in the second decade of the post-revolutionary era, was the negative reaction of the clergies and government to his views. Sorough was mainly challenged by the clergies not only for his advocacy of the foundations of modernity, but because of his effort to weaken clergies’ unique authority over Islamic discourse. Sorough’s social and political ideas were in favor of freedom, citizenship and democracy. For this reason his ideas became so politicized that the students struggling for democracy took his ideas as a theoretical base for their action. The Islamic intellectual enterprises to gain a comprehensive, deep understanding of modernity was not confined to the current of thought represented by Sorough. Reza
Davari also tried to ponder on modernity, though from another perspective. He also raised the questions of rationality, science and progress, but through a radical criticism of these questions. For long modernity had been criticized for its immoral and materialist way of life. However, in this period it is criticized for its human-centrism, subject-centered epistemology, lack of thinking, and domination of instrumental rationality. Since Davari’s criticism of the West was based on the ontological Heideggerian viewpoint, the attention of many intellectuals was attracted towards Davari’s ideas. For these intellectuals such ideas were effective in understanding as well as criticizing modernity. However, when Davari presented his theory of society, the similarity of his ideas and that of the governing clergies came into light. It was inferred that Davari’s theory of society lacks notions such as citizenship, human rights and freedom, and his political ideas would culminate in a religious totalitarian government. For this reason, Davari’s ideas received much attention primarily when he addressed the ontological views of Heidegger concerning the West.

What was special about Davari’s ideas was his effort to make a shift in the discourse of the opponents of modernity. For this reason, during these years tradition also gained an opportunity to be defended through a postmodern argumentation on the decline of rationality and its consequential anti-foundationalism. However the traditionalist clergies, were not happy of such a modern defense of religious traditions. For they were not familiar with the Western ideas and this might weaken their unique authority for talking of religion.

In the second decade of the post-Islamic revolutionary period, Davari and Soroush’s ideas, both more or less underwent a decline. Many flaws of these ideas were revealed
and meanwhile, the need for new ideas was felt. In fact the dialogue and interaction between the two currents, not only laid bare the shortcomings and deficiencies of both side, but raised new questions concerning the possibility of a systemic acceptance or rejection of modernity. In line with these developments, one intellectual current trying to strike a balance between the views represented by Soroush and Davari was bound to emerge form. This current did not discard modernity but it took its criticism seriously. Also it did not ignore tradition while projecting both its positive and negative elements. Indeed this current immediately linked to Shariati’s ideas that prevailed once in the initial phase of the post-revolutionary period. At that phase, Shariati’s general, though critical outlook on tradition and modernity was replaced by two rival outlooks of Davari and Soroush who challenged and defended respectively the foundations of modernity. Contrary to Soroush and Davari, Shariati’s perspective does not imply the rejection of religious tradition and its replacement by modern ideas and vice versa, but a radical critique of both, by employing the symbolic resources of tradition and the emancipating tenets of modernity. Now, it seems the second wave of adherence to Shariati’s ideas, are more careful and contemplative. Certainly the second generation of Muslim intellectuals in the post-Islamic revolutionary era do not try to appropriate Shariati’s ideas for ordering the society or organizing the state. Instead, it seems what fascinates these intellectuals is Shariati’s critical approach to both modernity and tradition. In fact criticism becomes the main theme in exploring tradition and modernity. It is approved that without gaining a deep awareness of tradition it cannot be criticized, and without criticizing tradition modern ideas and institutions cannot be achieved. In this vein, it is also approved that without understanding and criticizing modernity, it is not possible to select the positive
aspects of tradition. Therefore, a critical approach emerges as a crucial base for bridging the gap between tradition and modernity. Such an approach provides some ground for the new generation of Muslim intellectuals to identify two main dangers in their effort to reconstruct modern Islamic social and political ideas: the danger of retrogressing into a traditional religious ideology which leads to totalitarianism and lack of freedom; and the danger of advocating systematically modernity and liberalism which culminates in ignoring the very realities of the society as lack of genuine democracy and social justice.