Chapter I

Islam, Tradition and Modern

I. Introduction

The impact of modernity on non-Western societies, even those with old and rich civilization, propelled them to redefine their own tradition and its affiliated ideas and institutions. In this way new ideas were set forth and new institutions were established. Muslim societies were not immune from the impact of modernity, and Muslim intellectuals, including Iranian ones, were deeply preoccupied with ideas that came with modernity. In general, notions of rationality, science, and progress became the main concern of Muslim intellectuals and brought them into a close contact with the moment of modernity. In particular, notions of individual liberty, social equality, and democracy engaged the attention of these intellectuals as they brought in conceptions of state and society which were fairly different from those that prevail in Islamic communities. Indeed, Muslim intellectuals in different societies reflected on these ideas that came with modernity and tried to see how they could be accommodated with their own historical experiences.
Modern ideas and conceptions became the focus of attention of Muslim intellectuals in the late nineteenth century, when many of the Muslim societies encountered the increasing expansion of the West into their own territories. The domination of the Western colonial powers over Muslim societies was not confined to military invasion and economic exploitation. It entailed an all-encompassing challenge of modernity to various aspects of these societies. In such a circumstance, from the outset, Muslim intellectuals sought to respond to the challenge through exploring and understanding the western, modern societies. In the course of these enterprises, many of them were, in one way or another, influenced by the intellectual tenets of modernity. Conventionally, it is said that the impact of modernity on Muslim intellectuals created the dichotomy between traditionalists and modernists. For many scholars modernism is represented in contradiction to traditionalism or fundamentalism (Stowasser 1987: 6-8). Modernism implies a “positive attitude toward innovation and change and toward western civilization generally...[and represents] a dynamic outlook, essentially pragmatic and adaptable” (Sharabi 1970: 6). On the contrary, traditionalism is indicative of “a negative attitude toward all types of innovation and toward the West...[and represents] a static position, fundamentally passive and hardly able to react to external stimuli” (Ibid.). However, such forms of dichotomization between modernism and traditionalism focuses upon extremes and ignores the gray area which exists between these two extremes in real life. There is, indeed, “a middle ground” between the two poles which is called ‘reformism’ (Ibid.), and this too deserves considerable attention. Although in most discussions it is
precisely this that is eclipsed. This middle ground is identified by Yvonne Haddad with the term ‘neo-normative’. Haddad also offers a “tripartite model of Islamic thought: normative, neo-normative, and acculturationist” (Lawrance 1987: 17). This tripartite model, indeed, covers the three main Islamic responses to modernity: traditionalism, modernism, and reformism. Interestingly these responses are in harmony with a more general analysis, based on cultural analysis of religion which indicates that “movements within a religion (those historically labeled liberal) reconstitute their religion to conform to these transformations...other movements (labeled conservative) within the same religion, also self-conscious, become embattled...still other movements are not so neatly categorized as liberal or conservative” (Thomas 1993: 289).

Even the analysis based on the recognition of clashes between civilizations is not able to disengage itself from these three responses. Although this analysis postulates the dichotomy in which Western civilization is placed in one side and Islamic civilization in the other, but ceases to endorse that the confrontation of Islam with modernity has only resulted in two contradictory form: fundamentalism against modernism. Rather, this analysis stresses that Islamic societies have adopted three forms in their confrontation with the Western civilization: pursuing a course of isolation or resistance, accepting Western values and institutions, and modernizing, while preserving indigenous values and institutions (Huntington 1993).

Such analyses show that the framework of binal oppositions that operates with a two-fold distinction between traditional and modern or liberal and conservative is
not sufficient to explain the reality of Muslim intellectual confrontation with the
West. Therefore, it is preferable to think in terms of a three-fold categorization of
the responses to modernity: 1) Negation, rejection or resistance toward modernity;
2) acceptance of or conformity to modernity; 3) selection and critique of elements
of both modernity and tradition. In their encounter with modernity a group of
Muslim thinkers, the traditionalists, including the Ulama, tended to reject modern
ideas and institutions. Another group, regarded as modernists, grasped the entire
modernity as the only means to reconstruct Islamic ideas. The third one, however,
sought to select those elements they recognized as being constructive of and
compatible with traditional dynamic elements. Since these groups fall into three
categories through distinct approaches to modernity, it seems useful to consider
ideologies that Edward Said termed as Orientalism as well as the theories of
modernization, whose point of departure is presuppositions of modernity.
Moreover, it would be helpful also to throw light on perceptions that alternatively
analyzed modernity critically.

II. Islam, Tradition, and Modernity

On the one hand, in the studies Edward Said terms as Orientalism the East,
including Islamic societies, are identified and represented through the West and
usually in a manner that they appear to be static and primitive. On the other
hand, the mainstream theories of modernization also place Islamic societies as
lagging behind in the progressive movement toward modernization. Theories of
modernization almost always present modern Western societies as the ultimate
stage to which all traditional, non-Western societies must aspire (Chilcote 1981: 278-81). Hence there exists a complementarity between the discourse of Orientalism and modernization. Both represent the West as occupying the high ground of modern, progressive rationality. Both recognize a sharp distinction between the West and the rest, although such distinction is viewed from different perspectives.

Orientalists, as Said puts forward, pre-supposed a sort of dichotomy consisting of the West and the rest. This dichotomy shaped the entire scholarship on Islamic studies. No matter where they were located, in the West or in the East, Islamic studies everywhere assumed a sharp polarization between the West and Islam. Islam was defined as a non-Western entity and it was placed on the negative side of the pole. This trend is carried on in the mainstream theories of modernization. They begin with a dichotomized world in which the modern West occupies the positive side, and other societies, lacking the traits of the West are placed on the negative one. Orientalism, as identified by Said, and the theories of modernization, thus have thematic as well as methodological commonalties and these arise from an ontological distinction. Both take the West as the touchstone and establish a dichotomy in which the West, in general, and modernity, in particular, demonstrates positive traits, while tradition and what is recognized as the rest bear negative ones.

The distinction between traditional and modern surfaced in Weber’s writings. While discussing the process of rationalization that marks the distinct character of modern societies (Weber 1930), Weber made a distinction between the Orient
and the Occident. He identified Protestant ethics, as the crucial variable which enabled the transition of traditional Western societies to modern ones (Turner 1994: 39).

There is a plethora of writings in which the dichotomy of tradition-modern is postulated as a fixed conceptual frame of reference. In most of these analyses Weber’s definitions of traditional and modern society, along with Talcott Parsons’s representation of pattern variables have been taken as the basic model for discussing the modern. Parsons begins by acknowledging Ferdinand Tönnies’s famous distinction between community (Gemischaftr) and association (Gesellschaftr) as the source of his pattern variables (Hamilton 1996: 163).

Keeping this distinction in mind Parsons delineates five conflicting realms within which he separates modern social roles from the traditional ones:

“I. The Gratification-Discipline Dilemma
   Affectivity Vs. Affective neutrality

II. The private Vs. Collective Interest Dilemma
   Self-Orientation Vs. Collective Orientation

III. The Choice Between Types of Value-Orientation Standard

IV. The Choice Between ‘Modalities’ of the Social Objects
   Achievement Vs. Ascription

V. The definition of the scope of Interest in the Object
   Specificity Vs. Diffuseness” (Parsons 1982: 114).

On the basis of the aforementioned dichotomies, a rich literature concerning the process of modernization in both the West, that is, modernized, developed
societies and the rest, that is, non-modernized, developing societies has been produced. In most of this literature a modern society is identified with rationality, scientific analysis, progress and democracy. Further, the modern is associated with the Western, industrial, capitalist societies. In sharp contrast to this, a traditional society is usually marked by lack of modern attributes. As a non-modern society it is identified with irrationality, mystical beliefs, nonscientific or religious-allegorical views, despotism, and backwardness. These representations of traditional and modern are important because they have defined the study of Islam and influenced the characterization of the latter as traditional.

Taking into account the presupposition that Islam stems from a long past and an old tradition, many theorists place it in the dark side of the dichotomy and define it as a pre-modern entity which has nothing to do with modernity. The attempts of these theorists who try to show the impossibility of Islam in the side of modernity and to locate Islam on the other side are viewed by Said as a sort of Orientalism in which “Islam is defined negatively as that with which the West is radically at odds” (Said 1997: 163).

By Orientalism Said means several interdependent things: “an academic designation, a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the orient’ and (most of time) ‘the occident’..., the corporate institution for dealing with the orient” (Said 1980: 2-3). However, he adds, “(T)he most readily accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic one, and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic institutions” (Said 1980: 2). For him, without exception, one “who teaches, writes about, or
researches the Orient and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism” (Ibid.). Said finds it useful “to employ Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse, as described in, The Archaeology of Knowledge and in Discipline and Punishment” (Ibid.: 3). For Michael Foucault ‘discourse’ connotes three things: “sometimes as the general domain of all the statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements” (Foucault 1994; 80). To Foucault, discourse is a way of producing meaningful knowledge about a subject, particularly way of representation of a subject, not only through language but practice. Knowledge about a subject, therefore, is a production of discursive practice. Foucault, then, advances the argument that knowledge, as the production of a discourse, when exercised in practice, produces power and, in a more precise sense, organizes and regulates power relation which, in turn, consolidates the truth. In this manner, “the discursive formation of knowledge/power produces ‘a regime of truth’” (Hall 1992: 295). Based on the Foucault’s analysis Said represents the Orient as a system of scholarship, and elaborates his notion of Orientalism by appropriating Michael Foucault’s theory of discourse revealing the presence of power relation in society through the construction of systematic knowledge. Here he is explicit that “without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, military,
ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said 1980: 3). It is Foucault’s analysis of knowledge that provides the ground for Said to hold “Orientalism as a discourse which creates typologies within which characters can be distributed: the energetic Occidental man versus the lascivious oriental, the rational Western versus the unpredictable oriental, gentle white versus the cruel yellow man” (Turner 1994: 44).

Indeed, Said has set out to deconstruct the Orientalist discourse which postulates the Western societies as the standard form upon which comparisons are to be made. The discourse produces a set of interwoven ideas and values identifying the superiority of the West and the inferiority of the Orient (Said 1980: 42). Said conceives of such a discourse as the matrix of “the idea that Islam is medieval and dangerous, as well as hostile and threatening to ‘us’... And in turn such an idea furnishes a kind of a priori touchstone to be taken account of by anyone wishing to discuss or say something about Islam” (Said 1997: 157). For Said the prevailing trends in Islamic studies are constitutive of Orientalism which may be traced back to, at least, the eighteenth century, the period of invasion by the western colonial powers, of non-Western societies. Since then, “modern Occidental reactions to Islam have been dominated by a radically simplified type of thinking that may still be called Orientalist” (Ibid.: 4). In this respect, Said for instance, refers to the views of prominent Islamologists such as Gibb and Von Grunebaum. He notes Gibb’s assertion that the West took from Islam only those non-scientific elements that it had originally derived from the West (Said 1978: 289). As for Von Grunebaum, Said mentions, “Von Grunebaum’s Islam, after all,
is the Islam of the earlier European Orientalists- monolithic, scornful of ordinary human experience, gross, reductive, unchanging” (Ibid.: 299). Such an account of Orientalism, in its essence, also implies laying bare the hidden construction of modernization theories in relation to Islam. For in such theories also, Islam is presupposed as non-modern, irrational, and mystical entity in contrast to what is defined as modernized entity characterized by rationality, and scientific outlook. In fact perceiving Islam through both Orientalism and modernization theories brings us to a closer scrutiny on the term modernity.

III. Reconsidering Modernity

The concept of modernity is closely linked to the ideas that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, and represented as the Enlightenment. However, in its literal sense modern refers to what is now existing, distinguished from the remote past. Not only does it imply “a contrast between a recent and late (latmodo) and an earlier period” (Mautner 1997: 358), but demonstrates an all-encompassing process of change which lends substance to “the belief that everything is destined to be speeded up, dissolved, displaced, transformed, reshaped”(Hall 1992: 15). “Modernity” as Vatimo puts it, “is that era in which being modern becomes a value” (Vatimo 1988: 99). Indeed, the era of modernity “bring(s) into focus the value of the new” (Ibid.: 100). Identification of value with that which is new denotes the centrality of change. In this sense modernity has been largely identified with change and its concomitant, rapidity and vast scope (Giddens 1993: 4). Therefore, change may be regarded as the defining feature of
modernity (Smart 1992: 1). As a vehicle of change, modernity corresponds to an historical period of Western Europe, involving "modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence" (Giddens 1993: 1).

Although the characteristic feature of modernity was crystallized in the seventeenth century it receives a more complete expression in the ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers in the eighteenth century. Thus, modernity is often regarded as being identical with the Enlightenment, through which the program of "the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973: 3) was implemented. "The men of the Enlightenment", in the words of Peter Gays, "united on a vastly ambitious program, a program of secularism, humanity, cosmopolitanism, and freedom; above all, freedom in its many forms - freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom to realize one's talents, freedom of aesthetic response; freedom, in a word, of moral man to make his own way in the world" (Gay 1967: 3). The Enlightenment thinkers, such as Diderot, Montesquieu, and Voltaire, celebrated the move from traditional worldview and social order to modern ones. They did so through their enthusiasm for reason, empiricism, science, universalism, toleration, freedom, uniformity of human nature, and secularism (Hamilton 1992: 21-22). Enlightenment thinkers were the expression of "an epoch in which a set of contending understandings of self, responsibility, knowledge, rationality, nature, freedom and legitimacy have established sufficient
presence to shuffle other possible perspectives out of active considerations” (Connolly 1988: 4). However, “as long as the theory of modernity takes its orientation from the basic concepts of the philosophy of reflection— from ideas of knowledge, conscious awareness, self-consciousness— the intrinsic connection with the concept of reason or of rationality is obvious” (Habermas 1987a: 75).

Indeed, the core of the Enlightenment is reason or rationality which shows the promise of freedom and happiness.

In the modern time, reason has shaped both individual and collective life, and through appropriation of science and technology, it has been used to control nature or external reality, as well as the order of society (Tourain 1995: 10). The thread of rationality is discernible in different aspects of the modern societies constructed on the foundations of European modernity with its special characteristics. These characteristics “were initially focused on attempts at the formation of a ‘rational’ culture, an efficient economy, and civil (class) society and nation states where these tendencies to ‘rational’ expansion could become fully articulated and which would also create a social and political order based on freedom” (Eisenstadt 1987: 6).

Typically, a rationalized modern society is regarded to be as an industrialized society, with representative form of government and a secular culture. Culturally, in such a society, religious worldview is entirely replaced by a secular one such that social and moral values no longer emanate from the sacred, but from the profane (Gay 1979: 31-40). In fact, faith in progress is substituted for faith in religion, which means “both a secularized faith and a faith in secularization”
It is in such conditions that modernity proceeds to achieve an "independent, rational justification for morality" (MacIntyre 1981: 50). In line with cultural sea changes, political, economic and social realms undergo remarkable changes. Politically, secular political power gains legitimation within a sovereign state, with a defined territory and control of means of violence (Held: 87-8). Socially, the traditional social order based on hierarchy and stratification collapses and in its place a new one is born: one which is rooted in the principle of equality and merit (Bradley: 191-205). Economically, an increasing commercial boost paves the way for an industrial revolution, and both commercial and industrial growth rely entirely on a significant expansion of market and consumption (Brown: 138-9). To Gay, economic freedom plays a significant role to consolidate Enlightenment's values. As he puts it, the "fundamental values - Enlightenment values - were involved in the issue of economic freedom: most notably man's right to determine his own fate, his right to be treated not as a ward of a supremely wise government but as an autonomous being" (Gay 1970: 367).

All the above-mentioned features of modernity are usually seen to be so distinct and that they are seen as representing the unique discontinuity of modernity with previous traditions (Giddens 1992: 3). It is indeed this understanding of modernity that has led to the dominant trend among the early anthropologists, folklorists, and sociologists who conceptualized all other traditions as a unique entity vis a vis modernity. They "developed the idea of 'tradition' as the repository of all that is ancient and virtually unchanging" (Peterson 1995: 183). However, this idea has been challenged in recent decades and "the term 'collective memory' is now often
substituted for 'tradition' acknowledging that the past is continually reinterpreted to fit the changing needs of the present. On such basis it is said that the concept of "tradition refers to any human practice, belief, institution or artifact which is handed down from one generation to the next" (Turner et al. 1994: 432). Tradition, as a key concept in social sciences, is a setting for social practices and an organizing medium of collective memory, through which this memory gets revived and reconstructed to organize the present and transmit to the next generation. Tradition is almost strongly demonstrated, preserved, and redefined through rituals and is connected with what Giddens calls a "formulaic notion of truth", interpreting by "guardians" (Giddens 1994: 63). In its religious sense, tradition is "a deposit of knowledge or truth, originating with a past authority, and handed down within a religious community" (Valliere 1987). Religious tradition encompasses a truth lying at the root of revelation endowed with a scared authority, and embodied in rituals. Then, there are priests, Ulama, monks, and sages to decode and interpret the truth.

In its broader sense, tradition contains four aspects which may be regarded as four functions (Thompson 1996: 91-3). First, it gives birth to and consolidates the assumptions individuals take for granted in the conduct of their daily lives; in this sense, it provides an interpretation and understanding of the world. Second, its normative characteristics provide the guidance for actions and beliefs in the present. Third, tradition, in the Weberian sense, is a source of legitimation of the power exercised which constructs the allegedly traditional authority. Fourth, it is
a source of identity by transmitting values, beliefs, and behaviors from the past to the present.

It has been a dominant trend in diverse branches of social sciences to perceive tradition-modernity dichotomy from a modernist point of view. Thus, tradition as an object of inquiry is perceived as an antithesis to modernity. In a similar vein, modernity is defined through the nature of its antithesis, tradition. Both, tradition and modern are represented through each other, in a Saussurian sense. In such a context, the positive values of modernity designated as new, unique, dynamic and rational, are defined through the negative attributes of tradition, which is presupposed as pre-modern, trivial, static, and irrational. This perception which is fairly widespread resembles the Orientalist view, which in Said's word, has been dominant in the occident. Even if modernity is not regarded as unique, it is recognized as distinctive. "In its optimistic moment", as Connolly observes, "it defines itself by contrast to earlier periods which are darker, more superstitious, less free, less rational, less productive, less civilized, less comfortable, less democratic, less tolerant, less respectful of the individual, less scientific and less developed technically than it is at its best"(Connolly 1988: 1).

While tradition and modernity have usually been counterposed to one another such that the presence of one necessarily denotes the exclusion of the other, some theorists have represented the relationship between tradition and modernity differently. These theories range from re-traditionalization to a harsh critique of modernity, to hermeneutic understanding of modernity.
The reciprocal incompatibility of tradition and modernity and the concrete, unchangeable structure of the tradition-modern dichotomy have recently been regarded as being problematic by social theorists who are motivated by their reflection on modernity to conceptualize the term reflexive modernity. As Giddens puts forward “modernity destroys tradition. However (and this is very important) a collaboration between modernity and tradition was crucial to the earlier phase of modern social development” (Giddens 1991: 56). In fact, tradition bound up with collective memory, links the past to the present. To explain the inevitability of the presence of tradition, MacIntyre maintains, “I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition” (MacIntyre 1985: 221). In order to propound the interconnections between tradition and modernity Giddens opts to call modern society as a post-traditional one (Giddens 1991: 56). To him, such interconnections can be described in several aspects of modern society such as “the legitimating role of science” interpreted as the perpetuation of the traditional “formulaic truth”, or individual and collective identity in modern times mediated by tradition (Ibid.: 94-95). Even in late modern world, Giddens maintains that “traditions do not wholly disappear; indeed, in some respects, and in some contexts, they flourish” (Ibid.: 100).

Traditions, Giddens describes, may exist either through discursive articulation, “justified as having value in a universe of plural competing values”, or through “assertion of formulaic truth without regard to consequences” (Ibid.), which to him, represents fundamentalism. Following this line, other social theorists argue
that with due consideration to the changing situation of tradition in the moment of globalization, there seems room for casting a glance at the outside of the story of mutual antagonism of tradition and modernity and throwing new light on identities differing from what is attributed to modernity. In this juncture, what become visible are “actual intra-plays of other identities and differences in which one finds tradition-in-modernity and modernity-as-tradition that clearly can tell another story” (Luke 1996: 110). In a socio-historical sense, liberal bourgeois capitalism’s pretension of having ‘all-that-is-new’ against the rest, that is ‘all-that-was-old’ seems to be less than undoubted, for “the spaces of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ are becoming fused into ‘the now’ of globalization” (Ibid.). From this point of view in late modernity, it is not proper to look at society through the paradigm based on tradition-modern dichotomy. It is, therefore, no more effective to suppose that tradition as a time-space bound entity, something old, which belongs to a particular space, stands against the newness of modernity.

However, prior to the emergence and development of views that try to show the presence as well as necessity of tradition in the modern condition, critiques of the tenets of modernity, such as, instrumental reason, science and progress had provided the ground for rethinking and further revitalizing tradition. In fact these critiques are expressive of the crisis with which modernity has been faced. In this respect, Touraine refers to three crises. The first one was indicative of “the exhaustion of the initial liberation movement”; the second one showed its “loss of meaning”; and the third one demonstrated a radical “challenge not modernity’s deficiencies, but its positive objectives” (Touraine 1995: 94).
Among the criticism made of modernity two powerful currents have received a great deal of attention: critical theory of the Frankfurt School, and the so-called postmodern philosophies based on Nietzsche and Heidegger’s ideas. While the criticisms of the Frankfurt School revolve around the first and the second crisis mentioned by Touraine, the postmoderns oscillate between the second and the third ones.

Frankfurt School tried to formulate a critical theory of the trajectory of modernity, without leaning towards anti-modernism. Among the prominent figures of the first generation of Frankfurt School, Horkheimer and Adorno posed a philosophical critique of modernity. Reason, Horkheimer argued, “for a long period meant the activity of understanding and assimilating the eternal ideas which were to function as goals for men. Today, on the contrary, it is not only the business but the essential role of reason to find means for the goals one adopts at any given time” (Horkheimer 1974: vii). In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*¹, Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of modern reason became so radicalized that they failed to formulate a definitive, positive social theory, an ambitious goal they had set before. However, they formulated a systematic criticism of rationality, science and ‘culture industry’. In their approach to Enlightenment, they reach the conclusion that “men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power. Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward men (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973: 10).

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However, Jurgen Habermas, as the most well known representative of the second generation of Frankfurt School, has undertaken the task of formulating a critical social theory based on a critique of modernity. Habermas set forth a cultural and social theory to explain both the achievements as well as the pathologies of modernity (Passier d'Entreves 1996: 1). Relying upon Weber's distinction between the notions of 'instrumental rationality' and 'substantive rationality', Habermas in his later theorization, viewed the problem of the modern world as that of 'rationalization' of 'purposive-rational action'. Instead he tries to find the conditions of redemption of communicative rationality. In this enterprise Habermas appropriates the concept of 'lifeworld', as "the background consensus of everyday life" which implies a sense of tradition. As Habermas argues, communicative rationality can only arise in the lifeworld, and in modern societies lifeworld needs to be rationalized. In his words, lifeworld is "represented by culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive pattern (Habermas 1987b: 124). As the "the background consensus of everyday life" (Ibid. 130) lifeworld implies a sense of tradition, for it "is given to the experiencing subject as unquestionable" (Ibid.). To him the normative unrealized potential of modernity can be realized only through communicative action which is consent-oriented aimed at reaching a rational agreement and meaning. Habermas argues that communicative actions are always moving within the horizon of lifeworld, and in modern societies lifeworld needs to be rationalized. Therefore, rationalization of lifeworld could be actualized when one appropriates tradition critically through communicative action. In this manner Habermas
subjects both modernity and tradition to a rational critique in order to restore the project of modernity.

It is said that the most powerful challenge to modernity begins with Nietzsche who questions the foundation of the modern notions by raising the question of ‘nihilism’ as “the condition he often identifies as the central feature of modernity” (Nehamas, 1996: 227). The devaluation of all values and horizons in Nietzsche’s view, is the core of nihilism, and, as he foresees, “(t)he next two century will be the gradual discovery of this fact” (T.B.Strong 1975: 12). It is Heidegger, then, who takes up such enterprise and challenges Western philosophy from an ontological vantagepoint. For Heidegger, “Modernity is characterized by a distanced subjectivity that stands over against objects, judging and manipulating them for its own chosen goals” (Kolb 1986: 119-20). He also “speaks of the ‘calculative thinking’ that dominates our life” (Kolb 1986: 120). Heidegger maintains that with modernity philosophy, which is originated from the Greeks, has come to an end. Then he posits thinking as the alternative outlook that belongs to the future. Thinking, he maintains “is no longer philosophy, because it thinks more originally than metaphysics—a name identical to philosophy”. (Heidegger 1978: 242). Both, Nietzsche and Heidegger, call the heritage of European thought “into question in a radical manner, but at the same time refuse to propose a means for a critical ‘overcoming’ of it” (Vatimo 1988: 2).

Such an approach paved the way for the flourishing of what Habermas calls, anti-modern views, that are expressed by thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida.
(see Habermas 1987a). In 'On the Genealogy of Morals' Nietzsche made an effort to separate the present from the past, and thereby, revoke the legitimacy of the present. Following Nietzsche Foucault tries to "question the tendency of the present to evaluate its own progressiveness positively" (Couzens Hoy 1897: 141). Along with Foucault, Derrida is also recognized as a pioneer to challenge modernity's postulations. It is the implications of his deconstructive approach and his emphasis upon difference, which leads to deconstruction of the Cartesian subject as well as to the questioning of the monolithic domination of modernity. Derrida tries to show the false image of an independent Cartesian subject by endorsing the death of the author. Derrida deconstructs 'the perception of self in presence' which emanates from an inextricable tie of the notions of self or subject to those of consciousness and presence. Following Heidegger, he maintains that it is not the subject that masters language; rather "the subject is a 'function' of language" (Cooper 1996: 717). Therefore, as he poses, subject is far from being the author. Derrida also identifies the history of the West, which he regards as the history of metaphysics, with the notion of 'presence'. According to Derrida, any system of thought which depends on a foundation, the origin, a center, or a first principle is 'metaphysical'. In his view, a chain of determinations of the center and the origin are always expressed in terms of 'presence'. Derrida interprets the history of metaphysics as the history of different forms or names given to the center (Derrida 1978: 279-80). Then he undertakes the task of deconstruction of the center and first principle which is

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often defined by what it excludes (Sarup 1993: 37). In this way many modern postulations, such as, progress, science and even rationality, regarded as the origins and first principles, may be subject to deconstruction.

Along with these criticisms and challenges to the foundations of modernity another outlook captured the attention of social scientists, in which modernity is also perceived as one tradition. In the period of what is called ‘late modernity’, however, it is true that modernity has lasted a few centuries, and thus, its way of looking at things may be regarded as not new, but old (Connolly 1988: 3). This directs our attention to a hermeneutic sense of tradition by which the Enlightenment, as the early moment of modernity, is identified with a set of assumptions and presuppositions, such as rampant subjectivism, the reign of reason, scientism, and progress, which in turn, may be regarded as the main elements of one sort of tradition. In this sense “Enlightenment is not the antithesis of tradition but is, on the contrary, one tradition (or cluster of traditions) among others—that is, a set of taken-for-granted assumptions which provide a framework for understanding the world” (Thompson 1996: 90). Gadamer’s hermeneutic view goes further and lays emphasis on allowing “the validity claim made by tradition, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me” (Gadamer 1979: 324).

The above-mentioned views represent the fact that tradition and modernity are not inevitably antithetical, rather, in moments they appear as complementary to each other. Moreover, in a hermeneutic perspective, modernity has no superiority over tradition. Both in views based on the dichotomy of tradition and modern, and in
views that go beyond the dichotomy, it is always the question of reason, its meaning and its limitations that comes to the fore. To understand the specific nature of reason that manifested itself in the ‘tradition of Enlightenment’ and other traditions it is appropriate now to consider the idea of reason and rationality that manifested itself in some Islamic currents.

IV. Thrust of Rationality in Islamic Intellectual Currents

Reason or rationality has been defined as the main foundation of modernity. It is said that the extent to which rationality is embodied in cultural, social, political and economic aspects, they are justified as modern. Therefore, pondering on the relation between some main Islamic intellectual currents and reason would be an appropriate entrance to the question of confrontation of Muslim intellectuals with modernity.

Reason, located in the autonomous subject, and designated as the spirit of modernity, has not been a brand new phenomenon to many Muslim thinkers and they have not been completely alien to reason and rational speculation. One of the most powerful Islamic theological schools, *Mutazila*, in medieval Islam, advocated categories of reason to redefine issues such as freedom and determinism, good and evil, and justice. Reason, in that sense, was borrowed from Greek ancient philosophy by Islamic philosophers.

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1 A religious movement founded by Wāsil ibn Ṭātā in the mid eighth century in Basra, subsequently becoming one of the most important theological schools in medieval Islam in eleventh and twelfth century (see Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi 1986: 286-291).
NEPAL
ETHNIC/CASTE MAJORITY BY DISTRICTS
1991

SOURCE: HARKA GURUNG, NEPAL MAIN ETHNIC CASTE GROUPS BY DISTRICTS BASED ON POPULATION CENSUS 1991 (KATHMANDU, SEPTEMBER 1994)
The ideas of Mutazila were based on five axioms: uniqueness of God, justice of God, the promise and the threat, the theory of an ‘intermediate state’, and the obligation laid upon every believer to command the good and forbid evil (Bosworth 1993: 790). More important among these axioms are justice of God and the obligation to command the good and forbid the evil. These axioms led to four principles including the existence of a divine pattern, the capacity of man to know that divine pattern, the capacity of man to act or not to act in accordance with the pattern, and the doing or non-doing of man will not be in vain (Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi 1986: 290). Indeed the basis of Mutazila’s thought is the doctrine that “good and evil are discernable by human reason” (Rahman 1984: 33). Mutazila tried to import a rational flavor to divinity, and argued that God is just, and the order of things, as the demonstration of God’s activity, is a rational activity. They maintained that God neither does evil nor commits wickedness, and every evil and wickedness emanates not from God, as creator, but from us, as creatures. Therefore, God is free from evil (Davari 1980: 259). In Mutazila’s belief system, God has created human beings, endowed them with reason, and left them to themselves. Against Ash’ari² school, which ascribed all activities to God, Mutazila argued that when God gives us rewards and punishes us according to our activities, it implies that actions emanate from us and not God; otherwise God would be unjust and irrational. Individuals use reason to discern between good and evil in all practical activities. Here “reason is the criterion for values

² A theological school of thought which emerged as a powerful rival to Mutazila school. Ash’ari school was founded by Abu al Hasan al Ash’ari, one of the great Mutazila thinkers turned anti-Mutazila, in the first half of the tenth century (See Ibid.: 291-294)
and both values and decrees of Sharia\(^3\) are consistent with reason (Ibid.: 308). Mutazila conceived of reason and revelation as complementary to the effect that "reason is able to comprehend values and morality, but is not able to devise it" (Ibid.: 309). To prove their views many of Mutazila thinkers who "were influenced increasingly by Greek philosophic and scientific thought with its emphasis on reason, logic, and study of laws of nature" (Ahmad 1992: 80), formulated theories about the attributes and essence of God. In this quasi-rationalist journey, they concluded that God did not exert influence or control on our deeds, and at the beginning, he had only created the creatures without any subsequent interference, like an engineer constructs and establishes a factory.

In Shiite sect\(^1\), also, among the two major schools of jurisprudence, Akhbari\(^2\) (which referred to Akbar or narratives) and Usuli\(^3\) (which referred to principles), the latter advocated reason to deal with Islamic texts. According to this school, the decrees of Sharia are extracted and inferred from Quran and Sunna, through rational argument and logical analysis. Such a process, called ijtihad (independent

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\(^3\) "The term normally used to refer to Muslim law, i.e. the divinely revealed law. However, there is considerable disagreement over the precise definition. For some, it consists only of legislation clearly laid down in the Quran and the Sunna [based on sayings and actions of the Prophet] together with the norms and principles set out therein. For most Muslims it consists of the corpus of detailed law set out in the codices of the recognized schools. Since the Sharia is immutable and eternally valid, the latter definition has led to a number of casuistic arguments to permit the making of new positive law to cover situations not covered in the Sharia" (Bannerman 1988: 256-7).

\(^1\) Since from Safavid dynasty (1501-1722) onward, Shia in Iran has been recognized as the dominant cult, it is necessary to mark the thrust of rationality within its branches.

\(^2\) "One of the two schools of thought in Shia Islam which fought for supremacy in Iran during the seventeenth century. The Akhbaris opposed the use of Ijtihad and sought to base Shia jurisprudence on the use of Hadith in place of the rationalist principles advocated by their opponents the Usulis" (Bannerman 1988: 240).

\(^3\) The Usuli school "was largely in place by the sixteenth century.... However,...the Akhbari (traditionalist), rose prominence and doctrinal development paused until the controversy between the two was finally resolved in favor of the Usuli towards the end of the eighteenth century" (Bannerman 1988: 48).
reasoning), is primarily the task of a living Mujtahid (one qualified to exercise *Ijithad*) “whose education and effort qualified him best to interpret the will of the Hidden Imam” (Keddie 1981: 24). In fact, *Usuli* school went beyond traditionalism by introducing reason and consensus (of *Ulama*) to understanding of the truth of Islamic rules. The school regarded independent reasoning as a reliable and leading authority to weigh Islamic texts, though such reasoning has been limited to *Ulama*’s circle. In the medieval Islam, also two famous schools of philosophy, *Masha*4 and *Ishraq* reached to their zenith. The most influential figure of *Mashà* School is Ibn Sina (Avesina, 980-1037), who “drew from Aristotelian logic and physics, neo-Platonic metaphysics and psychology, and even certain elements of Stoicism and Hermeneuticism, and constructed a philosophy that marks the beginning of ‘medieval philosophy’ in the Western term of the sense” (Nasr 1996: 68-9, also see Nasr 1964: 9-51). *Ishraq* School is pioneered by Sorvardi (1151-1191) whose prolific works have forged “a treasure of traditional doctrines and symbols combining in them with wisdom of Sophism with Hermeneuticism, and Phytagorian, Platonic, Aristotelian, and Zoroastrian philosophies together with some other diverse elements” (Ibid.: 127, also see Nasr 1964: 52-82). While Ibn Sina is regarded as a follower of Aristotle, Sorvardi seems affiliated with Plato, as he himself acknowledge, “whoever is a traveler (*Sàlik*) on the way to truth is my companion and a help on this path. The procedure of the master of philosophy, the divine Plato was the same…”(Ibid: 129).

4 Masha philosophy depending on Aristotle ideas advances the argument that man is able to achieve the truth only by through thinking and argumentation.
However the rational thrust of Mūtazila, Usuli, Masha, and Ishraq Schools did not result in a rational theory of society and a democratic political theory. Several reasons have been mentioned for the repression of rationalist dynamic in Islam, including “the negative consequences of mystical Sophism, folk, religiosity, the rigidity of Islamic law, or the closing gate of Ijīthad, the effect of Zakat\(^1\) in relation to more profitable investments, and the absence of an autonomous urban culture within civil society” (Turner 1994: 11). Certainly, to select one reason among the others to explain the retardation of Islamic social and political ideas would create the danger of overlooking many aspects of the study. However, there is no way to attach preference to any one cause. Thus, it is appropriate to start from questions of social and political theory.

For both, Plato and Aristotle, the end of politics is happiness achieved through practicing virtue, and the best of the virtues is to become a member of a city and participate in its running. ‘Public good’ is a fundamental notion in Greek political philosophy which had not been transplanted to the domain of Islamic political thought (Tabatabaie 1994: 136-8). In addition, when the early utopian Caliphate\(^2\) turned to absolute monarchy, and Islamic political philosophy was imbued with Sharia, there remained no room to talk about democracy (Ibid.: 139). It is true that the analysis by Greek philosophers of the notion of “public good” largely owed to special organization of Greek cities. Islamic cities, however, were not

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\(^1\) The ‘purifying tax’ levied on the property of Muslims. “The Quran defines the recipients as the poor, the needy, those entrusted with the collection and distribution of the alms, those who will become converts, the emancipation of slaves, travelers, debtors, and those who fight in God’s cause” (Bannerman 1988: 262).

\(^2\) “Title of head of Islamic state after Muhammad. From 632 to 661, the four ‘rightly guided’ (rashidun) caliphs; from 661 to 750 the Umayyads; from 750 to 1258 the Abbasids. The Ottoman
able to provide a proper ground for such an experience (Ibid.: 165-6). Thus, Islamic thinkers failed to establish a link between happiness and 'public good' (Ibid.: 166). They failed indeed to make a convergence between salvation as an end in religion, and happiness, as an end in political philosophy. In their speculation, the public did not become the focus of philosophical inquiry, free from Sharia. Even if efforts were made to deal with Sharia-free argumentation, these were limited only to the small circle of philosophers. However, the majority of the community practically followed a Sharia-bound morality, which was far from establishing a link between public good and happiness (Ibid.: 118). In this way, social and political theory of medieval Islam, under the domination of a Sharia-bound morality, failed to express the rationality that was present in Greek political philosophy.

Among the rational enterprise of Muslim thinkers, Mutazila school of theology came closer to what may be recognized as an intellectual base for a democratic theory. Mutazila thinkers referred to rationality as the only criterion for human conduct. They also stressed upon the equality of human beings before God which implies fraternity. Formulation of a democratic theory, however, required a step taken from fraternity of human beings to equality of individuals. Such a crucial step, in turn, itself had to be taken on the basis of the formation of subject and individual self which was absent in medieval Islam.

Only in modern times leading thinkers, such as, Seyed Jamal and Mohammad Abdu, tried to take such a step by drawing upon both Mutazila tradition and

sultans latterly claimed they had inherited the caliphate from the Abbasids, but it was abolished by the Turkish Republic in 1924” (Watt 1988: 144).
modern Western social and political theories. Abdu set out to revive “a Mutazilite type of rationalism” (Rahman 1984: 100). To put it more concretely, this was an effort to link rational thrust they found in Mutazila with modern rationality. Such an endeavor has been interpreted as Islamic revival which “is largely not reactionary, but rather is caused by the desire in many Islamic societies to modernize within a religious context which is in harmony with the indigenous culture” (Stowasser 1987: 2). Seyed Ahmad Khan, the leading figures of modernist Muslims, not only utilized the arguments of Mutazila, but in the end, became almost as a naturalist deist (Rahman: 52). Finally transcending the rationalism of Mutazila, he set out to totally draw upon modern rationality and modern science to redefine Islam. To challenge the orthodox view of the Ulama, Seyed Ahmad Khan “re-read the Quran in the light of nineteenth century Western science and concluded that there was no contradiction between the two” (Mortimer 1982: 101). Contrary to this view, an orthodox or traditionalist belief posed, particularly, by the majority of Ulama, and vigorously rejected appropriation of modern reason. This view elaborated by thinkers such as Maududi, provided no possibility for reason-based claims while laying emphasis on total submission to God on which basis “none but God can be a lawgiver and that the goal of all human government must be to implement the Divine law” (Butterworth 1982: 95).
V. Models of confrontation

At one extreme, traditionalists recognize both tradition and modernity as two contradictory totalities. In a similar way the anti-Orientalist views give birth to a sort of Occidentalism or what Al-Azmeh chooses to call reverse Orientalism (Al-Azmeh 1984: 355). Such views take the Orient as a positive totality against the negativity of the Occident. Here, modernization theories are refuted from the viewpoint reinforced by Said's theory of Orientalism. At the other extreme, theories of modernization endorse the totality of modernity and set out to designate tradition as a negative entity, with which non-Western societies must be dispensed. The intellectuals fascinated by the views, based on modernization theories, see modern western societies as perfect ones and ignore any constructive element in the Islamic tradition. This perception is in harmony with what Said terms as Orientalism. In between, reformists throw a critical light on both tradition and modernity and simultaneously select what they find positive within both sides. In this context, one may think of a critical and hermeneutic understanding of both, the East, including Islam, and the West.

This directs our attention towards categorization of confrontation of Muslim intellectuals with modernity. At one level, the intellectuals are fascinated by the views based on modernization theories. They see modern western societies as perfect ones and ignore any constructive element in the Islamic tradition. At another level, modernization theories are refuted from the viewpoint reinforced by Said's theory of Orientalism. At the third level modernity is perceived critically,
and that one may think of a critical and hermeneutic understanding of both, the East, including Islam, and the West.