Chapter II

The Historical Context of Modern Islamic Thought

I. The Influence of Arab and Indian Intellectuals

Many scholars are of the view that historically the impact of the West on Muslim societies began with the Crusades. It is true that a general awareness about the European societies was imparted to the Muslims by the Crusades. However, in the plane of ideas, the impact of the West on Islamic thought may be traced back to the ancient Greek. The deep influence of Greek philosophy is quite conspicuous in the creation of two major Islamic theological school, Mutazila and Ash'ari (Ahmad 1992: 80) as well as two significant Islamic schools of philosophy, Masha and Ishraq (Nasr 1964: 24-5, 60-61). Particularly, Islamic “theological system formulated with the aid of Aristotelian logic” (Gibb 1969: 203, also see Hosseini Tabatabai 1980). However, the most crucial impact of the West on Muslim societies and Islamic ideas was made by ‘modernity’. In contrast to the time Greek philosophy influenced Islamic theology, and the time of the confrontation with the Crusades, modernity exerted a profound and far-reaching influence on not only the mind of Muslim thinkers, but also the every-day life and attitudes of Muslim communities (Gibb 1969: 320-23).

Modernity, initially, came with colonial powers and imposed itself upon ideas and institutions of Muslim societies (Kedouri 1980:1-3). At the initial stage, it was the European sense of adventure for exploring the New World that opened up the gates of modern world to the Islamic societies. This was followed then by a very keen interest
taken by Europeans in conducting trade with these societies, which in turn entailed the protection by their army of this trade (Watt 1988: 45). To mark the inception of the new era, two major historical events may appropriately be mentioned: the conquest by the British East Indian Company of Bengal in the 1756, and Napoleon Bonapart's invasion of Egypt in the 1798 (Mortiemer 1982: 84). The presence of the Britishers in Bengal provided the objective conditions for new forms of Islamic ideas and organizations, at the time of the dissolution of Mughal empire. It was in such a milieu that intellectuals such as Seyyed Ahmad Khan became capable enough to express their modernist ideas. In this vein, Bonapart's invasion of Egypt, revealed the helplessness of Muslims, and paved the way for reformers such as Seyyed Jamal Addin Asadabadi (Al-Afghani) to pose his opposition to Western superiority in the context of a new Islamic perception.

In the late nineteenth century, Ottoman Empire became well aware of its inferiority to European powers; hence the desire to reform (Kedouri 1980: 8-25). The rulers then intended to grasp modernization in military terms as well as through such things as the constructions such as railway, provisions for electricity, drinking water and medicine. The people also were attracted by welfare and technology, and many of them pleaded for new education system (Watt 1988: 46). Those who sought Western science and technology were, however, ignorant of its far-reaching social and cultural consequences. Now Muslim societies of Indian subcontinent and Middle East region were basically rural, based on kinship system under semi-feudal conditions with its particular social strata, though the towns were entering into expansion with the emergence of a mercantile class.
In such a situation Muslim intelligentsia revealed a paradoxical feeling, indicative of both inferiority before the West, and a hope to overcoming the colonial rule and gaining access to the Western achievements. They devoted a great deal of attention not only to the Western dominance but also to their own internal weaknesses and deficiencies (Humphreys 1982: 75-77). In this manner Muslim intelligentsia were preoccupied with modern ideas and institutions as well as the tradition of their own societies. The response of the intellectuals to the challenge presented by the West assumed three forms: modernism, traditionalism, and reformism (Sharabi 1970: 6-10).

Among Muslim intellectuals who have brought modernity into the light of Islamic ideas, Seyyed Jamal Addin Asadabadi (al-Afghani) is regarded as the main founder and the most outstanding pioneer. He was born in Asadabad, Iran, in 1838; he died in Istanbul, Turkey, on March 9, 1897. He spent most of his life out of Iran to actualize the idea of pan-Islamism. An ideologue and a politician, he promoted the concept of unity of all Muslims against British rule in particular and against global western interests in general. His belief in the potency of a revived Islamic civilization in the face of European domination significantly influenced the development of Muslim thought in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In particular, his call for Muslim solidarity influenced Egypt’s Nationalist Movement, Turkey’s Tanzimat reforms, as well as Iran’s Constitutional Movement1.

Seyyed Jamal Addin symbolized “three types of Muslim responses to the West: the defensive call to arms, the eager attempt to learn the secret of Western strength, and the

1 Constitutional Movement (1905-11) is the first and one of the most powerful social and political upheavals in the twentieth century. This movement was formed against the despotic rule of the Shah and in favor of justice and law. More important among the achievements of this movement were the first constitution of Iran and the parliamentary system of law-making.
internalization of Western secular mode of thought (Mortiemer 1982: 115). He represented ‘Islam’ as the embodiment of all the Muslim societies vis-a-vis the otherness of the West as a whole. He established an antagonistic relationship between Islam and the West, considering them as two correlative concepts (Smith 1957: 49).

Seeing the Muslim Ulama as the main obstacle to resurgence of Islam, Seyyed Jamal Addin made an eager attempt to learn more and more from the West. He lamented, “our Ulama these days have divided science into two parts. One, they call Muslim science, and one European science. Because of this they forbid others to teach some of the useful sciences. They have not understood that science is that noble thing that has no connection with any nation.... Men must be related to science, not science to men” (quoted in Keddie 1983; 62). However, his image of science is not limited to the modern notion of science. He refers to the need of a science with “a comprehensive soul for all sciences, so that it can preserve their existence, apply each of them in its proper place, and become the cause of the progress of each one of those sciences” (Ibid.: 60). In fact, he introduces his notion of philosophy to science to impart basis and aim to science. “It is philosophy”, he continues, “that makes man understandable to man, explains human nobility, and shows man the proper road” (Ibid.: 61).

Seyyed Jamal Addin, in his famous exchange with Ernest Renan goes further and surpasses religion to embrace science and philosophy. Indeed in part of his answer to Renan he conceives of religion as a transitive phase in the process of man’s evolution. He argues that “since humanity, at its origin, did not know the causes of events that passed under its eyes and the secret of things, it was perforce led to follow the advice of its teacher and the orders they gave. This obedience was imposed in the name of the
supreme Being to whom the educators attributed all events, without permitting men to
discuss its utility or its disadvantages...but one cannot deny that it is by this religious
education that...all nations have emerged from barbarism and marched toward a more
advanced civilization” (Ibid.: 86).

Nevertheless, Seyyed Jamal Addin is to be classified as a reformist for his lifetime
enterprise to unify Islamic world revivify ‘Islam’ against the West, and his struggle
against both traditional Ulama, as well as modernist Islamic thinkers, such as Sir Seyyed
Ahmad Khan. In a comparative overview, when Seyyed Ahmad Khan is conceived as a
pioneer of modernist Islam and Hassan al Banna and Abul Ala’ Mawdudi, as the
examples of conservative Islamic traditionalism, Seyyed Jamal is to be located in
between and recognized as a reformist.

In the cultural and political planes, however, he expressed alarm at the threat of Western
domination. Although he announces the privileges of a republican political system, but
due to the historically institutionalized despotism and superstitions of the time, he
advocated a more open and rationalized dictatorship, or “a just king recognizing the
sovereignty of a fundamental law” (Hourani 1962: 116).

---

2 He has criticized harshly Seyyed Ahmad Khan an his followers and labeled them as naturalists
and materialists (see Keddie 1983).

3 Seyyed Abul Ala’ Mawdudi was born in the city of Aurangabad in South India in the 1903. In
1920s, Maududi was involved in journalism as well as politics in Delhi. He participated in the
Khilafat Movement, and became associated with the Tahrik-e Hijrat, which was a movement in
opposition to the British rule over India. He took up the editorship of the monthly Tarjuman al-
Qur’an in 1933. Around the year 1940, Maududi developed ideas regarding the founding of a
more comprehensive and ambitious movement and this led him to launch a new organisation
under the name of the Jamaat-e-Islami. Maududi was elected Jamaat’s first Ameer and remained
so till 1972 when he withdrew from the responsibility for reasons of health. After migrating to
Pakistan in August 1947, Maududi concentrated his efforts on establishing an Islamic state and
society in the country. However, Maududi was often arrested and had to face long spells in prison.
He wrote prolifically on disciplines such as Tafsir, Hadith, law, philosophy and history. He died
1979, after a surgical operation in United States (see Nasr 1994: 98-121).
The main heritage left by Seyyed Jamal Addin for the Muslim world may be summed up as “the belief in inherent competence of Islam to lead and promote Muslim societies, the struggle against Muslims submission to the status quo, and a return to original sources of Islamic thought, a rational interpretation of Islamic doctrines, and the struggle against despotism and colonialism as the first step in social and intellectual resurgence of the Muslims” (Enayat 1980: 113). Although Seyyed Jamal’s influence on the Constitutional Movements in Iran, Egypt, and Turkey is evident, but “there are numerous examples of Afghani’s working with, not against, autocratic rulers and the actual reforms he wrote about have more to do with modern rationality and strength than with popular sovereignty” (Keddie 1994: 24). However, many Muslim intellectual of different dispositions ranging from progressive modernists to reformists to conservative traditionalists, were inspired by Seyyed Jamal’s enlightening ideas. In the whole he may be regarded as a reformist, for “he wishes both to destroy false views of Islam held by Muslims and criticisms of Islam made by Europeans” (Hourani 1962: 120). Although he criticizes harshly many aspects of traditional Islam, and he praises new ideas and modern institutions, he is not regarded as much of a modernist as Seyyed Ahmad Khan.

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98) is rightly regarded as the first significant Indian Muslim speculative modernist. He did not, however, establish a system of theology or school of thought, though he did indicate a methodology and a series of principles which were refined by his successors and which are still a clear influence on the modern speculative rationalists…. His basic thesis was that “the word of God (Quran) must be in harmony with the work of God (nature) (Bannerman 1988: 114-15).
Seyyed Ahmad Khan, having despaired of the Indian Ulama's capacity to comprehend the modern world proceeded to make a constructive contribution to updating laws and policies. Thus, to reinterpret Islam to meet modern challenges he "re-read Quran in the light of nineteenth century Western science" (Mortimer 1982: 101). Seyyed Ahmad Khan established the foundations of his ideas by reconsidering the notion of truth. In this respect he postulates both God and science as truth. Then he reaches the conclusion that "there cannot be any discrepancy between the truth of God (of the Qur'an) and of science. Further, the word of God and the work of God (as we get to know it better by the advance of science) cannot contradict each other or be at variance" (See Sayyid Ahmad Khan's *Tafsir*, quoted in Troll 1978: 165). Along with science, he also lays emphasis upon reason, and insists "that the variable interpretations must nevertheless be consistent with the laws of nature and with reason" (Bannerman 1988: 115). He takes reason in its modern sense and argues that reason is an "inherited capacity in man by which he draws conclusion on the basis of observation of objective phenomena or mental thinking processes...the capacity of man which has enabled him to understand and control the forces of nature" (Quoted in Dar 1957: 161). It is obvious that Seyyed Ahmad Khan was largely influenced by the early European positivist ideas. He also showed a great deal of interest in the Western system of education. Such affiliation to European scientific method and system of education was quite compatible with his sense of cooperation with the British colonial rule (Ahmad: 126-7). Although Seyyed Ahmad Khan did not talk systematically about the nature of the state and form of government, but it seems "he had opted for gradual progress towards representative government in British India" (Bannerman 1988: 117).
Seyyed Ahmad Khan's enterprise to adapt Islamic Ideas with modern science and socio-political Institutions culminated in a rich legacy for the consequent bearers of modernist Islam. However, his affiliation with modern Western ideas appeared harmful for the majority of traditionalist Muslim scholars who found modern ideas and institutions as a Western product: hence non-Islamic. They proceeded to resist to this new enemy, without enough awareness of its content and ingredients. Thus, they were not able to make any significant contribution to any intellectual discourse concerning Islam and modernity. The Islamic anti-modern outlook, however, was brought into an intellectual plane by Hassan-al Banna.

Hassan Asl-Banna (1906-19949) the Egyptian Muslim activist, the founder and supreme figure of the Muslim Brotherhood (1928). Al-Banna studied literature and theology at Dar al-Ulum. While teaching at Damanhour, he created a movement which eventually moved its center of operations to Cairo and was later to flourish throughout the Muslim world (see Abdel-malek 1983: 45).

Banna followed initially a spiritual awakening based on Islamic principles, and raised a world-wide call aiming to teach reverence for God to all of mankind. Not only did he try to accomplish the task of liberating Islamic fatherlands from all foreign rules, he also set out to eliminate the impact of Western culture on the Muslim societies by reviving Islam (Commins 1994: 131-2). For him “the introduction of the traditions and values of the West has corrupted society, bred immorality, and distorted the inherited and traditional values of Muslim society (Mitchell 1969: 233). He conceived of the West as a declining civilization, and invited all the peoples “to follow the sacred path that God had traced for them and to hold a straight course” (quoted in: 100). He portrayed European civilization
as the one which “consisted of atheism, immorality, individual and class selfishness, and usury” (Commins 1994: 133). To overcome the destructive impact of the West on the Muslims, Banna set forth the credo of Muslim Brotherhood, a construction which mentioned the beliefs, power and duty of the Muslims and encouraged them to act against the West in favor of Islam (see Abdel-Malek 1983: 45-47). Such a credo inevitably entailed its corresponding political expression. In this respect, in one of his writings, ‘Mushkilatuna’ (our problems), Banna maintains that “only God is the ultimate ruler while those entrusted with authority should rule in accordance with his orders” (quoted in Khadduri 1970: 80). The ruler, thus, “is responsible to God and the people” (Commins 1994: 135). Indeed the Islamic government is the guardian as well as the guide for the society of the Muslims. Here Banna is not silent about the society of muslims. Since he believed that the solution of all the problems is to return to Islam, he formulated an Islamic theory of society including Islamic laws economics and norms on the basis of which the Muslims should shape their own society (see Ibid.: 133-144).

Between the two responses given to the challenge of modernity, that is, traditionalism represented by Banna and Maududi, and modernist Islam provided by Sir Seyyed Ahmad Khan, lies a third one, reformism. The reformist response is neither so conservative as to fit in traditional category, nor so progressive as to be adjusted to modern one. This response being closer than other ones to Seyyed Jamal’s ideas, reached its culmination in Muhammad Iqbal who set out to bring the East and the West together.

Muhammad Iqbal (1875-1938), as well as being a political and religious thinker, he was a poet, a philosopher, and a mystic in the tradition of Jalal alDin Rumi, an important Sufi scholar in the thirteenth century. In addition, he had studied at Cambridge and at Munich
and had an understanding of Western modes of thought and philosophy rarely seen among Muslim scholars of the twentieth century.... His starting point was that human knowledge and religious experience were not opposed to one another, that "philosophic rationality and religious intuition were complementary ways of understanding the truth and that belief enabled him to combine a variety of perspectives" (Bannerman 1988: 118).

In the view of modernist Muslims who advocated early positivism, Islam should be scientifically verifiable. In contrast, traditionalist Muslims believed in one single unique interpretation of Islam. None of these outlooks satisfied Iqbal, who leaned to the hermeneutic understanding of religion. He made "a distinction between experience as a natural fact, significant of the normally observable behaviour of reality, and experience as significant of the inner nature of reality". Then he argued, "in the domain of science we try to understand its meaning in reference to the external behaviour of reality; in the domain of religion we take it as representative of some kind of reality and try to discover its meanings in reference mainly to the inner nature of that reality" (Iqbal: 196).

'Unity' is the key concept on which Iqbal constructed his theories. With reference to the concept of 'unity' he claimed that he found no reason "to suppose that thought and intuition are essentially opposed to each other" (Iqbal 1994: 2). He maintained instead that the two "spring up from the same root and complement each other. The one grasps Reality piecemeal, the other grasps it in its wholeness" (Ibid.). His profound knowledge of Western philosophy rendered him powerful enough to make an epistemological critique of modernity. Referring to Kant's idea that thought is essentially finite, and that it is unable to capture the infinite, Iqbal held it as the incapability of the logical
understanding of seeing the multiplicity as a coherent universe” (Iqbal 1994: 6). He advanced the argument that essentially “thought is not static; it is dynamic and unfolds its internal infinitude in time, like the seeds which, from the very beginning carries within itself the organic unity of the tree as a present fact” (Ibid.). In this way Iqbal removed the demarcating line drawn by the Enlightenment thinkers between rational thought and religious faith.

Relying upon his conception of unity he introduced religion in his social and political theory. In his view, “Islam does not bifurcate the unity of man into an irreconcilable duality of spirit and matter. In Islam God and the universe, spirit and matter, church and state are organic to each other” (Iqbal 1973: 5). Iqbal formulated his theory of society on the basis of “equality, solidarity, and freedom” (Iqbal 1994: 154), as the “essence of ‘Tawhid’ [unity]” (Ibid.). Then he defined his notion of Islamic state with reference to the three ideal principles, equality, solidarity, and freedom. For Iqbal, such a state “is an endeavour to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them in a definite human organization” (Ibid.). Of course social and political ideas of Iqbal were initially theoretical devices rather than practical programs. In fact, he “articulated those Islamic principles which he believed were fundamental for a rejuvenation of the Islamic community while leaving the practical implementation to the politicians, economists, sociologists, etc” (Esposito 1983: 188).

II. Iran and Modern Islamic thinking

Despite the above-mentioned intellectual enterprise in the Middle East and Indian sub-continent, Iran was a latecomer in the domain of modern Islamic socio-political ideas.
This may be traced back to the initial stages of consolidation of Islam, when many opponents of Arab dominance in Iran adopted the principle of Imam against that of Caliph, and embraced Shiism as their distinguished religion (Algar 1969: 2). This departure was completed when Safavid monarchy (1501-1722) announced Shiism as the official religion of Iran in the early sixteenth century (Ibid.: 1). In this way Iranian Shiism found its own institutions and ideas deferring from those of Sunnis, and Iran emerged as a powerful rival to Ottoman Empire who regarded itself as the unique representative of Muslim societies. These historical records might explain the reason for the lack of a constructive relationship between Iranian thinkers and those of other Muslim societies; however, it would not explain the delay of Iranian Muslim thinkers in dealing with modernity.

To put it more precisely, in comparison with Muslim societies, such as, Egypt or Turkey, Iran, in the eve of twentieth century, was less receptive to entering a dialogue with modernity. As a result the dialogue took place somewhat later in this country. Three main reasons may be cited for such a delay. Firstly, contrary to the Ulama of the Sunni sect, who believed historically in obeying the governmental apparatus working under the name of Islam, that of Shia sect did not recognize any government as legitimate, but that which is led by Imam. Of course, the acceptance of the existing regime was deemed as a temporary necessity, “but the religious guidance in all matters, including political ones was to come from the Mujtaheds (Clergies allowed to give fatwa through independent reasoning) and Ulama in general rather than from the political rulers” (Voll 1982: 105). This prevented the central government from gaining enough power to initiate reforms.
Secondly, in parallel with Ulama’s view of existing government, the opposition of the merchants and minority leaders to the government put limitations upon the power of Shah (king), and appeared as contributory to engendering a delay in reforms and taking initial steps towards modernization (Ibid.). However, with the breathtaking efforts of a group of intellectuals, emerging in the late nineteenth century, Ulama also became acquainted with modern social and political ideas. In particular, the role of Mirza Malkum Khan¹ and Seyyed Jamal Addin Asadabadi, who emmerged as the two apostles of change in enlightening the Ulama, was of momentous importance (Algar 1969: 184-204). Many of them were fascinated by constitutionalism as a means of restraining the power of Shah, and tried to adapt it with Islamic principles. For instance three of the high-ranking Mujtahids, who were qualified to be followed acknowledged that parliament is in the service of the glory of the Islamic state (Kermani 1988: 87-8).

Thirdly, Iran has never been colonialized totally and semi-colonialization by the Western colonial powers brought about a delaying confrontation of the society with modern ideas and institutions. However, similar to many oriental societies, Iran inevitably encountered modernity and was heavily affected by its consequences. The acquaintanceship of the Iranian intellectuals with modern ideas along with the partial presence of the colonial power heralded a new era. Almost 1803-1828, the period in which Iran suffered defeats in the wars against Russia, is mentioned as the period characterized by the inception of Iran’s constant relationship with the West (Behnam 1996: 19). In that moment Abbas

¹ Mirza Melkum Khan was born of Armenian parents (1833/4- ). He “spent most of his youth in Paris, receiving his education first at American schools and then at the Polytechnique, where, on the advice of Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir [a reformist prime minister], he studied political science. Shortly after the disgrace of Amir Kabir he returned to Iran. ...[In Iran he tried to form a] nucleus of highly men for the dissemination and eventual application of his projects of reform-political and economic organization according to European model. ...He also suggested that use
Mirza, heir apparent to Fath Ali Sahh (1797-1834), touched the backwardness and weakness of Iran's society, and along with Qaem Maqam Farahani, a reformist prime minister, set out to overcome the backwardness and weakness. Trying to establish modern system of military and some industries, Abbas Mirza thought of sending students to Western Europe (Ibid.: 23). Moreover Tabriz, the city of the prince, was a bridge, linking Iran to Russia and Ottoman Empire.

In the early nineteenth century, Iran was mainly an agrarian society governed by an absolute state. In this period the only groups exerting partial influence on social and political process were the Ulama and the merchants (Lambton 1961: 123-139). However, in the course of Iran's encounter with the West, particularly in the mid nineteenth century, a group of intellectuals, distinct from Ulama, emerged in Iranian public life. Committed to social and political practice, they challenged the traditionally held metaphysical bases, and "were strongly convinced that the principle causes of the social decay, injustice, and oppression they saw in Iran lay in men's ignorance and archaic sense of values, and that only with scientific knowledge could their society liberate itself" (Bayat-Philipp 1980: 47). These men did not take change as dangerous, but the harbinger of reason, science, freedom, and progress, and set out to advance reforms in the society from different points of view. Mirza Melcom who favored the Western social and political institutions (Algar 1969: 185-193), and Seyyed Jamal who sought for reason, science, and progress through religious reform (Enayat 1980: 112) laid the foundation for a new intelligentsia. The formative endeavors of such intelligentsia provided the intellectual foundation of Constitutional Movement. The movement which was seemed as

should be made of the special knowledge of the Ulama for the reformation of the legal system, and in his newspaper, Qanun repeatedly expressed devotion to the Ulama (Algar 1969: 185-193).
a call for limitation of the power of the Shah, appeared to be a watershed in the Iranian intellectual development, a moment for rethinking traditions, as well as for pondering over modernity (see Geissari 1997). In the era of post-Constitutional Movement, particularly between 1908-1920, it was expected that the interaction between different trends of the intellectuals, along with a constant dialogue between the intellectuals and the society could lead to a dominant discourse or competing discourses capable of reconstructing social and political ideas with a great deal of focus on traditional as well as modern factors. (see Adamyat 1977). In other words, despite the weakness of the central government and the fact that the country was in turmoil, following the Constitutional Movement¹, Iranian society was prone to absorb elements of modernity in the context of continuity and change. However, the coup of 1921 by Reza Shah¹, gave rise to an absolute state. Reza Shah’s dictatorship posed a serious obstacle to the relationship between the intellectuals and the society, and only allowed the existence of a narrow path for the discourse of modernity, devoid of its democratic components, while other discourses were halted. Of momentous importance among these discourses were the modern Islamic discourse based on Seyyed Jamal’s modern ideas, and the traditional

¹ Constitutional Movement is the first and one of the most powerful social and political upheavals in the twentieth century. This movement was formed against dispotic rule of the Shah and in favor of justice and law.

¹ Reza Khan (1878-1944) was of a family of chiefs of a clan named Pahlevan. In Tehran he enlisted as a private in an Iranian military unit under Russian instructors. Backing by Britain, he staged a coup d'etat in 1921 and took control of all the military forces. Reza Khan’s efforts between 1921 and 1925 as, successively, war minister and prime minister under Ahmad Shah, the last Shah of Qajar’s dynasty, resulted in the formation of an army loyal to him, the achievement of order, and finally, in 1925, the deposition of the last Qajar Shah and the transference of sovereignty to himself. In 1933, improved terms were gained for Iran on the oil concession granted to a British company in 1901. Trade necessities, fear of the Soviet grip on the routing of Iranian goods to Europe, and fear of British influence in the south and of Soviet influence in the north made Reza Shah turn to Nazi Germany. His refusal to abandon what he conceived to be obligations toward numerous Germans in Iran in 1941 occasioned an Anglo-Soviet invasion of the country, to ensure the safe passage of American supplies to the Soviet front through Iran. In
discourse of the Ulama, represented by Sheikh Fazlullah’s Nouri. Later the former was
reproduced and developed by thinkers, such as Bazargan and Shariati and the latter by
prominent figures like Navab Safavi.

Reza Shah set out to establish a centralized state through the oppression of different
ethnic groups. Also he tried to modernize educational and judicial system through a
powerful initiative to weaken the role of religion in both spheres. In the social realm he
set out to activate women and one of his initiatives was to eliminate forcefully women’s
veil as part of their traditional clothes.

The most successful part of Reza shah’s policies during 1925-1940 was the construction
of infrastructures, including the establishment of a modern army, modern bureaucratic
system, and 200 industrial manufactories as well as development of electricity,
communication and transportation means (Bharier 1971: 69-72). In order to proceed to
successfully implement his policies, Reza shah had to construct an alternative ideology to
the prevailing Islamic ideology. For this reason he set out to revive the image of ancient
Iran by laying a great deal of emphasis on Arian race in shaping the Iranian nationality.

September 1941 Reza Shah abdicated and left Iran. He died in South Africa in 1944 Reza (see
Encyclopedia Britannica).

Sheikh Fazlulah Nouri (1843-1909) was one of the leading high-ranking clerics who opposed
the Constitutional Movement for lack of a powerful role for the Ulama and the centrality
of Sharia in the constitution. He also “showed a strong concern for order, and a belief in the Shah
and the existing system of government which must not be weakened” (Martin 1987). After the
winning of the constitutionalists, Sheikh was arrested and executed. His ideas, namely, the
centrality of Sharia and Ulama has bee a powerful source of inspiration for many Iranian Islamist
activists and political groups.

Mehdi Bazargan, the founder of Nebzat Azadi (liberation Movement of Iran), and the first prime
minister of Iran after the Islamic revolution of 1979. is regarded as the most important pioneer of
modern Islamic thought in Iran. He is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

Ali Sharit and his ideas are the subject of chapter five.

Navab Safavi (1924-1956) was a militant young cleric who founded the organization of
Fadayan-e Eslam (devotees of Islam) “to push back the tide of de-Islamization or apostasy that
had been ushered in by Reza Shah” (Rahnema and Nomani 1996: 80).
The task of modernization from above was taken up by Reza shah’s son, Mohammad Reza. In fact the process of modernization that took place in the era of Mohammad Reza shah was but the expansion and development of what his father had initiated. To put comparatively, “in Iran like China and Russia but unlike France and England, the state - but not the bourgeoisie class - has been the main modernizing agent” (Milani 1988: 71). Mohammad Reza, also proceeded to modernize the country without a democratic process, and aggrandized more and more the glories of pre-Islamic Iran through an expensive reconstruction of ancient Iran. Although Mohammad Reza Shah, following his father, halted the emergence of alternative discourses, but he let a sort of interaction between modern and traditional sects of the society. For, his modernization strategy “created pervasive dualisms in the economy, in cultural arenas and in modes of thinking. It increased the power of the modern sectors of the economy without destroying the power of the bazaar, and it somewhat secularized the society but fell short of substantially diminishing the Ulama’s power” (Ibid.: 70).

1 Mohammad Reza (1919-1980) was the eldest son of Reza shah Pahlavi. He was educated in Switzerland and returned to Iran in 1935. In the early 1950s a struggle for control of the Iranian government developed between the Shah and Mohammad Mosaddeq, the leader of Iran’s National Movement. Mosaddeq’s growing power gained from his struggle to nationalize the vast British petroleum interests in Iran forced Mohammad Reza appoint Mosaddeq premier. Later Shah tried to dismiss Mosaddeq but was himself forced to leave the country by Mosaddeq’s supporters. Several days later, however, Mosaddeq’s opponents, probably with the covert support and assistance of the United States, restored Mohammad Reza to power. The shah reversed Mosaddeq’s nationalization. With U.S. assistance he then proceeded to carry out a national development program, called the White Revolution, that included construction of an expanded road, rail, and air network; a number of dam and irrigation projects; the eradication of diseases such as malaria; the encouragement and support of industrial growth; and land reform. He also established a literacy corps and a health corps for the large but isolated rural population. Opposition to the shah himself was based upon his autocratic rule, corruption in his government, the unequal distribution of oil wealth, forced westernization, and the activities of Savak (the secret police) in suppressing dissent and opposition to his rule. Widespread dissatisfaction among the lower classes, the Shi’ite clergy, the bazaar merchants, and students led in 1978 to the growth of support for the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a Shi’ite religious leader living in exile in Paris. Rioting and turmoil in Iran’s major cities brought down four successive governments; on Jan. 16, 1979, the shah left the country, and Khomeini assumed control. The Shah traveled to Egypt, Morocco, The Bahamas. Mexico, and died in 1980 in Egypt. (Encyclopedia Britanica).
Constitutional Movement brought with itself modern institutions, such as new educational system, university, bureaucracy, and military, through which new social strata came into social life, which eventually led to a drastic, far-reaching change in the social relations. Of course, the new situations required new ideas. However, due to the dominance of Ulama over religious issues, Islamic socio-political ideas did not undergo any significant development until the early 1950s.

It was only in the midst of the National Movement of the 1950s that religious socio-political ideas were brought into intellectual domain and the formations of different Islamic intellectual trends, though incomplete and crude, took place. In the course of these formative years, Navab Safavi, the leader of Fadaian Eslam (Devotees of Islam) in consonance with Egypt’s Muslims Brotherhood, called for enacting Islamic laws instead of secular ones, and tried to respond the challenges of modernity with resort to Islamic tradition (Rahnema and Nomani 1996: 79-83). Modernist Islam, in turn, was manifested in two versions, Marxian and liberal. Bazargan as the most significant pioneer to appropriate modernity reconstructing Islamic socio-political ideas, in conformity with Seyyed Ahmad Khan. Bazargan put forward a positivist version of Islam, with a liberal political theory, while God-Worshipping Socialists tended to adapt Islam with socialism (see Nekoorooh 1999). The latter, although, failed to gain adequate capacity to nurture next generation of Muslim intellectuals, later on it was restored in Ali Shariati’s ideas.

At this juncture, Islam in its reformist form did not find a positive identity. To some extent, Seyyed Mahmud Taleqani1, an intellectual cleric who spent much of his time out

---

1 Seyyed Mahmud Taleqani (1911-1980), is a progressive cleric who is regarded as one of the outstanding leaders of Islamic Revolution. Fighting against dictatorship since 1940s onward, Taleqani was one of the members of Liberation Movement of Iran founded by Mehdi Bazargan. On the eve of Islamic revolution he was released from the Shah’s jail and played a vital role in
of the circle of clerical institution, made some contribution to reformism (see Bayat 1987: 67-94). But this type of Islamic response to modernity in Iran reached its culmination in the late 60s and early 70s, with the emergence of Ali Shariati, the most influential intellectual in contemporary Iran.

In the midst of 1970s, with the rise of oil price, and as a result of social mobilization, urbanization began to accelerate (Ashraf 1996: 33-4). In this way a huge number of the poor urban migrants were entering in the social milieu, and a wide spectrum of people were being identified as the middle class. The role of this new middle class in the process changes and this was of great importance, for a large sect of the middle class, including the majority of government employees, along with the white collars of private sector, were regarded as a powerful force of fundamental social and political changes (Adibi: 1970: 117).

At this juncture, contradictory elements, such as religious faith and scientism, Imamat (religious leadership) and democracy, Islamic cosmopolitan and nationalism, capitalism and socialism, this world and hereafter, converged within the discourse of Islamic reformism. For this reason, there was the coming together of a wide range of social sectors, including urban religious masses, traditionalist merchants, urban middle class, and Muslim, nationalist, and leftist intellectuals leading to a total revolution (Ashraf 1996: 37-40). In fact, the revolution of 1979 was comprehensive enough to encompass “traditional classes and organizations as well as modern classes, parties and organizations” (Bashirieh 1998: 73). In this period Shariati’s reformist ideas, in this

leading the revolutionary movement, while Ayatollah Komeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution, was in Paris. Taleqani’s enthusiasm for democracy brought about his serious opposition to the theory of Guardianship of Jurisconsult formulated by Ayatollah Khomeini.
period showed enough potential to generate a discourse covering such a wide range of social sectors. However in the course of 1980s, a new social arrangement was formed so that reformist discourse was not able to preserve its wide domination. In this period, a time of eight years war with Iraq, a wide “gap emerged between the vast coalition and separated the whole traditional classes from the modern ones” (Ibid.). In these years, traditional commercial capitalism (bazaar or merchants and small shopkeepers), along with the consolidation of the clergies power in the state apparatus, brought about a powerful social current, and in this vein religious masses achieved a new status and were elevated up to the middle class. Such a social process provided the way for the domination of traditional discourse, while borrowed heavily from postmodernism, albeit to support religious authority. This traditional discourse was best represented in the writings of Fardid and Davari. This discourse implies notions such as absolutism, the presence of religion in public and private realms, idealism, the essentiality of religious codes, authority of religious sentiments, guardianship of the Ulama, challenging the West as a whole, and reconstruction the tradition.

In the midst of Iran-Iraq war, parallel to the dominant traditional discourse, there emerged signs of a new thinking. This, to some extent, corresponded to the new social conditions that were gradually emerging. Standing at a considerable distance from the revolution, a new generation was entering into the social milieu whose demands, attitudes and perceptions were quite deferent from the former generation. Socially, such a change

---

However, because of his demise in the early period of Islamic republic, his ideological contrast with Ayatollah Khomeini and the majority of the clergies did not become illustrated enough.

1 Ahmad Fardid (1912-1994), a philosopher and philologist who was educated in France and Germany. He gained also a deep and vast knowledge about oriental philosophies and mysticism, including Islamic philosophy and Sufism. From 1960 he was appointed as a professor of philosophy in Tehran University to teach European philosophy.
implied a significant shift in 'reference group' from the religious authority to collective rationality. For, "the presence of two million university students was indicative of the emergence of an important reference group in the course of the development of the society" (Piran 1998: 35). Moreover, the rearrangement of bureaucratic system helped the technocrats and practitioners to gain their lost status. Now many of the managers of the public sector were involved in economic activities in the private sector, which brought about new demands, different from those of the traditional merchants. Such a process along with the profound emotional shock felt from the inability to achieve the avowed goals of war entailed a different discourse. The new discourse being formed in contrast to the discourse of traditional Islam, contained elements such as, the representation of religion as a matter of private realm, acceptance of the authority of science, endorsing relativism, secularism, pursuit of short term goals, reliance upon utilitarian rationalism, along with a softened attitude toward the West. The work of Soroush\(^3\) captured these sentiments and at this time it is Islamic modernism that flourished in Iran. The modernist vision gained some eminence, however, it was by no means the single most dominant expression.

In the process of these social developments, what captured the attention of Muslim intellectuals was the increasing tendency of different sects of the society, specially the youth, towards the West. In their view, Soroush’s ideas, actually, did not set forth a theory of society distinguished from what was portrayed by liberalism. Being worried about the decline of public morals and the growth of capitalist relationship, many of the Muslim intellectuals, set out to look for an alternative approach. In such an enterprise.\\

\(^2\) Reza Davari and his ideas are discussed in chapter three.\\
\(^3\) Abdolkarim Soroush and his ideas are the subject of chapter four.
Shariati's ideas once again came to the fore and gained importance. This time Shariati's ideas were held not as the foundation of an ideology, but as an approach to dealing with the West as well as Islam.