CHAPTER 5
MATERIALISM AND ISLAM

The post-World War II period witnessed drastic socio-political changes throughout the world. The growth of communism and socialist ideas is the most important among them. Under the influence of the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R) around one fourth of the world became communist, and in many other countries the ideology gained tremendous progress. But many West Asian countries were exceptional in this case. The ideological integrity of Islam and the anti-religious and materialistic base of the communist ideology were the reasons for the cold reception accorded to this school in this part of the world.

Iran was an exception to the common trend of West Asia. The Iranian communist party, Tudeh, formed in 1941, was one of the biggest political organizations in the country. The general anarchy that followed the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941 during the Second World War after a near two-decade long authoritarian rule had created socio-political chaos in the country. His successor Mohammed Reza Shah was not efficient enough to contain the oppositional elements who were inspired by the post-war socio-political situations. The general anarchy was utilized by different elements in the society- the clergy, the nationalists and the socialists. By the early 1950s, the Tudeh party gained tremendous influence in the society that it became the second largest communist party in the world, after the Soviet Communist Party. When Dr. Mussaddiq started the campaign for nationalism under the banner of National Front, an alliance of various secular, nationalist parties, it was rivaled only by the Tudeh Party, with over 25,000 members and 300,000 sympathizers, supported by workers, intellectuals, students, teachers, professionals, urban underclass and even some peasants (Bayat 1988:148).
In the 1950s especially after the coup de tat of 1953 Iran witnessed an unprecedented growth of the Tudeh Party. Students, workers, intellectuals and various other segments of the society were recruited to the party. The growth of the party was so alarming for the religious section that during the coup, the Shiʿi clerical community supported the preservation of the monarchy and the return of the Shah was expected as a safeguard against the spread of communism (Arjomand 1988:85). The ulama including Ayatollah Burujirdi, the sole marja-e taqlid of the Shiʿis during this period, followed a quietist attitude in politics because he feared that the attempt to weaken the monarchy will be favourable to the Tudeh and to the growth of communist ideas among the people.

The 1970s witnessed new developments among the Iranian communists. By this time, Tudeh party had lost popular support, and most of its members, especially the students, joined radical organizations. Consequently, certain guerilla groups emerged in the country, the two prominent of them were the Marxist Fedayin-e Khalq and the Islamic leftist Mojahidin-e Khalq (Keddie 1981a:219). Though their methods and tactics were different, they had certain common points in their agenda: opposition to the Shah, indifference to the clerical involvement in politics and hostility to American imperialism. Ideologically, the Mojahidin accepted the principles of both communism and Islam. The importance of these organizations increased to such an extent that the educated youth, intellectuals, the professionals and the workers, who are the products of the industrialization and urbanization of the early 1970s swelled their ranks. In the late 1977, when the revolutionary activities began there were two Mojahidin- Marxist and Muslim, and two Fedayin: Tudeh and activist (Keddie 1981a:223). Thus, Islam played an active role in making ideological shifts in these organizations. The ideological shift was due to the leaning of a major part of the members towards Islam. In this effort some scholars - both the Islamic intellectuals and
the traditional ulama -had a decisive role. Murthaza Mutahhari is the pioneer and one of the most prominent among them.

Mutahhari has played a significant role in combating the threat of communism and providing an alternative ideology to the people on the basis of Islamic principles and philosophy. The influence of communist ideas became so popular that many members of the new generation renounced Islam and embraced materialist ideology. Some reconciled Islam with communism, some others analyzed Islam by using the tools and means of communism and concluded that the two ideologies are compatible. Religious intellectuals like Ali Shariati believed in the compatibility between these ideologies, though he differed on some points. The influence of Communist ideas was so prevalent in the country that even students and youth from the religious background flocked to such organizations. Mojtaba Taleqani, the son of Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani, the leading Shi’i scholar and one of the prominent leaders of the Iranian Revolution, wrote to his father that, "to organize the working class, we must reject Islam, for religion refuses to accept the main dynamic force of history—that of the class struggle. Of course, Islam can play a progressive role, especially in mobilizing the intelligentsia against imperialism. But it is only Marxism that provides scientific analysis of society and looks toward the exploited classes for liberation" (Abrahamian 1980:11)

Mojtaba's word reflects the mindset of the educated youth in the 1970s. It was in this background that Mutahhari realized the ‘seriousness of the issue’. He feared that unless the doctrines of Marxism are analyzed and its ‘real’ nature is revealed to the people, it would threaten the very foundations

1 Shariati was influenced by the Marxist ideology, though he opposed historical materialism. He analysed historical movements on the basis of ‘class struggle’ and argued that even religion is used to exploit the people by the wealthy class. For details see Shariati (1979).
of Islam in the country. He analyzed the doctrines of communism in a critical way, compared them with Islamic principles, and concluded that not Marxism but Islam can serve as a comprehensive ideology against imperialism and despotism and provide a logical explanation for the evolution and course of historical events. Though his attempt was to disarm Marxism ideologically and to present Islam as a better and more logical system than Marxism, he concentrated on its emphasis of materialism and treatment of economic issues. Though he does not mention why he chose this doctrine alone, he may have thought that this is the fundamental principle of the ideology and is most opposed to the religion. Since his purpose was the proclamation of the sublimity of Islam, it was natural that he stressed on materialism. He says, "the real target of my criticism is historical materialism and not the theories of Marx" (Mutahhari 1997:88).

Mutahhari's concern about the integrity of the Islamic society was not because of his fear of propaganda from the part of communists, but about some Muslim intellectuals including Ali Shariati who interpreted Islamic philosophy by using the Marxist tools and means. There was an intellectual debate between the two scholars regarding the attitude to Marxist ideology. However, in the debate Mutahhari never mentions Shariati's name. Instead, he points to a dangerous ploy that threatens Islam. This ploy, according to Mutahhari, is the formation of a tendency to create a materialist exegesis of the Quran. There, instead of referring to Shariati, he criticizes an Iraqi scholar, Ali Wardi, whose views, as Mutahhari summarized them, are similar to Shariati's (Behdad 1994:781).

**Causes for the Growth of Materialism**

Materialism is a school of thought that considers existence and the realm of being as confined to matter. It negates the existence of all that is not perceivable by sense, including God. The idea of materialism is not a new
phenomenon, but it prevailed in the ancient period itself. In ancient Greece, there were many philosophers before Socrates who denied the supramaterials. In Islamic history, during the period of the Prophet, there were materialists in Arabia who challenged the existence of God. The Quranic verse 45: 24 throws light to this aspect.

Materialism took the form of a school of thought during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was then that the materialist ideas took the form of an ideology and many embraced it eagerly. The materialists themselves tried to convince others that the cause of the growth and prevalence of materialism during the 18th and 19th centuries was the emergence of scientific theories and that it was the spread of science and technology that resulted in humanity being drawn towards it. Mutahhari turns down this view. Growth of science or education has nothing to do with materialism. According to him, this observation resembles a "joke more than any noteworthy fact" (Mutahhari 1375/1996:60). He believes that materialists can be found in all classes, educated as well as the illiterate, and education or scientific progress is not the factor for inclination to materialism. If it were so many scientists would not have become staunch theists in the modern society (Mutahhari 1375/1996:60-61). In his view, there are certain historical and social causes for the growth of materialism in the modern age. He identifies six major reasons for the growth of materialism. The first three are applicable to Europe, where the idea had its origin and development. The latter three were common to European as well as to Iranian environments.

Mutahhari finds that the organization and functioning of the Christian church in Europe was the root cause for the inclination of people towards materialism. The inadequacy of its theological ideas and its inhuman attitude

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2 The Quran says that, „And they say “What is There but our life In this world? We shall die and we live, And nothing but Time Can destroy us” (Quran 45:24).
towards the scholars and the masses is the first cause that led Europeans to search for new pastures (Mutahhari 1375/1996:65). He analyzes this point in two sections: the inadequacies of the religious ideas regarding God and violent conduct of the church.

At first, about God, the ideas of the church were not satisfactory to the intelligent and educated people; rather it created an aversion against religion and incited them against theism. He writes that:

[T]he church painted a human picture of God and presented Him to the people in a humanlike form. Those who were brought up to conceive God with these human and physical features under the influence of the Church, later with advances in science came to find that these ideas were discrepant with scientific, objective and sound rational criteria…. Thus, when they saw that the views of the church did not conform to the criteria of science they rejected the issue altogether (Mutahhari 1375/1996:65-66).

Here what made the people alienated from belief in God, is not the growth of science, rather the depiction of God in an irrational and narrow way. When they understand the absurdity of the argument of the church, they took aversion from God itself.

Commending on the opinion of Augustus Comte that “Science has dismissed the Father of nature and the universe from his post, consigning him to oblivion, and while thanking him for his temporary services, it has escorted him back to the frontiers of his greatness”, Mutahhari explains how science became a cause for uncovering the irrationalities of Church's teachings. He says:
[W]hat he [Comte] means is that earlier every event that took place in the world was explained by relating its cause to God. For example, if someone got a fever, the question why the fever had come about and from where it came had the answer that God had sent the fever. What was intended by this statement was… that He was the real and ultimate mover of the world. [On the contrary] this statement meant that God, like a mysterious being or a magician engaged in sorcery, had all of a sudden decided to cause fever without any preparatory cause, and so the fever came about. Later science discovered its cause and it was observed that fever was not brought about by God, but by a certain bacteria. Here God drew back one-step. Henceforth, the theist was forced to say that we would shift our argument to the bacteria. Who created the bacteria? Science also discovered the cause of bacteria by identifying the conditions in which they come to exist. Again God had to draw back one step, and the argument proceeded by asking the cause of that cause. God's retreat continues, and at last, with the spread and expansion of science the causes of a large number of phenomena were discovered,… There man had to dismiss God for good with an apology, because there no longer remained any place and post for Him (Mutahhari 1375/1996:69-70).

Thus, the real problem is the inadequacies of the teaching of Church. The science has helped to understand the shortcoming and equipped the people to reach the realities.

The second section regarding the inadequacies of the Church is its violence towards the people. The Church imposed its religious and scientific views on the people in an authoritarian manner and denied them any freedom
of thought and belief. Mutahhari says that the Church committed two mistakes: firstly, it placed certain scientific principles inherited from the Greek philosophers and Christian theologians concerning the universe and man and treated opposition to them to be heresy, secondly, not only the church exposed and excommunicated these heretics, but tried to find out their dissent and persecuted them in a ruthless manner. This intense repressions of ideas naturally resulted in the development of a negative reaction towards religion (Mutahhari 1375/1996:78).

The second reason was the inadequacy of the philosophical ideas of Europe to deal with theological issues. The inability to satisfy the theological question of the people created an intellectual atmosphere conducive to materialism (Mutahhari 1375/1996:82). The difficulty of the philosophers to define the 'first cause', the discrepancy between the notions of creation of humans by God according to Bible and the theory of evolution propounded by Charles Darwin, and the confusion regarding the approach of the church and the philosophers to predestination and human fate are the examples (Mutahhari 1375/1996:91). The third was the inadequacy of certain social and political concepts. When certain social and political ideas were propounded in the West and the issue of natural rights, especially the people's right to sovereignty was raised, a group of people advocated despotism. It did not recognize any right for the masses vis-à-vis to the rulers and the only thing it recognized for the people was their duty and obligation to the latter. In order to lend justification to their arguments in favour of despotic rule, they took recourse in theology, claiming that the rulers were not answerable to the people but only to God, while the people were answerable to the ruler and owed a duty to them. The people had no right to question the rulers' actions. Only God was entitled to question him and call him to account. Thus, the people had no right over the ruler, although he had rights over them that were their duty to fulfill. Consequently, there arose in the minds of the people a
kind of artificial connection and implication between faith in God on the one hand and the stripping the people off their political rights on the other (Mutahhari 1354/1975:179). The result was that it came to be thought that if one accepted God, one also had to accept the tyranny of the state. The people imagined that if they accepted God they would have to accept social repressions as well and if they wanted social freedom they would have to negate God.

The fourth reason was the defective method of religious preaching by unqualified scholars, the result of which was many religious topics were misread and misinterpreted (Mutahhari 1375/1996:189). Some scholars explain religious doctrines and ideals without having a clear understanding of them. As a result, the listener mistakenly imagined that they are the teachings of religion and that they speak from on in-depth knowledge of these ideas. The issues pertaining to Divine wisdom, will and omnipotence, divine justice, divine dispositions, free will and determination, life after death, the purgatory, Resurrection, heaven and hell, so on (Mutahhari 1375/1996:189). Mutahhari elaborates this point in detail:

[M]an is compelled to obey his instinctive urges. He is gifted with certain instincts that urge him towards goals envisaged in his creation. Urge to have children, desire to seek truth and acquire knowledge and love of wealth are the basic and common instincts in man. Now if these instincts are repressed in the name of religion or God, and celibacy and monasticism are considered holy in the name of faith, and marriage a defilement, if ignorance be considered as being conducive to salvation in the name of faith, if in the name of religion wealth, power and prosperity be considered sources of eternal wretchedness, and
poverty, weakness and deprivation the causes of bliss and happiness (Mutahhari 1375/1996:191)

Such a situation will make more harm to the religion. The consequence will be negative. He writes that “a person who on the one hand gravitates towards religions and religious teachings and on the other, is strongly drawn towards these [the above mentioned] things. Eventually he will either opt for one of these two, or will remain entangled in the conflict between these two forces” (Mutahhari 1375/1996:193). Here what Mutahhari explains is the attitude of some preachers who concentrate on the ritualistic part of Islam and neglect other parts. In fact, Islam gives importance to the life in this world and the hereafter. The worldly life need not be sacrificed for the next, because the fulfillment of material needs is not tantamount to religion. If it is insisted that the positive material values are to be forsaken in the name of religion, naturally the people will develop aversion to that religion. This paves the way for the growth of materialism.

The fifth cause is the disharmony between the sublime spirituality and a person’s inner spiritual ethos. Mutahhari explains that if humans fall victim to the pursuit of corporal appetites, gradually their thoughts begin to conform with their spiritual and moral ethos. The sublime thoughts relating to faith, worship, and the love of God give way to degenerate materialistic ideas and a sense of the futility of life, and the feeling that all that matters is transitory pleasures of the moment (Mutahhari 1375/1996:199). How the social environment causes to the growth of materialism is explained by Mutahhari that,"[A] corrupt social environment initially spoils one's spiritual ethos, and a corrupt spiritual state weakens the basis for the growth of sublime thoughts and strengthens the basis for the growth of base ideas"(Mutahhari 1375/1996:200). The sixth cause is peculiar to modern times, and very
particular to Iran. It is the negligence of the revolutionary character of the
religion by the Muslims. Mutahhari observes that:

[T]he young people see that uprisings, revolutions, struggles
and confrontations are staged by materialists, while believers
are generally found in the camp of the inactive and the
indifferent. For a youth this is sufficient for pronouncing a
negative judgement on the school of Divine thought and a
favourable judgement about materialism (Mutahhari

Mutahhari views that the youth cannot be chastised for this attitude because
they find that the majority of the struggles against despotism and exploitations
are being staged under the individuals inclined towards materialism. On the
other side, the religious scholars have embraced pacifism and treated these
acts as if they were outside the confines of religion. Mutahhari says that this
situation appears strange, because it should have been the opposite. It is faith
in God and worship to Him that links humans to objectives transcending
material things and endow them with the spirit of sacrifice on the path of
these objectives. Moreover, history shows that it were always the prophets
and their followers who revolted against tyrants and despots, and mobilized
the dispossessed and oppressed masses against the corrupt and the affluent
(Mutahhari 1375/1996:211).

Mutahhari vehemently criticizes the religious leaders for this
phenomenon. He says that “those who claimed' to be religious leaders
ignored the Quranic verses about struggle against evil, oppression and
injustice, and developed the spirit of seeking a life of ease and comfort. In
other words, this occurred when self-seeking people and those who sought the
mundane ends of life occupied the seat of the prophets and genuine religious
leaders” (Mutahhari 1375/1996:215). Thus the individuals unworthy to be the religious leaders are responsible for this phenomenon.

The first three reasons are common for all societies – the Christian west as well as to Iran. These three relate to the method of preaching or practice that the religious scholars follow. The next three are particular to Iran and Islamic societies. All the reasons are connected with the distortion of religion by the religious scholars. Whether Christian or Islamic, the religious scholars are responsible for alienating the people from the folds of religion and the people had to find an alternative. Thus they resort to materialism.

By taking materialism into its core, communism provides the ideological solution to the people for this philosophical problem. Thus in Mutahhari's view, the inability of the distorted version of Islam to respond to the intellectual questions of the people is the root of the growth of materialism in Iran. Here the religious ulama are the culprits, not the common people. The simple solution to the 'problem; is to return to the original tenets of the religion and depict them in their true sense. He suggests certain measures. They are:

1. To present the divine teachings in a rational, scientific and logical manner.
2. To present clearly the attitude and principles of Islam towards social economic and political affairs.
3. To counter the expressions of non-specialist opinions in the field of preaching.
4. To regenerate the combative spirit of Islam, i.e., to engage in jihad both intellectually by using pen and tongue, and practically by action and deed (Mutahhari 1375/1996:222-26).
Thus, a return to the true principles of Islam is suggested as the ‘solution’ to prevent the spread of materialism and thereby of communism.

**Appraisal of Historical Materialism**

Historical materialism, which is an economic interpretation of history, explains every human activity from the economic point of view. This means that the basis of all historical movements is its economic structure. The material forces of production and their reciprocal relations fashion history and give direction to all intellectual manifestations of a society like morality, science, philosophy, religion, law, culture and politics. These manifestations change with changes in the mode and relations of production. As historical materialism is the core of the Marxist ideology Mutahhari critically examines it and tries to establish that it is a “baseless and false ideal”.

At first, he examines the various features of historical materialism critically and replies to the arguments of intellectuals including Shariati, who view that Islam is compatible with historical materialism. He views that historical materialism not only does not share anything with Islam, but it itself is self-contradictory. He says that it is a baseless and unscientific theory celebrated as 'scientific theory' achieved by the art of propaganda (Mutahhari 1997:101). In his view, historical materialism is a theory without proofs. At the same time, it is noteworthy that he does not deny the role of economic factors in determining the course of history. What is rejected is the economic factor as the sole element (Mutahhari 2004:35, Mutahhari 1363a/1984:110). However, he maintains that a philosophical theory of history ought to be formulated on the basis of historical evidence, or it should have been deduced and inferred from scientific, philosophical and logical principles. But the historical events that occurred during thousands of years of human history do not confirm this theory (Mutahhari 1997:90).
Secondly, according to the Marxian view, in the relationship between base and superstructure, the former influences and shapes the latter. The economic factors act independently and other factors are dependent on them. But Mutahhari points out that, in many of his writings Marx had raised another issue, which may be regarded as a revision of his previous view. This is the principle of reciprocal causal relationship among all parts of nature and all parts of society. Hence, the priority of one thing (base) over another (superstructure) is meaningless, because if two things are interrelated and dependent upon each other for their existence, and the existence of one is conditioned by that of the other, the question as to which is prior or fundamental is meaningless (Mutahhari 1997:91). What he pointed out here is that the view of Marx has been revised by Marx himself. In some of his statements, Marx emphasized the primacy of the base and its influence on the superstructure. In some other statements, he proposes reciprocal cause-and-effect relationship between the base and superstructure. In short, he was not consistent on this issue. Mao Tse-Tung, the leader of Chinese Revolution, also had the same idea. Quoting from the works of Marx and Mao, Mutahhari points out to this contradiction and concluded that they too deviated from Marxism (Mutahhari 1997:91-94).

Mutahhari indicates to the practical experience of deviations from Marxist ideology by Mao and Lenin. In China, Mao overthrew the feudal regime by the means of an agricultural revolution to establish a socialist regime in its place. According to the theory of Marxism and historical materialism, a country at the stage of feudalism cannot go directly to socialism. Socialism is possible only at the peak of a capitalist society. But China entered the state of socialism without passing through capitalism. Thus without occurring any change in the economic base, a drastic change happened in the superstructure (Mutahhari 1997:95). Secondly, according to Marx the class that can lead a society in the transition from feudalism to
capitalism and has a revolutionary character in the historical movement is the bourgeoisie class. The peasant class can never take initiative for bringing out a revolution. But Mao realized a socialist revolution in the country by creating the peasantry as a revolutionary class (Mutahhari 1997:96). Earlier in Russia, Lenin had created the same course, i.e., established a Socialist Republic in a feudal society, by using the peasantry as the revolutionary force.

The third criticism Mutahhari raised against historical materialism is the self-contradiction in the doctrine of necessary correspondence between the base and superstructure. According to the theory there is a sort of correspondence between the base and superstructure, so that whenever the base is changed, the superstructure is affected, disturbing the social equilibrium and giving rise to crisis, followed by a necessary deterioration of the superstructure. But, Mutahhari says that the historical events have practically disproved this thesis. After the series of economic crises in Europe from 1827 to 1847, Marx and Engels predicted that there would be social and political revolutions. But it never happened. The industrially advanced countries like England, Germany, France and America did not experience socialist revolutions as the Marxist protagonists predicted. The changes in their economic structures have not brought changes in the political, legal and religious aspects, i.e., the superstructure. In the twentieth century, there are certain countries quite similar in respect of economic base, but different from one another regarding their superstructure. The USA and the USSR are the best example of this phenomenon. The similar economic conditions did not warrant identicalness in religion, morality, politics and culture (Mutahhari 1997:97-98).

Mutahhari rejected the idea of historical compulsion for the occurrence of events also. He says that "it is possible that in a capitalist society, the proletarian class attains such a state of prosperity and wellbeing that it may
totally reject all ideas of revolution” (Mutahhari 1361a/1982:45). He is pointing out to the working classes of the western countries like USA, England and Britain, where the wealth concentrated in the capitalists, but the workers did not initiate the revolution, rather they also enjoyed the fruits of the general prosperity. All these cases prove that the notion of necessary correspondence between the base and superstructure is a mere illusion.

Fourthly, according to the theory of historical materialism the superstructure cannot precede the base at any point of history. On the basis of this doctrine, the consciousness of every epoch is necessarily associated with that age. With the lapse of every particular period, the corresponding consciousness also expires. Mutahhari says that practical evidence goes against this hypothesis. There are a number of philosophies, personalities, including religions which are ahead of their times and their own class interest. There are many ideas that were the products of the material needs of a specific period that still remain alive after the passage of considerable time (Mutahhari 1997:98). Fifthly, Mutahhari argues that the theory of historical materialism contradicts itself. According to the theory, all philosophical and scientific theories are inseparably connected with their own specific objective conditions. Hence, their value and validity are not absolute, but dependent upon a specific period. With the lapse of a particular period and changes in the economic conditions, every idea or theory corresponding to it is bound to be replaced by new ideas and theories. Accordingly, the theory of historical materialism too is subject to this law and it also is bound to change in the subsequent time. If it is not subject to this universal law and is an exception, it would mean that there are some laws which are fundamental and independent of any kind of economic base, and if historical materialism is subject to the general law, its value and validity are applicable to that period alone which has given rise to it. In both cases, the theory is contradictory by itself (Mutahhari 1997:101).
After evaluating the various principles of historical materialism, Mutahhari presents the conclusion that the theory is “baseless, unsounded and self-contradictory”. Even its propounders have sometimes proposed opposite views. Hence, according to him, such an ideology cannot be taken to analyze the historical events.

**Islam and Historical Materialism**

Some scholars in Iran find compatibility between Islam and historical materialism. Many Muslim intellectuals also analyzed history from this point of view. Even Ali Shariati was influenced by this ideology and he analyzed historical events on the basis of the class struggle and the importance of the means of production in the evolution of history. Mutahhari took the issue seriously and made a comprehensive discussion to ‘prove’ the incompatibility between the two ideologies. He concluded that the logic of Islam and that of historical materialism are diametrically opposed to each other. It is noted that the argument here is against Muslim scholars who find historical materialism in Islam, not against communists or secular intellectuals.

According to the advocates of historical materialism in Islam, the Quran views societies in a bipolar way. It points out to a kind polarization on the basis of material conditions, i.e., on the basis of prosperity and deprivations of the people. The Quranic terms like *mala* (ruling clique), *mustakbirin* (oppressors, the arrogant), *musrifun* (the extravagant), *mutrafun* (the affluent), and on the other side terms like *mustada’jun* (the oppressed, the deprived) *nas* (mankind, masses), *dhurriyyah* (the insignificant) *aradhil* (the lowest) are considered to denote social classes. On the other hand, Quran put forward bipolarity in spiritual terms also. The *kafirun* (infidels), *mushrikin* (polytheists) *munafiqun* (hypocrites) *fasiqun* (corrupt) and *mufsidun* (mischief

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3 For details, see Shariati (1979 and 2009).
mongers) on the one hand, and *mu'minun* (the believers) *mowahhidun* (the montheists), *salihun* (the virtuous) *muttaqun* (the pious) *muslihum* (reformers), *mujahidun* (the warriors) and *shuhada* (martyrs) are the classes which have spiritual implications.

The advocates of materialism in Islam argue that there is a kind of correspondence between the first material pole and the first spiritual pole, and also between the second material pole and the second spiritual pole. That is, the *kafirun*, *mushrikun*, *fasiqun* and *mufsidun* are the same people who are called 'the *mala*’, *mustakbireen*, *mutrafun* and *musrifin*. Similarly, the *mu'minun*, *salihun*, *muslihun* and *mujahidin* are the same people as *mustada'fun*, *nas*, and *dhurriyya*. It means that Islam also acknowledges that there are only two classes in the society: the oppressors and the exploiters who are also the disbelievers on the one side, and the oppressed and the deprived who are also believers on the other side. In other words, oppression and affluence is accompanying polytheism and disbelief, and oppression and poverty is accompanying belief, monotheism and piety (Mutahhari 1997:103-04).

Mutahhari objects this argument vehemently and argues that the polarization of society into two classes and correspondence between the material and spiritual classes are baseless and false. In the history of Islam there are many examples for believers, pious, virtuous and reformers among the tyrannical ruling class, yet revolted against that class and its values. There are also disbelievers and infidels among the disinheritied and oppressed. In Quran there are examples of Moses and wife of Pharaoh who revolted against their patron and husband respectively. Moses was brought up in the palace and pharaoh's wife also lived in the luxuries of the palace. But this relationship with the *mutrafin* and *mustakbirun* was not a constraint for them to revolt against the tyranny and oppression of Pharaoh. Pharaoh's magicians rose
against their master when they realized the truth and embraced the religion of Moses (Mutahhari 1997:112). In the case of Prophet Muhammed, he led a life of poverty in childhood and it was after his marriage with Khadijah that he become rich and prosperous. It was at this time of prosperity he rose in rebellion against the ‘capitalists’, the usurers and the slavers of Mecca, and revolted against idolatory, which symbolized the corrupt life of those days (Mutahhari 1997:112-13).

From the examples of Quran and Prophet’s life Mutahhari conveys that neither all believers are the oppressed class nor all oppressed are believers. Hence, the correspondence between them is absolutely absurd. However, it is a fact that majority of the believers were oppressed. According to Mutahhari, this is not because there is any correspondence between the social class and spiritual class. He explains the reason that:

This is so because although the human nature which accepts the Divine message is common to both classes and exists in everyone, but the oppressors, the affluent and the extravagant confront a great barrier because their souls are polluted and their habits are deeply entrenched in the evil existing system. There are few out of this class who are capable of freeing themselves from under the mountain load of these evils. But the oppressed class has no such restraints. Their nature not only responds readily to the Divine call, but they see in it the opportunity to recover their lost rights (Mutahhari 1997:113).

At another occasion, Mutahhari points out that the direction of the revolutions are for the benefit of the poor and the downtrodden because they are in the direction of justice and naturally since it is the direction of justice, it is necessary to take the hoardings of the rich and place them at the disposal of the poor (Mutahhari 1985b:25). The oppressed have another additional
reason: they are leaving behind hard circumstances and attaining a better life. This inspires them to support the cause of the Prophets (Mutahhari 1985c:102). Thus, the cause for the minority from the affluent in the fold of Islam is not class antagonism, but the difficulty of the rich to free from the bondage of the evil system. In fact, the ability to respond to monotheism is inherent in all human beings, but to escape from the corrupt system based on wealth, pleasure and luxuries is very difficult (Mutahhari 1997:111-113).

Second criticism of Mutahhari is about the claim that the addressees of Quran are *nas* (people) and it is a term synonymous with the deprived masses. Hence Islam addresses itself to the oppressed masses, and Islamic ideology is the ideology of the oppressed class. Mutahhari dismisses this claim and says that the address of Quran is the human beings which include the whole humankind. No dictionary in Arabic language gives the meaning of the word *nas* as the 'under privileged and oppressed masses', it does not denote any particular class. So the argument is baseless and untrue (Mutahhari 1997: 114-15).

The next argument is that the Quran claims that the leaders, the prophets and martyrs arise exclusively from among the oppressed. The basis for their argument is the Quranic verse, "He it is who has sent among *ummiyyun* a message of their own' (62:2) (Mutahhari 1997:105). Here the term *ummiyyan* has been interpreted as the oppressed masses. Mutahhari states that it is ridiculous to interpret the word *ummiyyun* as community and *ummah* as equivalent to 'the oppressed masses'. In fact, *ummiyyun* is the plural of the term *ummi* which means illiterate. Moreover, if we ascribe it derived from *umma* it means 'community which is composed of different groups and different classes' (Mutahhari 1997:115-16).

Fourthly, it is claimed that the mission and the message of the Prophets is aimed at establishing justice by implementing social equality and
obliterating class distinctions and divisions. The Prophets have always started their mission from the base and later on brought changes in the superstructure i.e. the principles of faith, rituals, moral and behavioural reforms. The superstructure always occupied a secondary place (Mutahhari 1997:107). Mutahhari objects this argument and writes that establishing justice and equality are not their primary goal. They started their works with emphasis on right thinking, correct doctrine, belief, spiritual fervour, love of God, and constant remembrance of the origin of the world and the Day of Resurrection (Mutahhari 1997:117). They gave importance to this aspect and considered them vital for the perfection of humanity.

Fifthly, the advocates of historical materialism hold that the logic of the opponents of the prophets has always been opposed to the logic of the prophets and their followers. The ideology of the opponents has always been conservative, traditional and backward-looking, whereas the ideology of the prophets has always been dynamic, anti-traditional and progressive. Mutahhari says that the opponents of the prophets have a conservative logic is quite natural. If it could be deduced from the Quran that the opponents of the prophets believed in this logic, one might justifiably say that all opponents of prophets belonged to the affluent and privileged class. But what can actually be deduced from the Quran is that this type of thinking is the logic of the leaders of the opponents, the ruling clique and the tyrants, whom Marx regards as owners and distributors of the society's intellectual products (Mutahhari 1997:117). He says that the logic of the prophets should be the logic of dynamism and rationalism is also natural. But it is not justifiable to say that deprivation, exploitation, and oppression of the lower classes have been responsible for moulding their consciousness in this manner, and that their thinking is naturally determined by their deprivations and privations (Mutahhari 1997:117). Thus, he objects to the argument that toils and
persecutions are the moulding factors of progressive, anti-traditional and dynamic ideas of the followers of the prophets.

The sixth argument is that Quran promises that in the struggle between the oppressed and the oppressors the final victory is on the side of the oppressed. It is maintained that this victory of the oppressed fully corresponds with the principle of historical materialism. Mutahhari cites the views of a group of Muslim intellectuals explaining the Quranic verse 28:5. In his *Society and History*, he lists the conclusions of their arguments as; (1) In Quranic view, the society is bipolar: the oppressors and the oppressed. (2) there is a conflict between the oppressors and oppressed, ultimately the latter will be victorious (3) the leaders, guides, apostles and martyrs arise from among the oppressed and (4) the ideological base is always in harmony and correspondence with social base and class character (Mutahhari 1997:110-11). Here it seems that this is a Marxist interpretation of the Quranic verse and the authors fully agree with the principle of historical materialism. Mutahhari makes a detailed discussion of this sixth argument which put forth the idea of inheritance and succession of the oppressed.

Objecting to the interpretations of the verse 28:5, Mutahhari says that the views held by the above mentioned intellectuals are not acceptable because, (1) in Quran there are many other verses which explain and interpret the verse 28:5 and suggest that its contention is true only under certain conditions, and (2) this verse cannot be interpreted as formulating any universal law in itself. This verse is related to the verse preceding it and the one following it. Taken together, they mean a particular issue and not contain any universal principle (Mutahhari 1997:117-18, Mutahhari 1985b:67-69). He explains the point that that in several verses of the Quran the ultimate destiny and fate of history as well as its course of evolution are pictured as the ultimate victory of faith over faithlessness, victory of piety over lust, the
victory of righteousness over corruption and victory of good and godly conduct over perverse behaviour (Mutahhari 1997:118). The Quranic verses like 24:55, 7:128 and 21:105\textsuperscript{4} are examples to these types of verses. They promise victory and successions to those who believe in God, perform good works and are righteous. Incidentally, among the victorious majority may be the oppressed, not because of being oppressed and deprived but they have more chances to free themselves from corruption and evils, as mentioned earlier. By analyzing all these verses, Mutahhari comes to the view that:

[T]he moral value we derive from the verse concerning oppression is deliverance of the oppressed from the tyranny of the oppressor, which implies that God is the Saviour of the oppressed (thus highlights only one Attribute of God), whereas the verse concerning succession embraces all the Attributes of God including the one designated by the former verse (Mutahhari 1997:121).

What is meant is that the verse 28:5 (verse of oppression) should not be taken isolated, because it pertains to only one attribute of God. And since there are other verses, like the 24:55 (verse of succession) which is inclusive of all the attributes of God, the former should be interpreted as part of the latter.

Mutahhari explains another aspect regarding the verse concerning oppression. This verse is preceded by one and followed by another. The contradiction between the 28:5 and other verses of Quran is because of its

\textsuperscript{4} The verse 24:55 says that: ‘God has promised, to those/ Among you who believe / And work righteous deeds, that He / Will, of a surety, grant them/ In the land, inheritance / (Of power), as He granted it/ To those before them;...’

The verse 7:128 reads as: ‘Said Moses to his people : / “Pray for help from God, / And (wait) in patience and constancy: / For the earth is God’s, / To give as a heritage / To such of His servants / As He pleaseth;...’

The 21:105\textsuperscript{th} verse says that: ‘Before this We wrote / In the Psalms, after the Message / (Given to Moses): “My servants / The righteous, shall inherit / The earth.”’
reading separate from the verses preceding and succeeding it (Mutahhari 1985b:70). These three verses read as:

    Indeed Pharaoh exalted himself in the earth and made its people into castes: Abasing one party of them, slaughtering their sons and sparing their women; surely he was of those who work corruption. And we desired to show favour unto those who were oppressed in the earth, and to make them leaders and to make them the inheritors, and to establish them in the earth, and to show Pharaoh and Haman (his prime minister) and their hosts that which they feared from them (Quran 28:4-6, quoted in Mutahhari 1997:122).

Mutahhari says that these three verses are interrelated and and hence should be interpreted when read together. The inseparable connection of these verses absolutely excludes the possibility of deducing any universal principle. What is meant by these verses is that, "Pharaoh indulged in acts of self-aggrandizement, discrimination, repression and infanticide, while God had determined to bestow leadership and inheritance of the earth upon those who were humiliated, oppressed and deprived of their rights" (Mutahhari 1997:122-23). Thus, the promise of inheritance is to the people of Moses and the purpose is to show to Pharaoh and Haman. If the second verse is taken alone, it will be using an incident out of its context, and hence a universal principle of victory of the oppressed against the oppressors cannot be justified on the basis of this verse.

The assumption that the oppressed are promised succession and inheritance on the earth, says Mutahhari, is because of the conception of its advocates that if Islamic culture is regarded to be a revolutionary culture, the recourse to historical materialism is inevitable. Secondly, they observe that there is a clear inclination in favour of the oppressed in Quran that reflected
in its historical discourses about the movements led by the prophets (Mutahhari 1997:124-25). He says that they fail to understand that an ideology which has Divine origin and addresses all human beings, aligned with the values of justice, equality, piety, spirituality, love benevolence and struggle against tyranny, is capable of giving birth to revolutions and profound changes. He believes that the statement that the alignment of Islam with the oppressed is a sort of loose statement. Islam supports the oppressed not because they are oppressed, but it upholds the human values of equity, equality, and justice and directs the believers to strive for the realization of these values (Mutahhari 1997:126). Naturally, the oppressed are the beneficiaries and the oppressors and the exploiters are the losers.

Mutahhari further discusses another aspect of the issue. Contrary to the Marxian view that along with state, religion is the tool of the rulers to exploit the people, Shariati believed that religion could be divided into two: the religion of the rulers and the religion of the ruled. The religion of the rulers is polytheism and the religion of the ruled is monotheism (Shariati 2009). Mutahhari does not mention that this argument is of Shariati instead writes that it is view of "certain Muslim intellectuals". This is the attitude of Mutahhari against Shariati that he does not mention the name of the latter, while making vehement criticism of his views (Mutahhari 1985c:16).

According to Shariati, the religion of the rulers is partisan, discriminatory, static and justified the status quo, and hence is the opium of the society. On the other side, monotheism, the religion of the ruled, advocated equity, equality, dynamism, protest and demand revolution and condemns the status quo, hence is a tonic for the society. Here Shariati differs from Marx and his ideology. The view of Marx that religion is a tool of oppression and the opium for the masses, is limited to the religion of the rulers, according to Shariati. But religion has another facade. That is
monotheism which is the dynamic, revolutionary and progressive ideology that is potent and powerful to confront the oppressors and despots (Shariati 2009).

Mutahhari criticizes these arguments outright. He says that 'they do not realize that what they have said, in spite of its going against the views of Marx, Engels, Mao and other Marxists, is nothing but a confirmation of the materialist interpretation of religion” (Mutahhari 1997:128). They accept that the religion of the ruled has a particular class origin. They have unconsciously affirmed the materialistic conception of religion, the only thing they have done contrary to Marxist view is that they have affirmed the existence of religion, which originates in the oppressed class and serve its interests. However, they unknowingly accept the doctrine of materialistic character of religion (Mutahhari 1997:128-29). He criticizes the intellectuals for creating the impression that only the polytheistic religion of the ruling class has played a significant role in human history. Because of determinism in history, the religion of the ruled, monotheism did not play any historical role in society, as superstructure cannot precede the base. It means that the prophets could not play any historical role, because the rulers defeated their attempts under the mask of monotheism. Mutahhari rejects these arguments outright. According to him the above mentioned views present the apostles of God as ‘the acquitted failures’; failure because they failed in the struggle against evil and were overpowered by the rulers; 'acquitted' for the reason that they never belonged to the pole of exploiters and plunderers, they belonged to the class of the oppressed and the exploited (Mutahhari 1997:130-31). He also rejects the view that polytheism is the product of social injustice. He says that "[T]he interpretation of monotheism as the outcome of the aspirations of the oppressed classes to uphold the values of equality, brotherhood, and unity, as against the philosophy of discrimination and injustice of the rulers, appears to
be more unscientific as well as incompatible with the basic tenets of Islam" (Mutahhari 1997:130).

Thus, Mutahhari criticizes the Marxist influence on certain Muslim intellectuals in Iran who analyze historical events on the basis of historical materialism. They interpret and analyze the Quranic verses by using the tools and techniques of materialism and thus come to the view that fourteen hundred years back, the Quran foresaw the philosophy of Marxism. Mutahhari rejects their ideas and present 'Islamic philosophy' as comprehensive and perfect to analyze historical events.

Islam's Philosophy of History

Mutahhari believes that the “Quran looks at history as a lesson, a percep, a source of knowledge and a subject worth contemplation and deep thinking” (Mutahhari 1361a/1982:11). Naturally, it will have a definite purpose, a clear vision of its course, and certain laws and rules behind its developments. He believes that if history is considered to be merely a string of accidental happenings, having no definite cause behind them, it will be nothing but a fiction which can have no instructional value (Mutahhari 1361a/1982:55-56). But in Quranic philosophy, history has a definite purpose. By pointing out to the past events, it attempts to instruct certain values and thereby intends to make the human beings equipped with the ability to reach perfection.

According to Mutahhari, unlike the materialistic view of history which gives importance to the means of production, thereby to the economic factors, the Quranic view is human or natural approach and it gives importance to man and human values. According to this approach, history like nature itself is developing and progressing towards a state of perfection. The development is not confined to any particular aspect, but is an all-round and all-pervading
process and extends to all human affairs (Mutahhari 1361a:37). The Quran rejects any war on the basis of class, race, nationality or colour, it points out to the ideological aspects of the society in determining the course of the historical development. Mutahhari illustrates that from the viewpoint of human values humans are gradually coming closer to perfection i.e., to the stage of an ideal human being in ideal society. He/she will continue to advance on this path till a World Government having full regards for all human values is established and that will be the end of all the evil forces and selfish wars (Mutahhari 1361a:44).

Mutahhari finds two approaches to history: the materialistic approach and the human or natural approach. Islam's approach to history is the human approach (Mutahhari 1361a/1982:55). By placing human or natural approach to history opposite to the materialist view, Mutahhari was indirectly pointing out that the latter is not human or natural, and hence a reconciliation between the two is impossible. It also indicates that materialistic philosophy is anti-Islamic and anti-Quranic. Like materialist philosophy, Islam also believed in the conflict between two forces as part of the development and course of history. But it is not class struggle, between the affluent and the deprived, rather it is the conflict between the right and the wrong and the good and evil (Mutahhari n.d.b:78). Mutahhari elaborated the conflict further that it is a fight between the troops of Allah and the troops of Devil. He says that, "[T]hey represented a struggle between the human motives and the animal propensities, between the high human values and the base desires, and between the progressive and the elated man, and the low and the perverted man. In the words of the holy Quran, they were fights between the troops of Allah and the troops of the Devil" (Mutahhari 1361a/1982:40). Thus, there is a perpetual struggle between the human values and animal instincts within the individual as well as in the society. This conflict determines the course of human history.
Unlike materialistic school which addressed the oppressed, Islam does not address any particular class. It addressed all human beings of the world, whether wealthy or deprived. According to Mutahhari, this is because, according to Islamic world view, inside each oppressor, there is an enchained human being. Even inside pharaoh, there is such an enchained human being. The call of Islam is to this inner human being. Islam arouses the 'humanity' in human beings, which is their primordial nature. That is why, pharaoh's wife, part of the ruling class, rich and wealthy, responded positively to Moses (Mutahhari 1985b:23-24).

In the Quranic view of history, human being is the prime mover, who is free and master of his/her actions. He/she is the master of his/her destiny and has a natural yearning for, the truth, justice and righteousness. Human values are inborn in him/her and he/she can use his/her reasoning power and can implement his/her ideas. Thus human being is the master and the prime agency of the historical evolution. Commenting on the Quranic verse 13:11, Mutahhari explains that, “the destiny of a people is never change unless they change their mental and spiritual attitudes” (Mutahhari 1997:133)\(^5\). About the role of human being in the development of history, Mutahhari writes that, "[I]f we consider history to be subject to definite rules and at the same time admit that human will plays an effective and final role in determining its course for the benefit of society, then and only then, is history both instructive and useful and its study is educative and rewarding" (Mutahhari 1997:56-57). The human being becomes the prime source of the development of history because, as Mutahhari believes, he/she is endowed with certain inherent qualities. The capacity to collect and preserve the experiences of life, the ability to communicate and exchange those experiences through speech and writing, and the capacity for creation and

\(^5\) The Quran says,‘Verily never / Will God change the condition / Of a people until they / Change it themselves’(13:11)
his/her natural urge for inventions and innovations are the forces that drive
man towards progress (Mutahhari 1997:152-53). Thus in the Quranic or
Islamic view of history the most important factor is human being. Human
being has been given many talents, capacities and powers from God, and
he/she should use these for oneself and for the society. When humans use
their capacities according to their natural tendencies, it will lead to the
progress of human society. Here it differs from the materialistic view in
which the economic factors are the determinants of human progress and
oppressed people are the movers.

According to Quran the course of history is evolutionary. The history
starts from the genesis of man i.e., Adam the first human being. Then it takes
the course of progress till the establishment of the World Government by
Imam Mahdi, in which truth and justice will be the cardinal features. Though
history moves towards evolution, Mutahhari says it is not essential that every
society and stage of its history should be more perfect than it was in the
preceding stage. Since human being is the mover of history, who is free in
his/her actions, history fluctuates in its movements. Sometimes it goes
forward and sometimes backwards (Mutahhari 1361a/1982:47-48). Broadly
speaking, it seems that, Mutahhari's concept of history is the story of
experiences and activities of human beings during the interval between the
Origin of man and the Resurrection, i.e., the end of the world. During this
period human civilizations rise, persists, falls and extinct. He agrees with
Arnold J. Toynbee that decline of every civilization is inevitable, but sticks
on that on the whole human history continues to advance steadily along a
line of evolution (Mutahhari 1361a/1982:48). The Quran describes the destiny
of people and the history of civilizations ruled by evil or falsehood is doomed
to annihilation, and only a society ruled by truth survives. There existed many
communities which were chastised by God because of their deviation towards
wrong and falsehood (Mutahhari n.d.b:84).
In the rise and fall of the human societies Mutahhari identifies certain factors. Justice and injustice, unity and disunity, neglect of the principle of enjoining good and prohibiting the evil, and moral corruption and degeneration are the four factors that influence human societies (Mutahhari 1997:143-145). On the basis of various verses of the Quran, he describes that justice and unity are essential for the rise and existence of civilizations, and injustice, disunity, negligence of the principle of enjoining good and prohibiting evil, and moral degeneration ultimately results in its destruction and doom.

To sum up, Mutahhari's evaluation and analysis of historical materialism has made great impact on the intellectual sphere of Iran. Many youth who were attracted to Marxism returned to Islam due to his philosophical debates and critical analysis of its principles. Mutahhari selected the principle of historical materialism and spent much energy to prove that the theory is ‘irrational and illogical’. He concludes that as an ideology it is not based on any rational principle but emerged as a result of the inefficiency of the Christian clergy in the west and Muslim ulama in the East. Analyzing the Quranic verses that are claimed to be in accordance with historical materialism, in the view of some Muslim scholars, he concludes that the arguments of these scholars are not factual and historical materialism and Islam are incompatible. Against the common belief among the intellectual circles of Iran that only materialistic interpretation is the most ideal philosophy of history, he argued that as a philosophy materialistic interpretation is very ‘weak’ and only Islamic and Quranic principles can be used to analyze historical events aptly and justly.