

## **Socio-political Role of Ulama in Modern Iran with Special Reference to Murtaza Mutahhari**

Muzamil Shafi\*

### **Abstract**

The present paper is an attempt to provide an opportunity to its readers about the history of origin of Ulama in Iran. It provides information about how Ulama in Iran emerged as leading force since the beginning of modern period. The paper also discusses about social as well political situations persistent in the country under the tyrannical Paharvi regime. As a whole, the paper briefly discusses socio-political role of Ulama in Iran, and special emphasis has been given to Murtaza Mutahhari's life, works and role as leading personality of the country.

**Key Words:** Ulama, Iran, Politics, Modernism

### **Introduction**

The twentieth century has witnessed the number of significant changes in the muslim world. One of the most notable events that occurred in the earlier part of the century was the demise of the Ottoman empire whose domains were then divided by the European powers. With it the last Islamic caliphate, functional in name only, disappeared from the face of this earth. The other significant events which this century witnessed was the establishment of Islamic State in Iran in 1979, displacing American interests in the country. The Islamic state did not lean towards United States or the Soviet Union. Most Islamic societies were under the influence and severe pressure of state-(secular ideologies) such as marxism, socialism, nationalism and colonization. New forces of imperialism penetrated these states by offering attractive packages. Amidst of all these complexities Iran's Ulama's tendency towards Islamism rose and gradually expanded in reaction to Shah's insistence in separating religion and politics. The Iranian Ulama adapted Islam as their identity, their way of living and their strategy. They sheared the views that Islam holds the key to the problems Iran is facing on the name of secular ideologies. One such Aalim whose role is more visible than others, perhaps, in rendering Islam an up-to-date, comprehensive, socio-political ideology compatible with modern times and present needs was Ayatullah Murtaza Mutahhari. He played a key role in the Iran's Islamic Revolution. Mutahhari belongs to a group of clergy which may be identified as social and political reformers. Throughout his life he remained faithful to socio-political commitment.

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\* Research Scholar, S. H. Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir

## **Origin of Ulama in Iran**

### **Safavids**

Safavids ruled Persia from AD 1501 to AD 1722. They established the greatest Iranian empire since Islamic conquest of Persia. The origin of the Safavids is not clear, what is clear is that they were Azhari speaking people who headed a Sufi order which from early 1400's were propagating 'Shia' doctrine. Safavid adherence to the Sufi version of Shia Islam had the support of the Turk tribes called the Qizilbash literally the "Red Heads" for the twelve strips on their turbans symbolizing adherence to the twelve Shia Imams. In AD 1494 the task of promoting Safavi order was left to Ismail the master of the order and was destined to lead the order to imperial power by establishing Safavids state of Iran in 1501 AD. "Under the Safavids Twelver Shi'ism was made state religion of the country."<sup>1</sup>

Safavid Shi'ism in power stressed the Shia law and theology brought in by Jurists and theologians partly imported by Safavid Shahs. Safavids stressed on the semi divine powers of the ruler himself which in case of Ismail and his successor Tahmasp were often considered actually divine by the Safavids followers. Divine claims were frequent in extremist Islamic movements, and had been voiced regarding several pre-Safavid religious rebels by group in Anatolia where the Safavids got their military start. The Safavids as part of their ideology also claimed descent from the seventh Imam (meaning every preceding Imam) which gave them Twelve credentials<sup>2</sup>. Safavid's authority was based on the claim that the ruler were descendants of the 7<sup>th</sup> Imam, and therefore were Quasi divine persons chiefs of the dominate Sufi moments, they claimed absolute obedience of all their disciples<sup>3</sup>.

### **Safavids and the Ulama**

It is the part of Shiisms' history and ethos that the Ulama have been seen as leaders, spokesmen and intercessors for the Shia community. The theoretical basis for this role of the Ulama was through the evolution of the Na'ib al amm (collective or general vicegerency) concept. The history of this concept goes back to the earlier period of Twelver Shia history with the occultation of the Imam, all of his functions, including giving of judgments on points of religious law, the collection of religious taxes, the leading of Friday prayers etc. were at first considered to have lapsed. However, as time went by and the Imam did not re-appear, the theoretical absence of all religious authority became a doctrine that was increasingly difficult to maintain therefore the Ulama began gradually to argue that they, as a body, had been designated the deputy of the Imam. In the centuries of the greater occultation there was

considerable development of Twelver Shia thought and law which prior to the establishment of Twelver Shiaism as Iran's state religion in 1501 AD was carried out mostly outside Iran. For relations between religion and politics perhaps the most important development was that of the Mujtahids<sup>4</sup>.

Under the Safavids the royal patronage raised the power, prestige and influence of the Shia clergy. By the end of the Safavid period one group in particular among the clergy had risen to eminence, known as Mujtahids, these were individuals famed for their learning and piety deemed capable of exercising independent judgments in matters of religious law”<sup>[5]5</sup>. In fact with disappearance of the Imam, the Twelver were in position roughly parallel to that of the very early; the source of legal judgments had disappeared and yet issues continued to arise on which some trust worth judgment, even in , was desired. To meet this need there gradually developed many legal and theological scholars whose intelligence, training and qualified them to make judgments on a range of questions. Although their judgments were, and they lacked divine qualities of the Imams by their learning and response to the popular needs they commanded a respect that increased over time.

Under the first Safavid rulers such theologians, who were paid directly or indirectly by the government and had few ties with the local population and were firm pillar of political support. The Safavid rulers patronized a section of higher Ulama. It included contribution to the Ulama's economic power through donations of Waqf property, endorsement of Ulama control over religious taxes, and payments for their official and religious functions. In fact, in establishing officially favored Ulama, the Safavids stressed the obligatory nature of large aims to be administered by the Ulama<sup>[6]6</sup>. As such Ulama got a control over certain religious taxes called as Khums. These taxes were used to spend on charity and other welfare purposes.

With the increasing wealth of the Safavid Ulama, the development of growing Ulama of local Iranian origin, and the creation of intellectual and material condition for the Ulama to be increasingly independent of the state, there also grew up a division between two kinds of Ulama that, in general, has, on the one hand there were government appointed and supported Ulama who filled official religious posts, including the Imam Jom'eb or leader of the chief Friday prayers of each city, and various judicial figures on the “non official” side were those who filled no government functions but taught, preached and made judgments in Ulama – run institutions and courts, receiving their income from waqf revenues and the gifts of their followers. The most learned of the Ulama, who had reached the highest level in their studies became Mujtahids who were capable of giving authoritative interpretations on question of religious law. In Safavids times there were very few Mujtahids, but there was

gradually an “inflation of honors” <sup>[7]7</sup>. Many of the Shia Ulama closely cooperated with the Safavids rulers and enjoyed great influence in the Safavid state (AD 1501-AD1722) <sup>[8]8</sup>.

Many leading Ithna-Aashari jurists in Safavid times developed and endorsed the idea of the ruler being the “Shadow of God” thereby providing religious legitimacy to the Safavid regime <sup>[9]9</sup>. The Safavid state entered into rapid decline in the Seventeenth century, as the Safavid power declined in the seventeenth century, some of the Ulama began to question the religious legitimacy of the Shah’s power, and claimed that the Mujtahids had better right to rule <sup>[10]10</sup>. In late Safavid time some Mujtahids claimed that they had more right to rule than did the impious, wine-bribing Shahs. They did not yet say they should rule directly, an idea came only with Ayatollah Khomeini <sup>[11]11</sup>.

### **Qajar period and the Ulama**

The Qajar having established themselves by force, and not having descendency from the Imams which the Safavids claimed. With the advent of Qajar dynasty (AD 1779-AD 1925) the Ulama began in practical terms to reassert their independence from the state. It is interesting to note that the Qajar Shahs were continued to be called the shadow of God<sup>12</sup><sup>12</sup>. In the years leading to the Qajar restoration large number of clergy had taken refuge in Shia shrine centers of Najaf, Karbala and Samara in Ottoman controlled Iraq. This concentration of clergy in one area lead to an important theological debate, one of whose major consequences was the definite establishment of Mujtahids as supreme authorities in Shiaism. The subsequent creation of new state in Iran under the Qajars provided an opportunity for them to exercise their power and saw the institutionalization of their positions in the concept of the *Marja al taqlid* (source of imitation), term used to described a Mujtahid deemed to be endowed with overriding authority in religious matters, by virtue of his learning and his piety <sup>[13]13</sup>.

Fateh Ali shah was second Qajar king of Iran and ruled from AD 1797 to AD 1834. His clerical policy has played an important role in promoting the Ulama class in Iran. His reign witnessed an expansion of court and administrative life and the intervention of prominent Ulama such as Mirza Abdul Qasim Qumi, Syed Mahdi Bahar ul uloom and others. <sup>[14]14</sup>. Shah started getting closeness and popularity with the clergy in Iran. Quite obvious, Ulama influence on the ruling class also multiplied in the years to come. As a special concession, he declared that the inhabitants of Qum are exempted from taxation and a large Madrasah known as Fadiya, was built near the shrine <sup>[15]15</sup>. The treasury of the shrine was constantly enriched by the gifts from the king himself. Such

constant devotion hardly has failed to produce a favorable impression on the Ulama.

Sometimes supported by Qajar Shahs, the revitalized Shia clergy greatly extended its sphere of influence and range of administrative power. It re-established control over the courts, waqf lands and other innumerable social and political functions. Each Mujtahid was distinguished by his own influence retinue of mullas and gangs. The former transmitted the Mujtahid's influence to the local population while the later representing his executive power, were charged with collection of religious taxes, Khums and Zakah, as well as the administration of religious punishments, only the death sentence needed ratification of shah <sup>[16]</sup><sup>16</sup>.

In the reign of Fateh Ali shah the dual role of Ulama developed that of opposing the state and that of countering the impact of foreign powers. During Mohammad Shah the third Qajar king (1834—1848) the relations between the state and Ulama entered a new phase of conflict and hostility. His heterodox tendencies and the slow, almost unconscious attempts at strengthening the central secular authority exacerbated the inherent hostility of the Ulama. The inherent hostility of the Ulama while their power in the provinces continued undiminished; they became constant and formidable force in the politics of the capital <sup>[17]</sup><sup>17</sup>. After 1850 AD the area of conflict between the clergy and state began to widen as the religious hierarchy opposed an initiative to modernize and strengthen the Qajar government. Clerical resistance to reform in the state apparatus that might threaten their prerogatives was linked to the struggle against economic concessions to foreign non-Muslims. The traditional social imbrications of the clergy and the native merchant community acquired a new socio-political expression in the form of clergy lead movement against the western economic and ideal penetration . In fact, by the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century clergy has argued its role as the *Sarparast* or Wali (Guardian) of the believers <sup>[18]</sup><sup>18</sup>.

#### 1.4 Tobacco Movement

The agitation by the Ulama of Iran during Qajar period against tobacco monopoly was not just cursing blow to British colonization but it gave impetus to the struggle against the self centered despotic Qajar dynasty until the constitutional movement.

After tobacco deal Iran became a truly European market, especially Tehran were the crowds of foreigners could be seen everywhere. Whether it be in houses, shops, markets or alleys <sup>[19]</sup><sup>19</sup>. Ayatollah Mirza Muhammed

Hassan Shirazi is the name that strikes our mind who took revolutionary steps in boycotting the tobacco concession.

The expression of discontent was seen in the fatwa of Mirza Hassan Shirazi, (Mujtahid) prohibiting the use of tobacco. This agitation was not just a protest but was essentially a confrontation between the people and the state in which Ulama exercised the leadership and sense of direction. The agitation got its expression in the constitutional revolution <sup>[20]</sup><sup>20</sup>.

### **1.5 Constitutional Revolution:**

The Tobacco deal—a trigger that escalated into a nationwide agitation was a first successful mass protest backed by Bazaaries, clerics, intellectual and the ordinary folk. This tobacco movement was followed by other great event known in history as constitutional revolution.

It was in the reign of Nasir-ud-din Shah (1848 – 1896) that the factors responsible for the development of turmoil and confusion prior to constitutional revolution took place. The most important was the area of conflict widened between state and Ulama. The attempts at westernizing certain aspects of the state necessarily pushed forward the line of demarcation between clerical and monarchical power into the realm of the former <sup>[21]</sup><sup>21</sup>. The constitutional movement was the political manifestation of foreign domination by England and Russia, societal dislocations, economic stagnation and lawlessness that had generated strong resentment among Iranians in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was a popular urban reform movement launched by the merchants, the secular reformers and the prominent Shia Ulama. Its objective was to loosen the shackles of foreign domination, to save the country from bankruptcy, to put an end to lawlessness and limit the arbitrary power of the king by farming a written constitution and creating a consultive assembly -The Majlis. The repression increased in the last decade of Nasir-ud-din Shah's rule (1886-1896) and necessity of comprehensive reform was felt <sup>[22]</sup><sup>22</sup>. The tyrannical Qajar rule and European domination compelled the Iranians society to raise their voice and it was for this reason that the movement was backed by prophetic classes, consistency of land owners, administrators merchants and artisans <sup>[23]</sup><sup>23</sup>. The Movement derived its financial support from merchants, religious legitimacy from Ulama and ideological direction from secular reformers <sup>[24]</sup><sup>24</sup>.

In turn the merchants were supported by Ulama because the religious class was very unhappy with Qajar rule and Christian managing Persian customs <sup>[25]</sup><sup>25</sup>. The increased European domination and westernization imposed by the lavish Qajar rulers created rift between state and the merchants and the Ulama

<sup>[26]</sup><sup>26</sup>. In 1896 Muzaffar-ud-Din Shah (1896-1907) was crowned and it was under his rule that constitutional revolution took place. This rift which was created between State, Ulama and merchants was widened by the impetuous action of speculation in price, in December 1905, the punishment of the merchants added fuel to the fire and led to instant closure of Bazaar <sup>[27]</sup><sup>27</sup>. Ultimately Muzaffar-ud-Din Shah signed the document ordinary creation of the Majlis and drafting deputies. In the constitution of (1906-1907) the Ulama in Iran got a legal expression and underpinning. Their position was strengthened by their election as members to the early parliament <sup>[28]</sup><sup>28</sup>. The involvement of Ulama in day to day events was greatly witnessed in the constitutional period (1905-1909) off course this involvement was sometimes pro or anti Shah.

### **1.6 Paharvi dynasty and the State Clergy relations**

The Ulama's power and influence gained due to the weakness of the Qajar Shah was never broken under the long centralized authority of the Paharvi monarchs. By the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century the clergy revitalized itself as a social force and has successfully argued its role as a Sarparast <sup>[29]</sup><sup>29</sup>. Raza Khan after becoming prime minister and before becoming Shah pursued a policy of alliance with clergy. The British were preparing to impose a league of nations over Iran in 1920 but due to internal rebel, later it was decided to establish monarch, a limited form of constitutional government and alliance with united kingdom when the preparations were made for the election to parliament, Ulama strictly opposed especially Naina and Isfani as such direct confrontation took place between British and Ulama and both the Ulama were ordered departure and they went to Qum. Both Ahmed Shah and Riza Khan try to win the pleasure of these Ulama, keeping in view the power of Ulama in Iran. In turn they tried to persuade them for Jihad against British imperialism. In fact Ahmed Shah and Riza Khan tried to keep both British and Ulama in their hands keeping in view the power and position of Ulama in Iran. Both Ahmed Shah and Riza Khan were badly in need of Ulama as their allies on the other hand, couldn't afford to antagonize British.

Mean while year before becoming prime minister Kamal Ataturk had abolished Caliphate in Turkey and had established a Republic. Reza Kahn was greatly impressed by the idea for a time being, he preferred the concept of Republic <sup>[30]</sup><sup>30</sup>. When Ulama got the impression of this, they vehemently opposed the concept. Riza Khan visited the Ulama like Hairi, Naini and Isfahani in Qum and promised them about the collapse of Republicanism and then Ulama informed the other Ulama through a telegram <sup>[31]</sup><sup>31</sup>. Reza Shah issued certain proclamation in response to the wishes of the three leaders of Shiaism <sup>[32]</sup><sup>32</sup>. With this Reza Khan developed positive links with the Ulama

of Najaf. When Reza Khan came to power, he too like his predecessor Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir who in 1851 limited the power of Ulama by snatching their power as head of Maktabas, Madrasas and institutions.

The Maktabas, Madrasas and all deni institution in Iran were under control of Ulama, but in 1951 the minister Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir changed the system and it was not under the control of Ulama and even he secularized them.

The conscription Law of May 1925 passed under the Prime Ministry of Reza Shah gave the state authority to decide who could be exempted from military service and weekend the power of Ulama.

Following are the main amendments which Reza Khan made as Shah of Iran are listed below.

1. One of the important reforms made in judiciary in 1926 resulted in the demise of the Sharia (i.e. religious court). In 1928 Ayatullah Bafqi was exiled from Qum to Shah Abel-al-Alim. In 1935 fatalities were made in the shrine of Imam Riza in Mashad. In 1928 a law was made under which religious teachers were supposed to possess license provided by government and another law regarding examination of religious students <sup>[33]</sup><sup>33</sup>. The most important step that was taken towards the secularization was snatching the power of Ulama as Judges under the law of 27 December 1936 <sup>[34]</sup><sup>34</sup>.

1) Judges should have three years of legal study from Tehran faculty of law or foreign university.

2) Even the religious teachers were to be identified on the basis of their meeting the following criteria:

- Possession of Diploma from a marja-i-Taqlid
- Evidence of 5 years of teaching experience
- Successful passing of examination in Fikh, Usul and Hikmati-i-Illahi, possession of a certificate from the local office of education <sup>[35]</sup><sup>35</sup>.

With time, the number of Ulama in the Majlis started declining and ultimately in the Eleventh Majlis (1936-1938) there was not a single well known cleric <sup>[36]</sup><sup>36</sup>. In order to limitize the power of clergy they were deprived of the belongings. The waqf were secularized which had far-reaching results for the clergy. It was not only loss of power but he also deprived them of their



independence <sup>[37]</sup><sup>37</sup>. In power, Reza Khan brought waqf's under greater government control, limited those who could be certified as Mollas, jailed a few Ulama leaders, improved the position of religious minorities, and limited the Ulamas judicial, educational and welfare roles. Even in 1936 women were to unveil. Veiled women were harassed by the police forcing many of them into virtual exile, as they refused to appear unveiled <sup>[38]</sup><sup>38</sup>.

Reza Khan was forced to abdicate in favour of his son in 1941. Upon his abdication clergy had reached a debilitated stage on the other hand there was dramatic rise in western influence and communism. Now the clergy started ge-gaining their power as such seeds of growth of Ulama influence lay in these difficulties, again they were intervening by issuing fatwa decreeing nationalization of the Anglo Iranian company (ALOC) <sup>[39]</sup><sup>39</sup>. In 1952 Burujirdi and Bihibhani made Prime Minister Musadiq to with drawn bill on the women's vote <sup>[40]</sup><sup>40</sup>. But the dissatisfaction of clergy with Muhammad Reza Shah was increasing as state police interfered in every matter of Ulama. Walking on the foot steps of his father Mohmmad Reza Shah by secularizing education system, establishing seculars courses, placing institution under state suspension, unveiling and enfranchisement of women. But there was protest in making the unhappy silence of Ulama in response to the expansion of state authority. Until 1944, first systematic formulation of a position of clerical opposition was delayed. In 1944 Ruhullah Khomeini write a book entitled as the discovery of secrets (Kashf-ul-Asrar). This book was reply to the writings of Ahmad Kasravi and his followers, who had condemned the clerical opposition to Reza Shah. In the book knomeini also discussed clergy's view of the harmful changes brought by Reza Shah's refreshes. They condemned unveiling of Women ordered by Reza Shah. The clergy insists that these co-educational schools, mixing young-girls and lustful young boys destroys the chastity. The incision was on the closure of shops selling wine and destroying young minds and increasing moral corruption <sup>[41]</sup><sup>41</sup>. In book Khomeini criticized Reza Shah on various grounds like, he accused him of exposing youth to corruption and prostitution, he criticized existing ministry of justice and judicial procedure etc.

During Dr. Muhammad Masaddiq's prime minster ship, a close reading of the events of the period clearly reveals that Ulama collaborated with Shah on the ground that Ulama feared Masaddiq's republicanism, anti clericalism and softness towards communism having secured the throne. In the coup of 1953 Shah forged a closer relationship with the Ulama in order to legitimize and consolidate his regime. In order to entertain closing down of places of public entertainment on days of religions observances reaffirming the Shah's commitment to uphold the faith, visits to the holy shrines, introduction of religious instructions in the secular schools, declaration of Baha'ism as illegal

and the crushing of Tudeh party. Having consolidated his regime, Shah followed the footsteps of his father and embarked on modernizing the country on the western model. In 1961 he came out with his six-point reform package known as white revolution<sup>[42]42</sup>. Direct challenges to the Shah's authority came from, Hoseinyeh ershad (reformist religious forum) under the readership of Ali Shariati and Ayatullah Khomeini.

### 1.7.1 Life of Murtaza Mutahhari

Ayatullah Hajj Shaikh Murtaza Mutahhari Farimani falls under the group of Ulama that were less openly active in politics but may be identified as social reformers<sup>[43]43</sup>. He was born in the eastern province of Khorasan known as Fariman on Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> in the year 1920<sup>[44]44</sup>. He was university professor of Philosophy and a Mujtahid at the shi'ite seminary and a pupil of Ayatullah Khomeini . Hujjatal Islam Muhammad Hussain Mutahhari father of Murtaza Mutahhari was one of the pious Ulama of his time<sup>[45]45</sup>. Mutahhari was an erudite and versatile scholar. Mutahhari completed his elementary education under the guardianship of his Father Hajj Muhammed Hussain.<sup>46</sup>

During his period of study at Mashad Seminary an important event i.e. Gauharshad Mosque uprising took place that made Mutahhari to take an important decision i.e. to move to Qum. Under the tyrannical rule of Reza Khan Mashad school of theology suffered great deal of hardship, the situation of scholars and students was very bad and it was on the verge of dismemberment and collapse . So in the year 1938 Mutahhari decided to move to Qum ,as the seminary was considered by Tullab and Mudarrisin as Iran's most important religious establishment<sup>[47]47</sup>. When Mutahhari came to Qum the three prominent authorities in Qum were: Sayyad Muhammed Taqi Khurisani (d.1951), Sayyid Muhammed Hijat (d.1952) and Sad-al-din sadr (d.1953)<sup>[48]48</sup>. He stayed in Qum for 15 years and received valuable education from great teachers.

The period from 1942 until 1952 was the most important part of Mutahhari's theological training and lasted almost for ten years. In the summer of 1942 Mutahhari attended Mirza Ali-Aqa Shirazi's (d.1957) classes at the Madrasah-yi sadr in Isfahan. This event served in shaping his scientific and spiritual personality<sup>[49]49</sup>. Through his meetings with Mirza Ali shiraza he came to know the Nahjul-Balaghah of Imam Ali. In fact the Book entitled as the *Sairi dar Nahj al Balaghah*. A review of the Najh-ul-Balaghah was written as a result of those lessons<sup>[50]50</sup>. It is in fact this period i.e. from 1942 to 1952 Mutahhari met his three important teachers (Hussain Burujirdi, Hajj Aga

Ruhullah Khomeni and Sayyid Muhammed Hussain Tabatabai) and benefited from them <sup>[51]</sup><sup>51</sup>.

### 1.7.2 Socio-political role of Murtaza Mutahhari

Imam Khomeini according to Mutahhari was the last person he was looking for <sup>[52]</sup><sup>52</sup>. When Mutahhari arrived in Qum, Khomeini on every Thursday & Friday was teaching Philosophy and Islamic ethics in Gnostic form and context <sup>[53]</sup><sup>53</sup>. In order to fulfill his strong spiritual thirst Mutahhari then attended Khomeini's weekly ethical lessons and became fascinated by his mystical teachings and spiritual course of action. In this regard Mutahhari says "The lessons in ethics taught by my beloved personality every Thursday and Friday were actually the teachings of treading the divine path and Gnosticism, not just ethics in its lifeless and scientific form. I was being overwhelmed with his teachings in such a way that I found myself a great deal under their influence until the next Monday and Tuesday. A great part of my intellectual and spiritual personality was formed during those classes and similar ones which I underwent for 12 years from that divine teacher. Therefore, I always regard myself as being indebted to him" <sup>[54]</sup><sup>54</sup>.

During the course of his studies in the Qum theological school, another chapter is opened to Islamic society as well as political and social activities. For a person such as Mutahhari who closely studied the problems and made efforts to find solutions for them and a person who loved Islam and Islamic society, everything relating to the destiny of Muslims and that of Islam were important to him. On the other hand, undergoing training in the classes of personalities such as Imam Khomeini who always called his students to strive to correct society and promote Islam, could be another factor for directing the attention of Mutahhari towards dealing with Islamic society. As a result, during the years of 1949-1951 when the waves of the freedom seeking movements had spread throughout the country, Mutahhari was also involved in them and was in touch with most of the Islamic groups, demanding correction of the of the Islamic society. One of such groups was the *Fadayin of Islam* (1945-1955) or sacrificers for Islam. Mutahhari always had been a supporter of political views of Fadayin although he was not a member of the Fadayin but was a close friend of Navab Safavi.

In Tehran he established the Islamic council of University students in 1952 <sup>[55]</sup><sup>55</sup>. Mutahhari's first academic contribution i.e. his book *Usul-I-Falsafih va Ravish-I-Realism* (The Principles of Philosophy and the method of realism) published in 1953-1954 followed gradually by volume 2, 3 and 5, the fourth volume remained incomplete and was not published until 1985. Mutahhari started writing this book jointly with Tabatabai earlier in

Qum, in response to the propagation of the Tudeh party's so called scientific philosophy<sup>[56]56</sup>. After changing his residence from Qum to Tehran Mutahhari became highly involved in writing and delivering lectures at public and intellectual centers, he attempted to illuminate darkened corner of Islamic thought and to hoist the banner of pure Islamic reasoning against the threat of materialistic views becoming widespread among Iran's youth<sup>[57]57</sup>. In 1955 he started teaching as a faculty member at the Theology at the doctorate level continuing until 1978<sup>[58]58</sup>. While working as a professor at the University of Tehran besides teaching, he studied various fields of Islamic culture and took part in various deliberations pertaining to Islamic Jurisprudence, literature, philosophy, social and historical subjects. He was striving to train and educate the young generations and therefore delivered many speeches on various Islamic subjects in the different university circles and scientific bodies. Basically, he choose the university as a strong hold in order to have constant contacts with religious intellectuals and un-informed westoxicated ones.

Mutahhari belonged to the group of clergy which may be identified as social reformers. He concentrated more on social and educational problems of clerical institute. Through out his life he remained faithful to socio-political commitment<sup>[59]59</sup>. Ayatollah Khomeini was arrested in 1965 in wake of series of fiery speeches against the tyrannical Paharvi regime . Mutahhari too was arrested along with Khomeini, afterwards Khomeini was send into exile to Turkey. At the crucial movement Mutahhari took the banner of leadership in his hands and made a decisive contribution, he faithfully co-operated the foundation of Hoseinyeh Ershad and accepted membership in its managing committee<sup>[60]60</sup>. In 1969 he severely condemned the violent aggression of U.S in Palestine<sup>[61]61</sup>. In 1971 he took responsibility of Politico-ideological program of Al-Javad Mosque<sup>[62]62</sup>. In 1972 he was arrested for a short while for his Political involvement in Al-Javad Mosque and Hoseinyeh Ershad<sup>[63]63</sup>. In 1978 his public lectures and sermons were denounced by regime<sup>[64]64</sup>; and in year 1979 he was assassinated by a group called Furqan<sup>[65]65</sup>.

### 1.7.3 Murtaza Mutahhari and his Works

For almost three decades, Mutahhari's speeches, teachings and writings had constantly targeted materialist, Marxist, Secularist, Traditionalists and Pro-Westernization movements. Initially, his academic works were concerned mostly with issues of a more ethical, religious and philosophical nature; however, they gradually shifted towards topics relating to sociology, economics and politics. He was concerned about the political divisions which had intensified among the nationalist and religious leaders during these years, notably the division between Musaddiq and Kashani, Burujirdi and the Fadaiyan-i-Islam, and between the Fadaiyan and Musaddiq

and Kashani; or rather he was generally worried by the disputes within the religious establishment with respect to the major political affairs of the country.<sup>[66]66</sup>

It has lately been disclosed that, after the royalist *coup d'état* of August 1953, some Islamic dignitaries of the capital city, including Mahdi Bazargan (Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran after January 1979) and Murtaza Mutahhari, decided to clarify their policy towards the new situation and to establish a program for their activities in the future. The program, abbreviated to MAT'A (*Maktab-i-Tarbiyati, Ijtima'i 'Amali*) was basically aimed at improving the religious understanding and practice of the younger generation. According to the programme, new publications needed to be produced, scholarly teachings of Islam expanded and the activities of pro-religious supporters with academic backgrounds co-coordinated<sup>[67]67</sup>. During the years of Khomeini's exile to Bursa (Turkey) in 1964 and then to Najaf (Iraq) 1965), Mutahhari played the major role in propagating Ayatullah Khomeini's views and distributing his statements and cassettes in Tehran<sup>[68]68</sup>.

Soon afterwards, he and a number of his associates together formed a clerical society, later called *Jami'ih-yi Ruhaniyat-I Mubariz* (the society of combatant Religious Scholars) in Tehran, not only with the aim of organizing but also co-coordinating various political activities which later played an important role in the Islamic Revolution. After the event of 5<sup>th</sup> June 1963, three small religious groups in Tehran announced a new coalition entitled *Haiat-ha-yi Mutalifih-I Islami* or *Jamiyat-ha-yi Mutalifih-I Islami*. The central committee of the *Mutalifih* consisted of Twelve members with a five men clerical committee including Mutahhari. Besides distributing Khomeini's statements and propagating his ideas as their first immediate priority, the *Mutalifih* announced guidelines for expanding Islamic ideology<sup>[69]69</sup>.

Mutahhari apparently preferred cultural and educational solutions. He expressed the view that religious thoughts and dogmas had not yet been logically and reasonably presented to the people. A great number of believers were not properly taught and trained by reliable Islamic sources. Therefore, to insist on violent ways to construct an Islamic society, before presenting its ideological foundations, was not considered fruitful by him: "Every social movement must be backed by a theoretical and cultural movement, otherwise it will be caught up in [social] currents which will benefit from it and will modify its path"<sup>[70]70</sup>.

The *Insan va Sarnivish* is a compilation of Mutahhari's lectures which was presented regularly to the members of this Union. It was used as a core

text for the *Mu'talifah's* training programme and repeatedly taught by their teachers to members and supporters. In this book, he mainly concerns himself with issues relating to the sociology of the backwardness of contemporary Muslim societies. Although he mentions some purely sociological theories, such as Western imperialism, he deliberately moves towards the internal causes and the cultural hypotheses <sup>[71]</sup><sup>71</sup>. In his analysis, Mutahhari examined different hypotheses to ascertain which doctrine was responsible for the retrograde situation and finally concentrated on the theory of fatalism (*mashiyatgirai*).

Mutahhari's sense of duty towards the moral education of the younger generation, who would eventually take over the reins of government in his ideal Islamic society, motivated him to write such moral fables with enthusiasm. In the preface to *Dastan-I Rastan*, he elucidated his reform policies and how they differed from others. He argued: "It is a wrong notion, generally adopted by some partisans of social changes that one should start with the higher echelons of the upper classes. However, [historical] experience has taught us that any such approach, instead of providing beneficial guidelines to society, presents propaganda and demagogy".

In short, Mutahhari's theory is that any social reform must originate among the masses and not emerge via the minority dominant upper classes. In order to achieve this, public culture and the people's style of living has to be modified by programmes which include publishing tales and stories <sup>[72]</sup><sup>72</sup>.

Mutahhari was, from the time of his education in Qum, in favor of a comprehensive reform of the clerical establishment. His views, however, were that reforms had to originate from inside the clerical system, through a leading Mjтахid or a group of leading Mjтахids and not form outside, through the intelligentsia.

In relation to the phenomena of Westernization, particularly those based upon liberal sexual relationships, nakedness and hedonism, Mutahhari published seven articles in the religious journal *Maktab-i-Islam* in 1965-1966. His *Akhlaq-i Jinsi dar Islam va Jihan-i Gharb* is in fact a reflection of those articles. The articles mainly deal with Bertrand Russell's (1872-1970) sexual doctrine as explained in his book *Marriage and Morals*. Russell's concepts of sex had been based on two essential principles, both originating from other philosophers. His notion on liberal sexual pleasure had been influenced by Freudianism, and his 'Radical Reformation of Mankind' – which means the legal right of reproduction being exclusively restricted to men and women who possess superior inherited physical abilities – had emanated from Plato's Republic. According to Mutahhari, these ideas differ from Muslim ethics

concerning sex, which are founded on the sanctification of legal sexual relationships – whether permanent or temporary, single or numerous – the liberty of divorce and society's disapproval of celibacy <sup>[73]</sup><sup>73</sup>.

During the year 1966-1967, the modification of Iran's civil codes and the desire for the introduction of further Western legal norms became an explosive social issue in the press. A vigorous debate developed in public. Ibrahim Mahdavi Zanjani, a judge, wrote 40 articles asserting his approval for this modification. This matter disturbed the religious authorities and impelled them to react. Undoubtedly, Mutahhari, as an eminent jurist, appeared to be the most suitable candidate for this task and so all hopes were pinned upon him. He has meticulously described the current social movements and also made clear his role in the introduction to his book, *Niazm-i Huquq-i Zan dar Islam*, published in 1974-1975, in which all his discussions with Judge Zanjani were made known <sup>[74]</sup><sup>74</sup>. The *Niazm Huquq-i Zan dar Islam* is a collection of these articles (1974-1975) presenting a comparative study of Islamic family rights from a philosophical and sociological viewpoint. This book (whilst not mentioning the government's Westernizing policy), was written as a clear response to the infiltration of the Western customs and values so ardently supported by the monarchy. The flaws in government policy became indirectly clear. The large number of devoted readers which the book attracted was a clear sign of how well the religious argument was received in public <sup>[75]</sup><sup>75</sup>.

During the early years of the *Husainiyih-yi Irshad* (1968-1969), Mutahhari's lectures on the question of the Islamic veil, and on the criticisms with regard to the edict on the 'Removal of the veil' (*kashf-i Hijab*, 07-Jan-1936), had, surprisingly, angered the traditional clergy and their devotees. The abolition of the veil during Reza Shah Pahlavi's rule had changed the appearance of women, giving them a more Westernized Image. This action led to great psychological pressure on pious women which gradually gave rise to a more extreme position on their part. The women from clerical backgrounds still wore the traditional clothing, namely the *chadur va ruband* (a large veil covering the whole body and a white or black piece of cloth just covering the face). This slowly made an impact on the mind of religious communities who began to accept this particular mode of veil as the correct dress for muslim women.

There was no simple solution to this problem, save intervention by someone whose knowledge and personality were respected by the religious authorities. Mutahhari, again, was the ideal person to deal with this situation. In his *Mas'alih-yi Hijab* he maintained that such shortsightedness would cause

the formation of a hypocritical group in Islamic society which would eventually ‘open the path to Imperialism’<sup>[76]</sup><sup>76</sup>.

On collecting evidence from the Quran, hadith and fatwas, Mutahhari clearly illustrated the restrictions of Islamic veiling. Although he did not comment on which version of the veil should be worn, he indicated that women wearing the traditional chadur and ruband did not have a monopoly on piety. Consequently he endorsed the newer type of religious veiling – the scarf and manteau – which became increasingly popular with the working and educated women. This encouraged many of the country’s unveiled ‘Westernized’ women to adopt this more up –to– date Islamic dress. Further-more Mutahhari revived the practice of religious life in the minds of many non-religious women. Nevertheless, the book encountered apposition from two sides – one being that of the Westernizing moment which was in favor of women being bareheaded and normally in disagreement with any form of Islamic veiling; the second comprising the pious formalists who did not recognize the new style of veiling as Islamic. This later traditionally minded movement had organized intense propaganda against Mas’alih-yi hijab and towards the end of this period (1970-1971), they wrote strong criticisms against it – to which Mutahhari neatly responded. Later, all these arguments were jointly published in one volume<sup>77</sup>. In 1971-1972, the non-religious part of society, led by the house of Pahlavi’s, produced a film entitled Muhallil (‘Mediator’) which mocked the sexual relations of religious families and questioned the piety of religious institutions. Although this film was broadcast throughout the country, nevertheless it could not suppress the increased propensity of the people towards a religiously based lifestyle. The film’s scenario was founded on some comical concepts. First, Mosques were portrayed as meeting places for some professional mediators, receiving high salaries for their jobs. Second, the country’s religious men were shown as having no trust in their wives, like the European knights of the Middle Ages who, before leaving their homes, locked their spouse’s chastity belt, taking the key with them. Third, the film suggested that it was permitted, according to Islamic law, for a man to divorce his wife three times at one session, and a few hours following the third to be able to remarry her, just by paying money to a muhallil. Being the only clergy man who wrote an article against the film Mutahhari considered it mainly as a propaganda exercise which did not reflect any of the realities in regard to the religious families and Persian society. He then publishes his critical view and stated: “The duty of film director is to display and criticize real affairs not to produce totally imaginary picture, falsely accusing his society and thus creating misleading notions in relation to it. This movie is a perfidy from both the Islamic and the national point of view”<sup>78</sup>.

## Conclusion



Mutahhari was a social reformer and moderate political activist. His contribution to the Iranian society started as a teacher, and ended up as a moderate revolutionist opposing the Communism and Capitalism school of thoughts. He theorized an Islamic view and ideology, improved the argumentation of the Islamist groups, expanded the Islamic way of living among educated Muslim activists, rights of women and played an important role in the Islamic Revolution. Iran's Islamic system was formed under the visible influence of his views and he is still being regarded as the main architect of the Islamic Iran. His works are still attractive to the general public and are regarded as the major source for the Islamic way of life in most of the Islamic societies.

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