

Some Reflections on the West and Iranian Revolution with Special Reference to Baqir al-Sadr

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As it is well known that behind every civilization there is a guiding ideology that is ultimately rooted in the epistemological categories cherished by the ideologues of that particular civilization. After the Renaissance the West banished every religious relic to the oblivion and adopted man made laws and etiquette in its place. Therefore it was bound that such scholars and philosophers from the West would emerge who laid down the foundation for the Godless secular fabric of its society. They were divided into Rationalists and Empiricists. Starting from Descartes, the Western philosophers propounded systematically the theory of epistemology that banished God from the realms of knowledge and brought man to fore as a sovereign being "filling up the place" which belonged to God. To quote Dostovesky, "if God is removed from the universe everything will be permissible for an individual." Locke, Hobbes and Hume also believed sense perception as the sole source of knowledge. Hobbes considered the religion as the dream of a sick man. Sensations and impressions were the stuff from which every knowledge emanates. This was a tacit denial of revelation that forms the basis of Islamic faith. Bertrand Russell is a famous advocate of this atheism who blatantly declares that: "I think all the Great religions of the world -Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Communism ---[are] both untrue and harmful. . . . I am firmly convinced that religions do harm as I am that they are untrue." Advocating the cause of basing everything on sense based observation and evidence, Russell thinks: "A habit of basing convictions

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upon evidence, and of giving to them only that degree of certainty which the evidence warrants, would, if it became general, cure most of the ills from which the world is suffering." He adds by saying that the whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotism. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran which is a turning point in the modern history of Muslim world, was preceded by the important intellectual as well as political and social developments. It might even be argued that the intellectual background of the revolution has been crucial to the course it has taken. The greatest mission of religion, especially Islam is to impart a world view based on a right understanding of the total system of being, an understanding turning on the axis of Tawhid. It is to mold the spiritual and the moral character of people and to educate individuals and society on the basis of its world view. Baqir-al-Sadr was an important figure in contemporary Islamic life, who continued the holistic tradition of Mulla Sadra and developed his theories on the basis of logic and Islamic philosophical tradition, clearing the ground of all the thought patterns which had crept into the Islamic world since the 19th century, and brought to fore the true spirit of Islamic epistemology. He had a very sound background in philosophy as he studied logic at an early age of 11 and wrote a book in which he criticized philosophy. His important philosophical books are *Ta'liqāt 'alā Al-Asfār-al-Arabah* (Commentary on the Four Books of Mulla Sadra's Journeys), *al-'Uṣūl al Mantiq lil Istiqrā* (Logical Foundations of Induction) and *Falsafatunā* (Our Philosophy). The most important contribution of Sadr to philosophy is his theory of knowledge. He considered reason the only criterion of knowledge, and claimed that even empirical knowledge has to rely on reason in its lost analysis. The limitations of empiricism are evident in its treatment of the notions like causality and harmony between cause and effect etc., which being based on objective necessity rather than the so called empiricist psychological necessity and can be demonstrated by a "solid explanation" as a dispossessed notion al-intiza'i, from the Islamic philosophical point of view. Though Locke 'destroyed' theory of 'innate ideas' and paved the

way for 'dangerous' epistemology of Hume and Berkeley, positivists and Marxists, but from the point of view of empiricism even the reality of matter couldn't be affirmed, except to the level of 'sense-data'. The positivists have not anything new to their empirical doctrine. The Marxists adopted Empiricist theory of knowledge as they called 'human consciousness' the reflection of the objective reality, claiming that there is no 'higher philosophy' but committed a mistake by negating the metaphysical entities, which lie beyond the purview of their philosophy.

In comparison to this epistemology, Baqir al Sadr projected Islamic epistemology, based on rational doctrine, comprising the *Conception* and *Assent*, where knowledge consists of necessary and intuitive principles. The soul, apart from deriving knowledge from the prior truths, has several self-evident notions, which don't need any demonstration or evidence from outside. It is the "corner stone" of knowledge and the secondary knowledge is dependent on it. Sadr takes recourse to the substantive movement initially advocated by Mulla Sadra, that matter is a continuous motion and constant renewal until the progressive series reaches the primary rational knowledge that does not arise from previous knowledge, as this knowledge is considered the primary cause of knowledge.

The dualism between matter and soul which was advocated by the various schools of the West, taking sides either with materialism or spiritualism, can easily be solved by the theory of substantive movement advocated by Sadr. The Cartesian doubt, was proved inadequate long before by Ibn Sina and Razi had provided the theory on the onward development of motion long before the Marxists. Thus Sadr has presented a comprehensive Islamic theory of knowledge after criticizing the 'mild' and the 'extreme' forms of empiricism and has for the first time in the contemporary world of Islam taken lead in attacking the un-Islamic philosophy on the basis of 'rigour' and "intellectual demonstration and not an appeal to only external meaning of revelation" in the manner of classical Muslim philosophers with a vantage point of being well versed with the delicate subtleties of modern philosophies.

Apart from the philosophical and epistemological challenge which was accepted by Baqir al-Sadr, he boldly proved that it is only Islam which could

work as a universal paradigm of change and spiritual and material succor to the demonized world torn apart by man made ideologies. There have been several attempts for advocating the theory that Western civilization, (philosophy; epistemology and culture) is not only objective but universal also. For example V. S Naipaul strangely argues that the Western civilization is the "universal civilization" that "fits all men ". Huntington got clue from Naipaul who quotes him in favour of his erroneous theories.

There are several such other examples of advocacy of the same theory. Joseph Chamberi and Kipling also fall in this category. Kipling spoke in 1899 of the "white man's burden" and Chamberi showered encomium on the British (as the greatest governing race over) who would have the twain of East and West meet but on their own terms. The East shall yield and assimilate.

Huntington extends the logic to "the West and the Rest". At a superficial level much of the Western culture has indeed permeated the rest of the World. But at a more basic level, however, the Western concepts differ fundamentally from those prevalent in other civilizations. Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of Church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures. Such ideas of the West bring a reaction against rather than acceptance. The very notion that there could be a "universal civilisation" is a Western idea, directly at odds with the particularism of most Asian societies and their emphasis on what distinguishes one people from another. Harry C. Triandi's review of 100 comparative studies of values in different societies concludes that, "the values that are most important in the West are least important worldwide".³

Not only at cultural level even at the political level, these differences are most manifest in the efforts of the US and other Western powers to induce other peoples to adopt the Western ideas concerning democracy and human rights. Modern democratic government originated in the West. When it has developed in non-Western colonial societies it has usually been the product of Western

colonialism or imposition."⁴

Elsewhere, in his article, Huntington writes that decisions made by the Security Council or IMF reflectively of Western interests are often projected as reflective of the desire of the world community. The very phrase "world community" has become the euphemistic collective noun, replacing "the free world", to give global legitimacy to actions reflecting the interests of the U.S. and other Western powers". Here a quotation from an American Neo-Muslim scholar seems very pertinent to quote:

The West's attempt at control has been through anthropologists, missionaries, sociologists and economists who all have misunderstood Islam; or elect to understand it in their own peculiar way."⁵

The best example of this diplomatic attempt can be gauged in John Major's remark when he inadvertently spoke of actions of "the West" against Saddam Hussain. He replaced "the West" with "the World Community". Commenting upon this Huntington argues: "He was right when he erred."⁶ Same policy was continued by the successors of George Bush, Clinton and John Major in their treatment meted out to Taliban, Iraqis and Al Qaida, i.e., masquerading "the campaign of US and Britain against Afghanistan, Iraq and others as a global alliance against the net work of international terrorism. They have even gone a step ahead of their predecessors by including Iran and Korea in the "axis of evil". However, Realist theorists like E.H. Carr, Morgenthau, Kissinger etc. will reject such interpretations as a vicious ploy to project national interests as global interests.⁷

This legacy of demonizing other people and communities goes back to the Middle ages where people like Pope Urban 11 (1042-99, who described himself as: "the spiritual ruler over the whole world," delivered a sermon in 1095 at Clermont in which he promised remittance of sins for exterminating "the infidels", the barbarians, "the vile race" so despised, base and demon -spirited," (namely the Muslims) which led to the first (1095-99) of the five Crusades against the Muslims, thus the hostility between the Muslims and Christian West, has persisted in one form or the other.

In this global backdrop when Islamic Revolution of Iran is analyzed and its ideological moorings discussed several view points come to the fore. There are several theories floated about the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Sometimes it is said that it was "result of a classic political mobilisation hijacked by a better -prepared social category (the clergy)"; or on the other hand in the culturalist and elitist view, "the clergy and their agents are credited with "awakening the consciousness" of masses ---because they are supposed to have been more aware of the distance between the nations aspirations and the oppressive realities imposed by the West ---and the clerical domination is de facto justified. It is projected to be the result of "a devilish manipulation, with the probable connivance of an external power (United States, Soviet Union. . . .?)", or sometimes it is suggested, on the other hand that it was a "the providential miracle out of the magicians' hat" .After mentioning these opinions Yam Richard concludes:

Things were probably far more complicated, although the evolution of the Iranian revolutionary movement sometimes seems to prove both interpretations right, each in its turn.⁸

However according to Yam "religious sensitivity and a rejection of the West were not the only factors in the Iranian uprising of 1978-9, but the religious colour eventually prevailed." Moreover, he suggests that when religion loses "its hold over the people the social movement ---for want of anything better ---adopted the language of Islam; doubtless because, at a time when dictatorship stifled all opposition, that is where it found a means of self expression". These remarks warrant strong reaction from the factual point of view as though the dictatorship of the Shah was prevalent yet the intellectual roots of the movement go back to Tobacco movement and the subtle influence of the classical Iranian Islamic scholars philosophers and, of course clerks. What is more important to note is that unlike the West religion had been not only intact with all its components and niceties in Muslim world in general and Iran in particular. Moreover, Muslims have never accepted separation of religion from the practical and mundane affairs of life, politics included; as they believe that Islam is the complete code of conduct. However

when there was any decline in the religiosity of Muslim ummah, people of vigour and vitality came to fore to arrest this apathy and inertia with the profound sacrifices and perpetuated intellectual and spiritual role. Those are known in Islamic history as mujjadids or mujtahids. Dilip Hero writes: "One of the salient features of Islamic history that it offers many examples of revivalist movements ...such a comprehensive system sets standards and norms for its followers in every aspect of life. Being human, they fail to live up to these stringent, all pervasive standards. And every so often an extra -ordinary pious leader rises and calls for an end to backsliding. "He says further that revival and reform have been recurring phenomena in Islamic history and they manifest themselves differently in different circumstances".⁹ The Western scholars insist on calling these movements as militant or fundamentalist movements while as these are just the reformative movements aiming at rejuvenating the religious institutions and defending the cause of Islam at a particular point of time against the onslaughts of enemies of Islam. It is in this back drop that Jansen sees nothing new in militancy rising its head in many Muslim countries .The Iranian Revolution was "only the most recent episode in the long history of militant Islam, a history as old as Islam itself. And, in its future, as long as Islam retains any real vitality, it will necessarily contain within it elements of political militancy."¹⁰

Huntington, as the true champion of Capitalist ideology sees an "Islamic - Confucian "link -up that will "challenge the west in the future."¹¹ After the collapse of Soviet Union politically and ideologically, for which Muslims have played the most vital role. Now it is the turn of this very old Western tyranny masquerading as the real alternative to Communism. It seems that if Capitalism was dear to the West, Islam was found to be antagonistic to the spirit of Capitalism. Because "there has been no special Muslim road for Capitalism"¹²

Thus any attempt to understand the genesis of Islamic Revolution of Iran this backgrounding is to be kept in view as it was always present there and was evident very glaringly from very beginning. Thus it was not merely a reaction to a particular situation but a holistic movement which had involved religious revolutionaries like

Khomeini, Bahisti, Taliqani on one hand and the intellectually oriented ulama like Muttahari, Tabatabai and Allamah Baqir Sadr on the other. At the same time modern educated intellectual scholars like Shariati and Jalal Aali-Muhammad. The Marjaie (Shia religious leadership) guided the movement, which has been declared "revolutionary" even by Shariati as he regards Islam the "revolutionary ideology".

The Iranian Ulama have had been at the forefront of all cultural, intellectual and political movements. Although the earlier struggle of Ulama was dubbed as "resistance of a reactionary nature". However the role-played by Sheikh Fazlullah Nuri in 1909, the most erudite of the ulama, was very significant as he opposed the Westernized democratic movement of his time. The consequence of the struggle was that he was executed publicly in the capital, without the anyone daring to protest against this cool blooded execution. It is also true that Devotees of Islam, Shiite revolutionaries, (Fedaiyane-e Islam) active between 1946 and 1956, were harshly repressed by the Shah in 1956 in Iran like their counterparts in Egypt by Nasser from 1954. It is also worth mentioning here that the rebellions which took place in Iran in 1963 could easily be presented to the world as "backward looking" resistance in which Islam did not play "a very enlightened role", therefore their brutal crushing in 1964 was justified by the oppressors. But in fact from that date onwards everything changed. And Islam in Iran, greatly reduced in its public expression for half a century, resurfaced in spectacular fashion from the years 1960-70. The new Muslim theorists knew where their enemy lay, and intended to combat it on the intellectual plane as well. They took up the challenge of modernity and showed that they had plans for society for our day and age.¹³

The parallel developments in Iraq and Lebanon also affected Iranian revolutionary movement a great deal. Yam is quite right when he says "the fact that Iraq played a pivotal role, thanks to the meeting in Najaf of clerics from different geographical and political horizons."¹⁴

The most important revolutionary scholar and visionary of Iraq who played most significant role during and after Islamic Revolution of Iran was Baqer al-Sadr. Born in 1935 at Kazemeyn, he belonged to a great Iraqi clerical family of

Lebanese origin. He followed a religious career at Najaf, where he was notably the disciple of Ayatollah Khoi. His first work was published in 1955 on the Shia viewpoint about the ownership of Fadak. Later on he became a member of editorial board of the Association of Ulama Magazine, *al-Adhwa*. His publications of that time tackled the burning ideological problems, starting with communism, and presented Islam as "the source of a philosophy superior to other currents of thinking, chiefly Marxism and materialism. His attack on Capitalism was also effective."¹⁵

In his book *Eqtesadonā* (Our Economy), the discussion of the system of limited private ownership, that has consideration for serving the Community and avoids usury and monopolizing, and recommends the best methods of economy. It is a market economy where the state plays a regulatory role. In all his analysis, Islam has a central role and appears as "the one and only alternative for solving the problems of our times."¹⁶ The most significant feature of this book is that Baqir A-Sadr endeavours to "use only references that are acceptable to both Sunnis and Shiites".

In his whole career, Baqir al-Sadr tackled the variety of topics and even drew up the plan of the constitution for the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. Its echoes were noticeable in the constitution adopted by the constitutional experts in Tehran. He has inspired generations of scholars and intellectuals. He is predominately present also in the writings and thinking of all his contemporaries, in Iraq as well as in Iran and the Lebanon, where his works were disseminated and translated. One of the unique features of his life was that his "militant activity took him to places where religious preaching had hitherto seemed impossible, on university campuses, at great ritual gatherings, and mass meetings."¹⁷

He was "a hero" at the time of Islamic revolution, who was already regarded as the "theoretician behind that revolution because he had been the first to impart a constitutional dimension to the Khomeynist principle of the *Velāyat-e faqīh*. The Iraqi Shiites believed that they had found in him someone who would help them to attempt, between Tigris and the Euphrates, an experiment similar to that of Iran. However he was first arrested and then released in 1979 when the political

unrest increased in Iraq. He was assigned a forced residence in Najaf. On April 1, 1980, Tariq Aziz, the then Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, escaped a murderous attack by the Dawa. Four days later Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr and his sister, Bint al Hoda, were executed.¹⁸

He was the "exceptional figure" who stood out from this provincial and disadvantaged community. His chief rival was the Communist Party. He was the intellectual fore runner of "the revolutionary theology", which shaped a new future for the entire Islamic international movement aiming at rejuvenating religious institutions throughout Muslim world. Since Islam was to be presented before the world as an alternative to Communism, Materialism and Capitalism, there was an earnest need of preparing intellectual background for it. Moreover, since all ideologies and world views are somewhere rooted in the epistemological framework present forth by the advocates, there was the need of providing a befitting alternative to the atheistic, materialistic and communistic philosophies after demolishing their foundational hypotheses. This job was done excellently by Baqir al-Sadr through his *Eqtesadonā* and *Falsafatunā*. His career as an ideologue of revolution reminds us about the clandestine work done by classical Iranian philosophers like Ghazzali and Mulla Sadra, who dismantled the edifice built on the superficial premises of Greek philosophy, which in a sense was advocated in refined manner by contemporary Marxists and their capitalist counterparts. After this all-shattering criticism of these philosophies, Baqir al-Sadr has provided the guidelines for new Islamic philosophy and epistemology. He has smashed the out dated theories of some Western writers about the tenacity and universal application of the Western values and philosophies, thereby rendering their claim that the Western civilization is universal groundless.

Baqir al-Sadr continued the holistic tradition of Mulla Sadra and developed his theories on the basis of logic and Islamic philosophical tradition, clearing the ground of all the thought patterns which had crept into the Islamic world since the 19th century, and brought to fore the true spirit of Islamic epistemology. He was an important intellectual figure in contemporary Islamic life, continued the tradition

of Mulla Sadra, rooted in "the revealed sources of Islam and in the dicta of the intellect", He had a very sound background in philosophy as he studied logic at an early age of 11 and wrote a book in which he criticized philosophy. His important philosophical books are like *Ta'liqāt 'ala Al-Asfār-al-Arabah* (Commentary on the Four books of Mulla Sadra's Journeys), *al-'Usūl Mantiq lil Istiqrā* (Logical Foundations of Induction) and *Falsafatuna* (Our Philosophy). The most important contribution of Sadr to philosophy is his theory of knowledge. He considered reason the only criterion of knowledge, and claimed that even empirical knowledge has to rely on reason in its lost analysis. The limitations of empiricism are evident in its treatment of the notions like causality and harmony between cause and effect etc., which being based on objective necessity rather than the so called empiricist psychological necessity and can be demonstrated by a "solid explanation" as a dispossessed notion *al-intiza'i*, from the Islamic philosophical point of view.

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