

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE PROJECT OF MODERNITY IN IRAN

1.0 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The shift in the traditional Christian doctrine during the Renaissance in the 16th century under the shadow of rationality, and the end of the Church's reign, were the significant factors which led to the end of the Middle Ages. This was the beginning of the revolution towards modernity in the following two centuries which created the foundation of modern Europe.

The beginning of modernity, however, is believed to have started in the West and caused the Enlightenment in Europe as a result of which the Industrial Revolution followed. In spite of its origins being in Europe, the wave of modernity is now the most overwhelming ideology in the world about which no country has the ability to compromise. Human wisdom, which is able to criticize itself, is the basis of modernity and as a consequence its other aspects such as science, technology and politics (Wilson & Hanns Reill, 2004). In effect modernity has been at the top of the cultural and socio-political agenda of the thinkers in the Islamic world since its rise in the 18th century. The spread of modernity has not been without controversies however. It has caused some clashes between a numbers of thinkers in the Islamic World. Some have attempted to draw a relationship between the modern world and Islam and some have labeled it as an anti- Islamic Western project. Some have tried to be selective and have chosen certain aspects of it in their political and social lives. Iran has been facing the wave of modernity for decades. Facing it, the Iranian people had two concerns; firstly, they have

been interested in science and technology, secondly, being invaded culturally by Western modernity (Vahdat, 2002, p. 11).

In its history, Iran has seen important shifts toward or away from modernity many times. Iran encountered modernity in the Nineteenth Century during the Qajar Dynasty (1785–1925). The first occasion was when the Iranian military during the Qajar Dynasty faced aggression from Russia and Britain who were equipped with modern warfare. The Iranian military was poorly equipped and this embarrassment resulted in the acceptance of such awful treaties such as The Treaty of *Gulistan* between Russia and Iran on 24 October 1813 and The Treaty of *Turkmenchay* on February 21, 1828 (Vahdat 1998, p. 57). During the Qajar Dynasty many students were sent to Europe to study modern science and technology and institutions of higher education were established, for example Darolfonoon School to train professionals. There were other actions taken to confront modernity, such as ordering technical and scientific books and journals from France. This marks the beginning of the process of modernization in Iran, which trained the first group of intellectuals in the country. The intellectuals during the Qajar Dynasty belonged mostly to the upper class of the society (Kazemi, 2004, p. 51). One of those intellectuals was Malkom Khan (1833-1908) who strongly believed in the necessity and the priority of modernity. He also believed in superiority of science over superstition. At the same time he claimed to be able to sustain the true meaning of Islam by introducing change. As a result, he offered a reform-based system of governance based on democracy, and democratic institutions just like the one in France. This view resulted in the Persian Constitutional Revolution between 1905 and 1907. There is no doubt in the political and cultural reforms which took place in the meantime but such reforms had no real impact in the society as they had no real connection to the national identity of Iran. It is difficult to compare the outcome of Reza Shah's many cultural,

technological and infrastructural steps which were taken during the 1910s with the negligible actions that had taken place in the decades before during the Qajar Dynasty.

Shah Reza's era was mixed with non-democratic rule of the King to push the country forward. This oppressive state made most of his reforms temporary, having no lasting effects on the generations to come. Even the intellectuals who came back from the West were only concerned about utilizing their techniques but had no concerns about the social and political status of the country. In fact detaching the techniques from their originating mind and culture limits us only in the field of using such techniques and not understanding the background in which such advances were made. This means that during the of Shah Reza it was the practical side of modernity, i.e. instrumental modernity, which was emphasized most, not the ideological and cultural background which led to this.

During the reign of Shah Mohamad Reza Pahlavi, the main concern of royalty and a class of intellectuals was to reach to the Great Civilization. Of course, this wave was miles away from the class of intellectuals and politicians who set their priority on attaining technical advances and social reconstruction. They considered civil society and democratic institutions as the only way to promote modernity. In effect, modernity turned into the pivotal point of discussions during the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. On the other hand, many of the contemporary politicians were very much inspired by *The Tudeh Party of Iran* ("Party of the Masses of Iran") which was an Iranian communist group. They considered Western ideology as satanic and colonizing. Apart from such ideologies, there were groups of thinkers who constantly and genuinely tried to return to the original Iranian identity along with their deep knowledge of the Western modernity (Azghandi, 2006, p. 68). To be named are Ali Shariati (November 23, 1933 – 1975) and Jalal Al-e-Ahmad (December 2, 1923 – September 9, 1969). They

had a deep ideological view of modernity and were deeply inspired by the totalitarian Russian Marxism but at the same time believed in a revival of Islamic origins. The negative view of the Western modernity was empowered with the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979. During this period all the aspects of modernity were rejected and a return to Islamic origins was offered instead. At the same time, a number of Iranian thinkers tried critically to detect the burdens on the way of modernity and offered their solutions to the crisis of identity which exists among the Iranian masses. They believe that to understand religion, people should use wisdom and to deal with the identity crisis we have to overcome religious ideology.

Another group of thinkers reject the notion of accepting Western modernism without modifications but at the same time believe in a coexistence of tradition and modernity. This group of thinkers believes that attaining civil society and wisdom is only possible by deeply understanding the West and utilizing the superior bases of modernity such as science, contemporary interpretation of religion and cultural interaction (Soroush, 1987, p. 244). Abdol Karim Soroush, Iranian thinker and philosopher is one of these thinkers.

It is useful to consider Iranian modern thinkers in either of the two categories: Western-minded and religious. The most prominent aspect of Western minded thinkers is their emphasis on separation of tradition and modernity. On the other hand, religious thinkers look forward to combining the two. The Western-minded thinkers believe that the most important burden on development in Islamic countries is in the Islamic culture itself. Therefore, they try to minimize the impact of religion on culture and society. The other group which is more religious put the emphasis on encountering the negative responses to modernity by the religious society. They also have the concern for maintaining the religious identity and at the same time pushing the society toward

development. The rise of such religious thinkers was also simultaneous with the Persian Constitutional Revolution. Sayyid Jamal-ad-Din Asadabadi (b. 1838 - d. March 9, 1897), who was a political activist and Islamic ideologist, was also one of the first religious thinkers in this respect (Kazemi, 2004, p. 75). The rise of religious thinkers peaked in the 1940s because of several reasons. First was the abolition of Shah Reza Pahlavi's dictatorship toward the end of the Second World War as a result of which many clerics and intellectuals felt more secure to express their ideas more freely. At the same time three major social and political movements were on the move: *Tudeh* Party of Iran, which was mentioned earlier and was a Communist party, National Front who had nationalistic ideology and the Islamic Movement. In the decade before the resolution of the Islamic Republic there were a number of trends before the Islamic rule. Initially, Communist influence was strong, and then it was replaced by national movement and at the end by the Islamic movement. Islamic societies of universities around Iran had a very prominent role in resisting Marxist ideology among students and university professors. By the activities of such societies, the activities of religious thinkers came to a peak, never seen before. They tried, by publishing books, holding speeches, and writing columns and journals to re-establish the role of religion in society as well as reconnecting the religious principles with the needs of the modern world. Starting in the 1960s and mostly as a result of a harsh oppression, the activities of the Communism block radically decreased in educational and social arena in Iran. This was the beginning of the process of empowering the Islamic ideology by ideologue thinkers such as Ali Shari'ati and Murteza Mutahhari. They invaded the Marxist ideology in occasions and their main gathering station was at the Hosseinieh Ershad (a Mosque), a religious institute in Tehran (Kazemi, 2004, p. 90).

The most important platform of differences between traditions and modernity are: i) the political aspects and role of the government, and ii) the role of science and technology in society. With this in mind, we will therefore focus on science and politics as the two key dimensions of modernity, in this thesis. Based on the historical research and sociological investigations held, a type of government is suggested with an accompanied human civilizations platform. Similarly, social life had its boundaries within certain amended legal regulations and the structure of a system that were related to context of bonding between individuals. However it has remained insufficient for an individual or a ruling class over one another. It appeared that the existence of the government was merely to create a society, which is a reflection of a self evident social principle. Government is a crucial element that forms a society as the it has two main functions which are: 1) Legislation and society regulation 2) Execution of legislation. Currently, democracy is well-accepted in the whole world as the rule of majority and follows a certain division of the government into two categories 1) Liberal Democracy 2) Religious Democracy. Democracy and the people's role in the government are regarded as one of the main concerns at this time. In the process of identifying the importance of correct recognition of people's role and position in the government, democracy was raised as the main concern that played an important role in society's political future, that could be referred to as the explanation of the theory on religious democracy and government establishment connects directly to the Islamic laws. This caused a tiff when assorted perspectives through different point of views have been stated concerning people's position in the government and the most appropriate method of interaction between these two. Through this process, one point that was made visible was simply that the political system today was crafted very attractively and was named "Democracy". This witnessed several of its kind, among which the one identified as "Liberal Democracy" was regarded as the best political system existing in the world.

However, this was again compared to the last method of political system that was named “Religious Democracy” that presented itself by the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran, which served as a Muslim rival for liberal Democracy. The form of the government structure was based on public wills. However based on Islamic teachings, people could choose their preferred person, a canonist who had complete qualifications.

Persia’s several defeats by Russia during the Russo-Persian War (1804–1813) made the Persian elite, led by Abbas Mirza (August 26, 1789 - October 25, 1833) to rethink of their strategies and to understand the real reasons behind the defeat and the underlying reasons behind the Western stance on warfare. This marks the beginning of the wave of modernization in Persia. It is distinguished by the Persian envoys to London who were trained and educated, who on their way back home, brought with them the modern scientific bases upon which the modernization in Persia was started.

In 1849 the biggest delegate was sent to France, including 42 trainees. In 1851 Amir Kabir established the Dar ul-Funun School. This institution played a big role in the road of modernization in Persia by educating more than 7000 experts. The numerous European tours by Naser al-Din Shah Qajar in 1873, 1879 and 1889 as well as his son and successor Mozaffar ad-Din Shah Qajar in 1900 paved the way for reforms in Persia. These were not the only contributing factors to the beginning of the reform in Persia. Another important factor was the writing of politicians and reformists such as Mirza Malkom Khan (an Iranian proponent of Freemasonry and the Iranian ambassador to Rome), Mirza Abdul Rahim Talebouf (an Iranian intellectual and social reformer), Zeinul Abidin Maragheh (social reformer and the author of the “Ebrahim Beig's Travelogue”), and Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (a celebrated Azerbaijani author, playwright, philosopher, and founder of modern literary criticism) played a huge role in preparing the theoretical bases of reform in Persia. Akhounzadeh believed that if the

ordinary public are not educated, all the efforts in bringing law and order to the country will be fruitless. Mirza Malkom Khan believed that the only way to development is a belief in humanity; he would say that:

Development is in the hand of nurturing the world, and nurturing the world lies in science. I see this belonging to humanity and I see this in humanity's reach (Bashiriyeh, 1997, pp. 448-453).

What came as a result was the occurrence of the Persian Constitutional Monarchy which paved the way for a Persian nationalism, theorized by the contemporary elites. With the flood of science and development, Iran became divided into a religious, domestic branch and the pro-Western, secular minded one. Although there were occasional, strong objections to the import of science from the West, such voices were quietened as the Persian elite had no intention to block the inflow of science to the country, as science was considered to be one of the highest virtues of all. Reform in those days was merely equal to wisdom, opposed to today's definition as humanism and democracy. The skeptical voice of the modern science in recent era was never heard in Iran except for a short period at the end of the Pahlavi, and the beginning of the Ayatollah Khomeini era.

The main periods of modernization in Iran can be categorized into three parts:

(A) Nationalization of Iranian oil in the early 1950s: This was the flagship era of Iranian awakening toward social movements and national interests, although it did not live long;

(B) The last years of Shah Reza Pahlavi in which the Western science was at the heart of a skeptical view and the leftist movement started to criticize the whole Western scientific foundations. This movement, which was started by Jalal AlAhmad, and

continued by Ali Shariati questioned the very foundations of the modern science and rejected its negative aspects for the Iranian traditional culture.

(C) Morteza Mutahhari believed that there should be no confrontation with modern science from the side of *Hawzah* (a seminary of traditional Shiite Islamic studies). He believed that each institution has its own duties and responsibilities. Therefore neither of them should intervene in the affairs of the other.

This trend towards criticizing modern science declined during the years after the Islamic revolution and science became a socio-political right. There are two prominent views on the matter in today's modern Iran which belong to Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Abdolkarim Soroush. Soroush believes that insufficient scientific record is the reason behind Islamic world's problems and he is a supporter of the modern science. On the other hand, Nasr believes that the empirical sciences with their present underlying metaphysics are a reason behind the fall of civilizations. He is therefore a critique of modern science thus calling it 'unholy' and considers metaphysics, the real 'holy' science. In this study, will also attempt to examine the ideas of the various selected Iranian thinkers on science, and its relationship to Islam, politics and government.

1.1 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

This dissertation further explores and explains the thoughts of individual Muslim intellectuals that owned different understandings concerning the relationships between Islam, science, politics and the introduction of Modernity. The beginning of the problem which was identified through this study is religious intellectual survey conducted in Iran and the investigation done about thoughts and ideas of five Iranian Muslim intellectuals namely as: *Abdolkarim Soroush, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ali Shariati, Morteza Mutahhari, Mehdi Golshani*. They originated from different ends

where Islam and modernity was concerned. Meanwhile, liberalism through Soroush, *critical Radicalism* through Shariati, *Reformist* from Ayatollah Mutahhari, *traditionalist* from Nasr, *traditionalist* through *Golshani* was introduced respectively. Further on, this study became more sophisticated by identifying the relationship shared between Islamic Science and Modernity. Through the identification, the process of fitting this structure within an Islamic framework of the government was conducted. Currently, modernity is the major concern for most Islamic countries and their individual encounter between tradition and modernity is indeed a struggle. Intellectuals like *Abdolkarim Soroush*, *Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, *Ali Shariati*, *Murteza Mutahhari*, *Mehdi Golshani* in Iran have found different methods of solving this problem. The thought derived by Intellectuals through this study stands firmly on two foundations: a) modern thought and b) religious attitudes. The crucial element of differences between tradition and modernity were two main attributes which were: i) the political arena and the government structure, and ii) science and technology. However, these two remained essential in the growth of a healthy society.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study is based on the methods of textual, analytical, critical and descriptive research on Iranian Muslim intellectual, on their views of Islam, and with special reference to *science& politics*. Overall, the theme of this research is to study the insights and ideas of selected Muslim intellectuals in Iran on science and politics. The specific objectives of this research are:

- 1.2.1 This study is focused on gathering information about Iranian Muslim intellectuals. This is to recognize the main ideas involved and drawing a connection or disconnection between Islam and modernity.

- 1.2.2 The study mainly investigates controversial ideas of Iranian Muslim intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Seyyed Hossein Nasr , Ali Shariati , Murteza Mutahhari , and Mehdi Golshani .
- 1.2.3 In addition to that, this study will also focus on the ideas of Islam concerning science through the writings of thinkers mentioned above.
- 1.2.4 The aim of this study is to reflect the level of democracy in the ideas of the Iranian Muslim intellectuals. It certainly projects the influence of science and modernity as well as democracy fitting into the Islamic system of government.

1.3 THESIS STATEMENT

The aim of this dissertation is to examine and characterize the ideas of selected Iranian intellectuals, namely, Abdolkarim Soroush, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ali Shariati, Murteza Mutahhari, and Mehdi Golshani on Islam, modernity, science and politics, and its implications for Iran. The justification for the choice of these five scholars is based on their intellectual prominence and influence in dealing with the theme of Islam, modernity, science and politics in Iran. The results of the research will then be examined further to demonstrate the similarities and dissimilarities of their ideas on Islam and modernity.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF RESERCH

The significance of this research is as follows:

- 1.4.1 It is hoped that the contributions from this study will be channeled to the current debate on Islam, science and politics as well as the creation of an alternative Islamic world view which will be developed with regards to science, technology and a systematic government.

1.4.2 This study will draw an outline from some of the main themes discussed by Abdolkarim Soroush, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ali Shari'ati, Murteza Mutahhari and Mehdi Golshani in creating a vision of a new Islamic world view which would be achieved through the process of Islamization of knowledge, using scientific arguments and Islamic teachings.

1.4.3 This study is part of an accumulated effort towards the rise of an Islamic world view which will hopefully lead to the advancement of science and technology in the Muslim world.

1.4.4 This study will provide a platform for the issues involved in the Muslim's pursuit of contemporary knowledge, from an Islamic perspective.

1.4.5 Religious democracy is crucial to the government as the axis of all social and personal activities. It involves the role of God and the authorities' selection must reflect God's will. Society's vote must be in the context of a religious framework as, they cannot vote beyond this boundary, as the formation of the government is based on people's achievement on the welfare of the world through religious democracy.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

Attention started to be paid to the role and potential of intellectuals in the early 1960s. Naturally, in Iran, intellectual societies were present in the academic societies and vice versa, but outside of this boundary, little attention was paid. This was simply because Shah possessed strong and distinguished position in the region and with this position he stirred academic conflict outside the country where people were not able to relate themselves to this issue. With regards to this matter, censorship was established within the country, without serious research being carried out, and that only resulted in obvious crisis symptoms within the Shah's regime that raised the West's serious

attention on this matter. It was only at the height of the revolution that the intellectuals started to attract attention and this attention continued until a number of years after the Islamic revolution. Still, relative to what has been published about the Islamic Revolution, there has been little study on the topic of intellectuals' influence on society. Of course, there are extensive writings about the first and the second wave of the Islamic resistance inside the very circles in which the movements were established, but unluckily there is little of it outside these circles.

Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Mutahhari have been the pioneers of writing about the subject. In addition, there has been too little work on the ideas of Mehdi Golshani and S.H. Nasr. In the realm of publication, "Kayhan Farhangi", "Kian", and "Rah Noor" were the most prominent Journals which covered the intellectual movement of the time as a whole. Political scientists, sociologists, political economists and historians who were deeply associated with modern Iran through research and studies, expressed Iran's encounter with the West, which was a result of the fundamental changes witnessed in the 19th century. This was also when the centuries-old mode of governance was demolished, leading to a rapid rise in the struggle between modernity and tradition.

My first encounter was with a book by Farzin Vahdat entitled, *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity*, published by Syracuse University Press, 2002. The author, Farzin Vahdat is a sociologist who was interested in discovering critical theory and exploring the development of modernity in the West and the Middle East. He lectured on social studies at Harvard University where his papers appeared in journals such as *Critique* and the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. This book was a theoretical analysis of Iran's intellectual encounter with modernity. The main objective of this project was twofold: 1) The effort of examining closely the concept and phenomenon of modernity in its western and global context, and

2) The platform to analyze Iran's intellectual and cultural encounter with modernity within the period between mid 19th century until now, focusing on the major socio-political discourses and themes which have contributed in the shaping of Iranian consciousness and institutions within this period. Vahdat, was the first Iranian writer to provide an analysis based on critical theory, especially the concept of subjectivity as expounded in writings of Jurgen Habermas. Following that, he deployed the Western philosophical method which have universal applicability, by publishing the concern of Iranian theorists such as Shariati, Mutahhari, Ayatollah Khomeini—the former supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution—and Soroush, who were reflecting on human subjectivity as the main subject.

The process of involvement in the major theoretical discourses of modernity depicted the author's efforts since the very beginning, in a non-Western context in order to resolve some of the central theoretical issues that have been hovering on the issue of modernity in Iran. Nevertheless, this research is a platform made to provide a foundation for the study of modernity and its development within the Middle Eastern context. This is indeed achieved as the book is an important addition to the increasing body of work done within the global context with critical theory as well perspectives on contemporary Iran.

The next book is called, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*, by Ali Mirsepassi, and published by Cambridge University Press (2000). Mirsepassi is a Professor of Middle Eastern Studies and Sociology at the Gallatin School and director of Iranian Studies Initiative. During 2002-2007, he was entrusted with several administrative posts in the Gallatin School Deans' Office, most respectably serving as the School's interim dean for two consecutive years. However, currently he is a Carnegie Scholar (2007-2009) whose

research project contains and examines the Western influence rampant on the Islamic political perspective. His journey has been pretty challenging as before joining the faculty at Gallatin, Professor Mirsepassi taught at Hampshire College, Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. With the amount of workload on his head, his teaching was concentrated on social theories in the lines of modernity, comparative and historical sociology, sociology of religion, Middle Eastern societies that are associated with cultures, and its connection to Islam and the social change experienced in the process.

Through this process of thought-provoking study, one certain thing is that Ali Mirsepassi definitely explored the concept of modernity, while exposing the Eurocentric prejudices and the hostility towards non-Western cultures that has been its ground. This continued by narrowing on the Iranian's encounter with modernity, where he charted the political and intellectual history and progressed on working towards a new level of interpretation within the Islamic sphere where Fundamentalism was given a new platform through the detailed analysis of the ideas presented by the Islamic intellectuals. Furthermore, the author stands on a simple fact that the Iranian Islamic Revolution was not only a simple rift between modernity and tradition but a conscious effort to spice modernity through a blend of authentic Islamic identity, culture and historical experience. He summed up by highlighting on the future of secularism and democracy within the Middle East. Certain prominent contributions were made towards the literature pondering on modernity, social change and Islamic Studies. What is seen in chapter four of the book is certainly related to this thesis. Parts of the book were dedicated to Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati who were much more involved in the careful analysis of the issues. This helped each of them to offer a critique towards modernization in its Westernized form, and both, in their search for authenticity in their

respective fields, articulated to the call for a “return” to the “nativist” ideology, in which preparing for the ground seemed extremely crucial for an Islamic political movement. He believes that most of the times Iranian thinkers have been too vague or incomprehensible in posing their arguments and many times they have ended against democracy instead of defending it.

The third piece is based on a book by Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West, the Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, published by Syracuse University Press (1996). Mehrzad Boroujerdi is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs where he was simultaneously responsible as the Founding Director of the Middle Eastern Studies Program and Co-Director of the Religion, Media and International Relations Program. Through this book, he longed for critical analogy to revise the ontological and epistemological premises that were the underlying element in the process of identity construction through the contemporary Iranian intellectuals. This study focuses on the birth of a new phase of thought which was described as “Orientalism in Reverse,” and which served the purpose of dominating the political and intellectual sphere of the pre- and post- revolutionary conditions in Iran. Drawing upon the works of Michel Foucault and Edward Said on the “constitution of otherness”, permits whatever form of process in the identity formation. He moves on to examine two dominant problems confronting Iranian intellectuals: identity *per se* and the major encounter with the West. He remained in that position since the Iranian intellectuals’ vision of their “self” was constructed through their ideology of the “western other,” These individuals could not and indeed refused to carry forward any sort of experiment pertaining to the same types of ontological and epistemological elements that the Western counterparts experienced through the aftermath of the Enlightenment. In conclusion, the Iranian intellectuals

involved from the last three decades have drastically shifted towards the idea of nativism, traditionalism, and politicized Islam which was considered as a subject of relativity. This intellectual art provided a hinge for the theoretical guidelines as the revolutionary movement commenced to power in 1979. Drawing identification of the Iranian intellectuals' means and modes by the process of cultural identification, forced him to follow the methods laid by methodological pluralism that drew on certain ideas found in post structuralism and sociology of knowledge. However, what makes it all profitable is that, the study has been based on certain personal interviews, oral history files, and a range of primary as well as secondary textual sources that projects the authenticity.

Another work is by Ali Gheisari who has written extensively in his book entitled "*Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century*". Published by University of Texas Press (1998), this book is about Iranian modernist thinkers in the 20th century and it discussed them in a holistic way that is, discussing their impact and history, but has not involved in any discussion on religious modernist thinkers, such as Soroush etc. It is worth mentioning that Soroush wrote a series of articles about limiting the boundaries of religion in the period of 1988 and 1990 but the first time his name was mentioned in the West was in an article by Robin Wright titled "Martin Luther King of Iran". From then onwards, the democracy and rights activists in the world were attracted to the events related to the issue of religious modernism and its impact on democracy movement and human rights in Iran and a number of essays and articles followed the trend.

A major work relating to the this study is by Forough Jahanbakhsh, PhD holder from the University of McGill in Islamic Studies and currently a professor at Queen's University, who published her PhD thesis as a book called "*Islam, Democracy And*

Religious Modernism In Iran (1953-2000): From Bazargan To Soroush . This book explores the relationship between society and religion since its introduction to public life in Iran after the Islamic Revolution and intends to define the relationship between Islam, governance and democracy in the process which finally led to the Islamic Revolution. Therefore, she starts by introducing the seven key personalities in the Islamic awakening: Ayatollah Taleghani, Mehdi Bazargan, Ayatollah Tabatabaei, Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Mutahhari, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Soroush.

Finally, the work by Mehran Kamrava, entitled “*Iran’s Intellectual Revolution*”, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Professor Mehran Kamrava’s new edition revolves around contemporary Iranian intellectuals: where one stands on the debate pertaining the source of political legitimacy and the responsibilities held for those who govern and the other where the degree of modernity has a space within the Islamic republic.

A sad condition is the conservative theories of government in Iran where the focus lies on the concept of *mashru’iyyat*, or the legitimacy that God bestows upon a system. However, *maqbuliyyat*, or the extent of the people’s approval of the government was seen as a crucial element. Majority of the intellectuals depicted in Professor Kamrava’s book focused on popular sovereignty that however projected different paths taken to reach a conclusion that seemed dramatic. The idea of modernity was never seen from a clear scope of definition by Professor Kamrava, considering the fact that few Iranian intellectuals conformed to the meaning of the word. However, one should grasp the concept on a wider depth as the negotiation between tradition and innovation instead of “modernization” through the economic or political arena, where it appeared visible to almost all of the conservative thinkers of Iran that agreed to embrace modernity in a limited way. This caused preference for *maqbuliyyat* and *modernité* as Professor

Kamrava argued, which is obviously the natural result of a long historical development path. Following closely from a model of the Iranian intellectual history through the modernist thinker Ramin Jahanbegloo, he then positions four recent phases where the first two were undoubtedly a modernist approach that preceded a series of violent anti-modernist backlash that happened back in the 1960s and 1970s. This brought questions to the conservative world and Western values respectively, where the new generation of intellectuals was more circumspect with intellectual commitments compared to the previous generation that gradually crafted out a new social and political landscape. He writes, “Democracy is not limited to freedom to rebel; but it also advocates the absence of authoritarianism and arbitrariness. Keeping the same method, they disregard ideological partisanship and do not stand for the active engagement of intellectuals in a social engineering. The central question of today is the identification and the ability to recognize ‘the enemy’ while engaging in a rational discourse set by trading ideas”.

Of course, there have been writings on the topic of modernity and religion, but they are mostly journalistic articles which do not have the expected analytical depth and are generally descriptive of ideas and repeating them. Such writings which do not have a strong scientific, or research-based, background are not infallible and by carefully scrutinizing them we can see that they are all (or mostly) discussing the very personal perspectives of the modernist thinkers or the politics and governance in their ideology. Hopefully this investigation will put together the required background for understanding this deep and impressive movement in the modern history of Iran.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this work is to provide answers to the related questions that follow from the general discourse on Islam and modernity, from my research on the Iranian Muslim intellectuals’ Islamic ideas on science and politics.

- 1) What are Iranian Muslim intellectuals' ideas with regards to Islam and science?
- 2) What are Iranian Muslim intellectuals' ideas about democracy?
- 3) What is the relationship between science, government and politics, in a modern Iranian state?
- 4) What are the similarities and dissimilarities in the ideas presented by the Iranian scholars pertaining Islam and modernity?

1.7 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study follows a strong approach of textual, analytical and descriptive research methods. However, it has adopted the method of textual analysis and library research as the main method of data collection. The data for this dissertation is channeled through several sources and they are divided into two categories which are: a) primary sources and b) secondary sources.

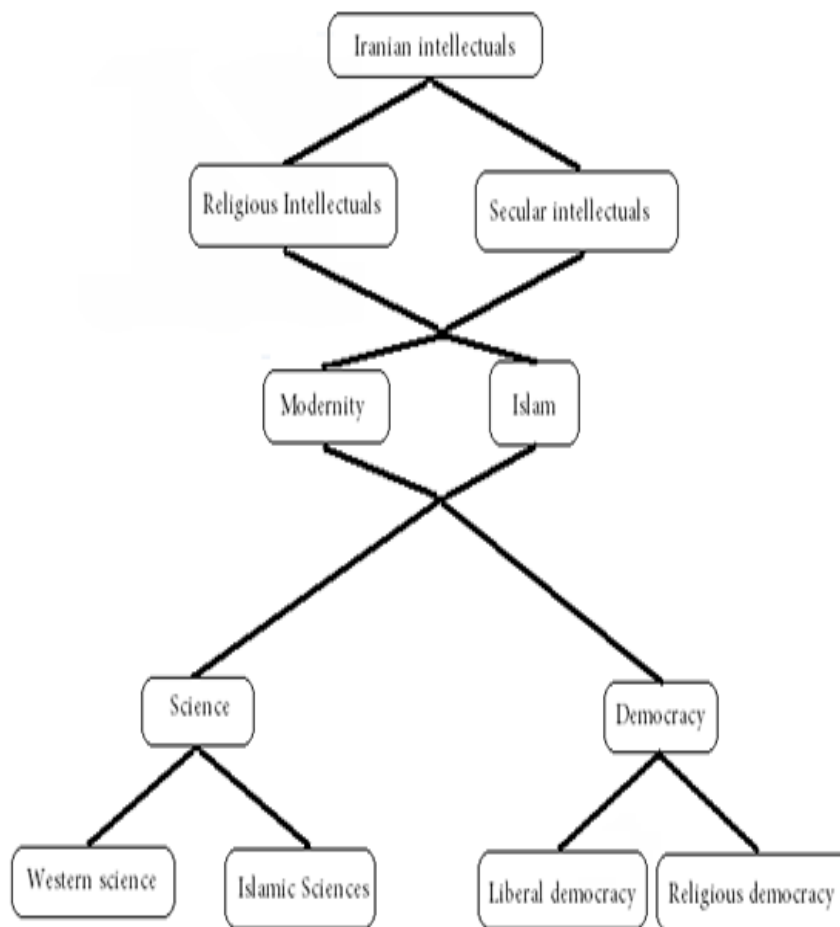
Primary sources consist of two categories of literature on the subject under this discussion. The first category includes the writing of Abdolkarim Soroush, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ali Shari'ati, Murteza Mutahhari, Mehdi Golshani, book, articles, letters, lectures and etc. Besides that, their followers that have proved to be an important resource have compiled other texts, articles, letters and lectures of these scholars.

The second category consists of literature and papers of other prominent Muslim scholars (both ancient and modern) on the philosophical and religious insights. The secondary sources also include literature and papers on the subject under the discussion that has been written and translated by other scholars pertaining to the views of these intellectuals.

1.8 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

The thesis will examine the concept and the phenomena of Islam and Modernity, through the ideas of selected Iranian thinkers, by trying to examine their ideas of science and politics. Various concepts such as modernization, secularism, Islamization and democracy will be employed in this study. Through this study, I will evaluate the key intellectual's elements of the Iranian encounter with regards to modernity in the contemporary period. The Iranian Muslim intellectual confrontation with modernity in the contemporary period initiated a response to modernity onslaught. They have responded - in various ways- to the modernization brought about by the West. Investigation has been in progress to figure this context. In order to analyze contemporary Iranian Muslim intellectual's ideas about Islamic science and politics and encounter with modernity, we used the available primary and secondary sources both in Persian and English. In cases where primary sources have not been accessible, I have managed with secondary sources that closely represent the original works.

Fig1.1. Synopsis of the Conceptual Framework



According to Figure 1.1 we can explain that the inception of intellectuality in the modern Iran dates back to the Safavid Dynasty in which the first encounters between the Western civilization and the traders/politicians took place.

In spite of this fact, the real birth of intellectuality in Iran started during the Qajar Dynasty. The intellectuals of this era believed in a total Westernization of the Iranian society. This intellectual leadership continued until the reign of Shah Reza Pahlavi and stretched up to the 1953 coup in Iran which divided the intellectuals into two groups, one was the secular thinkers who believed in the separation of tradition and modernity and the other which included the religious thinkers, were fighting for the cooperation between religion and modernity.

Starting in the 1970s the religious intellectuality strengthened its position in the political arena, thus lifting its position in the intellectual circles of the time. Thinkers who subscribed to this group definitely believe in Islam as opposed to the secular thinkers who firmly believed in modernity. In this thesis the core of our analysis will be on the religious thinkers' influence on science and politics.

One of the most discussed topics in the political and philosophical circles today is democracy. It is also one of the most important concerns of the religious intellectuals. Democracy is a widely accepted ideology which can be either in a form of a secular, liberal or religious democracy.

The other concern of most religious thinkers today is the modern science and technology which has its 100 percent supporter's right up to stern opponents. In this research we will discuss the insights of five Iranian thinkers on the relationship between science and politics. The thesis is presented in six chapters and a final concluding chapter.

In the first chapter the concepts and theoretical tools which are used for analyzing the insights of Islamic thinkers are explained. A general analysis on the process and development of the intellectual movement in Iran is presented and its related concepts and their position with regard to its relationship with science and politics are examined.

What are Iranian Muslim intellectuals' ideas with regards to Islam and science?

This question is going to be discussed in the 2th chapter of this study.

In this chapter we will look for the ideas of Iranian Muslim intellectuals with regards to Islam and science which identifies their ideas and insights in three different categories: (a) Reformist ideologues such as Mutahhari, (b) Modernists such as Soroush and (c) Traditionalist like Nasr, and Golshani is a Reformist-Traditionalist.

Their insights on the topic are then presented. In summary, Mutahhari sees no contrasts between science and religion at all. Soroush is trying to take pattern from the modern science

and adjust religion according to that. Nasr sees science as a complete opposite to religion and Golshani believes that putting science in the general frame of religion can legitimize it.

In the third chapter the political system of Iran has been re-examined so as to realize the peak of modernism influence on Iran and the beginning of the separation of tradition and society. This study will then arrive at the beginning of the Islamic republic, which after centuries of monarchic powers in Iran, is the first democracy in power. This democracy is different from the other forms of democracy which are practiced in the other parts of the world. The democracy in practice in Iran is an Islamic democracy in which all the principles are to be compatible with the Islamic rules. In this chapter these principles and the reasons behind its superiority compared to other forms of democracy are presented and discussed. In the same section, the pillars of the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the Islamic republic of Iran are compared and the reasons of superiority of an Islamic democracy over a secular one are explained.

In the fourth chapter comes the most important question of the study: What are Iranian Muslim Intellectuals' ideas concerning democracy?

In this chapter the ideas of the most prominent contemporary Iranian Islamic thinkers are discussed such as Shariati's views which are very radically critical, Soroush who is a liberal and Mutahhari who is a reformist. In summary, Shariati was an opponent of the Western democracy and proposed a form of engaged Democracy as his ideal form of democracy to be implemented in Iran, and which is inspired by Shiite insights into governance by jurists.

Soroush proposes an Islamic democracy, but one which is not bases on the fundamental Islamic principles. He considers governance as a fundamentally nonreligious practice which can only become involved with religion if religious leaders take hold of it; otherwise, it's fundamentally nonreligious. Soroush is somehow a supporter of the Western liberal democracy. Mutahhari agreed with democracy, provided it was framed within the Islamic principles, which makes it a religious democracy, in which he believed.

What is the relationship between science, government and politics, in a modern Iranian state? This question is going to be answered in the fifth chapter.

In this chapter the history, of the relationship between the development of science and the kind of governance in Iran in the course of time has been explained. Based on the Iranian contemporary history the more the religious the leaders in Iran were, the stronger their support and attention to the advancement of science. It is needless to say that the kind of governance and the political ideology in a country is one of the factors affecting the advancement and the influx of science in and into that country. Based on this claim, democratic political powers have stronger support for science, as in the Western democracies. On the other hand, religious and Islamic democracies pay enough attention to both the material and the spiritual sides of science.

The main theme of the sixth chapter is the similarities and dissimilarities in the ideas presented by the Iranian scholars pertaining to Islam and modernity.

In this section the relationship between Islam, science and politics based on the insights of the Islamic thinkers who have been named earlier (Soroush, Mutahhari, Nasr, etc) has been discussed. Soroush who is a liberal thinker believes that the modern science, religion and politics are in fact homogenous and compatible and that the religious democracies pay enough respect to both the material and the spiritual sides of the modern science and believes that there is a positive relationship between respecting democratic values and commitment to scientific activities.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Golshani are the representatives of the traditionalist band of Islamic thinkers in Iran. Most of their writings focus on the relationship between science and Islam and not much about governance or politics. Especially Golshani whose work is mostly concentrated on the topic of science and religion. In spite of this, Nasr has a brief work on governance and democracy in which he discusses his belief in an Islamic kingdom as seen during the golden age of Islamic civilization. He is at the same time one of the opponents of the modern science and democracy. Ayatollah Mutahhari who is a supporter of the reformist movement believes that the respect to science and democracy are the inseparable parts of the

Islamic governance and the liberal values do actually exist in Islamic texts. The seventh chapter is a general summary of these discussions.

1.8.1 Some Key Concepts

Below are some key concepts that have been used in this thesis.

1- Modernity:

Modernity concept refers to the form of society which started in the Enlightenment in Europe and became consolidated with the French Revolution and the rise of German idealism. The word ‘modernity’ refers to the new civilization in Europe and North America which started in the 1800s and matured in the early 20th century. This civilization is by all accounts modern and unique. It is unique in the study of nature, machinery, and also the modern methods of industrial production which led to development of the humanity’s status in a way unseen in history. As it was the case with democracy, there are several descriptions of modernity. Anthony Giddens, a British sociologist, believes that “Modernity is the way of living and socio-political institutions which appeared in the West starting in the 17th century until today, which spread gradually across the world” (Giddens, 1991, p. 4). In summary, modernity means living contemporarily. “Modernity can be called a very deep social reform which affects social, economical, political, bureaucratic, and religious principles” (Masini, 1998, pp. 81-82). In this description, modernity is limited to a time-based, periodical phenomenon, not a philosophical notion. That is why many thinkers believe that like any other periodical, or historical phenomenon, modernity had a birth and shall have a death, but of course this is not shared by many thinkers (Legenhausen, 1998, p. 50). Giddens believes it started in the 18th century, but many believe it started long before, in the 17th century. There is however one repeated theme: wisdom and rationality overcame religion and classical philosophy and discoveries and inventions paved the

way to eradicate poverty. Discouragement toward invaluable religious ideas, Protestant reform and the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century hastened the process of modernity in Europe. Modernity however, remained a mixture of several modern ideas, which started to appear one after another. It also includes many aspects of contemporary art, philosophy, sociology, psychology, religion politics, literature, and morals.

Some of the most prominent effects of modernity in society and politics are:

- 1- Scientism: as a cause for positivism, it believes that the only way to understanding the world around us is to experiment and try. (T.Hunter, 2009, p. 81)
- 2- Rationalism: it only recognizes practical wisdom and rational thinking which only trusts the results of scientific research.
- 3- Materialism: the belief that recognizes existence and matter as the only concepts and the initial truth. The fact is that it is a direct result of the previous thinking, if the only way to understand the truth is experimentation, then there is nothing beyond what we can feel and taste. Therefore only materials exist because they can be 'real', or 'existential', if something cannot be experimented then it does not exist (Delanty, 1999, p. 163) .
- 4- Humanism: modernity believes in a human-centered universe in which the only reason to exist is to serve humanity, and all things are there to serve humanity. The fact is that among traditionalist thinkers, this is the position of God, not humans to be served unlimitedly (Berman, 1994, p. 107).
- 5- Individualism: individualism is the belief in individuals and giving the priority to the individual units of society (humans) rather than society as a whole. This is to serve the freedom, rights and personal development and dignity of the individuals (Lan & Redissi, 2004, p. 16).

As mentioned earlier, there is a tendency among some thinkers that

modernity has an end. They offer a replacement: Postmodernism. Many thinkers consider this as the natural complementary to the modern period.

2- Democracy:

Democracy has its roots in the Greek word ‘Demos’ meaning people and ‘Keratos’ meaning power or ability, as a whole, to mean the will of people. The word entered English in the 16th century (Green, 1993, p. 19). Political systems around the world follow either of these forms: Monocracy, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, and Democracy.

In a monocracy all the privileges, powers and authority is in the hands of a monarch/king/dictator that controls the country exactly as he/she wishes. In an Aristocracy the power and authority goes to the elites, leaving behind the rest of the society. In an oligarchy a small number of people hold the power and pursue the path to their profit, in whatever ways they desire. Description of democracy on the other hand is very difficult and can include a wide range of different forms. Carl Cohen introduced democracy as the “Governance by people” (Cohen, 1971, p. 202). Abraham Lincoln saw democracy as “Government of the people, by the people for the people.” (Lesage & Vercauteren, 2009, p. 129). Joseph Schumpeter believed that:

institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the people’s vote (Schumpeter, 1947, p. 269).

Abdol Fattah Shahade also argues that the simplest form of democracy is one that let people govern themselves (Shahada, 1987, p. 9). David Beetham calls a country a democracy if:

the government is elected to power, is responsible to people and all the adults have the right to choose and be chosen and in which law is the guarantor of civil and political rights of every individual (Behnam, 1996, p. 18).

Givani Sartori believes pessimistically that “Democracy is a power of the people and power to the people”(Sartori, 1987, p. 7). By telling all these inscriptions into consideration, we can attain a common idea about democracy: “The power of the majority.” The reason for choosing the word ‘majority’ is that we can see that taking into consideration of all the people with their various ideologies into consideration in order to govern a country is something idealistically unattainable. There are however more precise descriptions for democracy such as:

The collection of institutions whose responsibility is to minimize the systematically mistakes by taking into account the public contributions to govern and to minimize individual rule” (Soroush, 2009, p. 269).

In the Encyclopedia of Political Terms we read that:

Democracy is the demonstration of rule of the majority and recognizing freedom an equal right for all the members of the society(Aghabakhshi & Afshari Rad, 2004, p. 76).

Not all political scientists believe this description. Therefore, we come back to the first solution, as it is practically impossible to take into account all the different views of a society, the majority rules.

3- Islamization of Knowledge:

Science has always had a prominent role in Islamic understanding of the world, as Franz Rosenthal, puts it: in Islam, the concept of knowledge enjoyed an importance unparalleled in other civilizations (Rosenthal, 1970, p. 242).

The conceptualization of the relationship between science and Islam dates back to a hundred years or so. In 1883, Ernest Renan and in 1897 Jamal Addin Afghani started a serious debate on the attitude of Islam toward science (Iqbal, 1997). Modern science is in fact, in many occasions a threat to many of the Islamic concepts, which led to a form of confrontation between the two. We can trace many of the issues arising in the Islamic World to have their roots in the modern understanding and concept of

empirical understanding of science. Such issues do not only include the relationship between Islam and science, but also the relationship between Islam, and methods, principals and the sort of beliefs in the West. Facing this fact, Islamic thinkers have recently started a debate on the impacts of Islamic teachings on the modern science and tried to revive the outlook of Islam in such societies. In their endeavor, they therefore use the terms “Islamization of science” or “Islamization of understanding”. The interesting part of the story is that during the 14 century not only was there no conflict between Islam and the sciences of the time, but the two were considered to be complementary. However, with the secularization of science, and the shift in the principles of science and its relationship with humanity and spirituality, and by introduction of the stiff secular outlook to the world, this view of compatibility between science and Islam started to deteriorate. By this process, the modern science has in effect criticized the very bases of religion and in particular Islamic faith in principles. We should consider this as a fact that Islamic science dates back to the 7th century A.D., whereas the peak of the confrontation between the Islamic World and the secular view of science and humanity based on the principles of empirical science and secular knowledge, dates back to the early 20th century. This has caused the Islamic society to be fearful and cautious about the Western science and as a result creating controversies and doubts among the masses. This has encouraged the modern thinkers in the Muslim world to take actions and to reverse the process by introducing science in an Islamic frame. The methodology and the origin of the Western science is experimentation and empirical data, leaving no space for spirituality. This has been best put into words by Nasr in his speech in the MIT: “Modern science is successful in telling you the weight and chemical structure of a red pine leaf, but it is totally irrelevant to what is the meaning of the turning of this leaf to red. The “how” has been explained in modern science, the “why” is not its concern. If you are a physics student and you ask the

question, ‘what is the force of gravitation?’, the teacher will tell you the formula, but as to what is the nature of this force, he will tell you it is not a subject for physics. So [science] is very successful in certain fields, but leaves other aspects of reality aside” in a conference called “Islam and modern science” (Nasr, 2007). In Golshani’s view, modern science has quite a positivistic view toward the universe, which leaves no space for metaphysics (Golshani, 1998a, p. 33). Muslim thinkers who has this concern of reviving the Islamic role in science based on their principles have therefore tried to bring about a new look to compete with the current secular view which currently exists in the world. They believe that science and culture have a very direct effect on each other, based on the book *God, Life and Universe*, by Ibrahim Kalin (Kalin, 2002). The process of introduction and development of science is therefore impacted very deeply by the cultural and social elements of the host societies. Nasr, in his speech entitled: “*Islam and modern science*” which was mentioned before has completed his view by mentioning that:

we cannot disentangle science and technology from the western worldview as they are the core of the western worldview as it is through them that the world spanning power of the worldview is asserted (Nasr, 2007).

It was the Western Culture which created the modern science, and the modern view of the world. In other words, the values and the worldview of the Western world are a result of their culture and society, in which they were created, making it unsuitable to be universally acceptable as a result. We can remember great names in the Nineteenth and the early Twentieth century in the Islamic World, who helped to build the contemporary Islamic science and culture by facing the effect of the Western culture in a realistic way. Some of such thinkers are Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and Muhammad Iqbal (Hazim Shah, 2001, p. 1). The process is still continued by contemporary thinker: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Naquib al-Attas, Ziauddin Sardar and Ismail Raji al-Farouqi. Their endeavor, in their own words, is to create a new Islamic

worldview and a new Islamic society which is welcoming Islamic principles, science and modernity.

Taha Jaber Al-Alwani, in his paper “Islamization of Science: Introduction, Hurdles and Principle” has argued that:

The adequate formulation of the contemporary Muslim civilization enterprise requires the contemporary Muslim mindset to locate the issue of reforming Muslim thinking and Islamization of knowledge in the right niche, entitling it sufficient priority, ensuring its precedence and considering it as the key issue in solving the crisis of the Muslim world and the torch that will diffuse the intellectual and scholastic glooms in which the Muslim world has been engulfed for the last two centuries (Al-Alwani, 2004, p. 1).

We need to pay special attention to the teachings of Islamic thinkers and consider replacing an Islamic solution not only in the Islamic World, but also trying to introduce it globally, therefore avoiding the wrong practices in science which are in conflict with Islamic teachings and principles. Life Stenberg, in his paper “The Islamization of Science” has described the position of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ziauddin Sardar:

The one important task is to establish the true interpretation of the word of Allah (s.w.t) in order to live the perfect life in accordance with the Islamic tradition. Science must, therefore, be Islamic. In its correct shape it will reveal the true understanding of nature, and increase our comprehension of the creation. Science has a meaning. To be noted here is that science is in opposition to the Quran will not be accepted. It is not a good science. Science becomes good almost automatically when it is in accordance with the Quran text(Stenberg, 1995, p. 364) .

Therefore, the Muslim in this way cans achievements important things in the world that means modern world and religious.

This thesis will consist of seven chapters. These are:

- 1) Theoretical foundation and definition of terms used in this approach and concepts followed in the thesis.

- 2) Muslim intellectuals in Iran on science, Islam and modernity.
- 3) The discourse of the structure of the government in Iran.
- 4) Muslim Intellectuals in Iran on Islam Political Theory and Modernity.
- 5) The relationship between Science and Government in Iran: A Historical Perspective.
- 6) Islam, Science and Government According to Iranian Thinkers.
- 7) Conclusion