

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.0 Introduction

Currently, Modernity is the major concern for most Islamic countries and their individual encounter between tradition and Modernity. Intellectuals like Abdolkarim Soroush, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ali Shariati, Murteza Mutahhari, Mehdi Golshani in Iran have found different methods of solving this problem. Thus, this dissertation explored the thoughts of these individual Muslim intellectuals who have different understandings concerning the relationships between Islam, science, and politics. It deals with modernity through the thoughts and ideas of five Iranian Muslim intellectuals namely: Abdolkarim Soroush, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ali Shariati, Murteza Mutahhari, and Mehdi Golshani. In the meanwhile, the thoughts and ideas of liberalism through Soroush, critical Radicalism through Shariati, Reformist from Ayatollah Mutahhari, traditionalist from Nasr, and traditionalist through Golshani were also studied in order to identify the relationship shared between Islamic Science and Modernity. Through this identification, the process of fitting this structure within an Islamic framework of the government was also considered.

7.1 Summary of Findings

Through this study it was found that the thoughts derived by these intellectuals 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.

This study was based on textual, analytical, critical and descriptive methods, and examined Iranian Muslim intellectuals on their views of Islam, with special reference science and politics. Overall the theme of this research was to study the insights and ideas of selected Muslim intellectuals in Iran on science and politics. The specific objectives of this research was focused on gathering information of Iranian Muslim intellectuals by recognizing the main ideas involved and drawing a connection or disconnection between Islam and modernity, investigating controversial ideas of Iranian Muslim intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ali Shariati, Murteza Mutahhari and Mehdi Golshani, while focusing on the ideas of Islam concerning science, through their writings. The results of the research are examined further to identify the similarities and dissimilarities in their ideas on Islam and modernity, followed by the projected answers to the research questions.

This study identified 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) Traditionalists like Nasr, and Golshani. Their insights on the topic are then carefully presented. The research pointed out that Mutahhari sees no contrasts between science and religion at all. On the other hand, Soroush tries to adopt the model from modern science and adjust religion according to that. Nasr, though, sees science as a complete opposite to religion while Golshani believes that putting science in the framework of religion can legitimize it. To seek the answer to Iranian Muslim Intellectuals' ideas concerning democracy, the ideas of the most prominent contemporary Iranian Islamic thinkers such as Shariati's views which are very radically critical, Soroush who is a liberal and Mutahhari who is a reformist, were discussed. The study revealed that Shari'ati was an opponent of the Western democracy and proposed a form of 'Engaged

Democracy' as his ideal form of democracy which must be implemented in Iran, which is inspired by Shiite insights into governance by Jurists. Soroush, though, proposes an Islamic democracy, but one which is not based 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 is fundamentally nonreligious. Soroush is somehow a supporter of the Western liberal democracy. Mutahhari, on the other hand, agreed with democracy provided that it was framed in Islamic principles, which makes it a religious democracy which he believed in. To seek relationship between science, government and politics, in a modern Iranian state, the history of the relationship between the development of science and the kind of governance in Iran in the course of time was explained. The study indicated that, based on the Iranian contemporary history the more the religious leaders in Iran were, the stronger their support and attention to the advancement of science. Needless to say, the kind of governance and political ideology in a country is one of the factors affecting the advancement of science in that country. Based on this claim, democratic political powers have stronger support for science, specially for the natural sciences, in the Western democracies. On the other hand religious and Islamic democracies pay enough attention to both the material and the spiritual aspects of science.

To find out the similarities and dissimilarities in the ideas presented by the Iranian scholars pertaining to Islam and modernity, the relationships between Islam, science and politics, based on the insights of the Islamic thinkers who have been named earlier (Soroush, Mutahari, Nasr, etc), were discussed. The study pointed out that 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, on the other hand, 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 study looked at the discussions on the subject of Islam and science through the eyes of our prominent Iranian thinkers. The first which is popular in the writings of Ayatollah Murteza Mutahhari, is the idea that Islam and science have no conflict at all. He firmly believes that it is wrong to divide a line between Islamic and non-Islamic science since Islam is containing science and it is not precise to divide a line between science and Islam. He objected those who try to describe science in this form and said that he does not recognize a difference between Islamic and non-Islamic science as long as the science under discussion is useful for Islamic society. The second thinker, is Seyyed Hossein Nasr. In his view, the backbone of modern science is purely empirical and has no roots in revelation. Second, in this view, phenomena have purely causal relationship with each other. Islamic worldview suggests that apart from the physical causality which exists between phenomena, there is a supernatural causality system as well. Islam wants the modern science to consider a space for supernatural causality in

explaining natural phenomena. He believes that if the Western science is absorbed with its full culture and worldview, it is definitely disastrous for the Islamic worldview of the natural and supernatural events. It is mentioned that absorbing Western science which has its own identity is disastrous, but we are able to introduce an Islamic identity to minimize the harmful effect. It is necessary that the Islamic identity is reinvented and reintroduced to the modern world and it is only under this condition that we can absorb modern science and repel its harmful influence. The third thinker is Mehdi Golshani who believes that limiting the Islamic science to Islamic text, Fiqh and etcetera is not fair to religion and has no support in the holy text either. He considers Islamic science to be more than that. He also believes that abandoning the modern science which humanity has gained during the recent past is neither possible nor intended in Islam. Quran and other holy texts have no trace of the details of science; therefore we have to learn and gain knowledge by research in the natural world and the human spirit and discover the laws governing them. It might be very misleading and wrong to assume that religion can help us in all aspects of science, many times the reason behind opposition to religious science is the wrong interpretations which some people give. But, this should not lead us to believe that all kinds of religious science are farfetched and out of reach. Many opponents of Islamic science believe that because of methodological reasons, it is impossible to have religious science. Golshani believes that such opposition is because of having wrong definitions. For example, limiting the religion to supernatural and apocalyptic usages is one of those wrong definitions in Golshani's idea. This is not the reality of religion, as many secular thinkers suggest. The other thing is being unaware of the limitations of science. Some seem to have forgotten that science itself has its limitations and empirical research cannot find the reality to everything possible. The other wrong definition in his view is assuming that all the paradigms and assumptions of science come from science itself. For example, atoms,

electrons, genes, and energy are all scientific paradigms or assumptions which are needed to further science but in fact there is no evidence of their existence in the real, physical world, if we confine ourselves to the physical realm. Some metaphysical assumptions are always needed.

It seems that there is a strong tendency among the believers that a good religious science is one which pursue the study of nature in the frame of religious metaphysics and see the holistic totality of the phenomena from an Islamic perspective. If we can accept the impacts of metaphysical worldview on the understanding of various phenomena, we can then see that it will definitely fulfill the needs of the society as well. In other words, the practice of the Islamic science will be Islamic itself. Fundamental sciences should form before forming the industry and technology. Beyond the fundamental science there is a metaphysical base upon which the practice of industry can take an Islamic or non Islamic form. The religious science is a science in which a Godly worldview rules, to minimize the harmful impacts of modern science. Religious science is not limited to rules and principles mentioned in Quran and other holy texts, but it is an empirical science which is based on Islamic metaphysics. The Fourth thinker is, Abdolkarim Soroush, who saw the concept of Islamic or any other form of religious science as paradoxical. In his view, the realms of science and religion are completely separate and they have no influence on each other. His view and that of his followers is that it is impossible to expect religion to fulfill our scientific and intellectual needs, as it is unthinkable to expect science to fulfill our religious needs.

7.2 Conclusion

This study was primarily aimed at exploring the insights and thoughts of contemporary Iranian Islamic intellectuals on the subject of the position of science and politics in the context of Islam and modernity. The ideas covered in this study are those which arose

as a the result of the encounter of Islam, science and politics in the modern world and are based on the testimony of the Iranian thinkers who deal with the question of the relationships between democracy and modern science. This study reveals several of the theoretical difficulties in the way of this encounter. Further thought on these difficulties can pave the way for many future studies on the matter. We have also provided an exposition of the current thinking of contemporary Iranian Islamic thinkers. The first conclusion is the close proximity between the structure of a government and its respect and commitment to science. This relationship was explained in the fifth chapter in which we concluded that the form of a government is a very important factor in the support for science. Many scientists and philosophers have discussed the importance and the role of government in the prosperity and wellbeing of a nation. It is so important that we can easily claim that even individual attempts to salvation can be fruitless if the government is not supportive. For this reason many philosophers focused their attention on the politics and governance and explain their ideal political state. A definition of the virtue is necessary if the salvation is the goal. The form of government has a direct effect on the advancement of science. Some governments effectively halt the process of development of science and on the other hand some governments improve the stature of science in a nation by their right policies.

Thus, the process of advancement of science is to some extent dependent on governments. In explaining the relationship between the two, we divided the governments into two categories, either dictatorial or democratic. In a dictatorial regime, the closed society and intellectual circles, the natural process of development is blocked and it is therefore limited to a selected few. On the other hand, in a democratic country the open political and scientific atmosphere provides a lot of space for the advancement of science and technology. It is purely dependent on whether a democracy

is religious or not, the extent to which a government pays attention to spiritual development of the nation as a secular democracy focuses most on the material development of the nation, whereas a religious democracy pays enough attention to both material and spiritual needs of the people.

In the old days of Iran, governance was given to professional ministers even if power was obtained by force and bloodshed. Such ministers were a chosen select from the religious and scientific circles. During the Pahlavi era enough attention was paid to development, but it was at best superficial, leaving no space for traditions and religion. The Islamic Revolution in 1979 was a direct result of such ignorance. Many other incidents in other parts of the world show the same result, the fall of great civilizations was mostly as a result of ignoring the traditions and religion of nations. The success story of the West has encouraged nations of the world to take up the goals and the style of the West in development. The west has, on the other hand, imposed its values and cultures as the universally acceptable norms in the world, especially in the developing and the underdeveloped East without considering the existing culture and traditions of the host countries. Despite all this, the West itself has come to the conclusion that science and development cannot be purely positive and leaving solely good consequences as it can ultimately cause alienation with the self and greed comes as a result of it. On the other hand the Easterners have found out that the imported technology and modernity is not neutral to their own culture, requiring a certain amount of perquisite norms to be accepted. This new look toward the West made theorists rediscover their thoughts on the matter and its essence for the eastern countries. Some thinkers realized that technology itself is not in essence bad or evil, but it is the practice which makes it so. It is believed by another group of thinkers that as modernity has been

cultivated in a certain cultural atmosphere, it cannot be neutral to the cultures and traditions in other nations.

Among the Islamic thinkers, there are two major groups in approaching the concept, one which support a selective modernization, meaning that they believe in selective the positive elements in a modernity which is a combination of good and bad aspects, and the opponents of modernity who are skeptical about the capacity of modernism to be divided into good and evil and they believe dividing it into these two categories will unavoidably make it less effective. Both groups have their own and sometimes conflicting reasons which should be considered equally.(Rahdar, 2008, p. 211) Abdoul Karim Soroush is one of the supporters of modernity. Allegedly, Murteza Mutahhari is one of such supporters of selective modernization. Seyed Hossein Nasr, and Mehdi Golshani on the other hand are two of the most outspoken critics of modernization, although Golshani supports a form of belief-centred science which does not conflict with religious views and principles. Ali Shari'ati is one of the opponents of modernization who believed that the negative outcomes of modernization are far greater than the positive gains of it in the developing world.

But what are the reasons offered by these thinkers in support of their respective positions? Having surveyed the ideas of these thinkers on Islam, science, politics and modernity, we are now in a position to make a conclusion regarding their respective positions towards modernity. In the following section, we look at their respective positions in terms of the arguments presented for and against modernization.

7.2.1 Arguments in Support of Modernization:

1) Scientific neutrality: the supporters believe that science has no affiliation or direction towards any virtue. Therefore, they do not have the capacity to be divided into good,

evil, religious, secular, Islamic, non-Islamic and the like. They also believe that there is no such thing as Western or Eastern science, science is science. The idea behind science is legitimacy of an idea or its falsity, thereby having nothing to do with its ideological or religious interpretations. In other words, if two people discuss a chemical reaction, this discussion is only true and legitimate with the side which is empirically supported, regardless of their ideology. Some thinkers such as Abdolkarim Soroush, an Iranian thinker, reformer, Rumi scholar and a former professor at the University of Tehran, goes beyond this point and discusses that as this world is a human-Godly creation, there is not such boundary as between good and evil. Soroush, sees the concept of Islamic or any other form of religious science as paradoxical. In this view, science and religion and the realm of the two are completely separate and they have no influence on each other. His view and that of his followers is that it is impossible to expect religion to fulfill our scientific and intellectual needs as it is unthinkable to expect science to fulfill our religious needs.

Another thinker is Ayatollah Murteza Mutahhari. As Mutahhari believed, Religion is not in conflict with science. This idea shows itself particularly, in Islam, which has admired science and scientists for all its existence. Therefore, we need to understand this idea that being intellectual does not necessarily imply rejecting religion such as idea, rather, it arose as result of the historical and cultural experience of the West. Therefore, human beings need religion both in social and human contexts. In other words, man takes science to wherever he wants it to go, and use it whichever way he wishes, but a religion takes control of one's life and changes it to a great extent(Mutahhari, 2008, pp. 358,401).

2) Religion's emphasis on competition among humans: this is allowed to humans, as far as we make use of the human experiences. Not only does religion approves of human

thinking and innovations, but it also supports it. It is in the soul of Islam to emphasize scientific, technological, economical and social reform exactly like the one which has happened in the West (Peyman, 2002, p. 19). In fact it is the people's behavior which has increased its distance from religion and has reached the point of conflict. On the other hand, we sometimes find that the findings of scientific research happen to support religious beliefs, which indicates an agreement between science and religion. As Ayatollah Mutahhari believed, there is no conflict between science and religion since science has its roots in the human soul (MirSalim, 2005, p. 102). Therefore in Mutahhari's view, both science and religion have appeared to give humans enough means to know. The difference is that science is a set of tools by which human takes over nature, i.e. has a vertical development. On the other hand, religion gives directions to human and describes the eternal life to us. So religion does not omit anything from the greatness of the universe, but adds to it by describing it to us. (Mutahhari, 1989, pp. 166,167)

(3) Interactions between civilizations are their key to survival: many modernist thinkers in the developing world believe that a harsh independence ideology adopted by a society decreases its ability to cooperate and interact with other societies. Societies and civilizations need each other and owe one another in their development which is not possible to achieve if no interaction is taking place. Ultimately, the cooperation and interaction will reach to a point of saturation in which we will all face a homogeneous global culture all over the world. Under such conditions, with the affiliation of all culture, everything will have a trace of globality and this will be the truth behind the cultures and the essence of them, and not only cooperate with one another, but this will essentially be their identity. For example, under such assumed circumstances, the Persian culture will only find its meaning under intense competition in which it proves

itself through its strength, creativity, and assiduity. Talking about independence under such conditions will therefore be only for obscurantist ideologies and cultures. On the other hand, science and technology are an inevitable part of today's lives and identities and therefore have a global meaning to all. It is therefore absurd if a country closes its borders to other cultures, but still imports science and technology from others (Hajjarian, 2001, p. 243). Such thinkers basically believe that it is possible to move on a straight line to go from tradition to modernity in the developing world. Such thinkers approach the opponents of their ideology as equating Western civilization with corruption and in which a foreigner means an enemy. Rather than engage in positive cooperation with other cultures they have chosen a negative confrontation. The reality is that neither the Western civilization is totally corrupt nor our societies are all needless of change (MirSalim, 2005, p. 365). But we should accept that the supporters of modernization should not accuse their opponents of being closed-minded. This will in effect result in the death of thinking (MirSalim, 2005, p. 4) .

(4) Modernization is seen as a means to social development: the supporters of this idea believe that we need to develop the society in such a way that it can handle the complicated issues of modern life which is only possible through modernization. Of course, these thinkers believe that in case of occurrence of conflict between religion and the process of modernization we inevitably have to take the side of religion.

7.2.2 Arguments against Modernization

(1) Partiality of science: the opponents of modernization believe that human sciences are all affiliated with certain norms and values. And they are in fact deeply sceptical of the idea that there is no interaction between religion and science. They offer historical examples thereby to support their allegation. Seyyed Hossein Nasr is one of the thinkers who hold this view.

(2) Impossibility of achieving social development by the means of modernization: the opponents of modernization believe that although development is a necessity for all the developing countries, but this should start by reversing the effects of modernization and we should not even call this development a “modernizing” process. Their reason for this allegation is that the contextual meaning of development is a positive attitude which means moving toward a better future, but in fact, the history of the past decades in the West has shown that such developments in the West have not really brought the world to a better condition. In their view, Western civilization, as a secular and human-centered civilization, is therefore anti-development in the real sense. According to their thinking, development should be toward a more God-centered reality whereas the path of civilization shows that the reverse is true (Rahdar, 2008, p. 257). For example, Shariati viewed the process of “becoming modern” as one of the most ominous means by which the West entices the East to be modern (Shariati, 1979c, p. 19).

(3) Modernity is a holistic entity and it is impossible and to divide it into pieces. In the eyes of the opponents of modernity, modernity is an entity, in which many warps and woofs are sewed up together to make it a whole. Science, technology, politics, modern philosophy and the like are the building blocks of modernity having a fixed aim. These are all in the package with the same soul, meaning that modern science is secular as is its politics, and all these separate pieces support each other in this way. Thereby it is impossible to study such entities in singular units, because each of these units is only inspired by a whole, its significance depends on how effective their role is in the whole entity

(4) A view of religion as comprehensive and all-encompassing: in their view, religion has a maximal role in life, meaning that it covers all or at least many aspects of life as religion cannot just govern one aspect of human life. Even in the West many scientists

believe in such a role of religion in our lives. The opponents of modernization believe that in the context of modernity, there is a minimal role for religion in human's lives which is in contrast with the leadership role of religion. Through the eyes of the opponents of a maximal religion, religion is only good for the matter of eternal lives of humans, and thus useless for temporal living in the present world. In their view religion is a necessity, but a minimal necessity (Rahdar, 2008, p. 270) . For example Golshani believes that there is a rise of relativism in religious beliefs. As was mentioned before, the direct result of secularism is relativism in religious identity (Golshani, 1998, p. 38). Shariati wanted religion to be a prominent part of human lives and thus had a maximalist view of religion in the lives of people. On the other hand Soroush has a minimalist view of religion, that is, to have the minimal effect on everyday life.

(5) The synthesis of modern science with modernity: They believe that modernity as a whole is a nonreligious and even antireligious movement. The fruits of this tree have no religious shape. This shows that the modernity and the west in general have no good relationship with religion as the Western civilization is a humanistic civilization, separated from religion. It is a civilization whose gods are humans and its rules are only to satisfy humanity. The supporters of religion such as Golshani thus believe that the suitable place for religion in the modern world is in assuming a leadership role, and to have a controlling stake in the management of this world (Avini, 1997, p. 282). However, Golshani, believes that religious leadership has been mostly reduced to moral matters in the Islamic countries and that science has also been neglected in reality (Golshani, 1998, p. 35).

The religious thinkers have taken either of the following two major positions in viewing modernism:

(a)The supporters of selective modernization,

(b) The opponents of selective modernization.

The supporters of selective modernization are mostly concerned about the development and the survival of the developing countries and civilizations and the opponents have the local development schemes in mind. We can therefore, take the middle line and consider a middle point in this argument; meaning to define that instant development and survival is helpful and effective, but real, sustainable development requires patience. Therefore, the adherence of Islamic nations to the notions of modernity is just a result of the concern for survival, rather than development. In its true sense a move toward a real Islamic ruling and Islamic democracy is in fact the basis for an optimal path to development. Based on this reality, and considering that it is necessary to survive in this world, we have to accept modernization to the extent which is necessary, always considering taking the necessary part of it. On the other hand and based on the idea of selective modernization, we have to aim at reviving the real Islamic nation when working toward development. Thus, it neither is necessary to surrender nor to be too cautious to be stopped on the way, but the best way is to take risk not with the tools that are provided by the West, toward their aim, but by using local tools, toward a God-centered, Islamic aim.

Religious democracy is crucial to the government, as the axis of all social and personal activities involves the role of God and the authorities' selection must reflect God's will. Society's vote must be in the context of 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 world by the Religious democracy body. 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. The goal 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 implication 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.

This study drew an outline from some of the main themes discussed by Abdolkarim Soroush, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ali Shariati, Murteza Mutahhari and Mehdi Golshani in creating a vision of a new Islamic world view which would be achieved further through the process of Islamization of knowledge, using scientific arguments and Islamic teachings. It is part of an accumulated effort towards the rise of an Islamic world view which is hoped to conclude in the advancement of science and technology with regards to the Muslim's world and a return to its past glory. Thus it is hoped that the results of this study would provide a platform for the issues involved in the Muslim's pursuit of contemporary knowledge, from an Islamic perspective. Also it is hoped that through this study contribution will be channeled to the current debate on Islam, science and politics as well as the creation of an alternative Islamic world view that will be developed with regards to science, technology and a systematic government.