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**Dr Mir Mohammad Ibrahim, Sociology of Religions:
*Perspectives of Ali Shariati.***

Dr. Mir Mohammad Ibrahim is a promising and budding scholar of Kashmir who has already authored several books on various themes of Islam and Iran. He has also translated several tracts from Persian to Urdu. The present book is his more serious and research based attempt.

It is a complete book touching on almost all areas that have been covered by Dr Shariati in his books on Sociology of religion especially his voluminous book *Jamih Shinasi- Adyan*. This book being the basis for Dr Mir Ibrahim, the author of the book, has a great desire that Shariati's magnum opus *Jamih Shinasi Adyan*, should be translated, as it marks the entry of Muslim intellectuals into the heretofore neglected field of sociology and comparative study of religion as a whole, which has assumed great significance in wake of modern scholarly rendezvous, world over in this field. As the book is an erudite scholarly work of great depth, its translation into English language

was worth attempting. Although the scholar due to research restraints of his doctorate programme at our university could not perform this job, he has extensively quoted from the book while expounding the intricate subjects of his theses. In the introduction, the author says rightly that: "Shariati has analysed the role of almost all religions of the world. For his liberal thoughts on the religion, particularly Islam, his ideas have attracted sharp minds throughout literal and academic as well as religious institutions of the world" . "While explaining Shariati's views of phenomenon of Religion in Chapter 1 the author has tried to reach at the real objective of Shariati's views on modern sociologists of religion.

Shariati has analysed and evaluated religion from philosophical, sociological and anthropological view point in the manner in which others have challenged religion itself .in his view , tracing out the religion of primitives would help, to some extent, to explore the essence/ origin of religion. Durkheim, Lierol, E.B Tylor (1832-1917) , Max Muller , Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and others have adopted similar approaches to study religion in the 18th , 19th and early 20th century. Although these social thinkers have arrived at anti religious conclusions , they agree that religious beliefs have always been intertwined with human life such as Fetishism, Animism , Totemism, etc. The origin of religion is to be found in "Primitive' 'Societies that manifested simple, fragmented attitudes towards the unseen powers of such

entities as the ghosts. Contrary to what Durkheim has said, worshipping religious God is not same as worshipping social symbol. The relation of man with religious God is not what is relation of individual with his ancestor may be fraught with much praise and adoration , but it is far behind in comparison to one's religious feelings and instincts with relation to God or Gods or the unseen sacredness or Sanctity. For this, it is not possible that the individual in a society change his religion, but only when religion , but only when religion with collective soul of society are not one and the same thing. Thus, Shariati challenges the theory that Totemism can be considered as a religion of the primitives. Shariati thinks that Durkhemian determinism arises due to the failure to recognize the essential nature and essence of human beings. Shariati Says,

I believe all religions were based on monotheism and when, in the course of history, the social system was changed to multi theism , when the original classless societies were changed into ones with class distinctions and multi groups , monotheism changed into multitheism.

Shariati is of the opinion that Marx seeks the easiest way to fight against religion. Instead of referring to the faithful principles and the basic text of a school, Marx prefers to infer on the basis of those superstitious deviations in which common and misled people invest belief , Hence, in this way , there is no need for research and it would be easy to ridicule, repudiate and

negate that special school Shariati says,

This shortcut changes his tone, as a 'learned philosopher' into a "propagatory orator, or a "sophist politician. This is not important, because to him, beating the power of religious faith paves the way for the victory of Marxism. In any case, from Marxian point of view, end justifies means' although the way of achieving aim, as Lenin states, would be through fighting against religion. Therefore, it is not strange while Marx, a scientific philosopher and dialectician in scientific combat against religion, substitutes the 'historical and social role of religion for the intellectual and scientific truth of religion and tends to prove the falsification of it, which is not an easy task, through condemning it.

Shariati thinks it unfortunate that Karl Marx identifies Jesus with pope and this kind of argument and inference is vulgar: although unscrupulous propagandist may make use of it for political or quasireligious ends. Shariati thinks it vulgar to criticize the weakness and corruption of the religious classes and it infer from it that religious studies are futile.

Shariati agrees with Jung (who explained Freud) as the latter believes in three consciences of man, i.e. conscience, unconscious or inner conscience and a third conscience which he has named as 'intermediate conscience' or 'social conscience'. Social conscience is a force that gets an individual involved towards society. Running from individuality towards society/ class

is called social spirit. Jung points out that social conscience is in the very nature of man. But he is unable to explain that why this particular conscience after all springs out in man and what is its philosophical explanation, because this is not Jung's task according to Shariati. Shariati describes that this is the very spring (source) from where the river of religion shoots forth and this effulgence is manifested even to all antireligionists and theoreligionists, although its name would not be given as religion or any other things, It is this aspect of man which has bent him towards different kinds of worship. Shariati, therefore, opines that roots of a belief be found in the inner core of man's essence . He quotes the famous French writer Charles Montesquieu, (1689-1755) that religion is a spiritual urge; a deep well in the heart of man to be filled with truth, otherwise superstitions shall occupy it .Shariati Says,

From the early history we see man in search of finding a way towards spiritual direction , raising his hands towards heaven or fixing his eyes in the eyes, of sun , or sitting impatiently near fire and bewildering in aspirations of salvation and making supplication , filled with sincerity and enthusiasm, whispering and murmuring with himself something , insuch a situation he sees full of mysteries, from that city he has perceived a gesture of light that with the instinct of this earthly abode finds somewhat alien, he feels this world a shadow of thought that has come from any other heaven.

Shariati opines that man's faith in fitches, taboo, totem manna, idol , worship, stars, sun, fire, animism and his belief in various religions indicate his inner natural urge and tendency to worship.

Shariati divides religions into semitic and non semitic rubrics. He classifies prophets or founders of respective religions into semitic and non semitic groups. The Abrahamic prophets such as Jesus, Moses and Muhammad come under the category of semitic prophets, while as non semitic prophets Tao-Tzu, Confucius and Buddha fall under this category.

Shariati has quoted Biharul-Anwar and referred also Al-Mizan, wherein there is quotation from Hazrat Ali that when he was asked about Zoroastrianism (Majusi) he said that they are people of book.(AhlulKitab)

Shariati further mentions that in Greece the "pseudo prophets"(shubh-e payambran) and teachers of conduct like Socrates and other thinkers emerged in the 4th , 5th , 6th, and 7th BC, i.e. only one or two centuries before the above mentioned non-semitic Eastern prophets,

Thus, to Shariati, the emergence of all these founders of ethical and religious schools at a specific period cannot be reckoned merely a chance. Instead, there should be a sound and important reason behind all this. Shariati points out that economic factor has been responsible behind this development. It is this period when private property ownership came into existence. This, individual ownership gave birth to many social evils such as

exploitation, injustice, slavery, poverty, servitude and rivalry . It was a historical turning point when the age of the quadrupeds, in which man ate his food from the table laid by nature, changed into the age of private ownership. So when the social evils in reaction of private ownership began to erupt, there emerged a need for a school of conduct and human guidance, so that humanity may survive. Shariati points out that here ownership, culture and ideology have cause and effect relations with each other.

Dr Mir Mohammad Ibrahim, the author of this book, has expressed his reservations on some of the views of Shariati at times, For example, he says,

While as Shariati tries to make a differentiation between Semitic and non -Semitic religions, Islamic approach seems to be neglected some times. Because according to the Quran all the nations have received divine guidance from Allah from time to time through the prophets or Hadis (guides) . Besides it is well known that all the prophets preached Tawhid and by implication a complete code of conduct for practical life of the people was formed. The Quran categorically says that the message received by one and all the prophets has had been same throughout the annals of history. Therefore, to make distinction between the groups of religions into the rubrics of semitic and non-semitic does not seem islamically acceptable,

Bringing Shariati's views on religion to fore, the author

explains that according to Shariati, religion is a road or a path, leading from clay to God (i.e man to Allah) and delivering man from violence , stagnation and ignorance, from the lowly life of clay and satanic character towards exaltation, motion, vision, the life of the spirit and divine character . If succeeds in doing so, then it is religion in truth. He is of the opinion that different aspects and dimension of religion have the meaning of road. In addition to the other significance that has been proposed for it, such as sacred wisdom and so forth, Shariati ascribes the word *din* (religion) itself having the meaning of road. Other relevant terms denote the same meaning. Shariati puts forth the example of *silk*: a narrow mountain path; *Shari at*: the path leading down to a river, enabling the thirsty to take water ; *tariqah*: a broad path or road leading from one town to another or one land to another ; *Mazhab*: a highway ; *Sirat* : a road leading to a place of worship ; *umma* : a group of people moving towards a common destination under a single leader and along a single road. Shariati does not think it fortuitous or accidental that all the above names and expressions used in the vocabulary of Islam to designate the different aspects and dimensions of religion having the meaning of road. Instead, it is a way open for man from 'being' to 'becoming' which never ends.

Explaining the similar themes in Chapter 3, the author discusses Shariati's views about the nature of religion . It is a direction for man in his striving towards God, absolute essence

and infinite perfection. In the verse , "truly we are God's and to Him we shall return" (23:60) does not use the word "fihi" (in Him); it uses the word "ilayhi"(to Him) . That is , we return to God, not in God, this verse is proposing an orientation of man towards infinite perfection. The distance between clay and God is the distance that man travels in his search for perfection; but he travels unceasingly, in ascent and upward striving to Him who is infinite, unbounded and unlimited. Thus, the movement of man, in Shariati's view , is from infinite lowliness towards infinite exaltation, and the destination is God, the spirit of God, entreaty ; it is impossible for him ever to stop. Hence, religion is a way, which leads man to the infinite bounties of infinite one; the path that has been laid down from clay to God. On account of his dualistic and contradictory nature (clay and spirit,) man this dialectical phenomenon, is compelled to be always in motion. His self is the stage for a battle between two forces that result in a continuous evolution perfection .Shariati, however, points it out that religion itself is not a goal or aim, but is a means. All the misfortunes to the religious societies have stemmed from the fact that means has been taken as goal. He adds that all misfortunes that are of overvalue in religious societies arise from the fact that religion has changed its spirit and direction; its role has changed so that religion has become an aim in itself . Shariati opines,

If you turn the road into an aim or destination -work on it, adorn it, even worship it generation after generation for hundreds

of years, love it and become infatuated with it so that every time its name is mentioned or your eye glimpses it you burst into tears; if you go to war with anyone who looks askance at it, send all your time and money on decoration, repairing and levelling it , never have it for even a minute to go in pursuit of your worldly affairs, constantly walk on it, talk about it, and rub its dust into your eyes as if it were some cure- if you do all of this, generation after generation, for hundreds of years, what will you become? You will become lost !yes, this straight , true and correct road will deflect you and hold you back from your aim and destination. And to be lost in this fashion after having found the road is worse than never to have found the road in the first place.

Shariati describes that at the beginning, all human beings were equal in characteristics. In Barbaric periods, when Prophets were send they shuttered the brains of people and in the words of Imam Ali,

They (Prophets) exposed the treasures of nature then all the intellects came out from the graves of monotonous nature of thinking. This scene of revival of intellect and thinking was like the day of resurrection reckoning . There was movement in it.

Hazrat Ali after making a mention of creation of universe and Adam, points towards the cause of sending Prophets and says,

Then Allah sent his messengers and series of his prophets towards people to get them fulfil the pledge which lies beneath

their own innate (fitrah), to recall to them his bounties, to exhort them by preaching , to unveil before them the treasures which lie deep hidden in this conscience.

Part II of chapter 4 is very important as it deals with the crucial subject of Ijtihad in light of Shariati's sociological religious thought. According to the author, Shariati does not confine ijthihad to fiqh only. Instead, he thinks it is a free and independent endeavour aiming at obtaining a thorough and progressive understanding of Islam in all its dimensions. In his opinion, it is a tool by which a conscious Mujtahid (the person who practices ijthihad) presents a new and changing interpretation of Islam according to his progressive and exalted outlook. It means understanding the multidimensional language of the Quran and discovering the inner meaning of the Quran which, like nature, has different aspects when, looked upon from different angles. It means constant extraction of new truths of Islam parallel with the evolution of human thought and science. And , finally it means deducing or inferring new legal standards and ordinances in accordance with changing needs and institutions involving principles as well as derivatives of the changing social systems, and encompassing the evolutionary and deterministic motion of history and humanity. Therefore, ijthihad is a grand factor in creating motion, life and constant renewal of Islamic culture and spirit as well as practical and legal orders through changing of times. Shariati holds that ijthihad is the name of free research of a

responsible researcher. It is not done for the sake of good reputation through publishing books and sending the findings in laboratories. Instead, the aim of a researcher is worldly welfare as well as eternal salvation, and a good understanding of doctrines, beliefs and their explanation according to contemporary challenges, the essential needs of social life and the guidance and mental training for individuals. Ijtihad is a great clear and explicit responsibility over a researcher, by dint of which a mujtahid keeping in view the culture and scientific development of people creates mental appetite in them to accept religion. He keeps people affirm to the Islamic tenants according to the needs of the time; makes the present more splendid than the past.

The author brings Shariati's views on ijti had closer to those of Ayatullah Murtaza Mutahhari, the greatest Islamic scholar of Iran, who has written extensively on the revolutionary themes of Islam in the context of modern times. Like Mutahhari, Shariati thinks that a mujtahid or faqih should have a complete comprehension and grasp over the situations about which he is going to issue his fatawa. Mutahhari said,

If we compare a fiqih who all the time remains enclosed in the isolated corner of his house or school, with a faqih who is always in close contact with daily affairs of life, we shall notice that both of them have recourse of the same sources of the Shari'ah'each one of them formulates his verdicts from a different point of view..... if one compares and contrasts the fatwa issued

by different fuqaha with one another, and studies their personal backgrounds and their ways of thinking regarding the problems of life, one shall see how the intellectual background of a faqih, his information and knowledge about the external world play an active role in influencing his fatawa. The fatawa of an Arab reflect an Arab spirit and the fatawa of a non-Arab reveal his non-Arab character. The fatawa of a villager reveal his rustic qualities and those of an urban faqih show his urban outlook.

Shariati agrees with view of Mutahhari and suggests a mujtahid to have a broader outlook so that his fatawa may have also a broader perspectives when getting implemented. He thinks ijihad, the most outstanding feature of the scientific spirit and ideological outlook of Islam, not only prevented Islamic thinking from becoming static according to the stable moulds of a particular time; not only prevented the religious thinking , laws and orders from becoming stagnant traditions , hereditary worshipping and futile spiritless and repetitious actions ; not only prevented Islamic thinking from becoming alienated with the passing of time and from stopping its motion in the process of changing social and economic conditions and in the process of death , birth and other exigencies of life; and finally , not only caused Islamic thinking to remain new and progressive, but it also contributed in the flourishing Islamic thinking and its progressive evolution. It caused Islamic thinking to grow, enrich itself and evolve more fully throughout the course of history.

According to Shariati, not only did ijihad prevent Islamic thinking from falling behind the times, but it also moved ahead of the times. In short, the aim of independent reasoning (ijihad) was more than to adapt Islamic laws to new needs and to coordinate them with the new life and movement , it also creates needs and encourages and guides life.

This is the reason that in the past, the great Islamic ulama were also the greatest naturalistic and humanistic scholars, and this is the reason why Islamic schools were at the same time the only centres for the spiritual (ruhani) from the non-spiritual. The separation of religious scientists from scientists who knew non-religious sciences, and modern science is a new phenomena incompatible with the mission of Islamic and with its spirit and outlook. The Ummah today does not need Ulama who are familiar with the maqasid al Shariah the divine way to help develop and govern our societies efficiently and effectively. In Islamic Madrasahs, the syllabi have not been revised in over 200 years! All good social scientists revise their curriculum every time they teach their courses.

In order to widen and strengthen the field of ijihad, Shariati has promoted the idea of specialization in the different disciplines of ijihad, and in such a case ijihad becomes an all inclusive activity rather than a juristic exercise in its limited traditional area. Shariati says,

Specialization did exist in our past Islamic culture and

jurisprudence, ilmul Hadith, (the science of narration) theology, philosophy, history, ethics, literature, mysticism, divinities and other fields such as medicine.

Shariati regrets that most of the Ulama are exclusively experts in field of fiqh alone. In this way, it is not possible to expect and rely on jurists to have a complete expertise concerning every aspect of different Islamic issues. As remedial measures, he has suggested specialization that too in the wide, modern and scientific sense of the world. He, for example, opines that 'purity' should be discussed by the jurisprudent from its jurisprudential aspects alone, while bacteriologists, health specialists, medical doctors and chemists should discuss its scientific dimensions only. In the same way, he describes the Islamic Zakat should be discussed from one perspective by jurisprudence, another perspective by economists and still from a third point of view by sociologists.

In fact, the present deficiencies in the world of Islam, the failure to confront the contingent issues in a proper way, the issuing of baseless and irrational fatwa, the improper attitude towards new ideas- all these are consequences of the closing of the gates of ijtihad. It has been instrumental in following dubious hands, with the aid of taghuti governments, to instill unhealthy ideas into the people's minds and to insinuate the feeling that Islamic fiqh cannot fulfil the demands of the present age and the modern civilization. Shariati illustrates.

I believe that what has hampered the implementation of the Islamic spirit in the course of time, and has made the Islamic culture and world view anachronistic, is the death of the spirit of ijtihad. In the Islamic religious, spiritual , and cultural domain, ijtihad was the gate through which the caravan of time traversed and a channel to the Islamic house of learning , constantly breathing in fresh air.

Thus , this and other chapters of the book make a refreshing study of the most crucial issues remotely related to various dimensions of religions in general and islam in particular. The book is a first attempt to discuss these vital subjects most dear to Shariati in a very simple and erudite manner. It is bound to become a standard book on the subject and will be useful for the students of world religions and Islamic studies equally apart from catering to the needs of the students of Iranian studies.

