

## **Ali Shariati on Alienation and the Return to the Self: An Assessment of his Critics**

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### **Abstract**

The problem of "alienation" and the "alienated man" is one of the most attractive features of the critique of modernity. Ali Shariati, the contemporary Iranian theorist who was highly concerned with the critique of both tradition and modernity, introduced the idea of a "third way". As the main cause for decadence, defining and defying alienation was at the core of Shariati's intellectual agenda. In this paper, we will explain his view on alienation and his recommended solution which invites peoples of the third world to return to their very identity. Then, some critical arguments raised by his critics will be explored and assessed.

**Key Words:** Alienation, Self, Colonization, Modernism, Self-Consciousness

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## **Introduction**

The problem of "alienation" and the "alienated man" is one of the most attractive features of the critique of modernity. Social thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Adorno, have extensively discussed this problem. Third world's intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, too have used the concept of alienation to explain the state of the colonized man. Ali Shariati, the contemporary Iranian theorist and intellectual who was highly concerned with the critique of both tradition and modernity, introduced the idea of a "third way" at a time when Marxism, capitalism, machinism, and colonialism had targeted the social and religious identities of his society. He believed that his society was undergoing decadence and 'therefore' argued that the society's history, culture, and religion should not be left to the mercy of these "isms" (Collected Works, 1:60). He held his society was threatened in two ways: on the one hand, it was immersed in ignorance, illiteracy, hunger, poverty, and arrogance; and on the other, cultural colonialism and imperialism were alienating the very identity of the society. As the main cause for decadence, therefore, defining and defying alienation was at the core of Shariati's intellectual agenda. Shariati viewed machinism, scientism, caste system, bureaucracy, materialism and wealth as the main sources of the alienation of man in contemporary societies. He also believed that in the third world countries, the process of homogenization by colonialists was the chief cause of alienation.

Shariati's view has been studied from different aspects. Some scholars, such as Shahrokh Akhavi,

have examined his arguments on man, world and monotheism and concluded that Shariati introduced a new perception of monotheism (Akhavi, 1983). Others have viewed Shariati's ideas of "the return to the self" and "Islamic Renaissance" as plans for Muslims to escape underdevelopment through which they would be able to recognize and respect their distinct identity (Mongol Bayat, 1366). Javad Tabatabaei, who holds that the growth of mysticism and decline of rational thought should be viewed as the main sources of the degeneration of the Iranian society (Tabatabaei, 1373), believes that Shariati's ideas of Islamic Renaissance and Islamic Protestantism indicate that he has adopted a rather naïve and superficial perception of the historical development of Christianity. He argues that Shariati tried to imagine such a development in the Islamic world, in order to find resolution for more fundamental problems (Tabatabaei, 1374: 351). Shariati's viewpoints about Marxism and modernism have attracted many scholars (Pedram, 1382). Many have criticized his perception of ideology and intention to change Islam from a "culture" into an "ideology". Abdolkarim Soroush is yet another well-known critics of Shariati's thought. Soroush was concerned that turning religion into ideology undermines people's faith. By turning religion into ideology, he argues, religion would lose its sanctity and would change to an instrument for achieving a social objective (Soroush, 1372, 107). According to Soroush, the Islamic ideology which Shariati propagates is only useful for the period of "foundation" and has no utility for the period of "establishment" of the



Islamic society. That would require an "official" interpreter, to which Shariati is strongly opposed. Hence there is a contradiction in Shariati's position on the matter (Ibid. 117).

The aim of the present article is to evaluate the issue of alienation in Shariati's thought. This is one of the key concepts through which Shariati explains how man's identity and "real" self have been lost and how the "fake" consciousness and, consequently, the decadence of people in the third world has emerged. After a brief introductory discussion on the origins of the idea, we will explore Shariati's view on alienation in general and cultural alienation in particular, and their connections with some of his other arguments. Then, some important criticisms raised by contemporary Iranian thinkers will be presented. We intend to show that an assessment of such criticisms indicate that although his position is defective in some respects, the whole idea seems still defensible.

### **Alienation**

It was Hegel that for the first time introduced the concept of "alienation" into the realm of philosophy. From Hegel's point of view, human mind creates the conceptual and social bases of things. But these things, which are the creations of man's mind, seem independent of "being" and are assumed as distinct realities. As a result, the mind is estranged from what it has created (Aron, 1364:187). Hegel believed that the very moment we feel something which is part of us or belongs to us is a stranger to us, then the phenomenon of "alienation" occurs (Maggy, 1372:317).

According to him, man obtains freedom only when he overcomes this alienation (Garaudy, 1362:118). When the mind realizes that the only final reality is its very self, it can be conceived in the state of absolute freedom, through which it overcomes alienation.

Karl Marx transferred the concept of alienation to the domain of criticizing the realities of the capitalist society. Marx describes alienation in relation to the concept of "labor", as such, according to him, man can be defined with it. He argues that when labor is turned into a means for earning the life and man creates things that are independent of him and even prevail up on his life, the problem of alienation emerges (Arron, ibid. 188). In such a situation, man becomes alienated from the outcomes of his labor or the natural environment in which he lives, and becomes a stranger to himself and his humane potentials (Petrovich, 1377: 442). According to Marx, in a capitalist society, in which market, goods, and capital prevail over the volatile social reality, i.e. innovative labor and collective life, and turn man into a "thing", the phenomenon of alienation appears more tangibly (Bashirieh, 1376: 166). Unlike Hegel, who believed relief from alienation is a subjective and spiritual matter, Marx held that it is an objective issue. In other words, Marx emphasized that by the collapse of capitalism and private ownership as well as the creation of a contradiction-free society, man becomes the proprietor of his own work and releases himself.

Horkheimer and Adornoe, the well-known members of the Frankfurt School, who adopted a critical approach towards modernity and its



outcomes and reviewed it from a historical-philosophical point of view, believed that the role of the self had reduced to a means for achieving prompt objectives in a special time. Therefore, man uses his energy to produce things that would finally control him (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1973). From their perspective, reason is an instrument for controlling nature and perceived as such, it has caused man's subjectivity to capital. Therefore, man is "not only alienated from nature but also from the real essence of himself" (Ahmadi, 1373:131). They believe that industry and modern science are essentially the source of crisis and "thingness" because they have lost their instrumental nature and are prevailing on us (Bashirieh, *ibid*: 167). Similarly, Herbert Marcuse believes that nowadays the fate of the individual has been tied to "things". In his view, market and the system prevailing on things have adopted the same viewpoint towards men and, therefore, have abolished man's freedom. The new science attaches more importance to the means and instruments and considers man as an instrument, too. According to the philosophers of the Enlightenment, technology and science should be at the service of man and prevail him on nature and things, but technology has put the personal freedom on the verge of destruction and has turned man into a one-dimensional creature. Marcuse concludes that in a technology-stricken life, man loses his independence (Marcuse, 1362: 168-9). According to him, instrumental knowledge is at the service of powerful people and helps them to practice their authority and maintain their influence and, therefore, it moves towards prevailing on human

beings (Lesnaf, 1378: 81) and turn the opposition forces into compatible ones and suppress any movement towards man's liberty (McIntyre, 1360: 104). He believes that communist regimes and liberal democracies have common characteristics, which are rooted in modern science. Both are trying to develop industry and to create extensive centralized bureaucracies. They are trying to homogenize the public through mass media and trainings. Surprisingly, both are coexisting with each other and take advantage of the threats of the opposite side as a means for suppressing people and justifying their behavior (Marcuse, 1985: 81).

### **Shariati and Alienation**

Shariati believes that man is a creature that is revealed through "consciousness" and the most brilliant aspect of his presence is revealed through "self-consciousness". When man explores the world of existence, his self-consciousness reaches to its climax and he find himself in the most perfect form of existence. Self-consciousness would not emerge unless man obtains consciousness about his status as man and feels it. Certainly, this would only be possible through the context of the world. Therefore, he argues, the most important characteristic which distinguishes man from other animals is not that he is evolutionary more developed, but that he possesses consciousness. Furthermore, the real difference of human life from that of other animals is not being civilized but to be self-conscious. As a result, in order to ascend the highest levels of existence, man relies on consciousness and self-consciousness rather than progress and civilization. Whenever



progress and civilization are the characteristics of man's ascendance, gaining capability and access become his final objectives. But for Shariati, the existential characteristics of man's life are consciousness, value, and knowledge, man relies on piety and his ideal is salvation. Therefore, he believes that the main responsibility of science is searching for reality, not, as can be observed, a desire to get access to power (*Collected Works* 24: 21-26). According to Shariati, it is piety that protects human values and it is salvation that existentially relieves man from subjectivity and natural, intellectual, and cultural self-alienations.

Shariati considers man as a creature with the following characteristics:

1. He is a genuine being and an independent self who has a noble sort of essence.
2. He has an independent will. Thus, as a primary and independent cause, he subjects nature, history and society to its will in the hierarchy of cause and effects. Man enjoys freedom of will.
3. He is conscious, and with the power of thought can grasp the reality of the world.
4. He is self-conscious, that is, he is the only living creature which possesses knowledge about himself.
5. He is a creating animal. This creativity is integrated into his labor. Therefore, he makes instruments through his ability of creation and, in later steps, he creates art.
6. He is idealist in the sense that he is not satisfied by the reality which has surrounded him. He tries to turn this "is" into what it should be.

7. He is an ethical creature and prefers values over interests. The preference of values over interests is a kind of "divine relationship" which is associated with respect and worship. In such a relationship, man is even justified if he decides to sacrifice his life (1366: 46-49).

Shariati believes that anything that undermines any of these characteristics leads man to alienation and eventually, to decadence. Decadence, therefore, is the denial of characteristics by which man is defined.

Shariati views technocracy, money, technology, religion, and expertise as various factors which cause the alienation of man. Accordingly, one of the effects of capitalism and the dominance of technology is the fragmentation of man, as a result of which, he is reduced to an object. In such a condition, man turns into a commodity and is estranged from his labor (1361b:195-6).

In order to define the "alienated man", Shariati employs the term "mad" or "jinni-afflicted". People apply these terms to individuals whom they think are associated with jinni or demon. The mad man no longer feels himself; rather he feels another person within himself. "Alienation is a disease in which man does not feel himself as he really is; rather, he feels and identifies jinni within himself" (Ibid. 189). Contemporary man has created artificial objects and is so involved with them that it is difficult for him to assume life without them. In such a situation, man is alienated from his labor and the objects which he has created and, therefore, his real personality has faded away. As a result, it seems that an alienated personality (a man or an object) has replaced the real one within him



and he considers the "other" as "himself" (Ibid. 200). This situation is the outcome of the environmental conditions of the modern age.

According to Shariati, the main characteristic of modern age is a nexus among "science, machine, money, and bourgeoisie". The decadence of human society has begun since bourgeoisie gained control over science, machine, and money (1367:86). In order to survive, bourgeoisie (once one of the most open-minded, dynamic, rational, and progressive social class) by access to money and technology was forced to increase the speed of production and propagate more consumption. Therefore, "interest" and "progress" were the results of this nexus and Shariati believes that in such a condition, truth and human values lost their importance (Shariati, 1366: 189). Furthermore, bourgeoisie expanded its control over science, which has led to "scienticism". Since then, the objective of science has been nothing but to further increasing the power of man and the scientist feels no other responsibility towards man and the world (Shariati, 1367: 226).

Shariati observed the rejection of human values in the nexus among machine, money, and bourgeoisie and believed that science while subjecting man to money, capital and technology has alienated him, and industry and expertise made him part of an industrial entity. The contemporary man is not free. He makes instruments, but these instruments are not at his service. Man innovates, but his innovation is at the service of power and capital. With the expansion of identical machine-made and bureaucratic frameworks, man's freedom and thought were threatened. Capitalism and

socialism, one with the promise of welfare and the other with the promise of justice, deprived him of freedom and the right of making his own choice. Mystic sentiment which is the main factor for values, dynamism, and generation, was demolished in the capitalist system. When man is deprived of his freedom, creativity, consciousness, and mystic sentiments, he becomes "alienated". In such a situation, he is no longer a man and we should call him another creature because man without freedom is meaningless (1361b: 317 and 1356b: 48-49).

Shariati, like other critics of the modern age, criticizes the rapid development of the production, concentration of capital, and mechanization, as the sources of bureaucracy and the establishment of large private and governmental organizations (Ghanei Rad, 1381: 81). He considers the significant growth of consumption, which is the result of fake needs emerging from capitalism and machinism, the most important danger for humanity. Such a rapid increase of consumption separates man from his real needs and deteriorates further the situation in third world countries because it forms a "civilization of consumption" without any production (Shariati, 1359: 43). Contemporary man is subject to machine and machine determines how he should live. Machine has targeted man's thought, feelings and will and has dominated him. Shariati describes this as "machine-strickenness" (Ibid. 7). In such a situation man is imprisoned by machine and a new creature comes into existence which is quite unfamiliar and estranged. He considers man as a free, conscious, and creator being which is captivated by technology; a technology that itself is at the service



of capitalism. This is what distinguishes Shariati from intellectuals such as Ahmad Fardid, Seyyed Hussein Nasr, and Reza Dawari, who believe that technology destroys the essence of man's being. These intellectuals consider the West as a holistic entity in construction of which "Satan" is at work (Boroujerdi, 1377:248, 198, 107). Shariati argues that both "Ahouramazda" and "Ahriman" are working simultaneously at constructing the western civilization. He emphasizes that many aspects of this civilization are though useful and we should adopt them. According to Shariati, if technology is removed from the domination of capitalism, we can use it as an instrument for the promotion of a spiritually valued life (Shariati, 1368:2). Shariati believes that contemporary man is captivated by capitalist technology and machinery and an instrument who has adapted himself to machines. In other words, man, the only free creature in the world, has been transformed into a compulsory and unconscious instrument (Sharaiti, 1359:8). Like Erik Ferrum, he thinks that the present situation reduces man to the status of a "thing" which should be triumphantly employed in the market. He should sell himself successfully and allocate what he has earned in this way to purchase commodities and the means of welfare. Our intensive inclination to consumption disguises us from our real needs because nowadays the very consumption itself has become an object and we have been subject to these fake needs (Ferrum, 1368: 163, and Shariati, ibid: 24). According to Shariati, in both capitalist and communist systems, the philosophy of man's life is mostly concerned with consumption and

materialism. They view all countries of the world as markets for their goods and commodities and create identical human beings that are nothing but mere "consuming animals". He considers this as a consequence of "machinism", because machines produce massively and this massive production is far more than the demands of the domestic markets. Therefore, all human beings are the consumers of similar commodities and should consequently adopt identical tastes (1367: 336). Like Marcuse, he believes that people have no right to freedom of choice in such a system and can not think about their kind of production system, their kind of democracy, and their way of life (Held, 1369: 347 and Shariati, ibid. 337). His emphasis on consciousness and self-consciousness and the similarities between him and Erik Ferrum and Marcuse reflect the influence of Hegel (even though in an indirect and unconscious way) and philosophical as well as humanist Marxists on him (1357:17,c.w 16:24 and Pedram,1382:166). Shariati believes that if we distance money, science, and machine from capitalism, then science and technology are no longer an instrument for alienation of man. If we save the "machine" from anti-human orders and restrictions of "machinism", then man can be saved from the alienation caused by machine (1361b: 209). He valued science and technique but attacks machinism. He describes his criticism as saving the "machine" because, according to him, machine can save the man (Ibid. 213).

Shariati believes that rationality has two aspects: rationale and reason. The "rationale" aspect of rationality can grasp the outside objective



reality. It concerns the calculating function of reason; and science is the result of this kind of reasoning. The "reasoning" aspect of rationality helps us to understand truths, beauties, and values. It is this aspect of rationality that deals with concepts such as worshiping God or sacrifice. If these two aspects of rationality are put together, man's salvation is secured. However, the calculating and instrument-making function of reason, despite its abilities in material development and progress, overshadows many humane aspects of man (Ibid.). His distinction between the two aspects of rationality and his emphasis on the distinct roles they play in shaping the self, comes close to scholars such as Habermas and Allen Turen who believe that problems which are argued by Marcuse and others are derived from technology and science *per se*. From their point of view, exclusive emphasis on the calculating aspect of reason and ignoring its critical aspect should be understood as the main source of man's alienation (Turen, 1382: 180 and Lechte, 1378: 293).

Shariati believes that modern science is the outcome of calculating and instrumental reason which leads to the emergence of the alienated man, since it exclusively concentrates on the question "how we should live?" instead of the issue of "why we should live?". The goal of science perceived as the domination of man over nature and to empower him further (Ibid.215). In the past, the ultimate goal of science was a search for "truth", but nowadays science is merely looking for "power". He believes that the turning point in the direction of science is the time when Francis Bacon announced that "science and philosophy which

help man to get power are real science and philosophy and acceptable" (1362:11). From the time of this announcement on, a shift in the orientation of science can be observed; science becomes subject to capital with no responsibility for man's freedom and spirituality. According to him, it is this shift in orientation that determines the direction of modern civilization: civilization continuously moves towards power and money, but man experiences weakness and lack of spirituality (1366: 226). Shariati holds that this shift in orientation of science is the real cause showing that our world is deprived of highly esteemed spirits. He argues that modern science generally tends to the multiplication of "ordinary, dark, and repetitious individuals and to homogenize thoughts, cultures, values, desires, needs, and ideals" (Ibid). As a religious thinker, his opposition to Bacon is understandable. As Karl Popper argues, Francis Bacon is the prophet of the religion of secularism, who replaced "God" with "nature" and substituted the "law and power of God" with the "law and power of nature". In Popper words, "The absolute science and power of God was replaced with the absolute power of nature and experimental sciences" (Popper, 1379: 183). Bacon believed that in order to obtain cognition and power, we should devoid our mind from all prejudices. We should ignore all theories, superstitions and idols that religion, philosophy, education, and tradition have imposed on our minds and it is only then that we can approach nature and observe it (Ibid. 185). Shariati does not consider these as the actual objectives and missions of modern science, rather, he believes



that they have been imposed on it by bourgeoisie. It was bourgeoisie that changed the orientation of science and employed it for its own goals (Pedram, 1382: 46). As a result, the "science for the sake of science" movement prevailed and man tried to concentrate on producing more and more goods and commodities, and more and more consumption. This role was not determined by Popes and priests or by science itself, but was given by the desire for power, capital and money (Shariati, 1367: 297). The new science empowered man and saved him from natural disasters, but since it is indifferent to the "meaning" of life, it has deprived man of his real identity and turned him into an "object" (Shariati, 1367: 295). Like the American sociologist C. Wright Mills, who believes that most of scholars in social sciences in capitalist societies are entangled in an atmosphere and have no other choice but serving the interests of capitalism and standing against democracy (Mills, 1360:131), Shariati believes that nowadays science can not determine its own principal goals and objectives, rather, they are determined by machine and production. He thus continues that in such a system, the value of scientists is determined by capital and money (Shariati, *ibid.* 297). If we remove the domination of capital over science and machine, both of them would become instruments for salvation and freedom of man.

Shariati's view has similarities and differences with his contemporaries on "alienation". At the time, Iranian intellectuals were tremendously exposed and affected by Marxism. This ideology, with its claim on clarifying social relationships and its promise for establishing an ideal society, was

greatly welcomed by Iranian intellectuals and educated citizens (Qoreishi, 1384: 213). Shariati used concepts employed by Marxism to clarify social realities and, at the same time, introduced new concepts and meanings in religious terms. Similarities between his ideas and those of Marx may be observed, but these similarities do not mean that Shariati has unconditionally adopted Marxism without criticizing its very foundations. His ideas about capitalism and its relation to science and technology are similar to the Marxian interpretation. Both hold that capitalism is the main source of problems being faced by man today both argue that the remedy for these problems lies in removing private ownership and establishing equality in the society (Arron, *ibid.* 159-161 and Shariati 1356b: 48-49).

But unlike Marx, Shariati integrate equality and socialism with worshiping of God and mysticism and intend to save socialism and equality from materialism (Shariati, *ibid.*). According to Shariati, socialism saves the divine and highly humane spirits from the prison of private ownership and destructive values of bourgeoisie (Rahnema, 1383: 68). Marx considers capitalism as the symbol of devil that alienates man through its domination over technology and science. But not only he had no objection to science, industry, and modernism, he holds that man's freedom from such unnecessary sufferings was the result of his abilities in the domain of science and technology (Bashirieh, *ibid.* 165-166). According to Marx, with the collapse of capitalism and the destruction of the state, modern science and industry would return to the states they deserve. Like Marx,



Shariati considers capital and technology the sources of alienation and objectiveness and believes that with the removal of capitalism's control over modern science and technology, they can find out their real orientation. But their arguments are distinguishable in their views on the mission of science. Based on his monotheistic worldview, Shariati considers the main goal of science as understanding man and recognizing the truth, as well as helping man in his search for spiritual development (1361b:218). Marx on the other hand, holds a materialistic worldview and argues that science and technology are instruments that help man to exercise his control over nature and release him from unnecessary sufferings of life (Bashirieh, *ibid.* 168). Therefore, both of them see no real and essential relationship between "science and technology" and "capitalism" and focus their criticism on capitalism rather than science and technology.

Reversionary Marxists, however, redirect the criticism of capitalism into modern science and technology. They argue that there is an essential relationship among science, technology and capitalism. In their views, the history of the recent centuries, which is the period of the victory of instrumental rationalism over the forces of nature, is by no means a period of the promotion of freedom. They believe that the real essence of "progress" is on the verge of decadence. According to these intellectuals, "the reason is not committed to its promises and intrigues and destroys itself; therefore, man's history is nothing but the history of scarification for progress" (Ahmadi, *ibid.* 1356). But unlike Marcuse, who believes the basis of

modern science has been formed in a way that attaches the greatest importance to the use of means and instruments (Marcuse, *ibid.* 168), Shariati argues that if this modern science is associated with the religious culture would have different results and consequences. In the materialistic culture of the West, science is the instrument for meeting man's material needs and gaining power. In such a culture, man is an instrument that is fit for machine-work and production and his cost and value is determined in accordance with his effectiveness in the market (Shariati, 1366: 226). But in the religious culture which emphasizes on ethics and values, the mission of science is discovering the truth, man, and his high values (Pedram, *ibid.* 147). In religious culture, the main philosophy and mission of science is achieving two goals: one is intellectual and scientific development for discovering the reality of the world and realizing the existential essence and mission of man and the meaning of life; the other is existential by which he means the development of transcendental values and spiritual evolution of man (Shariati, *ibid.*).

According to Shariati, some aspects of Marxism, i.e. its fundamental absolute materialism, would lead to the alienation of man. Marxism denies man an "independent essence" and "divine entity". It would be quite natural, therefore, for man viewed as such to see himself as "alienated". He would consider himself as a living object; by creating instruments of his labor, he creates himself; and with the development of these instruments, he develops himself unconsciously (1361c: 220). A significant feature of Sharati's



thought, therefore, lies in his distinction between western culture and capitalism on the one hand, and technology, machine, and science on the other. He argues that capitalism, materialistic culture, and aimless technology are the causes of man's "alienation" in contemporary world.

Nevertheless, some contemporary Iranian intellectuals have raised their criticism against this point. Ramin Jahangablou believes that Shariati's view of the West has changed modernity to a kind of modernization; in other words, critical reason has been replaced by instrumental reason (Jahanbaglou, 1383: 169). He argues that with his emphasis on "localism" and "authenticity" against globalization, Shariati postponed our dialogue and interaction with modernity. However, he continues, Shariati did not stop the emergence of capitalism and technology in Iran or to protect Iranians from negative effects of capitalism and technology; rather, Iranians were deprived of critical rationality which lies at the very basis of democracy, human rights, tolerance, and freedom (ibid. 125). Jahanbaglou makes no reference to the relationship between Shariati's view and the emergence of technology and capitalism and the prevalence of instrumental reason in Iran. The opposition or inclination of one or a few intellectuals can not change a country like Iran with such a speed. Before Shariati, the prevalent atmosphere was inclined towards obtaining the western culture without any Iranian interference; however, it could not bring both aspects of modernism to Iran and make Iranians both industrially developed and socially democratic. How far it would be reasonable to argue that Shariati's opposition to

capitalism had no effect on its emergence in this country but his opposition against critical reason blocked its emergence in the Iranian society, particularly if we are reminded that, as has been shown, Shariati believed that it was the separation between critical reason and instrumental reason that should be considered as the main source of the problems of the contemporary man?

Shariati concludes that the prevalent situation in the western world, which is the result of machinism, scienticism, and capitalism, is nothing but the alienation of the contemporary man. He develops the concept of alienation and relates it to colonialism, culture, and religion in the third world. Shariati believes that the origin of decadence in the third world is colonialism. According to him, this decadence is affected through direct control and exploitation of resources of third world nations as well as the process of "assimilation", which results in man's alienation. While in the West, alienation is the natural consequences of the domination of technology and machinism; it is imposed on third world societies from outside and is accompanied with the rejection of their native cultural identity. Therefore, Shariati believes that the issue is the greatest catastrophe that the third world has experienced and is, in fact, the origin of its decadence (1367: 270-271).

### **Cultural Alienation**

The concept of alienation was not limited to labor and "thingness" or the result of prevalence of instrumental reason. In the third world, intellectuals like Frantz Fanon and Aime Ceasier, used this concept in order to explain the



relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. They used it to define the process of destruction and metamorphosis of the colonized culture by the colonizer. Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) is one of the intellectuals that had a great impact on Shariati's thought. Fanon believes that the most important effect of colonialism is the destruction of the local traditions. According to him, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is not a personal relationship; rather, it is the relationship between an arrogant entity with humble masses. The colonized man is entangled in the closed circles of the colonizer and becomes motionless, dumb, and almost regressive (Fanon, 1358: 42). Therefore, the colonized man tries to reduce his defects through imitating his colonizer. When the colonized man is distanced from his traditions, he no longer has a clear picture of himself and, therefore, begins imitating the "others" whom he thinks are more civilized and better (Borojerdi, 1375: 29). According to him the "other", who is the colonizer, is a subject who recognizes the colonized as an object. Such identification is not based on benevolence, but to exploit the colonized (Saeed, 1382: 390). According to Fanon, this is a process for alienating third world societies.

Similarly, Aime Ceasire argues that colonialism depletes man from within and then tries to play the role of savior for the colonized people. The colonizer pretends that, due to his race and culture, he has the responsibility to civilize the lower races (Ceasire, 1356: 19-20). Colonialism is equal to transforming man to a "thing". There is no human relationship between colonizer and colonized. The

colonized is humiliated and disappointed by the colonizer and, therefore, alienated (Ibid. 26-28). According to him, as long as the colonized is a captive of his colonizer, he can not be equal to his master. He should release himself from alienation and return to his "self". Whenever he announced his freedom to the world, he can be equal to Europeans (Rahimi, 1352: 212).

Shariati considers culture as a collection of spiritual, artistic, religious, and sensual reflections of people, according to which they justify their needs, tastes, and ways of life (1361b: 201). Man can be considered human as long as he has "his" religion, literature, sufferings, and needs. He is a man as long as he is conscious of his situation and distinguishes himself from others by reference to his culture. When man is alienated, he feels needs and sufferings which are not his real needs and sufferings. These needs do not belong to the time and place in which he lives. They belong to people who live in a different time and place with a different history, society, and economy (Ibid. 202). The alienated man has no social consciousness; rather, his social and historical status as well as his identity is imposed by others (Manouchehri, 1376). According to Shariati, capitalism, which considers man as a "thing" and has transformed him to a mere consumer of goods, has alienated man through colonialism as well as the denial and distortion of the cultural identity of third world societies. In order to make them dependent on the productive systems of its "global empire", colonialism tries to alien them from their spiritual and historical identities. By taking advantage of sociology, psychology, and historical experiences,



imperialism has realized that the best way for making a society incapable of productivity and turning it into a mere and everlasting consumer of other's products, is to curtail it from the "production of thought". In such a situation, people such a society turn to mere consumers of the imperialist's products and loses their freedom (Shariati, 1360: 334).

Like Albert Memmi and Aime Cesaire, Shariati believes that for making them subject to its power, colonialism tries to deny the real historical identity of the colonized and invent a new one which is not theirs. The colonizer tries to delete, transform and distort people's mentality which is shaped by their history and institutions and not a mere mental state. When these people lose their roots and authenticity, they would resort to those who are depicted as having more respected personalities by the colonial power (Memmi, 1356: 144, Cesaire, *ibid*: 42-43, and Shariati, *ibid*.). In Shariati's view, the Asian or African alienated man has forgotten his real pains and sufferings, i.e. hunger, illiteracy, arrogance, and injustice, and makes complains of pains and sufferings which actually belong to Europeans. Hunger has no meaning for the European citizen. Instead, he is looking for a gateway for his crisis of meaning (Obeidi, 1366: 54). The European man is complaining of the machines and the iron order imposed on him by machinism and capitalism and the man in the third world, who is suffering from "machinlessness", is complaining of "machine", too (1361b: 203). According to Shariati, colonialism alienated the people of the third world and introduced a new culture on them which is named "modernization".

The desire for modernization was the greatest blow to the people of other countries by the Europeans. The colonized believes that modernization would lead to be as civilized as Europeans. The modernized man lives and consumes like Europeans and distances himself from his old and native traditions as well as his social and national values (1367: 378). In order to modernize third world societies, colonialism "depersonalized" and assimilated them. These assimilated individuals stand against the cultural, religious and historical identity of their own past which prevents them from becoming the mere consumers of European goods and commodities (*Ibid*. 382). As a consequence of such depersonalization, they lose their identity and become "modernized" instead of "civilized", since to become civilized is not a matter of imitation and is achieved only in a long-term process of development. Hence the clash between modernization and tradition which was the most idiotic in the history of man. It was idiotic because colonialism was its advocate and people were not the real winners of this showdown (*Ibid*. 384).

In order to exercise its control over the whole world and to propagate the culture of over-consumption, colonialism tried to destroy cultural differences. As their economy became dependent on the production of just one type of good and commodity, they were also moved towards cultural hegemony.

"Monoculturalism" is a product of colonialism, because colonizers consider themselves as the masters of the world. They consider the world as a farm. Therefore, production integration is a characteristic of



the colonialism because culture at the same time means farming. Western nations try to move other nations towards production of just one good and at the same time try to impose one culture on them. (Shariati, 1357:15-16)

According to Shariati, machine should constantly increase its production because without this constant increase it can not survive. Colonialism thus tries to make people ignorant on the purpose of life and future. For the sake of the survival of the machine and capital, they worked hard to transform man to someone who no longer is able to say that "in accordance to values derivable from my culture and history, I will or will not use this good and commodity" (1367:373).

It is for this that Shariati considers the decadence of third world societies as the outcome of capitalism and colonialism. Economic colonialism is, in fact, an economic invasion. This kind of invasion, together with other forms of invasion (such as military, cultural, and political invasion), forms a collection, the main purpose of which is the exploitation of other countries natural resources. Colonialism imposed itself on Africa and Asia through the use of force. It continued its presence in these countries through cultural deceptions and alienating their people. As a result, native cultures and local economies collapsed. Even after its departure, colonialism sustained its colonial presence through shaping dealer bourgeoisie and alienated intellectuals. They paved the way for exporting their countries raw materials to Europe in exchange for European products. The colonial relationship, therefore, survived. Like

Edward Said, he believes that the colonial system leaves no more than two choices for the colonized: he should either cooperate with the owners of capital and machine, or be destroyed (Said, 1382: 260). Capitalism values nothing, but production, consumption and accumulation of capital. According to Shariati, capitalism and modern bourgeoisie consider man as homo-economicus and, therefore, sacrifice truthfulness for power and man's ascendance for development. They sacrifice everything, even happiness, for the consumption of the means of happiness (Shariati, 1357: 176-177).

Shariati considers man as having a divine spirit which has been exposed to the invasion of the materialistic western culture. He is faced with this main question: "why to live?" He believes that contemporary political and intellectual schools of thought have done nothing to help man in his very "being". Instead, they have distorted genuine humane principles. Shariati opposes the viewpoint that the only culture and civilization of our time is the western culture and civilization and considers this viewpoint as an imperialistic one whose ultimate goal is economic exploitation. That is why he proposes that a Muslim, Iranian, and oriental could take advantage of machine, industry, and technology without losing his cultural identity. By inviting people to utilize science and technology but rejecting machinism and capitalism, Shariati tries to acquit himself from the allegation that he is an advocate of regression and backwardness (1361b:212and1360:115).

Shariati believes that western culture is a mundane and materialistic that advocates Epicurean motives and ignores transcendental



objectives. This culture, he argues, defines man's life in terms of pleasure and consumption. However, in religious culture and ideology, science has a clear goal: it should help man to understand the reality of the world and to run a life in accordance with moral values. In such an ideology, science, art, and culture are divine and the metaphysical reflections of man's nature. But in materialistic ideology, everything is at the service of economy. In such an ideology, the social order is essentially based on economy and consumption (*Collected Works* 227:24).

He argues that the materialistic culture has invaded Oriental territories, and with this invasion, the "meaning" of oriental life, identity, and spirituality has been destroyed and the "worshipping" man is replaced with the "consumer" one. That explains why he seriously criticizes all individuals who have acted as mediators for transplanting this culture into his country. At the same time, he is concerned with industrialization, modernization, and development. Therefore, he raises this main question: how we can adjust modernity and modernization with our culture and society in order to make development without losing our cultural, religious and national identities? Shariati offers his theory of "the return to the self" to answer this question. For him, religion is both a belief and an identity. He advocates a kind of religious modernity which requires both a shift in religious viewpoints and an adjustment between culture and modernity. The main point of his arguments is that we can obtain economic growth and development through preserving our genuine culture. Shariati considers

real science as spiritual knowledge and which elevates man's value and status to the extent that he feels no humiliation against western culture. The "spiritual" life which is Shariati's ultimate goal is rooted in the past, since a man who has no past can have no future. He concludes,

Based on our conscious cultural principles, we should remain "ourselves" and do not imitate the west. We should select and try to guide the Orient towards the status that the West enjoys today. (1360:122).

### **The Idea of "the Return to the Self" and Its Critics**

Shariati reviews those elements of modernity that are assumed to enter this country and turn into the values of the modern time. "Consciousness" is the main scheme in Shariati's works where he attaches great importance to it for respecting his culture, society, and religion against the "stranger" and the "west". Shariati insists on the necessity of careful and scientifically elaborated understanding of the contemporary world and its dominant civilization. However, he has ignored this important fact that criticizing modernity in a society that is not modern yet, might lead to the resistance against modernization. In such a society, the resistance is focused on cultural and bureaucratic aspects of western civilization because their people can not ignore modern technology. Perhaps it was due to such an hard criticism against western culture raised by intellectuals like him and Jalal Ale Ahmad and all those who were influenced by Heidegger, Spangler, Marcuse, Rene Guenon and the like that westernization in Iran was replaced



by resistance against the west. This has led to the condemnation of any interactions with the west.

There is some preservation on the idea of "return to the self". It seems that the advocates of the idea have fallen in to the trap of imperialism. The Eurocentric view has divided the world into two parts: the civilized and the uncivilized, and concludes that the uncivilized should be governed by the civilized. An imperialistic position try to classify peoples into various fragmented groups by reference to ethnic, political, and religious differences and to raise issues among the developing societies which would deepen their divisions. This is more easily done if people pay no attention to understand the realities of this world and create some sort of mythological models that are extensively uncompromising. To hold the view that that all Europeans are opposed to non-Europeans would run against any relationship between the two. Freedom means self-consciousness rather than confining ourselves to fabricated borders and denying any relationship with others. In fact, only an ongoing dialogue would lead to real liberation of the colonized.

Moreover, cultural identities are not fixed and unchanging. It is a changing subject which we continuously revise and by taking advantage of the present and the past, we try to enrich it. This is not to say that mere imitation would not result in alienation. In a changing and intertwined world like ours, no one can be identified as having purely western or oriental. While the persistence of traditions, national languages, and diverse cultures cannot be ignored, there is no reason to separate and distinct human beings from each other through

bias, fear, and pre-judgment since human life and values are not confined to these separations (Said, 1382: 483).

Here we may raise the following questions: Is the return to the self possible at all? Even if it is possible, how valuable it would be? For example, would it be possible if Arabs decide to return to their pre-Islamic identity? And would it be a return to the self or going astray? For Shariati, of course, the return to the self is not equal to the return to the past. But a prevalent interpretation of his idea has ended in the denouncement of all that is obtained from other cultures and civilizations. To see his exact point, we may be reminded, for instance, that Arabs introduced Islam to Iran and Iranians adopted this religion and contributed in its expansion. It was an honor for Iranians rather than humiliation. Is it justified for Iranians to return to their pre-Islamic history, culture, and religion? It seems that nobody, except extreme nationalist would approve of such a return and Shariati has repeatedly described those who invite Iranians to return to the pre-Islamic period as "reactionaries" and "fools" (1357: 28-29). As Soroush puts it, in any discussion about culture we can not talk about exclusive ownership of this or that value. Rather, we should adopt all logical and rational elements of other cultures that we deem as appropriate for our people's material and spiritual life (Soroush, 1377: 176).

Shariati had no intention to return to the past rather, he emphasizes on the reconstruction of religious thought based on selective and purified cultural resources alongside considerations concerning time and place. Here, he is greatly



influenced by Protestantism and religious reformation as took place in the Christian world. The writings of Max Weber and particularly his theory of "Protestant Ethics and Capitalist Spirit" left their effects on Shariati's thought too and encouraged him to ask for fundamental critical assessment and revision of what Muslims hold as religious beliefs. And he did his best to prevent reactionaries as well as religious and political authorities from taking advantage of his idea of "return to self" as an instrument employed for their own distinct positions. Furthermore, he introduced this idea as a criticism against bourgeoisie, modernization, and machinism of the contemporary time. Nevertheless, no emphasis on the flexibility of man's identity can be observed in his writings. He believes that we are influenced by the spirit of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is the representative of the western history and mentality and, therefore, has nothing to offer to the oriental mind (1357: 114). Despite his primary intention for making a reasonable relation between modernity and religious, the extension of his success may be questioned. Historically, it is true that the anti-western characteristics of his writings lead to a rather naive understanding of the contemporary world in a great number of university students in Iran. But again, how far he is to be blamed for such naivety is a question finding a satisfactory answer to which seems very difficult. Some critics argue that ignoring of feature of our identity for the sake of another is the root of all these problems. Farhang Rajaei, who draw a parallel between identity and a river since we are always experiencing a kind of development, argues that

Iranians should combine concepts of modernity, such as the "responsible individual" and "rational freedom", with some elements of Iranian culture, such as "mystic personality" and "flexibility", and several features of Islamic culture, such as "monotheism" and "justice". He argues that we should not omit one of these elements in the expense of the other, because it is totally detrimental to our identity (Rajaei, 1382: 238 and 68). Reducing the Iranian identity to only one of these aspects, though quite easy, has great costs for us. As Darioush Shaigan puts it, if we accept "national-religious" and modern identity without any bias, we can enrich ourselves and expand our knowledge to a larger extent. Otherwise, it distorts our identity and reflects a broken image of the world (Shaigan, 1380: 169).

Moreover, it is true that autocrats and opponents of freedom in third world countries can easily take advantage of the separation of western culture from its technology and science. Political leaders would welcome western science and technology and make great efforts in order to modernize their own country, while opposing other aspect of the western culture and describing it as decadent and materialistic under the pretext of "protecting our own culture". Science and technology have equipped them with the apparatus for controlling their people. They exclude their critics from society and accuse them as pro-western. Consequently, it would rather seem that science and technology have nothing to do with the prosperity of such societies. Reducing modernization into a technological process has created numerous problems for these countries as issues like human rights, freedom, and liberty are denied in practice



(Jahanbaglu, 1382: 125 and 169). This condition is usually justified with reference to the pretexts of originality and opposition towards the imitation of the west. Conservatives, too, can make use of the idea and suppress their opponents by accusing them of submission to the west. Since conservatives influence masses, they can raise them against any new idea.

But the idea of "return to self" was originally a more reasonable approach towards modernization rather than an entirely blind rejection. Even though many of the points mentioned by the critics seem encouraging, it is still quite unclear whether the fact that incorrect interpretations have overshadowed the very rationale of Shariati's argument, can undermine the usefulness of the idea. The problem, therefore, may lie somewhere else. It could be, as Javad Tabatabaei believes, that since the idea of "the return to self" was not elaborated by assessing traditions against modernization, it would eventually end with the full break-up of the relationship with tradition:

A tradition that is not revised and scrutinized during the process of modernization is doomed to destruction. In modern times, every civilization is based on intellectual activity. This can be carried out through a burgeoning and generating tradition that is always changing and revising its principles against the requirements of the modern time. (Tabatabaei, 1374: 368).

### **Conclusion**

As has been shown above, in introducing the idea of the return to the self, Shariati's main purpose is

to assess the relations of tradition and modernity. Modernity threatens man's three basic needs of freedom, equality, and mysticism. He criticizes capitalism and its control over science, machine, and money. At the same time, he stands against orthodox and official Marxism. All these indicate that he is mainly concerned with protecting comprehensive and integrated freedom. Shariati distinguishes "capitalism" from "modern science and industry" and proposes a localized concept of modernity through rejecting the former and confirming the latter. Throughout his intellectual life, he had been advocating the kind of modernity in which man was an "end" not a "means". He was defending a kind of modernity within which man moves towards "becoming" not "being". Shariati rejects aimless technology because he believes that such technology evacuate civilization from any ideal. Technology can lead towards liberation in a society which is related and affiliated to God. He questions the prevalent belief among the first generation of Iranian intellectuals according to which western civilization should be adopted without any question. He separates "western culture and its mundane system" from "technology, science, and industry" and relates it to religious culture. Shariati does consider socialism as an ideal system; but for him socialism was not an end but an instrument. He considered socialism as an instrument with which man can move towards improvement, development, truth, and, ultimately to God. Shariati rejects religion as experienced throughout history (which he refers to as religion of dualism) because this kind of religion distances man from his humane



condition and makes him captive of metaphysical forces (Shariati, 1382: 20-24).

In order to save himself from the modern iron cage, Shariati proposes that man should return to his self. He considers the struggle for humanism unassociated by equality between classes as an illusion. According to him, the humanism in the third world should come after nationalism and class equality; the native should be considered as a "human being" and allowed to speak out. To Shariati, humanism can only be raised when the humanity of man is realized in the society (1357: 348-349). Like Hegel, he rejects the return to nature and primitive simplicity because in that period man was apparently free, but in fact imprisoned by of nature. Shariati hails science and development because they have made man free from the prison of nature. But this is not the whole point. He believes that God, who is the symbol of freedom, creativity, beauty, improvement, and consciousness, gives meaning to human life. For Shariati, the mission of religion is to provide self-consciousness to man. This is a kind of consciousness which gives birth not to philosophy or technology, but to love, faith, and ideology. Shariati believes that the alienated man can be saved from his disease through a return to his real essence and nature. The "perfect" man is one who has immunity against all "alienating" factors and has realized himself. Shariati does not prescribe a general solution to the problem; rather, he argues that the first thing we should do is finding out our identity and believing in it. Like Fanon, he invites third world nations to propagate a "third way" (Fanon, *ibid*: 192 and Shariati 1359: 83) and do not

imitate Europeans. In the ideal society that Shariati is advocating, a new man would emerge who advocates industry and economy alongside with truth and ethics. In such a society, man who is not worshipping money since for him, economy is a significant means and spiritual improvement an end. According to Shariati, man's disintegrated elements would reunite and release from "one-dimensionality" and alienation and, finally, the "perfect man" would be actualized in human society. In the society that Shariati is proposing, there are three basic principles:

1. "Mysticism", which moves man towards what he "should be" and is the spiritual and supreme aspect of him;
2. "Equality and Justice" among people and the rule of justice;
3. "Freedom" which is the basic essence of man and without which there is no development and evolution.

These principles can make a new man who is no longer decadent, imitator, and alienated.

We assessed some criticisms offered by Shariati's critics. It has been argued that although some of these criticisms indicate important deficits of his argument, there are many others which are, in fact, concerned with the misunderstanding and misuse of the idea of "the return to the self". Shariati, of course, can be criticized for the shortages of his theory, but certainly not for it being misused.

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## دیدگاه علی شریعتی دربارهٔ از خود بیگانگی و بازگشت به خویشتن: ارزیابی منتقدان آن

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مقوله «الیناسیون» یکی از مباحث کلیدی اندیشه شریعتی است. او با این مفهوم، مسائل انسان امروز را تجزیه و تحلیل می‌کند. از نظر وی در «از خود بیگانگی» انسان «دیگری» را «خود» احساس می‌کند و آگاهی به خویش را از دست می‌دهد و دچار نوعی «خود آگاهی کاذب» می‌شود.

از خود بیگانگی همان از دست رفتن «وجود حقیقی و فطری» و «خویشتن اجتماعی» است. او، هر آنچه که انسان را از ویژگیهای انسانی اش (که تعریف خاصی از آن دارد) دور کند عامل «الینه» کنندگی می‌داند. از نظر شریعتی عقلانیت ابزاری، بوروکراسی و ماشینیسیم انسان را در قرن بیستم از خود بیگانه کرده‌اند و از این منظر آنها را نقد می‌کند. ولی اینها را مشکل ما نمی‌داند بلکه معتقد است درد ما بی‌ماشینی است و اگر زمانی که آن را نداریم از آن بنالیم معلوم می‌شود که دردهای دیگری را احساس می‌کنیم. او، انسانها را زادهٔ تاریخ و محیط فرهنگی‌شان می‌داند و تا زمانی «خودشان» هستند که فرهنگ و مذهب و دردهای خویش را داشته باشند. اما امپریالیسم فرهنگی با تحریف تاریخ و فرهنگ و مذهب مردمان دنیای سوم آنها را از خود بیگانه کرد و آنها دچار «خودآگاهی کاذب» شدند. از نظر او، چاره کار، در ارائه یک راه حل عمومی و بزرگ نیست، بلکه قبل از هر کاری باید به «خود» برگردیم و از «بیگانگی با خود» رهایی یابیم.

واژگان کلیدی: الیناسیون، خودآگاهی، ماشینیسیم، تمدن، تجدد، فرهنگ

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