Imagination, meaning and revolution: The sources of the revolutionary power of Islam in Iran
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Epilogue

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Throughout this text, I have intended to offer an alternative perspective from which to understand the Islamic Revolution of Iran as a modern phenomenon with traditional belongings. I have tried to explore the meaning of this revolution in terms of both its break and continuity with the past. In this sense, this revolution was partly caused by the same systemic problems that precipitated other Third World revolutions, and thus may be partly explained by the same politico-economic reasoning as that used to explain the revolutions in Asia, Africa and Latin America in the twentieth century. However, in terms of its operation and manifestation, the Iranian Revolution was totally different from the Chinese, Cuban, Algerian and Vietnamese Revolutions.

For example, whereas all the revolutions just mentioned were manifestly secular or non-religious in intent, the Iranian Revolution was expressed in purely religious terms. Also, those revolutions were primarily concerned in their expressed aims with social and economic questions, and in their attention to political institutions, they did not go beyond the creation of a monolithic one party system. By contrast, the Iranian Revolution has been primarily expressed in political and cultural terms with economic and social issue given a second billing.

After the victory of the revolution, Iranian revolutionary leaders have been engaged mainly in an ideological struggle between contesting claims for religious and political authority, and in building religious and political institutions. The intertwining of religion and politics has been the unique characteristic of the Iranian Revolution compared to other Third World revolutions. The post-revolutionary doctrinal and ideological disputations, and the diversification of religious and political institutions, have not been compatible with a monolithic polity. Therefore, the Iranian Revolution is also unique among the Third World revolutions in not quickly degenerating into a one-party-system. In this sense, the Iranian Revolution might be compared to a certain extent with the English and American Revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which were fuelled by religious and/or political enthusiasm and created novel and diversified religious and/or political institutions. The religious flavour of the Iranian Revolution makes it also comparable with the medieval millenarian revolutions, which persisted mainly in the form of messianic aspirations and struggles fuelled by collective pride, religious passion and cultural sensitivity.

The Iranian Revolution may be considered as politico-religious in nature due to its passion to create a new form of State equipped with a religious ideology, which would have the task of shaping a new social, political and moral order. The impetus to this revolution originated from the lack of institutional mechanisms to regulate the polity by allowing the expression of social, political and intellectual dissent. In other words, it was fuelled by the absence of modern institutions that could allow contained and communally sanctioned collective rebellions. The Shah’s regime failed to provide any means for modern day “rituals of rebellion”, such as strikes, civil disobedience, and even intellectual and artistic protest. It also failed to allow for the existence of

1 Interestingly, this passion is similar to the passion of American revolutionaries if the late eighteenth century who, according to Hannah Arendt in her On Revolution, attempted to answer the “political question”.

2 Here, I have been inspired by what was observed in less complex societies by Max Gluckman as “rituals of rebellion”, and by Victor Turner as “the rituals of reversal of roles”.

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community-based religious, political, social and cultural organisations, which would supply a semblance of “reversal of roles” by providing chances for political and social mobility via political participation and social integration.¹

I have placed the Iranian Revolution at the centre of my study of the Iranian polity and society on the basis of the assumption that it encompasses the main features of Iranian’s rational and irrational political behaviour. Conventionally speaking, the exercise of voting, predominant in the Western democracies, has been considered as a rational type of collective intervention in politics. Another rational form of collective political action is that of organised interest groups, which pursue specific goals. In both of these examples being organised, goal-oriented and interest driven are features of rational political action. As for the irrational type of collective political behaviour, riots and rebellions are the clearest examples. They share such features as spontaneity, disorganisation and not being focused. Whereas in voting individual choice finds a limited free play, in a rioting crowd there is little room for individualism. Yet in both, the collective mind plays an overarching role.²

In Iran, where any attempt on the part of the population to effect change in the polity, such as genuine elections and other forms of protest, were muzzled for a long time, revolution became the final resort. The Iranian Revolution exhibited both the rational features, such as organisation, goal-orientation and being interest-driven, and irrational features, such as spontaneity, emotionalism, violence and being indiscriminate against its opponents. Thus, in its violent expression, it went beyond a peaceful act of voting. But, it also surpassed the blind violence of a riot. The aims of a certain pattern of voting or a specific riot do not go beyond expressing a grievance, protesting against an undesirable legislation, demanding a right or privilege, or simply releasing some tension within the framework of the existing political authority. But the Iranian Revolution, like other great revolutions, broke out where the existing authority structures were no longer believed to have a viable existence. An interest group or a rioting mob might diminish in flare after a sudden surge, and cannot sustain itself for an extended period of time. But the Iranian Revolution offered an organised, sustained and directed challenge to the existing polity and projected a totally new political order.³

However, this revolution went further than pursuing certain social and political interests by seeking to destroy the existing economic relations, moral values and social norms, and to replace it with an idealised vision of an imagined past, a found-again paradise that had been lost for a long while. And in this latter sense, it pursued a rather Durkheimian path of creating a new collective conscience, which was based on the deconstruction of old collective traditions, and the construction of new interpretations of the old traditions.

Granted that all action is mediated by symbols and motivated by meaning, it can be said that voting is an exercise mediated by the symbols of general will and

¹ Here, I might add that in the post-industrial world of Western Europe and North America, the explicit political revolutions have receded into permanent eclipse as a result of the capacity of the political system to allow for expression of dissent through strikes, political mobility and fragmented social movements. Social movements such as women and gay movements have instigated real social change in the Western world without risking disastrous political repercussions.

² Gustav Le Bon and Robert Parks were the early observers of the operation of collective mind in collective action and formation of public opinion.

³ In its organisation and mobilisation, the Iranian Revolution largely complied with Charles Tilly’s understanding of revolutions developed in his book From Mobilisation to Revolution (1978).
individual rights as propounded by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. But, the concrete interests of the individual and the imagined interests of the collectivity are also involved in motivating the act of voting. In the case of a riot, the behaviour may be said to be mediated by the symbols of primitive freedom and solidarity with a crowd, and motivated by tension release and resulting in orgiastic ecstasy. The Iranian Revolution, like other great revolutions, created a space for the expression of individual worth, collective purpose, ecstatic release of tension and the far-reaching goal of a perfect reconstruction of the world, and as such combined important aspects of the two other types of political behaviour.

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The Iranian Revolution as a collective political action encompassed and addressed itself, and not always successfully, to various social, political, cultural and psychological problems. The social problems included the problems of class and ethnic conflict, inequality, injustice, discontent, deprivation, uneven development and suppression of social movements. In the political sphere, there were problems associated with illegitimacy of the State power, the decline in national pride, the lack of freedom and autonomy and the rise of new ideologies and utopias. Culturally, the revolution had to deal with problems, such as identity crisis, decline in morality, the need for a new value system, desire for religious and mystical experience, and need for new forms of artistic expression. The psychological problems faced by the revolution included aggression and violence, sexual repression, lack of the means of tension release, guilt feeling, lack of self-esteem, and feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. Therefore, in understanding the meaning of the Iranian Revolution and its consequences, I have tried to avoid a strict disciplinary approach, which could confine this revolution in the narrow boundaries of functionalism, psychologism, reductionist Marxism and more importantly religious fanaticism.

The functionalist view, mainly inspired by the sociology of Talcott Parsons, considers the viability of a system as a function of its capacity to survive in its entirety by constantly making appropriate adjustments to cope with internal and external variations. It does not place much emphasis on individual motives in inspiring social life.1 For functionalism, the primary question is the functioning of social, political and economic “systems” via the usage of appropriate technologies of government in a manner that socio-political order is preserved. Functionalism also emphasises the “socialisation” of the individuals as a necessary means to provide for individual and social sanity. In this sense, social and political deviance are considered as “maladjustment” and have to be either coerced (punished and disciplined), or treated for a cure. A narrow functionalist view would see the Iranian Revolution as a political aberration with aggressive and violent impulses, which must be contained. It would, therefore, be unimpressed by the liberatory potentials of this revolution. Broadly applied, however, a functionalist approach may shed light on certain aspects of the Iranian Revolution as far as Iran as a social system is concerned. For example, Chalmers Johnson’s approach to revolutionary change may be used to explain how “endogenous” and “exogenous” factors upset “social equilibrium” in Iran, and how the revolution helped to restore the equilibrium of the “social system.” 2 But, one has to be aware of the limitations of this approach, particularly that it does not address any of the aspects of the revolution, which are associated with its human actors.

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1 See, for example, Parsons, T. Essays in Sociological Theory. The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1954.
The Marxist model redefines the concept of social deviance in terms of social alienation or fetishism. This view not only does not try to preserve social order through the elimination or cure of deviance, but also celebrates deviance and nonconformity as factors to incite revolutionary disorder in order to fundamentally change the social and economic relations, which are based on the capitalist mode of production. However, the positions taken by the radical left as a result of narrow Marxist interpretations, would ignore, as it has, its own proclivity to repression. In Iran, the Marxist view welcomed the revolution’s opposition to the existing political order and glorified its aggressiveness especially against the “U.S. imperialism”. But, the tacit or expressed approval of the existing repressive socialist regimes, such as the former Soviet Union, by many Marxists made them blind to the danger of the revolution’s terror to which they would also fall victim. Marxism also would not accord much significance to the human actors of the revolution due to its historicist understanding of social movements.

A third model has been the psychological model, which has proved to be adaptable by both functionalist and Marxist models for understanding revolutions. Taine and Le Bon were among the first in the modern time to attempt to analyse the psychology of the “crowd”. Their views were essentially negative, and considered crowd behaviour as subject to “irrational”, “unconscious” and “primitive impulses” of the human animal, which were unleashed when individuals were lost to the “crowd”. It was in this sense that the functionalist model assimilated their views.

Freud, however, attributed the impulse to violence against the social order to an inherent “discontent” and alienation that has been caused by socialisation, culture and “civilisation”. In his Civilisation and Its Discontents, he used his psychoanalytical model to suggest that the repression of the death instinct and the deferment of the pleasure principle were the price paid for the social and cultural survival of humanity. It was in this context that the Marxist model appropriated Freud. In the Marxian-Freudian camp, the prominent figure was Wilhelm Reich with his visionary work, The Mass Psychology of Fascism. His concepts of religious feelings and the authoritarian family structures anticipated the mass behaviour of the Germans, who responded to the ecstatic-sexual appeal of symbols and rituals of the rising Nazi mass movement.

Herbert Marcuse has also dealt with the Freudian psychoanalysis with a view to incorporate it into his own version of Marxism. His understanding of the concepts of “utopia” and “phantasy” has had important political implications. In this vein, one must also mention Eric Fromm and his Sane Society and Escape from Freedom. Although, there was very little direct influence of the psychoanalytical model on the ideology of the Iranian Revolution, they exercised an indirect influence as the works of Marcuse and Fromm were widely read by the Iranian intellectuals prior to the revolution.

A form of psychologism, more prevalent in scientific works on revolutions, was influenced by frustration-aggression theories inspired by a narrow understanding of the models developed by Leonard Berkowitz and Ted Gurr on frustration and aggression. This type of psychologism placed too much emphasis on frustration of expectations and the deprivation of social and economic mobility as a source of the appeal of the revolution to the masses. As such, it concealed other reasons for the attraction of the Iranian people to the revolution, such as the loss of self-esteem,

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feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy, perceptions of purposelessness, and consequently lack of valuable existence as individuals, which had created the need to be absorbed into a collective movement of believers.

Yet, the frustration-aggression theories may also be illuminating if seen not in strict psychological terms, but in their social and historical context, and in conjunction with other possible causes of the revolution. To do this, one may consider Tocqueville’s assertion that a revolution is most likely when there has already been some social change in the interest of the disinherited, thus awakening the repressed population to the possibility and desirability of further change. Tocqueville’s conceptualisation has also been used by James Davies, who has pointed to the divergence between social advancement and rising expectations of the population as a principle motivator of a revolution.¹

And finally there have been the religious views of the revolution, inspired by religious modernists of clerical and non-clerical background. Such views were a product of the continuities and discontinuities of the Islamic tradition in modern times. They were inspired by religious reformers like Seyyed Jamal-ad-Din Assadabadi, Iqbal Lahuri, Muhammad Aduh, Rahid Rida, Seyyed-e Qotb and Mowlana Mawdudi in the Muslim world, and influenced the ideologues of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Such views, which were popular mainly among radical Muslim revolutionaries in Iran, took a fanatic bent when they viewed the revolution in the limited instrumental sense of bringing to power an Islamic government in order to implement the Islamic law. To bring about the revolution, however, the followers of this model drew largely on the social and political issues raised by the Marxists, such as social alienation and imperialist aggression, without failing to refute Marxism as an atheist philosophy. A religious understanding of the revolution devoid of fanaticism would, nevertheless, be essential in identifying the motivations felt by the overwhelming majority of the revolutionary population. These motivations were inspired by a new political ideology that was based on a modernist interpretation of Islamic texts offered by Muslim ideologues such as Khomeini, Shari’ati, Motahhari and Bazargan, Taleqani and Al-e Ahmad.

Since its victory, the Islamic Revolution has hosted a variety of violent conflicts. The roots of such conflicts may be traced to the individual-social dichotomy, the painful striving of the individual to learn how to defer seeking satisfaction through making adjustments to his or her desires and thence adapting them to the external realities, which were considered to be of more urgency. However, the changing circumstances since the victory of the revolution has created new needs and, therefore, the people have begun to seek more political and social rights, as well as higher standards of living.

¹ Other interesting insights to revolutions and rebellions have also offered possibilities for understanding various aspects of these multifaceted phenomena. In this regard, one may refer to Huntington’s argument that political instability is a result of the lag of institution building behind economic development (1971), Moore’s consideration of revolutions as a vehicle of modernisation (1969), Skocpol’s attribution to revolution of the role of bringing to power stronger States (1979), Tilly’s analysis that sees revolutions as having a dual potential: as a mode of right-seeking by those who had no rights before (progressive), or as a mode of right-regaining by those who have lost their previous rights (regressive) (1991), or Rude’s view in which a revolution is to enhance the desire of the oppressed to liberate themselves from the hegemony of the oppressors (1980).
Unjustifiable dissynchronisation between personal wishes and actual social realities and the failure of the revolutionary government to address collective aspirations will increase chances of violence. The wider the scope and the higher the intensity of such individual dissatisfactions, the more likely the breakdown of social standards of morality. The attendant to such breakdown of the bonds of individual to society is a sense of insecurity and uncertainty. This condition can make violence morally acceptable and practically beneficial. However, it should be emphasised that preparedness to engage in collective violence to resolve conflicts appears to be justified where peaceful means of conflict resolution have either failed or have not been pursued effectively.

This understanding holds both bad and good news for the present Iranian rulers. The bad news is that the combustive accumulation of frustrated needs for change, precipitated by the rigid and insensitive institutions and norms, provide justification for resort to violence in order to effect the required change. But the good news is that it is possible to diffuse collective frustrations by allowing creative expressions of conflict and difference at various political, economic, social and cultural levels, and subsequently reap the benefits of the resultant creativities. Such expressions may well use religious and non-religious imagery and symbolism, embark on offering new interpretations of the past to legitimise their innovations in various spheres of life. Yet, they may not need to threaten the political and social order if they see that the existing power relations facilitate their struggle to deal with social and economic problems, and do not appear as a mode of oppression. Otherwise, what could be satisfying if realised peacefully within the context of the existing structures and institutions, could become frustrating and sooner or later create motives for the destruction of the existing institutions by new revolutionary imaginations.

Specifically speaking, there has been an intense passion on the part of the proponents of an absolutist theocracy within the Islamic Republic to treat social discontent as a question of religious heresy and cultural pathology rather than a legitimate struggle for liberty, political participation, social fulfilment, cultural recognition and artistic expression. Until the May 1997 elections, which gave personalities like President Khatami a chance to address some of these issues, the dominant tendency in the government was intolerance with respect to any criticism of its failures. As such, criticisms of the government policies, which were adopted without any sensitivity and understanding about the legitimate collective needs, were often dealt with as subversive activities against the revolutionary regime, and subjected to harshest punishments. Of course, there are still attempts by the conservative clergy to attribute the problem of social discontent exclusively to the individual’s failure to restrain the flame of selfish desires. And hence, their demands that the people submit completely to the traditionally or religiously sanctioned norms of community, which they prescribe. This is a dangerous path that may lead to further violence. Nonetheless, longing for recognition, autonomy and identity tamed for so long has now found a new turn and an irreversible tide. The radical imaginary that fuels these desires is of the same power and potency that inspired the revolution. It is so full of life energies that one may claim it is destined to break all the forces that have sought to undermine the humanity of the Iranian nation.

The vastness of the influence of religious challenge to absolutist theocracy in the post-Khomeini era is due to the fact that it is a challenge against the exclusive
authority of the jurists in power to express opinion on religious knowledge. And due
to the close link between religion and politics in Iran at present, those who can claim
authority in religious knowledge naturally exercise the highest amount of political
power. Therefore, any meaningful religious reform-movement in Iran needs to contest
the exclusive authority of the Shi'i jurists to engage in the interpretation of religion.
This is what makes the task of the post-revolution religious reformers so difficult.

Not since the Safavid period around five hundred years ago, has the exclusive
right of the Shi'i jurists to interpret the word of God been disputed so seriously. To be
sure, since the demise of the Safavid, the descendants of the great jurist Mulla Muhammad Baqir Majlisi have preserved this exclusive right by successfully
thwarting the Akhbari, Sheikhi and Babi challenges. With the victory of the views of
the Shi'i ulama over those of the Akhbari, Sheiki and Babi movements, religious
knowledge became the exclusive domain of the Shi'i jurists. But, it appears that this
time around the Shi'i jurists face a much more fundamental challenge. It is
particularly so because this time the challenge is coming in the context of the total
dominance of modernity on the world, and because this time the Shi'i jurists are in the
position of political authority. And it is for this very reason that they face the
fundamental problem of tackling the issue of reconciling the faith and modernity
without abdicating their political power.

The Akhbaris had argued against the idea of the recognition of an official class
of clergy that would mediate between man and God. However, the Usuli movement,
led by the Shi'i jurists, proved that the Akhbari position was untenable by exposing
the “irrationality” of their philosophy. The Usuli school showed that without the Shi'i
jurisprudence, the constituting element of Shi'ism (i.e. its legal system that identified
it from Sunnism) would be sacrificed. And further than this, they showed that without
the expertise of the faqih to derive new rulings form the oral traditions of hadith, the
Muslim community would lose its religious leadership, and thus the connection of
people with the traditions of the Prophet and the infallible Imams would be broken.
The brief resurgence of the Akhbaris during the eighteenth century did not pose a
serious challenge to the Usuli movement because it did not offer anything new. Even
the occasional flares of mystical movements, such as that of the Sheikh's and the
millenarian movement of the Babis', were not able to loosen he grip of the Shi'i jurists
on the authority to interpret the religion, because they also were entangled too firmly
in the past.

The attribution of the title rohani (a spiritual person) to the jurists added vastly
to the legitimacy of the jurist's position. So was, particularly in the modern time, the
distinctive manner of clothing used by the clergy, which put them apart from the lay
people. The Shi'i ulama continued to dress in traditional scholarly attire in order to
stress their commitment to religious learning. They also continued to spend long years
in learning and contributing to religious sciences. They thus implied that those who
adopted the Western clothing, stopped spending time in the religious seminaries, and
refused to learn traditional fiqh and kalam, lost their commitment to their own
religious traditions in the face of the modern West. They were therefore successful to
dramatically diminish the ability of their critics to claim authority in religious
knowledge.

To be sure, the neglect of the scholastic religious learning by the Iranian
secular intellectuals of the early twentieth century ultimately served the ulama by
giving them the chance to remain the highest authority in the domain of spiritual and
philosophical thought. The early modern intelligentsia and their descendants did not, as their Western counterparts had done more than a century earlier, develop an internal philosophical critique of their religious tradition. Rather, they became fascinated with the Western liberal ideology and literary genres. Later on, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, many Iranian secular intellectuals, who had not been attracted to liberal literature, turned to Marxist ideology and literature. In the 1970s, Marxist discourse became dominant among the secular intellectuals. As such, in attending to political issues, Iranian secular intellectuals were almost entirely inspired by liberal and socialist traditions of the West, either distancing themselves from the religious tradition, or criticising it from an external and condescending perspective. This was perhaps the main reason for the detachment of the secular intellectuals from the religious and political sensitivities of the people, and their lack of influence on the public opinion. Even Muslim believers, like Shari’ati, were heavily influenced by scientific genres, such as that of the Western sociology. The jurists thus remained the sole intellectual authority in the domain of religious philosophy, and in addition came to be considered as a spiritual class, which had the advantage of having access and affinity to the original religious sources.

The post-revolution religious reformers, such as Soroush and Shabestari, do not have the weaknesses of earlier intellectuals, but they have yet to go a long way to match the authority of the jurists. Their great advantage is that they have access to both traditional and modern knowledge, and most importantly they realise the fundamental need of Iranians for a meaningful and yet critical connection with their traditions. Using this knowledge, they can go beyond the past without having to miss out on its motivational and creative capacities, and its emotional and ecstatic energies.

They have the opportunity to observe the fallacies of modernity, such as its over-emphasis on instrumental rationalism and its total rejection of the power of religious experience in motivating collective action. They can thus learn not to cling to the past as rigid structures to be revived, nor to rely on the passing hype of modern economic, political and cultural fads. They can instead tap into the sources of psychic energies hidden in the layers of the collective memory in order to project new imaginaries of the future. Such imaginaries can constitute a solid base for new social, political and cultural discourses and institutions, which would serve not as an instrument of the legitimacy of glorious past, but for the purpose of the emancipation of productive forces of the young Iranian nation.

Due to the serious difficulties on the part of the official clergy to sustain their authority in the face of Iran’s emergent cultural, social, economic and political problems, there is a strong chance that the dream of religious reformation will become a reality in Iran. It is increasingly difficult for the jurists to argue for a permanent continuation of revolutionary condition, and continued unquestionable obedience of the people to their religious rulings. These could only be justified in the emergency situations, such as war with internal and external enemies, and under charismatic figures like Ayatollah Khomeini. However, the current jurist-rulers cannot continue to survive politically by reliance on their shrinking constituency of religious zealots and the ultra-revolutionary die-hards. It is difficult for them to continue to insist on a rigid ideological interpretation of religion that only allows restrictive social, cultural, economic and political practices in a country of 65 million where a huge number of population are women and the youth.
On the other hand, it is also difficult for the jurists to turn away from their heart-felt ideological convictions in favour of modernist reforms. But, their intransigence would mean the confirmation of the criticisms of the liberal religious thinkers, such as Bazargan, Montazeri, who insisted that the ruling jurists opposed any reform, charges that the ruling jurists have so far vehemently denied. This situation increases the chances of religious reformation if the lay religious groups and individuals could forge an alliance with the reform movements within the official religious establishment. In this regard, the emergence of the movement called “progressive jurisprudence” (fiqh-e pouya) against the proponents of traditional jurisprudence (fiqh-e sunnati) is a significant development within the jurisprudential establishment, which should be taken seriously by any lay religious reform movement.

The exposition of the fallacious nature of the position of the official jurists in justifying a medieval theocracy does not seem to be an out-of-the reach task for the clerical and lay religious intellectuals. The excellent command of these intellectuals on traditional religious knowledge, their access to the Iranian literary and mystical heritage and their knowledge of modern scientific and philosophical trends give them a considerable edge over the traditional jurists.

It seems that the liberal religious reformers who helped build up the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, but were pushed out of political power by the ideologues of the Islamic State, are now in a position to make a come back. They seem to be capable of defeating the government ideologues in their own game, i.e. to demonstrate the outmoded and inefficient nature of the official interpretations of the religion from a religious theoretical perspective. It seems thus that modernist ideas, put forward by figures such as Shari'ati, Taleqani, Montazeri, Bazargan, Motahhari, and Tabataba'i, which had been kept at bay by the government ideologues, may now herald an alternative religious thinking. This new religious thinking could offer new creative interpretations of religion, and could thus give rise to a new culture upon which the young Iranian nation could draw in its move forward in the modern world.

There is no doubt that Iranians as a nation would like to be a proud member of the world community, and for that purpose, are prepared to contribute to the scientific, economic and cultural development of the world. A reformed Islam can provide a rich cultural resource that, due to its indigenous nature, can resolve the problem of cultural alienation for the Iranian psyche, and thus provide for the rise of an Iranian national identity favourable to the non-violent and democratic development of the economy, politics and society.
The need for a religious accommodation process in a pluralist society has been widely recognized. The way to establish such a process is by involving all stakeholders in the decision-making process. This ensures that a genuine understanding of the religious and cultural perspectives of all parties is reached. In the context of religious pluralism, it is crucial to find a way to accommodate the diverse religious beliefs and practices within a secular framework.

Religious institutions have a dual role: they represent the spiritual needs of their followers and provide a forum for debate and dialogue. The challenge is to balance these two functions in a way that respects the autonomy of religious communities while ensuring the protection of individual rights.

In the face of these challenges, there is a strong case for the promotion of religious tolerance and accommodation in society. This requires a commitment to open dialogue, mutual respect, and a willingness to compromise. It also involves addressing the socio-economic and political factors that contribute to religious conflicts.

While there are complex issues to be resolved, the pursuit of religious harmony and understanding is essential for the continued development of a pluralist society. It is important to remember that religious differences are not insurmountable barriers to cooperation and progress. Rather, they provide an opportunity for mutual learning and growth.