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## **RELIGIOUS VS NATIONALIST IDENTITIES: THE CASE OF SHIA REVIVAL**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Socio-political grievances caused by economic recession and repressive policies of authoritarian regimes have resulted in uprisings in most of the states in the Middle East. US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said in Iraq on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2011 Iran and extremist groups such as al-Qaida would try to exploit the unrest sweeping the Arab world.<sup>(1)</sup> In the era of American unipolarity the emerging conception of ‘modernity means ‘plurality’. It is to be carried out by expanding the system and integrating countries into western democratic world. US National Security Adviser, Anthony Lake has explained in 1993; The United State would, help ‘democracy and market economies take

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root,' which in turn expands and strengthen the wider western democratic order.<sup>(2)</sup>

Thus a new 'forward strategy of freedom' in the Middle East resulted in the abuses of enemy combatants at Guantanamo and the torture of Abu Gharib. The Central argument of this study is that the powerful political concepts like democracy, security, violence and existence can not be easily universalized. Their forms and meaning are rooted in the paradigms of national security power and sovereignty, that realists affirm. Underlying assumption of this study is that the dominant conceptual framework of realism within which we understand Nationalism and Religion is deeply inadequate and dangerous. Thus in a political framework grounded in means-end calculations of real politik the religious dimensions of Islamism recedes into the background. The objective of this study is to draw sustained and critical attention on categories that shape 'modernity' and its relation to nationalist identity, state craft, foreign policy, diplomacy, violence, geo-politics and strategy of the last few decades.

Secondly, a host of literature has emerged explaining boundaries of political Islam, an Islamic counter public, liberal Islam, mystical Islam, ethical Islam, radical Islam even western Islam, Islam's multiple voices/ Making Islam Democratic<sup>(3)</sup>/ The Islamist Impasse<sup>(4)</sup>/ Millennial Islam<sup>(5)</sup> and finally end of Islam.<sup>(6)</sup> Eventually, Graham Fuller clarified this confusion by stating that, "the real issue is not what Islam is but what Muslims want". The basic contention of this paper is that by highlighting Islam on the basis of divisions shades, discriminations only adds to de-legitimise concrete issues of distribution of wealth and political values in the Middle Eastern states which are infact a major cause of political disturbance presently.<sup>(7)</sup> Specially these authors take as their starting point the public sphere as

an institution of national political life and then proceed to examine how different religious actors and organizations have contributed to its constitution..... its moral basis etc.

In the context of religion this study focuses on the case of *Shia* Islam. Thus the central questions that it addresses are:

1. What are the basis for privileging religion over self, family, clans or nation in the constitution of an individual's identity, particularly among the *Shias*.

2. Has *Shia* Islam historically been revolutionary or quietist?

Theoretically this study is based on the works of critical theoretician that challenge the constructs of present day socio-political reality. The key concepts identity, nationalism and *Shia* revival have been analysed. To explain the process of formation, performance and transformation of identity we have taken insights from William Connolly's seminal book *Identity/Difference*. This work has provided IR scholars with a powerful Identity/alterity nexus. Social sciences approach assumes that the social physical world consists of fixed entities (the units of analysis) that have variables. Identity then is understood as political processes which establish security of identity for any individual or group by defining the other as evil or irrational".<sup>(8)</sup> IR scholars therefore consider identity as a potential causal factor and not as an analytical category unless material-based interest explanations have been exhausted.<sup>(9)</sup> Which a 'type' identity is defined by the intrinsic qualities of an entity. It retains a 'social quality' only in relation to others and not only by itself. For example, in the context of realist framework, 'a great power military capability is in relation to other states.' By some taken, the democratic peace identity is grounded in the 'type' identity. Thus social identity as democracy will compel them to adopt certain preferences that lead

them to a non-conflictual mode of interaction.<sup>(10)</sup> Nationalism thus is a secure identity defined and limited by the state and the locus of modern political thought. With a range of economic, political, technological, philosophic and scientific developments is the central constitutive events of our modernity.

The German legal scholar Carl Schmitt's work is relevant to the contemporary world. In defining 'the state' he highlights 'friend-enemy' distinction which he argues is the essence of the political. This in turn has consequences for the relationship between identity, politics and war and the possibility of universal human rights.<sup>(11)</sup>

Like Hobbes before him, Schmitt conceived the figure of enemy as a threatening the Other-that is constitutive of the state as the 'specific entity of a people'. Like many realists, he claims to oppose military conflict. Yet the potential for war was an existential condition".

In his second treatise of *Government*, Locke asked: if in the state of nature man is 'absolute Lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest, and subject to no Body, why will he part with his freedom? His answer is however free, is full of fears and continual dangers.'

For Hobbes this freedom in Leviathan is by definition a state of war, where "life of Man" remains "nasty, brutish, and short".<sup>(12)</sup> in Hobbes' introduction to Leviathan, state is imagined as an immense natural machine, an 'Artificial Man' for whom to be torn apart is tantamount to annihilation.<sup>(13)</sup>

*Thus for Anthony Burk, this was the 'philosophical basis of the modern nationalisms whose darkest manifestations would be fascism, imperialism and genocide and of the rhetorics and narratives of national identity..... elimination of*

*minorities whose claims appear to threaten the state's bodily integrity. State and citizen find their identity and ontological bond within the state's supreme sovereignty and protective violence. "As global influence becomes conceivable the interrelation of political economy, nationalism and the Other become central to security as a vector and rationality of power. The national state however inspiring should be only one locus of identity. The modern system of sovereign nation-states not only purchase security at the expense of others but also politically save, use or kill others."<sup>(14)</sup>*

Challenging existing identities unleashes 'a politics of disturbance', which can become the breeding ground for politics of fundamentalism and extremism. Thus a patient and determined process of argument and discursive transformation is required that works across transnationalism. Repression and violence compounds the problem and builds new forms of violence and instability. For example, the preponderance of arms was defied by two intifadas and 2006 Israeli attack against *Hezbollah*. Increasing challenges of globalization and transnational problems such as refugees, terrorism or climate change have rendered the function of nation state as exclusive container for identity ethically suspect.

This study challenges the general perception that there is the rise of a *Shi'ite* crescent in the Arab balance of power with dominant *Shi'ite* government in Baghdad and Hizbullah's growing influence in Lebanon.<sup>(15)</sup> Moreover, the anti-government protests in Sunni cum Wahabi regimes of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Yemen and Egypt are readily attributed to Iran.<sup>(16)</sup> The nation state system that evolved in the context of Treaty of Westphalia 1648 is became rule in the Muslim world in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Thus, the predominant view of a *Shia*

revival is challenged on the basis of historical, doctrinal, political and social factors in this study.

1. Throughout Islamic history, the *Shi'ite* community had never been in political power.

2. Institutional structure of *Shi'ite* clergy in Iran is a unique case study and more powerful than clergy elsewhere in the Arab world.

3. There is a longstanding discrimination against *Shi'ites* in the Arab world, particularly Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

4. The territorial integrity of the Middle Eastern states is not only due to the cohesive national communities but an acceptance of territorial status quo by the regional Arab states at the end of Second World War.

The demise of Pan Arabism as a consequence of 1967 war initiated a process of institutionalization of the status quo. Division of the *umma* into sovereign nation states has been internalized. Lebanon continues to be a unique case of a precarious confessional republic.<sup>(17)</sup> However, the real dimension of the territorial state's crisis consists of the ipso fact notion that tribal or the communal authority is profoundly anchored in the existence of the political society of the state itself." In the context of Lebanon the *Shia's* remained improvised and a marginalized community since the 1970's. They had been "excluded from power by governments dominated by political primordialism (e.g. Sunni minority rule in Iraq and the Maronite Sunni coalition in Lebanon). The current alternative political enterprises of the *Shi'ites* in both countries is influenced by the same political culture."

The Arab or national affiliation of the *Shi'ite* communities in Iraq and Lebanon was never truly doubted. On the other hand a long drawn contentious interaction with the successive ruling regimes resulted in the *Shi'ites* exclusive control of government in Iraq and Hezbollah's

maintenance of communal armed organization outside Lebanese state's authority.<sup>(18)</sup> In Lebanon the political turmoil was created by Rafiq Hariri's assassination in February 2005 and this resulted in withdrawal of Syrian forces. July 2006 Israeli attack on Lebanon and Syed Hassan Nasrullah's survival established Hezbollah's prestige among the Lebanese broader communities: Sunni, Druze, Moronites. As a counter measure prime minister Fouad Sinoria decided crack down against Hezbollah's telecommunications network. Political pretexts after the Doha agreement in 2008 provided Hezbollah to veto major government decisions. Hezbollah, in short achieved what no other Arab army had been able to do, when it ousted Israel from Lebanon without committing any concession. This directly connected Hezbollah to Palestinian Intifada.

The case of *Shia* Revival presents as if *Shia's* had historically been in power which afterwards fizzled out. Let us situate this case in its proper historical, social, political and cultural perspective.

*Shi'a* considers Ali as the first Imam and to speak of Ali is to speak not of exclusivist sectarianism but of universal spirituality. According to all *Shi's* authorities and several leading Sunni sources Ali (AS) had the unique distinction of born in the Ka'ba in Mecca. Ali (AS) is regarded as the first male to enter the religion of Islam. At a time of drought Muhammad (P.B.U.H) relieved the pressure on his uncle Abu Taib (AS) and took his young son 'Ali' then about five years old, into his own household. Form this time on 'Ali' was like a son to him, rarely being separated from him.

The role played by Ali (AS) in the migration (*Hijra*) from Mecca to Median (622 CE) the event which marks the beginning of the Muslim Calendar. The enemies of Prophet (P.B.U.H) had planned to assassinate him, and knowing this Ali (AS) risked his own life by

pretending to be the prophet, sleeping in the latter's bed on the night he departed. In Medina, Prophet (P.B.U.H) adopted the 'emigrants' (*al-muhajirun*), that is, the Muslims who accompanied the Prophet (P.B.U.H) on the *hijra* from Mecca and the 'helpers' (*al-ansar*), the tribes of Median who had embraced the new faith.

*“Ali distinguished himself on the field of battle, as a scribe of the unfolding revelation of the Qur’an, and as a leading companion of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) .... in Uhad, a heavenly voice was heard proclaiming, ‘there is no chivalric knight but Ali, no sword but dhu’l-faqar... (what established) Ali’s reputation as the ..... indeed invincible-warrior of Islam was that of Khayber in 7/629. The Muslims were unable to make any headway against the heavily fortified, apparently impregnable defences of their opponents. The Prophet then declared that he would give the banner of his army to one who ‘loves God and His Messenger and is loved by God and His Messengers’, through whom victory would be granted. He sent for Ali (AS), who was absent because of an affliction of the eyes. The Prophet (P.B.U.H) cured his ailment..... and Ali proceeded to lead the Muslim to victory. Moreover, Ali (AS) was given the immense honour of marrying the Prophet’s daughter Fatima (AS) considered to be the most saintly woman in Islam, along with her mother, the Prophet’s first wife, Khadija (AS). One of the epithets bestowed on Fatima on the tradition is Majma al-Nurayen, “Confluence of the Two Lights – the two lights of nubuwwa (prophercy) and of walaya (sanctity). Ali was thus, after the Prophet (P.B.U.H), the leader of Ahl-al-Bayt, ‘The people of the*

*House', that is the family of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). Ahl-al-Bayt are referred to in Quranic verse as;*

*'God only wisheth to remove from you all impurity, O People of the House, and to purify you with a complete purification (33:33).*

*According to several of the most important early sources, the prophet (P.B.U.H) called for Fatima (AS), Ali (AS) and their two sons, Hassan (AS) and Husayn (AS), and said, 'This is my Ahl al-Bayt. The importance of the Ah al-Bayt is expressed in another verse in which the Prophet is instructed, 'Say: I ask for no reward, save love of the near of kin' (42-23).*

*It is also essential to take note of the following Prophetic saying indicating the spiritual importance of the Ahl al-Bayt:*

*Turly, I am leaving behind amongst you the two weighty things (al-thaqalya): the Book of God and my Ahl al-Bayt, they will not be parted from each other until they return to me at the (paradise pool) al-hawd.<sup>(19)</sup>*

On the one hand, Ali (AS) is regarded as the first spiritual pole (qutb) of Sufism after the Prophet (P.B.U.H) himself, and is situated at the summit of all the spiritual chains by which the Sufi order link their masters to the Prophet (P.B.U.H), on the other hand Ali was “Cursed by official Umayyad decree from all mosques in its domains, as part of the Friday congregational prayers, a practice instituted by Mu’awiya and brought to an end by Umar II (d. 101/720)... The geographer/historian Yoqut writes: “What greater honour than to have refused to curse the brother of the Prophet (P.B.U.H), even though he was being cursed from the pulpits of Mecca and Medina.<sup>(20)</sup>

In the case of succession to Muhammad (P.B.U.H) when Ali (AS) asked the first caliph, how was he chosen as Ansars were in majority? He was informed that Muhajireen gave the argument that they had a fairer claim to governance being closer to Muhammad (P.B.U.H). Ali (AS) stated the argument which you used against Ansaar on the basis of that he held the strongest claim as the heir of the prophet (P.B.U.H). Returned to his home and remained quietist. In the time of first caliph Ali was pressurised but then he was left alone. Therefore, Ibne Ziyad When informed Saad of Husayn's refusal he stated: Husayn (AS) carries the heart of his father. He will never bear allegiance. By for Islamic history reveals that caliphate continued and Imams from the lineage of Prophet (P.B.U.H) showed forbearance, Patience and tolerance. None of them accepted any position of authority under the allegiance of existing rulers. Each Imam stayed away from politics but the rulers kept a close watch on them or else put them in captivity.

Hujrb Adi al Kindi his sons and companions six in number consistently protested against the cursing of Ali (AS). "He was a distinguished companion of the Prophet, widely respected for his piety and devotion to religious practices". Hujr was given a chance by Muawiya's executioners to save himself and his young sons by denouncing Ali (AS).<sup>(21)</sup> This history can not be explained in political terms only. Hujr was offered both political power and economic advantages. Umro bin Al Hamaq al Khuzaye was also imprisoned and was brutally killed by nine lances on the orders of Muawiyah, his head was cut from the body and placed on top of the lances for the first time in Islamic history.

A serious historical and ideological fallacy need to be clarified at the outset. Note the following passage:

- i. Since ‘Ali (AS)’ was regarded as the first Imam, his sons, Hasan and Husayn (AS) (both grandsons of the Prophet), were obviously his successor. Although Hassan (AS) did not take any public stand against the Umayyad ruler, Husayn (AS) led an unsuccessful revolt with a small band of followers, who were all killed in battle in 680 C.E. The Imams (AS) descended from these early leaders were renowned for their piety, and many of them spent their lives in virtual imprisonment under the watchful eye of the Caliphs.<sup>(22)</sup>
- ii. Intra-Muslim strife culminated in the massacre at Karbala in 680 CE of Ali’s (AS) son and the Prophet’s (P.B.U.H) grandson Hussein (AS) (himself a claimant to the caliphate) and his seventy odd companions, by forces loyal to the newly established Umayyad dynasty. The religious schism between Sunni and Shia dates back to this supremely political event, a war for the throne. Politics was clearly in the driver’s seat.<sup>(23)</sup>
- iii. Upon Muawiya’s death his son Yazid attempted to take over, but those in Iraq favored Imam Husain (AS) (the second son of Ali (AS)). Hussain (AS) went to Kufa, in Iraq, to mobilize support before proceeding to Damascus, the capital of the empire, to claim the caliphate. He was ambushed and killed in battle by Yazid’s forces in Karbala<sup>(24)</sup> revolt, a war for the throne and politics. (Historical fallacy that Hussain (AS) went to Kufa and then to Damascus to claim Caliphate, needs correction.

On Mu’awiya’s death, his son Yazid assumed the caliphate in Rajab 60/ March 680. In order to combine religious with temporal power Yazid sent a letter to the governor of Medina, Al-Walid b Utba to obtain *baya* from Husayn b Ali. Husayn replied that since such an

acceptance in order to be valid, must be made in public the governor should arrange a public gathering. As Husayn (AS) rose to leave Marwan b al Hakam rebuked the governor and stated: “Arrest him and do not free him until he bears allegiance, or behead him”, Walid’s reply is meaningful:

*“You advised me to do something in which there lies complete destruction of my religion. By God, if the entire wealth and treasures of the whole world were given to me I would not kill Husayn. Should I kill him only because he refuses to pay homage, I would suffer total destruction on the Day of Judgment, for in the sight of God there cannot be anything more accountable than the blood of Husayn (AS).”*

There is not evidence of Husayn’s revolt. He remained quietist and left Medina alongwith his family. While at Mecca, he did not enlist active support form among the people who gathered around him or to propagate his cuase among the great numbers of people who were coming to Mecca for Hajj. There is also no evidence that he attempted to send his emissaries to stir up any rebellion in any provinces.”<sup>(25)</sup>

Had he acted promptly on the invitation of Kufans (who wrote hundred of letters to Husayn (AS) his arrival would have forestalled any effective action on the part of Umayyad government. Husayn’s letter to *Shi’as* of Basra is revealing:

“God has chosen Muhammad (P.B.U.H) from among his people, graced him with his prophet hood and selected him for his message. After he admonished the people and conveyed his message to them God took him back unto himself. We, being his family (*ahl*), his close associate endowed with the quality of guardianship (*awliya*), his trustees and vice regent (*awsiya*), and his heir and legatee (*Warith*), are the most deserving among all the people to take his place. But

people preferred themselves over us for this (privilege). We became contented, disliking dissension and anxious to preserve the peace and well being (of the community).<sup>(26)</sup> Husayn (AS) did not go to Kufa, though sent his cousin, Muslim b. Aqil (AS) as his emissary. Husayn (AS) left Mecca on 8 Dul-Hajj/ 60 CE, the same day Muslim was beheaded in Kufa. Husayn's (AS) sudden departure from Mecca where he had been staying for the past five months and where large number of people were arriving for Hajj was clearly a defensive and not a provocative move. At the same time, the then governor of Kufa Ibn Ziyad blocked all roads leading from Hijaz to Kufa. A strong military post of 40,000 men was created at Al-Qadisiya under the command of Haseen bin Nameer. The border areas of Kufa and Basra were being heavily patrolled by Umayyad army.<sup>(27)</sup> Husayn (AS) received words from some travelers at *Tha'libiya* about execution of Muslim b. Aqil and Hani b. Urwa at Kufa. At Zubala he learned that his messenger Qays b. Mushir a-Saydawi, whom he had dispatched from Hajir, the fourth stage from Mecca, had been brutally killed by Ibn Ziyad in Kufa. On Mushar's refusal to curse Husayn (AS) and save his own life, he was thrown from the top of *dar al amara* (the governor's palace).<sup>(28)</sup> Husayn's (AS) thinking is reflected by his proclamation to his companions. After informing them of the danger of death and complete destruction he asked them to leave him. Those who had joined him during the journey with hopes of political and material gains did depart. Only those remained who were accompanying him from *Hijaz*.

At Dhu Husm the commander of *Qadisiya* sent a detachment of 1000 troops under the command of *Hurr b. Yazid at Yarbui*. Hurr's army had run out of water. Husayn (AS) the grandson of prophet (P.B.U.H) could not tolerate even his enemies to be without water.

Zuhayr b. Qayn a companion of Husayn (AS), then suggested to attack Hurr's detachment. Husayn refused to initiate hostility and in his address asked Hurr to allow Husayn return Median. Hurr had order from the governor to follow Husayn closely and not to allow him a halt except in a desert place without fortifications or water.<sup>(29)</sup>

The martyrdom of al-Husayn (AS) as the Sayyed ul Shuhada forms the foundation of *Shi'a* identity being unjustly persecuted. "whenever, the *Shi'a*, whether as individuals or a community, are afflicted by natural disasters, day-to-day troubles, or an oppressive ruler, associations of historic injustice and oppression bound up with Karbala are immediately aroused."<sup>(30)</sup> The major political and military ranks were accorded to the Sunni minority in Iraq throughout history. With an estimated 60% of Iraqi population Sunnis constituted 70% of all officers in the Army. "Accordingly, between 1958 and 2003, only three *Shi'ite* politicians were nominated to be prime minister".<sup>(31)</sup> The repression of *Shi'a* community in Iraq even according to Sunni sources resulted in deportations 1,50,000 to Iran between 1979 – 89. The execution of *Shi'a* ulema, particularly Mohammad *Baqir-al-Sadr* and his sister in April 1980 is considered as the first execution of a Grand Ayatollah in the modern history of the Middle East.<sup>(32)</sup>

Similarly in Lebanon after achieving independence from France in 1943, the *Shi'as* experienced gradual alienation and deprivation. The share of *Shias* in highest civil service posts remained disproportional as compared to the population percentage on a national level.<sup>(33)</sup> The leftist and nationalist parties were thus considered as a means to overcome social injustice.<sup>(34)</sup> The rise of Musa al-Sadr's in 1960's was a hope for the unprivileged *Shia's*. The Lebanese Parliament's decision in 1967 to establish the Islamic *Shi'a* supreme council to led to the rise of Musa al-Sadr as its just elected chairman.

It was the failure of Pan-Arab movement and simultaneously the rise of the leadership of Sadr, which became a formative event in the history of Lebanese *Shi'a* community. Amal Militia was established in 1975 by Sadr, and having acquired his religious training in the Hawzeh Ilmiyah (education centers) of Qum and Najaf, Sadr discredited the political discourse of leftist parties. Furthermore, the founding of *Hezbollah* in 1982 was a watershed event in the organizational development of *Shia's* in Lebanon. The crystallization of a politicized *Shi'ite* community, the largest in both Iraq and Lebanon is due to the increasing dominance by sectarian and religiously-oriented forces. Secondly in addition the regional, international and local forces also generated politicization of shia dynamics. With the US intervention in Iraq 2003 and the fall of the Baath regime, the process of rebuilding “the new Iraq” was interrupted by the Sunni insurgency. The 2008 blowing up of *Shi'ite* Shrines in Samarra provoked the activities of anti-Ba'ath death squads. “Iyad Allawi's victory by the thinnest of margins in the 2010 parliamentary election does not alter the fact that Prime Minister Nuri-al-Maliki's State of law coalition and the United Iraqi Alliance comprise an obstructive bloc (holding 159 seats out of a total 325) and more importantly, still control the *Shi'ite* political scene in Iraq.”<sup>(35)</sup> Experts commonly agree that the *Shi'ite* community long faced discriminatory policies propounded by the ruling class in Iraq and Lebanon. The major political and military ranks were reserved for the Sunni minority. The Baath regime (1968 – 2003) banned ‘Azadari’ in 1977 by opening the arms against 30,000 *Shi'ites* and following this no processions were held until 2003.<sup>(36)</sup>

The *Shi'a* uprising in Bahrain are attributed to Iranian instigation is an exaggeration. The majority of *Shia's* are concentrated in areas that are under developed. The communities are galvanized by the

quest for a better future. The *Shia* Muslims in the Persian Gulf region, Central Asia, and the Caucasus-including Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and even in Pakistan and Afghanistan never followed the Iranian political model.

### **THE RISE OF IRAN’S SOFT POWER: AN EXAGGERATION.**

Since the Safavid in the beginning of 1500, twelver *Shi’ism* became the official religion of Iran. In addition, with the victory of *usuly* school over the traditionalist *akhbari* school of *Shia* clergy in Iran in 18<sup>th</sup> century the position of *mujtahid* within *shi’a* society was enhanced. An additional unique factor strengthening the organizational base of clergy in Iran is its independent economic sources and system of endowments. The *shia* ulema have demonstrated, above all, a much greater capacity to remain relevant to contemporary issues from their Sunni counterpart.<sup>(37)</sup>

The enormous influence of the Iranian clergy is explained by Nikki Keddie as a “power beyond anything claimed by the Sunni ‘ulema’ and gave to their ruling a sanction beyond anything merely decreed by the state.”<sup>(38)</sup> It must be emphasized over here that the idea of the revolutionary overthrow of the state and establishment of an Islamic government was by and large Khomeini’s own invention. Indeed many grand ayatollah’s disagreed with Khomeini’s political views.<sup>(39)</sup> Over a passage of time could ge discredited. For example, the analysis that ‘rise of a pluralistic momentum’ in Iran in the forms of a ‘gliding phenomena’ that is in constant motion is a growing challenge. ‘Vehicle of such a momentum’ according to Arshin Adib-Moghaddam are ‘students, non-governmental organizations, intellectuals, writers, polls, film makers. However, this does not mean that the principle of unchangeable laws of the Islamic revolution will

be surrendered ideologically, but the possibility of change is there. Capturing instances of political cultural and socio economic change in Iran amounts to a critical approach to Iranian politics.<sup>(40)</sup> The modern conceptions of society, humanity, free will, freedom, democracy, the rights of individuals, the state, the nation so on, exemplified by Tobacco revolts of 1891 – the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 – m07, the oil nationalization movement of 1951, Mossaddeq’s overthrow by CIA sponsored operation Ajax 1953 and the Islamic Revolution of 1978/79.

In the foreseeable future the US will maintain a significant military balance in the Gulf region even after withdrawal from Iraq counters any Iranian moves in the region. Secondly, the GCC countries have contained and balanced Iran more actively. The peninsula shield force of Saudi Arabia that crossed the causeway into Bahrain to clampdown on *Shi’ite* minorities is directed to prevent Iranian support. The fact that *Al-Arabiya* and *Al-Jazeera* are more popular in Arab streets than Iran’s *Al-Alam* indicates that the conservative monarchies would contain Iran by all means.

Khomeini’s revolution was framed and worked out through the imperatives of the national – state: now it is increasingly being recognized that Iran is adopting an ideology that can be termed ‘national Islamism’, but this was ever so,” (*Maslahat* or interest above that of religion remains essential agenda of foreign policy.<sup>(41)</sup> The Iraqi *Shi’ites* or Pakistanis have never followed the Iranian *Valayat e Faqih* doctrine and Ali al Sistani, the most powerful *Shi’ite* cleric in Iraq, regards it as a purely Iranian Model.<sup>(42)</sup> Similarly Iyad Allawi’s success in 2010 national elections proposes American influence to continue.<sup>(43)</sup>

## CONCLUSION

There are divisions within the clergy in Iran resulted in Khomeini's increasing support for the conservative camp. This has resulted in the centralization of authority and accumulation of political power at the presidency.<sup>(44)</sup> In the 21 person cabinet of Mahmud Ahmadinejad 14 belonged to former IRGC and systematically replaced provincial governors supporting Khatami and Rafsanjani. An increasing number of analysts regard Khomeini's support for brutal suppression of the demonstrations by IRGC in the aftermath of June 2009 elections as eroding the Supreme Leader's legitimacy. The crackdown against members of 'Green Movement' and other opponents has increased polarization and factional infighting.<sup>(45)</sup>

The economic performance of the Islamic regime is beset with problems due to decrease in foreign investment, reduction in oil exports that fell by 24% in 2009, international sanctions, and the domestic instability.<sup>(46)</sup> A major challenge for the regime is the legislation to cut the subsidies by \$20 billion. The implementation has been delayed since 2010 due to protests. The attempts to increase taxes is also unsuccessful. In 2010, *bazaar* merchants strike forced government to reduce income tax from 30% to 15%.<sup>(47)</sup> Economic issues constrain Iranian regime to fund foreign policy initiatives in foreseeable future.

It is no longer linguistic/ethnic or the cultural/religious identities that constitute the main survival unit for the individual. In the present day international system the adequate context within which nationalism must be analysed is 'modernity'. Thus it is a question related to the organization of state power on a transnational system of states. Thus, the Islamic regime in Iran, is in fact, a modern nation-state, cast in an authoritarian form and may well constitute future

confrontations on the issue of Political authority of *mujtahids*. Since nation – state is also a mediator of identity, by which the individual is connected to what now has turned out to be his/her most significant survival unit. As such it holds important keys to existentially meaningful aims and values in life.<sup>(48)</sup> In this context identity should be viewed a discourse, which supposes addresses and engages individuals and groups. This comprises overlapping interactions and networks of relations that shift over time and space. ❖

## NOTES:

1. The News International: 8<sup>th</sup> April 2011
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3. Pnina Werbner, "The Predicament of Diaspora and Millennial Islam", in Frederic Volpi (eds.) *Political Islam: A Critical Reader*, Routledge: New York and London, 2011, pp. 231-243.
4. Bayat, Asef, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and Post – Islamist Turn*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
5. Burgat Francois, *Face to Face with Political Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2003, Zubaida Sami, *Law and Power in the Islamic World*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2005 an insightful analysis of relationship between religious and political powers in contemporary Middle East.
6. For example, see Peter Van der Veer, "The Moral State: Religion, Nation, and Empire in Victorian Britain and British India", in Peter Van and H. Lehman eds., "Nation and Religion: Perspective on Europe and Asia, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, pp.15-43, and David Zaret, "Religion Science, and Printing in the Public Spheres in Seventeenth Century England, in Craig Calhoun, ed. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, pp. 212 – 235,
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