

Reconstruction of the Concept, Characteristics, and Obstacles of Civilization in Shariati's Thought

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Abstract

Civilization plays a central role in Ali Shariati's intellectual framework, to the extent that understanding his broader philosophical system is nearly impossible without comprehending his views on the concept of civilization and the evolution of human society throughout history. This article seeks to explore Shariati's approach to civilization by employing the dynamic framework of Thomas A. Spragens and addressing five interconnected questions: What is the concept of civilization? What are the characteristics that shape human nature? What are the obstacles to human development? What are the factors that can free humanity from these obstacles? And, finally, what drives the progress of human civilization? The findings of this study shows that Shariati views civilization as the collective achievements and accumulated knowledge of human society, which do not naturally exist in the environment but are created by humans due to three inherent qualities: self-awareness, free will, and creativity. These attributes are inherited from God and exist as latent potentials within each individual. To actualize these qualities, however, humanity must overcome four determinisms: nature, history, society, and the self. According to Shariati, the gradual mastery over these four constraints leads to the formation of civilization. Throughout historical processes, humans gradually liberate themselves from these external and internal forces. In this transformation, individuals evolve from beings shaped by nature, society, history, and the self into creators of nature, society, history, and the self. As a result, their divine-like attributes—self-awareness, will, and creativity—reach full potential, leading them to the ultimate ideal of a true, exemplary human, which in Shariati's view, is a near-divine figure.

Keywords

Shariati, civilization, determinisms, Thomas A. Spragens, reconstruction.

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Introduction

The common image of Ali Shariati in the public mind is that of a "revolutionary Muslim" who ignited revolutionary fervor among youth and the broader population by promoting an activist form of Islam. This functional and practical aspect of Shariati's work is well-known. However, a less familiar and deeper facet of Shariati's persona is that of a "philosopher and thinker." In this role, he sought to create a new framework of meaning based on religious tradition, which would pave the way for social action by believers. The obscurity of this intellectual side can be attributed to the nature of Shariati's works, which were often delivered in a rhetorical, lecture-based style aimed at students and the general public. This oratory-driven approach has led some to view his work as ideological sermons rather than academic texts. However, the rhetorical style of Shariati's writings was an inherent feature of his thought process, as he believed in educating and raising public awareness. His speeches and lectures aimed to provide philosophical insights while simultaneously fostering political consciousness and a revolutionary spirit among the people.

Due to this method of intellectual expression, Shariati's work has faced criticism, similar to the critique he once made of Marx and Marxism. He argued that when science takes on a social responsibility and steps out of the domain of specialists to become a tool for popular mobilization, it inevitably suffers. It becomes diluted and loses its scientific rigor. As Shariati himself stated: "If knowledge seeks to fulfill a social mission and step outside the framework of specialists to become a weapon for everyone, it will suffer, become populist, and lose its depth" (Shariati, *Islamic Studies* 2, p. 76). His own thought, which was meant to serve as a tool for revolution and rebellion against the oppressive system of his time, has now met a similar fate. In one view, Shariati is portrayed as being insufficiently academic, with a strong emotional charge in his words. Critics who take a more negative stance suggest that his thinking lacked intellectual rigor and was overly romantic. Some even claim that he was uneducated. As prominent intellectuals like Javad Tabatabai have remarked, Shariati was neither taken seriously in religious scholarship nor in sociology, while Ehsan Naraghi pointed out that Shariati knew little about sociology. Such extreme views reflect the polarized reception of his work. A more moderate interpretation suggests that Shariati was not academically inclined. Today, Shariati is often perceived primarily as an advocate of revolutionary Islam, regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with this characterization. In an exaggerated portrayal, he is depicted as an "Islamic Maoist" who sought to ignite revolutionary change with any available means. A more restrained

view holds that he aimed to turn culture into a weapon for revolution, directing it at the enemy to bring about its downfall (Kazemian, 2007, pp. 227-228).

Other analysts argue that Shariati was an effective teacher. Despite his limited knowledge in certain theoretical areas and his lack of precision in some cases, he was skilled at conveying his ideas in an accessible, organized, and understandable manner. His strength lay in understanding and addressing his audience directly. In fact, Shariati did not play the role of a philosopher or a thinker in the traditional sense. Rather, he functioned as an intellectual whose direct audience was the people, and his goal was to communicate ideas to them. This approach was both a strength and a weakness: a strength in terms of his success as a revolutionary intellectual and a weakness in his quest for lasting impact within the history of thought (Hashemi, 2008, p. 29).

Thus, while Shariati is widely recognized as a "revolutionary Muslim," his deeper intellectual system has remained largely overlooked. His philosophical framework is grounded in ontological, anthropological, and epistemological foundations, which give rise to a modern interpretation of religious tradition. From this system of thought emerges a new framework of meaning for religious concepts, which are logically interconnected and form a cohesive, integrated structure aimed at achieving a specific goal.

1. Research Background

The intellectual legacy of Ali Shariati has been the subject of numerous books and articles, each offering a unique interpretation of his thought. These analyses do not present a unified or consistent understanding of Shariati's philosophy; in fact, many of them are often contradictory. Several works, such as *Iranian Intellectuals: Narratives of Despair and Hope* by Ali Mirsepassi (2007), *Religious Intellectuals and Modern Rationality* by Taghi Rahmani (2005), *Freedom of Conscience* by Hatam Qadiri (2002), *Genealogy of Modern Rationality: A Postmodern Reading of Shariati's Thought* by Mohammad Amin Ghanei Rad (2002), *Shariati: The Phoenix of Rebellion* (a collection of authors, 2002), *Shariati: Path or Misstep?* by Reza Alijani (2002), *Shariati's Political Thought and a Critique of Shariatism* by Seyyed Reza Shakeri (2003), *Civic Mysticism and Emancipatory Hermeneutics* by Abbas Manouchehri (2005), *Shariati: The Thinker of Tomorrow* by Hashem Aghajari (2000), and *A Re-examination of Shariati's Political Philosophy* by Bijan Abdolkarimi (1991), *From Democracy to Religious Democracy: A View on Shariati's Political Thought and His Era* by Sadegh Zibakalam (2005) and *Political Thought in Contemporary Islam*

by Hamid Enayat (1983), offer diverse perspectives on Shariati's intellectual framework.

In these works, Shariati's philosophy is approached through different lenses, including existentialism, modernism, and postmodernism. For instance, in *Genealogy of Modern Rationality*, Ghanei Rad argues that Shariati's thought cannot be explained by traditional or modernist frameworks. Instead, Ghanei Rad asserts that Shariati's philosophy is distinct and critiques both traditional and modernist schools, labeling Shariati as a "postmodern critic" (Ghanei Rad, 2002, p. 14). He further elaborates: "In this essay, postmodernism is emphasized as an intellectual framework for evaluating Shariati's ideas. While Shariati's thought does not fully align with the works of Foucault or Derrida, certain similarities can be identified. These differences in thought arise from varying historical contexts" (Ghanei Rad, 2002, p. 45).

Such studies do not directly engage with Shariati's ideas in their own right but rather interpret his philosophy through intermediaries like Heidegger, Romanticism, and postmodernism. This creates a hermeneutic circle between these intermediaries and Shariati's thought. Analysts approach Shariati's texts with preconceived notions influenced by external philosophies, which illuminate certain meanings in Shariati's works. When parts of Shariati's philosophy do not align with these frameworks, they are either rationalized or dismissed. As a result, the primary criterion for understanding Shariati's thought becomes the intermediary frameworks rather than Shariati's own intellectual system.

In contrast, other scholars have sought to reconstruct Shariati's philosophy based on its internal logic. In works such as *Shariati: Path or Misstep?*, *Shariati: The Thinker of Tomorrow*, and *Civic Mysticism and Emancipatory Hermeneutics*, Shariati's thought is reinterpreted through core concepts such as "religious radicalism and socialism," "mysticism, freedom, equality," and "Islam as a liberating meta-ideology." These scholars adopt a selective approach, reconstructing Shariati's thought around specific key ideas and magnifying them to create an idealized and abstract image of his philosophy. While such studies help to illuminate certain aspects of Shariati's thought, they fail to provide a comprehensive, cohesive, and systematic understanding of his intellectual framework. In fact, to understand Shariati's philosophy in a holistic and integrated way, one must directly engage with his ideas, striving to reach his intellectual horizon without relying on external mediators. Such an approach can reveal the consistent, interconnected, and non-contradictory relationships between the various elements of Shariati's thought. Arguably, the first step in understanding

Shariati's intellectual system is to examine his views on the concept of "civilization"—the most crucial concept in his philosophy of history. As such, Shariati can undoubtedly be regarded as a "philosopher of history." His philosophy revolves around the concept of "civilization" as its starting point, and the "ideal human" as the ultimate product of human evolution in history. Therefore, understanding Shariati's intellectual system is impossible without grasping his concept of "civilization" and the process of human and societal evolution throughout history. This concept forms the foundation for theorizing about more concrete aspects of Shariati's philosophy. Consequently, revisiting and reconstructing Shariati's ideas about civilization can help to shed light on his intellectual legacy and counteract the misunderstandings that surround his thought.

2. Theoretical Framework

In Schleiermacher's view, the mission of hermeneutics is to reconstruct the author's mindset and individuality. Understanding, according to him, is essentially a reconstruction and re-experience of the author's thoughts. Schleiermacher never considered a text's phrases independent from its author. This reconstruction is not achieved through psychoanalyzing the author or identifying their emotional stimuli but through the art of recreating the author's thoughts. This art emerges from an intuitive approach to the text. The goal of the interpreter is not to delve into the author's psychological aspects by analyzing their mental state, but rather to capture the mindset reflected in the text. The interpreter must, in essence, step outside of themselves and enter into the author's mindset, intuitively experiencing the mental processes that led to the text's creation. Understanding is achieved when the interpreter can recreate the original mental process that led to the production of the text and grasp the mental atmosphere governing the author during that time (Vaezi, 2001, pp. 87–97).

Spragens' theory offers a framework for understanding the author's mindset through the reconstruction of the mental steps that led to the creation of a text. Spragens suggests that, for a thorough understanding of any inquiry, one must precisely trace the mental processes behind it, paying close attention to what Abraham Kaplan refers to as the "Logic-in-Use" of phenomena. In this logic, the focus is not merely on categorizing topics post-theorization, which is characteristic of static analysis. Rather, it seeks to provide a "dynamic historical picture of intellectual activity," aiming to understand the historical dynamism of concepts and uncover their Logic-in-Use (Spragens, 1991, pp. 33–34).

According to Spragens, once an inquiry begins, it takes on its own

internal dynamism. Initial answers and solutions lead to new questions, which must be addressed in turn. These answers raise further issues at different levels, continuing until the theorist has refined their "symbolic representation of a coherent whole" into a polished understanding. Only at this stage does the exploratory intellectual process come to an end (Spragens, 1991, p. 38).

Spragens proposes four questions to reconstruct the steps of theorizing:

What is the observed disorder?

What are the causes of this disorder?

What is the proper order?

What is the solution?

These four questions help uncover the internal logic of a theory, leading to a deeper understanding. However, these questions are not fully applicable to reconstructing the thought process of Ali Shariati regarding the concept of civilization. For a better understanding of Shariati's theorization on civilization, a set of tailored questions must be formulated, such as:

What is the concept of civilization?

What characteristics define human nature?

What obstacles stand in the way of humanity's full realization?

What factors lead to humanity's liberation from these obstacles?

What is the driving force behind the evolution of human civilization?

In addressing the fifth question, the distinction between civilization and nation must first be clarified. These five interrelated questions, along with their corresponding answers, reveal the overarching structure of Shariati's thought on civilization. Each question and answer, like scenes in a film, depict a dynamic image of his thought process. As we follow these questions and answers, the internal logic of Shariati's thought emerges, revealing a cohesive and organized view of his ideas. Through this framework, it may be possible to more clearly explain the development of Shariati's theorization on civilization, unveiling the "philosopher and thinker" aspect of Shariati that has remained obscured. To answer these questions, only primary sources — particularly Shariati's collected works — have been consulted. Although many of Shariati's works address the subject of civilization, the most relevant sources include *History of Civilization* (Volume 1), *Rediscovery of Iranian-Islamic Identity*, *Alienation of Man*, *Worldview and Ideology*, *Characteristics of the New Ages*, *The Covenant with Abraham*, *Islamic Studies* (Volume 1), and *Human*. In sum, The

Dynamic Framework Theory offers a robust approach to analyzing how intellectual ideas, especially from complex thinkers like Ali Shariati, can be deconstructed and understood. This theory facilitates the reconstruction of a thinker's cognitive process that leads to the formation of their theories. As applied to Shariati's concept of civilization, the theory draws on Spragens' framework to analyze the mental process behind Shariati's idea of civilization, outlining key questions and stages in his thought process.

3. The Concept of Civilization

The first step in reconstructing Shariati's thought on civilization is to ask: What is the concept of civilization? Shariati's perspective on civilization is discussed in *History of Civilization (Volume 1)*. He defines civilization as "the collection of humanity's spiritual and material creations and achievements" (Shariati, *History of Civilization 1*, p. 5). A key feature of his definition is the emphasis on the human aspect of these creations and achievements. In other words, these are not naturally occurring phenomena; they are produced by human will and consciousness. He categorizes civilization into two types: human creations and human achievements.

"Human creations" refer to things that do not exist naturally and are created by human society (Shariati, *History of Civilization 1*, p. 6). To the extent that humans and human society contribute to creating something natural, that creation is considered part of civilization. For example, when a cow produces milk, it is a natural process, but when it produces 10–15 liters of milk, it reflects human effort and is a sign of civilization. The additional milk is both a material and spiritual achievement of humanity and thus part of civilization (Shariati, *History of Civilization 1*, p. 6). Therefore, both material and spiritual creations of humans are considered aspects of civilization (Shariati, *History of Civilization 1*, p. 9). "Achievements" are defined as "a storehouse of experiences, data, knowledge, contracts, and inventions from the past or from other people that are inherited by society." Society inherits these through its historical past or from other civilizations. Thus, achievements are also human creations, originating from the past or from other places, and their roots are the same as human creations. In sum, human creations and achievements are both elements of human civilization (Shariati, *History of Civilization 1*, pp. 5–6). In Shariati's view, human civilization consists of "the heritage of the past, imitation of others, and current creations, both material and spiritual" (Shariati, *History of Civilization 1*, p. 6). In *Rediscovery of Iranian-Islamic Identity*, Shariati distinguishes between civilization and culture. He argues that human beings are born of two forces: "nature" and "history." Nature shapes a person's

"universality," while history shapes their "nationality." What emerges from nature and depends on universality is civilization, while what takes shape in history and is related to nationality is culture (Rediscovery of Iranian-Islamic Identity, p. 107). Thus, for Shariati, civilization is what arises from human nature, and anything that emerges from this nature is civilization.

4. The Nature of Civilization

Shariati identifies specific qualities in human nature that give birth to civilization. These qualities are shared by all humans and form the essence of what he calls humanity's nature. In Shariati's view, only those human actions that arise from these unique characteristics are considered part of civilization. He emphasizes the following key traits:

- Awareness: Human beings possess self-awareness and an understanding of their environment and their relationship to it.
- Will: Humans have the ability to exercise conscious will, a freedom from the deterministic chains of cause and effect that bind other animals.
- Creativity: Humans have the power to create tools, ideas, and arts that surpass natural limitations. This capacity to invent and create is central to the development of civilization.

In Ali Shariati's philosophy, human beings possess these three inherent qualities that exist as potential within them. Just as God is self-aware, willful, and creative, so too is the human being who is described as God's vicegerent on Earth. These traits are deposited in humans by God as latent abilities, and only God possesses them in their absolute form. Everything that emerges from human actions based on these three qualities constitutes civilization. Shariati, drawing from Quranic verses, distinguishes between two terms: Man (Bashar) and Human (Insan). According to him, Man refers to the biological and physiological human being, the two-legged creature that appears at the end of the evolutionary chain, similar to other animals. Human, however, refers to a higher, transcendent truth, a unique and enigmatic entity that stands apart from other natural phenomena. The term Man encompasses all human beings, regardless of race, religion, or geographic location, and is subject to the same physiological, biological, and psychological laws. This shared nature is the foundation of sciences such as medicine, biology, and psychology. However, Human refers to the exceptional essence of being human, characterized by unique attributes that differentiate individuals from mere Man and determine the extent to which they achieve true humanity.

Therefore, when Shariati speaks of Human, he is not referring to all

members of the human species. While all individuals are equally Man, not all are fully Human. Each person, to varying degrees, strives to become human. Some individuals manage to reach the stage of becoming human, and within this process, there are varying levels of advancement or regression.

Shariati explains that humanity, in its evolutionary journey, moves towards Man. This higher understanding of Human is a transcendent ideal, representing the attributes that humans must strive to attain—qualities that they do not yet possess but should work towards. Thus, the goal of every human being is to become Human, but this process is never complete; it is a continuous journey of growth and transformation. The human being is always in the state of "becoming" and is perpetually evolving towards the infinite. Since becoming human is an infinite endeavor, civilization is also an infinite process. The more individuals progress on the path of becoming Human, the more the three divine attributes—awareness, will, and creativity—manifest within them, and the more civilization evolves. In Shariati's view, civilization is nothing other than the actualization of these shared human qualities with God on Earth. As humans increase in self-awareness, will, and creativity, civilization advances in complexity and refinement. In conclusion, for Shariati, the development of civilization is inseparable from the process of human becoming. The more humans realize their divine potential, the more civilization flourishes. Thus, civilization is an ongoing, never-ending process, constantly expanding as humans deepen their understanding, exercise their free will, and express their creative capacities. This philosophical framework places human and civilizational progress on a continuous trajectory towards the infinite.

5. The Four Determinisms in Shariati's Thought

In the third phase of Shariati's exploration of civilization, the question arises: what prevents the actualization of the three defining human qualities, namely awareness, will, and creativity? Shariati addresses this issue in his well-known lectures titled "The Four Prisons of Man," found in the collection *The Selfless Human*. According to him, four deterministic forces or prisons hinder human beings from achieving true self-awareness, will, and creativity. He believes that humans are trapped by these forces, which prevent them from fully realizing their humanity. Shariati states, "The core thesis I wish to present is that 'the free will of choice is imprisoned by four determinisms,' or four prisons. Therefore, becoming truly human and reaching the God-like free will, where a person can make conscious choices in nature, is possible only when they escape these four prisons and are

liberated from these determinisms" (*The Selfless Human*, p. 176-177). shariati explains: "My thesis is that humans are subject to four determinisms; humans are prisoners of four prisons, and naturally, they can only truly be human when they break free from these four forces" (*The Selfless Human*, p. 130).

The four determinisms—nature, history, society, and the self—restrict human will, limiting conscious choice and creative expression. These forces do the choosing for the individual, preventing true self-awareness, will, and creativity. In Shariati's view, human beings evolve to the extent that they liberate themselves from these determinisms, and in doing so, they ascend from the stage of being Man to becoming Human. Shariati elaborates: "I do not reject naturalism, sociologism, or historicism. I accept all three. But I accept them in the sense that humans can choose. In the course of their evolution, humans are truly shaped by nature, truly shaped by history, and truly shaped by society. A person is genuinely made by their environment, and when that environment changes, the person changes too. But my point is that as humans move from being merely Man to becoming Human, they gradually free themselves from these determinisms... Today, as humans evolve, they increasingly free themselves from these forces. This does not mean that these forces no longer exist or that they no longer influence human life. Rather, I mean that in the process of human becoming, individuals gradually escape from these determinisms" (*The Selfless Human*, pp. 150-153).

In Shariati's thought, there is an inverse relationship between the four determinisms and the three core attributes of human nature: self-awareness, will, and creativity. When the four determinisms dominate a person, little remains of their true humanity, and they become more like animals, unable to exercise divine-like qualities. However, as individuals break free from these forces, they move closer to the ideal of a god-like or exemplary human being. Shariati further argues that human history is the process of liberation from these determinisms. As humanity advances through history, individuals and societies gradually emancipate themselves from the constraints imposed by nature, history, society, and the self. This progression towards freedom is also the advancement of civilization. As humans become more self-aware, exercise greater freedom of choice, and engage in creative acts, civilization evolves alongside them. Thus, in Shariati's view, human freedom and the development of civilization are intertwined. The more humans liberate themselves from the determinisms that bind them, the closer they move towards becoming true Human, and the more civilization flourishes. This dynamic reflects the perpetual striving for

freedom, self-actualization, and the realization of divine-like attributes that define Shariati's vision of human progress and civilization.

6. The Path to Liberation from Determinisms

The fourth stage in the development of Shariati's thought on civilization focuses on the factors that enable humans to free themselves from these determinisms. In his two lectures (*The Four Prisons of Man*), Shariati also addresses the means by which individuals can achieve liberation from each of the four determinisms.

- **Determinism of Nature:** Shariati believes that the key to escaping the determinism of nature lies in understanding the laws of nature and developing technology. By mastering scientific knowledge, humans can manipulate nature to their benefit. He states, "Humans free themselves from nature's determinism by understanding nature's laws, which leads to the development of technology. Technology enables human beings to liberate themselves from nature" (*The Selfless Human*, p. 154). This transformation from a being controlled by nature to one who controls and transforms nature is, for Shariati, a significant step in becoming truly human.

- **Determinism of History:** Historical determinism is overcome through a philosophical understanding of history. By recognizing the laws that govern historical movements, humans can break free from being passive subjects of history. Shariati emphasizes the importance of "rebelliousness against history" through understanding and rejecting the deterministic forces of the past, allowing societies to leap into advanced stages of development through revolutions that defy historical inertia (*The Selfless Human*, p. 182).

- **Determinism of Society:** Shariati argues that social determinism is broken through the study of sociology. By gaining a deep understanding of social structures and their impact, individuals can actively shape their societies rather than being shaped by them. The human mastery of sociological knowledge enables them to fight against oppressive social systems, much like technology allows them to conquer nature (*The Selfless Human*, p. 156-157).

- **Determinism of Self:** For Shariati, the determinism of the self is the most difficult to overcome. Unlike the other three prisons, where the individual is at least aware of their confinement, the prison of self is internal and invisible. It is the most challenging prison because the individual carries it within themselves. Shariati stresses that the tools used to overcome the first three prisons—science and reason—are ineffective against this fourth prison. The key to breaking free from the self is self-sacrifice, or the transcendence of the individual ego in favor of collective and higher values,

often achieved through love and faith.

Shariati asserts that neither science nor technology can free humans from the prison of self. While they can master the determinisms of nature, history, and society through knowledge, the liberation from the self requires something beyond logic and reason—something transcendent, such as religion and love. He explains that "for liberation from the prison of self, a force stronger than rational calculation and scientific inquiry is needed" (*The Selfless Human*, p. 192). Religion, particularly its focus on love, provides the means to transcend the ego and to align the individual with a higher, collective purpose.

7. Migration: The Engine of Civilization

The questions raised thus far concerning the reconstruction of Shariati's thought have primarily focused on the nature of civilization. Through these inquiries, the concept, characteristics, dimensions and obstacles of civilization have been clarified. However, the manner in which this civilization, with its characteristics, evolves through history remains ambiguous. One might assume that identifying the factors of civilization's evolution and overcoming the four constraints would suffice for its development. Yet, Shariati believed that civilization's progress and liberation from the four constraints do not occur spontaneously. For civilization to advance and for humanity to achieve liberation from these constraints through science, technology, history, sociology, and religion, another factor is required—a factor Shariati refers to as the "engine of civilization". Previously, questions revolved around the essence and nature of civilization; here, the question shifts to understanding the cause of civilization. Thus, in the fifth question, civilization is viewed as a dependent and resultant variable, meaning that another factor contributes to its growth and transformation. Addressing the fifth question requires first clarifying the relationship between civilization and culture or nationality in Shariati's thought. What is the relationship and connection between civilization and nation? Without elucidating this relationship, it is impossible to answer the question.

As previously mentioned, Shariati defined civilization as that which pertains to human nature and shapes the essence of humanity, while culture pertains to what emerges in history and relates to nationality. Shariati considered human nature to be defined by three traits: awareness, will and creativity. Anything emerging from these traits is considered part of civilization. The question then becomes: where are the human creations resulting from these three traits, or civilization, actually made? Shariati's response is that civilization is created within nations and cultures. Although

civilization represents commonalities among humankind and is thus universal and transnational, when it manifests in reality, it takes on the color of a particular nation and is shaped within that nation. Therefore, the concept of civilization without a nation and culture is not feasible. In Shariati's view, culture and nationality are prerequisites for the existence of civilization. The notion of civilization without a nation and culture is abstract and theoretical; in reality, it is intertwined with a nation. Shariati states: "Science and technology are abstract concepts that, as long as they remain as such, are universal and transnational. However, as soon as they materialize in the realm of reality, they acquire the cultural color of a nation" (*Rediscovery of Iranian-Islamic Identity*, pp. 104-105). He also states: "Science and technology, while based on universal and general principles and rules that are the same everywhere, which nation has advanced through stages of science and industry without imprinting its own color, history, and culture upon these general aspects of civilization?" (*Rediscovery of Iranian-Islamic Identity*, pp. 104-105)

Thus, according to Shariati, nations and cultures are not science, technology, philosophy, literature, art, religion, or ethics themselves. These are components of civilization. However, the collection of these components, over the course of history for a specific group, forms a distinct entity that differentiates this group from others. This combination creates a "spirit" that connects the members of a group as "parts of a whole," imbuing this collective with not only an independent and defined existence but also a type of "life" recognized throughout history and in relation to other cultural and spiritual entities (*Rediscovery of Iranian-Islamic Identity*, p. 110). Consequently, civilization grows and manifests within nations and cultures, and it is these nations that, through their unique characteristics and overcoming the four constraints, create civilization and advance humanity towards self-realization, leaving valuable legacies for other nations.

The fifth question, for the reconstruction of Shariati's thought on civilization, is what fundamental characteristic a nation must possess to bring humanity closer to divine traits and enhance human civilization. Essentially, what is the "engine of civilization" according to Shariati? Shariati, analyzing various theses in the philosophy of the history of civilizations, states: "Migration is the engine of human history's movement" (*Worldview and Ideology*, p. 345). Migration of nations and cultures, due to changes in their perspectives and thoughts, predisposes them to create civilizations. According to him, throughout the history of all human tribes, the pattern has been that primitive tribes migrated and, after migration, established new civilizations, powerful societies, and new cultural,

intellectual, artistic, literary, and philosophical schools (Worldview and Ideology, p. 345).

He believes that all human civilizations are born by migration (Worldview and Ideology, p. 344) and behind every civilization in human history and behind the face of every civilization lies a hidden migration. The language of every great society, if listened to, speaks of a migration (The Covenant with Abraham, p. 144; The Method of Understanding Islam, p. 136). Therefore, no civilization exists without an accompanying migration (Features of the New Centuries, p. 447). Shariati argues that neither racial nor geographical factors are crucial in the creation of civilizations, as we do not find a clever or genius tribe that established a civilization before migration or without migration, nor do we see any tribe in the most fertile and bountiful lands creating a civilized society due to geographical factors alone (Worldview and Ideology, p. 343). Thus, migration is a highly positive factor in shaping human history and, if one may say, the greatest factor in human civilizations and the origin of successive and new cultures throughout human history (Worldview and Ideology, pp. 326-327).

Therefore, the answer to the fifth question in reconstructing Shariati's thought is migration. According to his migration theory, the evolution of human civilization involves the transfer of previous human heritage to the migrating people and the creation of new civilization constructs by the migrant people, which is then passed on as new heritage to subsequent migrants. He says: "The reality of human history from the beginning has been the history of social transformations based on the creation of more advanced and newer civilizations on the ruins of decayed and old civilizations. Thus, history, which started from primitiveness, has continually progressed towards civilizational evolution. This evolution has occurred such that moment by moment and era by era, every society that has become decadent and lost its ability to change and create, new civilization, culture, religion, and ways of thought have been built upon it. This new civilization is a combination of the past civilization's heritage plus what is newly added by the creators. But the factor, engine, and power that transforms stagnant humanity into a dynamic, innovative, and creative being, a stagnant society into an open and evolving society, and a uniform thought into a vibrant, creative, and constructive mindset, is migration" (Worldview and Ideology, pp. 343-344).

8.The Impact of Migration on Civilization Development

Following the fifth question, another essential question arises: how do people and nations become creators of civilization through migration and

contribute new spiritual and material creations to humanity? Shariati explains this positive change through shifts in individuals' worldviews. He posits that worldview is the quality and form of perception that exists in an individual's mind about the external world. The external world encompasses everything and everyone outside the individual—other lives, societies, races, the animal, the earth, the sky, stars, and the entire nature. The quality of seeing this world constitutes the worldview (*Worldview and Ideology*, p. 347). Shariati emphasizes that humans never see the world exactly as geography describes it. An individual's worldview is influenced by their spiritual and material societal dimensions. As a city's structures expand, the external world also evolves in the perception of its inhabitants (*Worldview and Ideology*, p. 11).

Thus, according to Shariati, every individual's worldview reflects the characteristics and specifics of their society. He states: "This principle has been established in sociology and social psychology that the world, in the geographical sense—the earth, sky, and material world—appears in each person's view according to their spiritual, intellectual, educational, and environmental quality. Thus, no one sees the world as it is; rather, each person sees the world as they are. The human eye, ear, nerves, and perception are not like a camera, which simply reflects what exists; rather, it is the person who, depending on their spiritual and intellectual condition, sees the world not as it is but as they themselves are" (*Features of the New Centuries*, p. 428). Shariati argues that even an individual's mental image of the world is aligned with their class structure, meaning that the external world's image in an individual's view is a reflection of their society and class in the mirror of reality (*Worldview and Ideology*, pp. 11-12).

Ali Shariati's conceptual framework for understanding societal dynamics divides societies into two main types: closed and open. This dichotomy reflects the nature of their interaction with the external world and influences the worldview of their inhabitants. Shariati defines a closed society as one that remains isolated, surrounded by impenetrable barriers. Such a society is completely cut off from other communities, lacking any notion of the outside world or its phenomena (*The Features of the New Centuries*, p. 434). In a closed society, the environment is perceived as static and unchanging. The land is merely an extension of the homeland, and the sky is seen as an unalterable dome that confines the community. This creates a "personal, simple, and very small" worldview, with boundaries so tight that beyond them lies only the absolute void (*The Features of the New Centuries*, p. 435).

In closed societies, there is no room for ideological conflict or

intellectual diversity. The entire population shares a uniform perspective, resulting in a homogeneous intellectual and spiritual unity. Religious, social, and political beliefs are fixed and immutable, contributing to a stagnant and rigid worldview (Worldview and Ideology, pp. 12-13). Conversely, Shariati describes an open society as one that maintains various channels to the outside world, much like a bay receiving streams from multiple rivers. These rivers represent different cultures, arts, philosophies, and customs continually flowing into the society. Consequently, an open society is in a constant state of flux, continually evolving and adapting (The Features of the New Centuries, pp. 434-435). Even when such a society undergoes deterioration, it remains dynamic and continuously changing. In an open society, it is impossible for individuals to have a uniform level of thought or belief. The presence of new elements and the continuous demise of outdated ones ensure that intellectual and ideological diversity is prevalent (The Features of the New Centuries, p. 435).

Shariati argues that the fundamental link between humans and the land is a primary factor in the confinement of societies and their corresponding worldviews (The Method of Understanding Islam, p. 132). A society restricted to a specific location becomes stagnant, with all aspects of human thought, culture, and religion potentially freezing or decaying. Migration, therefore, serves as a powerful catalyst for change. It breaks down the barriers of stagnation and facilitates a dynamic interaction with new ideas and cultures, leading to the transformation of society (The Method of Understanding Islam, pp. 135-136). Shariati suggests that migration—both external and internal—plays a crucial role in liberating societies from the constraints of nature, society, and history. It fosters the development of civilization by challenging the static conditions imposed by a closed society and facilitating intellectual and spiritual growth (The Covenant with Abraham, p. 134). According to Shariati, the ideal human is one who transcends the limitations imposed by their environment and societal constraints. This person is not shaped by their surroundings but instead molds their environment. By overcoming the fourfold constraints of nature, society, history, and self, an individual aligns their divine potential with their material existence, becoming a successor of the divine on Earth (Islamic Studies 1, p. 75).

Shariati sees migration in Islam as a perpetual force. It manifests both internally and externally: internally as “spiritual migration” and externally through migrations that are scientific, social, intellectual, and political in nature. These various forms of migration encourage Muslims to break free from the constraints that bind them to a particular place, city,

society, or political system. Shariati warns against the dangers of settling in one place, which can lead to intellectual and spiritual stagnation. When a person becomes too attached to a specific location, all truths become obscured, and their responsibilities remain unfulfilled. In his view, "staying" in one place corrupts the individual, while migration transforms a passive existence into an active, dynamic state of being—both internally and externally (The Covenant with Abraham, p. 347). Shariati further explores this idea in his analysis of the end of history, where he envisions the emergence of the "ideal human" as a result of migration. This ideal human, according to Shariati, is not shaped by their environment but rather shapes their surroundings. This individual breaks free from the four types of determinism that have historically constrained humanity. Through the power of knowledge, technology, sociology, self-awareness, faith, and consciousness, the ideal human liberates themselves from the forces that once molded them (Islamic Studies, Vol. 1, p. 75).

Conclusion

In this article, Ali Shariati's theory of civilization is reconstructed using Spragens' dynamic framework. To achieve this, five key questions were designed, each addressing a different phase of Shariati's intellectual journey. Together, the answers to these interconnected questions provide a symbolic representation of Shariati's theory of civilizational development. At the core of this theory lies the notion of human evolution, or more precisely, the process of "becoming human in history." Shariati views humans as dual beings, composed of two distinct elements: the "spirit of God" and "putrid clay," each pulling the individual in opposite directions. The divine aspect of human nature symbolizes the potential for willpower, creativity, and consciousness, traits inherited from God. However, the actualization of these qualities requires humanity to overcome four fundamental forces of determinism: nature, history, society, and the self. By conquering these forces, the divine aspect of human nature can dominate the material and earthly side, allowing humans to become God's representatives on earth. This liberation from the four determinisms is achieved through science, technology, the study of history, sociology, and religion. Migration and the subsequent broadening of human worldview lay the foundation for this emancipation. Migration, in Shariati's thought, is not merely a physical journey but an intellectual and spiritual expansion that enables individuals to transcend these limitations.

Without a doubt, Shariati can be considered one of the first modern Iranian thinkers who revolutionized traditional Iranian-Islamic thought. He

shifted the focus from individual spirituality to a broader social context, reminding people that reaching God is not through isolation or escapism, but by actively engaging in social arenas. Through the use of science and technology in both nature and society, as well as through history, Shariati believed that humans could achieve freedom from the determinisms of nature, dominant social systems, and historical forces, culminating in their spiritual victory over materialism. This transformation is only possible when the individual "self" is sacrificed for the collective "we," through altruism and martyrdom, allowing humans to assume their divine role as God's vicegerent on earth. Shariati's social interpretation of religion and mysticism granted religious believers, whose ethics and behavior were previously confined to individual relationships, the opportunity to engage in social action. For Shariati, the path to God was through active opposition to the oppressive social and historical systems, with believers sacrificing their personal desires for the greater good of society. This stands in contrast to the traditional Islamic mysticism that advocated for seclusion and detachment from the world. In Shariati's view, the way to God was now through serving the people and the community, not by turning away from them. In light of this, one might critique those who perceive Shariati solely as a "militant Muslim" who inspired revolutionary fervor among the youth through his promotion of Islamic activism. The question arises: how could a person spark revolutionary zeal through ideological speeches without having a robust theoretical foundation and intellectual system behind them? Behind the image of an "activist Muslim," there is undoubtedly the figure of a "philosopher and thinker," one who provided a new semantic framework within religious tradition, paving the way for believers to engage in meaningful social action.

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